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Key Demographic and Organization Factors in Predicting Healthy Families New York Home Visitor Retention

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CENTER FOR HUMAN SERVICES RESEARCH
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Key Demographic and Organizational Factors in Predicting Healthy Families New York Home Visitor Retention

Background

Healthy Families New York (HFNY) is a voluntary, evidence-based home visiting program supporting high-need families across New York State. HFNY's goals are to foster parent-child bonding and relationships; promote optimal child and family health, development, and safety; enhance family self-sufficiency; and prevent child abuse and neglect. For more information, see www.healthyfamiliesnewyork.org

Within HFNY programs, the retention of home visiting workers is critical for success, both because it promotes family retention, and because frequently training new workers is a burden for the programs themselves. While programs aim to hire home visitors who will effectively provide the intervention and will stay at the program for several years, many leave much sooner. To explore the area of worker retention, this Research Brief addresses the following questions:

What characterizes a home visitor who is likely to stay?   **AND**   *What makes a program one at which workers want to remain?*
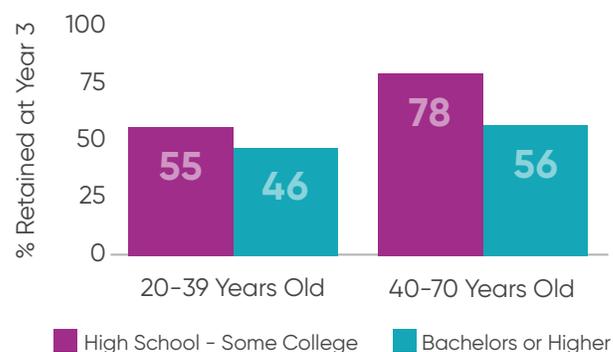
Methods

To determine factors impacting worker retention, researchers at the Center for Human Services Research analyzed data from a summer 2014 survey of HFNY Family Support Specialists (FSSs) and recorded which respondents were still employed at their program in July 2017, three years later. Out of 213 FSSs, 127 (60%) had been retained. This attrition rate is similar to that of comparable fields, such as child welfare workers. Respondents' demographics and backgrounds, ratings of organizational experiences, and work histories were then examined to ascertain which variables significantly predicted retention over this period.

FSSs showed a **60%** retention rate over three years
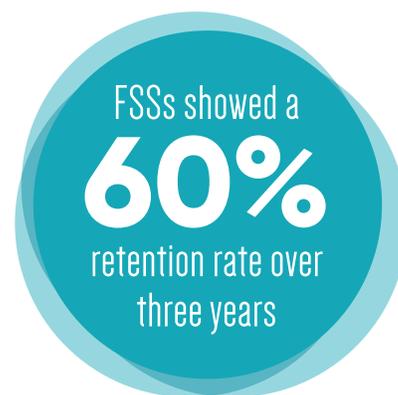
What demographic factors predict worker retention?

Of the demographic factors assessed, age ($p=0.007$), education ($p=0.041$), and proximity to the program ($p=0.015$) each impacted retention (model $R=0.303$, $F_{(3,205)}=6.9$, $p<0.001$). As displayed in Figure 1, **younger FSSs with a bachelor's degree or higher were most likely to have left their position after three years; in contrast, older workers with a high-school diploma or associate's degree were most likely to have been retained.** Additionally, staffers who lived in the target community served by their program were also more likely to be retained after three years. Factors such as gender, race, and having outside paid employment were not related to retention.

Figure 1. Impact of Age and Education on Retention

% Retained at Year 3

20-39 Years Old: 55, 46
40-70 Years Old: 78, 56

■ High School - Some College   ■ Bachelors or Higher

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What organizational factors impact worker retention?

Several organizational factors related to work experience were then evaluated. Of these, respondents' ratings of work climate were the strongest predictor of retention (model $F_{(3,179)}=11.1$, $p=0.001$). Work climate consists of the perceived quality, sustainability, and supportiveness of an organization; questions included the degree to which respondents felt that their organization cared about their general satisfaction at work, and whether they were held responsible for things over which they had no control. Staff who were retained after three years had higher, more positive ratings of work climate than those who left the program.

Importantly though, all of the organizational factors tested were highly interrelated (r's = 0.3 to 0.6, p's<0.001). As such, improvements in one aspect of work experience may indirectly promote other components as well. For example, increased reflective supervision may help to build mastery and create a positive work climate, which supports job satisfaction and decreases burnout, et cetera, together making a worker more likely to stay in their position.

How does promotion impact worker retention?

Finally, the opportunity for growth and advancement was found to be a significant factor in worker retention. As displayed in Figure 2, staffers who were supervisors, or who were promoted to supervisor in the interim period, showed a remarkable 86% retention rate, compared to 56% for non-supervisors ($F_{(1,201)}=9.25$, $p=0.003$). A similar pattern was seen for dual-role workers: staff trained to perform home visits and assessments had a retention rate of 70%, versus the single-role rate of 55% ($F_{(1,201)}=4.5$, $p=0.035$). While a worker cannot be given additional responsibilities or promoted if they have already left, those who were promoted and allowed more growth were especially likely to stay in their positions.

Figure 2. Impact of Promotion on Retention
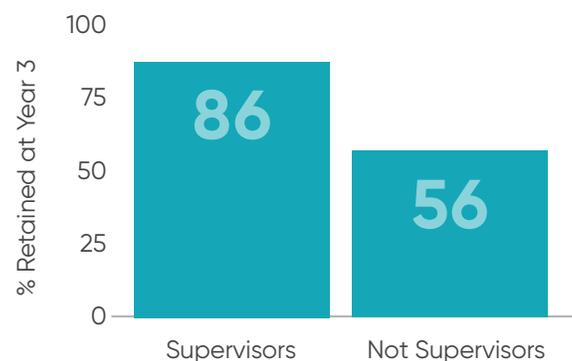
Conclusions

Recruiting and hiring good workers who will stay at a program is difficult work, and each case must be considered individually: not every young educated worker left their position, and not all workers reporting positive work climates stayed. But programs can use these overall patterns to inform decisions regarding how long potential hires are likely to stay, and focus on building an organizational culture that is responsive to workers, addresses burnout, and fosters job satisfaction. Managers should also consider how best to create opportunities for worker's growth and advancement within their agency, when possible.