

# Job Satisfaction, Burnout, And Coping Among Illinois School Psychologists

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## Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) the estimated number of children in American public schools will reach approximately 52 million by 2027. The retention of trained school psychologists is of great importance to this growing number of school aged children as the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) notes that this burgeoning population of youth will be increasingly diverse, both culturally and linguistically, as well as maintain at least proportional growth in issues related to poverty, homelessness, and mental health (NASP, 2017). As professionals, trained in both mental health and learning, school psychologists are uniquely qualified to support these very needs (Armistead et al., 2013).

Regrettably, there is a long-standing shortage of school psychologists (Curtis, et al., 2004; McIntosh, 2004; Fagan, 2004). The most recent estimates suggest that this shortage will persist through at least 2025 (Castillo et al., 2014). Due to this shortage, the needs of school aged children and the organizations that educate them are underserved. The unmet social, emotional, and academic needs of American school children and the lack of support in public schools is an issue of equity. Understanding the shortage of school psychologists, their working conditions, and ultimately, their reasons for attrition are, in fact, an issue of social justice.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1.) What are the current rates of job satisfaction, burnout, and occupational intentions (i.e., expect to stay in current job, change position, or leave the field) of school psychologists in the state of Illinois?
- 2.) What are the rates of the occupational stress coping styles, social support, problem solving, avoidance, or positive thinking among school psychologists in the State of Illinois?
- 3.) Do levels of job satisfaction, burnout, occupational intentions, or age of the practitioners predict any of the four coping styles?
- 4.) If age is predictive of any of the coping styles, does generational membership further explain differences in coping styles?

## Method

### SURVEY

- 72 items in total length
- Measures of job satisfaction, coping, and burnout were taken from three pre-existing tools
  - Brief COPE Instrument (Brief COPE)(Carver, 1997)
  - Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ)(Weiss et al., 1967)
  - Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI)(Demerouti et al. 2010)
- School Psychology Satisfaction and Burnout Questionnaire (SPSBQ) was used as a template to better match survey language to the field (Schilling & Randolph, 2017)

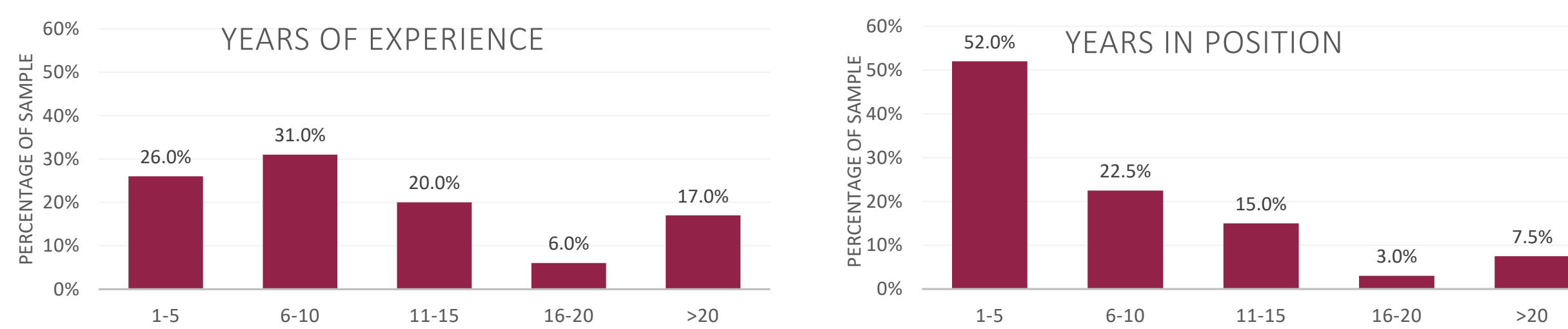
### PROCEDURE

- Random cluster sample of 600 schools from all 3,993 public schools
- The recruitment email was sent to 312 potential participants
- 133 (43%) agreed to participate and 120 (38%) completed the survey

## Results

### SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

- Predominately female (85%)
- Age ranged from 26 to 72 ( $M = 39$ ,  $SD = 9.6$ )
- 4% Baby Boomers, 39% Generation X, and 57% Millennials
- Majority (78%) held an EdS
- Experience ranged from the first year of practice to more than 20 years of experience
- Majority (52%) had been in their current position between 1 and 5 years



### QUESTION 1: Rates of Job Satisfaction, Burnout, and Occupational Intentions

#### JOB SATISFACTION

- Job satisfaction among Illinois school psychologists appears high
- Higher degree of intrinsic satisfaction

OLBI	M	SD	Low n (%)	Moderate n (%)	High n (%)
Disengagement	20.0	3.2	9(8)	92(77)	19(16)
Exhaustion	21.0	3.6	6(5)	86(72)	28(23)

#### BURNOUT

- Majority reported a “moderate” degree of burnout
- School psychologists were generally satisfied with their jobs
- School psychologists also endorsed symptoms of burnout

MSQ	M	SD	Low n (%)	Moderate n (%)	High n (%)
Extrinsic	14.4	3.5	17(14)	62 (52)	41 (34)
Intrinsic	22.6	4.9	1(<1)	35 (29)	84 (70)
General	41.6	8.6	4 (3)	56 (47)	60 (50)

#### OCCUPATIONAL INTENTIONS

- (next five years)
- 23% leave school-based practice
- 77% continue in school-based practice

### QUESTION 2: Rates of the Occupational Stress Coping Styles

- Majority reported a “moderate” to “high” degree of adaptive coping strategies to cope with occupational stress
- Yet, maladaptive styles were indicated by some

Brief COPE	M	SD	Low n (%)	Moderate n (%)	High n (%)
Social Support	21.0	4.1	11(9)	79(66)	30 (25)
Problem-Solving	11.6	2.5	4(3)	55(46)	61(51)
Positive Thinking	16.8	2.9	3(3)	72(60)	45(38)
Avoidance	17.9	3.2	90(75)	29(24)	1(<1)

### QUESTION 3: Prediction of the Four Coping Styles

Four hierarchical multiple regression models to predict coping styles with job satisfaction, burnout, occupational intentions (Step 1) and age (Step 2)

#### SOCIAL SUPPORTS:

- STEP 1: Job satisfaction, burnout, and occupational intentions accounted for change in variance ( $\Delta R^2$ ) = .02 and was not significantly different from zero ( $p = .74$ )
- STEP 2: Age accounted for a further change in variance ( $\Delta R^2$ ) approximately = 0 and was not significantly different from zero ( $p = .65$ )

#### PROBLEM-SOLVING:

- STEP 1: Job satisfaction, burnout, and occupational intentions accounted for 11% of the variance at a level of statistical significance ( $p = .01$ )
- STEP 2: Age accounted for a further change in variance ( $\Delta R^2$ ) approximately = 0 and was not significantly different from zero ( $p = .66$ )

## Results (cont.)

### POSITIVE-THINKING

- STEP 1: Job satisfaction, burnout, and occupational intentions accounted for change in variance ( $\Delta R^2$ ) = .07 and was not significantly different from zero ( $p = .07$ )
- STEP 2: Age accounted for 5% of the variance at a level of statistical significance ( $p = .01$ )

### AVOIDANCE

- STEP 1: Job satisfaction, burnout, and occupational intentions accounted for 21% of the variance at a level of statistical significance ( $p = <.00$ )
- STEP 2: Age accounted for 8.5% of the variance at a level of statistical significance ( $p = <.00$ )

### QUESTION 4: Generational Membership Further Explain Differences

A 3-x-1 ANOVA was performed on Positive Thinking and Avoidance; models which indicated that age contributed in a statistically significant way

#### POSITIVE THINKING

- No statistical difference between generational cohort and Positive Thinking [ $F(2, 117) = 1.94$ ,  $p = <.15$ ]
- This result indicates that generational affiliation does not appear to influence the use of positive thinking

#### AVOIDANCE

- No statistically significant difference between generational cohorts on the utilization of an avoidant coping [ $F(2, 117) = 8.13$ ,  $p = <.00$ ]
- Bonferroni test indicated that Millennials were significantly different from Generation X, but not Baby Boomers
- Millennials reported higher avoidant coping than Generation X, but no more than Baby Boomers

## Discussion

### COMPARISON OF DEMOGRAPHICS

- Similar to NASP Membership Survey (Walcott & Hyson, 2018)
  - Age of the practitioner in present study ( $M = 39$ ,  $SD = 9.6$ ) was slightly younger than NASP survey ( $M = 42$ ,  $SD = 12$ )
  - Participants in both this study (85%) and the NASP survey (84%) were predominantly female
- Differed from the NASP survey in the degree of training
  - 78% of participants had an EdS, 12% had doctoral degrees, and 9% had a Master’s degree
  - NASP survey 55% had an EdS, 25% had doctorates, and 19% had a Master’s degree

### COMPARISON OF JOB SATISFACTION

- High rates of job satisfaction among school psychologists comparable with historical trends
- Considering historical trends high job satisfaction appears to be stable (Anderson et al., 1984; Brown et al., 1998; Worrell et al., 2006)

### COMPARISON OF OCCUPATIONAL INTENTIONS

- Consistent with rates reported in older studies, 16% of Illinois school psychologists report the desire to leave school-based practice
- Provide rationale for the job mobility among school-based practitioners

### COMPARISON OF BURNOUT

- The majority of Illinois school psychologists experience burnout
- However, they appear motivated to practice despite occupational stress

## Discussion (cont.)

### LIMITATIONS

- Cross-sectional and close-ended survey; future research should include some longitudinal and qualitative elements
- Some statistical assumptions were violated due to sample size; future research should seek to obtain a larger sample size, as this will increase the likelihood of normality and homogeneity in the data

### IMPLICATIONS

- The shortage of school psychologists creates an issue of social justice in the unmet social, emotional, and academic needs of American school children
- Illinois school psychologists both like their jobs as well as experience occupational stress
- The majority of school psychologists engage in adaptive coping behaviors, but younger psychologists are more prone to engage in avoidant coping
- Individual school psychologists may benefit from the shortage in their ability to leave their position
- Mobility does nothing to address the underlying cause of stress
- If efforts to reduce the shortage are successful, mobility will be reduced, potentially limiting an individual’s ability to escape suboptimal conditions

## Recommendations

### PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Professional organizations could add systemic and repeated ways to monitor this topic; it seems plausible as NASP surveys the membership every five years to determine demographic trends
- Data may be used to improve the shortage by identifying the needs of school-based practitioners

### TRAINING PROGRAMS

- Increase the explicit instruction of self-care and advocacy to preservice psychologists
  - Recent endorsement of such instruction in the NASP Communiqué (Kelly-Vance, 2018; Gill-Lopez, 2016)
  - Instructing students on techniques to advocate for a role beyond “assessors for eligibility” (Schilling et al., 2018, p. 330)
- Partnerships with training programs for school administrators
  - Broaden traditionally narrow role of school psychologists
  - Increase preservice administrators understanding of the professional ethics of school psychologists

### EMPLOYERS

- Improve working conditions for school psychologists with long-term supervision
  - NASP endorses supervision throughout the professional lifespan (NASP, 2018)
  - Unfortunately, supervision that meets the definition of NASP is infrequently available in schools

### INDIVIDUAL PRACTITIONERS

- Mental health is an ethical obligation according to Standard II.1.4 of the NASP *Principles of Professional Ethics* “school psychologists refrain from any activity in which their personal problems may interfere with professional effectiveness” (NASP, 2010, p. 309)
- Creation of a self-assessment
  - To measure job satisfaction, symptoms of burnout, and coping strategies
  - As a screener for intervention and to monitor the progress



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