

FOOD and NUTRITION EDUCATION in COMMUNITIES

programs that turn research into action

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Community Nutrition Educators: Job Satisfaction and Intention to Leave

The effectiveness and efficiency of nutrition programs depend on the performance and retention of front-line Community Nutrition Educators (CNEs). As part of a New York State survey of how CNEs view their work context and their role in EFNEP, we asked CNEs to rate their job satisfaction and intentions to leave the job. Then we examined how these attitudes were linked to CNEs' views of many aspects of the context in which they work.

Understanding how CNEs view their jobs and what affects their satisfaction and willingness to stay in the job helps program managers motivate staff and enhance program success.

Measuring work context

Based on interviews with EFNEP staff, a survey was developed to ask CNEs how they felt about their jobs, coworkers, and supervisors. The confidential survey also asked CNEs for their views on program management, workload, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and how the program benefits participants. All of these factors are part of CNEs' "work context".

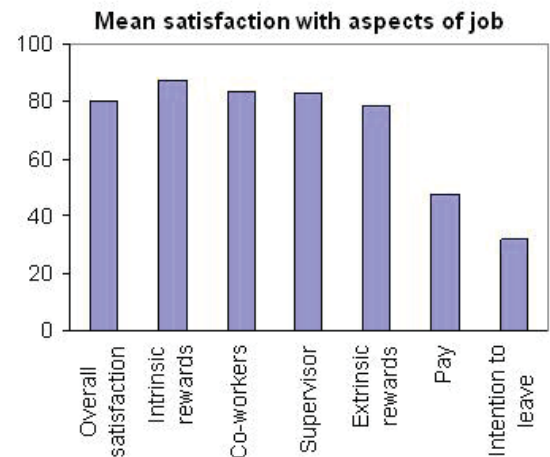
Almost all CNEs in the state answered the survey, for a total of 115 respondents in all CCE sites that were implementing EFNEP in 2001.

Measuring job satisfaction and intention to leave

We used questions developed by other researchers to ask CNEs how satisfied they were with their jobs in general (1) and with specific aspects of their jobs (2). These scores were combined to create a score for overall job satisfaction. We also used a questionnaire (3) to assess whether or not CNEs intended to leave their positions in the near future. Both scores had a maximum of 100 points.

Most CNEs are satisfied with and plan to stay in their jobs

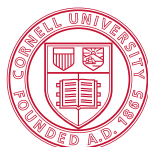
About 80% of CNEs were highly satisfied with their jobs overall and with most of the specific aspects of their jobs we measured (see chart). Satisfaction was particularly high for intrinsic rewards such as enjoying the work and seeing results. Only mean satisfaction with pay was much lower than 80 out of 100 points. Intention to leave was low and only a few CNEs strongly intended to leave the position.



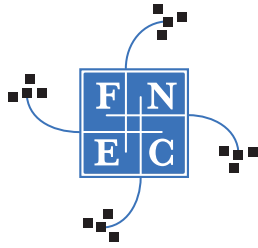
CNEs believe in the value of EFNEP

Most CNEs feel strongly that EFNEP really helps participants. They are more satisfied and less likely to plan to leave when they believe in the program's value. We found previously that belief in the value of EFNEP is also related to better program outcomes (4).

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CNEs who have a voice in decisions are more satisfied

Many specific management practices were related to job satisfaction and intention to leave. When considered all together in a regression model, the management practice most related to job satisfaction was consulting or giving CNEs a voice in decision-making. This management practice was reported to be less common than others.

Work relationships influence satisfaction and intentions

CNEs who felt trusted, respected and supported by other CNEs and by the Cooperative Extension association where they worked reported higher job satisfaction. Positive relationships with supervisors were linked with lower intention to leave. Having an intermediate supervisor was positive, especially for CNEs with more education, but there were few sites like this so results were hard to interpret

Education level, pay satisfaction and value of the program

Satisfaction with pay was low, but mostly among the 80% of CNEs with more than high-school education. CNEs with higher education who were not satisfied with the pay were more likely to consider leaving the job. This was not true if they believed strongly in the value of EFNEP. Making a difference to participants compensated for their disappointment about pay. This is evidence of a high level of commitment among front-line educators.

Paraprofessional educators have professional motivations and work attitudes

Overall, what mattered most for CNE job satisfaction was feeling that they make a difference in their work, feeling supported and trusted to do a good job, and having a voice in relevant decisions. While such views are typical of professionals, supervisors may not always recognize their relevance to paraprofessionals.

Strategies to enhance satisfaction and retention

Recognizing CNEs' professional work attitudes is crucial. Management practices such as consulting, mentoring, inspiring, and supporting were more important for satisfaction than planning, monitoring, and setting objectives, so a participatory style of management is recommended with CNEs. Belief in the value of the program matters, so it's important to give CNEs feedback on how their efforts benefit program participants. Promoting positive relationships among CNEs and helping them feel accepted in the broader CCE organization are other relevant strategies.

For more details:

Dickin KL, Dollahite JS, Habicht J-P. Job satisfaction and retention of Community Nutrition Educators: The importance of perceived value of the program, consultative supervision, and work relationships. (under review).

Dickin, KL. (2003) The work context of Community Nutrition Educators: Relevance to work attitudes and program outcomes, Doctoral Thesis, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

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2. Weiss DJ, Dawis RV, England GW, Lofquist LH. Manual for the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. Industrial Relations Center, University of Minnesota; 1967.
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4. Dickin KL, Dollahite JS, Habicht J-P. Nutrition behavior change among EFNEP participants is higher at sites that are well managed and whose front-line nutrition educators value the program. *J Nutr*, 2005;135:2199-2205.