Research Study Reveals Factors That Impacted Ohio Funeral Director Attrition and Retention Rates

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Abstract

A phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to obtain facts and details about the lived experiences of Ohio funeral directors during their first five years of licensure. The goal of the study was to understand these lived experiences as told by funeral directors to understand better the factors that impact the attrition and retention of new licensees. The data was analyzed using the Colaizzi 1978 method. The collected data aided in professional development programs offered to Ohio funeral directors and embalmers which increased the discussion and interest in factors that impact attrition and retention rates of new funeral director licensees at the local and national levels. The information from the study can be applied to allied helping professions such as healthcare, ministerial, and education. The stories and experiences as told by Ohio funeral directors provides new insight into the factors that impact attrition and retention rates of new licensees.

Introduction

At the junction of death and grief, stands the funeral director. A person who guides the way through the many steps of grief. The role of a funeral director is multifaceted and multitalented, which serves a niche in the community that is unique unto itself. Funerals are symbolic rituals that display the transition from life to death and honor the social ties of the deceased [1]. Funeral directors can be considered the gatekeepers of these ritualistic expressions and therefore specialize in them [2]. The funeral director's role is to facilitate the grief process through ritualization and memorialization that is appropriate for both the deceased and the survivors [2]. For the funeral director, death signifies business and is expected and relied upon [1]. It is a unique blend of vocation, identity, leadership, and business, which creates the funeral director's role.

Historically, there has often been a stigma surrounding the work of a funeral director [3]. While funeral directors often interact in a single set of one death at a time, there are times, such as in pandemics, tragedies, or instances of mass fatalities, in which the funeral director is tasked with interacting with multiple deaths in a brief time frame [3]. In this multifaceted role, it can become difficult to set boundaries and create a healthy environment in which to work and balance work and home life [2]. In dealing with death as part of the task, funeral directors emphasize that funerals are for the living and focus on making the most out of the

present moment [1]. The funeral director's role is multifaceted and has implications far more significant than the immediate population in which they are employed and serve within [4]. Recent labor shortages of funeral directors has placed a strain on the number of funeral directors still engaged in the practice of funeral directing. At the time of research there had been little to no research on the factors that impacted attrition and retention rates of funeral directors as expressed by the funeral directors. Further, no research was revealed that focused on Ohio funeral directors solely. A research study was needed to identify the factors that have impacted the attrition and retention factors of funeral directors to help promote positive retention practices and avoid factors that could increase attrition rates. The research study was approved by the University of the Cumberlands, Williamsburg, Kentucky, Institutional Review Board, reference number 122-0822.

Background Information

The purpose of the phenomenological qualitative study was to obtain new facts and details about the lived experiences of Ohio funeral directors during their first five years of licensure after graduating from mortuary college. The first five years of initial licensure seemed to be a benchmark in which those who surpassed the five-year mark tended to remain working as funeral directors. Prior research conducted by Fritch and Steward (2020) at the University of Central Oklahoma had indicated an attrition rate among new funeral director licensees and laid the groundwork for this study conducted in Ohio [4]. The study aimed to understand these lived experiences as told by the funeral directors to understand better the factors that impact the attrition and retention of new licensees. The term funeral director in this study is synonymous with a licensed funeral service professional, embalmer, or mortician; one singular term provided for clarity in writing the findings of the study [4]. This study would appear to be the first of its kind examining the lived experiences of Ohio funeral directors and directly interviewing funeral directors. With the attrition of new licensees creating a labor shortage, research was needed on funeral directors to understand the factors that impact attrition and retention rates which can then be used by leadership in the industry and collaboratively with mortuary colleges to mitigate the attrition rate [4]. The research study consisted of interviewing funeral director and embalmer licensees licensed in Ohio about their experiences the first five years that they were licensed. The interviews were comprised of ten questions which allowed the participants to express and share their thoughts [4]. The interviews were then analyzed using a deductive approach to glean emergent themes and then group those themes to identify larger thematic elements.

Research Design

The loss of available funeral directors in the labor market draws on those still practicing and places additional workloads and stress on an already stressful career [5]. The sample population was selected from participants who met the inclusion criteria: holding a valid Ohio funeral director license, having been licensed for a minimum of five years, currently employed as a funeral director, and having graduated from an accredited mortuary science program within the last twenty years. Participants were solicited with the aid of the Ohio Embalmers Association, the Ohio Funeral Directors Association, and the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science. The Ohio Funeral Directors Association further worked collaboratively with the State of Ohio Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors to obtain public records of licensure would further aid in recruitment. Through virtual and face-to-face interviews with persons who had met the inclusion requirements for the study, a gradual image of their lived experiences became apparent. A convenience sampling method was employed to achieve participants and to meet the data saturation point. Sampling is the process in which a part of the population is

chosen to represent the whole population [6]. The sample population of funeral directors in Ohio meeting the inclusion requirements is unique in that population has the potential to cover the entirety of a geographic US state, and the study population has historically been reticent to participate in studies or be observed for studies [3, 7, 8]. As such, a convenience method of sampling, which incorporated snowball sampling, was employed to reach the target population [4]. A convenience sampling technique is employed when the population is reached through ease of convenience [6]. In this case, interested participants responded to an advertisement placed through funeral trade organizations. The convenience sampling method was employed because of its relative ease in recruiting participants and the ability to cover a vast geographic region, the entirety of Ohio, through the advertisements with the assorted Ohio funeral trade organizations [4]. Snowball sampling is a sampling method in which study participants recruit future participants through their social circles and encourage others who meet the inclusion criteria to be a part of the research study [6]. This method can be extremely helpful in cases such as funeral director participants when the population group presents difficulty in recruiting participants due to the requirements, nature of the population, or hesitancy regarding the research study [6].

The sampling procedures involved an in-depth, semi-structured interview with follow-up prompts based on the answers provided. The interview was either in-person at a neutral location of the participant's choice, such as a library meeting room or conducted via online teleconference software, Zoom, using a secure meeting room [4]. The interview questions were grouped to guide the interview in a narrative fashion. The first three questions focused on the participant's role as a funeral director. Questions four through six focused on the mortuary science curriculum and its impact on their lived experience. Questions seven through nine explored burnout and emotional management in the early years of licensure [4]. The final question was open-ended and invited the participant to share any thoughts which may not have already been captured. The interview questions were as follows, with prompts based on the answers provided:

1. How many years has the participant worked as a funeral director in Ohio?

2. Describe your experiences as a funeral director in Ohio.

3. How has the participant found career-fulfillment in this role?

4. Describe the ways that the participant's mortuary science education prepared them to be a successful funeral director.

5. How did the participant's mortuary science education prepare them emotionally and psychologically to be a funeral director?

6. In what ways did the participant find their mortuary science education to be lacking in adequate emotional and psychological preparation to be a funeral director?

7. Describe how the participant's apprenticeship prepared them emotionally and psychologically to be a funeral director.

8. What circumstances in the work environment would have caused the participant to leave the funeral service within the first five years of licensure?

9. What circumstances outside the work environment would cause the participant to leave the funeral service within the first five years of licensure?

10. What other information does the participant believe to be helpful in describing the transition from mortuary college to licensure as a funeral director and ensuring retention beyond the initial five

years of licensure?

The interview questions provided the framework in which the participants were guided. Participants were referred to using aliases after the interview to protect anonymity. Keeping the participants anonymous promoted more authentic remarks from the participants regarding their first five years of licensure [4]. All items that could be used to identify the participant personally were redacted or amended to provide confidentiality and anonymity.

The data was presented in an unaltered transcript to the participants for review of its integrity. Once the participants confirmed the integrity of the data, the data was analyzed and manually coded for analysis using the Colaizzi seven-step method [9]. The data transcripts were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step model for phenomenological study [9]. This provided for a grouping of thematic elements which were constructed from the essential statements that were gleaned from the interviews.

Data

Forty-one persons expressed interest in the study, with 34 who met the inclusion criteria and were successfully interviewed. Of the original 41 participants, four did not choose to continue the study, and three did not meet the inclusion requirements. The participants ranged in their geographic regions, ages, and years licensed. A demographic form was used to capture the number of years the participant had been licensed, the participant's age, and lastly, whether the participant was employed full-time in funeral service in a licensed capacity [4].

The amount of time licensed varied for each participant. Sixteen participants, 47% of the study population, were licensed between five and 10 years of licensure. A total of 11 participants, representing 32% of the study population, were licensed between 11 and 15 years of licensure. A total of seven participants, representing 21% of the study population, were licensed between 16 and 20 years of licensure. Many participants were licensed as funeral directors between five and 10 years, 47% of the sample population. This group of licensees would have graduated from a mortuary science education program approximately between 2012 and 2017. The second group consisted of those licensed 11-15 years, which made up roughly 32% of the sample population. This group would have graduated from a mortuary science education program approximately between 2007-2011. The final group consisted of those licensed between 16 and 20 years, which comprised approximately 21% of the sample population. This final group would have graduated from a mortuary science program approximately between 2002 and 2006 [4].

The participants ranged in age from 28 to 62. A total of 13 participants, 38% of the study population, were between the ages of 26-35. A total of 17 participants, 50% of the study population, were between the ages of 36-45. A total of three participants, 9% of the study population, were between the ages of 46-55. A total of 1 participant was between the ages of 56-65, representing 3% of the study population. The mean age of the participants was 36.76 years of age, while the median age was 44 years of age. Of the 34 participants, 18 were female (53%), and 16 were male (47%) [4].

After analyzing the data, emergent themes became apparent. In understanding the factors that contribute to funeral director and embalmer retention, the greatest indicator of entry-level preparedness and career fulfillment and satisfaction was pre-mortuary school employment in a funeral home [4]. Many respondents identified this factor as contributing to a greater understanding of funeral service and providing for long-term career development. During the interviews, it became apparent that participants employed at a funeral home before enrolling in a mortuary science program felt better prepared for the
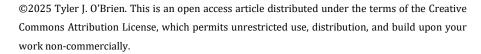
rigors of the mortuary science education program and had more realistic expectations of entry-level into funeral service. Employment, internships, or even job shadowing has been shown to be effective in crystallizing a student's career choice route and providing for more realistic expectations [4]. Pre-career employment or internships allows the student learner to envision themselves in the funeral director career role and strengthen their own identity as an individual and as in the collective identity of the funeral service profession [4]. Further, pre-employment or internships also reduces the cause of dysfunctional career thinking, namely a misunderstanding of the role of the selected career, and to gain real-life skills which poise the student learner for greater success in the selected career field. Funeral service is a unique profession that many in the career field liken to a vocation and has its own vocational identity. Pre-career employment and internships in this career field allow the student learner to gain a clearer perspective of this career and its unique culture. Promoting employment or internships in a mortuary setting before enrollment in a mortuary science program may help increase the retention of new licensees as they have a more realistic understanding of their chosen career path [4].

Through positive work engagement, which provides meaning and meaningful relationships, the funeral director can create meaning and assign importance to the relationships they create and the role they provide society through their tasks. Some participants expressed a sense of vital engagement and work engagement which led to a strong sense of social identity as a funeral director. This coupling of social identity and positive engagement led to a greater sense of career satisfaction in many participants in the research study [4]. While some funeral director participants in the study expressed a positive experience of the interconnectedness of social identity, vital engagement, and work engagement, some participants experienced times when the three components did not corroborate a positive experience. It appeared that for some participants, when something was lacking in the three theories used to understand funeral directors, they experienced career distress and often coupled with emotional distress.

In evaluating factors that impact attrition rates of new licensees, several themes became apparent. The contributing factors for attrition were poor work environment, organizational culture conditions, and an unrealistic expectation of an entry-level funeral director position. Many participants described a lack of an acceptable work-to-life balance and described excessive hours of being on-call coupled with poor management of the company, which led to strenuous hours which caused emotional distress as many participants felt the requirements of the job exceeded their emotional management capabilities and placed strains on their personal relationships, especially for those with young families [4]. One participant noted that in several funeral homes they had been employed with, the long hours and unpredictability of the job created issues in childcare which were ignored by management and ultimately led to the funeral director finding employment at another mortuary.

The perceived lack of boundaries between work and personal life caused some participants to feel a lack of personal space and created strife within their personal relationships at the intrusion of the funeral home into their private residence. The nature of the on-call hours and the expectation of also working standard business hours led many participants to feel overwhelmed [4]. The technology gap as described by some, was emblematic of a wider issue of generational issues between older funeral directors and younger, newly licensed funeral directors. Several funeral directors described this generational issue as a potential motivating cause to leave the business, as many experienced negative connotations with the generational gap. One respondent expressed the issue of the generational gap and a sense of distrust from older funeral directors about implementing organizational and industry-wide changes.

A further strain on a positive work engagement approach became apparent as several participants noted the pay was not commensurate with their workloads or their experiences and educations. Dissonance in the pay led many participants to experience stress in other areas of their lives as they felt a financial strain [4]. The stress of the financial strain was also coupled in many participants' interviews with a toxic work environment in which poor working conditions were often exacerbated by poor management and leadership techniques. Salaries varied extensively based upon the amount of calls, the on-call requirements, and fringe benefits that it was difficult for some participants to adequately express what a satisfactory salary would be.

While many participants noted that their academic experience was well-versed in the curriculum and theoretical nature of the content, they shared that it could not have satisfactorily covered the real-world, hands-on application of the theories presented. Several participants noted that, in many cases, there was not an authentic way to prepare for some of the experiences without experiencing them in a real-world setting [4]. Some of the experiences and lessons to be learned as a funeral director can only be learned by being in the field setting and cannot be adequately conveyed in the classroom setting. For many of these participants experiencing a disconnect between their expectations and what they experienced in their first job as a funeral director, it could have been alleviated by employment or internship at a funeral home before or during their enrollment in a mortuary science program [4]. Funeral Director 32 expressed the concern that many current students in mortuary programs do not have prior college experience in a funeral home setting. For them, it immensely helped in shaping realistic expectations.

I worked at a funeral home prior to going to school, which I think was the right choice because I knew what I was getting into. Some of these students didn't know what they were getting into. And I think that if I say anything, I'd say, to be honest with the students right off the bat, their schedules are going to be a little crazy that they're going to have to find work-life balance and find places that will respect that work-life balance because it's hard to find.

Funeral Director 2 shared that they felt more prepared for mortuary college because they had worked at a funeral home before enrolling in the program. They stated:

I worked here [funeral home where the interview took place] prior to going to mortuary college, and I worked here for several years prior to. [Supervisor] was very accepting and had me with him doing everything I was doing, helping with removals. I was sitting in with meeting on families. I was sitting in and helping in the prep room. Funeral service is the whole nine yards. And so I saw a lot of things and learned a lot of things before going to mortuary college. I don't know that I would've done as well that I did in mortuary college had I not had that experience.

Funeral Director 27 shared a similar sentiment regarding the importance of pre-mortuary school funeral home employment.

You can't do the hands-on stuff in mortuary school as well, and that's true. It's a school, it's a controlled environment, and funeral service is just wild. There's no real way to actually prepare for funeral service unless if you are actually in the business doing these things on a day-to-day scale. The best way that I would say that someone could prepare to get into this business would be to start doing it. Like I started working at a funeral home part-time, just helping answer the phone, wash the cars, and then eventually I worked my way up to doing removals at night working the front door, and then I went to mortuary school. And then the rest is history, as you know.

Funeral Director 11 noted that job shadowing was a great benefit and would be highly recommended for someone interested in the profession.

I would definitely tell them job shadow. If you can find a funeral home that will take you for a week or two and just tell them, hey, all I want to do is job shadow. And they can say, Yep, I can let you follow me around, do certain things, certain things I can't let you do obviously, but just to give you a little taste of the day-to-day.

Funeral Director 21 shared a similar sentiment that employment at a funeral home helped them decide to pursue funeral directing as a career.

For me one of the biggest determining factors I thought that helped me decide to do this [funeral directing] was that I had already worked at a funeral home beforehand, so I already knew, or I thought I knew, what I was getting into. I started out just helping them do just small stuff around the funeral home. I'd start out mowing the grass and just washing the cars, and overall, it really helped me just decide that this is something that I wanted to do. I actually worked at a funeral home for about five years, just doing random odds-and-ends jobs. They would send me down to vital records to get death certificates and stuff like that, but definitely, working at the funeral home before going to mortuary school helped out. I actually didn't want to be a funeral director when I first started. I just did it because it paid ten bucks an hour, and I knew that it was a decent job, so I just started doing it because it was a job. I didn't actually anticipate becoming a funeral director, and then after doing it for five years of just random help work, then I decided to go to mortuary school, and I already had a leg up on most of the kids there because I knew what I was getting into and stuff like that [4].

Participants attended a variety of mortuary science programs, and many felt that, overall, the mortuary science programs they attended covered the theoretical and academic content well and the technical aspects of mortuary science, such as transporting, preparing, and handling human remains [4]. Many participants expressed that they felt prepared to handle the remains and had a basic knowledge of the technical skills required for embalming and preservation techniques. For many participants, it was not until they began their apprenticeship program that they gained valuable experience in emotion management and were able to better hone their funeral service skills. Indeed, the apprenticeship serves the very purpose of bridging the gap between the classroom and practical application. The need for a high-quality apprenticeship experience became an emergent theme in the discussions with participant funeral directors [4]. The apprenticeship period bridged the gap between classroom instruction and real-world applications through hands-on learning [4]. As such, this necessitated a skilled mentor to guide the apprentice through this learning period. An apprenticeship benefits both the apprentice and the employer in providing a period in which the apprentice can learn the skills needed to be a successful employee; this also reduces chances of later career dissatisfaction and attrition. While this is a period of learning, it also requires a mentor who is skilled in the profession and who can articulate those skills in a teaching fashion. Participants in the study had a variety of apprenticeship experiences. Funeral Director 13 noted that they were unprepared for a number of after-hours work they would be performing in their early years.

The nighttime calls I didn't think would be as often, so that was a little of a disappointment early on that, yes, it's not just the nightmare scenarios the school talked about. It was actually just as much as part of the job as that 10:00 AM funeral.

Funeral Director 13 went on to describe the nature of the on-call hours and adjusting their work life and personal life around the unpredictability of funeral service.

It just becomes one on-call schedule. The visitations in the evenings, whether you've got wife and kids at home or not, it's like that's your job. You know, get there in the morning, you got to make that 10:00

AM arrangement. You got the service and the visitation later, and then you got the service for that visitation the evening before. So, you're building the rest of your time, of your waking hours outside of work, around everything that you're scheduling. And we schedule things just days in advance. So, somebody says, hey, what are you doing next week? I probably don't know, but I won't know until probably two or three days prior to that date [4].

Some were positive and beneficial to the apprentice, while others felt their apprenticeship was a type of indentured servitude. In either case, the experience of the apprenticeship laid the foundational building blocks of that person's career.

Most participants surveyed expressed general contentment with their first five years of licensure. Many expressed that it was not always an easy time, but they are grateful for their experiences which have shaped who they are now. Funeral Director 34 resonated with the thought of allowing families to say goodbye and provide for those who can no longer care for themselves as a source of great career fulfillment. Specifically, they shared that:

Career fulfillment looks <pause> it's like the quiet whisper because you don't always get a whole lot of thank you cards. Most of the time people will complain and that's what you hear, the complaints. But when someone is really appreciative, it's usually in the form of a teary hug where they come up to you and say, "I just want to give you a hug for making mom look so nice," or "I haven't seen dad look this good since he's had dementia." A lot of it, I think looking back now, after doing it for so long, is that the person died from whatever way, and we kind of take that death back from the disease, the accident, whatever it was. And we kind of give it back to the family, that they're in charge of it and they're able to say goodbye on their own terms. Sometimes people will come up and say thank you, sometimes they don't. And always hearing thank you is appreciated, but it's not necessary for the job. And also, sometimes there's nobody else there, like someone who's an indigent or a ward of the state. It might just be me and the grave diggers at the cemetery when I lower the body into the ground and there's nobody else for that person. But here I am, laying them to rest. And there no one says thank you for doing that. Nobody even really knows that you're doing it. But that I think is what it's about. Caring for those who can no longer care for themselves [4].

Funeral Director 24 shared that career fulfillment involved a balance between work and personal life with the ability to provide for their family as a central focus.

I think career fulfillment means that you take care of your family, you feel successful, and you feel that you're doing something good in the world. You feel like you have purpose. You've got to have a purpose, but you've also got to be successful, and you've got to take care of your means to survive and means to grow financially [4].

The findings of the qualitative study revealed facts not previously known about the lived experiences of funeral directors during their first five years of occupational licensure. The themes that emerged offered a foundation for future studies to be conducted. A sub-theme emerged regarding the mental health of funeral directors during the SARS-CoV-2 viral pandemic due to an inability to provide funeral and memorial services, which led to emotional distress. Funeral Director 7 expressed the feeling of discontent at their inability to offer funeral services.

For me, I felt as if I had failed, but I knew it wasn't my fault. We were just following what were told about how many people could come and what stuff we needed to do in order to stay open. It really messed with me having to say no and that we couldn't do a funeral.

Funeral Director 34 shared their thoughts by stating:

You can get married again and have that ceremony twice, I know it's not the same the second time around, but you get the idea. A funeral, though, you only die once, we don't get a chance to do another funeral. Once we've buried you, you're buried or cremated or whatever, but it's final and it's done. There is no second chance. That's why we changed the obituaries to read as private and told the families to let folks know, and we just let the funeral happen. I can't, in good faith, look you in the eye and say I would be in agreement with denying people funerals. It's basic to who we are, we have to mourn and say goodbye, and I couldn't be the person to stop that. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'll let God decide on that.

Funeral Director 9 had left the funeral service twice during their career and returned to the profession each time. When asked about their most recent departure, they reflected it was because of an improper work-life balance with no time left to be with their family.

The workload was ridiculous. There was no help with everything after COVID. It just kind of came to a point where I was just done. I had asked, and I'd gone to them with, hey, I'm having some serious issues right now. I'm getting sick in the mornings because I don't want to go to work. I'm panicking about every new call that comes in and how I'm going to make this happen. I need help, like, and after you asked a couple of times and you're no, you're still not seeing any change, any assistance. It's kind of become a martyr, and then you wind up turning into the whole burnout period where you're just like, you don't care about anything [4].

Further investigation is warranted on this topic of the funeral director's response to pandemics. Many participants shared their experiences regarding emotional and psychological preparation in the classroom and during their apprenticeship period. Further studies are needed to address the learning gap between the classroom theory and the practical hands-on application of the concepts and learning emotional management and psychological preparation in the formation of funeral directors.

Summary and Implications of Findings

The findings and implications from the study can also be applied to allied helping professions such as ministry, healthcare, and education to alleviate factors that may contribute to burnout and attrition. The interviews and retelling of the experiences of Ohio funeral directors in their initial five years of licensure captured the essence of these experiences and allowed for a greater understanding of the factors that impact attrition and retention of new licensees [4]. The findings present an opportunity for further dialogue and discussion from all aspects of funeral service to identify and mitigate factors that impact the attrition of new funeral director licensees and to promote positive retention practices to better serve the families and loved ones entrusted to their care. During the interviews, it became apparent that participants employed at a funeral home before enrolling in a mortuary science program felt better prepared for the rigors of the mortuary science education program and had more realistic expectations of entry-level into funeral service [4]. Employment, internships, or even job shadowing has been shown to be effective in crystallizing a student's career choice route and providing for more realistic expectations [10].

Further, pre-employment or internships also reduces the cause of dysfunctional career thinking, namely a misunderstanding of the role of the selected career, and also to gain real-life skills which poise the student learner for greater success in the selected career field [10]. Funeral service is a unique profession that many in the career field liken to a vocation and has its own vocational identity [3, 11, 12, 13, 14]. Promoting employment or internships in a mortuary setting before enrollment in a

mortuary science program may help increase the retention of new licensees as they have a more realistic understanding of their chosen career path [4]. Several participants noted that the theoretical concepts and the technical skillsets were covered well in their program of study. Emotion management and emotional preparation for what they encountered outside the classroom needed improvement [4]. Many expressed shock during their initial licensure years at experiences they encountered that their respective mortuary science programs did not prepare for them. Their classroom preparation did not cover emotion management and the psychological preparation accompanied by the inherent job requirements of being a funeral director [4]. For many participants, it was not until they began their apprenticeship program that they gained valuable experience in emotion management and were able to better hone their funeral service skills.

Within the funeral service profession itself, the study identifies several areas of concern that can be addressed to promote positive retention practices. The discussion of on-call and off-call hours in addition to regular business hours worked is a conversation that must be had between the employer and employee to find an agreeable balance [4]. Participants were quick to note that many employers requested that they work additional hours but were not accommodating when the funeral director needed to request time off [4]. Several study participants referenced the use of trade or third-party services that would be able to do after hour transfers and embalming work as needed which could potentially alleviate the after-hours workload of the funeral director leading to fewer instances of burnout due to excessive hours worked. Study participants also noted the variance in pay from one mortuary to another and identified salary as a concern when faced with evaluating career fulfillment [4]. Mortuary managers need to engage in discussion to ensure that salaries are commensurate with education and experience of the licensee with respect to the finances of the mortuary. Lastly, the generational gap between new licensees and senior licensees provides an opportunity for discussion on best practices for each party to learn from the other and work toward a common goal of providing quality funeral care [4]. Together, these findings present an opportunity for discussion between mortuary management, licensees, and stakeholders to identify and promote positive retention practices.

Leadership opportunities within mortuary science education include sharing the findings with funeral trade organizations, funeral home ownership, mortuary management, and other funeral service stakeholders to increase awareness of the factors that contribute to the attrition and retention of new licensees. Identifying the factors that contribute to attrition rates will afford leadership within funeral service trade organizations to have discussions and create strategies that can mitigate these factors [4]. Further, the implications and findings of this study can provide valuable insight into strategies that can be employed to mitigate burnout and attrition in allied helping professions, such as healthcare, education, law enforcement, and ministry. The findings of the research study demonstrate the need for change within the funeral service industry to reduce instances of attrition and to promote positive retention practices.

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