



DSHS Children's Administration Social Worker Qualifications Study

Proposed Final Report

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee

January 9, 2008

John Bowden, JLARC Staff

Presentation Overview



O
v
e
r
v
i
e
w

- What we looked at in the study
- What we learned
- How we came to our recommendations
- Recommendations and agency responses

What We Looked At



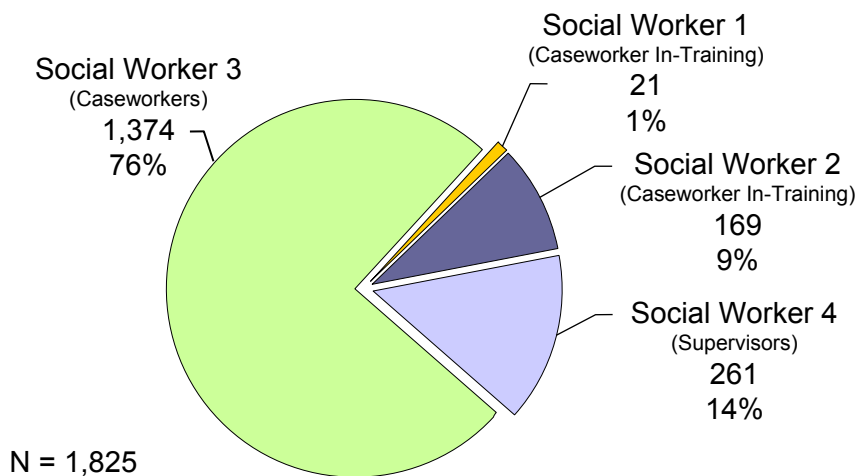
B
a
c
k
g
r
o
u
n
d

- Qualifications required to become a Social Worker within the Children's Administration
- Education and experience levels of Social Workers employed within the Children's Administration
- Research related to child welfare worker qualifications
- Qualifications for similar positions in other states
- Council on Accreditation standards

Children's Administration's Social Worker Positions



B
a
c
k
g
r
o
u
n
d



Source: JLARC analysis of Department of Personnel data from July 2007.

Social Workers Meet State Qualifications



Q
u
a
l
i
f
i
c
a
t
i
o
n
s

- Children's Administration Social Workers meet the Department of Personnel and DSHS experience and education qualifications.
- The educational attainment of Children's Administration Social Workers has been steadily increasing in recent years. This may be attributable to the Child Welfare Training and Advancement Program.

Additional Children's Administration Social Worker Job Requirements



Q
u
a
l
i
f
i
c
a
t
i
o
n
s

- To augment the required education and experience, all Children's Administration Social Workers must attend the six-week Social Worker Academy within 15 days of hire and before being given a caseload.
- Social Workers must also attend 20 hours of on-going training each year.

What Does Research Tell Us about Qualifications?



R
e
s
e
a
r
c
h

S
t
u
d
i
e
s

- Foremost, the design and rigor of research studies are not sufficient to draw solid conclusions about optimal Social Worker qualifications.
- Most research looks at education, but not experience and does not address what constitutes a good balance of education and experience.

What Does Research Tell Us about Qualifications?



R
e
s
e
a
r
c
h

S
t
u
d
i
e
s

- Most research related to qualifications focuses on retention and recruitment and not child outcomes.
- However, some research indicates that a degree in social work might improve retention which, in turn, might lead to better child outcomes.
- However, as qualifications become more stringent, the size of the candidate pool might decrease.

What Does Research Tell Us about Qualifications?



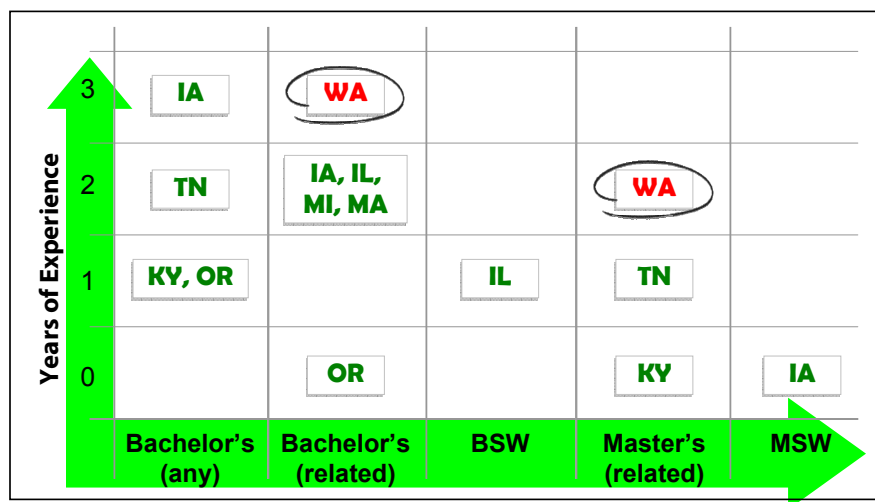
Research Studies

- Other factors can impact child outcomes more than child welfare worker qualifications. These include:
 - Societal or general population factors contributing to child abuse and neglect (e.g., rates of unemployment and substance abuse); and
 - Policy decisions regarding child welfare services (e.g., caseworker caseloads and frequency of home visits).

Caseworker Qualifications Generally Exceed Those in Comparison States



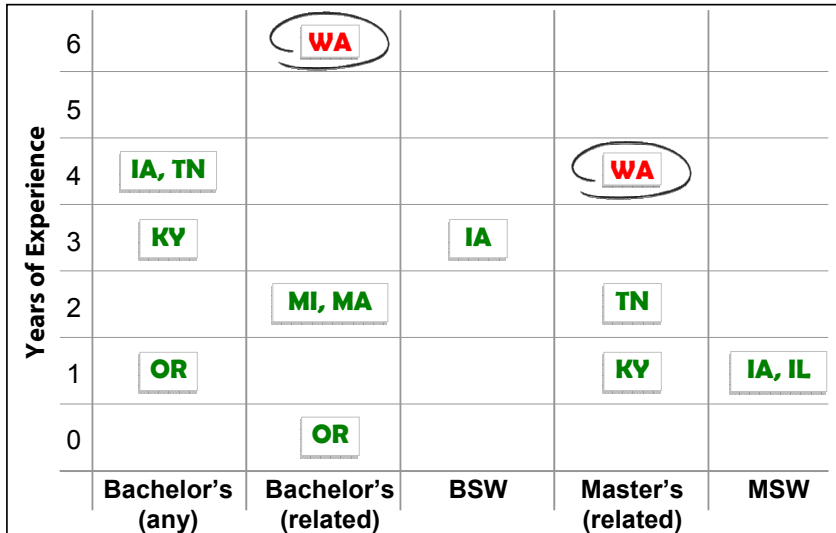
State Comparison



Supervisor Qualifications Generally Exceed Those in Comparison States



State Comparison



Pathway to Recommendation #1



Pathway & Finding

- There are no federal requirements for child welfare worker qualifications.
- However, the Legislature directed the Children's Administration to seek accreditation from a nationally recognized accreditation body.
- DSHS selected the Council on Accreditation.
- As part of the accreditation process, the Council considers numerous different factors including child welfare worker qualifications.

Pathway to Recommendation #1



P
a
t
h
w
a
y
&
F
i
n
d
i
n
g

- In comparing the Council's specific child welfare worker standards to the Children's Administration job qualifications and levels of experience and education, JLARC found that:
 - Current job qualifications, and the educational attainment and experience of caseworkers, meet the Council's standard.
 - However, current job qualifications and the educational attainment of more than half of supervisors do not meet the Council's standard for a Master's degree in Social Work or comparable field.

Pathway to Recommendation #1



P
a
t
h
w
a
y
&
F
i
n
d
i
n
g

- While an organization does not need to fully meet every Council standard, JLARC did not prioritize the standards or try to determine which standards it would be acceptable to not meet.

Finding #1

Based on DSHS-supplied data, only about 42% of Children's Administration Social Worker supervisors meet the Council's standard that supervisors have a Master's degree in Social Work or comparable field.

Meeting Accreditation Standards



R
e
c
o
m
m
e
n
d
a
t
i
o
n

Recommendation #1 (as originally written)

The Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration should develop a plan and a timeline for ensuring that the required qualifications for Social Worker job classifications with supervisory duties are in compliance with the standards established by the Council on Accreditation.

DSHS and OFM Partially Concur

Accreditation does not require 100% passage of all standards.

Meeting Accreditation Standards



R
e
c
o
m
m
e
n
d
a
t
i
o
n

Recommendation #1 (as rewritten by the Legislative Auditor)

DSHS Children's Administration should develop a plan and a timeline for ensuring that they **continue to make progress** on the standards established by the Council on Accreditation concerning the required qualifications for Social Worker job classifications with supervisory duties.

Pathway to Recommendation #2



P
a
t
h
w
a
y
&
F
i
n
d
i
n
g

- During our initial review of the Children's Administration personnel data supplied by DSHS, JLARC found only 7% of supervisors met the Council's standard for a Master's degree in Social Work or comparable field.
- This percentage was contrary to preliminary accreditation results and raised concerns over data quality.

Pathway to Recommendation #2



P
a
t
h
w
a
y
&
F
i
n
d
i
n
g

- In response, the Children's Administration conducted a manual evaluation of supervisors' educational attainment and found 42% met the standard.

Finding #2

DSHS Human Resources data on Social Worker educational attainment have not been kept up-to-date after hiring or promotion.

Improve and Maintain Accurate Human Resource Data



R
e
c
o
m
m
e
n
d
a
t
i
o
n

Recommendation #2

DSHS should improve and maintain the accuracy of the Children's Administration Social Worker human resources data, especially in the area of educational attainment.

DSHS and OFM Concur

DSHS has already updated the data and procedures are being implemented to assure current data are entered with each hiring/payroll action.

Contact Information



John Bowden
360-786-5298
bowden.john@leg.wa.gov

Report available on JLARC website:
www.jlarc.leg.wa.gov