
Recovery Support Specialists Experiences of Burnout and Plans for the Future

Maria Gaiser, MPH; Danya Krueger, MSW, MBA; Nelson Spence BAAS, RSPS, ICPR; Brianna Lombardi, PhD, MSW

Introduction

This study, conducted in partnership with a national nonprofit organization, sought to identify the relationship between burnout, work satisfaction, and planned retention of Peer Recovery Support Specialists (PRSS) in the behavioral health field.

Methods

A survey was distributed via listserv in June 2023 to active employees providing or supervising PRSS. Validated instruments measuring burnout, resilience, and workplace satisfaction were identified and adapted for a survey of PRSS.

Findings

The survey sample comprised 453 PRSS, 42% of which were in a supervisor- or manager role. Nearly half (42%) considered leaving their position, with 44% reporting an intent to leave in the next year. Reasons for intent to leave included pursuing a position with better pay/benefits (76%), career advancement/promotion opportunities (61%), burnout (41%), and a lack of advancement opportunities in their current role (41%). Multivariate models indicated inability to meet financial needs (OR=0.49, 95% CI [0.33, 0.72], $p < .05$), the need to complete extra tasks outside of PRSS responsibilities (OR=2.81, 95% CI [1.85, 4.28], $p < 0.05$), low overall job satisfaction (OR=0.41, 95% CI [0.23, 0.73], $p < 0.05$), and higher symptoms of burnout (OR=1.55, 95% CI [1.01, 2.38], $p < 0.05$) significantly predicted intent to leave.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Minimizing PRSS turnover will require systemic change to address wages and ability to advance with PRSS roles. Increasing the Medicaid reimbursement rate for peer services, along with organizational strategies to improve PRSS role definition and scope of effort, could increase peer wages and minimize misuse of PRSS.