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How Relevant is the Role of Values in Child Protection Practice? A National Survey of Statutory Child Protection Staff 2009

Preliminary Findings

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1 Background and Overview

A survey of those working in Australian statutory child protection authorities was undertaken by the Australian Catholic University as part of a larger project at the Australian National University: Community Capacity Building in Child Protection (<http://ccb.anu.edu.au>). The purpose of the project is to explore new ways for supporting families and young people so that they can develop the skills, confidence and resources they need to flourish without continuing intervention from the state. Child protection authorities are expected and do intervene when they have reason to believe children are unsafe or neglected. Too often, however, the outcome is that these families stay in the system instead of developing capacity to move on with their lives free of state intervention. The survey described in this paper represents one part of the project: the views of those who work at the heart of the system in statutory child protection agencies. The survey was funded through an Australian Research Council Linkage grant (LP0669230).

This report is based on survey responses from 859 public service employees working in a statutory child protection context in eight offices in Australia's states and territories. Child protection staff in each of these offices were invited to log on to a web survey set up by the Australian Catholic University. The invitation was sent to a senior official in each state and territory and was circulated to staff by a designated officer. The survey comprised 100 questions about the values that child protection workers held and practiced, the beliefs that guided their practice, the supportiveness of their work environment, their overall satisfaction with their jobs and their intention to remain in their jobs in the immediate future.

Participants were introduced to the idea of values in the following way. Values relate to the principles, goals and ways of doing things that people use to make judgments about what is happening in their world. Values are part of the professional code of conduct of individuals. They are also part of the policies and procedures of organizations, reflected in organizational mission and vision statements.

We know little about how well the expression of values that are embedded in professional codes of conduct mesh with the expression of organizational values through rules and procedures. This survey explores this issue through asking those employed in statutory child protection agencies what they think of their organization's values, how they describe their own values, professionally and personally, and how they practice their values in their day to day work.

2 Survey

2.1 Methodology

A self report web survey methodology was utilised for this study. The survey ran from March to October 2009. A total of 100 statements/questions made up the survey. Mostly participants were required to rate statements or respond to questions on a rating scale. For some questions, participants had to write one or two word answers or select categories that best described their

situation. Five questions were open-ended, requiring participants to express a point of view on their own values and what they would like to change about child protection practice.

This is a companion survey to the Australian National University's survey of third parties (Ivec, Braithwaite & Reinhart, 2011). Third parties are people from government or non-government organizations who engage with child protection authorities around issues of child safety and well-being. Third parties come from a number of fields including education, health, and law and justice.

2.2 Participants

Survey participants ranged from frontline child protection workers to child protection managers. Participants responded from each state and territory across Australia. A final sample of 859 provided a good cross section of employees across states, age groups, and years experience in child protection.

2.3 Description of sample in terms of social-demographic variables

Those who completed the survey were predominantly female (85%). Survey participants' ages ranged from 20 to 70 years with a mean age of 39 years (median 37 years). 86% of the sample had a tertiary degree, mostly in social work (48%) or human sciences (32%). Participants in this survey had worked in child protection for varying lengths of time, ranging from less than a year through to 37 years. The average number of years spent working in child protection was 7, with a median of 5 years.

Most statutory child protection employees who participated in the survey were born in Australia (79%), obtained their qualifications in Australia (92%) and spoke English only (92%). Only 4% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, a low percentage given the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families involved with the child protection system. 59% of participants were front-line case workers. 89% were working full-time. All states and territories were represented in the sample, though not necessarily proportionally: New South Wales (33%); Western Australia (17%); Victoria (16%); Queensland (11%); South Australia (9%); Australian Capital Territory (7%); Tasmania (4%) and Northern Territory (3%).

It is impossible to gauge how representative this sample is of the population of employees working in a statutory child protection context. It may be of some interest, however, to compare this sample with those who responded to the third party survey conducted around the same time by the team at the Australian National University (Ivec et al., 2011). Third party respondents tended to be slightly older on average (44 years), had worked in the field for longer (median 10 years), and while also well-educated, were somewhat less likely to hold a tertiary degree (70% held degrees). The third party sample had a higher proportion of men (21%), and the representation of third parties with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background was higher (7%).

3 **Headline Results**

3.1 **Values in statutory child protection work**

3.1.1 **Professional beliefs and values**

Participants were presented with 28 statements that represented the beliefs and values that child protection workers were likely to bring to their work situation. These beliefs and values could be interpreted as principles guiding and justifying judgments and actions. 19 of the 28 belief and value statements could be grouped into clusters called value orientations. These groupings were identified through principal components analysis. The orientations were: (a) Inclusion and empowerment of the family of the child in working toward a solution; (b) Commitment to continuous improvement in one’s professional practice; (c) Attention to ensuring that the rights of families and the rights of the child are protected and respected. Endorsement rates for individual value and belief statements belonging to each orientation are described below:

Table 3.1

| Items for <i>inclusion and empowerment of family</i> | Percent ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ |
|---|--|
| Parents should be involved in making decisions about their children in the child protection context | 94 |
| Parents should be given a chance to make changes that show they are good parents | 96 |
| Negotiation and compromise are effective when working with families in child protection | 77 |
| Parents should always participate in case plans for their children | 81 |
| Children should have a say in decisions that affect them | 95 |
| The support of the family is critically important in child protection | 90 |
| Only by understanding a parent’s perspective can workers be effective | 54 |

These findings are significant in so far as they show broad acceptance of the ideas of empowerment and giving voice to parents and children. Less consensus surrounds issues associated with putting a philosophy of empowerment into practice. Endorsement rates fall to just over three quarters of participants at the suggestion that negotiation and compromise might be called for. Endorsement falls to just over half with the idea that in order to effect change, a worker has to understand the perspective of parents. Perhaps there is ambiguity in the minds of participants that understanding another’s perspective might mean agreeing with that perspective. Even so, the finding that only half could see value in this statement raises questions of how well equipped workers are to practice in an inclusive and empowering way. An inability to empathize may do little to generate a relationship of mutual respect and trust between the government worker and the family, both of which are necessary to build capacity through empowerment (see Ivec et al., forthcoming for examples).

Table 3.2

| Items for <i>continuous improvement in professional practice</i> | Percent 'very important' or 'most important' |
|---|---|
| Use supervision to talk about what you do and why | 86 |
| Consult with colleagues when unsure of what to do | 92 |
| Work with other professions to improve practice | 88 |
| Update knowledge and develop skills | 92 |
| Accept responsibility for your own practice | 94 |

These findings show that the participants shared a strong commitment to professional improvement through accepting responsibility for their own conduct. At the same time, there was convergence on the view that improvement came through asking for and listening to the advice and learnings of others. Statutory child protection workers place great importance on the knowledge/support infrastructure that they provide for each other.

Table 3.3

| Items for <i>protecting and respecting the rights of families and children</i> | Percent 'very important' or 'most important' |
|---|---|
| Protect the moral and legal rights of families | 76 |
| Act as a child advocate | 95 |
| Act without prejudice towards families | 94 |
| Safeguard a family's rights to privacy and confidentiality | 75 |
| Engage in practice guided by principles of respect and human dignity | 96 |
| Understand the values of families that you work with | 84 |
| Adapt your ways of working to align with the values of families | 52 |
| Take personal responsibility to ensure families are treated in an ethical manner | 82 |

Participants strongly supported the protection of rights of children, the importance of treating families with respect and dignity, and of acting without prejudice. There was less consensus around safeguarding families' privacy and confidentiality with only three quarters of participants regarding such standards as very or most important. Only half of participants agreed to their adapting ways of working to align with the values of families.

3.1.2 Principles of regulation in child protection

Principles of regulation refer to the shared beliefs within statutory child protection agencies for how authorities might get people to comply. Using the term ‘regulation’ in this context implies that the Australian community believes that government has a responsibility for protecting children. In a preliminary set of questions, participants from statutory authorities were asked: How much responsibility does government have for the safety of children and the well-being of children? The majority selected the category ‘a great deal’ (52% for safety and 51% for well-being). When the question was asked in relation to the responsibility of parents, the majority said ‘total responsibility’ (57% for safety and 56% for well-being) followed by ‘a great deal’ (42% for safety and 43% for well-being). Government is seen to have a role, but not ahead of parents. A description of how responsibility was allocated for different groups across the two upper response categories is provided below.

Table 3.4

| Responsibility for children | A great deal | Total responsibility |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>How much responsibility for safety of children?</i> | | |
| Parents | 42 | 57 |
| Extended family | 65 | 8 |
| Local community | 46 | 4 |
| Government | 52 | 8 |
| Society | 48 | 8 |
| <i>How much responsibility for wellbeing of children?</i> | | |
| Parents | 43 | 56 |
| Extended family | 63 | 9 |
| Local community | 47 | 5 |
| Government | 51 | 7 |
| Society | 49 | 7 |

These results show that statutory child protection staff regard the safety and well-being of children to be a shared responsibility across the community. While recognizing parents as most responsible, they put themselves on a par with extended family. As such, they accept a role as regulators, as people who influence the flow of events in children’s lives when concerns are raised about their safety and well-being.

In order to gauge how statutory child protection workers approached their regulatory responsibility, participants were presented with 19 statements and were asked to indicate their level of disagreement or agreement with each one. These statements have been used previously to represent styles of regulating individuals and groups. Styles of regulation can be broadly grouped as punitive and/or controlling and as rehabilitative and/or enabling. The popularity of these styles among statutory child protection staff is reflected in the percent agreeing or strongly agreeing with each of the statements below. The statements were grouped around 5 themes: (a) persuasion and education to win compliance; (b) firm legally based action to win compliance; (c) the discretionary use of law to win compliance; (d) belief in punitive just desserts; and (e) belief in good intentions from families.

Table 3.5

| Items for <i>persuasive and educative regulatory style</i> | Percent 'agree' or 'strongly agree' |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| It is better to try to persuade families to do the right thing voluntarily even at the risk of being considered 'soft' | 60 |
| It is best for child protection authorities to obtain compliance through advice and encouragement rather than taking legal action | 74 |
| Child protection authorities who rely on their legal authority are less effective than those who rely on persuasion | 24 |

The majority of participants supported persuasion, education and encouragement but it is of note that endorsement rates are not as high for this regulatory approach as for the professional values discussed earlier. There also appears to be some ambivalence when the law is mentioned.

Such ambivalence becomes more evident when responses to items proposing a firm legally based regulatory style are examined (see below). The percent considering legal intervention as a necessary condition for change is small. A sizeable minority (just under half) held the view that the law gave statutory workers legitimacy and credibility.

Table 3.6

| Items for a <i>firm legally based regulatory style</i> | Percent 'agree' or 'strongly agree' |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Without the power to take legal action families would ignore a child protection practitioner's requests for them to meet parenting expectations | 43 |
| It is better to be a tough enforcer of the legislation, even at the risk of being considered punitive | 8 |
| In order to change the behaviour of people who break the law, a child protection authority has to legally intervene | 14 |

The strongest evidence of ambivalence to law was found in the items suggesting that there should be some discretion in applying law: Law should not get in the way of finding compromises that will facilitate better outcomes. While this was the view of the majority, it was not an overwhelming majority. It appears that statutory child protection workers have different views about what is necessary to produce effective outcomes.

Table 3.7

| Items for <i>regulating with the discretionary use of law</i> | Percent 'agree' or 'strongly agree' |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Child protection authorities should use common sense by applying the legislation in a way that is not dogmatic or legalistic | 71 |
| It is desirable for child protection authorities to use discretion in their administration of the legislation where permitted | 60 |
| Relationships between child protection authorities and clients can produce effective outcomes when there is negotiation, accommodation and compromise on both sides | 89 |

Regulatory styles are associated with the beliefs that are held about human beings, what they are capable of doing and how they should be treated (Braithwaite, 2000). One set of items was included to measure attitudes of punitiveness toward those who harm children. Another set of items was included to measure belief in families that they try to do the right thing. The findings below show very little support for punitiveness. By the same token, belief in the good intentions of families divided participants down the middle. It is reasonable to conclude that participants did not share a philosophy of believing that families had the will and capacity to make things work well for children.

Table 3.8

| Items for a <i>belief in punitive just deserts</i> | Percent ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ |
|--|--|
| People who harm their children are not going to cooperate with a child protection authority unless they are forced to | 8 |
| People who harm their children don’t deserve ‘kindness’ from a regulatory agency | 3 |
| It is not a good idea for a child protection authority to offer assistance to people who have done the wrong thing and harmed their children | 1 |
| A child protection authority can’t afford to show compassion or sympathy towards those they regulate | 2 |

Table 3.9

| Items for <i>belief in the good intentions of parents</i> | Percent ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ |
|--|--|
| Most of the time child protection authorities are dealing with families who want to do the right thing | 52 |
| Families usually try to do what child protection authorities ask of them | 45 |

In summary, participants favoured persuasion, providing help and support over strategies that would incapacitate and punish families. At the same time, the role and need for law appears to divide the group. These data suggest that statutory child protection workers work in a context where there is tension between how law sits alongside and meshes with professional obligations. Moreover, participants are divided about families and their capacity to change without the control made possible through law.

3.2 Personal values

Participants were asked about two kinds of personal values: ‘inner harmony and personal development’ represented by 6 items and ‘social standing and getting ahead’ represented by 5 items (Braithwaite & Law, 1985). Participants indicated how important these values were to them as guiding principles in their lives. The table below shows the percent endorsing the two upper response categories of ‘very important’ and ‘of the greatest importance’.

Table 3.10

| Personal Values | Percent 'of greatest importance' or 'very important' |
|--|--|
| <i>Inner harmony and equality</i> | |
| Self-knowledge or self-insight (being aware of what sort of person you are) | 81 |
| Inner harmony (feeling free of conflict within yourself) | 41 |
| Self-improvement (striving to be a better person) | 69 |
| Wisdom (having a mature understanding of life) | 62 |
| Self-respect (believing in your own worth) | 73 |
| The pursuit of knowledge (always trying to find out new things about the world we live in) | 71 |
| <i>Social standing and getting ahead</i> | |
| Recognition by the community (having a high standing in the community) | 16 |
| Economic prosperity (being financially well-off) | 10 |
| Authority (having power to influence others and control decisions) | 8 |
| Ambitious (eager to do well) | 26 |
| Competitive (always trying to do/be better than others) | 4 |

These findings show that participants were strongly driven by personal development goals and a humanistic world view. There was considerably less commitment to achieving power, control and a competitive advantage over others within this sample of participants.

In an additional question, participants were asked about the degree to which they could engage their values in their every day work. 54% replied 'always' and a further 34% responded 'most times', suggesting that for 88% of the participants, value engagement in work was possible for the most part.

An open-ended question approached value engagement in the workplace from a different angle. Respondents were asked to volunteer at least three values that were important in their work.

For the purposes of this paper, a sub-sample of 144 respondents was selected from the whole sample of 859 to develop a coding frame for the qualitative data. The findings from the coding of this subset of the sample are provided in this report. A reliability analysis was conducted to check the validity of the coding for the open-ended responses in this section and following sections. A second person coded the responses blind, using the categories developed by the research team. Agreement was virtually 100 per cent with a 0.007 per cent discrepancy. All differences were satisfactorily resolved upon discussion, leading to the conclusion that the coding categories were satisfactory. Future research will investigate spontaneously mentioned values in more detail.

Responses to the question, "What values are important in your work?" were coded into 16 value categories described in the table below. The number of respondents mentioning values belonging to each category appears in the column on the right. The qualitative data supported the quantitative data. The values mentioned most frequently involved relational skills – being respectful, caring, understanding, honest, open, empathic, and practicing with professional integrity.

Table 3.11

| Value codes for answers to the question, “What values are important in your work?” | No. participants mentioning this value (n=144) |
|--|---|
| Showing social and interpersonal skills (respectful, non-judgmental, care-oriented) / understanding diversity (including cultural diversity) | 82 |
| Transparency/honesty/accountability/openness | 72 |
| Showing compassion and empathy /trust in families | 37 |
| Integrity in professional role? | 34 |
| Acting in accordance with children’s and human rights | 24 |
| Professional skills/making good assessments/knowledge based | 24 |
| Child centred | 21 |
| Acting with consistency and fairness/impartiality | 20 |
| Seeing strengths and being positive/encouraging strengths and change for better | 16 |
| Probity and propriety (politeness), acting ethically, being treated according to one’s position | 15 |
| Commitment to achieve outcomes | 12 |
| Valuing teams by being supportive | 11 |
| Professionalism | 10 |
| Being responsive/showing flexibility/imaginative in problem solving | 9 |
| Partnerships with family (treat family as an equal in trying to resolve difficulties) | 8 |
| Valuing teams by sharing knowledge | 5 |

3.3 Culture of organizational support

Table 3.12

| Does your employer do the following for you? | Percent ‘always’ or ‘most times’ |
|--|---|
| Value you as a child protection practitioner | 57 |
| Discuss organizational values with you and your colleagues | 35 |
| Trust you to act on your professional judgment | 77 |
| Back you when you make a difficult decision | 71 |
| Provide constructive feedback to help you do your job better | 51 |
| Support you when things get tough | 53 |
| Share the burdens that can be experienced as a child protection practitioner | 46 |

Over 70% of participants reported that their employers trusted their professional judgment and backed their difficult decisions. Only just over half, however, felt valued as a child protection practitioner, felt supported when things got tough and received constructive feedback to help do the job better. These data suggest that many child protection staff felt there were limited organisational supports that were integral to their sense of best practice, articulated earlier through their professional values. It is of note that less than half saw the

organization sharing the burdens of staff and only just over a third were exposed to discussions of the organization's values.

3.4 Satisfaction and retention

3.4.1 The quantitative data

Three questions were used to assess staff's level of engagement with their work. Participants responded in terms of their satisfaction with the job, level of stress and intention to remain in their current job.

Table 3.13

| Overall how satisfied are you in your current job? | Percent |
|---|----------------|
| Very satisfied | 16 |
| Satisfied | 53 |
| Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | 15 |
| Dissatisfied | 12 |
| Very dissatisfied | 4 |

Table 3.14

| Please indicate the level of stress you feel in your job. | Percent |
|--|----------------|
| Level 1 = no stress | 2 |
| Level 2 | 13 |
| Level 3 | 30 |
| Level 4 | 40 |
| Level 5 = extreme stress | 14 |

Table 3.15

| How long are you planning to stay in your current job? | Percent |
|---|----------------|
| Indefinitely | 56 |
| More than 18 months, less than 2 years | 14 |
| More than 12 months, less than 18 months | 9 |
| More than 6 months, less than 12 months | 9 |
| 6 months or less | 12 |

These data show that most participants obtained satisfaction out of their job (69%), although most also reported experiencing levels of stress that were on the high side (54% scored above the midpoint of the scale). The majority reported that they would stay in their jobs indefinitely (56%).

While the majority were positive about their work, it is important to note that a substantial minority (31%) were not positive. These results support concerns that have emerged in the care and protection sector about attrition and difficulty in retention of staff. Most statutory agencies would prefer to see stronger commitment to staying on given the specialized nature of the work and the costs of turnover to the government. To express the findings in another way, knowing that 44% of participants are expecting to have moved on in 2 years (even after taking account of the fact that some of this group will be planned retirements) poses challenges to child protection agencies in terms of recruitment and training.

3.4.2 The qualitative data

The next four tables summarise the qualitative data collected. Again, the analysis is based on 144 respondents whose written replies were coded by two independent researchers.

In Table 3.16, 43 of these 144 respondents chose to answer this particular question. Those who were not planning a departure more than likely had nothing to say in response to this particular question. For the other questions regarding what they liked about their work and how things might be improved, all respondents provided a written answer. This high response rate in itself was impressive, suggesting strong interest and concern among child protection staff about their work.

Table 3.16

| If you are planning to leave your current job what is the one thing that would need to change to encourage you to stay? | No. participants addressing issue (n=43) |
|--|---|
| external incentives - promotion/better pay/permanency | 13 |
| solve problem of overwork/caseload/type of work | 11 |
| personal development incentives - feel more challenged/skill development | 10 |
| better support from management | 10 |
| to be able to help more people/more resources for families | 9 |
| nothing | 8 |
| having status/being recognised for knowledge/expertise | 7 |
| improved organisational culture | 5 |
| other/maternity leave | 1 |
| not leaving | 1 |

Work conditions that Herzberg (1959) referred to as hygiene factors (for example, hours, salary, security, relationship with boss) topped the list. Hygiene factors are associated in Herzberg's model with job dissatisfaction. Some of Herzberg's motivators – those factors that lead to job satisfaction as opposed to dissatisfaction, such as challenging work, responsibility, satisfaction from the work itself, achievement and growth, also appear on the list, suggesting that planning on leaving their current job was a mixture of not being provided with the basics (hygiene) as well as not being provided with opportunity to grow and extend themselves (motivators).

Table 3.17

| What do you like about how child protection agencies operate? | No. participants addressing issue (n=144) |
|---|--|
| value children's safety/rights/child-focussed | 59 |
| supervision/support/teamwork/committed people/training and development/conditions/type of work | 36 |
| being a leader in change - introduce innovation/collaboration/aim for service improvement/share info/use initiative/flexibility/work collaboratively with | 35 |

| | |
|---|----|
| other services/multi-disciplinary approach | |
| working with families/staff committed to families | 34 |
| work within legislation/procedures/guidelines | 24 |
| accountability/transparency | 6 |
| professionalism/integrity of workers | 4 |
| access to resources | 3 |
| new/can't say much | 3 |
| nothing/not much | 2 |

The positives for respondents were very much about helping children, followed by camaraderie with colleagues, management and helping families. While not the highest category, there was nevertheless satisfaction gained through working with legislation, an interesting finding given the tensions between social work professionalism and legal obligations that were commented upon in earlier questions.

Table 3.18

| Are there any changes you would like to see child protection agencies make in the way they operate? | No. participants addressing issue (n=144) |
|--|--|
| improved recruitment & retention strategies/access to resources/training for teams | 60 |
| improve/change practice/ improve knowledge base | 47 |
| more time/resourcing for intervention with families & children | 42 |
| to be listened to/supported/understood by leaders in & out of the organisation | 33 |
| improved collaboration | 23 |
| improvement to act in the best interest of the child | 21 |
| greater transparency/accountability/honesty | 15 |
| not so much procedural/legal focus | 12 |
| more consistency across offices | 7 |
| nothing/on the right track/unsure | 5 |
| change top-down approach | 4 |
| more caring, compassionate | 4 |
| yes/everything | 2 |

Child protection staff identified the need to improve the recruitment and training of staff, resources available in their work, capacity to act in the child's interest, and support from management. Some practitioners also stated the need to increase their collaboration with other groups involved in child protection matters.

Table 3.19

| Are there any other comments you would like to make? | No. participants addressing issue (n=50) |
|--|---|
| more organisational support required/supervision/staff development | 14 |
| lack of care/respect/value of workers by organisation & society | 10 |
| value differences/standards of practice | 10 |
| not able to work sufficiently with families/more help for families needed/social responsibility for children | 9 |
| questionnaire/research | 6 |
| improved work conditions needed | 5 |
| experience support in my work/like my work | 5 |
| process/paperwork focussed | 3 |
| more legislation required | 3 |
| positive changes within the organisation | 2 |

The qualitative data tell a story of statutory child protection employees wanting support, recognition and respect for the work they do, along with resources and training to improve their skills and build their capacity. The majority believed they were able to show relationship building skills and valued transparency, openness and honesty in their work. Importantly, they believed in what they were doing and were committed to children's safety.

4 What Contributes to Commitment to the Job?

4.1 How are values related to job satisfaction and retention?

An important question arising from these data and facing managers in child protection agencies is what needs to be done to improve levels of job satisfaction and to retain staff. This question is a bigger one than can be answered through this project alone. Future research might address conditions of employment, training, recruitment, and job descriptions as part of improving satisfaction and retention.

This project provides some preliminary insights through addressing the issue of satisfaction and retention at the level of values fit. A substantial body of research examines job satisfaction and staff retention in terms of the values fit between people and organizations. The argument that emerges from this work is that if employees express values that are in line with those of the organization, they will feel as if they belong and will express greater satisfaction and commitment to the organization. On the other hand, if employees operate under a set of values that are at odds with the organization, it is likely that they will feel as if they don't belong. The organization may not be supportive of values that do not correspond with those of the organization.

In this project, we do not have data on the values of the organization as well as the values of individuals working in them so it is not possible to do an analysis that examines person-environment fit at the values level. We do have data, however, on the values and approaches to child protection work of individual employees, on the support they perceive themselves receiving from the organization, and on their satisfaction and commitment to remain in their jobs. This means that these data can be used to ask questions around whether particular kinds of values of employees are related to satisfaction and staff retention across the organization.

Two broad categories of values are examined. First are values associated with the professional practice of social work – empowerment, best practice and respect for rights. Second are personal values that facilitate one's engagement with organizations either through finding satisfaction through internal rewards associated with learning and contributing to worthwhile tasks or through rewards that are external related to promotion and recognition of job success. Specifically, the questions are:

1: Do employees who express support for *professional values* that are in accord with social work training show greater commitment (in the form of satisfaction and retention) to their jobs than those who do not express such support?

2: Do employees who feel a strong allegiance to personal values of *inner harmony and personal development* and *social standing and getting ahead* show greater commitment (in the form of satisfaction and retention) to their jobs than those who do not express such values?

3: Do employees who feel that the organization allows them to *practice their values* show greater commitment (in the form of satisfaction and retention) to their jobs than those who feel that they use their values in the work less than they would like?

4: Do employees who feel that the organization provides *support* for them in their work show greater commitment (in the form of satisfaction and retention) to their jobs than those who experience less organizational support?

This last question allows us to tease apart the effect of a person's values (questions 1,2,3) and the effect of organizational support (question 4) on job commitment. It is highly likely that those with certain kinds of values, presumably those best aligned with the organization, will experience greater support from the organization than those who hold values that are less well aligned with those of the organization. When values and perceptions of organizational support are correlated in this way, it may be difficult to know whether it is values or support that has the biggest effect on job commitment.

In order to examine the relationships between values and job commitment after controlling for organizational support, multiple regression analysis was used. A multiple regression analysis allows us to examine the effect of one variable while controlling for the effects of all others. The 7 predictor variables are described in Table 4.1. Each of these variables represents a scale score. A scale score comprises responses to a set of items (with similar content) discussed previously in this report. When the responses to these sets of items are aggregated we obtain more reliable and valid measures of the variables of interest: empowerment; best practice; respect for rights; inner harmony; social standing; practice own values, and organizational support.

The outcome variable was formed through combining the measure of job satisfaction and the measure of intention to remain in the job described in Section 3.4. The satisfaction measure comprised responses from 1 = low satisfaction to 5 = high satisfaction. Intention to remain in the job was derived from the data on how long people thought they would stay. Indefinitely was coded as 1, everything else as zero. These individual measures were correlated ($r = .47$). Scores on the two measures were standardized before being averaged to produce the outcome variable that was called job commitment.

Table 4.1

| Scale | Range of scores | % scoring above midpoint | Mean, SD, Alpha reliability coefficient |
|--|--|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Professional values</i> | | | |
| Inclusion and empowerment of families See Table 3.1 for 7 items | 1 strongly disagree through 5 strongly agree | 99% | 4.17, .45, .70 |
| Continuous improvement in professional practice See Table 3.2 for 5 items | 1 not important through 5 most important | 99% | 4.35, .50, .78 |
| Protect and respect rights See Table 3.3 for 8 items | 1 not important through 5 most important | 98% | 4.20, .51, .82 |
| <i>Personal values</i> | | | |
| Inner harmony and personal development See Table 3.10 for 6 items | 1 reject this through 7 of greatest importance | 98% | 5.74, .72, .81 |
| Social standing and getting ahead See Table 3.10 for 5 items | 1 reject this through 7 of greatest importance | 80% | 3.90, .90, .73 |
| <i>Organizational culture</i> | | | |
| How much can you use your values in your everyday work? See Section 3.2 | 1=always through 5=never | 12% | 1.60, .74, n/a |
| Support See Table 3.12 for 7 items | 1=never through 5=always | 68% | 3.45, .84, .92 |
| <i>Outcome</i> | | | |
| Job commitment (Satisfaction and retention) See Section 3.4.1 for 2 items | Scores standardized before averaging | n/a | .00, .86, .64 |

An ordinary least squares regression analysis was performed using job commitment as the outcome variable and professional values (empowerment and inclusion of families, continuous improvement in professional practice, and protect and respect rights), personal values (inner harmony and personal development, social standing and getting ahead) and organizational culture (support and how much can you use your values in your job) as the predictor variables (see results in Table 4.2). First, professional and personal values were entered into the model to predict job commitment (the values model). They did little to explain how committed child protection staff were to their jobs, explaining less than 1% of the variance in job commitment. The only relationship that was significant in Model 1 (the values model) was continuous improvement in professional practice. Those who believed in continuous improvement had high job commitment.

In Model 2, the values were maintained and organizational support was added (values + organizational support model). In Model 2, the variance accounted for jumped from less than 1% to 27%. Job commitment was higher if staff could use their values in their job and if they perceived the organization as supportive. In Model 2, professional values became insignificant, suggesting that the biggest driver of commitment was organizational support and use of values, whatever those values might be.

In summary, these results show that low job commitment in the form of low satisfaction in the job combined with an intention to leave the job was related to organizational culture. Organizational culture encompassed the following characteristics: allowing staff to use their values in their work, discussing values with staff, trusting staff's professional judgment, backing staff in making decisions, and supporting staff. Where organizational culture was not supportive in the eyes of child protection staff, staff were dissatisfied and expressed an intention to leave.

Table 4.2

| Predictors | <i>r</i> | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|---|----------|---------|---------|
| <i>Professional values</i> | | | |
| Empowerment and inclusion of families | .02 | -.01 | .01 |
| Continuous improvement in professional practice | .09* | .09* | .02 |
| Protect and respect rights | .07 | .05 | -.03 |
| <i>Personal values</i> | | | |
| Inner harmony and personal development | -.01 | -.08 | -.04 |
| Social standing and getting ahead | .03 | .04 | -.02 |
| <i>Organizational culture</i> | | | |
| Can't use values enough in job | -.29*** | | -.17*** |
| Support | .50*** | | .46*** |
| Adjusted R^2 | | .007 | .273 |

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

4.2 How are regulatory styles related to work commitment?

The ordinary least squares regression model tested in this instance used the same outcome variable, job commitment, as was used above. Instead of using personal values as predictor variables, the regression model tested the importance of regulatory styles as described in Section 3.1.2. Regulatory styles refer to the ways in which child protection staff engage with families in the belief that this is the best way of changing their behaviour. Regulatory styles rely on access to a range of regulatory tools: being persuasive, inspiring, providing resources, sanctioning, using law and so on. Through training and experience, staff come to believe that some styles are more useful and effective than others. Organizations also come to favour some styles over others because they believe them to be more effective, more efficient, or more consistent with the policy of the government. The organization's preference for some regulatory styles over others may mean that some individuals feel more comfortable practicing their craft in the organization than do others. This may translate into job

satisfaction and a decision to remain in the job, that is, job commitment. The initial question asked therefore is:

Question 1: Do staff who favour particular regulatory styles feel more or less committed to their jobs than others?

Table 4.3

| Scale | Range of scores | % scoring above midpoint of scale | Mean, SD, Alpha reliability coefficient |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Professional values</i> | | | |
| Inclusion and empowerment of families See Table 3.1 for 7 items | 1 strongly disagree through 5 strongly agree | 99% | 4.17, .45, .70 |
| Continuous improvement in professional practice See Table 3.2 for 5 items | 1 not important through 5 most important | 99% | 4.35, .50, .78 |
| Protect and respect rights See Table 3.3 for 8 items | 1 not important through 5 most important | 98% | 4.20, .51, .82 |
| <i>Regulatory styles</i> | | | |
| Persuasion and education See Table 3.5 for 3 items | 1 strongly disagree through 5 strongly agree | 71% | 3.47, .59, .54 |
| Firm legally based intervention See Table 3.6 for 3 items | 1 strongly disagree through 5 strongly agree | 23% | 2.70, .64, .54 |
| Law with discretion See Table 3.7 for 3 items | 1 strongly disagree through 5 strongly agree | 86% | 3.79, .56, .52 |
| Punitiveness See Table 3.8 for 4 items | 1 strongly disagree through 5 strongly agree | 2% | 1.92, .52, .70 |
| Best intentions See Table 3.9 for 2 items* | 1 strongly disagree through 5 strongly agree | 57% | 3.34, .68, .55 |
| <i>Organizational culture</i> | | | |
| Support See Table 3.12 for 7 items | 1=never through 5=always | 68% | 3.45, .84, .92 |
| <i>Outcome</i> | | | |
| Job commitment (Satisfaction and retention) See Section 3.4.1 for 2 items | Scores standardized before averaging | n/a | .00, .86, .64 |

* These two items have a correlation of .38.

A multiple regression analysis was used to assess the importance of five regulatory styles: belief in persuasion and education; belief in firm legally-based intervention; belief in the use of law with discretion; belief in punitiveness; and belief in families that they have the best of intentions. To make sure that our regulatory styles variables were measuring something different from professional values, both regulatory styles and professional values were entered into Model 1 (values + regulatory styles). The variance accounted for in Model 1 was 3.5%. The most important variables among this set of predictors were the regulatory style of persuasion and education and the regulatory style of believing parents had good intentions. Interestingly, those who believed that persuasion and education was the best regulatory strategy were the ones who expressed lowest job commitment, that is, they were the ones most likely to leave and were feeling dissatisfied with their work. Staff who believed families had the best of intentions, in contrast, expressed highest job commitment; that is, they were most satisfied and wanted to stay.

In Model 2, the organizational variable representing the individual's belief that the organization was supportive of staff was entered into the regression model. Organizational support is likely to be correlated with certain regulatory styles more than others. We want to assess the importance of regulatory styles once organizational support has been controlled. In Model 2, the variance explained in job commitment increased from 3.5% to 26%. Perception of lower organizational support was strongly predictive of lower job commitment. While organizational support was the most important variable in Model 2, the regulatory style variable, persuasion and education, remained significant. Those who believed in persuasion and education rather than legal intervention were least committed to their jobs. The results of the regression analysis appear in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

| Predictors | <i>r</i> | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|---|----------|---------|---------|
| <i>Professional values</i> | | | |
| Empowerment and inclusion of families | .02 | .02 | .01 |
| Continuous improvement in professional practice | .09* | .08 | .01 |
| Protect and respect rights | .07 | .02 | -.03 |
| <i>Regulatory Styles</i> | | | |
| Persuasion and education | -.16*** | -.20*** | -.12*** |
| Firm legally based intervention | .00 | .00 | -.04 |
| Law with discretion | -.05 | .00 | .02 |
| Punitiveness | -.04 | -.03 | -.02 |
| Best intentions | .05 | .09* | .04 |
| <i>Organizational culture</i> | | | |
| Support | .50*** | | .49*** |
| Adjusted R^2 | | .035*** | .256*** |

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

5 Conclusion

This paper shares preliminary findings from a national survey of child protection staff conducted in 2009. The survey examined the values of staff, both professional and personal, their attitudes to regulatory styles used by regulators to elicit compliance (particularly legal measures versus education and persuasion), and their satisfaction with their jobs and intention to stay in their jobs.

The findings show high levels of commitment to what have traditionally been understood as social work practice and social work values, with some revealing, though small, cracks in the armour. Child protection staff believed in empowerment and social inclusion of families, rights and respect for children and families, and continuous improvement in professional practice. They were not of one voice, however, on understanding the values and perspectives of parents. A surprisingly large number did not seem to believe that empathy was important in changing parents toward a more satisfactory parenting style. This finding is somewhat at odds with more traditional social work beliefs that emphasize the importance of care and compassion (Chenoweth & McAuliffe 2008; Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried & Larsen 2010).

Generally, the sample of respondents expressed wariness of legal measures to bring about change in families. Yet a small proportion liked the legal code that guided child protection practice and saw promise in having the law as part of the regulatory arsenal. Interestingly, it was the staff who favoured education and persuasion over legal measures (and most staff did) who were the ones most dissatisfied with their jobs in child protection.

A further finding of considerable importance is the way in which child protection staff were divided on the support they received from their organization. Around half did not feel valued by their organization, and did not feel they were receiving the support they needed in their jobs. Perception of an organization that was failing to deliver support was the major predictor of low job satisfaction and an intention to leave their jobs. More research is needed to understand how the philosophy of social work is meshing or failing to mesh with a more legal approach to dealing with child protection issues, how managers are responding to tensions in practice, and how this affects attrition from the child protection workforce.

6 References

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