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The impact of work-life balance on intention to stay in academia: Results from a national survey of pharmacy faculty

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Border-Crossing theory suggests work-life balance and career satisfaction are inter-related and disappointment in work-life balance may predict changes in one's career path. Application of this theory to health profession faculty is plausible but has not been fully explored. The purpose of this study is to examine factors related to reported career change intention among United States pharmacy school faculty and to determine if Border-Crossing theory fits these observations.

Methods: Results from a national web-based survey administered via Qualtrics[®] to American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP) members were utilized. Bivariate analyses were conducted to compare differences among faculty stating an intention to stay or leave academia. A logistic multivariate model was used to determine if work-life balance remains significant when controlling for other variables and if survey results support the Border-Crossing theory.

Results: Nearly all (seven hundred of 811 responders, or 86.3%) stated a desire to stay in academia. Faculty with higher work-life balance were more likely to report an intent to remain in academia. Male, older, full-professor and non-pharmacy practice faculty (social or administrative science, pharmacology, medicinal chemistry and others) were more likely to state an intention to remain in academia relative to their counterparts. Lower stress, as measured by the validated Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) scores, was seen among faculty stating a desire to remain in academia. Work-life balance remained significantly inversely related to career change intention after controlling for all other factors.

Conclusion: A significant factor related to pharmacy faculty's stated intention to remain in academia was work-life balance. Other factors such as gender, age, rank, stress level and department may also play a role. These results support the application of the Border-Crossing theory in health profession faculty and may provide pharmacy school administrators and stakeholders with insight to foster faculty retention and decrease faculty turnover.

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1. Introduction

Border-Crossing theory postulates that work-life balance and career satisfaction are different (bordered) but interconnected by transitions (border-crossing).¹ The theory argues that disappointment in one area or system propels individuals to pursue or change activities in the other area.^{2,3} Career satisfaction among health-system pharmacists, nurses and physicians has been shown to

directly affect turnover intention - suggesting turnover intention as a valid marker for career satisfaction.^{4–7} Although less is known about health-system professional faculty, one study found improving workplace satisfaction crucial for recruiting and retaining high-quality medical faculty.⁸

Results of other studies have demonstrated moderate levels of job satisfaction among pharmacy school faculty.^{9–11} Critical factors identified in influencing pharmacy faculty job change intent include a high workload, poor compensation, lack of perceived support for research, lack of perceived support from administration, desire to try a new career path, high stress and geographic location of the current faculty position.¹² One study uncovered that

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pharmacy practice faculty may be more satisfied with their positions (regarding working in an intellectually challenging environment) relative to non-pharmacy practice faculty.⁹ The previous studies were all conducted prior to or in conjunction with expansion in the number of pharmacy schools in the United States (U.S.).

Between 2005 and 2014, the U.S. experienced a 48% increase in the number of ACPE-accredited pharmacy schools (from 87 to 129 institutions). As of late 2016, there were 6346 full-time pharmacy faculty members and 279 part-time members employed at 136 colleges and schools of pharmacy.¹³ With the expansion of pharmacy schools in the U.S., existing faculty have likely been tasked with additional or expanding roles and responsibilities—thereby increasing their workload. Work-life balance may have potentially suffered as faculty endeavored to balance teaching, research and service. Clinical responsibilities may have also placed additional strain on the pharmacy practice faculty members. The purpose of this study is to examine factors related to reported career change intention among United States pharmacy school faculty and to determine if Border-Crossing theory fits these observations.

2. Methods

A 48-item web-based survey was distributed to members of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) utilizing Qualtrics®. This included all current AACP members working within the U.S. or 4787 individuals. The survey launched in February 2012 and non-responders received an e-mail reminder in March and again in May 2012. The survey closed on May 31, 2012. The survey included questions regarding respondents' demographics, type of academic institution, appointment type, lifestyle traits, and work-life balance. The survey methods and a detailed description of the analytical cohort have been described in detail elsewhere.¹⁴ This survey was determined to be exempt by the Investigational Review Board at Touro University California. No incentives were provided for participation in the study. Statistical analyses were conducted using SAS for Windows 9.3 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC). Work-life balance was assessed via use of Likert-scale questions, each scaled 1 through 5. Intent to remain in academia for the remainder of their career was assessed with a yes or no response question. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was utilized to gauge respondents' overall stress levels. The PSS, is a validated instrument consisting of 10 multiple choice questions individually scored 0 to 4 (with requisite reverse scoring for 4 items).¹⁵ Means and standard deviations were used for the reporting of continuous variables, while frequencies and percentages were used for reporting categorical data. Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine differences among faculty stating a desire to remain in academia compared to those stating a desire to leave academia. Comparisons were made utilizing Student's *t* and Chi-square tests for continuous and categorical variables, respectively. In addition, multivariate logistic analyses were conducted to examine the impact of work-life balance on faculty intention to remain or leave academia while controlling for other factors. More specifically, the multivariate models were run while controlling for faculty level variables such as demographics, PSS score and information related to the faculty member's position (e.g., type of institution) (e.g., public vs. private), department (e.g., pharmacy practice, social or administrative science, pharmacology, pharmaceuticals, medicinal chemistry and other), and rank (e.g., assistant professor, associate professor, full professor, and other) etc. Indicator (dummy variables) were created for each of the categorical variables used in the model.

3. Results

Of the AACP members invited to participate, 828 completed the

entire survey and 17 were excluded for not reporting information such as academic rank, full-time status and department. Complete responses were obtained from 811 respondents yielding a final response rate of 16.9%. The majority of respondents, 535 (66%), identified themselves as members of the pharmacy practice department. Other respondents were members of the social and administrative sciences department (91, 11.2%), pharmacology or biological science (84, 10.4%), pharmaceuticals or pharmacy (46, 5.7%) and medicinal chemistry or pharmaceutical chemistry (41, 5.1%). Less than 2% identified themselves as associated with library, educational resources or other. Seven-hundred (86.3%) of the 811 respondents declared a desire to remain in academia for the remainder of their career. Women, younger (mean age in years) faculty, assistant professors and pharmacy practice faculty were all overrepresented in the group stating a desire to remain in academia relative to the group stating a desire to remain in academia. Additional demographics can be found in Table 1. In addition, faculty not wanting to remain in academia reported higher PSS stress scores and lower work-life balance relative to faculty who wished to remain in academia. No differences were seen according to ethnicity, marital status, leadership responsibility (i.e., committee chair) and institution setting (i.e., public or private). Other variables recorded but not shown in Table 1, include hours worked per week, commute times and number of children. In addition, number of chronic health conditions and BMI were included as measures of overall health. None of these variables were found to differ significantly between the "remain in" or "leave" academia groups.

Lastly, in multivariate logistic models controlling for the previously mentioned variables, work-life balance was found to be significantly related to a predicted desire to remain in academia. More specifically, a one-point increase (on a five-point Likert Scale) in work-life balance led to a 51% increase in predicted desire to remain in academia (Table 2). Discriminative ability (area under the receiver operating characteristic or ROC curve) and calibration of the logistic model was found to be very good overall, as measured by the *c* and Hosmer-Lemeshow statistics, respectively.

4. Discussion

The notion of predicting one's work environment shows the complexity of the work-life balance and intention to change career path relationship. At the same time, Border-Crossing theory predicts the changes some make and gives a framework for explaining the search for a new balance (career change) that may occur.¹ This study is one of the few to analyze factors affecting health professional faculty in the work field as well as in their personal life. This study found that overall, pharmacy school faculty were satisfied with their career with over 85% of subjects reporting they wished to stay in academia. While previous studies in medicine faculty have found no correlation between gender and intention to leave academia, this study found a greater percentage of women desiring to leave academia versus men in unadjusted analyses.^{16,17} In addition, surveyed faculty who reported a desire to remain in academia were older and held a higher academic rank relative to those who did not report an intent to stay in academia. It is unknown if time in academia, achieving a higher appointment status, and better management of work duties contributes to an overall better adjustment of work-life balance or if these characteristics independently lead to an ability to succeed in academia. In addition, this study found that while the majority of clinical or pharmacy practice faculty express an intent to remain in academia, they appear overrepresented in the cohort desiring to leave. This mirrors previous work finding that while faculty working in pharmacy practice or clinical departments have higher job satisfaction they have greater job turnover rates compared to faculty working in basic

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