



HOPE'S MODERATING EFFECTS ON CRISIS WORKERS' MEANING IN WORK AND TURNOVER INTENTIONS

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Abstract: Introduction: High turnover in the helping professions has been a widespread issue, disrupting client care and burdening workers who stay. Historical data has identified meaning in work, comprised of transcendent and practical facets, as a persistent buffer to turnover intentions. This study integrated hope as a novel variable while examining crisis workers' meaning in work and turnover intentions. Specifically, the study assessed whether meaning in work and hope would correlate with crisis workers' turnover intentions and whether hope would moderate crisis workers' meaning in work and turnover intentions. **Methods:** This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design ($N = 116$) with moderating regression analysis. **Results:** A statistically significant, positive relationship between meaning in work and turnover intentions was found. Hope did not account for variance in turnover intentions at a statistically significant level when entered into Step 2, nor did hope moderate the relationship between meaning in work and turnover intentions at a statistically significant level. When entered into Step 1, hope had a mild but statistically significant positive relationship with turnover intentions, and meaning in work sustained a statistically significant relationship when entered into Step 2. **Conclusion:** Crisis workers with higher meaning in work were at higher risk for turnover intentions, a divergence from the existing literature. Data were collected at the height of the Great Resignation and higher hospitalization rates for COVID-19, which may have contributed to this unexpected outcome.

Keywords: turnover intentions; crisis workers; meaning in work; hope; quantitative; moderating regression

INTRODUCTION

Hope's Moderating Effects on Crisis Workers' Meaning in Work and Turnover Intentions

Human services professionals (HSPs) in the United States have an exceptionally high turnover rate, persistently above 31% from

2015–2019, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2020). High turnover threatens effective client care as providers struggle to maintain continuity and occasionally shutter programs due to chronic insufficient staffing (Woltmann and Whitley, 2007) in a field where job openings hover

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between 27% and 40% (Lisinski, 2019), and 72% of providers report difficulty filling jobs (Citino et al., 2017). Professional stress is a powerful driver of high turnover intentions and actual turnover among helping professionals (Bong, 2019), with turnover compounding stress among employees who remain (Chung & Choo, 2019). High turnover and turnover intentions tend to coincide with high stress, emotional strain, and low job satisfaction (Asikainen et al., 2020), which are highly correlated with exposure to violence, whether directly (Asikainen et al., 2020; Lamonthé & Guay, 2017) or indirectly (Tavormina & Clossey, 2017). However, employees with high meaning in work tend to be less likely to consider leaving their jobs (Akgunduz et al., 2020; Fouché et al., 2017; Vermooten et al., 2019).

Prolonged or intense, acute exposure to trauma, duress, and decision making pressure heighten crisis workers' psychological risk (Guilaran et al., 2018; Nagamine et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2015; Wines et al., 2019). Crisis environments are those in which a professional comes in direct contact with individuals and communities because of acute trauma or devolvement, disposing the client to a state of disequilibrium (Yeager & Roberts, 2015). Such stress can increase posttraumatic stress (Nagamine et al., 2018; Wines et al., 2019) and has been associated with unusually high suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Rose et al., 2015). High posttraumatic stress response, high turnover intentions, and diminished job satisfaction have been demonstrated among helping professionals who have been assaulted on the job (Lamonthé & Guay, 2017), witnessed violence in their workplace (Wilson et al., 2018), or fear that their job poses a risk to their well-being (Agyapong et al., 2015) across crisis or noncrisis environments.

Crisis Worker Stress and Turnover

Crisis workers encounter clients due to trauma or acute distress, causing a state of disequilibrium (Yeager & Roberts, 2015), regularly encountering lethality (Gilliatt et al., 2018; Tavormina and Clossey, 2017; Wines et al., 2019), violence (Asikainen et al., 2020; Tavormina and Clossey, 2017; Wilson et al., 2018), illness (Rose et al., 2015), and destruction (Guilaran et al., 2018). For this study, employees who identified as crisis workers included (a) prehospital personnel, such as emergency medical services (EMS) and emergency department (ED) medical professionals and social workers; (b) behavioral health crisis or inpatient staff; (c) domestic violence shelter advocates; (d) disaster responders; (e) child welfare professionals; (f) CIT members, and (g) crisis hotline workers.

Crisis workers have reported experiencing stress from conflicting responsibilities (Merchant & Whiting, 2015; Nelson et al., 2017), delayed debriefing (Wilson et al., 2018), diminished psychological well-being (Guilaran et al., 2018; Nagamine et al., 2018; Passmore et al., 2020), increased suicidal ideation and attempts (Kitchingman et al., 2018a; Rose et al., 2015), and disordered mental health and substance use (Lee et al., 2017). Crisis workers across fields also reported becoming hardened or numb because of their professional stress (Asikainen et al., 2020; Tavormina & Clossey, 2017; Wines et al., 2019). Such distress can hamper service delivery, reduce employees' effectiveness (Kitchingman et al., 2018b; Wilson et al., 2018), and increase turnover intentions and actual turnover (Fukui et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2018).

Meaning in Work

Meaning in work is an employee's feelings of their work's significance, worthwhile

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purpose, and reflection of their self, values, and goals (Steger et al., 2012) and incorporates the individual's values, motivations, beliefs, and perceptions of the people in their work community (Rosso et al., 2010). Researchers have illustrated meaning in work as a compass with poles of self vs. others and being vs. doing (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012), proposing that employees experience optimized meaning in work when their work balances at the intersection of self/others and being/doing.

People who feel their work contributes to the world's betterment (Sun et al., 2019), feel a calling to their work (Fouché et al., 2017), and are engaged with their work (Vermooten et al., 2019) tend to have higher meaning in work and lower turnover intentions. Researchers have classified factors like calling and contributing to the greater good as transcendent features of meaning in work, distinct from components like relationships with supervisors and work-role fit. Meaning in work can moderate the effects of burnout (Leunissen et al., 2018; Passmore et al., 2020), secondary traumatic stress (Passmore et al., 2020) and unsatisfactory working conditions (Arnoux-Nicolas et al., 2016) on turnover intentions.

Hope

Snyder et al. (1991) described hope as a two-factor construct explaining human motivations, beliefs, and behaviors, eschewing the colloquial emotionality of the term. A person's ability to conceive multiple solutions to problems or routes around barriers (e.g., pathways thinking) and belief in their ability to persist and achieve (e.g., agentic thinking) comprise hope (Snyder et al., 1991). Hope has been researched as a protective factor against secondary traumatic stress (Passmore et al., 2020) and a reason people leave their jobs (Mobley et al., 1979). Helping professionals have also reported that their sense of hope enables optimism in the

face of clients' struggles and grief (Browning et al., 2019) and transferable between client and helper (Bishop & Willis, 2014; Flesaker & Larsen, 2010).

Shiri et al. (2020) proposed that hope serves as a summative protective factor against compassion fatigue and burnout and determined that hospice workers had a more pronounced sense of hope and meaning in life than health professionals outside of the hospice unit. Helping professionals with higher hope were less likely to report secondary traumatic stress (Browning et al., 2019; Passmore et al., 2020), less burnout (Browning et al., 2019; Passmore et al., 2020), higher meaning in work (Passmore et al., 2020), and higher compassion satisfaction (Browning et al., 2019).

Hopelessness has been a prominent risk factor in suicide risk assessments (Beck et al., 1974; Grewal & Porter, 2007; Weishaar & Beck, 1992), demonstrating the overt power of hope or hopelessness to direct a person's actions. A person's hopefulness could mitigate suicidal behavior in depressed individuals with suicidal ideation, while hopelessness augmented suicidal risk (Beck et al., 1974; Grewal & Porter, 2007; Snyder et al., 2014). Meanwhile, clinicians' sense of hopelessness for a better future for their clients was assessed as an accurate suicidal risk prediction tool (Barzilay et al., 2018), highlighting hope's interpersonal components.

Turnover Intentions

Turnover intentions denote an employee's consideration of leaving their post (Dahling & Librizzi, 2015) though turnover intent does not necessarily lead to voluntary departure (Sundram et al., 2018). Mobley (1977) theorized that most people follow a linear pathway from initial turnover thought to actual voluntary turnover. However, turnover intention is not highly predictive of actual

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voluntary turnover (Bothma & Roodt, 2013; Fukui et al., 2019).

Turnover Intentions and Meaning in Work

Researchers have consistently reported direct (Akgunduz et al., 2020; Fouché et al., 2017; Heleno et al., 2018; Siahaan & Gatari, 2020; Vermooten et al., 2019) and indirect (Arnoux-Nicolas et al., 2016; Fouché et al., 2017; Leunissen et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2019; Vermooten et al., 2019) effects of meaning in work on turnover intentions. All reviewed articles demonstrated a negative relationship between meaning in work and turnover intentions, such that employees with higher meaning in work reported less desire to leave their jobs. The strength of the relationship between meaning in work and turnover intention has been less stable than the relationship's nature. Correlations ranged from -.14 among financial services employees (Vermooten et al., 2019) to -.226 among hotel employees (Akgunduz et al., 2020) to -.50 among teachers (Fouché et al., 2017) and -.54 (Siahaan & Gatari, 2020) among Millennial workers. Meaningful work and work engagement also have a strong relationship and have moderated one another's effects on turnover intentions (Siahaan & Gatari, 2020; Vermooten et al., 2019). Meaning in work has also moderated burnout (Leunissen et al., 2018; Passmore et al., 2020) and undesirable working conditions' effects (Arnoux-Nicolas et al., 2016) on turnover intentions.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of job embeddedness, proposed by Mitchell et al. (2001), provided the theoretical framework to conceptualize this research study. The researchers proposed the theory of job embeddedness to explain why people stay in their jobs, a departure from previous literature that primarily sought to explain why people leave. Mitchell and colleagues summarized job embeddedness as

the "totality of forces" that contribute to employees' decisions to remain in their positions (2007, p. 1115). Job embeddedness is used to consider the dynamism of employees' internal and external environments, including how protective factors influence their stay/leave decisions, conceptualized through the lens of attachment theory.

Hypotheses

H_{a1}: There is a statistically significant relationship between meaning in work and turnover intention among crisis workers.

H_{a2}: There is a statistically significant relationship between hope and turnover intentions among crisis workers.

H_{a3}: Hope moderates the relationship between meaning in work and turnover intentions at a statistically significant level among crisis workers.

METHODS

I used a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to complete this study. Specifically, a moderating multiple regression analysis was used to assess whether hope would moderate the established relationship between meaning in work and turnover intentions. Meaning in work (*X*) was an independent variable, hope (*M*) was the independent/moderating variable, and the dependent variable was turnover intentions (*Y*) for this study. Surveys were administered electronically to crisis workers and analyzed using multiple regression analysis.

Respondents were invited to participate via the American Association of Suicidology listserv and via crisis-focused professional groups and pages on social media. Respondents had to be age 18 or above and employed in a paid crisis-serving position at the time of survey completion. Respondents provided demographic information and completed the *Comprehensive Meaningful*

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Work Scale (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012), *Adult Hope Scale* (Snyder et al., 1991), and the 9-point *Turnover Intention Scale* (Cohen, 1999). The final sample size was 116 respondents who had completed all survey instruments and did not have any missing data, yielding a .945 statistical power. To examine the research hypotheses, meaning in work was entered into Step 1, hope into Step 2, and the interaction variable was entered into Step 3, with turnover intentions entered as the dependent variable.

RESULTS

The final sample ($N = 116$) predominantly identified as female (58.6%, $n = 68$), and 55.2% reported having supervisory duties as part of their crisis work ($n = 64$). Psychiatric crisis workers were the most represented occupation, accounting for 23.3% of the sample ($n = 27$). About half self-reported being married ($n = 57$), and respondents with a bachelor's degree accounted for over a third of the sample ($n = 43$) (Table 1). The mean age was 39.79 years, years in a human-serving field was 14, years in current position was 6.8, and the average income for this sample was \$60,748USD (Table 2).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Nominal Data

Characteristics	n	Percent	
Gender	Female	68	58.6%
	Male	44	37.9%
	Nonbinary	3	2.6%
Occupation	Child welfare worker	8	6.9%
	CIT/CERT	4	3.4%
	Crisis hotline	9	7.8%
	ED medical provider	13	11.2%
	Emergency response	17	14.7%
	EMT/EMS/paramedic	19	16.4%
	Hospice care	3	2.6%
	Other	11	9.5%
	Psychiatric crisis	27	23.3%
Psychiatric inpatient	5	4.3%	
Highest education	High school/GED	15	12.9%
	Associate's	19	16.4%
	Bachelor's	43	37.1%
	Master's	35	30.2%
	Terminal	4	3.4%
Supervise	Yes	64	44.8%
	No	52	55.2%
Marital status	Divorced	10	8.8%
	Married	57	50%
	Partnered	13	11.4%
	Single	33	28.9%
	Widowed	1	.9%

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Table 2

Range, Mean, Median, and Standard Deviations of Descriptive Nominal Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Age	112	19	68	39.79	12.85
Total years in human-serving field	115	1	50	14.14	11.56
Years in your current position	109	0	43	6.82	8.40
Income	108	15000	160000	60748.92	27814.24

Hypothesis 1

Meaning in work and turnover intentions were related at a statistically significant level ($r^2 = .446$, $p < .001$, Table 3), so I accepted Hypothesis 1. Examination of a scatterplot demonstrated a positive relationship between meaning in work and turnover intentions, such that respondents with higher meaning in work also tended to have higher turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 2

Hope accounted for an r^2 change of less than half a percentage point and did not have a statistically significant relationship with turnover intentions ($r^2 = .004$, $p = .367$). I concluded that hope did not relate to turnover intentions at a statistically significant level when accounting for meaning in work.

Hypothesis 3

The moderation analysis did not demonstrate that the interaction variable was related to turnover intentions at a statistically significant level, $r^2 = .004$. $F(1,112) = 31.060$, $p = .386$. Tables 3 and 4 show the results of the entire multiple regression with moderation analysis, demonstrating that the entire model was statistically significant ($p < .001$) but that the interaction variable was not. Therefore, I rejected the third hypothesis that hope would moderate the relationship between crisis workers' meaning in work and turnover intentions.

Table 3

Model Summary for Multiple Regression with Moderation Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2
1	.668a	.446*	.442	.912	.446	91.94	1	114
2	.671b	.450	.441	.912	.004	.819	1	113
3	.674c	.454	.440	.913	.004	.757	1	112

* $p < .001$

a. Predictors: (Constant), CenCMWS

b. Predictors: (Constant), CenCMWS, CenAHS

c. Predictors: (Constant), CenCMWS, CenAHS, CenCMWSxCenAHS

d. Dependent Variable: TIS Values

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Table 4

Moderated Regression Analysis with Centered Meaning in Work (CMWS) as IV, Hope (AHS) as Moderator, and Turnover Intentions as the Outcome Variable

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized	t
	B	Std. error	Coefficients	
(Constant)	.035	.080		.44
Centered CMWS	.665	.083	.665*	8.01
Centered AHS	.025	.093	.025	.26
Centered CMWS x Centered AHS	-.084	.096	-.074	-.87

* $p < .001$

Reordered Regression Analysis

Per guidance on stepwise regression analysis statistical significance (Desboulets, 2018), I reordered the regression analysis to determine whether the independent variables' order would bring the hope/turnover intentions relationship into statistical significance. When entering hope into Step 1 and meaning in work into Step 2, hope accounted for some variance in turnover

intentions at a statistically significant level ($r^2 = .117, p < .001, 13$), and meaning in work sustained a statistically significant relationship with turnover intentions at a weaker effect size when accounting for hope ($r^2 = .334, p < .001$) (Table 5). Scatterplot examination of the hope/turnover intentions relationship demonstrated a positive relationship, such that crisis workers with higher hope also tended to have higher turnover intentions.

Table 5

Model Summary of Multiple Regression, AHS in Step 1 and CMWS in Step 2

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R ² change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	.342a	.117	.109	1.152	.117	15.069	1	114	<.001
2	.671b	.450	.441	.912	.334	68.614	1	113	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), AHS Values

b. Predictors: (Constant), AHS Values, CMWS values

DISCUSSION

The positive, statistically significant relationship between meaning in work and turnover intention diverged from existing literature (Akgunduz et al., 2020; Fouché et al., 2017; Heleno et al., 2018; Siahaan & Gatari, 2020; Vermooten et al., 2019). Previous research on the meaning in work/turnover intention relationship has

ranged from $-.14$ among financial services employees (Vermooten et al., 2019) to $-.54$ among Millennials from a variety of fields (Siahaan & Gatari, 2020). The directionality of the relationship observed with this research ($r^2 = .446$) is thus drastically different than previously reported.

There are potential explanations for the different observed results between this study and existing literature on meaning in work

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and turnover intentions. Respondents completed the survey instruments from Oct.-Dec. 2021, at the height of the Great Resignation and 18 months into a pandemic that uniquely taxed crisis workers. This research study may have unintentionally captured a snapshot of how crisis workers saw their job options among a greater societal shift toward mass job departures. Furthermore, crisis workers were designated essential workers during the pandemic and experienced more exposure to disease, death, and other job stressors than their non-crisis counterparts, emphasized by increased attention to ED physician suicides as their professional strain overtook their protective factors (Greenberg, 2022; Laboe et al., 2021). This research was also unique in that crisis workers were the target sample. Without comparative literature on crisis workers from different times, I cannot discern whether this unexpected result reflects the Great Resignation, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the field of crisis in specific, or a combination of all three. As emerging literature quantifies the profound stress emergency personnel have experienced during the pandemic (Greenberg, 2022; Laboe et al., 2021; Yeo et al., 2021), turnover intentions (Falatah, 2021) and actual turnover (BLS, 2022) have coincidentally increased.

Potential reasons for the unexpected directionality of the relationship between meaning in work and turnover intention may be explained by existing literature. Theorized constructs of meaning in work have envisioned meaning in work as a balanced compass (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010). Scholars have agreed that the balance of self and others in work amplifies meaning and have postulated that being/doing (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012) or autonomy versus communion (Rosso et al., 2010) complete the balance with self/others. As the compass falls out of

balance, employees might derive diminished meaning from their jobs (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). This research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and examined workers who may have had expanded duties or greater demands foisted upon them to meet the demands associated with the pandemic (Gonzalez-Gil et al., 2021). Examining crisis workers' meaning in work and turnover intentions under these conditions might have exposed the practical threats that an unbalanced compass can have on employees.

Hope's two factors—pathways and agency—may account for the positive nature of this relationship and align with Mobley et al.'s (1979) assertion that employees who believe they can find another job are more likely to entertain and pursue other opportunities. Because hope was related to turnover intentions at a statistically significant level when entered into Step 1 of the regression but not when entered into Step 2, and because hope and meaning in work correlated at a statistically significant level, I postulate that global hope structurally precedes meaning in work as a transcendent, contributing factor. A similar effect was observed among community-based mental health providers, as providers who worked at organizations with more advancement opportunities were more likely to leave their positions (Bukach et al., 2017).

LIMITATIONS

Several research design elements, including sampling strategy and data analysis methods, may have limited this study. Self-selection bias can contribute to a polarized exposure of the dependent variable, turnover intentions (de Haan et al., 2015), and convenience sampling is less likely to capture a representative sample (Wall Emerson, 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the surprising result that meaning in

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work had a positive relationship with turnover intentions, I recommend repeating this assessment among crisis workers at other periods. A longitudinal analysis can examine shifts over time to discern whether this unexpected result was more reflective of crisis workers' feelings during the pandemic and the Great Resignation or whether this outcome was a stable representation of crisis workers' views on leaving their jobs.

I studied crisis workers to begin developing data on crisis as a niche field; future research is needed to contextualize crisis workers among the greater population to identify what differences might exist and to what degree. I also propose that future researchers utilize a comparison of means analysis to examine whether other factors linked to turnover intention risk factors might be replicated among crisis workers. These factors might include age, gender, income, history or fear of being exposed to aggression

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CONCLUSION

This research study examined the relationship between crisis workers' meaning in work, hope, and turnover intentions at the height of the Great Resignation and amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, unexpectedly identifying a positive correlation between crisis workers' meaning in work and turnover intentions. These results demonstrate that crisis workers may have different risk factors for turnover than other populations, possibly because of the high exposure to death, illness, lethality, and destruction and a lack of balance in their ability to care for themselves and their needs because of their professional demands.

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