Author's response to reviews

Title: Turn-over rate of academic faculty at the College of Health Sciences, Addis Ababa University: A twenty years analysis (1991-2011).

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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Dear Editors,

Thank you for reviewing our manuscript and considering it for publication in BMC HRH. We would like to also thank the referees for giving their time in reviewing the manuscript. We have made the necessary revisions based on the review comments.

Please find attached the point-by-point response to each reviewer’s comments.

With regards,

Alemayehu Hailu
On behalf of the team
Responding to the reviewers’ concerns

Reviewer 1

Major Revisions

1. The authors should clarify and describe more clearly that this is an analysis of faculty employee records (versus other academics or staff) - if that is the case. It might also help to indicate who was included as faculty, e.g., only those salaried with Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor titles. There is inconsistency in the manuscript with the use of the words "employees", "academics", and "faculty."

Response:

We agree with the reviewers’ suggestion and we have clearly indicated that our study is analysis of employee records. The term ‘faculty’ includes academic staff with rank of lecturer and above (page 6). In our revised version, we have used the term ‘faculty’ consistently.

2. The calculation of crude turn-over rate is defined as the number of those leaving/number employed. It would help to provide information about any changes or trends in the size of the total during this time period. A 93% turnover suggests that the overall faculty size was pretty stable (i.e., same number hired as those leaving). However, a high turnover ratio could be due to many leaving (numerator) or fewer being hired (denominator).

Response:

We agree that the turn-over rate figure for the overall twenty years seems stable. But the reality is quite alarming, in a situation where the number of senior faculty is quite limited.

We have included following paragraph in discussion section- See Page 9

“In addition, even though the 92.8% rate seems stable during the first three five years when relatively high number of faculty were employed due to expansion of university activities, it has dramatically increased to 172% in the last five years. For developing
country like Ethiopia where human resource is limited; and in a situation where the number of senior faculty is few, the depicted magnitude is quite alarming.”

3. The authors classify all those who left as "leaving" without any information about why they left. If the data are available it might help to provide information and data about the reasons people left, i.e., retired, resigned, were fired.

Response:

We agree with the reviewer that it would have been more informative if we had included data on reasons of leaving the university. However, we could not get that information and we have acknowledged that as a limitation in the discussion section on page 10.

4. (Bottom Page 8): The authors state that the turn-over rate for the last five years was two times higher than the preceding five years. This temporal suggests some significant differences in the employment conditions during those time periods. Are there ideas about what might have accounted for these temporal changes?

Response:

As we have mentioned in the response for comment number 2 above, we could not come up with exact reasons for the increment of turn-over rate during the last five years of the study. However, the speculated reasons were mentioned in the discussion section.

Minor Revisions

1. The manuscript would benefit from some minor editing for English grammar.

Response:

The manuscript was edited by a native English speaker who has previous editorial expertise.
Reviewer 2

1. A revision of the references (Full names in some cases) is needed.
   
   **Response:** We agree with the reviewer and corrections have been made accordingly.

2. The table and graph titles should mention the institution and not only the place.
   
   **Response:** We agree with the reviewer and corrections have been made accordingly.

3. Since the data source (administrative records) is not frequently used for research purposes, a comment or suggestion for further development of studies could be added. It will be useful for other schools.
   
   **Response:** We agree with the reviewer and corrections have been made accordingly at the end of the discussion section.

4. Indistinct use of “firm”, "company", "organization" and school diminishes the specificity of the academic environment.
   
   **Response:** In our revised version, we have consistently used the term ‘organization’.
Reviewer 3

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The trend of turn-over was not reported in the result of abstract while in the first two lines in conclusion of abstract this issue was mentioned. I suggest mention this trend in the result section of abstract, too.
   
   **Response:** We agree with the suggestion of the reviewer and we have included the trend of turn-over rate in the results section of the abstract.

2. In the result section of the abstract, what is the mean of “The top five departments where employment contracts were relatively higher”? Do you mean that these departments had higher turn-over?
   
   **Response:** This was an error and has been corrected accordingly.

3. In the background, the trend of turn-over was not mentioned as the objective of study.
   
   **Response:** We agree with the reviewer suggestion and we have now mentioned the trend of turnover as an objective in the background section (page 5).

4. In the results section, please clarify the last sentence” The turn-over rate for the last five years (172%) was two times higher when compared with that of the preceding five years”. It needs more explanation in the analysis section, too.
   
   **Response:** This is explained by giving the rate for the preceding year (86.1%) in parenthesis.

5. In the discussion there is nothing about study weakness. The turn-over rate of other university in the world could be compared with this study finding. The discussion needs major revision.
   
   **Response:** We have addressed the reviewers' concerns by clearly discussing the results and comparing our findings with studies done elsewhere. In our revised manuscript we have aloses acknowledged the limitations of the study.
Reviewer 4

1. In page 4 (Background Section), would suggest use of “better conditions” instead of “greener pastures”.
   
   **Response:** *We agree with the reviewer and correction has been made accordingly.*

2. In page 5 (Background Section), would suggest following changes “…given to investigate and understand the causes…”; “Academic faculty turn-over is driven by certain identifiable characteristics such as type of workers, tasks, firms, and markets.”; “The current analysis is aimed at investigating the magnitude of turn-over of the…”
   
   **Response:** *Thank you and we have accepted the suggestion.*

3. Although the authors refer to obtaining authorization from officials of the Medical School, they do not say anything about ethical submission and approval of the study from an IRB. Some countries require that even secondary data use studies are cleared by IRB. Perhaps should be stated that IRB is not required for secondary data for Ethiopia or if required then needs to be clarified if obtained or not.
   
   **Response:** *As we have mentioned, the study is communicated for officials in the College including the College IRB and the human resource department. Approval of the study protocol was not necessary since the study was entirely based on record review without any personal identifiers attached. All the data obtained in the course of the study were not used for purposes other than indicated.*

4. When presenting data of dichotomic variables such as gender, authors should only mention one of the two options (thus would be enough to say that there were 85.4% male and omit the % of female for logical inference reasons).

   **Response:** *We agree with the reviewer and correction has been made accordingly.*

5. Very well described and scientifically acceptable. However, when reading the first paragraph on the Results Section clearly one can notice one problem when authors mention that “Out of a total of 253 academic faculty members…”. This raises many questions, such as: 253 are academics in year 2001? Which denominator was used to measure crude turn-over rate? Was different for each period of 5 years? How socio-demographics varied for each period of 5 years?

   And many more questions could be asked and which leads to conclude that the study seems to have a methodological problem due to major bias in data selection and analysis requiring major revision of data collection and analysis. Summarizing socio-
demographic data as a snapshot of one year and trying to imply it as reflection of 20 years of reality of academic staff is not appropriate and would require major revision. The authors perhaps would like to analyze crude turn-over rate for each five year period as well as the demographics of the academics in the same period.

**Response:** We would like to thank the reviewer for the appreciation and comments. In fact, this kind of retrospective analysis has its own limitations. We have acknowledged this as a limitation in the discussion section. We have also tried our best to minimize the possibility of bias.

*In terms of denominator, we have used “average number of employed faculty members during the time period of September 1991 to August 2011. As the denominator is different for each of the five years, we used the average for the specified period as a denominator and 253 is the number of faculty during 2011.*

*We have also tried to look our data at snapshots and the socio-demographics did not significantly vary for each of the five periods. However, even though we provided a general overview of the situation during September 2011 in the first part of the results section, we are not claiming that this was exactly the same during the twenty years of analysis.*

6. Other major weakness in results is not showing/presenting the reasoning of academics that leave the School and because of this lack in information there are major limitations in explaining the relatively high turn-over rate among academic staff with higher qualifications and even leading authors to explain/conclude that retention of “…high caliber academic staff was a serious challenge to the college of Health sciences at Addis Ababa University due to different reasons.” Which seems inappropriate based on data they presented in the paper.

**Response:** We have tried to acknowledge this and other limitations in the discussion section.