



## **Child Protection Workers and Education**

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to

The Child Protection Study Committee

August 19, 2014

# Headliners



**Georgia child welfare workers under criticism again after two deaths**

*Posted: Sunday, September 15, 2002*



**Counties Cited for Child Welfare Issues**

*Reported: 11:07 PM, Nov 6, 2003*

**CBS Atlanta**

**Child Deaths Up In Families Watched By Ga. Agency**

*Reported: February 18, 2012 10:26 AM*

**ajc.com**

**Dozen of Georgia children die despite state intervention**

*Posted: 8:37 a.m. Sunday, Oct. 20, 2013*

**Crime & Law**

**Police: Father, stepmom starved 10-year-old to death**

**Court records say DFCS let child stay with abusive stepmother**

*Updated: 6:16 p.m. Monday, Nov. 4, 2013 | Posted: 10:23 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 2, 2013*

**State & Regional Govt & Politics**

**DFCS report: 152 Georgia children died with agency history**

*Posted: 12:00 a.m. Saturday, April 20, 2013*

# Headliners, Citizens, and Child Welfare viewed as a Social Work Domain

Citizens are often alarmed when they hear such headliners. This alarm is even more looming once citizens discover that the child and family involved were under or previously investigated by DFCS and hence the abuse should have been detected by a social worker and preventive services rendered.

Child Welfare is a field of practice that the public most readily identifies as a social work domain, yet less than 30% of child welfare workers have professional social work degrees (BSW or MSW). In some states the number of professional social workers in public child welfare is as low as three (3%) with fewer than 15% of states requiring a BSW or MSW degree for any child welfare position.  
(CWLA, 1999).

- **Approximately 20% of child welfare workers in the state of Georgia are professional social workers**

The delivery of agency –based child protection services is deeply rooted in the early history of the social work profession, and direct links exist between child welfare competencies and social work education (Rittner & Wodarski, 1999):

Social work professionals continue to play key roles in child welfare/child protection practice e.g. supervision, administration, and training. However, despite the long history connection between social work and child welfare, child welfare/child protection agencies have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified staff. \*The difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff correlates with certain challenges.

# Recruitment and Retention Challenges

90% of states reported that recruitment and retention of child protection workers is related to the following challenges:

- High case loads
- Limited or inadequate training and support
- Limited supervision and lack of qualified supervisors
- Little to no case management experience prior to receiving complex cases
- Salaries that do not correspond with the job demands
- Decline in benefits e.g. retirement and medical/dental health
- No educational enhancement opportunity

\*(Halt of Title IV-E to obtain a BSW or MSW degrees)

- Lacking of Loan Forgiveness programs
- Risk of violence for front-line workers
- Emotional exhaustion
- Policy and values confusion
- No clear career-path defined
- Poor working conditions
- Administrative burdens (Agency not being able to support/take care of their own e.g. workers work an average of 50-60 hrs. a week, workers on call at least once a month.)

*Comment: A former DFCS employee with over 23 years invested in the agency stated, "DFCS leadership puts excessive demands on the workers in order to meet numbers instead of promoting **quality case work** with families to prevent serious injuries and deaths."*

## **Knowledge, skills, and values of a qualified Child Protection Worker**

- With proper education, training, and supervision child protective services workers can adequately serve children, youth, and families by preventing future episodes of child maltreatment.
- There is a demand for workers who have the knowledge, skills, and values to:
  - Perform high quality assessments for both children and families
  - Make decisions at multiple levels
  - Work with children and families with complex needs
  - Facilitate intra-and inter system coordination
  - Understand and implement policy mandates and advocate for changes where needed
  - Develop relationships with the multiple players in the child welfare system
  - Maintain their own emotional well-being, faced with trauma and a stressful working environment

**What constitutes the best or optimum education and training for Child Protection Workers?**

**\*\*This debate has been ongoing for almost 50 years\*\***

As many state and private agencies attempt to meet accreditation standards, as state and localities access federal funds for degree education of workers, and agencies face recruitment and retention challenges of the “right” workers, a growing body of evidence supports the value of having professionally educated social workers in child welfare.

- What does NASW believe is needed to attract qualified workers?  
Education, Training and Workforce Standards Are Needed to Encourage Highly Skilled Professionals to Work in Programs that Promote the Safety and Well-Being of Children and Promote Family Self-Sufficiency and Family Stability such as Child Protection Agencies.

## NASWGA's Recommendation for Recruiting Qualified Child Protection Workers

- NASW GA recommends that federal and state funding be enhanced to support the education and training of professional social workers to work in public and private child welfare agencies, including support for the education and training of supervisors. In addition, child protection agencies should increase their staffing standards, by requiring a minimum of a bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) for front-line workers and a master's degree in social work (MSW) and experience for supervisors in child protection programs. Resources should also be available to ensure that other professionals, including physicians, lawyers, and nurses, have the necessary training to recognize and assess child abuse and neglect and to ensure that there are high quality multi-disciplinary services available. In addition, all health and behavioral health, legal, and social service professionals should have training related to child abuse and neglect assessment and prevention.

# Supporting Professional Social Work in Child Welfare (Some Statistics)

In the child welfare field, research shows that **those who are most prepared to do the job are also the most likely to remain on the job**. Numerous studies indicate that **professional commitment** is a major factor in continuing to work in the child welfare field.

These studies include the perspectives of individual workers, supervisors, and administrators (Ellett, 2000, 2003; GAO, 2003; Rycraft, 1994; Reagh, 1994; Vinokur, 1991), as well as assessment of agency performance and outcomes (Booz-Allen & Hamilton, 1987; Dhooper, Royse & Wolfe, 1990; Cyphers, 2001; Mon Barak, Nissly & Levin, 2001).

## Coming and Staying

- Intent to stay is related to 'human caring' and self-efficacy, which correlated with a social work degree (Ellett, 2000; Ellett, Ellett & Rugutt, 2003).
- Intent to stay is a critical factor for agency's organizational change strategies, as child welfare workers do not leave impulsively (Mon Barak, Nissly & Levin, 2001).
- Staff with social work degrees — and those who are IV-E trained — are most inclined to stay (Barbee, 2003; Harrison, 1995; Lewandowski, 1998; Jones, 2002; Okamura & Jones, 1995; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991; Ellett, 2003).



## Supporting Professional Social Work in Child Welfare (Some Statistics) Continued ...

- Workers with social work degrees demonstrate “goodness of fit.”  
(Rycraft, 1994; Bernatovicz, n.d.; Landsman, 2001)
- States find that partnerships with universities, often supported by Title IV-E funds, provides a useful recruitment strategy (Cyphers, 2001; GAO, 2003), by:
  - Creating a pipeline for employees through BSW & MSW education
  - Providing degree education for advancement of current staff
  - Enhancing staff ‘s level of knowledge and skill
  - Meeting and/or achieving COA standards
  - Enhancing professional identification and commitment
- Decreased turnover is affected by professional BSW and MSW degrees.
- Non-specific staffing requirements discourage those with professional degrees from seeking child welfare jobs.

## Supporting Professional Social Work in Child Welfare (Some Statistics) Continued ...

### Child Welfare Outcomes

- Permanence is more likely achieved if staff have BSW or MSW degree (Albers, Reilly & Rittner, 1993).
- Worker turnover affects achievement of permanence. Hiring workers prepared for child welfare reduces turnover (Hess, Foloran, & Jefferson, 1992).
- Workers who acquire MSW degrees also acquire more positive view of clients (McGowan & Auerbach, 2004).

### Important Links

- **National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work (NADD) and the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA) (2002)**  
*Proceedings from the Professional Education to Advance Child Welfare Practice: An Invitational Working Conference*  
Available  
at: [http://ssw.chcu.umn.edu/cascw/cascw\\_confernece\)proceedings.htm](http://ssw.chcu.umn.edu/cascw/cascw_confernece)proceedings.htm) OR <http://www.uky.edu/SocialWork/cswe/>

\*This report highlights findings from studies indicating the impact of social work education on recruitment and retention and makes recommendations for sustaining university/agency partnerships.

## Supporting Professional Social Work in Child Welfare (Some Statistics) Continued ...

### Child Welfare/Social Work Education Partnerships

Web site:

<http://www.uky.edu/SocialWork/cswe/>

- This rich information resource is maintained through the College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky in support of the cross-university collaboration, the Child Welfare Symposium, which evolved from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). This Web site includes rules and regulations for Title IV-E training; a matrix of stipends for child welfare training; links to Title IV-E programs around the country; bibliographies; and findings from research studies.

### \*Child Welfare League of America

*R2P Research Round-Up: Child Welfare Workforce* (September 2002)

Available at:

<http://www.cwla.org/programs/r2p/rrnews0209.pdf>

**This overview of child welfare workforce issues summarizes research studies that address workforce issues including evidence that:**

- BSW and MSW degrees positively correlate with worker performance;
- Social work education is linked to employee performance and retention;
- Workers who have graduated from specialized child welfare/social work degree education program are more likely to remain in child welfare and experience greater satisfaction;
- Personal characteristics (e.g., coping strategies, professional commitment, self-efficacy, and human caring) are a factor in retention and turnover;
- Organizational factors related to retention include organizational support; and
- Supervision and flexibility of assignments.

# Social Workers and Education

**Social Workers are educated** on the (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate levels)

Typical courses or subjects covered in a bachelor's degree program include:

- At-risk populations
- Community resources
- Diversity Human behavior
- Modern social problems
- Social and economic justice
- Social work research methods
- Sociology
- Ethics and values

**Masters level** an advanced degree -- a two year Master of Social Work (MSW), plus supervised clinical experience requires to work as a clinical social worker; however, number of supervised clinical experience (hours) varies by state.

**Private practice** to counsel clients or earn an advanced position as a supervisor, program manager, agency director or teacher, you'll be required to possess an advanced degree -- a two-year Master of Social Work (MSW) or a doctoral degree (DSW or Ph.D.). **A master's degree program provides training in performing clinical assessments, managing caseloads, working in supervisory roles and exploring social work resources.**

- Social Workers abide by a code of ethics
- In most states, must be licensed to be identified as a social worker. Additionally, a license provides for a level of accountability.
- To maintain licensure and be prepared for their duties and responsibilities social workers are required to participate in continuing education courses (CE) annually and other trainings relevant to their positions.

**\*Georgia's social workers are required to obtain 35 CE(s) every 2 yrs. to maintain licensure. 5 of these hrs. must be on Ethics and they must be received in a face to face format.**

## NASW-GA Recommendation - Education Levels for Child Protection who are Social Workers

- BSW  
**(Front line staff – case managers)**
- MSW(with experience) or CSW  
**(Supervisors and/or Intake Workers)**
- CSW or LCSW  
**(Administration - Managers)**
- MSW (with a LCSW), BSW with a MPA, MPH or DSW, Ph.D. with a  
masters degree in Social Work  
**(Agency Director)**

## **Additional Ways Child Protection Workers can be Supported**

- Provide a safe and supportive working environment
- Monitor workloads and caseloads of staff
- Provide effective supervision and modeling to staff
- Support professional development opportunities
- Support the use of emerging technology
- Promote the use of information management systems
- Collaborate with other agency units and outside programs
- Use a variety of funding streams  
(e.g. Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers)
- Make the case to support child abuse and neglect prevention efforts  
(e.g. Social Work administrators and directors can involve themselves in their community's fund allocation project)

# Final Thoughts

There are a range of personal and organizational factors/characteristics that can positively influence retention of qualified child protection staff such as

## Positive personal factors

- Professional commitment to children and families
- Previous work experience / training
- Education
- Job satisfaction
- Efficacy
- Personal characteristics (age, bilingual)

## Organizational factors that can impact retention and turnover

- Better Salary
- Supervisory Support
- Reasonable workload
- Coworker support
- Opportunities for advancement
- Organizational commitment and valuing employees

**\*However, the level of education and professional commitment are the most consistent personal characteristics of child protection workers who stay within the child protection workforce. Hence, NASW and NASW-GA believe that child protection agencies should increase their staffing standards, by requiring a minimum of a bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) for front-line workers and a master's degree in social work (MSW) and experience for supervisors in child protection programs.**