
RJP Evaluation – Michigan Department of Human Services

Executive Summary

In 2005, the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) began using a Realistic Job Preview (RJP) video for children’s services caseworker applicants to view prior to their employment interview. Of the 88 newly-hired employees we tracked during their first year of employment, 56 percent had viewed the RJP and 44 percent had not.

The employees who saw the RJP had a first-year turnover rate of 6.2 percent, compared to a first-year turnover rate of 21.6 percent of those who did not. In terms of retention, 93.8 percent of the RJP group and 78.4 percent of the non-RJP group remained in the job for at least one year.

To measure the impact of the RJP on job satisfaction, we reviewed responses to nine questions included in a survey that newly hired caseworkers take approximately eight months after they’re hired. Although the findings are based on a rather small sample of employees, the survey results suggest that:

- A greater percentage of the RJP group was satisfied with their jobs than of the control group.
- The percentage of employees dissatisfied with their job is generally lower for the RJP group than for the control group, suggesting that the RJP has caused those who would be a poor fit to “self-select” out of the hiring process.
- A greater percentage of the RJP group felt that they were better able to cope with the pressures of the job than the control group.
- A greater percentage of the RJP group felt that DHS had been more honest with them during the recruitment process.

Background

With the support of a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) produced a Realistic Job Preview (RJP) to show to all applicants for children’s services caseworker positions.¹ All involved in the project agreed that evaluating the effectiveness of the RJP was an important component of the project.

CPS Human Resource Services conducted the evaluation of the impact of Michigan’s RJP from several different perspectives:

- Cost Effectiveness.
- Impact on Applicant Decisions to Continue with the Selection Process

¹ Children’s services caseworkers at DHS are classified as Services Specialists; this classification includes caseworkers performing adult services work. This study only tracks the Services Specialists working as children’s services caseworkers.

- Impact on Turnover.
- Impact on Job Satisfaction.

Beginning in July 2005, DHS began mailing Realistic Job Preview DVDs to applicants for children’s services caseworker positions who meet the minimum qualifications for the job. Applicants must watch and return the DVD with an acknowledgment of their continuing interest in the position in order to have their application receive further consideration in the screening process.

RJP Impact on Turnover

Methodology

Because DHS recruits, screens and interviews children’s services caseworkers in anticipation of future vacancies occurring in its hundred-plus worksites across the state, they had a pool of well-qualified candidates available for job offers. Consequently, for a period of several months after they introduced the RJP, many of the newly hired caseworkers had not seen the RJP. Over time, an increasingly greater share of new hires had seen the RJP.

We included in our turnover study all children’s services caseworkers hired by DHS between November 24, 2005 (the start date of the first caseworkers who saw the RJP) and June 19, 2006. DHS hired 128 caseworkers during that period.

One year after the hire date of the most recently hired employees, we reviewed the personnel records for each of these 128 employees to verify their hire date, if they had prior DHS experience, whether they were still working as a caseworker and, if not, the termination date and reason.

Since we wanted the “pre-employment understanding” of the DHS caseworker job to come from the RJP, we removed from the study those with prior experience in the Department as a caseworker or those promoted to the caseworker job from positions in DHS offices where they would have become familiar with the job. This reduced the size of the study group from 128 to 88. Of the 88 employees who had been hired from outside DHS, 50 had viewed the RJP and 38 had not.

Because the purpose of the RJP was to reduce **voluntary** turnover, we removed from the study group anyone who had been involuntarily removed (discharged) from their position. That reduced the study group to 85 employees, 48 who saw the RJP and 37 who did not.

We reviewed personnel records and were able to track the employment history of each employee for their first full year after hire. In order to use a common yardstick, we looked at job retention – and turnover – during the first year of employment for both the RJP and non-RJP groups.

Findings

The Realistic Job Preview should have had the greatest impact on early turnover – turnover occurring within the first six to twelve months of employment. The underlying premise is that employees who do not have a good understanding about the nature of difficult and stressful jobs will leave as soon as feasible after gaining an understanding about the job's demands.

Of the newly hired caseworkers who saw the RJP, 93.8 percent (45 of the 48 employees) of them stayed at least one year. Of those who did not see the RJP, only 78.4 percent (29 of the 37 employees) stayed at least one year. Or, turnover during the first year for those new-hires who saw the RJP was 6.2 percent and the first-year turnover rate for those who did not see the RJP was 21.6 percent.

Of those who resigned, the caseworkers who saw the RJP stayed a bit longer, on average 160 days compared to 138 days for those who did not. Table 1 shows the number of days each newly hired employee worked before resigning.

Table 1: Days on payroll before resigning

Worker	Days on payroll before resigning	
	Saw RJP	Didn't see RJP
A		8
B		71
C		72
D	76	
E		86
F		103
G	183	
H	223	
I		244
J		244
K		281
Average	160	138

Five of the employees who did not see the RJP resigned within the first 100 days compared to only one employee from the RJP group who resigned within the same frame. Although it can be misleading to draw conclusions on such small numbers, the data certainly supports the notion that the RJP had an impact on early turnover.

Given the difficulty of isolating the impact the RJP had on turnover, we took into account the impact other external and internal variables may have had.

Since the employees included in our study who had seen the RJP were being hired over the same time period as those who had not, external labor market forces (e.g., unemployment rate, housing availability, hiring competition with private child welfare agencies, etc.) were virtually identical.

The impact of internal variables – such as changes in organization leadership, changes in workload, changes in policies and procedures – was also minimal because employees in both the RJP and non-RJP groups were hired during the same time period. In addition, most of the employees in both groups were hired to work in the same metropolitan counties (Genesee, Ingham, Kent, Muskegon, Oakland and Wayne). Oakland County is the location from which all three RJP employees resigned and from which half of the eight non-RJP employees resigned (see Table 2).

Table 2: Placement County of Employees Included in Study – RJP Group vs. Non-RJP Group

County	RJP Group		Non-RJP Group		Total
	Worked at least one year	Resigned during first year	Worked at least one year	Resigned during first year	
Allegan			1		1
Barry			1		1
Berrien			1		1
Eaton			1	1	2
Genesee	6		4	1	11
Gratiot	2				2
Ingham	4		2		6
Jackson			1		1
Kent	2		3		5
Macomb	3		1	2	6
Mecosta	1				1
Monroe	1				1
Muskegon	2		3		5
Oakland	16	3	8	4	31
Ottawa	1				1
Saginaw	1		2		3
St. Joseph	1				1
Wayne	5		1		6
Total	45	3	29	8	85

Oakland County has experienced very high turnover in recent years, which is reflected in the very large number of hires (31) when compared to counties of similar size (Kent, Genesee and Macomb), or to Wayne County (Detroit) which is much larger. It is noteworthy that fewer

than 20 percent of the RJP group resigned from Oakland County during the first year compared to half of the non-RJP group.

Overall, it appears that the RJP has had a positive impact on caseworker retention.

Although not the focus of our review, it is also noteworthy that of the 40 employees promoted internally within the Department who had the opportunity to observe the demands of the caseworker job before applying for it, none of them voluntarily terminated their employment within the first year. They essentially received their RJP through the opportunity to observe their colleagues on the job on a day-to-day basis.

RJP Impact on Job Satisfaction

Methodology

Based on our review of the literature we hypothesized that the employees who had the opportunity to view the RJP video prior to accepting a job offer would have a higher level of job satisfaction than those who did not. In order to test that hypothesis, we worked with the University of Michigan's School of Social Work to design questions to include in their longitudinal study of child welfare caseworkers.²

Child welfare caseworkers hired after September 2004 are asked to complete a longitudinal survey. First, employees complete a baseline survey on-site after finishing the formal eight-week new-worker training program. At this point, the new worker has received classroom training and participated in on-the-job shadowing experiences, but has not yet been assigned any cases. Then, employees receive a follow-up survey six months after the baseline survey. This is approximately eight months after the date-of-hire for most employees. The follow-up surveys are sent to the employee's home address.

The response rate for the follow-up survey is approximately 73 percent. For purposes of this study, we have included only those caseworkers who were hired as new employees by DHS after September 2004. DHS employees who were promoted, transferred or reinstated were not included in our analysis. Because DHS began using the RJP rather recently, the number of employees who have been employed long enough to complete the six-month follow-up survey is rather small (see Table 3).³

² With the support of USDHHS Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Training Grant Award #90CT115, the University of Michigan is conducting a longitudinal study of child welfare caseworkers hired by DHS and other Michigan private child welfare agencies. The University intends to conduct the longitudinal study over the course of the five-year grant period. In order to minimize intrusiveness on DHS staff time, the University, with the concurrence of DHS, agreed to include several questions we designed in their longitudinal surveys.

³ There are only 151 responses to the six-month follow-up survey because some of the employees completing the baseline survey had not been employed long enough at the time the data were run to have completed the follow-up survey.

Table 3: Baseline and Follow-up Survey Respondents

Respondent Category	Saw RJP	Non-RJP	Total
Baseline Respondents	113	187	300
Six-month follow-up	38	113	151

At the baseline, 83 percent of the respondents were females and 17 percent were male. By race/ethnicity, 57.5 percent were White, 29.6 were African American, 1.6 were Hispanic, 7.2 percent reported being multiple races, and 4.1 percent were other race/ethnicity.

Findings

The relationship between employee job satisfaction and turnover is intuitively obvious, but the actual correlation may be a bit less direct. Some people stay in unsatisfying jobs because they have may have few reasonable options, and others leave highly satisfying jobs for any number of reasons. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that large numbers of employees in certain occupations leave the job early in their careers because the job did not meet their expectations.

Research finding suggest that aside from reducing turnover, RJPs provide the additional benefit of increasing job satisfaction among those who have been exposed to the RJP because there are fewer “surprises” once the employee starts the job. Research findings also show that satisfaction levels are improved because the new employees who have been exposed to the RJP are better prepared to cope with the pressures of the job and are more satisfied because they perceive the employer as having been honest and forthright in the recruitment process.

Of the 151 child welfare caseworkers new to DHS who completed the six-month follow-up survey, only 38 had been exposed to the RJP. Although this is a small group and the results should be used with caution, the findings from all nine of the questions dealing with job satisfaction are in the expected direction.

General Job Satisfaction

Two survey questions deal directly with the general issue of job satisfaction:

1. How satisfied would you say you are with your job?
2. If a friend of yours told you s/he was interested in working for DHS in child welfare, what would you tell that person?

In response to the first question above, 76.4 percent of employees in the RJP group are at least somewhat satisfied with their jobs as compared to 62.8 percent in the control group (see Table 4). Even more pronounced are the differences in the two groups’ responses of

“Not at all satisfied.” (2.9 percent for the RJP group compared to 15.5 percent for the control group.)

We expected the satisfaction levels of those who saw the RJP to be higher than those who did not. We also expected the RJP to have its greatest impact on borderline applicants, some of whom will withdraw from the application process after watching the DVD. If the RJP had the expected effect, applicants dissatisfied with the job would have self-selected out of the hiring process. Table 4 illustrates that the results are consistent with these expectations.⁴

Table 4: Survey Question - How satisfied would you say you are with your job?

			Saw Video		Total
			Yes	No	
6mQ15 How satisfied would you say you are with your job?	Very Satisfied	Count	6	17	23
		% within Saw Video	17.6%	15.5%	16.0%
	Somewhat Satisfied	Count	20	52	72
		% within Saw Video	58.8%	47.3%	50.0%
	Not Too Satisfied	Count	7	24	31
		% within Saw Video	20.6%	21.8%	21.5%
	Not at all Satisfied	Count	1	17	18
		% within Saw Video	2.9%	15.5%	12.5%
Total		Count	34	110	144
		% within Saw Video	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

For the second question dealing with overall job satisfaction (outlined in Table 5 below), only 7.9 percent of the RJP group answered “Advise against it” while nearly twice as many (15.3 percent) of the control group responded “Advise against it.” This also suggests that the RJP has weeded out some applicants who would have been dissatisfied with the job. By the same token, 52.6 percent of the RJP group would strongly recommend the job, compared with 44.1 percent of the control group.

⁴ In Tables 6 through 14, the total number of responses may be less than the total number of respondents shown in Table 5 because some respondents did not answer all of the survey questions

Table 5: Survey Question – If a friend of yours told you s/he was interested in working for DHS in child welfare, what would you tell that person?

			Saw Video		Total
			Yes	No	
6mQ17 If a friend of yours told you s/he was interested in working for DHS in child welfare, what would you tell that person?	Strongly recommend it	Count	20	49	69
		% within Saw Video	52.6%	44.1%	46.3%
	Have doubts about recommending it	Count	15	45	60
		% within Saw Video	39.5%	40.5%	40.3%
	Advise against it	Count	3	17	20
		% within Saw Video	7.9%	15.3%	13.4%
Total	Count	38	111	149	
	% within Saw Video	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Job Expectations

Four questions included in the six-month follow-up survey help determine the extent to which the RJP may have had a bearing on job expectations:

1. Knowing what you know now, if you had to decide all over again whether to work in DHS in child welfare, what would you decide?
2. I never would have taken this job if I'd had a better understanding what it was going to be like. (Agree/Disagree)
3. Based on what I've learned so far, this job is pretty much as I expected it to be. (Agree/Disagree)
4. Now that I have a better understanding of what this job is all about, I believe it's going to be harder than I thought. (Agree/Disagree)

In response to the first question above, virtually the same percentage of the RJP group and the control group would “Decide without hesitation to do the same” (see Table 6 below). However, only 5.3 percent of the RJP group would “decide definitely not to work for DHS,” while 18.9 percent of the control group would decide not to work for the agency. The responses to this question suggest that the RJP may have a stronger effect on weeding out borderline applicants than increasing the satisfaction of those who take the job.

Table 6: Survey Question – Knowing what you know now, if you had to decide all over again whether to work in DHS in child welfare, what would you decide?

			Saw Video		Total
			Yes	No	
6mQ16 Knowing what you know now, if you had to decide all over again whether to work in DHS in child welfare, what would you decide?	Decide without hesitation to do the same	Count	16	46	62
		% within Saw Video	42.1%	41.4%	41.6%
	Have second thoughts	Count	20	44	64
		% within Saw Video	52.6%	39.6%	43.0%
	Decide definitely not to work for DHS	Count	2	21	23
		% within Saw Video	5.3%	18.9%	15.4%
Total	Count	38	111	149	
	% within Saw Video	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

In response to the survey statement highlighted in Table 7, only 2.6 percent of the RJP group strongly agreed with the statement. Alternatively, 20.5 percent of the control group strongly agreed with the statement. Again, the data suggests that the RJP was effective in dissuading those who would have been a poor fit for the job from taking it.

Table 7: Survey Statement – I never would have taken this job if I'd had a better understanding of what it was going to be like.

			Saw Video		Total
			Yes	No	
6mQ3m I never would have taken this job if I'd had a better understanding of what it was going to be like.	Strongly Agree	Count	1	23	24
		% within Saw Video	2.6%	20.5%	16.0%
	Agree	Count	3	11	14
		% within Saw Video	7.9%	9.8%	9.3%
	Neither Agree or Disagree	Count	9	20	29
		% within Saw Video	23.7%	17.9%	19.3%
	Disagree	Count	17	37	54
		% within Saw Video	44.7%	33.0%	36.0%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	8	21	29
		% within Saw Video	21.1%	18.8%	19.3%
Total	Count	38	112	150	
	% within Saw Video	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 8 illustrates the effect of the RJP in helping form realistic job expectations. Employees who saw the RJP were only about half as likely as the control group to be surprised by what they learned about the job after they started it. Only 33.4 percent of the RJP group disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement shown in Table 8, compared to 43.7 percent of the control group.

Table 8: Survey Statement – Based on what I've learned so far, this job is pretty much as I expected it to be.

			Saw Video		Total
			Yes	No	
6mQ3I Based on what I've learned so far, this job is pretty much as I expected it to be.	Strongly Agree	Count	0	5	5
		% within Saw Video	.0%	4.5%	3.4%
	Agree	Count	17	45	62
		% within Saw Video	47.2%	40.2%	41.9%
	Neither Agree or Disagree	Count	7	13	20
		% within Saw Video	19.4%	11.6%	13.5%
	Disagree	Count	11	39	50
		% within Saw Video	30.6%	34.8%	33.8%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	1	10	11
		% within Saw Video	2.8%	8.9%	7.4%
Total	Count	36	112	148	
	% within Saw Video	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

In response to the statement highlighted in Table 9, only 2.6 percent of the RJP group strongly agreed with the statement as compared to 17.0 percent of the control group. Based on these percentages, we can assume that the RJP provided a realistic enough portrayal of the job to prevent newly hired employees from being totally surprised by what they found after starting the job.

Table 9: Survey Statement – Now that I have a better understanding of what this job is all about, I believe it's going to be harder than I thought.

			Saw Video		Total
			Yes	No	
6mQ3o Now that I have a better understanding of what this job is all about, I believe it's going to be harder than I thought.	Strongly Agree	Count	1	19	20
		% within Saw Video	2.6%	17.0%	13.3%
	Agree	Count	17	37	54
		% within Saw Video	44.7%	33.0%	36.0%
	Neither Agree or Disagree	Count	10	25	35
		% within Saw Video	26.3%	22.3%	23.3%
	Disagree	Count	8	27	35
		% within Saw Video	21.1%	24.1%	23.3%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	2	4	6
		% within Saw Video	5.3%	3.6%	4.0%
Total	Count	38	112	150	
	% within Saw Video	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Ability to Cope

Two questions in the six-month follow-up survey shed some light on the effectiveness of the RJP in helping prepare new employees to cope with the pressures of the job:

1. I believe I am going to be able to cope with the stress and pressure of this job.
2. Learning what I did about this job during the application and selection process has helped me cope with some of the job pressures I'm experiencing.

The data support the proposition that the RJP has been an effective tool in helping prepare new employees cope with the pressures of the job.

In response to the first statement above, 76.3 percent of the RJP group agreed or strongly agreed with the statement as compared to 59.8 percent for the control group (see Table 10).

Table 10: Survey Statement – I believe I am going to be able to cope with the stress and pressure of this job.

			Saw Video		Total
			Yes	No	
6mQ3q I believe I am going to be able to cope with the stress and pressure of this job.	Strongly Agree	Count	3	9	12
		% within Saw Video	7.9%	8.0%	8.0%
	Agree	Count	26	58	84
		% within Saw Video	68.4%	51.8%	56.0%
	Neither Agree or Disagree	Count	4	26	30
		% within Saw Video	10.5%	23.2%	20.0%
	Disagree	Count	4	9	13
		% within Saw Video	10.5%	8.0%	8.7%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	1	10	11
		% within Saw Video	2.6%	8.9%	7.3%
Total	Count	38	112	150	
	% within Saw Video	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

In response to the statement highlighted in Table 11, 28.9 percent of the RJP group agreed or strongly agreed with the statement as compared to 18.8 percent of the control group.

Table 11: Survey Statement – Learning what I did about this job...has helped me cope with some of the job pressures I'm experiencing.

			Saw Video		Total	
			Yes	No		
6mQ3n Learning what I did about this job during the application and selection process has helped me cope with some of the job pressures I'm experiencing.	Strongly Agree	Count	0	4	4	
		% within Saw Video	.0%	3.6%	2.7%	
	Agree	Count	11	17	28	
		% within Saw Video	28.9%	15.2%	18.7%	
	Neither Agree or Disagree	Count	12	23	35	
		% within Saw Video	31.6%	20.5%	23.3%	
	Disagree	Count	15	47	62	
		% within Saw Video	39.5%	42.0%	41.3%	
	Strongly Disagree	Count	0	21	21	
		% within Saw Video	.0%	18.8%	14.0%	
	Total		Count	38	112	150
			% within Saw Video	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Perceptions of Honesty during the Recruitment Process

Based on our research of the literature, we expected that employees exposed to the RJP would have a higher level of job satisfaction because of their belief that the Department had been honest and forthright during the recruitment and selection process. Table 12 summarizes the responses to the statement, "DHS' honesty during the recruitment process makes me feel more loyal to the Department." 28.9 percent of the RJP group agreed or strongly agreed with the statement in contrast to only 15.2 percent of the control group.

Table 12: Survey Statement – DHS' honesty during the recruitment process makes me feel more loyal to the Department.

			Saw Video		Total
			Yes	No	
6mQ3p DHS' honesty during the recruitment process makes me feel more loyal to the Department.	Strongly Agree	Count	1	0	1
		% within Saw Video	2.6%	.0%	.7%
	Agree	Count	10	17	27
		% within Saw Video	26.3%	15.2%	18.0%
	Neither Agree or Disagree	Count	20	52	72
		% within Saw Video	52.6%	46.4%	48.0%
	Disagree	Count	7	25	32
		% within Saw Video	18.4%	22.3%	21.3%
	Strongly Disagree	Count	0	18	18
		% within Saw Video	.0%	16.1%	12.0%
	Total	Count	38	112	150
		% within Saw Video	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Conclusions

Our review of the effectiveness of the Realistic Job Preview used by the Michigan DHS is based on a rather small sample of employees and our findings should be considered preliminary. Nonetheless, all of the findings are consistent with a larger body of research that demonstrates the effectiveness of the RJP in improving job retention and job satisfaction in occupations that are often not well understood by job applicants. It is noteworthy that both the turnover data and all of the survey questions support the proposition that the RJP has reduced early turnover and increased job satisfaction among newly hired caseworkers. We found that:

- 93.8 percent of the newly hired caseworkers who had viewed the RJP stayed with DHS at least one year, compared to 78.4 percent of the caseworkers who did not see the RJP.
- Based on the findings from nine survey questions asked of caseworkers approximately eight months after being hired, the data are consistent with our expectations for the effectiveness of the RJP.
- A greater percentage of the RJP group was satisfied with their jobs than of the control group.
- The percentage of employees dissatisfied with their job is generally lower for the RJP group than for the control group, suggesting that the RJP has caused those who would be a poor fit to “self-select” out of the hiring process.
- A greater percentage of the RJP group felt that they were better able to cope with the pressures of the job than the control group.
- A greater percentage of the RJP group felt that DHS had been more honest with them during the recruitment process.