



## **Exploring the Drivers of Turnover Intentions: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of NGOs in District Chitral**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the key drivers of employee turnover intentions in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) based in District Chitral, Pakistan. Using a foundation of established theoretical models—including the Job Dissatisfaction Model, Unfolding Model, Emotional Response Theory, and Job Embeddedness Theory—the research examines how personal characteristics, organizational dynamics, external labor market conditions, and unexpected organizational events influence employees' decisions to consider leaving. Data were gathered through a structured survey of 60 NGO employees, complemented by semi-structured interviews with human resource professionals. The results highlight that younger employees and those with higher education levels are more inclined to express a desire to leave, particularly when coupled with dissatisfaction over salary, limited job security, and a lack of organizational commitment. Additionally, external job opportunities and disruptive organizational events, such as leadership changes or funding instability, were found to strongly impact turnover intention. The study concludes that a mix of modifiable internal practices and external factors contribute to employees' intentions to exit, and it recommends targeted human resource strategies to strengthen retention within the nonprofit sector.

**Keywords:** Personal Factors, Organizational Factors, Turnover Intentions, External Factors, NGOs,



## INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in economic and social development, particularly in areas where presence of state is limited or ineffective. NGOs play critical role in creating jobs, delivering services and capacity building of underprivileged societies alongside with government and private sector organization (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). These NGOs focus on crucial areas such as rural development, education, health, disaster relief and livelihood to minimize the important development gaps

The effectiveness of NGOs is heavily dependent on their human capital, especially in remote and underserved regions like District Chitral, where attracting and retaining skilled employees is already a challenge (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Loquercio, Hammersley, & Emmens, 2006; Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

However, employee turnover is a common organizational phenomenon, its consequences are often more severe in nonprofit settings. Frequent staff exits disrupt program continuity, affect institutional memory, and strain limited financial and human resources (Loquercio, D., Hammersley, M., & Emmens, B. (2006), Anheier, H. K. (2005). Previous studies have explored the causes of employee turnover across various sectors, identifying factors such as job dissatisfaction, weak organizational commitment, and better external opportunities as common triggers (Mobley, W. H. (1982). However, most of these studies have focused on actual turnover behavior—i.e., employees who have already left their jobs.

This study shifts focus toward **employee turnover intention**, which refers to the likelihood or conscious decision of an employee to leave their current organization. Turnover intention is widely accepted in organizational research as a strong predictor of actual turnover and is especially relevant in contexts where it is difficult to track confirmed exits (Mobley, W. H. (1982), Tett, R. P., & Meyer, J. P. (1993). Understanding of the core drivers of the turnover intention can help organization to design human resource strategies to ensure stability of workforce and reduce turnover.

The study in hand investigates how external, organizational, personal and unexpected events influence turnover intention based on well structured conceptual framework. The analysis of the study is based on robust theories, like Unfolding Theory, Job Dissatisfaction Theory, Job Embeddedness Theory, and Emotional Response Theory. The findings are intended to propose suggestions for enhancing retention strategies in Nongovernmental organizations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Turnover intention is defined as an employee's deliberate and planned consideration to leave their present organization. It is widely recognized as a strong predictor of actual turnover behavior (Mobley, 1982; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Although previous researches have heavily focused on actual turnover, however, some recent studies have shifted attention toward turnover intention, particularly where it is difficult to measure actual turnover. This makes the construct especially useful in the nongovernmental organization sector, where limited human resource, reliance on external funding and the unpredictability of project cycles create unique retention challenges.

Several theories have been developed to explain the factors influencing turnover intention. Such as Mobley's Job Dissatisfaction Model (1982), links unfavorable



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job-related attributes such as dissatisfaction with pay or leadership to an increased probability of turnover. Price's Factors Model (2001) extends this view by adding organizational and personal factors as contributing elements of turnover. The Unfolding Model introduced by Lee and Mitchell (1994) discusses how unexpected events or shocks can trigger the turnover decision, despite prior job satisfaction levels. Whereas, the Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001) argues that social, professional, and organization ties serve as anchors, making it more difficult for employees to leave. Together, these theories provide comprehensive lens for understanding employee turnover intention across four dimensions: organizational, personal, external, and shock-related influences.

### 1. Personal Factors

Literature depicts that personal traits have a significant influence on employee turnover intentions. Age as personal trait is one of the most reliable predictors; younger employees often express a stronger intention to exist the organization, driven by their aspirations and career mobility (Griffeth et al., 2000). On the other hand, older employees usually place a higher value on job stability and security, reducing the probability of their turnover intentions (Price, 2001). Similarly, educational background also plays a vital role to enhance turnover intentions. Employees with advanced qualifications tend to have higher career expectations and better access to job opportunities, which can lead to a greater intention to leave if their current roles don't offer advancement (Carsten & Spector, 1987). In the context of NGOs, younger, well-educated staff may view their positions as temporary rather than permanent careers, particularly when there are limited financial or developmental incentives.

### 2. Organizational Factors

The internal work environment is critical to employee retention. **Job dissatisfaction**—stemming from poor compensation, limited recognition, or restrictive supervision—is a major driver of turnover intention (Herzberg et al., 1959; Mobley, 1982). **Organizational commitment and job involvement**, as explained by the **Emotional Response Theory** (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979), inversely correlate with turnover intention; employees who feel emotionally connected and involved are more likely to stay.

Compensation is especially relevant in the NGO sector, where salary structures often fall below private or government benchmarks. According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, inadequate compensation is a hygiene factor that, when absent, leads to dissatisfaction and intent to exit—even if other aspects of the job are positive. Similarly, **job security**, particularly in the form of short-term contracts, weakens employees' sense of stability, increasing turnover intention (Loquercio, Hammersley, & Emmens, 2006). Lack of opportunities for growth and limited involvement in organizational decisions further diminish engagement and retention.

### 3. External Factors

Conditions beyond the organization's control also influence turnover intention. The **availability of alternative employment opportunities**, especially in the public sector or with internationally funded projects, pulls employees away from NGOs (Campion, 1991). Studies show that when employees perceive better



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external prospects, their likelihood of intending to leave rises—particularly in regions with constrained career pathways (Rankin, 2006).

Such external “pull factors” are consistent with the logic of the Factors Model, especially when internal workplace dissatisfaction is present. In geographically isolated regions like Chitral, NGOs often face stiff competition from public sector jobs and migration-related opportunities, which heightens the risk of losing qualified staff.

### **4. Shocks and Career Triggers**

The Unfolding Model of Turnover, proposed by Lee and Mitchell (1994), emphasizes that employees’ intention to leave may be initiated by abrupt or impactful occurrences, commonly referred to as “shocks.” These may include incidents such as the termination of projects, reductions in funding, sudden changes in organizational policy, or transitions in leadership. Importantly, such events can prompt employees to rethink their employment status—even if they were previously content in their roles.

In the context of NGOs, encountering unforeseen disruptions is quite common. As noted by Loquercio and colleagues (2006), staff departures in development-oriented organizations are often less about dissatisfaction and more about instability brought on by shifting donor agendas, funding uncertainties, or leadership turnover. This perspective underlines the importance of recognizing organizational shocks as a separate and influential factor in the study of turnover intention.

To sum up, existing literature depicts that turnover intention is shaped by a complex interaction of organizational factors, personal characteristics, alternate job opportunities, and unforeseen events. Therefore, understanding and addressing these crucial factors is essential for NGOs in remote areas like Chitral to make ensure stability of workforce and sustainable development.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Gaining insight into the causes of employee turnover intention necessitates a solid theoretical base that accounts for why employees contemplate leaving their organizations and how personal, organizational, external, and situational (shock) factors shape this decision-making process. Although these models were initially designed to explain actual turnover, contemporary studies have increasingly adapted them to examine turnover intention, which is widely recognized as a key predictor of eventual employee departure (Mobley, 1982; Tett & Meyer, 1993). A range of frameworks from human resource management and organizational behavior contribute valuable perspectives on the psychological and contextual elements influencing such intentions.

Job Dissatisfaction model posits that turnover is primarily driven by dissatisfaction with one’s job role, environment, or conditions. When employees perceive better opportunities elsewhere, they are more likely to leave. This model emphasizes the importance of employee attitudes in shaping exit decisions (Mobley, 1982).

Emotional Response theory suggests that psychological variables such as job involvement and organizational commitment significantly affect an employee's decision to stay or leave. A weak emotional attachment to the organization often results in a higher likelihood of turnover (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979).



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Unfolding model of turnover proposed by Lee and Mitchell (1994), challenges the assumption that dissatisfaction is always central. It argues that sudden “shocks”—positive or negative events that disrupt the employee’s connection with the organization—can prompt resignation, even when job satisfaction is high. Shocks such as funding cuts and project closures—frequent occurrences in the NGO sector—can trigger turnover intention independently of job satisfaction, as highlighted in the Unfolding Model.

Factors model framework integrates multiple influences and suggests that personal characteristics (e.g., age, education), organizational factors (e.g., pay, job security), and external conditions (e.g., labor market competition) affect turnover indirectly by shaping job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Price, 2001).

Job Embeddedness theory proposed by Mitchell et al. (2001) emphasizes the role of social, psychological, and organizational ties. Employees are less likely to leave when they are highly embedded in their job and community through connections, compatibility, and perceived sacrifice if they quit.

Herzberg's model (**Two-Factor Theory**) divides job-related factors into **hygiene factors** (e.g., salary, supervision, work conditions) and **motivators** (e.g., achievement, recognition). While hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction, they do not necessarily motivate performance. Conversely, motivators drive long-term engagement. Turnover tends to occur when hygiene needs are unmet (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959).

Building on the above theories, this study adopts an integrative approach by examining how personal, organizational, external factors and shocks contribute to employee turnover intention in NGOs. These theoretical foundations provide a lens to understand what shapes employees’ decisions to consider leaving, even if they have not yet exited. The framework evaluates the following dimensions:

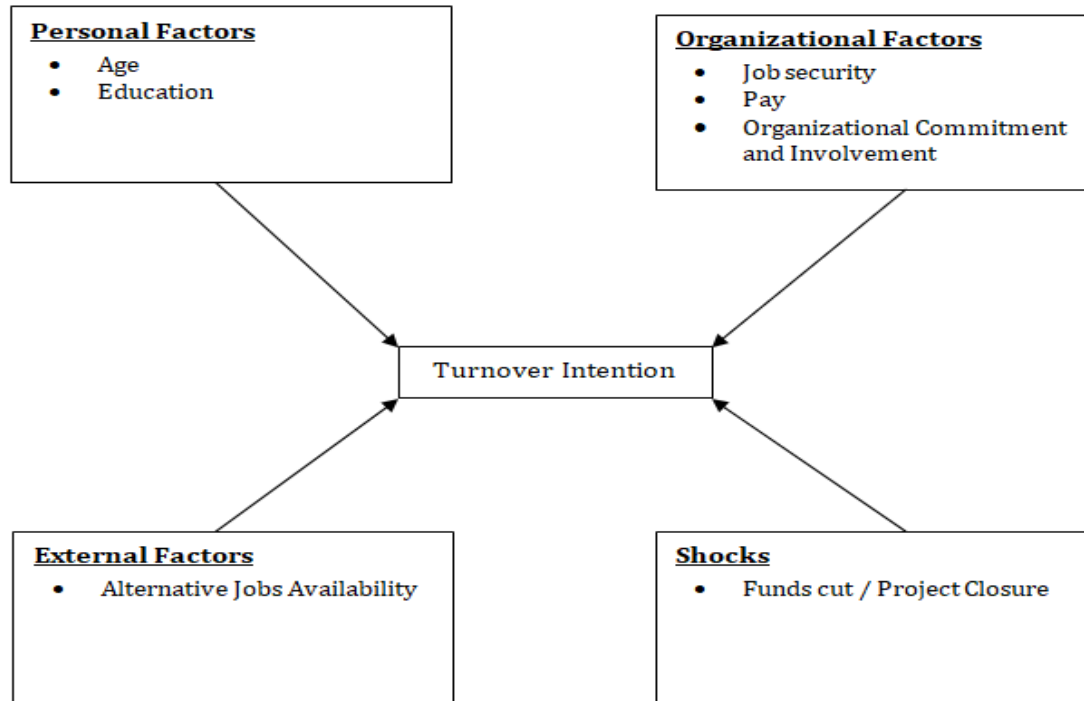
- Personal factors such as age and education level
- Organizational factors including pay, job security and organizational commitment & involvement.
- External factors such as availability of alternative employment
- Shocks such as funding cuts and Project closure.

These categories are explored through the lens of the aforementioned theories to identify practical implications for improving employee retention and reducing turnover intention within NGO settings.





## Schematic View



## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the theoretical review and prior empirical findings, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Age is negatively associated with employee turnover intention.

**H2:** Education level is positively associated with employee turnover intention.

**H3:** Job security is negatively associated with employee turnover intention.

**H4:** Pay is negatively associated with employee turnover intention.

**H5:** Organizational commitment and involvement are negatively associated with employee turnover intention.

**H6:** Alternative job Availability is positively associated with employee turnover intention.

**H7:** The presence of shocks is positively associated with employee turnover intention.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a **quantitative research design** using a **survey method** to investigate the factors contributing to employee turnover in non-governmental organizations. The design was structured to collect measurable data that could be analyzed statistically to identify trends, associations, and potential causes of turnover intentions across personal, organizational, external and shocks dimensions.

The target population consisted of employees and human resource (HR) personnel working in NGOs operating in District Chitral. A **cluster sampling technique** was used to categorize the population into organizational clusters. From each cluster, a **simple random sample** of 15 employees was selected, resulting in a total sample size of **60 respondents**. The sample included both male and female



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employees from diverse job roles and departments. Additionally, in-depth insights were gathered from selected HR managers through interviews.

A **self-developed questionnaire for collection of data from employees** was designed for this study based on prior literature and theoretical models relevant to employee turnover. The items were informed by commonly studied variables in turnover research, ensuring content and construct validity. Though not directly adopted from a specific source, the structure and language of the tool align with best practices in survey design and were reviewed by field experts for refinement ((DeVellis, 2017; Boateng et al., 2018; Price, 2001; Griffeth et al., 2000). In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected HR professionals to supplement the quantitative findings with qualitative insights on causes and effects of turnover.

Data collection was conducted through **personal administration of questionnaires** to ensure a high response rate and proper understanding of the questions. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. A 100% response rate was achieved, and only fully completed questionnaires were included in the analysis. Data were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** such as frequencies and percentages to summarize the demographic profile and responses of participants. The analysis focused on identifying patterns and associations between the proposed independent variables (personal, organizational, external factors and Shocks) and the dependent variable (employee turnover intention).

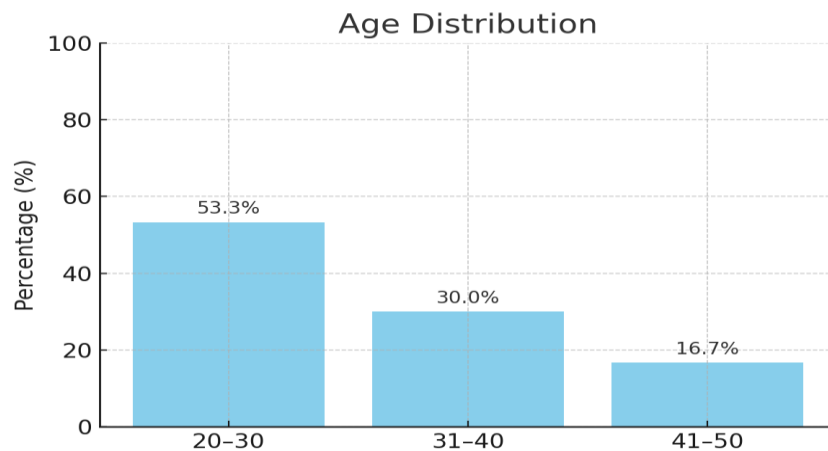
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings from the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. The analysis is structured around the study's conceptual framework, which categorizes determinants of employee turnover intentions into **personal factors, organizational factors, external influences and shocks**. The results are discussed in relation to the hypotheses and supported by existing literature and theoretical models outlined earlier.

### 1. Personal Factors

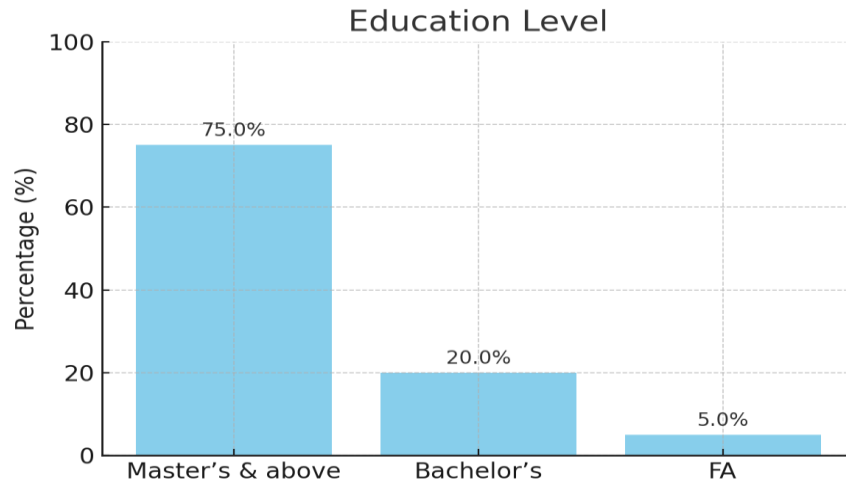
#### i) Age

Descriptive statistics show that **53.3%** of employees were between **20–30 years old** and 30.0% between 31-40 ages, while only **16.7%** fell in the **41–50** age brackets. Younger employees expressed a greater desire to switch jobs, often citing aspirations for better roles and higher salaries. These findings support **H1** and are consistent with previous research (Price, 2001) which indicates that younger workers are more mobile and career-focused, making them more susceptible to turnover intention. Older workers, in contrast, are more likely to value job stability and remain committed longer.



## ii) Education

A significant **75%** of respondents held a **Master's degree or higher**. Many of these individuals expressed dissatisfaction with career development opportunities within their current NGO roles. This supports **H2**, indicating that higher educational attainment correlates with increased turnover intention. These results echo **Carsten & Spector (1987)**, who found that educated professionals often have higher expectations and broader external job options.



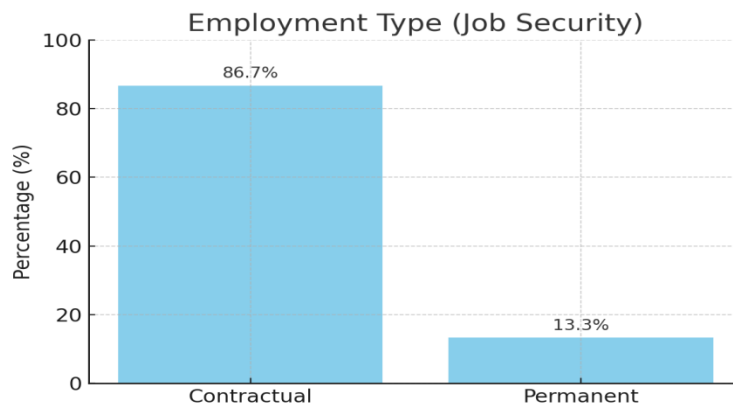
These findings are consistent with the **Factors Model**, which suggests that personal characteristics (age and education) indirectly influence turnover through job satisfaction and commitment levels.

## 2. Organizational Factors

### i) Job Security

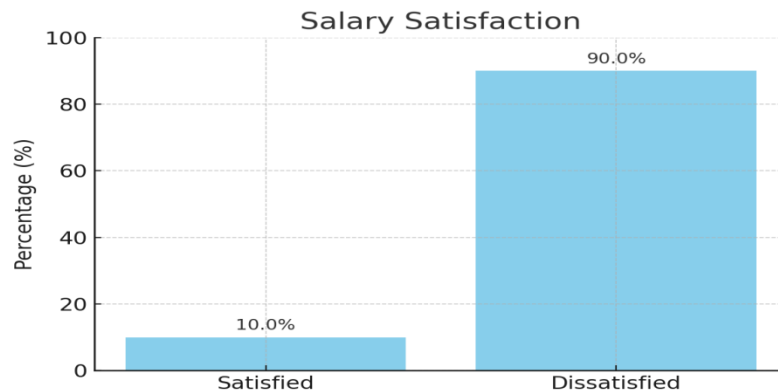
Data revealed that **86.7%** of employees were employed on **contractual terms**, with very few holding permanent positions. This overwhelming reliance on short-term contracts contributes to job insecurity—a well-known driver of dissatisfaction and intention to leave. These findings strongly support **H3** and are aligned with **Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory** (1959), where job security is considered a core hygiene factor.





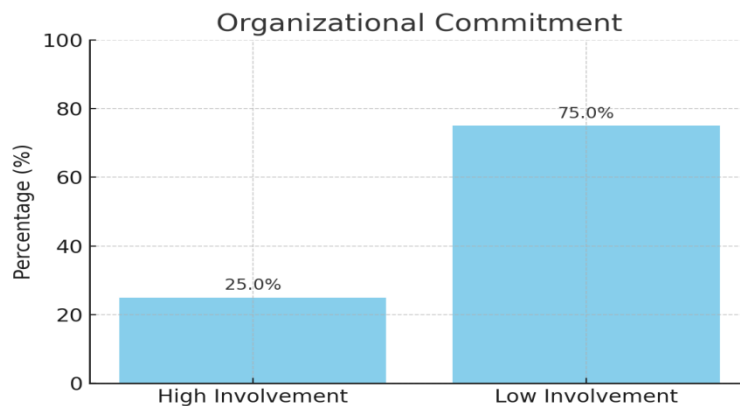
## ii) Pay

An overwhelming 90% of respondents reported dissatisfaction with their current salary. Many also mentioned that their compensation was not competitive with other sectors, such as government or donor-funded programs. These findings provide strong evidence in support of H4. As Herzberg (1959) argues, inadequate compensation leads to dissatisfaction, which, in turn, increases the risk of voluntary exit.



## iii) Organizational Commitment and Involvement

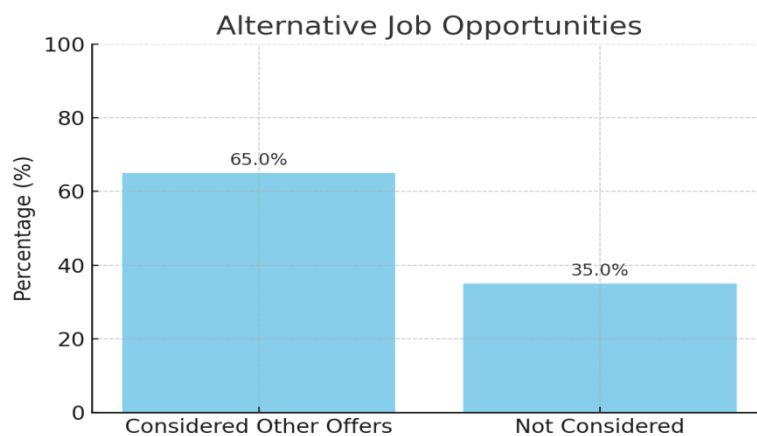
Survey responses and qualitative interviews revealed that a majority of employees reported feeling excluded from decision-making and undervalued in their roles. Approximately **75%** of respondents indicated **low involvement** in organizational processes. HR managers also highlighted that employee participation in planning and feedback mechanisms was minimal. These findings support **H5** and align with **Emotional Response Theory** (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979), which emphasizes that low emotional commitment increases the likelihood of turnover intention.



### 3. External Factors

#### i) Availability of Alternative Opportunities

About **65%** of employees stated that they had recently searched, **considered or received job offers** from public sector organizations or international projects. This confirms **H6**, suggesting that the presence of alternative employment options significantly contributes to turnover intention. The result is consistent with both the **Job Dissatisfaction Model** and **Unfolding Model**, where external opportunities act as a pull factor.



### 4. Shocks and Career Triggers

Discussions with HR personnel revealed that employees' intention to leave often intensified after abrupt changes within the organization—such as the closure of projects, suspension of funding, or shifts in leadership. These events created a sense of instability, leading staff to reconsider their future with the organization, even when their general job satisfaction remained high. Such patterns align with Hypothesis 7 and lend further credibility to the Unfolding Model of Turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994), which emphasizes the independent role of unexpected disruptions—or shocks—in influencing exit decisions.

In summary, complex interplay of organizational factors, personal traits, external job opportunities and shocks are appeared to be the drivers of employee turnover intention in NGOs operating in Chitral. Job insecurity, alternate job availability and dissatisfaction with compensation are among the prominent determinants of turnover intention. The findings of the study suggest the need of targeted human resource management interventions to address organizational shortcomings,



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external factors and unexpected events, with an aim of enhancing human resource retention in NGOs.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

#### Conclusion

The present study explored the key drivers of employee turnover intention in NGOs based in district Chitral. The combined effects of personal traits, organizational factors, external job opportunities, and unforeseen organizational upheavals were the main focus of the analysis. The study put forth and assessed seven hypotheses organized around a thorough conceptual framework, drawing on a variety of widely accepted theoretical stance, such as the Job Embeddedness Theory, the Factors Model, the Unfolding Model, the Job Dissatisfaction Model, and the Emotional Response Theory.

The findings depict that turnover intention is multifaceted problem. Among personal factors, younger age and higher educational attainment were associated with increased intention to leave, suggesting that younger, qualified professionals may view NGOs as transitional rather than long-term career destinations. Organizational factors such as contractual employment, inadequate compensation, and limited involvement in decision-making emerged as key internal drivers of turnover intention. Additionally, the availability of alternative job opportunities as external pull factor and sudden shocks—such as project closures and management changes—were significant drivers of turnover intention. These findings are consistent with existing literature and strongly support the proposed hypotheses. They also reinforce the notion that while some employee exits are inevitable, much of the underlying turnover intention can be mitigated through strategic human resource interventions. The study contributes to both theory and practice by contextualizing employee turnover intention within the unique environment of remote, development-focused NGOs and by identifying actionable areas for improvement.

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered to NGOs, HR practitioners, and policymakers aiming to improve employee retention and organizational effectiveness:

1. NGOs should transition from short-term to longer-term or renewable contracts to enhance job security and reduce staff turnover intention.
2. Compensation packages should be aligned with industry benchmark and include non-monetary benefits to boost satisfaction and fairness.
3. Organizations must foster employee engagement through participation, feedback, and recognition to strengthen organizational commitment.
4. Career development opportunities such as training, mentoring, and promotions should be provided to retain skilled and educated employees.
5. Proactive strategies are needed to manage organizational shocks like leadership changes or funding issues to maintain staff trust.
6. NGOs should collaborate on sector-wide initiatives, including shared training and advocacy, to improve overall HR practices and retention.



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