

# Factors Affecting Turnover Intention in Public Healthcare Workforce: A Conceptual Study

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**Abstract:** *A high turnover rate is a critical challenge to any organisation, especially in the healthcare sector, considering the involvement of high costs, significant efforts to develop human capital, and other negative implications. Focusing on the identification of factors that affect turnover in the public healthcare workforce, specifically among medical doctors in public hospitals, a conceptual model was proposed in this paper based on the review of key literature on the relationships of cross-behavioural factors for the assessment of employees' turnover intention. This conceptual paper extends the body of knowledge on the significant effects of work-family conflict, role stressors, and employee engagement on turnover intention.*

**Keywords:** Turnover intention, role stressors, work-family conflict, employee engagement, healthcare

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## 1. Introduction

The rising healthcare costs, lack of healthcare professionals, disproportion between the healthcare workforce in rural and urban areas, and high turnover rate pose critical challenges to the healthcare sector globally (Zhang, Luo, Chen, Min, & Fang, 2017; Mazumdar-Shaw, 2018; Klundert, Broek, Yesuf, Vreugdenhil, & Yimer, 2018). A high turnover rate, which typically indicates highly disengaged employees, negatively affects the organisation (that these employees opt to leave), especially in the healthcare sector (Scanlan & Still, 2019). Hence, assessing factors that affect turnover intention in the public healthcare workforce yields significant findings that benefit the healthcare sector given the indicative role of turnover intention as a precursor of the actual turnover.

In Malaysia, it is highly challenging for the public sector to maintain healthcare affordability and highly competent and specialised workforce. The number of resignation in the public healthcare workforce steadily increased from 2010 to 2017—more than 6,000 medical officers and specialists submitted resignation (Ministry of Health, 2018), which accounted for approximately 4% of the existing workforce. The lack of healthcare professionals significantly affects the service performance of the healthcare system, where patients would have to wait longer to receive the appropriate healthcare services; the existing infrastructural capacity may worsen; the remaining employees may suffer from a lack of motivation; the

incidences of morbidity and mortality would increase; the quality of healthcare services would deteriorate (Li, Zhang, Xiao, Chen, & Lu, 2019; Liu, Zhu, Wu, & Mao, 2019).

A high turnover rate, especially among young medical professionals (Zhang et al., 2017), may be attributed to the lack of policies to retain talents, which prompt them to work elsewhere for their professional career growth, such as in the private sector or other countries. Other reasons for high turnover rate among medical officers in the Malaysian public healthcare sector include job dissatisfaction, high role stressors, poor commitment and engagement, low moral support, and unfavourable monetary incentives (Mensah & Kosi, 2016; Hafiz, Ima, & Chin, 2018).

Significant factors that affect turnover intention were extensively explored across diverse settings (Wang, Cheng, & Wang, 2018; Lee, 2019; Sheehan, Tham, Holland, & Cooper, 2019) and professions (Gilmartin, 2012; Hatam, Jalali, Askarian, & Kharazmi, 2016; Siau et al., 2018). Despite that, studies on the behavioural factors that affect turnover intention in the Malaysian public healthcare sector, especially on the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationships of work-family conflict, role stressors and turnover intention, remain scarce, which will be addressed in this study.

Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to extend the current literature on the effects of behavioural factors, specifically work-family conflict, role stressors, employee engagement, on turnover intention in the public healthcare workforce. Both Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory establish the underlying theoretical basis of this study. This study would significantly benefit healthcare managers and other significant stakeholders in the public healthcare sector in their efforts to maintain healthcare affordability by enhancing the quality of healthcare services and retaining highly competent and specialised healthcare workforce.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Turnover**

Turnover refers to the resignation of employees from the organisation (Tett & Meyer, 1993), which may be a voluntary or involuntary notice (Morris-Sweeney, 2017). Accordingly, voluntary turnover takes place when the employee opts to quit (Greyling & Stanz, 2010), while involuntary turnover takes place when the employee is let go by the employer due to death, retirement, and other irredeemable factors (Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998). Meanwhile, Arokiasamy (2013), as cited by Ngo-Henha (2017), defined turnover as the replacement of the current employees by new employees in an organisation.

Ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, turnover has been a pivotal construct of interest among scholars (Samad & Saufi, 2017) given its negative implications on the organisation, especially in the healthcare sector (Liu et al., 2019). To date, turnover trends in organisational behaviour have been extensively explored, resulting in diverse theories, concepts, and models on turnover. According to Samad and Saufi (2017), the concept of turnover has evolved over the past

decades, for instance, the concept of turnover shifts from the focus on attitudinal and behavioural factors to the significant influence of external factors, such as environmental and non-organisational factors. Prior studies highlighted job satisfaction, organisational commitment, turnover intention, withdrawal behaviour, absenteeism, quitting, job searching, job opportunities, and performance (Blau & Boal, 2011; Kazmi, 2013) as the major determinants of employees' turnover.

## **2.2 Turnover Intention**

Turnover intent involves the resignation of employees from their respective position at the workplace (Ma & Trigo, 2008; Chao, Jou, Liao, & Kuo, 2015; Nwobia & Aljohani, 2017) to pursue a career elsewhere (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, 1979; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Bedeian & Armenakis, 2014; Albaqami, 2016). Turnover intention is identified as a primary cognitive predictor of turnover (Mobley, 1977; Model et al., 1982; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Ongori, 2007; Ma & Trigo, 2008; Knudsen, Ducharme, & Roman, 2009; Alhamwan, Mat, & Muala, 2015), which was extensively explored in numerous prior studies (Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Bothma & Roodt, 2013; Nei, Snyder, & Litwiller, 2015; Cohen, Blake, & Goodman, 2016). To date, there have been over 1,500 to 2,000 studies on turnover intention alone (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008).

## **2.3 Factors Affecting Turnover Intention**

In general, there are various factors affecting turnover intention across different settings and professions. Earlier studies primarily focused on job satisfaction (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002), job demand, job resources (Heijden, Peeters, Le Blanc, & Van Breukelen, 2018), emotional intelligence (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018), transformational leadership (Choi, Goh, Adam, & Tan, 2016), and human resource management (HRM) practices (Okodogbe, 2018). Besides that, affective commitment (Thay, Othman, Siong, & Lim, 2013), role stressors (Eastham, 2014), work-family conflict (Wang, Lee, & Wu, 2017), employee engagement (Collini, Guidroz, & Perez, 2015), quality of work life, job control (Nasabi & Bastani, 2018), ethical leadership, and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Shareef & Atan, 2018) were also recently identified to exhibit significant effects on turnover intention (dyadic relationship) under different circumstances (Karatepe & Karadas, 2014; Ahmad & Afgan, 2016; Bonds, 2017; Purdy, 2017; I. A. Wang et al., 2017).

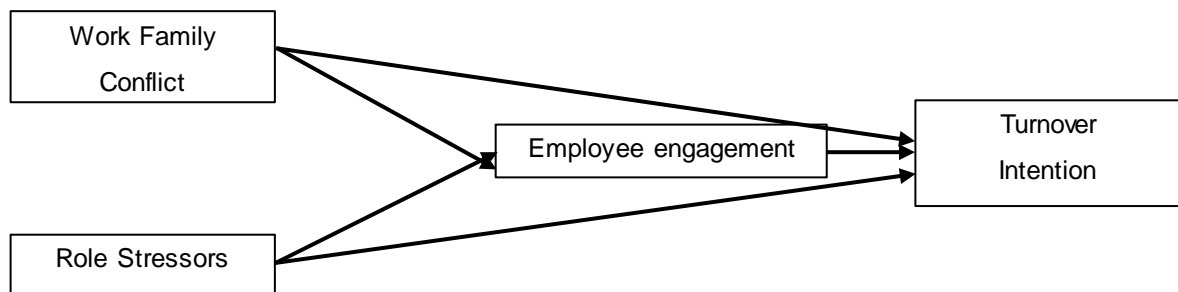
Surprisingly, based on the in-depth review of literature, only a few conceptual models of turnover intention (Ngo-Henha, 2017) in the healthcare workforce, particularly among medical officers in the public sector, were validated. Furthermore, the obtained findings on the relationships of work-family conflict (Blomme, Rheede & Tromp, 2010; Asghar, Gull, Bashir, & Akbar, 2018; Chen, Ayoun, & Eyoun, 2018), role stressors (Eastham, 2014; Devi & Rani, 2016; Nazir, Ungku, Nawab, & Shah, 2016), employee engagement, and turnover intention (Collini et al., 2015; Milliman, Gatling, & Kim, 2018; Saks, 2019) remain inconclusive, which has prompted the need to explore these relationships between behavioural factors and turnover intention (Table 1).

**Table 1: Relationships between significant constructs of interest**

Independent variables	Dependent variables	References
Role stressors	Turnover intention	Lambert, Hogan, Keena, Williamson, & Kim (2017); Naidoo (2018)
Work-family conflict	Turnover intention	Asghar et al. (2018); Chen et al. (2018)
Employee engagement	Turnover intention	Bright (2018); Collini et al. (2015); Memon et al. (2018); Milliman et al. (2018)
Role stressors	Employee engagement	Curran & Prottas (2017); Mohamed Seada (2017)
Work-family conflict	Employee engagement	Dåderman & Basinska (2016); Karatepe & Karadas (2016)

### 3. Proposed Conceptual Model

Overall, the existing literature on turnover intention and HRM revealed various constructs of interest. Nevertheless, only the most pertinent and significant constructs were considered for the development of the conceptual model in this paper. Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual model with respect to Conservation of Resources Theory. The selection of each construct is based on specific theoretical rationalisation. Referring to the relationships of significant constructs of interest in Table 1, the effects of work-family conflict, role stressors and employee engagement on turnover intention in the public healthcare workforce, specifically within the Malaysian context, are deemed noteworthy for this study to explore. Furthermore, since both concepts of turnover intention and HRM are closely related, the need to explore the significant effects of employee engagement on turnover intention is evident.



**Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model**

Additionally, Conservation Resources Theory establish the underlying basis of the overall study. In line with the Conservation Resources Theory, the external environment of an organisation (in terms of its operation and settings) potentially influences how affective commitment, role stressors, and work-family conflict affect turnover intention. With that, increased role stressors are postulated to reduce employee engagement between the public hospitals and medical doctors, which increases the likelihood of them to resign. In other words, this translates into higher turnover intention. Similarly, the engagement of medical doctors at the workplace mediates the impact of role stressors on their turnover intention. Adding to that, it is also postulated that role stressors directly affect turnover intention among medical doctors in public hospitals. Likewise, increased work-family conflict are also

postulated to reduce employee engagement between the public hospitals and medical doctors, which raises the likelihood of them to resign; thus, higher turnover intention in the workforce. The engagement of medical doctors at the workplace mediates the impact of work-family conflict on their turnover intention. Besides that, it is also postulated that work-family conflict directly affects turnover intention among medical doctors in public hospitals.

In short, the proposed conceptual model that integrates these significant constructs serves as an initial step to expand the concept of turnover intention in the public healthcare workforce, particularly among medical doctors in public hospitals. The proposed conceptual model in this paper is expected to extend the current body of knowledge on turnover in the public healthcare workforce within the Malaysian context. Despite the extensive number of studies on turnover intention and HRM, such conceptual model has not been introduced for testing, which will be addressed in this study.

#### 4. Conclusion

Focusing on the turnover in the public healthcare workforce, a conceptual model to assess the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationships of affective commitment, role stressors, work-family conflict, and turnover intention was developed and proposed in this paper. Work-family conflict, role stressors and employee engagement were identified based on the theoretical rationalisations and review of key literature on turnover intention and HRM. Additionally, the proposed conceptual model in this paper was developed with respect to Conservation Of Resources Theory, resulting in the formation of four hypothesised relationships for testing: (1) the direct relationship between work-family conflict; (2) the direct relationship between role stressors and turnover intention; (3) the mediation effect of employee engagement on the relationship between role stressors and turnover intention; (4) the mediation effect of employee engagement on the relationship between work-family conflict and turnover intention. It should be noted that only the most pertinent and significant constructs were selected from literature to develop the proposed conceptual model to identify significant factors affecting turnover intention. The obtained findings of this study based on the proposed conceptual model are expected to benefit healthcare managers and other significant stakeholders in the public healthcare sectors in grasping the impact of the identified factors on turnover intention. Additionally, the enhanced understanding of the factors that affect turnover intention serves to facilitate the implementation of effective policies and strategies that promote employee engagement and reduces turnover in the public healthcare workforce.

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