Factors Contributing to Turnover Intentions of South African Forensic Social Workers

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Abstract

High turnover rates among forensic social workers affect service quality in social welfare. This article emanates from quantitative survey which investigated factors contributing to turnover intentions among South African forensic social workers. A census of 97 graduates in forensic social work at North-West University (NWU) was attempted; 28 valid responses were received via an online questionnaire. Standardised measures assessed perceived social support, overall job satisfaction, job stress, turnover intentions and work engagement (vigour, dedication and absorption). Analyses comprised descriptive statistics, Spearman's rank correlations (ρ), and Kruskal-Wallis tests. Internal consistency in this sample was acceptable across scales. Higher job satisfaction and work engagement were associated with lower turnover intentions, while greater job stress related to lower job satisfaction and engagement. Perceived social support correlated positively with work engagement and was associated with lower turnover intentions. Demographic factors showed minimal direct effects. Given the small, non-probability sample, findings are not generalisable, however, they indicate that enhancing day-to-day social support and strengthening engagement may be relevant for retention.

Keywords: Forensic social work; employee assessment; job satisfaction; burnout; employee wellbeing; workplace support; turnover and turnover intention

Introduction and Background to the Study

Forensic social work is a specialised field linking social work and the legal system, centred on providing expert evidence in court (Weyers 2020). In South Africa, this relatively new specialty involves traumatic, ethically complex court-related work (Butters and Vaughan-Eden 2011; Chiarelli-Helminiak 2014; Loue 2018). Supervision is central to managing these demands (Butters and Vaughan-Eden 2011). Sector-level challenges include resource shortages, professional undermining, adoption of international standards, registration, role specification and limited inter-agency collaboration (Mangezi 2014). Routine exposure to distressing material contributes to burnout (Louie 2021).

High job demands and inadequate support are linked to stress and burnout, which in turn relate to turnover intentions in human services (Munson 2011; Chiarelli-Helminiak 2014; Starcher and Stolzenberg 2020). Social and supervisory support buffer these risks and associate with higher job satisfaction (Ravalier et al. 2023). Managerial or organisational support is likewise emphasised for stress and turnover intentions (Giauque and Varone 2019). Personal attributes and organisational climate may further shape intentions (Hamama 2012).

In South Africa, practice occurs across distinct settings, the South African Police Service's Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FVCPSO) units, the office of the family advocate, provincial departments of social development (DSD) and private practice, under different mandates and supervision frameworks (e.g., Children's Act procedures and the national supervision framework) that shape caseloads, role clarity and access to supervision. Child-protection studies also document heavy caseloads and resource constraints (Western Cape DSD; DSD and South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) 2012; Sibanda and Lombard 2015; Mashego et al. 2023). However, South African-specific empirical evidence remains limited, hence, this study's relevance

To better understand the factors influencing workforce stability in the forensic social work sector in South Africa, this study posed the following research questions: (1) What are the turnover intentions of forensic social workers in South Africa? (2) To what extent are job satisfaction, job stress, work engagement (vigour, dedication and absorption), and perceived social support associated with turnover intentions? (3) Do socio-demographic and employment variables (e.g., employer type) differentiate levels of social support, job satisfaction and work engagement?

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to determine the factors that contribute to the turnover intentions of forensic social workers in South Africa.

To achieve this, researchers established three sets of hypotheses as shown below.

Hypothesis set 1: Social support, job stress, vigour, dedication and absorption, job satisfaction and turnover intentions (correlation)

Hypothesis	Indication
Null hypothesis (H0.1)	There is no statistically significant relationship between social support, job stress, vigour, dedication and absorption, job satisfaction and turnover intentions among South African forensic social workers.
Alternative hypothesis (H1.1)	A statistically significant negative relationship exists between social support, job stress, vigour, dedication and absorption, as well as job satisfaction and turnover intentions, among South African forensic social workers.

Hypothesis set 2: The influence of employee variables namley, age, gender, tenure period and employer type on social support, job stress, vigour, dedication and absorption, job satisfaction and turnover intentions (group differences)

Hypothesis	Indication
Null hypothesis (H0.2)	There is no statistically significant difference in the mean levels of social support, job stress, vigour, dedication and absorption, job satisfaction and turnover intentions among forensic social workers employed by different age groups and employer types.
Alternative hypothesis (H1.2)	There is a statistically significant difference in the mean levels of social support, job stress, vigour, dedication and absorption, job satisfaction and turnover intentions across different age groups and employer types (e.g., SAPS, private practice, family advocate) among South African forensic social workers.

Hypothesis set 3: The influence of turnover intentions reflected by "How likely is it that you will actively look for a job in the next year", "I often think about quitting", and "I will probably look for a job in the next year" — on social support, vigour, dedication and absorption and job satisfaction (group differences)

Hypothesis	Indication
Null hypothesis (H0.3)	There is no statistically significant difference in the mean levels of social support, job stress, vigour, dedication and absorption, and job satisfaction regarding the turnover intentions of forensic social workers.
Alternative hypothesis (H1.3)	There is a statistically significant difference in the mean levels of social support, job stress, vigour, dedication and absorption, as well as job satisfaction, regarding the turnover intentions of forensic social workers.

This study provided valuable insights into the turnover intentions of forensic social workers in South Africa, informing the development of guidelines and directives for social work management and supervisors to create more conducive working conditions for the retention of social workers.

Methodology

A quantitative survey research design was followed. Data were collected via an online survey that included demographic questions and five standardised scales measuring social support, job satisfaction, job stress, turnover intentions and work engagement. The purpose of the survey was to accurately identify and define the factors and characteristics that affect the study population (Rubin and Babbie 2016). Characteristics included the work settings of the respondents, the number of years of experience in the field of forensic social work and the factors that could contribute towards turnover intentions.

Population, Sampling and Procedure

No separate sampling procedure was used; all graduates in the database were contacted (census approach). Missing or outdated email addresses influenced sampling. To mitigate this, invitations were also sent to known employers of forensic social workers, such as SAPS. Recruitment emails and social media invitations were sent to alumni over 14 days, with extensions. Informed consent was obtained electronically. Due to the voluntary nature of participation, 28 valid responses were received and analysed.

Participants were predominantly female (96.4%; 27/28). Most obtained their master's degree from North-West University (27/30 respondents indicated NWU). Respondents were mainly based in the North-West (35.7%) and Gauteng (32.1%). Current employers included SAPS (35.7%), private practice (32.1%), the office of the family advocate

(17.9%), DSD (7.1%) and other (7.1%). Employment tenure clustered at three to five years (50.0%) and zero to two years (32.1%).

Measures

To measure the impact of turnover intention, several established measures were used as dependent variables. The Social Support Scale (O'Driscoll, Brough and Kalliath 2004; Bateman 2009) assesses co-worker support on a six-point Likert scale (6 = all the time to 1 = never), reliability α = .89. It is unidimensional, covering support from supervisors and colleagues (Mao et al. 2024) through items such as helpful information, sympathetic advice, clear feedback and practical assistance. Researchers used the four-item short form to capture these facets and their links to well-being and job satisfaction (Mao et al. 2024).

Job satisfaction was measured with the Brayfield and Rothe Overall Job Satisfaction scale (five-point Likert, 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree), with reported alphas .83 to .90 and development using Thurstone and Likert methods (Brayfield and Rothe 1951). The scale is unidimensional and originally 18 items; the six-item short form, used here, offers a concise, reliable alternative (Nortje 2021).

Work stress was measured with Parker and DeCotiis' Job Stress Scale (five-point agreement; Parker and DeCotiis 1983; Jamal and Baba 1992; Bateman 2009), capturing pressure and strain (e.g., "I have too much work and too little time to do it in"). Internal consistency in this sample: α = .770.

The Michigan Organisational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ), developed within the Quality of Work Research Program (Spector 2020) includes items on stress and job satisfaction (Bateman 2009). Researchers also used the two items from the turnover intention subscale targeting thoughts of leaving (Hammond 2008) on a five-point Likert scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). The MOAQ is well established in research on job satisfaction and turnover; for example, Bowling and Hammond (2008) confirmed construct validity and correlations with job satisfaction and turnover. Recent studies (e.g., Christensen and Knardahl 2022) likewise apply the MOAQ to examine factors linked to turnover intentions. Forensic social workers face challenges that may affect satisfaction and intention to leave (Mangezi 2014).

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-17) (Schaufeli et al.; Carmona-Halty et al. 2019) assesses vigour, dedication, absorption and shows a stable three-factor structure with high internal consistency (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). Vigour reflects energy and resilience; dedication reflects meaning, enthusiasm and pride; absorption reflects deep immersion. Lower engagement relates to higher turnover intentions (Monahan 2002). The UWES-17 has been used widely in international and South African studies with stable constructs over time (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). Table 1 below provides sample items from each measure.

Table 1: Scales and Dimensions Used in the Study

Instrument (citation)	Construct(s)	Example item(s)
Co-worker social support (O'Driscoll et al.)	Workplace social support	"Sympathetic understanding and advice"; "Clear and helpful feedback"
Brayfield-Rothe: Job satisfaction (short form)	Global job satisfaction	"Most days I am enthusiastic about my work"; "I find real enjoyment in my work"
Parker-DeCotiis: Job stress	Time pressure/strain	"I have too much work and too little time to do it in"
MOAQ – Turnover	Intention to leave	"I often think about quitting"; "I will probably look for a job in the next year"
UWES-17 (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004)	Vigour; dedication; absorption	"I feel bursting with energy" (vigour); "I am enthusiastic about my job" (dedication); "I am immersed in my work" (absorption)

Note: Sourced from Bateman 2009; Brayfield and Rothe 1951; Hammond 2008; Jamal and Baba 1992; Parker and DeCotiis 1983; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004.

Reliability and Scoring

As part of the methodology, the researchers investigated the reliability of the measures used. The following section presents internal consistency evidence, where available, both locally and in the current study.

Co-worker social support (short form adapted from O'Driscoll, Brough and Kalliath). Four items, six-point frequency anchors (1 = never to 6 = all the time). Example content includes "sympathetic understanding and advice", as well as clear and "helpful feedback". Internal consistency in this sample: $\alpha = .832$. (Developed outside South Africa; no South African-specific validation located; construct has extensive international use.)

Overall job satisfaction (Brayfield and Rothe). The researchers used the brief global measure of job satisfaction (short form). five-point agreement anchors (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Example items: "Most days I am enthusiastic about my work"; "I find real enjoyment in my work". Internal consistency in this sample: $\alpha = .752$. (Scale originated in the USA; large-sample meta-analysis supports its reliability/validity; South African-specific validation is limited.)

Work engagement was measured with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-17). The UWES-17 has three subscales with seven-point frequency anchors (0 = never to 6 = always): vigour (energy and resilience; e.g., "I feel bursting with energy at work"), dedication (meaning/enthusiasm; e.g., "I am enthusiastic about my job") and absorption (immersion; e.g., "I am immersed in my work"). Internal consistency in this sample: $\alpha\_total = .831$; $\alpha\_vigour = .689$; $\alpha\_dedication = .824$; $\alpha\_absorption = .719$.

(Developed in the Netherlands; validated in South Africa, including factorial validity and measurement equivalence, across large SAPS and other South African samples.)

Job stress (Parker and DeCotiis). Multiple items with five-point agreement anchors capturing time pressure and anxiety/strain (e.g., "I have too much work and too little time to do it in"). Internal consistency in this sample: $\alpha = .770$. (Developed outside South Africa; widely used internationally; South African-specific validation not identified.)

Turnover intentions (MOAQ, turnover subscale). Two items, seven-point Likert: "I often think about quitting"; "I will probably look for a new job within the next year". Higher scores = greater intention to leave. Internal consistency in this sample: $\alpha = .900$. (MOAQ developed at the University of Michigan; the researchers did not locate a formal South African validation of the two-item turnover subscale; therefore, the researchers report sample reliability and draw on international validation of MOAQ components.)

Among these tools, the UWES-17 has explicit South African psychometric evidence. For social support, job satisfaction (Brayfield and Rothe), job stress (Parker and DeCotiis) and the MOAQ turnover pair, the researchers did not find published South African-specific validation studies of the exact forms used, however, all have extensive international evidence and showed adequate internal consistency in the present sample. The different scales for measuring turnover intention were used as designed and discussed above. Due to the small sample size, the study did not employ factor analysis, as it would not yield substantial results (Jung and Lee 2017). A summary of the scales and the associated constructs is presented in table 1. Items indicated as PRE 1 to PRE 31 corresponded with the question numbers in the questionnaire and represent the different scales used in the study. A mean score was computed for each multi-item scale in the package. At the same time, the single item of the job stress scale and the two items of the MOAQ were used independently as variables for turnover intention. In these instances (PRE 12, 13 and 14), the variables were recoded into binary categorical variables and used as independent variables to understand the group differences further.

To simplify the analysis, the researchers did not employ the specific scoring protocols suggested by some of the instruments; instead, they calculated mean scores across the different instruments, as these scores were found to lead to similar outcomes in the analysis.

Sampling and Data Collection

Sampling

The study targeted the population of forensic social workers who had completed Master of Social Work (MSW) specialisation training at the North-West University's School for Psychosocial Health. The population comprised all graduates of the MSW (Forensic

Practice) programme at North-West University since its inception in 2006, as listed in the alumni database (N = 97). The researchers attempted a census of this population by emailing all entries in the alumni list. There was no separate sampling procedure, and all graduates in the database were targeted. Because some alumni records had missing or outdated email addresses, the researchers supplemented coverage by circulating the identical invitation via known employers of forensic social workers (e.g., SAPS units) and through closed professional Facebook groups to enhance the sampling frame. Only responses meeting the eligibility criteria (below) were retained for analysis. Respondents were included if: (i) they were currently practising as a forensic social worker in South Africa (government, NGO or private practice), and (ii) completed the MSW (Forensic Practice) at North-West University. A screening item at the beginning of the survey asked, "Have you obtained your MSW (Forensic Practice) from NWU?" (Yes/No). Responses indicating "No" or incomplete screening were excluded. Social workers not practising in forensic social work were excluded. The sampling was thus all-inclusive. Given the use of an email/web survey to a professional population, the researchers anticipated a relatively low response rate. Web/email surveys typically achieve lower response rates than other modes, and these rates have declined over time. Meta-analyses and reviews consistently find that web surveys underperform mail surveys by 11 to 20 percentage points. This study was no exception, as the researchers obtained 28/97 valid responses (28.9%) (Shih and Fan 2008; Sheehan 2001; Daikeler, Bošnjak and Lozar Manfreda 2020).

In total, 30 individuals started the survey; 28 provided valid, complete responses and were analysed. This represents a valid response rate of 28.9% relative to the population frame (28/97). Despite the low return, the researchers continued the analysis by utilising non-parametric statistical procedures.

Sample Profile

The valid analytic sample comprised n = 28 respondents (of N = 97 alumni), with 96.4% female (27/28) and 3.6% male (1/28). Respondents were located mainly in the North-West (35.7%, 10/28) and Gauteng (32.1%, 9/28), followed by the Western Cape (17.9%, 5/28), Limpopo (7.1%, 2/28), the Northern Cape (3.6%, 1/28) and Mpumalanga (3.6%, 1/28). Current employers were SAPS (35.7%, 10/28), private practice (32.1%, 9/28), the office of the family advocate (17.9%, 5/28) and other (7.1%, 2/28).

Tenure clustered at three to five years (50.0%, 14/28) and zero to two years (32.1%, 9/28), with six to 10 years (7.1%, 2/28) and more than 10 years (10.7%, 3/28) being less common. Of the 30 who opened the survey, 27/30 (90.0%) reported an NWU master's and 28/30 (93.3%) confirmed employment as a forensic social worker; n = 28 valid completes were retained for analysis.

Data Collection and Ethics

Recruitment emails were sent to alumni, and the invitation was reposted, with administrator permission, to two closed professional Facebook groups to improve reach where contact details were unavailable or outdated: South African Social Workers and Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI). Posts contained only an invitation and survey link; no data were collected from Facebook, no direct messaging occurred, and no scraping/harvesting took place. Eligibility was confirmed via screening items in the survey (including the NWU MSW (Forensic Practice) alumni status). Participation was voluntary and anonymous; electronic informed consent preceded the questionnaire; no incentives were offered; procedures complied with Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval (NWU-0028-21-S1) and the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). The fieldwork window was 14 days, with extensions and reminder notices; the survey closed after the final extension and data were exported for analysis. The Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (RDGC) at North-West University granted access to the alumni list of MSW (Forensic Practice) graduates, with permission from the School of Psychosocial Health's deputy director. Confidentiality was protected by separating distribution email addresses from responses; biographical items excluded personally identifiable information, and data were securely stored with coded identifiers. Data access was restricted to the researchers who analysed the data. Participants could withdraw at any time and seek support for emotional distress; LifeLine South Africa provided trauma support and counselling when needed.

Data Analysis

The researchers used JASP 0.17.3.0 statistical software to analyse the data. The analysis employed descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, central tendencies, and dispersion measures (Hassan 2024). The methods included a correlation analysis between the dependent variables using Spearman's Rho coefficients (McLeod 2023). The non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to assess group differences on various demographic and turnover intention variables, considering the impact of the small sample size on the lack of normality (Frost 2024). Data normality was checked using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Statistical significance was interpreted at the 95% confidence level. In addition, reported Cohen's d levels were analysed as 0.2 (minimal effect), 0.3 (small effect), and 0.5 (medium effect).

While the statistical results cannot be generalised to the broader population, they provide insights into factors affecting turnover intent among a specific sample of respondents.

Results

The response rate for the online questionnaire was 30 out of a total population of 97 respondents. This corresponds to a response rate of 28.8% (N = 28 valid responses from the total population of 97), which was higher than expected. Due to the voluntary nature of participation, the sample size was limited to 28 valid responses.

Sample Demographics

Respondents were predominantly female (96.4%, 27), with 3.6% males (1). The results indicated that 27 respondents obtained their master's degrees from North-West University, and three respondents obtained their degrees from another university. The respondents were mainly from the North-West province (10), accounting for 35.7%. The age distribution of respondents was predominantly between 25 and 30 years. Respondents were employed by the South African Police Services (35.7%), private practice (32.1%), the office of the family advocate (17.9%), DSD (7.1%) and others (7.1%). The employment period of respondents varied between three and five years (50%) and zero and two years (32.1%). Turnover intention was measured using the three questions from the turnover intention scale, which were recoded to become independent nominal variables. Half of the respondents reported active job hunting (14/28 = 50.0%). The majority often thought about quitting (16/28 = 57%). For the item "I will probably look for a job in the next year", 16/28 = 57% endorsed Yes. These indicators suggest a substantial proportion of the sample was considering exit at the time of the survey. The expected turnover resulting from this profile would have severe, negative impacts on these workers' employment situations and the clients being served.

Table 2: Mean Scores on the Different Scales

	Job satisfaction mean	UWES vigour mean	UWES dedication mean	UWES absorption mean	Social support mean
Valid	28	28	28	28	28
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.286	3.679	4.429	4.464	3.821
Std. Deviation	0.713	0.945	0.879	0.744	0.863
Minimum	2.000	2.000	3.000	3.000	2.000
Maximum	4.000	5.000	6.000	6.000	5.000

The mean scores on the different dependent variables indicate that, on average, respondents scored between 3.2 and 4.4 on the scales, representing moderately positive scores.

Analysis 1: Correlations Among Dependent Variables in the Workplace

This section examines the relationships between the various workplace conditions that are assumed to contribute to turnover intentions. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, symbolised by "ρ" (rho), is a non-parametric statistical measure for use with ranked data (Sedgwick 2014). It proves valuable in mitigating the impact of extreme scores or violations of assumptions (Field 2015). The correlation table (table 6) presents the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between social support, job satisfaction and work engagement (vigour, dedication, absorption), along with their statistical significance and sample sizes.

Table 3: Spearman's rho Correlations Between Social Support, job Satisfaction and Overall Work Engagement

Spearman's correlations								
Variable	Social mean	Job satisfaction	UWES vigour mean	UWES dedication	UWES absorption	StressPre 12	QuitPre 13	QuitPre 14
1. Social support mean	Spearman's rho	—						
	p-value	—						
2. Job satisfaction mean	Spearman's rho	0.343	—					
	p-value	0.074	—					
3. UWES vigour mean	Spearman's rho	0.14	0.749***	—				
	p-value	0.478	<.001	—				
4. UWES dedication mean	Spearman's rho	0.372	0.74***	0.682***	—			
	p-value	0.051	<.001	<.001	—			

Variable	Social mean	Job satisfaction	UWES vigour mean	UWES dedication	UWES absorption	StressPre 12	QuitPre 13	QuitPre 14
5. UWES absorption mean	Spearman's rho	0.498**	0.153	0.163	0.271	—		
	p-value	0.007	0.436	0.408	0.163	—		
6. StressPres 12	Spearmans' rho	-0.528**	-0.217	-0.121	-0.443*	-0.522**	—	
	p-value	0.004	0.268	0.541	0.018	0.004	—	
7. QuitPre13	Spearman's rho	-0.428*	-0.695***	-0.587**	-.0538**	-0.159	0.382*	—
	p-value	0.023	<.001	0.001	0.003	0.419	0.045	—
8. QuitPre14	Spearman's rho	-0.639***	-0.286	-0.152	-0.44*	-0.601***	0.903***	0.423*
	p-value	<.001	0.14	0.441	0.019	<.001	<.001	0.025

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

The analysis of Spearman's rho correlations highlights several notable relationships among the variables. Social support has a moderate positive correlation with job satisfaction ($\rho = .343$, $p = .074$), although this is not statistically significant. It also shows a mild positive correlation with UWES-17 dedication ($\rho = .372$, $p = .051$), which is marginally significant. A stronger positive correlation exists between social support and UWES -17 absorption ($\rho = 0.498$, $p = 0.007$), indicating that higher social support is associated with greater absorption in work activities.

Job satisfaction strongly correlates with UWES-17 vigour ($\rho = .749$, $p<.001$) and UWES dedication ($\rho = .74$, $p<.001$), suggesting that higher job satisfaction is associated with increased vigour and dedication. However, the correlation between job satisfaction and UWES-17 absorption is weak and insignificant ($\rho = .153$, $p = .436$).

Stress shows a significant negative correlation with social support ($\rho = -.528$, $p = .004$), job satisfaction ($\rho = -.217$, $p = .268$), UWES-17 vigour ($\rho = -.121$, $p=.541$), UWES-17 dedication ($\rho = -0.443$, $p = .018$), and UWES-17 absorption ($\rho = -.522$, $p = .004$). This indicates that higher stress levels are associated with lower levels of social support, job satisfaction, vigour, dedication and absorption.

The results indicate that job stress, intention to find a new job and intention to look for a different job in the next year were strongly linked to lower levels of social support,

job satisfaction, vigour and dedication. Only the stress question showed a significant negative link with absorption. Employees with lower turnover intentions were not actively considering leaving their current positions. The study also found that receiving sufficient social support from colleagues, supervisors, or other sources engaged forensic social workers more. It is worth noting that social support did not directly affect turnover intention, meaning that having social support did not significantly impact the likelihood of leaving the job. Overall, this result highlights the importance of job satisfaction and social support in forensic social work. Job satisfaction reduces turnover intentions, while social support primarily influences work engagement rather than directly affecting turnover decisions.

The alternative hypothesis (H1.1) for the relationship between workplace factors and turnover intentions is hereby partially supported. Planning to start looking for an alternative job in the future is not related to job satisfaction and vigour, demonstrating that these aspects are independent of job search. Similarly, thinking about quitting is not associated with absorption, indicating that social workers will continue their jobs responsibly despite considering quitting.

Analysis 2: Demographic Factors and Social Support, job Satisfaction and Work Engagement

Sushmita (2023) found that work engagement was influenced by work environment, culture, job security, reward systems and demographic factors. This analysis examined the influence of age, gender, place of employment and tenure on turnover intentions, as well as their impact on social support, job satisfaction and work engagement. The group comparison results indicate that the employment tenure period did not affect any of the measured dimensions. Similarly, age did not influence any of the workplace conditions being measured. This was not surprising, seeing that the tenure period rendered similar results.

The choice of employer significantly influenced *social support* ($H(2, n = 28) = 13.889$), $P < .008$, $d = .526$) as illustrated in the following figure.
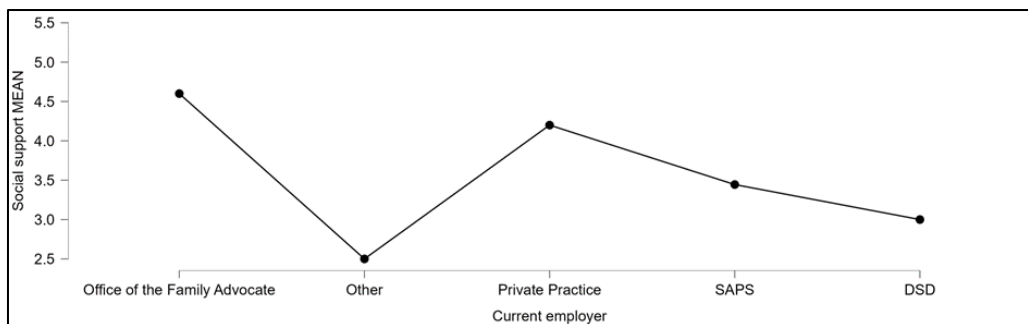
Figure 1: Influence of Social Support on Employment

The office of the family advocate provided the most supportive employment conditions, followed by private practice. The "other" employment category was the most non-supportive, but the researchers did not indicate the type of employer.

The null hypothesis (H0.2) was supported for the variables employment tenure period and age. This meant that respondent turnover intentions could develop even if the tenures were long, and one would expect the respondent to have adjusted and settled into a long-term career. The alternative hypothesis (H1.2) was supported, indicating that specific employers were more effective at reducing turnover intentions compared to others.

Analysis 3: The Influence of Turnover Intentions on Workplace Conditions

Next, the influence of turnover intention variables was assessed as independent variables. The alternative hypothesis (H1.3) was supported for some variable combinations, while the null hypothesis (H0.3) was supported in the case of other variable combinations. Where respondents were "thinking about quitting" their current jobs, their "job satisfaction" (2, n = 28) = 9.719, p = .008, d = .334), dedication H(2, n = 28) = 8.262, p = .016, d = 0.330) and vigour levels H(2, n = 28) = 8.706, p = .013, d = .309) were negatively affected. The effect sizes were small in these cases.

Where respondents were "merely looking for other work", their "social support" was negatively influenced (H(2, n = 28) = 10.338, p = .006, d = .365) and their absorption by their work was lower H(2, n = 28) = 15:831, p < .001, d = .571). It seemed that lack of social support contributed to less absorption with work or vice versa.

Where respondents were "actively looking for other jobs," their job satisfaction was low H(1, n = 28) = 4.018, p = .045, d = .167), their "social support" was low, H(1, n = 28) = 11.239, p = .001, d = .40), dedication was low H(1, n = 28) = 7.169, p = .007, d = .0247), and their absorption levels were low H(1, n = 28) = 7.194, p = .002, d = .289). Their "active job hunting" did not influence vigour. Thus, this group was able to continue working with the necessary energy while job hunting.

Since the calculated effect sizes were small in many of these results, the researchers were cautious about overinterpreting the nuanced differences. Overall, the researchers concluded that thinking about quitting harmed performance at work, as reflected in dedication and vigour, and such employees would become dissatisfied with their work. As they began searching for alternatives, they became less engrossed in their work and it seemed they had lost the support of their colleagues. As they started actively seeking work, the negative impacts compounded, they became less dedicated and less absorbed, and more dissatisfied. However, they regained their vigour and could still perform.

Limitations

Several limitations became apparent throughout the research process and had an impact on the study outcome. The researchers only focused on forensic social workers. As a result of the minimalised response on the questionnaire, these results cannot be generalised to the broader population in South Africa. Due to time constraints, minimal participation from respondents and limited financial resources, conducting a comprehensive investigation on a larger scale proved difficult. The sample size of this study was notably smaller than anticipated. Little additional participation could be elicited by extending the data collection time and continuing to send reminders. The COVID-19 pandemic further influenced the data collection rate and the data collection time was further extended.

The small sample size affected the normality of the data and non-parametric techniques were used by default. All results were limited to the sample and contributed to a better understanding and description of the working conditions in individual cases. Further qualitative studies could provide more detailed conclusions about the working conditions and burnout associated with forensic social work.

The study did not focus on the direct measurement of burnout, but rather on those workplace conditions that contributed to turnover intentions. Burnout could be included in future surveys.

Discussion

For future research, the researchers are considering employing a mixed-methods approach to capture the nuanced, lived experiences of forensic social workers that quantitative data alone do not fully reveal. Additionally, incorporating variables related to organisational position (e.g., role clarity, seniority) and organisational climate (such as leadership style and communication culture) could offer a more comprehensive understanding of structural influences on turnover intentions. These enhancements would deepen the study's practical relevance and broaden its applicability across diverse institutional settings.

This study highlighted the workplace factors that appear to contribute to turnover intentions among forensic social workers in South Africa. Consistent with Gifford and Young (2021), age and tenure did not significantly affect turnover intentions. Progression was observed in the different types of turnover intentions. For instance, vigour declined as employees became increasingly outspoken about their intentions to leave and began searching for alternatives. This pattern aligns with evidence that lower work engagement, particularly in terms of vigour, is associated with stronger turnover intentions in human service settings (Dechawatanapaisal 2022). As intentions shifted from thoughts to casual job-seeking actions, social support appeared to become less critical. The researchers saw social support as those behavioural reactions of support by colleagues. Active job hunting also led to a decline in dedication and absorption, two

critical aspects of one's ability to enjoy and thrive in their work. Job satisfaction seemed to be at stake once ideas about quitting turned into job searching.

Workplace factors, such as the level of social support and job expectations or roles, could account for turnover intentions (Douglas and Roberts 2020; Pelly 2023). Some employers were markedly more successful in rendering social support, and this could be the hinge factor in starting turnover intentions. Hence, when respondents began thinking about quitting and then actively pursued searching for other jobs, the social support was already significantly lower.

Turnover does not appear to be determined by the nature of the forensic social work task, but rather by workplace factors, primarily the level of social support provided to employees. It became clear that in this study, the family advocate's office provided the most supportive work environment, followed by private practice contexts where social workers have more autonomy and choice in what they want to do. SAPS and DSD were at the lower end of supportive work environments, although the "other" category was markedly lowest of them all. Would this category represent workers who had already left the forensic context and were now working in environments they enjoyed even less? Due to the study's limited sample size, no generalisations can be made regarding organisational working conditions and the conclusions reached here apply specifically to the respondents included in the sample.

Recommendation

After analysing the literature and study findings, the researchers propose several actionable recommendations. These recommendations pertain to forensic social work practice, organisational improvements, policy implementation, and areas for further research. The study's results and recommendations can inform guidelines for social work management and suggest potential research topics to support these professionals.

Recommendations for Forensic Social Work Practice and Organisational Improvements

An online survey, consisting of a questionnaire that included a series of standardised scales, was used to determine the factors contributing to the turnover intention of South African forensic social workers. The study did not focus directly on personal burnout factors but rather on workplace factors such as workplace support, job satisfaction, job stress, work engagement and intention to quit. Besides these workplace factors, social work management emerged as an essential part of supporting practising forensic social workers, particularly through effective supervision. Supervisors can also help better prepare forensic social workers for what the practice environment may entail, thereby potentially reducing disillusionment and turnover intentions.

Although the link between social support and job satisfaction was not statistically significant, the positive relationship is noteworthy. Management should strengthen

social support, team building, peer support and mentorship to build a sense of community and emotional well-being. The strong positive relationship between work engagement and job satisfaction suggests that enhancing engagement can improve satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions. Management should therefore invest in professional development, training and skill-building to keep forensic social workers engaged and motivated.

Since job satisfaction significantly affects turnover intentions, it is crucial to monitor and improve it. Organisations should run regular surveys, address workload, workplace culture and job design, and involve social workers meaningfully in decision-making processes. Training in critical thinking and clear report writing can further improve report quality and may also influence turnover, as more competent and confident practitioners may be less inclined to leave. In conclusion, attending to job satisfaction, work engagement, supervision and social support is key to reducing turnover intentions and retaining skilled forensic social workers.

Recommendation for Further Research

The results of this study call for further research on job satisfaction, work engagement and social support among South African forensic social workers, given the limited existing literature. Future research should investigate the qualitative aspects of social support, including its quality and sources, to better understand their impact on work engagement and job satisfaction. Additionally, researchers should explore organisational factors, such as leadership support and team dynamics, that may influence the relationship between social support and turnover intentions.

Longitudinal studies should be considered to assess how changes in social support and job satisfaction affect turnover intentions over time. The study's small sample size may have influenced the results; therefore, future studies should use larger samples to achieve more reliable outcomes in quantitative studies.

Conclusion

This study highlighted job satisfaction, social support and work engagement as key factors influencing turnover intentions among South African forensic social workers. Thoughts of quitting and active job searches significantly reduced dedication and absorption, while higher social support was associated with lower turnover intentions. Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, employment status, and duration of employment, showed a minimal direct impact on dedication and work engagement. However, younger professionals exhibited slightly higher dedication. The study also revealed that active job hunting negatively affects dedication and absorption levels, while those not engaged in job hunting reported higher scores. Similarly, thoughts about quitting significantly affected dedication and vigour, with higher scores among those not considering resigning. Overall, this research underscores the importance of

enhancing social support and addressing psychological factors to mitigate turnover intentions among forensic social workers. By focusing on these areas, organisations can potentially improve job satisfaction and work engagement, thereby reducing turnover rates in this critical field.

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