

## **Organizational Commitment and Intention to Leave among Nurses in Malaysian Public Hospitals**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigates the relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave among nurses in Malaysian public hospitals and it focuses on public hospital nurses in Peninsular Malaysia. Results of analysis confirmed that organizational commitment was significantly and negatively related to intention to leave and the results were a crucial consideration enabling management and employers attain ample understanding and guidelines if they were to draft retention strategies. Even though many studies had been conducted on intention to leave, most of them were conducted in developed countries. Thus, this study is believed to enhance the literature gap since it has an emphasis on the Malaysian context.*

**Key words:** intention to leave, organizational commitment, public hospital nurses

### **1. Introduction**

Intention to leave is not a new issue. In fact, there have been abundant studies on intention to leave. However, at a time when nursing shortage has become a global issue (Buchan & Calman, 2004) and a serious problem in the vast majority of post-industrialized countries (Galletta, Portoghese & Battistelli, 2011), the issue seems to be relevant and still needs special attention. In many developing countries, the situation is worsening as many trained nurses hop over to the private sector or leave their own countries to serve in developed countries due to better salaries and benefits.

The shortage of nurses has become a critical issue all over the world. The situation is worsening, especially in poor- resource countries, whereby many trained nurses hop over to the private sector or leave their own countries to serve in foreign countries due to better offers and benefits. To mitigate the problem of employees' turnover in the nursing field, some researchers suggested that it was better for employers to examine nurses' intention to leave instead of studying turnover itself.

There are many reasons that contributed to workers' intention to leave. However, this paper would only focus on one of the most prominent variables - organizational commitment and its relationship with intention to leave.

### **2. Literature Review**

In studying turnover and shortage in certain professions, recent decades have witnessed an increasing interest in understanding why employees leave (Van der Heijden, Van Dam & Hasselhorn, 2009). However, knowing the reasons for leaving is too late to stop the actual leaving and detecting the presence of intention to leave feeling is said to be better in supporting the effort to prevent or minimize employees' leaving. In fact, voluntary turnover is said to be best predicted by employee's intention to leave (Price, 2000). Thus, further understanding and investigation of the existence of the intention to leave feeling is crucial.

It is important to know the signals to turnover by studying the employees' intention to leave so that necessary preparation and preventive action can be taken. Consequently, this study proceeds with the aim to examine the relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave among Malaysian public hospital nurses.

## **2.1 Intention to leave**

Turnover and intention to leave are two different concepts. Intention to leave involves an individual's perception towards leaving while turnover involves the act of an individual actually leaving the organization or profession (Hinshaw & Atwood, 1984). An employee is said to have intention to leave when he or she has serious consideration to leave his or her current job (Castle, 2007). The literature also suggests that intention to leave could be split into three stages: thinking about quitting, intention to search for another job and intention to quit (Falkenburg & Schyns, 2007)

Many studies on intention to leave have been conducted to examine intention to leave and factors relating to intention to leave in various fields. Many researchers have attempted to answer the questions of what really determines employees' intention to leave by investigating possible antecedents of employees' intention to leave. However, to date, there is no standard reason why employees leave an organization or profession (Ongori, 2007) and there has been little consistency in the findings to the question of what really determines employees' intention to leave.

## **2.2 Organizational Commitment and Intention to Leave**

Literature research shows that studies on organizational commitment have increased and are continuously gaining importance among researchers all over the world. This is because more and more organizations realize that human resources are their most valuable assets and having loyal and committed employees can ensure that they would stay competitive and survive. In fact, some articles do mention that organizations cannot perform efficiently and effectively without committed employees. This kind of employees will also enhance the organizational competitiveness and guarantee the survival of the organizations (Ongori, 2007). In short it is a valuable bonus for the company to have employees with a high level of organizational commitment. These highly-committed employees would feel that they owe so much to the organization and in return, they would be less likely to leave.

Organizational commitment is said to be an important variable in the discussion of intention to leave since it is a popular belief that the more committed the employee is the more likely he or she will stay loyal to the organization. In other words, it is less likely that he or she will leave for another job or organization. The statement is supported by the study of Slattery and Selvarajan (2005). In their study, they found that organizational commitment is negatively associated with turnover intention.

Results of some other studies also showed that more committed employees would be less likely to leave an organization (Nogueras, 2006; Simmons, 2005; Larkey et al., 1995). This is also supported by some local researchers (Ishak Ismail, 2006; Zulkifli Kassim, 1997; Mohd Fikri, 1997) who found that the higher the degree of commitment among employees, the less likely they would express the intention to leave. In fact, organizational commitment is found to be critical (Khatri et al., 2001) and has a negative correlation with turnover intention (Rahman, Naqvi & Ramay, 2008).

## **2.3 Problem Statement**

Proper staffing and a stable nursing workforce will ensure the quality of nursing care received by patients and the quality of the health-care system. Thus, having a sufficient number of nurses who are experienced, talented and skilled is important. However, many articles and journals have discussed the nursing shortage, which has become a global issue. The existing and predicted national and global shortage of nurses would surely bring negative impact on society's health-care needs. The shortage at the national and international level is exacerbated when nurses, especially from the public sector, are lured by offers from private hospitals or even foreign hospitals (Ministry of Health, 2008; Missouri State Nursing Board, 2008). Thus in this situation, it is a valuable bonus for the organization to have employees with high level of organizational commitment; they would give full support, effort and cooperation to the organization and would be less likely to leave.

## **2.4 Research Objectives**

The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave among nurses in Malaysian public hospitals.

## **2.5 Hypotheses**

Based on literature research, this study hypothesizes that:

- H1: Organizational commitment is negatively related to intention to leave
- H1a: Affective commitment is negatively related to intention to Leave
- H1b: Normative commitment is negatively related to intention to leave
- H1c: Continuance commitment is negatively related to intention to leave

## **3. Methodology**

The data were collected using a structure questionnaire. Most of the questions used in the survey were based on established existing instruments with some alterations and modifications to the original question made to suit the study due to cultural factors and practice. The questions used in this study applied multi-item approach where a few questions were asked under one particular variable. These questions were grouped under three major sections. Section A measures respondents' level of organizational commitment, Section B measures the respondents' intention to leave and Section C requires the respondents to provide their demographic data.

Prior to the distribution of questionnaires, the ethical approval for the study and its method was first obtained. Since this study involved nurses working at public hospitals as the respondents, permission and approval were obtained from the Malaysian Ministry of Health and a few other important related institutions such as the Malaysian Research Ethical Committee (MREC), National Institute of Health (NIH) and the respective hospitals.

Seven hundreds questions were distributed and 436 were returned which then gave 62.3% overall response rate. A total of 398 questionnaires were usable. The respondents consist of 395 females and 3 males. Of that number, 360 respondents were Malays, 18 respondents were Chinese, 18 respondents were Indians and 2 respondents were others.

### **3.1 Population, Sample and Sample Size**

Nurses who are working permanently in public hospitals were the population sample of this study. They were chosen as the sample since this group of workers was said to be more likely to opt for offers from private health institutions (News Straits Times, 2007) or even accept offers to serve overseas (Ministry of Health, 2004 ; Missouri State Nursing Board, 2008). As of March 2008, there were about 75,000 active nurses serving in public hospitals in Malaysia (Ministry of Health, 2008). According to Sekaran (2003), if the size of the population is 75,000, the sample size (S), should be 382. However, 700 sets of questions were delivered at the selected hospitals, considering that the response rate would not be 100 percent.

### **3.2 Measurements**

To measure the three types of organizational commitment of the respondents: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment, The Revised Scale of TCM (Three-Component Model Employee Commitment Survey) by Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993) was used. While to measure the respondents' intention to leave, The Anticipated Turnover Scale (ATS) which was developed by Hinshaw and Atwood (1984) was applied. All the questions used were rated on a seven point scale (Likert Scale) ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

For data analysis, the responses were keyed into SPSS and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, min, mean and standard deviation to show trends in the data. Correlation analysis and hypothesis testing were then conducted by applying SPSS Pearson Correlation and SPSS macro which was provided by Preacher and Hayes (2009).

### 3.4 Validity and Reliability

Principal Components Analysis (PCA) factor loadings show whether items are actually measuring what they should measure. Items with larger factor loadings provide better measures of the underlying property than do items with smaller factor loadings. As suggested by Hair (1998), loadings are considered significant if they are 0.50 or greater (Manning and Munro, 2004). The questions used in this study were considered valid since all the questions fell under their respective dimensions. As for reliability, if the variable has internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of at least 0.60 (Nunally, 1978) or 0.50 (Smith and Glass, 1987) the measurement is sufficient and reliable for research purposes. The Cronbach's Alpha for all dimensions in this study were all well above 0.50.

### 4. Findings and Discussion

Out of 700 questionnaires distributed, 436 were returned which then gave 62.3% overall response rate. However, only 398 responses were usable. The respondents' demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 : Respondents' Profiles**

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	3	0.8
	Female	395	99.2
Age	Below 25 years	32	8
	26 – 30 years	87	21.90
	31 – 35 years	68	17.10
	36 – 40 years	66	16.60
	41 – 45 years	29	7.30
	46 – 50 years	39	9.80
	More than 50 years	77	19.30
Race	Malay	360	90.50
	Chinese	18	4.50
	Indian	18	4.50
	Others	2	0.50
Marital Status	Married	349	87.70
	Unmarried	38	9.50
	Divorced, Separated,	11	2.80
	Widowed		
Level of Education	MCE/HSC	89	22.40
	Certificate	38	9.50
	Diploma	258	63.60
	Degree	16	4
	Master	2	0.50
Level of Income	Less than RM 1500	18	4.50
	RM1501 – RM 2500	167	42
	RM2501 – RM 3500	161	40.5
	RM3501 – RM 4500	43	10.80
	Above RM 4500	9	2.30
Organisational Tenure	Less than 1 years	78	19.60
	1 – 3 years	86	21.60
	4 – 6 years	70	17.60
	7 – 9 years	37	9.30
	10 – 12 years	40	10.10
	13 – 15 years	42	10.60
	More than 15 years	45	11.30

n=398

Literature suggests that there is a significant relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave the organization (Labatmediene at al., 2007). In fact, a recent review shows a strong relationship between organizational commitment and both job performance and employee turnover.

Employees with a higher level of organizational commitment tend to be better performers and would stay longer with the organization (Bernadin, 2010).

Table 2 depicts that the direct effect coefficient for organizational commitment on intention to leave which is about 0.137 (negative) and p value 0.040. The figures (coefficient value was negative and p value < 0.05) clearly show that organizational commitment has significantly negative relationship with intention to leave. Thus, the results supported hypothesis 1 (organizational commitment is negatively related to intention to leave). The result is also consistent with many previous results (Rahman, Naqvi & Ramay, 2008; Labatmediene et al., 2007; Slattery & Selvarajan, 2005; Nogueras, 2006). Blin et al. (1991) also found a significant relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave. With those arguments and statistical findings, it is confirmed that organizational commitment has a significant negative relationship with intention to leave feeling among nurses who are working in public hospitals in this country.

**Table 2: Results of Estimating the Direct Effect of Organizational Commitment on Intention to Leave**

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Total/Overall Organizational Commitment	-0.137	-2.058	0.040*
Affective Commitment	-0.208	-3.920	0.000*
Continuance Commitment	0.068	1.557	0.120
Normative Commitment	-0.012	-0.249	0.804

\* Significant at 0.05 significance level

The results for estimating the direct effect for all the three dimensions of organizational commitment (affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment) found that only one dimension of organizational commitment has a significantly negative relationship with intention to leave ( $p < 0.05$ ) which is affective commitment. Normative commitment also shows a negative relationship with intention to leave but not significant (coefficient = -0.0121,  $t = -0.249$ ,  $p = 0.804$ ). Whereas the continuance dimension shows a positive relationship with intention to leave, even though it is not significant ( $t = 1.557$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The results supported hypothesis H1b; however they did not support H1a and H1c. The results of this study contradict the results of Dunham's et al. (1994) whereby they found that normative commitment is positively related to intention to leave while continuance commitment is negatively related to intention to leave. The difference in the findings might be due to sample and setting. It also suggests that there might be a need to refine the measures to suit samples and settings (Labatmediene et al., 2007).

## 5. Conclusion

Organizational commitment is said to be a significant issue to be looked into since it is a popular belief that the more committed employee is, the more likely he or she will stay loyal to the organization. The findings of the study regarding organizational commitment mirrored the previous findings in that it revealed a significantly negative relationship with intention to leave. However, as for the individual dimension of organizational commitment, only affective commitment was found to be significantly and negatively related to intention to leave among Malaysian public hospital nurses; continuance commitment and normative commitment were found to be not significantly and negatively related to intention to leave among Malaysian public hospital nurses. This study extends past literature in the area of intention to leave in such a way that it provides empirical evidence and helps to increase the understanding of the relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave especially in Malaysian context.

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