



Relationships between work–life balance and job-related factors among child welfare workers



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships between work–life balance and several job-related factors among 573 public child welfare workers in a northeastern state in the United States of America. It explored job-related correlates of work–life balance and the possible mediating role of work–life balance between these factors and job satisfaction. Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that the job-related factors organizational support, job value, work time, and income were significantly associated with work–life balance among child welfare workers. It also confirmed that work–life balance partially mediated the associations of organizational support and job value with job satisfaction. Implications for child welfare research, policy, and practice are proposed based on the empirical findings.

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1. Introduction

In the context of personal life and family demands in contemporary society (Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009; Hobson, Delunas, & Kesic, 2001; Lewis, 2003; Moen & Yu, 2000), the capacity of balancing employees' work and personal lives is essential for the well-being of workforce. A national survey (Hobson et al., 2001) disclosed that the 10 most stressful life events for US workers revolved around major life and family issues. As working couples have become the norm in society (Moen & Yu, 2000), rising household financial and care needs (Hobson et al., 2001), together with increasing expectations for personal satisfaction and enjoyment (Lewis, 2003), have a high propensity to cause conflicts between employees' work responsibilities and their personal life demands (Carlson et al., 2009). Workers, including in child welfare, are obliged to balance their work and life roles and domains simultaneously. It is therefore necessary to understand their work–life balance by administrators and researchers.

Child welfare is regarded as a demanding and stressful field with challenging working conditions. It entails large caseloads, long hours, on-call responsibilities, inadequate compensation, insufficient supervision and training, lack of adequate resources to serve children and their families, stringent state and federal policy requirements, etc. (Westbrook, Ellis, & Ellett, 2006). On one hand, working conditions are likely to worsen the existing conflicts between work and life among child welfare workers. This suggests a strong need to understand the

possible job-related correlates of work–life balance in child welfare. On the other hand, working conditions are likely to result in low job satisfaction, which has powerful and far reaching consequences for social workers and organizations (Lambert, Pasupuleti, Cluse-Tolar, Jennings, & Baker, 2006). Given the evidence-based influence of work–life balance in shaping job satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2006; Losoncz & Bortolotto, 2009), the role of work–life balance as a mediator of the relationship between working conditions and job satisfaction merits close attention.

Work–life balance has been intensively studied in business, management, and other disciplines (e.g., Carlson et al., 2009; Connell, 2005; Dean, 2007; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Hobson et al., 2001; Jang, 2009; Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010; Lewis & Campbell, 2008; Losoncz & Bortolotto, 2009; Mescher, Benschop, & Doorewaard, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre, 2010; Virick, DaSiva, & Arrington, 2010). However, it is still a novel research topic in social work, let alone child welfare research. Some studies explored the association between work–life balance and job retention in child welfare (Smith, 2005; Strolin-Goltzman, Auerbach, McGowan, & McCarthy, 2007), but various job-related correlates of work–life balance have been under-examined so far. Although prior research asserted the impacts of work–life balance on social work and human service worker job satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2006), the mediating effect of work–life balance on job satisfaction is still an untouched issue among child welfare workforce.

This study seeks to examine the relationships between work–life balance and job-related factors supervisor support, organizational support, job value, work time, income, supervisory status, tenure, and job satisfaction among 573 public child welfare workers in a northeastern state in the United States of America. It explores job-related correlates of work–life balance and the possible mediating role of work–life

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