Taking an Industrial Organizational Psychology approach to the

Examination of Turnover among Child Welfare Workers

By

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Child welfare worker turnover is a pervasive problem. In some cases, turnover can be as high as 90% per year (CWIG website, 2017). The present study examined factors that may contribute to worker turnover. Child welfare workers (N = 373) completed a questionnaire that included measures from the industrial/organizational psychology literature, that is, job involvement and the availability of job opportunities, as well as measures previously examined in the child welfare literature, that is, burnout and turnover intentions. In addition, a measure that assessed workers' perceptions of making a difference was developed for this study. Finally, job performance data were obtained from the state agency in which participants worked for up to six months prior to job turnover, and turnover data were collected for a full year after the administration of the questionnaire. Structural equation modeling indicated that child welfare workers who reported that they were making a difference also reported more involvement in their jobs and were less likely to exhibit burnout. In addition, workers higher in job burnout reported stronger turnover intentions, were more likely to perceive alternative job opportunities, and were more likely to turnover. Contrary to expectations, job burnout did not influence change in performance over time nor average job performance. Changes in job

performance but not average performance was found to be negatively related to turnover. Finally, workers who reported stronger turnover intentions also perceived more alternative job opportunities and were more likely to turnover. The results suggest that additional resources and supports to help alleviate the burden and stress on workers and improving the way success and recognition are defined in child welfare work may help reduce turnover.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing family. To my father, Tony, who always pushed me to strive for excellence. Although you are no longer here, you continue to be an important role model in my life. I love you very much and miss you. To my mother, Diane, who has continually supported me and believed in me. Your love and support mean the world to me, and I could not have done this without it. I love you. Finally, to my husband, Clarence, who helped me cross the finish line. You are my best friend and my number one fan. Thank you for always helping me along and keeping me sane. I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

One of the most serious issues facing child welfare agencies is the ability to find, hire, and retain child welfare workers. In fact, in 2003, the United States General Accounting Office identified turnover in child welfare as a national concern (GAO, 2003). Estimates of child welfare worker turnover in both private and public agencies have ranged from 20% to 60% (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; Cyphers, 2001; Drake & Yadama, 1996; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Jayaratne, Hinile, & Chess, 1991; Reagh, 1994; Strolin, McCarthy, & Caringi, 2007). Currently, the Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG), a website service created by the Children's Bureau, the Administration for Children and Families, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, states that turnover can be as high as 90% per year in some areas (CWIG, 2017). Considering that the national average of turnover across U.S. industries is around 15% (Steel, Griffeth, & Hom 2002), the rates of turnover in child welfare certainly warrant concern.

At a high level, the job of a child welfare worker is to work with families who have entered into the child welfare system. Although families enter the system for a variety of reasons, in all cases is determined that the caregivers are unable to provide safety and care for their children. The role of a child welfare worker, then, is to act as a liaison between these families and the numerous organizations that provide services that the families need (see Figure 1).

This responsibility requires child welfare workers to become intimately involved in the lives of the families they serve. Ultimately, it is the job of child welfare workers to help families become self-sustaining. They work with the families, the courts, and other agencies to develop a plan and a combination of services that, when successfully implemented, help the families to become independent and exit out of the child welfare system. However, the turnover in child welfare workers has a strong negative effect on the delivery of these services and, ultimately, the ability of families to exit the system (Flower, McDonald, & Sumski, 2005; Hess, Folaron, & Jefferson, 1992).

Turnover in any profession is undesirable from a cost-analysis perspective, and turnover in child welfare is no exception. There are, of course, the typical administrative costs of turnover to the child welfare agencies, which includes the costs of hiring, training, and replacing workers who leave. Graef and Hill (2000) utilized a return-on-investment approach to assess these kinds of costs and found that the cost of turnover to child welfare agencies was approximately $10,000 for each child welfare worker in 1995. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, this cost estimate would translate to almost $16,000 today (2016).

To my knowledge, the most recent study on the cost of child welfare worker turnover was by Dorch, McCarthy, and Denofrio (2008). These researchers examined the cost of child welfare worker turnover by identifying the cost of separation, replacement, and training (SRT), tuition, and inter-county transfers. Using data from four child welfare agencies and then applying their findings to arrive at statewide costs, the researchers estimated that the cost of SRT to be, on average, a little over $27,000 per worker. They

also estimated an additional cost of almost $16,000 for workers who received tuition reimbursement towards a degree in social work.

However, these estimates overall may be very conservative. Indeed, Cascio (2003) has suggested that the cost of turnover can easily run an organization 1.5 to 2.5 times the annual salary of the job in question. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the median annual salary for child welfare workers was documented at just over $44,000 in 2012, which would put the cost of child welfare worker turnover anywhere from $66,000 to $110,000 per worker using Cascio's approach.

In addition to the financial cost to the agency, there is also a cost to those caseworkers who remain. It takes almost five months, on average, to hire, train, and onboard a new caseworker (Gunderson & Osborne, 2001). In some cases, new hires may be able to take on a small caseload as early as one month after being hired, but even then would need significant support and guidance from supervisors or other caseworkers and are at a much greater likelihood of making errors (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). The additional burden of work placed on remaining workers is compounded by the fact that the caseload of child welfare workers is already over the recommended number in a majority of agencies. In fact, in some agencies, caseworkers are handling twice the recommended number of cases or more (American Public Human Services Association [APHSA], Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], & Alliance for Children and Families, 2001). Furthermore, this issue becomes cyclical, as large caseloads and heavy workloads are often reported as predictors of child welfare worker turnover (GAO, 2003; Gonzalez, Faller, Ortega, & Tropman, 2009; Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & Lane, 2005).

Ultimately, however, the costs of turnover in child welfare workers are much greater than the financial burden placed on child welfare agencies and the work burden placed on other caseworkers. The separation of child welfare workers from the families they serve may have immeasurable social and psychological consequences for the families. For example, families may disengage from the process or develop feelings of distrust and resentment towards the child welfare system, which may prevent them from getting the help they need.

Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, and Trinkle (2010) interviewed 25 children whose caseworkers left; three independent coders coded the children's responses. The results revealed two major themes: (a) a loss of stability; children whose caseworkers had left reported feeling like things were constantly in flux or changing around them; and (b) a loss of trust; children whose caseworkers had left reported a lack of trust in their new caseworker. Children within the child welfare system need relationships that are steadfast and strong, something they often lack in their lives outside of the system. Because of the intimate relationship caseworkers must establish with the families they serve, it is likely that children may establish this steady relationship with their caseworkers. However, as Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010) found, turnover compromises this stability and trust, a finding that other researchers have replicated (Nissly, Mor Barak, & Levin, 2005; Zlotnik et al., 2005).

A Professional Review Action Group (PRAG) reviewed 62 child welfare cases in which multiple instances of child abuse, neglect, and child removal occurred. The primary goal was to identify problems contributing to family reentry (i.e., another instance of abuse or neglect that requires a new placement for the children; Hess et al.,

1992). Each review included a thorough examination of all case documents and records and one-on-one interviews with child welfare workers and supervisors, community service providers involved in the cases, parents, children, and other parties when necessary. Three independent experts conducted each review: (a) a social work educator, (b) a community social work practitioner, and (c) a child welfare public agency administrator. The group found that child welfare worker turnover was a contributing factor to case failure and subsequent family reentry in the majority (67%) of the cases they reviewed.

Clearly, child welfare worker turnover is detrimental to child welfare agencies, other child welfare workers and supervisors, and the children and families they serve. Identifying the factors that contribute to child welfare worker turnover and ways in which agencies can mitigate the effects of worker turnover is therefore imperative. It is no surprise, then, that researchers have spent many years investigating the causes of child welfare worker turnover. Through these research efforts, a laundry list of turnover predictors has emerged. However, even with the vast amount of research dedicated to this national concern, much remains to be learned.

The current study addressed four main gaps within the current research on child welfare worker turnover. First, much of the previous research on child welfare worker turnover examined predictors in isolation. The use of controls and the investigation of mediators and moderators has been minimal. The current study addressed this gap by examining a turnover model that includes several controls, mediators, and moderators to provide a more holistic view of turnover. Specifically, I investigated the mediators of job

burnout, job performance, and turnover intentions and the moderators of job involvement and alternative job opportunities.

Second, the role of job performance has been largely ignored. In fact, a recent meta-analysis of child welfare worker turnover research could not include the predictor of performance in the analysis, as there were not at least two studies available with performance as a usable variable (Kim & Kao, 2014). The researchers concluded that the investigation of performance as a predictor of turnover is an area that needs much more attention. To address this issue, the turnover model in the current study utilized an objective-based measure of job performance that tracked workers' completion of specific federally and state mandated work tasks.

Third, child welfare turnover research has rarely accounted for the type of turnover (e.g., voluntary or involuntary, avoidable or unavoidable). In some cases, turnover may be desirable (e.g., poor performance) or unavoidable (e.g., move or death) from the agency's perspective. The current study therefore considered the type of turnover, with a focus on the type of turnover a child welfare agency would have control preventing (i.e., avoidable turnover).

Finally, the research in child welfare worker turnover has only rarely accounted for the timing of measurement in turnover research. The current study utilized a longitudinal approach to examining child welfare worker turnover. My goal was to develop and investigate a more holistic picture of the child welfare worker turnover process to provide a broader understanding of both proximal and distal predictors of turnover.

CHAPTER TWO

A Review of Turnover Research in Industrial/Organizational Psychology

The current study relies on three major areas of research in the area of Industrial/Organizational (IO) Psychology that seem particularly relevant to child welfare worker turnover: (a) the definition of turnover, (b) the process of turnover (i.e., the factors associated with and the chronological sequence of events within the turnover process), and (c) the measurement timing of turnover (i.e., the relative timing between measurement of predictors and turnover).

Defining Turnover

Although defining turnover may seem simple, a review of the research suggests it is more complicated than it initially appears. For example, turnover can be defined as exit out of a job position or exit out of an organization. Turnover can be considered voluntary (an employee decision) or involuntary (an organization decision). Furthermore, within voluntary turnover there may be certain circumstances that warrant further consideration (e.g., turnover due to pregnancy, re-location due to spouse, employee illness).

Dalton, Krackhardt, and Porter (1981) suggested that certain types of turnover should be considered desirable by organizations. They refer to this type of turnover as functional turnover (i.e., benefits the organization), as opposed to dysfunctional turnover (i.e., hurts the organization). As an example, firing an employee whose job performance is inadequate may benefit the organization and may be considered functional turnover. In contrast, a good employee who leaves an organization due to dissatisfaction with a supervisor or a lack of support would likely hurt the organization and may be considered

dysfunctional. It is important to define turnover specifically, as the predictors may differ depending on the type of turnover examined.

As one example, Park, Ofori-Dankwa, and Bishop (1994) examined organizational and environmental predictors of functional and dysfunctional turnover. Dysfunctional turnover was defined in three ways: (a) the ratio of excellent performing employees who left over total employees, (b) the ratio of average performing employees who left over total employees, and (c) the ratio of both excellent and average performing employees who left over total employees. Functional turnover was defined as the ratio of poor performing employees who left over total employees. Using questionnaires and human resource data from various organizations in Michigan, the researchers found that although the industry unemployment rate was negatively related to functional turnover, it was not related to dysfunctional turnover. In addition, they found that incentive types were differentially related to the two types of turnover. Specifically, individual incentives were more predictive of functional turnover; whereas, group incentives were more predictive of dysfunctional turnover (types two and three only). In other words, when incentives were tied to individual performance, those employees who were lower performers were more likely to leave. On the other hand, when incentives were tied to group performance, those employees who were higher performers were more likely to leave.

Johnson, Griffeth, and Griffin (2000) provide further empirical support that the predictors of functional and dysfunctional turnover differ. Using data from 110 sales people, Johnson et al. (2000) placed participants into one of four groups: (a) low-performing leavers, (b) low-performing stayers, (c) high-performing leavers, and (d)

high-performing stayers. Utilizing multiple group discriminant analysis, a statistical technique that identifies whether or not a set of predictors is effective in determining group membership, Johnson et al. (2000) found several key differences between the two types of turnover. Specifically, the function of promotion satisfaction best predicted high-performance leavers; promotion satisfaction included satisfaction with promotion opportunities, supervision, and overall job satisfaction – all of which were least satisfactory to high-performing leavers. Additionally, the function of role ambiguity distinguished between low-performing leavers and high-performing stayers, such that low-performing leavers reported the highest level of role ambiguity and lowest levels of work satisfaction; whereas, high-performing stayers reported the opposite. Finally, a third function identified as intention to quit best predicted low-performing stayers compared to the other groups, such that low-performing stayers perceived fewer external job opportunities than the other groups, especially compared to low-performing leavers. These studies, along with many others (e.g., Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012; Price, 1977), indicate that there are different types of turnover and, more importantly, that the predictors of turnover differ depending on the type of turnover being measured.

Another way to characterize turnover is with respect to whether the turnover was avoidable (i.e., the organization may have prevented it) or unavoidable (i.e., there is nothing the organization could have done to prevent it) (Abelson, 1987; Barrick & Zimmerman, 2005). An example of unavoidable turnover would be termination of employment due to retirement or employee death. Alternatively, avoidable turnover would include turnover that may have been prevented if certain interventions or processes had been in place. For example, turnover due to a lack of support or promotional

opportunities would be considered avoidable. Similar to functional versus dysfunctional turnover, the predictors of avoidable versus unavoidable turnover also somewhat differ.

As one example, Abelson (1987) examined differences among predictors of avoidable and unavoidable turnover in a sample of nurses. A one-way MANOVA revealed significant differences in the predictors of overall job satisfaction, job tension, and exchange commitment; the latter was measured by asking the employees to compare aspects of their current job with those of their significant other. Abelson (1987) found that avoidable leavers were less satisfied (overall) and less committed when compared to unavoidable leavers, but that there was not a difference in satisfaction and exchange commitment between stayers and unavoidable leavers. Finally, Abelson (1987) found that although job tension was significantly lower for stayers when compared to avoidable leavers, there were no differences in job tension between the two types of leavers.

Once again, empirical research provides support that the type of turnover examined does matter. However, different types of turnover have rarely been considered in the child welfare turnover research. As a result, the predictors of child welfare turnover remain unclear. For example, child welfare research indicates that younger child welfare workers are more likely to leave (e.g., Fryer, Miyoshi, & Thomas, 1989; Jones, 2002; Nissly et al., 2005), but it is unclear whether the turnover was avoidable or unavoidable. In addition, research shows that workers who hold a social work degree (BSW or MSW) are more likely to leave (e.g., Booze-Allen, 1987; Dhooper, Royse, & Wolfe, 1990; Jones, 2002), but the reason is unclear. Is it because they move up the organizational ladder (i.e., become a supervisor, etc.) or leave the field completely?

The current study focused on avoidable turnover—the type of turnover that child welfare agencies may be best able to prevent through implementing formal or informal incentive programs, improving employee and organizational supports and structures, or changing organizational or state policies and practices. Next, I examine the different models of turnover from the field of IO psychology, focusing on their relevance to the current investigation.

Models of Voluntary Turnover

Throughout the years, IO psychology researchers have examined the turnover process in great depth both theoretically and empirically. In more recent years, researchers have focused on precise models of turnover that apply within certain industries (e.g., business vs. healthcare), certain job types (e.g., expatriates vs. immigrants), or certain employee types (e.g., baby boomers vs. millennials). However, much of the earlier research on turnover focused on developing theories that took a more general approach to turnover with the focus on all employees. The intent of these classic models was to identify why employees quit (i.e., the predictors of turnover).

March and Simon's (1958) organizational equilibrium model. One of the first models of employee turnover was developed by March and Simon (1958). The premise of this model was that employees are motivated to maintain employment with an organization if there is a balance or equilibrium maintained within the employee-organization relationship. The model included two main components: (a) inducements, which are defined as those things offered by the organization as reimbursement for work (e.g., pay and incentives, intrinsic value), and (b) employee contributions, which are the contributions the employee makes to the organization (e.g., performance).

The model suggested that if there was a balance between contributions and inducements, equilibrium would be maintained and the likelihood of turmover would decrease. However, the model also suggested that this balance relied on two additional factors: (a) the perceived desirability of the job to the employee (i.e., job satisfaction), and (b) the perceived ease of movement out of the job (i.e., availability of alternative job opportunities). In other words, this model suggested that the turnover decision is a function of both the desire and the ability to leave the organization.

March and Simon's (1958) equilibrium model of turnover was one of the first to integrate both external factors, such as unemployment rates, and employee behaviors, such as examining alternative job opportunities. However, some researchers found that this model of turnover was inadequate in determining the turnover process in its entirety. For example, Anderson and Milkovich (1980) investigated whether the model would generalize across job contexts in a sample of 759 participants working in professional, managerial, and technical state government positions. Their results provided only partial support for the model. Specifically, across employee types, the perceived ease of movement was directly related to the perceived number of alternative job opportunities and unemployment rates. This finding supported the model's premise that the availability of alternative job opportunities, including those perceived by the employee and actual opportunities available as measured by unemployment rates, predicted employees' perceived ease of movement. However, the relationship between perceived ease of movement and the propensity to leave was not as strongly supported, as it was only evident among employees in professional positions; there was no relationship among employees in either managerial or technical positions.

Anderson and Milkovich (1980) suggested that one aspect missing in March and Simon's (1958) model was the desirability or utility of alternative opportunities. Specifically, they suggested that the propensity to leave is not solely determined by the number of alternative opportunities, but rather by the number of *desirable* alternative opportunities. Finally, although job satisfaction was related to the propensity to leave across all employee types, alternative opportunities (both internal and external) were only related to the propensity to leave for the managerial sample.

March and Simon's (1958) equilibrium model of turnover was one of the first theoretical-driven models of turnover to be empirically tested. In fact, the equilibrium model of turnover served as the foundation for most, if not all, succeeding models of turnover within the field of IO psychology. For example, job satisfaction and withdrawal behaviors continue to be two of the most prominent features of modern day turnover models.

Porter and Steer's (1973) met expectations model. In 1973, another major contribution to turnover research came from Porter and Steers (1973) who suggested that turnover was primarily a function of unmet expectations on the job, which were organized into four major categories: (a) organizational factors (pay, promotion, etc.), (b) work environment factors (supervisor style, peer interaction, etc.), (c) job factors (job autonomy, job clarity, etc.), and (d) personal factors (age, tenure, etc.). According to the met expectations model, as long as an employee's expectations continued to be met, there would be no reason to expect the employee to leave the company.

Porter and Steer's (1973) model of turnover expanded the work of March and Simon (1958) and was strongly influenced by Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory of

human motivation, which posits that humans are motivated by the extent to which they perceive that their behaviors will lead to expected results. Porter and Steer's met expectations model further clarified and organized ways in which employee equilibrium could become disrupted; therefore, the underlying mechanisms of the model appear to be largely the same as those of March and Simon's model. Specifically, in March and Simon's model, a state of equilibrium must exist; Porter and Steer's met expectations model also includes the idea of equilibrium, however it is somewhat subsumed under the idea of expectations. As an example, to the extent employees' expectations are unmet (e.g., the company promised a bonus payout for good performance but failed to follow through), an imbalance might occur (i.e., equilibrium is disrupted), which ultimately creates tension within the employee-organization relationship.

Another similarity between Porter and Steer's (1973) met expectations model and March and Simon's (1958) equilibrium model is the inclusion of job satisfaction as a mediator. In the same way that imbalance leads to dissatisfaction in the equilibrium model, in Porter and Steer's model of turnover, employees' unmet expectations leads to dissatisfaction, which eventually leads to job turnover.

Irving and Meyer (1994) examined the utility of Porter and Steer's (1973) met expectations model of turnover in a sample of 137 MBA students who were recruited for a study that spanned a one-year period after students secured full-time employment. Irving and Meyer found partial support for the met expectations model. Using principal components analysis, the researchers identified three components of met expectations: (a) comfort, which was the expectations about the comfort of various working conditions, including job security, work routines, rules and procedures, time off, and the actual work

environment; (b) reward, which was the expectations of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, including intellectual stimulation, feelings of accomplishment, pay, respect from others, and recognition of good work; and (c) responsibility, which was the expectations of job responsibilities, including the ability to take risks, developing methods of doing the work, problem-solving organizational issues, and working independently. The researchers measured these same components both prior to employment, referring to them as expectations, and longitudinally after employment both at one month and six months, referring to them to as work experiences.

Irving and Meyer (1994) examined the extent to which the three types of expectations were related to job experiences one and six months post-employment, and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions at 6 and 12 months post-employment. They found that expectations of comfort, reward, and responsibility were all positively related to the same work experiences one month and six months post-employment. However, only the expectation of reward was positively related to job satisfaction at six months, and only the expectations of reward and responsibility were positively related to organizational commitment at six months. None of the expectations were related to intentions to leave at 6 or 12 months post-employment. In contrast, all three work experiences of comfort, reward, and responsibility measured one month post-employment were positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment and negatively related to intentions to leave both at 6 and at 12 months post-employment. There was only one exception; Comfort at one month was not related to intentions to leave at 12 months.

Irving and Meyer (1994) provided partial support for the model in that job satisfaction mediated the relationship between expectations and turnover intentions. However, job experiences, rather than expectations, had a more direct relationship with job attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction and organizational commitment) and withdrawal cognitions (i.e., intentions to leave). In short, this study indicated that work experiences matter, which has implications for the timing of measurement within turnover research. When independent variables are measured at a single point in time and turnover is measured at another single point in time, as is done in much of the turnover research, the results may be misleading.

Overall, research utilizing Porter and Steer's (1973) met expectations model of turnover highlighted the need for employers to establish expectations early in the onboarding process. Ultimately, Porter and Steer's model of turnover became the premise for the development of the realistic job preview (Wanous, 1977). In addition, Porter and Steer were some of the first researchers to begin incorporating a variety of work and environmental predictors of turnover. Subsequent turnover research relied heavily on this line of research and began to investigate a multitude of turnover predictors.

Price's (1977) causal model. After almost five years of additional turnover research, Price (1977) began development on what he referred to as the causal model of employee turnover, incorporating known determinants or predictors of turnover, such as pay and promotional opportunities. Price asserted that this model of turnover was superior to older models because the inclusion of these determinants created a more comprehensive model of the turnover process. As in previous models of turnover, Price

also incorporated job satisfaction and withdrawal cognitions (intent to leave) as mediators.

This model was later empirically tested in a sample of 1,091 nurses across seven hospitals (Price & Mueller, 1981). The researchers examined determinants of voluntary turnover, which excluded turnover due to layoffs, dismissals, retirements, deaths and also excluded turnover due to transfers or promotions, as those employees did not technically leave. Eleven determinants of turnover were examined, including alternative job opportunities, job routinization, job autonomy (referred to as participation), communication of information from the organization to employees, integration or the extent to which employees had friends at work, pay, distributive justice, promotional opportunities, professionalism, training, and kinship responsibilities. Two intervening variables (or mediators), namely, job satisfaction and intent to stay, were also examined.

Price and Mueller (1981) found that almost all of the determinants had relatively small correlations with voluntary turnover. The results of path analysis indicated that only 18% of the variance in voluntary turnover was accounted for by the predictor variables and only three (i.e., alternative job opportunities, training, and intent to stay) were significant. The strongest relationship was with intent to stay and was negative, as would be expected. However, the results for job satisfaction were interesting. Price and Mueller did not find a significant direct effect of job satisfaction on turnover, which was contrary to most of the literature on turnover at that time. Instead, they found that job satisfaction had only an indirect influence on turnover through intent to stay, which the researchers described as a type of organizational commitment.

Price and Mueller (1981) helped set the path for later research on turnover. Prior to Porter and Steer's (1973) met expectations model, the research on turnover was mostly limited to demographic predictors and job satisfaction. Porter and Steer's model broadened the scope to other factors, including job and environmental variables and much of the research between 1973 and 1977 followed suit, investigating a number of other predictors. Price and Mueller demonstrated the relatively weak relationships many of these predictors had with voluntary turnover. Thus, once again it became important to narrow the scope. For example, it seemed that some predictors of turnover should be given precedence over others or, alternatively, that predictors of turnover may be important at different points in the employment timeline. The latter is something that Mobley (1977) explicitly considered in his model of turnover.

Mobley's (1977) process model. Mobley (1977) developed a model that examined in greater detail the process of turnover, or alternatively stated, the steps an employee may take when making the decision to leave an organization. At this time, the majority of research on employee turnover was focused on predictors of turnover, which primarily focused on the job satisfaction-turnover relationship. The fundamental thinking at this time was that different factors influenced job satisfaction (mediator), which would then lead to employee turnover. Mobley's model of turnover advanced this thinking by suggesting that there are additional steps or decision points between job dissatisfaction and leaving. Although this idea was not new, as some earlier models of turnover had incorporated withdrawal cognitions, Mobley was the first to examine the turnover process as a whole, including not only predictors of turnover, but also their timing and links to more specific events within the turnover process. Mobley referred to these as

intermediate linkages (i.e., additional steps) that occurred between job dissatisfaction and actual turnover. These intermediate linkages included thinking of quitting, intentions to search for new employment, searching and evaluating alternative employment opportunities, and intentions of quitting (see Figure 2).

Hom, Griffeth, and Sellaro (1984) tested Mobley's (1977) process model in a sample of 192 hospital employees who completed questionnaire measures of all the intermediate linkages within Mobley's model; turnover was defined as either voluntary or involuntary, as determined by exit interviews and was measured one year later. The researchers also incorporated a social determinant of turnover, that is, social pressure on employees (e.g., from family members and peers) to quit. Hom et al. found some evidence in support of Mobley's process model. In the majority of cases, the best predictor of each subsequent determinant was the determinant hypothesized to occur directly prior to it. In addition, Hom et al. found that his alternative model, which included social pressure, provided a slightly better fit to the data than did Mobley's model alone.

Hom et al. (1984) also examined Mobley's (1977) model using path analysis to examine the recursive nature of the model. They found several direct and indirect effects that Mobley's original model did not include. For example, met expectations not only had an indirect effect on thoughts of quitting through job satisfaction, as suggested in Mobley's model, but there were also direct effects of thoughts of quitting on both intentions to quit and intentions to search. Hom and colleagues continued to research turnover using their alternative model, which was tested and supported in another sample (Hom & Griffeth, 1991). Continuing research in this area, Hom subsequently improved

his model with the addition of employment rate, role conflict, and job avoidance (Hom & Kinicki, 2001).

The work of Mobley (1977) and Hom and colleagues (Hom et al., 1984; Hom & Griffeth, 1991; Hom & Kinicki, 2001) played an important role in shifting the focus from identifying predictors of turnover to a more complex analysis of identifying the underlying processes of employee turnover, that is, the order in which various types of cognitions and behaviors are likely to occur. These researchers brought greater attention to cognitions within the turnover process, such as thinking about searching and thinking about quitting, neither of which had been examined much prior to this time. Over the next decade, much of turnover research turned its focus to meta-analytic reviews of these classic turnover models (e.g., Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; McEvoy & Cascio, 1985, Steel & Ovalle, 1984). As research and knowledge of employee turnover grew, additional models of turnover began to emerge.

Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model. Lee and Mitchell (1994) took a decision-making approach to investigating the turnover process. In the unfolding model of turnover, distinctive foci, psychological processes, and external events all play unique roles in employee turnover decisions. Based on the alternative decision-making and image theory research of Beach (1993), Lee and Mitchell's unfolding model included five major components. First, a shock or event occurs (e.g., a company buy-out, a death in the family, a new baby on the way), which initiates the turnover decision process. Second, employees run a "script" to examine whether they have a set of actions established for the given the event, which can be based on various factors, including personal interests, experiences, biases, dreams, and beliefs. A "match" to a pre-

established action plan may be found or an image violation, the third component of the model, may occur if there is not a match. The final two components include an examination of alternative job opportunities and job satisfaction. Based on the outcome of these components, an employee follows one of three decision paths: (a) automatic decision, (b) push decision, or (c) pull decision.

In an automatic decision, a shock event occurs and the employee identifies a script for dealing with the shock event. In other words, there is a "match." In this case, an automatic decision is made that aligns with the pre-established matching image. If a shock occurs and the employee does not have a pre-established matching frame, an image violation occurs and additional information must be processed, such as the availability of alternative job opportunities and job satisfaction. For example, if no viable alternative job opportunity exists, a push decision is made and the employee stays with the company; if a viable alternative job opportunity is available then a pull decision is made and the employee quits. The final decision path discussed in this model is not prompted by a shock event, but instead has to do with the employee's monitoring of job affect or job satisfaction. In this case, job dissatisfaction can prompt the employee to begin down a decision path.

Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model of turnover was later slightly modified and empirically tested (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999). Questionnaires were sent to former employees of six large organizations; a total of 229 questionnaires were returned and included in the study. An analysis of the data revealed that the slightly modified unfolding model led to a 30.1% increase in the classification of job exits compared to the original model, which provided general support for the

unfolding model. Using national data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lee, Gerhart, Weller, and Trevor (2008) found additional support for the unfolding model but suggested that the model's success depended on the type of shock that occurred and the demographic characteristics of the leaver. For example, the model was better at predicting more straight-forward job exits (e.g., looking for another job or taking another job); it was less successful at predicting job exits due to unsolicited job offers or for family reasons.

Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model of employee turnover is similar to many of the classic models outlined above; however, it does provide a unique perspective on employee turnover. First, the model utilizes several alternatives within the turnover process compared to examining a singular approach like most previous models. It also maintains a central focus on the role of internal processes (e.g., pre-established interests, beliefs, experience) in the turnover process. Whereas, most classic models of turnover focus on the role of external events or factors (e.g., job satisfaction, job opportunities, rewards, turnover intent).

Maertz and Campion (2004) integrative model. Building on the work of Mobley (1977) and Lee and Mitchell (1994) who examined how employees quit (i.e., the process of turnover) and the classic models of turnover that focus on why employees quit (i.e., the predictors), Maertz and Campion (2004) developed an integrative model of employee turnover that examines both how and why employees quit. They identified eight motivational forces that influence turnover, including (a) affective (e.g., job satisfaction), (b) alternative (e.g., alternative job opportunities), (c) contractual (e.g., psychological contracts), (d) constituent (e.g., coworker or organizational commitment),

(e) calculative (e.g., expected utility), (f) normative (e.g., family or peer pressure), (g) behavioral (e.g., cost of turnover), and (h) mora factorsl. In addition, they identified four types of quitters, including (a) impulsive, that is, spontaneous quitters who do not plan or think much about quitting; (b) comparison, that is, quitters who think rationally about quitting and consider other information within the decision; (c) preplanned, that is, quitters who make plans to leave that have little or nothing to do with the current organization but more about life circumstances; and (d) conditional, that is, quitters who make decisions to quit if certain conditions are met.

Maertz and Campion (2004) examined the circumstances around 159 employees' previous job departures using interviews and surveys. The researchers approached potential participants either at their workplaces or in public and interviewed those who could clearly remember their most recent job departure; participants were also given a survey to complete. Participants were categorized into one of the four quitter types based on their responses. Using ANOVA, the researchers found differences among the motivational forces between the different quitter/decision types. For example, the affective force was stronger and more negative, and the alternative force was weaker, in impulsive quitters compared to other quitter types. These findings suggest that impulsive quitters, as expected, make more rash decisions based on feelings rather than on a rational examination of current and potential job circumstances.

More importantly, however, Maertz and Campion (2004) further highlighted the utility and importance of taking a two-pronged approach to the study of employee turnover by examining predictors of turnover along with the process itself. As research on turnover progressed, it became more apparent that predictors of turnover often depend on

the process or decision path of the employee. The current study took a similar approach, focusing both on the predictors of child welfare worker turnover and on the turnover process of child welfare workers as a whole. The child welfare turnover research to date has primarily focused on turnover predictors.

Overall, IO psychology research on employee turnover to date indicates that (a) it is a time-based process in which (b) there are distal and more intermediate predictors that (c) lead to turnover intentions and, subsequently, actual turnover (Hom et al., 2012). In addition, according to Steel and Lounsbury (2009), three core mechanisms are central to almost all turnover models: (a) attitudinal variables, (b) job-search mechanisms, and (c) turnover intentions. Another important factor to consider when investigating turnover is the timing of measurement.

Timing of Measurement in Turnover Research

The current thinking regarding the turnover process within IO psychology is that there is a specific sequence of events that occurs prior to turnover; some variables are thought to be distal predictors while others are thought to be more proximal predictors of turnover (Hom et al., 2012). As such, the timing of measurement is important. Ideally, predictors should be measured when they are hypothesized to exist within the actual turnover process, but the cost of collecting data at numerous points in time can be problematic. For that reason, most researchers collect self-report information at one time and turnover data at another and then utilize analytic techniques to try to estimate the chronological order of turnover events (e.g., identifying the primary predictors of subsequent events within the process). However, the passage of time can greatly affect the accuracy and stability of predictor-turnover relationships (Steel, Hendrix, & Balogh,

1990; Steel & Ovalle, 1984), which can be problematic for these point-in-time measurement designs typically used in turnover research.

For example, in a meta-analysis of turnover predictors, Griffeth, Hom, and Gaetner (2000) found that time lag weakened the negative relationship between performance and job exit. Similarly, Dickter, Roznowski, and Harrison (1996) found that the job satisfaction-turnover relationship weakened with the passage of time between assessments of job satisfaction and turnover. In an examination of 1,026 employees sampled throughout the United States, Dickter et al. (1996) investigated the effect of time within the voluntary turnover process. Specifically, survey data were used to determine employee characteristics such as income, job history, job satisfaction, and cognitive ability. The researchers then employed an event history model to examine the hazard function of the probability of turnover. Dickter et al. (1996) found that time moderated the relationships between job satisfaction and turnover and cognitive ability and turnover, such that these relationships were weaker with the passage of time.

Boswell, Boudreau, and Tichy (2005) similarly demonstrated the importance of time. They found a "honeymoon-hangover" effect of job satisfaction on voluntary turnover by examining the turnover process among 538 high-level managers across a 5-year period. Boswell et al. found that job satisfaction dropped immediately prior to turnover (job change), jumped dramatically after a job change (honeymoon), but then eventually began to decrease again (hangover).

Although rarely examined, the point at which predictors are measured can greatly influence the nature of the results that are obtained, as demonstrated in the research above. The model of child welfare turnover examined in the current study partially

accounts for the effect of time by utilizing performance data collected across time and up to six months prior to the event of turnover, which allowed me to examine performance across time rather than examining performance as a single point in time. This research represents one step towards filling the gap within child welfare worker turnover research, which, to my knowledge, has never explicitly examined the timing of events. In the next chapter, I briefly outline the research to date on child welfare worker turnover, with a specific focus on those variables analyzed within the current investigation.

CHAPTER THREE

Turnover Research in Child Welfare

The origin of the child welfare system dates back to 1875, when the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children became the first organized agency dedicated to the protection of children (Myers, 2008). The child welfare system grew rapidly in the early 1900s with the development of both child welfare organizations and juvenile courts in many states, and by the late 1900s, the federal government took a central role in the protection of children (Myers, 2008). Given the difficulty of child welfare work, turnover in child welfare, in many ways, has been a problem since the field's infancy. Therefore, efforts to investigate and mitigate the turnover problem within child welfare began very early and continues to a major area of focus in child welfare research.

Factors Related to Child Welfare Worker Turnover

Historically, researchers in child welfare worker turnover have investigated a multitude of factors related to worker turnover, including employee attitudes/perceptions, job, organizational, and environmental factors. Utilizing a variety of research designs, methodologies, and analytic techniques, researchers have been able to identify factors associated with child welfare worker turnover that generalize across child welfare agencies and across state lines.

My review of the research on child welfare worker turnover suggests that the predictors are best organized into five major categories: (a) characteristics of the employee, (b) characteristics of the job, (c) characteristics of the job environment, (d) employee job-specific attitudes, and (e) employee withdrawal cognitions and behaviors.

This categorization provides the four typical categories of predictors identified in child welfare worker turnover research (e.g., Kim & Kao, 2014), but has the additional fifth category of withdrawal cognitions and behaviors. This category includes those behaviors that occur directly prior to turnover, such as searching for alternative job opportunities, changes in performance, or intentions of leaving — a category that seems to have been missing in much of the child welfare worker turnover research to date.

I utilize this five-category classification of turnover predictors to organize the predictors of child welfare worker turnover and identify the relative timing of each along the employee-organization relationship timeline (see Figure 3). The current study examined a model of turnover in which specific predictors are hypothesized to occur before and influence other later predictors within the model. The five-category typology is used to organize and summarize the research findings on child welfare worker turnover to date, with a primary focus on variables investigated in the current study.

Characteristics of the employee. Characteristics of employees include demographic characteristics of child welfare workers and the role those characteristics play in the turnover process. Research indicates that individual characteristics, such as age, tenure, and work experience are all related to the retention of child welfare workers. Child welfare workers who are younger (e.g., Fryer et al., 1989; Jones, 2002; Nissly et al., 2005), do not have a social work degree (BSW or MSW) (e.g., Booze-Allen, 1987; Dhooper et al., 1990; Jones, 2002), and have less experience in child welfare (e.g., Balfour & Neff, 1993; Nissly et al., 2005; Rosenthal, McDowell, & White, 1998) are more likely to have intentions to leave or ultimately leave.

Findings regarding gender and ethnicity, however, have been mixed. Several studies have indicated that men are more likely to leave (e.g., Curry, McCarragher, & Dellman-Jenkins, 2005; Rosenthal & Waters, 2006), one study found that women are more likely to leave (Landsman, 2001), and others have found no gender differences at all (e.g., Glisson & James, 2002; Jacquet, Clark, Morazes, & Withers, 2008; Nissly et al., 2005. Similarly, Landsman (2001) found that Whites were more likely to intend to remain when compared to ethnic minority child welfare workers. However, another study (Jones & Okamura, 2000) found the opposite (i.e., that Whites were more likely to leave), and yet others found no relationship between ethnicity and turnover (e.g., Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001).

Another group of predictors that would fall into this category include personality or dispositional type characteristics. However, because the focus of this study was to examine predictors of turnover that a child welfare agency has some control and influence over, it should be noted that personality and/or dispositional characteristics were not examined as part of this study. Although the omission of this group of predictors was intentional for the current study, there is likely some benefit to examining these types of employee characteristics and how they relate to worker turnover. I discuss the use of personality and dispositional predictors more within the discussion section of this paper.

Characteristics of the job environment. Another common area of interest among researchers on child welfare worker turnover is the role of the job environment. This category of predictors includes those factors that are a part of the environment or atmosphere under which that job exits, including physical factors related to the work environment, such as temperature and space, and also more psychological and

organizational factors, such as organizational culture and climate and bureaucratic structure and policies.

One interesting area when it comes to the job environment of child welfare workers concerns what Lipsky (1980) referred to as street-level bureaucracy, which is the idea that the workers who are on the streets directly involved in the implementation of public policy within their work have some level of discretion in how that work is completed. Research in this area highlights the importance of street-level experience when it comes to the implementation of social policies, such as those related to child welfare work (e.g., Mead, 2005). As one example of street-level bureaucracy at play within the area of child welfare, Fluke, Corwin, Hollinshead, and Maher (2016) found that workers who had more experience in child welfare (i.e., higher levels of street-level experience) were more likely to lean towards views and beliefs related to family preservation compared to workers with less experience who were more likely to lean towards views and beliefs related to child safety.

Although these environmental factors may be important to the child welfare worker turnover process, the focus of the current study was on the more proximal predictors of turnover (refer to Figure 3), such as job-specific attitudes and employee withdrawal behaviors and cognitions. Therefore, job environment predictors of turnover were not included in this study. However, I discuss this group of predictors more within the discussion section of this paper.

In addition, it should be noted that at the time these data were collected, the child welfare system under investigation was a public-based system (i.e., there were no private-based components) that had been in effect for several decades. Furthermore, all

participants in this study were public, state-employed child welfare workers. Therefore, although variations within the work environment due to things such as street-level bureaucracy cannot be assumed to be consistent for all participants, it can be assumed that the overarching state-run bureaucratic structure the participants worked within was similar across all participants.

Characteristics of the job. The vast majority of research to date has focused on characteristics of the job as potential predictors of turnover. This category of predictors refers to aspects of the job itself and can include anything from specific job tasks to how the compensation or reward structure of the job motivates and drives employee productivity. The current study examined the job characteristic of job involvement in the turnover model.

Job involvement. Job involvement, which has been often examined by IO researchers (e.g., Kanungo, 1982; Rizwan, Khan, & Saboor, 2011), has been less often examined by child welfare researchers. Job involvement was originally conceptualized as the extent to which individuals identify with their jobs (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965) and is generally considered a type of work engagement. The current study utilized Kanungo's (1982) definition of job involvement, which is defined as a cognitive state of psychological identification or attachment with one's job and includes employees' perceptions of the extent to which their jobs can satisfy salient needs. The underlying premise of job involvement is the idea that a job is not viewed as a means to an end (e.g., a job gives you money to live), but rather as an integral part of one's life (e.g., a job becomes a part of one's social identity).

The current study investigated the extent to which job involvement influences worker job-specific attitudes, which was hypothesized to influence worker withdrawal cognitions and behaviors, and, ultimately, worker turnover. There is some general support for these hypothesized relationships. For example, job involvement has been shown to relate to both employee job attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Kahn, 1990; Zatzick & Iverson, 2011) and employee productivity and retention (e.g., Chughtai, 2008; Keller, 1997; Pfeffer, 1994) within various work industries.

In addition, a meta-analysis of job involvement (Brown, 1996) indicated that employee and situational characteristics influence job involvement, which subsequently influence employee attitudes and behaviors. Brown suggested that job involvement, because of its utility in satisfying salient needs, directly influences motivational processes (i.e., attitudes), which then influence psychological processes (e.g., withdrawal cognitions) and behaviors (e.g., performance or turnover). This rationale was based on finding relatively weak direct relationships between job involvement and performance and between job involvement and turnover. Based on these meta-analytic findings, Brown identified job involvement as a more proximal predictor of motivational processes and a more distal predictor of behavioral processes.

Furthermore, Rizwan et al. (2011) theorized that the difficulty in consistently predicting job behaviors (in this case job performance) using job involvement was due to an important mediator missing from the equation, that is, employee attitudes. The current study examined this theoretical assumption directly by investigating the relationship of job involvement, mediated by worker burnout, to both job performance and turnover intentions. In alignment with Brown's (1996) findings, the current study examined job

involvement as a direct or proximal predictor of the motivational process of job burnout and a more distal predictor of the job withdrawal cognitions and behaviors of performance, intentions to quit, and turnover.

Although the research on job involvement in IO psychology provides some insight on its role in the turnover process, child welfare researchers have not yet investigated this predictor. In fact, I could find only two studies where job involvement was examined within the broader social work area. In alignment with the IO research outlined above, there is also some support for the job involvement—employee attitude relationship within recent research of on social workers. Social work is the broader category of public service employees that includes child welfare workers. Using survey data from over 8,716 social workers in South Korea, Kim, Henderson, and Eom (2015) found that perceived job involvement was related to the job-specific attitude of public service motivation. Public service motivation is a type of altruistic attitude or belief that one's work is meaningful and purposeful, and it has been shown to be related to employee retention (Gould-Williams, Mostafa, & Bottomley, 2015; Kim, 2005) and performance (Bright, 2008).

In another study, Liou and Bazemore (1994) examined job involvement as an outcome of professional attitudes (treatment-focus versus punishment-focus) in 109 juvenile delinquent caseworkers in two detentions centers in two different southeastern cities. Utilizing questionnaire data, the researchers found that treatment-focus, which refers to the professional attitude that the caseworker's role is to treat and rehabilitate delinquents, was positively related to job involvement; whereas, punishment-focus,

which refers to the professional attitude that the caseworker's role is to punish and discipline delinquents, was negatively related to job involvement.

Although not specific to child welfare workers, both of these studies provide some evidence that job-related attitudes are related to job involvement within a more general social work environment. In alignment with these findings, it was hypothesized that the job-related attitude of making a difference, which is described in more detail below but is generally defined as the extent to which welfare workers feel they are making a difference in the lives of the families they serve, is positively related to job involvement. This hypothesis aligns with Kanungo's (1982) definition of job involvement as a cognitive state of psychological identification or attachment with one's job. The relationship between job involvement and making a difference, then, becomes a way in which child welfare workers psychologically attach (or detach) themselves from their work. The current study was the first, to my knowledge, to investigate the role of job involvement in the turnover of child welfare workers.

Employee job-specific attitudes. With a foundation in the turnover research within IO psychology outlined previously, the current model included job-specific attitudes and their role within the child welfare worker turnover process. Attitudes are the most proximal predictor of intentions and behavior (Griffin & Moorhead, 2012); perhaps this is the reason job satisfaction was such a large focus of early turnover research. In addition to attitudes being closely linked to subsequent cognitive withdrawal (job searching, turnover intentions, etc.) and behavior (performance or turnover), attitudes become particularly important to examine within the child welfare area because of the

emotional nature of child welfare work. In the current study, I examined two job-specific attitudes, including workers' perceptions of making a difference and job burnout.

Making a difference. Making a difference has rarely been examined as a quantitative predictor of child welfare worker turnover. However, there are many case studies and/or qualitative research studies on child welfare workers in which the idea of making a difference emerges. In fact, in many of these qualitative studies, making a difference is identified as a key driver in decisions about turnover.

In one qualitative study (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2006) based on interviews of almost 300 former workers in child welfare and juvenile delinquency, 50% of the workers who had left child welfare reported feeling like their work made no difference; they identified it as one of the contributing factors in their decision to leave the child welfare field. A qualitative open-ended survey of 150 child welfare workers similarly revealed that experiencing client success was very important (Harris & Middleton, 2000).

In another qualitative study, interviews with 13 "committed survivors" of child welfare, defined as being employed for eight or more years in the child welfare area, revealed that having a real vision and desire to make a difference in the lives of children and families was a primary contributing factor to employment longevity (Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003). In a research study conducted by Reagh (1994), child welfare workers identified the main reasons they remained in child welfare. Two of the most frequent responses were (a) the desire to help families make life better for their children and (b) the enjoyment of working with children and families. Similarly, Bernotavicz (1997)

found that workers reported being more likely to continue working in child welfare if they felt that their work was making a difference.

Research also indicates that other aspects of child welfare work are influenced by the ability to make a difference. For example, a survey of 36 child welfare workers revealed that one of the major sources of job satisfaction was opportunities to make a difference in families' lives (Tracy, Bean, Gwatkin, & Hill, 1992). Similarly, a larger survey of over 200 child welfare workers found that opportunities to make a difference in clients' lives was listed as one of the most important factors contributing to workers' job satisfaction, which ultimately influenced child welfare worker turnover intentions and turnover (Dickinson & Perry, 1998; 2002).

Chen, Park, and Park (2012) examined child welfare worker turnover utilizing a human needs perspective based on the work of Alderfer (1969, 1972). Utilizing structural equation modeling, they found that growth needs, which are needs associated with feelings of success and making a difference through work, were the strongest predictors of intentions to leave. Specifically, child welfare workers who felt more successful and better able to make a difference were less likely to report intentions to leave. Furthermore, growth needs had the strongest effect on turnover intentions compared to the other needs within the model (i.e., existence needs and relatedness needs) and fully mediated the relationship between existence needs and turnover intentions. The current study, to my knowledge, is the only study that has attempted to quantify this aspect of making a difference and utilize it within a quantitative study of child welfare worker turnover.

The findings outlined above clearly show that child welfare workers' feelings towards being able to make a difference in the lives of the children and families they serve is a very important factor in their decision to stay within the field of child welfare. It seems, then, that much of the quantitative research of child welfare worker turnover has been missing what could be one of the most significant driving factors of turnover.

Conrad and Kellar-Guenther (2006), for example, examined the relationship between compassion satisfaction and burnout in child welfare workers. Compassion satisfaction was defined, based on the work of Stamm (2002), as the degree to which workers felt successful in their jobs. It can be argued, then, that success in child welfare work is improving the lives of families (i.e., making a difference). After all, the job of a child welfare worker is to help support families on their journey to become self-sustaining. Conrad and Kellar-Guenther used self-report questionnaire data from 363 Colorado child protection caseworkers who attended a seminar on secondary trauma to better understand the relationships between compassion fatigue, compassion success, and burnout. They found that caseworkers who had more compassion satisfaction exhibited less compassion fatigue and job burnout. It is not clear, however, whether compassion satisfaction and making a difference are necessarily the same. Therefore, the current study was the first to directly examine the effect of making a difference on child welfare worker turnover in a quantitative way.

The job of a child welfare worker is incredibly stress-ridden. Every connection made with a family must be fully and adequately documented within very tight time constraints, and adding to this stress, these documents are often used in court as evidence. In addition, and perhaps most taxing to child welfare workers, is the emotional burden

that comes with this type of work. It is for these reasons that the current study examined the role of job burnout in the child welfare worker turnover process.

Burnout. Job burnout is defined as "a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding" (Pines & Aronson, 1988, p. 9). One of the most highly researched and supported predictors of child welfare worker turnover is job burnout, and when one considers the type of work a child welfare worker does this is not surprising. A child welfare worker must manage the cases of multiple families, which includes ensuring appropriate services are available and provided to help the families, ensuring that the families utilize those services, all while navigating the bureaucratic, paperwork heavy world of local, state, and federal governments. In addition, child welfare workers experience horrific circumstances of child abuse and neglect and at times have to face the difficult decision of separating children from their families.

In general, burnout can be very debilitating for employees, as research supports the premise that job burnout leads to employees' feelings of inadequacy and insignificance in their work (e.g., Etzion & Pines 1986; Pines, 2000a; 2000b; 2002), which can ultimately lead to a variety of negative workplace outcomes. In the area of child welfare, high levels of job burnout have been linked to a negative outcomes, such as stress and depression (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Smith & Clark, 2011; Regehr, Hemsworth, Leslie, Howe, & Chau, 2004), work-family and family-work conflict (Nissly et al., 2005), and role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload (Lambert & Hogan, 2010; Savicki, Cooley, & Gjesvold, 2003). In addition, previous research in child welfare shows burnout to be a significant predictor of turnover intentions (Kim & Stoner, 2008) and job exit

(DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Kim, 2011; Kim & Stoner, 2008; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Zlotnik et al., 2005).

As one example, Williams, Nichols, Kirk, and Wilson (2011) utilized a mixed-methods design to examine burnout among 260 public child welfare workers. They found that only 3% of all workers in the study reported feeling emotionally strong and not burned out. Using growth curve analysis, another study of 335 public child welfare workers by Lizano and Mor Barak (2012) found that the burnout of child welfare workers increased with time. This finding is not surprising, as it seems likely that with additional time spent working under emotional and psychological stress that burnout would increase dramatically.

Kim (2011) examined how burnout differed in child welfare workers compared to others types of social workers. Using Maslach and Jackson's (1986) burnout measure, Kim found that compared to other types of social workers ($N = 338$), child welfare workers ($N = 70$) reported greater burnout. Specifically, child welfare workers reported greater feelings of depersonalization, which is characterized as feelings of detachment from the job, and lower personal accomplishment or achievement at work. Kim's research points out how the magnitude of burnout that child welfare workers experience can be great, even when compared to workers within similar job positions.

Because burnout is shown to be such a strong predictor of child welfare worker turnover, I included it within the model of turnover examined in this investigation. Specifically, I examined job burnout as a mediator between the job-related attitude or feeling of making a difference and withdrawal cognitions and behaviors. Although the variable making a difference is new to child welfare research, the general premise that

burnout can serve as a mediator between job-related characteristics (in this case perceptions of making a difference) and withdrawal cognitions and behaviors is supported in the current research in child welfare. For example, in a longitudinal study of 363 urban child welfare workers, Travis, Lizano, and Mor Barak (2015) found that several job-related characteristics, including work-family conflict, role ambiguity, and role conflict, were related to employee disengagement (withdrawal) indirectly through job burnout. Next, I review the role of withdrawal cognitions and behaviors in the child welfare worker turnover process.

Employee withdrawal cognitions and behaviors. The most direct or proximal predictors of turnover are cognitions and behaviors that indicate an employee is beginning the process of job withdrawal. Variables within this category of predictors include, changes in job performance, job withdrawal cognitions (i.e., thinking about looking for new employment or thinking about quitting), withdrawal behaviors (i.e., actually looking for new employment), and turnover intentions. As mentioned previously, Mobley's (1977) process model of turnover was the first to examine what he referred to as intermediate linkages (i.e., additional steps) between job dissatisfaction and actual turnover. These intermediate linkages included these withdrawal cognitions and behaviors. Based on this work, I examined some of these cognitions and behaviors in the current study. Within the field of child welfare, these variables - with the exception of turnover intentions, which was most often used as an outcome rather than a predictor - have largely remained unexamined. The present study supplements the turnover research in child welfare by examining a process model that includes the withdrawal cognitions

and behavior characteristics of turnover intentions, alternative job opportunities, and job performance.

Turnover intentions. One of the most widely used outcomes in child welfare turnover research is turnover intentions (e.g., Ellett et al., 2003; Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, 2007; Flowers et al., 2005; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; 1985; Mitchell, MacKenzie, Styve, & Gover, 2000; Siefert, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1991). The use of intentions as a proxy of turnover has foundations in theories on human beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, which posit that intentions and attitudes are the most immediate precursor to actual behavior (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Research on the relationship between turnover intentions and actual turnover strongly support these claims (Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Griffeth et al., 2000; Tett & Meyer, 1993).

Nevertheless, the act of leaving an agency is fundamentally different from simply thinking about leaving. It is also at this point within the turnover process that interventions could be most effective. For example, new recognition, incentive, or promotional programs implemented within an organization may more strongly influence employees thinking about leaving due to a lack of these programs when compared to those who are already satisfied with such opportunities. Therefore, it could substantially benefit an organization to understand how turnover intentions relate to turnover and, more specifically, at what point within the turnover process interventions are most effective in preventing intentions from leading to actual job exit.

Within child welfare, turnover intentions have been examined extensively as an outcome of interest but to a much less extent as a predictor of turnover. Furthermore, turnover intentions have rarely been examined within a process-type model of child

welfare turnover where both distal and proximal variables are considered. I included turnover intentions in the current model as a direct, and the most proximal, predictor of child welfare worker turnover. Another job withdrawal cognition I examined within the present study is the consideration of alternative job opportunities.

Alternative job opportunities. Typically, the turnover process includes three main tasks: (a) deciding to quit a job (i.e., turnover intentions), (b) searching for new employment opportunities (i.e., job search behaviors), and (c) quitting (Steel & Lounsbury, 2009). However, some researchers within the field of IO psychology also consider a fourth primary task in the turnover process, an examination of the job market (March & Simon, 1958; Price, 1977). These models suggest that a significant factor in one's decision to leave a job is the availability of other jobs. Prior to job departure, most employees (although not all) first attempt to secure employment with another company. In addition, it is less likely that an employee will leave one employer for a job that is considered less desirable than the job they hold with his or her current employer.

Based on this underlying rationale and the extant research in IO psychology regarding the role of alternative job opportunities within the turnover process, I investigated the role of alternative job opportunities in the turnover decision process of child welfare workers. This variable examines the extent to which a child welfare worker is likely to leave his or her current job for another job that is viewed as more desirable than his or her current job. Specifically, I hypothesized that the evaluation of alternative job opportunities would moderate the relationship between turnover intentions and turnover. The role of alternative job opportunities has rarely been investigated within the child welfare area. Finally, I investigated the relationship between job performance and

turnover in child welfare workers with a focus on where, in the turnover decision process, changes in job performance occur.

Job performance. The majority of research in IO psychology indicates that poor performance is associated with turnover (Bycio, Hackett, & Alvares, 1990; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth et al., 2000; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; McEvoy & Cascio, 1987; Williams & Livingstone, 1994; Zimmerman & Darnold, 2009). In other words, low performers are the most likely to leave an organization. However, some of these findings do not distinguish between voluntary and involuntary turnover. When both voluntary (e.g., turnover to work at another company) and involuntary (e.g., turnover due to performance) turnover are examined, there is some evidence that the performance-turnover relationship is more curvilinear (i.e., both very low and very high performers are most likely to leave) (e.g., Jackofsky, Ferris, & Breckenridge, 1986). However, there has been limited support for this perspective and the curvilinear nature of the performance-turnover relationship is largely untested (Sturman, Shao, & Katz, 2012). Currently, the most widely used and accepted view of the performance-turnover relationship is that it is linear.

According to Sturman and Trevor (2001), performance should be measured as a trend, rather than as a single point-in-time measurement. Doing so allows one to examine how patterns or trajectories in performance affect turnover. However, most turnover research utilizes annual performance reviews as the performance variable, and using this type of data can be problematic. Employees are typically reviewed at different points in time and at different points within their employment careers, yet most researchers treat all performance as equal. In addition, annual performance reviews often utilize subjective

supervisor ratings of performance, introducing possible biases into the performance measure.

Indeed, Lieberman and Levy (2006) suggest that more objective measures of performance should be used in turnover research, especially in the child welfare research as many states have relatively objective measures they already capture by federal mandate. For example, child welfare workers are required, by federal or state laws, to visit families a certain number of times per month or document specific events that occur within a specified period of time. Unfortunately, most researchers in child welfare do not utilize these objective measures of performance. The current study utilized an objective, trajectory-based measure of job performance to determine whether job performance mediates the relationship between job burnout and turnover intentions. Job performance has rarely been investigated as a predictor of child welfare worker turnover and has specifically been identified as an area that needs additional research (e.g., Kim & Kao, 2014).

Turnover. For the current study, child welfare worker turnover was defined as job exit *out of child welfare*. The primary type of turnover examined in this study was avoidable turnover, that is, turnover that could potentially have been avoided if certain interventions were put into place. For the purpose of this study, avoidable turnover was defined as turnover due to performance concerns or reported dissatisfaction, for example, with pay, working conditions, and one's supervisor; unavoidable turnover was defined as turnover due to issues outside the child welfare agency's control, for example, medical issues, spouse move, death, and retirement.

CHAPTER FOUR

Study Summary, Design, and Hypotheses

Summary

The current study examined the child welfare worker turnover process using a longitudinal research design with an IO psychology focus. I incorporated two major components from turnover research in IO psychology that have largely been ignored within child welfare worker turnover research. The first was the definition of turnover. Although some researchers in child welfare have examined different types of employee turnover, much of the research is not specific when it comes to the definition of turnover. This study attempted to fill this gap by specifically examining avoidable turnover, which is the type of turnover that child welfare agencies may be best able to control. Second, building from the historical turnover research in IO psychology, I examined variables that are considered to be both more proximal and distal predictors of turnover. In addition, I considered time by investigating a trajectory of performance over a six-month period rather than examining performance at a single point in time.

Study Design and Hypotheses

Data for the current study were from child welfare workers employed by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) of a midwestern state who were invited to participate in an online study of child welfare worker turnover. The child welfare department within DHHS is responsible for ensuring that children suffering from abuse or neglect or are delinquent are safe from harm and in a place of stability. Child welfare workers are on the "front line" working intimately with families in the system and a variety of service providers to ensure these responsibilities are met. Because they

are responsible for children's safety across the state, child welfare workers often work with families in both urban and rural areas.

Participants of the current study were all state-employed, public child welfare workers who worked in three main areas: (a) case intake, which is the work related to receiving a family into the child welfare system and includes tasks such as reviewing and researching case evidence and screening families in or out based on the findings; (b) initial assessment, which is the work related to the first assessment made on a family once the family is screened into the system and includes a thorough investigation of the family's situation and children's safety; and (c) permanency, which is the work related to identifying and implementing the services needed to help a family exit out of system. The vast majority of participants in the study performed work tasks across all three of these areas, however some workers may have specialized in one or two areas.

The data were gathered because of a DHHS directive to investigate the factors that lead to worker turnover with the ultimate goal of identifying system interventions to enhance worker retention and reduce turnover. The study combined an online survey with objective, agency-level data to examine turnover over the period of one year. To ensure confidentiality, the survey data and agency data were matched using a unique code developed by and available only to the researchers.

Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine the issue of staff turnover with a focus on identifying the key factors that contribute to staff turnover; they were also informed that the underlying intent of the study was to identify potential solutions to improve the retention of child welfare staff. Participants were allowed to complete the survey during their normal workday. To ensure participants felt

comfortable responding honestly, they were ensured that their responses were completely confidential and that no individually-identifiable information would be associated with their responses (e.g., name, employee ID). In addition, the study was conducted by an external partner and not by the child welfare agency directly.

Survey data were collected from child welfare workers in 2007 and objective, agency-level data continued to be collected through 2008. A 30-minute survey was used to collect worker responses on a variety of factors, including job involvement, perceptions of making a difference, job burnout, the availability of alternative job opportunities, and intentions to leave, among others not examined within the current study. The objective, agency-level data included objective measures of job performance, worker demographics, and turnover. Figure 4 illustrates the hypothesized relationships of the current study, which are also listed below:

H1: Making a differences will be positively related to job involvement.

H2: Making a difference will be negatively related to burnout.

H3: Job involvement will moderate the relationship between making a difference and burnout; specifically, the relationship between making a difference and burnout will be stronger and more negative when job involvement is high versus low.

H4: Burnout will be negatively related to performance.

H5: Burnout will be positively related to turnover intentions.

H6: Burnout will mediate the relationship between making a difference and job performance; specifically, child welfare workers who more (vs. less) strongly

perceive themselves as making a difference will report lower burnout and will have better performance.

H7: Burnout will mediate the relationship between making a difference and turnover intentions; specifically, child welfare workers who perceive themselves as making a difference will report lower burnout, resulting in lower turnover intentions.

H8: Performance will partially mediate the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions.

H9: Turnover intentions will be positively related to turnover.

H10: Alternative job opportunities will moderate the relationship between turnover intentions and turnover; specifically, the relationship between turnover intentions and turnover will be more positive when alternative job opportunities are high versus low.

H11: Turnover intentions will fully mediate the relationship between burnout and turnover; specifically, child welfare workers who have higher burnout will have higher turnover intentions and will be more likely to leave, whereas child welfare workers who have lower burnout will have lower turnover intentions and will be less likely to leave.

H12 Turnover intentions will fully mediate the relationship between performance and turnover; specifically, child welfare workers who have higher performance will have lower turnover intentions and will be less likely to leave, whereas child welfare workers who have lower performance will have higher turnover intentions and will be more likely to leave.

CHAPTER FIVE

Method

Participants

A total of 376 Protection and Safety Workers (PSWs) participated in this study as part of an agency study to examine child welfare worker turnover. The average age of participants was 37.80 years (*SD* = 10.81). Most participants were White (98%), female (80%), and held a bachelor's degree (85%). The average job tenure of participants at the time of the study was 5.02 years (*SD* = 5.85).

Procedure

All Protection and Safety Workers (*N* = 481) were sent an email invitation to participate in an online study to determine the key factors that contribute to staff turnover. Participants were granted permission to complete the survey on work time. In addition, all participants electronically signed an informed consent, which guaranteed confidentiality in their responses, prior to completing the survey. The survey included the measures described below (see Appendix A), which were presented in the same order; however, participants were allowed to skip questions and come back to them if they desired. The entire survey, which also included measures that are not part of the current study, took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Study Measures

Job involvement. Participants' level of job involvement was measured using 10 items from Kanungo's (1982) measure of job involvement (α = .82). This uni-dimensional measure of job involvement (Blau, 1985) has been widely used in organizational research to assess the extent to which participants have a psychological

identification or attachment with their job. Participants rated items like "The most important things that happen to me involve my present job" on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree)*.

Making a difference. Five items were developed for this study to assess how often participants felt they were successful in helping families make positive changes, and achieve safety, permanency, and well-being (α = .81). Sample items include "How often do you feel you are successful in helping families make positive changes in their lives?" and "How often do you feel your efforts have contributed to the physical, mental, and educational well-being of children and families." Participants provided responses on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*).

Burnout. Twenty-one items were used from Pines and Aronson (1988) to assess job burnout (α = .96). Participants rated how often they experienced physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion (e.g., having a good day, which was reversed scored, and feeling hopeless) as a result of their job. Responses were provided on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). Three sub-factors of burnout were used as part of a higher-order burnout factor and included the sub-factors of exhaustion (α = .93), demoralization (α = .93), and loss of motivation (α = .89).

Performance. Monthly job performance data for a one-year period were extracted from the agency's human resource system and were based on the Performance Evaluation Process Tool for child welfare workers. A total of 16 items were used to assess participants' objective job performance. This measure includes objective performance requirements around family intake (i.e., receiving a family into the child welfare system; example item includes the percentage of appropriately screened cases),

initial assessment (i.e., the first assessment made on a family regarding the family's situation and children's' safety; example item includes the percentage of Priority 1 contacts – having the first contact with the family within one day), and permanency (i.e., providing services needed to help exit a family out of the child welfare system; example item includes the percentage of finalized case plans within 60 days).

The Performance Evaluation Process Form is a scoring rubric that outlines benchmark ratings on each item using a scale from either 0 (Does Not Meet Expectations) to 3 (Meets Expectations) or from 0 (Does Not Meet Expectations) to 5 (Meets Expectations). Two items were transformed so that a rating of 3 always represented the benchmark Meets Expectations. After calculating a monthly performance score for each participant, performance trends were calculated using either the turnover date or end of study date. Specifically, a slope was calculated for each participant to assess each participant's performance trend six months directly prior to either turnover or the end of the study for those who did not leave. Six months of data were used to calculate each performance measure to ensure I was able to get an accurate picture of performance for each participant across a significant portion of time and also allowed for greater variability within the performance measure for analytic purposes. Utilizing a slope to examine performance trends allowed me to examine the directionality (i.e., performance increased or decreased) of performance for each participant prior to leaving. An average level of performance across the six months prior to either turnover or the end of the study was also examined as part of this study.

Intentions to quit. Two items assessed participants' intentions to quit their jobs in the coming year for another job with an employer outside the agency (external quit

intentions). The two items were "What are the chances that you will leave your current job for another outside the agency sometime in the next six months?" and "What are the chances that you will leave your current job for another job outside the agency sometime in the next year?" Participants rated items on a scale of 1 (*terrible*) to 7 (*excellent*). Final scores for intentions to quit were calculated by taking the mean score for each participant across the two items ($\alpha = .97$).

Alternative job opportunities. One item was developed and used for this study to assess how easy it would be for participants to find a job that was better than their current job. Participants were asked "How easy or difficult would it be for you to find a job with another employer that is better the one you now have?" Participants indicated their responses on a scale of 1 (*very easy*) to 5 (*very difficult*).

Turnover. Data on employee turnover/retention were collected from DHHS for up to one year after the initial study (i.e., when the survey data were collected). The type of turnover was also documented based on a follow-up interview with the direct supervisor of each leaver. Turnover was coded based on type (e.g., out of agency vs. promotion or lateral transfer within agency), voluntariness (e.g., whether or not the worker voluntarily left or was terminated based on DHHS decision, performance concerns, etc.), avoidability (e.g., whether or not the turnover was avoidable or unavoidable from DHHS' perspective), and functionality (e.g., whether or not the turnover would be considered functional or not from DHHS' perspective). The official exit reason, as stated by the worker through the official human resource exit survey, was also collected. To test the model of child welfare worker turnover outlined in Figure 4, I focused on avoidable worker turnover because the directive from DHHS was to

investigate factors that lead to worker turnover with the goal of identifying system interventions to reduce turnover.

CHAPTER SIX

Results

Analysis Overview

The data were first screened to examine analytic assumptions and to identify outliers and assess violations of assumptions. Next, the underlying factor structures of the measures were examined using exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Descriptive statistics and basic correlations were then examined. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted to test hypotheses and examine the overall fit of the turnover process model (Figure 4).

Data Screening

There are several analytic assumptions that should be examined prior to conducting SEM (Kline, 2011). Prior to conducting additional analyses, the following were examined to ensure statistical assumptions were met in the data: (a) missing data, (b) outliers, and (c) normality.

Missing data. Using a Monte Carlo methodology, Roth, Switzer, and Switzer (1999) found that scale means are unstable when 40% or more of the data are missing for a single participant. In order to ensure stability of study measures, scale means were computed only when participants had responded to at least 60% of the items within that measure. For example, 13 out of the 21 items in the burnout measure were required to receive a scale score on burnout. Once scale scores were calculated, missing data at the scale level was examined to ensure no more than 5% of data were missing on a single variable (Kline, 2011). All variables in the study had 5% or less missing data with the highest amount of missing data being 5% on the measure of intentions to quit (20 out of

376 participants were missing a scale score on intentions to quit). Finally, examination of the data did not reveal any evidence of systematic patterns of missing data.

Outliers. Next, outliers were examined at both the univariate and multivariate levels. I examined standardized scores to identify potential univariate outliers, considering standardized scores over 3.29 as potential outliers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Five univariate outliers were found within the performance variable; no other variables had univariate outliers. However, before removing these five cases, the multivariate space was also examined for outliers using Mahalanobis' distance as the criterion. Three of the five univariate outliers also showed up as multivariate outliers at $p < .001$. Therefore, three cases were removed from further analyses, which reduced the sample size to 373 participants.

Normality. Univariate normality was examined by examining the skewness and kurtosis for all study variables. Based on the thresholds outlined by Kline (2011) that skewness greater than 3.00 and kurtosis greater than 10.00 indicate non-normality, I did not find any evidence of non-normality within the data. An examination of each measure's scatterplots for linearity and homoscedasticity did not reveal any evidence of multivariate non-normality.

Factor Structure of Measures

An analysis of the underlying factor structure of the study's measures was examined using EFA and CFA. For these analyses, I used maximum likelihood estimation and Geomin rotations. I also examined several indices to assess model fit; in addition to chi-square statistics, I examined the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square errors of approximation index

(RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). As per Kline's (2011) guidelines, acceptable level model fit was determined using the following thresholds: (a) CFIs and TFIs greater than .90 and (b) RMSEA and SRMR no greater than .08. In addition, the threshold of .40 was used for identification of primary factor loadings and secondary factor loadings of .30 or greater were considered an indication of cross loading. Items were considered for deletion if they did not have a primary loading (i.e., no loading of .40 or higher) or had high cross loadings (i.e., secondary loadings of .30 or higher).

Making a difference. An ESEM was conducted on the five items of making a difference. ESEM is a modernized method of EFA that provides modification indices and allows one to include correlated residuals and covariates (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2009). The making a difference measure was developed for this study and was intended to be a uni-dimensional scale. The ESEM with a one-factor solution did not meet the established thresholds for acceptable model fit. Although an examination of the factor structure identified a single factor solution (i.e., all factor loadings were well above the .40 threshold with no significant secondary loadings), the examination of the modification indices indicated that a better fit would occur if the errors of items three and four were correlated. Item three, "How often do you feel you are successful in helping children and families remain safe?" and item four, "How often do you feel your efforts have contributed to the physical, mental, and educational well-being of children and families?" both refer to the physical and psychological safety of children and families. Therefore, it made conceptual sense that the errors for these two items might be highly related; they refer to the same outcome using different words. Therefore, another ESEM was run

allowing the errors for items three and four to correlate, which improved model fit and provided acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 3.033$, $df = 4$, $p = .55$, CFI = 1.0, TLI= 1.0, RMSEA= .00, 90% CI [.00, .070], SRMR = .01. Therefore, all five items were retained and a one-factor solution was utilized in later analyses (see Table 1).

Job involvement. An ESEM was conducted on the 10 items that were intended to assess job involvement. This scale is purportedly uni-dimensional. Indeed, the one-factor solution met all but one of the established thresholds for acceptable model fit, $\chi^2 = 82.62$, $df = 26$, $p < .00$, CFI = .937, TLI= .89, RMSEA= .077, 90% CI [.059, .096], SRMR = .036. An examination of the factor loadings revealed that all items had strong primary loadings on the single factor except for one item, "Usually I feel detached from my job," which did not meet the .40 threshold for a primary factor loading. Therefore, this item was removed and another ESEM was conducted on the remaining nine items. The removal of this item produced a one-factor solution with acceptable model fit, $\chi^2 = 83.909$, $df = 27$, $p < .001$, CFI = .929, TLI= .906, RMSEA= .076, 90% CI [.058, .094], SRMR = .041. All factor loadings for this new nine-item measure met the primary loading threshold of .40 with no secondary loadings higher than .30. Therefore, the one-factor solution with the remaining nine items was utilized in later analyses (see Table 2).

Burnout. The measure of burnout includes 21 items that were developed to assess physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion (Pines & Aronson, 1988). Other researchers have suggested that the three dimensions are better described as demoralization, exhaustion, and loss of motivation (Enzmann, Schaufeli, Janssen, & Rozeman, 1998). I examined one-, two-, and three-factor solutions, using ESEM. The one- and two-factors solutions did not fit the data. The three-factor structure solution produced the best model

fit indices and they were at acceptable levels, $\chi^2 = 383.043$, $df = 150$, $p < .001$, CFI = .962, TLI= .947, RMSEA= .065, 90% CI [.057, .073], SRMR = .023 (see Tables 3 & 4). The three factors more closely aligned with the three-factor structure of demoralization, exhaustion, and loss of motivation that Enzmann et al. (1998) found compared to the original three factors Pines and Aaronson (1988) identified. There were two items with cross-loadings that met the established threshold to be considered a secondary loading: (a) Item ten "being unhappy" had a primary loading of .42 the factor demoralization and a secondary loading of .31 on the factor loss of motivation, and (b) item 20 "feeling energetic" had a primary loading of .57 on the factor loss of motivation and a secondary loading of .34 on the factor exhaustion. These cross-loadings make conceptual sense. Specifically, item ten "being unhappy" from the demoralization factor is the direct opposite of item eight "being happy" from the loss of motivation factor; therefore, I allowed these two items to correlate. In addition, item 20 "feeling energetic" from the loss of motivation factor is opposite of item two "being tired" from the exhaustion factor; therefore, I also allowed the errors for these two items to correlate. These changes did slightly improve model fit, but the improvement was minimal, $\chi^2 = 376.21$, $df = 148$, $p < .000$, CFI = .963, TLI= .948, RMSEA= .065, 90% CI [.057, .073], SRMR = .023.

Although the three-factor solution of burnout best fit the data, I did not have specific hypotheses regarding types of burnout and believed that a single measure would be best suited for my final model based on the work of Brenninkmeijer and VanYperen (2003). I therefore examined whether the three factors of burnout were part of a higher-order burnout variable. I examined this by utilizing the three factors outlined in the previous analysis, allowing the error terms for the similar items to correlate as explained

above. As expected, the higher-order factor model produced acceptable fit to the data, χ^2 = 614.83, *df* = 184, $p < .000$, CFI = .93, TLI= .92, RMSEA= .080, 90% CI [.073, .087], SRMR = .05. Based on these findings, the higher-order burnout variable was utilized in later analyses.

Alternative job opportunities. Two items were originally intended to measure alternative job opportunities: "How easy would it be for you to find a job with another employer in this geographical area that is as good as the one you now have?" and "How easy would it be for you to find a job with another employer in this geographical area that is as better than the one you now have?" However, the two items were negatively correlated, $r(358) = -.26$, $p < .00$. Respondents who thought they could find another job just as good as their current job were less likely to think they could find one that was better. Further, the frequency distributions indicated that about half of participants reported that finding a job just as good as their current job was either easy or neutral, but only one-fourth reported the same about a job that was better. I therefore chose to use the single item assessing the extent to which workers perceived they could find a better job because employees generally seem less inclined to leave their current jobs for jobs that are viewed as equivalent.

Intentions to quit. The two items assessing intentions to quit were highly and positively correlated, $r(353) = .94$, $p < .00$. I therefore retained and used both items in later analyses.

Full measurement model. Once I had established the factor structure of each measure independently, ESEM was utilized to examine the overall factor structure combining all items together to assess whether the measures assessed distinct constructs.

Based on the results outlined previously, I ran an ESEM with six factors, one for each of the measures, including three factors for the burnout measure. This six-factor model produced acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 820.16$, $df = 459$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, TLI= .94, RMSEA= .046, 90% CI [.041, .051], SRMR = .023 (see Table 5). A closer examination of the loadings indicated six distinct factors with sufficient primary loadings (.40 and above) and no cross-loadings (.30 and above): Making a Difference (F1), Job Involvement (F2), Burnout-Exhaustion (F3), Burnout-Demoralization (F4), Burnout-Loss of Motivation (F5), and Intentions to Quit (F6). The correlations among study measures are reported in Table 6. As expected, the three burnout factors were highly correlated.

Structural equation model (SEM) of latent variables. Next, to examine the factor structure of the latent variables and to ensure the identified latent factors fit the data appropriately, including a higher-order burnout variable, I ran a SEM to assess model fit. Results of the SEM produced acceptable levels of model fit, $\chi^2 = 1331.858$, $df = 617$, $p < .000$, CFI = .92, TLI= .91, RMSEA= .056, 90% CI [.052, .060], SRMR = .07 (see Figure 5). As confirmation of the higher-order burnout variable, I also ran a SEM model to examine the model fit when burnout remained as three separate factors; the model fit of this analysis revealed slightly lower (although similar) levels of model fit. Therefore, the higher-order burnout variable was utilized in later analyses.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics, including variable ranges, means, standard deviations, and reliability estimates are reported in Table 7. The ranges, variances, and reliabilities for all measures appear to be sufficient. I examined descriptive information for performance in two ways. First, the proposed model in the study utilizes a slope or trend of performance

that is based on the performance of each participant up to six months prior to job turnover. The distribution of slope values can be found in Figure 6. An independent sample t-test indicates that the overall slope was not significantly different from zero, as expected, $t(279) = .746$, $p = .46$. Second, because I also wanted to explore how the level of performance played a role in child welfare worker turnover, I also calculated average job performance for each participant using the six months directly prior to turnover. The descriptive statistics for both types of turnover are found in Table 7.

As far as turnover, recall that I assessed actual turnover using a dichotomous indicator of avoidable job turnover out of child welfare. In total, 77 (24%) of the workers in the present study left child welfare and 248 (76%) remained employed by the end of the study. The percentage of turnover found in this study is similar to the child welfare worker turnover rates in public child welfare agencies, which has been reported as being 20% on average (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003).

The correlations among study measures are reported in Table 6. As expected, workers who reported feelings that they were making a difference also reported more involvement in their jobs and were less likely to exhibit feelings of burnout; these findings provide support for H1 that making a difference would be positively related to job involvement and H2 that making a difference would be negatively related to burnout. In support of H5, workers who reported greater burnout also reported stronger turnover intentions. Workers who reported greater burnout also perceived there to be more alternative job opportunities and were more likely to turnover. In support of H9, that is, that turnover intentions would be positively related to turnover, workers who reported stronger turnover intentions were more likely to turnover. Finally, workers who reported

stronger turnover intentions also perceived that there were more alternative job opportunities, which although was not directly hypothesized, would be expected.

Sample differences were examined using independent sample t-tests. Specifically, the control variables used in the study, gender and ethnicity (majority v. minority), were examined to see if there were any significant differences found within the measures for these groups; there were a couple significant differences that were found in the data. There were no significant differences regarding participant gender. However, regarding ethnicity, it was found that perceptions of making a difference were significantly higher in majority participants compared to minority, $t(358) = -2.80$, $p = .005$; it was also found that alternative job opportunities were significantly higher for majority participants compared to minority, $t(352) = 2.38$, $p = .018$.

Structural Equation Model

I estimated the overall model for child welfare worker turnover using SEM both with and without controls (e.g., race and gender) and the results showed no meaningful difference in overall model fit; therefore, the results reported are without controls.

The overall model provided acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 654.72$, $df = 451$, $p < .000$, CFI = .93, TLI= .92, RMSEA= .036, 90% CI [.030, .042] (see Figure 7). In support of H2, that making a difference would be negatively related to burnout, results show that workers who reported feeling more successful in helping to make a difference in the lives of children and families exhibited lower overall burnout. It was expected that the relationship between workers' perceptions of making a difference and job burnout would be stronger when job involvement was high. However, job involvement did not moderate the relationship between making a difference and burnout (H3). Also, contrary to

expectations, job burnout did not predict a downward slope in job performance (H4). However, SEM results did show that workers who reported greater job burnout also reported stronger turnover intentions (H5) and that workers who reported stronger turnover intentions were more likely to turnover (H9).

Finally, it was expected (H10) that the availability of alternative job opportunities would moderate the relationship between turnover intentions and turnover. That is, when alternative job opportunities were high (vs. low), workers who reported stronger turnover intentions were expected to be more likely to turnover. SEM results were consistent with this hypothesis.

Mediators. I used the Model Indirect option in MPLUS (Muthen & Muthen, 2011) to independently examine several potential mediators, including (a) job burnout as a mediator between making a difference and turnover intentions, (b) job burnout as a mediator between making a difference and the trend of performance, (c) the trend of performance as a partial mediator between burnout and turnover intentions, (d) turnover intentions as a mediator between burnout and turnover, and (e) turnover intentions as a mediator between the trend of performance and turnover. The results of these analyses provided no evidence for the hypothesized mediated relationships (see Table 7). However, the mediator analysis did reveal a couple of significant direct effects. As already reported, there was a significant direct effect of burnout on intentions to quit (H5). The mediator analysis also identified a direct effect of the trend of performance on turnover, such that workers who exhibited improved performance over time were less likely to turnover. Although this specific relationship was not hypothesized in the model,

it does make conceptual sense that workers who show an upward trend of performance (i.e., are experiencing a positive movement in performance) might be less likely to leave.

Alternative Models

I also estimated two alternative models to compare to the proposed model. Overall, I wanted to examine whether there were other models that would equally fit the data. If other models failed to fit the data, it would provide additional support for the proposed model.

Average performance. One area I wanted to examine was whether the level of performance, rather than the trend of performance, would better fit the data. In the proposed model, I examined how the trend of performance (i.e., performance slope) was related to job burnout, turnover intentions, and ultimately, turnover. In this modified model, I examined if the model fit improved using the level of performance rather than the performance trend. All other components of the original proposed model were the same. The revised model using the average level of performance fit the data almost identical to using the trend of performance (slope). Therefore, the use of level of performance did not improve model fit, $\chi^2 = 654.10$, $df = 451$, $p < .000$, CFI = .93, TLI= .92, RMSEA= .036, 90% CI [.030, .042]. In addition, like the findings on the trend (slope) of performance, the level of performance was not found to be a partial mediator of burnout and turnover intentions. Furthermore, although the trend of performance was significantly related to turnover intentions, such that when the performance trend was positive (performance was increasing), turnover intentions were lower, this relationship was insignificant when looking at performance level.

Removal of job involvement. Based on the findings of the proposed model, job involvement was not found to moderate the relationship between making a difference and burnout. An examination of the correlations revealed that although job involvement was positively related the variables of making a difference, alternative job opportunities, turnover intentions, and turnover, the strength of these relationships were small. Therefore, I examined a model without job involvement. The removal of job involvement did slightly improve model fit but the improvement was minimal, $\chi^2 = 608.88$, $df = 422$, $p < .000$, CFI = .93, TLI= .92, RMSEA= .035, 90% CI [.290, .041].

Summary of Results

Although the proposed model of child welfare worker turnover had acceptable fit to the data, some of the proposed hypotheses were not supported by the data. Overall, five out of the original twelve hypotheses were supported. A list of the hypotheses and whether each one was supported or not is reported in Table 9. I examined two alternative models based on my results and did not find an alternative model that improved model.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Discussion

Child welfare worker turnover is one of the largest concerns of child welfare agencies. In fact, according to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG), child welfare turnover can be as high as 90% per year in some areas (CWIG, 2017). This level of turnover would be crippling to any organization; however, in the child welfare area this high level of turnover can have extensive negative effects on both child welfare agencies and the children and families they support.

The purpose of this study was to examine predictors of child welfare worker turnover using an IO psychology focus. I examined both mediators (i.e., burnout, job performance, and turnover intentions) and moderators (i.e., job involvement and alternative job opportunities) of child welfare worker turnover. In addition, because of the lack of information regarding the role of job performance in the child welfare worker turnover process, I utilized an objective-based, longitudinal measure of job performance to investigate its role in worker turnover. Finally, I focused specifically on avoidable turnover rather than combining all types of turnover into a single indicator.

Summary of Findings

I tested twelve distinct hypotheses. A SEM analysis indicated that, although the proposed model fit the data relatively well, only five of my twelve hypotheses were supported. I summarize the findings below, including the findings regarding direct effects, mediators, and moderators.

Direct effects. Based on previous research showing that job involvement influences employee job-specific attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Hackman & Lawler, 1971;

Kahn, 1990; Zatzick & Iverson, 2011), the current study examined the extent to which job involvement influenced child welfare workers' perceptions of making a difference. Recall that job involvement refers to a cognitive state of psychological identification or attachment with one's job; it includes employees' perceptions of the extent to which their jobs satisfy salient needs (Kanungo, 1982). Thus, job involvement is more than job engagement; job involvement concerns the perception that one's job is an integral part of one's life. As expected, workers who perceived that they were making a difference in the lives of children and families also reported greater job involvement.

Of course, data assessing making a difference and job involvement were collected at the same time so the temporal order is unclear. It may be that those workers who are more involved in their jobs (i.e., had greater psychological identification and attachment to their work) are also more dedicated and put forth more effort towards their work, which could then lead to more success in their work (i.e., making a difference). However, it is also possible that workers who experience feelings of success (i.e., making a difference) subsequently identify more with their work and become more attached to that work in hopes of it leading to additional success in the future. It may also be that both occur. In any case, the current study cannot address this question of causality.

As expected, child welfare workers who perceived that they were making a difference in the lives of the children and families they served were also less likely to exhibit feelings of burnout. This finding is consistent with those of Conrad and Kellar Guenther (2006) who found that caseworkers who had more compassion satisfaction, a concept similar to making a difference, exhibited less compassion fatigue and burnout. Similarly, Dombo and Blome (2016) interviewed child welfare directors who reported

that workers' feelings of stress and burnout often translated into negative attitudes and thoughts about children and families, such as feelings of hopelessness in being able to help families solve problems that are too big to fix; these feelings align with the definition of making a difference used in this study.

Finally, it was found that neither the higher-order factor of burnout nor any of its sub-factors (i.e., exhaustion, demoralization, and loss of motivation) were related to change over time in job performance. However, the correlations did provide evidence that greater exhaustion was negatively related to the average performance of workers. Although job performance has rarely been examined within the child welfare area, a similar relationship to that found in other work industries was expected. Therefore, this finding contradicts previous research showing that burnout predicts job withdrawal cognitions and behaviors, such as job performance (e.g., Rahim & Cosby, 2016) and worker disengagement (e.g., Travis et al., 2015). It is possible that this finding contradicts previous research due to the nature of the objective-based job performance measure used in this study, which assessed workers' performance on tasks required by state and federal regulations. Workers do not have much leniency or flexibility in performing the work tasks assessed by this measure, as failing to perform these tasks could result in legal implications. Therefore, it is likely that this specific type of performance may be less influenced by employee attitudes, such as burnout.

As expected, and consistent with research in the child welfare area (e.g., Kim & Stoner, 2008), job burnout was positively related to turnover intentions. Finally, as expected, turnover intentions were positively related to child welfare worker turnover. Although this relationship has been well documented in general turnover research (e.g.,

Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Griffeth et al., 2000; Tett & Meyer, 1993), it has remained largely untested within the area of child welfare, as most research in this area examines either turnover intentions or turnover as the outcome of interest but rarely both.

Moderators. One of the contributions of this study was the examination of moderators and the role they play within the child welfare worker turnover process. In general, the investigation of moderators and mediators within child welfare turnover research is minimal. The present study examined the moderating roles of job involvement and the availability of alternative job opportunities.

Based on the research of Brown (1996) who found in a meta-analysis that employee and situational characteristics influence job involvement, which subsequently influence employee attitudes and behaviors, it was expected that job involvement would moderate the relationship between making a difference and job burnout. Specifically, it was expected that job involvement would exacerbate the relationship between making a difference and job burnout. However, contrary to expectations, the data did not support this hypothesis.

It should be noted, however, that job involvement, making a difference, and burnout were all assessed at the same time. Perhaps the relationship between making a difference and job burnout is time sensitive. I would expect perceptions of making a difference to precede job burnout (i.e., workers who feel as if they are not making a difference seem likely to subsequently experience burnout), but job burnout may also precede perceptions of making a difference (i.e., workers who experience job burnout may also begin to experience other feelings of defeat, such as feelings that they are not

making a difference). It would be a contribution to research in this area to examine these factors longitudinally.

Based on research in IO psychology that identifies three main tasks within the turnover process, including deciding to quit a job, searching for new employment opportunities, and quitting (Steel & Lounsbury, 2009), I investigated the availability of alternative job opportunities as a moderator between turnover intentions and actual turnover. As expected, the relationship between turnover intentions and actual turnover was moderated by the availability of alternative job opportunities. Specifically, turnover intentions were more likely to lead to actual job turnover when an alternative job opportunity that was better than the current job was perceived to be available (vs. unavailable). Although this relationship has never been examined in the child welfare area, it has been supported within the IO psychology area (e.g., Price, 1977; Steel & Lounsbury, 2009).

Mediators. I had expected that burnout would mediate the relationships between making a difference and (a) the change over time in job performance and (b) turnover intentions. This hypothesis was based on findings that employee job-related attitudes precede withdrawal cognitions and behaviors and research that supports job burnout as one of the most direct predictors of child welfare turnover intentions (Kim & Stoner, 2008) and job exit (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Kim, 2011). However, neither of these hypothesized mediating relationships were supported. The results indicated that making a difference was negatively associated with turnover intentions and was unrelated to changes in job performance. Therefore, it appears that stronger perceptions of making a

difference in the lives of children and families did, in fact, relate to lower intentions to turnover but this relationship was not mediated by job burnout as hypothesized.

It was also expected that turnover intentions would mediate the relationships between (a) burnout and turnover and (b) performance and turnover. These hypotheses were based on IO psychology research, which suggests employee turnover intentions (cognitions) are the direct predecessor of actual job turnover (behaviors) (e.g., Steel & Lounsbury, 2009). However, these hypotheses were not supported perhaps at least partly because of the cross-sectional nature of the data, which would have limited the conclusions I could have drawn regardless.

Study Implications

The findings of this study can help child welfare agencies to better understand the child welfare worker turnover process, which can be used to identify, develop, and implement interventions and strategies to mitigate worker turnover. One major contribution was the examination of child welfare workers' perceptions that they were making a difference in the lives of the children and families they supported. The present study provided some empirical evidence that it is important for child welfare workers to feel as if they are able to make a difference for the families they serve. Not only did the data indicate that making a difference was related to lower job burnout, but making a difference was also associated with lower turnover intentions. To the extent that these findings represent causal relationships, they suggest that child welfare agencies might make intentional efforts to reduce external factors that hinder a worker's ability to help improve the lives of children and families, such as heavy caseloads or overbearing bureaucratic policies and procedures.

In addition, to the extent possible, agencies may want to consider resetting the expectations or definitions regarding "success" in child welfare. Celebrating and recognizing case successes, even those that may seem small, could help to facilitate workers' perceptions of making a difference, which in turn could reduce job burnout and turnover intentions. Benton, Chenot, and Boutakidis (2017) suggest that crises too often play the leading role when it comes to child welfare, especially when it comes to what types of stories are highlighted by the media. Therefore, the authors emphasize the importance of celebrating and recognizing case success to help reinforce and encourage child welfare workers. Highlighting case successes in child welfare work more frequently could also be useful in reducing worker turnover directly. Giffiths and Royse (2017) found in a study of 54 former child welfare workers that a lack of recognition was listed as one of the primary reasons workers quit. Therefore, child welfare agencies might consider increasing the frequency of recognition in child welfare, as it would most likely have positive impacts on child welfare workers' perceptions and behaviors, such as perceptions of making a difference and worker retention.

Another contribution of this study to the child welfare area was the examination of job involvement. Although the hypothesized relationship regarding job involvement as a moderator was not supported, the results did yield some interesting findings regarding job involvement. Specifically, job involvement was positively associated with workers' feelings of making a difference in the lives of the children and families they support. The cross-sectional nature of the data prevent me from drawing causal conclusions, but the positive association suggests that it may be beneficial to child welfare agencies to seek out workers who have strong (positive) feelings and beliefs regarding child welfare work.

The present findings also suggest that workers who have stronger psychological identification or attachment to child welfare work tend to see themselves as more successful (i.e., making a difference) in the work. Furthermore, workers who had stronger psychological identification or attachment to child welfare work were (a) less likely to perceive the availability of alternative job opportunities that were better than the work they were already doing, (b) reported lower turnover intentions, and (c) were less likely to turnover. Other qualitative research supports this premise that a personal commitment or sense of mission to child welfare is a strong contributor to worker retention (e.g., Ellett et al., 2007; Levin, Nissly, & Barak, 2003; Reagh, 1994).

Based on these findings, child welfare agencies may want to explore the possibility of developing or utilizing a selection instrument that can be used to identify job candidates who have stronger (positive) feelings and beliefs regarding child welfare work. Of course, this is easier said than done. Most child welfare agencies do not have the luxury of being selective within their hiring process, as turnover is often high and candidate pools are often small.

Another possibility is for child welfare agencies to identify ways in which to increase the desirability of child welfare work. For example, given that this type of work can be very taxing both psychologically and physically, child welfare agencies might focus on ways they can help to reduce the burdens on child welfare workers, such as reducing worker caseloads and the amount of paperwork and documentation required by workers, which is often cited as a significant burden and challenge (e.g., Reagh, 1994; Samantrai, 1992). Child welfare agencies might also consider identifying ways in which to increase the amount of support and resources for workers, such as high-quality

supervisors and a supportive work environment, both of which have been shown to directly influence worker turnover (supervisor support: Benton, 2016, Benton et al., 2017; organizational support: Griffiths & Royse, 2010; Johnco, Salloum, Olson, & Edwards, 2014). Increasing the amount of support and resources and reducing the burdens placed on child welfare workers may also help child welfare agencies attract more applicants, allowing them to be more selective in their hiring process.

Of course, it would also do well for the public to provide greater funding opportunities for child welfare work so that agencies can attract high-quality job candidates and provide high-quality services to families. For example, allowing greater flexibility in the use of federal and state funding has previously shown to improve outcomes in child welfare. Specifically, utilizing a mixed-methods approach that included longitudinal funding data spanning over 10 years, interviews with key stakeholders, and both in-depth interviews and a survey of state child welfare directors, Cerulli, Allen, Chin, Reagh, and Mangold, (2017) found that flexibility in the use of funding helped child welfare agencies improve outcomes for the children and families they served through stronger collaborative partnerships and additional resources and services directed towards families' needs. Furthermore, the researchers found that it was the flexibility of funding rather than the source of funding that mattered.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

Although the model of child welfare worker turnover examined in this study fit the data well and included several strengths that improve upon previous research in the child welfare area, there are limitations to the study that should be noted. Together, these

strengths and limitations can be used by future researchers to continue investigating the critical issue of child welfare worker turnover.

Strengths. One strength of this study was the use of an objective-based measure of job performance that was collected across time. To date there has been little to no investigation of the role of job performance in the research on child welfare worker turnover (Kim & Kao, 2014). I examined job performance in two ways. First, I used up to six months of performance data to calculate a slope assessing change over time in job performance, which is a unique way of looking at performance data. Second, I used up to six months of performance data to calculate each worker's average job performance up to six months prior to job turnover. In other words, I limited job performance to the most immediate timeframe prior to job exit, which was unique to each worker in my study. I believe that examining turnover in this way provides more sensitive and accurate performance information compared to using a point-in-time variable based on annual evaluation data.

I found that improvement over time in job performance was associated with lower job turnover. In other words, when performance was trending downwards, workers were more likely to leave. In fact, this was one of the strongest predictors of worker turnover, second only to turnover intentions. In contrast, the average level of performance was unrelated to job turnover.

That said, there are likely additional aspects of performance that are unable to be measured using an objective-based approach. This might especially be true within the area of child welfare where social service and human empathy are large components of the work. In fact, it is highly likely that there are important components of performance

that can only be measured using a subjective measure, such as supervisor or peer ratings. Therefore, future research might continue to investigate the role of both objective and subjective job performance within the child welfare worker turnover process to better understand how performance affects turnover in this area. In addition, with limited knowledge about the role of job performance within the child welfare area, researchers might investigate the antecedents of child welfare worker performance, focusing on the factors that may influence withdrawal in performance. Doing so may enable researchers to identify specific triggers or early indicators of performance withdrawal, which was found to predict worker turnover within the present study. Child welfare agencies could potentially utilize this information to develop and implement monitoring strategies to identify early warnings or indicators of performance withdrawal and then implement interventions or strategies to help support workers when and where they most need it.

Another strength of this study was the path model utilized to examine child welfare worker turnover. Prior research in this area has primarily focused on direct effects and has focused less on the examination of moderators and mediators. I examined two moderators and several mediators using a path model. The primary finding was that alternative job opportunities moderated the relationship between turnover intentions and turnover. The examination of available job opportunities or other job search type behaviors has not previously been a focus on research within child welfare. In fact, the vast majority of research in the child welfare area focuses on turnover intentions. However, research on job turnover in IO psychology provides evidence that there are additional job search behaviors and cognitions, such as an examination of the external job

market, that take place within the typical turnover process between turnover intentions and actual turnover (e.g., March & Simon, 1958; Price, 1977).

Future research might continue to examine job search behaviors and cognitions and the role they play within the child welfare worker turnover process. As one example, researchers might collect information to help identify the specific characteristics child welfare workers look for when examining alternative job opportunities. Is pay the primary issue or is it something about the work itself? This information would be beneficial to child welfare agencies, as they would have more targeted information to use as they make efforts to increase the desirability of child welfare work. In addition, child welfare agencies may be able to use this information to identify appropriate interventions or resources that prevent workers from making the decision to leave. Specifically, if child welfare agencies could identify ways in which workers feel their current job is inferior to alternative jobs, they may be able to implement interventions or provide additional resources that directly combat those deficiencies.

Limitations. There were also limitations to my study. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, I was unable to draw conclusions regarding the chronological order of most relationships. The proposed model does suggest that certain factors subsequently influence others; however, in most cases, with the exception of job performance and actual turnover, these measures were not collected in a way to ascertain the directionality of their relationships. However, such data are challenging to gather as it involves the collection of data at numerous points of time throughout the employment period, ideally collected on a monthly or quarterly basis. However, as noted above, child welfare workers are already overworked with caseloads often upwards to twice the recommended

number (APHSA, CWLA, & Alliance for Children and Families, 2001). Researchers might therefore focus on identifying ways to collect data in less intrusive ways. Strategies may include the use of agency-based data or other external sources of data, such as supervisors or workers' family members. Another strategy may be to use a short (3-5 question) survey designed to focus on one or two factors rather than an extensive survey that tries to collect information on a multitude of factors.

Another limitation to the current study is one similar to much of the research on child welfare worker turnover. That is, it is difficult to investigate a complete and all-encompassing model of worker turnover. Previous research in child welfare has identified a multitude of factors associated with child welfare worker turnover, but I was only able to examine some of those factors. It is possible that other models might equally predict, or even better predict, child welfare worker turnover.

For example, because one goal of my study was to examine factors that child welfare agencies had some control over, I did not include dispositional or personality types measures. However, some research suggests that certain dispositional characteristics may influence child welfare worker turnover. For example, Benton et al. (2017) found that service orientation, a dispositional attitude towards public service work where it is viewed as compassionate and rewarding (Perry, 1996), predicted child welfare workers' intent to stay above and beyond that of job satisfaction and supervisor support, both of which have historically been viewed as strong predictors of worker retention. However, a positive dispositional attitude, such as service orientation, towards child welfare work seems to be atypical. Arbeiter and Toros (2017) found that most child welfare workers take a more traditional, deficient-based approach to social work where

problems are the focus and the worker is viewed more as an enforcer versus a collaborative partner.

Future research might investigate the role of various dispositional characteristics in order to further identify the role they play with the child welfare worker turnover process. As one example, it is possible that the coping mechanisms or strategies the child welfare workers utilize to help deal with the high levels of stress associated with child welfare work may play a significant role within the child welfare worker turnover process. One recent study (Lovseth, 2016), for example, indicated that child welfare workers' abilities to adapt to stressors at work were related to worker health and well-being. Given that research supports health and well-being as important factors to employee retention (e.g., Conrad, 1988), it seems likely that child welfare workers' abilities to adapt to stressors at work may also influence worker withdrawal cognitions and behaviors.

In addition, realistic job previews (RJPs) have been shown to be effective in helping employees cope with stress and job demands (e.g., Suszko & Breaugh, 1986) and have been shown to be effective at preventing turnover within high-stress jobs (e.g., Meglino, Denisi, & Ravlin, 1993). Although there has been some support for the use of RJPs within the child welfare area (e.g., Faller, Grabarek, & Ortega, 2010), future work might continue to examine the utility of RJPs within child welfare, specifically as a strategy to prevent worker turnover.

In the present study, I focused on the more proximal predictors of child welfare worker turnover, omitting work-related environmental predictors, such as organizational climate and bureaucratic structure. However, research on child welfare worker turnover

and retention identifies several environmental characteristics that are important to child welfare worker retention, including a supportive organizational climate (e.g., Griffiths & Royse, 2010; Johnco, Salloum, Olson, & Edwards, 2014) and supportive supervisors (e.g., Benton, 2016, Benton et al., 2017; Chen & Scannapieco, 2010) and peers (e.g., Hopkins, Cohen-Callow, Kim, & Hwang, 2010; Lee, Rehner, & Forster, 2010). In addition, research and theory concerning street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010) suggests that workers' individual work environments, beliefs, and attitudes may be unique based on previous experience and interactions with the work. My goal was to include some of the better-known predictors of child welfare worker turnover (e.g., burnout, turnover intentions) along with some new measures from turnover research in other areas that have rarely or never been examined in the child welfare area (e.g., making a difference, job involvement, performance, and alternative job opportunities). However, future research might examine variables from the present study in combination with work-related environmental and dispositional type predictors.

Conclusion

Turnover within the area of child welfare continues to be a problem across the nation. Researchers have spent decades trying understand the factors associated with and contributing to this widespread problem. I took a IO psychology approach to investigating child welfare worker turnover, examining several factors that have not previously been researched within the child welfare area, including workers' perceptions of making a difference, job involvement, job performance, and the availability of alternative job opportunities. The results of this study indicated that perceptions of making a difference and job performance both play a role within child welfare worker

turnover, and that job search behaviors and cognitions, such as the consideration of alternative job opportunities, also appear to be an important component of the child welfare worker turnover process.

Overall, the findings of this study can be used by child welfare agencies and others concerned with the work of child welfare to identify interventions and strategies to help reduce the likelihood of worker turnover, such as identifying additional funds or ways to make funds more flexible in order to better support child welfare work, developing a hiring system to identify candidates that strongly identify with child welfare work, identifying additional resources and supports that may be used to help alleviate the burden and stress put on child welfare workers, improving upon the way success and recognition are defined in child welfare work, and/or prioritizing the implementation of interventions when worker performance begins to take a downward turn. Finally, future work might build upon the findings of this study to further investigate the roles that workers' perceptions of making a difference, job involvement, job performance, and the availability of alternative job opportunities play within the child welfare worker turnover process.

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Table 1

Factor Loadings for ESEM of Making a Difference

Items	Factor 1
1. How often do you feel you are successful in helping families make positive changes in their lives?	.83
2. How often do you feel you are successful in helping children and families achieve permanency?	.82
3. How often do you feel you are successful in helping children and families remain safe?	.54
4. How often do you feel your efforts have contributed to the physical, mental, and educational well-being of children and families?	.66
5. How often do you receive thanks or expressions of gratitude from children or families you have worked with?	.44

Note. $N = 364$. $\chi^2 = 3.033$, $df = 4$, $p < .55$, CFI = 1.0, TLI= 1.0, RMSEA= .00, 90% CI [.00, .070], SRMR = .01. Factor loadings below .30 omitted. All responses were on a five-point scale.

Table 2

Factor Loadings for ESEM of Job Involvement

Items	Factor 1
1. The most important things that happen to me involve my present job.	.59
2. To me, my job is only a small part of who I am.*	.49
3. I am very much involved personally in my job.	.48
4. I live, eat, and breathe my mob.	.64
5. Most of my interested are centered around my job.	.69
6. I have very strong ties with my present job which would be very difficult to break.	.54
8. Most of my personal life goals are job-oriented.	.54
9. I consider my job to be very central to my existence.	.70
10. I like to be absorbed in my job most of the time.	.55

Note. $N = 369$. $\chi^2 = 83.909$, $df = 27$, $p < .001$, CFI = .929, TLI= .906, RMSEA= .076, 90% CI [.058, .094], SRMR = .041. Factor loadings below .30 omitted. All responses were on a six-point scale. *Indicates item was reverse-coded.

Table 3

Factor Loadings for ESEM of Burnout

Items	F1	F2	F3
Exhaustion			
2. Being tired	.86		
3. Being weak & susceptible to illness	.67		
4. Being troubled	.53		
5. Being physically exhausted	.90		
6. Being weary	.72		
7. Being emotionally exhausted	.81		
9. Being "wiped out"	.80		
11. Feeling run-down	.89		
Demoralization			
10. Being unhappy		.42	.31
12. Feeling trapped		.61	
13.Feeling worthless		.89	
14. Feeling disillusioned and resentful		.74	
15. Feeling depressed		.75	
16. Feeling hopeless		.90	
17. Feeling rejected		.90	
18. "Can't take it anymore"		.55	
21. Feeling anxious		.49	
Loss of Motivation			
1. Having a good day*			.71
8. Being happy*			.86
19. Feeling optimistic*			.69
20. Feeling energetic*	.34		.57

Note. $N = 369$. $\chi^2 = 383.043$, $df = 150$, $p < .001$, CFI = .962, TLI= .947, RMSEA= .065, 90% CI [.057, .073], SRMR = .023. Factor loadings below .30 omitted. All responses were on a seven-point scale. *Indicates item was reverse-coded.

Table 4

Correlations and Reliabilities of Burnout Factors

	1	2	3	α
1. Exhaustion	-	.73**	.64**	.93
2. Demoralization		-	.68**	.93
3. Loss of Motivation			-	.89

**p < .00

Table 5

Factor Loadings for Full ESEM

Items	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
MAD1.How often do you feel you are successful in helping families make positive changes in their lives?	.77					
MAD2.How often do you feel you are successful in helping children and families achieve permanency?	.80					
MAD3.How often do you feel you are successful in helping children and families remain safe?	.65					
MAD4.How often do you feel your efforts have contributed to the physical, mental, and educational well-being of children and families?	.74					
MAD5.How often do you receive thanks or expressions of gratitude from children or families you have worked with?	.41					
JI1. The most important things that happen to me involve my present job.		.58				
JI2. To me, my job is only a small part of who I am.		.49				
JI 3. I am very much involved personally in my job.		.46				
JI4. I live, eat, and breathe my mob.		.64				
JI5. Most of my interested are centered around my job.		.70				
JI6. I have very strong ties with my present job which would be very difficult to break.		.49				
JI8. Most of my personal life goals are job-oriented.		.56				
JI9. I consider my job to be very central to my existence.		.73				
JI10. I like to be absorbed in my job most of the time.		.53				
BOE2. Being tired			.83			
BOE3. Being weak & susceptible to illness			.67			
BOE4. Being troubled			.54			
BOE5. Being physically exhausted			.88			
BOE6. Being weary			.71			

Items	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
BOE7. Being emotionally exhausted			.79			
BOE9. Being "wiped out"			.78			
BOE11. Feeling run-down			.87			
BOD10. Being unhappy				.41		
BOD12. Feeling trapped				.57		
BOD13.Feeling worthless				.85		
BOD14. Feeling disillusioned and resentful				.71		
BOD15. Feeling depressed				.72		
BOD16. Feeling hopeless				.87		
BOD17. Feeling rejected				.88		
BOD18. "Can't take it anymore"				.50		
BOD21. Feeling anxious				.46		
BOLM1. Having a good day*					.65	
BOLM8. Being happy*					.80	
BOLM19. Feeling optimistic*					.66	
BOLM20. Feeling energetic*					.56	
ITQ1. What are the chances that you will leave your current job for another job outside the agency sometime in the next six months?						.91
ITQ2. What are the chances that you will leave your current job for another job outside the agency sometime in the next year?						1.00

Note. $N = 370$. $\chi 2 = 820.16$, $df = 459$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, TLI= .94, RMSEA= .046, 90% CI [.041, .051], SRMR = .023. Factor loadings below .30 omitted. MAD = Making a Difference; JI = Job Involvement; BOE = Burnout-Exhaustion; BOD = Burnout-Demoralization; BOLM = Burnout-Loss of Motivation; ITQ = Intentions to Quit.

Table 6

Correlations among Study Measures

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. MAD	-	.14**	-.18**	-.25**	-.28**	.05	-.03	-.14**	-.18**	.02
2. JI		-	.06	.04	-.13*	-.10	.12	-.17**	-.19**	-.11*
Burnout										
3. BOE			-	.73**	.64**	-.15**	.02	.36**	.49**	.12*
4. BOD				-	.68**	-.07	.05	.42**	.56**	.12*
5. BOLM					-	-.06	-.05	.45**	.56**	.15**
Performance										
6. Average						-	-.09	.00	-.01	.05
7. Slope							-	-.10	-.04	-.23**
8. ITQ								-	.66**	.34**
9. AJO									-	.22**
10. TO										-

Note. JI = Job Involvement; MAD = Making a Difference; BOE = Burnout-Exhaustion; BOD = Burnout-Demoralization; BOLM = Burnout-Loss of Motivation; ITQ = Intentions to Quit; AJO = Alternative Job Opportunities; TO = Avoidable Turnover.
*p < .05;
** p < .001

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics

Measure	*M*	*SD*	Range	Cronbach's α
Making a Difference	3.40	.51	3.20	.81
Job Involvement	2.98	.73	4.10	.82
Burnout				
Exhaustion	4.12	1.09	5.63	.93
Demoralization	3.05	1.14	5.67	.93
Loss of Motivation	3.44	.93	5.25	.89
Performance				
Average	2.43	.98	4.88	NA
Slope	.01	.31	2.67	NA
Intentions to Quit	3.35	1.68	6.00	.97
Alternative Job Opportunities	3.11	1.21	4.00	NA

Table 8

Direct and Indirect Effects of Model Mediators

Mediator	Indirect Effect		Direct Effect		Total Effect	
	β	*SE*	*β*	*SE*	*β*	*SE*
Burnout						
H6: Making a Difference & Performance	.004	.351	-.019	.352	-.015	.021
H7: Making a Difference & Intentions to Quit	-.138	4.42	-.001	4.42	-.139*	.057
Performance						
H8: Burnout & Intentions to Quit	-.002	.007	.478*	.045	.476*	.046
Intentions to Quit						
H11: Burnout & Avoidable Turnover	.053	.604	.004	.083	.058	.683
H12: Performance & Avoidable Turnover	-.038	.032	-.242*	.084	-.280*	.087

Table 9

Summary of Hypotheses and Results

Hypothesis	Supported?
H1: Making a difference will be positively related to job involvement.	Yes
H2: Making a difference will be negatively related to burnout.	Yes
H3: Job involvement will moderate the relationship between making a difference and burnout; specifically, the relationship between making a difference and burnout will be stronger and more negative when job involvement is high versus low.	No
H4: Burnout will be negatively related to performance.	No
H5: Burnout will be positively related to turnover intentions.	Yes
H6: Burnout will mediate the relationship between making a difference and job performance; specifically, workers who more (vs. less) strongly perceive themselves as making a difference will report lower burnout and will have better performance.	No
H7: Burnout will mediate the relationship between making a difference and turnover intentions; specifically, workers who perceive themselves as making a difference will report lower burnout, resulting in lower turnover intentions.	No
H8: Performance will partially mediate the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions.	No
H9: Turnover intentions will be positively related to turnover.	Yes
H10: Alternative job opportunities will moderate the relationship between turnover intentions and turnover; specifically, the relationship between turnover intentions and turnover will be more positive when alternative job opportunities are high versus low.	Yes
H11: Turnover intentions will fully mediate the relationship between burnout and turnover; specifically, workers who have higher burnout will have higher turnover intentions and will be more likely to leave, whereas workers who have lower burnout will have lower turnover intentions and will be less likely to leave.	No
H12 Turnover intentions will fully mediate the relationship between performance and turnover; specifically, workers who have higher performance will have lower turnover intentions and will be less likely to leave, whereas workers who have lower performance will have higher turnover intentions and will be more likely to leave.	No

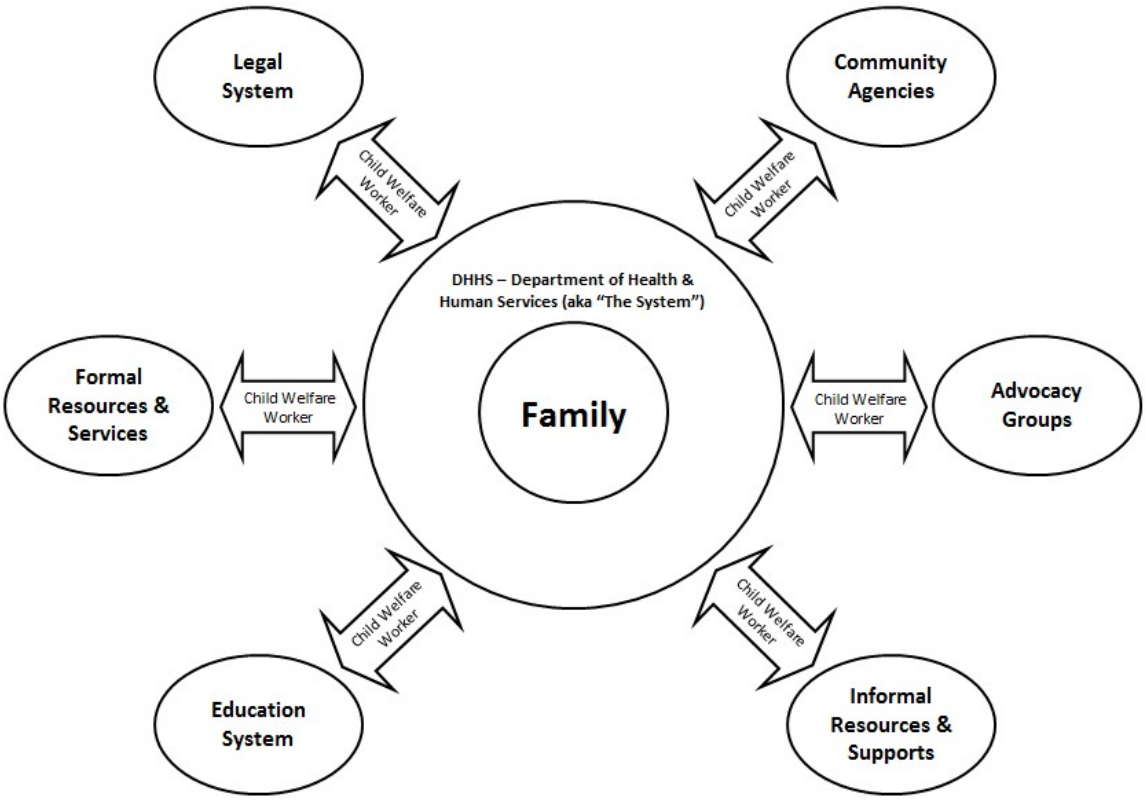

Figure 1. Depiction of the child welfare worker role as liaison between the family and other agencies and resources.

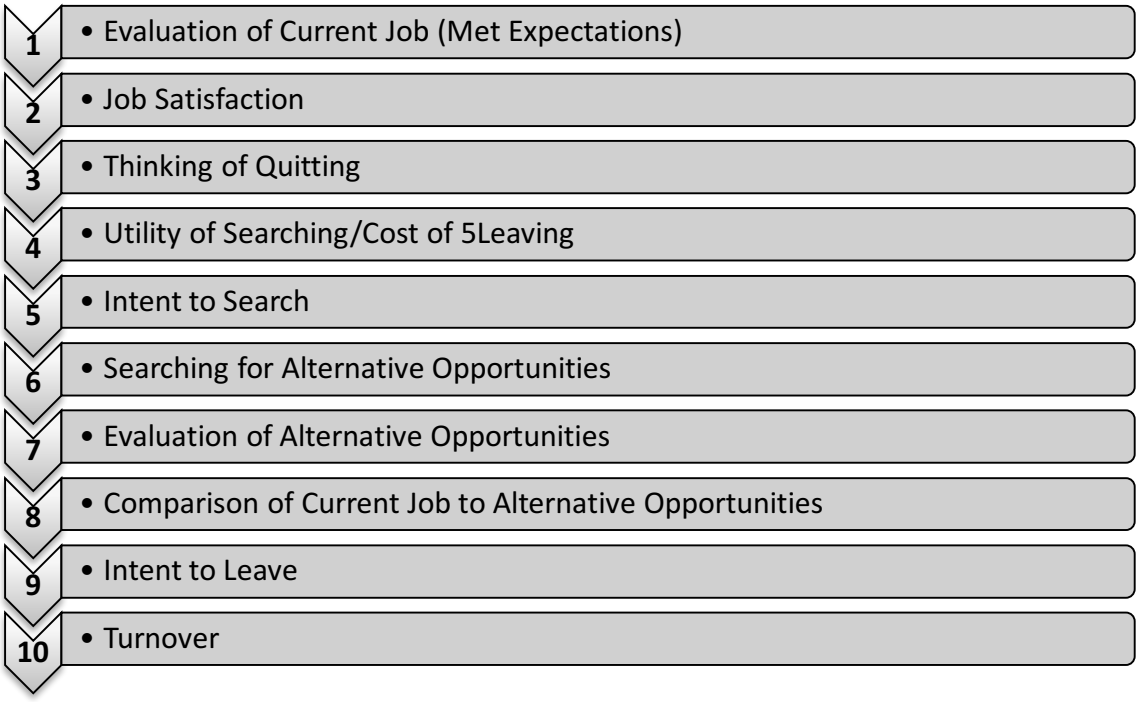

Figure 2. Steps in Mobley's (1977) Process Model of Employee Turnover

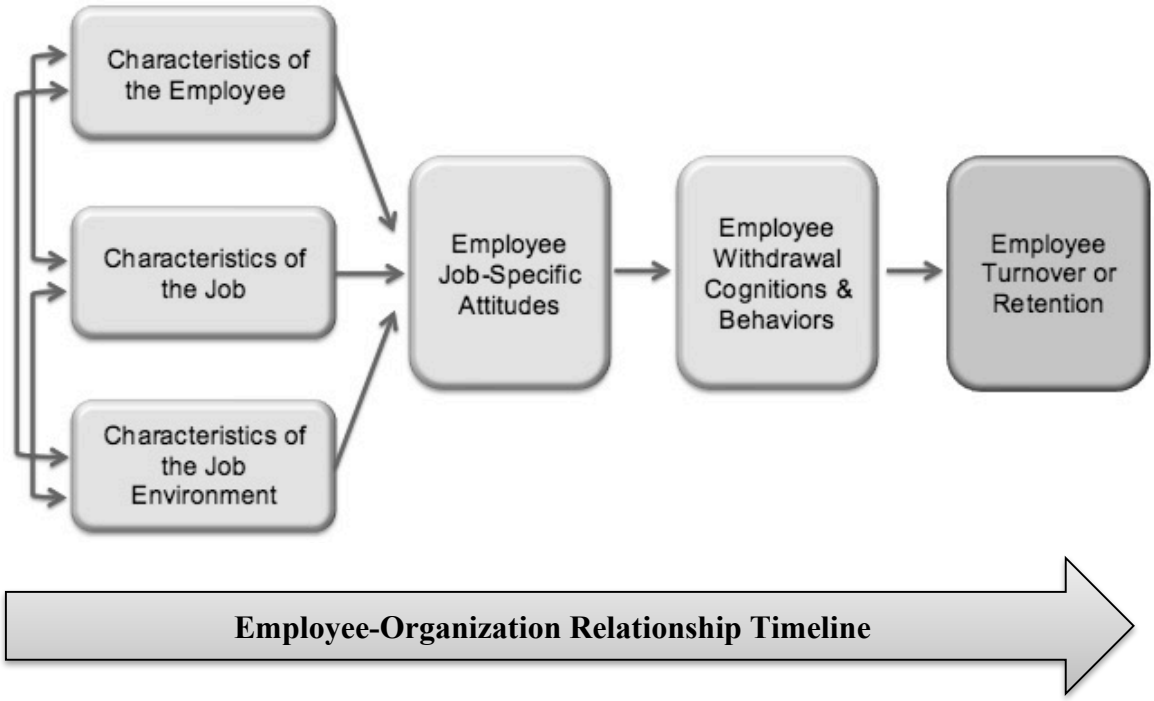

Figure 3. Graphic typology of predictors of turnover.

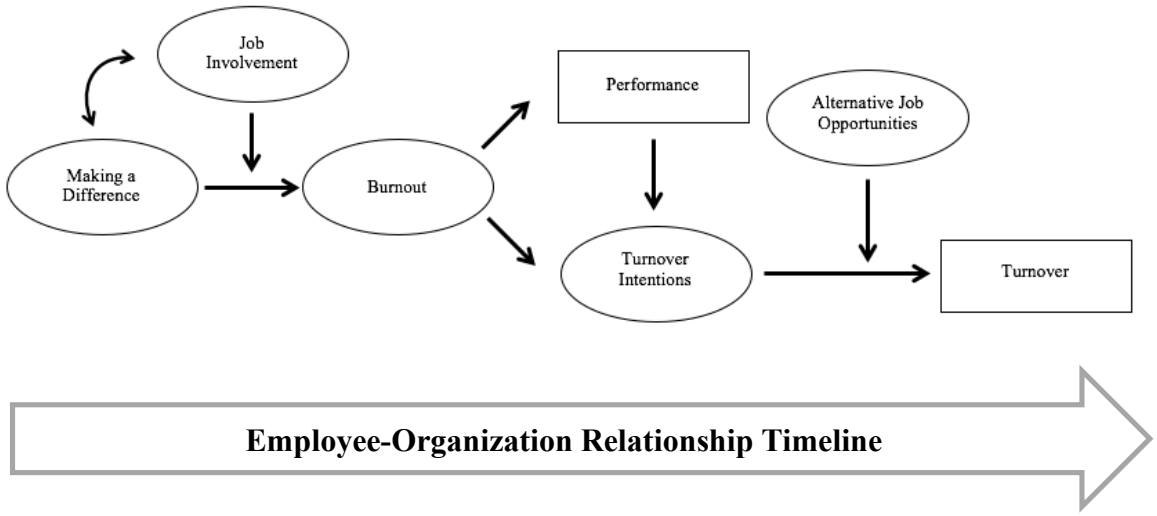

Figure 4. Hypothesized model of child welfare worker turnover

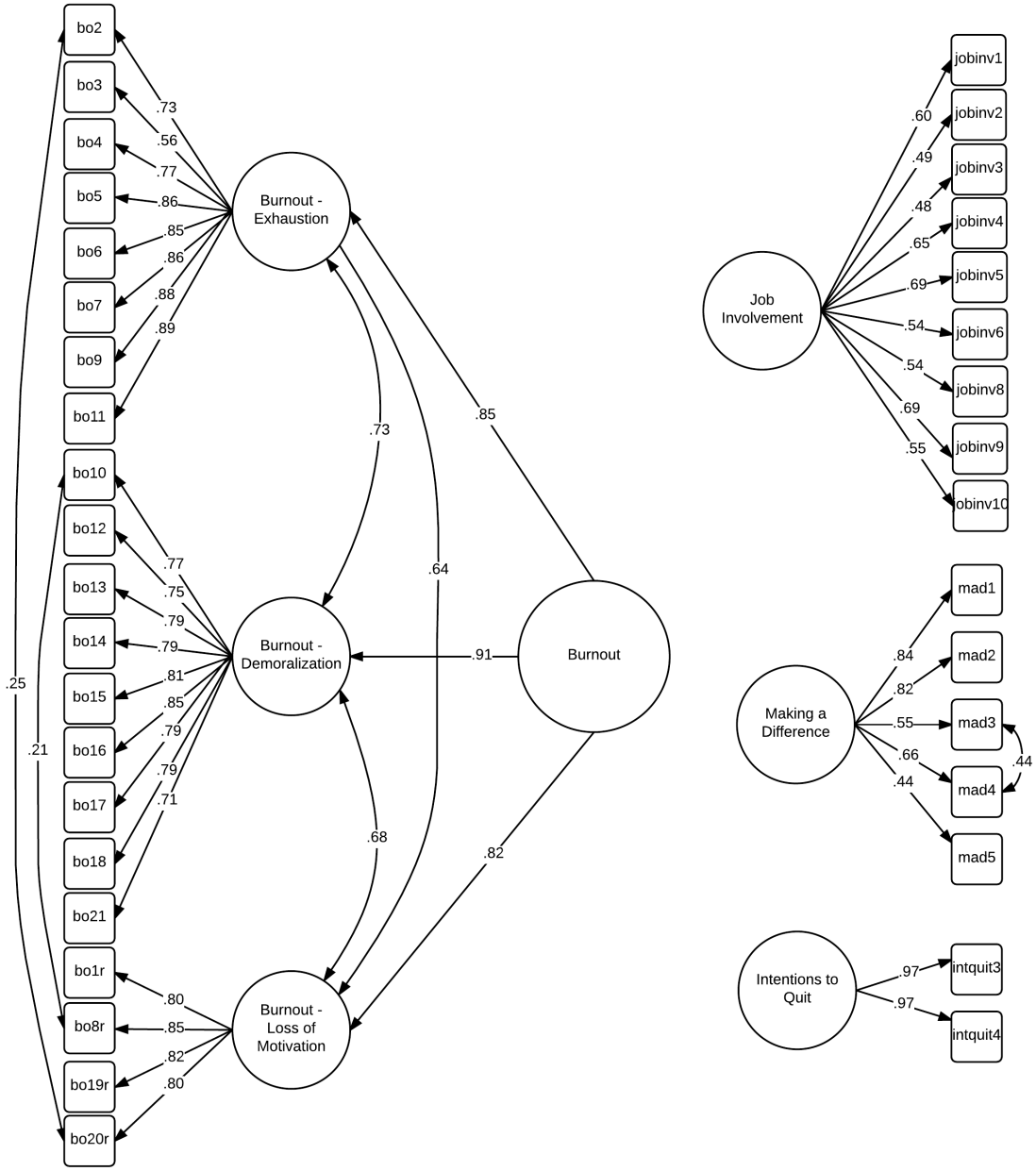

Figure 5. Full SEM measurement model for latent factors. χ^2 = 1331.858, *df* = 617, p < .000, CFI = .92, TLI= .91, RMSEA= .056, 90% CI [.052, .060], SRMR = .07.

```
Frequency    Stem &  Leaf

    4.00 Extremes    (=<-.96)
    3.00       -7 .  001
    2.00       -6 .  24
    3.00       -5 .  047
   11.00       -4 .  00003344778
   15.00       -3 .  000111334468889
   27.00       -2 .  000112222344555556777788899
   38.00       -1 .  00000111111222222233333456666888888999
   11.00       -0 .  00011233455
   33.00        0 .  00000000000000000000000001112223345
   53.00        1 .  00000111122222222223333333444444555566666667778889999
   37.00        2 .  00001111111122333334445578888889999999
   21.00        3 .  000002223444455777999
   11.00        4 .  01224445677
    7.00        5 .  0014777
    1.00        6 .  0
    1.00        7 .  5
    1.00 Extremes    (>=1.25)

Stem width:  .1000000
Each leaf:        1 case(s)
```

Figure 6. Stem and leaf plot for performance slope.

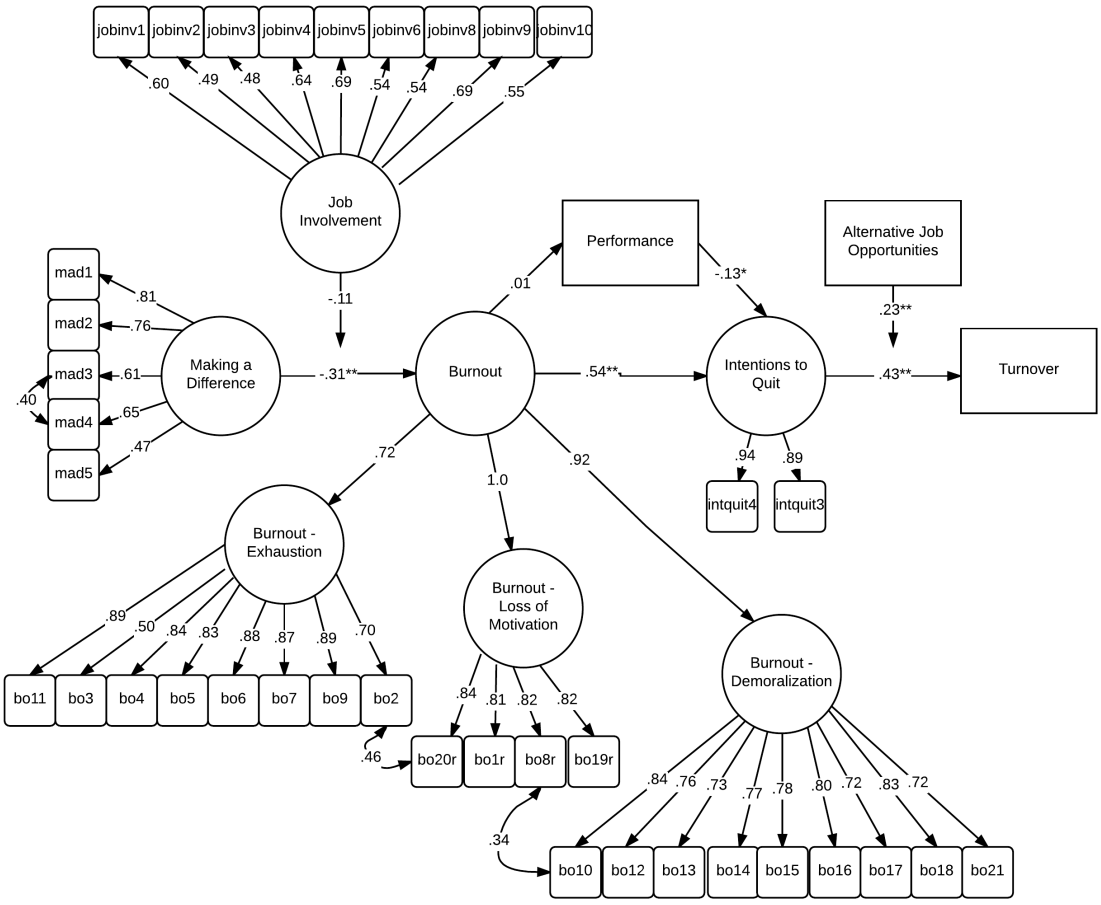

Figure 7. Full SEM model. $\chi^2 = 654.72$, $df = 451$, $p < .000$, CFI = .93, TLI= .92, RMSEA= .036, 90% CI [.030, .042].

Appendix

Appendix A
Study Measures

Job involvement

1. The most important things that happen to me involve my present job.
2. To me, my job is only a small part of who I am.
3. I am very much involved personally in my job.
4. I live, eat, and breathe my mob.
5. Most of my interested are centered around my job.
6. I have very strong ties with my present job which would be very difficult to break.
7. Usually I feel detached from my job.
8. Most of my personal life goals are job-oriented.
9. I consider my job to be very central to my existence.
10. I like to be absorbed in my job most of the time.

Making a difference

1. How often do you feel you are successful in helping families make positive changes in their lives?
2. How often do you feel you are successful in helping children and families achieve permanency?
3. How often do you feel you are successful in helping children and families remain safe?
4. How often do you feel your efforts have contributed to the physical, mental, and educational well-being of children and families?
5. How often do you receive thanks or expressions of gratitude from children or families you have worked with?

Burnout

How often do you have any of the following experiences as a result of your job?

1. Having a good day
2. Being tired
3. Being weak and susceptible to illness
4. Being troubled
5. Being physically exhausted
6. Being weary
7. Being emotionally exhausted
8. Being happy
9. Being "wiped out"
10. Being unhappy
11. Feeling run-down
12. Feeling trapped
13. Feeling worthless
14. Feeling disillusioned and resentful
15. Feeling depressed
16. Feeling hopeless
17. Feeling rejected
18. "Can't take it anymore"
19. Feeling optimistic
20. Feeling energetic
21. Feeling anxious

Performance

1. Percentage of Appropriately Accepted Priority 1 Can Intakes
2. Percentage of Priority 1 - First Contact in One Day
3. Percentage of Priority 1 - IA Completed in 10 Work Days
4. Percentage of Priority 2 - First Contact in Five Days
5. Percentage of Priority 2 - IA Completed in 20 Work Days
6. Percentage of Priority 3 - First Contact in Ten Days
7. Percentage of Priority3 - IA Completed in 30 Work Days
8. Percentage of Priority 1 - Service Provision in 10 Work Days
9. Percentage of Priority 2 - Service Provision in 15 Work Day
10. Percentage of Priority 3 - Service Provision in 20 Work Days
11. Percentage of Finalized Case Plans in 60 Days
12. Percentage of Finalized Current Case Plans
13. Percentage of Monthly Child Contact
14. Percentage of Monthly Parent Contact
15. Percentage of Reunification in 12 Months
16. Percentage of Adoption within 12 Months of Setting Goal to Adoption

Intentions to quit

1. What are the chances that you will leave your current job for another job outside the agency sometime in the next *six months*?
2. What are the chances that you will leave your current job for another job outside the agency sometime in the next *year*?

Alternative job opportunities

1. How easy would it be for you to find a job with another employer in this geographical area that is *as good as* the one you now have?
2. How easy would it be for you to find a job with another employer in this geographical area that is *better* than the one you now have?

Demographic Controls

1. Gender
2. Ethnicity