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Utah school psychologists: Self-reported reasons for retention and job satisfaction

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UTAH SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' SELF-REPORTED REASONS FOR
RETENTION AND JOB SATISFACTION

by

Lisa A. Dickison

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist

Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education
Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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ABSTRACT

UTAH SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' SELF-REPORTED REASONS FOR RETENTION AND JOB SATISFACTION

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This study focused on the level of job satisfaction reported by Utah school psychologists and their reasons for staying in their profession. An existing survey was modified and distributed to 119 of the 238 licensed school psychologists in Utah to obtain information on this topic. Sixty-nine school psychologists completed and returned the questionnaire (58% return rate). Based on their feedback, the top five reasons Utah school psychologists stay in their profession were (a) feeling the success and joy of helping students, (b) counseling with students, (c) working one-on-one with students, (d) taking vacation time during summers and holidays, and (e) working with other professionals and students in the school setting. Overall, Utah school psychologists are satisfied with their job. Participants were least satisfied with their salary and perceived an increase in salary as a critical strategy in retaining school psychologists.

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Introduction

The field of school psychology has changed dramatically over the years. From its beginnings in the early 1900's to its prominence in the field of education in the 21st century, the need for qualified professionals to perform psychological services in the schools has grown. With this increased need for school psychologists in the public schools has come the continual struggle to fill these positions. Historically, there has always been a shortage of school psychologists, yet little has been written about personnel shortages in the field (Fagan, 2004), and even less information exists on why school psychologists choose to stay in the profession. Understanding this shortage sets the stage for delving deeper into the practical challenge of retaining currently employed school psychologists.

History of School Psychology Personnel Needs

The history of school psychology is generally discussed as the *Hybrid Years*, from approximately 1890 to 1969, and the *Thoroughbred Years*, from 1970 to the present (Fagan & Wise, 2000). During the Hybrid Years, reliable estimates of personnel shortages were lacking due to disagreement on school psychologists' job titles, training, roles and functions, and credentialing (Fagan, 1999; Fagan & Wise, 2000; Magary, 1966). School psychology's identity improved over the years and with that improvement came a severe demand for personnel by the late 1960s (Fagan, 2004). The Thoroughbred Years brought a dramatic change to school psychology with about half of the current personnel that now comprises the field entering the workforce after 1970 (Fagan, 2002). Little worry was expressed over personnel shortages for much of the 1970s and 1980s (Fagan, 2004), but with 50% of the current personnel projected to retire within the next ten years (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004) the shortage has gained national attention (Curtis, 2002; Curtis, Hunley, & Grier, 2004; De Angelis, 2000).

Professional Practices

The job functions of school psychologists are many and varied. For children who are referred for special education services, school psychologists are required by law to participate in teams conducting initial assessments (Prasse, 2002). These assessments provide information to determine initial eligibility. For students already receiving special education services, school psychologists also conduct reevaluation assessments every three years. Assessments are initiated by a referral, followed by an examination of school records, classroom observations, cognitive and academic testing, interviews, and report writing that summarizes assessment findings. This information is taken to multidisciplinary staffing meetings to determine if the students' needs merit special education services and placement (Fagan & Wise, 2000).

In addition to assessment, other school psychology roles include consultation, counseling, behavior management, social skills training, and acting as a community resource liaison (Davis, McIntosh, Phelps, & Kehle, 2004). School psychologists are also involved in systems change, program evaluation, and staff development.

Demographic Characteristics

To examine changes in the field of school psychology, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has mandated the completion of a national study every five years to describe the demographic characteristics and professional practices of school psychologists. These results are entered into a national database (Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999). The most recent study, completed for the 1999-2000 school year, found that the field of school psychology is comprised of a largely female, caucasian workforce, with a significant percentage of school psychologists nearing retirement and not enough school psychologists entering the field to replace those who will retire (Curtis, Grier, Abshier, Sutton, & Hunley, 2002).

A constant struggle in the field has been to achieve a sufficient school psychologist to student ratio. A manageable caseload is necessary in order for school psychologists to adequately manage the demands placed upon them and to adequately perform the functions of their job. Curtis, Hunley, and Grier (2002) found that the greater the student-to-school psychologist ratio, the greater the number of initial special-education evaluations and reevaluations performed and a greater percentage of time spent overall in special education related activities. At the same time, the lower the student-to-school psychologist ratio, the more students were served through individual counseling and through student groups. Generally, a high student-to-school psychologist ratio is linked with job functions considered less desirable by much of the field while a low ratio is linked with more desirable services (Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004).

Projected Shortages

As the school-age population increases, it is anticipated that the need for school psychologists will grow as well. Curtis, Grier, et al. (2004) developed projections of personnel needs for school psychologists in the future and their findings indicate that the greatest shortage will take place between 2000 and 2010 with an approximate shortage of 9,000 school psychologists. They also projected these shortages will continue to be significant through 2020, though the shortage rate is expected to decline to 6,000 for the years 2010 to 2020. Based on these projections, 15,000 school psychologist positions are anticipated to go unfilled over the next 15 years.

Fagan (2004) noted that “it is unlikely that school psychology’s leadership has ever, or might ever, admit to having a sufficient supply of practitioners to meet the need for services” (p. 420). It appears evident that a shortage of school psychology personnel exists and will continue to exist, and most likely will worsen in the immediate future. Little if any research, however, is

being done to examine why school psychologists stay in the field. This is an area that needs to be studied so measures can be taken to retain current personnel who might leave the field prematurely. The retention of licensed school psychologists is of the utmost importance so that students can continue to receive quality services from those qualified to provide it.

Statement of Problem

Currently there is a critical shortage of school psychologists. Numerous surveys have monitored this shortage, keeping the profession acutely aware of the problem (Charvat & Feinberg, n.d.; Curtis, Grier, et al., 2002; Curtis, Grier, et al., 2004; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2004; Ehrhardt, 2003; Fagan, 2004; Lund, Reschly, & Martin, 1998; McIntosh, 2004; NASP, n.d.; Reschly, 2000; Thomas, 1999). A few studies have also investigated why school psychologists exit the field (Menlove, Garnes, & Salzberg, 2004; Wilczenski, 1997), yet limited research examines why school psychologists stay in the profession.

Statement of Purpose

The general purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the reasons why school psychologists stay in the profession of school psychology. This study will also investigate school psychologists' level of job satisfaction. Another purpose of this study is to identify measures that can be taken to retain school psychologists and reduce or eliminate their premature exit from the field.

Research Questions

In line with the statement of purpose, this study will investigate three main research questions. First, *What are the top five reasons Utah school psychologists stay in the field of school psychology?* Second, *How satisfied are Utah school psychologists with their job?* Third,

What measures do Utah school psychologists believe should be taken to retain school psychologists who might leave the field prior to retirement?

Importance of Study

Two central reasons support the importance of this study. First, no studies were found that examine the reasons school psychologists stay in the field of school psychology. Considering the current and projected shortages, a sufficient supply of school psychologists is and will be needed to provide the services that contribute to the mental, emotional, and academic well-being of children. Practically speaking, a substantial amount of school psychologists' time is spent assessing and serving students with disabilities. These students are those most likely to suffer the effects of school psychology shortages. An understanding of why school psychologists remain in the profession may increase retention of those who might otherwise leave. Ultimately, increased retention will ensure that students continue to receive quality services.

Second, a shortage of school psychologists may place additional pressure on other special education-related personnel to perform typical school psychology duties. This is problematic, given other special education-related personnel also experience great shortages. Also, shortages of school psychologists could result in school districts hiring individuals with temporary or alternative credentialing, jeopardizing the quality of student services. Additionally, the means of retaining school psychologists should be examined because it is critical to keep those already trained and employed as school psychologists, in addition to training new personnel (Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004).

Review of Literature

The literature review begins with a discussion of the history of school psychology and professional practices. The following topics are also reviewed: (a) shortages and retention as related to gender of school psychologists, (b) district size, (c) service ratio, (d) job satisfaction, (e) salary, (f) burnout, (g) attrition, and (h) retirement. Finally, future projection of shortages and implications of shortages are addressed.

History of School Psychology

Bolstered by the need for psychometric testing to determine special education eligibility, the profession of school psychology came into prominence during the *Hybrid Years* (Fagan, 2004). In 1930, Gertrude Hildreth expressed the need for comprehensive services and described the training needs of school psychologists. However, she did not describe the profession in terms of current size, nor projected shortages in the profession. In 1933 Symonds recommended that every school building employ a school psychologist. This recommendation, if implemented today, would necessitate hiring three times as many school psychologists as currently employed in the United States (Fagan, 2004). During the Great Depression school psychological services began to expand, increasing applied psychology jobs, particularly in the schools. This resulted in less unemployment in the school psychology profession than in other psychology-related professions (Finch & Odoroff, 1939). Yet, no dependable estimates existed on the number of school psychologists or the need for additional personnel (Special Committee on School Psychologists, New York State Association for Applied Psychology, 1943).

During the Hybrid Years, there was not much agreement on the identity of a school psychologist in relation to job titles, training, roles and functions, and credentialing. Therefore, the shortage numbers were not clearly specified (Fagan, 1999; Fagan & Wise, 2000; Magary,

1966). Throughout this time, with the exception of the era of the Great Depression, opportunities for employment exceeded the number of practitioners available to fill the positions. Until midway through the Hybrid Years, efforts were mired to meet the rising demand and need for services due to the lack of training programs and credentials specifically for school psychologists. The post World War II era saw school enrollments increase and special education services more broadly established, augmenting the need for school psychological services. With the improvement of school psychology's identity, the demand for personnel became severe by the late 1960s and was followed by an expansion of training programs, credentials, and professional associations (Fagan, 2004).

The practitioner to student ratio was poor and many schools had no experience with school psychology or special education. Very few districts required school psychological services and many did not offer comprehensive special education. The regulation of these fields differed throughout the nation and advocates for school psychology, in terms of state and national associations, were few in number. Personnel needs and shortages, although acknowledged, did not create an impending sense of panic (Fagan, 2004).

The field of school psychology changed swiftly after 1970, the period also known as the Thoroughbred Years. Approximately half of the school psychologists currently employed began working during the 1970s (Fagan, 2002). Throughout the Thoroughbred Years, the practitioner to student ratio was a convenient method to identify personnel needs (Fagan, 2004). The approximate national ratio began to increase as it changed from 1:4,800 in 1974 to 1:2,100 in 1986. Yet, few states recommended what this ratio should be, resulting in wide disparities across the country (Burke, Haworth, & Brantley, 1983). By the mid 1990s the national practitioner to student ratio had improved to 1:1,875, but variations continued to exist when taking into account

geographic region, per-pupil expenditure, and other economic factors (Lund et al., 1998). With improved ratios, little worry was expressed over personnel shortages for much of the 1970s and 1980s (Fagan, 2004). The shortage of school psychologists gained national distinction in the next decade and became a key topic of the 2002 Future of School Psychology Conference (DeAngelis, 2000; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004). National associations are currently seeking means to lessen the shortages in the field (Ehrhardt, 2003).

According to Fagan (2004), “Despite the fact that there were times when jobs were scarce, we have been in continuous shortage from one perspective or another even though formal efforts attempted to keep pace with the increasing need and job demand” (p. 424). The shortages of recent years have been brought into prominence through improved status of the field, increased state and federal requirements and regulations for services, and the public awareness shortages have garnered. Due to increased regulation and accountability, it is now much more challenging to become and remain a school psychologist than it was in the early years of the field’s organization and more challenging to counter the shortages that the schools are currently facing. Current shortages could be due to the fact that training requirements are more challenging than before, leading potential students to evade school psychology as a profession. The requirements are particularly more time-consuming than those needed to become school counselors or licensed professional counselors (Fagan, 2004). One of the major reasons for the current personnel shortage in the field of school psychology is the refining of the profession in the Thoroughbred Years. To eliminate this shortage it is important to question whether the field has made it too hard and thus less desirable to be a school psychologist. Or is it simply that the profession has been unsuccessful in drawing enough students into the field (Fagan, 2004)?

Factors Influencing Current Shortages

Professional practices. School psychologists undoubtedly have a number of job roles and duties. When a student is referred for special education services, an initial evaluation is required to determine eligibility and the educational needs of the student (Prasse, 2002). For those students currently in special education, school psychologists participate in their reevaluation every three years to ascertain continued eligibility. Some of their other job functions may include activities related to prevention, intervention, consultation, research, mental health services, family support, training, and administration (Canter, 2006; Fagan & Wise, 2000). Often their ability to perform these duties is hampered by the number of assessments they are required to perform. The shortage of school psychologists also compounds this problem as many school psychologists work in more than one school and may even serve an entire district. This may cause some school psychologists to conduct over 100 assessments a year, leaving them with little or no time to engage in other activities (Davis et al., 2004).

School psychologist roles have changed over the years. Increasingly school psychologists are required to participate in mental health services and provide crisis counseling for immediate and ongoing emotional needs. But, this growing need has not diminished the necessity of providing traditional services. Services provided by school psychologists are also continually needed in the general education sector, as well as in the community. With increasing public school enrollment, there is a growing demand for the services provided by school psychologists (Fagan, 2004). In respect to this demand, schools are challenged to increase and maintain an adequate number of trained school psychologists who can offer these services.

Gender. The demographics of those who make up the population of school psychologists provide interesting insight into the current shortage in the field. The most vivid changes in the field of school psychology over the past 20-30 years have been in terms of the gender of those who comprise the field (Fagan, 2004). In the beginnings of the profession, school psychology was seen as a fast growing area of applied psychology which constituted a large presence of women, with possibly more than three women for every man (Finch & Odoroff, 1939). Around the 1960s, the ratio between males and females became more balanced, while in the 1970s greater numbers of male school psychologists were found. In the 1980s a great increase of women in the field occurred with the proportion of male-female practitioners increasing to 35:65 by the 1990s. The current proportion of male to female school psychologists is approximately 30:70 (Curtis et al., 1999; Reschly, 2000; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). Reschly (2000) predicts that women will continue to dominate the profession at least through the next decade. This change in male to female proportions over the years shows the rising presence of women in the field of school psychology during the last three decades (Fagan, 2004).

Fagan (2004) cites the abandonment of male professionals in the field as a possible reason for the current shortage of personnel. In his opinion, a workforce composed of primarily female personnel represents uncertain job stability in the field, as many women may leave or take temporary absences from their positions to have and raise children. The probability of these women providing the traditional 30-40 years of service until retirement may not be likely, thus increasing the likelihood that shortages will continue in the field. With the possible instability surrounding females and their longevity as professionals in the field of school psychology, it is ever more important to examine and come to an understanding of why women stay in the field. It is also important to ascertain why some males choose to stay in the profession as their presence

has diminished greatly over the years. The answers to these questions could prove invaluable to helping alleviate the shortage of personnel that currently exists.

Service ratio. The ratio of school psychologists to students is an interesting facet to consider when contemplating the possible reasons for shortages in the field of school psychology. A constant struggle in the field has been to achieve an adequate school psychologist to student ratio, since this affects the type of services that are provided to students and the job satisfaction of school psychologists.

In the year 2000, a ratio of 1:1,000 school psychologists to students was recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). Only one out of four school psychologists met that ratio in 1995 (Curtis et al., 1999). Curtis, Grier, et al. (2002) found that the percentage of school psychologists working at the aforementioned recommended ratio of 1:1000 school psychologists to students improved from 17.9% to 35.7% between 1990 and 2000. Furthermore, the ratio of school psychologists working at a ratio of 1:2,000 school psychologists to students declined during this time period from 38.8% to 25.2%. Yet, there will most likely be a turnaround in the improved ratios in the future as the shortage of school psychologists continues to increase (Canter, 2006; Curtis, Grier, et al., 2002).

The ratio of school psychologists to students has great implications in the field as it often determines the type of services a school psychologist performs. School psychologists who work with a higher proportion of students more often conduct activities that are related to special education, such as initial evaluations, reevaluations, assessments, and report writing. Those who serve a lower proportion of students often engage in activities that are not related to special education, such as individual counseling, group counseling, and intervention and prevention type activities. A lower school psychologist to student ratio appears to give the school psychologist

the opportunity to participate in activities that are more preferred while the professional activities associated with serving higher ratios of students tend to be less preferred (Curtis, Grier, et al., 2002; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2002). A lower school psychologist to student ratio may allow the school psychologist to perform a wider variety of functions and facilitate greater changes in the field (Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2002).

These findings could lead one to believe that those school psychologists who serve a greater number of students are more likely to leave the field of school psychology as they tend to take part in less desirable professional activities. It is important to investigate whether the ratio of students per school psychologist is related to psychologists' reasons to remain in the field. This would help the profession determine what measures could be taken to reduce the higher proportion of students served.

District size. Another source of consideration is the area or district in which the school psychologist works. School psychologists are employed in rural, urban, and suburban areas and in districts that are considered large (>20,000), medium-sized (10,000-20,000), and small (<10,000) (Menlove et al., 2004). School psychologists who work in medium, large, urban and suburban districts may serve a greater number of students and may work in several schools as compared to those working in small or rural areas. This might increase the likelihood that school psychologists participate in more of the less-desirable activities of their job, such as assessments and evaluations, which may lead to a greater chance of personnel departing the profession. Or a larger number of professionals may leave as there are more school psychologists employed in these areas.

A recent study of attrition of Utah special educators found that 11.9% of school psychologists employed in large-sized districts left at the end of a school year as compared to

15.4% of those who worked in medium-sized districts and 42.6% who worked in small districts (Menlove et al., 2004). The percentages for small districts are hard to analyze because they employ fewer school psychologists than larger districts. While those school psychologists who work in smaller or more rural areas may serve proportionately fewer students, and participate in more desirable activities, it is important to understand the reasons they may leave since the loss of even one school psychologist could result in the loss of all student psychological services for an entire community (Menlove et al., 2004).

Job satisfaction. In looking at the shortage of school psychologists and the reasons they stay in the profession, it is important to consider the degree of satisfaction school psychologists have with their job. National studies of school psychologists have indicated that overall, school psychologists are satisfied with their jobs, would choose school psychology again as a career, and intend to stay in the profession of school psychology (Brown, Hohenshil, & Brown, 1998; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006; Wilczenski, 1997; Worrell, Skaggs, & Brown, 2006).

A meta-analysis of school psychologist job satisfaction studies found that 84% of school psychologists were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). The areas in which they were most satisfied were the opportunities to serve others, stay busy, work independently, and establish relationships with coworkers. Advancement, school policies and practices, compensation, supervision, and recognition were areas in which school psychologists were least satisfied.

A study of school psychologists employed in secondary schools also found overall job satisfaction for those surveyed, with approximately three-quarters reporting satisfaction with their work (Huebner, 1993b). Of particular interest in this study was the finding that job

satisfaction increased as school psychologists spent more time in intervention-related activities, such as individual and group counseling, and spent less time in psychological assessment activities.

Another recent study examined job satisfaction among school psychologists who are employed in a single school compared to those who work in multiple schools. The findings of this study indicated that school psychologists serving a single school have higher rates of job satisfaction and perceive themselves as more effective than school psychologists serving more than one school (Proctor & Steadman, 2003).

Despite relatively high rates of job satisfaction among school psychologists, the findings of the above mentioned studies show that job satisfaction may vary according to variables such as district size, professional practices, and ratio of students served. These factors are important to remember when looking at the reasons school psychologists stay in the profession and ways they can be retained.

Salary. In any profession, salary can be a contributing reason for how long one stays in their field. For school psychologists, the range of salaries differs greatly across the United States. Salary is determined by factors such as type of degree, years of experience, setting, and number of contract days (Fagan & Wise, 2000). The *U.S. News & World Report* (Mulrine, 2002) indicated the average salary for a full-time practicing school psychologist in the United States was \$50,000. Hosp and Reschly's (2002) figures from a national survey of school psychologists closely supported that finding with a mean national salary of \$48,346. They also found variation in salary by regions, ranging from a mean of approximately \$39,000 to \$55,000. The Mountain Region, consisting of 8 states including Utah, reported a mean salary of \$45,400.

While overall job satisfaction is relatively high, several studies have found the area of pay consistently ranking lower than other areas on satisfaction ratings (Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006; Worrell et al., 2006). A meta-analysis of job satisfaction studies found that of 20 facets measured for satisfaction, compensation ranked 18th (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). Reschly & Wilson (1995) found school psychologists felt neutral in their satisfaction with pay. A 1997 survey of national school psychologists also found satisfaction with salary as neutral (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Of nine regions studied in this same survey, the Mountain region ranked pay with the second to lowest satisfaction rating. Hosp and Reschly (2002) concluded that school psychologists in the regions with highest mean salary were the most satisfied and those in regions with the lowest mean salary were the least satisfied.

In terms of salary, another important factor to consider is the salary schedule on which school psychologists are paid. Many school psychologists receive compensation based on teacher salary schedules. Compensation on this type of salary schedule often leads to unrecognized differences in expense and training at the entry level for teachers and school psychologists. Hyman and Kaplinski (1994) assert that, "When school psychologists are locked into teacher salary schedules and are viewed by the administration as functioning hierarchically at the level of teachers, their ability to affect policy is severely limited" (p. 576). As a result, they state that administrators often view school psychologists as personnel who diagnose and classify children instead of as behavioral and social problem solvers. A national survey of school psychologists found that 47% believed that placing school psychologists on teacher salary scales led to an increasing number of school psychologists leaving the schools for psychology related jobs with higher salaries (Hyman & Kaplinski).

Studies have consistently shown that salary is an area in which school psychologists are not highly satisfied. Dissatisfaction with salaries may lead to school psychologists leaving the field prematurely for higher paying jobs. An examination of the effect of compensation and salary schedules on school psychologists' desire to stay in the field can aid in retaining and attracting more personnel to the profession.

Burnout. "School psychology is not a stress-free profession" (Sandoval, 1993, p. 321). School psychologists at the beginning and end of the year are emotionally stressed (Mills & Huebner, 1998). There are many facets of a school psychologist's job that are stressful and lead to burnout. In a review of the literature on burnout among school psychologists and other professionals, Huebner (1993a) cited *organizational factors*, *interpersonal factors*, and *intrapersonal factors* as the factors often leading to burnout. Organizational factors are those that relate to role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload, while interpersonal factors include quality of peer interactions and supervisor interactions, and intrapersonal factors comprise personality traits of school psychologists and the competencies they possess.

Role ambiguity can be a cause of stress for school psychologists as the profession itself has struggled to establish an identity, leaving school psychologists often struggling to meet, change or clarify the expectations of supervisors or those they serve. Role conflict is experienced when school psychologists deal with contradictory role expectations or service demands. Role overload is often related to heavy caseloads, which leads to lack of time for activities such as consultation and intervention, which may lead to decreased personal feelings of accomplishment (Huebner, 1993a). Other organizational factors that Huebner (1992) found to be significant predictors of burnout were lack of resources that included lack of sufficient supervision, unavailability of testing materials, and administrative constraints.

School psychologists also tend to experience a lack of peer interactions. This is often due to the roaming nature of school psychologists who work in more than one school. Professional peers have the potential to offer support, encouragement, and ideas to school psychologists who may be struggling. Another source of support and, on the other hand, potential stress is the supervisor. As Huebner (1993a) states, “Supervisors who respond effectively to supervisees’ needs increase their feelings of confidence, competence, and control, whereas supervisors who respond ineffectively may increase negative feelings” (p. 43).

Certain personality characteristics may also lead to burnout in school psychologists. Mills and Huebner (1998) found that school psychologists who display introverted behavioral tendencies, such as passivity, withdrawal, and reserved reactions, report high emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment. Also in regards to intrapersonal factors, Sandoval (1993) found that those who are less prone to burnout are individuals who are integrated and well adjusted.

Organizational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors are possible elements contributing to stress and burnout and should be taken into consideration when examining the shortage of school psychologists. Stress resulting from these factors will most likely contribute to burnout and may contribute to professionals leaving the field. If measures can be taken to reduce the amount of stress these factors place on school psychologists, the profession may be better able to keep school psychologists in the profession.

Attrition. Another significant effect on the personnel shortage in school psychology is attrition. Lund et al. (1998) defined attrition as “leaving the field before retirement or not entering the school-based practitioner career after graduate training” (p. 107). Undoubtedly, for a number of reasons, the field of school psychology will experience a loss of personnel every year

due to attrition. While the reasons for leaving the profession due to attrition would be of valuable insight to the field, little is known about the reasons for or rates of attrition (Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004). Some studies have used a conservative estimate of a 5% annual attrition rate when making predictions about the future personnel needs of school psychologists, but do so acknowledging there is no empirical basis for this figure, and that this figure is most likely a modest one (Curtis, Grier, et al., 2004). In the projections made by Curtis, Grier, et al. (2004) of future personnel needs, they indicated that more school psychologists will leave the profession due to attrition than through retirement through the year 2020 using the annual estimated attrition rate of 5%.

It is important to study the reasons for attrition in order to determine ways to prevent it. When an understanding of why professionals leave the field is gained, it will help to focus on ways that these individuals can be retained. The retention of school psychologists should become a top priority for the field, educators, and other child advocates. Retaining a trained school psychologist is much more effective than going through three years of training a new professional (Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004).

Retirement. During the past several decades, the number of professional school psychologists in practice has grown from approximately 5,000 in 1970 to between 25,000 to 30,000 in 2000 (Fagan, 2002). Yet, this increase in the number of school psychologists is misleading as the number of school psychologists approaching retirement is dramatically increasing, thus amplifying the shortage of personnel that exists in the field (Davis et al., 2004). Curtis, Grier, et al. (2002) reported that during the 1999-2000 school year the percentage of school psychologists who were 40 years old or younger was 31.2% and that the percentage of those who were 50 years old or above was 32.8%. By using these data, Curtis (2002) predicted

that by the year 2010, 37.7% of all school psychologists would retire, 52.9% would retire by 2015, 66.6% by 2020, and by 2025, 83.7% would retire. According to these predictions, it is anticipated that within the next 10 years more than half of the school psychologists currently working in the field will retire. Their findings also suggest that the numbers of school psychologists moving towards retirement are not being replaced by an adequate number of practitioners coming into the field (Curtis, Grier, et al., 2004; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004).

A 1999 state-by-state survey of demographic information of randomly selected NASP members provides interesting insight into the retirement projections of the future. Thomas (2000) found that in most states an estimated 10% of school psychologists will retire within four years. Also of note is that within ten years, over half the states will face a retirement of 50% or more of their school psychologists. These projections indicate that the current shortage of school psychologists could go from a serious state to a disastrous one (Davis et al., 2004).

School psychology is currently feeling the effects of retirement of its practitioners and will continue to do so. With impending shortages due to retirement inevitable, examining why school psychologists remain in the profession is of dire importance. If the field understood why school psychologists stay, measures could be taken to retain those currently employed who are not facing immediate retirement.

Future Projections of Shortages

To determine the personnel needs of the future, Curtis, Grier, et al. (2004) calculated the difference of losses in the field due to retirement and attrition from an estimated number of additions expected in the field. Their findings show that between the years of 2000 and 2010 the projected shortage of school psychologists will reach its most critical point with a shortage of 8,800 school psychologists. Future projections continue through 2020, with a shortage of 3,310

school psychologists between 2011 and 2015 and a shortage of 2,860 practitioners between 2016 and 2020. In total, from the date of their projections, 2003, through the next 17 years, it is estimated that there will be a shortage of almost 15,000 school psychologists in the nation.

With such a significant number of unfilled positions expected in the future, an understanding of why school psychologists stay in the field cannot be taken for granted. This understanding could lead to methods that could be implemented to retain current and attract new professionals to the field.

Implications of Shortage

When contemplating the current and continued projected shortage of school psychologists, there are two important considerations to keep in mind. In the past several years the ratio of school psychologists to students has seen a decline, which is a positive occurrence considering that lower ratios are often associated with more desirable services performed by school psychologists (Curtis, Grier, et al., 2002; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2002; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004). But, there could be a reverse in this trend if the shortage continues and vacant positions are not filled. This means that school psychologists would most likely see a rise in the number of assessments and special education related duties to be performed, which are often considered less desirable.

In contrast, recent and pending legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001) and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, may reduce a school psychologist's demand to perform special-education related assessments and increase the need to provide more intervention-based services. The implications of these and other legislations that might arise in the future are unknown at this

time, but could have a significant impact on the duties performed by school psychologists (Canter, 2006; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004).

It is important to consider the differential effects that an increased service ratio and various legislations may have on the field of school psychology. Their effects could significantly influence the type of services a school psychologist engages in and as a result impact the supply and demand of the professionals in the field.

Another consideration to bear in mind is who will fill the positions of school psychologists who leave the field. It is unlikely that others engaged in professional educational practice, such as counselors, teachers, and social workers, will be recruited into the field of school psychology. This is due to the fact that these respective fields also experience considerable shortages. Another factor to consider is the time, money, and training that those not in the field of psychology would have to expend in order to become credentialed as a school psychologist (Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004). The personnel shortage might also lead to alternatives to full credentialing, which could result in lower standards, less effective services and potentially greater liabilities for schools (Canter, 2006). It appears the most cost effective means to maintain a stable number of psychologists in the field would be to find ways to keep those who might leave prematurely from doing so.

Conclusion

Previous research suggests that in the next 8-10 years the field of school psychology will experience a significant shortage of personnel that will continue with less critical shortages through the year 2020 and possibly beyond (Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004; Curtis, Grier, et al., 2004). This shortage will most likely result in serious problems for the field and those who are served by school psychologists, namely in the types of services that school psychologists provide

(Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004). McIntosh (2004) acknowledges the significance of the personnel shortage when he stated, “School psychology as a profession must act quickly if it is to continue to provide high-quality mental health services within the school setting” (p. 413). The shortage is upon us and action must be taken to find out why school psychologists stay in the field and what efforts could be taken to retain those who might leave the field before retirement, so the students who benefit from the service of school psychologists are not unnecessarily hindered. This is of the utmost importance for as Fagan (2004) states, “The personnel shortage is going to be with us for a long time” (p. 427).

Method

Participants

Participants in the study included a random sample of school psychologists employed in public schools in the state of Utah during the 2005-2006 academic school year. A list of school psychologists employed during this time was obtained from the Utah State Office of Education (USOE), including name, school district in which they were employed, and address of the school or district in which they worked. A table of random numbers was used to determine which of the 238 school psychologists provided from the list would be asked to participate in the study. Half (119) of the certified and practicing school psychologists in Utah were randomly selected for the study. Of the 119 school psychologists who were randomly selected and asked to participate, 69 responded and participated in the study. Specific demographic data are presented in the results section.

Procedures

Prior to conducting any research, approval from the Institutional Review Board at Brigham Young University was sought. Upon approval, each selected participant was sent materials to be completed and returned to the researcher. The participants were mailed materials at their primary school of employment, which included an informed consent letter, questionnaire and an addressed stamped envelope in which to return the survey materials (See Appendix A). Approximately 3 weeks after the initial mailing, a follow-up letter was sent via U.S. postal mail with another consent form and questionnaire.

As an incentive to participate in the study, each participant who returned the questionnaire was sent a \$5.00 gift certificate if they provided an address to which it could be sent. Fifty-one (73.9%) participants provided such an address and were mailed a gift certificate.

Measures

An existing instrument that measures the reasons why school psychologists remain in the field of school psychology was not found. Menlove and Garnes (2002), however, asked similar questions about the field of special education. Portions of their survey were modified and additional questions were created to answer the research questions of this study.

The questionnaire consisted of a section pertaining to demographic information, current placement, and career history, as well as a survey section. The demographic questions asked the participant's gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, number of children, degree(s) earned, and where degree(s) were obtained. Current placement questions asked grade level of students served, type of current contract, average number of students in caseload, average working hours a day at school, average hours worked at home per week, school(s) of employment and enrollment, and district of employment. The career history section asked participants to respond to questions about years of experience, years taken off and why, type of contract previously worked, yearly attendance of professional workshops and training, and affiliation with professional organizations.

Participants were also asked to rank the top five reasons they stay in the field of school psychology from a list of 16 possible reasons. An item that was ranked number 1 received an ordinal weight of 5, a ranking of number 2 was assigned an ordinal weight of 4, an item ranked number 3 received an ordinal weight of 3, an item with a ranking of 4 was assigned an ordinal weight of 2, and an item ranked fifth received an ordinal weight of 1. Hence, the scores for the top reasons for staying were based on a weighted ranking. Participants were also asked to indicate their agreement with the 16 reasons on a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 =

disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). The reasons were adapted from a survey conducted by Menlove and Garnes (2002) about Utah special education teachers who stay on the job.

The survey also included a section regarding school psychologist satisfaction issues in which participants rated their agreement on 11 issues related to job satisfaction also on a Likert-type scale with four options (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). The satisfaction issues were also adapted from the Menlove and Garnes (2002) survey.

The final portion of the survey consisted of four qualitative questions that addressed what the participants perceived can be done at the school, district, state, and professional field level to encourage school psychologists to stay in the field until the age of retirement.

No reliability or validity can be stated about this survey instrument given that modifications and additions were made to the questionnaire to align with the research topic. The survey was, however, disseminated to four university faculty members, four school psychology interns, and two licensed school psychologists who provided feedback on the format and questions. Revisions were made according to the feedback to make the questionnaire more clear and accurate.

Research Design

This study followed a mixed model research design (Johnson & Christensen, 2004), with the questionnaire including both quantitative and qualitative items.

Data Analysis

Response data were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences-Windows Version (SPSS) where descriptive statistics were the chief analysis methods used. Percentages, measures of central tendency (i.e., mean), ranges, and frequency counts of themes were used to describe the data.

The qualitative data gathered from the four short-essay questions were analyzed by recording reoccurring themes in the participants' responses and tallying the frequency of themes. As each response was read, the researcher generated a list of topics for each short-essay question. A tally mark was put beside each topic in accordance to how often it was reported by the participants. After all responses were recorded, specific topics were combined into more general themes. The tally marks for each theme were then added together. The top responses for each short-essay question are presented in the results section.

Results

Return Rate of Survey

The Utah State Office of Education (USOE) provided a list of certified and practicing school psychologists employed in public schools in the state of Utah for the 2005-2006 academic school year. Of the 238 school psychologists on record, half of them were selected to participate in the study by means of random sampling through the use of a table of random numbers. Of the 119 school psychologists selected as a target sample, 69 responded to the survey.

Survey materials containing an informed consent letter, questionnaire, and self-addressed stamped return envelope were sent to all 119 randomly selected participants at their primary school of employment. Three weeks following the initial mailing, 57 participants completed and returned the questionnaire for a 48% return rate. A follow-up letter was then sent via regular mail to participants to encourage them to respond to the survey if they had not done so already. Three more weeks were given for participants to respond, and in that time 12 more school psychologists returned the survey for a total of 69 out of the 119 randomly selected school psychologists. The final response rate for the study was 58%.

Participants Data

Demographic information. Forty (58.0%) females and 29 (42.0%) males participated in the study. The mean age of the participants was 47.5 years, with ages ranging from 26 years to 73 years. In regards to ethnicity, 100% of the respondents were Caucasian. Fifty-three (76.8%) of the participants were married while 16 (23.2%) were single. The average number of children for participants was 2.4. Forty-four (63.8%) of the participants reported having a Master's degree, 14 (20.3%) reported having an Education Specialist degree, and 11 (15.9%) reported having a Doctorate degree. In regards to where participants obtained their degrees, 63.8% obtained one or

more of their degrees from universities or colleges in Utah, 14.9% obtained their degrees from schools in the West, while 14.9% received their degrees from other schools with 1.0% of the participants receiving a degree from a non-traditional school.

Some of the key demographic data from participants of this study are compared to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) national database of demographic information for the 1999-2000 school year in Table 1. These national data are collected every five years from a survey of school psychologists with membership in NASP (Curtis, Grier, et al., 2004; Curtis, Grier, et al., 2002). There are fewer females (58.0%) and more males (42.0%) in this study's sample as compared to the national demographics of female (70.0%) and male (30.0%) school psychologists. There is relative similarity in the mean age of the two groups with the mean age of participants in this study being 47.5 years and the mean age of the NASP study being 45.2 years. The participants in this study were all Caucasian (100.0%) while the national sample was only primarily Caucasian (92.8%). Respondents to the NASP survey obtained higher degrees (Master's, 41.0%; Specialist, 28.2%; Doctorate, 30.3%) overall than respondents to this study (Master's 63.8%; Specialist, 20.3%; Doctorate, 15.9%).

Current placement. Thirty-one participants reported that they worked only at an elementary (22, 32.8%), middle/junior high (4, 6.0%) or high school (5, 7.5%). All other participants worked across levels. These included preschool and elementary (4, 6.0%), preschool through middle/junior high (3, 4.5%), preschool, elementary, and high school (4, 6.0%), elementary and middle (7, 10.4%), middle/junior high and high school (3, 4.5%), elementary through high school (4, 6.0%), and all grade levels (11, 16.4%).

Table 1

Demographic Data Comparison

<i>Category</i>	<i>Utah Study</i>	<i>NASP Study</i>
Gender		
Female	58.0%	70.0%
Male	42.0%	30.0%
Mean Age	47.5	45.2
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	100.0%	92.8%
Degree		
Master's	63.8%	41.0%
Specialist	20.3%	28.2%
Doctorate	15.9%	30.3%

Note. Utah study $n = 69$. NASP study $n = 2,052$.

Fifty-three (76.8%) participants were on a full-time contract, while 16 (23.2%) of the participants worked part-time. Of those employed part-time, the mean number of hours they worked a week was 23.2, with a range of 16 to 35 hours. The mean number of students in a participant's caseload at a time ranged from 5 to 430 with a mean of 61.9. This large variability of responses is probably due to the manner in which the question was asked. The mean number of hours a day participants were at school was 7.7 (range = 3-10), while the mean number of hours a week that work was done at home equaled 2.0 (range = 0-20).

The number of schools participants worked at ranged from 1 to 16 with a mean of 2.7. Participants reported working at schools with an enrollment of less than 250 students (23, 16.0%), between 251-500 students (25, 17.4%), from 501-750 students (43, 29.9%), 751-1000 students (24, 16.7%), and more than 1000 students (6, 8.8%). These results indicate a greater number of responses than those who participated in the study because several school psychologists worked in more than one school within their school district. In terms of district size, 58 (85.3%) participants reported working in a large school district (>20,000 students), 4 (5.9%) worked in a medium-sized school district (10,000-20,000 students) and 6 (8.8%) worked in a small school district (<10,000 students).

Career history. The mean number of years worked as a school psychologist was 13.5, with a range of 1 to 35 years. Sixty-two (89.9%) participants indicated that they have not taken a leave of absence, while 7 (10.1%) have taken an absence at sometime. The reasons for taking a leave of absence included raising children, working in a private business, sabbatical, disability, and traveling abroad. The mean number of years for a leave of absence was 3.3, with a range of 1 to 13 years. Twenty-one (30.4%) of the participants reported working less than a full-time contract at some point, while 48 (69.6%) had never worked less than a full-time contract. For those that had worked less than a full-time contract, the mean number of hours they worked a week was 22.8, with a range of 16 to 32 hours.

Participants indicated that on average they attend 5.6 professional development workshops or trainings in a year, with the range including 1 to 20 workshops or trainings. Fifty-five (79.7%) participants belong to one or more professional organizations, while 14 (20.3%) do not belong to any professional organizations. The Utah Association of School Psychologists (UASP) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) were the organizations

that most participants belonged to with 47 (68.1%) and 36 (52.2%) participants respectively reporting membership in those organizations.

Data Analysis of Research Questions

Research question 1. The first research question was *What are the top five reasons Utah school psychologists stay in the field of school psychology?* The reasons Utah school psychologists stay in their position were weighted (based on ranking) and are listed in descending order in Table 2. The top reason for staying in school psychology, according to the participants, was the feeling of success and joy in helping students. Working one-on-one with students was the number two reason for staying. The remaining three of the top five reasons for staying in school psychology included the opportunity to counsel with students, summers and holidays off, and population of students with whom the school psychologist works.

In addition to ranking their top reasons for staying in their position, participating school psychologists were asked to rate their level of agreement regarding 16 reasons for staying in the profession, based on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). These data are summarized in Table 3. The reason for staying that rated with the strongest level of agreement was the feeling of success and joy in helping students. Working one-on-one with students, having the opportunity to take summers and holidays off, and having the opportunity to counsel students also received high ratings. The reason for staying that received the lowest rating was financial reasons. Respondents also rated the professional affiliation with the field of school psychology, the advantage of rarely taking work home, and participation in school-wide prevention and intervention programs with low ratings.

Table 2

Reasons Utah School Psychologists Stay

Reason	Weighted Ranking
Feeling of success and joy in helping students	189
Working one on one with students	97
Opportunity to counsel students	82
Summers and holidays off	73
Population of students with whom I work	67
Making a difference for teachers	41
Working hours	41
Financial reasons	30
Opportunity to assess students	30
Acknowledgment of administrators and teachers of a job well done	23
Professional affiliation with the field of school psychology	22
Participation in school-wide prevention and intervention programs	20
Rarely taking work home	19
Acknowledgment of parents of a job well done	17
Rarely working on the weekends	9

Note. $n = 53$. Other responses included: variety, making a difference in society, working to validate importance and impact of school psychology in district, clarify the relevance of certain beliefs regarding their pragmatics, district policy making, autonomy, interesting work, opportunity to interact with other professional educators, opportunity to coach, and belief in public service.

Table 3

Agreement for Staying in School Psychologist Position

Reason	<i>n</i>	Mean Rating
Feeling of success and joy in helping students	61	3.74
Working one on one with students	56	3.50
Summers and holidays off	56	3.43
Opportunity to counsel students	52	3.42
Population of students with whom I work	56	3.25
Making a difference for teachers	52	3.12
Working hours	49	3.12
Opportunity to assess students	54	3.07
Rarely working on the weekends	46	3.07
Acknowledgment of parents of a job well done	51	2.90
Acknowledgment of administrators and teachers of a job well done	51	2.87
Professional affiliation with the field of school psychology	49	2.78
Rarely taking work home	48	2.77
Participation in school-wide prevention and intervention programs	49	2.73
Financial reasons	49	2.41

Note. Other responses included: variety, making a difference in society, working to validate importance and impact of school psychology in district, clarify the relevance of certain beliefs regarding their pragmatics, district policy making, autonomy, interesting work, opportunity to interact with other professional educators, opportunity to coach, and belief in public service.

Research question 2. The second research question was *How satisfied are Utah school psychologists with their job?* Participants were asked to rate their agreement on eleven issues related to satisfaction with their job on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). The agreement ratings for the satisfaction issues are summarized in Table 4. Almost all respondents rated the following statements with *agree* or *strongly agree*: my job is important, I enjoy being a school psychologist, my job accommodates family life responsibilities, I would recommend school psychology as a profession to someone else, others perceive my job as important, my university training prepared me for the profession, and I plan on staying in the field of school psychology until the end of my career. While most participants agreed or strongly agreed that being a school psychologist is a stressful job, they also indicated they have found ways to deal with the stress. The majority of respondents does not think about leaving school psychology, but admit that they are dissatisfied with their salary.

Research question 3. The third research question was *What measures do Utah school psychologists believe should be taken to retain school psychologists who might leave the field prior to retirement?* Participants were provided with four open-ended questions to provide their insight at what could be done at the school, district, state, and professional field level to retain personnel. The most common themes that emerged in the first question (*What could the school in which you are employed do to encourage you to stay in school psychology until your retirement?*) are highlighted in Table 5. A common theme was the desire for an increase in salary. Another key theme was to establish more communication with teachers and administrators. Many school psychologists expressed a desire to build relationships with their colleagues, increase collaboration, and participate as part of a team. Another common response

was to recognize the value of the school psychologist and the work they do. Several respondents implied the need for greater recognition and appreciation at the school-level for their work.

Table 4

Utah School Psychologist Satisfaction Ratings

Satisfaction issues	<i>N</i>	Mean Rating
My job is important	67	3.64
I enjoy being a school psychologist	67	3.60
My job accommodates family life responsibilities	65	3.29
I would recommend school psychology as a profession to someone else	67	3.28
Others perceive my job as important	67	3.18
If (job) stressful, I have found ways to deal with the stress	62	3.16
I plan on staying in the field of school psychology until the end of my career	67	3.15
My university training prepared me for the profession	67	3.15
Being a school psychologist is a stressful job	68	3.06
I think about leaving school psychology	68	2.19
I am satisfied with my salary	67	2.18

Table 5

What Could Your School Do to Encourage You to Stay?

Theme	<i>n</i>	Sample Statements
Salary	14	“Improve financial and employment benefits” “Raise my salary significantly”
Communication	9	“More communication with the teachers and administration” “Work as a team and support one another”
Value me and my position	7	“Help us feel valued, successful, and like we matter” “More recognition and/or appreciation of our role and skills”

Note. *n* = 65.

Responses to the second open-ended question (*What could your district do to encourage you and other school psychologists to remain in the field until retirement?*) are summarized in Table 6. Comments related to salary were the most common response to this question. In particular, respondents suggested an increase in salary and the importance of placing school psychologists on a different salary schedule than the basic teacher's schedule. It was mentioned that lightening caseloads and reducing paperwork would also encourage school psychologists to stay in the field, along with providing better benefits and retirement.

The key responses to the third open-ended question (*What could keep you in the state of Utah as a school psychologist?*) are highlighted in Table 7. The majority of the respondents listed an increase in salary as the incentive for them to stay in the state. Specifically, it was suggested that in order to retain school psychologists, school psychologists' salaries should be comparable to salaries in surrounding states. However, regardless of salary, many school psychologists stated they continue working in Utah due to personal reasons. Also related to financial issues, another common factor participants offered as way to keep school psychologists from leaving the state was for Utah to increase the legislature's funding for education. This response is not surprising considering Utah has the lowest per pupil expenditure for public elementary and secondary education in instruction and support services expenditure (Zhou, Honegger, & Gaviola, 2007).

The final question (*What do you think the field of school psychology should do or change to encourage school psychologists to remain in the field?*) generated some of the same key themes mentioned previously, as well as a few more, which are summarized in Table 8. Once again, an increase in salary was the most common response. It was suggested that the field of school psychology should advocate, lobby, and negotiate for such an increase. Another common

theme was to promote the field. Many felt there should be more public education and exposure about the profession of school psychology, describing the roles and functions of school psychologists. Finally, it was suggested that increasing local training, workshops, and conferences would be beneficial in encouraging school psychologists to remain in the field.

Table 6

What Could Your District Do to Encourage You to Stay?

Theme	<i>n</i>	Sample Statements
Salary	38	<p>“Raise pay to national standards”</p> <p>“Pay us on a different pay scale from teachers to reflect our unique skills and education”</p>
Lighten caseload	17	<p>“School psychologists are spread too thin-too many schools and students to cover”</p> <p>“Hire more school psychologists to distribute the caseload more evenly”</p>
Benefits and retirement	7	<p>“Retain early retirement/retirement incentives for psychologists who have worked many years”</p> <p>“Offer better benefits and retirement for staying”</p>

Note. *n* = 66.

Table 7

What Could Keep You in the State of Utah?

Theme	<i>n</i>	Sample Statements
Salary	36	<p>“Make the pay more in line with other surrounding states or the national average”</p> <p>“Comparable salary schedule as other states”</p>
Personal reasons	14	<p>“Quality of living in Utah”</p> <p>“Personal reasons”</p>
Funding	5	<p>“More funding for education which would allow more psychologists to work at fewer schools and really implement change”</p> <p>“Greater support of education by Utah state legislature (i.e. money)”</p>

Note. n = 64.

Table 8

What Could the Field of School Psychology Do to Encourage You to Stay?

Theme	<i>n</i>	Sample Statements
Salary	18	<p>“Advocate for higher salaries”</p> <p>“Lobby for higher pay”</p>
Promote the field	9	<p>“Public education on what a school psychologist is and what we can do”</p> <p>“Promote heavily the field and focus on the positive aspects of the job”</p>
Training and workshops	7	<p>“Have training meet what actually happens in the schools-less theory, more practical application”</p> <p>“More training in school-wide prevention and intervention programs”</p>

Note. *n* = 59.

Discussion

Limitations and Cautions

A limitation of this study is that the sample was randomly selected only from licensed and practicing school psychologists employed in public schools in the state of Utah as recorded by the Utah State Office of Education. Due to this fact, the external validity of the study may be limited. Stated in practical terms, the findings of this study may not generalize beyond Utah's practicing school psychologists.

Secondly, findings may not represent the majority of Utah's school psychologists. Although participants were randomly selected from the total pool of school psychologists in Utah, the end result of 69 participants, a 58% return rate, represents only 29% of all Utah school psychologists. However, in defense of this study's participation rate, there is, no widely accepted consensus regarding acceptable return rates (Drew, Hardman, & Hart, 1996). Also, these results may be more representative of participants that work in large districts, given that the majority of respondents (85.3%) worked in this setting.

Another limitation of the study is that the questionnaire was adapted and modified from an existing questionnaire to align with the research topic of retaining school psychologists. Therefore, no reliability and validity data can be given regarding this measure. It is assumed that the survey instrument measured what it intended to measure.

Finally, the language and format on two portions of the questionnaire appeared to be unclear to some of the participants. In the current placement section, participants were asked to indicate on average how many students were in their caseload at a time. This question did not specify what type of caseload. Responses varied greatly from 5 to 430 students and could have included only the students a school psychologist works with directly or the number of students in

the school(s) where the school psychologist is employed. Also, on the section that asked participants to rank the top five reasons they stay in their school psychologist position and circle the number that best reflected their opinion to the reasons, a number of respondents only indicated their agreement for the reasons ranked as their top five and not their agreement for all of the reasons that were provided. This resulted in a lower response rate to these items than other items that were measured on the survey.

Discussion of Results

In looking at the top reasons why school psychologists stay in their position, four of the top five reasons relate directly to the students they serve. The results of this research indicate the number one reason school psychologists remain in their job is the feeling of success and joy in helping students. The other top reasons were opportunity to counsel with students, working one-on-one with students, and the population with whom the school psychologist works. These top reasons also received high mean agreement ratings as to why school psychologists stay in their position. These findings seem to align with the literature that indicates job satisfaction increases when a school psychologist spends more time in intervention-related activities, such as individual counseling (Huebner, 1993b). The literature also suggests that activities that are more desirable to perform are those related to counseling, intervention, and prevention, while the least desirable activities are related to assessment (Curtis, Grier, et al., 2002; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2002; Curtis, Hunley, et al., 2004). This also appears to be true in this study with the opportunity to counsel with students receiving a weighted ranking of 82 and the opportunity to assess students receiving a weighted ranking of 30.

Other top reasons for staying in the field in which almost all respondents indicated they agreed or strongly agreed it was a reason for staying were working hours and summers and

holidays off. These responses illustrate the flexibility the school psychologist position provides in accommodating family life responsibilities.

The participants' rate of agreement on a number of satisfaction issues provides interesting and valuable information. The literature states that nationally, school psychologists are satisfied with their jobs, would choose school psychology again as a career, and intend to stay in the profession of school psychology (Brown et al., 1998; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 1996; Wilczenski, 1997; Worrell et al., 2006). This study resulted in similar findings. The majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that they enjoy being a school psychologist (98.5%) and that they feel their job is important (98.5%). The majority of respondents also indicated they would recommend school psychology as a profession to someone else (91.0%) and that they plan on staying in the field of school psychology until the end of their career (80.6%).

While the majority of respondents indicated they did not think about leaving school psychology, it should be noted that 25 (36.8%) of the respondents indicated that they thought about leaving school psychology. Another cautionary satisfaction issue is in regards to salary. Forty-two (62.7%) participants indicated that they are dissatisfied with their salary. This finding coincides with other national studies in which salary received low satisfaction ratings (Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006).

This study also examined what could be done at the school, district, state, and national level to encourage school psychologists to remain in the field until retirement. The overwhelming response at all levels is an increase in salary. Particularly, many school psychologists would prefer their salary be based on an administrative pay scale, rather than on a teacher's salary schedule. Salary appears to be the issue that causes the most dissatisfaction

amongst school psychologists in Utah, while an increase in salary appears to be the chief way to dissuade the dissatisfaction and encourage school psychologists to stay in the field.

While an increase in salary appears to be the key in keeping Utah school psychologists in their position until retirement, an increase is most likely dependent on the amount of funding that education in the state of Utah receives from the legislature. It is also important to keep in mind that salary schedules vary from district to district. Therefore, some districts may pay their school psychologists more than others, making responses dependent on the particular district in which the school psychologist worked and that particular district's pay scale.

The literature suggests that role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, and lack of peer interactions are a cause of stress and burnout for school psychologists (Huebner, 1993a). In looking at what can be done to keep school psychologists in the field, similar themes along these lines emerged. Participants expressed a desire to promote the field of school psychology, educate others about their roles, hire more school psychologists to lighten their caseloads, and engage in more communication with teachers and administrators in order to build relationships and become part of a team. These suggestions appear to be feasible in encouraging school psychologists to stay in the field. The question is whether schools, districts, the state, and the field of school psychology will implement them in order to alleviate the shortages that currently exist and most likely will continue to exist in the near future.

Future Research

This study focused on the reasons why school psychologists in Utah stay in their position. Future research could look at why school psychologists around the nation remain in their position and a comparison of similarities and differences could be made. In addition, interviewing school psychologists who have remained in the field for a long period of time could

be of value in finding strategies they have found useful in keeping them in the profession. Also, interviewing school psychologists who have left the field could provide helpful insight into what could have been done to retain them.

Further research could study the correlation between such characteristics as gender, age, marital status, and number of children in relation to why school psychologists remain in their position. Since Utah has a high proportion of families (Utah Department of Health, 2006), examining how schools can be flexible in meeting the needs of school psychologists with families could be very beneficial. Also, more analysis could be done to examine if factors such as the number of schools assigned, how many students one serves at a time or if the school district in which one is employed affects their reasons for staying.

More research could investigate the professional development and training school psychologists receive and subsequently the effects pre-service and inservice training have on one's desire to stay in the field. Along these lines, an examination of current and future legislation and its effects on professionals in the field could provide valuable information in helping to alleviate the shortages in school psychology. An example of such legislation includes the revisions to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) with its push for responsiveness to intervention (RTI).

Because an increase in salary was identified as the main avenue to keep Utah school psychologists in the profession, administrators and legislators need to explore plausible ways to make this occur. Further research could be conducted into how funding is disseminated to educators and consideration could be given to other alternatives of the current process.

Summary

The field of school psychology has evolved in many ways over the years. As the profession has struggled to gain prominence, it has also faced struggles to maintain a sufficient supply of personnel. With current and projected shortages in the foreseeable future, continued attention should be given to what keeps school psychologists from leaving their positions prematurely. This area of examination is timely and of importance so those students who need and benefit from quality school psychological services will continue to receive such care.

The top reasons Utah school psychologists stayed in their positions were related directly to the students they served. Specifically, they stay for the feeling of success and joy in helping students, working one-on-one with students, and the opportunity to counsel students. Overall, school psychologists in Utah are satisfied with their jobs, except when it comes to salary. The number one measure that could be taken at the school, district, state and national level to keep Utah school psychologists in their position is to increase salary. Consideration should also be given to placing school psychologists on a different salary schedule than teachers. Other ways that could aid in retention are more recognition for the roles that are performed, increased funding for education, lighter caseloads, and more applicable trainings and workshops.

While Utah school psychologists appear to remain in their jobs for the opportunity to serve others, and not for monetary reasons, financial issues are most likely to keep them in their positions. While salary is dependent on a number of factors, it is an area of preventable attrition that warrants continued investigation.

If the results of this study can be generalized to all Utah school psychologists, it appears that many enjoy their job, perceive it as important, and want to stay in the field. These results are encouraging in light of the shortages that exist. It is important to further explore and implement

the measures that can be taken to retain school psychologists so that students do not miss out on the beneficial services of the profession.

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Appendix A

Dear

You have been asked to complete this survey because you and your experience are important to us. We will use this information to gain insight about retaining school psychologists in the state of Utah. The questions ask:

- (1) Why you stay in the field of school psychology,
- (2) How satisfied you are with your job, and
- (3) What measures you think could be taken to retain school psychologists.

It will take approximately 10-15 minutes to answer these questions. A pre-paid self-addressed return envelope is enclosed for convenience in returning the survey. As an incentive for you to complete and return the survey, we will send you a \$5.00 gift certificate to Blockbuster Video **if the survey is completed and postmarked by _____**. The name and address to send the gift certificate to will be separated from the survey in order to maintain confidentiality and will be destroyed once the gift certificate is mailed. The information you provide will remain anonymous. The information that we collect will be stored and safeguarded in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

The experiences and information that you provide to us will help us understand why school psychologists stay in the field and identify means to retain school psychologists in Utah schools. This may raise awareness of the field of school psychology, and perhaps increase the retention of school psychologists within Utah school districts. The risk is considered minimal and your participation is voluntary.

This research is being completed by Lisa Dickison, Mary Anne Prater, Melissa Allen, and Ellie Young. The later three persons are chair and professors of the Counseling Psychology and Special Education department at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. If you have concerns, you may contact me at (801) 787-5716 or by e-mail at lad27@byu.edu.

Thank you for your help with this important research.

Sincerely,

Lisa Dickison

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction: This research is being conducted by Lisa Dickison, an education specialist student in School Psychology at Brigham Young University, to estimate why school psychologists in Utah stay in the profession of school psychology and to explore measures that could be taken to encourage school psychologists to remain in the field until retirement. You were selected to participate in this study because you were randomly chosen from a list of currently licensed school psychologists as recorded by the Utah State Office of Education.

Procedures: You are asked to complete the enclosed questionnaire. You will be asked to provide demographic information, rate and rank your top five reasons for remaining in the field of school psychology, rate issues pertaining to your satisfaction as a school psychologist, and answer four short questions requiring a written response about measures that could be taken to retain school psychologists.

Risks/Discomforts: There are minimal risks for participants in this study. You may feel emotional discomfort at providing information about yourself. There is a possibility that individuals could be identified based on demographic information.

Benefits: The benefits of this study may not have direct relation to you as a participant. However, results of this study will lead to more information on retention of school psychologists. This could lead to more research and advancement on this topic.

Confidentiality: All information will remain confidential. The information will not identify certain individuals, but instead, will be categorized as group data. All data, including questionnaires, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and will only be accessible to those directly involved with the research. After the research is completed, the questionnaires will be destroyed.

Compensation: A \$5.00 gift certificate will be mailed to those participants who return the survey within two weeks.

Participation: Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy or penalty.

Questions about the Research: If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact Lisa Dickison at (801) 787-5716 or lad27@byu.edu, or Dr. Mary Anne Prater at (801) 422-1592 or prater@byu.edu.

Questions about your Rights as a Research Participant: If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Renea Beckstrand, Institutional Review Board Chair, (801) 422-3873, 422 SWKT, renea_beckstrand@byu.edu.

The return of the attached survey is your consent to participate in the research.

School Psychologist Survey

All survey responses are confidential.
Please **circle answers or fill in blanks** for each question.

Demographic Information

1. Gender: Female Male
 2. What is your age? _____
 3. Ethnicity: African-American Asian Caucasian Hispanic Native American
 Pacific Islander Other: _____
 4. Marital Status: Married Single
 5. Number of children, if any _____
 6. Degree(s) obtained: Masters Education Specialist Doctorate
 7. Degree(s) from (list university(s)/college(s): _____
-

Current Placement

8. What grade level of students do you work with? (Circle all that apply)
 Preschool Elementary Middle Junior High High
9. What is your current contract? Full-time Part-time
 If part-time, how many hours a week? _____
10. On average, how many students are in your caseload at a time? _____
11. On average, how many hours a day are you at school? _____
12. On average, how many hours a week do you do work at home? _____
13. What number of schools do you work at within your district? _____
14. What is your school's enrollment? (Please list for each school you work at)

(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
(4) _____	(5) _____	(6) _____

15. What is your school district? _____

Career History

16. How many years have you been working as a School Psychologist?

17. As a School Psychologist have you ever taken a leave of absence?

Yes No

If yes, for what purpose? _____

If yes, for how long? _____

18. As a School Psychologist have you ever worked less than a full-time contract?

Yes No

If yes, how many hours a week? _____

19. On average, how many professional development workshops or trainings do you attend in a year?

20. Do you belong to any professional organizations? Yes No

If yes, which ones? _____

Reasons Why I Stay in My School Psychologist Position

Please **rank the top five reasons** you stay in your school psychologist position on the left, with 1 being the top ranking, and **circle the number** that best reflects your opinion on the right.

Rank top 5	Rate your agreement with	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Feeling of success and joy in helping students	1	2	3	4
	Population of students with whom I work	1	2	3	4
	Working one on one with students	1	2	3	4
	Opportunity to assess students	1	2	3	4
	Opportunity to counsel with students	1	2	3	4
	Participation in school-wide prevention and intervention programs	1	2	3	4
	Financial reasons	1	2	3	4
	Working hours	1	2	3	4
	Summers and holidays off	1	2	3	4
	Rarely taking work home	1	2	3	4
	Rarely working on the weekends	1	2	3	4
	Making a difference for teachers	1	2	3	4
	Acknowledgment of administrators and teachers of a job well done	1	2	3	4
	Acknowledgment of parents of a job well done	1	2	3	4
	Professional affiliation with the field of school psychology	1	2	3	4
	Other (please list specific reason(s):	1	2	3	4

School Psychologist Satisfaction Issues

Please **circle the number** that best reflects your opinion.

Rate your agreement with	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My university training prepared me for the profession.	1	2	3	4
I enjoy being a school psychologist.	1	2	3	4
My job is important.	1	2	3	4
Others perceive my job as important.	1	2	3	4
I would recommend school psychology as a profession to someone else.	1	2	3	4
I am satisfied with my salary.	1	2	3	4
My job accommodates family life responsibilities.	1	2	3	4
I plan on staying in the field of school psychology until the end of my career.	1	2	3	4
Being a school psychologist is a stressful job.	1	2	3	4
If stressful, I have found ways to deal with the stress.	1	2	3	4
I think about leaving school psychology.	1	2	3	4

Address to send gift certificate to: _____
