



**EFFECTS OF LABOR RELATIONS STRATEGIES ON
EMPLOYEE RETENTION AMONG MEDICAL
PRACTITIONERS IN THE COUNTY GOVERNMENTS IN
KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF KIRINYAGA COUNTY**

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Abstract

As a result of the transfer of healthcare functions to county governments, they have been facing the challenge of retaining their medical practitioners who either join the private hospitals, start their own private hospitals and clinics or immigrate to other countries in search of greener pastures. The study's primary focus was to analyze the effects of labor relation strategies on employee retention among medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County. The specific objective was to determine the effects of industrial action on employee retention. The study was anchored on Marxist theory. A descriptive research design was employed. Krejcie and Morgan tables and stratified random sampling were utilized to come up with a sample size of 272 respondents from a population of 930 medical practitioners. Primary data was collected through questionnaires



from selected respondents while secondary data was sourced from Kirinyaga County website and database. Multiple regression using SPSS (version 24) was used to determine the effect of industrial action on employee retention. The coefficient of correlation ($r = 0.751$) indicated that there was a strong positive relationship between industrial action and employee retention. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.564$) indicated that 56.4% of the variations in employee retention were caused by industrial action. The study concluded that industrial action affected retention of medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County and recommended Kirinyaga County Government to put in place policies to handle strikes and carefully address the pressing issues raised by the medical practitioners in their fight for better pay and working conditions.

Keywords: Employee retention, Industrial action, Kirinyaga County Government, Medical practitioners

INTRODUCTION

The main challenge facing companies in today's volatile and competitive economic environment is retaining employees (Harsch & Festing, 2020). According to Malik (2018), labor relations are the strategies and practices of managing unionized employment situations. Retention of employees is the ability and effort of employers to establish a work environment that encourages current employees to stay (Cloutier, Felusiak, Hill & Pemberton-Jones, 2015). Employees are the most valuable resource in any organization. Organizations adopt a variety of employee retention techniques in order to safeguard this resource and help the organization meet its set goals and objectives. Medical practitioners are the key factor in the access of the public health care and form the backbone of health institutions (Cohen, Steven, Zafeer, Asokumar, Brian, Yian, Michael & Scott, 2020). The World Health Organization (2019), defines medical practitioners as all those involved in activities that are primarily aimed to enhance health.

Globally, retention of medical practitioners has been a challenge for most countries. In the United States, the inability to retain medical practitioners is not something new. According to a more recent estimate by the HSM Group (2018), nurse turnover was around 21% and 25% for physicians in America. The findings of a related study carried out in Argentina revealed that 21% of doctors had a strong desire to go abroad, 57.3 % had a moderate want to leave, and only 21.5 % were willing to stay. In Iran, research by Kerman (2014), revealed that 26% of medical practitioners had already quit and 77.3% of them intended to leave their current health facilities in the near future. Better salaries and collective bargaining were the major reasons cited.

Between 2010 and 2020, Kenya has had a number of regional and national industrial actions. A physicians strike amounting to 100 days and a 150-day nursing strike took place in Kenya in 2017; the latter was the longest strike for the health sector in the country's history. The

official cause of the strike was the government's failure to implement the CBA agreed upon by the national and local governments with the trade unions.

Statement of the problem

In 2020/2021 budget allocation for Kirinyaga County Health sector, the County Government allocated 1. 582 billion shillings, which amounted to 55.63% of the total budget for the county to the medical practitioners' salaries (County Government of Kirinyaga budget, 2020). Despite the huge County Government investment and budget allocation towards the health sector in relation to improvement of working conditions for the medical practitioners, Kirinyaga County has continually reported an increase in the turnover rate of its medical practitioners in the public hospitals.

The HRH report (2018), revealed that Kirinyaga County had an attrition rate of 4% for the hospitals, 3% for district hospitals, and 5% for the dispensaries. In 2019, 386 medical practitioners including clinical officers, nurses, medical lab officers, pharmacists and dentists were laid off by the County Government following a strike (Kirinyaga County HR Office, 2022). A lot of research had been done on the labor relation strategies but few have been done on how they affect employee retention. The study therefore aimed to bridge the gap and add more knowledge on the effect of labor relation strategies on the retention of employees among medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County.

Specific objective

To analyze the effects of industrial action on employee retention among medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County Kenya.

Research Hypothesis

H1: Industrial action has a significant effect on employee retention among medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical review

The study was anchored on the Marxist theory which was developed by Karl Max in 1926. The theory argued that in a capitalist society, industrial antagonism was evident between the employer and the employees where the employers used to exploit employees for their own good. The argument behind this theory is that employees participate in industrial

actions in an attempt to express their dissatisfaction with their work when they feel the employer is exploiting them.

According to Hyman (1995), in a capitalist society, there is always a power struggle between the few people who control the means of production and those who are forced to sell their productive abilities as a commodity in an open market. This is where capitalists want to buy labor at a low price, whereas workers want to sell their only asset at the greatest possible price in a bid to assure their survival.

Capitalists seek to maximize profit, whereas employees seek to maximize their take-home pay (Streeck, 2016). This leads to a clash between the employees and the employers. The trade unions see industrial action as a way to a way to bring things together between employers and employees by actively advocating for workers' rights and preventing them from being exploited.

Empirical Review

Industrial action occurs when workers and employers disagree on wages, working conditions, management policies, political aims, or other social issues (Cooke, Xu & Bian, 2019). Workers are officially involved in a labor dispute when they refuse to work or impose a work ban (Doucette & Kang, 2018). Absenteeism, sabotage and turnover are the examples of industrial activities that are subtler than lockouts and pickets.

Arul (2018), conducted research on the frequency of industrial disputes and its effect on the retention of employees in Indian industries. The information on 72 employees was gathered through questionnaires and interviews and a descriptive research design employed. The empirical findings revealed that industrial action caused stoppage of work and employees had to stay at home before the issues were resolved. This therefore significantly affected the retention of employees who then sought for better jobs.

Maina (2019), a researcher at Kenya Power and Lighting Company, studied the impact of industrial disputes on employee retention. Only 50 people out of 60 participants were included in the sample. Disputes and employee retention were found to have a strong correlation in the study. The findings revealed that for every one-unit increase in industrial disputes, employee retention decreased by (-0.623). Based on the empirical results, it was recommended that management devise a plan to reduce disputes at all levels in the firm.

Conceptual Framework



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) tables and stratified random sampling were used to come up with a sample size of 272 respondents from a target population of 930 medical practitioners working for Kirinyaga County Government. Primary data was collected by use of questionnaires while secondary data was sourced from the website and database of Kirinyaga County.

A pilot study was initially undertaken on the medical practitioners in Embu Level V Hospital prior to delivering the questionnaires to the representative sample among medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County. The pilot test included a total of 27 questionnaires which represented 10% of the sample size. To establish the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher consulted with lecturers from the School of Business and Education in Kirinyaga University where an improved research instrument was made possible as a result of revision and adjustments of the questionnaire. Reliability was tested using Cronbach Alpha which produced a value of 0.873. This indicated that the items had relatively high internal consistency suggesting that the research instrument was reliable to collect data. The data was analyzed by use of SPSS version 24.0.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A five-point Likert scale was used where 5 reflected strongly agree, 4 represented agree, 3 was for undecided, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly disagree. The data was interpreted as follows: (mean of above 3= agree, below 3= disagree). In this study, the standard deviation was interpreted as follows: the larger the SD, the more spread the opinions of the respondents were and the smaller the SD, the closer the opinions of the opinions were to the mean.

Response rate

The response rate was 66.2%. For data analysis and reporting, Mugenda & Mugenda (2003), recommended a response rate of 50% and above, hence the response rate of 66.2% was deemed fit.

Descriptive Analysis for Industrial Action

Number of times the medical practitioners had participated in strikes with current employer

Table 1: Strikes Participation

Strikes participation		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	One	25	13.9	13.9	13.9
	Two	45	25.0	25.0	38.9
	Three	60	33.3	33.3	72.2
	Above three	50	27.8	27.8	100.0
	Total	180	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 shows responses on the number of times respondents had participated in industrial strikes with their current employer.

According to the findings, 25(13.9%) of the respondents had participated in one strike, 45(25.0%) of respondents had participated in strikes twice, 60(33.3%) of respondents had participated in strikes three times while 50(27.8%) of the respondents had participated in a strike more than three times. This meant that most medical practitioners participated in organized industrial actions. The majority, having experienced three times and above, shows that they were ready to champion their rights and understood the effect of labor relations strategies on employee retention among medical practitioners.

Descriptive Statistics on opinions on Industrial Action

In an attempt to investigate on whether industrial action affected their decision to stay with their current employer, the medical practitioners were to show how each of the opinions below affected their decisions. Table 2 indicates their responses.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on opinions on Industrial Action

Statement	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Undecided %	Agree %	Strongly agree %	Mean	Std. Dev
The frequency of strikes in an organization affects employee retention	10.0	12.2	10.0	28.9	38.9	3.74	1.35
The response of the management during employee strikes affects employee retention	6.7	8.9	5.6	34.4	44.4	4.01	1.21
The demands of the strike are always met	33.3	51.1	2.8	8.0	3.9	1.99	1.04
My employer has policies in place to handle strikes	44.4	41.7	5.6	5.6	2.8	1.81	0.97
Employees use strikes to express their dissatisfaction when negotiations fail	4.4	6.7	5.6	44.4	38.9	4.07	1.05
Strikes adversely affect employee retention	3.9	4.4	4.4	45.6	41.7	4.17	0.98

According to the findings, majority of the respondents had participated in a strike more than three times in Kirinyaga County (33.3%). The respondents were asked to state their opinion regarding several statements. The findings were as follows: Regarding whether the frequency of strikes in the organization affects employee retention, 67.8% of the respondents with an average score of 3.74 and a standard deviation of 1.35 were in agreement that the frequency of strikes affected their retention. These findings agree with those of Arul (2018), who found out that the frequency of strikes affected employee retention in the industries in India.

Concerning whether management response during employees strikes affected retention, 78.8% (mean 4.01, SD = 1.21) of the respondents were in agreement with the statement. On whether the respondents demand of the strike was met, majority of the respondents 84.4% (mean 1.99, SD = 1.04) were in disagreement with the statement. These findings agree with those of Orok et al., (2016) who recommended that to improve retention of employees, the employer should meet the demands of the workers.

Regarding whether the employer had policies in place to handle strikes, 85.1% (mean 1.8, SD = 0.97) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that their employer had policies in place to handle strikes. This is consistent with the findings by Evans and Uju (2018), who found a strong link between workplace policies and employee retention. Majority of the respondents (83.3%) were in agreement with the statement that they used strikes to express their dissatisfaction whenever negotiations failed. The average score was 4.07 and a standard deviation of 1.05 was recorded. These findings agree with Cooke, Xu and Brian, (2019), who stated that industrial action occurs when employees and employers disagree on wages, working conditions, management policies, and other social issues.

On the opinion whether strikes affected employee retention, 87.3% (mean 4.17, SD = 0.98) agreed with the statement. The findings of this study agree with those of Marlow (2019), Odey (2020), and Evans & Uju (2018), who concluded that industrial action had a significant effect on employee retention. Abiwu (2016), also indicated that strikes significantly affect retention of employees.

Descriptive statistics for opinion on the major issues that led the medical practitioners to strike

Table 3: Major issues that led medical practitioners to strike

Issues that led to the strikes		Valid			
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Poor salaries	50	27.8	27.8	27.8
	Job insecurity	20	11.1	11.1	38.9
	Uncertain career paths	20	11.1	11.1	50.0
	Failure of employer to implement CBA	30	16.7	16.7	66.7
	Lack of protective gears	20	11.1	11.1	77.8
	Conflict and disagreement with employer	20	11.1	11.1	88.9
	Poor state of the hospital	20	11.1	11.1	100.0
	Total	180	100.0	100.0	

The open-ended question asked respondents to highlight some significant issues that they felt triggered their strikes. Most respondents indicated that in Kirinyaga County, medical

practitioners organized and took part in strikes to champion an increase in salaries which they termed as poor and not sustaining. Respondents also indicated that Kirinyaga County Government failed to honor and implement the CBA. Hence, this triggered them to strike and demand the implementation of CBA agreements. Most physicians and specialists indicated that they participated in strikes since they felt many uncertainties in their career paths. Respondents also indicated that they resulted to strikes due to the poor state of hospitals, which made their working environment hostile.

Consequently, medical practitioners in Kirinyaga county strikes were triggered by a lack of protective equipment that they needed to carry out their responsibilities. During the epidemic, the Kirinyaga county administration failed to supply health and social workers with proper personal protective equipment, highlighting the breakdown of any culture of accountability, openness, integrity, and support for healthcare professionals. Medical practitioners stated that the minimum protection for their job safety was that they should receive adequate protective equipment from their employers. They needed protective gear, including gloves, foot protection, eye protection, respirators, and complete body suits.

Some respondents indicated that they engaged in strikes because Kirinyaga County Government had poor conflict and grievance resolution strategies to address medical practitioners' issues. Respondents indicated that job insecurities were another reason to engage in industrial action. Conflicts and disagreements among medical practitioners and Kirinyaga County Government raised tension among the workers and contributed to most of the industrial activities evidenced in Kirinyaga.

Descriptive statistics on the opinion on whether industrial action affects employee retention

Table 4: Opinion on whether industrial action has an effect on employee retention

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	150	83.3	83.3	83.3
	No	30	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total		180	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows results of opinion on whether industrial action affects medical practitioners' retention in Kirinyaga County. According to the findings, 150(83.3%) of the medical practitioners accepted beyond reasonable doubt that industrial action had an effect on

employee retention while 30(16.7%), rejected that industrial action had an effect on employee retention.

Most respondents indicated that industrial action lowered their motivation towards work in Kirinyaga County hospitals. It brought about uncertainty as the courts sometimes ruled the strike to be illegal, leading them to be fired. This drove them to seek better opportunities in the private industry where at least their job security was secured and to open and equip their own private clinics. Respondents indicated that the working relationships between them and their employer could deteriorate due to participation in industrial action, which impacted their productivity and teamwork therefore leading to tension and job insecurity.

Correlational Analysis

Table 5: Correlational Analysis

		Employee Retention	Industrial action
Employee Retention	Pearson Correlation	1	.751**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	180	180
Industrial action	Pearson Correlation	.751**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	180	180

The coefficient of correlation ($r = .751$, $P = 0.000$) indicated a strong positive correlation existed between industrial action and employee retention. The P value of 0.000 indicated that the correlation between industrial action and employee retention was significant.

Regression analysis

Table 6: Regression analysis on industrial action and employee retention

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.751 ^a	.564	.562	3.93356	2.016

a. Predictors: (Constant), Industrial action
b. Dependent Variable: Employee Retention

The coefficient of correlation ($R = 0.751$) revealed that there existed a strong positive relationship between the industrial action and employee retention. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .564$) revealed that industrial action explained about 56.4% of the employee retention among medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County. Therefore, 43.6% of the changes in employee retention could be explained by other factors other than industrial action. Durbin Watson test for autocorrelation was performed. As indicated in the table, the *d value* was ($d=2.016$). According to Genest and Rémillard (2004), when *d value* lies between 1.5 to 2.5 it implies that there is no autocorrelation among variables and hence there is independence among variables.

Table 7: ANOVA analysis for industrial action and employee retention

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3562.130	1	3562.130	230.217	.000 ^b
	Residual	2754.181	178	15.473		
	Total	6316.311	179			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Retention
b. Predictors: (Constant), Industrial action

The F- test revealed that ($F= 1, 178 = 230.217$) and $P = 0.000$ meaning that the model was significant at 95% confidence level as indicated in Table 7. P value $0.000 < 0.05$, hence the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

To test for the significance of the coefficients used in determining the effect industrial action on employee retention among medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County, t- test was used.

Table 8: Coefficients of linear regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
1	(Constant)	-3.798	.265		-4.330	.000
	Industrial action	-.807	.055	-.829	-1.667	.000

The regression coefficient table shows that the regression model between industrial action and employee retention was given as $\text{Employee Retention} = -3.798 - 0.807 + 0.265$. The results revealed that industrial action was significant ($t = -1.667, P = 0.000$). The beta coefficient

of -0.807 was an indication that with every one-unit increase in industrial action, employee retention decreased by -0.807.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the frequency of strikes in the organization affected the retention of medical practitioners. The response of the management during a strike also affected employee retention. It was also concluded that failure of employer to meet the demands of employees following a strike acted as a demotivating factor that led to employee turnover. It was also concluded that employees used strikes to express their dissatisfaction with some aspects of their work including salaries and work conditions.

It was also concluded that the medical practitioners resulted to strikes due to: poor salaries, failure of employer to implement the CBA agreements, uncertain career paths, poor state of the work places, job insecurity, failure of employer to provide protective gears and unresolved conflict and disagreements with employer. This led to the conclusion that industrial action negatively affected employee retention among medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account that industrial action had a significant effect on employee retention among medical practitioners in Kirinyaga County, the study recommended Kirinyaga County Government to set clear policies in place to handle strikes. Similarly, they should try and address most pressing issues raised by the medical practitioners in the fight for better pay and working conditions.

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