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A structural equation model of turnover for a longitudinal survey among early career registered nurses

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ABSTRACT

Background: Key predictors of early career nurses' turnover are job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search, intent to stay, and shock (back injuries) based on the literature review and our previous research. Existing research has often omitted one of these key predictors.
Objectives: The purpose of this study in a sample of early career nurses was to compare predictors of turnover to nurses' actual turnover at two time points in their careers.
Design: A multi-state longitudinal panel survey of early career nurses was used to compare a turnover model across two time periods. The sample has been surveyed five times.

Participants: The sample was selected using a two-stage sample of registered nurses nested in 51 metropolitan areas and nine non-metropolitan, rural areas in 34 states and the District of Columbia.
Methods: The associations between key predictors of turnover were tested using structural equation modeling and data from the earliest and latest panels in our study. We used predictors from the respondents who replied to the Wave-1 survey in 2006 and their turnover status from Wave 2 in 2007 ($N = 2386$). We compared these results to the remaining respondents' predictors from Wave 4 in 2011 and their turnover status in Wave 5 in 2013 ($N = 1073$). We tested and found no effect for missingness from Wave 1–5 and little evidence of attrition bias.
Results: Strong support was found for the relationships hypothesized among job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intent to stay, and turnover, with some support for shock and search in the Wave 1–2 sample. However, for Wave 4–5 sample ($n = 1073$), none of the paths through search were significant, nor was the path from shock to turnover.
Conclusions: Nurses in the second analysis who had matured longer in their career did not have a significant response to search or shock (back injuries), which may indicate how easily experienced registered nurses find new jobs and/or accommodation to jobs requiring significant physicality. Nurse turnover is a major concern for healthcare organizations because of its costs and related outcomes. The relevant strength and relationships of these key turnover predictors will be informative to employers for

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prioritizing strategies to retain their registered nurse workforce. We need more research on programs that implement changes in the work environment that impact these two outcomes, as well as research that focuses on the relevant strength or impact to help administrators prioritize translation of results.

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What is already known about the topic?

- Turnover is a continual concern for organizations because of its costs and impact that it has on patient outcomes; however, nothing is known about what impacts turnover in the same sample over time.
- Four key concepts that are consistently identified in the literature predicting turnover are intent to stay or leave, search, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, but much of the research omits at least one or more of these.
- Additional research has identified shocks as initiating one of four possible pathways to turnover.

What this paper adds

- This study identifies the significant pathways among four key variables (intent, search, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, and incorporates a measure of shock in the comparison of the model at two time periods in the early careers of RNs.
- Using longitudinal data this study shows a causal relationship between predictor variables and turnover at both time periods. In the earlier time period search and shock are both significant, but they are not significant in the later time period.
- Our research suggest that when controlling for confounding factors, attrition, and missing data, we can conclude that change among the sample over time may explain the lack of importance of search in the model of intent to stay and turnover.

Turnover is a continual concern for organizations because of its costs and impact that it has on patient outcomes (Jones and Gates, 2007; Li and Jones, 2013), and many factors have been proposed to explain it. Two substantive integrated reviews of turnover literature (Gilmartin, 2012; Griffeth et al., 2005) resulted in two remarkably consistent models with a set of four variables forming the core of both reviews. These variables are job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search (search), and intent to stay (or leave; intent). In addition, the meta-analysis of Griffeth et al. (2000) supported that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, search, withdrawal cognitions, and quit intentions were the best predictors of turnover. Withdrawal cognitions are a group of constructs that mediate intent and turnover. Lee and Mitchell (1994) include these constructs in a voluntary turnover model but also posit that shocks play a significant role (Lee et al., 1999; Morrell et al., 2004).

Generally researchers examine a cross section of an organization's workforce at one point in time; at best, turnover may be examined one time period later. We found no literature that uses a panel survey at different points in time to determine whether the turnover predictor relationships vary over time. One problem in evaluating literature about turnover is that much of the research is based on underspecified models in which only a subset of these variables theoretically related to turnover are included. For example, Coomber and Barriball (2007) reviewed literature examining the relationship of job satisfaction to intent to stay (or leave) and turnover. Some of the research studies included organizational commitment (e.g., Gurney et al., 1997; Simon et al., 2010 and some did not (e.g., Galletta et al., 2011; Meeusen et al., 2011). Studies that include all five key variables posited as significant in reviews are less common than those that include a subset (Blau, 2007; Brewer et al., 2012). Thus, a direct relationship of satisfaction to intent is proposed when in fact that relationship may be indirect (mediated) through organizational commitment. The same issue exists for turnover.

Another issue is that many researchers (Beecroft et al., 2008; Simon et al., 2010) examine intent rather than turnover. While there is a moderate relationship between intent and turnover (Brewer et al., 2012; Griffeth et al. 2000) using a longitudinal data set is a stronger method to show a causal relationship than cross-sectional studies (Estryn-Behar et al., 2010), but more difficult methodologically to accomplish. The purposes of this study are to determine the pathways among all five key variables using longitudinal data, and to compare the model at two time periods for differences in a group of new nurses compared to the nurses at a later point in their careers.

1. Background

The search procedure captured articles addressing turnover in primarily populations of registered nurses, practical nurses, or other health professionals (i.e., physicians). To identify potentially relevant studies that were published in English from 1981 to January 2014, we conducted searches using CINAHL, MEDLINE, EconLit, Web of Knowledge, and IngentaConnect databases along with manual searches of the reference lists of the articles retrieved. The search was limited to quantitative or meta-analytic empirical studies, systematic reviews, and at least two of the three major constructs that have been used in turnover research to predict either intent or turnover, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and search. Studies were included in this review if they provided evidence of level 1 through level 3 based on *Evaluation standards of management research* (Reay et al., 2009): Level 1 includes randomized controlled trials or meta-analyses; Level 2 includes a high quality review or a systematic literature review; and Level 3 includes large sample, multisite quantitative studies.

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