Retirement Intentions: Licensed Professional Counselors

Healthcare Workforce Data Center

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this report is to examine whether licensed professional counselors (LPCs) actually retire when they intended to retire. The impetus for the study is the high retirement intentions reported by LPCs in past surveys administered by the Healthcare Workforce Data Center (HWDC) and the high median age of the workforce in those surveys. For instance, the median age for LPCs licensed in Virginia has been at least 50 for the past seven years[1], one of the highest among all healthcare professions that HWDC surveys. The LPC workforce seems to be one of the healthcare workforce professions impacted by the aging of baby boomers, that is those born between 1946 and 1964. For instance, 45% of Virginia's LPC workforce was age 55 and over[1] in 2013. Most of these baby boomers are expected to retire within the next decade. Recently, the proportion of LPCs over age 55 years of age declined to 32% in 2020[2], prompting the question of whether baby boomer LPCs are exiting the workforce. Aging, coupled with high reported retirement intentions, allows this study to ask whether retirement intentions become reality for LPCs or how closely do retirement intentions and plans correlate with behavior. The three sections in this study address this question for LPCs licensed in Virginia.

METHODS

Data

The data for this study come from the Virginia Licensed Professional Counselor Workforce Survey. The Virginia Department of Health Professions Healthcare Workforce Data Center has been administering the survey to LPCs annually as they renewed their license since 2013. In the first survey in 2013, LPCs were asked at what age they intend to retire. Their current age was subtracted from their intended retirement age to obtain the expected number of years to their retirement. The expected years to retirement was used to create the samples in this study. This study created three samples from the 2013 survey data.

The first sample includes LPCs who intended to retire within two years of the 2013 survey, the base survey. A second question asked LPC survey respondents what they planned to do in the next two years, with options including retire, leave the profession, continue in the profession, decrease practice hours, increase practice hours, pursue additional education, decrease teaching time, and increase teaching time. The first sample included LPCs who intended to retire within two years and who also indicated that they planned to retire in two years. It excluded those who were already retired. This study also restricted the sample to LPCs working in LPC-related positions at their primary work location. Using 2013 as the base survey year and 2014 to 2020 as follow up years, this study examined how many of these LPCs retired by 2020.

As shown in the following table, there were 3,754 licensed LPCs in Virginia in 2013. Of those, 2,957 completed the 2013 survey. However, only 2,379 respondents answered the retirement age question; 578 did not respond to the question. A total of 123 LPCs indicated that they intended to retire within two years of the 2013 survey. Of the 123, 103 also reported that they planned to retire in two years. Further, of the remaining 103, 9 had retired, 8 did not work in a LPC-related position, and 3 were voluntarily unemployed; these 20 were excluded from subsequent analyses. Sample one included the remaining 83 LPCs; these LPCs were followed in subsequent surveys from 2014 to 2020 to see if they indeed retired.

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[1] http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/media/dhpweb/docs/hwdc/behsci/0810LPC2019.pdf
[2] http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/media/dhpweb/docs/hwdc/behsci/0810LPC2020.pdf

	LPCs
Total licensees in 2013	3,754
Total respondents in 2013	2,957
Total who responded to retirement age question	2,379
Reported retiring within 2 years	123
Of those how many also reported 2-year retirement plan	103
% agreement between intentions and plan	84%
Number already retired	9
Number not employed as a LPC in 2013	11
Sample 1: Number employed and intending/planning to retire after removing retirees	**83**
Reported retiring within 5 years	222
Number already retired	**16**
Number not employed as a LPC in 2013	**15**
Sample 2: Number employed and intending/planning to retire after removing retirees	**191**
Reported not retiring within 5 years	**2,157**
Number already retired	**10**
Number not employed as a LPC in 2013	**66**
Sample 3: Number employed and not intending/planning to retire after removing retirees	**2,045**

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

The second sample started with 222 respondents who intended to retire within at least 5 years of the 2013 survey. Of these 222 respondents, 16 had already retired, 11 did not work in a LPC-related position, and 4 were voluntarily unemployed; these 31 were excluded from subsequent analyses. Sample two included the remaining 191 LPCs who were followed in subsequent surveys from the 2014 to 2020 surveys to see if they indeed retired.

The third sample included the 2,157 respondents who were not intending to retire within five years. Of these 2,157 who responded to the retirement age question and who did not intend or plan to retire within five years, 10 indicated that they were already retired, 55 were not employed in a LPC-related position, 11 were involuntarily unemployed, and 36 were voluntarily unemployed. A total of 2,045 were employed in a LPC-related capacity. This third sample was followed to see whether any of them retired between 2014 and 2020.

Analyses

The first analysis in this study examined how many of the respondents who intended and planned to retire within two years of 2013 were retired at the end of the review period in 2020. The work and retirement status of each of the LPCs in sample one was reported. The second analysis examined how many respondents who intended to retire within five years of 2013 were retired by 2020. The study could not conduct logistic regressions to examine which workforce factors were associated with the likelihood of the LPCs in samples one and two to retire because of the small size of both samples. Finally, the third analysis examined how many respondents who did not intend to retire within five years of 2013 were retired by 2020.

Measures

Dependent Variable
Respondents were asked what their working status was in subsequent surveys after 2013. The options included: employed in a LPC-related capacity; employed capacity unknown; employed not in a LPC-related capacity; not working, reasons unknown; voluntarily unemployed (including for medical reasons); involuntarily unemployed; or retired. A binary variable indicating whether a respondent had selected retired or not (1=Yes,

0=No) was created from the response to this question. The frequency of respondents indicating they had retired was obtained from this variable and was used for the analyses.

RESULTS

Using the 2013 survey data, the following table compares the summary statistics of samples one, two, and three. Not surprisingly, sample three had the lowest mean age of the three samples. Females were also most represented in sample three and least represented in sample two. The intended retirees in samples one and two had a higher proportion of Whites than sample three but sample three included the highest percent of Hispanic and Asian LPCs. LPCs in samples two were more likely to have a doctorate degree compared to those in the other two samples.

|	Sample One	Sample Two	Sample Three
Mean age	64 yrs.	64 yrs.	50 yrs.
Female	74%	71%	77%
White	90%	92%	85%
Black	6%	5%	8%
Hispanic	0%	1%	3%
Asian	0%	0%	1%
Others	4%	2%	3%
Doctorate degree	17%	22%	17%
Master's degree	81%	78%	83%
Community Service Boards	23%	21%	16%
Private practice – solo	17%	17%	19%
Private practice - group	16%	16%	17%
Mental health facility – outpatient	6%	12%	12%
Works one part time position	35%	29%	16%
Works full time/2 part time	47%	57%	61%
Works 2 or more full time	18%	14%	23%
Job length between 3 and 10 years	22%	28%	43%
Job length more than 10 years	63%	56%	28%
Works <30 hrs.	38%	35%	18%
Works 30-49 hrs.	47%	51%	61%
Works 50-59 hrs.	12%	12%	14%
Works 60+ hrs.	3%	2%	7%
% Satisfied with job	93%	94%	95%
Median income	$45,000-$50,000	$45,000-$50,000	$50,000-$55,000
% Licensed outside state	8%	9%	17%
% in VA workforce	94%	94%	93%
% Employer-provided health insurance	48%	43%	47%
% Employer-provided retirement benefits	43%	35%	39%

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

Compared to sample three, LPCs in sample one and two were most likely to be working in community service boards in 2013; nearly a quarter of both samples were working in such establishments. LPCs in sample three were most likely to be working in solo private practice establishments. Sample one had the highest proportion of LPCs who worked in one part time position and sample three had the highest percent working at two or more

positions. Over 60% of sample one had been at their position for more than a decade compared to only 28% of sample three. LPCs in sample three were least likely to be working less than 30 hours per week in 2013 and most likely to be working more than 50 hours. Median income was higher for sample three but the same for the other two groups. LPCs in sample one were least likely to have held a license outside Virginia; the inverse was the case for sample three. Report of employer-provided health insurance and retirement benefits was highest among sample one LPCs.

Analysis One

The following figure presents the retirement status of the 83 LPCs in sample one from 2013 to 2020. It also demonstrates some attrition, as ten of the LPCs followed were lost to follow up either because their licenses expired or they became inactive. Some licensees may have requested for their license to be made inactive because they are working out of state or they have stopped working, among other reasons.

Of the 83 LPCs, the retirement status of 73 was known. Thirty-one (43%) of the 73 had retired by 2020. The following figure shows how many retired each year; no new retirement occurred in 2019. Additionally, three of the 31 retired LPCs shown in the figure went back to work in a LPC-related capacity by 2020.
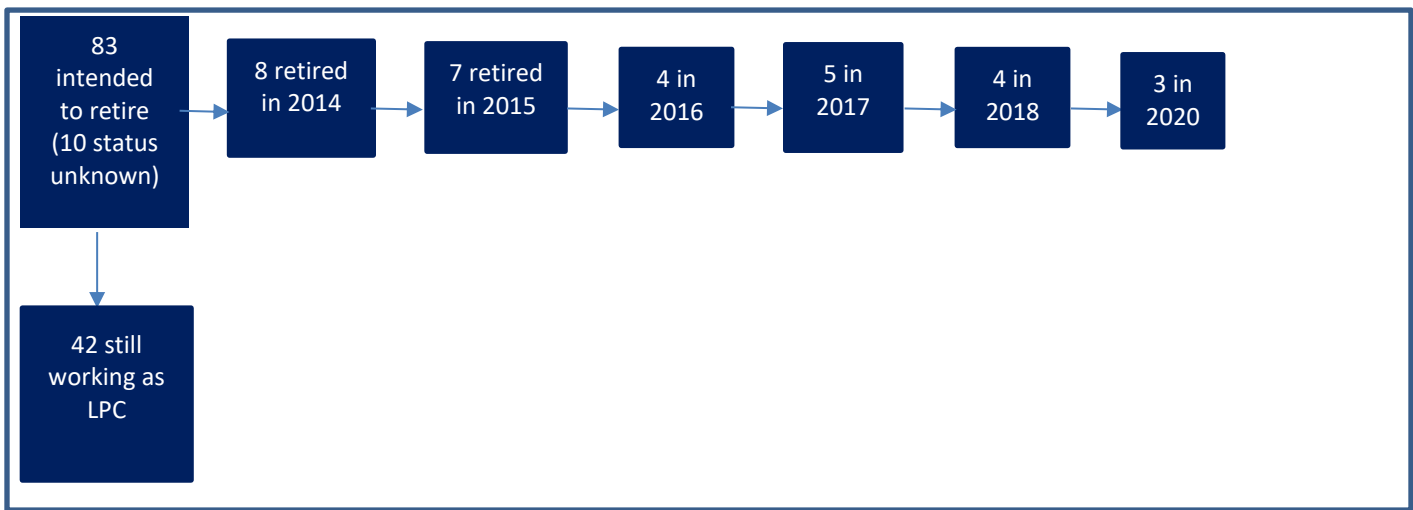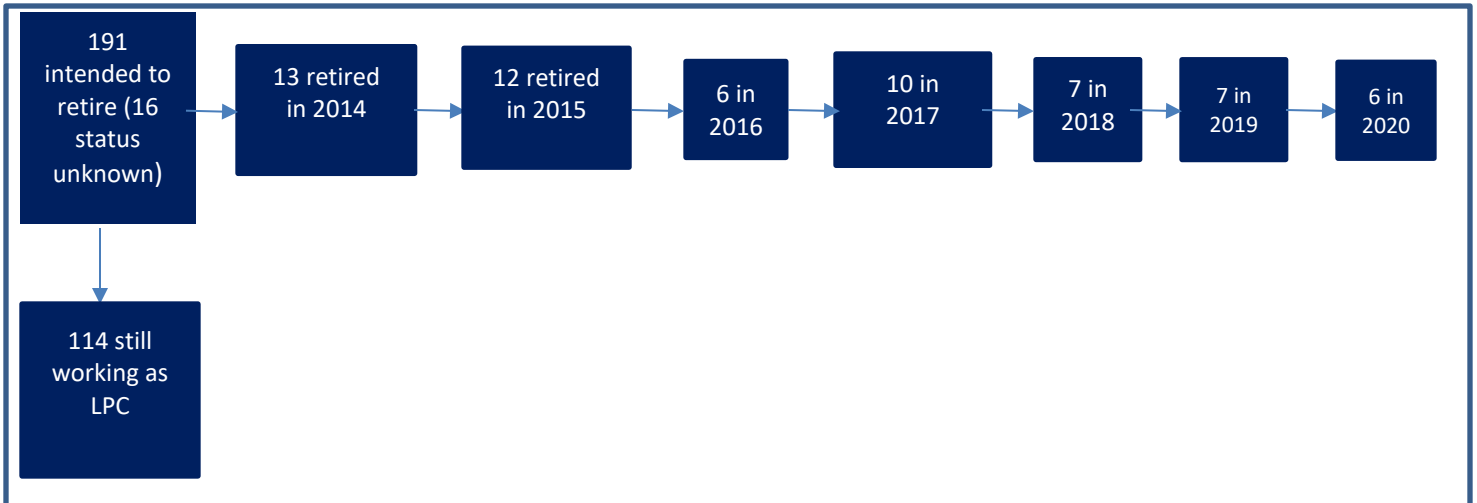

*Boxes are proportional to group size
Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

Analysis Two

The following figure presents the retirement status of the 191 LPCs in sample two from 2013 to 2020. It also demonstrates some attrition, as 16 of the LPCs followed were lost to follow up either because their licenses expired or they became inactive. Further, some licensees had active licenses but did not respond to the retirement status question in subsequent surveys.

Of the 191 LPCs, the retirement status of 175 was known. Sixty-one (35%) of the 175 had retired by 2020. The following figure shows how many retired each year. By the end of the follow up period in 2020, four of the 61 retired LPCs had gone back to work in a LPC-related capacity.

| 191 intended to retire (16 status unknown) | 13 retired in 2014 | 12 retired in 2015 | 6 in 2016 | 10 in 2017 | 7 in 2018 | 7 in 2019 | 6 in 2020 |

114 still working as LPC

*Boxes are proportional to group size

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

Analysis Three

Of the 2,157 licensees who did not intend to retire within five years of the 2013 survey, the retirement status of 2,090 (97%) was known in 2020. The 67 licensees with unknown retirement status mostly had let their licenses expire as they were no longer active in the LPC licensing system. Of the 2,090 with known retirement status, only 146 (7%) had retired by 2020. Further, only 1,485 of the remaining 1,944 non-retirees responded to the working status question in 2020. Of these 1,485, 1,394 were working in a LPC-related capacity in 2020; 55 were working in other fields, 30 were voluntarily unemployed, and 6 were involuntarily unemployed.

2,157 did not intend to retire within 5yrs. (67 status unknown)

146 (7%) had retired by 2020

1,944 (93%) had not retired after 7yrs.
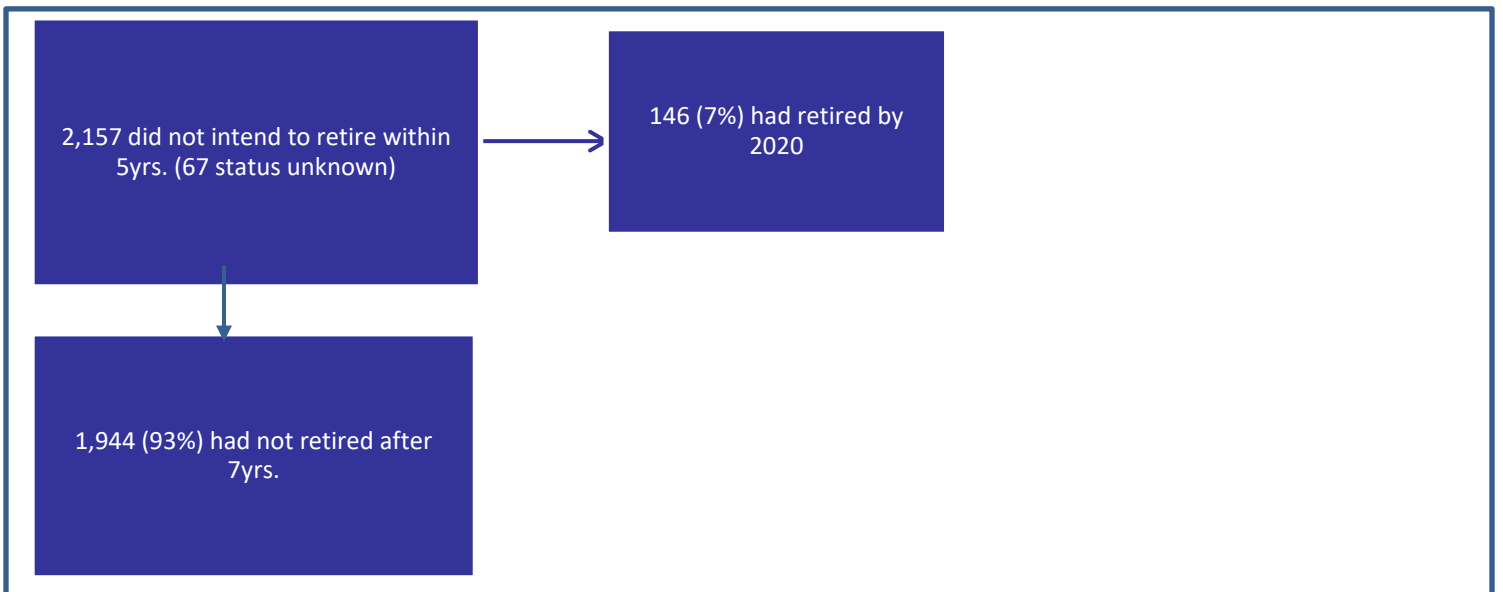
*Boxes are proportional to group size

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study are very informative; LPCs who intend and plan to retire within two years were most likely to retire compared to the other two groups. Reporting both an intention and plan for retirement may indicate its salience in the thoughts and preparation of those respondents. Further, the shorter the number

of expected years to retirement the higher the likelihood of retirement. Those who intended to retire within two years of 2013 were more likely to retire within the 7-year period of observation than those who intended to retire within 5 years who were also more likely to retire compared to those who did not. Thus, intentions and plans of retirement do function as an indicator of retirement even though they are not perfect. In sample one, 43% of those with known retirement status had retired within seven years. In sample two, 35% of those with known retirement status had retired. These two statistics can be compared to sample three in which only 7% of those with known status had retired.

Further investigation into the LPCs lost to follow up may help inform the quest to understand retirement intentions among LPCs. In this study, a number of LPCs leave Virginia's workforce by letting their licenses expire. For example, 13% of sample one respondents had unknown status and many of these were due to expired licenses. It is unknown whether these LPCs leave for another state's LPC workforce, work in another capacity in Virginia, or let their license expire because they have retired. These unknowns need further investigation and finding ways to keep non-retirees among the unknowns licensed and working in Virginia is important.

However, based on the known retirement and working status of the LPCs followed, there are some encouraging findings that suggest that any impact of the aging LPC workforce may not be as severe as anticipated in Virginia. Of those with known status, less than half had retired by 2020 even among sample one which is made up of respondents who intended and planned to retire within two years of 2013. Thus, it is reassuring that, even though a lot of baby boomer LPCs are exiting the workforce, a significant number remain past their intended and planned exit. Further, individuals often retire in stages. As reflected in the findings from this study, some of the retired LPCs return to work, even if for fewer hours, which would still help respond to LPCs demand. A more pressing concern might be recruiting younger workforce so there is transfer of knowledge before all the older workforce leaves due to retirement or mortality. This is likely taking place as the number of licensed LPCs has nearly doubled, increasing by 3,089 (82%) since 2013 and the median age of the workforce has declined. The condition of the economy will likely also play a critical role in how closely LPCs retirement intentions and plans match their behavior.