

# Factors influencing child welfare employee's turnover: Focusing on organizational culture and climate

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## ABSTRACT

Organizational culture and climate have been studied within the context of understanding the effectiveness of business and for-profit organizations. But these organizational factors have not been seriously considered in the social welfare literature, particularly in the child welfare area, even though Glisson and his colleagues have studied organizational culture and climate. This paper addresses this void through a systematic examination of organizational culture and climate and their effects on employee turnover in child welfare. To do this, it uses mainly the workforce retention study survey data that the New York State Social Work Education Consortium (SWEC) conducted and collected in 2002 and 2003. Organizational culture is classified into achievement/innovation/competence (AIC), cooperation/supportiveness/responsiveness (CSR), and emphasis on rewards (ER), while organizational climate into role clarity (RC), personal accomplishment (PA), emotional exhaustion (EE), and workloads (WL). It employs a logistic regression model (LRM) in analyzing an individual child welfare worker's intention to leave the current job. Empirical findings indicate that organizational culture and climate are the significant factors to explaining an employee's intention to leave. In particular, ER in organizational culture is significant, implying that child welfare employees with clearer and more effective incentives and rewards for job performance have less intention to leave than those with less clear and effective incentives and rewards. EE in organizational climate is significant, implying that employees with higher levels of emotional energy have less intention to leave than those with lower levels of energy. These findings suggest that child welfare organizations can improve organizational culture and climate by supporting ER and reducing EE.

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## 1. Introduction

The mission of child welfare organizations is to deliver continuous and high quality services for vulnerable children and families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2008). The ability of child welfare agencies to meet the needs of children and families they serve depends on a competent and stable workforce. However, high turnover rates in child welfare have been recognized as a major problem (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Nissly, Mor Barak, & Levin, 2005).<sup>1</sup> To deal with this problem, previous studies have explored the multiple factors that influence employee turnover from both the individual and organizational perspectives. They have accounted for individual

factors such as education level, emotional exhaustion, experience in this field, and age, and organizational factors such as supervisor's support, caseload, and salary, especially in the field of public child welfare (Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Drake & Yadama, 1996; Ellett & Ellett, 2004; Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; Ellett & Millar, 2008; Fox, Miller, & Barbee, 2003; Koeske & Kirk, 1995; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Rosenthal & Waters, 2004; Scannapieco & Connell, 2003; Smith, 2005; Strolin, McCarthy, & Caringi, 2007; U.S. Government Accounting Office [GAO], 2003; Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & Lane, 2005). So far, however, there has been little attention to the effects of organizational culture and climate on employee's turnover in the public child welfare area.

Although Glisson and his colleagues have studied organizational culture and climate in the field of child welfare and juvenile justice system (Glisson, 2007; Glisson, Dukes, & Green, 2006; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Glisson & James, 2002), organizational culture and climate have been studied mainly within the context of understanding the effectiveness of business and for-profit organizations (Ashkanasy, Broadfoot, & Falkus, 2000). Researchers in this area of study have tried to understand organizational function in terms of how organizational culture and climate influence employee working attitudes and service delivery, why some organizations are more

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<sup>1</sup> According to national studies, annual turnover rates in child welfare agencies are estimated to be between 20 and 40% (APHSA, 2005; GAO, 2003), with 90% of the states reporting difficulty in recruiting and retaining child welfare workers (GAO, 1995). Turnover tends to be cyclical, with high turnover resulting in increased workloads for remaining workers which then in turn creates incentives for additional workers to leave (APHSA, 2005). Child welfare agencies also cite several other common factors that impede recruitment and retention of qualified workers. These include salaries, concerns for safety, lack of resources, lack of adequate skill and supervision, and complexity of the work (GAO, 2003).

successful than others in achieving performance benchmarks, or why some organizations are more successful than others in retaining skilled and qualified employees.

This study seeks to address this void through a systematic examination of organizational culture and organizational climate and their effects on employee turnover in child welfare at the line of inquiry. A better understanding of organizational factors impacting child welfare agencies, specifically the factors of organizational culture and climate, will help in better informing efforts to maintain a more competent and stable workforce.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Employee turnover

Employee's turnover is primarily classified into three categories: (1) unpreventable turnover; (2) desirable turnover; and (3) undesirable turnover (Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, 2007). Unpreventable turnover (i.e., due to illness, family issues, or retirement) or desirable turnover (i.e., due to employee's incompetence) may not cause any harm to clients, other workers, or the agency. But an organization needs to attend to undesirable turnover. Examples of undesirable turnover would include competent and qualified employees leaving due to such organizational issues as lack of supervision, poor support, and role conflict. These issues need to be addressed because they do directly affect client service quality and organizational effectiveness.

Scholars operationalize employee's turnover in child welfare in several ways, ranging from an employee's *intention to leave* (Mor Barak et al., 2001; Nissly et al., 2005; Tham, 2007) to an *actual job exit* (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Rosenthal & Waters, 2004). Some researchers rationalize that intention to leave is appropriate in operationalizing and measuring employee's turnover, because it is a strong single predictor of actual turnover and tracing workers is very difficult once they have left the agency (Mor Barak et al., 2001; Nissly et al., 2005; Tham, 2007). They also posit that employees who intend to leave are directly affecting client service quality and organizational effectiveness as a result of their probable unwillingness to invest their time and energy in providing quality services for clients.

**Assumption 1.** Employee's undesirable turnover negatively influences remaining employees, clients, and the organization itself. This study assumes that employee's undesirable turnover might be decreased if organizational culture and climate changed positively.

### 2.2. Organizational culture

Organizational culture, which is defined as the way things are done in an organization, shapes employee behavioral expectations and norms (Cooke & Szumal, 1993; Verbeke, Vlogering, & Hessels, 1998). Scholars have developed tools for the measurement of organizational culture, such as the Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI) by Cooke & Lafferty (1987), the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) by O'Reilly et al. (1991), and the Organizational Social Context (OSC) by Glisson (2007). These measurements are used to understand organizational culture, with a particular focus on explaining its effects on organizational performance. They also share several common elements in understanding organizational culture, although they use different categories for classification.

Organizational culture is mainly categorized into constructive culture (OCI, OCP) or proficient culture (OSC) versus defensive culture (OCI, OCP) or rigid/resistant culture (OSC). For example, in the category of constructive or proficient culture, employees possess behavioral expectations and norms of achievement, innovation, competence, cooperation, supportiveness, responsiveness, and emphasis on reward for their performance (Cooke & Lafferty, 1987; Cooke & Szumal, 2000; Glisson, 2007; Glisson et al., 2006; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991).

In this type of culture, employees have sufficient knowledge of their work and tend to help each other meet high levels of mutual satisfaction needs and are oriented toward their clients. In contrast, in the category of defensive or rigid/resistant culture, employees have behavioral expectations and norms of approval, conventionality, dependency, opposition, power, formulation, and suppression (Cooke & Lafferty, 1987; Cooke & Szumal, 2000; Glisson, 2007; Glisson et al., 2006; O'Reilly et al., 1991). In this type of culture, employees follow conventional rules, tend to conduct their task to protect their lower status, and they orient toward their tasks rather than the client's well-being.

There exists the relationship between organizational culture and the effectiveness of an organization. For example, Ouchi (1981) found that focusing on humanistic organizational values — such as motivation, cooperation, and emphasis on rewards — had positive financial impacts on Japanese firms. An organization with positive culture where employees receive quick feedback and reward for their performance responds well to working environments and adapts well to changing circumstances (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Behavioral expectations and norms explaining organizational culture affect an employee's work attitudes and quality in service delivery (Glisson et al., 2006; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Glisson & James, 2002). For example, employees working in a defensive culture are less likely to provide high quality services for children and families than those with a constructive culture, because a defensive culture promotes passive reactivity and the avoidance of legal sanctions they may receive if they fail to provide the services. These poor work attitudes by employees, in turn, decrease the quality in service delivery.

**Assumption 2.** Organizational culture is related to employee work attitudes and organizational performance. This study assumes that positive organizational culture, as defined by constructive behavioral expectations and norms, might be negatively associated with employee's intention to leave.

### 2.3. Organizational climate

Organizational climate is defined as employees' shared perception in their work environment (Jones & James, 1979; Joyce & Slocum, 1984; Verbeke et al., 1998). Scholars have developed several dimensions of organizational climate, including Campbell et al. (1970), James and Sells (1981), and Glisson et al. (2006). Of particular interest for this study, Glisson and his colleagues (Glisson, 2007; Glisson et al., 2006) categorize organizational climate into engaged, functional or stressful climate. In explanation, an engaged climate indicates a high level of personal accomplishment and low levels of role conflict, emotional exhaustion, and workload. In this type of climate, employees have shared perceptions of their work environment in such ways that they are personally able to accomplish many worthwhile things, remain personally involved in their work, and provide high quality of services for their clients. In contrast, a stressful climate is seen as indicating a low level of personal accomplishment but high levels of role overload, role conflict, and emotional exhaustion. In this type of climate, employees have shared perceptions of their work environment that it is emotionally exhausting and overwhelming.

There also exist the relationships between organizational climate and the effectiveness of individual practice and between organizational climate and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, work attitude, and organizational productivity. Employee work attitudes and behaviors may be influenced by the individual's own perceptions of the work environment as well as by their shared perceptions with co-workers of the same working environment (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Glisson & James, 2002; Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002; Schulte, Ostroff, & Kinicki, 2006). These employee perceptions of the work environment

in turn play either a direct or an indirect role in organizational productivity (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, & Weick, 1970; James & Jones, 1974; Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990; Schneider et al., 2002). Glisson and his colleagues link organizational climate to work attitude, turnover, service quality, and service outcomes (Glisson, 2007; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Glisson & James, 2002). Their findings indicate that children and families who receive services from agencies with an engaged climate are likely to receive more comprehensive and continuous services and report more improvement in their child's psychosocial functioning than children who receive services from agencies with a stressful climate. In addition, employees in an engaged climate have higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of turnover than those in stressful climate.

**Assumption 3.** Organizational climate is linked to employee work attitude and organizational productivity. This study assumes that positive organizational climate, as defined by positive perception of their work environment, might be negatively associated with employee's intention to leave.

### 3. Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

Researchers increasingly emphasize the importance of organizational factors on employee turnover; however, more empirical studies need to be conducted to understand the organizational effects of organizational culture and climate. To address this need, this study presents a model – premised on the conceptual and empirical literature – to clarify a theoretical approach and the development of hypotheses related to organizational culture, climate, and worker turnover (see Fig. 1: A conceptual model of the effect of organizational culture and climate on an employee's intention to leave).

*Employee intention to leave* is employed as the dependent variable representing employee turnover. *Organizational culture* and *organizational climate* are the independent variables that are used to explain employee turnover. Organizational culture, defined as the way things are done in an organization and forming behavioral expectations and

norms, is examined in the following three aspects: achievement/innovation/competence (AIC), cooperation/supportiveness/responsiveness (CSR), and emphasis on rewards (ER). AIC consists of employee behavioral expectations and norms: (1) to set challenging goals, establish plans to reach those goals, and pursue them with enthusiasm (Cooke & Szumal, 2000, OCI); (2) to participate in decisions affecting their work, develop professional skills and behavior, and engage in interesting and innovative tasks (O'Reilly et al., 1991, OCP); and (3) to acquire sufficient knowledge and be competent for providing high quality of services (Glisson, 2007, OSC).

CSR consists of employee behavioral expectations and norms related to: (1) being supportive, constructive, performance and professional growth, and rewards (O'Reilly et al., 1991, OCP); (2) being open to influence in their dealings with one another (Cooke & Szumal, 2000, OCI); (3) being friendly, cooperative, and sensitive to the satisfaction of their work group (Cooke & Szumal, 2000, OCI); (4) placing the well-being of their client first and having the organizational responsibility (or authority to response) needed for serving their clients (Glisson, 2007, OSC). ER is employee behavioral expectations and norms related to being well paid for their performance and having their job fit with their life (O'Reilly et al., 1991, OCP).

Organizational climate, defined as the shared perceptions of their work environment by employees within their organization, is examined in the following four aspects: role clarity (RC), personal accomplishment (PA), emotional exhaustion (EE), and workloads (WL). RC is operationalized as shared perceptions among employees that they have clarity about their tasks and role characteristics in the work environment (James & Sells, 1981). Role ambiguity and conflict occur when employees are not sure of the tasks that constitute their job. Child welfare organizations are complex and when employees are not given adequate information, role ambiguity may exist (Glisson et al., 2006).

PA is operationalized as shared perceptions among employees that in their work environment they are personally able to accomplish many worthwhile things and remain personally involved in their work and concerned about their clients (James & Sells, 1981; Glisson et al., 2006). EE is operationalized as shared perceptions among

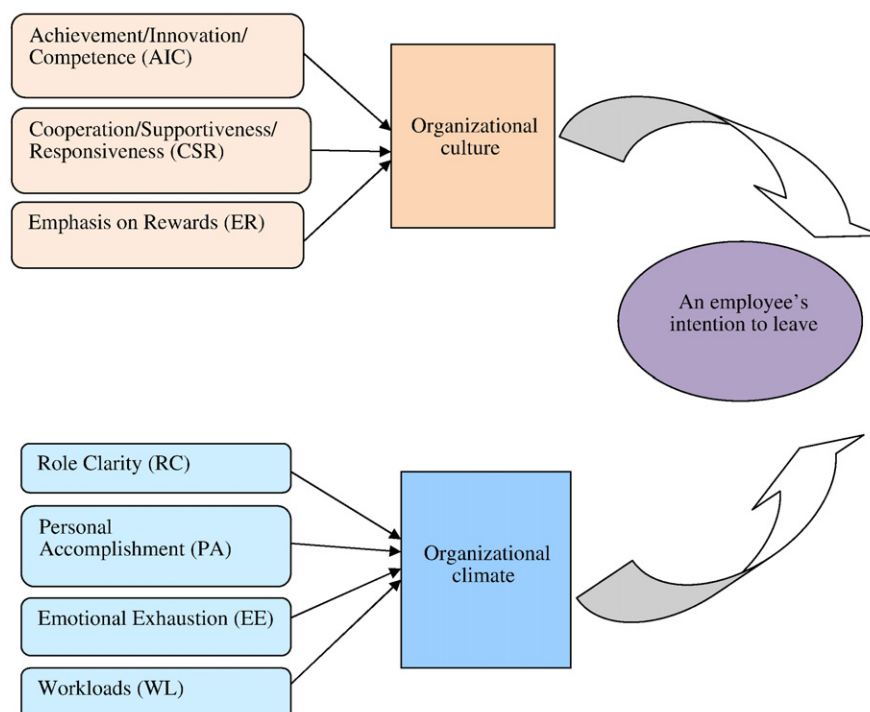


Fig. 1. A conceptual model of the effect of organizational culture and climate on an employee's intention to leave.

employees that in their work environment they are emotionally (psychologically) exhausted from their work demands and are unable to complete necessary tasks (Glisson et al., 2006). The EE measure includes both physical and psychological (emotional) fatigue. WL is operationalized as shared perceptions among employees that in their work environment they are overloaded in their work. For example, workload includes all aspects of the job such as supervision, paperwork, direct services, court, and community services. Child welfare employees may find their workloads to be unmanageable due to the complexities involved in each case (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984).

From the previous discussion, the following testable hypotheses are presented:

**Hypothesis 1.** There will be a negative association between organizational culture and employee's intention to leave in public child welfare agencies.

A positive organizational culture tends to have higher levels of achievement/innovation/competence (AIC), cooperation/supportiveness/responsiveness (CSR), and emphasis on rewards (ER) than does a negative organizational culture. In a positive organizational culture, also referred to as a constructive or proficient organizational culture, employees are encouraged to interact with co-workers and engage in such tasks as attaining achievement, innovation, and competence in their work (Cooke & Lafferty, 1987; Cooke & Szumal, 2000; O'Reilly et al., 1991). A positive organizational culture also supports motivated and positive behaviors, which tend to encourage employees to cooperate more fully with each other in performing their work tasks (Glisson et al., 2006). Therefore, a positive organizational culture is expected to decrease a child welfare employee's intention to leave by supporting AIC, CSR, and ER.

**Hypothesis 2.** There will be a negative association between organizational climate and employee's intention to leave in public child welfare agencies.

A positive organizational climate has higher levels of personal accomplishment (PA) and role clarity (RC), and lower levels of emotional exhaustion (EE) and workloads (WL) than does a negative organizational climate. In a positive organizational climate, also referred to as an engaged organizational climate, employees have a shared perception of their work environment that sees their organization as supporting employee emotional health, ensuring they have a manageable workload, and believing they can accomplish many worthwhile tasks (Glisson, 2007; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). Therefore, a positive organizational climate is expected to decrease a child welfare employee's intention to leave, by clarifying their role, increasing personal accomplishment, and reducing the worker's level of emotional exhaustion and workload.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Sample, data, and survey

This study uses the workforce retention study survey data that the New York State Social Work Education Consortium (SWEC) conducted and collected in two years (2002 and 2003).<sup>2</sup> Among the 62 counties in New York State, public child welfare agencies in 25 counties participated in the workforce retention study.<sup>3</sup> Utilizing data

<sup>2</sup> The workforce retention study survey was conducted two times. The first survey was conducted in the 13 counties having the highest turnover rates in 2002 and the second survey in the 12 counties having the lowest turnover rates in 2003. But survey questions were the same in the two sequential surveys.

<sup>3</sup> The workforce retention study survey was not conducted in all the boroughs and counties in New York City.

obtained from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), counties with turnover rates greater than 25% in 2000 were classified as high turnover counties, while counties with turnover rates of 17% or less in 2001 were classified as low turnover counties.

All workers and first line supervisors from these participating counties and child welfare agencies were invited to participate in the workforce retention survey and answer survey questions. Survey participation was voluntary and personally administered. For this, SWEC's workforce research team members visited each participating county on a pre-determined date to meet with caseworkers and supervisors for conducting the survey. All caseworkers and supervisors from the public child welfare units (e.g., Child Protect Services, Court Unit, Adoptions/Permanency Planning, Prevention, Foster Care, Family Preservation, etc.) in 25 counties were eligible for participation. In total, 781 caseworkers and supervisors participated in the survey. However, only 766 respondents completed the question related to seeking a new job during the past year (i.e., employee's intention to leave). Those not answering the question (15 respondents, 2%) were eliminated for this study. The workforce retention study survey instrument consists of 134 items across 7 sections. Some items were adapted from the emotional exhaustion dimension of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), and some other items were adapted from child welfare workforce retention studies (e.g., Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Scannapieco & Connell, 2003). Specifically, Section A consists of 64 items covering various characteristics of organizational culture and climate. Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*), participants are asked to indicate their level of agreement with work-related statements. Section B consists of 3 items asking about employee's future plans. Using a dichotomous scale (*Yes/No*), participants were expected to answer whether they had considered leaving their job during the past year.

Data for this study comes primarily from the workforce retention study by the New York State Social Work Education Consortium (SWEC). In addition, information about each county's urban versus rural location was obtained from the Labor Market Areas, 2008 (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) website). Data on total staff size in 2003 and caseworker turnover rates of 2000 and 2001 were obtained from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

### 4.2. Empirical model

This study employs a logistic regression model (LRM) to analyze an individual child welfare worker's intention to leave the current job. Logistic regression is primarily used to predict a dependent dichotomous variable, like employee's intention to leave (*yes/no*) in this study. For predicting the changes in the dependent variable, the variable needs to be transformed into a logit variable which uses the natural logarithm of the odds (Long, 1997; Long & Freese, 2006). In this way, logistic regression estimates the probability that an individual child welfare worker, with a particular set of values of the independent variables, will indicate an intention to leave his/her current job.

LRM assumes that  $y_i$ , individual worker  $i$ 's intention to leave, is determined by a vector of organizational culture ( $CU_i$ ), organizational climate ( $CL_i$ ), individual worker  $i$ 's characteristics ( $IND_i$ ), and the characteristics of the county where individual worker  $i$  works ( $CO_i$ ). In its systematic format, LRM is represented by:

Log odds of employee's intention to leave :

$$y_i^* = \alpha_0 + CU_i\alpha + CL_i\beta + IND_i\theta + CO_i\delta + \epsilon_i$$

$$y_i = 1 \text{ if } y_i^* > 0$$

$$= 0 \text{ if } y_i^* \leq 0$$

in which  $y_i$  is the probability of individual worker  $i$ 's intention to leave the current job.  $CU_i$  is a vector of individual worker  $i$ 's organizational culture, including AIC, CSR, and ER.  $CL_i$  is a vector of individual worker  $i$ 's organizational climate, including RC, PA, EE, and WL.  $IND_i$  is a vector of individual worker  $i$ 's characteristics, including age, gender, race, education attainment level, and salary.  $CO_i$  is a vector of the characteristics of the county where individual worker  $i$  works, including staff size and urban/rural location.  $\epsilon_i$  is the random error term.

#### 4.3. Measurement

**Dependent variable:** Although there is no single standardized definition of employee turnover, "intention to leave" has been utilized as a precursor to and predictor of actual leaving (Mor Barak et al., 2001; Nissly et al., 2005). This study employs a child welfare social worker's stated intention to leave rather than actual job exit as the dependent variable. It is obtained from the survey question, "Have you considered looking for a new job within the past year?" If a respondent answered "Yes," it is coded as 1; if a respondent answered "No," it was coded as 0.

**Independent variables:** Organizational characteristics are measured as two major factors, organizational culture and organizational climate. Organizational culture and climate factors are constructed on the basis of theory. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) test is used to examine the factor validity of the scales used as indicators of organizational culture (AIC, CSR, and ER) and organizational climate (RC, PA, EE, and WL) (Bollen, 1989). The results of the CFA test in this study supported the validity of the measurement model.<sup>4</sup>

Cronbach's alpha test is used to determine the internal consistency of items in a survey instrument. It is interpreted as the percent of variance in the observed scale and it would also explain the hypothetical true scale composed of all possible items (Hatcher, 1994). The alpha reliabilities of all variables employed in this study are acceptable.<sup>5</sup>

Organizational culture in public child welfare agencies is operationalized as three variables: achievement/innovation/competence (AIC), cooperation/supportiveness/responsiveness (CSR), and emphasis on rewards (ER). Organizational culture is measured using a scale of 32 survey items taken from the workforce retention study that include all items related to AIC, CSR, and ER. (For details on all survey items regarding organizational culture and its three variables, see Table A1). Each survey item has a 5 point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). AIC is composed of 12 survey items, and its value ranges from 12 to 60, with higher value representing more positive organizational AIC. CSR is composed of 14 survey items, and its value ranges from 14 to 70, with higher value representing more positive organizational CSR. ER is composed of 6 survey items, and its value ranges from 6 to 30, with higher value representing more positive organizational ER.

Organizational climate in public child welfare agencies is operationalized using the following variables, as discussed in the previous section: role clarity (RC), personal accomplishment (PA), emotional exhaustion (EE), and workloads (WL). Organizational climate is measured using a scale of 26 items that include all items related to RC, PA, EE, and WL. (For details on all survey items regarding organizational climate and its four variables, see Table A2). RC is composed of 6 survey items, and its value ranges from 6 to 30, with higher value representing more positive organizational RC. PA is composed of 8 survey items, with its value ranging from 8 to 40 and higher value representing more

positive organizational PA. EE is composed of 3 survey items, with its value ranging from 3 to 15 and higher value representing more positive organizational EE. WL is composed of 9 survey items, with its value ranging from 9 to 45 and higher value representing more positive organizational WL.

To get more precise effects of organizational culture and climate variables, other important explanatory variables need to be controlled for empirical estimation. There are two groups of control variables: individual-level and county-level variables. Individual-level variables include age, gender, race, salary, whether he/she has an undergraduate major in social work (BSW), whether he/she has a master's degree, and whether he/she has a master's degree in social work (MSW).

Age is a continuous variable. Age may be negatively related with job leave (Mor Barak et al., 2001) or an employee's age may not predict retention or turnover (Dickinson & Perry, 2002). Gender is a categorical variable, in which female is coded as 1 and male coded as 0. In past studies, gender was not found to be related to intention to leave (Nissly et al., 2005), but female workers were found to be less likely to leave their current job than their male counterparts (Rosenthal & Waters, 2004). Race is a categorical variable: Caucasian/White is coded as 1, otherwise the response is coded as 0. Race has not been found to be related to intention to leave or employee retention (Nissly et al., 2005).

Employee salary level is an ordinal variable. Survey question about an employee's salary includes five categories. Annual salary in current job of \$30,000 or less is coded as 1, from \$30,001 to \$35,000 is coded as 2, from \$35,001 to \$45,000 is coded as 3, from \$45,001 to \$50,000 is coded as 4, and more than \$50,000 is coded as 5. Based on prior research, it is expected that employees with higher salary levels are less likely to leave (Dickinson & Perry, 2002).

Undergraduate major is a dummy variable. If she/he had a bachelor's degree in social work, it is coded as 1, with all other responses coded as 0. It is expected that employees with a bachelor's degree in social work are less likely to move to other job. It has been found that employees with a social work degree are less likely to leave their job, because of shared professional values related to child welfare (Ellett et al., 2003; Scannapieco & Connell, 2003).

Master's degree and master's degree in social work (MSW) are dummy variables. If the respondent had a master's degree in any fields, it is coded as 1, otherwise it is coded as 0. In addition, if she/he had a MSW, it is coded as 1, otherwise it is coded as 0. Some studies have found that employees with a MSW are more likely to retain their jobs (Ellett et al., 2003; Jones, 2001; Rosenthal & Waters, 2004), while Nissly et al. (2005) found that the intention to leave is greater if a child welfare worker possesses a MSW degree. It is expected that having a master's degree might be also an important factor in explaining intention to leave.

Another important group of independent variables are county-level variables. This study employs urban versus rural location and staff size in county child welfare agencies. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) classifies labor market areas (LMAs) into three types: metropolitan, micropolitan, and small labor market area (SLMA). If a county is part of metropolitan labor market area, it is considered as urban location and coded as 1. If a county is part of micropolitan or small labor market area, then it is considered as rural location and coded as 0. It is expected that employees in an urban county are more likely to leave than their counterparts in a rural county because there are more job opportunities in a large labor market. Staff size in a child welfare agency is measured as the number of child welfare workers.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Descriptive results

Among 781 participants of caseworkers and supervisors from 25 counties in the State of New York, 766 respondents completed the

<sup>4</sup> Goodness of fit indices confirmed a relatively good fit for the indicators of organizational culture and climate. These indices are available upon request.

<sup>5</sup> The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for organizational culture as a whole, AIC, CSR, and ER are 0.89, 0.78, 0.74, and 0.70, respectively. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for organizational climate as a whole, RC, PA, EE, and WL are 0.87, 0.70, 0.72, 0.77, and 0.74, respectively.

question related to intention to leave, making them eligible for this study. Analytical tests run on the 766 cases included descriptive statistics to provide background information on the respondents. Findings are presented in Table 2 and primarily focus on control variables. Control variables are divided into two levels: individual and county-level characteristics. Individual-level variables include age, gender, race, whether he/she has a bachelor's degree in social work, whether he/she has a master's degree, whether he/she has a master's degree in social work, and annual salary. County-level variables include geographical location of county and the number of child welfare staffs in each county.

As shown in Table 1, the large majority of the respondents in the sample were female (81%) and Caucasian/White (85.5%). The average employee's age was 40.8. Eight percent of the total respondents held a bachelor's degree in social work (BSW), 22% held a master's degree, and only 6% (46 persons) obtained a master's degree in social work (MSW). Twenty-nine percent of respondents had an annual salary range from \$35,001 to \$40,000. About 70% of respondents worked in urban area, and almost 60% worked at the 25–100 (medium) child welfare staff size of county. About 63% of the 766 respondents indicated an intention to leave in the survey.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics.

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age ( <i>n</i> = 733)		
20–30	148	20.2
31–40	208	28.4
41–50	210	28.6
61–60	158	21.6
60+	9	1.2
Gender ( <i>n</i> = 757)		
Female	613	81
Male	144	19
Race ( <i>n</i> = 743)		
Black or African American	39	5.2
Hispanic/Latino	44	5.9
American Indian	1	0.1
Two or more races	11	1.5
Pacific Islander	1	0.1
Asian	3	0.4
Caucasian/White	635	85.5
Other	9	1.2
Bachelor's degree in social work ( <i>n</i> = 766)		
Yes	62	8.1
No	704	91.9
Master's degree ( <i>n</i> = 766)		
Yes	171	22.3
No	595	77.7
Master's degree in social work ( <i>n</i> = 766)		
Yes	46	6
No	720	94
Work experience in child welfare ( <i>n</i> = 727)		
0–2 years	125	17.2
2–5 years	138	19
5–10 years	159	21.9
more than 10 years	305	42
Annual salary ( <i>n</i> = 763)		
Less than 25,000	54	7.1
25,001–30,000	176	23.1
30,001–35,000	139	18.2
35,001–40,000	220	28.8
More than 45,000	174	22.8
Urban versus rural location ( <i>n</i> = 766)		
Metro	536	70
Rural	230	30
Staff size ( <i>n</i> = 766)		
Less than 25	90	11.7
25–100	456	59.5
more than 100	220	28.7
Intent to leave ( <i>n</i> = 766)		
Intent to leave	484	63.2
Not intent to leave	282	36.8

## 5.2. Empirical results

Logistic regression is employed to predict an employee's intention to leave using organizational culture and climate variables, after controlling for individual-level and county-level characteristics. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, to assess more precise influences of organizational culture and climate on an employee's intention to leave, Model 1 includes individual-level variables such as age, gender, race, salary, bachelor's degree in social work (BSW), master's degree, and master's degree in social work (MSW), while Model 2 includes county-level variables, such as geographical location of county and number of child welfare staffs, in addition to including the individual-level variables employed in Model 1.

Table 2 shows the empirical results using two aggregate organizational culture and climate variables in empirical estimation. Organizational culture is statistically significant and negative (in Model 1,  $t = 6.214$ ,  $p < .05$ ; in Model 2,  $t = 6.303$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This finding generally supports Glisson and his colleagues' studies about the effects of organizational culture on employee's work attitudes (Glisson, 2007; Glisson et al., 2006; Glisson & James, 2002). That is, in a positive organizational culture, employees appear to be encouraged to actively interact with co-workers and be engaged in activities that facilitate achievement, innovation, and competence. The finding also supports expectations that motivated and positive behaviors lead employees to cooperating with each other and achieve higher performance levels in their work.

Organizational climate is also statistically significant and negative (in Model 1,  $t = 11.088$ ,  $p < .01$ ; in Model 2,  $t = 10.440$ ,  $p < .01$ ). It supports the supposition that shared perceptions of co-workers in the same work environment influence employees' work attitudes and behaviors

**Table 2**  
Logistic regression: aggregate organizational culture and climate variables.

Dependent variable: employee's intention to leave	Model 1	Model 2
	Coefficient (Standard error)	Coefficient (Standard error)
Constant	9.674 (0.939)***	9.640 (0.945)***
Organizational characteristics		
Organizational culture	−0.028 (0.011)**	−0.028 (0.011)**
Organizational climate	−0.043 (0.013)***	−0.042 (0.013)***
Individual characteristics		
Age	−0.044 (0.009)***	−0.045 (0.009)***
Gender	−0.489 (0.229)**	−0.483 (0.229)**
Race	0.291 (0.257)	0.334 (0.284)
Salary	−0.264 (0.079)***	−0.241 (0.106)**
Master's degree	0.462 (0.254)*	0.461 (0.245)*
Master's degree in social work	−0.867 (0.423)**	−0.882 (0.425)**
Bachelor's degree in social work	−0.068 (0.316)	−0.064 (0.317)
County characteristics		
Geographical location		−0.174 (0.248)
Number of child welfare staff		0.000 (0.001)
<i>N</i>	719	719
$\chi^2$ -value	163.841	164.369
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.000	0.000
−2 Log likelihood	782.634	782.106
Cox and Snell $R^2$	0.204	0.204
Nagelkerke $R^2$	0.278	0.279

NOTE: \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* significant at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

**Table 3**  
Logistic regression: disaggregate organizational culture and climate variables.

Dependent variable: employee's intention to leave	Model 1	Model 2
	Coefficient	Coefficient
	(Standard error)	(Standard error)
Constant	8.927 (0.983)***	8.890 (0.988)***
Organizational culture		
Achievement/innovation/competence (AIC)	−0.027 (0.026)	−0.029 (0.027)
Cooperation/supportiveness/responsiveness (CSR)	0.001 (0.024)	0.002 (0.024)
Emphasis on rewards (ER)	−0.096 (0.032)***	−0.094 (0.032)***
Organizational climate		
Role clarity (RC)	−0.010 (0.033)	−0.010 (0.033)
Personal accomplishment (PA)	−0.046 (0.032)	−0.045 (0.032)
Emotional exhaustion (EE)	−0.161 (0.047)***	−0.160 (0.047)***
Workloads (WL)	−0.017 (0.021)	−0.016 (0.021)
Individual characteristics		
Age	−0.042 (0.009)***	−0.042 (0.009)***
Gender	−0.446 (0.234)*	−0.446 (0.234)*
Race	0.448 (0.265)*	0.490 (0.291)*
Salary	−0.203 (0.086)**	−0.202 (0.111)*
Master's degree	0.370 (0.250)	0.368 (0.251)
Master's degree in social work	−0.825 (0.425)	−0.840 (0.434)*
Bachelor's degree in social work	0.060 (0.323)	0.058 (0.323)
County characteristics		
Geographical location		−0.091 (0.259)
Number of child welfare staff		0.000 (0.001)
N	719	719
$\chi^2$ -value	181.019	181.223
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.000	0.000
−2 Log likelihood	765.457	765.252
Cox and Snell $R^2$	0.223	0.223
Nagelkerke $R^2$	0.304	0.304

NOTE: \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* significant at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

(Brown & Leigh, 1996; Glisson, 2007; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Glisson & James, 2002; Schneider et al., 2002; Schulte et al., 2006). That is, employees in a positive organizational climate have the following shared perceptions: (1) the organization supports their work; (2) they have a manageable workload; and (3) they have the ability to accomplish many worthwhile tasks in their current position.

Among the seven individual-level variables, the following five variables are statistically significant: age, gender, salary, master's degree, and master's degree in social work. No county-level variable is significant. Specifically, an employee's intention to leave decreases when the employee is getting older, when the employee is female, when the employee has high salary, or when the employee has a master's degree in social work. However, an employee's intention to leave increases when the employee has a master's degree.

Table 3 shows the empirical results using three organizational culture variables and four organizational climate variables in empirical estimation. More specifically, among the three variables in organizational culture, emphasis on rewards (ER) is a negative and statistically significant predictor of an employee's intention to leave (in Model 1,  $t=8.936$ ,  $p<.01$ ; in Model 2,  $t=8.454$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Correspondingly, among the four variables in organizational climate, emotional exhaustion (EE) is a negative and statistically significant predictor (in Model 1,  $t=11.468$ ,  $p<.01$ ; in Model 2,  $t=11.371$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Among the seven individual-level variables, the following five variables are statistically significant: age, gender, race, salary, and a master's degree in social work. No county-level variable is significant. Specifically, an employee's intention to leave decreases when the employee is getting older, when the employee is female, when the employee has high salary, or when the employee has a master's degree in social work. However, an employee's intention to leave increases, when the employee is Caucasian/White.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1. Discussion

Regression analyses performed in this study have shown that organizational culture and climate are significant predictors of an employee's intention to leave. Specifically, public child welfare employees with higher values of organizational culture and climate have less intention to leave than those with lower values. Among the three organizational culture variables, emphasis on rewards (ER) is statistically significant, implying that public child welfare employees with clearer and more effective incentives and rewards for job performance have less intention to leave than those with less clear and effective incentives and rewards. Among the four variables related to organizational climate, emotional exhaustion (EE) is statistically significant, implying employees with higher levels of emotional energy for their job report less intention to leave than those with less energy. The results are consistent with previous findings that factors associated with organizational culture and climate affect employee's work attitudes (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Glisson et al., 2006; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Glisson & James, 2002; Schneider et al., 2002; Schulte et al., 2006). The findings in this study also provide some guidance in improving our understanding of organizational factors that affect employee's work behaviors in child welfare agencies. By investigating organizational culture and climate variables defined in this study further, it may be possible to explain why employees in some organizations are more likely to have intent to leave their job than those in other organizations.

First, this study contributes to prior research by identifying those organizational factors that need to be addressed when attempting to reverse employee turnover trends in child welfare agencies. This study identified the commonalities among the most widely used quantitative instruments in measuring organizational culture and its impact: Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI), Organizational Culture Profile (OCP), and Organizational Social Context (OSC).

Second, this study helps understand our knowledge of organizational culture and climate in child welfare agencies. To examine the effects of different components of organizational culture and climate on an employee's intention to leave, organizational culture was disaggregated into achievement/innovation/competence (AIC), cooperation/supportiveness/responsiveness (CSR), and emphasis on rewards (ER), while organizational climate into role clarity (RC), personal accomplishment (PA), emotional exhaustion (EE), and workloads (WL).

Third, organizational culture and climate affect current employees' work behaviors as well as new employees' work attitudes in an organization. An organization's existing behavioral expectations and norms, as well as co-workers' perception of their work environment, guide how they behave within an organization and interact with their clients. Hofstede (1997, 1998) defines organizational culture as collective mental programs that distinguish the members of one organization from those of another group. Schein (1985, 1990) also suggests that behavioral norms and beliefs are expressed as observable

patterns of behavior within an organization. Thus, on the one hand, current employees are affected by behavioral expectations and norms and co-workers' perceptions of work environment, since they serve as formal and informal rules governing the socialization process and provide a mental guide for current employees. On the other hand, new workers in an organization are socialized and become members within an organization through existing behavioral expectations and norms, and through co-workers' perceptions of their work environment. Behavioral expectations and norms as well as patterns of shared perceptions would be readily influenced by the organization through the management strategies. So the organization might influence current and new workers with regard to how they think and behave, and what they perceive in relation to their work environment (Schein, 1985).

Fourth, organizational culture and climate in child welfare areas play important roles in delivering services and enhancing organizational capability, as organizational values have been popularly used to accomplish identified goals and desired organizational changes in business and for-profit organizations. Understanding the relationships between organizational culture and climate and employee's turnover may help administrators and managers see through their agencies and create a positive organizational culture and climate. In this way, child welfare agencies may be able to decrease employee's turnover and enhance organizational capability in achieving their organizational missions and goals through creating a positive organizational culture and climate.

Fifth, the findings in this study imply how organizational culture and climate should be improved to decrease an employee's intention to leave. When examining the effects of different components of organizational culture and climate on an employee's intention to leave, emphasis on rewards (ER) and emotional exhaustion (EE) appeared as significant determinants, suggesting that ER and EE are more important concepts than other organizational culture and climate components in understanding an employee's intention to leave in public child welfare agencies. Regarding ER, employees working in a positive organizational culture may work harder and in turn they receive rewards for a job well done. In performing their tasks, they are encouraged to actively interact with co-workers and are motivated to cooperate with each other and achieve higher performance levels in their work. Regarding EE, employees working in a positive organizational climate perceive their organization support for employees' emotional health. When employees have sufficient emotional energy for their job, they feel that they are able to accomplish many worthwhile things and their workloads are reasonable. Thus, child welfare agencies may be able to improve organizational culture and climate by supporting emphasis on rewards (ER) and reducing emotional exhaustion (EE) to decrease an employee's intention to leave. Administrators and managers in child welfare agencies influence the development of a positive organizational culture and climate through effectively managing crucial organizational factors such as strengthening reward systems and providing supervisory and practice supports which diminish employees' emotional exhaustion.

Child welfare employees are the frequent target of public criticism and their actions or failures are often subject to administrative sanctions or legal action (Glisson et al., 2006; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Glisson & James, 2002). In this respect, it seems really crucial that employees in child welfare organizations need to be appropriately rewarded and well taken care of by their agencies. Because organizations are comprised of a large number of people with various personalities and points of view, these employees will have a variety of reflections about how well the work environment of the organization functions. As a consequence, management strategies for organizational change conducive to creating a positive organizational culture and climate need to be based on understanding employees' individual perceptions of how they perceive about their organizational environment.

This study implies that public child welfare agencies are able to decrease employee's turnover through creating a positive organizational culture and climate. The findings suggest several strategies to construct a positive organizational culture, which include specifying clearer and more effective incentives, providing rewards for a job well done, recognizing high-performing employees, and encouraging employees to understand how their accomplishments can contribute to organizational goals. It is important that an agency recognizes employee's high performance and employees feel their contributions are valued, because reward systems are effective in motivating employees to behave in desired directions in an organization. In addition, to construct a positive organizational climate, child welfare administrators and managers should focus on how to reduce employees' emotional exhaustion. Some suggestions include providing opportunities for employees to discuss difficulties in doing their job, promoting communications throughout the organization, offering consultations for employees to address secondary trauma and other emotional issues that affect their work, and providing proper training and education programs for building highly qualified and competent workforce. By reducing employees' emotional exhaustion and strengthening their emotional energy, individual employees develop their coping skills and capacity, and child welfare agencies benefit from competent and qualified employees staying at their organization.

#### 6.2. Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the study explained the importance of organizational culture and climate associated with an employee's intention to leave, but it did not explain the causal link leading to an employee's actual job exit. The findings only imply that employees working in a negative organizational culture or climate are more likely to have an intention to leave. Second, this study has certain limitations in generalizing these findings to other states or other types of child welfare system. This study was conducted in 25 counties among the 62 counties in New York State. To improve generalizability, this type of research needs to be replicated in other states or randomized nationwide samples. Moreover, there are two types of child welfare systems across the nation: state-supervised county-operated child welfare system, and state run child welfare system. Since state government supervises and counties operate child welfare programs in the State of New York, it would be limited to apply the findings of this study to states which directly run child welfare programs.

The research findings were congruent with previous research in employee's work attitudes, organizational culture, and climate in the child welfare area. However, the findings from this study also suggest that future study needs to be done to look at an organization in more depth using additional measures. This study measured organizational culture and climate based on individual employee's perceptions of their child welfare agencies using survey items from the workforce retention study survey. However, self-reported data has limitations because some employees might hesitate about reporting negative perceptions of their work environment. Future research should include supplementary approaches, such as qualitative interviews and observations to provide additional insight into organizational culture and climate. This study included perceptions of front line supervisors and workers but it did not include perceptions of organizational leaders. Since Schein (1985) stressed the importance of leaders in creating an organizational culture, any future study needs to explore organizational culture and climate with different types of leadership in the child welfare system.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1**

Construction of organizational culture indices.

Organizational culture	Items
Achievement/innovation/competence (AIC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are clear measures of success and progress indicators for work with client.</li> <li>• My work uses client focused interventions.</li> <li>• There are “can do” attitude among co-workers.</li> <li>• My work uses helping strategies that work.</li> <li>• I have the support to make work-related decision when appropriate.</li> <li>• My professional opinions are respected in my agency.</li> <li>• My agency is committed to my personal safety in the office.</li> <li>• My agency is committed to my personal safety in the field.</li> <li>• The initial orientation to my job was adequate.</li> <li>• I am prepared for my job because of my prior training and education.</li> <li>• There is a good fit between training and the demands of my job.</li> </ul>
Cooperation/supportiveness/responsiveness (CSR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The work has the right level of challenge.</li> <li>• We have computer technologies that make the job easier and better.</li> <li>• I receive support and recognition from supervisor.</li> <li>• I receive support and recognition from co-workers.</li> <li>• I have a good relationship with my client.</li> <li>• Clients regularly succeed in reaching goals.</li> <li>• I receive support and recognition from clients.</li> <li>• My work offers opportunities to ensure the safety and well-being of client.</li> <li>• In my agency, there is more emphasis on the quality of the services than on the number of clients served.</li> <li>• The support staff in the agency is adequate.</li> <li>• The agency provides the resources I need to help families and children.</li> <li>• I have adequate legal support at my disposal.</li> <li>• The agency helps me to implement best practice.</li> <li>• Training provided by the agency is helpful to my work.</li> <li>• Training provided by the state is helpful to my work.</li> </ul>
Emphasis on rewards (ER)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are clear and effective incentives and rewards for a job well done.</li> <li>• There is a good fit between my personal life and work life.</li> <li>• There is a good fit between my family life and work life.</li> <li>• This job fits with my career goals.</li> <li>• The pay is sufficient.</li> <li>• The benefits are sufficient.</li> </ul>

**Table A2**

Construction of organizational climate indices.

Organizational climate	Items
Role clarity (RC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are clear job expectations and performance standards for my work.</li> <li>• Interviews for the agency give prospective workers an accurate picture of the work and the agency.</li> <li>• I am able to distinguish between local rules and state regulations.</li> <li>• Cases are assigned in a fair manner.</li> <li>• The agency's purpose is clear to me.</li> <li>• The work reflects the agency's purpose.</li> </ul>
Personal accomplishment (PA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In my work, I have a feeling of success and accomplishment.</li> <li>• My work offers opportunities to make a difference.</li> <li>• My work offers opportunities for improving knowledge and skills.</li> <li>• The agency is respected in my community.</li> <li>• When my co-workers are successful, I feel successful.</li> <li>• When outsiders attack my agency, I feel they are attacking me.</li> <li>• I would recommend my agency to others seeking employment in child welfare.</li> <li>• All in all, I feel good about what my agency does for children and families.</li> </ul>
Emotional exhaustion (EE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the whole, I have sufficient emotional energy for the job.</li> <li>• There is a good fit between my job and my personal health.</li> <li>• On the whole, I am able to do my job and not burnout.</li> </ul>
Workloads (WL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My work offers schedule flexibility.</li> <li>• On-call demands are reasonable.</li> <li>• The amount of paperwork is reasonable.</li> <li>• The computer systems used to track families are user friendly.</li> <li>• The computer systems make my work easier.</li> <li>• Uniform Case Records are helpful in day to day casework.</li> <li>• Uniform Case Records are helpful in my work with clients.</li> <li>• The workload is reasonable.</li> <li>• In the agency, work processes are efficient and streamlined.</li> </ul>

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