Sources of Stress for Kansas Child Welfare Workers (2011)

Workplace stress comes from a variety of sources including but not limited to: work demands, emotional demands, job control, support, rewards, role, interpersonal conflict, and organizational justice.

An assessment or inventory of stressors in the workplace can help to target strategies to address job stress. To identify specific sources of workplace stress among front-line child welfare workers, the Kansas Workforce Initiative developed a 35 item Child Welfare Worker Stress Inventory. The inventory was administered in several Kansas child welfare agencies in 2011.

Results from the Child Welfare Worker Stress Inventory
N= 230 (68% response rate)

Top 5 Stressors
#1 Insufficient time to complete work 2.84
#2 Working with difficult or uncooperative families 2.65
#3 Insufficient staff to cover cases 2.56
#4 Being held accountable for things over which I have no control 2.55
#5 Lack of resources for families 2.53

Bottom 5 Stressors
#1 Press/media coverage that reflects on what I do 1.43
#2 Feeling unsafe 1.65
#3 Lack of support from immediate supervisor 1.68
#4 Lack of discretion in doing job 1.78
#5 Inadequate training for the job 1.80

Respondents
- Gender/age: Predominately female (91%) with a median age of 35
- Race/ethnicity: White (89%), African-American (7%), American Indian (2%), Hispanic (1%), Asian (1%)
- Education: Social work degree (56%) equally split between BSW (28%) and MSW (28%) Less than a bachelor’s (18%), bachelor’s degree in a field other than social work (14%), master’s degree other than social work (12%)
- Child welfare experience: Range of less than a year to 31 years, median years of experience is 5.

A number of researchers suggest that organizations use a systems approach or public health model to respond to workplace stress (Blewett, Shaw, LaMontagne & Dollard, 2006; Cooper & Cartwright, 1997; LaMontagne and Keegel, 2010; LaMontagne, Keegel,
Louie, Ostry & Landsbergis, 2007). This approach typically characterizes intervention strategies as:

**Primary** proactive, seeks to reduce risk factors (example: reassigning tasks)

**Secondary** aims to modify worker’s response to stress (example: stress management training)

**Tertiary** treatment to minimize stress-related problems (example: employee assistance)

Pursuing organizational strategies to reduce stressors *along with* equipping individuals to better cope is the most promising approach to addressing job-related stress (Semmer, 2011; Lamontagne et al, 2007).

The Kansas Workforce Initiative developed a process for using the **Child Welfare Worker Stress Inventory** to identify sources of stress and target interventions or strategies for reducing workplace stress. The process is outlined in **Reducing Child Welfare Worker Stress: Inventory and Intervention Implementation Guide**. A copy of this guide is available to download from the KWI website [www.kwi.ku.edu](http://www.kwi.ku.edu).

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