Factors associated with intended staff turnover and job search behaviour in services for people with intellectual disability

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Abstract

Staff turnover is a major problem in services for people with intellectual disability (ID). Therefore, understanding the reasons for staff turnover is vital for organizations seeking to improve their performance. The present study investigates the factors directly and indirectly associated with an intention to leave an organization and actual job search behaviour amongst staff in services for people with ID. As part of a large-scale survey of staff in services for people with ID, information was collected from 450 staff concerning intended turnover, job search behaviour and a wide range of factors potentially associated with these outcomes. Path analyses revealed that work satisfaction, job strain, younger staff age and easier subjective labour conditions were directly associated with intended turnover. The same factors, with the exception of younger staff age, were also directly associated with job search behaviour. Factors indirectly associated with these outcomes included wishful thinking, alienative commitment to the organization, lack of staff support, role ambiguity, working longer contracted hours, having a low-status job, a lack of influence over decisions at work and less orientation to working in community settings with people with ID. The models of staff turnover empirically derived in the present study confirm and extend previous research in this area. The implications for organizations are discussed.

Introduction

High levels of staff turnover have long been recognized as a major problem in services for people with intellectual disability (ID). Annual turnover rates in community-based services in the USA have consistently been reported as being between 50% and 70% (e.g. Larson & Lakin 1992; Larson et al. 1998). While turnover rates in the UK are generally lower (between 10% and 30%; Felce et al. 1993; Hatton et al. 1995), such levels of turnover can have serious consequences for service quality. These consequences can be direct in terms of the high proportion of relatively inexperienced and untrained staff working in services, and the lack of continuity in the service provided to people with ID. There are also indirect consequences of high staff turnover, principally the time and costs involved in constantly attempting to recruit, train and monitor new staff.
Factors associated with staff turnover

(Larson et al. 1998; Hatton 1999). Clearly, discovering why staff turnover occurs is fundamental to any organizational attempts at turnover reduction.

Several studies have investigated factors associated with staff turnover in community-based services for people with ID, both in the US (e.g. Larson & Lakin 1992; Raza 1993; Larson et al. 1998) and the UK (Allen et al. 1990; Felce et al. 1993; Hatton & Emerson 1993, 1998). Studies have varied widely in sample sizes, and the range and nature of the measures used, resulting in a wide range of factors associated with staff turnover in services for people with ID. These factors include:

2. lower income or less satisfaction with income (Larson & Lakin 1992; Hatton & Emerson 1993; Askvig & Vassiliou 1991, cited in Larson et al. 1998);
3. a mismatch between expectations and the actual job (Raza 1993; Hatton et al. 1998; Larson et al. 1998);
4. a lack of commitment to the organization or to the general type of work (Hatton & Emerson 1993; Larson et al. 1998);
5. a lack of support from other staff (Hatton & Emerson 1993; Raza 1993; Bachelder & Braddock 1994, cited in Larson et al. 1998);
6. the availability of alternative employment (Larson et al. 1998);
7. high job stress (Raza 1993); and
8. low job satisfaction (Hatton & Emerson 1993; Raza 1993).

The factors associated with staff turnover in services for people with ID reflect the findings of general organizational research concerning staff turnover. Meta-analytic studies of general staff turnover (for a discussion, see Larson et al. 1998) have also found a wide range of factors associated with staff turnover. Factors reasonably consistently associated with staff turnover include organizational commitment, overall job satisfaction, intent to stay or leave, job performance and whether expectations have been met.

Organizational models of staff turnover (e.g. Arnold & Feldman 1982; Bluedorn 1982; Michaels & Spector 1982) are very similar to each other, and unsurprisingly, report factors commonly found in empirical studies. Common elements across the three models include age, tenure, expectations of the job, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceived opportunity for alternative employment and intention to leave.

For organizations attempting to design effective strategies to reduce staff turnover in services for people with ID, it is important to know which factors are the most important, and whether staff turnover in such services adheres to general organizational models of staff behaviour (cf. Larson et al. 1998; Hatton 1999). The present paper contributes to the literature on staff turnover in services for people with ID, by reporting the results of a large-scale survey of staff in services for people with ID (for further details of the study, see Hatton et al. 1998, 1999a,b,c,d). The survey is useful in that it covers a large number of staff working at all levels in services for people with ID. The survey also covers a wide range of factors identified in the previous literature as being associated with turnover amongst staff in services for people with ID.

The results reported here investigate the factors associated with two staff outcomes related to turnover: (1) intention to leave; and (2) actual job search behaviour. Whilst these measures are not always predictive of actual staff turnover (cf. Hatton & Emerson 1993, 1998; Larson et al. 1998), intention to quit is a commonly occurring predictor of actual staff turnover and job search behaviour is an almost universal prerequisite to voluntary turnover.

The present study had two major aims:
1. to investigate empirically which factors are most strongly associated with intention to quit and job search behaviour, and compare the findings with previous research and current organizational models of staff turnover; and
2. to investigate, using path analysis, factors which are both directly and indirectly associated with intention to quit and job search behaviour, to highlight potential points of intervention for organizations.

Subjects and methods

Participants
In the survey as a whole, seven UK services for people with ID were selected for inclusion (Hatton
et al. 1998, 1999a,b,c,d). However, only staff in five of these services received the full survey questionnaire containing items on intention to leave and job search behaviour. Therefore, staff from these five services are treated as the sample for the present study. Most of the five services operated under the aegis of the English National Health Service (NHS), but services varied widely in their geographical location, structure and the nature of the services provided (see Table 1). A total of 1023 survey questionnaires were distributed to staff across the five services. Staff at all levels in services for people with ID were included in the survey, including administrative, domestic, managerial and therapeutic staff. In total, 450 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 44%, a higher figure than usual for postal surveys of this type. A comparison of the job titles of respondents and non-respondents in service 3 revealed no differences between the two groups. Because of guarantees of participant anonymity, no other information on non-respondents was available.

The basic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 2. As Table 2 shows, respondents were fairly typical of staff in UK services for people with ID (see Hatton et al. 1995, 1999b), being on average in their late thirties and largely female; almost half of the sample had dependants. In addition to the information presented in Table 2, 96% of respondents were white, and 71% were married or living as married.

**Measures**

An extensive survey questionnaire was designed to collect information on a range of areas, including

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**Table 1** Characteristics of the five participating services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>Community residential and community teams</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>Community residential</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>Community residential</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Village and community residential and educational</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>Community residential and community teams</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Key: (NHS) National Health Service; and (SSD) Social Security Department.

**Table 2** Characteristics of respondents by job title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Number of staff</th>
<th>Mean age (years)</th>
<th>Sex (percentage female)</th>
<th>Percentage with dependants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unqualified residential/respite staff</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified residential/respite staff</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unqualified support team staff</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified support team staff</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative staff</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic staff</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapists/professionals</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** | 435 | 39 | 79 | 43 |

*Qualified* signifies the possession of a nursing or social work qualification.

†This category includes occupational and speech therapists, clinical and educational psychologists, and teachers.
Factors associated with staff turnover

basic information, aspects of the job, staff perceptions of the organization and staff outcomes (for detailed information on the contents of the questionnaire, see Hatton et al. 1998). The scales from the questionnaire reported in the present paper are:

1. Basic Characteristics of Staff: This section included demographic information (i.e. age, sex, ethnicity, marital status and dependents) and basic aspects of the job (i.e. job title, tenure, contracted and actual hours worked, and fixed-term contract);

2. Job Activities: A 10-item scale adapted from Allen et al. (1990) to make it suitable for staff across a range of jobs;

3. Job Control: A six-item scale (Jackson et al. 1992) used in the UK NHS Workforce Initiative Survey of 12,000 NHS staff (Borrill et al. 1996);

4. Quantitative Workload: A six-item scale used in the NHS Workforce Initiative Survey (Borrill et al. 1996);

5. Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict: A five-item scale and a four-item scale used in previous research concerning staff in services for people with ID (Allen et al. 1990; Hatton et al. 1995) and the NHS Workforce Initiative Survey (Borrill et al. 1996);

6. Job Feedback: A four-item scale from the NHS Workforce Initiative Survey (Borrill et al. 1996);

7. Support from Immediate Supervisor and Support from Colleagues: A six-item scale and a four-item scale from the NHS Workforce Initiative Survey (Borrill et al. 1996);

8. Influence over Work Decisions: A four-item scale from the NHS Workforce Initiative Survey (Borrill et al. 1996);

9. Potential Sources of Stress: A 33-item measure assessing a range of potential stressors developed from previous research concerning staff in services for people with ID (Bersani & Heifetz 1985; Rose 1993; Hatton et al. 1995). These 33 items have been factor analysed into seven subscales, showing adequate psychometric properties (Hatton et al. 1998, 1999d): user challenging behaviour; poor user skills; lack of staff support; lack of resources; low-status job; bureaucracy; and work-home conflict;

10. Actual and Ideal Organizational Culture: Two 54-item measures (O’Reilly et al. 1991) previously used in a small-scale survey of staff in a service for people with ID (Whybrow 1994). This scale has been factor analysed into nine subscales measuring matches between real and ideal organizational culture showing adequate psychometric properties (Hatton et al. 1998, 1999c): tolerant/staff oriented; achievement oriented; innovative; analytical; social relationships; rewarding staff; stable work environment; demanding; and conflict management;

11. Commitment: A 15-item measure that assesses three dimensions of commitment (calculative commitment, alienative commitment and moral commitment to the organization; Penley & Gould 1988), previously used in services for people with ID (Hatton & Emerson 1993);

12. Social Desirability Scale: A 10-item scale, the Marlowe–Crown short-form (Strahan & Gerbasi 1972), previously used with staff in services for people with ID (Hatton & Emerson 1995);

13. Coping Strategies: A 14-item measure producing two scale scores (i.e. wishful thinking and practical coping) developed in previous research for people with ID (Hatton & Emerson 1995);

14. Community Services Orientation: A two-item measure, used in previous research in services for people with ID (Allen et al. 1990; Hatton & Emerson 1993), assessing staff commitment to working in community-based services for people with ID;

15. The GHQ-12: A 12-item measure of general distress (Goldberg 1978) used in the NHS Workforce Initiative Survey (Borrill et al. 1996) and the Health Survey for England (Bennett et al. 1994);

16. Job Strain: A six-item measure of work stress/distress used in the NHS Workforce Initiative Survey (Borrill et al. 1996);

17. Work Satisfaction: A 16-item scale (Hackman & Oldham 1975) used in the NHS Workforce Initiative Survey (Borrill et al. 1996);

18. Intention to Leave: A two-item scale used in previous research in services for people with ID (Allen et al. 1990; Hatton & Emerson 1993, 1995);

19. Job Search Behaviour: defined as the number of jobs applied for in the past 3 months and used in previous research in services for people with ID (Whybrow 1994); and


Procedure
In all five services, survey questionnaires were distributed to all staff members working in the branch of the service concerned with people with ID. Questionnaires were placed in sealed envelopes with a FREEPOST return envelope and a covering letter from the researchers. The covering letter outlined the purpose of the research, explained that all completed questionnaires were confidential, and provided the address and telephone number of the researchers if further help was required. The questionnaires were then distributed to staff through services’ internal postal procedures. Completed questionnaires were returned direct to the Hester Adrian Research Centre, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK, using the FREEPOST envelope provided.

Results
Intention to leave and job search behaviour
Out of the 450 staff, 445 responded to the items concerning intention to leave. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed no significant differences in intention to leave across job titles ($F = 1.62$; d.f. = 7, 423; $P = 0.13$). The mean score on the intention to leave scale (range = 2–10, where 10 indicates high intention to leave) for the 445 staff was 4.90 (SD = 2.31).

A smaller number of staff (327) responded to the item concerning job search behaviour. Out of these 327 staff, only 41 (12.5%) reported applying for another job in the past 3 months. Consequently, job search behaviour was re-coded into a simple dichotomous variable (‘yes’ or ‘no’). A chi-square analysis revealed no significant difference in job search behaviour across job titles ($\chi^2 = 2.39$; d.f. = 7; $P = 0.94$). To investigate the possibility that non-responders on the job search behaviour item were more likely to be intending to leave the organization, an independent samples $t$-test was conducted between the responders and non-responders on the job search behaviour item, using intention to leave as the dependent variable. This showed that responders to the job search behaviour item scored significantly higher on intention to leave than non-responders to the job search behaviour item ($t = 3.17$; d.f. = 443; $P = 0.002$), implying that the majority of non-responders were not concealing actual job search behaviour.

The relationship between intention to leave and job search behaviour was investigated by conducting an independent-samples $t$-test between respondents reporting job search behaviour and those reporting no job search behaviour in the past three months, with intention to leave as the dependent variable. Those reporting job search behaviour scored significantly higher on intention to leave than those reporting no job search behaviour ($t = 10.65$; d.f. = 325; $P < 0.001$). For those reporting job search behaviour, the mean score on intention to leave was 8.24, compared to a score of 4.7 for those reporting no job search behaviour. In addition, a non-parametric Spearman’s rank correlation was conducted between the original job search behaviour measure and intention to leave. This correlation ($r = 0.47$, $n = 327$, $P < 0.001$) showed that the two measures were related but not confounded with each other.

Path analysis
Path analysis (see Asher 1983; Davis 1985) is used to build models from complex systems of variables. The purpose of path analysis is to identify factors that are important influences on the outcome measure of interest, in this case, intention to leave and job search behaviour. Factors can be directly associated with the outcome measure or they can be indirectly associated (i.e. they are strongly associated with a factor which itself is strongly associated with the outcome measure). Path analysis has two major advantages for the purposes of the present study: (1) it restricts the number of variables associated with the outcome measure by selecting those factors most strongly associated with the outcome measure; and (2) path analysis focuses not only on factors directly associated with the outcome, but also allows for the identification of factors with important indirect associations with the outcome. This assists in the building of models of complex organizational systems and provides insight into potential areas of intervention. Path
analytic procedures have been used in previous studies investigating staff performance, well-being and turnover in services for people with ID (Hatton & Emerson 1993; Razza 1993; Hatton et al. 1996).

Path analysis involves the extension of multiple regression techniques, and briefly, involves two steps. The first step is to place independent variables into various blocks, where it is assumed that variables in earlier blocks can have a causal influence on later blocks. Table 3 presents the variables used in the present study into blocks for path analyses. The two outcome measures to be analysed are presented in italic type; only variables in blocks below the outcome measures could be used in the path analysis. Variables were placed into blocks according to common organizational psychology models of stress, satisfaction and turnover in the workplace (Arnold & Feldman 1982; Bluedorn 1982; Michaels & Spector 1982; Fletcher 1988; Frese & Zapf 1988; Arnold et al. 1995).

The second step is to conduct multiple regressions to discover which independent variables are associated (both directly and indirectly) with the outcome measure. The first multiple regression uses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Independent and outcome variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Basic characteristics of staff</td>
<td>Demographics (i.e. age, sex, marital status, ethnicity and dependants) Job title and tenure (in services for people with ID, the organization and the current work location) Community employment orientation Life event in past 6 months Time in months since last holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Basic characteristics of job</td>
<td>Hours (i.e. contracted hours and actual hours) and contractual status (i.e. fixed-term or not) Subjective labour conditions Job activities (e.g. direct interaction with users in service setting, direct interaction with users outside service setting, preparing meals/serving food/clearing away, domestic tasks, administration/paperwork, receiving training, giving training, staff meetings/IPPS, supervising/managing other staff and receiving supervision/feedback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Person–organization relationships</td>
<td>Job control Quantitative workload Role ambiguity Role conflict Job feedback Influence over work decisions Support (e.g. from colleagues or immediate supervisor) Difference between real and ideal organizational culture (e.g. tolerant/staff oriented, achievement oriented, innovative, analytical, social relationships, rewarding staff, stable work environment, demanding and conflict management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Stressors</td>
<td>Stressor (e.g. user challenging behaviour, poor user skills, lack of staff support, lack of resources, low-status job, bureaucracy and work–home conflict)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Commitment and coping</td>
<td>Commitment (i.e. calculative commitment, alienative commitment and moral commitment) Coping strategies (e.g. wishful thinking and practical coping)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stress and satisfaction</td>
<td>General stress (GHQ 12) Job strain Work satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Intended turnover</td>
<td>Intended turnover Job search behaviour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
all the available independent variables to determine which of them is directly associated with the outcome variable of interest. If variables which are directly associated with the outcome measure are themselves not in block 1, then the same procedure is used to find out which variables in earlier blocks are associated with them.

Factors associated with intention to leave

A path analysis was conducted for intention to leave by using the following procedure. Univariate correlations were conducted between intention to leave and all variables in blocks below it. Because of the large sample size, variables correlating significantly \( P < 0.001 \) with intention to leave were entered into a hierarchical stepwise multiple regression, with intention to leave as the dependent variable. Variables which entered into the multiple regression as directly associated with intention to leave \( [P(\text{entry}) < 0.001; P(\text{exit}) > 0.005] \) were then themselves used as the dependent variable in further multiple regressions. Marlowe–Crown (social desirability) scores were forced into the equation before any other variables to control for the effects of social desirability.

For the present study, only a two-step path analysis was conducted (i.e. a regression against intention to leave; then a set of regressions against factors strongly associated with intention to leave): (1) to avoid over-complication in the resulting path analysis diagram to aid interpretation; and (2) continuing beyond two steps results in variables being included in the path analysis which have very tenuous statistical relationships with the outcome measure. These variables are of little utility for model-building or for identifying points of intervention for organizations.

The full details of the multiple regression with intention to leave as the dependent variable are presented in Table 4. As Table 4 shows, four variables were strongly associated with greater intention to leave: less work satisfaction, higher job strain, younger age and easier subjective labour conditions. The regression equation accounted for 37% of the variance in intention to leave scores.

Figure 1 presents the resulting path analysis diagrammatically, including factors indirectly associated with intention to leave (the figures represent beta-values, conceptually similar to correlation coefficients in that the sign represents the direction of the association and the size of the number represents the strength of the association). As Fig. 1 shows, less work satisfaction was strongly associated with: low levels of support from supervisors and colleagues, low influence over work decisions, high stress from being in low status job, high levels of alienative commitment and younger staff age. High job strain was associated with: high use of wishful thinking, high stress associated with lack of staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables in the equation*</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sig T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marlowe–Crown (forced entry)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Strain</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Labour Conditions</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Independent variables not in the final equation: Contracted Hours; Community Employment Orientation; Role Ambiguity; Role Conflict; Job Feedback; Support from Immediate Supervisor; Support from Colleagues; Influence Over Work Decisions; Stressor – Lack of Staff Support; Stressor – Low-Status Job; Stressor – Work–Home Conflict; Organizational Mismatch – Tolerant/Staff Oriented; Organizational Mismatch – Innovative; Organizational Mismatch – Rewarding Staff; Alienative Commitment; Moral Commitment; Wishful Thinking; and General Stress.
support and bureaucracy, high role ambiguity, high alienative commitment and working longer contracted hours. Easier subjective labour conditions were associated with having less community employment orientation and younger staff age.

Factors associated with job search behaviour

A path analysis was conducted for job search behaviour, using the following procedure. Univariate correlations were conducted between job search behaviour and all variables in blocks below it. Because of the large sample size, variables correlating significantly \( P < 0.001 \) with job search behaviour were entered into a logistic regression (since job search behaviour was a dichotomous variable) using the forward stepwise (Wald) procedure, with job search behaviour as the dependent variable. Variables which entered into the logistic regression as directly associated with intention to leave \( P_{\text{entry}} < 0.01; P_{\text{exit}} > 0.05 \) were then themselves used as the dependent variable in further multiple regressions (different significance levels were adopted because of the smaller numbers involved and the difference in statistical procedures).

Marlowe–Crown (social desirability) scores were forced into the equation before any other variables to control for the effects of social desirability. Again, a two-step path analysis was conducted.

The full details of the logistic regression with job search as the dependent variable are presented in Table 5. As Table 5 shows, three variables were strongly associated with job search behaviour: less work satisfaction, higher job strain and easier subjective labour conditions. The logistic regression correctly classified 88% of cases using the regression equation.

Figure 2 presents the resulting path analysis diagrammatically, including factors indirectly associated with job search behaviour. The path

Adj \( R^2 = 0.37 \)
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Table 5 Logistic regression with job search behaviour as the dependent variable (correct classification = 88%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables in the equation*</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marlowe–Crown (forced entry)</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Strain</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>7.78</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Labour Conditions</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>8.64</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Independent variables not in the final equation: Age; Job Control; Role Conflict; Stressor – Poor User Skills; Stressor – Low-Status Job; Organizational Mismatch – Achievement Oriented; Alienative Commitment; and General Stress.

Figure 2 Path analysis for job search behaviour.

Correct classification = 88%
Discussion

The present study identified a number of factors directly and indirectly associated with intended turnover and job search behaviour. Four factors were directly associated with intended turnover: work satisfaction, job strain, younger staff age and easier subjective labour conditions. Factors directly associated with job search behaviour were identical, with the exception that younger staff age was not directly associated with job search behaviour.

As the factors directly associated with the staff outcomes were so similar, factors indirectly associated with both intended turnover and job search behaviour were identical. Factors associated with job strain were the coping strategy of wishful thinking, stressors associated with bureaucracy and lack of staff support, role ambiguity, working longer contracted hours, and alienative commitment to the organization. Alienative commitment was also negatively associated with work satisfaction, along with the stressor of having a low-status job, a lack of influence over decisions at work, a lack of support from both colleagues and supervisors, and younger staff age. Easier subjective labour conditions were associated with younger staff age and less orientation to working in community settings with people with ID.

Before discussing the results further, it is important to bear in mind some limitations of the present study. In common with most postal surveys, the issue of sampling arises. Although a response rate of 44% is respectable for a postal survey, there is still the possibility that non-respondents differed systematically from respondents. In addition, only 73% of respondents answered the specific item on job search behaviour, although this did not appear to be as a result of concealment of likely job search behaviour. Secondly, this survey was correlational in design, limiting its utility for causal model building.

Thirdly, because of UK cultural norms, information on the income of staff was not directly requested, although the stressor ‘low-status job’ includes a low income component. Finally, the present study could only measure intended turnover and job search behaviour rather than actual staff turnover at a later time point, and factors associated with intended turnover may not be the same as factors associated with actual turnover (Hatton & Emerson 1993, 1998; Larson et al. 1998).

Bearing these limitations in mind, the findings of the current study appear to confirm, clarify and extend the results of previous research concerning staff turnover in community-based services for people with ID. The findings of the current study are also in line with general organizational research concerning staff turnover (Larson et al. 1998) and current models of staff turnover (Arnold & Feldman 1982; Bluedorn 1982; Michaels & Spector 1982). Four of the factors cited in previous research were directly associated with intended turnover (and three of these with job search behaviour): low work satisfaction (cf. Hatton & Emerson 1993; Razza 1993); high job strain (cf. Razza 1993); younger staff age (cf. Allen et al. 1990; Askvig & Vassiliou 1991, cited in Larson et al. 1998; Lakin & Bruininks 1981, cited in Larson et al. 1998); and easier subjective labour conditions (cf. Larson et al. 1998). Two factors cited in previous research were indirectly associated with intended turnover and job search behaviour: lack of commitment to the organization (cf. Larson et al. 1998); and lack of staff support (cf. Hatton & Emerson 1993; Razza 1993; Bachelder & Braddock 1994, cited in Larson et al. 1998). Levels of income were not measured directly in the present study (although the variable stressor ‘low-status job’ is partly concerned with low income), suggesting that low income is potentially associated with turnover. Finally, expectations in the present study were assessed through mismatches between aspects of real and ideal organizational culture. These mismatches were not directly or indirectly associated with aspects of intended turnover, although they may be more directly related to staff well-being (Hatton et al. 1999c).

The present study clearly confirms the findings of previous research, while also clarifying some of the inconsistencies across individual studies. First, studies have varied in the extent to which potentially important factors influencing turnover have been included, resulting in omissions of important
Factors in proposed models of staff turnover. Secondly, the majority of studies have only focused on factors directly associated with staff turnover, resulting in the omission of important factors which are indirectly associated with staff turnover. Thirdly, it is worth noting that the models presented here did not account for the majority of the variance in intended turnover or correctly classify all cases of job search behaviour. There are clearly other factors involved in staff turnover which need to be considered.

The present study also extends the findings of previous research. First, it is clear that specific job strain, rather than general stress, is most important for intended staff turnover (cf. Hatton et al. 1995; Hatton 1999). Secondly, it is evident from the present study that a specific form of negative commitment to the organization, namely alienative commitment (i.e. feeling trapped in a poor organization), is more important for staff turnover than a lack of positive commitment to the organization. Thirdly, this study demonstrates that both job strain and work satisfaction are important factors for intended turnover, providing further support for the idea that they are separate constructs rather than the opposite poles of a continuum (cf. Arnold et al. 1995; Hatton 1999). Fourthly, the present study shows the utility of investigating all staff in an organization, rather than simply direct care staff. This study found no differences in intended turnover or job search behaviour across job titles, and also found that individual job titles were rarely associated directly or indirectly with intended turnover or job search behaviour. Although more detailed studies of particular job types are clearly required, the present study suggests that general organizational models of turnover may hold throughout organizations. Finally, this study highlights the importance of moving beyond factors directly associated with staff turnover, to considering more complex models of turnover in services for people with ID (cf. Hatton & Emerson 1993; Razza 1993). Such models are of potentially greater utility for identifying points of intervention for organizations.

The findings of the present study suggest a number of points for intervention by organizations wishing to reduce staff turnover, from individual services to district, state and national planners, and commissioners of services. First, younger staff are clearly more likely to be considering leaving the organization. Whether this is because younger staff are less committed to this area of work, find less satisfaction in the area of work or are simply more mobile is as yet unknown (cf. Larson et al. 1998). Organizations may consider: recruiting and retaining older staff to the service (possibly through the provision of more flexible working practices; Hatton et al. 1998); providing additional induction training and support to younger staff recruited to the service; and improving recruitment procedures to ensure that staff have realistic expectations of the job and that staff are committed to this area of work (cf. Larson et al. 1998).

Secondly, local economic circumstances clearly have an impact on intended turnover (cf. Hui 1988; Larson et al. 1998). There is obviously little that organizations can do about local economies, although organizations can work to bolster a positive commitment to the area of work, and work hard to ensure that pay and conditions are favourable compared with potential alternative employment.

Thirdly, workplace stress (job strain) clearly is important for staff turnover. Organizations can attempt to reduce job strain by: fostering appropriate practical coping strategies in staff, rather than wishful thinking; encouraging a positive commitment to the organization; making staff roles clear; increasing the support available to staff; considering streamlining bureaucratic procedures where this is consistent with service quality; and possibly restricting the contracted hours which staff can work (cf. Hatton et al. 1998; Hatton 1999). Clearly, many of these considerations are a challenge to community-based services, where staff frequently work alone for very long shifts.

Finally, in addition to reducing staff stress, organizations can also consider steps to improve job satisfaction. Support from other staff (both colleagues and supervisors) is important here, as is fostering a positive commitment to the organization, and increasing the control which staff have, both over their own jobs (thus increasing the skills of staff) and over the decisions which are made in the organization (thus improving the likelihood of decisions being implemented and increasing the positive commitment of staff to the organization).
Reducing staff turnover in services for people with ID is clearly a major challenge for organizations. Research in this field is now at a point where major factors influencing staff turnover are being consistently identified across studies, services and countries. Researchers and organizations need to come together, to conduct and evaluate organizational interventions aimed at reducing staff turnover (cf. Larson et al. 1998). Such action research is required over the next decade if organizations are to be equipped with the tools to reduce staff turnover, to the benefit of everyone in services for people with ID.

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References


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