

# Loving and Leaving Public Health: State Health Agency Workers' Reasons for Joining and Departing from the Public Health Workforce

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# Background

- State health agencies play a critical role in protecting and promoting the health and well-being of the people they serve
- To be effective, they must maintain a highly skilled, diverse workforce of sufficient size and with proper training
- Variety of demographic, job and workplace characteristics, job satisfaction and other variables predictors of leave intentions

# Goal of Current Study

- Assess reasons that people initially join the public health workforce and their intentions to leave
- Examine demographic, job and workplace environment characteristics, job satisfaction, and reasons for initially joining the public health workforce as predictors of intentions to leave one's job within the next year

# Methods

- Nationally representative sample of central office employees who responded to the Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey (PH WINS)
  - Selected based on a stratified sampling approach, with 5 geographic (paired HHS regions) as the primary strata
- Survey administered to individual public health practitioners in 37 states from September to December 2014
- Survey collects information on public health workforce training needs, the workplace environment, national trends, and demographics

# Measures

- Demographic variables
  - Gender
  - Race/Ethnicity
  - Age
  - Education
  - Geographic Region
- Job Characteristics
  - Supervisory Status
  - Salary
  - Primary Program Area
  - Tenure in Public Health

# Measures

- Workplace Environment (20 items, 5-point Likert scale)
  - Items loaded onto 3 factors
  - Supervisory Support: e.g., “My supervisor/team leader treats me with respect”
  - Organizational Support: e.g., “My training needs are assessed”
  - Employee Engagement: e.g., “The work I do is important”
- Job Satisfaction (5-point Likert scale)
  - Job
  - Organization
  - Pay
  - Job Security

# Measures

- Reasons for Initially Entering Public Health (11 items, 4-point Likert scale)
  - Factor analysis conducted and items categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic motivators
    - Extrinsic: e.g., “Beginning salary and benefits”
    - Intrinsic: e.g., “Desire to make a difference”
- Leave Intentions
  - Asked if considering leaving the organization within the next year and if so, why (multiple response options)

# Results: Reasons for Initially Entering Public Health

Reason for Initially Entering Public Health	Not at all important	Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important
Opportunity to use my skills	3%	3%	32%	62%
Desire to make a difference	5%	4%	31%	60%
Importance of public health	8%	8%	35%	49%
Desire to work in public health	14%	14%	36%	36%
Learning about public health in college	43%	17%	24%	16%
Advancement opportunities	11%	14%	43%	32%
Job security in public health	14%	13%	43%	30%
Beginning salary & benefits	11%	16%	46%	27%
Status of public health practitioners	38%	25%	27%	10%
Lack of other career options	44%	21%	25%	10%
Extensive variety of job opportunities in PH	18%	18%	40%	24%

Note: First five items categorized as intrinsic motivators, second five as extrinsic motivators, last item dropped (split loadings)



# Results: Intentions to Leave Job

Are you considering leaving your organization within the next year, and if so, why?	Percent
No	74%
Yes, to retire	5%
Yes, to take another governmental job (in public health)	5%
Yes, to take another governmental job (not in public health)	4%
Yes, to take a non-governmental job (in public health)	2%
Yes, to take a non-governmental job (not in public health)	2%
Yes, other _____	8%

Note: those who replied “Yes, to retire” were excluded from all subsequent analyses

## Results: Intentions to Leave Job

- Groups with particularly high proportions of respondents considering leaving job within next year included:
  - Those ages 26-40
  - Racial/ethnic minorities
  - Those with salaries under \$35K
  - Employees with 0-10 years experience in public health
  - Employees living in the West (HHS Regions 9 & 10)
- Respondents considering leaving rated significantly lower on all satisfaction measures, all workplace environment indicators, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for initially entering public health than those intending to stay

## Results of Logistic Regression on Predictors of Intent to Leave

Predictor Variable	Odds Ratio	se	t	Low CI (95%)	High CI (95%)
<b>Gender</b>					
Male (Ref)					
Female	0.89	0.09	-1.13	0.72	1.10
<b>Race</b>					
Minorities (Ref)					
White	0.80	0.08	-2.31*	0.65	0.97
<b>Education</b>					
Associate Degree (Ref)					
Bachelor Degree	1.03	0.17	0.21	0.74	1.44
Graduate Degree	1.16	0.20	0.86	0.82	1.65
<b>Age</b>					
25 or below (ref)					
26 to 30	0.99	0.55	-0.02	0.32	3.04
31 to 35	0.87	0.43	-0.28	0.32	2.39
36 to 40	1.02	0.46	0.05	0.41	2.57
41 to 45	0.61	0.32	-0.93	0.21	1.77
46 to 50	0.57	0.27	-1.18	0.22	1.50
51 to 55	0.47	0.27	-1.30	0.15	1.52
56 to 60	0.45	0.22	-1.66	0.17	1.19
61 to 65	0.31	0.18	-1.96	0.09	1.04
66 or above	0.33	0.22	-1.69	0.09	1.24

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Results of Logistic Regression on Predictors of Intent to Leave: Demographics					
Predictor Variable	Odds Ratio	se	t	Low CI (95%)	High CI (95%)
<b>Salary</b>					
\$35,000 or less (Ref)					
\$35,000.01 - \$55,000	1.02	0.19	0.08	0.70	1.48
\$55,000.01 - \$75,000	1.00	0.20	0.00	0.66	1.51
\$75,000.01 - \$95,000	1.01	0.22	0.04	0.65	1.57
\$95,000.01 or higher	0.69	0.19	-1.33	0.39	1.21
<b>Supervisory Status</b>					
Non Supervisor (Ref)					
Team leader	1.29	0.17	1.99	1.00	1.68
Supervisor	1.20	0.16	1.39	0.92	1.56
Manager	1.08	0.13	0.62	0.85	1.37
Executive	1.17	0.30	0.60	0.70	1.95
<b>Tenure in Public Health</b>					
0-5 years (ref)					
6-10 years	0.72	0.08	-2.95**	0.58	0.90
11-15 years	0.57	0.08	-4.13***	0.43	0.75
16-20 years	0.75	0.14	-1.56	0.51	1.09
21 or above	0.47	0.11	-3.23**	0.29	0.75

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Results of Logistic Regression on Predictors of Intent to Leave					
Predictor Variable	Odds Ratio	se	t	Low CI (95%)	High CI (95%)
<b>Program Area</b>					
Chronic Disease and Injury (ref)					
Communicable Disease	0.96	0.31	-0.12	0.50	1.86
Environmental Health	0.67	0.18	-1.50	0.40	1.15
Maternal and Child Health	0.89	0.22	-0.45	0.54	1.47
All Hazards Preparedness	1.15	0.29	0.55	0.68	1.93
Assessment	0.94	0.30	-0.19	0.49	1.80
Communications	1.36	0.62	0.67	0.54	3.43
Org Competencies	0.90	0.25	-0.37	0.51	1.58
Other	0.90	0.25	-0.40	0.51	1.56
Other Health Care	1.16	0.42	0.41	0.56	2.41
<b>Pairwise Region</b>					
New England & Atlantic (ref)					
Mid-Atlantic & Great Lakes	1.14	0.11	1.31	0.93	1.38
South	1.21	0.13	1.80	0.98	1.50
Mountain/Midwest	1.05	0.09	0.64	0.89	1.24
West	1.30	0.14	2.39*	1.04	1.63

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Results of Logistic Regression on Predictors of Intent to Leave					
Predictor Variable	Odds Ratio	SE	t	Low CI (95%)	High CI (95%)
<b>Satisfaction</b>					
			-		-
Job satisfaction	0.60	0.04	-7.31***	0.52	0.69
Organizational satisfaction	0.80	0.04	-4.48***	0.72	0.88
Pay satisfaction	0.76	0.04	-5.64***	0.69	0.84
Job security satisfaction	1.06	0.05	1.43	0.98	1.16
<b>Workplace Environment</b>					
Supervisory support	0.89	0.06	-1.80	0.78	1.01
Organizational support	0.79	0.08	-2.32*	0.65	0.97
Employee engagement	0.78	0.07	-2.66*	0.65	0.94
<b>Initial Reasons for Joining Public Health</b>					
Intrinsic motivators	1.00	0.08	-0.06	0.85	1.17
Extrinsic motivators	0.89	0.08	-1.32	0.74	1.06

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

# Discussion

- Racial/ethnic minorities, those with shorter tenure in public health, and those in the West more likely to be considering leaving their jobs within the next year
- Those with higher levels of satisfaction (with their job, their pay, and their organization), those with higher levels of organizational support and higher levels of employee engagement less likely to be considering leaving their jobs within the next year
- Initial reasons for entering public health not predictive of leave intentions

# Discussion

- Majority of results consistent with previous literature on predictors of intentions to leave
  - Job satisfaction, tenure, employee engagement, organization support
- Explanation for regional differences less clear
  - May be explained by unexamined factors in model (e.g., state policies)
- Interesting to note that pay satisfaction, but not pay, predictive of leave intentions



# Limitations

- Concerns about privacy may have led to underestimates of intentions to leave
  - Those individuals with concerns may represent group less likely to show overt signs of intent to leave
- Measurement of intentions does not indicate who actually does leave an organization
  - But intentions to perform behavior are strong predictors of actual behavior
  - Understanding more about those with intentions to leave allows for interventions

# Implications

- State health agency human resource departments should focus on how to improve employee engagement and perceptions of organizational support to increase job satisfaction
- State health agencies should also examine organizational policies and informal practices that may encourage or discourage certain individuals from staying in their positions
- Important to recognize employees' achievements, encourage professional development and training, foster a positive work environment, and participate in equitable hiring and compensation practices to retain highly skilled, diverse workforce

# Questions and Contact Information

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More information about PH WINS available at:

[www.astho.org/phwins](http://www.astho.org/phwins)

# Questions?

- Data will become available to the public in April
  - <http://www.astho.org/phwins/>