

County Child Protection Workload Analysis

In 1988, the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) conducted a functional job analysis to determine the number of child protection cases for which a direct services social worker could be expected to be responsible and deliver quality and timely services to children and families as prescribed by the Ohio Revised and Administrative Codes. This initial study was requested by the PCSAO Board of Trustees and the House Select Committee to Study Child Abuse and Juvenile Justice.

This study was updated in 1992 to determine whether the implementation of Senate Bill 89 had had an impact on workloads. This purpose of this 1997 update was to determine whether the implementation of risk assessment would have an impact on workloads. As the results which follow indicate, implementation of a formal system of assessing the future risk of child abuse and neglect to a child does, indeed, have a slight impact on direct service professional workloads.

Using the results of these three functional job analyses has not only provided valuable information to determine maximum workloads for the direct service worker, but has also been able to be used to identify the discrete activities child protection workers must accomplish to fulfill their goal of protecting children; the knowledge and skills necessary to perform those duties and the pre-service and in-service training necessary to prepare them for these tasks; information to effectively predict agency staffing needs and utilize the human resources available; information to determine the unit costs of providing direct services in the child protection profession; and an objective basis for determining compensation for the work performed.

What follows is a description of the environment in which the public child protection functions; an explanation of the study design and process which was used; the findings of study which describe what social workers do in their daily work; and recommendations based on the study findings.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The Ohio Needs Assessment reviewed 1,240 randomly selected child protection cases from 30 of Ohio's 88 counties. Data collected from these cases indicated that, on the average, a family served by the child protection system faced more than three significant problems at the time of agency intervention. The most prevalent of these problems included substance abuse (more than 1 in 3); homelessness or substandard housing (i in 4); chronic or acute mental illness (1 in 6); chronic or acute health problems (1 in 6); poor child supervision or management (more than 1 in 2); and an unruly or delinquent youth in the home (1 in 6). Poverty also played a crucial role in the families served by the child protection system with almost 3 of 4 of the families with children in foster care being eligible for the ADC (now TANF) Program. These significant problems are areas which require other human serving systems to provide professional services to the family if any chance of effective intervention is to occur.

Another facet of the Ohio Needs Assessment concluded that the annual turnover rate of direct service professionals was almost 29%. This high turnover rate generally affects the continuity of services to a family and causes increased workloads for those workers who remain.

Additionally, the social worker and the family are not the only participants needing to agree on a proper course of action to protect the child. The social worker's supervisor; agency legal staff or county prosecutor; community norms; guardians ad litem; court appointed special advocates; substitute caregivers; and the family's attorney also have impact on this course of action. The Juvenile court must approve the plan and any

substantive changes to it. A court hearing with exhaustive scrutiny will result if any of the parties disagree with the approach. In short, the number of actors needed to effectively protect children and address the family's problems are many. These parties may often view the situation from different philosophies and have varying financial and human resources to effectively address the multidisciplinary needs of each individual family.

Finally, the life and death consequences of the decisions made for protecting children are often made with incomplete information and in a highly emotionally charged atmosphere. Deciding not to remove a child from his/her home could result in further harm, injury, or even death of that child. On the other hand, removing that child results in significant and long term harm to the child. The social worker must weigh the consequences of each alternative and make a decision to protect the child in their own home or through foster care placement on a case by case basis. The implementation of risk assessment has provided one more tool to assist social workers in this very difficult decision making process. However, as this system of risk assessment is used to gather more information on each family's situation, the trade off is time available for the social worker to assess other families in crisis. This study indicated that an additional ninety minutes is required to complete the risk

assessment at the time of initial investigation and assessment. While this process is critical, it lowered the number of cases, on the average, that a social worker can effectively investigate and assess by almost one per month.

STUDY DESIGN AND PROCESS

As stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to determine the average size of workload that a child protection professional could reasonably be expected to carry and deliver quality and timely services to families in crisis. Caseload sizes per worker currently range from ten to more than fifty per professional depending upon the nature of work being done by that worker.

The prescribed reporting formats were developed and mailed to ten county public children services agencies (five children service boards and five county departments of human services with children services responsibilities) for review and comment. Each county was asked to select from one to four direct service staff members to participate in the study. The number of staff to be selected was determined by the manner in which the agency had organized its workload. For example, an agency where the worker screened initial reports, investigated and assessed those reports and provided all services to the family selected one person for the study. A county which had specialized staff performed the duties of screening, assessment, ongoing services, and adoption services selected four workers to participate in the study. Other factors used to recruit counties for participation in the study included agency size and geographic location.

Administrative staff were asked to solicit the support of the functional job analysis respondents prior to the actual implementation of the study. They were asked to explain the process, philosophy, and intent of the project. They were also asked to assure staff that the information sought would not be used for purposes of evaluation or discipline.

The study took place over a six month period to minimize any potential manifestations of the Hawthorne effect. Each of the thirty-two respondents was studied a total of 21 to 23 days within that six month period. The study days were staggered in such a way so that every working day of a typical working month was sampled. By constructing the sampling days in this manner, an accurate picture of any given month's activities could be captured.

Special care was taken to conduct the study in a manner so the employee would not know when s/he would be given the data collection instrument for completion. This was done so that the activities could not be "bunched up" or saved in an effort to impress the researchers and influence the data collection. There were a total of 651 possible data collection instruments which were to be completed and returned to PCSAO. Of that total, 582 were actually received and utilized. This constitutes a 90% return rate.

UNDERSTANDING THE RESULTS OF THE FUNCTIONAL JOB ANALYSIS

For purposes of this study, child protection duties were broken down into the process areas of:

- I. Report Screening
- II. Investigation and Assessment
- III. Diagnosis and Assessment
- W. Services to Children in Their Own Homes
- V. Services to Children in Placement
- VI. Case Review
- VII. Adoption
- VIII. Case Closure
- IX. Other Agency Functions

Within each of these process areas, there are discrete activities. Time has been allotted to each of these activities with due consideration for the high and low extremes of time requirements for activities. For example, in the process area of Investigation and Assessment, a low extreme could be when the investigation concludes that the report is unfounded after one hour of information gathering. This situation would be noted as unsubstantiated and the case closed. On the other hand, a high extreme would involve a situation involving an allegation of sexual abuse with multiple victims. This investigation and assessment would require lengthy information gathering and interviews.

These high/low extremes are averaged to provide a general time requirement for each of the discrete activities. In developing a standard, averaging is necessary for there is no other way to account for the idiosyncratic nature of case variations. The results which follow represent the average of all results obtained from the functional job analysis data.

Activity/Case Average Time in Minutes (Hours)

I. REPORT SCREENING

· Receipt of Report/Screening	34.8
· Records Check	6.6
· Check Collateral Contacts	3.0
· Evaluate/Consult	3.6
· Priority Rating	3.0
· Information and Referral	9.6
· Documentation	8.4
TOTAL	69.0 (1.15 Hours)

II INVESTIGATION AND ASSESSMENT

· Preparation	30.0
· Initial Visit	168.0
· Subsequent Visits	45.0
· Collateral Contacts	81.5
· Court Contacts	28.0

· Completion of Risk Assessment	93.6
· Emergency Services *	30.0
· Consultation	34.0
· Travel	75.0
· Documentation	136.0
· Planned Placement *	18.0
· Sub-Total	739.1 (12.3 hours)
· Pre-sentence Investigation *	123.75
TOTAL	862.85 (14.38 Hours)

III. DIAGNOSIS/ASSESSMENT

· Additional Visits	14.0
· Consultation/Decision-Making	45.0
· Case Plan Development	48.5
· Travel	38.1
· Documentation	42.0
TOTAL	187.6 (3.13 Hours)

IV. SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN THEIR OWN HOMES

· Preparation	38.6
· Child/Family Contact	498.0
· Intensive Family-Based Services *	53.0
· Court Contact *	24.0
· Assessment of Risk	42.0
· Case Plan Update	32.5
· Documentation	236.5
· Travel	160.0
TOTAL	1,084.6 (18.08 Hours)

V. SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT

· Preparation	33.5
· Family Contact	187.5
· Child Contact	468.75
· Assessment of Risk	51.0
· Court Contact	375.0
* Case Plan Update	18.0
· Documentation	202.0
· Travel	176.5
TOTAL	1,512.25 (25.2 hours)

VI. CASE REVIEW

· Preparation	19.0
· Collateral Contacts	72.0
· Review/Assessment	66.0
· Client Contact	68.0
· Assessment of Risk	30.0
· Case Plan Update	17.0
· Documentation	182.0
· Travel	36.75
TOTAL	490.7 (8.18 Hours)

VII. ADOPTION

· Recruitment/Training	130.63
· Home Study Interviews/Report	488.33
· Child Study (1616)	164.85
· Recruitment Efforts for a Particular Child	6.0
· OAPL	9.3
· Parent-Child Matching Process	93.3
· Child Preparation	28.0
· Adult Preparation	43.8
· Preplacement Visits	37.3
· Court Preparation	158.63
· Closure Activities	99.5
· Explanation/Redetermination of Adoption Subsidies	74.4
· Post Adoption Services	214.6
· Assessment of Risk	6.0
· Travel	140.0
TOTAL	1,694.64 (28.24 Hours)

VIII. CASE CLOSURE

· Collateral Contacts	18.0
· Review/Assessment	64.8
· Assessment of Risk	34.8
· Client Contact	18.0
· Documentation	119.7
· Travel	36.75
TOTAL	263.67 (Hours)

IX. OTHER AGENCY FUNCTIONS

· Supervision	116.1
· General Agency Meetings	206.4
· Family and Children First Meetings	180.6
· Staff Development / Training	412.8
· Sick, Vacation, Compensatory Leave	1,148.1
· Breaks/Unproductive Time	387.0
· Completion of Administrative Forms	92.9
TOTAL	2,543.9 (42.4 Hours)**

* Activities are averaged since not all cases involve this activity

** Average Monthly Time Spent in Other Agency functions

CASELOAD STANDARDS BASED ON THIS STUDY

· Specialized Report Screening	113 Reports per Month
· Specialized investigations / Assessments	10-11 reports per Month
· Specialized In-Home Services	14 Cases at Any Given Time
· Specialized Placement Services	11 Cases at Any Given Time
· Ongoing Services (Combined In-home/Placement)	12-13 Cases
· Combined Screening / Invest. / Assessment	27 Screenings/7 Invest./Month
· Generic (Screening, Invest./Assess/Ongoing)	27 Screenings / 5 other / Month
· Adoption (Home Studies Only)	50/worker/year

- Adoption (Children Age 4 yrs. or Less) 11 children/worker/year
- Adoption (Children Age 5 yrs. or more) 5-6 children/worker/year

CONCLUSION

From the first study in 1988 to this one, functional job analysis has shown that maximum workloads per child protection professional have declined. Much of this has been caused by new legislation and administrative rules which has resulted in a better ability to protect children. However, the amount of "wood a woodchuck can chuck" has also diminished due to workers' implementation of these new tools.

This phenomenon can be reduced by strategic investments in the child protection system. AdoptOhio holds potential for reducing the number of children awaiting adoption. A formal system of risk assessment and resulting caseload analysis provide an objective basis for terminating unnecessary involvement in low risk cases thereby allowing more time for workers to address moderate and high risk cases. The development and implementation of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) holds enormous potential for reducing the crushing paperwork requirements on the social work system and the ability to better serve children. ProtectOhio, the Title IV-E waiver and the utilization of managed care technology holds potential to utilize old funds in new ways and contain the costs of providing care to at risk children without compromising their safety.

PCSAO September, 1997

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