

## ASSESSING INTENTION TO LEAVE AMONG PUBLIC HOSPITAL NURSES IN MALAYSIA

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Published online: 24 February 2018

### ABSTRACT

Insufficient number of nurses in many health care institutions especially in public hospitals is not a new issue and still remains as an unsolved issue. In fact, it has been a global issue and it is projected that many developed and developing countries will suffer from nursing shortage that is expected to exacerbate since the demand for health care is growing intensely. Studies show that there are various factors that can influence intention to leave feeling among employees, thus, this study would examine the influence of job satisfaction, hierarchical plateauing, organizational commitment and turnover opportunity and their relationship with intention to leave among public hospital nurses. There were 436 nurses working in public hospitals participated in this study. The results revealed that there were relationships between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, hierarchical plateauing, turnover opportunity and intention to leave and the relationships were statistically significant. The findings are significant to be scrutinized by managers and policy makers in order to promote retention rate among employees.

**Keywords:** Intention to Leave, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Hierarchical Plateauing, Turnover Opportunity.

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doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jfas.v10i3s.24>



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The shortage of nurses is not a new issue and in fact it has been a worldwide issue. It has become a critical issue when it is projected that in the next few decades the demand for nurses is expected to increase while the supply of nurses is expected to decrease. The United States of America is one of the countries that is projected to experience a shortage of nurses. American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2015) reported that this country is struggling to expand its capability and capacity to meet the rising demand for health care. The shortage of nurses remains severe especially in most of developing countries and poor countries. In Malaysia, the story is the same. Malaysia needs 20,000 more nurses in all specialization (Tang & Ghani, 2012).

In many developing and resource poor countries a number of their trained nurses were found to hop over to private hospitals or migrate to other developed countries for better salaries, better working conditions and better career advancement.

Literature revealed that some of the most compelling determinants of intention to leave were job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Many past studies consistently found that these two variables were negatively associated with intention to leave. Nogueras (2006) suggested that employees would be less likely to quit if they were more satisfied and committed to their job and organizations. However, a few studies did also reveal that those who stay did not report higher level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment than those who quit and some employees who resigned were satisfied with their jobs and committed to their organization (Sharkey, 1994).

Turnover opportunity was another relevant variable to be discussed since current labor market seemed to signal that there was high demand for nurses due to critical nursing shortage all over the world. Nurses have strong perception of their chances of getting employed by other employees if they leave their current employer. Besides, low opportunity for advancement would also be associated with intention to leave (Castle et al., 2007). This supported the inclusion of hierarchical plateauing as one of the variables in this study.

Thus, this study was conducted mainly to investigate and verify the relationship between intention to leave with job satisfaction, hierarchical plateauing, organizational commitment and turnover opportunity. Even though many studies have been conducted on intention to leave, this study was believed to produce results that can enrich the literature especially in the Malaysian context.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Study in the area of intention to leave among nurses is really a need especially when the shortage of nurses has become a serious issue across the globe (Blaaum et al., 2015; Buchan & Calman, 2004). In fact, Galetta, Portoghese and Battistelli (2011) reported that nursing shortage has been said to be a critical issue in many post-industrialized countries.

Studies have shown that there were many factors that have contributed to intention to leave feeling among employees in different occupational groups. Among them were job satisfaction (Castle et al., 2007; Slattery & Selvarajan, 2005), leadership styles (MohdSharuddin, 1997; Chou-Kang Chiu et al., 2005), organizational commitment (Nayak, 2002; Yamada, 2002; Slattery & Selvarajan, 2005), work environment (Shwu-Ru, 2007; Stagnitti et al., 2006), labor market (Rahman, Raqvi & Ramay, 2008), moral obligation (Sharkey, 1994), job autonomy (Stagnitti et al., 2006) and other personal, organizational and work-related and management issues.

Parasuraman (1989) claimed that intention to leave was found to be the most immediate determinant of nurse turnover. Cohen and Golan (2007) supported Parasuraman when they revealed that Krausz et al. (1995) agreed that turnover intention could predict the actual turnover of employees. Thus, to estimate future turnover, alternative estimate might be derived from information about employees' intention to leave.

### 2.1. Intention to Leave

How serious employees are searching for new job, or thinking about job searching or even thinking about leaving can be a signal of employee's intention to leave (Castle et al., 2007). Even though results from studies of the relationship between intent-to-leave and actual turnover have been mixed, many still agreed that intention to leave could be the best predictor and the strongest precursor of turnover. In fact, intention to leave has been used as a proxy to turnover by many researchers (Castle et al., 2007). Intent to voluntarily leave stated by an individual might suggest that he or she is drawing psychologically from the organization and its work (Dollar & Broach, 2006).

### 2.2. Job Satisfaction

There is abundant of literature reported that job satisfaction is negatively associated with intention to leave. For example, Castle et al (2007) found that nurses who scored high in job

satisfaction would demonstrate low turnover intention. Several other studies also found that intention to leave among nurses also influenced by job dissatisfaction (Masum, Azad, Hoque, Beh, Wanke & Arslan, 2016; Tao, Ellenbecker, Wang & Li, 2015; Alsaqri, 2014; Slattery & Selvarajan, 2005). In a study on intention to leave among Malaysian nurses conducted by Ramoo et al. (2013), they found that employees were prone to leave their current employment if they felt unsatisfied with their job. They also found that almost 40% of nurses who were not satisfied with their current employment would choose to leave. Meanwhile, Sharkey's (1994) findings were a bit interesting since she found that some nurses who quit were satisfied with their job while nurses who stayed did not report higher level of job satisfaction.

### **2.3. Organizational Commitment**

Another common variable that relates to turnover intention is organizational commitment. Some past researchers (Yasmin, 2015; Tarigan & Ariani, 2015; Kuean, Kaur & Wong, 2010, Slattery & Selvarajan, 2005) revealed that organizational commitment has significant influence on employees' intention to leave. In many studies, this variable had been consistently and negatively associated with turnover intention. Nogueras (2006) also revealed that less committed employees would be more likely to leave an organization. In Malaysia, several studies on organizational commitment had been conducted and the results showed that the more committed the employees, the less likely they would express their intention to leave their organization (Kuean et al., 2010; Ishak, 2006). However, Sharkey (1994) found that nurses who stayed did not report higher level of organizational commitment while those who resigned were found to be committed to their organizations.

### **2.4. Hierarchical Plateauing**

The issue of plateauing remains relevant (Patrick Chang Boon Lee, 2003) to most organizations and undeniably it also affected employees' career path. Organizations whether they like it or not, have to accept the fact that career plateau has become a growing issue (Veiga, 1981) and is inevitable. Past studies on turnover intention and its relationship with plateauing revealed inconsistent results (Tremblay & Roger, 1995). Drucker-Godard (2015), Salami (2010) and Tremblay (1995) found that employees experiencing career plateauing had a greater desire to leave but Slocum et al. (1985) observed the opposite. Interestingly, Veiga (1981) found no

significant difference in term of intention to leave among plateaued and non-plateaued employees.

### **2.5. Turnover Opportunity**

In developed countries, demand for nurses is posing a serious challenge to health care systems (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2015; Gallette et al., 2011; Pillay, 2007). McCarthy and Tyrrell (2007) in their study disclosed that 78% of their respondents believed that many nursing jobs were waiting for them if they leave their present organization. Some findings supported that perceived turnover opportunity was related to turnover intention. For instance, the study conducted by Ing-San Hwang and Jyh-HueiKuo in 2006 revealed a positive relationship between intention to leave and perceived turnover opportunity and the relationship was significant. Similarly, a study by Rahman, Raqvi and Ramay (2008) concluded that intention to leave was strongly associated with perceived turnover opportunity.

Based on literature research, this study finally hypothesized that:

*H1*: Job satisfaction is negatively and significantly related to intention to leave

*H2*: Hierarchical plateauing is positively and significantly related to intention to leave

*H3*: Organizational commitment is negatively and significantly related to intention to leave

*H4*: Turnover opportunity is positively and significantly related to intention to leave

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The study applied self-administered survey. Since this study involved nurses working at public hospitals as the respondents, approvals from a few related institutions such as Malaysian Research Ethical Committee (MREC), National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the respective hospitals were sought prior to distributing the questionnaires. Once the permission from the respective authority obtained (Ministry of Health, Malaysia), the questionnaires were sent to the selected major hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia.

### **3.1. Sample and Sample Size**

This study included only nurses from public hospitals. As stated by Ministry of Health Malaysia (2013), there were about 84,968 of active nurses in Malaysia. Based on the guide provided by

Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the acceptable sample size for a population size of N=85,000 was S=384. However, 700 sets of questions were delivered to the selected hospitals through their respective administration.

### **3.2. Measures**

To measure job satisfaction among nurses, Work Satisfaction Scale (WSS) developed by Hinshaw and Atwood in 1985 was applied. While, organizational commitment of the respondents was measured using revised scales of TCM (Three-component Model Employee Commitment Survey – Revised Version). The scales were developed by Meyer and Allen (1991). Milliman's (1992) survey questions were used to measure the existence of hierarchical plateau among respondents. Meanwhile, to measure turnover opportunity, a set of six questions used by Khatri et al. (1999) and adapted from Arnold and Feldman (1982), Billings and Wemmerus (1983), Mowdey et al (1984), and Michaels and Spector (1982) was used. Finally, the Anticipated Turnover Scale (ATS) developed by Hinshaw and Atwood in 1985 was used to measure the respondents' perceived turnover intention.

## **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed and 436 (62.3%) were returned. However, out of the total questionnaires returned, only 398 responses were usable.

### **4.1. Demographic Profile**

The respondents were 99.2% females and males were 0.8%. It was found that a large number of respondents were between 26 to 30 years (21.9%) and more than 50 years old (19.3%). Based on race, 90.5% of respondents were Malay, 4.5% were Indians, 4.5% were Chinese, and 0.5% were others. Majority of respondents were married (87.7%), single or bachelor (9.5%) and those in the category of divorced, separated or widow were 2.8%. As for education status, Diploma holders were 63.6%, those graduated with Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) and Higher School Certificate (HSC) were 22.4%, 9.5% were those with certificate, degree holders were 0.5% and those with Master Degree were 0.5%.

## 4.2. Hypothesis Testing

Table 1 reveals that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover opportunity and hierarchical plateauing are significantly related to intention to leave at significant value  $p < 0.01$  and  $p < 0.05$ . Job satisfaction is significantly related to intention to leave with the  $p < 0.05$  ( $t = 2.323$ ) while organizational commitment, turnover opportunity and hierarchical plateauing are significantly related to intention to leave with  $p < 0.01$  ( $t = 7.110$ ), ( $t = 3.512$ ), and ( $t = 3.573$ ). Therefore, all hypotheses in this study are accepted.

**Table 1.** Path Coefficient, T-Value and Significant Level Path of Hypothesis

Effect	coeff Beta	std. error	T	Sig.
H1: JS -> ITL	0.13 2	0.05 7	2.32 3	0.021
H2: OC -> ITL	0.40 7	0.05 7	7.11 0	0.000
H3: TO-> ITL	0.14 2	0.04 0	3.51 2	0.000
H4: HP -> ITL	0.14 6	0.04 1	3.57 3	0.000

The results support Reinardy (2007) who reported a significant relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. A few other studies also found that job satisfaction was associated with intention to leave on a consistent basis (Susskind et al., 2000; Horn & Gaertner, 2000; Slattery & Sevarajan, 2005; Chou, 2005). In local context, MohdFikri (1997), ZulkifliKassim (1997), Ishak Ismail (2006) and Ramoo et al. 2013 also proved that job satisfaction was negatively related to employee's intention to leave.

Results from previous studies found that organizational commitment was negatively associated with intention to leave (Labatmedience, Endriulaitiene and Gustainiene, 2007). Similarly, several other researchers (Nogueras, 2006; Mitchell, 2006) found that greater affective commitment, greater normative commitment and greater continuance commitment were associated with less

intent to leave among the nursing personnel. These results were also in consistency with results of studies by Rahman, Naqvi and Ramay that was conducted in 2008, Slattery and Selvarajan in 2005, Labatmediene et al. in 2007, Nogueras in 2006, Angle and Pery in 1981 and Blin et al. in 1991. However, Dunham's et al. (1994) study produced a bit different results. They found that normative commitment was positively related to intention to leave and continuance commitment was found to be negatively related to intention to leave.

As revealed by Table 1, turnover opportunity has a significant and positive relationship with intention to leave. The findings were consistent with Adjei-Appiah (2008), Castle et al (2007), McCarthy and Tyrrell (2007), Tatcher, Stepnia and Boyle (2003). Rahman, Naqvi and Ramay (2008) found that perceived job opportunities were strongly correlated with intention to leave. In contrast, Harman et al. (2009) argued that perception of job availability was not a significant predictor of intent to leave. Similarly, Khatri et al. (1999) also claimed that turnover opportunity was not a significant predictor of turnover intention. In other words, Harman et al. and Khatri et al. suggested that perceived alternative employment alone could not trigger turnover intention and there must be other stronger factors that pushed the potential leavers to leave.

Table 1 also shows a significant effect of hierarchical plateauing on intention to leave and the results was consistent with some previous studies (Veiga, 1981; Heilman et al., 2008). In Malaysia, majority of nurses who are serving in public hospitals are with Malaysian Education Certificate (SPM) qualification, which in turn meant they would be promoted to a higher level at a slower pace compared to those with higher level of academic qualification. Logically, this would result in nurses remaining at the same position longer. This study found that many of nurses had been in their present posts for more than 5 years and according to Near (1986), employees who were in the same position for more than five years had a tendency to be plateaued. Plateaued employees were more likely to be discontented and more likely to leave their organization.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The study revealed that there are relationships among job satisfaction, organizational commitment, hierarchical plateauing, turnover opportunity and intention to leave and the relationships were statistically significant. The findings support the previous studies whereby they revealed a significant relationship exist between job satisfaction, organizational



commitment, hierarchical plateauing and turnover opportunity with intention to leave among nurses in public hospitals. Administrators or managers must give attention to factors that significantly affect nurses' intention to leave so as to reduce or minimize nurse turnover. This would result in better patient care. The findings are also meaningful and can assist the relevant parties to prepare for some intervention strategies, especially in this era of technology and globalization that may change the way workers perceive their career.

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**How to cite this article:**

Omar K, Halim M A S A, Yusoff M Y, Ahmad A, Ibrahim R Z A R. Assessing intention to leave among public hospital nurses in Malaysia. *J. Fundam. Appl. Sci.*, 2018, 10(3S), 294-305.