

Should I Stay or Should I go? Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intent of Jail Staff Throughout the United States

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Abstract

Research on turnover in the correctional workplace has predominately focused on investigating the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intent among prison staff. In an effort to broaden that level of inquiry to encompass the jail workforce, this study analyzes data from a national survey of 1,924 line-level jail staff to assess the impact of both work-related variables and personal characteristics on the intention of employees to resign. Although not randomly generated, respondents represent 46 states and are generally reflective of what is known about composition of the national line officer jail workforce in terms of demographics. Descriptive results indicate that the majority of jail officers are satisfied with their jobs and have no intention of quitting. Further logistic regression modeling confirms related literature indicating that the most influential variables are dynamic factors such as job satisfaction and work environment, rather than the static variables associated with individual employee characteristics, such as gender, age, or race. Since the environmental variables investigated are amenable to change, it would appear that, with greater insights into these dynamic precursors of thoughts about quitting, jail administrators can develop strategic initiatives targeted toward proactively reducing the fiscal cost and intangible impact of voluntary turnover.

Keywords

jail staff, turnover, quitting, retention, job satisfaction, corrections

Introduction

Like their counterparts throughout public service, American jails are confronting unprecedented challenges as they struggle to cope with increasing demands in the face of declining resources.

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Unlike many other agencies, however, jails reflect a high-profile target for cost cutting. Since correctional expenditures typically consume a substantial slice of government's shrinking fiscal pie, jails represent a sizeable economic burden to many counties (Kieckbusch, Price, & Theis, 2003). Coupled with the reality of greater public support for the law enforcement component of county sheriffs' offices, it is tempting for elected officials to neglect the jail in favor of the visible patrol functions that are more likely to generate votes (Stinchcomb, 2011). Thus, when a recessionary economy dramatically diminishes local tax revenues, jails can become a tempting target for reducing deficit spending.

When deciding where to make painful cutbacks, it is logical to focus on the largest line item. Just as jails account for a sizeable portion of county costs, labor accounts for the largest percentage of the operating budgets of America's jails—75–80% by one estimate (Scott-Hayward, 2009, p. 2). Controlling personnel expenditures thus becomes one of the only fiscal options jail administrators have for substantially reducing expenditures. Yet most labor costs consist of contractually binding items such as salaries and benefits, leaving administrators without the fiscal flexibility necessary to achieve significant labor-related cost savings. There is, however, at least one discretionary aspect of personnel expenditures that is capable of reducing costs without violating either contractual provisions or legislative mandates—that is, employee turnover. While voluntary staff turnover is not a specific line-item entry on a jail's balance sheet, there is little doubt that its repercussions are expensive—in terms of not only immediate replacement costs but also the immeasurable impact on everything from employee morale and productivity to organizational stability.

Jails are hardly alone in the struggle to curtail voluntary resignations. Reducing employee turnover and its related cost has become a concern for any correctional agency struggling to cope with fiscal shortfalls but is perhaps most challenging for America's jails—where the unnecessary loss of even a few employees can produce a disproportionate impact, given the relatively small staff size of most jails. Moreover, unplanned departures are particularly problematic for agencies that may not provide competitive compensation, enjoy the benefits of a positive public image, or engage in the types of work that most people would prefer to do. Viewed in that light, it may not be surprising to find that corrections has historically been plagued by relatively high levels of turnover (American Correctional Association and Workforce Associates, Inc., 2004; Bynum, 2006; Clem, Krauth, & Wenger, 2000; Yearwood, 2003), nationally estimated at 16–20% annually (Lambert & Hogan, 2009, p. 97; Nink, 2010, p. 1, primarily reflecting prison data). Since over half of America's jails are small facilities housing less than 100 inmates (Sabol & Minton, 2008, p. 2), even losing several employees from such a limited workforce can have sizeable fiscal and operational implications.

The direct costs of turnover are most obvious—including, for example, the chronic staff shortages and mandatory overtime that are suffered while renewed efforts are mounted to recruit, test, select, and train another round of new staff members (Gibbons & Katzenbach, 2006, p. 71; Kieckbusch et al., 2003; Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Stohr, Self, & Lovrich, 1992). The total can add up to some \$20,000 for every correctional officer who leaves (Lommel, Layman, & Raleigh, 2004), and that includes only the overt costs. Less apparent are the more indirect costs—such as the dispiriting impact of watching valued employees leave, the stress of taking up their workload, the loss of cultivated social relationships (Mitchell, MacKenzie, Styve, & Gover, 2000), and the tension of integrating inexperienced newcomers into the organizational culture (Lambert, 2001). Certainly, the most direct fiscal costs are reflected in the agency's "bottom line," but the more subtle emotional, interpersonal, and stress-related costs can become even more organizationally damaging, especially in the absence of efforts to identify and address causal factors.

There may be little that jail administrators can do about antiquated facilities, insufficient funding, overcrowded cellblocks, or diverse and demanding inmate populations ranging from illegal immigrants to the mentally ill. Under such conditions, the relevant question may be not why so many employees leave, but rather, why so many stay. Nevertheless, there is at least one aspect of voluntary

turnover that may well be amenable to administrative intervention. According to the limited jail-related literature on this topic, employees who are more satisfied with their jobs are less inclined to leave (Byrd, Cochran, Silverman, & Blount, 2000; Lambert & Paoline, 2010), not unlike their counterparts in such related correctional settings as prisons and juvenile facilities (e.g., Dennis, 1998; Lambert, 2006; Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2000). However, these studies were based on samples of employees from either a single correctional system or a small number of jurisdictions.

To date, the potential relationship between job satisfaction and voluntary turnover intent has not been examined on a national scale. The purpose of this article is therefore to undertake that examination, using survey data provided by 1,924 line-level jail employees from throughout the country. Hence, this study fills two current voids in the literature: (1) the need for more research concerning *turnover in jails*, which have been characterized as “critically understudied” (Lambert & Paoline, 2010, p. 145); and (2) the need for a large national database of jail personnel to empirically test previous findings linking job satisfaction and voluntary turnover in correctional settings. In response to these existing shortcomings, the primary research question addressed in this study is, what impact does job satisfaction have on the intention of jail employees to quit? In seeking answers, relevant survey research on turnover intent and its correlates is reviewed, which then serves as a theoretical foundation for empirically testing related hypotheses, discussing relevant findings, and exploring their implications.

Literature Review

The focus of this article is on voluntary turnover in jails, but jail-specific research on turnover intent is somewhat limited. Thus, the literature review was expanded to incorporate studies of employee turnover and job satisfaction in other correctional settings, as well as research related to definitions of turnover and job satisfaction from public administration, business, and industry.

When examining voluntary turnover, researchers have largely focused on the antecedent concept of turnover intent (e.g., Lambert & Paoline, 2010; Price, Kieckbusch, & Theis, 2007), which is the cognitive process of thinking about, planning, and desiring to leave a job (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). Hence, the literature has primarily addressed the intent to quit, rather than the actual act of quitting. By understanding what motivates such preliminary thought processes, administrators have the opportunity to “institute changes to affect this intention,” which is a more pragmatic approach, since once an employee has left, “there is little the employer can do except assume the expense of hiring and training another employee” (Dalessio, Silverman, & Schuck, 1986, p. 261). Likewise, the intention to quit was also used as the measure of voluntary turnover in this article.

Certainly, few employees who are satisfied on the job and content with their work environment would be expected to give thoughts to leaving. While job satisfaction is a somewhat abstract concept whose description varies throughout the literature, it appears that most researchers have adapted some variation of Cranny, Smith, and Stone’s (1992) definition, “an affective response by an individual concerning his or her job that results from a comparison of actual outcomes with those that are expected, wanted, and needed” (Griffin, Hogan, Lambert, Tucker-Gail, & Baker, 2010, p. 242). In other words, job dissatisfaction can perhaps best be described as the disillusionment resulting from the gap between what the employee expects and what the organization has to offer.

Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intent

Over the past several decades, correctional literature has clearly demonstrated that dissatisfied employees intend to quit their jobs more frequently than their satisfied peers (Byrd et al., 2000;

Dennis, 1998; Jurik & Winn, 1987; Lambert, 2006; Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Lambert & Paoline, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2000; Stohr et al., 1992). Additionally, job satisfaction has been documented as a main predictor of voluntary employee turnover in other disciplines as well (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Mobley et al., 1979; Price, 1977; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Trevor, 2001).

Specific to criminal justice, a number of studies have established causal linkages between job satisfaction and voluntary turnover. For example, while controlling for the influence of a variety of sociodemographic and work-related experiential variables, Byrd et al. (2000) found that job dissatisfaction was the strongest predictor of a detention officer's inclination to quit his or her job. In a study of turnover among juvenile correctional employees, it was likewise determined that job satisfaction had a greater impact on turnover intent than stress, work environment, or personal characteristics, concluding that "employees who reported more job satisfaction . . . expressed fewer intentions to leave their positions" (Mitchell et al., 2000, p. 352).

Additionally, when turnover intent among state correctional staff was studied, job satisfaction was determined to be more influential than such variables as job involvement, work-related stress, organizational commitment, work environment, or personal characteristics—that is, "workers who are happy with their overall jobs have less reason to leave" (Lambert, 2006, p. 75).

Consistent with these results, studies of turnover intent in a maximum security private prison (Lambert & Hogan, 2009), as well as among staff at a Florida jail (Lambert & Paoline, 2010), uncovered a significant inverse relationship—that is, "as job satisfaction increased, turnover intent dropped" (Lambert & Paoline, 2010, p. 145). In fact, throughout this literature review, only one study was located that did not fully corroborate the aforementioned research. Even in that investigation of federal prison employee turnover, however, an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intent was found, although it was not significant (Camp, 1994).

Overall, the vast majority of correctional studies support a statistically significant association between job satisfaction and turnover intent. Building on such a solid empirical foundation, the primary hypothesis tested in this study is that jail employees who are satisfied with their job are less likely to have intentions to quit than those who are not satisfied with their jobs. If this relationship does, in fact, exist as hypothesized, it follows that the next logical avenue of inquiry would be to determine how the work environment is associated with dissatisfaction on the job and related thoughts about looking elsewhere for better employment opportunities. Another branch of the literature on this topic has therefore explored the impact of work environment on job satisfaction and thoughts about quitting.

Work Environment and Turnover Intent

Inasmuch as the term work environment itself is a multidimensional concept, a wide variety of measures related to it have been addressed in the literature—including everything from the pressures of working with inmates to perceptions of managerial fairness, respect for leadership, relationships with supervisors, nature of interpersonal communications, democracy of decision-making processes, and even physical attributes of the workplace (see e.g., Castle, 2008; Garland, McCarty, & Zhao, 2009; Griffin, 2001; Lambert & Hogan, 2002; Slate & Vogel, 1997; Taxman & Gordon, 2009). A review of each of these varied dimensions of the literature is beyond both the scope and the relevance of this study, in light of the fact that these specific operational aspects of the work environment are not addressed in the measures employed herein. It is nevertheless noteworthy that other more extensive reviews of the work environment in correctional settings (e.g., Lambert, 2006; Lambert & Hogan, 2009) justify its inclusion as one of several independent variables that can help to explain intentions to voluntarily leave jail employment.

In addition to its multidimensionality, the theoretical nature of the concept of work environment is further complicated by its foundation in the psychological perceptions of individual workers

(Schneider, 1975). Since what may be viewed as a positive aspect of the work environment by one employee may not be perceived with equal enthusiasm by others, the personalized lens through which this variable is viewed prohibits the development of a uniformly standardized measure of it. As a result, work environment has been operationalized as a reflection of variables ranging from such negatively charged issues as role conflict (Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985) and job stress (Auerbach, Quick, & Pegg, 2003) to more positive features such as peer support (Grossi & Berg, 1991) and promotional opportunities (Jurik & Halemba, 1984), among many others. Using multidimensional indices, work environment has also been measured in terms of organizational structure, supervisory support, job characteristics, and various combinations of relationships with inmates, coworkers, and managerial staff (e.g., Griffin, 2001; Saylor & Wright, 1992). While much of this research has reported some explanatory value, these studies are largely based on the hypothesis that characteristics such as good supervisory support, positive relationships with managers and coworkers, and the like produce the type of work environment that protects against job dissatisfaction and turnover. In this study, the index employed to measure work environment is therefore operationalized as a reflection of positive feelings about the workplace, having input into decision making, being treated fairly, and enjoying good supervisory relationships.

Salary/Benefits and Turnover Intent

Although working in a positive organizational environment might be an influential retention factor, the potential impact of such variables as salary and benefits cannot be dismissed. In that context, their relevance is not so much related to the finite amount of compensation or the fiscal value of benefits. Rather, the fundamental issue is one's estimated worth in terms of the extent to which employees believe their compensation package is equitably matched to their perceived self-worth—which is how salary and benefits have been operationalized throughout much of the literature, as well as in this study.

Surprisingly few studies, however, have included salary and/or benefits among the independent variables investigated, and findings have been inconsistent. While no relationship between job satisfaction and compensation has been reported in some studies (e.g., Camp and Steiger, 1995; Hepburn & Knepper, 1993), others have found salary-related perceptions to be positively associated with job satisfaction (Lambert, 2004). Nevertheless, it makes intuitive sense to hypothesize that jail employees who believe they receive appropriate compensation/benefits are less likely to harbor intentions to quit than their counterparts.

Employee-Related Independent Variables

Beyond job satisfaction and conditions in the work environment, a variety of personal variables could potentially serve as predictors of turnover intent. While their significance varies from study to study, most research on this subject has included such individual characteristics as age, gender, race, education, and job tenure (e.g., Byrd et al., 2000; Kiebusch et al., 2003; Lambert, 2006; Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Lambert & Paoline, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2000; Price et al., 2007; Tipton, 2002). With the exception of education, however, most of these variables appear to have produced either negligible or ambiguous results.

Although some previous studies have indicated that non-white correctional officers tend to have higher levels of turnover intent than white officers (Jacobs & Gear, 1977; Jurik & Winn, 1987), more recent research suggested that race does not significantly impact turnover intent when work environment and job attitudes are included in the analysis (Lambert & Paoline, 2010).

As might be expected in light of their minority status in the male-dominated correctional culture, some studies have shown that women have higher turnover rates than men (Camp, 1994; Lambert,

2006; Slate & Vogel, 1997; Tipton, 2002). More recently, however, no statistically significant relationship was found between gender and turnover intent (Lambert & Paoline, 2010).

While several studies have reported positive correlations between age and job satisfaction (Blau, Light, & Chamlin, 1986; Camp & Steiger, 1995), others have found that this relationship holds only for certain types of employees, such as women or those in particular job assignments (e.g., Griffin, 2001). A review of the overall literature failed to uncover any significant age-related differences.

Previous research points toward staff education as potentially influencing turnover intent in two ways. First, employees with higher levels of education have greater external employment prospects and are therefore more likely to quit than those with fewer job options (Lambert, 2006; Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2000). Second, employees with higher levels of education may also have elevated expectations of their workplace that are not realized, which can lead to frustration and disillusionment (Jurik, Halemba, Musheno, & Boyle, 1987). Indeed, education has been found to be negatively correlated with job satisfaction in a number of studies of correctional officers (e.g., Cullen et al., 1985; Jurik et al., 1987; Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986), although one study did fail to confirm this relationship (Rogers, 1991). Regardless of the reasons, it would appear that higher education can be expected to be positively correlated with turnover intentions (Lambert & Paoline, 2010; Robinson, Porporino, & Simourd, 1997).

Depending on the study, various researchers have reported job tenure to be either negatively or positively related to turnover intent (Byrd et al., 2000; Kieckbusch et al., 2003; Lambert, 2006; Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Lambert & Paoline, 2010; Price et al., 2007; Tipton, 2002). Yet these apparent contradictions are not as incongruous as they might initially appear to be. On one hand, the longer workers remain with an organization, the more investments they will have accrued in the form of seniority rights, pay increments, social contacts, and retirement vestiture—the cumulative impact of which makes it more difficult to voluntarily leave (Lambert, 2006; Lambert & Paoline, 2010). On the other hand, however, working in such a demanding environment as corrections can take a long-term toll in the form of burnout, wherein workers experience “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment” (Griffin et al., 2010, p. 240), which can ultimately lead to voluntary turnover.

Building on the foundation established by this body of research, the present study includes race, gender, and age in an exploratory manner only, but hypothesizes that tenure and education were expected to be positively associated with intentions to quit. In other words, it is anticipated that those with higher levels of education and/or greater longevity on the job think about quitting more often. Overall, this study is a test of the relationship between turnover intent and job satisfaction among jail employees, while controlling for the potential influence of both personal characteristics and work-related variables.

Methodology

The database of line-level jail employees used for this study was created using the National Jail Workforce Survey, which was conducted through a collaborative endeavor between the Center for Innovative Public Policy and the American Jail Association, with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). Seeking comprehensive insights to inform data-driven practices, the survey was designed to gather a wide variety of information about jail recruitment, retention, and succession planning.¹ With over 3,000 jails spread throughout various jurisdictions across the country and no means of obtaining specific employee names for sampling purposes, conducting the survey itself was a considerable methodological challenge (see Stinchcomb & Leip, 2010). Since there was no possibility of individually contacting the tens of thousands of line-level personnel working in jails throughout the United States, the instrument was developed

in a manner that would be accessible on the Internet through Survey Monkey, a web-based survey research site (with hard copies also made available upon request).² Both hard copy and online versions of the instrument were subjected to review by a nationally representative advisory committee of sheriffs and jail administrators as well as pretested several times in a variety of different jail settings.³

A massive preliminary publicity campaign was launched to announce the survey, and all line-level employees who work in jails across the country were invited to participate. Letters and flyers (suitable for posting) informing staff about the survey were sent to the 3,162 jails included on a national list provided by American Jail Association, along with 80 additional tribal jails obtained from a list provided by the National Institute of Corrections. Additionally, 1,500 letters and flyers were sent electronically to jails throughout the nation, announcements were mailed to all state sheriffs' associations, and the project was highlighted in professional publications of both the American Jail Association and the National Sheriffs' Association. To further maximize visibility and encourage participation, members of the advisory committee, affiliated partners, state sheriffs' associations, and relevant national professional associations also included information about the upcoming survey in their publications, membership circulation information, and list-serves. In terms of methodological limitations, utilizing such indirect and online approaches for contacting participants and obtaining their responses obviously do not reflect the most ideal research design. However, given the size, unknown parameters, and nationwide geographical dispersion of the population, it was the most pragmatic alternative available under the circumstances.

Representation of Survey Respondents

Ultimately, a total of 2,106 line-level jail personnel completed the survey, of which 1,924 surveys were suitable for inclusion in this study. The 182 cases that were dropped from the database did not contain responses to the dependent variable and/or the independent variables that were necessary to conduct this analysis. The remaining 1,924 respondents represent 46 states in all regions of the United States (i.e., Northeast, Midwest, South, and West), including Hawaii and Alaska.⁴

Since the survey population used in this analysis does not reflect a random sample of U.S. jail employees, it is important to compare respondents to national jail workforce data in order to identify similarities and differences. According to the 2006 *Census of jail facilities*, there are a total of 231,515 employees in jails throughout the country (Stephan & Walsh, 2011, p. 22). This figure, however, includes both full-time and part-time workers as well as staff in all job classifications. In the more detailed 1999 *Census of Jails* (Stephan, 2001, p. 9), it was noted that 72% of the overall jail workforce was comprised of correctional officers, a figure that had not changed substantially from the 71% reported in the 1993 census. Assuming that 72% of the 231,515 employees reported in the 2006 jail census are correctional officers, that would translate into a total of 166,690 (slightly inflated because part-time employees were counted in 2006). While the 1,924 jail officers in this study reflect just slightly over 1% of this population, a key consideration in terms of generalizability is also the extent to which the characteristics of survey respondents compare with those of the total population.

Demonstrating such comparability is a considerable challenge, since fully detailed national jail workforce statistics are neither current nor compatible in all respects with variables used in the survey. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) has not published a demographically detailed description of jail personnel (i.e., race and gender of jail personnel) since its 1999 census, and no other national data sources include demographic information on jail personnel. Lacking preferable alternatives, survey respondents were compared to the most recent BJS data (see Table 1). As the results indicate, among all racial, ethnic, and gender categories, differences range only from 1% to 7% points. Based on these comparisons, our population appears to be demographically similar to the nationwide

Table 1. Demographic Comparisons Between BJS 1999 Census of Jails ($n = 149,600$) and Survey Data ($n = 1,924$).

	Jail Personnel ^a	Survey Respondents
Race and ethnicity		
Black	35,400 (26%)	365 (19%)
Hispanic	11,200 (8%)	135 (7%)
White	89,000 (65%)	1,328 (69%)
Other	14,000 (9%; this includes "not reported")	96 (5%; this includes American Indian 2%, multiracial 1%, and Asian 2%)
Total	149,600 (100%)	1,924 (100%)
Gender		
Female	42,200 (28%)	577 (30%)
Male	107,400 (72%)	1,347 (70%)
Total	149,600 (100%)	1,924 (100%)

Note. BJS = Bureau of Justice Statistics.

^aSource. US Department of Justice. (1999). Census of Jails Table 13 (NCJ Publication No. 186633). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cj99>.

distribution of jail personnel. While such similarities are encouraging, given the fact that those responding to this survey numerically represent only a small fraction of the total population of jail officers throughout the country, the possibility of systematic bias in their responses cannot be dismissed.

Dependent and Independent Variables

The dependent variable used in the analysis was an overall measure of turnover intent, which was captured by the survey item that asked, "How often do you think about quitting your current job?" The responses were aggregated into a dichotomous variable (no intent to quit, some intent to quit)⁵ to use in a logistic regression analysis.

Independent variables included 3 work-related measures (job satisfaction, work environment, and compensation/benefits), along with 5 personal characteristics (gender, race, education, age, and job tenure). Job satisfaction, the primary independent variable, was quantified by asking respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with their current job on a 4-point ordinal scale. While using this global measure of job satisfaction instead of a multifaceted measure precludes the ability to explore more precisely why respondents may or may not be satisfied, such a detailed level of causal inquiry was not a feature of the design of this study.

Work environment, another job-related independent variable, was measured by summing dichotomous responses from 5 questions to create an additive index. The measure for compensation and benefits was also calculated by using an additive index composed of 3 questions (see Appendix for both indices).

Additional independent variables reflect the individual characteristics of survey respondents, including their job tenure, age, gender, and race. Education was measured by whether the respondent had some college or not. These measures were considered as control variables.

Correlation and logistic regression were used to analyze the data. Logistic regression was chosen because of the dichotomous dependent variable, the nonnormal distributions of the independent variables, and the nonlinear relationship between turnover intent and the independent variables. In addition, large sample sizes are required for logistic regression, and the sample size of 1,924 for

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables ($n = 1,924$).

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Turnover intent				
No intent to quit = 62%				
Some intent to quit = 38%				
Job satisfaction				
Very dissatisfied = 4%				
Dissatisfied = 16%				
Satisfied = 51%				
Very satisfied = 29%				
Work environment	1	10	8.26	2.15
Compensation/benefits	1	6	5.05	1.28
Age	18	65	37.7	9.80
Job tenure	.5	35	8.76	6.62
Education				
No college = 70%				
Some college = 30%				
Race				
Other = 31%				
White = 69%				
Gender				
Male = 70%				
Female = 30%				

this study meets that requirement. The cross-sectional design employed in this study does limit our ability to empirically demonstrate causality.

Findings

The descriptive statistics for the variables included in the analysis are presented in Table 2. It is noteworthy that a sizeable majority of jail officers in this study (80%) are actually either satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs. Likewise, they scored high on both the work environment and the compensation/benefits indices, pointing toward general satisfaction on those more specific dimensions of the job as well. From that perspective, it is not surprising to find most (62%) expressing no intention of quitting. More pragmatically, it may be that their job options are somewhat limited by lack of higher education (with 70% reporting no college coursework), combined with the fact that they have already invested nearly 9 years in the jail where they work, and are approaching an average of 38 years of age.

As indicated in the correlation analysis (Table 3), the bivariate relationships between turnover intent and job satisfaction, work environment, compensation/benefits, and job tenure are all statistically significant. Nevertheless, the strength of their relationship to turnover intent varies considerably, from $-.42$ for job satisfaction to $.11$ for job tenure. The remaining individual characteristics were not significant. No multicollinearity was detected between the independent variables.

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict the turnover intent of jail employees, using job satisfaction, work environment, compensation/benefits, and individual characteristics as predictors (see Table 4.) A test of the full model against a constant-only model was statistically significant, meaning that the predictors (as a set) reliably distinguished between jail employees who never think about quitting their jobs and those who do think about quitting ($\chi^2 = 462.8, p < .000$ with $df = 8$). The Cox and Snell R^2 indicated that 29% of the variation in turnover intent was explained by

Table 3. Correlation Matrix for Turnover Intent and Job Satisfaction, Work Environment, and Compensation/benefits, Controlling for Personal Characteristics ($n = 1,924$).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Turnover intent	—								
2. Job satisfaction	-.42**	—							
3. Work environment	-.35**	.41**	—						
4. Compensation/benefits	-.25**	.26**	.31**	—					
5. Age	-.01	.03	-.03	.05*	—				
6. Job tenure	.11**	.01	-.07*	.05*	.52**	—			
7. Education	.02	-.07	-.06	.01	.02	.05	—		
8. Race	.03	.00	.00	-.04	.00	.00	.04	—	
9. Gender	.02	.01	-.05*	-.08**	.02	.01	-.01	-.03	—

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4. Logistic Regression Results for Turnover Intent and Job Satisfaction, Work Environment, and Compensation/benefits, Controlling for Personal Characteristics ($n = 1,924$).

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SEb</i>	Odds Ratio
Job satisfaction	-1.26*	.11	.28
Work environment	-.18*	.03	.84
Compensation/benefits	-.84*	.17	.43
Age	-.02	.01	.97
Job tenure	.06*	.01	1.06
Education	-.14	.13	.87
Race	.16	.13	1.17
Gender	.11	.12	1.11

Note. * $p < .001$.

the logistic model. Nagelkerke's R^2 of .33 indicated a moderately weak relationship between prediction and grouping.

The relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intent was statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction. As the analysis indicates, employees who enjoy greater job satisfaction have a higher likelihood toward staying on the job than their less satisfied peers. The odds ratio for job satisfaction indicates that more satisfied jail employees are .28 times less likely to think about quitting their job than those employees who are not satisfied with their jobs, while controlling for the other independent variables.

Work environment was also statistically significantly related to turnover intent, with those who work in a positive climate having less turnover intention than their peers. For the work environment index, the odds ratio shows that for one unit increase in the index, employees are .84 times less likely to think about quitting their job, while controlling for the other independent variables.

While somewhat weaker, the relationship between turnover intent and compensation/benefits was statistically significant. Employees who believe they receive equitable compensation/benefits are less likely to express thoughts about quitting than their counterparts. The odds ratio indicates that for a unit increase in the compensation/benefits index, employees are .43 times less likely to think about quitting their job, while controlling for the other independent variables.

From the individual characteristics, job tenure was statistically significant. The relationship between turnover intent and job tenure was positive (but weak) and significant, with employees who have longer job tenure being more likely to think about leaving. Results show that the remaining

three individual-level variables (gender, education, race, and age) do not significantly predict turnover intent.

Overall, while controlling for personal characteristics, work environment, and compensation/benefits, it is job satisfaction that has the strongest association with the intention of quitting.

Discussion and Conclusions

For the first time utilizing a national jail database, the results of this study reaffirm much of the prior, more localized research on correctional job satisfaction and turnover intent described earlier. It is, however, one thing to empirically verify that satisfied employees think less about leaving their current job, and quite another to determine how to reduce the turnover intentions of their less-satisfied coworkers. Inasmuch as the relationship to compensation shown here is weaker than work environment and job satisfaction, this research does not tend to support the administrative productivity of attempting to convince employees to remain in jail employment through extrinsic incentives as salary and benefits. Yet it must be noted that the extent to which fiscal compensation may be an antecedent variable contributing to job satisfaction was not explored herein. Nevertheless, on the basis of this study, it appears that the benefits of being employed in a jail with a positive organizational climate, where staff feel that they are treated fairly, have input into decision making, and enjoy good rapport with their supervisors are strong influential factors in remaining committed to one's current job.

While the somewhat weaker but positive relationship between tenure and thoughts about quitting is somewhat more challenging to account for, the occupational stress and long-term burnout associated with correctional work has been well documented (e.g., Carlson, Anson, & Thomas, 2003; Castle & Martin, 2006; Morgan, 2009; Slate & Vogel, 1997). As job-related tension, anxiety, and frustration build up over years of service, the cumulative stress and strain may well promote increased thoughts about leaving. Especially if an employee has reached the degree of emotional exhaustion and lack of commitment associated with burnout, thinking about quitting may provide a psychological escape valve, even if it may not be a very realistic ambition. Although longer term staff members may actually be less likely to leave, that does not mean that they will discontinue giving thought to the possibility.

In viewing these results, the limitations of this study must be taken into account. First and foremost, respondents do not represent a randomly generated population, which given the intensely local nature of the more than 3,000 jails that are scattered throughout cities and counties across the country, presents an overwhelming methodological challenge to any nationally focused, jail-related research (Stinchcomb & Leip, 2010). Perhaps the most that can be achieved in this regard is comparability to known parameters of the population, which has been demonstrated herein. Nevertheless, since the fact remains that although 1,924 officers have never been involved in a prior jail research study, even this sizeable group of respondents still represents only a small fraction of the total population and, therefore, the potential of systematic bias cannot be overlooked.

Since the model used in this study only explained 29% of the variation in turnover intent, it is clear that other variables need to be added to the model used in future research. The global measures of turnover intent and job satisfaction used in this study are rudimentary, so future research should include multidimensional measures. Ideally, additional measures, such as organizational commitment, would be included as independent variables since previous research has shown its significant impact on turnover intent (Lambert & Paoline, 2010).

A precise causal analysis of the specific ingredients contributing to job satisfaction was beyond the scope of this study and, as a result, represents a primary agenda for future research. Especially given the fact that job satisfaction was such a strong contributor to turnover intent, exploring its multifaceted ingredients in more explicit detail would provide jail administrators with further guidance

in terms of what steps can be taken to promote employee job commitment. In that regard, agendas for future research might be well advised to explicitly distinguish between the influential impact of such extrinsic factors as compensation/benefits and the more intrinsic nature of nonmonetary motivators. Particularly in today's economic climate, where jails cannot continue to rely on increasing salaries and benefits as workforce incentives, it may be that the importance of intrinsic motivators assumes even greater importance.

With more in-depth understanding of the precursors to voluntary turnover, job satisfaction, and thoughts about quitting, as well as who is most influenced by them, the potential exists to implement changes targeted toward reducing the likelihood that good employees would contemplate leaving. As jail administrators gain more insight into what prompts turnover intentions, they are in a better position to proactively develop strategic initiatives designed to retain the well-qualified personnel who might otherwise consider resigning. In that regard, the positive news for jail administrators is that dynamic organizational variables exert greater influence on turnover intentions than static individual characteristics. Unlike the static, fixed nature of such personal traits as age, gender, race, or educational background, the variables primarily associated with line-level turnover intent are dynamic and therefore subject to change. Since these organizational features can be altered, jail administrators have the power to reduce voluntary resignations and the significant expense associated with them. That does not, however, mean that it can be done with ease. To the contrary, the leadership literature is replete with admonitions and advice related to the difficulty of effectively achieving the significant organizational changes most likely to affect turnover intent (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 1985; Kotter, 1999; O'Hara, 2005; Schein, 2004; Zajac & Al-Kazemi, 1997).

Nevertheless, if public sector agencies such as prisons and jails are unable to compete with business and industry on the level of extrinsic compensation, they must rely upon doing better with such intrinsic motivators as developing a positive organizational culture. Again, this is a good news/bad news dichotomy. The good news is that doing so does not require a substantial financial commitment. In fact, creating the "family-oriented" type of organizational culture where employees feel welcome, supported, important, and cared for actually involves very little, if any, fiscal outlay. The downside is that it demands considerable administrative introspection, supportive effort, and dedicated commitment toward developing a positive organizational climate—which may be too high a price to pay.

In order to assist jail administrators with their understanding of the complexities of turnover intent, future research would be productively focused on analyzing the impact of specifically targeted work environment variables on voluntary turnover. With improved understanding of the relationships between work environment factors and turnover intent, the capacity of jail administrators to innovatively promote a retention-focused culture increases. In turn, when satisfied and competent jail employees become less interested in other employment options, the organization as a whole benefits, which can lead to providing better services at a lower cost.

Appendix

For both of these indices, respondents were asked whether the statement describes their current situation, with "no" and "yes" the answer categories.

Work environment. (1) Enjoying a positive work environment on the job; (2) feeling that overall this is a good place to work; (3) having input into decisions that affect me; (4) having a good rapport with my supervisor; and (5) being treated fairly. Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$.

Compensation/benefits. (1). Getting a competitive salary; (2) getting competitive benefits; and (3) being paid what my skills, education, and experience are worth. Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$.

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Notes

1. Variables, for example, included how employees became interested in corrections, what attracted them to their current workplace, how they were recruited, how effectively the selection process worked for them, why they remain on the job, how often they think about leaving, their level of job satisfaction and agency commitment, what they think about various aspects of their job, and so on. For a complete description of the National Jail Workforce Survey, see Stinchcomb, McCampbell, and Leip (2009).
2. Ideally, a survey of this nature would be conducted by compiling a list of the total population (i.e., all line staff in all local jails throughout the country), utilizing random selection to obtain a representative sample, and then administering the survey directly to those included in the sample population. However, given the fact that there are over 3,000 jails of varying size spread throughout thousands of counties across the United States, this was clearly not feasible. Moreover, it is one thing to know how many jails operate in the United States and quite another to determine how many operational staff they employ. Since these employees are not listed on any centralized registry, e-mail list, or databank, it is impossible not only to identify them but also to directly communicate with them via survey research. Moreover, if participants completed hard copies of survey instruments, it would necessitate manually entering responses to all variables for all respondents—an extremely lengthy, costly, and labor-intensive endeavor.
3. For complete methodological details, see Stinchcomb, McCampbell, and Leip (2009).
4. Only the states of Delaware, Montana, South Dakota, and Vermont were not represented.
5. The 5-point scale for turnover intent was (1) never, (2) every few months, (3) about once a month, (4) about once a week, or (5) nearly every day, and the coding for the dichotomous turnover intent variable was 0 = *no intent to quit* (which included the “never” responses from the 5-point scale) and 1 = *some intent to quit* (which included the remaining four response categories).

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