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# Investigating the effects of caseworker characteristics in child welfare

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## Abstract

While it is widely accepted that the biological parent(s), the foster or adoptive parent(s) and the child all have a role in explaining child welfare outcomes, a fourth player—the caseworker—may have an equally influential role in effecting child outcomes. Caseworkers can influence the nature, amount, and quality of benefits and sanctions provided by their agencies, as well as the eligibility of clients for services, and can maneuver through the system in a way that has the most direct effect on clients. This paper investigates the role of caseworkers in determining outcomes in the child welfare system. We develop and test a variety of multi-level and multiple membership models to better understand the association between caseworker characteristics and child welfare outcomes. Specifically, we focus attention on the relationship between the number of caseworkers assigned to each child (i.e., turnover), the racial match between the child and the caseworker, and the role of graduate education (possession of an MSW) on a

child's length of stay in the child welfare system and family reunification.



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## Keywords

Case worker; Turnover; Length of stay; Family reunification

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