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How might we effectively support early-career social service workers in developing skills needed to work with youth and families and to thrive, grow and be retained in the sector?

Three Chiefs of the Stoney Nakoda Nations receiving payment for oil and gas lease rights in their reserve lands, July 29, 1929.

Oliver, W. (1927) *Stoney's receiving payment for oil lease rights in their reserve*. [Photograph] Glenbow Library and Archives Collection, Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary
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Research Dossier
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Wang, R. (2022). Organizational Commitment in the Nonprofit Sector and the Underlying Impact of Stakeholders and Organizational Support. *Voluntas* 33, 538–549 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00336-8>

This US study of over 200 nonprofit sector employees provides a knowledge base on employee turnover rates, satisfaction, and engagement in the nonprofit sector. This study suggests that increasing “affective commitment” increases an employee’s identification and emotional attachment to an organization based on shared values and goals. Perceived respect and value lead to stronger commitments to organizational values and social missions. This study found that employees focus on an organization’s engaged leadership, community engagement, and daily business operations, rather than wages, as factors that influence organizational commitment. How leadership manages stakeholder relationships is significant. Employees expect the Board and executives to encourage employee participation in decision making. Hearing and acting on employee voices increases employee commitment. Formalized operations and procedures that encourage communication, innovation and accountability increases employee commitment. Mission alignment, through engagement with community partners increases employee motivation. Professional development and career advancement matter more than wages. Supporting employee mental health is critical. The study determines that executive management will foster employee engagement by creating a participatory work environment that values autonomy and creative problem solving, factors leading to increased employee retention.

Problem Landscape

Leadership is a key factor that influences employee and stakeholder engagement.

Volunteer Boards may suffer from “role ambiguity”, failing to engage with employees.

Board and employee relationship significantly influences the stability of a nonprofit.

Frustration with managers is a key reason for employees leaving an organization.

Micromanaged employees will become dissatisfied.

Failing to communicate with community stakeholders.

Failing to satisfy community stakeholders.

Focusing on treating symptoms of a social problem leads to dissatisfaction.

Solutions Landscape

Engaged leadership creates a **participatory work environment** where **voices are heard** and employees **contribute to decision making** process.

Management significantly influences employee engagement and organizational commitment.

Delegation to employees develops self-motivated employees and then to action.

Autonomous environment positively impacts employee perception of organization.

Formal nonprofit structure: clear, defined organizational goals and clear organization rhetoric.

Encourage and accept employee innovations to achieve organizational mission.

Focus on addressing root causes of a problem increases employee retention.

Offering professional development and career advancement attracts and retains employees.

Focusing on employee mental health and wellbeing attracts and retains employees.

Burnout among social workers structural causes, coping strategies, and organizational interventions

Pazer, S. (2025). Burnout among social workers structural causes, coping strategies and organizational interventions. International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies 7(1), 583-587 (2025). <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26648652.2025.v7.i1h.233>

This article, by a German based researcher, is an important starting point in examining the potential structural reasons for new social workers leaving their field. Up to 60% of social workers in high stress sectors such as child welfare and mental health will report burnout. Burnout emerges from an environment of constraint, moral dissonance, and emotional overload with five key structural drivers: systemic underfunding; emotional labour; erosion of autonomy; gendered expectations; and precarious employment. Burnout, or avoidance of burnout, is related in part to the ongoing attempt to balance sufficient levels of organizational supports, such as autonomy, supervision, and peer support against organizational demands, including emotional intensity, workload, and administrative burdens. Research suggests that social workers may be subject to increasing ethical distress as they know what needs to be done to support clients but may be subject to organizational policies that conflict with a social workers values. Organizational models emphasizing managerial control, audits, and output driven logic reduce a social workers discretion and relational engagement. Resilience and self-care within the profession continues to be promoted as effective coping mechanisms but this shifts responsibility onto the individual social worker and ignores structural roots of distress. In other words, while individual adaptation is part of the solution it must be coupled will collective strategies and structural transformation. Caring for social workers should be viewed as a “recognition that the emotional, cognitive and moral labour of social work is not inexhaustible” and sustainability depends on “radically rethinking how care is valued, structured and supported.”

Problem Landscape

Political, economic, and organizational mindsets manage how care is managed, funded and morally framed.

High caseloads predict emotional distress and priorities based on economic efficiency.

Exposure to trauma, suffering and human crisis makes social workers vulnerable to secondary trauma, stress, and compassion fatigue.

Empathy and relational strength become an occupational risk.

Standardized procedures, documentation mandates, and top-down management restrict discretion and ethical judgment.

Precarious employment, short term contracts, low wages and limited advancement impact professional identity and institutional belonging.

High ethical demands with perceived low social prestige, lead to feelings of invisibility and devaluation.

Solution Landscape

Implementing enforceable caseload standards may reduce emotional exhaustion and staff turnover.

Trauma informed organizational cultures that prioritize emotional safety, reflective practice, transparency, and staff empowerment may mitigate psychological toll on social workers.

Fostering ethical cultures where institutional mandates support professional ethics.

Redistributing decision making to front line workers and legitimizing partitioner voices strengthens alignment between values and actions.

Participatory leadership enhances trust, ownership, and psychological safety.

Empowerment based governance foster's identity, competence, and engagement.

Structural investment in wages, working conditions and mental health protection.

Trajectories of well-being and burnout among health and social services community workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: a longitudinal study of job demands and resources

Paquin, A., Giroux, A., Radziszewski, S., Lauzier-Jobin, F., Coulombe, S., Houle, J., & Meunier, S. (2025). Trajectories of well-being and burnout among health and social services community workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: A longitudinal study of job demands and resources. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 53(8).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.70052>

This study of 1425 health and social service community (HSSC) workers in Quebec examines the challenges faced by an essential workforce related to decreased well-being and burnout that continues to be influenced by fluctuating job demands and resources. HSSC workers offer essential services (e.g. mental health support, housing assistance, food insecurity) through mission driven community organizations that meet critical needs or advocate for marginalized populations. Psychological well-being at work depends on: interpersonal fit, thriving, feeling of competency, perceived recognition, and desire for involvement, at work. Burnout, due to prolonged exposure to unmanaged work stress include: emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, and cognitive weariness. Common job demands for HSSC workers that influence well-being include chronic overload of tasks, role ambiguity, emotional labour of supporting vulnerable populations, financial insecurity, guilt for taking time off and overcommitment. Job resources that alleviate the demands include support from colleagues and supervisors, job autonomy, use of personal strengths, and sense of solidarity and shared purpose. Engaging in projects that align with individual interests and strengths bolsters competence and well-being. However, these resources are influenced by organizational stability, resources scarcity, and external crises. Addressing the well-being of HSSC workers is crucial for individual health and quality of care provided as well as the overall resilience and well-being of broader society. This study notes that it did not examine leadership, organizational culture, and individual coping mechanisms.

Problem Landscape

Colleague support and supervisor support, when perceived as lacking or if it is disrupted influences well-being over time.

Declining use of employee strengths parallels decreased well-being.

Quantitative workload and work guilt leads to increased burnout.

Overcommitment, excessive overtime, emotional exhaustion, difficulty detaching from work leads to increased burnout.

Recovery paradox, HSSC workers least likely to engage in recovery activities when they need them the most.

Prolonged stress and increased workload impact psychological health.

Employees with high initial engagement are sensitive to changes.

Structural factors, funding, employment stability, and management practices impact job precarity and emotional overload.

Solution Landscape

Monitor HSSC workers over time to assess long term impacts of crises.

Identify employee strengths with tools like the VIA survey.

Foster use of employee strengths by the organization.

Identify and support the at-risk worker, those with high demands and low resources and those with high initial engagement.

Implement routine mental health screening with psychological tools.

Implement routine resource checks with checklists.

Peer support groups and reflective practice spaces sustains well-being.

Strengths based coaching sustains well-being.

Management training to identify overcommitment and burnout.

Structural policies on workload balance, recovery time, employee recognition.

Pathways to retention: Job satisfaction, burnout, & organizational commitment among social workers

Brown, A. R., Walters, J. E., & Jones, A. E. (2019). Pathways to Retention: Job Satisfaction, Burnout, & Organizational Commitment among Social Workers. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 16(6), 577–594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26408066.2019.1658006>

This study of 1,786 social workers in the US is helpful since it specifically considers the practice setting of child welfare and its impact on job satisfaction, burnout, and organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is the employee's alignment with an organization's values, goals and mission and impacts not just turnover rates but also effectiveness and performance. In the child welfare setting, turnover is at least 20% per year which is among the highest in the social work setting. This impacts continuity of care, clients and their families and loss of trusting relationships. Burnout and low job satisfaction, often related to large caseloads, predicts low organizational commitment for social workers. Workplace culture, coworker and supervisor supports, employee recognition, autonomy, and professional development impact the organizational environment and is related not just to increased burnout but directly predicts organizational commitment. The study found that organizational environment most impacts organizational commitment followed by burnout and then workload satisfaction. Turnover will happen before the burnout stage is reached if the social worker is not supported, unhappy with work structure or the work environment is unhealthy. Organizations must assess the social worker's satisfaction and consider changes to the work environment as needed. Leaders and managers have direct control over the organizational environment which means direct control over organizational commitment. A climate of wellness and recognition of employee contributions will increase social worker satisfaction. The collective mindset of employees, managers and leaders will revitalize a culture by defining the values of the workplace and engaging in the change process. Further research is needed to identify additional factors associated with burnout, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

Problem Landscape

Lack of support reduces commitment.

Poor work arrangement reduces commitment.

Unhealthy work environment reduces commitment

Solution Landscape

Variety in roles and challenges increases cohesion and commitment.

Leaders and managers have direct control over organizational environment.

Organizational environment is strongest predictor of organizational commitment.

Supervisor and peer support is important for building culture and climate.

Mentors assigned to new hires.

Professional development supports including assisting with cost of providing paid leave.

Employee recognition and autonomy is important for building culture and climate.

Professional development, flexibility and compensation improve job satisfaction.

Implement scheduled recognition of outstanding work.

Performance reviews must recognize strengths and improvement along with employee feedback.

Workplace wellness programs such as group activities and gym memberships.

Promote work-life balance.

Promoting staff retention in social work: Identifying the ‘push’ and the ‘pull’ factors from the perspective of newly qualified social workers

Roulston, A., Mackle, D., Ross, J., Montgomery, L., MacDermott, D., Boyle, S., McFadden, P., & Hayes, D. (2025). Promoting staff retention in social work: Identifying the ‘push’ and the ‘pull’ factors from the perspective of newly qualified social workers. *The British Journal of Social Work*.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaf152>

The focus of this study is specific to the retention of newly qualified social workers and collected data from 122 social workers who graduated in 2022 in the UK, however, the study noted that retention is an issue for the “profession globally”. This study found that the UK experience mirrors international findings. Dissatisfaction with the organization, management and working conditions is prevalent with social workers in child welfare. International literature echoes the necessity of a team culture where peer support, self-reflection, supportive management and a space outside the team promote professional identity. Social workers in children’s services had high levels of dissatisfaction with organizations, management and working conditions. Saty or go moments include the new social workers struggle to finish their when dealing with child protection emergencies that impacts commitments to their own families and dealing with their peer’s high turnover rates which impacts the remaining social workers ability to develop strong relationships with parents and children. On the other hand, professional identity, support and being valued leads to competent and confident social workers. Similarly, building space to allow for transitions into new roles is necessary. Supervision is key to retention but is inconsistent or insufficient for complex or high risk cases. New social workers are motivated and committed however organizations must invest in improving management and supervisor skills, competency and quality and support mentoring and peer learning opportunities.

Problem Landscape

Inadequate support and supervision leads to burnout and leaving.

Push Factors: culture of blame, lack of clarity about role, increased bureaucracy.

Supervision is inconsistent or insufficient for high risk cases.

Management may not have the necessary skills or competence.

Solution Landscape

Social and supervisory support lead to retention.

Time and space to develop knowledge, skills, and experience.

Pull Factors, sense of making a difference, quality supervision, continuous professional development, career progression, positive organizational culture, team, and peer support.

Professional identity, management support and being valued increases competency, confidence, and retention.

Incentives for retention include higher wages, reduced caseload, healthier work-life balance, high quality supervision, training as a specialist, continuous professional development.

Invest in management to develop and improve competency and quality to supervise generally and to provide guidance in complex or high risk cases.

Peer learning and mentoring promotes competence and team environment leading to stability.

The influence of supervisor support, peer support, and organizational culture among early career social workers in child welfare services

Chenot, D., Benton, A. D., & Kim, H. (2009). The Influence of Supervisor Support, Peer Support, and Organizational Culture Among Early Career Social Workers in Child Welfare Services. *Child Welfare*, 88(5), 129–147.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/45400442>

This study of 767 social workers involved in child welfare (both public and general) directly examines the impact of supervisor support, peer support and organizational culture in the retention of early career social workers. Studies have confirmed that the retention rate of social workers in child services is related to length of employment and that the social workers most likely to leave an agency are those who are in their first two years of their social work career. This study examined two categories of organizational cultures. Constructive cultures emphasize self-actualization, achievement, motivation to excel, responsiveness to client needs and competence in fulfilling roles. Passive defensive cultures focus on approvals, conformity with conventional operations, rule following, evasion of responsibility, accountability and blame, and resistance to change in the form of apathy or even suppression. Supervisor support includes both knowledge and skill development as well as emotional support while peer support is focused on the level of assistance and understanding a social worker receives from co-workers. This study confirms the critical role of supervisor support in the socialization of new social workers in child services. Strong supervisor support increased retention within the field of child services social work as well as the employer. Strong peer support increased retention only within the employer, not the childcare social work field. Supervisor training is essential to retain social workers. The role of mentoring by supervisors should not be understated, however, research is required to understand how best to train mentors. In addition, interventions in relation to organizational culture change should receive further study.

Problem Landscape

Passive defensive organizational cultures impact early career retention, but not late career retention.

Enforcement and punishment oriented functions performed by supervisors creates a survival mode for social workers within organizations.

Solution Landscape

Supervisor training to fulfill roles beyond compliance with agency mandates and policies is essential.

Educating supervisors and the role they play in the careers of child welfare social workers must be major priority.

Professional development of social workers must be targeted through intentional mentoring by supervisors.

Encourage creative thinking by social workers that targets improving client lives.

Reward creative decision making should be enhanced and will have multilevel benefits.

Constructive organizational cultures increases probability that clients receive effective services.

Does mentorship among social workers make a difference? An empirical investigation of career outcomes

Collins, P. M. (1994). Does mentorship among social workers make a difference? An empirical investigation of career outcomes. *Social Work*, 39(4), 413–419.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23717052>

While older, this study of 420 social workers considered the role mentorship played in the career outcomes of social workers, from both the mentor and mentee perspective. The mentor relationships that were studied were between individuals at different stages of professional development, in contrast to peer mentoring which may occur between individuals at similar stages of professional development. The mentor's role was to facilitate the development and advancement of the mentee by serving as a source of social support beyond the formal confines of the professional relationship. This study tests whether mentoring facilitates career development and measures career success, satisfaction, and income levels. The study found that measurable differences exist in career success, satisfaction and incomes levels for those who participate in a mentorship relationship. Critically, the necessary investment of the mentors resources in the relationship benefits the career development of both the mentee and the mentor. Social workers in supervisory positions should be encouraged to take on mentorship roles to enhance their own development as well as to sustain the development of the profession.

Problem Landscape

Resource commitment, especially time, on the part of the mentor, as well as the mentee, may discourage some senior social work professionals from entering into a mentorship role.

Solution Landscape

Career success is highest for individuals who were both a mentee and later a mentor, followed by those who were a mentee only and not a mentor, followed by those who were a mentor only and never a mentee and finally those who did not participate in a mentorship.

Career satisfaction follows the same pattern, highest for individuals who were both a mentee and later a mentor, followed by those who were a mentee only and not a mentor, followed by those who were a mentor only and never a mentee and finally those who did not participate in a mentorship.

Income level had somewhat different results where income was, again, highest for individuals who were both a mentee and later a mentor, followed then by those who were only a mentor and never a mentee, then those who never participated in a mentorship and finally those who were only a mentee but not a mentor.

How do we prepare students for the challenges of social work? Examples from six countries around the world.

Tham, P., McFadden, P., Russ, E., Baldschun, A., Blakeman, P., & Griffiths, A. (2023). How do we prepare students for the challenges of social work? Examples from six countries around the world. *Social Work Education*, 42(4), 494–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2021.1976135>

This international study once again emphasizes that the challenges faced by early career social workers is a global issue, especially in the field of child protection and welfare. While the focus of the study is on university curriculums there may still be some merit in considering whether findings from this study may be incorporated in the early professional training of social work graduates. As this paper notes, effective induction or onboarding and supervisory support are critical for new social workers. If new social workers are expected to engage with clients who have experienced trauma, must face difficult situations and deal with high caseloads and crises, appropriate supports should be available. Internationally, new graduates in the field of child welfare work face significant stress and high turnover rates. The studies show that there is a need for adequate support and guidance in the early years and that organizational structures negatively impact retention such as large caseloads, role ambiguity, administrative burdens and lack of support from colleagues. This study suggests that new graduates may be weak in the following areas: formation of professional identity, management of emotions, managing demanding conversations with clients, collaboration, coping with stress, resilience, and well-being. This study notes that ongoing support in the workplace, is a positive development. However, more research is required to understand the social workers specific needs for support from the employer as they transition into the workforce.

Problem Landscape

Organizational factors, including large caseloads, role ambiguity, administrative burdens and lack of support from colleagues.

Areas of weakness in new graduates include formation of professional identity, management of emotions, managing demanding conversations with clients, collaboration, coping with stress, resilience, and well-being.

Workplace induction and supervisory supports are missing or inadequate

Solution Landscape

Proper induction and regular supervision and support are tools to help achieve success.

Ongoing training at the workplace, by identifying recurring professional weaknesses in new social work graduates and actively addressing these issues through training tools or courses for new recruits.

Transition to professional social work practice: The first three years

Hunt, S., Tregurtha, M., Kuruvila, A., Lowe, S., Smith, K. (2017)
Transition to professional social work practice: The first three years.
Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education, 19(2), 139-154.
<https://journal.anzswwer.org/index.php/advances/article/view/176>

In this interesting study from New Zealand, a cohort of social work graduates were followed for three years to better understand the challenges of transforming into a competent professional social work practitioner. The study notes that expect new social work graduates to “hit the road running” and that the “managerialist approach” is reluctant to invest in targeted induction, professional development and regular supervision. Social work education is focused on generalist knowledge that is reflective of social work values while the managerialist approach pushes for specialization and less focus on critical reflection. The literature suggests that neoliberal political environments impact the transition from school to professional practitioner. Market based values leads the practice to focus on measurable outputs, defensible risk assessment, statutory control, and individual compliance. As the managerialist approach to social work increases the preparation and support of new social workers decreases. The study found that new social workers experience a wide range of induction and supervision experiences. Further, some second year social workers were placed into supervisory roles. Supervision often focused on assessing measurable deliverables. Most social workers had case load protection for the first six months with no case load protection by the end of the second year due to resources, workload and the expectation that at the end of the second year social workers are competent. The researchers concluded that the political environment significantly influences the new social workers transition into practice and limits development of a professional identity and engaging in reflective practice. This also leads to conflicts between new social workers asked to emphasize individual empowerment over addressing structural causes of inequality. Graduation is only the foundation to a social workers knowledge and there should be recognition that social work requires lifelong learning that must be invested in. Employers were found to use supervision as a managerial and administrative tool rather than a safe space for critical thinking and exploration and formal mentorship programs were not available or not practiced. It should be noted that the researchers believe that these findings are relevant internationally.

Problem Landscape

Managerialist approach reluctant to invest in targeted induction, professional development, and supervision.

Managerialist approach values specialization with limited focus on critical reflection.

Missing CPD or training associated with missing managerial support and feelings of being devalued,

Fixed term contracts limit training and CPD opportunities.

Market based values where management focuses on outputs, risk assessment, statutory control, and individual compliance.

Neoliberal environment conflicts with a reflexive, analytical, person centered practice as new social workers try to negotiate government policy, employer responsibilities, and social justice needs of the client.

Supervision use to emphasize administrative and management goals and deliverables.

Office politics workplace bullying and oppressive atmosphere limits collegiality and limits mentorship opportunities.

Solution Landscape

Intensive structured induction, to guard against overload and burnout, leading to increased retention.

CPD and other training bridges the gap between education and specialized knowledge.

Caseload protection for at least the first two years of practice.

Lifelong learning is critical component of social work that should be accepted by employers and governments and will help lead to the specialized knowledge that is valued by employers.

Reflective thinking and practice must be encouraged, and employers must invest in a practice that uncovers underlying causes of inequality which is aided by induction, caseload protection, ongoing CPD, supervision and collegiality.

Supervision is a safe place to critically reflect on practice, structural power structures that impact clients and to bolster the social workers emotional resilience.

Addressing social workers' stress, burnout, and resiliency: A qualitative study with supervisors

Mack, B. (2022). Addressing social workers' stress, burnout, and resiliency: A qualitative study with supervisors. *Social Work Research*, 46(1), 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svab032>

This is a very interesting study as it examines how 24 supervisors in the social work practice help their supervisees approach stress, burnout, and resiliency. This is the only study to examine this issue from the perspective of the supervisor. In this study supervisors “provide oversight, guidance, training and mentoring of supervisors” and address health and well-being by offering support and resources to increase “professional resilience” and to help supervisees bounce back from challenges. In other words, the focus and function of the supervisor is neither managerial nor administrative. The study found that supervisors developed awareness of the signs and symptoms of stress and burnout and that communication builds resilience. Supervisors must be practice, attentive and committed to learning about supervisee job related stress. Supervisors must be proactive in messaging and create opportunities for the supervisee to talk about pressures while supervisors listen to understand. Supervisors also stated the importance of building supportive relationships through unconditional support through which difficult situations can be tackled together. Supervisors view it as a duty to educate supervisees about self-care, self-care tools and work-life balance. Supervisors also need to know when supervisees should be directed to external or internal resources that helps supervisees deal with stress. Sometimes this was just additional supervision and more frequent meetings and check-ins. Supervisors also play an important role in proactively encouraging supervisees to take time off, create boundaries and help establish autonomy and flexibility when possible. This study demonstrates that organizations should consider how to create or strengthen their supervision models to build a resilient practice. Engaging in these practices will strengthen the current and next generation of social workers.

Problem Landscape

Managerial supervision is focused on administrative matters, case reviews, and outputs.

Supervisors may lack the required training or may not understand that role of the supervisor in the social work context.

Solution Landscape

Supervisor communication is nonjudgmental and compassionate and intended to help social workers deal with adverse job related experiences.

Supervisors proactively assess employee stress and then initiate conversations with the supervisees.

Brave spaces are created by supervisors which are environments and opportunities to engage in discussions and can be individual or groups.

Humour and laughter are tools to encourage laughter, reduce stress and avoid burnout.

Highlighting self-care by encouraging and supporting supervisees to engage in personal and professional well-being behaviours, practices and activities including organization based opportunities.

Solution Landscape

Resources, supervisors must understand what external and internal resources are available to assist supervisees in times of stress and when it is appropriate to use these resources.

Work-life balance must be emphasized and encouraged, to allow supervisees to reenergize and rejuvenate.

Supervisor training will include: resiliency building strategies and practices, regular scheduled meetings, checking in to confirm plans have been implemented, advocating for organizational changes.

Organizations should introduce policies and procedures to create or strengthen opportunities to develop effective supervision and intentionally building a resilient workforce.

Identify existing challenges and barriers to implementing resiliency practices and problem solving.

Action plan should be developed regarding individual and group training needs on the topics of stress, burnout, wellness and resiliency building.

What knowledge and skills do early career social workers need to practice effectively with children and families?

Bostock, L., Shephard, L., & Grant, L. (2026). What Knowledge and Skills Do Early Career Social Workers Need to Practice Effectively With Children and Families? *Child & Family Social Work*, 31(1), 521–532. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.13306>

This literature review considers 51 research papers that examined the knowledge and skills required by early career social workers to work effectively with children and their families. The first 5 years of a social workers career can be daunting as they weave together their knowledge sources to affect positive change for children. The international studies suggest that a theory-practice gap does exist and new social workers may not feel equipped for the reality of practice and leads to early exits. The literature review revealed a gap when specifically examining what knowledge and skills are required or missing in the first five years of the social work career. That is the literature does not break down knowledge and skills gaps by career stage. However, studies strongly suggest that the quality of a social workers practice with children and the ability to build relationships and authority requires quality supervision and direct practice. At a minimum, the literature provides evidence on the skills that early career social workers require and these can only be developed through deliberate effort, practice, attention and support. Early career support requires a focus on building confidence to be a social worker who is also equipped to effectively perform child protection work.

Problem Landscape

Solution Landscape

Partnership building between agencies should be taught to new social workers through observation and participation.

Communication skills and relational skills are built through high quality supervision along with direct practice.

Support to build confidence to be a social worker.

Support to build competence to perform tasks rather than just do tasks.

Understanding child development to build relationships with children.

Understanding sociological theory and the impacts of poverty and socioeconomic status on parenting and development.

Relationship building with parents is a specific learned skill especially how to engage with parents on an emotional level without adopting the parents' perspective.

