

CPS TRANSFORMATION EVALUATION: CASEWORKER EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Summary of Findings from the Evaluation of Caseworkers Without a Bachelor's Degree

Introduction

In May 2016, DFPS enacted a policy to expand the pool of potential caseworkers by changing hiring criteria to allow CPS to hire qualified candidates with relevant experience who have not completed a bachelor's degree. The agency began hiring individuals who had completed: 1) an associate's degree with at least two years of full-time relevant experience; 2) 60 hours toward a bachelor's degree with at least two years of full-time relevant experience; or 3) 90 hours toward a bachelor's degree with at least one year of full-time relevant experience. Between June 2016 and September 2017, DFPS hired 225 caseworkers without a bachelor's degree who met these criteria. Caseworkers with less than a four-year degree were hired in each DFPS region and each stage of service. Approximately half of caseworkers with less than a four-year degree were hired into investigations, 30 percent were hired into conservatorship, and 20 percent were hired into family-based safety services.

Overview of the Evaluation

DFPS contracted Dr. Cynthia Osborne and the Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin to conduct an implementation and outcomes evaluation of the change in hiring policy to examine whether variation in caseworker preparedness, retention, and quality is associated with educational background, specifically completion of a bachelor's degree. To address these research aims, CFRP developed and administered surveys, conducted focus groups, and assessed casework quality outcomes in DFPS administrative data.¹

Summary of Findings

Overall, CFRP finds that caseworkers hired without a bachelor's degree (no BA/BS) typically have considerable work experience at the time they are hired into the caseworker position, and most come to the position with several years or more of experience in the field of child welfare. Caseworkers hired without a BA/BS remained with the agency longer, on average, than

caseworkers hired with a bachelor's degree. Further, CFRP found no difference in casework quality between caseworkers without a BA/BS and caseworkers with a bachelor's degree, indicating that the change in hiring policy may lead to increased retention among CPS caseworkers with no negative influence on casework quality.²

Implementation Study Findings

Caseworkers without a bachelor's degree typically have substantial full-time work experience, and more than half have experience related to child welfare.

Most caseworkers hired without a bachelor's degree (no BA/BS) reported substantial prior work experience, with nearly two-thirds of caseworkers with no BA/BS reporting that they had at least ten years of full-time work experience at the time they were hired. Further, almost two-thirds of caseworkers with no BA/BS brought at least one year of full time experience in the field of child welfare, and 11 percent of caseworkers had worked their entire career in a position relevant to child welfare. Approximately 30 percent of caseworkers hired without a BA/BS previously worked for the agency in another capacity, such as in an administrative assistant or human services transporter role. Due to data limitations, CFRP was unable to assess how the relevant work experience of caseworkers hired with no BA/BS compares to caseworkers hired with a bachelor's degree. However, approximately 25 percent of new hires *with* a bachelor's degree were younger than 25 years old when they were hired and more than half were younger than 30, suggesting based on age that caseworkers hired with no BA/BS might have more full-time work experience than caseworkers hired with a bachelor's degree.

Outcomes Study Findings: Retention

Caseworkers without a bachelor's degree are 16 percent more likely than similar caseworkers with a bachelor's degree to remain in their job for at least one year.

CFRP compared the retention of 139 caseworkers hired into the agency without a four-year degree with a group of similar caseworkers hired during the same time period *with* a bachelor's degree.³ CFRP assessed caseworker retention for both groups from each individual caseworker's date of hire through one year of tenure.⁴

Out of the 139 caseworkers hired without a bachelor's degree between May 2016 and December 2016, nearly 85 percent were still with the agency after one year. Among similar caseworkers with a bachelor's degree only 73 percent were still with the agency one year after their hire date, indicating that caseworkers without a bachelor's were more likely than their counterparts with a bachelor's degree to remain with the agency for at least one year of employment.

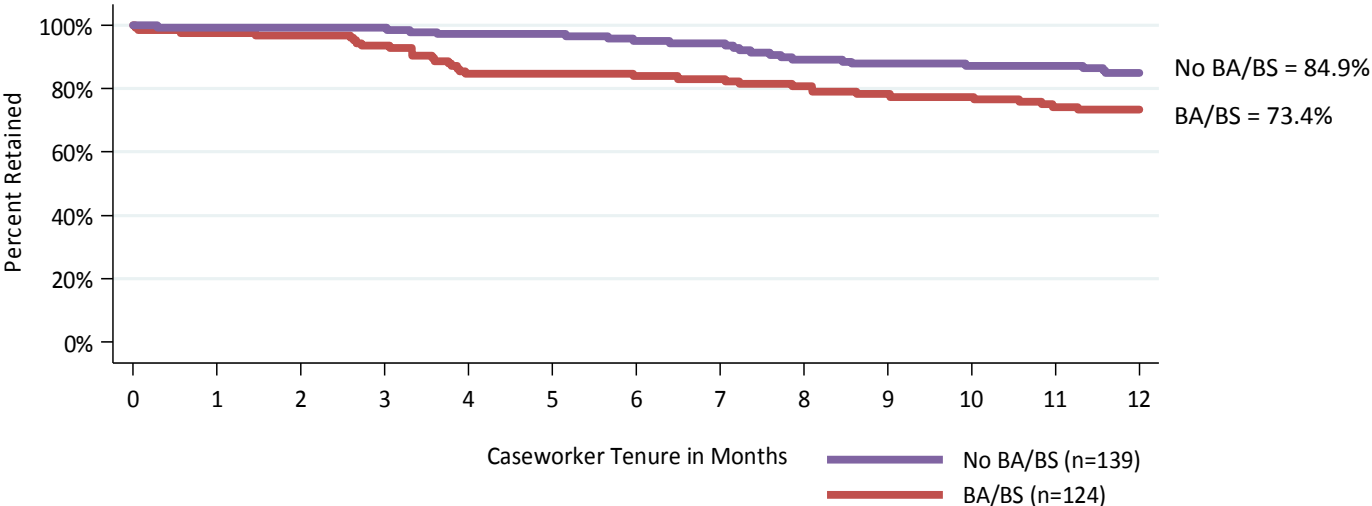
The differences in retention are illustrated in Figure 1, which presents survival curves representing the probability that a caseworker will still be employed with DFPS at every point over her first year of employment, based on educational background. As shown in Figure 1, a

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wedge between the two groups of caseworkers begins shortly after they are hired. The difference in retention between caseworker education groups is statistically significant beginning at three months of tenure, and at one year, caseworkers without a BA/BS were 16 percent more likely than caseworkers with a bachelor’s degree to still be working with the agency as a caseworker.⁵

Figure 1: 12-Month Survival Analysis of Caseworkers with and Without a BA/BS (n=263)



Source: CAPPS data and caseworker education tracking log data provided by DFPS current through December 31, 2017. Note: Sample is limited to caseworkers first hired between June 2016 and January 2017.

In line with increased retention among caseworkers without a BA/BS, caseworkers without a BA/BS degree were more likely to report on CFRP’s surveys that they are very satisfied with their job. Fifty-six percent of caseworkers hired without a BA/BS reported on CFRP’s survey that they were very satisfied with their job compared to 43 percent of caseworkers with a bachelor’s degree.⁶ Similarly, caseworkers with no BA/BS were more likely to report that they plan to remain with the agency for at least two years.⁷

Outcomes Study Findings: Casework Quality

To compare the performance of caseworkers hired without a bachelor’s degree with their degreed counterparts, CFRP worked with the agency to select casework quality measures for each stage of service (investigations, conservatorship, and family-based safety services) that meaningfully assess casework quality. For the following measures, CFRP calculated the average success rate among caseworkers hired into the caseworker position with and without a bachelor’s degree, during the period from their hire date through one year of tenure:

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1. Timely Attempted Initial Contact (Investigations): Proportion of investigations for which the caseworker attempted initial contact with a parent or child on the case within 24 hours for Priority 1 (P1) investigations or 72 hours for Priority 2 (P2) investigations⁸
2. Successful Timely Initial Contact (Investigations): Proportion of investigations for which the caseworker successfully made a face-to-face initial contact with a parent or child on the case within 24 hours for P1 investigations or 72 hours for P2 investigations
3. Timely Investigations Closure (Investigations): Proportion of investigations closed within 45 days of the investigations stage opening⁹
4. Monthly Face-to-Face Contact (Conservatorship): Proportion of children with a required face-to-face visit for which the caseworker completed a face-to-face visit with the child.¹⁰
5. Timely Initial Contact (Family-Based Safety Services): Proportion of cases for which the caseworker successfully made a face-to-face contact with at least one parent or child on the stage within 10 days of the FBSS stage opening¹¹
6. Monthly Face-to-Face Contact (Family-Based Safety Services): Proportion of cases with a required face-to-face visit for which the caseworker completed a face-to-face visit with at least one parent or child on the stage¹²

Across stages of service, CPS caseworkers hired without a bachelor’s degree performed similarly to caseworkers with a bachelor’s degree

Across each of the casework quality measures, caseworkers without a BA/BS performed similarly to caseworkers with a bachelor’s degree. Investigators with no BA/BS documented attempts to see a principal face-to-face on a new investigation in a timely manner, documented successful initial face-to-face contacts, and closed investigations within 45 days at the same rate as caseworkers with a bachelor’s degree. Conservatorship caseworkers with and without a bachelor’s degree completed monthly face-to-face visits at the same rate. Similarly, FBSS caseworkers without a BA/BS completed timely initial contacts and monthly face-to-face visits at the same rate as FBSS workers with a four-year degree.¹³ Findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Average Completion Rate of Casework Quality Measures by Education Group

	No BA/BS Caseworkers	BA/BS Caseworkers	Significant Difference?
Attempted Initial Contact (n=191)	98.2%	98.3%	No
Successful Initial Contact (n=191)	93.3%	93.8%	No
Timely Investigation Closure (n=188)	51.9%	53.9%	No
Completion of CVS Face-to-Face (n=99)	97.1%	98.3%	No
FBSS Timely Initial Contact (n=44)	87.6%	82.4%	No
Completion of FBSS Face-to-Face (n=69)	97.2%	98.4%	No

Source: CAPPS data and Education Tracking Log data provided by DFPS current through December 31, 2017.

Conclusions

Caseworkers without a BA/BS were, on average, more likely to stay with the agency for at least one year, which directly contributes to workforce stability within the agency. Caseworkers who leave DFPS impact the continuity of care for children and families. Service disruption occurs directly for families on the terminating caseworker's caseload, and indirectly for families on the caseloads of other caseworkers in the terminating caseworker's unit, through increased workload demands while the position is vacant. Because of the resources required to train caseworkers, caseworkers who leave the agency during their first year are particularly costly to replace relative to their service to the agency.

Although there are many factors that contribute to a high-quality caseworker and workforce that were not measured in this evaluation, CFRP found no differences in caseworker quality based on education level across the selected casework quality measures, indicating that caseworkers hired without a bachelor's degree are meeting selected casework practice standards at the same rate as caseworkers with a higher level of education.

The primary goal of the Caseworker Educational Background Evaluation was to assess whether hiring caseworkers without a BA/BS contributes to the quality and stability of the CPS workforce. Caseworkers without a bachelor's degree during the evaluation timeframe brought substantive fulltime work experience, as well substantial experience related to child welfare, remained with the agency longer than their counterparts with a four-year degree, and performed similarly on key casework quality measures, indicating that caseworkers hired without a BA/BS contribute to agency quality and stability.

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The Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) is an independent, nonpartisan research group at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin, specializing in issues related to young children, teens, and their parents. We engage in rigorous research and evaluation work aimed at strengthening families and enhancing public policy.

¹ See CFRP's Caseworker Educational Background Methodological Summary for complete details.

² For full results, please see CFRP's December 2017 interim results presentation and June 2018 final presentation to the agency.

³ To create a sample of similar caseworkers, or comparison caseworkers, for each caseworker hired without a bachelor's degree, CFRP selected the caseworker hired nearest to the focal caseworker in the same unit. If no caseworker in the same unit was available, CFRP selected the worker with the hire date closest to the focal worker in the same stage of service and region. If two caseworkers were hired into the focal worker's unit on the same day, both were selected.

⁴ The workforce stability sample of caseworkers is smaller than the full group of caseworkers hired under the new policy because some caseworkers were hired too recently for CFRP to assess a full year of retention.

⁵ Differences in retention by caseworker educational background persist when controlling for differences in region, stage of service, and gender

⁶ The difference in caseworker satisfaction is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

⁷ Eighty-nine percent of no BA/BS caseworkers planned to remain with the agency for at least two years, compared to 82 percent for caseworkers with a bachelor's degree.

⁸ CPS Handbook 2243.1

⁹ CPS Handbook 2292

¹⁰ CPS Handbook 6411.2

¹¹ CPS Handbook 2530

¹² CPS Handbook 2530

¹³ CFRP controlled for mean caseload, region of hire, age at hire, tenure, and whether the caseworker reached 12 months of tenure prior to terminating when comparing casework quality by education group.