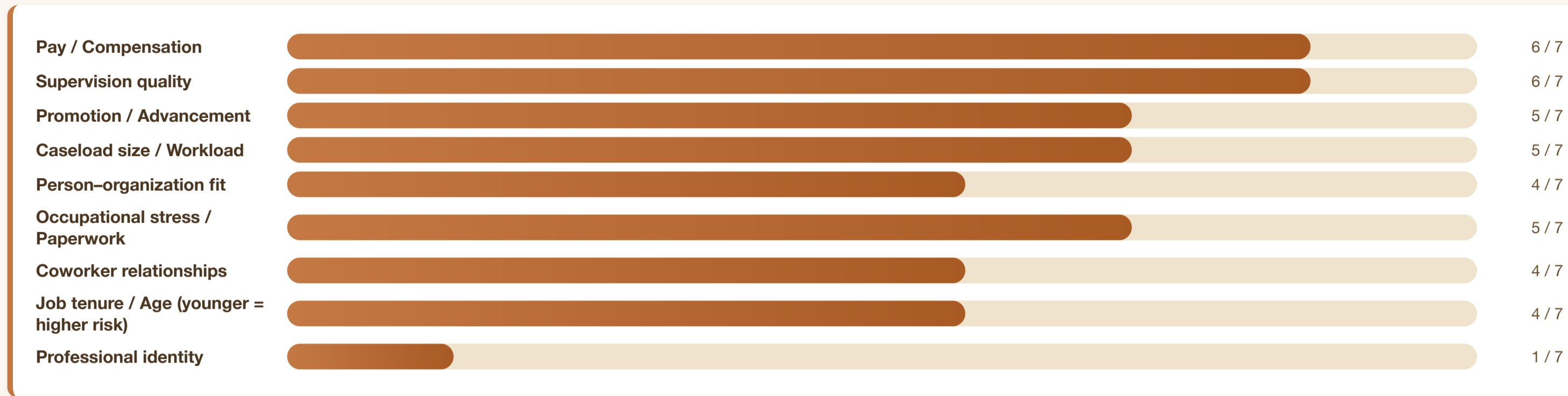


# Predictors of Turnover Intent Among Rehabilitation Counselors

A synthesis of seven studies (2004–2024) on what drives counselors out of — and what keeps them in — the public vocational rehabilitation (VR) system



## PREDICTORS OF TURNOVER INTENT — HOW OFTEN THEY APPEAR ACROSS THE 7 STUDIES



## WHAT PUSHES COUNSELORS OUT VS. WHAT KEEPS THEM IN

### ↗ Push Factors (raise intent to quit)

- Low / non-competitive salaries** — younger workers and those earning < \$36K most likely to plan to leave (Armstrong et al., 2008; Herbert et al., 2023)
- Excessive paperwork & documentation** shifting the role from "counselor" to "caseworker" (Zhai et al., 2021; Herbert et al., 2023)
- Limited promotion / advancement pathways** (Pitt et al., 2013; Zhai et al., 2021; Landon et al., 2023)
- Occupational stress** inherent in job functions — the lone significant predictor in the Layne et al. (2004) model
- Poor person-organization fit** (Pitt et al., 2013; Zhai et al., 2021)
- Large caseloads** — SVR counselors carried ~40% more cases (114 vs. 70) than peers in other settings (Zhai et al., 2021)
- Lack of clinical supervision** / weak supervisory alliance (Sabella et al., 2024; Landon et al., 2023)

### ↘ Pull Factors (reduce intent to quit)

- Clinical supervision** — uniquely lowered intent-to-quit; effect mediated by the supervisory working alliance (Sabella et al., 2024)
- Strong professional identity** — protective against turnover intent independent of workplace factors (Landon et al., 2023)
- Commitment to agency mission & inherent rewards of counseling** (Herbert et al., 2023)
- Higher salary, master's-level education, and advanced age** — all correlated with lower intent to quit (Armstrong et al., 2008)
- Strong person-organization fit** and organizational commitment (Pitt et al., 2013)
- Meaningful work with consumers** — even counselors leaving reported liking the helper / counselor role (Armstrong et al., 2008; Zhai et al., 2021)
- Employment benefits, flexible hours, telework, training investment** (Herbert et al., 2023)

## STUDY-BY-STUDY FINDINGS

Year	Authors	Findings	Sample Size
2004	Layne, Hohenshil, & Singh <i>Rehab. Couns. Bulletin</i>	Tested stress–strain–coping model. <b>Occupational stress</b> was the only significant predictor of turnover intent ( $\beta = .402$ ). Model explained <b>37.5% of variance</b> . Caseload size indirectly reduced coping resources.	n = 633 ARCA
2008	Armstrong, Hawley, Blankenship, Lewis, & Hurley <i>J. Rehab. Administration</i>	Three factors correlated with low intent to quit: <b>high salary, advanced age, master's education</b> . Least satisfied with pay and promotion. 54% of those planning to leave within 2 years had < 5 years tenure.	n ≈ 1,800 (50% RR)
2013	Pitt, Leahy, & Lewis <i>J. Rehab. Administration</i>	Among state VR counselors, <b>P-O fit, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment</b> predicted turnover intent (~40% of variance). Promotion and supervision were weak spots. Gender and tenure interacted with intent.	n = 73
2021	Zhai, Herbert, & Coduti <i>J. of Rehabilitation</i>	Model with <b>job satisfaction + P-O fit + general satisfaction</b> explained <b>64% of variance</b> . State VR counselors carried 40% larger caseloads and reported far higher intent to leave (30% vs. 3%) than peers in non-SVR settings.	n = 76
2023	Herbert, O'Shea, Yoon, & Al Balushi <i>J. of Rehabilitation</i>	Mixed methods with SVR directors. Counselors leave primarily for <b>low salaries, excessive paperwork, and limited career advancement</b> . They stay for <b>mission, inherent rewards, and benefits</b> . 33 retention strategies identified, but ~2/3 poorly implemented.	40 dirs. + 19 int.
2023	Landon, Phillips, McKnight, Sabella, & Kline <i>Rehab. Couns. Bulletin</i>	Over 1/3 of SVR counselors actively looking; half within 5 years (above national 19% average). <b>Supervision was the strongest workplace predictor</b> ( $\beta = -.25$ ). <b>Professional identity</b> was uniquely protective ( $\beta = -.15$ ) alongside caseload, coworkers, pay, and promotion.	n = 351
2024	Sabella, Landon, & Schultz <i>Rehab. Couns. Bulletin</i>	<b>Clinical supervision</b> raised job satisfaction and lowered intent-to-quit — effect <b>mediated by the Supervisory Working Alliance</b> . <b>Administrative supervision</b> was not a significant contributor in multivariate models. JS ↔ ITQ correlated $r = -.69$ .	n = 192

**Convergent takeaway across two decades.** Turnover intent in rehabilitation counseling — particularly in state VR — is not driven by demographics or individual coping. It is driven by **structural and relational features of the work itself**: pay that doesn't match credentials, caseloads that swamp the counseling role with paperwork, narrow promotion ladders, and administrative supervision that crowds out clinical supervision. What protects against turnover is also relational and meaning-based: **a strong supervisory working alliance, clinical (not just administrative) supervision, person-organization fit, commitment to mission, and a well-developed professional identity**. The literature has moved steadily from *describing* the problem (2004–2008) to *modeling* it (2013–2021) to *intervening* on the supervision relationship and professional identity that anchor counselors to the work (2023–2024).