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Retention of Case Managers within the Metro District

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Gabrielle Jack

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2021

Abstract

Retention of Case Managers Within the Metro District

by

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MPA, Texas Southern University, 2015

BA, Huston Tillotson University, 2012

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

The United States has issues involving child abuse/neglect with children being abused and neglected every 47 seconds. In 2018, approximately 443,000 children in the country were in foster care. The purpose of this administrative study was to identify measures for reducing turnover and improving retention among case managers within a GA agency. Qualitative data were collected from 10 case managers through virtual interviews and analyzed using NVivo to identify key themes. The three key themes emerged from the data collected: case managers need support from leaders and supervisors to perform their daily obligations, second, the leaders' unrealistic expectations make case managers feel that there is a lack of empathy within the agency and lastly, case managers addressed the lack of effective communication with leaders resulting in stress, thereby emphasizing the need for timely communication. The three themes are indicative to providing solutions to the retention of case managers within the GA agency. The case managers provided the information they felt was a dire need for them and their colleagues. Leaders in the child welfare field should look beyond factors for turnover cited in existing literature such as low wages, long hours, stress, and high caseloads and also address issues identified in this study to reduce retention. Addressing the issues identified in this administrative study will result in positive social change by ensuring that case managers continue to deliver needed services to families and children who rely on child welfare agencies. Future researchers can build on the study's findings by replicating the study in other agencies.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my parents, Mr. & Mrs. Alcede (Viola) Jack, who taught me education was vital, and hard work was the road that would lead me to success. My parents provided me all that was needed to become successful in life, from Sunday school, church services, life lessons, & business. They ensured I understood to work hard- not to expect nothing for free in this world, keep God first, and remain humble.

To my siblings, Jermaine, Chris, and Boo the hard-working men you all are, I couldn't have accomplished this without the encouraging words and help throughout my journey from each of you, I thank you whole-heartedly. To my late Uncle, Herbert Jack, who continues to resonate with me since childhood, I have shared each accomplishment with you in memory, and this will be shared with you as well- Uncle I did it! To my grandmother, Dorothy Fuselier, thank you for that "yes" many years ago, from the 6 yr. old who needed and wanted someone to call "grandma." It has been a tremendous journey as years have passed, and I have become a woman, I still find the pleasure to say "grandma." To my first nephew Christopher Jack Jr., thank you for your service to our country- Job well done... "Education is key," go and retrieve it- the bar has been set. My forever Sister, Jenny Stevens, A huge- thank you SNL—your tremendous help in 2005, played a major part into this journey. I am forever grateful SNL. To my closest & dear friends, Channell Harrison, you have been my cheerleader since I started my education journey, thanks for all the encouraging words; Diane Armstrong (we made it girl!) we were on this journey together, thanks for calling to check on me when you knew I needed a laugh. Telisa Robinson, Mr. & Mrs. Ernest (Suzanne) Matthews many thanks for

opening your home to me during my journey; Telisa its your turn, come join the sister
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Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

Introduction

The United States of America had its first prosecuted case of child abuse in 1874 with eight-year-old Mary Ellen Wilson, where her foster parents physically abused her (Jalongo, 2006). Mary was born to Irish immigrants. Her father died during combat in the Civil War, and her mother surrendered her parental rights when Mary was one year of age to the New York City Department of Charities (Jalongo, 2006). A century later, in 1998 the GA Metro District had one of its most profound cases resulting in a State Act to assist abused/neglected children. Five-year-old Terrell Peterson was in the custody of the State of GA, where he was placed with relatives, maternal grandmother, and aunt, who abused him severely, causing his death. Both relatives were sentenced to life sentences from the abuse and murder of Terrell. According to court documents, there were several abuse and neglect cases open/investigated for Terrell by different case managers, which indicated an issue with the retention within the metro district. Subsequently, these horrific actions brought on the Terrell Peterson Act (1999), where physicians may take temporary custody of a child without a court order or parental consent if the child's safety is compromised, and life/health is in danger.

In the United States, there are approximately 443,000 children in foster care (Children's Rights, 2018). There is an insufficient number of case managers in the field of child welfare to provide needed services (Griffiths et al., (2019). The preservation of case managers within child welfare is a need that continues due to the abuse and neglect of children occurring daily. In America, children are abused and neglected every 47

seconds (Children's Defense Fund, 2020). The contributing factors I utilized in the retention of case managers' approach were to identify the fairness, openness, and tenure for the case managers, in the attempt to gain the information about the high turnover rate I wanted to understand the relationships between case managers and leadership.

Transformational leadership is needed in child welfare, where followers receive assistance to grow and develop into leaders by responding to their followers' needs.

Northouse (2016) said transformational leadership creates professional relationships where followers can work in a positive work environment.

Essentially, transformational leadership assists with outlining and critiquing the criteria of child welfare during the interview phase for case managers by providing additional screenings to help determine the applicant's fit for the position they have applied. The applicant should be informed of the facts of the work within child welfare. The description of the job posting for case managers on the Department of Human Services website does not provide a clear synopsis as to the daily work in child welfare. The job posting provides an overview as to the job description as a whole. Complex cases can be a challenge to new case managers who are limited in experience or have inadequate knowledge. Child Welfare is a type of social work profession where college graduates are seeking to obtain employment and a salary. However, age is not a factor in graduates' maturity level. Ensuring that the social service agency workforce is permanent is imperative, especially for child welfare (Gomez et al., 2010).

Data I collected from interview questions will provide information regarding what solutions are needed daily for the retention of case managers while long-term solutions

will need to be approved. Families and children who receive services from the agency are those who will have a disadvantage in terms of agency retention issues.

According to the Children's Defense Fund (2020), there are three components which assist with strengthening families.

- Align federal child welfare funding to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.
- Support children and relatives in kinship families.
- Promote educational stability and success for children in foster care.

Components assist with ensuring childrens' needs are being met to continue to receive funding from the federal government. President Donald Trump signed into law the Family First Prevention Services Act, which assists with keeping children safe in their homes with family and avoiding foster care.

Problem Statement

The problem is the retention of case managers within a GA Metro District agency. High caseloads, secondary trauma, and burnout contribute to retention issues. The study focused on caseload sizes, burnout/trauma, and treatment of staff. According to Diaconescu (2015), traumatic stress is acute stress, a consequence of a traumatic event that disrupts essential functions. Case managers are a prime example of secondary trauma as they experience activities they were not directly exposed to, such as extreme physical abuse. Both secondary trauma and burnout are recognized by child welfare workers (Salloum et al., 2015). Currently, the GA agency has issues across the state involving retention of case managers due to several factors such as high caseloads, secondary

trauma, and burnout; this has been a constant concern within the agency without a resolution. This knowledge came from my previous role as a supervisor. The government has also outlined strategies to assist with child welfare retention, Title IV, where employers such as DFCS and educators have contracts to help with the recruitment of child welfare workers. Title IV is a contract where the agency pays college tuition for employees in return for a commitment to remain employed with the agency following college graduation (McFadden et al., 2015). Training partnerships with universities such as Georgia State and the University of Georgia, would assist with reducing caseloads and increasing supervision. Primarily, the research study was conducted within a GA agency.

My goal was to identify solutions and implement policies to assist with the retention of case managers within child welfare services. It is imperative to succeed and provide the best services to clients being served. Resources needed to assist with long-term partnerships include training and mentoring of staff. Locating outcomes and implementing policies to help with retention can have a positive impact on children and families who depend on the GA agency to provide services. This project will provide strategies to initiate changes throughout the agency where counties can implement and assist with promoting positive social change. The goal of this study was to find strategies for the retention of case managers. Employees are best motivated to be successful when they are provided purposeful work which helps them comprehend as well as appreciate the work that they do, provides tools and training to succeed with adequate time that is needed to master the work, and gives autonomy and discretion to make concrete decisions. According to Cagle (2016), the number of case managers was unstable with a

total 1,650, and in 2016 a total of 2,000 case managers were considered as more stable. The goal of the agency was a total of 2,750 case managers by 2018.

Purpose Statement

I collected data and identified case manager issues, with the intent to provide solutions to help better equip case managers in the agency. The child welfare field is a rewarding career as case managers collaborate with children and families by providing tools within services to assist them to a healthier lifestyle. Collecting data regarding how to retain case managers in the field of child welfare is imperative. This administrative project study will be used to identify the needs of the agency and case managers. The guiding question was: What solutions will reduce the turnover of case managers within a GA MD agency? It was my goal to provide a summary of solutions which would lead to positive change from data collected to the director of this agency. Interviewing case managers regarding changes they would like to observe was imperative to this administrative study project.

Nature of the Administrative Study

The qualitative method was used for retrieving data within this administrative project study. I focused on interviewing case managers regarding the nature of case manager retention within the GA agency. Interviews took place in a virtual setting over a period of 80 minutes. I gained knowledge needed to provide this agency with necessary tools concerning the retention of case managers. I anticipate that the findings from my analysis will give compelling reasons as to the retention issue in addition to what the

research articles have provided. In addition, I gained information by using a thorough assessment with interview questions.

There are two components to the issues with the retention of case managers: the case managers' and agency perspective. I determined the solutions that would reduce the turnover of the case managers, interviews were conducted by gathering data from the case managers within the GA agency. I will meet the purpose of this administrative study project by using the qualitative method approach with interviewing the case managers within the GA agency.

In the state of Georgia, the Child Family and Service Review (CFSR) is a federal mandate the GA agency must meet annually. This is a required in order to receive federal funding. It consists of items identified in case managers' daily work, such as monthly visits of children and parents. All information is documented in a confidential database which the federal government reviews to ensure items identified are being met. If elements are not being met, the agency can be fined, and fines can cause budget issues for the upcoming fiscal year. Figure 2 includes budget information for Child Welfare Services.

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is a federal system containing pertinent documentation for foster care children who are covered under Title IV-B/E. The purpose of this system is to address policy and program issues within state and federal levels. Figure 1 includes data regarding budget allocation in Georgia for human services.

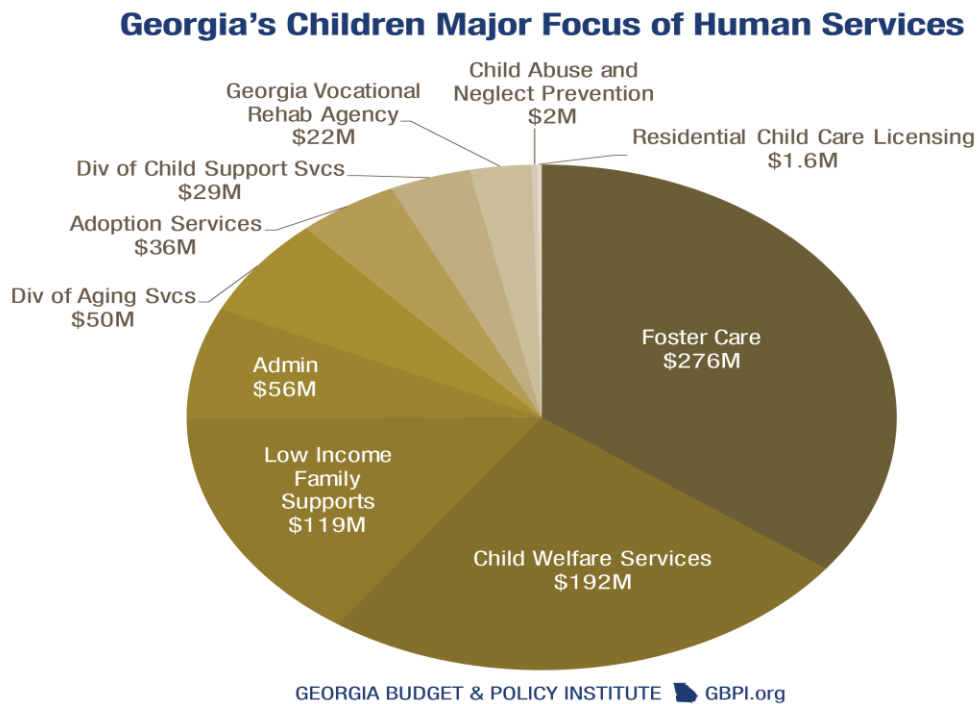


Figure 1. Georgia Human Services Budget Primer for State Fiscal Year. Adapted from Georgia Budget Policy and Institute, 2019. (<https://gbpi.org/2018/georgia-human-services-budget-primer-state-fiscal-year-2019/>).

Significance

There is an expectation for the GA agency to be impacted by strategies provided from this project study. The data has implemented positive social change within the GA agency. There are three types of modifications: emergent, transformative, and projectable changes (Reeler, 2015). The modifications are defined as the following: Emergent how and what steps are taken to change, transformative have been identified with crisis and robustness to improve, and projectable transition as to how we project the future following the identification and solution to the problem. The study will provide a plan of improvement involving case manager retention to reflect clear communication from

qualitative data obtained with potential implications for social change. It is intended for the data to provide a positive lead to assist with retention and promote the agency to implement a policy regarding the retention of case managers. In one sense, rulemaking will change information into law (Kerwin & Furlong, 2011). The study is intended to provide the agency with solutions to improve or create policies to reduce issues with the retention of case managers. Also, the positive social change will be driven by obtaining the qualitative data for the administrative study.

Summary

An agency in GA provides services to children and families. The agency strives to continue with their mission of permanency, safety, and wellbeing. These three components assist with locating permanency when it is no longer a viable option for children to be with their families, keep children safe from harm, and ensure that the children needs are being met. This study was aimed to find solutions involving the retention of case managers, where the agency can continue to meet the needs of children and families. In Section 1, I provided background information regarding child welfare and what was needed for the agency to assist families and children. In Section 2, I explain methods used and reasoning why the study is necessary and how it will help the agency with locating solutions.

Section 2: Conceptual Approach and Background

Introduction

There are several underlying characteristics which affect the retention of case managers within a GA agency. The primary purpose of this study was to promote policies to assist with the retention of case managers. Employees need energy, positivity, and confidence to perform at their best and thrive (Woocheol & Young, 2017). In addition, gaining support from their supervisors is a factor. Lower level leadership such as supervisors can be additional supports by accommodating the needs of employees (Lizano et al., 2014). Theoretically, caseload sizes are linked to burnout and can be related to reasons for increased turnover rates as well as staff being mistreated. High caseloads and low wages contribute to case managers' self-esteem (McFadden et al., 2015). There may be additional underlying factors that are critical in terms of determining solutions involving retention of case managers.

Concepts, Theories, and Models

Attempting to cope with organizational change is imperative within child welfare agencies, as policies and protocol change often. To adhere to the latest federal and state mandates, systems need to change to align with new regulations. It is the responsibility of supervisors to relay new policies and protocols to case managers. Supervisors are not separate from case management. Support is needed from supervisors for case managers. Supervisors remain employed within child welfare longer than case managers (McCrae, et al., 2015). The case managers job has been identified as overwhelming due to the demanding tasks (Preston, 2015).

Many factors involve the case managers being overwhelmed due to their profession. According to Wilke et al., (2017), there are four characteristics discussed: credibility, communication, consistency, and compensation as reasons for recruitment and retention. In child welfare, the four components credibility, communication, consistency, and compensation are imperative to provide reliability when and where it is due. According to Cooley et al. (2015), case managers who remain within child welfare are committed and demonstrate self-efficacy and low levels of emotional exhaustion. Case managers need and want to feel appreciated and be provided credit when they perform well. Communication is critical, young case managers prefer to use electronic forms of communication (Breyette & Hill, 2015). To communicate with the case managers, all measures are to be taken, such as e-mails, phone calls, text messages, trainings, check-ins, and meetings. According to McFadden et al. (2015), commitment plays a vital role in child welfare, as it identifies to have a strong significance to the case managers choosing to remain or resign from the child welfare profession. Consistency is among the highest characteristic in any profession. Case managers should have compatibility with leadership, such as their supervisors.

Lastly, compensation is imperative due to long hours and burnout. However, compensation may not be the main solution. However, it could be a significant beneficial factor in terms of retaining case managers. Case managers who are heard within their agency may be more invested in their work, demonstrate better skillsets, and engage with their colleagues to improve the agency (Deglau et al., 2014). According to Fernandes,

2016, p. 81 “personal factors are job satisfaction, personal commitment to family and children, education, opportunities for advancement, efficacy and emotional exhaustion”.

My research will be used to support the agency with strategies regarding the retention of case managers to identify the actual needs of participants in the field. I used a comprehensive method of researching throughout this study. In this study, topic terms such as retention, turnover, and leave vs. child welfare, cps, and child protection are subject terms (Kim & Kao, 2014). Topic terms have been identified to be more specific content in locating the information while researching. The terms case managers and caseworkers are the same in the child welfare profession. The term “just culture” is generally stated within the agency, to provide employees the positive support, and to increase the morale.

Relevance to Public Organizations

Case managers who have a social work degree are better prepared within the child welfare field (Griffiths et al., 2018). Figure 3 includes a broad overview of the child welfare system, outlining the education requirements of bachelor’s and master’s social work degrees as strategies to improve retention. As of 2019, the GA agency has modified recruitment qualifications so that social work and behavioral science degrees are eligible. In this study, I intend to discover if this strategy will lead to positive social change in terms of the issue of retaining staff. The modification to the type of degree required is an attempt to gain and improve staff the retention within the agency. The social work requirement modification for behavioral science degrees will provide opportunities for anyone who meets criteria and is interested in becoming an employee with the agency.

According to Haight et al. (2017), secondary traumatic stress is indirect exposure to traumatic events and vicarious trauma as well as effects of working with trauma victims. Child welfare case managers resign for several reasons: burnout, secondary trauma, stress, high caseloads, and lack of adequate salaries. According to Dickinson and Painter (2009), case managers also resign from child welfare agencies to accept promotions in other case management agencies. According to Griffiths et al. (2018), case managers are not receiving adequate training for street drugs or learning how to work effectively with parents who have substance abuse issues. New case managers attend classroom trainings as requirements when hired.

Essentially, the agency's goal is not to separate families but to intervene when they are no longer able to cope with circumstances. If conditions are deemed fit for immediate removal of children from home, withdrawal will be the outcome. When children are removed from their homes, case managers are assigned to the parents and children. The case manager is responsible for attending court hearings, visiting children and parents monthly, and ensuring services have been implemented.

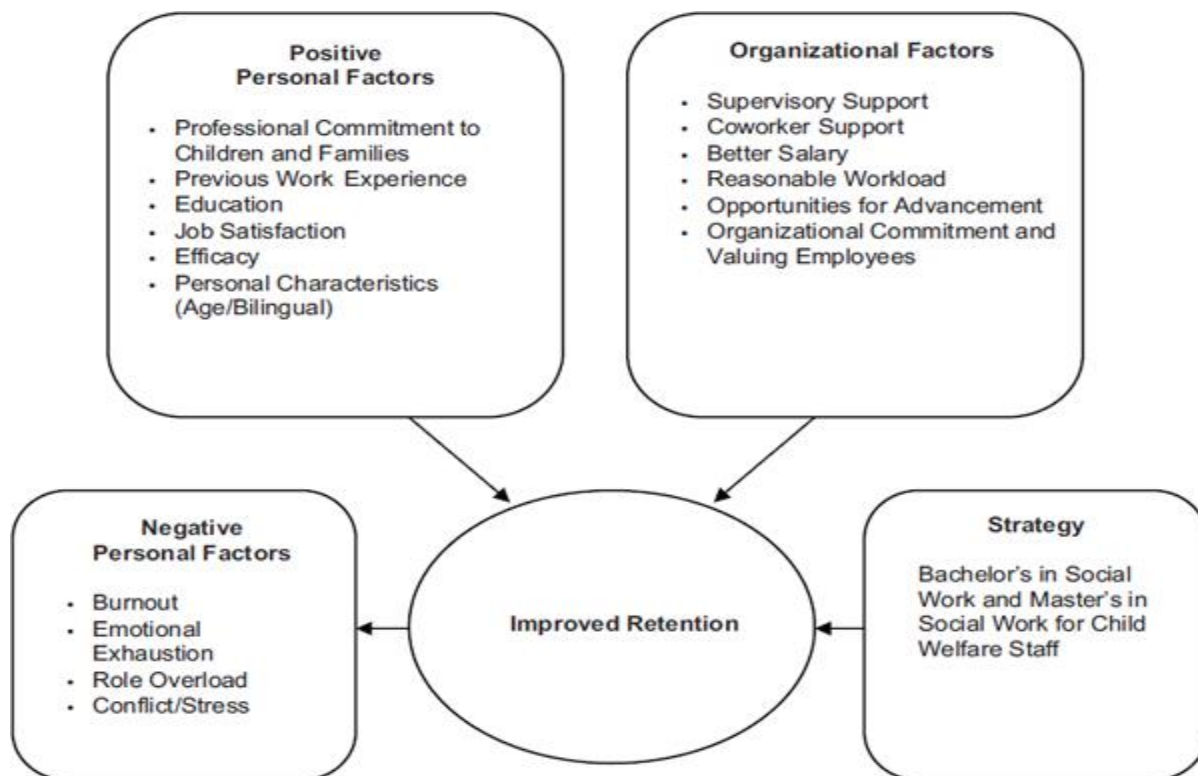


Figure 2. Child welfare system. Adapted from *New directions in child abuse and neglect research* (p. 15), by Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2014.

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Organization Background and Context

The GA agency has become the largest agency in state government. There is annual budget of 1.8 billion and nearly 9,000 employees within three divisions (DHSJobs, 2020). The three divisions entail the DAS, DCSS, and DFCS. Although the budget is 1.8 billion, this specified budget is allocated to the different divisions and the programs. In 2018, there were 14,000 children in the State of Georgia foster care system (DFCS) per Adoptions for Us (2019). The baseline number of foster care children is disproportionate to the number of case managers within the agency. When identifying the

characteristics for children to enter foster care, the agency specifies different areas of maltreatment. According to Denlinger and Dorius (2018), reasons for foster care entry are 61% parental neglect, 5% abandonment, 10% inadequate housing, 14% unable to cope, 12% physical, 4% sexual, 8% incarceration, and substance abuse to include 34% drugs and 6% alcohol. When a child abuse referral is received, the case manager case ratio is not considered. Child abuse and neglect in the degree of physical and sexual violence are more comfortable to determine with the guidance of the law (DeLong-Hamilton et al., 2016). The retention of case managers within child welfare is imperative, as the need continues due to the abuse and neglect of children occurring daily. As previously discussed, one of many characteristics for the Terrell Peterson Act (1999), this child abuse case, had several different case managers and supervisors, which played a vital role leading up to five-year-old Terrell's death.

It is the GA agency's policy for children to be seen once a month in their foster placement homes by their case manager. During the meeting, the case manager is to assess the safety and the wellbeing of the child within their placement as well as follow up with the foster parent during the visit. One of the essential factors within child welfare is the relationships with the foster parent and the foster child (Denlinger & Dorius, 2018). Case managers have disclosed the more rewarding aspect of the job is working with the children (Benton et al., 2017). In the State of Georgia, the children are placed within their county of residence (the county they are removed from); however, there are exceptions when a relative is located. The child can be placed with the relative outside of

their county of origin. The children with special needs sometimes receive the longest out of home services due to their needs, according to Birmingham et al., (2014).

Furthermore, placing the child in their home county will provide additional stability to have the opportunity to remain in the same school. Ensuring the child stays in their same county is an excellent resource for the child; however, the case manager could endure an additional struggle to travel outside of the child's province of origin to visit with them monthly. According to Yankeelov et al., (2009), child welfare case managers who have increase compassion for their career have a lower level of burnout and compassion fatigue.

In an archival document, the GA Board Advisory provides the retention rate from 2014 and 2016 identified as Now and Then, with the changes in retaining staff percentages. According to the Now and Then document in 2014, the retention rate deemed as unstable at a 36% rate vs. —2016 as more stable at 31% (Cagle, 2016). A goal of 15% was planned within the next two years. In 2019, the retention of case managers remained an issue, and a three-year position allocation plan developed to assist with the solutions of retaining staff. As previously discussed, there are modifications as to the qualifications to meet the criteria as a case manager; an applicant would no longer need to have a Bachelor of Social Work or Master of Social Work degree. This change should provide opportunities to all those who have a behavioral science degree with a different skillset. These modifications are strategies identified to assist with the retention and to have a positive outcome with hiring those who meet the criteria in hopes of retaining the new staff.

Role of DPA Student/Researcher

I am currently a Social Services Administrator (SSA) with the Communication Intake Call Center (CICC) with the GA agency. Before my SSA role with CICC, I was formally a Social Services Supervisor with the GA agency for three years. I will have no relationship with the selection of the study participants as I am no longer a SSS. My role in the study was different from my role as a previous Supervisor and current Administrator. As the researcher, I did not engage the participants from a leadership role. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable providing their truth as to the solutions to the retention of case managers. As a previous Supervisor in foster care, I am motivated to obtain solutions/strategies from the participants in this study. I do not have any personal biases within this study. I will be open to the information the participants provide. I will not provide any examples as to the concerns I noticed as a previous GA agency Supervisor. In addition, the following measures was taken to remove personal biases, I verified alternate explanations provided during the interviews and I provided the participants with their transcription. Although, I may have not agreed with the administrative study's responses, all information was documented. My motivations were to ensure the case managers can continue to provide services and meet the clients where they are effectively. According to Locke et al., (2014), the rationale of a study provides insight into logical argument and research gained with factual evidence.

Summary

I have provided the problem and purpose statement to assist with the targeted research question. The benefits of the study will impact the agency, the children, and

families who are currently receiving services and the future families who will need assistance, the current and future employed case managers, and lastly, the agency's leadership. The audience will gain updated knowledge on the issues with the case manager retention. The information provided from the study will offer beneficial factors to the agency and help promote a positive change within the agency and the reputation. The permanency, wellbeing, and safety will continue to be the trusted mission statement for the agency.

Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

Introduction

The problem is the retention of case managers within a GA agency. The purpose of this study is to locate root issues and develop solutions to the problem involving the retention of case managers. According to the GAO (2003), low wages play a vital role in gaining case managers and retaining employed case managers. Increasing salaries may resolve the issue, but there are many steps which include negotiation, proposal, and approval stages.

The qualitative data sources I used were interviews with case managers. This administrative study was conducted by using Microsoft Teams where participants were interviewed via virtual video. I used Microsoft Teams to explore strategies addressing this retention problem. Ten participants were interviewed until saturation had been met from three counties within the GA agency. The approach was invitations sent via email to metro district counties. Invitations included my contact information and selected dates with open availability to complete interviews. Interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams. Following invitations, selected participants received letters of consent for the study. The confidentiality and no financial payment clauses were provided in the letter of approval. Also, interviews were scheduled to last approximately 80 minutes. I asked nine interview questions with the choice to provide additional feedback.

In addition to the problem with the retention, the sole purpose was to find solutions to assist with the retention of case managers. Participants helped me identify other concepts regarding the issue of retaining staff. According to the GAO (2013),

United States child welfare agencies experience problems with recruitment and retention of staff and advise the Department of Human and Health Services, who can assist with these concerns. Data I obtained from participants provided information and helped me develop strategies for the agency regarding retention of case managers.

I remained open and nonbiased with data gathered from 10 participants. To assist with remaining nonbiased, I verified alternate explanations provided during interviews and provided participants with interview transcriptions. It was expected that every case manager had different experiences with the agency. The nine interview questions were used to help collect as much data as possible to assist the agency with the retention of case managers.

Practice-Focused Questions

Participants were informed that individual data collected would be kept confidential and not shared with anyone within the agency. The purpose of interviews was to obtain data and knowledge regarding the retention of case managers and provide strategies to the agency. I used practice-focused interview questions to identify strategies regarding the retention of case managers within the GA agency.

1. How can the GA agency create a safe and stable work environment that includes personal wellness for case managers?
2. How many cases are assigned to case managers' caseloads?
3. How long have case managers been employed with the agency?
4. What are case managers' expectations of support from their supervisors/leadership?

5. In your view, why do case managers resign from their positions?
6. Do case managers resign due to salaries? If so, why?
7. Have case managers resigned due to their leadership? If so, why?
8. Do case managers resign due to working conditions? If so, why?
9. Do case managers resign due to other promotional opportunities?

By asking participants open-ended questions and providing them the opportunity to expand on their responses, this was intended to help in locating underlying causes the problem within the GA agency.

Sources of Evidence

The GA MD agency Director provided approval for the study via email. Strategies regarding the retention of case managers is the focus of this administrative project study. Participants were 10 case managers employed within a GA agency. I identified interview questions to obtain information about retention of case managers during 80-minute virtual interviews. Furthermore, utilizing the nine interview questions to collect the data from random participants within the GA agency assisted and provided the clarity needed to the retention of case managers.

Published outcomes and research served as a key source of data for the project. The secondary data on retention of child welfare case managers. The data was retrieved from publications in different electronic databases including Walden Library, Adopt Us Kids, Children Rights Organization, Sage Publications, Government Authority Office (GAO), Lexis, Children Defense Fund, Children's Bureau, and Department of Health and Human Services, among others. Different search terms were used to query the databases

and retrieve relevant articles. The search terms included child welfare, child abuse and neglect, case managers' retention, number of children in foster care, leadership within child welfare, retaining child welfare staff, and Metro County child abuse lawsuits.

Evidence Generated for the Administrative Study

Participants

The ten participants were contacted via email and interviewed until saturation was met for the qualitative study. An invite was sent to a group e-mail to case managers within the three counties in the GA agency requesting their participation in the administrative study. In 2019, there were approximately 96 case managers within the three counties according to the GA agency daily face- face contact report. Majority of the case managers are females, for example the ratio is one male to seven females. The case managers are over the age of 22 years of age. The invite included an introduction to the researcher's school and program area with a brief statement as to the title of the study, purpose, and the exploration of how the agency can develop new innovative methods to be more productive with the retention of case managers. The interviews were semi-structured, as I allocated a specific time to meet with each participant separately, private and in a virtual setting. The participants were relevant to the study as they are employees within the metro district agency. There were no incentives offered to the participants for their participation.

Procedures

Before initiating the study, I requested the GA MD Director's approval via e-mail and consent was granted, please see appendix c. Additional components for the

procedures can be found in appendix b. The interview questions were derived from the literature reviews researched. These questions provided the information needed to determine solutions to assist with case managers retention. I completed the interviews utilizing the practice-focused questions with each participant for approximately 80 minutes within 30 days. The interviews were held during a virtual meeting using the Microsoft office TEAMS software. The participants were advised to choose a quiet, private setting for approx. 80 minutes to complete the interviews virtually. Due to the unforeseen circumstances with the COVID- 19 virus, this provided adequate time to schedule, and re-schedule interviews should the need arise. During the interviews, I took notes of the participants' facial expressions, body language, and hand gestures observed. In addition to ensure all information was captured, a voice recorder was used to assist with documenting the responses.

Protections

The participants' identities were not shared. The researcher did not use the case managers' personal information such as name, gender, age, or other identifying characteristics for any purpose than to complete this administrative study. No data, including the identities or location, will be disclosed or shared with outside sources. To secure the data collected, a numerical ID code will be assigned to each participant, a hard copy of the assigned numbers will be locked in a safe. All written data collected will be stored on a thumb drive and password-protected computer, and only the researcher will have accessibility to the computer and information. The written data and thumb drive will be stored in a locked safe in my home office.

During the data analysis or writing process, the numerical Id code will be used to identify each participant during this process. However, to protect all participating parties, the information will be categorized to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. A request was sent to the GA MD Director via e-mail for approval to complete a study of the retention of case managers within the GA agency. The GA MD Director granted permission via e-mail. Before selecting candidates and collecting data, the Walden University Institution Review Board will provide approval with an identifying code. Per the requirements of the Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB), the data will be kept and stored for 5 years (see Appendix B).

Analysis and Synthesis

To collect the qualitative data, the researcher utilized the interview method with a series of questions. The participants were identified by the numerical Id code assigned, as noted in (appendix b). Once the data was gathered, I utilized Nvivo a computer software to assist with analyzing the qualitative data (Roddesnes et al., 2019). I coded the data collected using themes and categories. Once the coding was completed, it was reviewed to provide a clear description of the data in the study.

The interview questions focused on an inductive framework. The inductive framework assisted the researcher to obtain a theory as to the retention of the case managers within the GA agency. According to the researched literature it provided specific reasons as to the problem with the turnover rate with child welfare case managers. The data collected from the ten participants to develop a generalization to produce a theory. The intent is to gain alternative reasons as to the problem with the

retention of case managers from what the research literature has provided. The questions are direct and forthcoming where there were no reasons for the participants to become confused with the practice-focused questions. If there were interview questions the participants chose not to respond to would have been noted under a missing information section within the documentation. I anticipated the participants may choose not to respond to specific questions. To assist with mitigating this expected problem, I reiterated at the beginning of the interviews, all information provided is confidential and the participants will not be identified by their names but by a numerical code. I intended to gain as much information as possible from the participants.

I used the coding method following the collection of the qualitative data interpreted from the information obtained with the research question in support of the interview questions. The coding method identified categories and themes. To code the data collected, I took shorthand notes on the responses and expressions observed as well as listen to the voice recording to assist with transcribing. I then reviewed and analyzed the data to determine the same/similar forms to the categories and themes. Utilizing all data collected, a description was provided for the categories and themes outlining the participants' responses. The transcribing was complete within three weeks following the interviews. I contacted the participants via email with the transcription to verify the responses provided are accurate.

Summary

The section has outlined the research methods that were adopted in the study in order to determine the strategies for reducing the turnover of case managers within the

GA agency. Qualitative data was collected through interviews, which were guided by nine interview questions. Ten case managers were interviewed using the Microsoft office TEAMS virtual platform. I also provided demographics of the case managers within the MD. In Section 4, following the IRB approval, I provided the data collected from the ten participants interviews. I have also provided the themes and codes from the data collected.

I intend to present a summary report to the GA agency MD Director with the documented outcomes of the research and recommendations. The raw data will not be provided to the GA agency MD Director, but specific recommendations to the concerns and solutions needed to reduce the retention within the GA agency. The recommendations received will assist with solutions and creating a policy to help with the retention of case managers within the GA agency.

Section 4: Evaluation and Recommendations

Introduction

This administrative study was completed to provide solutions regarding the retention of case managers. Case managers within an GA agency are resigning from the agency, leaving an insufficient number of case managers. To identify strategies, I identified nine practice-focused questions to answer the main research question. Scheduled informal interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. All interviews were scheduled after 7 p.m. throughout the week.

The practice-focused question was as follows:

RQ: What solutions will reduce the turnover of case managers within a GA MD agency?

Participants were advised to be comfortable during interviews and clarify any questions they had. A 15-30 min introduction interview was held with each participant prior to collecting data after being contacted about their interest in the study; the interviews ranged from 35- 50 minutes. During interviews, I took shorthand notes on facial expressions and hand gestures as interviews were recorded with an electronic voice recorder. Following interviews, I provided each participant a copy of the transcription via email to review and modify if needed. I used NVivo software to code qualitative data into themes.

Findings and Implications

During this section, I provide themes and categories. The identified nine practice-focused question to gain data regarding the problem. In Section 5, I identified recommendations and plans to disseminate to the GA agency.

Interview Question 1: How can the GA agency create a safe and stable work environment that includes personal wellness for the case managers?

P2B, P8H P6F, and P9I's responses included strategies involving providing mental health providers for case managers on sight, leadership listening to case managers when there is an issue, and case managers not feeling they will be retaliated against when reporting concerns. P1A, P5E, P3C, and P10J indicated providing a sense of relief to case managers when they are unable to bear the rigors of case managing. P7G and P4D identified additional training as needed to support case managers with safety.

Interview Question 2: How many cases are assigned to the case managers' caseload?

Seven participants had up to 24 cases, while two participants reported having over 27 cases assigned. One participant was unsure regarding the amount of cases they were assigned, and provided an approximate number of 22.

Interview Question 3: How long have the case managers been employed with the agency?

P4D has been with the GA agency less than a year. P2B, P3C, and P8H stated they had been employed with the agency approximately 1 to 2 years, while P1A, P6F, P5E, P7G, P9I, P10J had been employed with the agency between 4 and 10 years.

Interview Question 4: What are the case managers' expectations of support from their supervision/leadership?

This question provided the researcher an in-depth perception as to how the participants really felt with their non-verbal reactions. During this interview question, the participants provided some similar responses but specified what they needed for themselves. Three participants took a deep sigh prior to responding, three participants paused for a moment, one participant smiled as they responded, two participants began to look away when initially providing their responses, one participant showed no emotion, P4D said their expectation was to have open communication with timeliness of information being provided. P7G said they were comfortable and aware of the expectations of their position as a case manager. P2B and P5E said they needed transparency in terms tasks that need to be completed. P1A and P9I said that they needed leadership to be available and willing to assist to search for solutions as well as not take comments and concerns personally. P3C, P6F, P10J, and P8H acknowledged they needed realistic expectations of the assigned daily tasks and support from their leadership.

Interview Question 5: In your view, why do case managers resign from their positions?

This question was placed in the order to assist with any anxiety the participant may have been feeling from interview question 4. P8H said case managers resign due to lack of self-care. P6F, P10J, and P4D responded with lack of support. P3C and P2B suggested long hours and no work-life balance. P1A identified salaries and case load sizes as factors of case managers resigning. P9I and P7G identified stress and burnout

after approximately a year of being a case manager. P5E identified unrealistic expectations when being hired as a new employee.

Interview Question 6: Do case managers resign due to salaries? If so, why?

P9I identified salaries as being a reason for why case managers resign. P3C and P1A said they were unsure but felt case managers should have increased salaries, and participants expressed if they had to support a family financially, being employed with the agency would not be suit them. P4D, P9H, and P2B said, “A person can be employed within corrections with half the work and have a salary of twice as much;” P7G and P10J participants provided the case manager’s lifestyle changes, and the supplement is particular counties are not enough for the work expected of the case manager P2B and P6F said other positions are not paying more. P5E and P8H were aware of their salaries when they were hired.

Interview Question 7: Have case managers resigned due to their leadership? If so, why?

There were more mixed responses from the participants. P1A, P3C, P5E, P9I, P10J responded with “Yes,” due to not feeling supportive, being micromanaged, and leadership not assisting with concerns timely, two participants: P8H and P2B responded with “No,” as this is the last reason to resign, as they expressed leadership is important; one participant, P4D expressed they were “unsure as they hadn’t connected with other staff,” one participant, P6F was also unsure but knew of a case manager who may have resigned due to their personality conflict with their supervisor, and one participant, P7G

expressed they were” unsure due to not having direct knowledge but stated they would not be surprised if leadership is a reason to resign.”

Interview question 8: Do case managers resign due to working conditions? If so, why?

Eight participants: P1A, P2B, P3C, P5E, P7G, P8H, P9I PJ10 responded with “Yes,” providing multiple responses. There were zero responses for No. Two participants responded with being uncertainty. Three participants: P1A, P8H, and P9I responded with a concern of being stress, three participants: PB2, PC3, and P7G responded with the “unhealthy case load size and the demands,” one participant, P5E responded with feeling “overwhelmed,” and one participant, P10J responded with the “unsafe working conditions.” One participant, PD4 provided “it’s not the main reason as to why case managers resign, but it’s a factor into the severity of the work conditions,” one participant, P6F provided they “would guess it’s the safety of the unknown territory when out in the field.”

Interview question 9: Do case managers resign due to other promotional opportunities?

Eight participants provided a “Yes,” one participant was unsure, and one participant stated No. The eight participants provided different reasons, none of their responses were the same. One participant, P5E provided “yes, as the case managers utilize the agency to receive their experience,” one participant, P1A responded with “yes, as the pandemic has given case managers another perspective,” one participant, P9I provided “yes, as the agency has great opportunities,” one participant, P7G disclosed

“they had been provided an offer, but due to covid-19 the position was not able to be filled,” one participant, P4D responded with a “yes, if they received their Master’s Degree while being a case manager, and they will apply for the positions that require a Master’s,” one participant, P2B expressed “yes, as there are some case managers who aspire to be in other areas of the agency,” two participants: P3C and P10J provided a yes response with no additional information; one participant, P6F said, “No, as there are case managers who do not aspire to be a supervisor;” one participant, P8H expressed they were unsure.

Participants shared the constant cycle change of supervisors/leadership has played a factor in the retention of case managers. They went on to express as the supervision styles differ and it becomes difficult to become accustomed to different supervision styles. As the different supervision styles varies from lax, strict, or just no support/concern. It was also provided the veteran staff are expected to be more supportive to the newer staff, then the actual supervisor of the team. The participants were provided the transcriptions via email to review and make any modifications. There was one unexpected limitation where only 4 of the 10 participants reviewed their responses and replied, “with no changes were needed.” I am certain there was no changes needed, however, had they reviewed the transcription they may have felt compelled to modify the information. This did not impact the findings, as the voice recordings were clear and concise to complete the transcribing.

There were three themes identified with the retention of case managers within the GA agency with analyzing and coding the data using the Nvivo software. The first theme

identified the case managers are in dire need of support during their daily work duties. The case managers feel they are doing the best that they can, however, they are wanting and needing additional support from their supervisors/leadership. During the data collection, the question “What are the case managers’ expectations of support from their supervision/leadership?” The following responses were provided, two participants: P2B and P5E said they needed transparency with the tasks that need to be completed, two participants: P1A, and P9I said provided that they need leadership to be available and willing to assist to search for a solution as well as not take comments/concerns personal, four participants: P3C, P6F, P10J, P8H, acknowledged they needed realistic expectations and support from their leadership. This is clear from this question and responses provided, the case managers need support during their daily work.

The second theme is empathy, as the case managers expressed their leadership provide unrealistic expectations. It was expressed their supervisors/leadership have been a case manager at some point within their career and the case managers continued to express feelings of not receiving the empathy that they need. Empathy has also been located to have affected the safety being discussed with the case managers, alongside of training.

Lastly, the third theme is a lack of communication and stress, where the case managers identified they are needing increased communication. It was disclosed the need to be informed timely of tasks. In addition, the lack of communication as to the tasks that have not been completed. Case managers are having to depend on their colleagues for guidance, as it has been discussed their supervisors are not being supportive and lacking

the communication to the case managers. The lack of communication and being co-dependent on their colleagues has contributed to the stress factor.

Implications for Social Change

The potential implications for social change from the research obtained in this administrative study, will be provided to the agency with strategies to improve the retention of case managers' problem. The literature has a gap, as it focused primarily on the retention issues as low wages, long hours, stress/burnout and high caseloads. The data collected identified the needs are far different. The participants provided reasons as to being supported in their roles, communication, and empathy. These three themes identified there is more to the issues of retention of case managers. This administrative study will provide the needed social change to increase delivery of services with retaining the case managers. Increased retention is a positive move forward to continue helping and providing services to the families and children who depend on the agency's intervention.

Recommendations

These recommendations will provide strategies to the retention of case managers problem within the three themes identified. Theme 1 identified support. The agency will need to implement a protocol where the supervisors are providing the needed support. The protocol can be a documented plan, outlining for Supervisors to have one-on-one meetings and/or debriefings with the case managers on a weekly or on as needed basis. The protocol should be measured in a manner selected by the agency.

Empathy was identified as theme two. Case managers expressed they want to feel heard and that their supervisors/leadership are concerned with the issues or concerns they

bring to their attention. It has been disclosed, when concerns are brought to the attention of the supervisors/leadership it's taken out of context and/or taken personal. Case managers do not feel as they can have realistic conversations to whom they feel should be the first to respond and understand their stance. The recommendation for the concern of not being able to have a conversation with their Supervisor/leadership, when there is a conflict with communication, a brief meeting should be held with leadership if possible. In addition, the GA agency should implement "rotating" of staff to different supervision approximately every 9 months-to a year. As this could assist with the communication and build strong working relationships.

Theme three identified lack of communication and stress where supervisors/leadership has not provided the communication to the case managers where it has become a factor to their stress. According to McCrae et al. (2015), supervisors who have received a lack of scheduled individual supervision is possible to not provide the opportunity to their management. Supervisors are to be constantly lead in the needed direction, to ensure they are demonstrating the same positive supervision to their staff. The research identifying self-care practices to assist with burnout, stress and compassion is limited but needed (Salloum et al., 2015). A brief meeting held and/or rotating of the case managers every nine months to 1 year period, could be the solution to effective communication and bridging working relationships.

If case managers within the GA agency are provided the support and stability, they will feel compelled to remain employed within the GA agency. Salaries were not a huge factor as has been outlined in literature. However, lack of communication, empathy,

and support were identified factors as a reason to the retention problem. The GA agency should provide the case managers a “red table” where a brief meeting can be held and/or a rotating of staff should be implemented every nine months to a year. By completing a red table, this will provide the case managers the support needed, as their concerns will be heard. In addition, it will show empathy, as the GA agency is diving into the concerns of the case managers and how the concerns can/will be addressed; lastly it will provide an open line of communication and hopefully provide the supervisors the influential dialogue needed for the case managers. According to Benton et al. (2017), service orientation is expressed to be an imperative factor to support case managers to remain with the agency with devotion to provide assistance to the children and families.

Strength and Limitations of the Project

This administrative study has provided information regarding retention of case managers within the GA agency. The administrative study has its limits, as there was a small pool of participants interviewed. Information obtained in this study include agency solutions to the retention problem in the GA agency. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I selected a different method to gather participants. Initially, I wanted to post flyers in the GA agency office to gather data from 25 participants; however, offices were closed and still remain closed due to the pandemic. I elected to send out a mass email to case managers within three counties in the GA agency. The pandemic limited face-to-face contact, and the specified number of participants was reduced from 25 to 10 participants. However, I was able to keep my selected research method. This administrative study could be used for future research purposes for the GA agency and the protocols within.

Section 5: Dissemination Plan

The GA agency will receive a summary report identifying outcomes and recommendations regarding the retention of case managers. The summary report will include the following solutions: support, empathy, and increasing communication with supervisors. I will be available to meet with the agency should further explanation be needed.

The audience for this administrative study includes the GA agency, and directors within the GA agency. The appropriate individual to share this administrative study will be directors, and then to leadership within the GA agency. I will also include the recommendations for trainings, and conferences provided to supervisors and leadership with the approval of GA agency.

Summary

The recommendation outlined in Section 4 include solutions to help with the retention of case managers within the GA agency. The agency's mission addresses permanency, safety, and wellbeing. Participants identified several concerns within the GA agency. They expressed how they need to feel supported, in addition to communication issues. I identified the following themes: lack of communication and stress, support, and empathy provides the mission needed for the case manager to be successful within the GA agency. If recommendations are implemented for case managers, a positive outcome will be the result within the GA agency.

The retention problem within the GA agency will decrease and case managers will begin building a new foundation for their careers. Social change can be implemented

with recommendations from this administrative study. Needs of the case managers are imperative to address high turnover among case managers.

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