

# Exploring the relationship between employment-based social capital, job stress, burnout, and intent to leave among child protection workers: An age-based path analysis model

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## ABSTRACT

Research suggests that age and organizational factors are consistently linked with job stress, burnout, and intent to leave among child protection workers. However, no study has contextualized how age matters with regards to these adverse employee outcomes. We conducted a theory driven path analysis that identifies sources of employment-based social capital, job stress, burnout, and intent to leave among two age groups. We used a statewide purposive sample of 209 respondents from a public child welfare organization in a New England state in the United States. Results suggest that the paths to job stress, burnout and intent to leave differed by age group. Social capital dimensions were more influential in safeguarding against job stress for older workers compared to younger workers. Our results justify creating workplace interventions for younger workers that target areas of the organization where relational support could enhance the quality of social interactions within the organization. Organizations may need to establish intervention efforts aimed at younger workers by creating different structures of support that can assist them to better deal with the pressures and demands of child protection work.

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## 1. Introduction

Three significant challenges that impact the practice of child protection are job stress, burnout, and intent to leave (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006; GAO, 2003; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2006). Among child protection workers, individual characteristics and organizational factors are linked with job stress, turnover and burnout (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Depanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008). One of the individual characteristics more consistently associated with the aforementioned employee outcomes is an employee's age (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Jinnett & Alexander, 1999; Manlove & Guzella, 1997; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2006; Parker, & DeCotiis, 1983). Much of the literature suggests that, even accounting for organizational factors, on average, younger respondents are more likely to experience more adverse employee psychosocial outcomes (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Mor Barak et al., 2006; Parker, & DeCotiis, 1983). Despite such findings, very little research has examined how age matters when it comes to job stress, burnout, and intent to leave.

Why should an employee's age matter when it comes to job stress, burnout, and intent to leave? Age matters when it comes to job stress and burnout because younger workers may not have developed the coping skills to deal with the high levels of stress associated with child protection work (Leiter, 1990) and they may not have developed the ability to separate themselves emotionally from the traumatic experiences they encounter in child protection work (Holloway & Wallinga, 1990); thus giving way to experiencing higher rates of job stress and burnout. The reason why age matters in relation to intent to leave is not entirely clear. Some researchers have maintained that younger workers are more likely to leave because they may have more job alternatives, whereas older workers may lack other opportunities (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 1993) and older workers may perceive maintaining their health and retirement benefits as more important than younger workers (Mor Barak et al., 2006). Given that younger workers are more likely to experience higher rates of job stress, burnout, intent to leave and eventually resign (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Jinnett & Alexander, 1999; Manlove & Guzella, 1997; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2006; Parker, & DeCotiis, 1983), child welfare practice is likely to experience a shortage of workers.

Further exacerbating this issue is the aging child welfare workforce. There is growing recognition that the aging of the workforce is a dynamic that child protection will have to deal with in the near future

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and beyond (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; Cohen–Callow, Hopkins, & Kim, 2009; National Association of Social Workers, 2005). For example, one study found that as many as 30% of child welfare workers were age 50 and older (Cohen–Callow et al., 2010), while another suggests that as many as 40% of social workers are age 45 and older (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). Moreover, the National Association of Social Workers (2005) estimates that as many as 62% of licensed social workers are age 45 and older. Despite this acknowledgment, child welfare has yet to fully strategize how it will address staff shortages posed by an aging workforce (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). Therefore, it is likely that this dynamic will generate major problems for an already strained workforce.

Given that younger workers are more likely to leave a child welfare organization and more baby boomers are headed into retirement without a consistent following of subsequent generations in the workforce pipeline (Pitt-Catsouphes & Smyer, 2007; Shen, Pitt-Catsouphes, Smyer, 2007), organizations are going to have to consider what organizational factors contribute to the genesis of adverse employees psychosocial outcomes in order to keep their child protection workforce intact. Yet, little attention has been given to exploring path models that identify which paths to job stress, burnout and intent to leave differ between younger and older workers. Thus, there is a need for an investigation that provides a better understanding of the complex interaction of multiple factors that contribute to job stress, intent to leave and burnout by age group.

While earlier research focused on individual determinants of burnout, Leiter and Maslach (2000) maintain that sources of the work context can also produce burnout. Moreover, organizational factors are believed to have a greater influence than personal factors (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Despite the recognition that organizational dimensions can create adverse employee outcomes such as job stress, burnout and intent to leave, only a small number of investigations have examined the role that employment-based social capital can have in safeguarding against such damaging consequences. The current exploratory study responds to this need by conducting a theoretically driven path analysis model that identifies workplace sources of social capital and examines its association with job stress, burnout, and intent to leave among respondents in two age groups (child protection workers younger than 37 years old compared with those 38 years old and older). Our findings provide management with empirical evidence as to where opportunities exist to get involved earlier in the process before the development of job stress, burnout and intent to leave (Tham, 2007).

### 1.1. Background and significance

A number of stressors exist within child protection practice. Child protection workers face stress in the field when having to make immediate decisions on difficult cases, managing large caseloads, and dealing with continuous media scrutiny (Martinez, 2004). Organizational stressors stemming from the organizational structure, climate, and management style exist as well (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994), and such stressors in the workplace sometimes cannot be entirely circumvented (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984a, 1984b). However, when the number and types experienced exceed the individual's ability to cope with them comfortably, such feelings make employees susceptible to job stress. As the work environment in child protection continues to influence the amounts of job stress, more child protection workers are prone to experiencing burnout (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Shinn, Rosario, Morch, & Chestnut, 1984; Rai, 2010) and the development of notions of leaving such a stressful environment (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Hopkins, Cohen–Callow, Kim, & Hwang, 2010; Mor Barak et al., 2006; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001).

Burnout is also a major concern in the field of child protection. Current estimates suggest that as many as 50% of child protection workers report experiencing symptoms of burnout (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006). Burnout is defined as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 99). Examining burnout is an ongoing concern in the area of child welfare since it is often reflected in the development of damaging attitudes and thoughts of incompetence, a distant and possibly neglectful approach toward the profession, and faulty assessment, which may potentially impair client services (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Stevens & Higgins, 2002). Furthermore, workers experiencing burnout may become irritated, exhibit rigid thinking, express cynicism about the agency, and become increasingly less productive (Azar, 2000).

The U.S. General Accounting Office (2003) estimates that nationally, employee turnover rates in child welfare are between 30% and 40%. Such a level of turnover is alarming given that it is associated with considerable costs for organizations, workers, and clients. Financial costs associated with employee turnover in child welfare vary by state; however, it is estimated that for every worker who leaves, about \$10,000 will be spent to recruit, hire, and train a replacement (CSSP, 2006). One agency estimated that turnover costs them about \$1.4 million in an 18-month period (Flower, McDonald, & Sumski, 2005).

Aside from the consumption of financial resources, employee turnover also has negative direct consequences for the workplace. Turnover has also been linked with poorer child outcomes (GAO, 2003); poorer quality of services (Balfour & Neff, 1993; Flower et al., 2005); and increased caseloads (Graef & Hill, 2000; Strayhorn, 2004). For example, management has to redistribute the workloads to other workers and reallocate monies to advertise, hire, and train new workers, while concurrently trying to keep morale high among existing employees. Child protection workers must then deal with their own workload plus help cover departing workers' caseloads. This may partially explain why the GAO (2003) estimated that public child protection workers have to deal with twice the number of cases recommended by the Child Welfare League of America.

Turnover can also have an effect on consumers. Clients have to deal with inconsistent services and compete with turnover for rechanneling of monies because agencies are forced to spend additional financial resources to replace departed workers (Anderson, 2000). Turnover can also disrupt the continuity of services because clients have to get acquainted and establish a relationship with a new worker every time there is a change (GAO, 2003). Because so much is invested in each employee by clients and coworkers, organizations therefore have to do their best to minimize voluntary employee turnover (Graef & Hill, 2000).

## 2. Literature review

Given the absence of established literature and the novel application of the concept of employment-based social capital within the child protection milieu, the current literature review includes existing studies from other settings and disciplines. We reviewed antecedents of job stress, burnout, and intent to leave. The empirical support for the association of employment-based social capital and each of the employee outcomes is summarized below.

### 2.1. Employment-based social capital and job stress

A number of studies have examined the role that social relationships (peer and supervisor support) play in relation to job stress. Previous studies with national samples have established that a negative relationship exists between social support and job stress (Arrington, 2008; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984b). Much of this literature suggests that poor relationships between workers and their peers, supervisors,

and subordinates are sources of job stress (AbuAlRub, 2004; French & Caplan, 1972; French, Rodgers, & Cobb, 1974; Mor Barak et al., 2006). Among child welfare workers, supervisory and coworker support is associated with decreasing job stress (Mor Barak et al., 2006). In terms of perception of fairness and influence, as perceptions of fairness and influence increase, there is a decrease in job stress (Mor Barak et al., 2006). Turning to trust, there exists relatively minimal empirical support regarding the relationship between levels of trust and job stress within a child protection setting. Spector (2002) maintains that increased trust between supervisors and subordinates is essential in maintaining an environment where the job stress is manageable. Empirically, the relationship between trust and job stress is mixed. Some studies suggest that trust is significantly related to job stress (Ross, 1994; Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010), while another study found that there was not a significant relationship shared between these two variables (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983). However, the direction of the relationship appears to be consistent. Generally, as trust increases, job stress is likely to decrease. Communication has also been argued to be tied with job stress (Ray & Miller, 1991; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). Chen, Silverthorne, and Hung (2006) contend that there is a lack of research that investigates the relationship between organizational communication levels and job stress; this relationship is much more implied but not demonstrated. This is especially true as it relates to a child protection setting. Utilizing a sample of elementary school teachers, Ray and Miller (1991) examined the relationship between communication and job stress. Their findings demonstrate that increased communication was significantly related to reduce job stress (Ray & Miller, 1991).

The last dimension of employment-based social capital we explored examines the relationship between organizational commitment and job stress. Although most studies examine organizational commitment as an outcome, we examine organizational commitment as a moderator because we consider it a fundamental cognitive factor in reducing harmful consequences of anxiety rather than only being a result of it (Glazer & Kruse, 2008). There is some empirical support to suggest that organizational commitment serves as a moderator of job stress (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Glazer & Kruse, 2008; Sager, 1990). Using a random sample of 506 nurses in Israel, Glazer and Kruse (2008) found that affective commitment was negatively related to job stress at the bivariate level. Similarly, Boyas and Wind (2010) found that among public child protection workers greater organizational commitment was significantly associated with lower perceived job stress.

## 2.2. Employment-based social capital and burnout

Similar to job stress, there is minimal research that has examined how employment-based social capital shapes burnout among child protection workers. We found some evidence that suggests that trust does shape burnout. Essentially, when workers' perceptions of trust are higher, worker burnout is lower (Harvey, Kelloway, & Duncan-Leiper, 2003; Timms, Graham, & Caltabiano, 2007). Communication levels have also been found to shape burnout. In their study of 211 California registered social workers, Kim and Lee (2009) found that communication was negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. In the existing literature, researchers have found that levels of fairness significantly predict burnout (Lasalvia et al., 2009; Ronen & Mikulincer, 2009). In their study of 393 private sector workers, Ronen and Mikulincer (2009) found that lower perceptions of fairness were significantly associated with increased perceptions of burnout. Similarly, fairness has been found to significantly predict burnout. Among 1420 in a psychiatric care facility, which included social workers, Lasalvia et al. (2009) found that even after accounting for other organizational factors, increased fairness was significantly associated with lower levels of burnout. Organizational commitment has also been found to shape burnout. Among 160 correctional staff members in the Midwest, Griffin, Hogan,

Lambert, Tucker-Gail, and Baker (2010) found that increased organizational commitment was significantly correlated with lower levels of burnout. Moreover, of all of the other factors they examined, organizational commitment had one of the strongest influences on burnout. Existing research also suggests that positive social relationships in the form of coworkers decrease the likelihood of worker burnout (Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge, & Bakker, 2003; Kim & Lee, 2009).

## 2.3. Employment-based social capital and intent to leave

Similar to other employee outcomes, the literature on intent to leave and employment-based social capital within a child welfare setting was scarce. Once more, literature from other settings and disciplines was used to guide the hypotheses tested in the current study. The relationship between trust and intent to leave has received minimal attention. However, a few existing studies have established that importance of trust as it relates to fostering decreased notions of leaving the organization (Costigan, Ilter & Berman, 1998; Wong, Ngo, & Wong, 2003). Among 295 employees from four factories in Southern China, Wong et al. (2003) found that increased trust in the organization did have a significant and negative effect on employees' turnover intentions. Communication has also been found to affect notions of leaving (Kim, & Lee, 2009; Scott et al., 1999). Scott and colleagues found that among government employees, less communication may increase intent to leave. Research has established at the bivariate level, fairness was significantly associated intent to leave (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000; Mor Barak et al., 2006). Although not the focus of their study, Mor Barak et al. (2006) correlation matrix found that increased perceptions of fairness were associated with lower notions of intent to leave. Similarly, inclusion in the decision making process was significantly associated with job search behavior and intent to leave (Hopkins et al., 2010; Mor Barak et al., 2006). Social relationships have also been found to influence intent to leave. Much of this literature suggests that supportive social relationships in workplace are regarded as one of contributing factors to employee retention (Ellett et al., 2007; Rycraft, 1994). Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that increased social support is related to decreased notions of leaving (Kim & Stoner, 2008; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Mor Barak et al., 2006; Nissly et al., 2005). Organizational commitment has also been found to significantly shape turnover intentions (Clugston, 2000; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002). Clugston (2000) found that among 156 government employees of a Western state, there was significant and negative association between organizational commitment (affective type) and intent to leave.

## 2.4. Job stress, burnout, and intent to leave

Among variations of workers, job stress has been a strong contributing risk factor of burnout (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Griffin et al., 2010; Shinn, Rosario, Morch, & Chestnut, 1984; Rai, 2010) and intent to leave (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Hopkins et al., 2010; Mor Barak et al., 2006, 2001). Using a national sample, Jayaratne and Chess (1984a) found that job stress significantly predicted notions of intent to leave. As stress levels increased so did the notions of leaving. One study found that job stress had the strongest influence in predicting burnout (Griffin et al., 2010). Among a sample of 418 public child welfare workers, Nissly, Mor Barak, and Levin (2005) found that increased job stress predicted increased thoughts of leaving and accounted for 18% of the variance in intentions of leaving. Burnout is also well established as a known factor associated with intention to leave (Huang, Chuang, & Lin, 2003; Kim & Stoner, 2008) and job exit (Drake & Yadama). When burnout levels are higher, workers are more likely to have thoughts of leaving.

### 3. Research objectives, question, and hypotheses

Given that the child welfare workforce is aging and experiences a constant flow of turnover, we examined the moderating role played by age in predicting whether the paths to job stress, burnout, and intent to leave differed by age group. Furthermore, we examined the extent to which employment-based social capital directly shaped the aforementioned employee outcomes. The main research question examined was, “Controlling for demographic characteristics, do the relationships between perceived social capital, job stress, burnout and intent to leave vary by age group?” Since there are no investigations that examine how age influences the acquisition of employment-based social capital, we had no a priori expectations. Based on the theory of employment-based social capital and existing literature, we hypothesized that:

- Increased levels of employment-based social capital would be associated with lower levels of job stress, burnout, and intent to leave.
- Increased job stress would be associated with increased burnout and intent to leave.
- Increased burnout would be associated with increased intent to leave.

### 4. Theoretical framework of employment-based social capital and model

The worth of social relationships within an organization can be assessed through a worker's perception of the level of support received (Hagan, 1994). This relational perspective reflects the importance and defining characteristic of employment-based social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In broad terms, social capital is a notion of social development being cultivated through relationship building that is embedded in the social relationships and networks in which one participates (Leana & Van Buren, 1999). In the process of interacting with one another, individuals and groups have the potential to combine and use resources to help themselves and others (Portes, 2000). This form of intangible capital, if encouraged and developed between members of an organization, can promote collaborative relationships that allow groups to accomplish more than individuals working in isolation (Coleman, 1988; de Cremer & Stouten, 2003; Putnam, 1995; 2000). A social circle, in our case the organization, can provide individuals with the resources for social growth and social support. Lin (2000) recognizes this process as resource patterns linked in interaction patterns. The social web created as a result of social interactions can result in significant social returns from those we know and also from others we do not yet know who are linked and accessible because of our associations.

Although social capital measures structural components, such as network size and density, it also includes internal, cognitive components. The “cognitive” type reflects a psychosocial process that is embedded in the mind and not easily measured (Uphoff & Wijayaratna, 2000). This form of social capital is attitudinal and subjective in nature (Uphoff, 2000). Cognitive social capital speaks to the shared norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs that influence people towards collective action in the workplace (Krishna & Uphoff, 2002). It is this personal cognitive bond that can propel cooperation and coordination among coworkers. Harpham, Grant, and Thomas (2002) maintain that the simplest way of viewing this form of social capital is to measure what people “feel” in terms of social relationships.

Our conceptualization of employment-based social capital uses the social resource approach (Lin, 1999). Such an approach emphasizes the nature of the resources that are rooted in an organization (Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981) and as an element of an organization's culture (Leana & Van Buren, 1999) that is embedded within the organizational climate of a public child protection system. Through the social capital framework, the psychosocial processes that operate

within the workplace can be better explained by assessing the perception of interpersonal relationships (Watson & Papamarcos, 2002) in terms of how they exacerbate or safeguard employees' psychological health. Since one of the core functions of social capital is support, this study examines employees' perception of support from multiple organizational features. It speaks to the practices, norms, and linkages that make up an organization's culture and represents the traits that exemplify the network of relationships an employee has with organizational peers, subordinates, and superiors (James, 2000). We maintain that the milieu of employment-based social capital is salient in understanding employees' perception of the organizational climate in which they work. Moreover, these potentially supportive relationships can make a difference for workers (Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayan, & Schwartz, 2002) by potentially buffering against job stress, burnout, and intent to leave, and by extension, enhancing service quality and child outcomes (Baruch-Feldman et al., 2002).

#### 4.1. Model of employment-based social capital

We use a conceptual model of employment-based social capital that has been previously tested and validated as a helpful explanatory factor for satisfaction and quality of life in the workplace (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001; Requeña, 2003). We selected cognitive forms of employment-based social capital measures that reflect a common typology found in this literature (for an extensive review of the model see Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001, and Requeña, 2003). For the purpose of the current study, several aspects of cognitive organizational social capital dimensions were analyzed (see Fig. 1), including (a) trust/cooperation, (b) social relations with coworkers and supervisors, (c) organizational commitment, (d) communication, (e) influence, and (f) fairness. Lowe and Schellenberg (2001) maintain that these characteristics of an agency can be considered to better comprehend the quality of workplace relationships.

Trust serves as a component that makes up social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Rahn & Transue, 1998). Within work settings, trust refers to the expectation that people in an organization will abide by commonly held social norms, roles, and ethical dictates (Muhlberger, 2001) and that an employer will act fairly (Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001). Work-based social capital is embedded within the social relationships existing in an organization (Coleman, 1988). The relationships in which someone participates constitute an important resource during social interactions by providing members with “the collectivity-owned capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249) that can improve individuals' opportunities and prospects (Coleman, 1988). Organizational commitment emphasizes the worker's attachment to the organization rather than solely to the job (Lee & Henderson, 1996) and an employee's identification with an organization and its goals (Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001). Communication is a basic feature of any effective and cooperative work relationship (Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001); it underlies the majority of organizational procedures (Euske & Roberts, 1987). Effective communication is essential in creating order and keeping employees informed of important organizational issues and changes. Influence relates to the capability of having a say in the decision-making process in one's work (Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001). Others have viewed influence as professional control, which reflects the degree of influence a worker has over a particular area of their occupation (Abbott, 1988; Harrison, 1994). Influence could relate to having a say in the way a group performs certain tasks, having the ability to influence decisions that affect the organization, and voicing opinions in meetings that include senior management. Organizational fairness is described as the way in which the distribution of resources among employees is determined (Greenberg, 1990a). Employees' perception of fairness will affect their attitudes toward their jobs and workplaces (Roberts & Markel, 2001). When employees believe an organization is treating them fairly, they are more likely to positively assess and accept managerial policies and procedures (Greenberg, 1990b). Based on the theory of employment-based social capital and

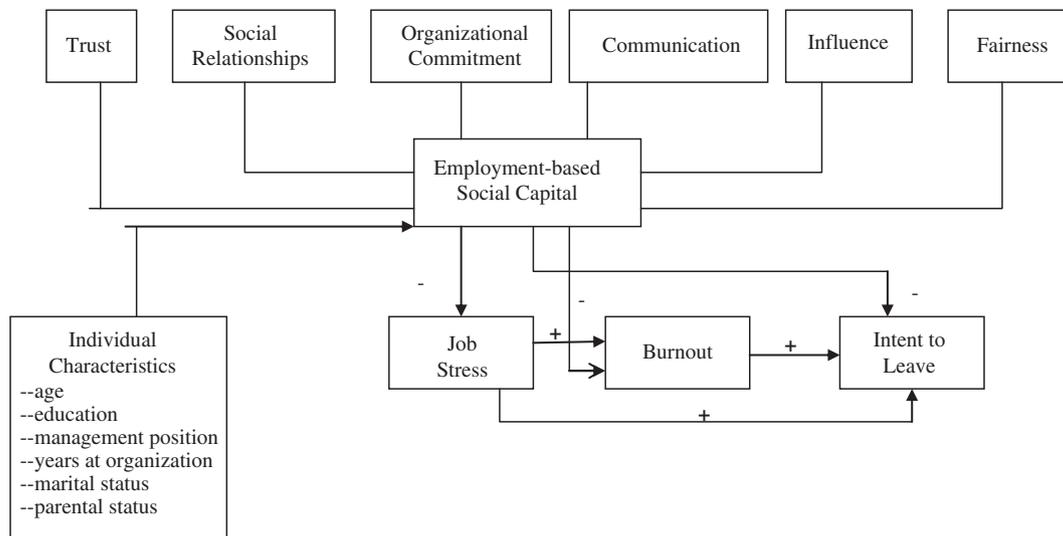


Fig. 1. Hypothesized relationships between social capital, job stress, burnout, and intent to leave.

existing studies (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001; Mor Barak et al., 2001, 2006; Requeña, 2003), we posited that higher levels of employment-based social capital were significantly associated lower levels of job stress, burnout, and notions of intent to leave. Because of the relational support received in the workplace, as operationalized by higher levels of trust, supervisory support, coworker support, organizational commitment, communication, influence, and fairness, child welfare workers were less likely to experience adverse employee psychosocial outcomes. Furthermore, as a result of lower levels of job stress, child protections were less likely to experience burnout and intent to leave. Our study builds on the existing literature in two ways. First, we examined whether employment-based social capital directly shapes notions of intent to leave. Second, we determined whether the hypothesized model includes similar paths to job stress, burnout, and intent to leave by age group. Our study took an initial step in gaining an understanding of the moderating effects of age in relation to job stress, burnout, and intent to leave. Given the early departure of younger workers and the retirement of older workers, organizations need to better understand what workplace factors influence these employee outcomes before problems begin. Increasing awareness about how employment-based social capital buffers against adverse employee psychosocial outcomes and the moderating effects of age are important first steps. This knowledge can be used to identify modifiable factors that can be considered in the development of age-appropriate prevention and intervention strategies to ameliorate some of the child protection workforce issues.

## 5. Method

### 5.1. Research design and sample

The current study used a cross-sectional research design with a statewide sample consisting of all employees of a public child welfare organization. Of the 313 possible employees who could have participated in the study, 209 completed the survey. This represents a 67% response rate, which is deemed an acceptable rate for survey research (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Data were collected from February 2003 through May 2004 from 12 offices throughout a New England state. Workers in all departments were invited to participate in the study during an oral presentation and through written explanation to the organization's field unit directors statewide. Based on their preference, respondents voluntarily participating in the study answered a confidential survey provided online or through traditional paper methods. A stamped and addressed return envelope was provided both to protect confidentiality in the workplace and to enhance

return rate. Institutional Review Board permission was obtained to ensure minimal risk to study participants. Informed consent authorizing participation in the study was obtained.

Most participants in the sample were women (87.1%), were younger than the average age of 37.7 years (61.6%), had a partner (57.0%), had children under 18 years of age (75.1%), primarily held baccalaureate degrees (63.7%), did not have management status (78.0%), and had less than 7 years with the organization (65.5%). The sample was also racially/ethnically homogeneous; the majority (97%) of respondents reported being Caucasian or non-Hispanic white. The sample was composed primarily of caseworkers (63%), followed by supervisors (21%) and other employee classifications (16%). Attempts to include multiple age groupings were hindered by smaller group numbers in some categories. Since the mean age of the sample was 37 years of age, we dichotomized respondents into two groups—those below and those above the mean. Respondents who were 37 years of age and younger were grouped together to make up the “younger worker” category, whereas respondents 38 years and older constituted the “older worker” group. In all, there were 110 younger workers and 99 older workers.

### 5.2. Measures

Instrumentation for this study included single-item and scale measures, including age, education, marital status, job tenure, whether they have children or not, trust, organizational commitment, communication, coworker support, influence, supervisor support, fairness, job stress, and burnout. Individual characteristics were measured as follows: Education was a dichotomized variable (coded 1 = graduate degree, 0 = baccalaureate degree). Marital status was a dichotomized variable (coded 1 = married, 0 = not married). Job tenure was a continuous variable. Parent status was measured as a dichotomous variable (coded 1 = has child(ren), 0 = no child(ren)).

### 5.3. Measures of employment-based social capital

Trust, the expectation that an employer will act fairly and collaboratively, has been proven to be an important organizational element (Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001). In the current study, there was not a trust variable available in the dataset; therefore, cooperation is used as a proxy for trust. Substantial evidence suggests that trust engenders cooperation by helping them to manage uncertainty associated with social interaction (Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Yamagishi, 1986). It has been argued that trust is the critical factor in people's decisions

to cooperate (De Cremer & Dewitte, 2002; Tanghe, Wise, & van der Flier, 2010; Tyler, 2003). Hence, we used cooperation as a proxy for trust. This is a single item that asked respondents on a 6-point Likert scale if they felt that they had the cooperation of the people at work (1 = Strongly Disagree–6 = Strongly Agree).

Perception of fairness was measured by assessing employee's perceptions of procedural and distributive justice. Questions on the overall perception of fairness scale ask respondents to indicate whether they are fairly paid in relation to their job responsibilities, the amount of effort they put in, the work they have done well, the amount of experience they have, and the stresses and strains of their job. Procedural justice was measured using a 4-item scale developed by Sweeney and McFarlin (1993) that has shown reliabilities of .88 to .93 for previous studies. The procedural justice index for the current study had a moderately high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80). A widely used scale to measure fairness, developed by Price and Mueller (1986), was used to assess employees' perception of distributive justice. Previous research using the distributive justice scale provides data relevant to discriminate and convergent validity. Cronbach alphas for two earlier studies were .94 (Bavendam, 1985), and .95 (Boyer, 1985). When the procedural and distributive justice indexes were combined, the fairness index had a high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91).

Social relationships were measured using a scale developed by Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau (1975), which assesses the extent to which supervisors and coworkers provide support when needed. The 8-item scale includes statements pertaining to accessibility and supportiveness between the respondent and the supervisor and coworkers. Employees rate these sources of support for each of the statements. Previously, the overall alpha coefficient of the social support measure was .82. The reliability coefficients for the various types of support were .88 for supervisor support and .80 for coworker support. In the current study, the supervisory support index had a moderately high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.86) and the coworker support index also had a moderately high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81).

Organizational commitment was measured using the Affective Commitment Scale (Allen & Meyer, 1990). All items represent statements to which the subject responds on a 7-point Likert scale. The scale includes items related to perceptions of employee loyalty to the agency, willingness to invest in achievement of organizational goals, and acceptance of organizational values. In previous studies, reliability of this scale as measured by coefficient alpha ranged from .82 to .93 (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). In the current study, the organizational commitment index had a high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.90).

We developed the communication composite index. This variable was a sum composed of the following five Likert-scale statements: (a) I frequently receive communication from management higher than my immediate supervisor; (b) I feel valued in my interactions with managers higher than my immediate supervisor; (c) my coworkers openly share work-related information with me; (d) my supervisor usually provides me with timely feedback and implications about decisions that concern me; and (e) my supervisor deals with me in a truthful manner (coded 1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree). The communication index had a moderate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75).

The influence composite index was developed by the authors of the current study. This summed variable was composed of the following four Likert-scale statements: (a) I have a say in the way my work group performs its tasks, (b) I am able to influence decisions that affect my organization, (c) my supervisor often asks for my opinion before making important decisions, and (e) I am often invited to voice my opinion in meetings with management higher than my immediate supervisor (coded 1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree). The influence index had a moderate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78).

Job stress was examined using a 9-item scale measuring employee perception of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload (Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970). The 3-item role ambiguity index measures employee perception of job clarity. The 3-item role conflict index assesses employee perception of conflicting demands. Szilagyi et al. (1976) reported Spearman-Brown internal reliability coefficients of .76 and .90 for role ambiguity and .90 and .94 for role conflict. The 3-item role overload index measures employee perception of their ability to meet job responsibilities (e.g., "I have enough time to finish job assignments"). Findler, Wind, and Mor Barak (2007) reported alpha coefficients of these scales were .75, .83 and .77, respectively. In the current study, the composite job stress index had moderately high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83).

Burnout was conceptualized and measured using the 14-item Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Two subscales of the MBI, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, explicate this construct. In the current study, both had acceptable levels of internal consistency: emotional exhaustion subscale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.94) and depersonalization subscale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79).

Intent to leave was measured by a subscale of the second edition of the Work Environment Scale (WES). It included 8 items, such as employee's thoughts on leaving, sending out resumes, and actively searching for another position. Reliability of the WES scale is indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .69 to .86 (Moos, 1986). In the current study, the WES subscale utilized produced high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.86).

#### 5.4. Analytic strategy

Univariate statistics were used to establish the study's sample. Bivariate analyses were then computed by way of Pearson's *r* zero-order correlations to determine the direction and size of the relationship between all variables in the structural model (not included to preserve space). In addition, Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) and *t*-tests were used to determine if significant differences existed between the two age groups on the major constructs. To examine the main research question and hypotheses, we computed a path analysis model using AMOS 18 software program. This software program is valuable in the current investigation because it can measure the multidimensional construct of social capital and can simultaneously examine a series of interconnected associations, assesses measurement error, and facilitate testing the fit of the data to the conceptual model (Kline, 1998). More practically, it can challenge the organization to consider the complexities of the relationships between constructs as they relate to structuring mechanisms in the workplace that support optimal employee and organizational outcomes.

The current study used the Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) estimator because of a minor presence of missing data. Byrne (2001) argues that this approach, when applied with Maximum Likelihood Estimation, is theoretically based, consistent, efficient, and provides estimates that are least biased when faced with missing data. This estimator is believed to lessen the biases that are created when using commonly used procedures to address missing data, such as listwise or pairwise deletion (Arbuckle, 1996; Byrne, 2001).

To develop a more parsimonious model of predictors of job stress, burnout, and intent to leave, we tested the hypothesized model in two stages. This stepwise approach is based on an analytic method that was applied by Mor Barak et al. (2006). The first stage included direct paths from all the individual characteristics (education level, parental status, marital status, and number of years with the organization [tenure]) to all of the various social capital dimensions (trust, social relationships, organizational commitment, fairness, and influence). In the second and final stage, only the statistically significant direct paths from the individual characteristics to the social capital variables were included. In this final stage, the outcome variables burnout and intent to leave were added. Additionally, new direct

paths were added from employment-based social capital to burnout and intent to leave and from job stress and burnout to intent to leave.

To assess the fit of the analytic model to the data, several indices were considered. The Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistic measures the model fit to the sample used in the study. The chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/df$ ) also provides evidence of a good model-to-data fit. A good fit is generally understood to be a  $\chi^2$  with a probability greater than .05 and a  $\chi^2/df$  ratio of 2.0 or less (Kline, 1998). Since the  $\chi^2$  is sensitive to sample size, the more robust root mean square error (RMSEA) index, was assessed to determine fit. Values lower than .06 suggests good model fit (Byrne, 2001). Two other indices use comparison to determine model fit. The normed fit index (NFI) indicates the proportion of the improvement in fit over the null or independence model where all correlations equal zero (Byrne, 2001). The comparative fit index (CFI) controls for sample size and is the preferred index.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Bivariate results

The two age groups were significantly different in the area of sociodemographics (see Table 1). The respondents who were part of the younger worker group were more likely to hold undergraduate degrees, but less likely to be parents, be married, hold a management position, and have less tenure with the organization. On the dimensions of employment-based social capital, the two groups only varied

**Table 1**  
Means and standard deviations for all variables and bivariate analyses ( $N = 209$ ).

	Younger workers	Older workers	t-value or $\chi^2$
Education			4.992*
Undergraduate	70%	54%	
Graduate	30%	46%	
Has children			17.458***
Yes	66%	91%	
No	34%	9%	
Is married			8.071**
Yes	49%	70%	
No	51%	30%	
In management			16.345***
Yes	37%	88%	
No	63%	12%	
Tenure			-6.160***
M (SD)	4.39 (3.99)	9.96 (8.33)	
<i>Social capital dimensions</i>			
Coworker support			1.363 <sup>ns</sup>
M (SD)	12.99 (2.47)	12.51 (2.21)	
Communication			-1.094 <sup>ns</sup>
M (SD)	16.74 (6.19)	17.75 (6.35)	
Fairness			-853 <sup>ns</sup>
M (SD)	28.56 (9.03)	29.72 (9.44)	
Influence			-1.937 <sup>ns</sup>
M (SD)	14.37 (4.24)	15.63 (4.70)	
Organizational commitment			-2.127*
M (SD)	44.43 (14.29)	48.84 (13.75)	
Supervisory support			-1.300 <sup>ns</sup>
M (SD)	12.07 (3.13)	12.65 (2.83)	
Trust			.012 <sup>ns</sup>
M (SD)	4.84 (.95)	4.84 (1.14)	
Emotional exhaustion			4.02***
M (SD)	30.49 (9.68)	24.23 (9.14)	
Depersonalization			3.79***
M (SD)	13.16 (5.08)	9.93 (4.54)	
Job Stress			2.256*
M (SD)	78.10 (16.92)	72.33 (17.68)	
Intent to leave			3.850***
M (SD)	23.28 (8.89)	17.84 (8.61)	

Notes. <sup>ns</sup> = non-significance; older workers ( $n = 99$ ), younger workers ( $n = 110$ )

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*  $p < .05$ .

significantly in one dimension—organizational commitment. Older workers reported significantly higher levels of organizational commitment than younger workers. The two groups varied significantly in all employee outcomes of interest. Younger workers reported significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, job stress, and intent to leave than older workers.

### 6.2. Multivariate results

Several indices were considered to determine the fit of the model tested. The chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/df$ ) was assessed. The model achieved a  $\chi^2/df$  ratio of 1.422, which is below the 2.0 cutoff (Kline, 1998), but the Chi-square was statistically significant. Since the  $\chi^2/df$  is sensitive to sample size, we turned to other more robust measures. The RMSEA produced was 0.047, which is below the .06 cutoff. The NFI was .90, IFI was 0.96, while the CFI was also 0.96. Based on these fit indices, we concluded that the overall model tested offered good model-to-data fit.

### 6.3. Younger child protection workers

Among younger workers, two control variables were significantly associated with employment-based social capital (see Table 2). Respondents who were in a management position also reported significantly greater perceived influence ( $\beta = .42$ ) and fairness ( $\beta = .29$ ). Various dimensions of employment-based social capital were significantly associated with job stress. Workers who reported higher levels of fairness ( $\beta = -.32$ ), organizational commitment ( $\beta = -.22$ ), supervisory support ( $\beta = -.19$ ), and influence ( $\beta = -.18$ ) also reported lower levels

**Table 2**  
Summary of significant direct effects in final model ( $N = 209$ ).

	Younger workers ( $n = 110$ )		Older workers ( $n = 99$ )	
	b	S.E.	b	S.E.
Influence				
Management status	4.090***	1.102	4.860***	1.454
Fairness				
Management status	5.785*	2.409	n.s.	
Marital status	n.s.		4.184*	1.711
Communication				
Have children	n.s.		-6.481***	1.137
Management status	n.s.		4.011*	1.977
Coworker support				
Have children	n.s.		1.918***	.529
Organizational commitment				
Have children	n.s.		8.135**	2.944
Job stress				
Influence	-.727*	.319	-.920*	.385
Organizational commitment	-.291**	.114	-.338*	.104
Supervisory support	-1.285**	.462	n.s.	
Fairness	-.625***	.148	-.343*	.149
Emotional exhaustion				
Job stress	.210**	.078	.298***	.060
Influence	1.911*	.825	.527*	.246
Organizational commitment	-.399***	.082	-.313***	.068
Supervisory support	.844*	.334	n.s.	
Depersonalization				
Job stress	n.s.		.112**	.038
Influence	1.017*	.483	n.s.	
Organizational commitment	-.193***	.048	-.100*	.043
Intent to leave				
Job stress	.242***	.062	n.s.	
Emotional exhaustion	.233**	.089	.198*	.092
Influence	n.s.		.437*	.215
Organizational commitment	-.229**	.070	-.430***	.063
Coworker support	.710*	.302	n.s.	

Notes. n.s. = non-significance

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*  $p < .05$ .

of job stress. Trust/cooperation, communication, and coworker support were not significantly associated with job stress. Among younger workers, higher organizational commitment ( $\beta = -.61$ ) was the only social capital predictor that was significantly associated with reduced emotional exhaustion. Respondents who reported higher levels of job stress ( $\beta = .43$ ), supervisory support ( $\beta = .26$ ), and influence ( $\beta = .24$ ) also experienced higher rates of emotional exhaustion.

Only organizational commitment ( $\beta = -.61$ ) and influence ( $\beta = .26$ ) were significantly associated with depersonalization. Among younger workers, two dimensions of employment-based social capital were significantly associated with intent to leave. Intent was higher among workers who reported increased coworker support ( $\beta = .18$ ) and among workers who reported lower levels of organizational commitment ( $\beta = -.36$ ). Intent to leave was also significantly higher among younger workers who also reported higher levels of job stress ( $\beta = .51$ ) and increased emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = .24$ ). Intent to leave was not significantly associated with depersonalization, influence, trust/cooperation, communication, fairness, or supervisor support. Among younger child protection workers, the independent variables in the current model accounted for 77% of the variance in intent to leave, 75% in job stress, 50% in emotional exhaustion, and 28% of the variance in depersonalization (Fig. 2).

#### 6.4. Older child protection workers

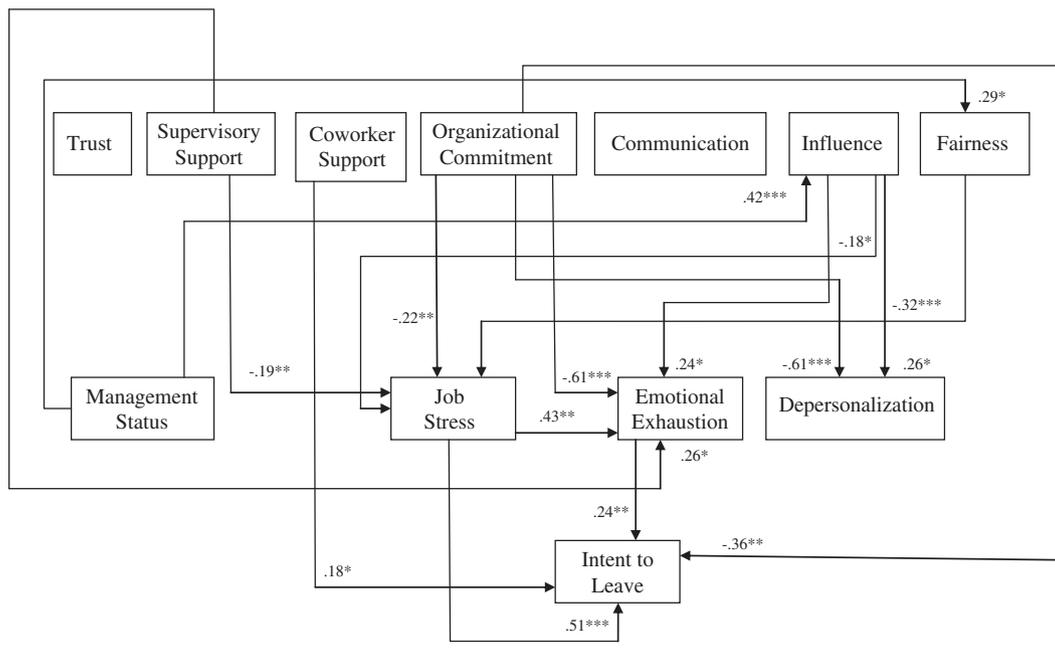
Among older workers, being married, having children, and being in a management position made a significant difference in increased employment-based social capital. Being married was significantly associated with increased fairness ( $\beta = .23$ ). Having children was predictive of greater coworker support ( $\beta = .36$ ) and organizational commitment ( $\beta = .27$ ), but lower levels of communication ( $\beta = -.50$ ). Being in a management position was significantly associated with increased perceived influence ( $\beta = .38$ ) and communication levels ( $\beta = .22$ ). Among older workers, fewer dimensions of employment-based social capital were significantly associated with job stress. Increased organization commitment ( $\beta = -.28$ ), influence ( $\beta = -.23$ ), and fairness ( $\beta = -.18$ ) were significantly predictive of lower perceived job stress. Among older child protection workers,

multiple dimensions of social capital were predictive of burnout. Higher levels of organizational commitment were significantly associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = -.45$ ) and depersonalization ( $\beta = -.28$ ). However, increased levels of influence were predictive of increased perceived emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = .22$ ). Increased job stress was significantly linked with increased emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = .51$ ) and depersonalization ( $\beta = .37$ ). Social capital had a mixed influence on older workers' intention of leaving. Intent to leave was lower among older workers who reported higher levels of organizational commitment were related to ( $\beta = -.67$ ), but intent was higher among workers who reported greater influence ( $\beta = .20$ ). Increased emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = .21$ ) was also associated with greater intentions of leaving. The greatest source of intent to leave among older workers was among those who lacked higher levels of organizational commitment. Among the older child protection workers, the current model accounted for 59% of the variance in intent to leave, 53% in job stress, 48% in emotional exhaustion, and 20% in depersonalization (Fig. 3).

### 7. Discussion

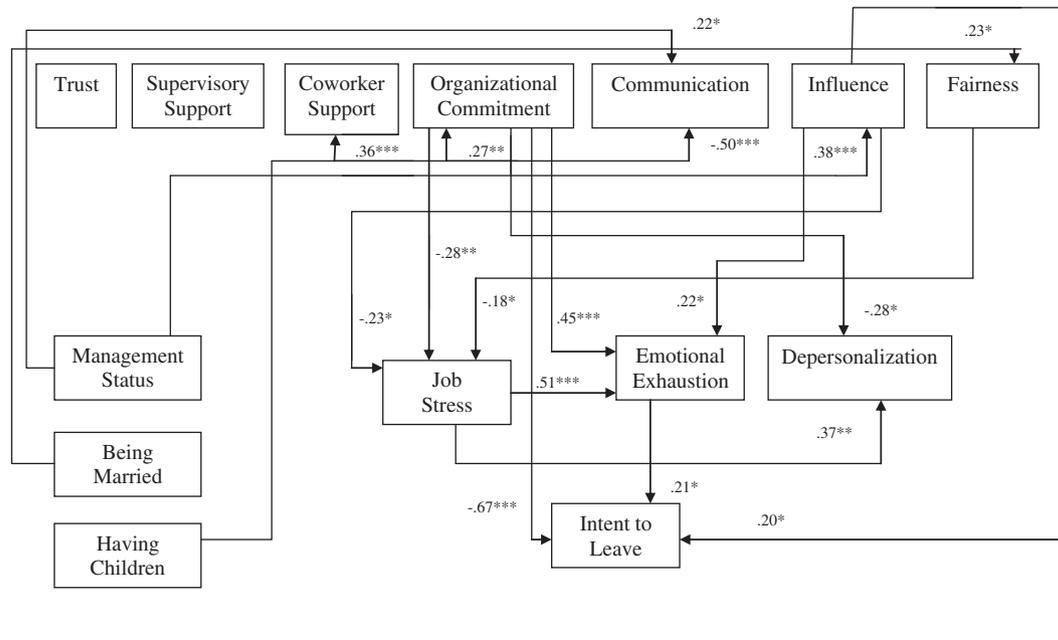
To the best knowledge of the authors, this exploratory study was the first investigation to examine whether the paths to burnout and intent to leave significantly vary by age group. The investigation builds on the limited evidence of the influence of organizational social capital among the child protection workplace. Although other fields (for example business, nursing, public health, sociology) have examined how employment-based social capital shapes various workplace outcomes, such a framework has yet to be examined in the context of a public child welfare milieu. We contribute to the literature by examining how the social resources embedded in workplace relationships shape salient child protection workplace outcomes, such as burnout and intent to leave, between younger and older workers.

Consistent with earlier studies (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001; Requeña, 2003), some dimensions of employment-based social capital were associated with job stress. For both age groups, increased influence, fairness, and organizational commitment predicted lower levels of job stress. However, one additional dimension of social



Note. All betas used in this figure are standardized.  
 \*\*\*  $p < .001$       \*\*  $p < .01$       \*  $p < .05$

Fig. 2. Significant relationships between social capital, stress, burnout, and intent to leave among younger workers.



Note. All betas used in this figure are standardized.  
 $*** p = <.001$      $** p = <.01$      $* p = <.05$

Fig. 3. Significant relationships between social capital, stress, burnout, and intent to leave among older workers.

capital was significantly associated with reducing perceived job stress among younger workers—supervisory support. It is likely that younger workers' perception that their supervisor pays attention to their problems and concerns, listens actively, encourages discussion, and uses other formal and informal methods of support is likely to safeguard against higher levels of job stress (Jayaratne, Himle, & Chess, 1988). Our results suggest that such supports make a significant difference for younger child protection workers, but not older workers. This issue is further reflected in how much overall influence social capital dimensions had on job stress. Among younger workers, cognitive organizational social capital dimensions explained 75% of the variance in job stress, whereas they only explained 53% of the variance in older workers.

Several dimensions of employment-based social capital were significantly associated with burnout among both age groups. Organizational commitment and job stress significantly predicted emotional exhaustion for both groups similarly. Contrary to our hypothesis, younger workers who also experienced greater perceived supervisory support and trust/cooperation also reported significantly higher emotional exhaustion. However, this was not the case for older workers. It is plausible that in the child welfare setting, workers who are receiving increased supervision are also those workers who have higher levels of emotional exhaustion. This would be consistent with findings that suggest that formal supervisory support is associated with increased perceptions of burnout (Catalano et al., 1996). This finding could point to the prospect that formal supervisory support may take on a dual role among younger child welfare workers. On one hand, it may alleviate some of the stressors associated with child protection work such as trauma exposure for concerns for work safety (Social Work Policy Institute, 2011), but in some ways it may also generate burnout (Leiter, 1998). It is plausible that unpleasant supervisory contact may lead to increased notions of emotional exhaustion (Leiter, 1998). Given that ours is one of only a handful of studies that has found a positive relationship between supervisory support and burnout among child protection workers, more research is needed to confirm this finding.

Turning to intent to leave, social capital had a modest influence. Only a few dimensions of social capital were significantly associated with increased appraisals of intent to leave. The only dimension that predicted intent to leave among both groups was organizational

commitment. Consistent with existing studies, increased organizational commitment significantly predicted lower notions of leaving the organization (Adams & Beehr, 1998; Clugston, 2000; Udo, Guimaraes, & Igbaria, 1997). However, the magnitude of this relationship differed between the two groups. The beta weight is twice as strong for older workers compared to younger workers. Moreover, organizational commitment was the strongest predictor of intent to leave among older workers, but not the case among younger workers. It is possible that older workers who have increased organizational commitment also have lower intentions of leaving because of the costs associated with leaving at an older age. Among older workers, it is plausible that there is an increased cost of departing with the organization because of their longer tenure and elevated seniority, whereas this may not be the case for younger workers (Gaertner & Nollen, 1992). Furthermore, older workers with higher levels of organizational commitment are probably less likely to leave because of the bond they may have developed with the organization. It is possible that the stronger social bond and ties with the organization create a safeguard against adverse work-related outcomes, such as intent to leave (Schmidt, 2007). Last, older workers may choose to stay because they may find it more difficult to find another job.

Among younger respondents in our sample, another dimension of organizational social capital was significantly associated with intent to leave. Younger workers who reported higher levels of perceived coworker support also reported increased intentions of leaving. This finding contradicts earlier findings that suggest that increased coworker support is associated with lower intentions of leaving an organization (Mossholder, Setton, & Henegan, 2005; Moynihan & Pandey, 2008). We maintain that this finding could be reflective of the supportive relationships in which a worker who may want to leave is engaged. It is possible that while younger workers are having increased intentions in leaving, their thoughts are supported by their coworkers. Osgood et al. (1996) point out that perhaps increased feelings of support from coworkers may be associated with unfavorable workplace norms of engaging in adverse behaviors, such as intent to leave.

In most cases, employment-based social capital can operate in a protective manner in that norms and social controls curtail deviant and unfavorable attitudes and behaviors in organizations where

individuals are more bonded to each other and to the group (Weitzman & Kawachi, 2000); however, that is presuming that such norms are constantly positive. Norms and social control can work in the opposite direction as well. Our findings on the negative influence coworkers can have on increasing intention to leave have alluded to the fact that not all social capital is positive. In some cases, especially those where there is constant stress and pressure as in child protection, social relationships can encourage the beginning of adverse social attitudes and behaviors, such as departing from the organization. This finding substantiates the contention that social capital can have a “dark side” and has counterproductive consequences (Boyas & Sharpe, 2010; Levi, 1996; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Putnam, 2000); social integration into an organization can also give way to developing detrimental attitudes that turn into consistent distressing behavioral patterns. Therefore, organizational leaders should ensure that they fully understand the strengths and limitations of being socially connected within the social fabric of the organization.

Consistent with existing research, both groups who perceived themselves as experiencing higher levels of emotional exhaustion also reported increased intentions of leaving (Cropanzo, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Drake & Yadama, 1996). Cropanzo and colleagues maintain that intentions of leaving may reflect a response to perceived imbalances in the exchange relationship between a worker and her or his employing organization. When the imbalance becomes emotionally taxing, child protection workers are likely to increase their intentions of leaving the organization and/or field of social work.

Among younger respondents, the strongest significant factor that increased a worker's notion of leaving was job stress. This finding corroborates existing research that has found that being a younger worker and job stress are influential predictors of intent to leave (Mor Barak et al., 2006; Todd & Deery-Schmitt, 1996). It may be that younger workers, unlike older workers, are at greater risk for negative psychological outcomes, such as job stress, because they may not have the skills or experience to better manage their stress levels. Over time, older workers may have developed better coping practices to deal with stress compared to younger workers (Cohen-Callow, Hopkins, & Kim, 2009). Development of an array of resources such as mentoring and peer consultation opportunities could contribute to a more positive and supportive organizational culture that enhances worker retention (Social Work Policy Institute, 2011).

### 7.1. Study limitations

Although the current investigation examined a much-needed analysis of age-group differences as they relate to organizational social capital, job stress, burnout, and intent to leave, a number of limitations need acknowledgment. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow assessment of the theoretical model variables over time or causal inferences (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). To accurately isolate the causal linkages of organizational social capital, job stress, and burnout, a longitudinal design is needed. Given that numerous variables within the model are likely to differ with time, it would be helpful to examine relational processes and workplace outcomes in child welfare organizations longitudinally. Second, we grouped respondents based on the mean average age of the respondents. Perhaps applying life course theories to determine how the age groups are created could be a more theoretically and methodologically sound way to examine age group difference. Third, our sample is mostly homogeneous. We could not examine the influences of visible diversity such as gender and race due to the high number of female Caucasian respondents. This is especially relevant within the context of the development of employment-based social capital. There is evidence that race/ethnicity and gender may be important determinants of workplace social resources (James, 2000; Mor Barak et al., 2006). Related, another limitation is related to the geographic location from which the data were collected. This New England state, which is homogeneous on multiple levels, may not reflect the current pattern

of burnout experienced nationally. For example, states with greater diversity demographically, in urban versus rural settings, and so forth, could have altered the results. It is possible that our homogeneous sample and limited geographic location could have biased the results (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). In regard to the measurement of social capital, there is still a debate as to which indicators are best suited to measure this concept (Adam & Roncevic, 2003; Collier, 2002; Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Although this study used indicators commonly used in the literature, employing different indicators could have yielded dissimilar results. Finally, based on the relational aspects of social capital, it is possible that reciprocal processes exist that are not considered in this conceptual model. The influence of reciprocal processes could change worker perceptions of the organizational culture as well as employee outcomes over time.

### 7.2. Implications

Several key implications can be drawn from the current study in understanding how organizational social capital is associated with job stress, burnout, and intent to leave between younger and older child protection workers. Our findings indicate that when a mixture of cognitive dimensions of organizational social capital are present, they may function as direct protective factors in decreasing levels of job stress. This was especially true for younger workers whose lower job stress levels were highly associated with increased social capital. These findings may well justify creating workplace interventions that target areas of the organization where relational support could enhance the moral fiber, or fortitude, of social relations within the organization (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Leanna & Van Buren, 1999). Our findings suggest that in order to reduce job-related stress among child protection workers, organizations should consider establishing a workplace environment that (a) promotes a sense of fairness through policies that offer distributive and procedural justice, (b) encourages organizational commitment by fostering a deeper personal bond between a worker and the organization that is built on inclusion and attachment, and (c) provides workers with a certain level of influence within the organization.

Given that increased supervisory support and emotional exhaustion were significantly associated with intent to leave among younger workers, organizations may need to structure a place of work where supervisory support is at the forefront of minimizing the levels of job stress and emotional exhaustion. Considering that job stress was the strongest predictor of intent to leave, organizations may need to establish diverse structures of support that can help younger workers deal better with the pressures and demands of child protection (Boyas & Wind, 2010). Organizations may need to help younger workers reduce job stress by offering strong supervisory support and promoting collaboration among workers so as to enhance younger workers' sense of trust. Similarly, older workers need assistance in reducing job stress, but also need to experience a sense of greater influence in their work. Younger workers may value their sense of empowerment less than older workers and instead seek a greater sense of belonging and confirmation of value. Hence, it will be germane for organizations to consider and address the different needs of workers in relation to emotional exhaustion.

We also found that supervision can be a source of support but also a source of tension. Existing studies have already established that formal supervision can play a dual role in the worker–supervisor relationship (Leiter, 1998). Therefore, organizations should ensure that in-depth preparation is provided to all supervisors to protect against invasive supervisory methods (Boyas & Wind, 2010). Boyas and Wind (2010) suggest that organizations should make stronger efforts to include a mechanism for ongoing monitoring of formal supervision to make certain that this process is constructive and is not overtaxing workers.

Last, being in a management position (perceived fairness and influence) contributes to social capital among both age groups, while older workers' marital status and parental status increase their social capital. This could relate to a greater sense of connectedness outside of organizationally related positions that then may diminish the need for supervisory and coworker support. Since development of social capital takes time to build, efforts to enhance it should be implemented from the start. Younger workers who are single and childless may not have the opportunity to use these two characteristics as social capital building blocks. Given that the average tenure is less than 3 years (GAO, 2003), it may be prudent for organizations to implement interventions to help younger workers develop organizational social capital from the time they are recruited and have a job offer package that includes a clear and systematic mentoring scheme (Ellet, Collins-Camargo, & Ellett, 2006).

## 8. Conclusion

Taken together, the results of this investigation underscore a number of key findings. Some aspects of the hypothesized model are equivalent for both age groups: (a) the contributions of fairness, influence, and organizational commitment on job stress, (b) the relationship of job stress to emotional exhaustion, (c) the contribution of organizational commitment to depersonalization, and (d) the influence of emotional exhaustion and organizational commitment to intent to leave. However, our investigation has unearthed a number of areas where younger and older workers differ significantly. We found that cognitive organizational social capital was more influential in reducing job stress among younger workers, which is important to consider since job stress was the strongest predictor of intent to leave. Although organizational commitment was negatively and significantly associated with intent to leave, this relationship is much stronger for older workers. These differences can provide a better understanding of the development of negative psychological employee symptoms based on age group and possible areas of prevention interventions that can modify and alter these outcomes. Our results justify creating workplace interventions for younger workers that target areas of the organization where relational support could enhance the moral fiber of social relations within the organizational context and thus increase an employee's intent to stay with that organization.

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