

Introduction

- Child welfare policy attempts to shape professional practice to focus on the significance of parental relationships and maintaining family connections whenever possible (Children’s Bureau, 2018).
- Scholarship investigating whether these policies are reflected in professional values on safety, well-being, and family preservation held among child welfare professionals is limited.
- Building upon previous scholarship examining decision making in child welfare (Fluke et al., 2016; Nikolova et al., 2017), the following research questions were investigated:
 - Does tenure in child welfare influence professional values about the focus of child welfare work?
 - Does level of position within child welfare influence professional values about the focus of child welfare work?

Methods & Objectives

- This study examined child welfare professionals’ values, which may orient them more strongly toward child safety versus family preservation.
- The study was executed as a part of a larger, five-year research collaborative aimed at improving child welfare outcomes through social work practice and court/legal practices.
- The sample included 241 child welfare professionals working in a Midwestern State.
- Data were collected cross-sectionally via an online survey.
- To examine child welfare values, study participants completed the Dalglish Scale (Dalglish, 2010). This scale comprises 8 items on which participants must choose between an orientation toward child safety versus family preservation (Dalglish, 2010). Participants’ work focus scores were recoded to range from a possible low of 1 to a high of 80, with 80 representing a very strong orientation toward family preservation and 1 indicating a very strong orientation toward child safety.
- Two linear regression models were examined to test the associations with professionals’ values regarding the focus of child welfare work. The first model included tenure in child welfare, and the second model included level of position (e.g., frontline practitioner versus supervisor/administrators). Both analyses controlled for professionals’ race and geographic region of the state.



Results

- Work focus mean scores on work focus ranged from 1 to 74 with an overall mean of 32.8 (SD = 17.0).
- Figure 1 (on slide 2) shows the work focus mean scores by professionals’ tenure in child welfare. Professionals working for less than 4 years reported stronger orientation toward child safety (Less than 1 year, M = 28.2 (SD = 14.1); 1-3 years, M = 28.3 (SD = 16.9)). In contrast, the strongest orientation toward family preservation was observed by those with 10+ years experience in child welfare (M = 36.2, SD = 18.1).
- Figure 2 (on slide 2) presents work focus mean scores by level of position. Supervisors/administrators reported a stronger orientation toward family preservation (M = 38.8, SD = 17.2) as compared to frontline workers (M = 28.8, SD = 15.6).
- When controlling for race and geographic location, linear regression indicated that tenure in child welfare ($F(3,165) = 2.86, p < .05, R^2 = .05$) and position level ($F(3, 165) = 12.66, p < .001, R^2 = .19$) both significantly influenced professional values toward child safety versus family preservation.
- Professionals with 7-9 years’ ($t = -2.315, p < 0.05$) and more than 10 years’ ($t = -2.738, p < 0.001$) experience reported values significantly more aligned with family preservation than professionals with fewer than 4 years’ experience. Participants in a supervisory/administrator position reported values significantly more aligned with family preservation compared to participants in a frontline positions ($t = -5.79, p < .001$).




Table 1. Effects of Tenure on Professionals’ Value of Family Preservation and Safety

Variable	β	$b (SE_b)$	p
Constant		16.186 (9.835)	.102
Race	-.016	-.375 (1.753)	.831
Geographic Location	.046	.614 (1.033)	.553
Tenure	-.228	-2.884 (.986)	.004

Table 2. Effects of Position Level on Professionals’ Value of Family Preservation and Safety

Variable	β	$b (SE_b)$	p
Constant		8.083 (8.411)	
Race	.016	.360 (1.612)	.824
Geographic Location	.058	.769 (.944)	.417
Position Level	-.436	-16.509 (2.680)	.000

Conclusions

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 To better align with policy that promotes family engagement and prioritizes family connections, these findings may suggest a need for additional training for family-centered practices among early career professionals and ongoing professional development among frontline workers.
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 Recent implementation literature also indicates ongoing coaching and professional development supports the integration of guiding principles in daily child welfare practice (Akin, 2016).
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 Future research should further explore the transmission of system and organization values to child welfare professionals.

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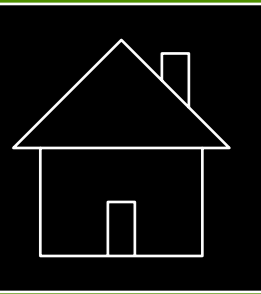


Table 3. Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Percentage
Sex	
Female	93.0
Male	5.3
Prefer not to say	1.6
Race	
White	96.3
Other	2.0
Latinx	1.6
Licensure	
Licensed	56.6
Unlicensed	43.4
Level of Position	
Frontline	59.8
Supervisor/Administrator	40.2
Years Experience	
Less than 1 year	8.2
1-3 years	29.5
4-6 years	18.0
7-9 years	8.2
10+ years	36.1

Figure 1. Work Focus Mean Scores by Tenure

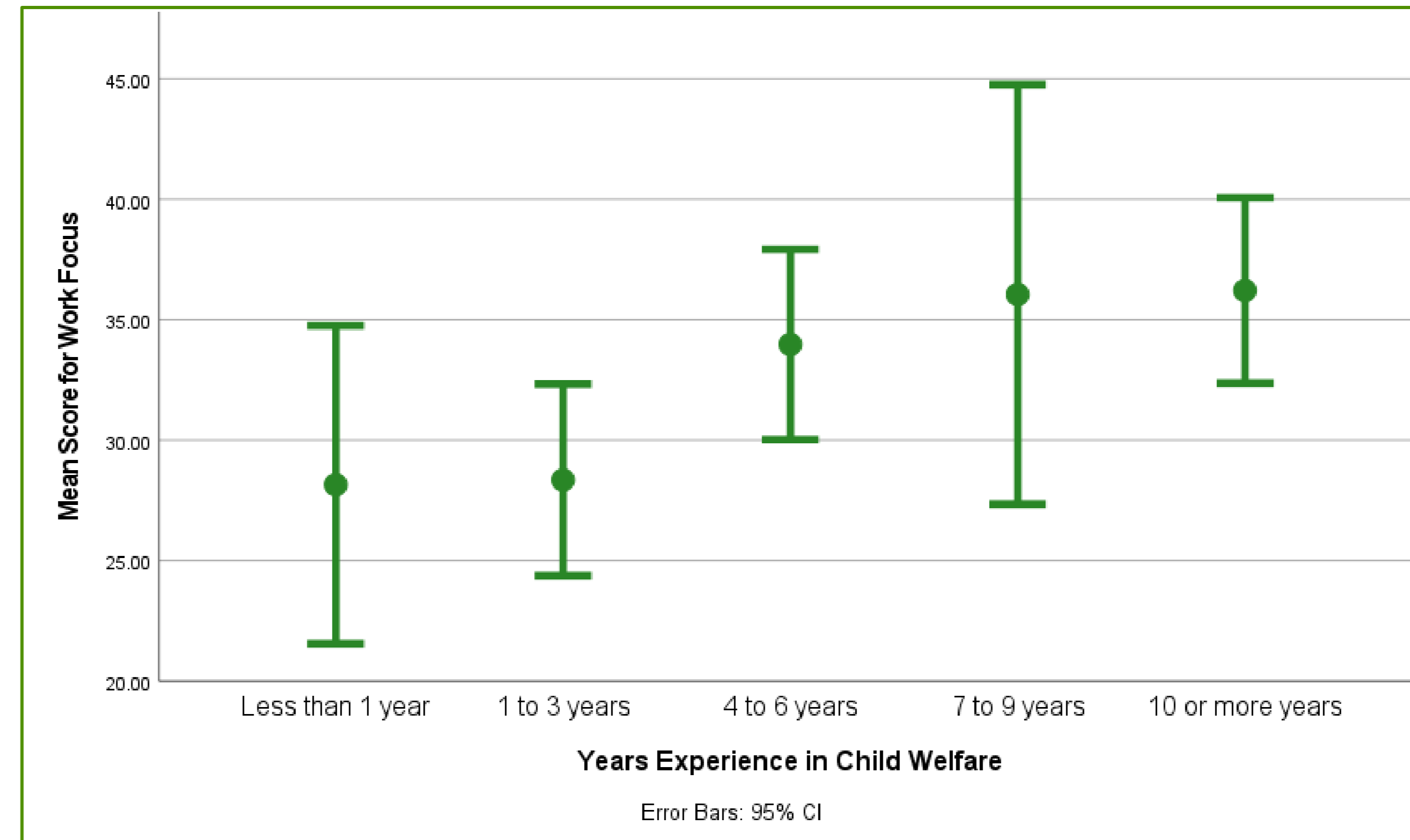
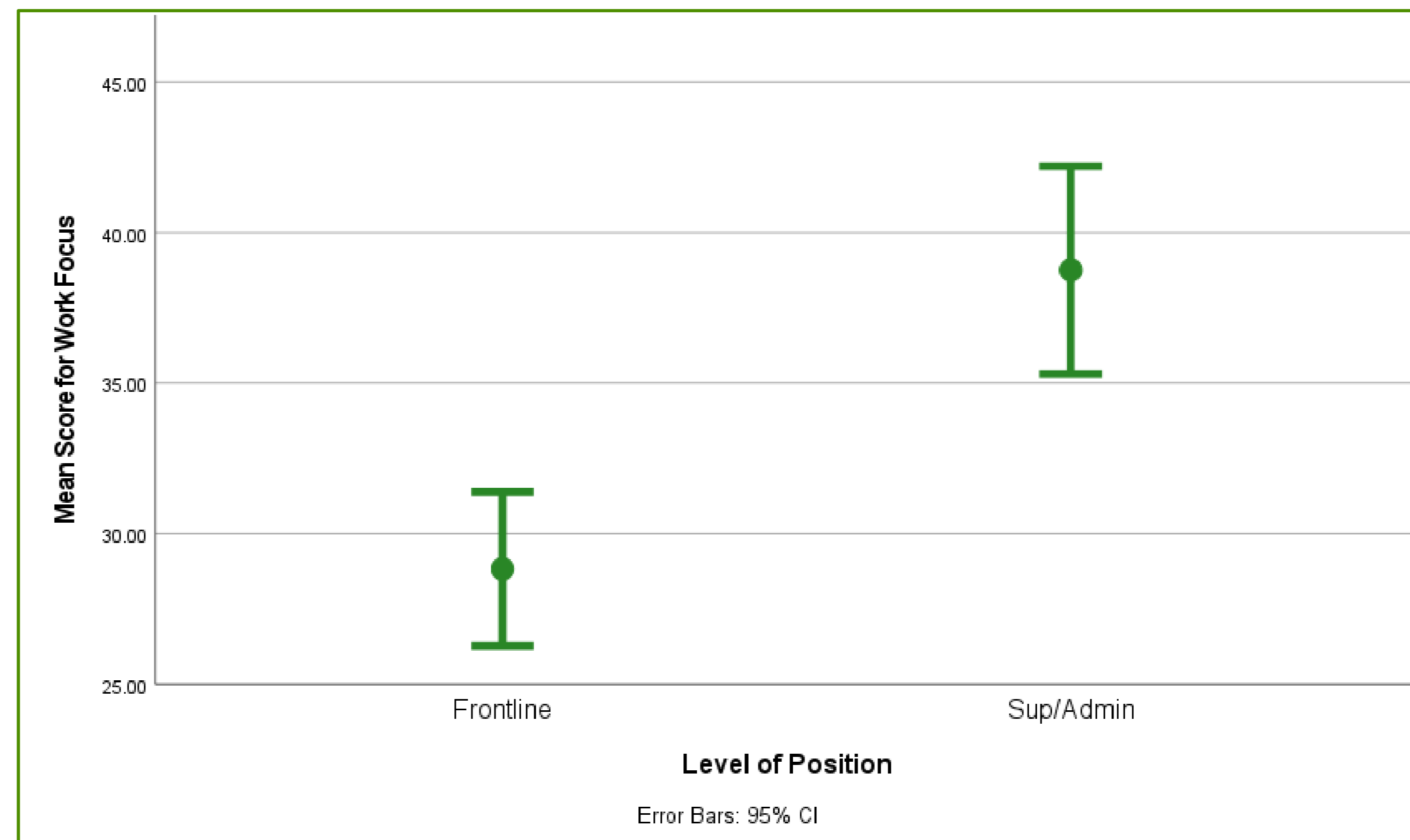


Figure 2. Work Focus Mean Scores by Level of Position



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Contact Information

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Co-Investigators:
Becci A. Akin (becciakin@ku.edu); Kaela Byers (kaela@ku.edu)