

## **PROFESSIONAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORK IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA: A REPORT OF THE NOCCWA RESEARCH AND STUDY COMMITTEE**

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**ABSTRACT:** On behalf of NOCCWA, a survey of personal characteristics and working conditions and attitudes was developed and distributed to the membership of over 2,000, with each recipient asked to provide a copy to a non-member colleague in the same agency. Almost 500 surveys were returned and formed the basis for the study. The results suggest that the segment of the child and youth care field involved in professionalization appears to be growing and making positive changes in its attempts to promote educational programming, higher employment standards, longer tenures both in the field and at current places of employment, career planning, and improved working conditions. This group also continues to struggle in some areas, such as salaries, attracting minorities, and promoting the status of women. The data may help to focus greater attention on the areas which can be used to guide further growth, including organizational factors that can enhance worker satisfaction and commitment at the work place.

In a continued attempt to understand its membership and other individuals who work in the field, the National Organization of Child Care Worker Associations (NOCCWA) recently conducted a second survey of child and youth care workers from 20 of the United States and 3 Canadian provinces. The goals were to gather information that could be used to guide further development of the profession and to enhance the knowledge of factors which contribute to workers' job satisfaction and commitment to their agencies.

A preliminary survey, reported together with a listing of previous surveys of this group was conducted in 1983 (Krueger, Lauerman,

Graham, & Powell, 1986). Data collected there were used to develop a profile of workers and to fill information gaps in areas such as workers' preservice education, types of inservice training provided by agencies, agency treatment approaches, and the availability of promotional opportunities and systems for workers. Differences between members and nonmembers of NOCCWA were also explored and a predictive model of Organizational Commitment was developed.

### **Conceptual Foundations**

In addition to Organizational Commitment, the preliminary report introduced definitions and measures of two other attitudes that were assumed to influence worker performance: Job Satisfaction and Decision Involvement. These three concepts, which were also included in the present survey, are defined as follows:

#### **Organizational Commitment**

Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) defined organizational commitment as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization." They also identified three characteristics of commitment: a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals; a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization; and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization.

#### **Job Satisfaction**

Job Satisfaction as defined by Mendenhall (1977) and Speed (1979) is reflective of one's response either to the job or to certain aspects of the job. It is further characterized by workers' attitudes regarding nine job facets: coworkers, interactions with administration and children, supervision, agency identification, financial benefits, working conditions, amount of work, parent and community awareness, and training.

#### **Decision Involvement**

Decision Involvement is an individual's perceived level of involvement in decisions made by the organization. Specific areas of involvement include administration, treatment, evaluation, and financial planning (Thierbach, 1980).

Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction are particularly important to the child and youth care field because, in addition to influencing work performance, they have been found to have a negative

relationship with employee turnover (Mowday, Porter, & Dubin, 1976; Myer, 1980; Ross, 1984; Rosenthal, 1980). This study was designed to develop predictive models of both attitudes that could be compared to models developed in the preliminary study (Krueger, 1985). It was also designed to gather information that would help sketch an updated profile of workers and to venture into new previously unexplored areas such as how and where workers interact with children, youth, and families. An additional purpose for the survey was to explore the significant differences, if any, between NOCCWA members and nonmembers, and between males and females.

## Method

### Population

The study population consisted of all NOCCWA members from 23 states and provinces and their nonmember working colleagues. It was anticipated that survey respondents would generally be child and youth care workers who worked with troubled and/or handicapped children in group care facilities (residential centers, psychiatric hospitals, correctional facilities, group homes, and temporary shelter care) and community-based programs.

### Procedure

Each member of a NOCCWA association ( $n = 2084$ ) was sent two copies of the survey questionnaire and asked to give one copy to a child care worker in his or her agency or program who was not a member. Thus, a total of 4,168 questionnaires were distributed. Specific instructions for distribution of the second copy were: "Please select the nonmember in your agency whose name immediately follows yours in alphabetical order on the agency's roster." Members were then asked to return the completed surveys in an enclosed, self-addressed stamped envelope within two weeks.

### Instrument

The survey questions were based on those asked in previous surveys (Krueger, et al., 1986; Limer, 1977; Myer, 1980) and needs for more information identified by NOCCWA's Research and Study Committee. The first section of the questionnaire was designed to gather information in three categories: 1) demographic data for developing a child and youth care worker profile; 2) other descriptive information

that could be compared to that from previous surveys, such as type of agency, sex and age of clients, length of stay in the field, types of inservice and preservice training, and career incentives; and 3) new information regarding working environments, salary ranges, and number of inservice hours.

The second section of the survey consisted of three forced choice questionnaires with four point Likert scales measuring workers' attitudes regarding Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction, and Decision Involvement, respectively. Organizational Commitment was assessed through workers' responses to 15 statements pertaining to their agencies or programs (e.g., willingness to exert energy beyond expectation, loyalty to agency, consistency in values, agency pride, willingness to stay at agency, and agreement with agency policies) (Porter, et al., 1974). Job Satisfaction was measured by 27 questions addressing the nine job facets mentioned earlier (Speed, 1979). Seventeen questions were designed to assess worker Decision Involvement in the following areas: treatment objectives, organizational structure, working schedules, assessment procedures, discipline, inservice training, group assignment, intake, budgets, community problems, setting unit goals, allocating supplies, staff evaluation, purchasing supplies for the group, recording procedures, selecting leaders, and choosing treatment techniques (Thierbach, 1980).

## Results

A 15% return rate is often expected for mail surveys; in this case, 492 (approximately 12% of the surveys mailed) were returned. Since we were unable to control the distribution and collection of nonmember surveys, we found this to be an acceptable rate of return. They came from 23 states and provinces, with the largest number coming from Illinois (68), Pennsylvania (56), British Columbia (44), Oregon (42), and Ontario (42). Only those findings deemed most pertinent to developing a greater understanding of the field are detailed here. Additional results are summarized in the Appendix.

### Child and Youth Care Worker Characteristics

The most frequently reported job titles were child care worker (49%), counselor (7%), houseparent (4%), and youth worker (4%). Others included teaching parent, psychiatric aide, correction worker, educator, and child mental health specialist. The primary roles of the respondents were direct service (62%), administration (16%), education/training (8%), and supervision (5%). Membership in NOCCWA

associations was reported by 71% of the respondents, and 42% of all respondents were certified child/youth care workers. (Half of the members were certified, compared to less than 25% of the nonmembers). To our knowledge, only six associations had certification programs.

The average age of respondents was 33.98 ( $SD = 9.3$ ). Females (61%) outnumbered males (39%). Just over three quarters of the respondents were Caucasian, 15% were Black, 2% were Native American, 1% each were Hispanic, and Asian and 4% responded "Other."

Ninety-two per cent had had at least some college education, with 63% reporting having achieved at least a bachelor's degree. Twenty-nine per cent had had some graduate work, and about half of these had master's degrees.

The average number of years participants had worked in the field was 7.8 ( $SD = 6.1$ ), and the average length of stay at their current place of employment was 4.8 years ( $SD = 4.6$ ). The medians were 6.1 and 3.3 years, respectively, and the modes were 2 and 1 years, respectively, suggesting that large numbers of respondents were relative newcomers, while smaller numbers who had been in the field for many years raised the average substantially. When asked whether they planned to be in the field in three years, 72% of the respondents indicated that they did.

### Working Conditions and Incentives

The largest percentage of respondents worked in residential treatment (47%). Other employment environments reported included group homes (17%), home and community (9%), schools (7%), psychiatric hospitals (6%), temporary shelter (5%), day care (5%), detention (2%), and corrections (1%). Seventy-two per cent of these agencies were private and the rest public. The average youngest age of children with whom participants worked was 9.2 years ( $SD = 4$ ); the average oldest age was 16.5 years ( $SD = 3.1$ ). Over half of the participants (55%) worked with both boys and girls, 31% with just boys, and 14% with just girls.

In response to the question, "Where do you work with youth?" about 88% of the respondents cited the "daily living environment" of their agency or program; just over one-fifth of those also work in the home, school, and/or community. Only about 10% work in the latter settings without being involved with the young people in the agency living environment. Those respondents who worked in two or more environments spent an average of 62% of their time in the daily living environment. About 90% of the respondents indicated that they work with young people in groups, nearly all work with them individually as well, and over 40% report that they also work with families. The

latter group indicate that they spend an average of 15% of their time in family work.

The average salary range of respondents was range five, \$13,000-\$13,999 ( $SD=3.1$  ranges), with the median range six (\$14,000-\$14,999). Over one-third of the respondents (36%) indicated that they earned above \$16,999, comprised of 30% of the females and 46% of the males. Half worked in agencies with "step plans" or "career ladders."

Ninety-two per cent of the respondents worked full time. The "day shift" was the most common shift (34%), followed by "combination first and second shift" (23%), "combination first, second, and third shift" (12%), "night shift" (10%), "live in" (9%), and "overnight shift" (4%).

### **Inservice Training**

Introductory inservice training was provided by 74% of the respondents' agencies. The average number of annual inservice hours was 42 ( $SD=28$ ), and the median was 40 hours. The most popular method of training was "Outside Conferences and Workshops" (78%), followed by "Regularly Scheduled Group Inservice" (74%) and "One-to-One Individual Supervision" (47%). (Multiple methods were reported by many respondents, so the total exceeds 100%.)

### **Differences by Gender and Membership**

Analyses of variance by gender and by membership in NOCCWA associations revealed significant differences for age of respondents, time in field, time at current job, and decision involvement. Males tended to be younger than females (33 vs. 35 years), had been at their current places of employment longer (5.3 vs. 4.5 years) and perceived themselves as being more involved in decision-making (45.43 vs. 43.26). (Salary difference by gender as cited above).

NOCCWA association members tended to be older than nonmembers (35 years vs. 30 years), had been in the field longer (9 years vs. 4.7 years), had been at their current places of employment longer (5.6 years vs. 2.9 years), and perceived themselves as being more involved in decisions (41.86 vs. 38.62).

### **Organizational Commitment**

Respondents' scores on Organizational Commitment served as the criterion measure in a regression analysis. This model revealed the variables listed in Table 1 as statistically significant predictors of Organizational Commitment. The multiple correlation coefficient for this model ( $R$ ) was .647.

**Job Satisfaction**

Participants' scores on the Job Satisfaction questionnaire also served as the criterion measure in a regression analysis and revealed the variables listed in Table 1 as statistically significant predictors of Job Satisfaction. This multiple correlation coefficient (R) was also .645; the correlation between the two variables was .51.

**Table One**

*Multiple Regression Analysis:  
Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction*

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**Organizational Commitment**

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Independent Variable	Beta	t	p
Job Satisfaction	.518	13.879	.000
One-to-One Training with Supervisor	.078	2.117	.035
Work in Three Years	-.076	-2.116	.035
Age of Clients	.083	2.415	.016
Training at Outside Conferences	.079	2.221	.027
Decision Involvement	.077	2.036	.042x
Educational Background	-.072	-2.032	.043
Step Plan	-.066	-1.820	.069
Type of Agency	.068	1.689	.092
R = .64661			

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**Job Satisfaction**

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Independent Variable	Beta	t	p
Organizational Commitment	.518	13.892	.000
Step Plan	-.094	-2.360	.008
Work in Three Years	-.086	-2.395	.017
Decision Involvement	.109	2.858	.004
Salary Range	.086	2.371	.018
Member of Association	.072	1.990	.047
Time in Living Environment	-.066	-1.881	.061
Time with Families	-.076	-2.126	.034
Type of Agency	-.078	-2.196	.029
Youngest Age of Children	-.0662	-1.796	.073
R = .64530			

## Discussion

The survey focused on members of professional associations and their nonmember colleagues who worked in the same agencies. It seems likely, therefore, that the individuals and agencies represented tended to be those most concerned with professionalization. The results, consequently, can be viewed as particularly relevant to that segment of the field.

The ranges of job titles and facilities in which respondents were employed suggest that the profession continues to broaden in membership and scope (Beker, 1977; VanderVen, 1986). New findings regarding where and how workers interacted with children also support the belief that workers' direct service roles are widening to include family work and school and community involvement in addition to traditional child care in the daily living environment. Further, the finding that over one-third of the respondents held indirect service positions suggests that the field is growing along the lines of other professions in which members are supervised by fellow professionals in the field rather than by members of another profession.

The levels of preservice education, inservice training, and certification, combined with the overall tenure of respondents — both in the field and at their current places of employment — offer encouragement for those who are concerned about raising standards of practice and increasing worker permanency (Krueger, 1983). On the other hand, the low percentage of minorities is clearly disproportionate to the percentage of minorities in placement and is a cause for concern if one believes in the importance of cross-culturally compatible communication and role modeling.

Although salaries do not appear to have increased markedly, it is encouraging to note that over one-third of the respondents earn above \$16,999 and that over half work in agencies that have step plans or career ladders. Both of these latter findings offer hope that organizations are responding to the need for financial and career incentives for workers (Krueger, et al., 1986; Krueger and Nardine, 1984; Myer, 1980).

The findings that NOCCWA association members had longer tenures both in the field and at their current places of employment than nonmembers, and perceived themselves as being more involved in decisions, replicated the findings from the preliminary survey. This seems to suggest that people who join associations may have been active in the field longer and may be more likely to assert themselves in the decision-making process, whether as a consequence of their longer tenure, because of their professional orientation, or both. It may also



reflect the impact of membership in a professional association. In any case, this is positive news for the profession. The findings that males had longer tenure at current places of employment and more decision involvement than females, coupled with the finding that a smaller percentage of women (30%, vs. 46% of the men) earned above \$16,999 suggest that the field needs to concentrate more energy on enhancing the status of women at the work place.

As in the preliminary survey (Krueger, Lauerman, Graham, & Powell, 1980), Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction were found to be strong predictors of each other. This supported the contention that there is a need to understand further the relationship between day-to-day satisfaction and long-term commitment within an organizational setting. It also suggests that attempts to change or influence one attitude may account for a change in the other.

Decision Involvement and whether or not an agency had a step plan or career ladder were once again found to be predictors of both attitudes. Type of Agency (private or public) also appeared for the second time in the Organizational Commitment model and for the first time in the Job Satisfaction model, suggesting that further investigation into the differences in attitudes among workers in these two types of settings is needed. Whether or not respondents planned to be in the field in three years was a predictor of both Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction as well.

The appearance of educational background and two forms of in-service training ("one-to-one training with a supervisor" and "training at outside conferences") in the Organizational Commitment model focuses additional attention on the importance of understanding the influence of education and training in shaping attitudes about the workplace. Additionally, it will be important to attempt to understand how workers' Organizational Commitment is influenced by the age ranges of the children with whom they work.

Association membership and salary level were repeat predictors in the Job Satisfaction model. This supports the belief that salary and professional identification have significant influence on workers' Job Satisfaction, although the direction of all the relationships that have been cited remain to be confirmed through further analysis. Finally, the percentage of work time spent "in daily living environment" and "with families" warrants further study in relationship to their Job Satisfaction.

Caution would appear to be in order in generalizing from the results of the survey to total populations of child and youth care workers, not only because such a small sample was obtained, but also because the sampling method focused on NOCCWA association members (79%)

and their colleagues in the same agencies (21%). For example, one might presumably conjecture that agencies having NOCCWA-affiliated staff tend to operate on a higher professional level than those that do not. It might also be assumed that the NOCCWA association members would tend to be at a higher professional level than their non-member colleagues in the same agency, but the results showed that such differences did not appear consistently.

It should also be noted that many of the findings are similar to those that were obtained in the preliminary survey (Krueger et al, 1986), lending credence to those particular results and their implications for follow-up. Together, however, the variables explored in the present study accounted for only slightly more than 40% of the variability on both Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment, suggesting that there is still much to be learned about these attitudes in relation to child and youth care workers and their work environments. More generally, the need for additional study to define the population of child and youth care workers more precisely and to identify significant trends in the field seems clear.

### Summary

The segment of the child and youth care field involved in professionalization appears to be growing and making positive changes in its attempts to promote educational programming, higher employment standards, longer tenures both in the field and at current places of employment, career planning, and improved working conditions. This group also continues to struggle in some areas such as salaries, attracting minorities, and promoting the status of women. This report has provided information that will help focus more attention on the areas which can be used to guide further growth and the organizational factors which will enhance worker satisfaction and commitment at the workplace. Additional information can be obtained by contacting the lead author at the Child and Youth Care Work address.

**APPENDIX**

**Descriptive Characteristics, Working Conditions,  
and In-Service Training**

**STATE/PROVINCE**

1. Illinois	68	12. California	14
2. Pennsylvania	56	13. Virginia	14
3. Brit. Colum.	44	14. Maryland	9
4. Ontario	42	15. Nebraska	9
5. Oregon	42	16. Arkansas	7
6. Michigan	38	17. Washington D.C.	6
7. New York	37	18. Alberta	3
8. Wisconsin	34	19. Connecticut	2
9. Arizona	18	20. Vermont	2
10. Massachusetts	18	21. New Jersey	1
11. Kansas	16	22. Ohio	1
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>492</b>

**JOB TITLE**

**Relative Frequency (%)**

Child Care Worker	49
Other	32
Counselor or Case Worker	7
Youth Worker	4
Houseparent	4
Educator	2
Child Mental Health Specialist	1
Correctional Worker or Counselor	.2
Teaching Parent	.4
Psychiatric Aid	.6

**PRIMARY ROLE**

%

Direct service to clients	62
Administration	15
Other	10
Education and/or training	8
Supervision of adults	5

**ETHNIC/RACIAL BACKGROUND**

%

Caucasian	77
Black	15
Other	4
Native American	2
Hispanic	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	1

<b>SEX</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>AGE</b>	
Female	61	Mean = 3.38	
Male	39	Standard Deviation	9.3
<b>TYPE OF PROGRAM OR AGENCY</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>NUMBER OF CHILDREN CURRENTLY SERVED BY AGENCY OR PROGRAM</b>	
Residential Treatment Center	47	Mean = 97.1	
Group Home	17	Median	52.4
Home and Community	9	Standard Deviation	156.5
School	7		
Psychiatric Hospital	6		
Day Care	5	<b>PRIVATE OR PUBLIC AGENCY</b>	<b>%</b>
Temporary Shelter Care	5	Private	71
Detention Center	2	Public	29
Other	1		

#### HOW WORKERS INTERACT WITH CHILDREN/YOUTH

	<b>%</b>
Individually and In Groups	47
Individually, In Groups, and In Family	37
In Groups	6
Individually (one to one)	4
Individual and In Family	3
Groups and In Family	2
In Family Sessions	1

#### MEAN PERCENTAGE OF TIME SPENT IN EACH CATEGORY

	<b>%</b>
Groups	45
Individuals	44
Families	15

#### WHERE WORKERS INTERACT WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH

	<b>%</b>
The daily living environment of the agency or program	69
The daily living environment of the agency/program & in their homes and the community and in the schools	13
In daily living environment of the agency/program & in their homes and the community	6
In the schools	5
In their homes and the community	3
In their homes and the community & in the schools	2
In their daily living environment and schools	2

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<b>MEAN PERCENTAGE OF TIME SPENT IN EACH ENVIRONMENT</b>		<b>%</b>
Daily Living Environment		61
Home and Community		27
Schools		21

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**AGE RANGE OF THE CHILDREN**

Youngest	9.2	Standard Deviation	4
Oldest	16.5	Standard Deviation	3.1

<b>SEX OF THE CHILDREN</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>APPROXIMATE ANNUAL SALARY</b>	
Boys & Girls	55	Cumulative	
Boys	31		%
Girls	14		%
<hr/>		1. \$ 0- 9,999	15
<b>FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME</b>		2. 10,000-10,999	8
<b>EMPLOYEE</b>	<b>%</b>	3. 11,000-11,999	7
Full time	92	4. 12,000-12,999	9
Part time	8	5. 13,000-13,999	7
		6. 14,000-14,999	7
		7. 15,000-15,999	7
		8. 16,000-16,999	4
		9. Above 16,999	36
			100

**SALARY RANGE FOR POSITION**

Starting Salary			
Mean Range	\$12,000-\$12,999	Standard Deviation	3.1 ranges
Top Salary			
Mean Range	\$15,000-\$15,999	Standard Deviation	2.4 ranges

**MEMBER OF A CHILD/YOUTH CARE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION**

Yes = 71%                      No = 29%

**CERTIFIED CHILD/YOUTH CARE WORKER**

Yes = 42%                      No = 58%

**AGENCY INTRODUCTORY INSERVICE TRAINING PROGRAM**

Yes = 74%                      No = 26%

**NUMBER OF INSERVICE TRAINING HOURS AGENCY PROVIDES PER YEAR**

Mean = 42.3                      Standard Deviation 28.1

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<b>TYPE OF INSERVICE</b>	<b>%</b>
Outside conferences and workshops	78
Regularly scheduled group inservice	74
One to one sessions with a supervisor	47
Informally	29
Other	8

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<b>WORK SHIFTS</b>	<b>%</b>
Day Shift (1st shift)	34
Combination 1st & 2nd shifts	23
Combination 1st, 2nd & 3rd shifts	12
Night Shift (2nd shift)	10
Live-in	9
Other	6
Overnight shift (3rd shift)	4
Split shift	2

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#### **STEP PLAN OR CAREER LADDER**

Yes = 50%

No = 50%

#### **NUMBER OF YEARS IN CHILD CARE**

Mean = 7.8

Median = 6.1

Mode = 2

Standard Deviation = 6.1

#### **NUMBER OF YEARS AT CURRENT PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT**

Mean = 4.8

Median = 3.3

Mode = 1

Standard Deviation = 4.6

#### **EDUCATION**

	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
Other	2	
Master's degree	14	16
Some graduate work	15	31
Bachelor's degree	32	63
Associate degree	10	73
Some college	19	92
High school grad.	7	99
Some high school	1	100

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