



## Take this job and shove it: An exploratory study of turnover intent among jail staff

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### A B S T R A C T

The success of any organization usually rests on the shoulders of its employees. As such, voluntary personnel turnover presents administrative challenges that have substantial and far reaching effects. Understanding the factors that lead to staff turnover intentions can assist organizational leaders in possibly altering the work environment to address employee concerns. Among correctional organizations, the few studies that have been conducted on turnover intent have focused, as most correctional research in general, on prisons. The exclusion of jail turnover intent is puzzling given the unique challenges that jail staff face. The current study attempted to fill this empirical void by using survey data to examine the antecedents (i.e., personal characteristics, perceptions of the work environment, and job attitudes) of turnover intent among staff at a large southern jail. Based on a multivariate analysis, the most powerful predictors of jail staff turnover intent were job attitudes (i.e., job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment). The findings suggested that administrators should concentrate on improving the work environment to boost employee job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

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### Introduction

Jails are a major component of the criminal justice system. There are currently more than 3,300 jails in the U.S., which house an average daily population of almost 750,000 detainees and employ more than 200,000 staff members (Pastore & Maguire, 2007). Jails are also labor intensive organizations, where personnel are responsible for a myriad of tasks and duties to ensure a safe, humane, and effective jail is operated. As such, staff retention is critical for the success of jail organizations. High rates of voluntary turnover among jail staff have substantial and far-reaching effects for jails. Moreover, many jails are confronted with recruitment and retention issues (Poole & Pogrebin, 1991; W. Price, Kieckbusch, & Theis, 2007). A review of the turnover literature among correctional staff revealed two primary conclusions. First, very few studies examined turnover of correctional personnel. This was surprising in light of the importance employees hold for the success of the organization. Second, the limited studies on correctional staff turnover had focused on prisons and not jails. "A lieutenant with a large urban county sheriff's department described the negative image of jails by stating that law enforcement is the golden child of the criminal justice system, prisons are the stepchild, and jails are the unwanted 'bastard' child who is locked in the attic and ignored" (Lambert, Reynolds, Paoline, & Watkins, 2004, p. 1). From the literature review, his contention is understandable. There has been

very little research on the potential predictors of turnover intent among jail workers. In fact, there has been a dearth of research on jail staff in general (Farkas, 1999; Griffin, 1999; Sims, 2001; Williams, Rodeheaver, & Huggins, 1999).

Jails are significantly different from prisons in many respects, and they also present some unique challenges. Jail staff members work with a wide array of individuals whose status range from pretrial detainees; those sentenced for misdemeanors and felonies; those awaiting transfer to prison; and parole and probation violators (Farkas, 1999). Jail staff deal with a higher rate of individuals suffering from mental health and medical issues than prison staff (Clear, Cole, & Reisig, 2009; Lambert et al., 2004), and there is also a higher suicide rate in jails than prisons (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005; Hayes & Rowan, 1988). Millions of people pass through jails each year (Tewksbury, 1997), resulting in a much higher rate of intake and release among the inmates incarcerated in jails than is found in prisons. Within jails, employees generally receive less training when compared to the staff at state-run prisons (Stohr, Lovrich, & Mays, 1997). Many urban jails are out of date, underfunded, understaffed, and overcrowded, which creates greater difficulties for the staff in accomplishing their jobs. Stohr, Lovrich, and Wilson (1994) argued that "staff shortages, due in part to low salaries relative to other similarly skilled positions in the criminal justice system, continue to bedevil jails" (pp. 313-314). Given these less than stable work conditions, especially when compared to prisons, one might expect higher turnover of personnel working in jails.<sup>1</sup>

The knowledge of and ability to understand the antecedents of turnover intent among jail staff are critical, yet there has been little

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research on jail staff turnover. There is an assumption that work place factors affect both prison and jail staff similarly. It is an assumption that should be tested numerous times before it is accepted. Thus, additional research is necessary on how work place factors affect jail staff. This study examined the potential antecedents of turnover intent among staff at a large, urban, southern jail by exploring the relationships among a host of personal characteristics, perceptions of the work environment, and overall job attitudes, all of which had been central components of previous correctional studies. Given the exploratory nature of the current study, the aforementioned sets of factors were chosen as a starting point of causal factors in explaining turnover intentions. Specifically, the effects of gender, age, tenure, race, educational level, position, supervisory status, role strain, job variety, relations with co-workers, perceived dangerousness of the job, input into decision-making, instrumental communication, job involvement, job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment on turnover intent among jail staff members were explored.

This article begins with a review of the limited research that has been conducted on turnover intent. This section is followed by an overview of the data used for the current study, as well as the research hypotheses guiding this empirical inquiry. Next, a series of analyses ultimately geared toward shedding light on the factors that explain jail personnel turnover intentions are presented. Finally, the implications of these findings for research and practice are discussed.

## Literature review

Voluntary and involuntary turnover represent the two primary means through which the employment relationship ends between an employee and an employer (J. Price & Mueller, 1986). Voluntary turnover occurs when the employee chooses to leave the job, while involuntary turnover occurs when the employer removes a worker from the job. Involuntary turnover is usually in the best interest of the organization (McShane & Williams, 1993); however, voluntary turnover tends to be more frequent, abrupt, and costly to the organization. Blakely and Bumphus (2004) reported that 60 to 70 percent of correctional staff turnover is voluntary. Furthermore, Wright (1993) noted in his study of juvenile correctional staff that the best employees tend to quit because they had more job opportunities. Voluntary turnover has both direct and indirect costs for organizations. Jails are heavily dependent on employees to carry out various organizational tasks and duties. Approximately 70 percent of jail operating costs is for labor (Kiebusch, Price, & Theis, 2003). In the end, employee turnover is costly for jails. There are the obvious costs of recruiting, testing, selecting, and training new staff, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars (Kiebusch et al., 2003; McShane, Williams, Schichor, & McClain, 1991; W. Price et al., 2007), but there is also the cost of overtime to fill critical posts until new employees are ready to carry out their duties. In addition, there are the indirect costs of losing the expertise of the person who has left, including their communication links with inmates and other staff. These social relationships take time to develop and cultivate (Mitchell, MacKenzie, Styve, & Gover, 2000; Stohr, Self, & Lovrich, 1992). Turnover can result in a high percentage of new and inexperienced staff, which can be a recipe for disaster (Lambert, 2001). Finally, turnover can erode employee morale over time (Byrd, Cochran, Silverman, & Blount, 2000; Stohr et al., 1992). Overall, turnover is costly, both directly and indirectly, for jails. Thus, understanding the potential causes of turnover is important so interventions can be made to reduce the problem.

Turnover intent refers to a person's desire to remain with or leave employment with a given organization (J. Price & Mueller, 1981). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), the best predictor of behavior is the intention to perform that behavior. Turnover intent has been consistently linked to voluntary turnover (Jurik & Winn, 1987; Lambert, 2001; Steel & Ovalle, 1984) and is usually the final stage

before a person quits (Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Understanding this intention is a critical step in examining the turnover process. More importantly, turnover intent should be a salient issue of jails (W. Price et al., 2007), as understanding such intentions might provide opportunities for recruitment and selection practices and retaining personnel that might be considering leaving. This knowledge could also lead to interventions aimed at reducing turnover intent in order to encourage employees to stay.

Despite the importance and cost of employee turnover and turnover intent, very little research on these issues among jail staff has been conducted. In Kiebusch et al.'s (2003) study of staff at five jails, those who perceived they had a challenging job; believed they had equitable promotional opportunities; felt the administration cultivated employees to reach their goals; and thought that the administration provided support for workers were less likely to express intent to leave their jobs. In addition, tenure was also inversely related to turnover intent (Kiebusch et al., 2003; W. Price et al., 2007). Among jail staff at five western jails, Stohr et al. (1992) observed that organizational identification and tenure both had a negative relationship with turnover. Age, tenure, and job satisfaction were all inversely linked with turnover intent among jail staff (Byrd et al., 2000). In addition, custody staff generally expressed a higher desire to leave their jobs than non-custody staff (Byrd et al., 2000), and age was negatively associated with turnover intent. So, while researchers are beginning to scratch the surface of correctional turnover intention, more work needs to be done, especially among jail populations. The current study attempted to fill this empirical void.

This study added to the literature in three ways. First, it added to the few studies that had examined the forces that shape the intentions of staff to stay or to leave. Second, this study examined a much larger number of respondents than past studies. Third, this study examined the three general categories of factors used in numerous studies of corrections as a theoretical framework to determine whether they also shape the turnover intentions of jail employees. Looking at all three categories is necessary to understand the variables involved in influencing turnover intent.

## Methodology

### Data

The present study used data from a survey that was provided to all available staff at the Orange County Corrections Department (OCCD), a large, county jail complex located in Orlando, Florida.<sup>2</sup> The county contains one major city and ten other municipalities, all of which exclusively use the county jail for local detention needs. The jail employs approximately 1,500 paid staff and typically houses more than 4,000 inmates. Ordered according to the inmate average daily population, the jail was among the fifteen largest jails in the country at the time data for this project were collected (Beck, Karberg, & Harrison, 2002).

The original data collection effort was conducted in the fall of 2001 under the direction of an ad hoc oversight commission, which was interested in exploring concerns and issues among the jail's staff. To accomplish this task, the researchers first conducted a series of focus groups designed to understand more fully those problems that might be unique to OCCD employees. Research staff conducted seven, two-hour focus groups, with forty-eight OCCD employees from different organizational levels and facilities, during a ten-day period. Findings from the OCCD focus groups assisted in developing a questionnaire that would be administered to staff at all levels within the department.

During five consecutive days in the fall of 2001, the staff from the OCCD were surveyed. The staff were informed that the survey was completely voluntary and the responses would be anonymous. With the consent of the jail director, jail personnel received two hours of overtime for participating in the survey. The administration of the survey took

place across each of the three primary shifts (i.e., 6:00 a.m.–5:30 p.m.; 3:00 p.m.–2:30 a.m.; and 7:00 p.m.–6:30 a.m.), and staff were afforded the opportunity to take part in any of the survey times even if it was not their assigned shift or work day. Of the 1,500 paid employees at the facility during the week the survey was administered, 1,062 staff members participated in the survey, which resulted in a response rate of 70 percent.

Respondents represented all areas of the correctional facility, such as correctional officers, case managers, medical staff, industry staff, food service workers, and so on. Moreover, the respondents represented various administrative levels of the correctional facility, from line staff to supervisors and managers.

In terms of respondents, about 56 percent of the responding staff were men and 44 percent were women. Four percent of those who responded were less than twenty-five years old; 10 percent were between twenty-five and twenty-nine years old; 18 percent were between thirty and thirty-four years old; 20 percent were between thirty-five and thirty-nine years old; 19 percent were between forty and forty-four years old; 12 percent were between forty-five and forty-nine years old; 11 percent were between fifty and fifty-four years old; and 6 percent were fifty years old or older. The mean tenure was ninety-five months, with a standard deviation of 74.68. About 39 percent of the respondents indicated that they were Black, 10 percent Hispanic, 45 percent White, and 6 percent other. About 21 percent of the respondents indicated that their highest educational experience was a high school diploma or GED; 43 percent indicated some college but no degree; 15 percent held an associate degree; 16 percent held a bachelor degree; and 5 percent had a graduate degree. Respondents represented all areas of the correctional facility, such as correctional officers, case managers, medical staff, industry staff, food service workers, etc. Finally, 10 percent of the respondents indicated that they supervised other staff.

### Hypotheses

The limited literature has suggested that there are three general categories of variables that may affect the turnover intent of jail staff members: personal characteristics, perceptions of the work environment, and overall job attitudes. Table 1 presents an overview of variable descriptions and hypothesized relationships to turnover intent.

In this study, the relationships between personal characteristics of gender, age, tenure, race, educational level, position, and supervisory status with turnover intent were examined. Given their minority status in the male dominated occupation of corrections, as well as their general negative perceptions of the work environment (when compared to males) (Jurik, 1988; Jurik & Halemba, 1984; Zimmer, 1986), the current study posited higher turnover intentions among female staff members. Age was predicted to have a negative relationship with turnover intent. Older jail staff may perceive fewer job opportunities than younger workers. Tenure was postulated to have an inverse association with turnover intent. That is, as tenure increases so do the investments a person has made with the employing organization, such as retirement benefits, pay level, social contacts, and so forth. Becker (1960) referred to these investments as sunken costs, which bind the employee to continue employment with the organization because the costs of leaving are too high. Previous correctional studies had noted that non-White officers hold less favorable perceptions of their work environment in terms of job satisfaction (Blau, Light, & Chamlin, 1986; Cullen, Link, Cullen, & Wolfe, 1989; Van Voorhis, Cullen, Link, & Wolfe, 1991) and equality (Jacobs & Kraft, 1978). Given these negative perceptions, the current study posited that non-Whites would have higher turnover intentions compared to their White counterparts. Educational level was hypothesized to have a positive effect on turnover intent. Higher education not only broadens people's horizons, it also raises their expectations. Jail employees with college degrees may have higher expectations for their jobs that the jail cannot meet. Jurik, Halemba, Musheno, and Boyle (1987) labeled this status inconsistency. Thus, jail employees with a college degree may become disillusioned about working in a jail, which would, in turn, increase their desire to find a new job. In addition, workers with a college degree may perceive themselves as having greater employment opportunities elsewhere. Position was hypothesized to be negatively related to turnover intent. Specifically, individuals who worked in custody positions in the jail were predicted to express higher levels of turnover intent compared to workers in non-custody positions, as has been previously observed. Working in custody is a demanding job that can wear down a person after a while. There has been little research on the impact of supervisory status on turnover intent among jail staff. Supervisory status, however, was hypothesized to have an inverse relationship.

**Table 1**

Description of variables predicting turnover intent

Variable	Predicted effect	Description
<i>Personal characteristics</i>		
Gender	-	Dichotomous variable: 0 = female, 1 = male
Age	-	Ordinal measure in years: 1 = less than twenty-five, 2 = twenty-five to twenty-nine, 3 = thirty to thirty-four, 4 = thirty-five to thirty-nine, 5 = forty to forty-four, 6 = forty-five to forty-nine, 7 = fifty to fifty-four, 8 = fifty-five or older
Tenure	-	Measured in months
Race	-	Dichotomous variable: 0 = non-White, 1 = White
Education	+	Dichotomous variable: 0 = no college degree, 1 = college degree
Position	-	Dichotomous variable: 0 = does not work in custody, 1 = works in custody
Supervisor	-	Dichotomous variable: 0 = not a supervisor, 1 = supervisor
<i>Work environment perceptions</i>		
Role strain	+	Seven-item additive index
Job variety	-	Four-item additive index
Co-worker relations	-	Three-item additive index
Dangerousness	+	Five-item additive index
Input into decision-making	-	Four-item additive index
Instrumental communication	-	Five-item additive index
<i>Job attitudes</i>		
Job involvement	-	Four-item additive index
Job stress	+	Six-item additive index
Job satisfaction	-	Five-item additive index
Organizational commitment	-	Two-item additive index

Notes: + indicates a positive relationship and - indicates an inverse/negative relationship; TI stands for turnover intent.

Supervisors have more power and input into organizational operations than do line staff. In addition, supervisors generally have higher salaries compared to their subordinates. These factors should increase the likelihood of wanting to remain with the jail.

The second category of variables that may influence turnover intent are work environment factors. In this study, the effects of role strain, job variety, co-worker relations, perceived dangerousness, input into decision-making, and instrumental communication were examined on the turnover intent of jail workers. Hepburn and Knepper (1993) defined role strain as where “one’s responsibilities and duties are vague, ill-defined and ambiguous or when administrative directives are inconsistent or contradictory” (p. 318). Thus, role strain generally results from role conflict and role ambiguity. Role strain was postulated to have a positive effect on turnover intent. Role strain is a negative experience that could cause employees to withdraw from the job. Role strain was measured using seven items (see Appendix A), which were taken from Cullen, Link, Wolfe, and Frank (1985); Poole and Regoli (1983); and Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970).

Job variety is the degree of different experiences offered by the job (J. Price & Mueller, 1986). Job variety was hypothesized to have a negative relationship with turnover intent. Job variety potentially makes the job more stimulating and enjoyable as compared to jobs that require repetitive tasks. This stimulation can cause people to appreciate their jobs, which in turn means that they are less likely to want to quit. Job variety was measured using four items that were summed to form an additive index (see Appendix A) from Curry, Wakefield, Price, and Mueller (1986).

Relations with co-workers deal with the perceptions a person has of his/her co-workers, and was predicted to have a negative relationship with turnover intent. Most human beings are social creatures and enjoy positive relationships with their co-workers (Paoline, Lambert, & Hogan, 2006). Positive relations with co-workers probably lead people to view their jobs in a more positive light, which in turn should lower intention to leave. Three items were used to form an additive index to measure relations with co-workers (see Appendix A) and were previously used by Mueller, Boyer, Price, and Iverson (1994).

Perceived dangerousness of the job deals with the degree a worker sees his/her job as potentially harmful (Cullen et al., 1985). Perceived dangerousness of the job was postulated to be positively linked with turnover intent. Most people would seek safer employment if they perceived their job as dangerous to their well-being. Perceived dangerousness was measured using five items from Cullen et al. (1985) (see Appendix A).

Input into decision-making deals with the degree to which an employee feels that he/she has input into the organization and the job (Slate & Vogel, 1997). Input into decision-making was hypothesized to be inversely associated with turnover intent. The greater the degree of perceived input probably will lead to a greater willingness to remain with the organization because it indicates being valued by the organization. The four items used to measure input into decision-making are presented in Appendix A.

Instrumental communication is the degree to which information necessary to complete tasks are successfully communicated to workers (J. Price & Mueller, 1986). Instrumental communication was postulated to have a negative relationship with turnover intent for jail staff. Providing employees the critical information for them to do their jobs makes their jobs easier and more enjoyable. In the end, people are less likely to desire to leave jobs that they enjoy and in which they feel successful. Instrumental communication was measured by five survey questions taken from Curry et al. (1986) (see Appendix A).

The third category of variables that may influence turnover intent is job attitudes (job involvement, job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment). Job involvement is the degree of psychological identification and importance with work in a person’s life (Kanungo, 1982; Lawler & Hall, 1970). Job involvement was

hypothesized to be inversely related to turnover intent among jail staff. The more importance a person places on his/her job, the less likely he/she is willing to leave said job. Job involvement was measured using four items (see Appendix A), which were adopted from Lawler and Hall (1970).

In the correctional literature, job stress is often defined as feelings of work-related hardness, tension, anxiety, frustration, worry, emotional exhaustion, and/or distress (Cullen et al., 1985; Grossi, Keil, & Vito, 1996; Van Voorhis et al., 1991). Job stress was predicted to be positively associated with turnover intent. Job stress is a negative state, which in the long-run, is harmful to most individuals (Cheek & Miller, 1983; Finn, 1999). The natural reaction is to try to escape from pain. Thus, jail staff who are experiencing higher levels of job stress may voice a greater intention to leave their current employment. A measure of job stress that focused on a person’s feelings of job-related tension, anxiety, worry, emotional exhaustion, and distress was included six items (see Appendix A). These items were taken from Crank, Regoli, Hewitt, and Culbertson (1995).

Job satisfaction is an affective response workers have toward their jobs (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992). Simply stated, it is “the extent to which people like their jobs” (Spector, 1996, p. 214). Job satisfaction was postulated to have a negative effect on turnover intent. If the job is enjoyable overall, there is less pressure to leave it. Conversely, if the job is not satisfying, there is a greater incentive for a person to desire to leave. A global, rather than facet, measure of job satisfaction was used. A global measure asks about an employee’s overall satisfaction with his/her job, while a facet measure asks about satisfaction with specific job facets, such as type of work done, physical plant, pay, co-workers, etc. (Cranny et al., 1992). Job satisfaction was measured using five items (see Appendix A), which were taken from Brayfield and Rothe (1951).

Affective organizational commitment is generally defined as having the core elements of loyalty to the organization, identifying with the organization (i.e., pride in the organization and internalizing organizational goals) and involvement in the organization (i.e., personal effort made for the sake of the organization) (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Organizational commitment was also hypothesized to have an inverse impact on turnover intent among jail staff. Staff members who have formed a bond with the organization should be less willing to sever the attachment they have formed. On the other hand, employees with low commitment have little in common with and few psychological investments in the organization. Thus, in the end, there are fewer and weaker ties to keep them interested in staying. Organizational commitment was measured using two items (see Appendix A) adopted from Mowday et al. (1982).

Finally, the dependent variable of interest for the current study was turnover intent. It was measured using the following item: “I would not consider taking another job.” This item was answered using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The responses were reverse coded to reflect a person’s desire to leave rather than to remain. Single item measures of turnover intent, such as that used in the current inquiry, have been used in other studies (e.g., Burke, 1989; Camp, 1994; Kane, Vanyur, Saylor, & Miller, 1988; Kiebusch et al., 2003; Kiyak, Namazi, & Kahana, 1997; W. Price et al., 2007).

## Findings

The descriptive statistics for all the study variables are reported in Table 2. Significant variation appeared in both the dependent and independent variables. The median and mean were similar to each another for each variable, which suggested that the variables were normally distributed. Based on the skewness and kurtosis statistics, there appeared to be no problem with either of these effects. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was also run, indicating that the variables were normally distributed. A principal factor analysis was conducted

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics of model variables

Variable	Med.	Min.	Max.	Mean	St dev	α
<i>Personal characteristics</i>						
Gender	1	0	1	0.54	0.50	--
Age	4	1	8	4.53	1.81	--
Tenure	72	0	336	95.33	74.68	--
Race	0	0	1	0.43	0.50	--
Education	0	0	1	0.38	0.49	--
Position	1	0	1	0.67	0.47	--
Supervisor	0	0	1	0.10	0.30	--
<i>Work environment perceptions</i>						
Role strain	18	7	35	18.48	5.05	.72
Job variety	12	4	20	11.94	3.54	.65
Co-worker relations	11	3	15	10.55	3.03	.83
Dangerousness	20	5	25	18.69	4.93	.79
Input into decision making	12	4	20	12.01	3.75	.88
Instrumental communication	17	5	25	16.96	4.37	.89
<i>Job attitudes</i>						
Job involvement	9	4	20	9.30	3.34	.64
Job stress	18	6	30	18.20	5.44	.78
Job satisfaction	17	5	25	16.42	4.92	.83
Organizational commitment	6	2	10	5.98	2.37	.72
<i>Dependent variable</i>						
Turnover intent	4	1	5	3.54	1.40	--

Notes: Med., Min., Max., St dev, and α represent median value, minimum value, maximum value, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha, respectively.

for each latent variable (i.e., index). Specifically, the individual survey items for each index were entered into a factor analysis using principal axis factoring to test for unidimensionality of the index (Gorsuch, 1983). Based upon the eigenvalues and the scree plot, a single factor was extracted for each latent concept, and all the items for a particular latent concept had factor loading of .50 or higher. In addition, two confirmatory factor analyses were conducted using AMOS. The first analysis was for all the items used to create the work environment perception indexes, and the second analysis was for all the items used to create the job attitude variables indexes. While not reported, the results indicated that the measures had convergent and discriminant validity.

Pearson's r correlation coefficients were calculated, and the results are presented in Table 3. Among personal characteristics, age, tenure,

educational level, and supervisory status had statistically significant correlations with turnover intent. Age, tenure, and supervisory status had inverse correlations with turnover intent, while educational level had a positive correlation. It is important to note that all correlations between personal characteristics and turnover intent were small and may be related to the large sample size. Except for perceived dangerousness of the job, all the work environment variables had statistically significant correlations with the measure of turnover intent. Job variety, relations with co-workers, input into decision-making, and instrumental communication had negative correlations, and role strain had a positive correlation. All the correlations for the work environment variables were small to mid-sized. Among the job attitudes, all had a statistically small to mid-sized correlation with turnover intent. Job stress, job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment all had positive correlations. Among the variables with significant correlations, job satisfaction had the largest correlation, followed by organizational commitment, and then job involvement.

To examine the relative independent influence of each of the personal characteristics, work environment perceptions, and job attitudes on turnover intent, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equations were computed.<sup>3</sup> A total of three OLS regression models were estimated, and the results for each are presented in Table 4. Model 1 used only the personal characteristics as the independent variables. The R-squared statistic was .05, suggesting that the personal characteristics only explained about 5 percent of the variance found in the turnover intent measure. Educational level and supervisory status both had statistically significant associations with turnover intent. Educational level had a positive association with turnover intent. Conversely, supervisory status had an inverse relationship with turnover intent. The other personal characteristics had nonsignificant associations with turnover intent.

Model 2 included both the personal characteristics and the work environment perceptions as the independent variables. The R-squared statistic was .16, suggesting that approximately 16 percent of the variance in turnover intent was explained by these two sets of variables. Among the personal characteristics, tenure, race, and supervisory status had significant associations. Race had a positive relationship, while tenure and supervisory status had inverse relationships with turnover intent. Among the six work environment variables, only two had significant effects on turnover intent. Perceived dangerousness of the job had a positive association with

**Table 3**  
Pearson's r correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Gender	1.00																
2. Age	.15**	1.00															
3. Tenure	.11**	.45**	1.00														
4. Race	.14**	.23**	.12**	1.00													
5. Education	.09**	.14**	.01	.02	1.00												
6. Position	.26**	-.07	.17**	-.01	-.22**	1.00											
7. Supervisor	.08*	.16**	-.01	.20**	.11**	.04	1.00										
8. Role strain	.01	-.09**	-.02	-.04	.06	.14**	-.15**	1.00									
9. Job variety	.08*	.19**	.01	.09**	.04	-.02	.17**	-.31**	1.00								
10. Co-workers	-.01	.04	-.05	.08*	.02	-.10**	.14**	-.31**	.26**	1.00							
11. Danger	-.26**	-.12**	.09**	-.04	-.16**	.49**	-.01	.26**	-.05	-.19**	1.00						
12. Input	-.01	.14**	.01	.15**	.08*	-.12**	.27**	-.50**	.44**	.38**	-.25**	1.00					
13. Inst. com.	-.05	.08*	-.07*	.11**	.10	-.17**	.17**	-.56**	.31**	.42**	-.26**	.54**	1.00				
14. Job inv.	-.03	.13**	-.04	-.04	-.05	-.10**	.05	-.28**	.34**	.16**	-.16**	.29**	.24**	1.00			
15. Job stress	.05	-.01	.13**	-.01	-.03	.13**	-.10**	.43**	-.22**	-.36**	.36**	-.44**	-.38**	-.15**	1.00		
16. Job sat.	.01	.14**	-.03	.10**	-.02	-.05	.15**	-.42**	.48**	.38**	-.20**	.51**	.45**	.43**	-.51**	1.00	
17. Org. com.	-.03	.06	-.14**	-.02	-.05	-.09**	.10**	-.46**	.45**	.39**	-.20**	.45**	.47**	.45**	-.49**	.67**	1.00
18. Turnover	-.06	-.08*	-.07*	-.04	-.12**	-.05	-.16**	.23**	-.27**	-.16**	.06	-.24**	-.22**	-.35**	.26**	-.49**	-.42**

Notes: Education is educational level; Supervisor is supervisory status; Co-workers is relations with co-workers; Danger is dangerousness; Input is input into decision-making; Inst. comm. is instrumental communication; Job inv. is job involvement; Job sat. is job satisfaction; Org. com. is organizational commitment; and Turnover is turnover intent. See Table 1 for a brief description of the variables.

\* p ≤ .05.

\*\* p ≤ .01.

**Table 4**  
OLS regression results with turnover intent as the dependent variable

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$
<i>Personal characteristics</i>						
Gender	-.06	-.02	-.14	-.06	-.06	-.02
Age	-.05	-.07	-.03	-.05	.02	.03
Tenure	-.01	-.03	-.01	-.17**	-.01	-.10*
Race	-.02	-.01	.26	.12**	-.05	-.02
Education	.38	.13**	-.02	-.08	.29	.10**
Position	.00	.00	.02	.01	-.06	-.02
Supervisor	-.77	-.17**	-.38	-.11**	-.64	-.14**
<i>Work environment perceptions</i>						
Role strain			.01	.04	-.01	-.01
Job variety			-.02	-.06	-.02	-.01
Co-worker relations			-.02	-.04	.02	.04
Dangerousness			.04	.18**	-.01	-.02
Input into decision-making			-.03	-.12*	.03	.08
Instrumental communication			-.02	-.06	-.01	-.03
<i>Job attitudes</i>						
Job involvement					-.08	-.19**
Job stress					.01	.05
Job satisfaction					-.10	-.35**
Organizational commitment					-.07	-.12*
R-squared/adjusted R-squared	.05**	.04**	.16**	.14**	.33**	.31**

Notes: For how the variables were measured, see Table 1. The independent variables in Model 1 were only the personal characteristic variables. The independent variables in Model 2 were the personal characteristics and work environment perception variables. All the independent variables were included in Model 3. B represents the unstandardized regression coefficient, and  $\beta$  represents the standardized regression coefficient.

\*  $p \leq .05$ .

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

turnover intent, while input into decision-making had an inverse relationship. Role strain, job variety, co-worker relations, and instrumental communication each had a nonsignificant association with turnover intent.

Model 3 included all the measures of personal characteristics, work environment perceptions, and job attitudes as independent variables; that is, the full model. Based on the R-squared statistic, the full set of independent variables accounted for approximately 33 percent of the observed variation in the turnover intent variable. Among the personal characteristics, tenure, educational level, and supervisory status had statistically significant effects on turnover intent. As tenure increased, the desire to leave decreased. Supervisory status also had an inverse association with turnover intent. Educational level, on the other hand, had a positive relationship with the turnover intent variable. Gender, age, race, and position all had nonsignificant effects. Among the work environment perceptions (i.e., role strain<sup>4</sup>, job variety, relations with co-workers, perceived dangerousness of the job, input into decision-making, and instrumental communication), none had statistically significant associations with the turnover intent measure. Among the job attitudes, job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment had statistically significant effects. As postulated, as each increased, the desire to leave the job decreased. Job stress had nonsignificant effects. Finally, based on the R-squared statistics, it appeared that the most powerful model predictors were the job attitude variables. The personal characteristics accounted for the least amount of variance in the turnover intent measure.<sup>5</sup>

In Model 2, perceived dangerousness of the job and input into decision-making had significant associations with turnover intent, but failed to reach significance once the job attitude variables were entered into the model. In addition, all the work environment perception variables, except for dangerousness, had significant correlations with turnover intent (see Table 3). This suggested that

the effects of the work environment perception variables on turnover intent may be mediated by the job attitude variables. To test this, the work environment perception variables were entered into OLS regression equations with job involvement, job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment as the dependent variables. While not reported in tabular form, the results indicated that significant relationships existed between the work environment and job attitude variables. All the work environment perception variables had significant relationships with one or more of the job attitude measures. Specifically, role strain and dangerousness had significant inverse associations with job involvement, while job variety had a positive relationship. For job stress, role strain and dangerousness had positive relationships and coworker relations, while input into decision-making and instrumental communication had negative associations. In the OLS regression equation with job satisfaction as the dependent variable, job variety, co-worker relations, input into decision-making, and instrumental communication all had significant positive effects, while role strain had a negative effect. Job variety, co-worker relations, and instrumental communication each had a positive relationship with organizational commitment, while role strain had an inverse association. These results suggested that the work environment perception variables may have indirect effects on turnover intent through job attitudes.

## Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to predict the turnover intentions of jail staff, a critically understudied occupation, using three sets of antecedents that had been part of several correctional and organizational studies. The analyses revealed that some hypotheses were supported, while others were not. As predicted, among the personal characteristics, tenure had a negative statistical relationship to turnover intent. Apparently, the longer an individual stays with the organization, the less likely that he/she wishes to leave.

Also as postulated, educational level and supervisory status both had statistically significant effects on turnover intentions. Staff members with a college degree were more likely to express a desire to leave. In light of the fact that there were no significant correlations between educational level and job involvement, job satisfaction, or organizational commitment, forces other than status inconsistency appeared to lead to increased turnover intent. Staff members with a college degree may enjoy greater employment opportunities and these opportunities may increase the desire to quit. This, of course, is an untested explanation, which future research should test. Supervisors were also less likely to express a desire to leave, and their position may increase their desire to remain employed at the jail. Among the personal characteristics, it appears that demographic factors such as gender, age, and race were not statistically related to turnover intentions. The lack of findings here was consistent with several other correctional studies (cf. Jurik & Winn, 1987; Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2002). Finally, also contrary to what was hypothesized, there was no significant relationship between position and turnover intent.

With respect to the work environment variables, none had statistically significant effects in the multivariate analysis. This suggested that work environment variables did not have direct effects on the turnover intent of jail workers. Lambert (2001) proposed that work environment factors would have no significant effects on turnover intent of prison staff once the job attitudes of job satisfaction and organizational commitment were taken into account. In a study of staff at a state prison, Lambert (2006) also found that none of the work environment variables of input into decision-making, instrumental communication, integration, organizational fairness, job variety, supervision, dangerousness of the job, role strain, work on family conflict, or family on work conflict had a significant impact on turnover intent once job involvement, job stress, job satisfaction, and

organizational commitment (all job attitudes) were entered into the analysis.

This does not mean that work environment factors are not important in the process of turnover intent. The results indicated that the work environment variables have no direct effects, only indirect effects that are mediated through job attitudes. As reported, all the work environment variables had significant associations with one or more job attitudes that were associated with turnover intent (i.e., job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment). Furthermore, past research among jail staff has found that these and other work environment variables are salient predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Byrd et al., 2000; Griffin, 2001; Kerle, 1985; Kiebusch et al., 2003; Lambert & Paoline, 2005; Lambert et al., 2004; Paoline et al., 2006; W. Price et al., 2007; Stohr, Lovrich, Monke, & Zupan, 1994). There has been little, if any, research on the determinants of job involvement among jail staff. As such, how work environment factors may help shape job involvement is much less clear.

The final set of factors, job attitudes, was the significant predictor of jail staff turnover intentions. As predicted, job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment had statistically significant negative effects on turnover intent. Those more involved in their jobs were less likely to want to quit. As job satisfaction increased, turnover intent dropped. People who liked their jobs were less likely to want to leave. Similarly, as organizational commitment increased, turnover intent decreased. Apparently, jail employees with higher commitment have stronger bonds with the organization, and these bonds help ensure that they want to remain part of the organization.

In looking across each set of variables used in this study, although some of the personal characteristics were significant predictors of turnover intent, the job attitudes appeared to be most important. Based on the separate multivariate analyses where each set of variables (i.e., personal characteristics, work environment perceptions, and job attitudes) were tested separately, the group of job attitudes accounted for more than five times the variance of turnover intent than did the personal characteristics. This is good news for jail administrators, who have far less control over personal characteristics than these (and other) job attitudes. For example, had gender and race been strong predictors of turnover intentions, jail administrators, in an effort to circumvent the costs of losing personnel, could not set policy or practice to deny positions to males versus females or Whites versus non-Whites.

Instead, the results presented here indicated that jail administrators need to focus on increasing the job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment of their employees in order to reduce turnover intentions. As such, the authors recommend that administrators focus on making changes in the work environment of their jails to facilitate improved job attitudes. As previously indicated, a small but growing body of literature has identified links between work environment factors and jail staff job satisfaction and/or organizational commitment (Byrd et al., 2000; Griffin, 2001; Kerle, 1985; Kiebusch et al., 2003; Lambert & Paoline, 2005; Lambert et al., 2004; Paoline et al., 2006; W. Price et al., 2007; Stohr, Lovrich, Monke, et al., 1994). There is a need for research to explore the determinants of job involvement for jail workers.

In addition, further research is needed on the different aspects of the work environment and how they shape the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of jail staff. Jail administrators must not only work on improving different aspects of the work environment for staff members, but they must ensure that these changes have actually resulted in changes in the job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment of the employees. A continuous loop of assessment, change, feedback, and further change needs to be created. In the long run, this should result in reducing turnover intent, a factor that has been strongly linked to voluntary turnover. If forced in the short-run to focus only on one job attitude, the findings presented

here indicated it should be job satisfaction. As previously mentioned, this had the largest effect on turnover intent. Administrators do, therefore, have the ability to reduce turnover intent (and voluntary turnover) in their jails. The key for success is concentrating on increasing the job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment of the employees.

While this study provided important insights, it was not without limitations. First, this was only one study of staff at a large urban southern jail. Staff at other jails, in other parts of the nation, and in other nations need to be studied to allow for greater generalization of the results. Moreover, researchers interested in turnover intent may want to include additional work environment perceptions and job attitudes not included in the present empirical inquiry. About 33 percent of the variance of turnover intent was accounted for by the independent variables used in this study. This meant that two-thirds of the variance of turnover intent was being influenced by variables not included in this study. Research is needed to identify these variables. One variable not included in this analysis and not identified until after data collection was complete was perceptions of external employment opportunities. Perceptions of employment opportunities are important, because the ability to find a new job probably affects people's turnover intentions (Kiebusch et al., 2003; Trever, 2001). Most individuals are not rash about leaving a job without some degree of confidence that they will find a new job (Camp, 1994; Lambert, 2001). Previous studies, for example, had shown that external employment opportunities were associated with higher levels of turnover intent among jail staff (Kiebusch et al., 2003).

Even among the measures used in the current study, researchers may want to use additional survey items to construct indices, particularly in light of the number of items used to measure some latent concepts and the low reliability for some indexes. How a concept is measured might influence the results and raises the issue of validity and reliability. For example, a more detailed measure of organizational commitment should be used. In this study, organizational commitment was measured by two items. Similarly, a single item to measure turnover intent was used in this study. Several of the indexes had lower than ideal Cronbach's alpha scores (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006). The results could change with more reliable measures. This is an area that needs to be investigated; therefore, future research is needed to develop indexes with higher levels of reliability than those found in the current study. Furthermore, future research needs to examine whether more detailed and extensive measures of the latent concepts would yield the same results. Furthermore, it was important to note that an attitudinal measure of organizational commitment was used in this study. It was possible that different results would have been observed if a calculative measure of organizational commitment was used. In addition, future research may wish to confirm that turnover intent is the immediate and best predictor of voluntary turnover among jail staff. This is a social science question that has bedeviled researchers for decades; that is, the link between one's attitude and one's behavior (Frank & Brandl, 1991).

Finally, there is a need for much more research focusing, not only on turnover intent, but on jail staff in general. This is a critically understudied component of the American criminal justice system. As mentioned, the bulk of correctional research has focused on prisons, yet given the unique conditions that operate among American jail systems empirical inquiry is certainly warranted. The current study added to a burgeoning area of study that has yet to reach its full potential.

In closing, employee turnover can be extremely costly for jails and can set a destructive course in motion for administrators in terms of recruiting and retaining personnel. While turnover in jails, or any organization, cannot be totally eliminated, it can be reduced. The findings of this study indicated that organizations should invest in the well-being of workers in order to reduce turnover intent. Well-thought

interventions at increasing the job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment of workers should pay dividends for jails for many years.

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### Appendix A. Survey item measures

#### Work environment perceptions

##### Role strain

1. There are so many people telling us what to do here that you can never be sure who the real boss is.
2. I know that I have divided my time properly (reverse coded).
3. I feel certain how much authority I have (reverse coded).
4. I know what my responsibilities are (reverse coded).
5. I know what is exactly expected of me (reverse coded).
6. The rules that we're supposed to follow never seem to be very clear.
7. The rules and regulations are clear enough here that I know specifically what I can and cannot do on my job (reverse coded).

(Responses for all items: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree somewhat*, 5 = *strongly agree*.)

##### Job variety

1. My job requires that I do the same things over and over again (reverse coded).
2. My job requires that I keep learning new things.
3. My job requires me to be very creative.
4. I get to do a number of different things on my job.

(Responses for all items: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree somewhat*, 5 = *strongly agree*.)

##### Co-worker relations

1. To what extent are people in your immediate group friendly? (Responses for this question were: 1 = not friendly at all, 2 = somewhat unfriendly, 3 = uncertain, 4 = somewhat friendly, and 5 = very friendly.)
2. To what extent do the people in your work group take a personal interest in you? (Responses for this question were: 1 = not interested at all, 2 = somewhat interested, 3 = uncertain, 4 = somewhat interested, and 5 = very interested.)
3. To what extent do you look forward to being with people in your work group each day? (Response categories for this question were: 1 = do not look forward to being with them, 2 = somewhat do not look forward to being with them, 3 = uncertain, 4 = somewhat look forward to being with them, and 5 = very much look forward to being with them.)

##### Dangerousness

1. In my job, a person stands a good chance of getting hurt.
2. There is really not much chance of getting hurt in my job (reverse coded).
3. I work in a dangerous job.
4. A lot of people I work with get physically injured in the line of duty.
5. My job is a lot more dangerous than other kinds of jobs.

(Responses for all items: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree somewhat*, 5 = *strongly agree*.)

#### Input into decision-making

1. How much freedom do you have as to how to do your job?
2. How much does your job allow you to make decisions on your own?
3. How much does your job allow you to take part in making decisions that affect you?
4. How much say do you have over what happens on your job?

(Responses for all items on a scale from 1 = *none at all* to 5 = *a great deal*.)

#### Instrumental communication

1. How well informed are you regarding what is to be done?
2. How well informed are you regarding what is most important about the job?
3. How well informed are you regarding how the equipment is used?
4. How well informed are you regarding rules and regulations?
5. How well informed are you regarding what you need to know to do the job correctly, including computer software?

(Responses for all items: 1 = *not informed at all*, 2 = *informed very little*, 3 = *informed somewhat*, 4 = *informed*, 5 = *very well informed*.)

#### Job attitudes

##### Job involvement

1. I live, eat, and breathe my job.
2. The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job.
3. I am very much involved personally in my work.
4. The most important things that happen to me involve my work.

(Responses for all items: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree somewhat*, 5 = *strongly agree*.)

##### Job stress

1. When I'm at work I often feel tense or uptight.
2. A lot of time my job makes me very frustrated or angry.
3. I am usually calm and at ease when I'm working (reverse coded).
4. Most of the time when I'm at work, I don't feel that I have much to worry about (reverse coded).
5. I am usually under a lot of pressure when I am at work.
6. There are a lot of aspects of my job that make me upset.

(Responses for all items: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree somewhat*, 5 = *strongly agree*.)

##### Job satisfaction

1. I like my job better than the average worker (correctional officer) does.
2. I am seldom bored with my job.
3. Most days I am enthusiastic about my job.
4. I feel fairly well satisfied with my job.
5. I find real enjoyment in my job.

(Responses for all items: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree somewhat*, 5 = *strongly agree*.)

##### Organizational commitment

1. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization (jail). Employees feel proud of the facility.
2. This job really inspires the best in me in the way of job performance.

(Responses for all items: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree somewhat*, 5 = *strongly agree*.)

## Notes

1. While beyond the focus of the current research endeavor, another empirical inquiry could be geared toward addressing why these unstable, less than favorable conditions (i.e., the causal factors), exist in jails. The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for stimulating this thought.

2. The survey had 154 questions, which covered a wide array of work environment dimensions and issues. The data from this survey were also used in several other studies that had examined the impact of the work environment of job satisfaction, job stress, and organizational commitment and the impact of medical issues on job satisfaction and job stress. There may be some familiarity in the methods section; however, none of the aforementioned previous studies examined the potential antecedents of turnover intent among jail staff. The full references of the above articles are available upon request.

3. While it is often debated whether or not OLS regression should be performed on ordinal level dependent variables (Long, 1997; Menard, 1995), given the five categories of responses, the noted lack of statistically significant findings between the two analytical techniques (Bollen & Barb, 1981; Johnson & Creech, 1983), and the more easily interpretable coefficients, it was decided that OLS regression would be used for this study. To confirm this choice, ordered ordinal regression was run as well. While the results were not reported in this study, the findings yielded the same results in terms of statistically significant predictors and overall model prediction as noted in Table 4 (Cox and Snell pseudo R-squared = .36 and Nagelkerke pseudo R-squared = .38).

4. As previously indicated, role strain was viewed as including both role ambiguity and role conflict. To determine whether the results would have changed if both had been included rather than a combined measure of role strain, the full model was reestimated using measures of role ambiguity and role conflict in place of role strain. In terms of statistical significance, the same results were observed. Specifically, both role ambiguity and role conflict had nonsignificant associations with turnover intent.

5. Separate OLS regression equations were estimated with turnover intent as the dependent variable with each of the three groups of variables entered individually (results not reported). When only the personal characteristics variables were entered into an OLS regression model, with turnover intent as the dependent variable, the R-squared was .05. When the work environment variables of role strain, job variety, relations with co-workers, perceived dangerousness of the job, input into decision-making, and instrumental communication were entered into an OLS equation as the only independent variables, the R-squared was .11. When the four job attitudes of job involvement, job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment were entered into an OLS equation by themselves, the R-squared was .28. As such, the most powerful model predictors appeared to be the job attitudes.

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