

Assessing Factors Affecting Palestinian Employees' Turnover Intention: A Cross-Sectional Analysis

Ismail Salama Iriqat¹ , Sameera Musapih Awawda² * 

1 Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Law and Public Administration, Birzeit University, Ramallah, Palestine.

2 Department of Economics, Faculty of Business and Economics, Birzeit University, Ramallah, Palestine.

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* Corresponding author:

sawawda@birzeit.edu

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Abstract

Objectives: Employee turnover may have adverse consequences on the performance of institutions. Yet, the empirical evidence on its determinants in Palestine are very scarce. The goal of this paper is to assess the determinants of turnover intention in Palestine with a special focus on the differences between the public and private sectors.

Methods: This paper uses the labor force survey of 2020 and the logistic regression of the turnover intention.

Results: Results show that the turnover intention is negatively associated with age, a positive work environment, good health conditions, high wages and job duration. However, the turnover intention is positively associated with employees' educational level. Results also show that female employees, civil servants, employees in the Gaza Strip and healthy employees are less likely to leave their jobs compared to their counterparts.

Conclusions: Although the study's results show a relatively low turnover intention in the Palestinian labor market, institutions should improve working conditions to minimize such behavior in order to avoid ensuing direct and indirect costs.

Keywords: Employee turnover; public sector; Palestine; work environment; demographic factors

تقييم العوامل المؤثرة على نية الدوران الوظيفي للعاملين الفلسطينيين: تحليل مقطعي

إسماعيل سلامة عريقات¹ وسميرة مصباح عواودة²

¹ دائرة الإدارة العامة، كلية الحقوق والإدارة العامة، جامعة بيرزيت، رام الله، فلسطين

² دائرة الاقتصاد، كلية الأعمال والاقتصاد، جامعة بيرزيت، رام الله، فلسطين

ملخص

الأهداف: قد يكون هناك للدوران الوظيفي عواقب سلبية على أداء المؤسسات. ومع ذلك، فإن الدلائل التجريبية على محدوداتها في فلسطين نادرة جداً. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تقييم محددات نية الدوران الوظيفي للعاملين في فلسطين مع التركيز بشكل خاص على الاختلافات بين القطاعين العام والخاص. المنهجية: تستخدم هذه الورقة مسح القوى العاملة لعام 2020 بالإضافة إلى تحليلي الانحدار اللوجستي لنية الدوران الوظيفي.

النتائج: تظهر النتائج أن نية الدوران الوظيفي مرتبطة سلباً بالعمر وبيئة العمل الجيدة والظروف الصحية الجيدة والأجور المرتفعة ومدة العمل. كما أن نية الدوران الوظيفي مرتبطة بشكل إيجابي بالمستوى التعليمي للموظف. تظهر النتائج أيضاً أن النساء العاملات وموظفي القطاع العام والعمال في قطاع غزة والأفراد الذين يتمتعون بحالة صحية جيدة أقل عرضة لترك وظائفهم مقارنة بنظرائهم.

الخلاصة: على الرغم من أن نتائج البحث تظهر نية دوران وظيفي منخفضة نسبياً في سوق العمل الفلسطينية، إلا أنه يجب على المؤسسات تحسين ظروف العمل للحد من مثل هذا السلوك من أجل تجنب التكاليف المباشرة وغير المباشرة المرتبطة به.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدوران الوظيفي، القطاع العام، فلسطين، بيئة العمل، عوامل ديموغرافية

1 Introduction

The turnover intention is one of the critical issues that human resources face in the workplace in the private sector or the public sector alike. Turnover intention is defined as employee's willingness to leave the current job and find an alternative better opportunity (Tett & Meyer, 1993). The turnover intention may reflect job dissatisfaction and hence negatively affect employees' performance as well as the overall organizational performance (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Furthermore, the turnover intention is a very crucial issue to organizations as it adds another cost to organizations in terms of hiring new employees – perhaps with new job description, compensations as well as other new job requirements (Park & Min, 2020). It is, therefore, very fundamental for organizations to understand the determinants affecting the turnover intention in the workplace. Empirical evidence shows that the turnover intention is affected by different factors including, amongst others, demographic factors such as gender, age, marital status and the level of education (Emiroğlu et al., 2015; Alsaraireh et al., 2014), and job-related factors such as the working environment, the level of compensations, job satisfaction and job security (Falahat et al., 2019).

Regarding the demographic factors, empirical evidence shows that females are generally less likely to change their jobs for many reasons such as the lack of information about other job opportunities due to weaker social networking as compared to male workers (Lee et al., 2017). Other studies show that females have higher turnover intention as compared to males due to family commitments (Blomme et al., 2010). Some studies show no significant differences between male workers and female workers as regards the turnover intention (Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2007). Age is one of the main demographic variables affecting the employees' intention to leave their organizations. Existing evidence shows that the rate of turnover intention is higher amongst the younger employees as compared to their older counterparts (Abubakar et al., 2014). This is explained by the fact that older individuals consider the stability issue in their workplace and believe that they have higher opportunities for promotions due to having longer experience as compared to younger employees (Oh & Kim, 2019). Studies analyzing the impact of the level of education on the turnover intention show that employees with high level of education are more likely to leave their job for the sake of better job opportunities that matches their level of education and level of expectations (Alsaraireh et al., 2014).

Turning to the job-related factors, lower salaries are amongst the most important drivers of turnover in the organization. Some studies show that employees who are satisfied with their salaries are less likely to quit their jobs while employees with low salaries or lower satisfaction with salaries seek to look for better job opportunities (Hung et al., 2018). The differences between the turnover intention rate and its determinants between the private and public sector has received some attention in the empirical literature. Existing theoretical as well as empirical evidence about the differences in the rates of turnover between both sectors is rather mix. A study applied to the context of United Arab emirates revealed that public sector employees tend to have lower turnover intention as compared to private sector employees since the former are more satisfied with their jobs (Zeffane & Bani Melhem, 2017). Another study supports this finding demonstrating that employees in high positions in public facilities have higher rates of job satisfaction and job commitment and lower rates of turnover intentions as compared to their counterparts in the private sector (Agarwal & Sajid, 2017). Another explaining factor is the level of trust in the leader and in the organization. Available evidence shows that high levels of trust are associated with lower rates of turnover since trust makes employees feel more comfortable in the workplace (Shahnawaz & Goswami, 2011). The level of trust and hence the organizational commitment are found to be lower in the public sector leading employees to have higher intentions to leave the public organization (Pepple et al., 2023). Other studies show that public sector employees may be more likely to leave their job in case they have better opportunities especially in sectors with higher compensation rates such as the medical sector (Roslan et al., 2014). Another strand of related literature argues that employees in the public sector have generally high work culture and higher performance as compared to those working in the private sector – two factors that are shown to be negatively associated with the turnover intention (Rakatu et al., 2022).

2 Theoretical framework

In Palestine, the share of employees working in the public sector is 24% as compared to 54% working in the private sector while the rest of the employed population works in Israel and Israeli settlements (PCBS, 2023). Also of note that the average daily wage for private sector employees is 11% and 50% lower than that observed for public sector employees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, respectively (Khalidi, 2018). Thus, with the wage rate being one of the most important drivers of turnover, it is expected to observe higher rates of turnover in the private sector in Palestine. The current study assesses factors affecting the turnover intention among Palestinian employees. To fulfill our research objective, we employ a logistic regression model of the turnover intention using data from the Palestinian labor force survey for the year 2020.

The remaining of this paper is organized as follows. The second part represents the methodology applied to fulfil our research objective including the dataset and main variables of interest as well as the sample characteristics. Results of the logistic regression of the turnover intention are provided in the third part while the fourth part discusses the main results.

3 Methodology

We used data from the Palestinian Labor Force Survey (LFS) for the year 2020. The LFS is a nationally representative repeated cross-sectional survey that is conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in annual basis. The survey contains information about male and female individuals aging 10 years and older. For the purpose of the current analysis, we only consider employed adults aging 18 years or older. We applied a binary logistic regression to assess factors affecting the likelihood of turnover intention. The list of independent variables is divided into four categories. The first category includes demographic factors: gender, age, place of residence (rural, urban and refugee camps (reference group)), region (West Banks and Gaza Strip (reference group)), and the level of education (less than school (reference group), school, high education (diploma and Bachelor), and higher education (Masters and PhD)). The second category includes job characteristics: average daily wage (in New Israeli Shekel (ILS)), employment sector (public, private sector, (reference group), work in Israel), length of current employment – a variable indicating the duration of the current job in months, full-time job – a binary variable indicating whether the job is full-time or part-time employed. The third category includes one variable regarding the working environment of the job. This is a binary variable which takes 1 if the working environment is bad as indicated by individuals. Employed individuals show having bad working environment if they encounter bad work conditions, uncomfortable workplace, unsuitable occupation, and if the workplace is very far from the place of residence. The last category includes variables about health status: health environment – a binary variable that takes 1 if “*the employer gives a paid sick leave in case of illness or injury*”, and another health variable – health difficulty – a binary variable indicating the existence of difficulties in vision, hearing, mobility, concentration or communication. Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: The characteristics of the 2020-LFS sample

| Turnover intention | Total | Yes: 772 (3.54%) | No: 21,065 (96.46%) |
|--------------------|---------|------------------|---------------------|
| Demographics | | | |
| Male | 83.09% | 88.08% | 82.91% |
| Age | 37.93 | 31.63 | 38.16 |
| Rural | 21.99% | 22.41% | 21.97% |
| Urban | 65.96% | 65.41% | 65.98% |
| West Bank | 76.21% | 70.47% | 76.43% |
| Married | 73.055% | 55.44% | 73.70% |
| School | 61.15% | 59.07% | 61.22% |
| High education | 31.58% | 36.27% | 31.41% |
| Higher education | 2.91% | 1.04% | 2.98% |

| Turnover intention | Total | Yes: 772 (3.54%) | No: 21,065 (96.46%) |
|--|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Job characteristics | | | |
| Wage | 137.86 | 92.87 | 139.37 |
| Public | 23.63% | 2.46% | 24.41% |
| Work in Israel | 13.47% | 10.36% | 13.58% |
| Length of current employment | 111.13 | 53.92 | 113.03 |
| Full-time job | 70.23% | 53.89% | 70.83% |
| Work environment | 19.53% | 38.86% | 18.82% |
| Health | | | |
| Health environment | 38.21% | 7.25% | 39.34% |
| Health difficulty | 5.01% | 8.29% | 4.88% |
| The share represented in the third column of the table is for the total sample, while the shares represented in the fourth and fifth columns are, respectively, for those having and those who do not have an intention to leave their jobs. | | | |

Table 1 shows that the rate of turnover intention in Palestine is relatively low. Only 3.54% of the total employed Palestinians have intention to leave their jobs. About 83% of the sample are males with an average age of about 38 years. Regarding the place of residence, 68.96% are living in urban areas, 21.99% are living in rural areas, while 9.05% are living in refugee camps. More than two thirds of the sample are residing in the West Bank (76.21%). Roughly 73% are married with 61% having school education only, 31.6% have high education degree (diploma or bachelor) and 2.91% have higher degree of education (masters or PhD). Concerning the differences in demographics according to the turnover intention status, the highest difference is observed for the marital status where the rate of married reporting a positive intention to turnover is 55.44% as compared to 73.70% for those reporting a negative intention to turnover. This may indicate that married individuals are less likely to change or leave their current jobs. Moreover, the average age is higher for individuals indicating no intention to turnover which may demonstrate that younger individuals may be more likely to change their jobs.

Turning to the job characteristics, the average daily wage for the sample is 137.9 ILS. Noticeably, individuals with a positive turnover intention have lower wages (92.9 ILS/day) as compared to individuals without intention to turnover (139.4 ILS/day). Regarding the place of work, 23.6% of the total sample work in the public sector while about 13.5% work in Israeli settlements. As shown in Table 1, the share of individuals who work in the public sector and indicate positive turnover intention is much lower than that observed for those work in the public sector and indicate negative turnover intention (2.46% vs. 24.41%). Furthermore, the share of individuals who work in Israeli settlements and indicate positive turnover intention is lower than that observed for those work in settlements and indicate negative turnover intention (10.36% vs. 13.58%). Regarding the length of current employment, the average length of current employment for individuals with positive turnover intention is about half the average length observed for individuals with negative turnover intention (about 54 months vs. 113 months). Those results may indicate higher job security for those working in sectors other than the private sector and have stayed at their place of employment for longer time. Lastly, the share of full-time employees considering turnover is less than the share of full-time employees who are not considering turnover (53.9% vs. 70.8%).

Turning to the working environment, about 19.5% of the total sample demonstrating the existence of bad working environment in the workplace. In addition, 38.9% of employees with positive turnover intention indicates the existence of bad working environment while only 18.8% of employees with negative turnover intention indicates the existence of bad working environment. As for the health environment, 38.2% of the total sample indicate the presence of good health environment within the workplace as measured by being granted a paid sick leave in case of illness or injury. As regards the health difficulties, only 5% of the total employed individuals have any type of health difficulty. The share of employed individuals with health difficulties is higher among those indicating positive turnover intention (8.3%) to those indicating negative turnover intention (4.9%). The following section explores the statistical significance of the impact of these cofactors on the likelihood of turnover intention.

4 Analysis

Table 2 summarizes the odds ratios (OR) of the logistic regression of the turnover intention under three scenarios. The first model includes all the cofactors presented previously while the second and third models eliminate some of the insignificant variables.

Table 2: The odds ratio of the turnover intention for Palestinian employees 2020

| Variable | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|
| Demographics | OR | OR | OR |
| Male | 1.448* | 1.424* | 1.442* |
| Age | 0.978** | 0.983* | 0.984** |
| Rural | 1.161 | 1.153 | |
| Urban | 0.962 | 0.964 | |
| West Bank | 1.441* | 1.354* | 1.418* |
| Married | 1.035 | 1.046 | |
| School | 1.048 | 1.046 | |
| High education | 2.801*** | 2.488*** | 2.418*** |
| Higher education | 2.183 | 2.385 | |
| Job characteristics | | | |
| Wage | 0.997*** | 0.996*** | 0.996*** |
| Public | 0.232*** | 0.222*** | 0.225*** |
| Work in Israel | 0.878 | 0.879 | |
| Length of current employment | 0.999 | 0.997*** | 0.997** |
| Full-time job | 0.119*** | | |
| Work environment | 1.102 | 1.318* | 1.301* |
| Health | | | |
| Health environment | 0.203*** | 0.203*** | 0.203*** |
| Health difficulty | 1.941*** | 1.875*** | 1.876*** |
| Constant | 0.573 | 0.079*** | 0.080*** |
| Pseudo R^2 | 0.182 | 0.146 | 0.145 |
| *p-value<0.05; ** p-value<0.01; *** p-value<0.001 | | | |

As shown in Table 2, there are some variables which are not statistically significant in the first model. Length of current employment and working environment become statistically significant under the second and third models. In addition, it can be noted that the values of the regression coefficients (OR) are generally the same for each variable under the three models. The place of residence, marital status, school education, higher education and work in Israeli settlements appear to be not statistically significant. Starting with demographic characteristics, results presented in Table 2 shows that employed males have higher probability of turnover intention as compared to females (OR=1.44). In addition, the likelihood of turnover intention is decreasing with age. This indicates that older employees have lower probability for changing or leaving their current jobs. Employed individuals living in the West Bank are about one and half time more likely to leave their jobs as compared to employed individuals in the Gaza Strip (OR= 1.42). Finally, employed individuals with high education degree (bachelor or diploma) are nearly two and a half time more likely to leave their jobs as compared to less educated individuals.

Turning to job characteristics, higher wages and longer duration in the current job reduces the likelihood of turnover with an odds ratio of 99.6% and 99.7%, respectively. Individuals working in the public sector are 22.5% less likely to leave

their jobs as compared to individuals working in the private sector. Regarding the working environment, the existence of bad environment in the workplace increases the likelihood of turnover intention ($OR=1.3$). By contrast, the existence of good health environment in the workplace reduces turnover intention with odds ratio being equal to 20.3%. Furthermore, having any type of health difficulties may increase the likelihood of turnover intention with 1.88%.

5 Discussion

This paper assesses factors affecting the likelihood of turnover intention among Palestinian employees using data from a nationally representative survey conducted by the PCBS in 2020. Many interesting results emerging from this research are worth highlighting.

First, the demographic characteristics appear to be correlated with the turnover intention. Our results show that the turnover intention decreases with age and that the turnover intention is higher for males. These results are similar to those found in previous literature (e.g., Oh & Kim (2019); Lee et al. (2017); Song et al. (2016); Abubakar et al. (2014)). In Palestine, female workers might think it is costly to look for another job due to the work-family balance she is committed to. Furthermore, as shown in other contexts, younger workers who are in the beginning of their career tend to improve their conditions and make significant advancement in their jobs, hence they are more likely to leave their jobs. However, older workers tend to value their job as being more stable and provide them with potential opportunity for promotions. Our results also show that the turnover intention for individuals with a high degree of education is higher as compared to individuals with a lower degree of education. This result is in line with the empirical evidence demonstrating that workers with high level of education and working in a job that mismatches their level of education and skills tend to leave their job to find a better match for their abilities (Ju & Li, 2019). Another interesting results that is particular to the Palestinian context is the difference in the turnover intention observed for Palestinian living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Current results reveal that employed individuals living in the West Bank are more likely to look for another job as compared to those living in the Gaza Strip. Such a result might be explained to the fact that there are unequal opportunities in the two regions due to the closure of the Gaza Strip. Thus, employed individuals living in the Gaza Strip might not have the intensive to leave their job as it is not plausible to find a better alternative.

Secondly, as shown elsewhere, job characteristics are considered main determinants of the turnover intention. Results found in this paper demonstrate that higher wages and longer duration in the current job reduces the likelihood of turnover intention. Such results may reveal that higher job security represented in higher wages and longer experience in the current job would reduce the employees' willingness to change their jobs. These results are similar to those found in the previous studies such as Oh and Kim (2019); Hung et al. (2018); and Ji and Kim (2018). An also interesting result is about the differences of turnover intention between workers of the private and public sectors. Results show that individuals working in the public sector are less likely to leave their jobs as compared to individuals working in the private sector. In the Palestinian context, as mentioned in the outset, public jobs are more stable as compared to other jobs in terms of the higher wages in the public sector in both Palestinian regions. Accordingly, public sector employees have higher probability to remain in their current jobs. This result is in line with the empirical evidence arguing that workers in the public sector tend to be more satisfied with their job – possibly due to the relatively higher wage rates – hence to have higher commitments to the organization and lower probability of turnover intention (Agarwal & Sajid, 2017).

Thirdly, good working environment in the workplace would reduce the likelihood of turnover intention. Such a result is not surprising since good working environment is highly and positively associated with job satisfaction, which is negatively associated with the turnover intention. This finding is supported by studies demonstrating that good working environment motivates workers to work more efficiently and feel comfortable in the workplace which increase their commitments to the organization and reduce their intention to leave (Asriani & Riyanto, 2020; Falahat et al., 2019). Lastly, good health environment in the workplace reduces turnover intention while having any type of health difficulties may increase the likelihood of turnover intention. These results are similar to those found in Liu et al. (2019) showing that the existence of a healthy workplace environment increases employees commitment to their job and reduced their intention to

quit. Furthermore, Jiang et al. (2023) and Feng et al. (2022) find that workers with poor health status are more likely to leave their jobs. Having health difficulties and illness may be translated into job stress and poor performance, thus it would increase the turnover intention among workers.

Some limitations confronted in the current study are worth highlighting. First, there is a lack of data about employees' trust in organizations (both public and private), employees job satisfaction, job commitment, as well as detailed data on the working environment of the public sector as compared to that of the private sector. A comprehensive analysis of the difference of the turnover intention between workers in the public and the private sector requires the existence of such data to better understand the determinants of the turnover intention and how organizations in both sectors can reduce the rate of turnover. Another important limitation is regarding job security related to the absence of job contracts. Job informality is a critical issue in the Palestinian labor market where more than half of employees are working in the informal sector particularly in informal jobs in the public or private sectors. The LFS does not include data on this regard. It is expected that individuals without formal contracts, i.e., without job security, would report higher turnover intention which would be expensive for the organization to replace those cheap workers with other workers with higher wages and formal job contracts.

6 Conclusions and policy recommendations

It can be concluded that differences in the turnover intentions related to personal or demographic characteristics can be deemed as legitimate since those are generally beyond the control of the organization. However, other determinants of the turnover intention can be classified as illegitimate and shall be alleviated. Based on the findings of this study, it is very vital for organizations to improve the workplace conditions, to increase the wage rate, to guarantee a paid-sick leave for its workers, and to provide help to workers with special health or physical needs. Such actions may partially help reduce the rate of turnover intention in the organization, hence reduces the cost associated to it.

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