

**CHANGES IN FRONTLINE FAMILY WORKERS:  
RESULTS FROM THE  
MISSOURI FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CREDENTIAL  
PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Deborah B. Smith, PhD

Megan McCarthy, MSW

Jennifer N. Hill, BA

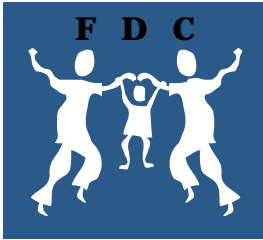
Jane Mosley, PhD

April 2007

For more information contact:  
Deborah B. Smith, PhD  
Associate Professor of Sociology  
Director, Family Studies Program  
University of Missouri-Kansas City  
208 Haag Hall  
5100 Rockhill Road  
Kansas City, MO 64110-2499  
(816) 235-2529  
(816) 235-1117 fax  
smithde@umkc.edu  
<http://cas.umkc.edu/fdc>

Suggested Citation:

Smith, Deborah B., McCarthy, Megan, Hill, Jennifer N., and Mosley, Jane. (2007). *Changes in Frontline Family Workers: Results from the Missouri Family Development Credential Program Evaluation*. University of Missouri-Kansas City Family Studies Program Research Report 2007-01.



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **CHANGES IN FRONTLINE FAMILY WORKERS:**

#### **RESULTS FROM THE MISSOURI FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CREDENTIAL**

##### **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Deborah B. Smith, PhD, Megan McCarthy, MSW,  
Jennifer N. Hill, BA, and Jane Mosley, PhD

The purposes of this report are twofold. We first review the literature on factors related to job satisfaction and feelings of burnout among frontline family workers. We then describe the background, implementation, and evaluation of The Missouri Family Development Credential (MO FDC) Program, a strengths-based, capacity-building program which educates frontline social service workers to create partnerships with families they assist by assigning responsibilities to both worker and family members thereby relieving some of the burden of the job. The program evaluation measures the impact on workers' attitudes toward themselves and their jobs using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Themes from two focus groups (n=13) find the benefits of participating in the MO FDC Program include: new abilities to set boundaries with clients and combat burnout; increased feelings of confidence to do their job; positive social support among frontline workers who attended the program together; and increased skill in communication with clients, coworkers, supervisors, and their own family members. We use a quasi-experimental research design to gather quantitative data from additional program participants as well as a comparison group of other social service workers who had not taken part in the program; total sample size is 229. We find significant differences in the amount of change experienced by the two groups. MO FDC Program participants report increases on measures of global self-esteem, mastery, and professional self-esteem between the start and finish of the program while the comparison group's scores actually decrease. At the conclusion of the program participants report a decrease in feelings of burnout while the comparison group feels more burnt out. There are no significant differences in change over time on job satisfaction or sensitivity to disclosure issues. These evaluation results suggest that workers do gain new skills and abilities through their participation in the MO FDC Program. However, in the case of communication skills, the lack of significant difference between the two groups in the quantitative data suggests the

MO FDC Program may have just reinforced the value of knowledge and skills common to all social service workers rather than teaching entirely new skills and techniques. In addition, the lack of demonstrable increase in job satisfaction or decrease in turnover may cause an employer to think twice about providing the means for a worker to participate in the program.

## INTRODUCTION

Social service work inherently occurs in relation to other people. Most frontline family workers enter the social service sector full of hope about making a difference in the world and in the lives of the families and individuals they assist, only to discover that merely providing services to families and documenting the provision of those services with seemingly endless mounds of paperwork are the *de facto* final outputs of their job (Magennis & Smith, 2005). In addition, the focus of these services seems to be on short-term crisis management which enables access to social services only when a family member is in crisis or the family unit is about to disintegrate while the ultimate desire of workers, agencies, policymakers, and the families themselves is to change the system from a deficit approach to a strengths-based approach. This approach allows efficient access to immediate services in addition to preparing families to face future challenges on their own by using services as stepping stones to achieve long lasting positive results. The Missouri Family Development Credential (MO FDC) Program addresses this desire to reorient human service practice to the strengths approach. By learning ways to change the nature of the interaction with families, workers participating in the program may have more positive experiences on the job thereby increasing job satisfaction and lowering incidences of burnout.

This report first explores factors associated with job satisfaction and burnout for social service workers. We then present a description of and the evaluation data for the Family Development Credential Program as implemented in Missouri. By teaching the principles of strengths-based social services, this classroom-based, capacity-building program seeks to provide workers the knowledge and skills to empower them to effectively assist those families and individuals who come to them requesting help.

## JOB SATISFACTION AND BURNOUT OF SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS

When clients have positive outcomes, workers may feel satisfied in a job well done. But when the worker can not assist the family and/or the family's outcomes are less than positive, a worker's stress increases (Collings & Murray, 1996) which may decrease job satisfaction. What other factors are related to job satisfaction for social service workers?

Considerable research has been conducted among social service workers in the areas of job satisfaction and its closely related concept, burnout, as the demands of this work are uniquely challenging. Social service workers are often confronted with disturbing situations such as sexual and physical abuse of children, poorly managed mental illness, and domestic abuse. Then they must actively manage their consequent emotions; a draining process which may partially explain the higher levels of burnout seen in social service work compared to other occupations (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Shapiro, Burkey, Dorman, & Welker, 1996).

Factors that have been found to be related to higher job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout for social service workers include recognition of one's own skill or feeling competent to provide assistance (Magennis & Smith, 2005; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Zimmerman et al., 2005; Zunz, 1998), positive experiences with supervisors (Acker, 2003; Collings & Murray, 1996; Sharma et al., 1997; Shields, 2007); and positive social support from coworkers and others (Acker, 2003; Magennis & Smith, 2005; Um & Harrison, 1998; Zunz, 1998). Social service workers who report high levels of variety and creativity as well as ample opportunities for learning are more likely to report being satisfied with their jobs than workers who do not report these job characteristics (Shields, 2007).

Workers who report high levels of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 1996), high levels of role ambiguity and role conflict (Acker, 2003; Um & Harrison, 1998), low levels of mastery, and inadequate promotion opportunities are more likely to suffer from burnout (Magennis & Smith, 2005) as are workers who report having to deal with too much or unnecessary paperwork (Collings & Murray, 1996; Magennis & Smith, 2005). Those helping professionals who display overinvolvement with their clients also show an erosion of job satisfaction (Koeske & Kelly, 1995).

A reason for concern about low job satisfaction and high burnout is one of their main consequences: worker turnover (Shapiro et al., 1996). Turnover is a huge issue for frontline workers in all sectors with \$5,500 being the average (some would say minimum) cost of replacing one \$8.00/hour frontline worker (Sasha Corporation, 2006). But turnover is of particular concern for the social service sector because in addition to the costs incurred by the employer, staff turnover reduces the efficacy of client services (Collings & Murray, 1996) and leads to a loss of continuity of services for families and individuals (Winefield & Barlow, 1994). Therefore all employers, but especially those in the social service sector, are keen to

find ways to increase job satisfaction and lower burnout which might possibly lower worker turnover, saving the organizations time and money while maintaining a client’s continuity of care.

So we might look for ways to increase job satisfaction and lower burnout by using the information from the literature on factors related to these conditions to create a training program explicitly addressing these issues. There is some support for using training to combat turnover for a particular group of social service workers, early childhood educators. In fact, *“teachers who participate in professional development opportunities...are more likely to continue in the field. This reduces turnover (a major benefit to employers) while also increasing the knowledge and experience base of the staff”* (Center for Family Policy and Research, 2002, p.2).

Findings reported in the literature above suggest there might be two mechanisms by which a training program becomes an intervention that increases job satisfaction and decreases burnout and turnover. First, just providing the chance to increase skills through attending a training program may directly increase a worker’s satisfaction of the job and organization (i.e. “They care about me enough to send me to a training”). Indeed, Missouri social service workers who report greater opportunities for learning through their job were more likely to report being satisfied with their jobs than workers who do not report this benefit (Shields, 2007) and training attendance has been found to increase a sense of professional accomplishment (Shapiro et al., 1996), a factor related to burnout.

This report focuses primarily on the other mechanism by which training programs may impact job satisfaction and burnout—the actual content of the curriculum. A program that seeks to increase job satisfaction and lower burnout and therefore possibly lower turnover for social service workers should provide instruction on topics such as how to increase feelings of self-efficacy and professional accomplishment, how to recognize individual talents in oneself and the families that are assisted, and how to increase social supports for workers.

<b>FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CREDENTIAL PROGRAM DESCRIPTION</b>
--

The Family Development Credential (FDC) Program is one such program that aims to increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of social service workers on these very topics. Through instruction on strengths-based principles, the FDC Program would help reorient

social service practice to the strengths approach, allowing families access to existing services, to successfully handle current challenges, while also empowering the workers to be able to assist those families craft long-term strategies to be prepared to face future challenges. Core values of the curriculum include understanding that all individuals and all families have strengths (Cochran & Henderson, 1986) and that the role played by the social service worker should be that of a nondirective facilitator who only assists help-seekers make decisions (Boehm, 2002). The FDC Program is implemented in two parts: classroom instruction on strengths-based topics, and the opportunity to earn a credential which indicates demonstrated comprehension of these topics.

### **Curriculum Content**

With chapters entitled “Helping Families Set and Reach Goals” and “Taking Good Care of Yourself,” the curriculum used in the FDC Program, *Empowerment Skills for Family Workers, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Forest, 2003), directly addresses issues such as emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among frontline social service workers which have been consistently shown in the literature to be related with low job satisfaction. It also provides concrete suggestions on how to proactively manage the stress intrinsic to assisting others and potential for burnout which comes with it. Other factors related to higher job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout that are also addressed in the curriculum include finding a sense of professional mission, recognizing the many skills to succeed in social service work, and increasing worker confidence in their ability to perform their job.

The FDC curriculum addresses cultural competence as well, an issue directly related to a strengths-based social service practice. The curriculum intelligently embeds its discussion of diversity within the context of the larger training. This, in fact, may be the most appropriate strategy for introducing this topic as previous research on isolated, stand-alone sensitivity training on individual diversity issues such as race found this technique actually may be counterproductive (Von Bergen, Soper, & Foster, 2002). Taking a broad view of cultural competence which expands its definition to include immigrant status, family form, sexual orientation and other forms of diversity in addition to race and ethnicity may allow people to benefit more from the discussion (Wellner, 2000).

The FDC Program also provides a practical, hands-on approach to interacting in a healthy manner with clients and their families called the family development process which begins with honoring every family’s strengths. By starting from family strength rather than family problem the nature of the worker-family partnership is immediately reoriented to encourage

positive interactions. The family development process outlined in the curriculum recognizes that both family and worker bring assets to the table so that worker and family can create a true power-sharing partnership. By determining a family's unique strengths and needs, the family is then able to set its own major goal—goals are not set for the family. The worker then assists the family in creating a written plan to achieve this goal with the responsibility for tasks divided between family members and worker; progress is reviewed and the plan continually updated. The thought is that this development process then strengthens families and empowers them to be more self-reliant and thus better able to handle challenges in the future.

### **The Need for a Credential**

There has been a call to increase organizational support for trainings such as the FDC Program which endeavors to empower workers to create partnerships between themselves and the families they assist (Cochran & Dean, 1991). Credentialing is a good avenue with which to pursue this organizational support because earning a credential, rather than just attending a training class, provides evidence that the resources allocated by the employer (e.g. money, time off to attend the classes, etc.) has had a desirable, demonstrable outcome. This willingness of the workers' organizations to support credentialing and not just training for frontline workers may be key if this type of program is to benefit employers. (Luo, 1999) found that organizations who support employee empowerment rather than haphazardly offering one popular training after another and who also have a broad organizational scope that includes a model of individual and community well-being seem to have better outcomes than organizations that merely embrace the latest training craze. The more intense process of credentialing moves the MO FDC Program beyond merely "another training".

The FDC Program is part of the nationwide movement which recognizes the need for credentialing or certification of direct human service providers in strengths-based family support principles (Dean, 1998; Sexton, Lobman, Constans, Snyder, & Ernest, 1997). This movement asserts credentialing is needed because many family support services often are provided by paraprofessionals without college degrees and/or workers who may have post-secondary training in other areas but who lack comprehensive knowledge of family support principles. The Family Development Credential does not take the place but rather can be seen as complementary to other credentials, licensures, and certificates.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FDC PROGRAM IN MISSOURI

The University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) College of Arts and Sciences Family Studies Program leads the implementation of the FDC Program in Missouri, organizing a partnership of educational institutions, state agencies, not-for-profit organizations, agency coalitions, frontline workers and families throughout the state. The MO FDC classes occur at local sites throughout the state and are led by a select number of facilitators who have demonstrated commitment to strengths-based principles and have attended the MO FDC Facilitators Institute held by UMKC. The facilitators then return to their local communities and offer the classes to frontline social service workers. Upon successful completion of the 90-hour curriculum over a 6 to 8 month period as well as passing the statewide exam and the review of the participant's portfolio which should demonstrate competency in strengths-based family support principles, the Family Studies Program at UMKC confers on the participant a Missouri Family Development Credential (MO FDC). See Figure One for more information.

The interagency nature of the FDC classes is meant to aid collaborative community efforts as it offers continuity in instruction for staff across many different organizations. Public health nurses sit beside workers from Catholic Charities, Head Start family advocates, child protective service workers, early childhood home visitors, and others in an interactive classroom setting designed to break down stereotypes and to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect among frontline workers who work within the same geographic area and very often serve the same families.

The Missouri FDC Program has been in place since 2002 and has issued approximately 200 credentials. The task at hand now becomes evaluating whether the social service workers who participate in the MO FDC Program report any change in job characteristics known to be related to job satisfaction and burnout. We first review earlier FDC Program evaluations.



# Earning the Missouri Family Development Credential

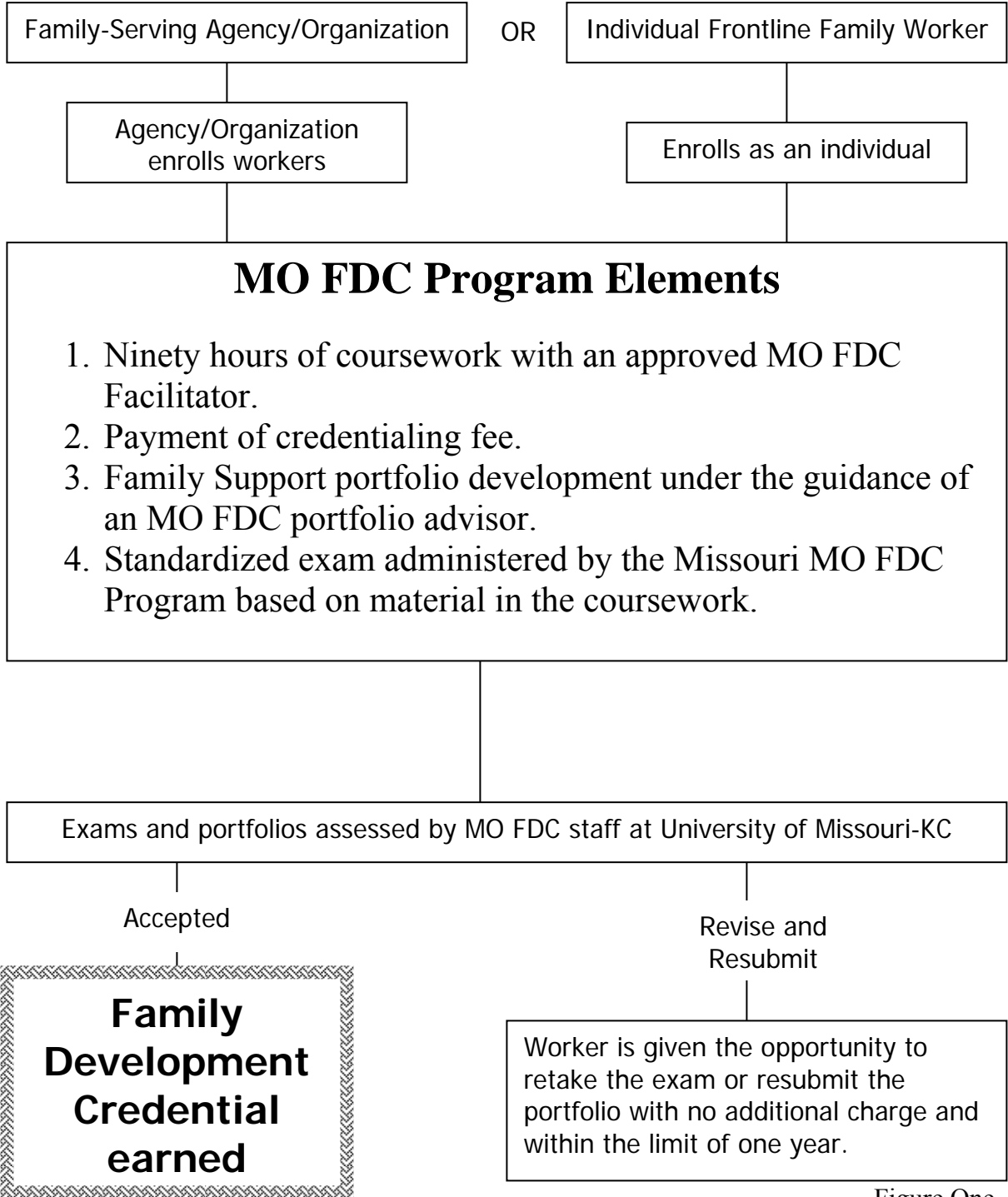


Figure One  
JH 03/07

## PREVIOUS FDC PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

Previous evaluations of state FDC Programs have occurred in New York State and California. The NYS FDC Program evaluation (Crane, 1999, 2000) reported evidence for family change, worker change, and agency change. Specifically, findings indicated that workers who participated in the program: (1) increased self-esteem, confidence, and assertiveness in helping families as well as in setting their own goals for higher education; (2) improved their communication and relationship skills in their professional lives with families and co-workers, as well as in their personal lives; and (3) increased their knowledge and use of empowerment-based family support skills in working with families. Supervisors of these workers also reported higher staff morale and lower turnover. The evaluation of the California FDC Program (Rolison & Watrous, 2003) found workers who earned an FDC mastered new skills set, improved on their existing work-related strengths, displayed increased cultural awareness, and made positive shifts in their intra- and interpersonal relationships. Administrators noted that the FDC graduates had learned techniques to decrease stress. These evaluation results are encouraging.

However, there is research indicating an FDC Program did not transform the way at least one group of workers regarded the families they assisted. A study specifically evaluating the program's impact on 251 Connecticut child protective service workers' attitudes toward the parents of system-involved children found no difference in "*adherence to the family development principles set forth in the curriculum between FDC and non-FDC participants*" (Alpert & Britner, 2005, p.57).

## EVALUATING THE FDC PROGRAM IN THE STATE OF MISSOURI

This report will build on these evaluations by reporting the findings from the Missouri Family Development Credential (MO FDC) Program evaluation. We should note that while goals of the FDC Program encompass family, worker, and agency change, we made the decision to focus only on worker change. It is quite difficult to determine how a program designed for delivery to the frontline workers will ultimately impact the families assisted by those workers because it is the workers and not the families who are involved in the MO FDC

Program. As stated in an article on this subject... *“positive (client) outcomes, while most conclusive, are also the most difficult to attain. A multitude of complex factors, both within and outside of programs, operate to influence (clients), which makes it difficult to demonstrate that the outcomes observed in (the clients) are due specifically to staff training”* (Bouffard, 2004, p. 19).

Therefore, the evaluation of the Missouri FDC Program seeks to answer the research questions: Did any change occur for the participants between the start and finish of MO FDC Program? If so, what are those changes? Are there any differences in changes between MO FDC participants and a comparison group of similar social service workers who have not participated in the MO FDC Program?

With the decision made to focus only on worker change, the MO FDC Program evaluation builds on both the existing literature on job experiences in the social service sector and the worker outcomes of the New York State FDC Program evaluation. We had interest in replicating the findings of the NYS evaluation, but we determined the third outcome for the workers (increased knowledge and use of empowerment-based family support skills) is already assessed through the multiple choice exam and portfolio review all participants must pass to earn the credential. Consequently, our evaluation research contained questions related to the two other reported outcomes: (1) increased self-esteem, confidence, and assertiveness in helping families as well as in setting their own goals for higher education; (2) improved their communication and relationship skills in their professional lives with families and co-workers, as well as in their personal lives. We were also, of course, interested in examining the workers’ perceptions of factors known to be related to job satisfaction and burnout.

## **METHODS**

This evaluation uses a mixed-methods model recognizing that gathering both qualitative and quantitative data will provide a fuller understanding of the participants’ experiences of the MO FDC Program.

### **Qualitative Evaluation Data Collection**

Qualitative data were collected primarily via focus groups which *“can give evaluators access to the reasoning processes that make it possible to understand what (in the program)*

*works and also how and why it works...focus groups provide a dynamic means to portray programs in action (Ansary, Perkins, & Nelson, 2004, p. 315)".*

### Sample

A convenience sample of workers who had participated in the MO FDC program were recruited to participate in focus groups at two local MO FDC hosting sites- one in St. Louis and one in Springfield. The two groups are similar in their demographic characteristics, see Table 1.

Focus group respondents were recruited in St. Louis through a mailed post-card asking them to attend one of two focus groups. Reminder e-mails were sent one week before the focus group sessions, and potential respondents were called the day before. A time was arranged to hold the focus group in the same location as one of the classes, and a meal was provided. The facilitator began the focus group by introducing herself and two neutral observers. Respondents were invited to introduce themselves and state what agency they worked for. The facilitator then asked questions of the group using an interview schedule with specific probes and encouraging group members to comment. The respondents also completed a short demographic questionnaire.

Because the Springfield MO FDC class was smaller than the St. Louis class, its focus group was comprised of all members from one class. A time was arranged to hold the focus group in the same location as the class, and a meal was provided. Two members of the research team were present, one to facilitate the discussion and the other to record the focus group. The facilitator began the focus group by introducing herself and the other researcher. Respondents were invited to introduce themselves and state what agency they worked for. The facilitator then asked questions of the group using an interview schedule with specific probes and encouraging group members to comment. The respondents also completed a short questionnaire.

### Topics of Interest

The topics of interest represent topics found to be important to the well-being of frontline family workers in the prior FDC evaluations and other studies exploring the job experiences of human service workers including feelings of efficacy and confidence to do their job, communication skills, social support from coworkers, and topics specific to the FDC curriculum such as sensitivity to disclosure issues and recognition of a skill or talent.

## Analyses

We video- and audio-recorded both focus groups; the tapes were then transcribed. We read all data, analyzing comments for manifest and latent content related to the topics of interest. Also used in the qualitative analysis were comments gathered from responses to the open-ended question, “Is there anything else you would like to add?” located at the end of the quantitative data collection survey instrument (described below).

### **Quantitative Evaluation Data Collection**

The project uses a quasi-experimental research design to gather its quantitative data, using a comparison group of similar, other workers who did not participate in the program rather than an actual control group to measure change over time.

## Sample

Evaluation data were gathered in Missouri via survey between 2002 and 2004 from MO FDC participants and a comparison group of other social service workers who have not participated in the program. Baseline data were collected from a total of 229 respondents. See Table 2 for a description of all respondents on selected characteristics at the baseline quantitative data collection. Overall, the groups are fairly comparable with three exceptions. The MO FDC participant group has a statistically significant higher percentage of African-Americans than the comparison group (52% to 26.6%,  $p < .001$ ), works significantly more hours in a week (42.9 and 39.2 hours respectively,  $p < .05$ ), and tends to have a larger number of respondents with less than a college degree (54.1% and 45.9%,  $p < .10$ ).

At the completion of MO FDC classes, we gathered a second wave of data to identify change over time. We also gathered a third wave of data at least one year after the completion of the program. We use data from this wave to assess any differences in turnover between the two groups.

## Variables of interest

The eight variables of interest come from the literature and the previous FDC evaluations. They are global self-esteem, mastery, job satisfaction, burnout, sense of professional mission, topics specific to the FDC curriculum including sensitivity to others’ disclosures and recognition of a skill or talent, and turnover.

## Operationalization of measures

The construct of *global self-esteem* is captured by the Rosenberg scale (Rosenberg, 1965) a durable measure of one’s assessment of self where higher score from 0-4 represents higher self-esteem (Chronbach’s  $\alpha$ : wave 1=.83/wave 2=.87). It includes ten items such as “I feel I’m

a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others,” “I am able to do things as well as most other people,” and “I wish I could have more respect for myself” (reverse coded). Pearlin’s (1978) task *mastery* scale from 0=low to 7=high measures the respondents’ feelings of mastery, or control (Chronbach’s  $\alpha$ : wave 1=.82/wave 2=.73).

The Human Services Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (HSJSQ), designed by Shapiro, Burkey, Dorman & Welker (1996) is used because it is the best source of measures for a variety of working conditions common to social service jobs. For all measures from this scale, higher scores represent higher levels of the construct of interest. Job satisfaction was measured by one of the responses to the questionnaire statement, “I am satisfied with my job.” The scale also included five subscales that measured several different aspects of the social service workers’ work experience. The Futility/Avoidance and Affect subscales were combined to create the dependent variable of *burnout* (Chronbach’s  $\alpha$ : wave 1=.85/wave 2=.83). Sense of profession mission is operationalized by the *professional self-esteem* subscale (Chronbach’s  $\alpha$ : wave 1=.54/wave 2=.70). which includes statements such as “I am confident in my ability to effectively serve my clients,” “I feel secure about the soundness of my professional decisions,” and “I sometimes wonder whether I really know what I am doing in my work” (reverse coded).

*Sensitivity to disclosure issues* is captured by agreeing or disagreeing in various intensities with statements such as “I know how appropriate my self-disclosures” and “I am aware of how intimate the disclosures of others are” on a 1-5 scale with 5 being “always true of me” (Chronbach’s  $\alpha$ : wave 1=.70/wave 2=.64). *Recognition of a skill or talent* is operationalized by agree or disagreeing in various intensities with the statement “I am fairly paid for my work.” A higher score indicates that they feel well-enumerated for their skill or talent.

*Turnover* is operationalized as not continuing to be employed by the same agency or organization.

The reliability of the scales at wave 1 and wave 2 are acceptable as the Chronbach’s alpha are all above the desired level of .60 with one exception; the professional self-esteem subscale reliability at wave 1 has a Chronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .54. At wave 1, there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups on the variables of interest demonstrating that these two groups are very similar and therefore can be profitably compared. The fact that there are no significant differences between the two groups in any of these measures at the

baseline makes a stronger case to say that any difference in change noticed over time between the two groups is due in part to the one group participating in the MO FDC Program.

### Analyses

We use T-test analysis to determine any differences in the mean scores of the variables of interest between waves 1 and 2 for the MO FDC participants. A significant difference between the wave 1 score and the wave 2 score indicates the MO FDC participants report a sizable change in their perceptions about the variable of interest (e.g. mastery) between the start and conclusion of their program participation.

We use analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if the difference between the change scores means of the participant and the comparison groups statistically significant. Change scores are considered one of the most robust measures to determine actual differences over time in panel studies (Johnson, 2005).

Not all wave 1 respondents completed subsequent waves of data collection. Therefore, to accurately determine change over time in the same individuals, the greatest strength of a longitudinal panel design, we include only those respondents from whom we have complete data. The number of respondents that provided data for both wave 1 and wave 2 was 167, a very respectable 73% response rate from the full wave 1 sample.

## **RESULTS**

### **Qualitative Results**

Results from the focus groups indicate MO FDC Program participants have experienced changes in several areas of their professional and personal lives. The themes that emerged are listed below with representative quotes from respondents.

#### Have increased feelings of efficacy and confidence in ability to do their job

*“The (program) definitely changed the way I work with my families, NOT cases. And every time I look at that credential, it is a reminder of the work I did and all the things I learned to make my life and the families lives better. I feel it’s more than a certificate like we get from workshops. And I think my co-workers feel the same.”*

*“I feel I am better equipped to work with my families.”*

*“I feel very effective. The clients like the approach. It starts from the very moment you talk to them on the phone and continues on. ‘Cause you let them know that you are there to work with them and want their active participation; it’s great.”*

*“I think the class you know has helped me work better with the families we’ve always done the strength based for several years (but) I think it causes me to look more at their strengths and focus on those a little bit more than maybe I did.”*

### Change in interactions with clients

*“I try to encourage (the parents) to take care – and I have had better luck at them keeping their dental appointments this year. The parents have been taking them..., I have not had to. I’ve set up (the appointment) for them three times already and they’ve not shown up, (but when) they set it up for themselves they’re more apt to show up. That’s really critical.”*

*“I think with me, now, a lot of the times in the beginning I was like now OK I know what this family needs to do, they need to get this ... but now it’s like...and I find myself being more saying to my families this is you know a partnership, you know, I’ll do this and you’ll be responsible, I’ll be responsible, as well as the child. I find myself saying this so many times I guess I look at it different aspect in that regards compared to hey, when I’d get to the visit I’d already know the family needs to do this and this is what we’re going to be working on .”*

*“Because the planning process (taught in the FDC) is very inclusive, the parent seemed to really take ownership of the plan, she felt the goals were realistic, and attainable, and she felt supported and encouraged by the process.”*

*“I’m more focused on the strengths now.”*

*“I’m seeing my relationship with my clients more as a partnership.”*

*“I feel more confident because I’m able really to look at the strengths, whereas before I took the class, I had no clue about strengths, because all the families that were coming to us there was always a problem and we focused on that problem. Whereas in this class, or after taking the class, I’m able to look at the strengths and knowing that yeah, they came to us because they had a problem, but that wasn’t the biggest focus.”*

*“I could definitely see a change just even when I meet with (the clients)...nothing specific, but just in the way we communicate...it’s more on a positive note. I think it has made them more open to communication with us. Like things they may not have wanted to tell you before, now I think that people are telling me more as a result of it.”*

*“The Family Development process itself is inherent and there are things inherent in that process that help us not take on all that responsibility because it’s a shared thing and um and that’s really been um helpful to keep reflecting on it’s not my responsibility for this family to succeed it’s my responsibility to journey with to help.”*

#### Increased skill in communicating with clients

*“I felt like it’s been helpful in helping me to gain more communication skills and allowing (clients) to set their own goals. You know, realizing that they usually know what best for them...and you sharing the power with them rather than I’m telling them what to do; it works a lot better...Just recently I met with one of our residents at the (domestic violence) shelter and I was explaining a little bit about (the family development approach) and she said it was the first time that anyone had ever told her that she could be empowered.”*

*“I think my ability to find their strengths has gotten a lot better. I just had a woman in my office the other day and we got to the part on the Family Development Plan about her strengths and she just looked at me and she said, ‘I don’t know what my strengths are’. I looked at her and said, ‘You obviously have very good survival skills. It couldn’t have been easy to live that way that she’s lived. And she was really kind of shocked that I even saw (that as a strength). In the past, I may have been shocked and not seen any strengths.”*

#### Increased skill in setting boundaries

*“How we gonna teach our clients boundaries? (For) a while there I really didn’t have any boundaries...I was one of those caseworkers that did everything for a client...I would take my (own) money (and) whatever they need(ed) I was right there. They can always depend on me. I learned to let them depend on themselves, lay the foundation, and give them resources and they have to go from there.”*

*“I was attached (to a teenage client) like it was a child of mine, but he wasn’t my child and I had to pull back, I had to look at his strengths. I just had to put it all out there and allow him to take some effort and some ownership. I learned that from the class.”*

*“I used to do everything, and even to this day, I have (clients who say) you go do this, this, and this. But now I’m standing my ground and I’m like no, that’s your responsibility, you need to take the initiative and do it because when I close my case, who’s gonna do it then? So, I think I definitely learned that.”*

#### Acquired new strategies to take care of themselves and avoid burnout

*“It’s hard to shut off those problems that some of our clients have. And so just sitting and relaxing really has made a difference.”*

*“I learned to take care of self by leaving work at work after five.”*

*“I used to feel like I needed to be there for everyone because that was what was expected of me. I’ve learned to put myself first; that’s O.K. to take care of myself first.”*

*“I think I just have an understanding that it’s not about me. I have my own life, I’m in charge of what my goals and objectives are, and they have their life and they’re in charge of what their goals and objectives are. I’m not in charge of making sure they do AB and C, these are adults.”*

### Increased skill in effectively communicating with supervisors and coworkers

*“I’m more assertive with my executive director. She’s still in that power over mode. So I have been more assertive with her to tell her that I feel we need to let our clients make more decisions.*

*“I’m kind of appalled sometimes in the way sometimes I have to use the effective communication skills more with the job site supervisors than I do with the families.”*

*“I was realizing how much I don’t use some of those effective listening and communication skills with coworkers because...I don’t expect to have to work as hard at communication. I have a supervisor who has very, very limited communication skills and using some of the feedback as part of what I’m hearing from him the rephrasing, the empathetic, and some of the conflict resolution skills especially when it talked about turf issues in our last chapter. That gave me a lot of skills as far as communicating with a supervisor that’s difficult to communicate with.”*

*“It helped me realize that I need to tell my coworkers and my supervisors how much I appreciate their support.”*

*“I think listening to my staff, to really listen to what they say in a different way, you know maybe even things they’re not saying to you. So it’s helped me (as a supervisor) a lot in that way.”*

*“I had been through several transitions while I was in the class...and so I was put in the position where I would have to be assertive and express what I needed. So the communication chapter really helped me a lot because it kind of opened up my mind for ways of communicating (and) styles of communication...”*

## Strengthening Agencies

*“I wrote a proposal to our executive committee and they have approved to send the other case manager when funding is available. I really talked (the class) up a lot and told them how much I learned and how beneficial I thought it would be so I’m hoping that we can continue with this.”*

*“(Our program has) focus(ed) on the strengths now for several years and we have a great program. The only thing is that they showed us how to use the (strengths assessment) tool but they didn’t tell us why to use the tool. (I learned in class the reason to use the tool is) because it should be a shared power and so that’s what I’m taking back to share (with coworkers).”*

*“I really feel until we get some more (workers) from our agency to attend this class I don’t know how much (of the strengths approach) we can really apply.”*

## Social support offered to each other by MO FDC participants

*“With the FDC offered to a range of support workers representing many agencies (in our community), more of us can work from the same perspective and plan of action. It truly is an opportunity for family support workers to develop a positive attitude together, support, rather than compete with each other, learn to partner with families to share responsibility for their success so we don’t have to do everything for them and feel challenged by our work but NOT overwhelmed or hopeless.”*

*“The discussion of the other people in the group was really key for stress reduction and just realizing that other people are having the same struggles as you are other people are going through the same types of situations um and I think that for many in many ways the group has been a little bit of a support group um I think that all social workers kind of need that and we need to be able to um kind of step back and realize that we’re not crazy for feeling a certain way or um you now that other people are under the same kind of situation and then learning how they little tidbits about how they deal with it, sometimes (about) even the smallest little thing.”*

*“The treasure that I take from this is the folks that I met and what they do and the jobs that they work and the networking that’s available.”*

*“My past work experience has not included opportunities for interagency communication when working with clients. Although the FDC (class) hasn’t provided conversations about specific clients, it has presented several occasions for me to hear other agencies’ perspectives about family support. I understand more clearly various agency approaches and limitations in working with families”.*

*“One of the things is what social workers need is a little support...to really vent their frustrations, and what they really need to do, for social services organizations, they need to subsidize a day a month a couple of hours a day, to let those folks get together*

*and talk. And it needs to be well facilitated so it doesn't just become a gripe session. And I think you could keep people in the field, prevent burnout, prevent turnover, or at least reduce it greatly, if they had a way of developing their own support systems. And I think that's lacking. But that's what I've seen in the little group I work with."*

#### Personal growth and changes in interactions in their personal lives

*"I am very thankful for having an opportunity to be a part of this class and I know it will help me throughout the rest of my life, not only in my work but also with my own family."*

*"My sister and I have had an on again off again relationship and I through this class and some other experiences in my life...I can now allow her to be who she is and not get so uptight and angry because I don't get the response from her that I want. It's helped there."*

*"I'm not ashamed to say this when I first started reading the book textbook I cried because I thought, 'Have I done what I should do? Do I still have the same vision (about why I started in this job)?' I was sharing with (my husband) that this class has really done something for me. He could see the change."*

*"(The FDC class) helped me get through (a family funeral) weekend without a major explosion on my part. Some of the communication skills came in handy to help me not react (to an angry relative), just that time of rephrasing and empathizing because when she would say something there was so much anger and so much resentment. My instant thought was to fire back and instead the time that it took to rephrase and try to empathize with what she was saying gave me time to settle down and also gave her time to be not so much on the defensive."*

*"I have a friend that I was pretty upset with about a choice she had made and a goal she had set for her life. But during these last few months I finally realized that I need to just let her do what she's wanting to do and if it doesn't work out I've decided I'm gonna be there as a support if it does not work out for her. So I've been using the things I've been learning (in the class)."*

Responses from open-ended question at end of quantitative survey instrument:

*"(T)his class it taught me a lot about myself. I am continuing my education because of some of the important points in this training."*

*I really enjoyed the FDC program. I use it everyday not just professionally, personally also. I hope more people "front line workers" want to take this class they will be surprised how it will affect their everyday lives.*

## Quantitative Results

### Changes in MO FDC participants between wave 1 and wave 2 data collections

Using T-tests to determine change over time for those in the MO FDC group who completed questionnaires for both wave 1 and wave 2 we find significant differences ( $p < .001$ ) between wave 1 and wave 2 scores for all seven dependent variables. MO FDC participants report that global self-esteem increased from 3.40 at wave 1 to 3.52 at wave 2; the mean mastery score rose from 3.25 to 3.35. Professional self-esteem and sensitivity to disclosure scores both show increases over time (2.94 to 3.14 and 4.02 to 4.12 respectively). The MO FDC participants also report significant decreases in burnout (1.48 to 1.44), being fairly paid for their work (2.15 to 1.84) and job satisfaction (2.95 to 2.85).

### Analysis of variance of change scores between MO FDC participants and the comparison group

We use ANOVA analyses to uncover any differences in means of the change scores for the two groups. We find statistically significant differences in the amount of change between the MO FDC participants and the comparison group on two measures. MO FDC participants report an increase in global self-esteem while the comparison group actually reports a decrease (.11 vs. -.10,  $F$ -score=6.55,  $df$ =164,  $p < .05$ ); the results document the same pattern for mastery (.10 vs. -.11,  $F$ -score=9.25,  $df$ =164,  $p < .01$ ) and professional self-esteem (.20 vs. -.00,  $F$ -score=9.25,  $df$ =164,  $p < .01$ ). The MO FDC participants decrease their feelings of burnout while the comparison group reports feeling more burnt out (-.04 vs. .23,  $F$ -score=4.83,  $df$ =123,  $p < .05$ ). There are no significant differences in the amount of change between the two groups on job satisfaction (-.10 vs. -.20, ns) and sensitivity of disclosure (.10 vs. .01, ns) while the change in feeling fairly paid for their work trends toward significance with a decrease for the MO FDC group and an increase on the measure for the comparison group (-.29 vs. .08,  $F$ -score=2.81,  $df$ =123,  $p < .1$ ).

### Turnover

Between wave 1 and wave 2 data collections, only 4.9% of the total sample ( $n=8$ ) left their place of employment so any analysis of differences in turnover between groups would be meaningless. Therefore we look at the percentage of turnover in each of the two groups between the wave 1 and wave 3 data collections to determine if there is any difference in the amount of turnover. In short, there is not. There is no significant difference in the percentage of MO FDC participants who change jobs (47.1%,  $n=33$ ) and the percentage of the members

of the comparison group (52.9%, n=37) between the two data collections which were gathered at least one and a quarter years apart.

## DISCUSSION

These results of the MO FDC Program evaluation suggest that the program generally has positive implications for the social service workers who participate in the classes. Program participants saw significant increases in several important measures including global self-esteem, mastery, professional self-esteem, and a decrease in feelings of burnout. The fact that the changes in these scores were of significantly greater magnitude and also in the opposite direction from the comparison group's change scores indicates the increase in positive feelings and decrease in burnout can most likely be attributed to participation in the MO FDC Program. Both the qualitative and quantitative results support the conclusion that the MO FDC Program provides several benefits to the participants.

### **Qualitative and quantitative support for change or lack of change of specific measures**

We find support for several topics of interest in both the qualitative and quantitative data signifying the results of the analyses report actual change over time. For example, the significant difference in change between MO FDC participants and comparison group on the global self-esteem scale is in concert with the qualitative evidence we collected with one FDC worker remarking: *"I have my FDC Credential on the wall above my desk. It means everything to me."* The significant difference in change between MO FDC participants and the comparison group on the professional self-esteem and mastery scales are also in concert with the qualitative evidence we collected which indicates the MO FDC participants have enjoyed an increase in confidence in ability to do their job (e.g. *"I now feel like I have the needed skills to benefit the families I work with. My confidence level as a social worker has soared."* and *"...Especially after this class, I've gained more confidence."*)

However, in the case of sensitivity to disclosure and other issues regarding communication skills, the lack of significant difference between the two groups in the quantitative data suggests the MO FDC Program may have just reinforced the value of knowledge and skills common to all social service workers rather than teaching entirely new skills and techniques. This interpretation of the quantitative results is supported by the focus group comments where respondents indicate they had improved their communication skills

rather than learned how communicate effectively for the first time (e.g. *“In my [place of employment] there’s great communication; it was my supervisor that recommended this program. [My communication with my coworkers has] probably improved because I like to talk about this program.”*) This supports a finding reported in the California evaluation as well which stated the workers who earned an FDC improved existing work-related strengths (Rolison & Watrous, 2003).

### **Employer Benefit**

MO FDC focus group respondents perceived a need for this experience to be organization-driven to be truly meaningful by commenting: *“(Those of us who) took the class have suggested at our agency that every time there’s a new class we need at least to have two to four people in that class, so the whole agency is working on one accord.”* This comment supports Cochran’s and Dean’s (1991) call for more organizational support for strengths-based training. But the absence of a quantifiable difference in job satisfaction and turnover between the two groups casts doubt on whether an employer could be motivated to provide the time and money required to build the capacity of a worker. If there is no evidence that the employer will gain the additional value of a more satisfied worker or retaining a worker longer, there is no incentive to foot the bill. The benefits of organizational support for workers’ development must be explored further.

### **Conclusion**

Frontline family work is very difficult and personally taxing; these workers deserve to be aware of the great value their contribution to society makes. This evaluation indicates workers who participate in the MO FDC Program are likely to acquire an increase in self-esteem, mastery, and job confidence and to decrease feelings of burnout. While this evaluation raises the question of who should bear the financial burden for this program, there is no doubt that the frontline workers who fill a critical need in our society on a daily basis can receive and do deserve the many benefits available from participation in the Missouri Family Development Credential Program.

**Table 1: Means and Frequencies of Key Variables for Focus Group Participants**

**(n=13)**

Variable	All	All (N)	St. Louis	St. Louis (N)	Springfield	Springfield (N)
Place of Employment						
<i>Government</i>	7.7%	1	0	0	16.7%	1
<i>Non profit</i>	92.3%	12	100%	7	83.3%	5
Education Level						
<i>Some HS /HS Graduate/Some College</i>	23.1%	3	33.3%	1	66.7%	2
<i>College Graduate</i>	53.8%	7	85.7%	6	14.3%	1
<i>Post-graduate work or degree</i>	23.1%	3	0	0	19.0%	3
Ethnicity						
<i>European-American</i>	53.8%	7	85.7%	6	100%	6
<i>African-American</i>	38.5%	5	100%	5	0	0
<i>Native-American</i>	7.7%	1	100%	1	0	0
Gender						
<i>Female</i>	92.3%	12	85.7%	6	100%	6
<i>Male</i>	7.7%	1	14.3%	1	0	0
Married	53.8%	7	57.1%	4	42.9%	3
Mean Age	42.7	13	38.9	7	47.2	6

Table 2: Key Variable Statistics for Quantitative Evaluation Participants at Wave 1 (n=229)

Variable	All	All N	Treatment Group	Treatment Group N	Comparison Group	Comparison Group N
	100%	229	44.5%	102	55.5%	127
Place of Employment						
<i>Government</i>	31.4%	72	29.4%	30	33.1%	42
<i>Non profit</i>	64.6%	148	69.6%	71	60.6%	77
<i>For profit/other</i>	3.9%	9	1.0%	1	6.3%	8
Education						
<i>Some HS /HS Graduate/Some College</i>	26.9%	61	32.4%	33	22.4%	28
<i>College graduate</i>	37.4%	85	35.3%	36	39.2%	49
<i>Post-graduate work or degree</i>	35.7%	81	32.4%	33	38.4%	48
Ethnicity						
<i>European- American</i>	49.1%	110	37.0%	37	58.9%	73
<i>African- American</i>	37.9%	85	52.0%	52	26.6%	33
<i>Latino/a</i>	7.1%	16	5.0%	5	8.9%	11
<i>Asian- American/Other</i>	5.9%	13	5.0%	5	5.6%	7
Gender						
<i>Female</i>	83.8%	192	87.3%	89	81.1%	103
<i>Male</i>	16.2%	37	12.7%	13	18.9%	24
Married	51.3%	115	51.5%	52	51.2%	63
Mean Age	44.9	215	44.9	100	44.9	115
Mean Income	\$45,726	215	\$42,990	100	\$48,104	115
Mean Years in Job	4.5	227	4.2	100	4.8	127
Mean Yrs in Field	10.35	224	10.4	101	10.3	123
Mean Hours worked per week	40.8	226	42.9	99	39.2	127
Mean Job Flexibility (0-100)	68.7	224	69.4	100	68.1	124
Mean Job Rating (100 average)	154.1	222	160.6	99	148.8	123

## REFERENCES

- Acker, G. M. (2003). Role Conflict and Ambiguity: Do they predict burnout among mental health service providers? *Social Work in Mental Health, 1*(3), 63-80.
- Alpert, L. T., & Britner, P. A. (2005). Social Workers' Attitudes toward Parents of Children in Child Protective Services: Evaluation of a Family-Focused Casework Training Program. *Journal of Family Social Work, 9*(1), 33-64.
- Ansary, S. J., Perkins, D. F., & Nelson, J. (2004). Interpreting outcomes: Using focus groups in evaluation research. *Family Relations, 53*(3), 310-316.
- Boehm, A. S., Lee H. (2002). The functions of the social worker in empowering: the voices of consumers and professionals. *Social Work, 47*(4), 449-460.
- Bouffard, S. (2004). Promoting quality out-of-school time programs through professional development. *The Evaluation Exchange, 10*(1), 10, 19.
- Brotheridge, C., & Grandey, A. (2002). Emotional labor and burnout: Comparing two perspectives of "People Work". *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 60*(17-39).
- Center for Family Policy and Research. (2002). *Early childhood workforce retention rates: What factors impact these statistics?* (Policy Brief). Columbia: University of Missouri.
- Cochran, M., & Dean, C. (1991). Home-school relations and the empowerment process. *Elementary School Journal, 91*, 261-269.
- Cochran, M., & Henderson, C. R., Jr. (1986). Family Matters: A Summary of a Final report to the National Institute of Education. In N. I. o. C. H. a. H. Development (Ed.) (pp. 81).
- Collings, J. A., & Murray, P. J. (1996). Predictors of stress amongst social workers: An empirical study. *British Journal of Social Work, 26*(375-387.).
- Crane, B. (1999). *Outcomes of NYS Family Development Credential Program (FDC)*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Crane, B. (2000). *Building a theory of change and a logic model for an empowerment-based family support training and credentialing program*. Unpublished Doctoral, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.
- Dean, C. (1998). *Credentialing caregivers*. Cambridge, MA: Families Matter Working Papers for the Harvard Family Research Project.

- Forest, C. (2003). *Empowerment Skills for Family Workers: A Worker Handbook* (Second ed.). Ithaca, NY: Family Development Press.
- Johnson, D. (2005). Two-wave panel analysis: Comparing statistical methods for studying the effects of transitions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(4), 1061-1076.
- Koeske, G. F., & Kelly, T. (1995). The impact of overinvolvement on burnout and job satisfaction. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 65(2), 282-292.
- Luo, X. (1999). "Not training, but development": A study of the relationship between employer-provided personal development training, organizational models, and organizational performance: American Sociological Association Paper.
- Magennis, R., & Smith, D. B. (2005). All used up: Factors associated with burnout among Missouri social service workers, *Missouri Electronic Journal of Sociology* (Vol. 5, pp. 1-33).
- Maslach, C., Jackson, J. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1996). *Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual* (Third ed.). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologist Press.
- Pearlin, L. I., & Schooler, C. (1978). The structure of coping. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 19(1), 2-21.
- Rolison, M. D., & Watrous, S. (2003). *Family Development Credential Project*. Los Angeles, CA: The Community College Foundation.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sasha Corporation. (2006). Compilation of Turnover Cost Studies. <http://www.sashacorp.com/turncost.html>, accessed February 8, 2006.
- Sexton, D., Lobman, M., Constans, T., Snyder, P., & Ernest, J. (1997). Early interventionists' perspectives of multicultural practices with African-American families. *Exceptional Children*, 63, 313-328.
- Shapiro, J., Burkey, W., Dorman, R., & Welker, C. (1996). Job satisfaction and burnout in child abuse professionals: Measure development, factor analysis, and job characteristics. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 5, 21-38
- Sharma, J., McKelvey, J., Hardy, R., Epstein, M., Lomax, R., & Hruby, P. (1997). Job satisfaction of child welfare workers in an urban setting: Status and predictors. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 6(2), 209-219.
- Shields, J. (2007). *Social Service Work and Job Satisfaction: Revisiting Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman*. Sociology Master's Thesis, University of Missouri, Kansas City.

- Um, M.-Y., & Harrison, D. F. (1998). Role Stressors, Burnout, Mediators, and Job Satisfaction: A stress-strain-outcome model and an empirical test. *Social Work Research*, 22(2), 100-115.
- Von Bergen, C., Soper, B., & Foster, T. (2002). Unintended negative effects of diversity management. *Public Personnel Management*, 31, 239-251.
- Wellner, A. (2000). How do you spell diversity? *Training*, 37, 34-38.
- Winefield, H. R., & Barlow, J. A. (1994). Client and worker satisfaction in a child protection agency. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 19(8), 897-905.
- Zimmerman, S., Williams, C., Reed, P. S., Boustani, M., Preisser, J. S., Heck, E., et al. (2005). Attitudes, stress, and satisfaction of staff who care for residents with dementia. *The Gerontologist*, 45(Special Issue I), 96-105.
- Zunz, S. (1998). Resiliency and burnout: protective factors for human service managers. *Administration in Social Work*, 22(3), 39-54.