

Calculating Child Welfare Separation, Replacement, and Training Costs

Edwina Dorch
Mary L. McCarthy
Daniel Denofrio

SUMMARY. Across the country, incoming child welfare caseworkers have an average tenure of 2 years, and states are being evaluated on the quality of caseworker training programs and their ability to provide child welfare services that meet federally mandated outcomes. Policy makers do not know the cost of workforce turnover and replacement or the cost of training child welfare workers. The objectives of the study were to (1) obtain the separation, replacement, and training (SRT) costs for four counties in a major Northeastern state; (2) compare the SRT costs for the three different child welfare pre-service training models; (3) incorporate hidden intercounty transfer and tuition reimbursement cost; and (4) extrapolate the four-county

Edwina Dorch, PhD, is a Visiting Associate Professor at Texas A&M, The Bush School. This research was performed while Professor Dorch was a Visiting Associate Professor at the University at Albany, School of Social Welfare.

Mary L. McCarthy, PhD, LMSW, is Director, Social Work Education Consortium, University at Albany, School of Social Welfare, Albany, NY.

Daniel Denofrio is Commissioner, Otsego County Department of Social Services, Otsego, NY.

Address correspondence to: Edwina Dorch, PhD, Visiting Associate Professor, Texas A&M, The Bush School, 1102 Allen Building, 4220 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4220 (E-mail: edwinadorch@aol.com).

The Social Work Education Consortium is funded by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Commissioner John J. Johnson. Contract Number: CO24153. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors.

average SRT costs to statewide average SRT costs. Results revealed that one pre-service training model was more than the state tuition for a 4-year bachelor's degree. Further, additional costs were incurred if new caseworkers transferred to another county and/or used Title IV-B tuition reimbursement funds in the first few years of employment.

KEYWORDS. Child welfare, training, Title IV-E, cost, benefits, retention, turnover, workforce

In 2002, the Child Welfare League of America's (CWLA's) Research Roundup reported that child welfare caseworker turnover frequently exceeded 50% per year. In 2003, the U.S. Government Accounting Office reported that new hires had 2-year tenures in child welfare service. Demographic shifts, female professionalization, low salaries, dangerous working conditions, large caseloads, low autonomy, high volume of paperwork, and legal liability have all been cited as reasons for the high caseworker vacancy and turnover rates. Over the past decade, child welfare workforce recruitment, retention, and professional preparation has been the focus of Title IV-E university-agency partnerships in more than 40 states (Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Cyphers, 2001; Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Fox, Miller, & Barbee, 2003; Ellett & Ellett, 2004; Jones, 2002; Rycraft, 1994; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003; Zlotnik & Cornelius, 2000; Liberman, Hornby, & Russell, 1988).

In 1997, with the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), specific outcome measures were identified for child welfare. Since 2000, the Administration of Children and Family Services (ACFS), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has performed nationwide reviews to assess states' performance with respect to specific administrative, output, and outcome goals relating to child safety, permanence, and well-being. Examples of goals include meeting children's educational, physical, and mental health needs; ensuring that children have permanent, stable homes; and making sure that they are protected. In 2000, all 50 states failed to meet the federal government's "substantial compliance" goal (i.e., 90% performance on all measures). Subsequently, states have been required to prepare a program improvement plan with specific improvement targets. This demand for accountability has resulted in greater attention to recruit-

ment, selection, and training strategies that will retain and support the child welfare workforce.

Both Title IV-E and Title IV-B provide states with federal child welfare training funds. Title IV-E provides for a 75% enhanced federal funding match that states can use for training employed staff or staff preparing for employment (Zlotnik & Cornelius, 2000; Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & McDermott Lane, 2005). Students' tuition, materials, books, transportation, and expenses for faculty, field supervisors, field liaisons, and curriculum development can be charged to Title IV-B, Section 426 funding administered by the Children's Bureau. The bureau provides 2- to 5-year grants to schools of social work for pre-service or in-service training and curriculum materials and traineeships to attract BSW and MSW students to child welfare careers.

Summaries of the benefits of Title IV-E and IV-B child welfare agency-university partnerships have been provided by Woodside (2005) and Zlotnick et al. (2005). Examples of successful partnerships can be found in California, Louisiana, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Texas. For example, in California, workers who earned master's degrees in social work scored higher on a test of child welfare knowledge, had a more realistic view of child welfare work, and were more likely to remain employed than non-Title IV-E workers (Jones & Okamura, 2000). In Louisiana, child welfare caseworkers scored higher on child welfare competency exams than control groups, scored higher on supervisor evaluations, and had higher retention rates (Ellett & Gansle, 1998). In Kentucky, child welfare caseworkers scored better on the agency's test of core competencies and their supervisors considered them better prepared for their jobs than other new employees; more than 80% remained with state agencies after their initial work obligations (Fox et al., 2003). In Oklahoma, retention was significantly longer for workers with master's degrees and those who had participated in Title IV-E training (Rosenthal, McDowell, & White, 1998). In Texas, 70% were still employed with the agency after their contractual employment obligation expired (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003).

There is a darker side to this story, however. The ACFS determines states' capacity to deliver child welfare training programs. In 2004, the ACFS reviewed whether states had initial and ongoing training programs and determined that 34 of the 52 states (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) were in substantial compliance in providing both initial and ongoing training programs. Eighteen states were in need of improved training programs because they assigned caseloads prior to pre-service training, trainees had irregular training

schedules, and there were limited offerings or inconsistent training requirements (Milner & Hornsby, 2004).

County-administered states had varying capacity to provide pre-service training, which in some instances was little more than orientation to the agency. In some states, pre-service training was heavily weighted toward policy (forms and procedures compliance) rather than practice intervention skills. In 14 states, there was no core requirement or standardized ongoing training curriculum. In 12 states, caseloads or work demands were so high or the distance to training was so far that employees were discouraged from enrolling. In 19 states, there was a lack of either pre-service or ongoing training of supervisors, suggesting that new hires are turned over to supervisors who might have contrary practices.

The available evidence seems to suggest that child welfare pre-training has little positive impact on ACFS review outcomes. This raises significant questions about whether there are less expensive training models that could provide equal or better caseworker job preparation, improvements in practice, and more positive federal reviews. The study below was performed to accept or reject this hypothesis. A description of the study begins by revealing the basic characteristics of the three models involved.

TRAINING MODELS

Model 1

According to Leighninger & Ellett (1998), until 1950, there was an upgrading of child welfare staff via pre-service education and professional credentialing and development. The enactment of the Child Abuse, Prevention, and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1964, however, resulted in an increase in child abuse and neglect reporting and a law enforcement emphasis on investigations. Child welfare systems responded by increasing training (vs. degree credentialing) and changing the focus of service provision toward a case management model.

A tacit assumption behind the case management model is that, although workers make safety and risk assessments, sometimes using copyrighted instruments instead of experienced judgment, and concomitant service plans, they rarely provide the educational, physical, or child or parent mental health services listed in the Child and Family Services Review. Instead, caseworkers refer clients to community

agencies. Thus, a tacit assumption is that Child and Family Services Review outcomes are to be accomplished by staff in the community agencies, *not* by child welfare caseworkers.

In Model 1, caseworkers are not expected to provide the bulk of direct services. The training curriculum for this model focuses on policy, forms, and procedures. Training is provided by on-site agency staff, and thus Model 1 does *not* involve the trainee/trainer mileage, lunch, and travel time reimbursements associated with off-site training.

Model 2

An article by Abramczyk and Liberman (1994) traces the history of social work preparation for child welfare practice and indicates that before the 1960s, MSWs in child welfare were mainly providing adoption services. As concern for child maltreatment rose, child welfare workers found themselves overwhelmed with families needing basic services like food, shelter, and health care; thus, child welfare began to hire caseworkers without MSWs.

The benefits of social work preparation for caseworkers were subsequently documented by the work of Zlotnick et al. (2005), Jones and Okamura (2000), Ellett and Gansle (1998), Fox et al. (2003), Rosenthal et al. (1998), and Scannapieco and Connell-Carrick (2003). Many child welfare training programs across the country therefore have included social work values and skills as part of the required curriculum for new employees, although only a handful of states in the United States require the degree as a prerequisite for employment.

Model 2 pre-service training tacitly assumes that in addition to making risk assessments and service plans, child welfare workers themselves may provide direct services (e.g., child and family counseling, ongoing support services, and psychosocial groups for parents or children). Model 2 also assumes that new hires need to attend training even if they have a bachelor's or master's degree in social work. The rationale for this is that most BSW programs in the United States emphasize generalist practice and do not focus on the specific practice protocols in child welfare or other services to children and families; the master's degree concentration may or may not emphasize child welfare practice. Another Model 2 assumption is that social worker knowledge, values, and practice skills and techniques in combination with parental motivation have a major impact on Child and Family Services Review outcomes.

Model 3

In 1995, as a result of a child death, the Canadian Government formed a commission to determine the adequacy of the Ministry Social Services. The subsequent investigation indicated poor social work practice, management, quality assurance, and funding in child welfare. The findings were used to undertake significant reforms across the child welfare service system, including employment preparation programs. Officials reviewed undergraduate social work program curricula with special attention to child welfare, which resulted in child welfare specializations as part of the baccalaureate social work degree. Canadian child welfare employees are now selected from among applicants who have completed a social work bachelors' degree, which includes a specialized series of child welfare specific courses. In Model 3, internships are taught by faculty members with experience in specific content areas. The University of Victoria's BSW child welfare program is one example of a Model 3 program. This program includes courses on Native Americans, family law, and community development. Model 3 is similar to Model 2 in assuming that social work knowledge, values, and practice skills and techniques coupled with parental motivation "cause" the outcomes in Child and Family Services Reviews.

The main difference between Model 3 and the other two models, however, is that community residents pay their own college tuition for the BSW degree program, thus reducing trainer and trainee training salary and mileage, lunch, and travel time cost. Model 3 is not costly as long as the state does not heavily subsidize social work students' college educations. A survey done by the CWLA in 1998 found, however, that fewer than 15% of child welfare agencies require caseworkers to hold either bachelor's or master's degrees in social work.

In summary, the U.S. General Accounting Office (2003) reported that states spent \$276 million in Title IV-E training reimbursements in 2001, but no state achieved substantial (i.e., 90%) compliance on all the Child and Family Services Review outcomes. The present study was designed to estimate separation, replacement, and training (SRT) costs and was carried out as part of a larger series of studies looking at factors that influence workforce retention (Social Work Education Consortium, 2002, 2003, 2004).

A Model 2 training program was used by the localities in the study reported below and consists of 20 days of core training, 5 days of training in child protection services, 1 day of computer application training, and several days of agency-based mentoring and field train-

ing. Courses are outcome-based and involve social work knowledge, values, and skills. The training is contracted out and provided to all new workers statewide. The cost for this training model includes off-site expenses, travel, and meals as well as trainer and trainee instruction time and on-the-job mentoring time salaries. Below is a description of the methodology used to establish the SRT cost and the cost of pre-service training models.

METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the study were to (1) obtain the SRT costs for four counties; (2) compare the SRT costs for the three training models; (3) calculate hidden costs that were not included in previous SRT calculations (i.e., the cost of intercounty transfer and Title IV-E tuition reimbursement); and (4) extrapolate from the average county SRT cost to estimate state SRT costs. This section describes the analyses that were performed to calculate the SRT costs and the cost of the pre-service training models.

PROCEDURES

The SRT Formulas

The authors are aware of only one child welfare study on the costs of SRT by Graef and Hill (2000), who used formulas created by Cascio (1999) to calculate SRT costs for a Midwestern child welfare agency. The formulas indicated that SRT costs are a function of (1) the time needed to perform the task(s) involved in the processes; (2) the level of pay of the individuals involved in the task; and (3) materials costs (e.g., human resource costs associated with SRT functions).

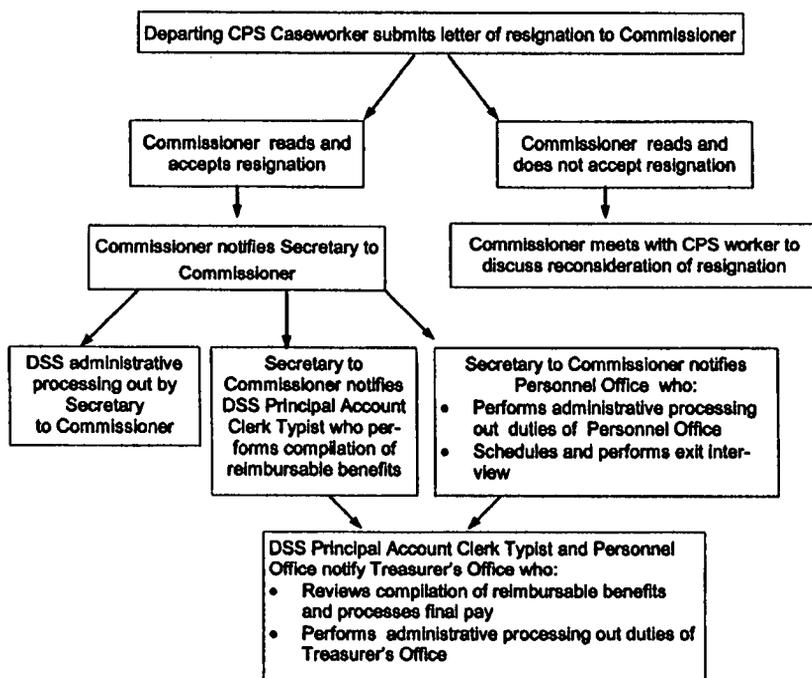
SRT Cost Inventories

One county deputy commissioner used Graef and Hill's (2000) formulas to identify the various steps that occur when an employee submits a resignation and a new employee is hired and trained. Subsequently, three other administrators used this inventory format as a template to create their own SRT inventories. The diagrams below illustrate the processes involved when an employee leaves a position

FIGURE 1. Cost Elements When Caseworkers Separate

*Draft—April 15, 1004**Schoharie County Department of Social Services*

SEPARATION OF CASEWORKER Cost Elements



and a replacement is hired. Figure 1 indicates the steps involved in casework separation. Figure 2 shows the steps required to hire a new casework employee.

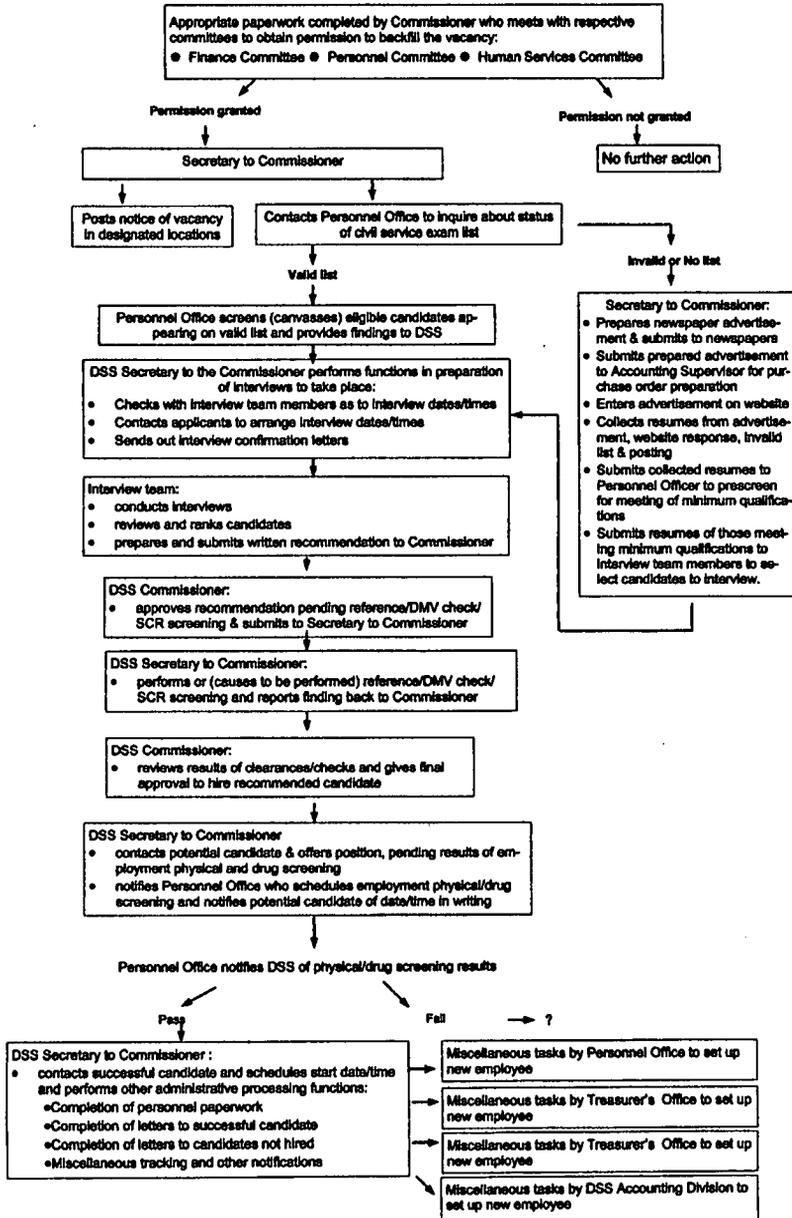
Average County and State SRT Costs

The lead author inserted the actual district expenditures for each step identified in the inventory into an Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to calculate the SRT costs for the four local districts participating in

FIGURE 2. Cost Elements When a Caseworker Is Replaced

Draft-April 15, 2004
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REPLACEMENT OF CASEWORKER Cost Elements



this study. The average turnover rate was determined for each district, using 4 years of separation and replacement data; then, statewide SRT costs were approximated utilizing the average local district cost.

Intercounty Transfer Costs

Differences in salaries and cost of living (particularly housing expenses) cause workers to move from one county to another in order to maximize their lifestyle. However, the cost of intercounty transfers was not included in any of the four SRT inventories. Thus, the lead author assumed that transfer costs included County 1's separation costs and County 2's replacement costs, along with forms and procedures mentoring.

Tuition

Undergraduate tuition at a state college was \$5,940 per year in 2006. Thus, the cost of tuition and fees for a 4-year bachelor of social work degree was \$23,760. Graduate tuition at a state college was \$7,998 in 2006. Thus, the cost for tuition and fees for a 2-year master of social work degree was \$15,996.

Tuition Reimbursement Cost

Tuition reimbursement costs were not listed as an item on any of the SRT inventories, even though a number of counties pay tuition costs for employees to attend graduate school. A bachelor's degree is the minimum educational requirement for the casework position, so employees attending school after they are hired pursue graduate study and their tuition is partially reimbursed through Title IV-E funds. This being the case, the lead author used in-state public university tuition and fees for 2 years full-time or 4 years part-time as the basis for calculating tuition expenses. This is the typical amount of time needed to complete a graduate degree in social work.

Calculating the Cost of the Three Models

The formula used to calculate costs was: time to perform a task \times employee's salary = cost. If no time was needed to perform a task

TABLE 1. Separation, Replacement, and Training Costs for Training Model 2

Local District	Total Separation Cost	Total Replacement Cost	Total Local Training Cost	State Training Cost per Worker
1	\$166.43	\$1,403.95	\$13,472.42	\$12,903.00
2	\$127.07	\$982.41	\$14,553.75	\$12,903.00
3	\$121.81	\$1,364.97	\$9,605.95	\$12,903.00
4	\$204.95	\$1,558.20	\$14,774.19	\$12,903.00
Total	\$620.26	\$5,309.53	\$52,406.31	\$51,612.00
Average	\$155.07	\$1,327.38	\$13,101.58	\$12,903.00

and thus no salaries or materials were needed, the average amount calculated for the four counties utilized in Model 2 were subtracted and resulted in zero dollars and cents for that task.

RESULTS

The following tables illustrate the county and statewide SRT costs for the three training models, cost savings when a worker transfers, and costs associated with tuition reimbursement programs. The data used for these calculations reflect the various elements of the models.

Table 1 shows the actual cost for SRT for a Model 2 training framework. The average child welfare caseworker SRT cost for the four counties was \$27,487.03. Table 2 shows that the average SRT costs for Model 1 and Model 3 are the same (\$6,503).

When the number of workers hired in each local district across the state for 2003 was multiplied by \$27,487.03, the estimated statewide cost for SRT totaled \$18,945,435. These computations reflect the cost

TABLE 2. Separation, Replacement, and Training Costs for Training Models 1 and 3

Model	Average Separation Cost	Average Replacement Cost	Average Local Training Cost*	State Training Cost per Worker	Total
Models 1 & 3	\$155.03	\$1,327.38	\$5020.64	\$0	\$6,503.05

*All travel to state training is eliminated.

TABLE 3. Separation, Replacement, and Training (SRT) Costs: Projected Average Statewide Expenditures for 4 Years

Funded Positions	Hired 2003	Hired 2002	Hired 2001	Hired 2000	Total	Average	SRT Costs
2999	489	1,477	357	434	2,757	689.25	\$18,945,415.00*
							\$4,482,227.21**

*Based on average cost of \$27,487.00. **Based on average cost of \$6,503.05.

of the Model 2 training. A comparison of the statewide cost of the three training models is provided in Table 3.

When intercounty transfer cost (i.e., \$6,366.42) and tuition reimbursement expenses (i.e., \$15,996) are added to the average county SRT cost (i.e., \$27,487.03), the combined cost for a new hire for Model 2 (Title IV-E pre-service training) becomes \$49,849.45. This is illustrated in Table 4.

DISCUSSION

The results of the analyses revealed that the Model 2 (Title IV-E pre-service training for less than a month) cost more than the cost of 4 years of the state tuition (i.e., more than the state university's bachelor's degree) and more than the cost of the other two pre-service training models. Further, additional Model 2 costs were incurred when new hires transferred from one county to another and/or received funding to obtain a MSW degree in their first few years of service. The substantial difference in the cost of Model 2 vs. the cost of

TABLE 4. Separation, Replacement, Training (SRT), Tuition, and Transfer Costs per Worker

Costs	Model 2
SRT (average)	\$27,487.03
Tuition*	\$15,996.00
Transfer	\$6,366.42
Total	\$49,849.45

*Two years' tuition in a public university.

the other two models can be attributed to trainer-trainee classroom-time salaries, on-the-job mentoring salaries, and mileage and travel time reimbursements, which are not components of the two other pre-service models. The next section discusses the cost of pre-service training relative to the *benefits* to children and families.

Implications of Training Cost for Child Welfare Policy and Research

The results of research indicate that the use of Title IV-E funds to provide pre-service training to prepare child welfare caseworkers increases caseworker's knowledge and improves their retention (i.e., such funding "benefits" caseworkers). But the literature lacks empirical studies that demonstrate that such funding has positive outcomes for abused and neglected children and their families. To the contrary, initial Child and Family Services Reviews revealed poor performance in all states, whether they had Title IV-E pre-service training or not. Increased caseworker knowledge and retention cannot be the primary goal of Title IV-E funding. Hence, exploring the of impact of both amount of education and type of pre-service training on outcomes of abused and neglected children and families needs to be a high priority task for child welfare agency officials and policy makers.

Currently, the federal government requires states to measure outputs (e.g., the number of children reunified and adopted). But "outputs" are not the same as "outcomes" (i.e., improved child and family functioning or improved child and family well-being). Unfortunately, and at present, there is no agreed upon means of measuring these types of outcomes. That is, at present, non-scored service plan narratives or ad hoc and nonvalidated risk assessment instruments typically serve as a proxy for culturally appropriate family functioning assessment instruments with validated scoring procedures.

An efficient way to launch an exploration of impact on child well-being would be for the three states that account for almost half of the abuse and neglect cases in the United States (California, New York, and Illinois) to agree to use the same family functioning instrument in their major cities (Los Angeles, New York City, and Chicago). Also, area universities should examine the impact of new and experienced workers' educational background and type of pre-service training on family functioning as well as federal outcomes. All this should be done without disrupting other counties in the three states and without disrupting the services of the other 47 states.

Such research would ultimately be an investigation of the *relative* contributions of amounts of education and type of pre-service training to other important variables that affect family functioning and well-being in major city settings (e.g., jobs, housing, and transportation). And it may turn out that additional education and/or pre-service training contribute relatively small amounts to the variability in improved family functioning and federal outputs (e.g., reduced recidivism). More clearly stated, it is possible that other variables (e.g., a "jobless (economic) recovery," or the impact of slow housing growth) or the impact of lack of a sufficient number of child care agencies may have a dramatic impact on family functioning of single-parent, female-headed households more than the amount of either education or pre-service training separately or combined. If other variables do indeed have substantial impacts on family functioning relative to worker education and training, a question of the value of using Title IV-E funds for the pre-service training of child welfare workers will remain (i.e., the added value of using taxpayer dollars to educate and train child welfare caseworkers for knowledge alone will remain).

Presently, few states are able to identify caseworker's educational background in their human resources computer banks. But those that are currently able to identify the amount of caseworker education are currently capable of discovering the relative amounts of impact that educational background has on both children and their family outcomes. Hence, the nine states that currently have this capability have proposed to perform a multistate study to discover whether there is a relationship between educational background and federal case review outcome measures. However, these nine states could also add caseworker pre-service training type to their analysis to discover whether level of education and pre-service training type interact and together increase family and child functioning more than either variable alone.

If caseworkers remain on the job for only 2 years, it may not be sensible to pay for anything more than the minimal amount of pre-service training. But if caseworkers remain substantially longer than 2 years and we can demonstrate the benefit of improved child and family functioning, then the cost of Model 2 pre-service training programs (\$27,487 annually per new hire) may be a good investment. Thus, it is incumbent upon stakeholders to use tools that more clearly demonstrate the effects of caseworker practice on family functioning as well as federal outputs and outcomes.

The CWLA, the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA), the National Staff Development and Train-

ing Association (NSDTA), the American Public Welfare Association (APWA), and the U.S. General Accounting Office have produced documents that discuss initial and ongoing training, training resources, equipment, styles, mentoring, the learning environment, performance evaluations, and the evaluation of training.

However, these documents do not answer the question of how to develop and implement pre-service training programs or educational programs the result of which is increased child safety, permanence, well-being, and improved family functioning. A national dialogue is needed to identify the following:

How much pre-service training is really needed?

What should be the content of pre-service training programs?

Which training or education model prepares workers to improve family functioning?

What is the best measure of child and family outcomes?

What are the costs and the benefits of different types of training vs. education?

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