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Attrition and Retention Factors of Dual-Appointment Athletic Trainers

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OBJECTIVE

The factors leading to athletic trainer (AT) job attrition and retention and the impact and on the profession regularly appear in athletic training literature and research. This literature and research found work-life balance, including work-family conflict, burnout, and work factors, such as hours worked and compensation, to be the primary attrition and retention factors for athletic trainers that are currently in traditional athletic training roles or have left the profession¹⁻¹⁴. Similar to athletic trainers, research shows university faculty job attrition, regardless of specialty, is caused by work-life balance, specifically work-family conflict. However, unlike athletic trainers, faculty attrition is also due to job dissatisfaction, including poor department climate and fit, lack of opportunity and support for professional growth, and low financial compensation¹⁵⁻³⁵. While athletic trainers and university faculty attrition and retention factors have been studied individually, little research includes dual-appointment athletic trainers (DAAT). DAAT are BOC certified and state licensed athletic trainers that work at a university in both a traditional educational role and in the athletic training room providing sports medicine coverage³⁶. The purpose of this study was to evaluate DAAT insights regarding attrition and retention.

DESIGN AND SETTING

A qualitative case study design was utilized. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on current DAAT. University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained. Document exploration and researcher memos supported the findings of the semi-structured interviews. Data was then analyzed through the processes of categorical aggregation, identification of themes, and the ultimate creation of naturalistic generalizations that provided the resulting attrition and retention factors.

PARTICIPANTS

Seven DAAT from different institutions participated (3 male, 4 female). Subjects were between the ages of 28-60 years old and had been practicing as DAAT between 3-19 years.

RESULTS

DAAT attrition factors were lack of coaches understanding, harmful athletic practice schedules, self-inflicted stress, missing life events because of work, lack of time outside of work, and unrealistic tenure and promotion processes. The six retention factors were love of teaching, time away from work, physical fitness, support for work-life balance and mentorship, encouraging work environment, and positive student relationships.

CONCLUSION

DAAT experience attrition and retention factors within and between each of their roles. The stressors DAAT experience are unique due to the interwoven nature of the jobs in both clinical environments and in academia. With the expected growth of the athletic training profession from 2021-2031 projected to rise by 17%, continued efforts to prevent athletic trainer attrition in all settings through mitigating known causes and supporting identified retention factors is crucial for the continued success of the athletic training profession³⁷.

KEY WORDS: *Attrition, Retention, Dual-Appointment, Athletic Trainer*

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