Family Support Workforce Study
Year 1 Report
Phase I: Family Support Workforce Survey

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**The
National Resource
Center
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Family Centered
Practice**

Family Support Workforce Survey

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IOWA FAMLY SUPPORT WORKFORCE SURVEY

This document summarizes key findings from a statewide survey of Iowa's family support program employees, sponsored by the Iowa Department of Public Health and conducted by the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice at the University of Iowa. The survey sought to better understand the family support workforce and the organizational contexts within which family support services are provided, with a goal of strengthening the workforce and improving the quality of family support services. The survey is part of a larger research effort to measure changes in the family support workforce and assess the relationship between workforce experiences and family support outcomes. A full report of survey results follows this executive summary.

The *Iowa Family Support Workforce Survey* was comprised of questions relevant to the backgrounds, work experiences, and work environments of a variety of family support workers. Topics covered by the survey include: demographics; geographic information; educational and employment background; organization and job responsibilities; workload; professional development; supervision; promotion and job transfers; pay and benefits; perceptions of the work environment; future plans; and challenges and rewards of family support work. The survey made use of the software program REDCap, which allowed for most responses to be pre-programmed. Free responses were collected for questions regarding challenges and rewards of family support work. The survey was distributed via email to family support professionals listed within a statewide database as well as to program administrators of other family support programs that may not have been represented in the database. Much of the information in the report is organized by position, as there are expected differences in the experiences and responsibilities of employees in diverse job roles. The majority of respondents (nearly two-thirds) were direct service workers; supervisors made up 21.5% of the sample, administrators 10.5%, and a small percentage were classified as "other" (those whose position did not fit within the standard categories).

Family support workforce by position
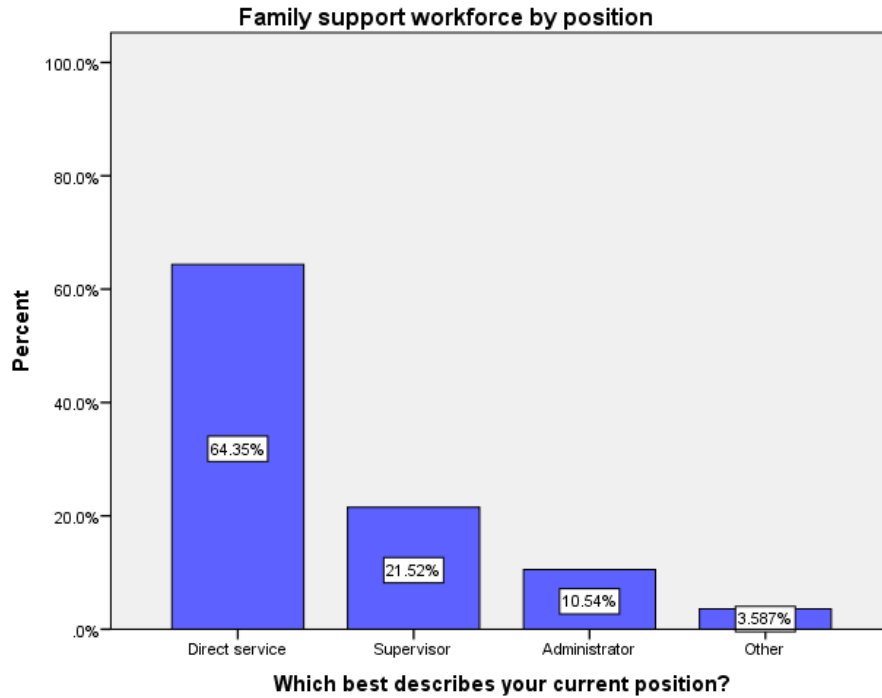
The demographic profile of the family support workforce is primarily female (97.7%), Caucasian (94.4%), and non-Hispanic (95.9%). More than three-quarters are married and are currently raising a child or have previously. Only age differed among positions, with the average age of administrators higher than that of direct service workers or supervisors; this can be expected as employees gain experience and change positions. Though the demographic profile is generally homogenous, geographic representation is diverse with almost every county in Iowa represented. The majority of respondents serve small Iowa towns (42.2%), though respondents also represent family support organizations in urban (27.9%), rural (22.9%), and suburban (7%) areas of the state.

Geographic area served

How would you describe the area that you serve?
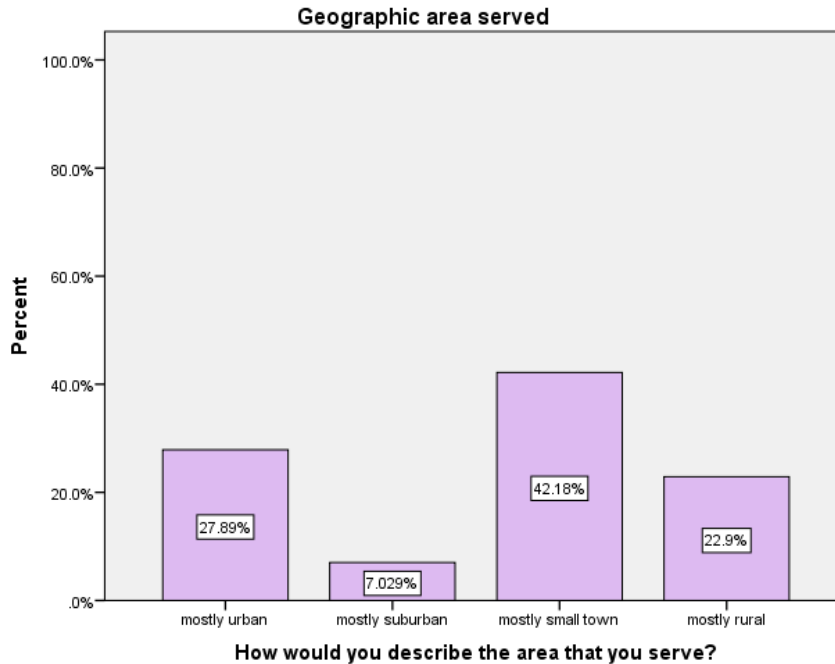
The family support workforce is well-educated, with over three-quarters of respondents possessing a bachelor's degree or higher. Those in supervisory and administrative roles are most likely to have advanced degrees. The educational background of this workforce is primarily in human services, health, or education, and most felt that this academic work prepared them somewhat (54.3%) or very well (39.8%) to do their job. Relatively few individuals (7% of sample) self-reported fluency in other languages as part of their academic preparation; as the population of Iowa becomes more diverse, this may be an area of growth for workers in the field.

Respondents were asked to characterize their work experience, organization, and job responsibilities to provide insight into the experience of family support workers. The modal organization type for the workforce is the private, non-profit agency, representing nearly 40% of the sample. Substantial proportions of respondents were also employed in public health (24.6%) and community action organizations (18.7%) throughout the state, among other types of institutions. The median length of time employees have worked in the field of family support was nine years, in the current agency for six years, and in the current position for three years.

Type of organization
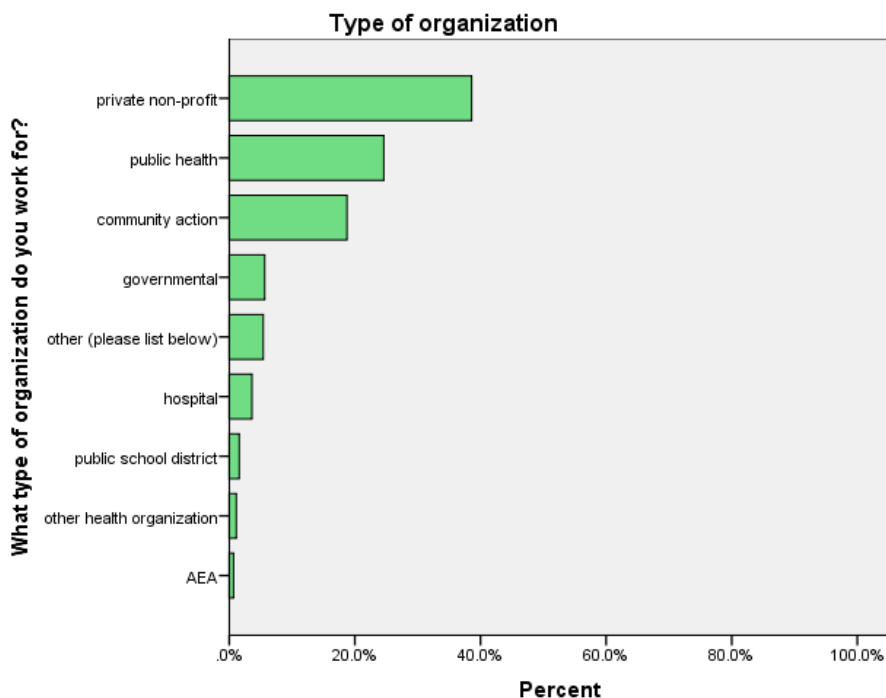
A desire to help was the most important factor as to why these individuals became interested in and continue to be employed in family support work, noted by 72.3% of respondents. Many also appreciated the fit with their personal belief systems (36.4%) and the flexibility of the positions (32.4%). Employees in the family support field have considerable experience in the field and are driven to service in the field by a desire to help others.

There is extensive variation in the number of hours worked and hours allocated to family support versus other job-related duties. Administrators worked significantly more hours per week than direct service employees, and administrators and supervisors spent less time in family support duties relative to other job-related tasks. The overall workloads of direct service, supervisory, and administrative staff also vary considerably. When asked about the caseload size, the modal range for direct service workers was from 11-20 cases with few carrying over 30 cases at a given point. The majority of supervisors reported managing staff sizes between one and ten; they considered this level of supervision to be "about right." One-third of supervisors also carried caseloads, with a modal caseload size of one to ten cases. Administrators reported greater variability in the number of staff supervised, though the modal range was still one to ten staff; most felt that the number of staff supervised was "about right." Few administrators (n=5) also carried caseloads.

Continuous professional development is vital for the family support workforce, and to measure the level of growth among this group the survey asked respondents about how many hours were spent in continuing education in the last 12 months. The overall average for the group was 19 hours, with direct support workers receiving significantly fewer hours on average (18.1) than their supervisory counterparts (21.4). This high level of professional development among supervisors may be part of IDPH's initiative to strengthen skills and knowledge of family support supervisors through ongoing training.

A sense of competence is important for employee job satisfaction and retention, and this holds true in family support roles. To gain a clear understanding of family support workforce capability and preparation for the job, several questions asked individuals to rate themselves in terms of competence in their current position and preparation for specific problem areas. Only one respondent felt "not very competent" in the job overall, while others identified as either "somewhat competent" (27.3%) or "highly competent" (72.5%). The problem area with the smallest proportion of very well prepared ratings was in substance abuse, with only 36.5% identifying as very well prepared; in other areas such as child maltreatment and developmental delays, the majority identified as well prepared. The results illustrate a workforce that sees itself as highly competent for the job and generally prepared to deal with most of the issues presented to it.

Effective supervision is important in retaining human services employees, and this survey asked a number of questions regarding the types, frequency, and perceived quality of supervision among the workforce. The majority of respondents (81%) reported receiving individual, in-person supervision often, with half characterizing this supervision as excellent and nearly 40% rating it as good. Group supervision was reported in some form by 52% of the sample, though this type of supervision occurred less frequently with the modal frequency reported as monthly. The quality of group supervision was also evaluated highly, with nearly 48% rating it as excellent and 39% as good. Electronic supervision methods such as email, Skype, and phone were reported by nearly 40% of respondents, with variability in frequency patterns ranging from the modal frequency of several times a week to only as needed. Overall respondents were satisfied with this method of supervision as well.

Questions related to promotions and job transfers were included to assess movement within family support organizations. These questions inquired how many times individuals were promoted within their current agencies at a higher salary, promoted within their current agency with no salary increase, and how many times they voluntarily transferred to a different position at the same pay scale. These data show that most supervisors and administrators have experienced promotions within their agencies at a higher salary. Most direct service workers, on the other hand, have not experienced a promotion in their agency; this cannot be contributed solely to tenure in the organization because only about one-quarter have worked for the organization for less than two years and a number have worked in the agency for more than ten years. Voluntary transfers within the organization were reported by nearly 19% of the sample, while promotions without pay increases were reported by about 13% of respondents.
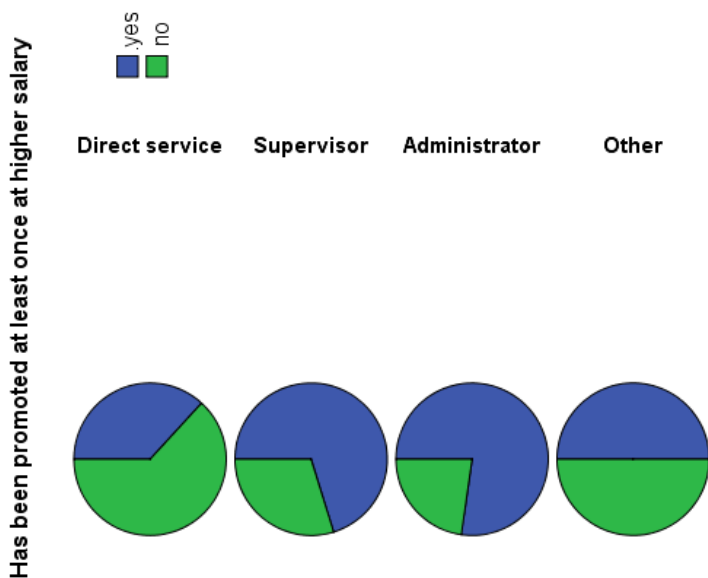
The survey asked several questions related to salary, available and utilized benefits, and satisfaction with pay and raises. Salaries of the family support workforce vary considerably within and across positions from less than $15,000 to more than $75,000 per year, with higher pay primarily among supervisors and administrators. Supervisors and administrators were consequently more likely to agree that their salary provided them with a living wage (71.7% and 80.0%, respectively) and were more likely to be satisfied with pay and pay raises than direct service workers. With regard to benefits, the benefits used most often were flexible work hours, vacation leave, and sick leave. Medical insurance was not available to 14.4% of respondents and dental insurance was not available for 20.5%; among those with access to these benefits, 57.2% actually used them. Of note was the large percentage of respondents who indicated that compensation for professional development was not available to them (37.8%). When the tuition benefits were available, they were used by 49.8% of respondents. Supervisors were most likely to believe that their benefit package provided a safety net (55%), while direct service workers were less likely to agree with this statement (45%).

Does salary provide a living wage?

No
Yes

| Direct service | Supervisor | Administrator | Other |
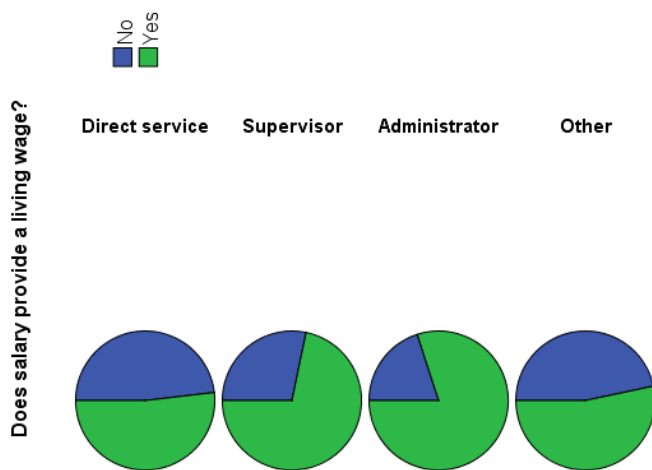
A portion of the survey measured aspects of the work environment related to job satisfaction, commitment to the agency and to the field of practice, and intentions to remain in the organization and field. Direct service workers perceive significantly less opportunity for advancement within the organization, lower job security, a higher degree of hazardous work conditions, and less clear and timely communication compared with supervisors and administrators. Direct service workers also perceived significantly stronger support from supervisors, lesser work overload, and lesser commitment to the organization than administrators. Finally, while the majority of respondents indicated that they felt supported at the state level, the percentage was lower for direct service workers (60.7%) compared with supervisors (76.3%) or administrators (74.4%).

Respondents were asked to characterize their future plans to assess the likelihood of retention and turnover. The majority of respondents anticipate that they will be working in the same agency five years from now, with more than one-half in the same position and another 15% in a different position; this is consistent with an expected organizational retention rate of 65% over five years. A small percentage sees itself as moving to a different agency, and few expect to be working in a different field. The greatest area of concern for employees who are considering leaving the field is salary, noted by 53.6% of respondents overall and 60.3% of direct service workers in particular. Salary was ranked over other factors such as opportunity for career advancement and better benefits.

Where do you expect to be in five years?
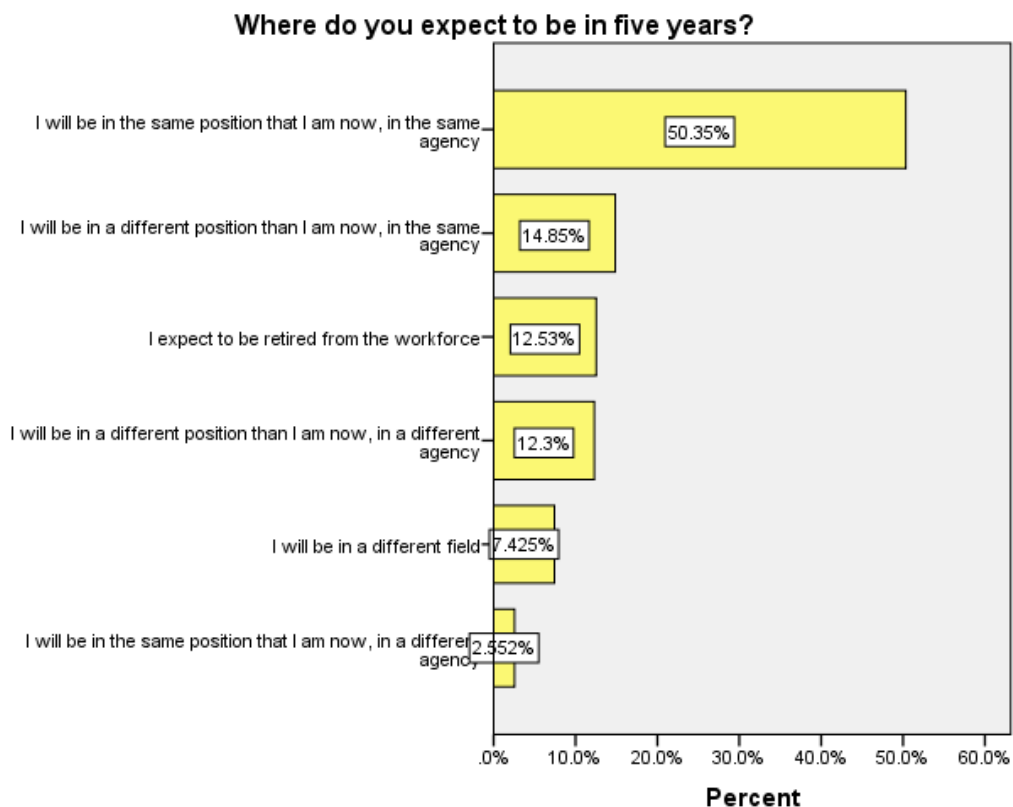
Finally, the challenges and rewards of family support work were evaluated through two open-ended questions: "What do you feel are the challenges that make it difficult to do your job in family support?" and "What do you feel are the greatest rewards in family support work?" Many respondents identified more than one challenge or reward in their comments. There was substantial variation in the reported challenges, with most issues relating to the demands of the job and the work environment. The most frequently cited challenges included paperwork, funding instability, workload, inadequate pay, client motivation, and client problems, though numerous other challenges were noted. The reported rewards of family support work were fairly consistent, with responses centered on satisfaction from helping families and seeing positive outcomes for children and families. Specifically, these responses include seeing families grow and develop, helping others, seeing child growth and development, and seeing family success stories, among others.

We note some differences by position in certain aspects of the work environment, including opportunities for promotion, job security, agency communication, work overload, hazardous working conditions, supervisor support, and commitment to the agency. In other respects, however, there were no significant differences by position, and respondents scored quite high on their overall job satisfaction, orientation to service, role clarity, and support from co-workers, the organization and the state. A few specific areas of growth for the workforce include greater access to funds for professional development (especially for direct service workers), greater rates of language fluency to serve an increasingly diverse population, and higher salaries to keep workers in the field of family support. As a whole, however, respondents are highly competent and satisfied in their family support roles.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

IOWA FAMLY SUPPORT WORKFORCE SURVEY

This report provides a profile of Iowa's family support workforce, obtained through a statewide survey of family support program employees under sponsorship of the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). The purpose of this survey was to gain a greater understanding of the family support workforce and its organizational contexts with a goal of strengthening the workforce and improving the quality of family support services. The Iowa Family Support Workforce Survey is the first step in a larger research effort that will assess changes in the workforce and the relationship between workforce issues and family support outcomes.

The Iowa family support workforce survey covers a broad range of topics pertinent to the backgrounds, work experiences, and work environments of family support employees. The survey was constructed using REDCap, a software program that allowed most responses to be pre-programmed in response categories. Use of this program reduced the likelihood of data entry errors.

The survey was distributed from October to December 2013 through email. Most of the survey recipients were family support employees whose email addresses were contained in a statewide database; these individuals received an email message containing a direct link to the electronic survey. An email message was also distributed to program administrators of other family support programs that may not have been represented in the database, with a request to distribute the message to family support staff. Because the number of individuals who received the survey through this latter method could not be determined, we cannot precisely report the response rate. The total number of respondents was 448, and our estimated response rate, after accounting for duplicate email addresses and messages returned undeliverable, is 70%.

Findings are organized according to key areas covered by the survey, beginning with workforce demographics; geographic representation; job characteristics; education and training; supervision; pay and benefits; aspects of the work environment; employees' job satisfaction and commitment; employees' future job plans; and challenges and rewards of family support work.

The survey respondents represent different positions within family support programs—direct service, supervisor, administrator, or "other" (those whose position did not fit within these standard categories). Because it is reasonable to expect differences by position on work-related questions, many of the results are presented according to position. When we conducted statistical tests to determine whether responses differed significantly by position, we only included direct service workers, supervisors, and administrators in these tests—because the "other" category contained a small number of individuals with varying job types that could not be reliably compared. Table 1 illustrates the number and percentage of respondents according to their position. Direct service workers comprise nearly two-thirds of the sample.

Table 1. Survey respondents by position

Position	Number	Percent of sample
Direct service worker	287	64.3%
Supervisor	96	21.5%
Administrator	47	10.5%
Other	16	4.6%

Demographic Profile

One of the questions of interest to IDPH was to what extent the current family support workforce is representative of the population of consumers of family support services. Results of the survey indicate that the family support workforce in Iowa is overwhelmingly female (98%), Caucasian (94%), and non-Hispanic (96%). More than three-quarters of the respondents are married and are raising a child currently or did so in the past. The average number of people living in their household is 3.2, but this varies widely from one to eight. Available statewide data indicate that 70% of family support consumers are Caucasian, 16% are Hispanic/Latino, 96% are female, and 43 % are married. Thus the demographic profile of the workforce is somewhat different from family support consumers in terms of racial/ethnic composition and family structure.

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics by position and generally illustrates the demographic similarities across positions. Only age differed significantly, with a higher average age for administrators compared with direct service workers or supervisors. This is to be expected as employees gain experience and move into higher level positions.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics by position

Variable	Direct Service N=285 n %		Supervisor N=95 n %		Administrator N=46 n %		Other position N=16 n %		Total N=432 n %	
Gender										
Female	281	98.6%	92	96.8%	43	93.5%	16	100%	432	97.7%
Male	4	1.4%	3	3.2%	3	6.5%	0	--	10	2.3%
Race										
Caucasian	270	94.4%	91	95.8%	42	91.3%	15	93.8%	418	94.4%
African-Am	10	3.5%	1	1.1%	2	4.3%	1	6.3%	14	3.2%
Asian	2	.7%	1	1.1%	1	2.2%	0	--	4	.9%
Multiple	4	1.4%	2	2.1%	1	2.2%	0	--	7	1.6%
Hispanic ethnicity	16	5.6%	2	2.1%	0	--	0	--	18	4.1%
Marital stat										
Married	198	70.2%	75	78.9%	36	78.3%	13	81.3%	322	73.3%
Partnered	9	3.2%	3	3.2%	2	4.3%	1	6.3%	15	3.4%
Single	42	14.9%	2	2.1%	4	8.7%	1	6.3%	49	11.2%
Div/sep	28	9.9%	13	13.7%	3	6.5%	0	--	44	10.1%
Widowed	4	1.4%	2	2.1%	1	2.2%	1	6.3%	9	2.1%
Raised a child	241	84.9%	78	83.0%	35	77.8%	15	93.8%	369	84.1%
Age*	X=40.7 (SD=11.9)		X=43.0 (SD = 11.5)		X=49.3 (SD = 11.0)		X=45.4 (SD = 11.1)		X=42.3 (SD = 11.9)	
N people in household	X=3.2 (SD = 1.4)		X=3.2 (SD=1.4)		X=2.8 (SD=1.2)		X=3.3 (SD=1.7)		X=3.2 (SD=1.4)	

*Age of administrators is significantly different from age of direct service and supervisors

Geographic representation

Survey respondents represent all geographic areas of the state. When we asked respondents about the number of counties in which they worked, the mean number was 1.8 (SD=1.7), but this ranged from one county to more than ten. When we asked for the county in which they worked the *most*, we noted that 93 out of Iowa's 99 counties were mentioned by at least one individual. Counties with the largest numbers of respondents were Scott (n=33), Polk (n=25), Black Hawk (n=22), Woodbury (n=20), and Dubuque (n=18). At the other extreme, 21 different counties are represented by one survey respondent.

If we group counties into the six IDPH regions, we note that there is a solid representation by each region as depicted in table 3. The largest proportion of survey respondents indicate that the county in which they work the most is located in east central Iowa-region 6; the smallest proportion is from the northeast-region 2.

Table 3. Geographic distribution of survey respondents

Region	Number	Percent of respondents
Region 1 – central	92	21.0%
Region 2 – northeast	44	10.0%
Region 3 – northwest	69	15.8%
Region 4 – southwest	50	11.4%
Region 5 – southeast	62	14.2%
Region 6 – east central	121	27.6%

As one other indicator of geographic coverage, we asked respondents to characterize the area they served as mostly urban, suburban, small town, or rural. These are depicted in table 4. The largest percentage of respondents described their area as small town, the smallest percentage as suburban.

Table 4. Primary area served

Primary area	Number	Percent of respondents
Mostly urban	123	27.9%
Mostly suburban	31	7.0%
Mostly small town	186	42.2%
Mostly rural	101	22.9%

Education

The family support workforce is well-educated. The largest proportion of respondents has a four-year college degree (66%), while a smaller proportion (10%) has a Master's degree; this means that over three-quarters of the workforce has a bachelor's degree or higher, with advanced degrees most common among supervisors and administrators. An additional 15% have a two-year (associate level) degree. The percentage of the workforce with no more than a high school diploma or GED is small (8%) and primarily at the level of direct service worker (table 5).

Table 5. Highest level of education attained

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
GED	3	1.0%	0	--	0	--	0	--	3	.7%
High school diploma	29	10.1%	4	4.2%	1	2.2%	0	--	34	7.7%
Associate's degree	52	18.2%	10	10.4%	3	6.5%	2	13.3%	67	15.1%
Bachelor's degree	186	65.0%	63	65.6%	33	71.7%	10	66.7%	292	65.9%
Master's degree	16	5.6%	19	19.8%	8	17.4%	3	20.0%	46	10.4%
Doctorate	0	--	0	--	1	2.2%	0	--	1	.2%

In addition to level of education, the survey asked respondents about their major course of study. As shown in table 6, results indicate that the majority of family support employees had educational preparation in human services, social work, education, health care, or in an allied field related to one of these areas. Very few respondents had degrees in fields that were not related to education, health or human services. The specific majors are varied and too numerous to list individually – but they includes fields as diverse as business administration, theology, home economics, criminal justice, philosophy, English, speech pathology, and Spanish.

Table 6. Field of study

Field	Number (n=427)	Percent of respondents
Human services	96	22.5%
Social work	75	17.6%
Education	72	16.9%
Health care	65	15.2%
Other field related to education, health, human services	90	21.1%
Other field not related to education, health, human services	29	6.8%

We asked respondents how well they felt that their academic work prepared them to do their job (table 7). The largest proportion (54%) felt that their academic work had prepared them somewhat for their job, while another 40% felt very well prepared. Only a small percentage (6%) indicated that their academic work did not prepare them well at all. These results did not differ significantly across positions.

Table 7. Academic preparation for job

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Prepared very well	111	39.9%	34	35.8%	20	43.5%	8	50.0%	173	39.8%
Prepared somewhat	152	54.7%	54	56.8%	23	50.0%	7	43.8%	236	54.3%
Not well at all	15	5.4%	7	7.4%	3	6.5%	1	6.3%	26	6.0%

In the area of linguistic competence, relatively few individuals (n=30, 7% of total sample) self-reported fluency in languages other than English. For 22 the second language was Spanish, and other individual respondents listed Arabic, French, Japanese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Serbian,

Croatian, and sign language. As the population of Iowa becomes more diverse, there may be an anticipated need for more multi-lingual employees.

Work Experience

The workforce survey asked several questions related to work experience: about how long the employee had worked in their current agency, time spent in their current position in the agency, and their total amount of work experience in family support. Responses to these items reveal both high average lengths of experience as well as considerable variation; therefore we examined both the means and medians. In addition we examined the percent of respondents with less than one year of experience, by position and in the aggregate. All of these data are presented in table 8.

Table 8. Work experience

Variable	Direct X (SD) Mdn	Supervisor X (SD) Mdn	Administrator X (SD) Mdn	Other X (SD) Mdn	Total X (SD) Mdn
Average number of years					
Years in agency***	6.5 (6.8) 5	10.0 (8.3) 7	13.4 (9.3) 12	10.8 (9.7) 9.5	8.1 (7.9) 6
Years in position**	4.9 (5.3) 3	4.9 (5.0) 3	7.6 (7.1) 6	6.1 (5.1) 5	5.2 (5.5) 3
Total years in family support***	8.9 (7.8) 7	12.2 (8.0) 10	16.0 (9.8) 15	12.4 (8.6) 11.5	10.5 (8.4) 9
Percent with less than one year	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %
Less than one year in current agency	51 17.8%	9 9.4%	2 4.3%	2 12.5%	64 14.3%
Less than one year in current position	51 17.9%	14 14.6%	4 8.7%	2 12.5%	71 16.0%
Less than one year in family support	24 8.7%	1 1.1%	2 4.3%	0 --	27 6.2%

**p<.01; ***p<.001

Because of the discrepancies between means and medians, the median length of time is a better indicator of "average" than the mean, which is affected by very low and very high numbers. These data reveal that the average employee has worked in the agency for six years and in their current position for three years. Furthermore, the average employee has nine years of experience in family support. Comparing across positions, direct service workers have spent significantly fewer years in the agency and in family support than either supervisors or administrators, and significantly fewer years in their current position than administrators. These are findings are consistent with expectations.

Due to concerns about job retention and turnover, we also looked specifically at the percentage of respondents who reported having less than one year of experience in each of the items in table 7. We note that 14% of respondents have less than one year in the agency and 16% have been in their

current position for less than one year. Only a small number (6%) have less than one year of total experience in family support.

To better understand respondents' motivations to enter the field of family support, we asked whether each of the items in table 9 interested them when they first started working in family support. The results show that a desire to help was the most important factor, reported by 72% of the respondents. A fit with personal belief systems and flexibility of the positions were also noted by 36% and 32% of respondents, respectively.

Table 9. What interested respondents about the family support field

Variable	Number	Percent of respondents
Desire to help	324	72.3%
Fit with personal belief system	163	36.4%
Flexibility of the position	145	32.4%
Job availability	111	24.8%
Personal experience with family support	64	14.3%
Other	32	7.1%

Organization and Job Responsibilities

Type of organization. Family support programs in Iowa are administered through a variety of organizational auspices. Respondents were asked to note the type of organization in which they worked. Table 10 illustrates the number and percentage of respondents employed in various types of organizations.

Table 10. Type of organization

Variable	Number	Percent of respondents
Private, non-profit	175	39.5%
Public health	109	24.6%
Community action	83	18.7%
Governmental	27	6.1%
Hospital	16	3.6%
Public school district	8	1.8%
Other health organization	5	1.1%
Extension	4	.9%
AEA	3	.7%
Other	13	5.4%

The modal organizational type was the private, non-profit agency, representing nearly 40% of the sample. Public health agencies were the second most prominent type, comprising nearly one-quarter of the survey respondents. Nearly 19% worked for community action agencies. Smaller numbers of respondents worked in governmental agencies, hospitals, public schools, other health settings, county extension offices, and area educational agencies. Examples of "other" types of organizations noted by individuals were community colleges or universities, empowerment programs, and Parents as Teachers.

Hours worked. Respondents were asked to estimate the numbers of hours they worked at their job each week, how many of those weekly hours were spent in family support duties, and how many were spent in other job-related duties. These data are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Hours worked

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	X	*(SD)*	*X*	*(SD)*	*X*	*(SD)*	*X*	*(SD)*	*X*	*(SD)*
Hrs per week in job**	35.7	(8.8)	37.8	(10.6)	40.3	(9.6)	37.1	(5.7)	36.7	(9.3)
Hrs in family support duties***	26.3	(10.5)	21.5	(12.2)	15.9	(12.2)	20.5	(13.1)	24.0	(11.7)
Hrs in other job-related duties***	12.1	(9.2)	18.9	(12.9)	23.9	(13.4)	16.8	(12.7)	15.0	(11.5)

** p < .01 *** p< .001

We noted some differences by position in these measures that would be expected in light of their job responsibilities. Administrators worked significantly more hours per week than direct service workers. Direct service workers differed from both supervisors and administrators in spending proportionately more of their time in family support duties and less in other job-related duties. Among all groups, however, there was wide variation in the number of hours worked and hours allocated to family support versus other job-related duties.

We further differentiated individuals who reported working up to 20 hours a week (part-time) from those who worked more than 20 hours a week, which is depicted in table 12. Part-time workers made up less than 10% of the sample. The means in table 12 more accurate reflect the number of hours for part-time and full-time workers. The presence of large standard deviations, however, still suggests that there is considerable variation in the numbers of hours worked and in the distribution between family support and other job-related duties.

Table 12. Hours worked for part-time and full-time employees

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	X	*(SD)*	*X*	*(SD)*	*X*	*(SD)*	*X*	*(SD)*	*X*	*(SD)*
Part-time (up to 20 hrs per week)	N=29		N=8		N=3		N=1		N=41	
Hrs per week in job	14.4	(6.0)	8.9	(6.5)	13.3	(9.9)	20	--	13.4	(6.6)
Hrs in family support duties	10.4	(4.6)	7.1	(4.5)	5.0	(7.8)	10.0	--	9.4	(5.0)
Hrs in other job-related duties	11.6	(11.0)	23.8	(15.1)	20.33	(17.0)	10.00	--	14.7	(12.9)
More than 20 hours (full-time)	N=257		N=86		N=43		N=15		N=401	
Hrs per week***	38.1	(5.0)	40.5	(5.8)	42.2	(6.8)	38.3	(3.6)	39.1	(5.5)
Hrs in family support duties***	28.1	(9.5)	23.0	(11.9)	16.7	(12.2)	21.3	(13.2)	25.6	(11.1)
Hrs in other job-related duties***	12.1	(9.0)	18.3	(12.7)	24.2	(13.3)	17.3	(13.0)	15.0	(11.3)

***p<.001

Workload. The family support workforce survey obtained information about the workloads of direct service, supervisory, and administrative staff. Direct service workers were asked about their caseload size. Supervisors and administrators were asked about their supervision responsibilities and whether they additionally carried caseload responsibilities. Each is discussed separately.

Direct service worker caseloads. The overwhelming majority of direct service workers (93%) described their primary job duty as home visiting. Their caseload sizes varied substantially, with the modal range from 11-20 cases (45% of sample). Sizable numbers of respondents carried caseloads of 21-30 and 1-10. Caseloads of more than 30 were reported by 11% of direct service workers. These data are displayed in table 13.

Table 13. Caseload size for direct service workers

Caseload	Number (n=287)	Percent of respondents
1-10	60	21.4%
11-20	128	45.4%
21-30	62	22.1%
31-40	19	6.8%
41-50	4	1.4%
51+	8	2.9%

Supervisor workloads. The majority of supervisors reported managing staff sizes between one and ten; accordingly, there was a strong sense that the number of staff supervised was "about right." In addition, about one-third of the supervisors in this sample also carried caseloads. Most commonly the caseload size ranged from one to ten, but as shown in table 14, caseload sizes for supervisors demonstrated variability.

Table 14. Workload for supervisors

Staff supervised	Number (n=96)	Percent of respondents
1-10	84	87.5%
11-20	8	8.3%
21-30	4	4.2%
Number of staff supervised seems	**Number (n=96)**	**Percent of respondents**
Too high	3	3.1%
About right	86	89.6%
Too low	7	7.3%
Number of Cases Carried by Supervisors	**Number (n= 33)**	**Percent of respondents**
1-10	22	66.7%
11-20	7	21.2%
21-30	3	9.1%
31-40	0	--
41-50	1	3.0%

Administrator workloads. When examining the workloads of administrators as compared to supervisors, there is greater variability in terms of the number of staff supervised. Although the modal number ranged from one to ten staff, data in table 15 demonstrate the variability in number of supervisees among the family support administrators. Nonetheless, the majority of administrators felt that the number of staff supervised seemed "about right." A small number of administrators (n=5) also carried caseloads.

Table 15. Workload for administrators

Staff supervised	Number (n=42)	Percent of respondents
1-10	23	54.8%
11-20	8	19.0%
21-30	5	11.9%
31-40	1	2.4%
41-50	2	4.8%
51+	3	7.1%
Number of staff supervised seems	**Number (n=42)**	**Percent of respondents**
Too high	2	4.8%
About right	36	85.7%
Too low	4	9.5%
Number of Cases Carried by Administrators	**Number (n=5)**	**Percent of respondents**
1-10	2	40.0%
11-20	3	60%

Professional development. Continuous professional development is vital for human services workers, including those who work in family support. The survey asked respondents about how many hours they spent in continuing education in the last 12 months. Responses are depicted in table 16. Supervisors spent a significantly greater number of hours in continuing education in the previous year compared with direct service workers, perhaps as part of IDPH's initiative to strengthen training for family support supervisors.

Table 16. Hours of continuing education in the last 12 months

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	X	*(SD)*	X	*(SD)*	X	*(SD)*	X	*(SD)*	X	*(SD)*
Hours*	18.1	(9.2)	21.4	(9.0)	19.4	(8.7)	18.0	(7.9)	19.0	(9.1)

*$p < .05$

Job competence. Research has highlighted the importance of a sense of competence to employee job satisfaction and retention. Several questions addressed the issue of individuals' competence and preparation for the job. One item asked respondents to rate themselves in terms of how competent they felt they were in their current position. The rating options were "highly competent", "somewhat competent", and "not very competent". Results are depicted in table 17.

Table 17. Self-reported level of competence in current position

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Highly competent	205	72.2%	68	71.6%	33	73.3%	13	81.3%	319	72.5%
Somewhat competent	78	27.5%	27	28.4%	12	26.7%	3	18.8%	120	27.3%
Not very competent	1	.4%	0	--	0	--	0	--	1	.2%

These results portray a workforce that primarily sees itself as highly competent for the job (73%). Slightly more than one-quarter described themselves as somewhat competent, and only one person felt not very competent in their job. The proportions were comparable across positions.

Another set of items asked respondents how well prepared they felt to deal with specific problem areas that they might encounter in family support work. The rating options were "not well prepared", "somewhat prepared", and "very well prepared". Results for these items are shown in table 18.

Table 18. Degree of preparedness in specific problem areas

Topic area	Not well prepared		Somewhat prepared		Very well prepared	
Child maltreatment	23	2.7%	159	36.3%	267	61.0%
Intimate partner violence	23	5.2%	227	51.7%	189	43.1%
Substance abuse	27	6.2%	251	57.3%	160	36.5%
Mental health (adult)	25	5.7%	207	47.4%	205	46.9%
Mental health (child)	35	8.0%	211	48.3%	191	43.7%
Developmental delays (adult)	32	7.3%	214	48.7%	193	44.0%
Developmental delays (child)	9	2.0%	103	23.4%	328	74.5%
Household/environmental hazards	12	2.8%	174	39.9%	250	57.3%

Overall, survey respondents felt either somewhat prepared or very well prepared to deal with most of the issues presented to them; only a relatively small percentage (ranging from two to eight percent, depending on the item) felt not well prepared in these areas. The areas in which the largest proportions rated themselves as being very well prepared were developmental delays in children and child maltreatment. The lowest proportion of very well prepared ratings was found in the area of substance abuse.

Supervision received. There is a considerable body of research documenting the importance of supervision in retaining human service employees. In this survey we sought to obtain information about types, frequency, and quality of supervision. For each type of supervision-in-person individual supervision, group supervision, and electronic supervision - we asked respondents to rate the frequency and quality.

Individual supervision. The majority of respondents (81%) reported receiving individual, in-person supervision. The frequency of this type of supervision varied, with the most commonly

reported frequencies being weekly (31%), monthly (30%), and every other week (22%). Smaller percentages reported supervision either more frequently than weekly or less frequently than monthly. With regard to quality, half of the respondents characterized this supervision as excellent with another 37% as good. Very few felt that the quality of in-person supervision they received was poor. These data are presented in table 19.

Table 19. Frequency and quality of individual, in-person supervision

	Number (n=352)	**Percent of respondents**
Frequency of supervision		
Daily	2	.6%
Several times a week	9	2.6%
Weekly	111	31.5%
Every other week	78	22.2%
Monthly	107	30.4%
Less than monthly	16	4.5%
Only as needed	29	8.2%
Quality of supervision	**(n=348)**	**Percent of respondents**
Excellent	177	50.9%
Good	129	37.1%
Fair	36	10.3%
Poor	6	1.7%

Group supervision. Supervision provided in a group format was reported by 52% of the sample. As shown in table 20, the modal frequency for group supervision was monthly (40%), although another 27% reported weekly group supervision and nearly 20% reported group supervision every other week. As with individual in-person supervision, few respondents reported other frequencies. The perceived quality of group supervision was also strong, rated as excellent by 48% and good by 39% of respondents.

Table 20. Frequency and quality of group supervision

	Number (n=224)	**Percent of respondents**
Frequency of supervision		
Daily	1	.4%
Several times a week	3	1.3%
Weekly	61	27.2%
Every other week	44	19.6%
Monthly	90	40.2%
Less than monthly	14	6.3%
Only as needed	11	4.9%

Quality of supervision	(n=220)	Percent of respondents
Excellent	105	47.7%
Good	85	38.6%
Fair	26	11.8%
Poor	4	1.8%

Electronic supervision. Electronic supervision includes methods such as email, Skype, and phone. Nearly 40% of respondents indicated that they received electronic supervision. Table 21 depicts the frequency and quality of electronic supervision. The frequency patterns differ from individual in-person or group supervision and show great variability. The modal frequency of electronic supervision was several times a week; the second most commonly noted was only as needed. With respect to quality, 44% rated this as excellent and 42% as good—suggesting overall satisfaction with supervision quality.

Table 21. Frequency and quality of electronic supervision

	Number (n=172)	Percent of respondents
Frequency of supervision		
Daily	21	12.4%
Several times a week	53	31.2%
Weekly	25	14.7%
Every other week	12	7.1%
Monthly	9	5.3%
Less than monthly	3	1.8%
Only as needed	47	27.6%
Quality of supervision	**(n=167)**	**Percent of respondents**
Excellent	74	44.3%
Good	70	41.9%
Fair	20	12.0%
Poor	3	1.8%

Promotion and job transfers. In order to better understand vertical and lateral movement within the organizations employing the family support workforce, we asked how many times individuals had been promoted within their current agencies at a higher salary, how many times they were promoted within their current agency but with no salary increase, and how many times they voluntarily transferred to a different position at the same pay scale. These data are presented in tables 22, 23 and 24.

Overall these data show that most supervisors and administrators have experienced promotions within their agencies and that these usually come with a higher salary. The majority of direct service workers (63%) have not experienced a promotion in their agency. This cannot be attributed wholly to their tenure in the organization, since only about one-quarter of direct service workers who have never been promoted have worked for the organization two years or less, and 13% of direct service workers who have never been promoted have worked in their agencies for more than ten years. Promotions without pay increases are relatively uncommon, as shown in table 23. Voluntary

transfers to different positions were reported by nearly 20% of the overall sample, as illustrated in table 24.

Table 22. Promoted in current agency at a higher salary

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Never	175	63.2%	28	29.8%	10	22.7%	8	50.0%	221	51.3%
1-2 times	67	24.2%	53	56.4%	16	36.4%	4	25.0%	140	32.5%
3-4 times	22	7.9%	9	9.6%	15	34.1%	4	25.0%	50	11.6%
5 or more times	13	4.7%	4	4.3%	3	6.8%	0	--	20	4.6%

Table 23. Promoted in current agency to higher level position with no salary increase

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Never	253	91.0%	73	79.3%	36	83.7%	13	81.3%	375	87.4%
1-2 times	22	7.9%	19	20.7%	6	14.0%	3	18.8%	50	11.7%
3-4 times	2	.7%	0	--	1	2.3%	0	--	3	.7%
5 or more times	1	.4%	0	--	0	--	0	--	1	.2%

Table 24. Voluntarily transferred to a different position at same pay

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Never	223	80.2%	74	80.4%	38	90.5%	12	75.0%	347	81.1%
1-2 times	51	18.3%	15	16.3%	4	9.5%	3	18.8%	73	17.1%
3-4 times	3	1.1%	2	2.2%	0	--	1	6.3%	6	1.4%
5 or more times	1	.4%	1	1.1%	0	--	0	--	2	.5%

Pay and Benefits

The family support workforce survey asked respondents about the salary and benefits available to them in their job, their use of benefits, and several items related to their satisfaction. As shown in table 25, salaries of the family support workforce vary considerably both within and across positions. The modal salary ranges by position demonstrate a general and expected increase in pay among supervisors and administrators, but the variation is still notable.

Table 25. Total yearly income from family support job

Income range	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	N	%	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Less than $15,000	21	7.4%	5	5.5%	3	6.8%	1	6.7%	30	6.9%
$15,000 to $19,999	15	5.3%	4	4.4%	0	--	1	6.7%	20	4.6%
$20,000 to $24,999	60	21.3%	3	3.3%	2	4.5%	1	6.7%	66	15.3%
$25,000 to $29,999	85	30.1%	9	9.9%	3	6.8%	2	13.3%	99	22.9%
$30,000 to $34,999	46	16.3%	16	17.6%	3	6.8%	3	20.0%	68	15.7%
$35,000 to $39,999	24	8.5%	18	19.8%	3	6.8%	3	20.0%	48	11.1%
$40,000 to $44,999	13	4.6%	12	13.2%	6	13.6%	0	--	31	7.2%
$45,000 to $49,999	6	2.1%	13	14.3%	7	15.9%	1	6.7%	27	6.3%
$50,000 to $54,999	1	.4%	5	5.5%	4	9.1%	1	6.7%	11	2.5%
$55,000 to $59,999	6	2.1%	2	2.2%	5	11.4%	1	6.7%	14	3.2%
$60,000 to $64,999	3	1.1%	0	--	5	11.4%	0	--	8	1.9%
$65,000 to $69,999	0	--	3	3.3%	2	4.5%	1	6.7%	6	1.4%
$70,000 to $74,999	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--	0	--
More than $75,000	2	.7%	1	1.1%	1	2.3%	0	--	4	.9%
Agree that salary provides a living wage*	140	51.9%	66	71.7%	36	80%	8	53.3%	250	59.2%
	X	(SD)	X	(SD)	X	(SD)	X	(SD)	X	(SD)
Satisfaction with pay	2.8	(1.2)	3.3	(1.2)	3.2	(1.0)	3.2	(1.2)	2.97	(1.2)
Satisfaction with raises*	2.8	(1.1)	3.2	(1.2)	3.2	(1.0)	3.1	(1.1)	2.9	(1.2)

*$p<.05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

Responses to the statement "My salary provides me with a living wage" indicate that supervisors and administrators were much more likely to agree (72% and 80%, respectively) than direct service workers (52%). Two additional questions asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with pay and satisfaction with pay raises on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Similar to the question about salary paying a living wage, ratings on the two Likert items were significantly lower for direct service workers than for supervisors.

With regard to fringe benefits, the survey asked whether specific types of benefits were available and subsequently whether the respondent used those that were available to them. These data are presented in table 26. The benefits used most often were flexible work hours, vacation leave, and sick leave. Medical insurance was not available to 14% of the respondents and dental insurance was not available for 20%. When these were available, only about 57% of respondents used medical and dental insurance. The majority of individuals who did not use these benefits were married; these individuals were possibly covered under a spouse's plan.

Of particular interest with regard to professional development was the large percentage of respondents who indicated that tuition for classes and training was not available to them (38%). However, when these benefits are available they are used - nearly 50% of respondents did take advantage of this opportunity while a relatively small percentage (12%) did not.

Table 26. Availability and use of benefits

Benefit type	Not available		Available/ doesn't use		Available/uses	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Medical insurance	63	14.4%	124	28.4%	250	57.2%
Dental insurance	89	20.5%	96	22.1%	249	57.4%
Vacation leave	35	8.0%	15	3.4%	386	88.5%
Sick leave	62	14.2%	25	5.7%	349	80.0%
Flexible work hours	39	9.0%	6	1.4%	386	89.6%
Tuition for classes/training	164	37.8%	54	12.4%	216	49.8%

In addition to the benefits specified and listed in table 26, respondents were asked an open-ended question about other available benefits that they used. Among those described were: retirement plans (n=27), life insurance (n=20), personal days/holidays/other paid time off (n=19), health care/flexible spending accounts (n=18), vision insurance (n=13), and short-term disability (n=7). A small number of individuals also noted cell phones, mileage reimbursement, wellness programs, employee assistance programs, and training programs.

In response to a question of whether the benefit package provided a safety net for employees, 47% believed that it did. This percentage was highest among supervisors (55%) and lowest for direct service workers (45%).

Perceptions of the Work Environment

A substantial portion of the family support workforce survey comprised a set of scales measuring various aspects of the work environment that research has found to be related to job satisfaction, commitment to the agency and to the field of practice, and intentions to remain in the organization and the field of practice. Table 27 provides a list of these scales, a brief definition, the means and standard deviations for all the respondents, and the scale reliabilities. Most of the scales contained three items, each measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 27. Work environment scales

Scale	Description	X	SD	Reliability α
Promotional opportunity	extent to which employee believes that opportunities for advancement within the organization are available	3.09	.85	.77
Job security	extent to which employee believes her/his job is stable	3.31	.77	.65
Communication	degree to which employee believes that communication within the organization is clear and timely	3.73	.80	.74
Agency fairness	degree to which employee believes the system of rewards and punishments within the organization is fair	3.31	.90	.79

Scale	Description	X	SD	Reliability α
Work overload	extent to which employee believes that performance expectations of the job are excessive	3.07	.83	.77
Role clarity	degree to which employee is clear about her/his work role	4.24	.59	.75
Job hazard	degree to which job exposes employee to physically harmful or risky conditions	2.97	.85	.69
Community support	degree to which employee perceives the organization's work is supported by the community	3.94	.64	.73
Coworker support	Extent to which employee believes that peers are supportive	4.19	.65	.83
Supervisor support	extent to which employee believes immediate supervisor provides instrumental (knowledge or skill) and affective (emotional) support	4.13	.85	.89
Organizational support	degree to which employee feels supported by the employing organization	3.92	.82	.86
Other job opportunities	perceived availability of employment opportunities outside of the organization	2.61	.81	.76
Job satisfaction	degree of employee's overall satisfaction with the job	4.16	.62	.81
Service orientation	degree to which employee believes that family support is a valuable service to society	4.46	.56	.89
Commitment-agency	relative strength of individual's identification with and involvement in the employing organization	4.05	.67	.82
Intent to stay-agency	likelihood of remaining with the current employing organization	3.67	.80	.78
Commitment-family support	relative strength of individual's identification with and involvement in the field of family support	3.97	.69	.77
Intent to stay-family support	likelihood of remaining in the field of family support	3.71	.75	.75

Table 28 below presents the means and standard deviations for each scale according to position in the agency. The scales noted with asterisks are those which demonstrated significant differences between at least two positions among direct service workers, supervisors, or administrators. Significant differences suggest that the magnitude of the differences between positions on these items are large enough to conclude that they represent real (not chance) differences.

Table 28. Work environment scales by position

Scale	Direct service X (SD)		Supervisor X (SD)		Administrator X (SD)		Other position X (SD)	
Promotional opportunity***	2.92	(.86)	3.35	(.75)	3.60	(.58)	3.21	(.93)
Job security**	3.21	(.74)	3.47	(.78)	3.64	(.79)	3.27	(.73)
Communication*	3.66	(.84)	3.83	(.68)	3.98	(.74)	3.75	(.76)
Agency fairness	3.24	(.90)	3.39	(.90)	3.48	(.92)	3.46	(.72)
Work overload**	2.99	(.83)	3.15	(.79)	3.48	(.84)	2.85	(.63)
Role clarity	4.27	(.61)	4.21	(.56)	4.18	(.58)	4.17	(.47)
Job hazard***	3.21	(.79)	2.59	(.76)	2.42	(.85)	2.67	(.89)
Community support	3.91	(.59)	4.01	(.71)	4.08	(.69)	3.85	(.76)
Coworker support	4.23	(.70)	4.13	(.56)	4.05	(.58)	4.31	(.52)
Supervisor support*	4.18	(.87)	3.97	(.85)	3.83	(.76)	4.12	(.87)
Organizational support	3.88	(.83)	3.96	(.79)	4.01	(.83)	4.09	(.90)
Other job opportunities	2.67	(.81)	2.48	(.79)	2.50	(.76)	2.64	(.91)
Job satisfaction	4.11	(.63)	4.21	(.61)	4.30	(.61)	4.19	(.60)
Service orientation	4.48	(.49)	4.47	(.58)	4.29	(.90)	4.35	(.61)
Commitment-agency*	3.98	(.68)	4.15	(.67)	4.30	(.57)	3.96	(.70)
Intent to stay-agency	3.62	(.81)	3.78	(.74)	3.83	(.65)	3.60	(1.20)
Commitment-family support	3.99	(.63)	4.01	(.76)	3.89	(.91)	3.67	(.71)
Intent to stay-family support	3.70	(.75)	3.79	(.70)	3.78	(.82)	3.25	(.89)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Feel supported at the state level* N/%	165	60.7%	71	76.3%	32	74.4%	12	80.0%

*p<.05   **p<.01   ***p<.001

Specifically, we note that direct service workers perceive less opportunity for advancement within the organization, lower job security, and less clear and timely communication compared with supervisors and administrators. Direct service workers also perceive a higher degree of job hazard—exposure to unsafe or dangerous conditions—compared with supervisors and administrators.

On three scales, direct service workers differed only from administrators. Direct service workers perceived significantly stronger support from their supervisors than did administrators. Administrators perceived significantly greater work overload than direct service workers. Administrators also reported significantly higher commitment to the organization than direct service workers.

One additional item was a yes/no question asking whether the respondent felt supported at the state level. Overall, 66% of respondents indicated that they did feel supported, with significantly higher proportions of supervisors and administrators expressing this opinion.

Future plans

In assessing the likelihood of retention and turnover, respondents were asked where they expected to be five years from now. The options included being in the same agency (either in the same position or a different position); being employed in a different agency (either in the same position or a different position); working in a different field; or being retired from the workforce. Respondents' future plans are presented in table 29.

The majority of respondents anticipate staying in the same agency five years from now, with more than one-half in the same position and another 15% in a different position in the same agency. This represents an expected organizational retention rate of 65% over a five-year period. Among supervisors in particular, the anticipated organization retention rate is 75% over five years.

A relatively small percentage of respondents see themselves moving to a different agency, either in a different position (12%) or a position similar to their current one (3%). Few respondents expect to be working in a different field (7%). Retirements are anticipated by nearly 13% of respondents, but the percentage is notably higher among administrators, of whom 30% expect to be retired from the workforce.

Table 29. Future plans

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
Same position in same agency	130	46.8%	55	59.1%	22	51.2%	9	56.3%	216	50.2%
Same position, different agency	7	2.5%	4	4.3%	0	--	0	--	11	2.6%
Different position, same agency	44	15.8%	15	16.1%	4	9.3%	1	6.3%	64	14.9%
Different position, different agency	41	14.7%	7	7.5%	4	9.3%	1	6.3%	53	12.3%
Different field	27	9.7%	2	2.2%	0	--	3	18.8%	32	7.4%
Retired	29	10.4%	10	10.8%	13	30.2%	2	12.5%	54	12.6%

Given the high rates of expected retention discussed above, the follow-up question about "what would it take to keep you in this field?" should be regarded as advisory rather than predictive. As depicted in table 30, salary is the area of greatest concern to employees who are considering leaving the field of family support. This was noted by 54% of respondents overall, and by 60% of direct service workers in particular. Opportunity for career advancement was the second most frequently noted issue, reported by nearly one-quarter of respondents, and better benefits was indicated by about one-fifth of respondents.

Table 30. What would it take to keep you in the field of family support?

Variable	Direct		Supervisor		Administrator		Other		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
Higher salary	173	60.3%	42	43.8%	17	36.2%	7	43.8%	239	53.6%
More opportunity for career advancement	81	28.2%	19	19.8%	5	10.6%	4	25.0%	109	24.4%
Better benefits	73	25.4%	12	12.5%	5	10.6%	2	12.5%	92	20.6%
More educational opportunities	56	19.5%	10	10.4%	3	6.4%	3	18.8%	72	16.1%
Better recognition by management	49	17.1%	8	8.3%	5	10.6%	2	12.5%	64	14.3%
Better supervision	34	11.8%	4	4.2%	2	4.3%	2	12.5%	42	9.4%
Other	36	12.5%	9	9.4%	6	12.8%	3	18.8%	54	12.1%

Challenges and Rewards of Family Support Work

In addition to the closed-ended questions that comprised most of the survey, two open-ended questions were included: "What do you feel are the challenges that make it difficult to do your job in family support?", and "What do you feel are the greatest rewards in family support work?"

It is notable that 315 respondents (70% of the sample) offered additional comments regarding the challenges of their family support job and 333 respondents (74%) commented on the rewards. In analyzing these textual data, we reviewed all comments individually and identified a set of key themes that predominated among the responses. As a final step, we counted the number of individuals whose comments reflected each of the categories. These are presented in tables 31 and 32. Many respondents noted more than one issue or reward.

As these tables illustrate, we found considerably more variation in the types of issues that emerged as challenges compared to those described as key rewards. The challenges represented a range of issues pertinent to the demands of the job and the work environment. The rewards of family support centered primarily on satisfaction from helping families and seeing positive outcomes for children and families.

Table 31. Challenges of family support work

Challenge	n	% of all respondents (n=448)	% of indivs who added comments (n=315)
Paperwork (includes reporting demands, data entry)	63	14.1%	20.0%
Funding instability (includes budget cuts)	61	13.6%	19.4%
Workload (caseload sizes, getting everything done in the available time)	47	10.5%	14.9%
Inadequate pay (including raises)	45	10.0%	14.3%
Client motivation (missing/cancelling appointments, not putting forth effort)	42	9.4%	13.3%
Client problems (severity, complexity, low progress)	31	6.9%	9.8%
Availability of resources to help families with their needs	29	6.5%	9.2%
Support in agency (from administration, supervisor)	20	4.5%	6.3%
Inadequate training	13	2.9%	4.1%
Safety (includes conditions of homes they visit)	12	2.3%	3.8%
Unclear job expectations	9	2.0%	2.9%
Inadequate community support (interagency communication)	7	1.6%	2.2%
Turnover and burnout	7	1.6%	2.2%
Issues specific to rural areas	7	1.6%	2.2%

Below we provide some examples of the most frequently noted challenges, in the words of survey respondents themselves:

Paperwork

> *"The paperwork is exhausting and takes away from the importance of working with families."*

> *"If we had less redundancy in our charting, we could serve at least twice as many families and provide better service to them."*

Funding instability

> *"Budget restrictions limit the number of families that we can serve and the ways that we can help them."*

> *"One of the biggest challenges in family support is constantly having to prove that your program is worthy of funding. It leaves providers feeling like they are defending their jobs."*

Workload

> *"The case load is too high to focus the attention needed for those who would benefit from it."*

> *"I think at times it is hard to not take things home with me."*

Inadequate pay

> *"Our salaries do not seem to rise but our workload and responsibilities do."*

> *"The pay scale for front line workers is not a living wage. It is less than the families they assist make in a factory with a GED education- when my front line staff have four year degrees."*

Client motivation

> *"Hard to get families who need our services to participate in programs."*

> *"Retention rates, as sometimes the parents do not see the importance and the stability that home visiting can provide for the families as well as the children."*

Client problems

> *"Sometimes positive changes in families are difficult to see or do not happen at all."*

> *"The families continue to have growing needs- more special needs, more mental health issues, etc."*

Availability of resources

> *"Family barriers are more challenging and with government budget cuts the community resources are not always available."*

> *"So many families in need—often fewer resources in rural areas."*

Table 32. Rewards of family support work

Reward	n	% of all respondents (n=448)	% of indivls who added comments (n=333)
Seeing families grow and develop	124	27.7%	37.2%
Helping others (families, children)	63	14.1%	18.9%
Seeing children's growth and development	58	12.9%	17.4%
Seeing family successes/ success stories	54	12.1%	16.2%
Receiving positive feedback, thanks from families	43	9.6%	12.9%
Helping families achieve their goals	41	9.1%	12.3%
Making a difference	37	8.3%	11.1%
Building relationships (families, parents, children)	23	5.1%	6.9%

Examples of the rewards of family support work, again in the words of survey respondents, are offered below:

Seeing families grow and develop

> *"The greatest reward as a supervisor is observing the positive relationship develop between the home visitor and a family that I would have otherwise thought to never accept services- and to observe that family find their strengths to move forward."*

> *"Seeing a family come so far that they no longer need assistance."*

Helping others

> *"Helping others in the community and knowing that you make a difference."*

> *"Making a life-long, positive difference in the lives of those I serve, in my community."*

Child growth and development

> *"Seeing the developmental milestones of kids I work with"*

> *"To have a child that is delayed and through interaction activities and education you can turn that around and they start school on track"*

Family successes

> *"Small victories a family has."*

> *"Seeing families become better parents, interacting with their children and meeting their children's needs."*

Receiving positive feedback, thanks

> *"When a family tells you thank you and that you really helped them. Nothing is better than that!"*

> *"When a client sends a thank you or calls you after having closed services a year or longer ago to 'update' you on their progress."*

Helping families achieve their goals

> *"The greatest rewards are when I see my clients accomplishing their goals and making their lives better because of things I have been able to help them with."*

> *"When clients make and reach their goals. Being part of clients' achievements"*

Regional Differences

As noted previously, survey respondents represent all six of the IDPH regions and the majority of counties in Iowa. It was not possible to compare responses across 93 counties, but we did examine the extent to which regional differences were present. We found relatively few differences across regions. For example, in some regions a larger proportion of respondents anticipated retiring in five

years compared with others; in some regions there was greater agreement that their family support salary paid a living wage compared with other regions; and the availability of particular benefits, including tuition for classes, medical and dental benefits, demonstrated some variation across regions. Overall, however, there were few regional differences.

Similarly, we compared responses across the geographical categories based on individuals' description of the area they served as primarily urban, suburban, small town, or rural. We uncovered relatively few differences. Those serving suburban areas tended to be younger, with less experience in their current position and lower salaries. Individuals serving urban areas were the most likely to have at least a four-year college degree. Medical and dental insurance benefits were less likely to be available to employees serving small town and rural communities. Job security was perceived as lowest by those serving rural areas.

Summary

This study of Iowa's family support workforce, which represents the geographic distribution of family support employees, depicts a well-educated and fairly experienced workforce that is predominantly female, Caucasian, and non-Hispanic. While the greatest proportions are in direct service positions, the perspectives of supervisors and administrators who work in a range of types of organizations are also represented. Most employees are married and have parented children themselves, and have been drawn to the field of family support out of a desire to help others.

Based on the survey results, there is variation in caseload size and in whether or not supervisors and/or administrators also carry caseloads; however there is not an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction or burden with regard to the workload. The one area where there appears to be frustration emerged in the open-ended comments about challenges—in which increased documentation and paperwork were noted by 14% of all survey respondents.

Respondents are generally pleased with the quality of supervision they receive. Most supervisors and administrators have experienced promotions in their organizations, though the majority of direct service workers have not despite long tenure. Pay is a source of dissatisfaction, especially for direct service workers; based on responses regarding the availability of fringe benefits, sizable proportions of employees do not have access to basic benefits such as medical and dental insurance and sick leave.

We noted some differences by position in certain aspects of the work environment, such as opportunities for promotion, job security, agency communication, work overload, job hazards, supervisor support, and commitment to the agency. In many other respects, however, there were no significant differences by position and, as a whole, respondents scored quite high on their overall job satisfaction, orientation to service, role clarity, support from co-workers, and support from the organization and from the state.

Asked about their plans in five years, the majority of respondents expect to be in the same agency whether in the same position or a different position. The expectation of staying in the same agency is particularly high among supervisors. The aging of the human services workforce is a well-documented phenomenon, and in this sample 13% expect to retire within five years. The percentage is higher among administrators, of whom 30% expect to retire in five years; perhaps this offers

potential for needed promotional opportunities. But despite the fact that most employees do intend to stay in their organizations, when asked "what would it take to keep you in the field of family support?" the largest percentage of respondents indicated "higher salary" (54%). This answer was selected by more than twice as many individuals over other factors such as opportunities for career advancement and better benefits.

Family support employees identified varied challenges that they face in their daily work. A couple of issues emerged from the open-ended comments that were not specifically captured elsewhere in the survey. First, there was a sense that family support workers are dealing with increasingly challenging family situations and complex problems in the face of decreasing resources. Another sentiment expressed was frustration with increasing demands for documentation and reporting that were perceived as sometimes duplicative, confusing, and resulting in a reduced amount of time available to work with families. The value that respondents place on working with families is demonstrated in the open-ended comments about the rewards of family support work. This is a population that derives the greatest satisfaction from helping children and families, watching them grow and develop, and feeling that they have played a part in that process.