Retention of School-Based SLPs: Relationships among Job Satisfaction, Caseload, Workload, and Best Practice

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Background

School-Based SLP Shortage
- ASHA has made the SLP shortage a top priority.
- By 2012, 49,000 new SLP positions will need to be filled nationally.
- In Vermont, 46% of school districts have at least 1 SLP opening.

Factors Related to Retention
- Job Satisfaction: see Table for operationalization.
- Caseload: The number of students an SLP serves.
- Workload: All SLP work to supply direct and indirect services.

In previous research, samples were drawn from populous states with very high caseloads. The purposes of this study were to:
1) repeat previous research to determine whether relations to caseload held in a less populous state with smaller caseloads and,
2) examine the links between retention, job satisfaction, caseload, workload, and important aspects of best practice defined as evidence-based, family-centered, culturally competent practice with the ability to carry out optimal service delivery models.

Method

Participants
- 75 full-time SLPs working in a school setting in Vermont.

Procedure
- A survey was administered to school-based SLPs in Vermont (41% response rate). Survey items were borrowed or adapted from previous investigations (Dowden et al., 2006; Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007) or were developed for the purposes of this study.

Descriptive Statistics

- 76% of respondents indicated they plan to leave within 10 years.
- Caseload ranged from 10-55 (M = 35; SD = 10) with 38% reporting caseloads at or exceeding the ASHA recommendation of 40. Nonetheless, the caseload sizes observed were less than those reported previously in the peer-reviewed literature making this sample a good one for comparisons.
- Overall, respondents reported high job satisfaction across several dimensions with workload being rated significantly lower than all other dimensions.
- Overall, respondents reported not having enough time to engage in all aspects of best practice that were assessed in this study.

Inferential Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Retention r (p)</th>
<th>Caseload Size r (p)</th>
<th>Workload Satisfaction r (p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what degree do you...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like school hours</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>-.27 (.02)</td>
<td>.31 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like working with children</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like your benefits</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like your schedule</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>.44 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like working in educational setting</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>-.28 (.02)</td>
<td>.38 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like professional advancement</td>
<td>.37 (.00)</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>.28 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like caseload</td>
<td>.37 (.00)</td>
<td>-.54 (.00)</td>
<td>.66 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like workload (workload satisfaction)</td>
<td>.29 (.02)</td>
<td>-.36 (.00)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like parental involvement</td>
<td>.43 (.00)</td>
<td>.30 (.00)</td>
<td>.36 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like your salary</td>
<td>.38 (.00)</td>
<td>-.23 (.03)</td>
<td>.33 (.00)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Like others understanding of your role</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>.35 (.00)</td>
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<td>Like your work space</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
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<td>Like availability of materials</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
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<td>Like administrative support</td>
<td>ns</td>
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<td>.46 (.00)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Like access to technology</td>
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<td>Like training for special populations</td>
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<td>Like your variety of tasks</td>
<td>ns</td>
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<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like collaborating with other professionals</td>
<td>.25 (.03)</td>
<td>ns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Like professional development</td>
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<td>ns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Like SLP mentor</td>
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<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caseload size</td>
<td>-.21 (.04)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.36 (.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Best Practice**

- Time to access and consume materials: ns ns .26 (.03)
- Time to collaborate with experts: -.27 (.02) ns .26 (.03)
- Time to collaborate with families: .28 (.02) ns .28 (.02)
- Time for optimal service delivery: .48 (.00) -.36 (.00) .54 (.00)
- Time to prepare for students who are culturally or linguistically diverse: ns ns ns

Results & Implications

- Like more populous states with larger caseloads, retention of school-based SLPs is an issue in the state of Vermont.
- Despite the smaller caseloads in the current sample, this research confirmed the findings of Dowden et al. (2006): In both studies, no correlation was found between SLP experience and caseload size suggesting that caseload size is driven by the need of individual schools.
- No correlation was found between caseload size and amount of overtime worked which is explained by SLPs hitting a ceiling in work time.
- A correlation was found between caseload size and number of group sessions suggesting that SLPs are choosing to conduct group therapy sessions to accommodate large caseloads and that this service delivery model is not driven by best practice.
- Dimensions of job satisfaction that involved available time were related to retention as were caseload, workload, and several dimensions of best practice. Caseload size predicted several dimensions of job satisfaction. Workload operated similarly but predicted more dimensions and predicted them more strongly.
- Results suggest that time is an important factor underlying the relations observed. Moreover, workloads are not leaving enough time for SLP’s implement best practice which has implications for retention.
- It is appropriate to move toward ASHA’s workload model of determining caseloads and SLPs are encouraged to advocate for more manageable caseloads and workloads (Cirrin, 2004).
- School districts need to allocate more funds to support speech and language services and several states are beginning to move in this direction.

Selected References


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