



## Feature Article

# The Job Embeddedness instrument: An evaluation of validity and reliability

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 14 January 2014  
 Received in revised form  
 10 April 2014  
 Accepted 14 April 2014  
 Available online 08 July 2014

## Keywords:

Nurse turnover  
 Nurse retention  
 Job embeddedness  
 Confirmatory factor analysis

## ABSTRACT

A cross sectional correlational mailed survey was used to assess the validity and reliability of the Job Embeddedness (JE) instrument for predicting nurse retention. A regression model using the variables of JE and age were predictive of nurse retention in a sample of Registered Nurses (RNs) working in long term care (LTC) settings. This study supports the multi-dimensionality, validity and reliability of the underlying JE construct. However a different factor structure was suggested that better fit the data. Long term care organizations (LTC) may benefit from a strategy of increasing the embeddedness of their existing employees in order to increase nurse retention. Job embeddedness could be used as a foundation to provide effective nurse retention strategies in LTC settings.

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## Registered nurses working in the long term care setting

Excessive nursing turnover is a costly and expensive problem for health care organizations in long term care (LTC) settings. Direct costs related to nurse turnover include recruitment and training costs for newly hired nurses<sup>1</sup> and costs of hiring contract and temporary personnel.<sup>2</sup> Revenues for nursing homes and assisted living facilities may be lost due to closed beds, closed units or from deferring patients elsewhere for care when adequate nurse staffing is not maintained.<sup>2,3</sup> More importantly low nurse staffing due to excessive turnover may result in poor patient outcomes<sup>4</sup> because the knowledge, wisdom and skills of a departing experienced nurse is not retained by the organization, even with effective orientation and preceptor programs.<sup>5</sup>

The workforce environment for long term care is also being shaped by the changing demographics in the United States (US), resulting in an increased demand for nursing services as the baby boom generation reaches retirement age. At the same time the U.S. population ages, the largest cohort of nurses (also from the baby boom generation) will reach retirement age. The increase in demand for nursing services and potential decrease in supply of nurses threatens the delivery of quality health care.<sup>6</sup> The aging of the nurse workforce and estimates that 55% of the nurse workforce plans to retire by 2020<sup>7</sup> make retaining experienced nurses a high

priority to maintain high quality care and positive patient outcomes. The number of elderly requiring residential care (including nursing care facilities, alternative residential care or home health care) is expected to increase from 15 million in 2000 to over 27 million by the year 2050.<sup>8</sup>

In addition long term care (LTC) nurses have higher turnover rates than nurses working in acute care settings. Estimates of first year turnover in LTC settings range from 14 to 37%.<sup>9</sup> It was estimated that 19,400 LTC nurse positions remain vacant.<sup>9</sup> This trend is expected to continue to grow. Nurses working in LTC settings reported significantly higher emotional exhaustion than nurses working in similar acute care settings<sup>10</sup> and may be one reason for higher turnover. In addition high RN turnover is associated with high certified nursing assistants (CNA) turnover compounding the problem of maintaining adequate staffing. Effective RN retention interventions may possess a spillover effect positively impact CNA retention.<sup>11</sup>

Increasing the retention of nurses working in LTC settings is one possible way to meet the growing demand for nursing services. Nurse turnover is defined as a nurse's voluntary termination of employment with a particular organization while nurse retention is the continuation of employment between the organization and nurse.<sup>12</sup> Using a retention based strategy to combat excessive turnover demonstrates a different fundamental approach. Instead of focusing on preventing turnover, an approach that emphasizes retention may be more effective. Although turnover and retention are related, evidence suggests that there are fundamental differences why a nurse remains with a particular organization (retention)

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or why this same nurse leaves the organization (turnover).<sup>13</sup> The Job Embeddedness (JE) instrument was developed to integrate non-work factors into a model for retention.<sup>13</sup> The JE instrument has been used in a variety of settings<sup>13–17</sup> including nurses<sup>18,19</sup> and has proven effective in explaining the variation in voluntary turnover above traditional measures such as job attitudes. However no studies could be located that used the JE instrument using a sample of RNs working in long term care settings.

The use of the JE construct may form the basis to develop effective nurse retention interventions. This study will attempt to fill in the gaps of our theoretical understanding of RN retention in the long term care setting. Although JE has demonstrated to explain additional incremental variation above job satisfaction and organizational commitment,<sup>13</sup> no studies could be located that used JE with a sample of RNs working in LTC settings. It is hypothesized that JE will be predictive of nurse retention as operationalized as self-reports of intent to stay. However the validity and reliability of the JE instrument should be established for RNs in LTC settings. The purpose of this study was to examine the validity and reliability of the JE instrument with a sample of LTC RNs.

### Conceptual framework

Traditional research on employee turnover has focused on job attitudes typically, job satisfaction and organizational commitment.<sup>20,21</sup> Although the research has supported the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment with employee turnover much of the variance of turnover remains unexplained.<sup>22–25</sup> Individual characteristics such as age and tenure also influence nurse retention.<sup>22–24</sup> Even when nurse turnover factors are combined, there is an inadequate picture of nurse retention and intention to stay. Without a more thorough understanding of nurse retention, the resources for building effective retention interventions remain deficient. Job Embeddedness (JE) has been shown to explain a larger share of variance in turnover in other populations of workers than either job satisfaction or organizational commitment.<sup>13,18</sup>

Job embeddedness can be thought as a three by two matrix representing the *fit*, *links* and *sacrifice* between an employee and *both* the community *and* the organization.<sup>13</sup> Fit is defined as an employee's perception of their compatibility with the surrounding community and the current organization. Links reflect informal and formal influences with other people or activities within the organization or environment. Sacrifice involves an employee's belief of what they would have to give up when leaving their job<sup>13</sup> (see Table 1).

Unlike much of the traditional job turnover research, JE possesses a fundamental difference focusing not on why an employee does not leave the current job (prevention of turnover) but rather on why this same employee would remain at the current job. Initially it may appear that the two concepts, employee turnover and employee retention, are opposite ends of a continuum of the same construct, employment. However previous research has supported the proposition that the reasons an employee remains at

the current job are distinctly different than the reasons this same employee leaves the same job. Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman<sup>26</sup> differentiate motivation factors, factors that motivate an employee to remain at the present job, and hygiene factors, factors that make an employee want to leave the current job. Motivating factors are intrinsic to the work itself (for example providing care in a nursing job) while hygiene factors includes things such as salary, working conditions and inter-personal relationships. So while the lack of adequate salary may be a critical factor in an employee's decision to quit the current job (turnover), adequate salary does not ensure the employee will remain at the current job (retention). Current research has supported the differences between retention and turnover. Factors that prevent turnover are felt to be qualitatively different than factors that encourage retention.<sup>27</sup> The JE construct incorporates these retention factors and guided this study.

### Method

This study used a cross sectional correlational mailed survey research design of Registered nurses (RNs) who work at nursing homes across the United States.

### Sample

Inclusion criteria included working as a staff nurse that currently provides direct care to patients in a long term care settings and having an active RN license. The majority of study participants worked as RNs in nursing homes or assisted care facilities. Directors of nursing, administrators and nursing supervisors were excluded. Human subjects' protections were ensured through institutional review at Illinois State University. Informed consent procedures were explained and integrated into the cover letter.

### Measures

The JE instrument developed by Mitchell et al<sup>13</sup> was used to assess the level of job embeddedness for RNs working in LTC settings. The JE instrument is a forty item tool using fill-in-the-blank and five point Likert-type items designed to measure JE for a variety of professions and industries<sup>13,15–18</sup> (see Table 2). The JE instrument includes six subscales; organizational fit, community fit, organizational links, community links, organizational sacrifice and community sacrifice. Total JE scores were computed by standardizing and averaging each subscale and summing these products. This procedure was utilized in order to provide each subscale the same weight when calculating the total JE regardless of the number of items each subscale possesses.

Individual demographic data including age, race, educational level, family income and gender were collected. Organizational characteristics of the nursing home (profit or not for profit status) were also collected. Nurse retention was operationalized as self-report of intent to stay. Two separate questions, "Do you plan to work at your current organization for the next year" and "I intend to

**Table 1**  
Job embeddedness dimensions.

| JE dimension | Organization   | Community   |
|--------------|--|---|
| Fit          | Organizational fit: An employee's perceived compatibility with the organization  | Community fit: How well a person perceives that they fit in the surrounding community and environment                     |
| Links        | Organizational links: Formal or informal connections that exist between an employee and other people or groups in the organization | Community links: The significant influence of family and other social institutions and their influence on decision making |
| Sacrifice    | Organizational sacrifice: What an employee would have to give up to break free from links from the organization                    | Community sacrifice: The ease that links can be broken between the employee and the surrounding environment               |

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