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Pathways to Retention:

Job Satisfaction, Burnout, & Organizational Commitment Among Social Workers

## Abstract

**Purpose:** Job satisfaction, burnout, and organizational commitment remain concerns for human service organizations. Few studies have utilized a large sample of social workers to investigate these factors while also considering practice setting. In the present study, work-related burnout, satisfaction with workload, and satisfaction with organizational environment are examined as factors contributing to organizational commitment while comparing the measurement and predictive strength of these factors based on practice setting. **Method:** Confirmatory factor analyses and structural equation modeling were used to estimate and compare factors related to organizational commitment with a sample of 1,786 social workers practicing in the United States. **Results:** Satisfaction with organizational environment showed a strong positive relationship with organizational commitment. Work-related burnout was confirmed to have a negative relationship with organizational commitment. No measurement or structural model differences existed between social workers from different types of practice settings. **Discussion:** Findings suggest that increasing satisfaction with organizational environment is a better target for retaining employees than reducing workloads. Results emphasize the need for human service organizations to foster work environments which provide a climate of wellness, support, and recognition of employees' contributions at work.

*Keywords:* organizational commitment, professional burnout, job satisfaction, personnel turnover, Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, Social Worker Satisfaction Scale

### Pathways to Retention:

#### Job Satisfaction, Burnout, & Organizational Commitment Among Social Workers

Social workers' commitment to their organizations continues to be an important issue for social work and human service agencies. Organizational commitment is a psychological state indicating an employee's cohesion with an employing organization and its values, goals, and mission (Jaskyte & Lee, 2009; Marchiori & Henkin, 2004). High levels of organizational commitment among employees are associated with enthusiasm, loyalty, and intentions to remain with an organization (Giffords, 2009; Jaskyte & Lee, 2009). Studies have also found that organizational commitment is associated with increased organizational effectiveness and performance (Marchiori & Henkin, 2004; McNeese-Smith & Crook, 2003).

High levels of organizational commitment have also been found to reduce the likelihood of turnover among employees (Ingersoll, Kirsch, Merk, & Lightfoot, 2000; Marchiori & Henkin, 2004; Sinclair, Leo, & Wright, 2005). Turnover can have substantial implications for organizations which employ social workers. While some degree of turnover is functional and can contribute to innovation within an agency, excessive turnover can make it difficult for agencies to effectively provide needed services (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007). When turnover reaches dysfunctional levels, cases transfer from one social worker to another, creating challenges related to client retention, client-therapist alliances, and service access (Flower, McDonald, & Sumski, 2005). Turnover also contributes to higher caseloads for remaining social workers, adding stress and heavier workloads which may compound existing problems and lead to even more employee departures (Yamatani, Engel, & Spjeldnes, 2009).

Turnover results in significant financial costs to agencies as well as losses of institutional knowledge and human capital (Bliss, Gillespie, & Gongaware, 2010; Graef & Hill, 2000). A

noteworthy example exists within child welfare, a field of social work that has been wrought with high levels of turnover and as such has been the focus of much of the research on organizational commitment within social work (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Dorch, McCarthy & Denofrio, 2008). Turnover within the child welfare system has been estimated to be at least 20% each year and is likely higher for frontline employees such as protective service workers (American Public Human Services Association, 2005; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006). It is estimated that it costs a child welfare agency \$54,000 for every child welfare worker that leaves (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2016).

Increasing organizational commitment is important not only to agencies but also to the clients they serve (Schudrich et al., 2013). High turnover rates make it difficult to maintain continuity of care, negatively impacting clients and their families (Belling et al., 2011). For instance, youth involved with the child welfare system have reported effects of worker turnover including feeling a lack of emotional and physical stability and loss of trusting relationships (Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, 2010). Research has also indicated that children who experience interruptions in services due to worker turnover risk staying in foster care for longer periods and are less likely to achieve permanency (Ryan, Garnier, Zyphur, & Zhai, 2006; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010).

### **Factors Associated with Organizational Commitment**

Given the established relationship between high organizational commitment and low turnover rates, better understanding the relationships between factors which contribute to organizational commitment is key to preventing unnecessary turnover. The present study examines job satisfaction and burnout as key factors related to organizational commitment.

**Burnout.** Burnout among social workers is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion often resulting from an ongoing imbalance of stress and coping resources (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Work-related burnout is predictive of low organizational commitment for social workers and other helping professionals (Halbesleben, 2008; Shim, 2010; Yanchus, Periard, & Osatuke, 2017). The relationship between work-related burnout and organizational commitment is especially salient among social workers considering that the average expected working life for social workers is much shorter than for other professionals such as nurses, doctors, and pharmacists (Curtis, Moriarty, & Netten, 2009).

**Job satisfaction.** Job satisfaction is associated with organizational commitment and intentions to stay with an organization among social workers and other types of human service professionals (Lambert, Cluse-Tolar, Pasupuleti, Prior, & Allen, 2012; Yanchus, Periard, Moore, Carle, & Osatuke, 2015). Low job satisfaction is a strong predictor of burnout, indicating that job satisfaction's relationship with organizational commitment may be at least partially mediated by work-related burnout (Yanchus et al., 2015; Yanchus et al., 2017). The present study examines two components of overall job satisfaction in their relationships with burnout and organizational commitment: satisfaction with workload and satisfaction with organizational environment.

Social workers, regardless of specialization, are often burdened by heavy workloads. Satisfaction with workload is a key component of overall job satisfaction (Hermon & Chahla, 2018) and is associated with work-related burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; McFadden, Mallett, & Leiter, 2018). Larger caseloads, a common indicator of workload among direct-service social workers, can lead to working longer hours, becoming burned out, and leaving a job (Ellett, Ellis, & Westbrook, 2007; Gonzalez, Faller, Ortega, & Tropman, 2009; Kim, 2011). Consequently, heavier workloads and low satisfaction with workload predict lower

levels of organizational commitment (Griffiths & Royse, 2017; Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & McDermott Lane, 2005).

Satisfaction with organizational environment is another component of job satisfaction which has been associated with work-related burnout (Hamama, 2012) and organizational commitment among social workers (Giffords, 2009). Organizational environment encompasses workplace culture and climate, support from co-workers and supervisors, recognition, and employee self-efficacy (Graham, Trew, Schmidt, & Kline, 2007). Organizational culture, climate, and supervisory support are associated with organizational commitment among various types of social workers (Ellett, 2009; Fakunmoju, Woodruff, Kim, LeFevre, & Hong, 2010; Shim, 2010). Claiborne, Auerbach, Zeitlin, and Lawrence (2015) found factors related to satisfaction with organizational environment such as support and autonomy to be predictive of intentions to stay with an organization for both direct-service professionals and administrators. Other organizational environment factors like increased compensation, benefits, schedule flexibility, and professional development opportunities – organizational policy-controlled factors – are associated with higher job satisfaction and desire to stay in the organization (Acker, 2010; García, Sangregorio, & Sánchez, 2016; Marmo & Berkman, 2018; McGowan, Auerbach, Conroy, Augsberger, & Schudrich, 2010; Renner, Porter, & Preister, 2009; Schweitzer, Chianello, & Kothari, 2013).

**Practice setting.** While organizational commitment is an important issue among all types of social workers, much of the research to-date has focused on child welfare settings. Research has indicated that social workers practicing in the child welfare field have higher job demands and heavier workloads, experience burnout at higher rates, and have some of the highest rates of turnover compared to social workers in other fields (Beckett, 2007; Bradbury-Jones, 2013; Kim,

2011; Tham & Meagher, 2008; Truter, Fouche, & Theron, 2017). Conversely, social workers in mental health settings have been found to have higher levels of organizational commitment compared to those in other settings (Jaskyte & Lee, 2009). Moreover, little is known about organizational commitment of social workers in other settings.

### **The Present Study**

Given prior research on factors associated with organizational commitment, the present study seeks to better understand the relationships between job satisfaction, burnout, and organizational commitment among a large sample of practicing social workers in the United States. The present study makes use of a mixed sample of social workers from different work settings to explore factors contributing to organizational commitment separately by type of work (e.g., child welfare, mental health, or other). Confirmatory factor analyses and structural equation modeling are utilized to answer two research questions: 1) Which of these factors is most strongly related to organizational commitment?; and 2) Do the relationships between these factors vary between social workers practicing in different settings: child welfare, mental health, or other?

### **Method**

The institutional review board at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville provided exempt status in June 2017 as all data were collected anonymously (IRB #17-03813-XM). Data used for this study were originally collected as part of a larger project to explore the relationship between rurality and job satisfaction, burnout, and organizational commitment (Walters, Brown, & Jones, 2018; Walters, Jones, & Brown, 2019).

### **Sampling Procedures**

Four social media platforms —Facebook, LinkedIn, Reddit, and Twitter— were utilized to distribute an anonymous, online survey to practicing social workers in the United States for three weeks in July 2017. After reading information about the survey and study, participants provided written consent. Eligibility criteria for the study included having obtained a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree, a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, or PhD/doctorate degree in social work; being at least 18 years old; and currently practicing social work in the United States at the time of the survey. The survey was only available in English; thus, non-English speaking social workers were excluded.

Social media was chosen as a recruitment venue because a more traditional sampling frame, such as those which can be purchased from professional organizations (e.g., National Association of Social Workers [NASW]) or state social work licensing boards, was cost-prohibitive. Moreover, limitations exist regarding the generalizability of a sample obtained using these more traditional methods. Fewer than 25% of social workers are members of NASW (NASW, 2012), and many social workers practice without licensure (Smith & Stout, 2014).

### **Measures**

**Demographics and worker characteristics.** In addition to measuring age, gender, race, educational attainment, and marital status via self-report, several worker characteristics were measured to describe the sample. Practice experience was measured in years: *How many years have you been practicing social work?* Job experience was measured in years and months: *How long have you worked in your current job?* Job experience was recoded to a continuous scale measured in years. A single item measured salary: *What is your annual salary before taxes in U.S. dollars?*



**Practice setting.** Practice setting was measured categorically by asking participants: *What best describes the type of agency at which you are employed?* The response set included the following options: child welfare, mental health (outpatient, inpatient, or crisis), hospital/clinic (not working specifically or only in mental health), nursing home/hospice, school (PreK-12), university/college, prison/jail/probation (adults), church/religious association, human service organization not listed above, and other. In order to have group sizes adequate for model comparison and to support testing of our second research question, practice setting was recoded as child welfare (0), mental health (1), or other (2).

**Burnout.** The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI; Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005) was used to measure work-related burnout. The CBI was designed to measure physical and psychological exhaustion which is perceived as related to the respondent's work, client interactions, and personal life (Kristensen, et al., 2005). All subscales of the CBI have previously shown good internal reliability and construct validity with samples of social workers (Walters, Brown, & Jones, 2018; Creedy, Sidebotham, Gamble, Pallant, & Fenwick, 2017). The work-related burnout subscale consists of seven items probing a respondent's psychological and physical exhaustion directly related to work. All items on the CBI are multiple choice with five possible responses indicating either frequency (*always, often, sometimes, seldom, and never/almost never*) or level of agreement (*to a very high degree, to a high degree, somewhat, to a low degree, and to a very low degree*). Items are coded from 0 to 100 in increments of 25. The work-related burnout subscale achieved acceptable reliability with our sample ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Job satisfaction.** The Social Work Satisfaction Scale (SWSS) was used to measure satisfaction with the organizational environment and satisfaction with workload. The SWSS was developed to measure subjective well-being among social workers and previously shown good

validity and reliability (Kline & Graham, 2009; Shier et al., 2012). All items are rated on five-point, Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The satisfaction with organizational environment subscale consists of ten items ( $\alpha = .88$ ), and the satisfaction with workload subscale consists of six items ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Organizational commitment.** Organizational commitment was measured using four items probing likelihood to stay in current job and organization. These items were originally adapted by Graham, Bradshaw, Surood, & Kline (2014) for use with social workers (McCloskey & McCain, 1987; Mueller, Wallace, & Price, 1992). The following four items were used: (1) *rate your intention to leave your job in the near future*; (2) *rate the likelihood that you will be working at your current job a year from now*; (3) *rate the likelihood that you will be working at your current job two years from now*; and (4) *rate your plans for staying with the organization you currently work for until retirement*. The first item was coded as *extremely unlikely* (1), *somewhat likely* (2), *neither likely nor unlikely* (3), *somewhat unlikely* (4), and *extremely unlikely* (5). The remaining three items were reverse-coded using the same response set. The items used to measure organizational commitment showed acceptable reliability with our sample ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

IBM SPSS (25.0) was used to generate descriptive statistics and conduct missing data analyses. Univariate and multivariate outliers were identified in SPSS using standardized residuals, Cook's Distance, and Mahalanobis Distance (Bowen & Guo, 2012). Confirmatory factor analyses and structural equation modeling were conducted using AMOS (25.0; Arbuckle, 2017). Only cases with complete data for at least one exogenous latent variable and at least one endogenous latent variable were included for analysis ( $N = 1,818$ ). Missing data were handled

using full-information maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) for structural equation modeling and using pairwise deletion for descriptive statistics.

**Measurement model.** The measurement model was estimated using MLE. The measurement model was initially analyzed with no missing data in order to examine modification indices and tests of normality and outliers. A measurement model with all 27 items (excluding type of practice setting which was only used as a grouping variable to test metric invariance and to compare structural models) and four latent variables (satisfaction with workload, satisfaction with organizational environment, work-related burnout, and organizational commitment) was tested for fit. All measurement weights were tested for statistical ( $p < .05$ ) and practical significance (standardized weight above  $|.60|$ ). The sample was randomly split in half ( $N = 893$ ) so that respecifications could be made to the measurement model using one half of the sample and then cross-validated with the other half of the sample (Byrne, 2016). Once the measurement model was respecified without missing data, the same model was tested with missing data for comparison. Before proceeding to examination of structural models, the measurement model was tested for metric invariance between three groups of social workers: child welfare, mental health, or other. Testing for metric invariance was conducted as a prerequisite for testing the invariance of structural weights. Metric invariance testing was conducted by using automated multiple group analysis in AMOS to compare a model which allowed the measurement weights to be freely estimated for all three groups to a model where measurement weights were constrained to be equivalent for the three groups (Byrne, 2016).

**Structural models.** Our first research question was tested by estimating a structural model with organizational commitment as the sole endogenous latent variable and satisfaction with workload, satisfaction with organizational environment, and work-related burnout as

exogenous latent variables (see Figure 1). Structural models were identified by fixing the variance of each exogenous latent variable to one and by fixing the largest measurement weight associated with each endogenous latent variable to one (Byrne, 2016). Our second research question was tested by using automated multiple group analysis in AMOS to examine whether the structural weights of our two structural models were significantly different between social workers practicing in different types of practice settings: child welfare, mental health, or other. Default models allowing the structural weights to be freely estimated for all three groups were compared to models with structural weights constrained to be equivalent for all three groups (Byrne, 2016).

*< Insert Figure 1 Here >*

**Model fit and comparisons.** The comparative fit index (CFI;  $> .90$ ) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA;  $< .08$ ) goodness-of-fit statistics were utilized to evaluate model fit and compare models (Byrne, 2016; Perry, Clough, Crust, Nabb, & Nicholls, 2015). For model comparison, a significant chi-square difference test and an increase in CFI of at least .001 indicated a significant difference between nested models (Byrne, 2016).

## Results

The total sample of respondents used for analysis was 1,818 representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Most respondents were recruited from Facebook (66.3%) followed by LinkedIn (29.1%), Reddit (3.7%), and Twitter (0.9%). Social workers practicing in New York (8.1%), California (7.8%), Tennessee (7.0%), and Texas (5.3%) were the most represented in the sample.

## Missing Data & Outliers

Analyses revealed no influential univariate outliers and 32 influential multivariate outliers, which were removed prior to other analyses ( $N = 1,786$ ). Among the 27 manifest variables, 13 variables (48.15%) had incomplete data and 53 cases (2.97%) contained missing data. In total, 1.24% of all possible values across the 27 manifest variables were missing. Items measuring work-related burnout contained the largest proportion of missing data, ranging from 2.7% to 3.0%. Little's (1988) missing completely at random (MCAR) test provided evidence that data used in analyses were MCAR ( $\chi^2[73] = 93.77, p = .051$ ).

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The mean age among respondents was 38 years old ( $SD = 10.81$ ) and ranged from 20 to 80 years old (see Table 1). Within the sample, 90.4% of respondents were female, 79.9% were white, and 62.8% were married or partnered. Most respondents held graduate degrees in social work (MSW/MSSW or PhD/DSW: 86.2%; BSW: 13.8%). A third of social workers sampled (33.3%) reported working in mental health settings, 20.3% reported working in child welfare settings, and 46.4% worked in other types of settings. The mean salary was \$53,093 ( $SD = 18,849.15$ ). The average amount of practice experience was 9.93 years ( $SD = 8.87$ ), and the average amount of current job experience was 3.92 years ( $SD = 4.78$ ).

*<Insert Table 1 Here>*

Mean scores on the two SWSS subscales and three CBI subscales used in analyses were calculated for each respondent. The mean score for satisfaction with organizational environment was 3.44 ( $SD = .90$ ) and 3.10 ( $SD = .90$ ) for satisfaction with workload, indicating a moderate level of job satisfaction for the average social worker sampled. The mean work-related burnout score was 51.86 ( $SD = 21.16$ ), indicating a moderate level of burnout on average.

For organizational commitment, slightly more than 41% of respondents indicated that they were somewhat or extremely likely to leave their job in the near future (see Table 2). More than two-thirds (70.3%) of respondents indicated that they were either somewhat or extremely likely to be working the same job in a year, whereas fewer expected to be there after two years (53.0%). Just less than a third (31.8%) of respondents planned to stay at the same organization until retirement.

*<Insert Table 2 Here>*

### **Measurement Model**

The default measurement model did not achieve suitable fit to proceed with testing structural models ( $\chi^2[318] = 3039.73, p < .001; CFI = .896; RMSEA = .070$ ). All measurement weights for this model were statistically significant, and there were no issues with univariate normality (Byrne, 2016). However, the assumption of multivariate normality was not met based on statistically significant multivariate kurtosis ( $p < .001$ ). Bootstrapping was used with MLE to estimate structural models in order to correct for biases to significance tests and parameter estimates which may result from using MLE with non-normal data (Bowen & Guo, 2012; Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2011).

Since the default measurement model did not achieve suitable fit, the sample was randomly split in half ( $N = 893$ ) before making refinements to allow for cross-validation of changes. Items were examined for practical significance based on standardized regression weights of at least  $|.60|$ . Items below this threshold were removed sequentially beginning with the lowest weights to test for improvements in model fit. Items were also reviewed for content prior to removal in a process sometimes referred to as “scale purification” (Wieland, Durach, Kembro, & Treiblmaier, 2017). After removing four items, adequate fit was achieved ( $\chi^2[224] = 1018.78, p$

< .001;  $CFI = .933$ ;  $RMSEA = .063$ ). Two of the removed items measured satisfaction with organizational environment (SWSS4 & SWSS5) and two of them measured satisfaction with workload (SWSS17 & SWSS19). See Table 3 for a list of the items from the SWSS measuring satisfaction with workload and satisfaction with organizational environment. The respecified measurement model was cross-validated with the other half of the sample ( $\chi^2[224] = 942.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $CFI = .938$ ;  $RMSEA = .060$ ). The respecified measurement model was then tested with the full sample without missing data ( $\chi^2[224] = 1689.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $CFI = .937$ ;  $RMSEA = .061$ ) and with missing data allowed ( $\chi^2[224] = 1706.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $CFI = .937$ ;  $RMSEA = .061$ ) and showed similar fit.

*<Insert Table 3 Here>*

A model allowing measurement weights to vary between groups based on work setting (child welfare, mental health, and other) was compared to a model constraining measurement weights to be equal across the three groups to test for metric invariance. A chi-square difference test indicated no significant difference between the unconstrained and the constrained models ( $\Delta CFI < .001$ ;  $p > .05$ ), providing evidence for metric invariance between the three groups of social workers.

Correlations between latent variables were not high enough ( $>.80$ ) to indicate issues with discriminant validity within the measurement model (See Table 4). Based on bivariate correlations, the latent variable most strongly related to organizational commitment was satisfaction with organizational environment ( $r = .572$ ), followed by work-related burnout ( $r = -.538$ ), and satisfaction with workload ( $r = .425$ ).

*<Insert Table 4 Here>*

### Structural Models

A structural model was estimated to test the direct relationships between each factor and organizational commitment (see Figure 1;  $\chi^2[224] = 1689.47, p < .001; CFI = .937; RMSEA = .061$ ). Similar to the results of bivariate correlations between latent variables, satisfaction with organizational environment was the factor most strongly related to organizational commitment, when controlling for other factors ( $\beta = .43, p < .001, 95\% CI [.36, .49]$ ). Work-related burnout remained a robust predictor of organizational commitment ( $\beta = -.38, p < .001, 95\% CI [-.46, -.30]$ ) while the relationship between satisfaction with workload and organizational commitment was less robust when controlling for other factors ( $\beta = -.15, p < .001, 95\% CI [-.24, -.05]$ ). The three factors combined accounted for 38.7% of the variance in organizational commitment.

A multiple group analysis was conducted to test whether structural weights were significantly different between social workers practicing in different types of organizational settings: child welfare, mental health, or other. A chi-square difference test revealed that the model with structural weights allowed to vary between the three groups did not significantly differ from the constrained model ( $\chi^2[6] = 2.45, p = .874$ ).

### Discussion

With a shortage of social workers looming in the United States in the near future, gaining a better understanding of the pathways to organizational commitment through job satisfaction and burnout is critical (Lin, Lin, & Zhang, 2016). These constructs have long been studied. However, our study adds to existing research by exploring work-related burnout, specific sources of job satisfaction (workload and environment), and their relationships with organizational commitment. Utilizing a large sample of social workers who are employed at various types of



agencies in the United States, comparisons between child welfare, mental health, and other settings were also made.

Many of the relationships examined in our study confirmed previous findings. First, a negative relationship between work-related burnout and organizational commitment was confirmed, meaning that the more work-related burnout an employee experiences, the less committed they are to their employing organization (and vice versa). This finding is consistent with existing literature (e.g., Shim, 2010; Yanchus, Periard, & Osatuke, 2017). Findings also indicate that satisfaction with organizational environment and satisfaction with workload are negatively associated with work-related burnout, which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Acker, 1999; Coyle, Edwards, Hannigan, Fothergill, & Burnard, 2005; Kristensen et al., 2005; Shier et al., 2012). As expected, when social workers are unsatisfied with their workloads and the climate where they work, they are more likely to feel burnt out.

*Which of these factors is most strongly related to organizational commitment?*

Satisfaction with organizational environment proved to be more closely related to organizational commitment than either work-related burnout or satisfaction with workload. Satisfaction with workload had the weakest relationship with organizational commitment among the included factors. The relationship between satisfaction with workload and organizational commitment was less robust than for other factors, as evidenced by a moderate bivariate correlation that was suppressed when controlling for other factors in the full model. This finding is congruent with existing job satisfaction research – the work itself is not the leading factor related to cohesion with an agency; social workers desire challenge and role variety and are eager to work hard (Lambert et al., 2012; Pugh, 2016; Roh, Moon, Yang, & Jung, 2016). Instead, intrinsic and extrinsic organizational environment factors contribute to social workers' decisions

about staying with an organization more so than their satisfaction with the workloads levied upon them.

Thus, social workers seem more likely to weigh the overall milieu and climate of their workplaces than satisfaction with their workloads when considering their commitment to their employers. Furthermore, social workers do not necessarily need to reach burnout status before they consider leaving the organization. This might explain why the average tenure within our sample of social workers was fairly low – slightly less than four years. If they are not being supported, unhappy with work arrangements, or the environment is simply unhealthy, social workers might opt to leave before they become burnt out.

*Do the relationships between these factors vary between social workers practicing in different settings: child welfare, mental health, or other?*

In response to our second research question, our findings did not indicate structural model differences between social workers in child welfare, mental health, and other settings. This finding is important as mental health settings and other social work-type settings are not often studied in relation to the pathways to organizational commitment. Turnover and organizational commitment have often been studied in child welfare organizations (e.g., DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Dorch et al., 2008; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010). However, understanding job satisfaction and burnout as factors that impact social workers' commitments to their employers in other practice settings is also critical. Social workers in other settings make a major impact on social problems such as mental and physical health, poverty, homelessness, and crime. Applying this model to agencies outside of child welfare may increase knowledge about satisfaction and retention of social workers.

While it is well-established that turnover is higher among social workers practicing in child welfare settings than most other settings, our findings indicate no difference in which of the included factors are associated with organizational commitment between social workers in child welfare, mental health, or other settings. Our findings do not indicate a lack of differences in amounts of job satisfaction, burnout, or commitment between different practice settings but rather that the relationships between these factors appear to be invariant. Differences in organizational commitment between various practice settings are likely due to differences in the underlying factors which affect commitment such as burnout, organizational environment, and workload. Jayaratne and Chess (1984) suggested in their national study of social workers and job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover that the approach to increasing satisfaction, reducing burnout, and limiting turnover should be prescriptive: organizations must assess for these phenomena in social workers and consider changes to the work environment as needed.

Overall, our findings indicate positive and practical implications for employers. Organizational environment is a key factor related to organizational commitment, one that leaders and managers may have direct control over. Our findings indicate that when organizations provide a climate of wellness and effectively recognize employees' contributions at work, they will be more satisfied with the environment of the organization. Kanter and Sherman (2016) note in their book, "The Happy, Healthy Nonprofit: Strategies for Impact Without Burnout," that addressing burnout and dissatisfaction and promoting self-care starts with revitalizing the culture of the organization, which is "the sum of the collective mind-sets and behaviors of all its employees, even the board" (p. 108). Upon assessment for these phenomena, employees – not just leaders and managers – should define the values of the workplace and be

engaged with the change process (Kanter & Sherman, 2016). Considering the elements of the SWSS, these are potential ideas for tangible solutions that promote a positive work environment:

- Implement monthly, quarterly, and/or yearly recognition of outstanding work.
- Take performance reviews seriously. Recognize strengths and improvements. This can be a time for receiving employee feedback.
- Implement workplace wellness programs: gym memberships, group fitness activities, health insurance premium discounts.
- When possible, promote work-life balance with flexible paid time off (PTO) or tele-commuting. PTO is a big incentive to stay with an organization especially when it accrues with seniority.
- Assign mentors for new hires to help with onboarding and adjustment.
- Support professional development by offering paid leave and/or assisting with other costs to attend professional trainings and conferences.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include the cross-sectional nature of the study and the use of a convenience sample collected through social media. Recruitment through social media may have contributed to response bias by limiting our access to social workers who are not active on social media platforms, and our sample may not be representative of all social workers in the United States. Furthermore, the use of social media to recruit our sample may have biased the sample towards those experiencing more burnout and less job satisfaction. Our posts to social media requested that potential respondents “consider taking a short, anonymous survey about job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover among social workers in the United States.” The SWSS has been used in a small number of studies, but the average scores for satisfaction with workload and

organizational environment among our sample were similar to those in other studies (Graham et al., 2011; Shier et al., 2012). The average score for work-related burnout among our sample was higher than in some previous studies including Kristensen et al.'s (2005) paper describing the CBI's development and initial validation. However, the average work-related burnout score obtained with our sample was lower (indicating less burnout) than those reported in a recent paper which sampled child welfare staff including both bachelor's-level and master's-level social workers (Leake, Rienks, & Obermann, 2017). To the authors' knowledge, the CBI has never previously been used in a sample comprised solely of social workers, so there is no normative comparison for CBI scores among social workers.

Given the strong relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intentions, we utilized items probing intentions to remain with an organization over various prospective time periods to indicate commitment to an organization. However, other aspects of organizational commitment such as an employee's agreement and identification with an organization's mission were not indicated by our measure. Thus, organizational commitment as measured in the present study is best understood as commitment to remain with an organization and not as a direct indicator of an employee's agreement or identification with an employing organization's mission, values, and goals.

## **Conclusions**

This study adds to the current literature regarding burnout, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment among social workers in the United States. Results indicated that work-related burnout has a negative relationship with organizational commitment. Satisfaction with organizational environment had a stronger relationship with organizational commitment than work-related burnout or satisfaction with workload. No structural model differences existed

among social workers from different types of practice settings. Results emphasize the need for organizations employing social workers to foster work environments which provide a climate of wellness, support, and recognition of employees' contributions at work in order to retain employees. More research is needed in this area to further identify factors associated with burnout, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment and to establish causal relationships between these constructs.

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Table 1  
*Characteristics of Sample (N = 1,786)*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%	Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Salary</b>		
Male	157	8.8	< \$35,000	227	12.7
Female	1614	90.4	\$35,000-49,999	599	33.5
Transgender/Genderqueer	12	.6	\$50,000-64,999	560	31.4
Prefer Not to Answer	3	.2	\$65,000-79,999	226	12.7
<b>Age</b>			\$80,000+	174	9.7
20-29	441	24.7	<b>Practice Setting</b>		
30-39	686	38.4	Child Welfare	362	20.3
40-49	357	20.0	Mental Health	595	33.3
50-59	206	11.5	Other	829	46.4
60+	96	5.4	<b>Years in Practice</b>		
<b>Marital Status</b>			0-2	346	19.4
Single	522	29.2	3-5	407	22.8
Married/partnered	1122	62.8	6-10	423	23.7
Divorced	131	7.3	11-19	346	19.4
Widowed	11	.6	20+	264	14.8
<b>Race</b>			<b>Job Tenure (In Years)</b>		
White	1427	79.9	< 1	393	22.0
Black	205	11.5	1-2	557	31.2
Asian/Pacific Islander	31	1.7	3-5	457	25.6
Native American	19	1.1	6-10	202	11.3
Other	104	5.8	>10	177	9.9
<b>Educational Attainment</b>					
BSW/BSSW	246	13.8			
MSW/MSSW	1510	84.5			
PhD/DSW	30	1.7			

Table 2

*Organizational Commitment (N = 1,786)*

	Frequency	Percent
<i>1. Rate your intention to leave your job in the near future.</i>		
Extremely likely	348	19.5
Somewhat likely	386	21.6
Neither likely nor unlikely	268	14.0
Somewhat unlikely	352	19.7
Extremely unlikely	432	24.2
<i>2. Rate the likelihood that you will be working at your current job one year from now.</i>		
Extremely likely	746	41.8
Somewhat likely	509	28.5
Neither likely nor unlikely	128	7.2
Somewhat unlikely	180	10.1
Extremely unlikely	223	12.5
<i>3. Rate the likelihood that you will be working at your current job two years from now.</i>		
Extremely likely	472	26.6
Somewhat likely	475	26.4
Neither likely nor unlikely	162	9.1
Somewhat unlikely	282	15.8
Extremely unlikely	395	22.1
<i>4. Rate your plans for staying with the organization you currently work for until retirement.</i>		
Extremely likely	259	14.5
Somewhat likely	309	17.3
Neither likely nor unlikely	237	13.3
Somewhat unlikely	256	14.3
Extremely unlikely	725	40.6

Table 3

*Social Work Satisfaction Scale (SWSS) Items*

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**Satisfaction with Organizational Environment**

1. My organization actively provides a climate of wellness in my workplace.
2. I feel efficacious (able to make improvements) in my organization.
3. My organization supports healthy lifestyle options in my workplace.
4. My organization provides flexible work arrangements.<sup>a</sup>
5. My organization provides me enough time off.<sup>a</sup>
6. My organization effectively recognizes my contributions at work.
7. I have supportive co-workers.
8. I have supportive supervisors.
9. I have flexibility in my work.
10. My organization provides support for professional development.

**Satisfaction with Workload**

17. The nature of my work is overly bureaucratic.<sup>a, b</sup>
18. I feel I can cope with my workload.
19. I keep a boundary between my professional and personal life.<sup>a</sup>
20. I am able to control my workload.
21. I take enough time off from work.
22. My organization assigns reasonable workloads.

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*Note:* The SWSS was developed by Kline & Graham (2009)

<sup>a</sup> These items were removed from the measurement model to improve fit.

<sup>b</sup> This item was reverse-coded.

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics & Correlations for Latent Variables in Models (N = 1,786)*

	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Work-related Burnout	0	100	51.86	21.16	1			
2. Satisfaction with Organizational Environment	1	5	3.44	.90	-.629*	1		
3. Satisfaction with Workload	1	5	3.10	.90	-.765*	.654*	1	
4. Organizational Commitment	1	5	3.14	1.30	-.538*	.572*	.425*	1

\* $p < .001$

Figure 1. Structural model predicting organizational commitment

