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RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Inadequate Federal Pay Cited as Primary Problem by Agency Officials

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The Honorable John Glenn
Chairman, Committee on
Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable William D. Ford
Chairman, Committee on
Post Office and Civil Service
House of Representatives

We are examining a number of issues related to federal recruitment and retention problems. This report provides information on what agency officials believed to be the causes and effects of these problems. We surveyed officials in 8 federal agencies within 16 metropolitan statistical areas on the subject of recruitment and retention in 11 federal occupations with high quit rates. We believe the results are relevant to the ongoing debate over federal pay reform.

We are sending copies of this report to other congressional committees, the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, and other interested parties.

The major contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV. Please contact me on 275-6204 if you have any questions concerning this report.

Rosslyn S. Kleeman
Director, Federal Workforce
Future Issues

Executive Summary

Purpose

Federal law requires that federal white-collar salaries be comparable to average private sector salaries for similar jobs. However, limitations on federal pay adjustments since the late 1970s have created a federal/private pay gap where average private sector salaries exceed average federal salaries by about 25 percent. Moreover, the federal salary schedule applies nationwide, with no variation to reflect differences in prevailing salary rates in the many locations where federal employees work.

A number of studies by GAO and others suggest that pay disparities have caused recruitment and retention difficulties and adversely affected agency operations. Given the congressional interest in these issues, GAO developed additional information by reviewing a range of jobs in different agencies and geographic locations across the country. GAO determined what agency officials believed to be the causes of recruitment and retention difficulties and what effects they believed those difficulties have had on agency operations.

Background

A number of studies during the past 5 years have clearly established that the federal government is experiencing a recruitment and retention crisis and that the problems will worsen in the future as demographic and technological changes occur. As a result, GAO believes recruitment and retention problems pose a major risk of reducing the quality of government services and programs. Therefore, GAO believes it is extremely important that Congress understand why these problems are occurring and the operational effects they are having on federal agencies.

Earlier research indicates that a variety of factors encourage employees to stay in or leave a job or to accept or decline a job offer. Studies of federal recruitment and retention, while recognizing that many factors are relevant, often focus on the fact that federal pay is substantially lower than nonfederal pay for the same jobs. Although the literature suggests that agencies may suffer both direct costs (such as added recruitment and training expenditures) and indirect costs (such as reduced productivity) because of these problems, little agency documentation of these effects is usually available.

Using federal personnel data, GAO selected 11 white-collar occupations with high national quit rates to serve as the focus of this analysis. The occupations were clerk typist, data transcriber, environmental engineer, general attorney, industrial hygienist, medical clerk, nurse, pharmacist, police, practical nurse, and tax examiner. GAO then selected 16 metropolitan areas with large numbers of employees in those occupations and

identified the agencies in the 16 areas that employed the largest number of persons in the 11 occupations. At these locations, GAO administered 271 questionnaires from December 1989 to March 1990 on recruitment and retention causes and effects in those occupations to agency-designated respondents (usually agency personnel officials assisted by line managers). GAO then conducted follow-up interviews with the respondents to discuss their answers and obtain any documentation of their answers.

Results in Brief

Low federal pay was the factor respondents most frequently cited as a reason for employees to leave the federal government and for applicants to decline a federal job offer. Respondents in geographic areas with the highest costs of living and private sector pay rates were much more likely to view federal pay as a cause of recruitment and retention problems than respondents in areas where costs and pay were low. Thus, GAO believes pay reform, particularly locality-based pay adjustments, would improve federal recruitment and retention efforts.

Respondents also listed the availability of nonfederal jobs and, particularly for nurses, federal understaffing as important reasons to leave or decline federal employment. Federal job security was described as the most important reason to stay in or accept a federal job. Respondents also saw federal training, career advancement opportunities, and the content of the work as positive features of federal work. However, training and career advancement opportunities were also viewed as means by which employees could leave the federal government.

The agencies seldom kept systematic records documenting how recruitment and retention difficulties affected their operations. However, respondents commonly said they believed that these difficulties had caused reductions in service delivery and productivity losses. They also described numerous examples of increased training; recruiting; overtime; and, to a lesser extent, contracting costs caused by these difficulties. Thus, while restoring federal pay rates to competitive levels will be costly at first, GAO believes the cost will be offset to some degree by savings and improvements in government operations. GAO also believes those costs are preferable to the further deterioration of government services.

Principal Findings

Pay and Job Availability Seen as Major Factors in Recruitment and Retention Problems

GAO believes pay reform, particularly locality-based adjustments, is needed to improve federal recruitment and retention. Federal pay compared with pay in the nonfederal sector was the factor respondents most frequently cited as a reason for federal employees to quit their jobs (78.3 percent of respondents) and for prospective employees to decline federal employment offers (72.5 percent). Respondents in high cost/pay areas were much more likely to view federal pay as a "very important" reason to leave (76.5 percent) than respondents in low cost/pay areas (33.3 percent). Also, respondents with recruiting and retention problems were much more likely to view pay as a reason to decline and leave federal employment than respondents without such problems. The respondents cited numerous examples of nonfederal employers paying far more than the federal government for the same job. For example, a Navy official in Philadelphia said that federal environmental engineers earn $36,645 per year in the federal government, but could earn $20,000 per year more in the private sector. (See pp. 27 to 35.)

The availability of jobs outside the agency was also seen by the respondents as an important reason to leave (71.3 percent) or to decline (63.6 percent) federal jobs. In locations where nonfederal jobs were plentiful, the respondents were most likely to say that federal employees would leave and prospective employees would decline federal job offers. (See pp. 35 to 37.)

Some recruitment and retention-related factors were occupation specific. Respondents for nursing jobs said job understaffing was the most important factor causing federal nurses to resign and the second most important reason for nursing applicants to decline federal job offers. Respondents for professional and police occupations often cited limited federal career advancement opportunities as a reason to leave. Other factors the respondents viewed as causing employees to leave or applicants to decline were poor federal life and health insurance benefits, the unattractive physical environment of federal worksites, and the lengthy federal recruitment and hiring process. (See pp. 37 to 46.)

The factor viewed as most important in attracting and retaining workers was federal job security. Nearly 80 percent of the respondents said federal job security was a reason for employees to stay in federal jobs, and nearly 85 percent said it was a reason for applicants to accept a federal

job offer. In some cases, federal training and career advancement opportunities were viewed as positive inducements to recruitment and retention in the short run but ultimately allowed some employees to find more attractive jobs elsewhere. (See pp. 46 to 56.)

Reduced Service Delivery/ Productivity and Increased Costs Reportedly Caused by Recruitment and Retention Problems

Almost all of the respondents said recruitment and retention problems resulted in a variety of operational effects in their agencies. For example, 85 to 90 percent said that as a result of recruitment and retention problems they were experiencing reduced service delivery, lower productivity, and the problem of upper-level people doing lower-level work. Although the respondents seldom had documentation of these effects, they cited numerous examples of delayed or eliminated safety inspections, missed production deadlines, lost tax revenues, and poorly served hospital patients resulting from their difficulties in recruiting and retaining employees. For example, officials at the Department of the Navy in Philadelphia and the Environmental Protection Agency in Chicago said turnover among environmental engineers had delayed hazardous waste cleanups. VA officials in Kansas City and Los Angeles said the shortage of nurses had led to the closure of hospital wards.

The respondents also said recruitment and retention problems were causing increased costs in training; recruiting; overtime; and, to a lesser extent, contracting. Sometimes the costs were direct, but some were indirect. For example, several respondents said new recruits frequently left after being trained, thereby necessitating another round of expensive recruiting and training. Respondents also said poorer quality applicants and hires increased the need for expensive training, sometimes in very rudimentary skills. (See pp. 58 to 70.)

Recommendations

Because Congress was considering legislative proposals to reform the federal pay-setting process when this report was being prepared, GAO is not making recommendations, but is endorsing the need for pay reform.

Agency Comments

GAO discussed this report with agency officials, and they generally agreed with GAO's findings and conclusions. The officials did, however, say they believed the report may have understated the extent of operational problems encountered as a result of recruitment and retention problems because the respondents may have been reluctant to disclose reductions in service delivery or productivity in their agencies.

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Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CBO	Congressional Budget Office
CPDF	Central Personnel Data File
CSRS	Civil Service Retirement System
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FEB	Federal Executive Board
FERS	Federal Employees Retirement System
GS	General Schedule
GM	General Merit
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
LPN	Licensed Practical Nurse
MSA	metropolitan statistical area
MSPB	Merit Systems Protection Board
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
SSA	Social Security Administration
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
VAMC	Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Introduction

In its 1989 report calling for a renewed national commitment to the public service, the National Commission on the Public Service, chaired by Paul Volcker, found that there was

"evidence on all sides of an erosion of performance and morale across government in America. Too many of our most talented public servants—those with the skills and dedication that are the hallmarks of an effective career service—are ready to leave. Too few of our brightest young people—those with the imagination and energy that are essential for the future—are willing to join."[1]

Several other studies also found that the federal government was experiencing serious recruitment and retention problems. The National Academy of Public Administration's 1986 report, The Quiet Crisis of the Civil Service, described a "process of erosion" in federal recruitment and retention.[2] The 1988 Civil Service 2000 report, prepared for the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), reported a decline in the government's ability to "recruit and retain the best."[3] A 1989 OPM study found that some white-collar occupations and geographic areas had significant recruitment and retention problems.[4] Studies by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) disclosed a 25-percent turnover rate among new federal employees as a "cause for concern,"[5] and echoed concerns about the federal government's continued ability to attract, hire, and retain "the best and the brightest" employees.[6] Our 1987 survey of federal managers revealed a widely held perception that the government's ability to hire and retain employees has been deteriorating for a number of years.[7]

We also found indications that federal recruitment and retention difficulties will worsen in the future. Competition for available workers is expected to intensify as a decrease in the number of young workers

[1]Report and Recommendations of the National Commission on the Public Service, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, U.S. House of Representatives, May 2, 1989, pp. 1 and 2.

[2]The Quiet Crisis of the Civil Service: The Federal Personnel System at the Crossroads, National Academy of Public Administration, December 1986, p.5.

[3]Civil Service 2000, Prepared by the Hudson Institute for the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, June 1988. pp.29-30.

[4]Federal White-Collar Pay System: Report on a Market-Sensitive Study, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, August 1989, p.4.

[5]Who is Leaving the Federal Government?, MSPB, August 1989, p.2.

[6]Why Are Employees Leaving the Federal Government?, MSPB, May 1990, p. vii.

[7]Managing Human Resources: Greater OPM Leadership Needed to Address Critical Challenges (GAO/GGD-89-19, Jan. 19, 1989), pp. 3-4.

slows the growth rate of the U.S. workforce. A larger share of public jobs are also projected to fall into the highest skilled, most competitive job categories, such as technical and research positions. Finally, compared to the nonportable retirement benefits of the traditional Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), the portability of the new Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) is expected to present less of an incentive for long-term, experienced employees to stay with the government.[8]

The decline and further deterioration of the federal government's recruitment and retention capabilities are matters of critical concern. As we concluded in our November 1988 transition report on the public service, problems in acquiring and retaining quality employees pose major risks to the quality of government services and programs.[9] Therefore, the federal government needs to find out more about what causes recruitment and retention difficulties and to identify the effects of the difficulties on federal programs and services. These are the issues addressed in this report, which concentrates on "white-collar" occupations—nearly 1.7 million full-time employees as of September 30, 1989.

Causes of Recruitment and Retention Difficulties

Studies of employee retention indicate that turnover is a complex and multifaceted process defying simple explanation.[10] Different factors push people out of jobs or pull them to stay. These factors or variables are commonly grouped into three broad categories: (1) economic variables generally focus on how turnover is affected by the economy (the stronger the economy, the more other jobs are available, and the easier it is for people to leave their current jobs); (2) organizational variables include pay, benefits, and job content (higher pay and better benefits are related to lower turnover); and (3) individual variables include age, job tenure, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (employees are less likely to leave their jobs the older they are, the longer they have had their jobs, the more satisfied they are with their work, and the more they identify with the organization).

[8]In general, FERS covers all employees first hired after December 31, 1983, and employees hired before that date who elected to transfer to the new system.

[9]Transition Series: The Public Service (GAO/OCG-89-2TR, Nov. 1988), p.4.

[10]See, for example, William H. Mobley, Employee Turnover: Causes, Consequences and Control (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1982), p.82.

Recruitment and Retention in the Federal Government

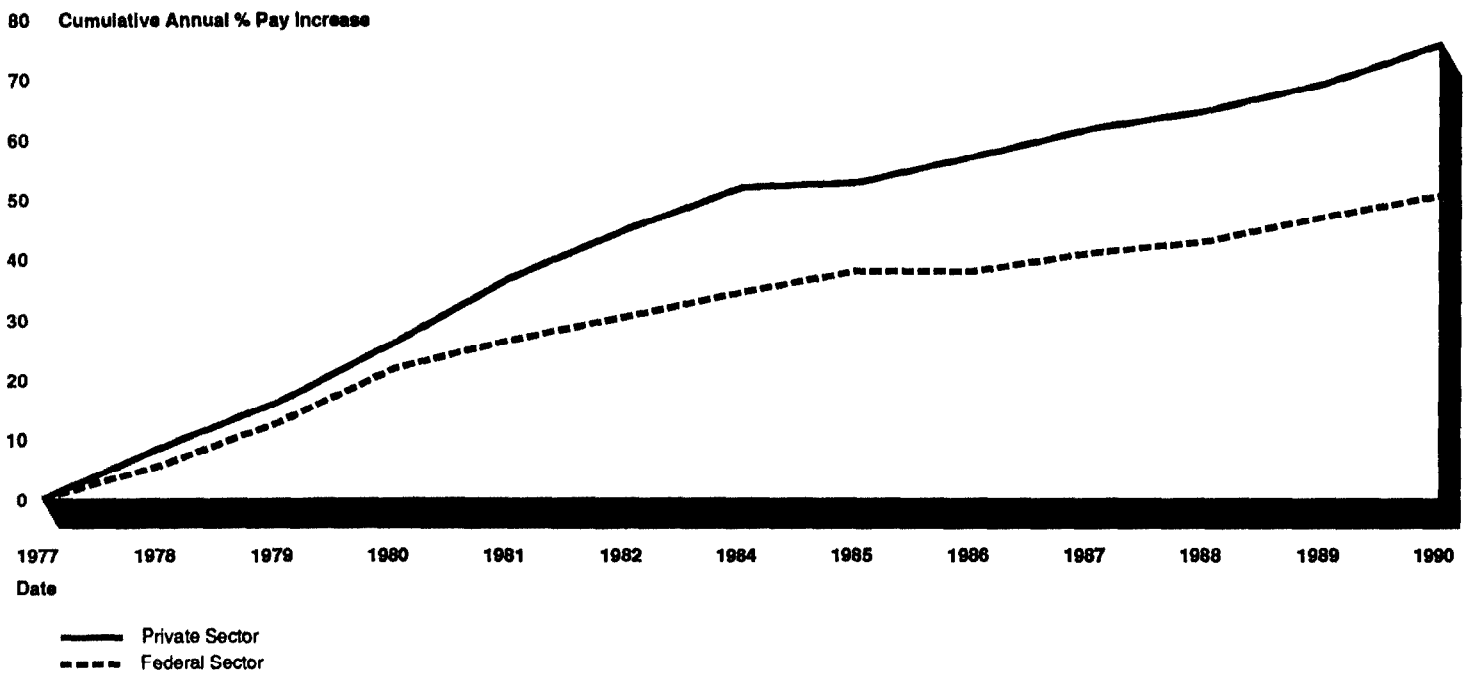
Studies of recruitment and retention in the federal government illustrate the interactions of the turnover variables there as well. Nevertheless, a number of studies have cited the critical importance of federal pay rates to recruitment and retention. We have reported over the years that noncompetitive federal salaries have created governmentwide recruitment and retention problems. As we noted in our transition report on the public service, "You get what you pay for. Unfortunately, the federal government's pay structure has broken down."[11]

Since 1962, federal law has required that federal white-collar pay rates be comparable to average private sector rates for similar jobs.[12] This objective has not been attained for two reasons. First, beginning in 1978 and in each year since, presidents proposed and Congress agreed to grant federal pay raises at lesser amounts than needed to maintain average pay comparability with the private sector. As a result, a federal/private sector pay gap gradually developed; average private sector pay currently exceeds average federal pay by about 25 percent (see fig. 1.1). Second, because the government pays white-collar workers on a national scale while private rates vary by locality, geographic differences exist in the competitiveness of federal pay rates.

[11]GAO/OGC-89-2TR, p.5.

[12]Specifically, the "pay comparability principle" holds that the private sector determines the "going rates" for jobs comparable to those found in government, and the government then pays the national average of those rates for similar levels of work. This principle was established by the Federal Salary Reform Act of 1962 (76 Stat. 841) and reaffirmed by the Federal Pay Comparability Act of 1970 (84 Stat. 1946). The principle applies to white-collar workers in the following pay systems: General Schedule, Foreign Service schedules, and Department of Medicine and Surgery schedules in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Figure 1.1: Federal/Private Sector Pay Gap Has Steadily Widened Since 1977



Note: Federal pay adjustments were made in October for years 1977 through 1982. Adjustments were shifted to January for 1984 through 1990; therefore, 1983 does not appear on the horizontal axis.

In a May 1990 report, we documented the combined effect of these two factors on selected jobs and localities.[13] In about 90 percent of the comparisons we made, the private sector paid more than the federal government for the same white-collar jobs within particular metropolitan statistical areas (MSA).[14] The degree of private sector pay advantage varied depending on the area and job, but in over half the cases the pay difference was more than 20 percent. In about 10 percent of the comparisons, federal pay rates were higher than private sector rates but usually by only about 5 percent.

[13]Federal Pay: Comparisons With the Private Sector by Job and Locality, (GAO/GGD-90-81FS, May 15, 1990).

[14]A MSA is an area consisting of a large population nucleus together with adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that nucleus. MSAs are composed of whole counties, except in New England where they are defined by city and town. A standard set of metropolitan areas in the United States is defined by the Office of Management and Budget as part of its statistical policy responsibilities under the Paperwork Reduction Act.

We found evidence that pay is affecting federal recruitment efforts in our 1989 report on the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) college recruitment program.[15] We reported that IRS and college officials considered noncompetitive starting salaries to be the chief obstacle impeding the recruitment of quality IRS enforcement staff.

The May 1990 MSPB study of why people leave the federal government gives clear evidence of the negative influence of low federal pay on employee retention. MSPB surveyed 2,778 employees who left the federal government and, for the respondents who resigned, found the following:

- Twenty-eight percent cited "compensation and advancement" as the most important reason for leaving. The percentage citing compensation and advancement increased to 37 percent in the selected high cost areas of New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.
- Sixty-three percent said "more money" was a "somewhat important" or "extremely important" reason for resigning, and 59 percent cited "insufficient pay" as a "somewhat important" or "extremely important" reason for resigning.
- Seventy-one percent resigned to work full time elsewhere after leaving federal employment and reported an average 26 percent salary increase in their new jobs.

The impact of low pay on recruitment and retention of federal employees was also documented in a 1990 report by the National Advisory Commission on Law Enforcement—a Commission established by Congress to study the effects of issues such as pay and benefits on federal law enforcement officers.[16] More than half of all federal law enforcement managers and employees surveyed believed that lack of competitive pay deterred qualified people from applying for federal law enforcement jobs. The Commission also found that many law enforcement officials believed noncompetitive pay was the main reason law enforcement personnel leave federal service.

Other factors said to influence employees to leave the federal government include the state of the labor market; occupational considerations; and the age, sex, and education level of employees—just as was found in

[15]Tax Administration: Need for More Management Attention to IRS' College Recruitment Program (GAO/GGD-90-32, Dec. 22, 1989), p.3.

[16]Report of the National Advisory Commission on Law Enforcement (OCG-90-2, Apr. 25, 1990).

studies of the nonfederal workforce.[17] In the MSPB study of departing employees, the employees frequently gave reasons other than pay for resigning: job stress and lack of management/employee cooperation, work-related issues such as poor match of their skills to their jobs, and relocation and other personal or non-work issues. We and others have also highlighted the low public esteem for civil servants as a reason prospective employees decline federal jobs or current employees leave them.[18]

Two factors commonly cited as influencing employees to stay with the federal government are the retirement system and job security. Under the traditional CSRS retirement system, nonportable retirement benefits are believed to make employees less likely to leave over time as their retirement benefits accumulate.[19] As noted above, however, the portable retirement benefits of the new FERS retirement system are expected to reduce the importance of retirement benefits as a reason to stay. Job security is a factor because federal employment is relatively stable and federal employees have procedural safeguards against arbitrary dismissal. Research also indicates that federal employees are more risk averse than their private sector counterparts and value the job security associated with federal employment.[20]

Effects of Recruitment and Retention Difficulties

Different studies have addressed the effects of recruitment and retention difficulties. These studies indicate that, while not all turnover is dysfunctional (e.g., if it weeds out poor performers or brings in employees with new ideas), it is usually considered costly and disruptive to the organization. Turnover leads to direct costs, such as increased recruiting and training expenses, and to indirect costs, such as reduced productivity while new recruits are being trained. It can also diminish the organization's ability to accomplish its mission.

[17]Federal Workforce: Pay, Recruitment, and Retention of Federal Employees (GAO/GGD-87-37, Feb. 10, 1987).

[18]GAO/GGD-89-19 and Report and Recommendations of the National Commission on the Public Service.

[19]Civil Service 2000, p.31,and The Quiet Crisis of the Civil Service, p.8.

[20]See Gilbert B. Siegel, "Compensation, Benefits and Work Schedules," Public Personnel Management, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 1989); and Don Bellante and Albert Link, "Are Public Sector Workers More Risk Averse Than Private Sector Workers?" Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Vol. 34, No. 3 (April 1981).

These dysfunctional effects of turnover are difficult to document, however. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has reported that, while managers need to consider the costs associated with turnover in their decision-making, "[d]ata for even the most obvious costs are generally difficult to obtain, and techniques for valuing less obvious indirect costs are poorly developed or nonexistent". CBO did find that replacement costs were much higher for highly skilled professional and administrative jobs than for less technical, clerical positions. CBO also looked at lost production time as a result of turnover at the General Services Administration and found that it took an average of about 32 days to fill positions at the agency after they became vacant.[21]

Studies by Federal Executive Boards (FEB) in various metropolitan areas have consistently concluded that recruitment and retention difficulties are making it harder for federal agencies in these areas to accomplish their missions.[22] The studies, done by local FEBs in New York, northern New Jersey, Boston, and Los Angeles, reported that these difficulties—which were largely attributed to uncompetitive federal pay rates—led to lower quality recruits, higher administrative costs, and lost productivity. For example, the 1989 Boston FEB study calculated that recruitment and retention problems in Boston cost the federal government $59.8 million in added recruiting and hiring costs in fiscal year 1988. Moreover, the study concluded that in many critical employment categories, the federal government in Boston had become "an employer of last resort."

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

One objective of our review was to determine what agency officials believed to be the causes of recruitment and retention difficulties in selected occupations, areas, and agencies in the federal government. We also sought to identify what agency officials believed to be the effects of those difficulties on agency operations. The following specific questions guided our work:

- To what extent do agency officials believe factors such as federal pay, work content, and training opportunities influence potential employees'

[21] Employee Turnover in the Federal Government, Congressional Budget Office, February 1986, pp.27-30.

[22] New York's "Not So Quiet" Federal Employment Crisis, New York FEB, April 1988; The New Jersey Crisis, Metropolitan Northern New Jersey FEB, August 1988; Competing for the Future: A Report on the Effects of Federal Pay Policy on Public Service, Boston FEB, March 1989; The Federal Employment Crisis in the Greater Los Angeles Area: A Vicious Cycle, Los Angeles FEB and the College Federal Council for Southern California, December 1988.

decisions to accept or reject offers of federal employment or current employees' decisions to stay in or quit federal jobs?
- What operational problems, if any, do agency officials believe recruitment and retention difficulties cause in federal agencies?
- To what extent do the respondents' answers to the preceding questions vary by occupation or geographic area?

To answer these questions, we selected 11 high quit rate GS or GS-equivalent occupations for study and administered 271 questionnaires to agency-designated focal points (usually personnel officers, in consultation with line managers) in 8 agencies in 16 MSAs across the country. The MSAs selected had above average numbers of employees in at least 7 of the 11 high quit rate occupations. The agencies selected within those MSAs were the predominate federal employers in those occupations.

We received responses to all 271 questionnaires. We then held follow-up interviews with the respondents to find out why they answered as they did and to obtain any supporting documentation. We did not, however, independently verify the information the respondents provided.

We identified occupations in this study using a measure of retention difficulty—quit rates—because, as a rule, neither OPM nor individual agencies collect data on attainment of recruiting goals. Available recruiting information consists of largely anecdotal evidence. "Quit," as used in this study, applies only to employees who voluntarily resigned their government jobs. It does not include any of several other possible forms of employee separation, including retirement, transfers to other federal agencies, dismissals, or deaths. Quit rates were calculated on the basis of those employees on board as of December 31, 1986, for the 2-year period ending December 31, 1988. We defined a "high quit rate" occupation to be any occupation with a quit rate 50 percent or more above the national average for all federal occupations.[23]

The 11 occupations in our review were selected from a total of 30 occupations with high quit rates over the 2-year period spanning calendar years 1987 and 1988. The 11 occupations were generally representative of the federal occupational fields with high quit rates (security, health, clerical/technical, and other professionals) and typically had higher quit rates and numbers of employees than the 19 occupations that were not

[23]The average national quit rate for all occupations was 6.2 percent over the 2-year period spanning 1987 and 1988, so that any occupation with a quit rate equal to or greater than 9.3 percent was considered to have a high quit rate.

selected. The 11 occupations selected were general attorney, pharmacist, industrial hygienist, and environmental engineer (grouped as "professional" occupations); clerk typist, data transcriber, tax examiner, and medical clerk (grouped as "clerical/technical" occupations); nurse and practical nurse (grouped as "nursing" occupations); and police.[24]

The 16 MSAs selected for our study had at least 1,000 federal employees and contained above average numbers of employees in most of the occupations in our review.[25] Using these criteria we chose the following MSAs: New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, and San Diego (grouped as high cost/pay MSAs); Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Atlanta (grouped as medium cost/pay MSAs), and Dallas, Denver, Kansas City, St. Louis, San Antonio, and Norfolk (grouped as low cost/pay MSAs).[26] Figure 1.2 shows the geographic dispersion of these MSAs across the continental United States. Table 1.1 shows the occupations we surveyed in each of these MSAs.

[24]In this report, the terms "nurse" and "registered nurse" are used interchangeably and are distinguished from licensed practical nurses (LPN).

[25]Although the Washington, D.C., MSA met the selection criteria, it was not included in the study because every agency and most subagencies would have had to have been surveyed concerning each high quit rate occupation, thereby skewing the survey universe toward Washington.

[26]See appendix I for a discussion of how the cost/pay area groupings were done.

Figure 1.2: MSAs in the Review Represented Various Parts of the Country

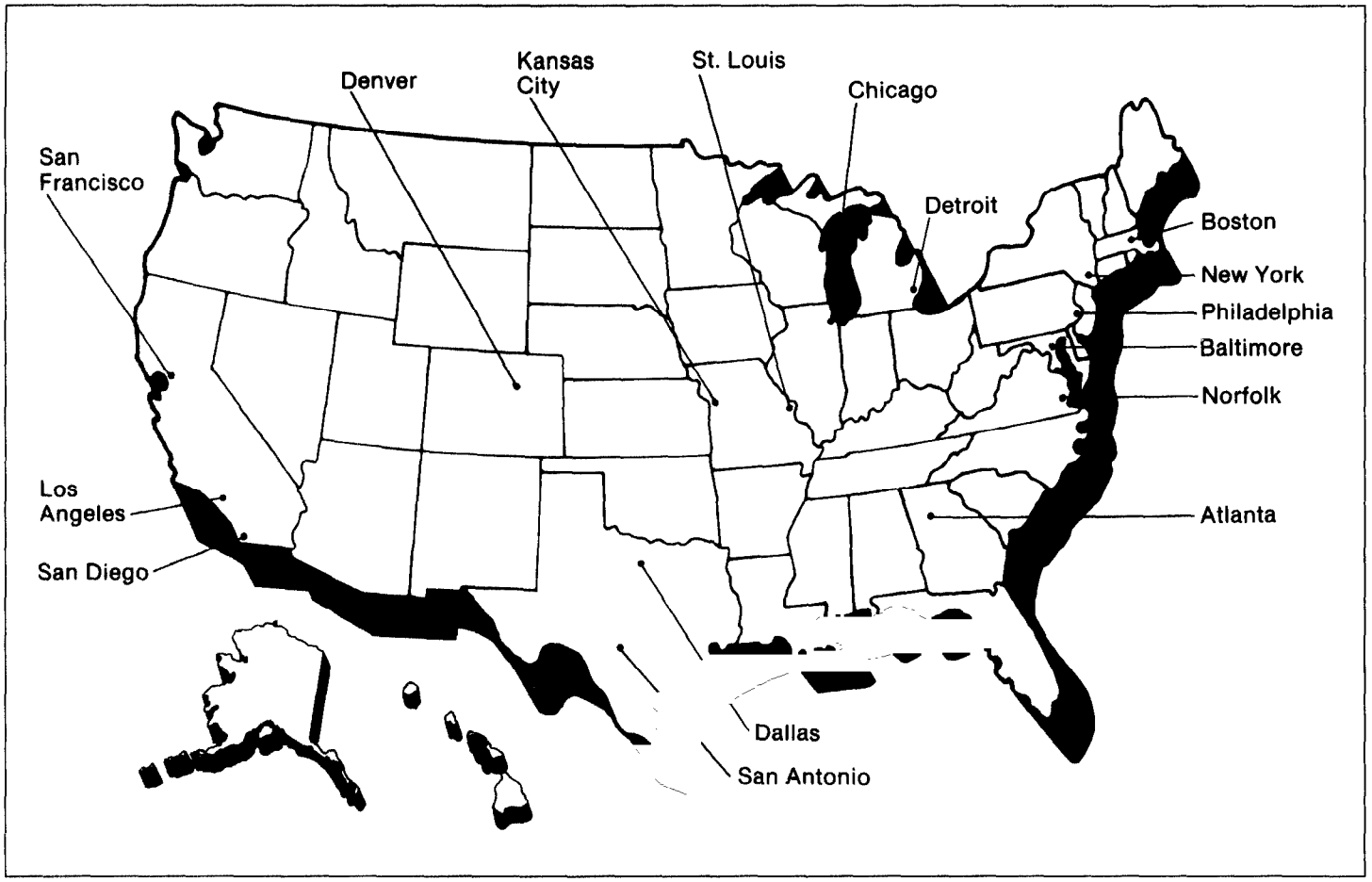


Table 1.1: Occupations Covered in Each MSA

	Occupations[a]										
MSA	CT	DT	EE	GA	IH	MC	RN	PH	PO	PN	TE
Atlanta	x	x		x	x	x		x		x	x
Baltimore	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		
Boston	x			x		x		x	x	x	
Chicago	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dallas	x		x	x	x		x	x		x	x
Denver	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Detroit	x	x				x		x	x		x
Kansas City	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Los Angeles	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x
New York	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Norfolk	x				x	x	x		x	x	
Philadelphia	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
St. Louis	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	
San Antonio	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	
San Diego	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
San Francisco	x		x	x		x	x	x	x		

[a]The occupations were clerk typist (CT), data transcriber (DT), environmental engineer (EE), general attorney (GA), industrial hygienist (IH), medical clerk (MC), registered nurse (RN), pharmacist (PH), police (PO), practical nurse (PN), and tax examiner (TE).

After the MSAs were chosen, we selected specific agencies (and subagency locations within them) in each MSA to receive the questionnaires—again on the basis of the number of employees in the 11 occupations. The subagency locations we identified were all in the following eight agencies: the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Departments of the Air Force, Army, Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor, Navy, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs (VA). Table 1.2 shows the agencies we surveyed in each MSA.

Table 1.2: Agencies Covered in Each MSA

MSA	Air Force	Army	Navy	EPA	HHS	Labor	Treasury	VA
Atlanta						x	x	x
Baltimore		x			x			x
Boston		x		x				x
Chicago				x	x	x	x	x
Dallas				x		x	x	x
Denver	x	x		x		x	x	x
Detroit							x	x
Kansas City		x		x			x	x
Los Angeles			x				x	x
New York				x	x	x	x	x
Norfolk			x					x
Philadelphia			x	x	x	x	x	x
St. Louis		x						x
San Antonio	x	x					x	x
San Diego			x					x
San Francisco				x				x

Although the occupations reviewed all had high quit rates nationally, there were instances in which the installations we visited had local quit rates for certain occupations that were below our high quit rate definition. To accommodate these cases, we administered a separate "low quit rate" questionnaire. Of the 271 questionnaires we administered, 199 were high quit rate questionnaires and 72 were low quit rate questionnaires. (See app. I for a more complete description of the survey and the methodology used.)

This study has several limitations that deserve emphasis. First, the quit rates generated from our approach cannot be compared to quit rates calculated in other studies. Our quit rates represent a compilation of all employees who resigned in 1987 and 1988; they do not describe the annual quit rates for either 1987 or 1988. The quit rates were calculated solely on the basis of those employees who were on board on December 31, 1986, tracking their status for a 2-year period ending December 31, 1988. The quit rates do not include employees who joined the federal government during the 2-year span and quit before the December 31, 1988 cut-off date. Although not absolute indicators of annual quit rates, the data are useful as comparative indicators of quit rates among occupations and agencies within the confines of the time period and quit rate definitions we used.

Second, our ability to determine the causes of recruitment and retention difficulties was limited by difficulties in contacting prospective and former federal employees. For example, to determine the reasons why employees left an occupation, the best approach would have been to survey former employees. However, difficulties associated with locating those former workers prevented that approach.[27] Nevertheless, the agency focal points we contacted instead of the employees who actually left were knowledgeable about the occupations surveyed and were the next best sources of information about why employees in those occupations come and go. Moreover, the focal points were the most appropriate source for perceptions of the effects of recruitment and retention difficulties, as most focal points were personnel officers or line managers who dealt with these issues on a daily basis.

Third, because of the judgmental sample used, the generalizability of the results is necessarily limited to the occupations, agency installations, and MSAs covered in our review. The General Schedule (GS), the largest federal white-collar pay system, encompasses over 400 occupational series; this study examined only 11 of those series. Likewise, the 16 MSAs included about 28 percent of all GS employees in the 338 MSAs in the United States.[28] Therefore, our findings cannot be projected to other occupations, agencies, and MSAs not covered in the review.

It should also be noted that, after the audit work was completed, legislation aimed at improving VA's ability to compete for nurses was signed into law. The new law (P.L. 101-366) restructures the pay system for VA nurses to allow locality pay and other monetary incentives. Therefore, some of the pay-related problems cited with regard to nurses at VA may soon be alleviated.

Given the immediacy of the congressional debate on these issues, we did not obtain written agency comments on this report. We did, however, discuss the results with representatives of each of the agencies involved in the study. They generally agreed with our findings and our conclusions. However, the agency representatives believed that the respondents may have understated the severity of operational problems

[27]We asked the agency respondents if they could provide reliable last addresses of the employees who left in 1987 and 1988 so we could conduct a verification survey. Although agencies are required to keep such information for 3 years, agency respondents said they doubted the accuracy of this information. We therefore decided not to contact former employees.

[28]As of March 31, 1989, 1,279,745 General Schedule employees were located in the 338 MSAs, ranging from 238,576 in the Washington, DC-MD-VA area to 7 in the Bristol, CT area. The 16 MSAs in our review included 362,617 General Schedule employees.

caused by recruitment and retention difficulties. Specifically, the representatives said that respondents may have been reluctant to admit reductions in service delivery or productivity at their agencies.

We did our work between August 1989 and June 1990 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Respondents' Perceptions of Causes of Federal Recruitment and Retention Conditions

In order to know how best to address federal recruitment and retention difficulties, it is first necessary to understand the extent of those difficulties and what caused them. As was discussed in chapter 1, a variety of factors can affect recruitment and retention in the federal government. Some of these factors may be positive inducements for current federal employees to stay in their jobs and for prospective employees to accept employment offers; other factors may have the opposite effect. In fact, a single factor may positively affect recruitment and retention of quality employees in some situations and have a negative effect in others.

Our questionnaire asked respondents to assess how important each of 17 factors was in causing employees to stay in or leave the particular occupations in question in their agencies and areas.[1] (For a list of these 17 retention-related factors, see app. II, question 2.) We also asked respondents to assess how important those same factors (as well as two additional factors specific to recruiting) were in prospective employees' decisions to accept or decline employment offers in these occupations in their agencies and areas. (For a list of these 19 recruitment-related factors, see app. II, question 16.) After completing the questionnaires, the respondents were asked why they responded the way they did and were asked to provide any documentation or examples available to support their answers.

In analyzing the questionnaire results, we first combined the respondents' answers for the high quit rate questionnaires and low quit rate questionnaires to produce an overall measure of the respondents' views on questions that were asked of both groups. We then separated and compared the responses from the high and the low quit rate questionnaires on those questions. We also separated and compared the answers of respondents reporting that their agencies did and did not have recruitment problems in the targeted occupations. Finally, we examined the respondents' answers by geographic area (with the 16 MSAs divided into high, medium, and low cost/pay areas) and by occupational category (with the 11 occupations divided into professional, clerical/technical, nursing, and police groups).

[1] As is discussed in appendix I, the questionnaire respondents were the 175 agency designated focal points for each of the 271 questionnaires. However, the term "respondents" as used in discussions of questionnaire tabulations refers to the questionnaires received relevant to that issue. Thus, for example, a statement that "50 percent of all of the respondents" responded a particular way refers to 50 percent of the 271 questionnaires, not 50 percent of the 175 focal points.

Pay and Job Availability Seen as Main Reasons to Leave or to Decline Federal Employment

Table 2.1 and figures 2.1 and 2.2 show the factors the questionnaire respondents most frequently said were reasons to leave federal employment and to decline employment offers in the occupations, agencies, and areas reviewed.

Table 2.1: Respondents Said Pay and Job Availability Were Primary Reasons to Leave and to Decline Federal Employment

Retention factors and percentage who said "reason to leave"	Recruitment factors and percentage who said "reason to decline"
Pay (78.3)	Pay (72.5)
Job availability (71.3)	Job availability (63.6)
Staffing (51.6)	Length of recruitment/hiring process (39.0)
Career opportunities (45.7)	Benefits (33.1)
Benefits (37.0)	Physical environment (31.2)
Physical environment (35.4)	Staffing (29.7)

Figure 2.1: Respondents Said Pay and Job Availability Were Primary Reasons to Leave Federal Employment

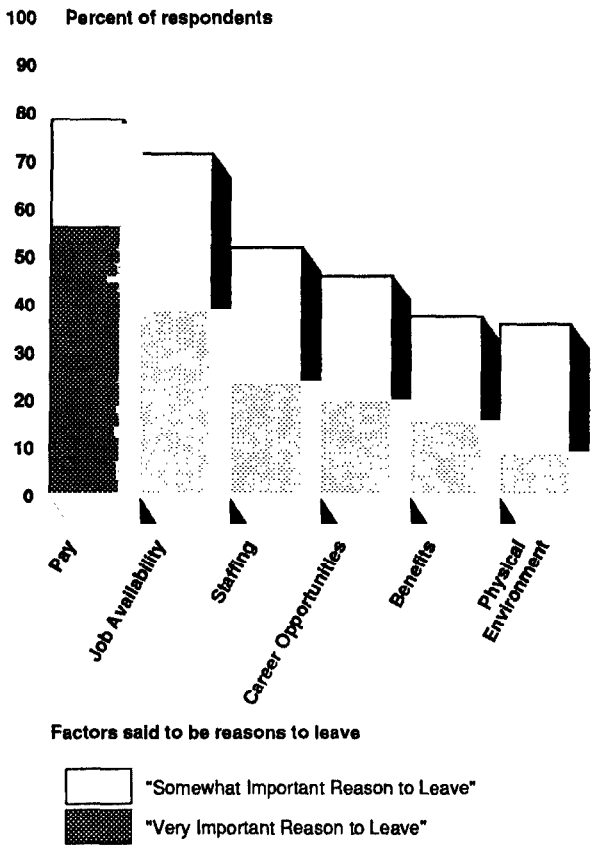
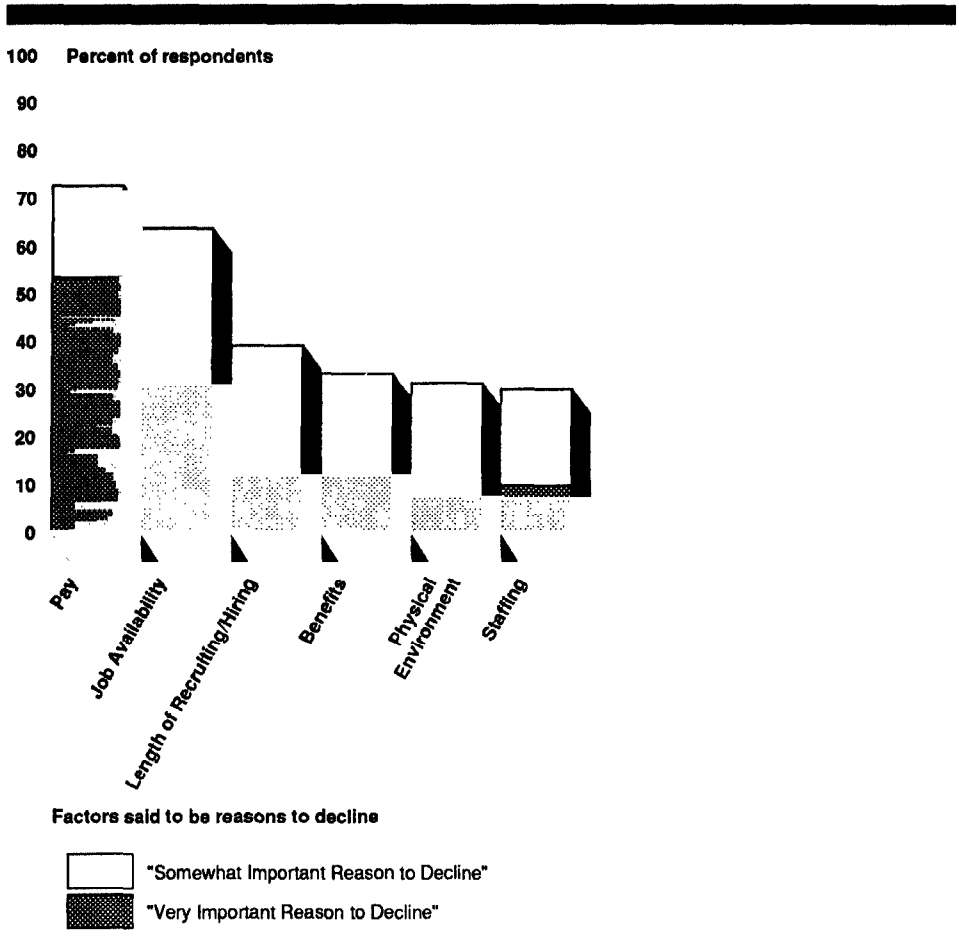


Figure 2.2: Respondents Said Pay and Job Availability Were Primary Reasons to Decline Federal Job Offers



Overall, the respondents said that two factors—federal pay compared to pay in the nonfederal sector and the availability of jobs outside the agency in the respondent's geographic area—were the most important reasons current federal employees leave these occupations and prospective employees decline employment offers. The other factors were of substantially less importance across all the occupations and areas, although some factors were more important for particular occupations.

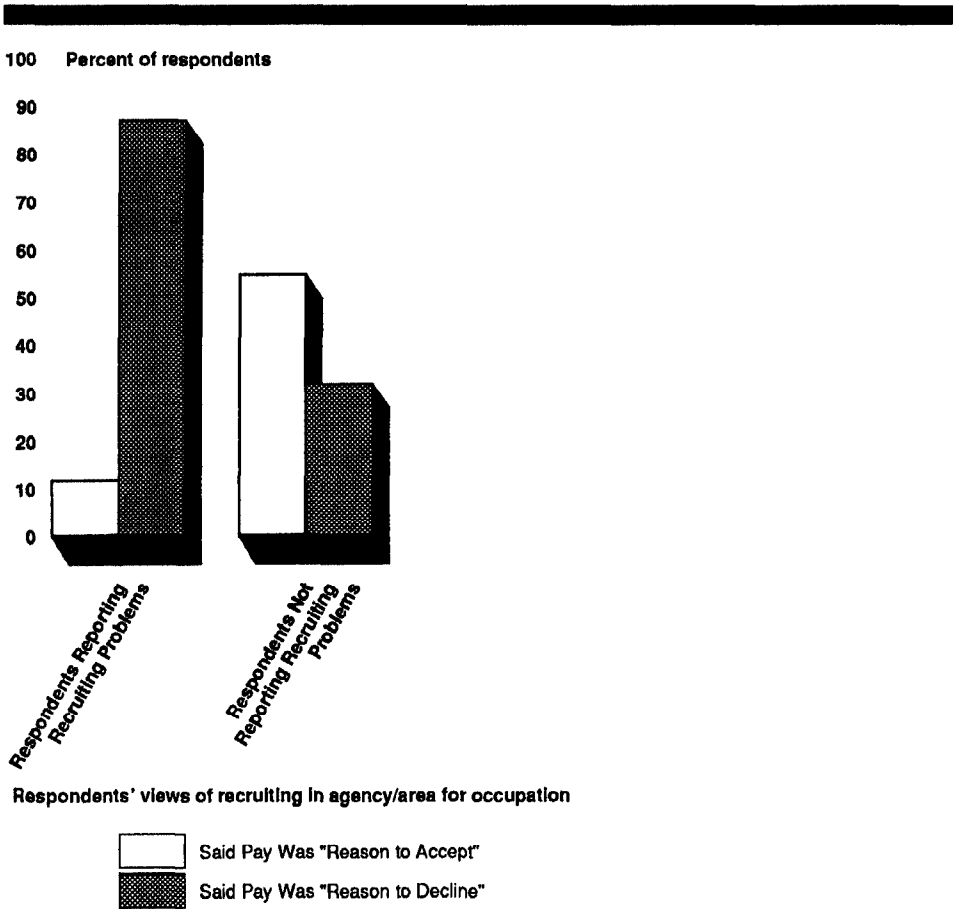
Pay Cited as the Most Important Reason to Leave or Decline Federal Employment

Over 78 percent of the respondents said that federal pay compared to pay in the nonfederal sector was either a "very important" or "somewhat important" reason to leave the jobs in question; nearly 56 percent said pay was a "very important" reason to leave. Pay was also the most frequently cited reason for declining federal job offers. Over 72 percent

of the respondents said pay was either a "very important" or "somewhat important" reason to decline; 53 percent said it was a "very important" reason to decline.

Both high and low quit rate respondents reported that federal pay compared to pay in the nonfederal sector was the most important reason to leave these federal jobs. However, respondents for occupations in agencies and areas where the quit rate was high were more likely to report that federal pay was a reason to leave (83.4 percent) than respondents where the quit rate was low (60.3 percent). About 74 percent of the respondents said they were having trouble recruiting new employees to at least some extent. These respondents said federal pay was a reason to decline federal employment much more often than respondents reporting little or no recruiting problems (86.9 percent versus 31.8 percent). (See fig. 2.3.) In fact, most of the respondents not reporting recruitment problems said federal pay was a reason to accept federal employment.

Figure 2.3: Respondents Reporting Recruiting Problems Most Frequently Said Federal Pay Was a Reason to Decline Federal Job Offers



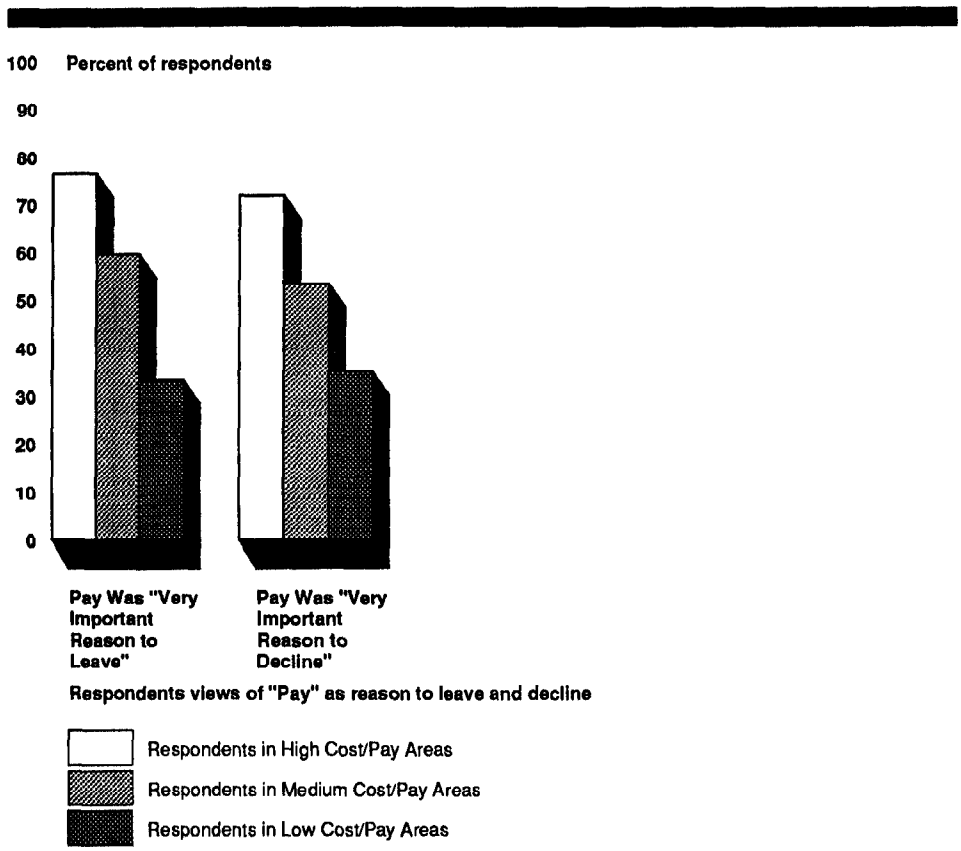
High Cost/Pay Area Respondents Most Frequently Said Pay Was the Cause of Recruitment and Retention Problems

There were also differences in the respondents' perceptions of the importance of pay to recruitment and retention across the geographic categories. In high and medium cost/pay areas, respondents overwhelmingly said federal pay was a reason to leave federal employment (90.6 percent and 83.5 percent, respectively); respondents in low cost/pay MSAs also said federal pay was a reason to leave, but to a lesser extent (62.2 percent). Likewise, federal pay was more frequently viewed by respondents in high cost/pay areas as a reason to decline federal employment (86.5 percent of respondents) than by respondents in the medium (77.9 percent) or low cost/pay areas (54.3 percent).

As shown in figure 2.4, differences in the respondents' answers across geographic areas were particularly evident when examining the most intense responses—the "very important" reason to leave or decline category. In the high cost/pay areas, about 75 percent of the respondents

said pay was a "very important" reason to leave (76.5 percent) or decline (71.9 percent) federal employment, compared to less than 60 percent of the respondents in medium cost/pay areas and about 33 percent of the respondents in low cost/pay areas.

Figure 2.4: Respondents in High Cost/Pay Areas Most Frequently Viewed Federal Pay as "Very Important" Reason to Leave and Decline Federal Employment

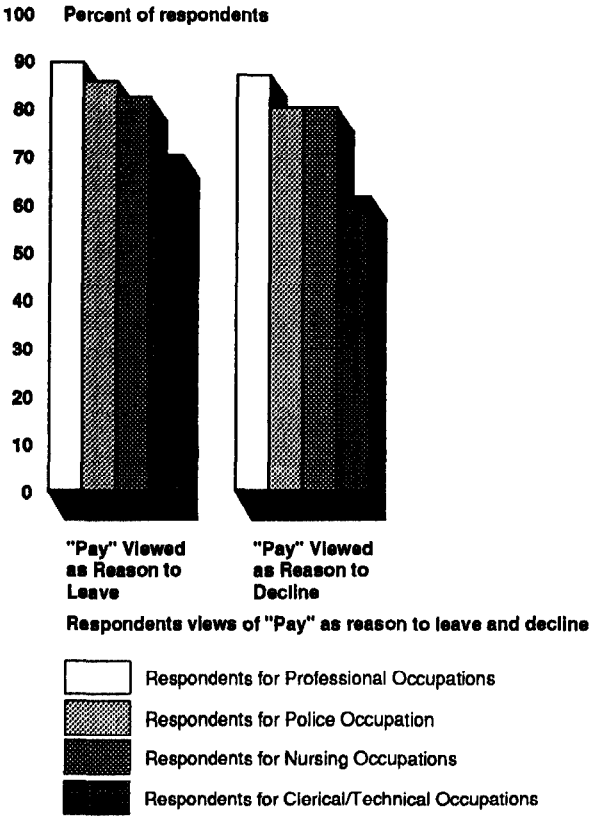


The differences between the geographic areas were especially striking when comparing individual MSAs. For example, in the San Antonio MSA (a low-cost/pay area), over 75 percent of the respondents said federal pay compared to nonfederal pay was a reason to stay in federal employment or that it had no effect on stay/leave decisions. In the San Diego and San Francisco MSAs (high cost/pay areas), none of the respondents said pay was a reason to stay in federal jobs; all the respondents said federal pay was a reason to leave, and nearly 75 percent said it was a "very important" reason to leave.

Respondents for Professional Occupations Most Frequently Said Pay Was a Reason to Leave or Decline Federal Employment

There were also differences in the respondents' views of the importance of pay to recruitment and retention across the occupational categories, although the differences were not as great as across the geographic areas. (See fig. 2.5.) Nearly 90 percent of the respondents for the professional occupations said pay was a reason to leave and a reason to decline a federal job; about 70 percent of the clerical/technical respondents said pay was a reason to leave, and about 60 percent said it was a reason to decline. Responses for the police and nursing occupations fell between those for professional and clerical or technical occupations.

Figure 2.5: Respondents for Professional Occupations Most Frequently Viewed Federal Pay as a Reason to Leave and to Decline Federal Jobs



Respondents Provided Many Examples of Federal/Nonfederal Pay Gap

When asked to explain why they believed federal pay was a reason to leave and to decline federal jobs, the respondents provided numerous examples of the nonfederal sector paying more than the federal government for the same jobs and related these pay gaps to their recruitment and retention problems. Federal/nonfederal pay disparities were cited

by respondents in virtually every geographic area surveyed and for almost all the selected occupations.

- Boston EPA officials said that four of the attorneys who left their agency during 1988 and 1989 accepted positions at private law firms paying from $50,000 to $80,000. Their federal salaries had been $39,501 and $43,452.
- The Dallas IRS district counsel noted that an attorney had resigned from the IRS after receiving an offer of $70,000 a year (a 50 percent pay increase) and was expected to earn over $100,000 a year within 5 years. The IRS respondent said that law students turn down IRS employment offers because other firms pay starting salaries of $10,000 to $20,000 a year more than IRS can pay under the General Schedule.
- The IRS General Counsel in Los Angeles said entry-level (GS-11) attorneys are paid approximately $28,000 to $30,000 a year, and, over time, can progress to the GS-14 level paying approximately $48,000 a year. In contrast, he said private sector firms in Los Angeles offer entry-level salaries of about $45,000 a year and pay attorneys with responsibilities equivalent to the GS-14 level approximately $70,000 to $80,000 a year.
- Documents provided by the IRS office in New York showed that New York state and local governments and the private sector paid substantially more for attorneys than the federal government. For example, in 1987 the federal government paid GS-11 level attorneys in New York $27,172 a year. At the same time, the New York city government paid entry-level attorneys $34,691, and the average New York City law firm offered $48,000. At the GS-13 level, the federal government paid $38,727; New York City paid $44,111; and the average law firm paid $65,000.
- The IRS regional counsel in Philadelphia told us that their office had just lost a General Merit (GM) -15 special trial attorney to a private employer who doubled his pay.
- An EPA official in Denver said that attorneys who come to work at EPA are usually dedicated to environmental causes and thus are willing to accept lower government salaries. However, after a few years the pressures of family expenses and other monetary realities cause many to leave. He said that attorneys making about $40,000 at EPA could make as much as $75,000 in the private sector.
- An IRS official in San Francisco said that, in contrast to a federal starting salary for attorneys of about $30,000 a year, the private sector starting salary in San Francisco is in the $60,000 to $70,000 range.
- An official at the Naval Facilities Engineering Command in Philadelphia said that journeymen environmental engineers at the GS-12 level earn

about $36,645 in the federal government; in the private sector in Philadelphia, he said, they could earn over $20,000 more. The official said "[t]his office has been reduced to a training ground. We hire good but inexperienced personnel, train them, only to lose them in 1 or 2 years to higher paying outside jobs."

- An August 1988 internal memo from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) New York Regional Office said pay was the single most important reason for industrial hygienists to quit; the memo said they stood to gain $10,000 to $15,000 a year by moving into the private sector. An OSHA management officer told us one hygienist left to work for the state of New Jersey, increasing the hygienist's salary from $42,000 a year to $60,000 a year. Nine out of 10 declinations of job offers at OSHA's Queens Area Office could, according to agency officials, be traced to the low salary offered, commuting costs, and low benefits. At the time of our visit, three industrial hygienist positions had been vacant for over 18 months. The officials said that individuals responding to job advertisements often declined further consideration when the salary structure was explained to them.
- The chief of pharmacy at the Boston Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) told us that salaries for newly graduated pharmacists were $7,000 to $15,000 a year higher at chain drug stores and other hospitals in Boston than at VA, where the entry-level salary was $32,121.
- According to a 1987 special salary rate review, low pay was a cause of recruitment problems for pharmacists at VA in Chicago. According to the review, local drug stores paid newly-hired pharmacists $12,000 to $13,000 a year more than VA rates allowed.
- A San Francisco VA official said the starting salary for pharmacists at the VAMC (with special rates) was $38,713 a year, and the top rate (after 15 years) was $47,819 a year. At two nearby private hospitals the starting salary was $51,730 a year. In the 5-month period prior to our visit, the VAMC lost seven pharmacists while managing to hire one. The VA official said VA serves as a training ground for the private sector.
- In 1988, 366 of the IRS Brookhaven (New York) service center's data transcribers quit for nonfederal government positions. In an IRS telephone survey of 294 of its former employees, 46 percent told IRS they quit because of inadequate pay.
- An official at the Philadelphia Naval Electronics Systems Command said more and more of their clerk typist losses were "quits for pay." The official said private sector positions paid $10 to $15 an hour in 1989, compared to the Navy's $6.74 an hour.
- Nineteen of 45 tax examiners at the IRS Philadelphia service center left during 1987 and 1988 to accept positions in the private sector. Agency officials said all left for comparable higher-paying jobs.

- A March 1988 Philadelphia Naval Shipyard special rate request stated that the Command Security Department had experienced a 38-percent attrition rate for its police officers as a "direct result of disparaging difference in pay and benefits." A March 1988 pay study by the Shipyard and two other agencies indicated that average pay for nonfederal security/police officers in the area with similar duties was more than 58 percent higher than average federal police officer pay. From 1980 to 1988, the shipyard had six chiefs of police, all of whom left for higher paying positions. An assistant chief left to take a higher paying position as a local township patrolman.
- A Leavenworth VA official told us that "it is embarrassing to tell (police) applicants what we are offering as a salary. Existing staff are embarrassed by advertisements in the paper because the pay is so low." He added that "employees in this occupation cannot support their families due to the low pay."
- In exit interviews at the VA hospital in St. Louis, some departing officers said local police and private security guards earn $6,000 to $7,000 a year more than what VA paid. VA officials said that the hospital's average on-board strength in 1989 was 27 police officers; of these, 22 left for higher paying jobs.
- According to March 1990 salary information compiled by Navy officials in Norfolk, starting salaries for police recruits in the Norfolk MSA ranged from $18,180 to $20,983 a year while the Navy was offering entry-level police recruits in Norfolk from $11,897 to $14,573 a year.
- VA data on salaries for the police occupation in Detroit showed that entry-level salaries at VA for the same level of work trailed other employers by nearly 25 percent. According to a VA official in Detroit, all seven of the police officers who quit between May 1988 and April 1989 did so because of pay; one reportedly quit because he was able to make more money "flipping burgers."
- The chief of police and security service at the Bedford, Massachusetts, VA hospital said that rookie police officers' base pay in a nearby town was as much as his own salary (about $28,000 to $29,000 a year).
- According to a 1987 special rate application for practical nurses at the Boston VAMC, the average entry-level salary for VA practical nurses was $3,000 a year lower than in other area hospitals. The application noted that 20 of the 28 quits between September 1, 1986, and September 1, 1987, were for pay. A 1988 VAMC special rate application noted that 14 of 16 practical nursing quits between June 30, 1987, and June 30, 1988, were for pay.
- In a 1989 salary survey of hiring rates for practical nurses at 37 hospitals in the Atlanta area, the Atlanta VAMC ranked last.

- At the Kansas City VA hospital, 22 of 28 registered nurse losses from April 1988 through March 1989 were quits for pay; 20 of 24 practical nurse losses from July 1988 through June 1989 were quits for pay; and 12 of 14 pharmacist losses in another 12-month period were quits for pay.
- A 1988 special salary rate review done by 11 federal agencies for registered nurses in Chicago showed that the federal/nonfederal wage gap increased with the level of job experience. For example, federal registered nurses with no prior work experience made about $2,000 a year less than nonfederal nurses. At 1 year of experience the difference was almost $3,000, and at 3 years the difference was nearly $4,000. The same widening of the gap by experience level was also apparent in regard to clerk typist salaries in the Chicago area.
- According to a VA official in Los Angeles, recruiters from other medical facilities in the area offered nurses up to $4,000 hiring bonuses and salaries of up to $30 an hour as of January 1990. VA salaries in the Los Angeles area, with special rates, were $15.67 to $21.85 an hour as of January 1990.
- According to two nurse recruiters, entry-level registered nurses at the Bronx and Brooklyn VAMCs earned $28,072 a year at the end of 1989. Local competitors paid starting salaries of $32,760 to $35,500 a year. A 1989 Bronx VA memo stated that one-third of the registered nurses who resigned said pay was the reason they left; all but one left for similar positions at higher pay.

Availability of Other Jobs Also Important to Recruitment and Retention

The availability of jobs outside the agency in the respondents' geographic area was the factor cited by the respondents as second in importance to pay as a reason to leave federal employment and to decline a federal job offer in these occupations. Over 71 percent of the respondents said the availability of jobs outside their agencies in their areas was either a "somewhat important" or "very important" reason to leave; over 63 percent said it was a reason to decline a job offer.

Like federal pay, the respondents' perceptions of the importance of the availability of other jobs as a reason to leave or to decline varied across the geographic areas. Over 80 percent of respondents in high cost/pay areas viewed job availability in their areas as a reason to decline federal employment, compared to just over 45 percent of respondents in low cost/pay areas. For example, respondents in the San Antonio MSA—where the local economy was depressed at the time of our review—

more commonly said job availability was a reason to stay with the federal government and to accept a federal job offer.[2] In the interviews, several of the San Antonio respondents referred to the area's economic decline and tight labor market.

Most respondents, however, said the availability of nonfederal work was a reason to leave. In explaining their answers, a number of these respondents cited examples of how the availability of nonfederal jobs adversely affected federal recruitment and retention.

- According to a VA official in the New York MSA, and as documented in the VA special salary rate request for pharmacists, the steady expansion of retail store pharmacies, other hospital-based pharmacies, and large pharmacy chain stores in the New York area created a competitive job market for pharmacists. The official said a number of VA pharmacists resigned to work in chain pharmacies.
- According to a special rate request for clerical occupations in the Chicago area, "private employers have largely absorbed what quality clerical candidates there were in the job market with the residue being attracted to the federal government as the 'employer of last resort'—a cliche that is alive and well in Chicago today." One agency representative said, "We're getting the splinters off the bottom of the barrel."
- The chief of classification at the Hines VAMC in Chicago said that when unemployment rates are high, Hines tends to get much better quality applicants. The official quipped that "what is really needed is a good multi-year recession to staff up positions with good quality applicants. Recessions do wonders for (federal) recruitment."
- According to a VA personnel specialist, the Atlanta VAMC competes for nurses and other medical staff against approximately 40 hospitals and a number of nursing homes within commuting distance of the VAMC. He said the VAMC loses approximately 20 percent of its practical nurses to just four of these hospitals each year because of their proximity to the VAMC, their pay rates, and their reputation for quality health care.
- Competition for nurses in the Philadelphia area was also intense, according to the VA. A VA official told us that there were 129 hospitals accredited by the American Hospital Association within the Philadelphia area. Whenever another facility had an available position, VAMC officials said their practical nurses left.
- The chief of the Dallas VAMC's nursing service estimated there were 8 to 10 job openings for every registered nurse in the Dallas area.

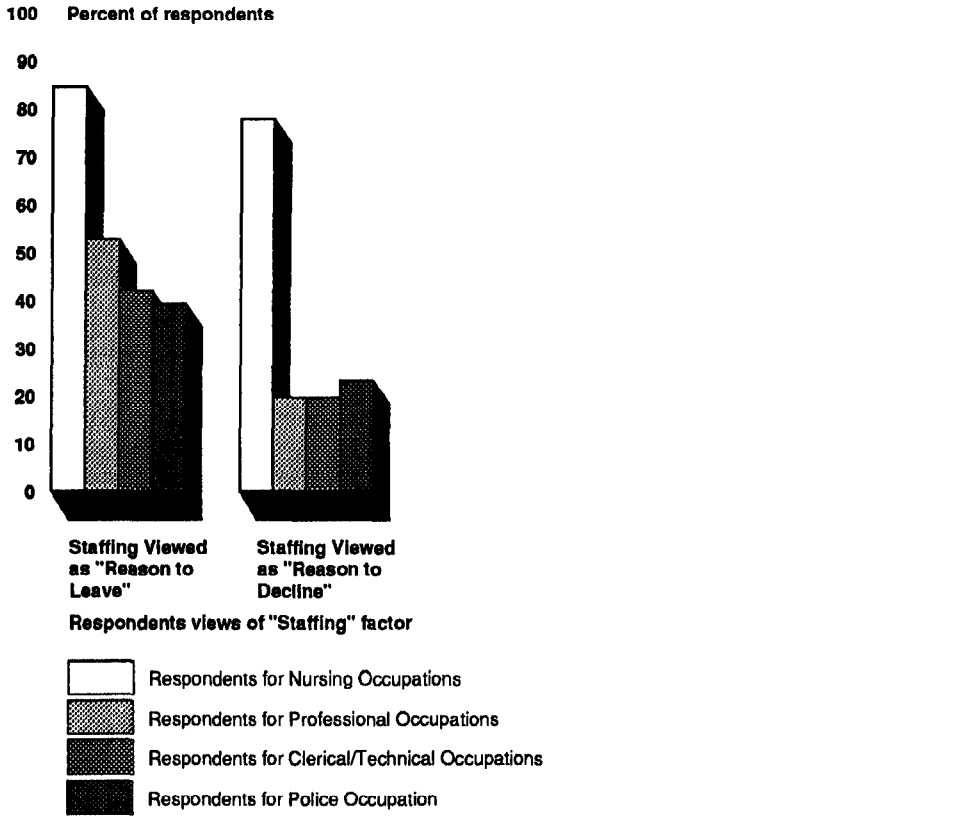
[2]As noted in app. I, the follow-up interviews were done between December 1989 and May 1990.

In some instances, the availability of nonfederal jobs was a byproduct of government requirements. For example, an EPA respondent for the environmental engineer occupation in New York noted that legislative mandates require EPA to implement an expanding, more sophisticated capability for hazardous waste clean up and minimization. The respondent said that continued growth of the private sector in these areas "will be an increasing source of competition for EPA in its recruiting of entry-level environmental engineers and in attracting EPA's senior-level environmental engineers and managers."

Respondents for Nursing Occupations Said Understaffing Is the Most Important Reason to Leave or to Decline

After pay and job availability, other factors were generally considered to be less important reasons to leave or to decline federal employment. However, certain factors were seen as especially important for certain occupations. For example, respondents for the nursing occupations said the "staffing" factor (i.e., the number of staff assigned to handle the work load) was the most important reason to leave federal jobs (outstripping even federal pay) and was the second most important factor to decline federal job offers. (See fig. 2.6.) Nearly 85 percent of the respondents for the nursing occupations said staffing was a reason to leave federal employment, compared to between 40 and 53 percent of the respondents for the other occupational categories. The difference between the nursing occupations and the other occupational groups was even greater on the recruitment questions. Nearly 80 percent of the respondents for the nursing occupations said staffing was a reason to decline federal job offers, compared to about 20 percent of the respondents for the other occupational categories.

Figure 2.6: Respondents for Nursing Occupations Most Frequently Viewed Staffing as a Reason to Leave and Decline Federal Employment



The importance of staffing to recruitment and retention in the nursing occupations was made clear through the examples cited in the subsequent interviews. For example, a respondent for the nursing occupation at the Leavenworth VA hospital said that "the lack of competitive salary. . . for LPNs leads to staffing shortages. This shortage adds to the pressures on the remaining staff. . . [and] subsequently the existing staff leave due to the compounded pressures." Other respondents cited the following specific examples of federal understaffing:

- At the St. Louis VA hospital, a nursing respondent said the patient-to-staff ratio was 30 to 1 on some floors; the respondent said that in other St. Louis-area hospitals the patient-to-staff ratio was 6 to 1.
- At the Boston VAMC and the Bedford (Massachusetts) VA hospital, respondents for the practical nurse occupation said federal understaffing was a "very important" reason for practical nurses to leave and to decline

federal jobs. According to respondents at the Boston VAMC, 31.2 percent of the authorized practical nurse positions at the medical center were vacant at the end of 1989—considerably higher than the statewide average. According to an agency official at the Bedford hospital, authorized practical nurse positions were cut from 523 in 1988 to 432 in 1990.

- In exit interviews with nursing staff leaving in 1987 from the Hines VA hospital in Chicago, nearly 70 percent said staffing at the hospital was either fair or poor. According to the nurse recruiter at Hines, practical nurses at VA facilities end up doing more and getting paid less than their counterparts at nonfederal facilities.

Although less frequent overall, staffing difficulties were also cited as important reasons for recruiting and retention problems in some locations for other occupations.

- An EPA official in New York said their office had 50 environmental engineer vacancies. The official said that this situation contributed to frustration, leading to even more turnover.
- An OSHA official in New York said 30 percent of the agency's industrial hygienist positions were vacant at the time of our interview; the regional administrator attributed this to the agency's inability to offer salaries comparable to those in the private sector. The OSHA official said each hygienist is expected to handle 40 inspections a year, which the official termed a "tremendous work load." He said this work load was expected to grow because of the AIDS epidemic and other health issues such as repetitive motion disease.
- At the Boston VAMC, the chief of pharmacy said the number of pharmacists had been cut because of budget reductions, but the work load had not changed. The chief of pharmacy said many pharmacists there felt that if they must "work like mad" they may as well take better paying jobs in the private sector. A pharmacist in Los Angeles stated in her exit interview that her job required a 60-hour work week to fulfill her responsibilities. Other pharmacists commented in their October 1988 exit interviews that the workload was "heavy" and that there was "never enough help."
- The Bronx VAMC chief of medical administration told us that medical clerks get "burned out" handling the work load caused by constant vacancies. This, in turn, reportedly causes more turnover. The official said medical clerks are often asked to cover two positions at one time and, as a result, experienced clerks are often overworked, frustrated, and suffer from low morale.
- Officials at the Los Angeles VAMC said clerk typists in their Personnel Employment and Records Section must serve approximately 800 to 900

employees. They said this work load was two to three times what was normal for clerk typists in the Section. The officials said this work load and the associated stress were contributing factors to these employees leaving VA and seeking less stressful jobs.

Other Factors Also Seen as Important to Federal Recruitment and Retention

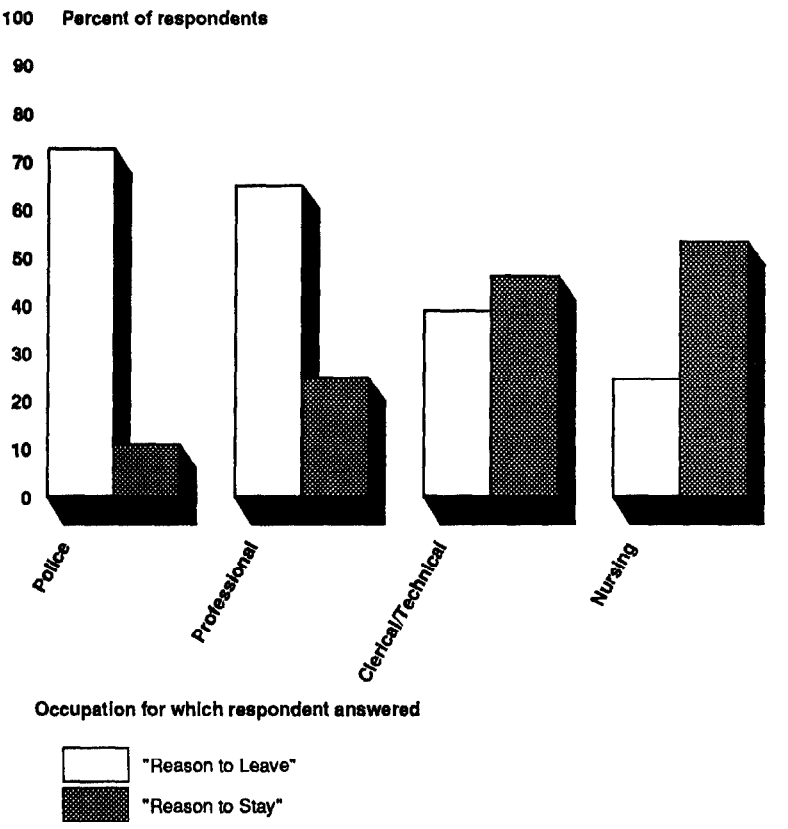
The respondents said that several other factors were important to federal recruitment and retention, although their perceived importance was not nearly so widespread as pay, job availability, and staffing. Nevertheless, a large portion of the respondents (though not necessarily the majority or even a plurality) believed they were important to understanding federal recruitment and retention difficulties.

Career Advancement Opportunities

In some instances, respondents saw certain factors as important for either recruitment or retention, but not both. For example, nearly 46 percent of the respondents said the factor "career advancement opportunities available" was a reason to leave federal employment; however, this factor was generally not viewed as a hindrance to recruitment. In fact, career advancement opportunities were among the strongest perceived reasons for accepting a federal job. (See table 2.2 below.)

There were strong differences across the occupational categories regarding the perceived importance of this factor to federal retention. (See fig. 2.7.) About 65 to 70 percent of the respondents for the professional and police occupations viewed career advancement as a reason to leave federal employment. Conversely, respondents for the clerical/technical and nursing occupations generally viewed career advancement as a reason to stay in federal jobs.

Figure 2.7: Respondents for Professional and Police Occupations Most Frequently Viewed Career Advancement as a Reason to Leave Federal Employment



In explaining their answers, several respondents for the professional and police occupations noted the short career paths in those fields.

- A Social Security Administration (SSA) official in Philadelphia said that attorneys have little opportunity to go beyond the GS-12 level and, as a result, leave after 5 years for higher pay.
- An IRS official in New York said their "constant attrition problem" for attorneys at IRS was "due mainly to non-competitive salaries and lack of promotional opportunities being offered to attorneys by the IRS in the New York area." The official provided statistics which showed that of the 23 attorneys hired from October 1984 to February 1986, only 3 were still with the office at the end of 1989; of the 23 attorneys hired in November 1986, only 8 remained at the end of 1989. The official went on to say that "it is anticipated we will lose a good number of the 1987 hires during 1990, as well as some of the remaining 1986 hires." He said

their attorneys see "limited, and sometimes no area, for advancement as attorneys within IRS."

- A VAMC personnel manager in Atlanta said the average pharmacist at the medical center does not advance beyond GS-11 because very few supervisory positions exist at GS-12.
- Respondents for the police occupation at the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia and the Naval Sea Systems Command in Philadelphia said that the occupation has a very limited career track. A U.S. Mint official said that police officers can only advance to the GS-6 level without assuming supervisory responsibilities; because few such opportunities exist, the officers leave.

Length of Recruitment/Hiring Process

Although the length of the federal recruitment and hiring process is commonly considered an impediment to recruitment, about the same number of respondents (about 40 percent) said the process had "no effect" as said it was a reason to decline a federal job offer. However, those respondents who said it was a reason to decline commonly said prospective employees find other employment while waiting to hear from federal agencies and cited numerous examples of the lengthy federal hiring process:

- An EPA personnel official in Dallas estimated that it takes about 3 months to get an attorney on board, partly because of the extensive interview process. Candidates must be interviewed by the regional counselor, the deputy, and branch chiefs before an offer can be made.
- OSHA officials in New York said that the recruitment and hiring process for industrial hygienists takes from 2 to 4 months, including a complete physical, which takes about 6 weeks to coordinate.
- An OSHA official in Atlanta reported that the lengthy hiring process causes them to lose some industrial hygienist recruits. The official said it takes as long as 3 months to fill an industrial hygienist vacancy because all applicants must apply and be certified on an OPM register.
- An official at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital in the Norfolk area reported that industrial hygienist applicants the hospital can afford to hire were usually entry-level college graduates who needed a job and often accepted the first offer they received. The official told us that the federal government's lengthy hiring process made it hard for them to make offers before candidates receive offers from the private sector.
- Army officials in Baltimore said it can take as long as 6 months from the time of selection to the time a clerk typist reports for duty if a security clearance is involved.

- According to a Manhattan (New York) VAMC official, the lag time for filling a medical clerk (typing) vacancy from an OPM register averages 167 to 170 days.

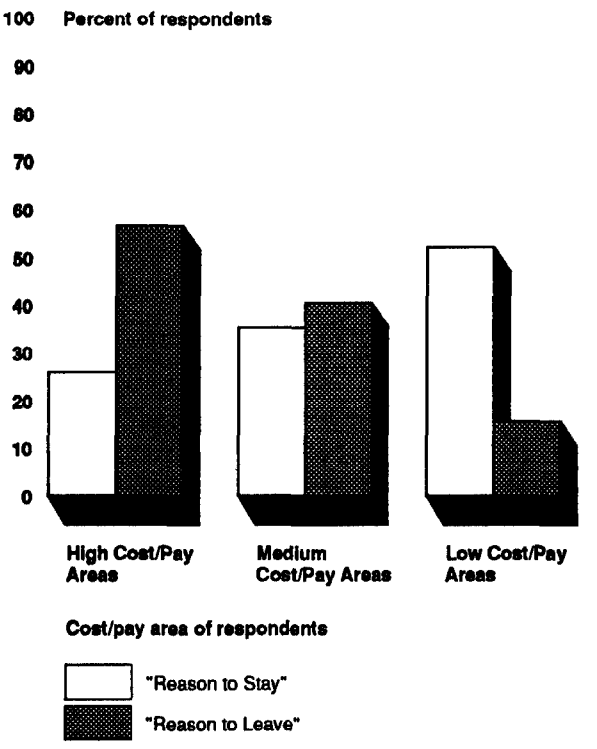
Employee Benefits

A number of the respondents viewed the federal employee benefits program (leave, health insurance, retirement, etc.) as a reason to stay in current federal jobs (38 percent) and to accept a federal job offer (50 percent). (See table 2.2 below.) However, another group of respondents said benefits were a reason to leave (37 percent) and to decline federal jobs (33 percent). This apparent contradiction seems to exist because of the respondents' differing views on specific elements of the benefits program.

While federal annual and sick leave were usually viewed by the respondents in the follow-up interviews as at least equal to nonfederal leave, federal health and life insurance benefits were frequently seen as inferior and therefore a reason to leave or decline federal jobs. Several respondents reported that federal health benefits had "eroded" or "gotten worse" over the past several years. Singled out for particular criticism were high employee premiums and inadequate hospitalization coverage.

There were substantial differences in the perception of benefits as a reason to leave federal jobs or decline federal job offers between respondents in the various subcategories. For example, respondents in high cost/pay areas were much more likely to view benefits as a reason to leave federal jobs (56.5 percent) than respondents in low cost/pay areas (15.6 percent). (See fig. 2.8.)

Figure 2.8: Respondents in High Cost/Pay Areas Most Frequently Viewed Benefits as a Reason to Leave Federal Employment



There were also differences in the perception of "benefits" across the occupational categories. Respondents for the nursing and professional occupations were more likely to view federal benefits as a reason to leave federal jobs and to decline federal job offers than respondents for the clerical/technical or police jobs. Also, high quit rate respondents most frequently said federal benefits were a reason to leave, whereas low quit rate respondents most commonly said they were a reason to stay.

In the follow-up interviews, the respondents described the negative effect federal benefits had on recruitment and retention as follows:

- The EPA human resource manager in New York said private sector benefits were more generous than federal benefits, which contributed to their loss of environmental engineers. The manager said the private sector offered environmental engineers in New York a better choice of employer paid health plans and were given other perquisites, including a company car, bonuses, and profit sharing plans.

- The chiefs of pharmacy services at three of the VAMCs in the New York area said private sector benefits for pharmacists were superior to federal benefits and included paid health insurance with dental and optical coverage or lower employee co-payments, free life insurance, a shorter work week, paid professional association dues, retention bonuses, and substantial tuition reimbursement.
- At the Army National Guard in Boston, an agency official said federal employees paid a much higher premium for health insurance than other employees in the Boston area. He said private sector employees in the area generally paid from 0 to 15 percent of the cost of health insurance premiums. He noted that health premiums were especially burdensome for individuals in low paying jobs, such as clerk typists.
- According to VAMC officials in Los Angeles, the private sector offered registered nurses in Southern California a number of benefits and incentives the VAMC did not offer, including free 12-hour night child care; free maid service for 1 year; free hospitalization, life insurance, and dental coverage; and van pool transportation.

Physical Environment

Another factor some of the respondents said adversely affected federal recruitment and retention was the work site's physical environment (defined in the questionnaire as the attractiveness of the work setting and the availability of support equipment). Over 35 percent of the respondents said the physical environment of these federal jobs in these locations was a reason to leave, and over 30 percent said the factor was a reason to decline an offer of employment. Respondents with recruiting problems were more likely to view the physical environment of the workplace as a reason to decline (nearly 40 percent) than were respondents without such problems (just over 10 percent). There were also differences by occupational category, with respondents for the nursing occupations most likely to view physical environment as a reason to leave.

In the subsequent interviews, the respondents cited several examples of why the physical environment was viewed as a negative recruitment and retention factor.

- The personnel chief of the Kansas City EPA said the agency's environmental engineers work in the basement of the building where there are ventilation problems, no windows, and leaks. The personnel chief said these conditions cause employees to leave and creates a poor image of the agency for potential recruits.
- An OSHA official in New York said industrial hygienists work in small, cramped offices and lack the proper personal protective equipment to

ensure workplace safety. The official said these factors negatively affect employee morale and agency recruitment efforts.

- At one Army installation in Baltimore, agency officials reported that clerk typists have left because of the poor working conditions. During the summer months, they said, one building becomes infested with bird lice that bite employees. An Army official said that some of their buildings were constructed during World War I and were meant to last only 18 months when originally built.
- An agency official at the Bedford (Massachusetts) VA hospital said that medical clerks work in unattractive wards where psychiatric patients routinely wander in and disturb them. The official said one clerk typist left during her first week because of the physical environment.
- In exit interviews with nursing staff at the Hines VAMC in Chicago in 1987, 16 of 26 nurses said the availability of equipment and equipment maintenance were "poor." The chief of classification at the Hines VAMC said that although they realized that one way to attract and retain registered nurses was to offer access to state-of-the-art equipment, they were forced to spend a significant portion of their operating budget on training and overtime because of the recruitment and retention problems. Thus, they are caught in a catch-22 dilemma—they can't afford a possible solution to the problem because the symptoms of the problem are so expensive.
- A nursing respondent at the Kansas City VA said that the "bleak surroundings" in the 50-year old VA facility were easily noted by applicants during tours, which "turns potential employees off immediately." The respondent said "who wants to work in this type of environment when they can go across town to a fairly new hospital?"

Job Security Viewed as Primary Reason to Stay in or Accept Federal Employment

Not all the news about recruitment and retention in the federal government was bad, however. Many of the respondents said certain elements of federal employment were positive inducements for recruitment and retention. Table 2.2 and figures 2.9 and 2.10 show the factors the respondents most frequently said caused employees to stay in federal jobs and applicants to accept a federal job offer.

Table 2.2: Respondents Said Job Security Was the Primary Reason to Stay in and Accept Federal Employment

Retention factors and percent who said "reason to stay"	Recruitment factors and percent who said "reason to accept"
Job security (78.7)	Job security (84.8)
Training opportunity (45.7)	Career opportunities (57.6)
Content of work (38.6)	Benefits (50.2)
Career opportunities (38.6)	Training opportunity (49.4)
Benefits (38.2)	Content of work (43.5)

Figure 2.9: Respondents Said Job Security Was the Primary Reason to Stay in Federal Employment

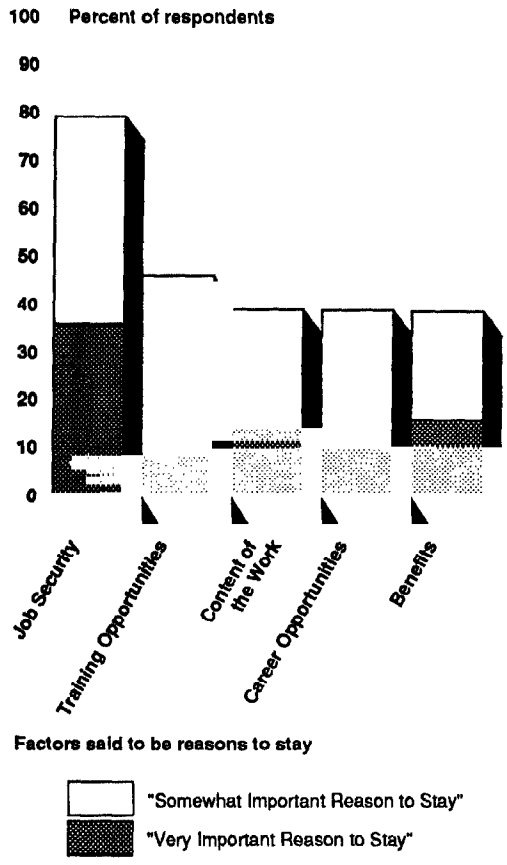
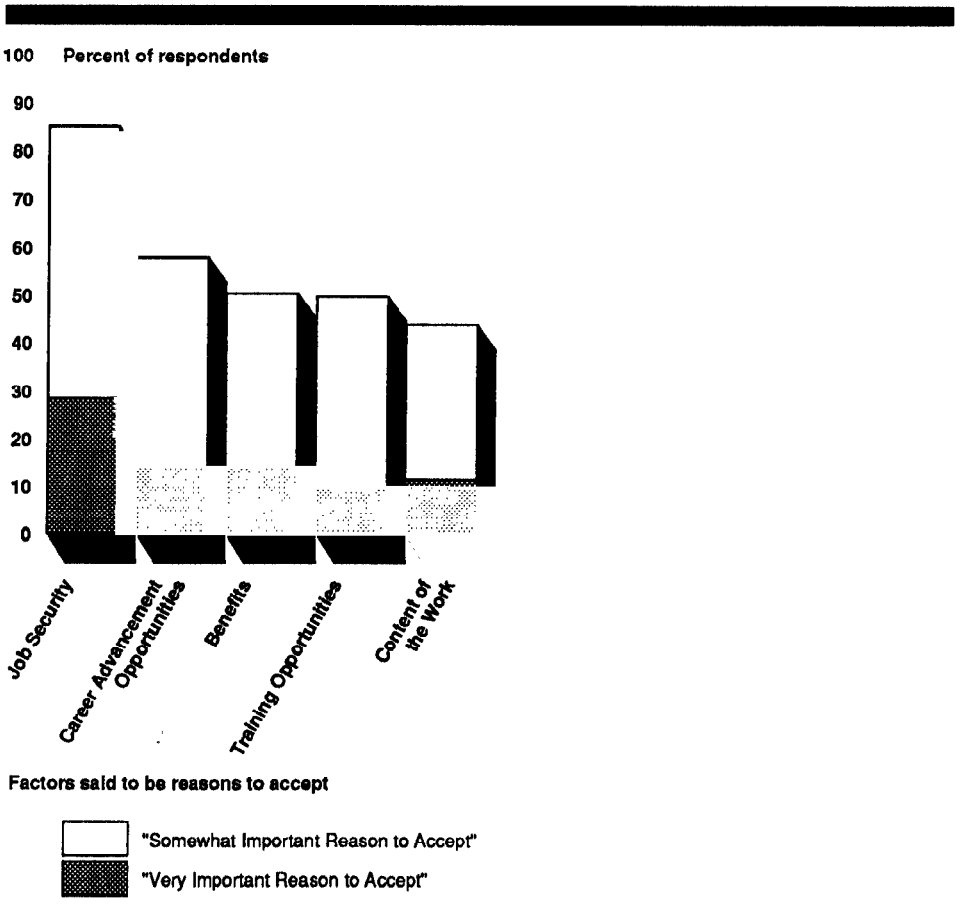


Figure 2.10: Respondents Said Job Security Was the Primary Reason to Accept Federal Job Offers



Respondents' perceptions of the factors represented a definite hierarchy. Overall, the respondents most frequently considered federal job security (defined as the stability of the government as an employer) as a positive factor for both federal recruitment and retention. All the other factors, though considered relevant, were much less frequently cited as reasons to stay in or accept federal employment.

Job Security Most Frequently Viewed as Reason to Accept and Keep Federal Jobs

Nearly 80 percent of the respondents said job security was a reason to stay in federal jobs, outdistancing all other factors by over 30 percentage points. An even larger percentage of the respondents—nearly 85 percent—said federal job security was a reason to accept a federal job offer. There were no substantial differences in the responses between the occupational or geographic groups or between those with and without recruitment or retention problems.

In the follow-up interviews, agency respondents commonly said employees are attracted to and stay in the federal government because they believe the federal government is a more stable employer than most nonfederal employers. Also noted was that federal employees are protected from summary dismissal by standard procedures and appeal rights, unlike some employees in the private sector. The following examples illustrate the importance the respondents accorded to federal job security:

- An IRS official in Detroit noted that the agency is considered a secure employer because it has never had a reduction in force. One official at the Atlanta VAMC said they had not had a mass layoff in 15 years. Similarly, officials at Ft. Meade, Maryland, said employees feel their jobs are secure since they have not had a reduction in force since 1973.
- EPA line managers in Dallas said engineers became more concerned with job security when the oil bust left many engineers unemployed.
- Naval Environmental Health Center officials in Norfolk said that job security was very important to industrial hygienists because they were usually not recent college graduates and were looking for a stable career. One official said that, unlike in the private sector, there was no pressure on their employees to retire.
- An Air Force official in San Antonio said federal job security was an important reason for clerk typists to accept a federal job offer and to stay with the federal government because the private sector is a more "free-hire and fire" environment, particularly with the depressed economy in the San Antonio area.
- According to the personnel officer at the VA regional office in Detroit, the economic situation in Detroit and Michigan as a whole has made local and state government jobs less secure than clerk typist positions in the federal government.
- Two VAMC nurse recruiters in New York said nurses in private and community hospitals fear being dismissed with no more than 2 week's notice, whereas VA procedures protect them from being fired on the whim of a supervisor.

Federal Training Opportunities Are a Reason to Accept and Stay in Federal Jobs—for a While at Least

A number of the respondents said that federal training opportunities were a reason to accept a federal job offer (49.4 percent) and to stay in federal jobs (45.7 percent). This was particularly true for respondents for the nursing and professional occupations. Several respondents described the types of training that would cause a job applicant to choose the federal government.

- OSHA officials in Atlanta said each industrial hygienist goes through a 3-year training program at the agency's training institute before becoming a full-performance hygienist.
- At the Naval Environmental Health Center in Norfolk, each industrial hygienist has an individual training plan and a training goal of 64 hours a year.
- Attorneys at IRS in New York receive 8 weeks of formal training, which IRS officials said was a major incentive for applicants to accept employment.
- Environmental engineers in Philadelphia are provided extensive formal and informal training in environmental laws and regulations along with tuition reimbursement for job-related college courses.
- The chief of security at the Hines VAMC in Chicago said they offer every entry level police officer 40 hours of VA training, 12 weeks of training the Chicago police receive, as well as post-entry training.

A respondent for the general attorney occupation at IRS in New York said

"... marketable experience is still the key in recruiting from law school graduating classes. And there is no doubting the experience. While we ask for a four-year commitment (which we recognize is unenforceable in law), a private practitioner, particularly associated with a major firm, will still be carrying a partner's briefcase when not doing research in the firm's library on his/her fourth anniversary; in the Office of Chief Counsel, that same individual would have compiled an impressive resume of Tax Court Trial work..."

However, many of the respondents noted that the presence of federal training opportunities is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it can help recruit workers who may lack job-related training and experience; on the other hand, that same training can be the gateway to nonfederal employment. The Los Angeles Federal Executive Board and the College Federal Council for Southern California called this phenomenon the "revolving door syndrome:"

"'[w]e recruit them, hire and train them, and they are gone to a local government or private position which is more advantageous to them.' Thus [the] [f]ederal government becomes a publicly supported training center for employees who have no choice but to seek better paying jobs in order to find a reasonable standard of living."

Numerous examples of this "revolving door" pattern were cited by the respondents in the follow-up interviews across all the occupational categories.

- According to the EPA human resources officer in Chicago, EPA has not had trouble recruiting for the environmental engineer occupation, but there has been high turnover in the occupation. The EPA official said engineers are eager to work with the EPA because 3 to 5 years of experience and formal training are valuable for career advancement in the private sector. One suburban waste management firm in the private sector hired so many engineers away from EPA they were jokingly referred to as "EPA West." The official said EPA has become a government subsidized training program for the private sector. A similar "revolving door" pattern was reported at EPA in New York.
- The OSHA regional administrator in New York said the agency has invested thousands of dollars in training each industrial hygienist, only to lose them to private industry after they spend 1 to 3 years with the federal government.
- Although the personnel officer at the VA regional office in Detroit believed training was an important reason for clerk typists to stay with the agency, the officer noted that such employees often leave the federal government once they become trained. The official said the situation will probably get worse as the demand for quality typists increases.
- A former tax examiner supervisor for IRS in Detroit said the state of Michigan used an automated tax collection system similar to that used by the IRS. She said many tax examiners transfer to the state once they are trained by the IRS since pay levels and benefits are better in Michigan state government than in the federal government.
- The chief of security at the Hines VAMC in Chicago said that he viewed himself as a "doormat" because so many police recruits reaped federal training benefits and then left for better jobs.
- According to agency officials, registered nurses and practical nurses in New York's VAMCs participate in a variety of training experiences, including a 110 hour intensive care unit course for registered nurses. They said this training makes the nurses very marketable. It is not uncommon, they said, for nurses to work at a VA hospital for 2 years, receive valuable hands-on and formal training, and then leave for better paying jobs.

Federal Career Advancement Opportunities Aid Clerical Recruitment and Retention—but in Different Occupations

Career advancement opportunities, although previously noted as a reason to leave federal jobs, were also viewed by some of the respondents as a positive feature of federal employment, with 38.6 percent saying they are a reason to stay in federal jobs and 57.6 percent saying they are a reason to accept federal employment offers.

Strong differences existed across the occupational categories. For example, about half of the respondents for the nursing and clerical/technical occupations said career advancement opportunities were a reason to stay with the federal government. Conversely, just over 10 percent of the respondents for the police occupation and less than 25 percent of the respondents for the professional occupations said career advancement was a reason to stay in federal jobs.

For clerical/technical occupations, though, the respondents said that it was not career advancement in those particular occupations that was relevant so much as the possibility of advancement into other federal occupations.

- Officials at Ft. Meade in Baltimore indicated that the career opportunities for clerk typists were limited at that installation, but other federal agencies provided such opportunities. Therefore, they said applicants will take a clerical job at Ft. Meade to get into the federal government and then move to better paying positions. Officials at the Baltimore VAMC said this was also true with regard to medical clerks, who viewed their jobs as a stepping-stone to get into government employment.
- According to an IRS personnel official in Dallas, tax examiners use their positions as stepping-stones to other IRS positions with greater career advancement opportunities (e.g., IRS revenue officer). As evidence of that career path, an IRS recruiting survey in Denver found that of the 79 respondents who said the position of tax examiner was their first job, only 51 were still tax examiners.
- According to officials at the Customs Service in New York, clerk typists can move into customs aide, inspector, or input specialist positions within the agency. They said employees use the clerical occupations as a stepping-stone to other positions within the agency.
- Respondents at VA and Army in Kansas City noted that clerk typists can cross over into other occupations where the full-performance level is higher and there are more promotional opportunities. The chief of recruiting and two staffing specialists cited themselves as examples in that they started with the Corps of Engineers as clerk typists and moved through the ranks to their current positions.

- In Boston, respondents who said career advancement opportunities were a reason for clerical employees to stay or accept a job offer also said their agency promotes from within or has an upward mobility program. At Ft. Devens, for example, an agency official told us that it is not unrealistic for clerks to work their way up to GS-11 positions or higher.
- Respondents for the clerk typist occupation at all of the agencies reviewed in San Antonio indicated that opportunities for advancement to other positions were an important reason to stay even though opportunities within the clerk typist occupation were minimal.

Certain Federal Benefits Seen as Federal Recruitment and Retention Incentives

As noted previously, a number of the respondents said parts of the federal employee benefits program, particularly annual and sick leave, were a positive feature of federal employment (38.2 percent reported that benefits were a reason to stay in federal jobs, and 50.2 percent said they were a reason to accept a federal employment offer). The respondents' views differed across the geographic and occupational categories. Respondents in low cost/pay areas were about twice as likely to consider benefits a reason to stay and a reason to accept a federal job offer than respondents in high cost/pay areas. Respondents for clerical and technical jobs were most likely to view benefits as a reason to stay or accept federal jobs; respondents for professional jobs were least likely to view benefits as a retention or recruitment incentive.

Examples cited by respondents of why federal benefits were viewed positively included the following:

- Respondents for the nursing occupations at the VA hospital in San Antonio said federal leave benefits were better than such benefits in the private sector. They also noted that employees with longer service under the civil service retirement system would be well served to stay with the federal government and avoid losing the opportunity to retire at a reasonable age and pay rate.
- Respondents for registered nurses at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital in the Norfolk area indicated there were more positive than negative aspects in the federal government's benefits package. Advantages cited included the more flexible use of federal annual and sick leave compared to the private sector, as well as the Thrift Savings Plan portion of the FERS retirement system.
- The Manhattan VAMC personnel officer said federal health insurance and leave benefits were reasons for police applicants to accept federal employment, because some security guard agencies offered no benefits to their employees.

Some officials said that even though they believed federal benefits were a reason for prospective employees to accept federal employment, they also believed federal benefits were eroding.

Professionals and Nurses Cite Content of Work as Reason to Stay in/Accept Federal Jobs

The content of the work in the selected occupations and agencies was also frequently viewed as a positive inducement for federal retention and recruitment (38.6 percent reported work content as a reason to stay, and 43.5 percent said it was a reason to accept an offer). Again, though, there were strong differences across the occupational categories in the importance accorded this factor. Over three-quarters of the respondents for the professional occupations and over half of the respondents for the nursing occupations said the content of the work was an important reason to stay in federal jobs or accept a federal job offer. However, only about 18 to 30 percent of the respondents for the clerical/technical and police occupations viewed the factor positively.

Examples of why work content was viewed positively by respondents for the professional and nursing occupations include the following:

- SSA officials in Baltimore said attorneys view the complexity and variety of their work and job autonomy as being positive features of federal employment.
- An EPA official in Boston said attorneys come to work at EPA to work "on the cutting edge of environmental law." Likewise, environmental engineers are drawn to EPA and the Naval Facilities Engineering Command in Philadelphia because, in the words of officials at those agencies, they are on the "cutting edge of the environmental field." EPA officials in Philadelphia said their attorneys like working for EPA because they are involved in interesting and challenging environmental law issues such as toxic waste control.
- IRS officials in Philadelphia and New York said their general attorneys find tax work very challenging. New York officials said their attorneys sometimes handle billion-dollar accounts and complex cases. The Philadelphia officials also noted that the attorneys can develop expertise in tax law and are given a great deal of courtroom experience.
- An Army respondent for the attorney occupation in St. Louis stated that, while their attorneys could make more money outside the agency, they liked what they were doing, the work atmosphere, the team work, and the regular hours, which all helped to keep them in the agency.
- Officials at the Army Health Services Command in Baltimore said the work content was a positive feature of federal employment for industrial hygienists because of the challenge of dealing with a variety of

hazards on a daily basis. These views were echoed by officials at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital and the Naval Environmental Health Center in Norfolk and at OSHA in New York. OSHA officials in New York said their hygienists are provided a wider range of work experiences than in the private sector, where industrial hygienists are often limited to one issue area.

- Nurses in the VA hospital in St. Louis told us that, although they could readily obtain work outside the VA, they stayed because of the people they work with and a sense of commitment to veterans.
- Respondents for the nurse occupation at the VA hospital in San Antonio said the work was very challenging since it is a primary-care facility and is affiliated with a university hospital, which provides new methods and unique cases.
- The Bronx VAMC nurse recruiter said the content of the work for nurses was a "very important" reason to stay with the federal government. She noted that the center is decentralized, which affords the nurses greater autonomy, independence, and responsibility.

As with some of the previous factors, the content of federal work, although commonly viewed as a positive feature, can also inadvertently lead to the loss of experienced workers. For example, an OSHA official in Philadelphia noted that industrial hygienists receive invaluable work experience because they are given the opportunity to work on a variety of subjects. This, though, makes them very marketable to private sector firms.

Several Factors Reported to Have No Effect on Federal Recruitment and Retention

Several of the factors listed in the questionnaire were commonly viewed by the respondents as having no effect on the stay/leave decision or the decision to accept or decline federal employment. "Travel required in job" was seen by over 80 percent of the respondents as having no effect on recruitment or retention. Agency officials told us that most of the occupations in our review have little or no travel requirements.

On the basis of earlier studies, we expected two factors, the portability of the FERS retirement system and the reputation or image of the federal government, to affect federal recruitment and retention across all occupations. However, the respondents said they had little effect in the occupations and agencies surveyed. For example, over 60 percent of the respondents said the portability of FERS had no effect on either retention or recruitment. This lack of effect may be explained in part by the fact that only about 20 percent of the employees on board as of December 31, 1986, were FERS employees. Some officials told us it was too soon to

evaluate the effect of FERS on employees and applicants. They also said retirement benefits have little effect on accept/decline or stay/leave decisions of younger applicants and staff. In contrast, an official at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital said that the traditional Civil Service Retirement System had kept older industrial hygienists from leaving, even though they could make more money in the private sector.

Respondents' Perceptions of the Effects of Recruitment and Retention Difficulties

While it is important to determine the causes of recruitment and retention difficulties, an equally important concern is the extent to which these difficulties affect agency operations. For each occupation in our survey, in each MSA and agency, we asked the respondents with high quit rates and those who reported recruiting difficulties in the selected occupations to describe the extent to which these difficulties led to reduced service delivery, increased training costs, increased recruiting costs, upper-level people doing lower-level work, increased contracting costs, increased overtime pay, and reduced productivity.

As tables 3.1 and 3.2 and figures 3.1. and 3.2 show, at least 81 percent of the respondents with retention problems (high quit rates) reported having six of the seven operational problems to some extent or more (indicated as "Total percent with problem" in the table). Similarly, for respondents who reported recruiting difficulties in these occupations, the corresponding responses for these six problems were all over 83 percent. The seventh potential operating problem—increased contracting costs—was cited as a problem by about 20 percent of respondents reporting either retention or recruitment problems.

Table 3.1: Respondents Reported Operational Problems Created by Retention Difficulties

Operational problem	Percent of respondents reporting the problem to "Some/moderate extent"	Percent of respondents reporting the problem to "Great/very great extent"	Total percent with problem
Reduced service delivery	29.8	55.0	84.8
Reduced productivity	36.8	51.6	88.4
Upper-level people doing lower-level work	33.5	53.4	86.9
Increased training costs	35.8	55.3	91.1
Increased recruiting costs	29.8	56.5	86.3
Increased overtime pay	30.4	51.3	81.7
Increased contractor costs	10.5	8.9	19.4

Table 3.2: Respondents Reported Operational Problems Created by Recruitment Difficulties

Operational problem	Percent of respondents reporting the problem to "Some/moderate extent"	Percent of respondents reporting the problem to "Great/very great extent"	Total percent with problem
Reduced service delivery	40.2	50.3	90.5
Reduced productivity	41.7	49.2	90.9
Upper-level people doing lower-level work	39.2	50.8	90.0
Increased training costs	39.2	45.7	84.9
Increased recruiting costs	35.7	52.3	88.0
Increased overtime pay	30.2	52.8	83.0
Increased contractor costs	14.1	8.1	22.2

Figure 3.1: Respondents Reported Operational Problems Created by Retention Difficulties

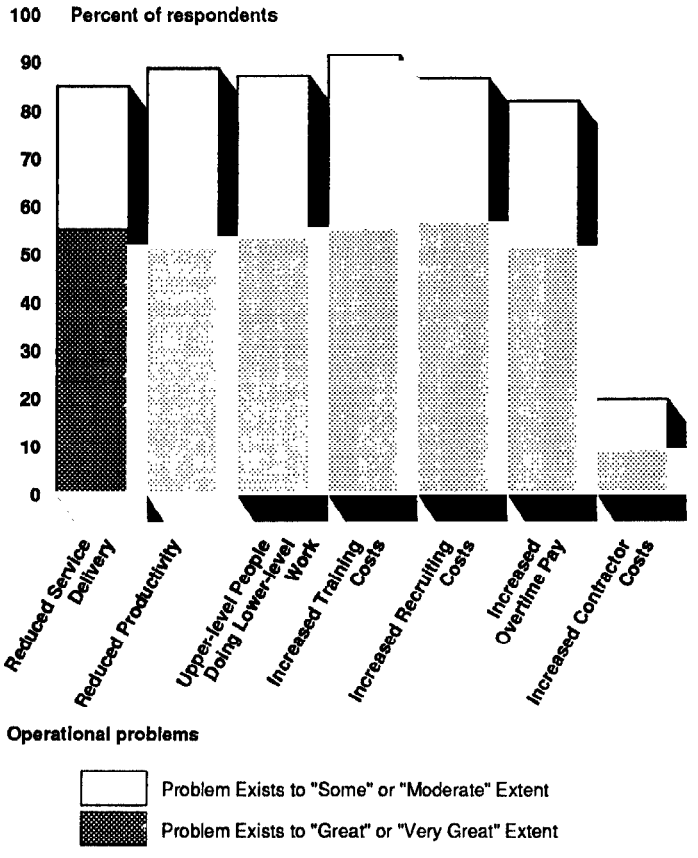
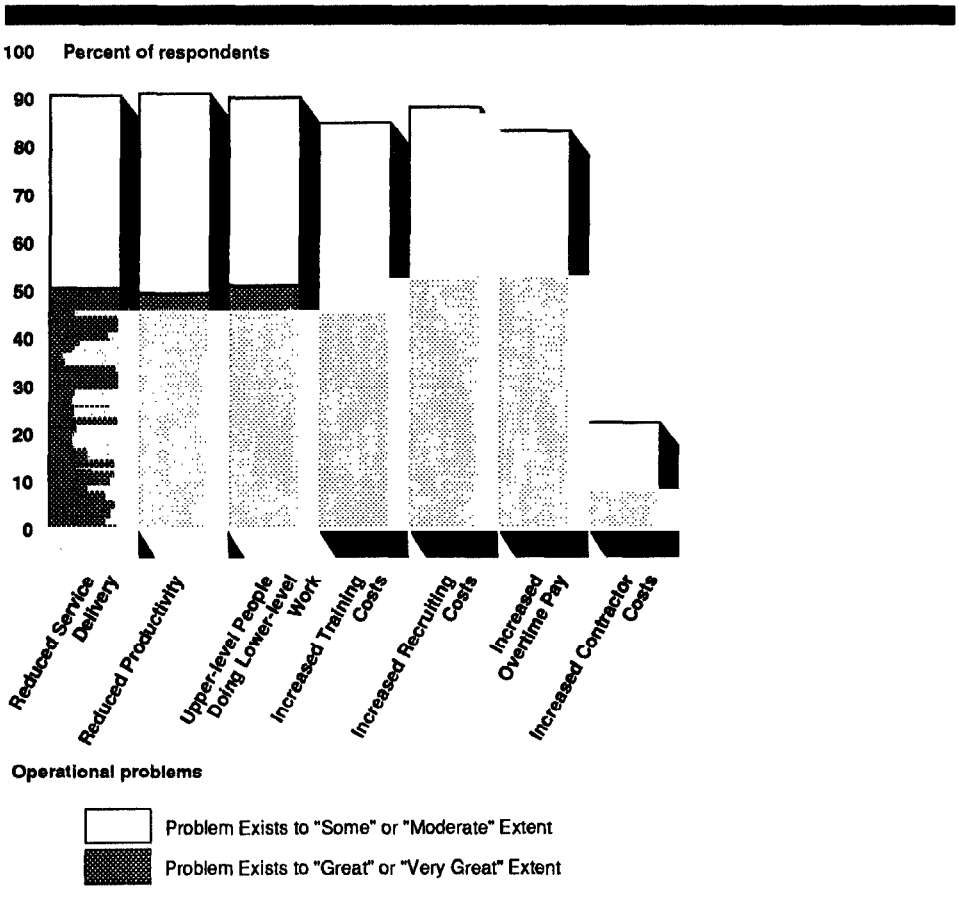


Figure 3.2: Respondents Reported Operational Problems Created by Recruitment Difficulties



The intensity of the responses indicates these problems are not minor nuisances for the respondents. For each of the six frequently mentioned operational problems, about half the respondents with recruitment and/or retention difficulties said the problems existed to a "great" or "very great" extent.

With the exception of the contracting cost problem, there were very few differences in the respondents' views of the operational problems within the recruitment and retention categories across the problems or between the most intense responses. For example, all of the six major retention problems were seen by the respondents as a problem to "some extent" or more within a 10-point range—from 81.7 to 91.1 percent. The "great extent" or "very great extent" responses varied even less—from 51.3 percent to 56.5 percent. Neither were there substantial and consistent

differences between the cost/pay groupings or occupational categories on the prevalence of these effects (again with the exception of increased contractor costs).

Despite the apparent pervasiveness and perceived intensity of these operational problems, the respondents said neither they nor their agencies systematically collected or maintained documentation of their effects. As officials in Atlanta said, they never had a need for such data so they never collected it. Other respondents said they were too busy trying to do their work to document why they could not do the work. Most of the evidence of operational effects that we collected was therefore drawn from respondents' recollections. In some cases, agency special pay rate requests provided documentation of the respondents' statements. We did not verify the respondents' recollections or the documents they provided.

Many Respondents Noted Reductions in Service Delivery and Productivity From Recruitment and Retention Problems

Three of the operational problems listed in the questionnaire—reduced service delivery, reduced productivity, and upper-level people doing lower-level work—are essentially variations on a single theme: reduction in the agency's ability to carry out its mission effectively and efficiently.

About 85 percent of the respondents with retention problems in the targeted occupations said those problems had caused reduced service delivery, reduced productivity, and upper-level people to do lower-level work. Over 90 percent of respondents with recruitment problems said those difficulties had caused all three operational effects. Most of the time respondents said that the operational problems had occurred to a "great" or "very great" extent.

Agency officials we interviewed after they completed the questionnaire cited numerous examples of reduced service delivery, productivity losses, and upper-level staff doing lower-level work caused by recruitment and retention problems.

- According to a 1988 special rate request for IRS in New York, the agency had been unable to retain working-level attorneys. An IRS official said that when their attorneys resign, the caseload is turned over to another attorney who is usually unfamiliar with the work. As a result, he said, the case may be mishandled. The special rate request also noted that it takes a minimum of 3 to 4 years experience to learn to make quality examinations of estate tax returns. However, the request indicated that 36 of the 57 estate tax attorneys in the District had less than 3 years

experience. The request noted that ". . . returns that are being prepared by the most sophisticated tax practitioners and corporate fiduciaries in the nation are being examined by our mostly inexperienced staff. They will miss issues with significant potential tax yield."

- Similarly, a respondent for IRS in Dallas said he believed the government had lost tax revenue because the heavy attorney workload meant bankruptcy cases were not pursued.
- An IRS official in New York said upper-level attorneys often worked on relatively simple cases left behind by attorneys who quit. The official said these upper-level attorneys become disgruntled because they feel overqualified to handle such cases.
- An EPA official in Chicago said turnover among environmental engineers reduced service delivery to a "very great extent" because it created a lack of continuity on complicated, long-term projects. Such turnover was also said to be very disruptive in meeting critical milestones on those projects. Similarly, an official in the Naval Facilities Engineering Command in Philadelphia said high turnover and the prevalence of new employees on hazardous waste disposal projects often resulted in missed production deadlines or putting projects on hold indefinitely.
- The EPA human resource manager in New York told us that, although services were being provided, it took longer to provide them due to environmental engineer recruitment and retention problems. He also said the number and quality of facility inspections and the number of environmental permits granted decreased.
- According to Department of Labor officials in New York, industrial hygienist recruiting difficulties caused a substantial case backlog and a reduction in the quality of their work. As a result, complaints had been answered informally, and no inspections had been done to detect unreported violations in industries with high numbers of violations in the past. The OSHA regional administrator said their recruitment and retention problem had directly affected their ability to fulfill the agency's mission effectively and efficiently. He said the Queens and Manhattan Area Offices were far behind their program goals at the time of our review because of severe staff shortages.
- An OSHA official in Chicago said turnover among industrial hygienists had reduced service delivery because the agency was required to respond to specific complaints before doing inspections targeted to industries with high numbers of past violations. The official said few targeted inspections were done because of the complaint workload. OSHA inspections were therefore merely reactive and were not able to prevent

problems from developing. The official also said that reduced productivity occurred because an experienced hygienist was required to accompany recently hired hygienists on plant visits, meaning that two people were doing a job that one trained person could have done alone.

- An OSHA respondent in Dallas also said she believed that industrial hygienists were conducting fewer health inspections as a result of retention problems.
- VAMC pharmacy service chiefs in New York said that pharmacist staffing shortages and turnover had resulted in reduced timeliness of services to veterans (3-hour waits at certain outpatient prescription windows, 2-day delays in filling prescriptions, and severe backlogs in the prescription mail-out program—sometimes resulting in double prescription refills). Staffing shortages and turnover had also affected inpatient activities, with patients frequently receiving their medications late. A January 1989 special pay request noted that staffing shortages caused charting and follow-up care of veterans to be "grossly affected."
- The respondent for the pharmacist occupation at the Leavenworth VA told us they had suffered reduced service delivery to a "great extent" because of not being able to fill orders on a timely basis, resulting in a backlog of work and increased patient complaints. A 1988 pharmacist special rate application at that facility indicated the pharmacist staffing problem had forced the hospital to only partially implement a medication program in its psychiatric building, leading to less timely and effective inpatient services. A 1989 special rate application at the same hospital noted that the pharmacy staffing problem had negatively affected the outpatient program, increasing the time outpatients had to wait for prescriptions and preventing pharmacists from counseling patients on proper use of medications.
- The pharmacy chief at the St. Louis VAMC said that retention problems resulted in lowered quality review and accuracy oversight, a backlog of work, delays in providing services, and complaints from patients. The overall result was, according to the pharmacy chief, a heightened risk of increased errors and substandard care being provided to the veterans.
- The Bronx and Brooklyn VAMC chiefs of pharmacy said that supervisory pharmacists often had to help in distributing prescriptions, which precluded them from doing their own work such as projecting and ordering needed supplies. The Bronx chief estimated that upper-level pharmacists spent 30 to 90 percent of their time doing lower-level work.
- The assistant chief of pharmacy at the VAMC in Atlanta said new pharmacists make two to four times as many errors as more experienced pharmacists. Since someone initially must work with the new pharmacist, two people are essentially doing one job.

- The chief pharmacist at the Hines VAMC in Chicago said part of the pharmacy service's function is to provide clients with cost-saving alternatives on prescriptions; however, as a result of recruitment and retention-related staff shortages, they have not been able to offer those services. He said this situation has led to increased drug costs for patients. A San Francisco VAMC official said that because of pharmacist losses at the Medical Center, the pharmacists who remained could no longer review doctors' prescriptions to identify less costly medicines or monitor the accuracy of the drugs prescribed.
- The Chicago IRS reported in a 1987 clerical special rate request that, because of the lack of qualified candidates, it had often hired "any warm body" just to get some work done. As a result, the request said, documents had been improperly typed and tasks improperly performed, ultimately costing the taxpayers money and damaging the efficiency and quality of IRS work.
- At the Leavenworth VAMC, a respondent for the medical clerk occupation said that they have experienced numerous problems, including incorrect patient records and billings (which leads to non-reimbursement of the government for patient care expenses) and services not being provided or being provided improperly. The respondent told us that medical clerk turnover led to lost and incomplete medical records, which in turn had resulted in delayed treatment for patients and had affected the quality of patient care provided. A medical clerk respondent at the Kansas City VAMC also said their use of inexperienced medical clerks had affected patient care. Assigning an experienced clerk to work with an inexperienced one has helped, she said, but this procedure also reduces patient care.
- Two VA personnel specialists in Atlanta told us that two patient wards at the medical center were closed because of professional and nursing occupation staffing shortages caused by recruitment and retention difficulties. They also said that, because of the staffing shortages, doctors and nurses had to perform administrative tasks (e.g. answering telephones and copying documents) and as a result were handling fewer patients.
- The chief of the staffing section at the Boston VAMC said high turnover, vacant positions, and poor quality hires in clerical positions at the medical center contributed to lowered service delivery. Patients had to wait longer for admission and lab services and their charts just met minimum requirements.
- Officials at the Customs Service and IRS in New York said upper-level personnel were typing their own work due to the lack of clerical support staff.
- A 1987 Boston area special rate application noted that the shortage of licensed practical nurses contributed to more patient incidents, such as

falls and medication errors. At the Bedford (Massachusetts) VA hospital, a 1988 special rate application for practical nurses noted that "[t]he inability to recruit and retain sufficient LPN staff contributes to increased patient/staff ratios, which has led to perceived unsafe patient care."

- Officials at the Los Angeles VAMC told us that several wards had been closed since 1984 because VA nurses left for better paying positions. At the time of our review, a total of 65 nurses were needed to open the 160 beds closed in those wards. Officials at the VAMC said they were beginning to question how the center would continue to provide care for its remaining patients with the increasing shortage of nurses.
- A 1987 special salary rate request for registered nurses in New York stated that the prolonged inability to hire registered nurses had seriously deterred specific programs. As of October 1987, the Manhattan VAMC was unable to utilize the full 15 beds authorized in the Surgical Intensive Care Unit because of the nursing shortage, thereby frustrating plans to increase the number of open heart procedures performed. Also, at the time of our review, the Manhattan VAMC had not opened the AIDS unit that was scheduled to open in November 1987 because of an inability to recruit additional nurses approved in June 1987.
- At the Bronx VA, the nurse recruiter said that because of understaffing they had to reduce patients' baths from every day to every other day. The recruiter also said that, since much of the recovery instruction was given during baths, the quality of care had been affected.
- According to a respondent for nurses at the Kansas City VAMC, a shortage of registered nurses at the medical center forced the closure of an entire ward, hiring less qualified practical nurses, and contracting out for registered nurses on a fee basis (in which the facility may pay up to twice the hourly cost of a VA registered nurse). She said closure of the ward resulted in the loss of up to 30 beds being available for veterans.
- The two St. Louis VAMCs had between 60 and 80 nursing vacancies at the time of our review. As a result, they received the lowest rating possible for patient care on a recent certification inspection.
- The VAMC personnel officer in Philadelphia said that the VA could only partially open a 240-bed nursing home care unit due to the shortage of registered nurses (caused by uncompetitive salaries). As of June 4, 1990, only 20 of the 240 beds had been opened even though the facilities were ready for occupancy.
- The police chief at the St. Louis VA said there had been an increase in crime in outlying parking lots at the midtown VA, and the VA could not provide security for employees to get to their cars.

- Officials at VA hospitals in Chicago said they had seen an increase in the incidence of theft, crimes against persons, and associated incidents resulting from fewer patrols.

Respondents Noted Increased Training, Recruiting, Overtime, and Contractor Costs Caused by Recruitment and Retention Problems

Other frequently mentioned effects of recruitment and retention difficulties were increased training; recruiting; overtime; and, to a lesser extent, contractor costs.

Training Costs

Over 91 percent of the questionnaire respondents said retention difficulties caused increased training costs to at least some extent, with over 55 percent of the respondents saying the problem was present to a "great" or "very great" extent. On the recruitment side, nearly 85 percent of the respondents said they were experiencing increased recruitment-related training costs, with over 45 percent saying increased training costs were present to a "great" or "very great" extent.

In the follow-up interviews, the respondents cited a number of examples of increased training costs from recruitment and retention difficulties.

- According to the IRS special rate request for attorneys in New York, the District had hired 41 new attorneys in the 2 years prior to our review, each of whom was required to take 10 weeks of formal classroom training. Senior attorneys primarily gave this training, which pulled them away from working cases and reduced their caseload. This reduced potential revenues significantly because the senior attorneys work the largest, most complex cases with the highest revenue yield.
- IRS officials in Atlanta estimated that excessive clerical staff turnover in 1 year cost the agency $414,556 in training costs. In a 1989 clerical special rate request, IRS officials estimated savings of almost $172,000 in advertising, training, and personnel processing costs if higher salaries could be paid in the Atlanta area.
- At the Boston VAMC, the chief of the staffing section said the quality of recently hired clerk typists was lower than it was 3 years prior to our

review. She said applicants for clerk typist positions cannot spell, punctuate, or set up a letter. As a result, the VAMC must spend time teaching basic office skills. Associated training costs included the time of the trainer, the cost of services lost, and overtime to cover the lost services. She also said the poor quality meant that recent recruits could not do as much in a normal day as a good clerk typist could in prior years, so overtime costs were also incurred to make up the loss in productivity.

Several respondents noted that training costs associated with recruiting and retention problems were essentially wasted because many of those who received the training often left. For example, the chiefs of pharmacy services at the Bronx and Brooklyn VAMCs said supervisory pharmacists spent much time reviewing, directing, and teaching new pharmacists who later transferred to the private sector. (They noted that the pharmacists who provided the training often fell behind in their work, resulting in backlogs and morale problems, which in turn caused even more turnover.) Similar experiences of employees receiving expensive training and then leaving the government were cited in regards to nurses at the VAMCs in New York and for clerk typists at the Customs Service in New York.

Recruiting Costs

Overall, 86 to 88 percent of the questionnaire respondents reported that retention and recruitment problems had caused recruiting costs to increase. Previous studies also indicated that extra recruiting and training costs are associated with employee turnover. For example, the March 1989 Boston Federal Executive Board report estimated that the overall excess costs of recruiting, hiring, and training in the Boston area during fiscal year 1988 were $270,704 for the Army Corps of Engineers, $998,779 for Fort Devens Army Base, $350,466 for the National Guard, $219,505 for the Environmental Protection Agency, $323,999 for the Bedford VA Hospital, and $2,000,869 for the Boston VAMC.

Our questionnaire respondents also provided examples of increased recruiting and training costs because of recruitment and/or retention difficulties.

- Respondents at the Army Corps of Engineers in Waltham, Massachusetts, said the Corps experienced such a crisis in recruiting for clerical positions in 1987 that it decided to recruit in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where the unemployment rate was high. Three agency officials went to Tulsa to interview 60 applicants, of whom 14 were hired at the GS-4 and GS-5

levels. The Corps spent about $4,000 each to move the new hires to Waltham.

- Officials at the Manhattan VAMC told us their advertising budget for nurses had doubled since 1986.

As was the case for increased training costs, agency officials reported increased recruiting costs associated with the poorer quality of applicants they were attracting.

- HHS personnel officials said they must test many applicants in order to find qualified employees. On one occasion, they said they tested nine applicants for a clerk-typist position and only one passed the test, even though they had all self-certified their typing abilities. In another instance, only 2 of 18 available applicants passed the test.
- The personnel staffing specialist at the Allen Park VA hospital in Detroit said that, although they get plenty of applicants for clerical positions, the low quality of the applicant pool made the qualified pool very small—perhaps 10 percent of the total pool. The specialist said considerable time and money were invested in recruiting, but the return in terms of hiring and retention was very low.

Overtime Costs

Over 80 percent of the respondents said recruitment and/or retention difficulties had caused increased use of overtime pay. The following examples were cited by interviewees as examples of increases in overtime pay.

- In a 1987 special salary request for data transcribers, the Atlanta office of IRS estimated that excessive turnover between July 1986 and July 1987 had cost the agency approximately $273,868 in overtime costs.
- According to officials at the Hines VAMC in Chicago, overtime to make up for the 40 police officers who quit in 1986 cost the agency $320,000.
- Personnel officials at Hines VAMC said high turnover resulted in nurses being taken away from patient care to train and orient new nurses. This resulted in overtime and nurses working double shifts. The officials said that overtime pay at Hines regularly exceeded the budget by $30,000 to $40,000 a year.
- Overtime costs for clerical/technical jobs at IRS in New York had consistently increased because of understaffing, growing by over $500,000 between fiscal years 1986 and 1987. IRS officials said they expected overtime costs to increase even more in the future.
- According to VAMC officials in Los Angeles, the VAMC incurred overtime costs in 1989 of approximately $156,000 for pharmacists and about

$62,000 for police officers because of recruitment and retention problems. The shortage of nurses at the VAMC in Los Angeles resulted in overtime costs in 1989 (excluding October through December) of $369,929.

- According to the associate chief of nursing, the St. Louis VAMC spent $285,985 for registered and practical nurse overtime during fiscal year 1989 (which officials said would have allowed the hospital to hire 11 registered nurses or 17 practical nurses). In the first quarter of fiscal 1990, the hospital had already spent $102,585 on overtime in these occupations.
- Respondents at the Kansas City VAMC said the medical center spent $289,336 for registered nurse overtime between April 1, 1988, and March 31, 1989. At the Leavenworth VAMC, the respondents said registered and practical nurse overtime caused by recruitment and retention difficulties cost $114,343 during fiscal year 1989.

Contractor Costs

Hiring outside contractors was reported least frequently of all the possible operational effects listed (about 20 percent of the respondents for both the recruitment and retention questions). There appeared to be a difference in the prevalence of contracting costs across the occupational categories. Contracting costs due to recruitment difficulties were most frequently reported by respondents for nursing occupations (37.3 percent of respondents) and least frequently by respondents for the police occupation (10.0 percent of respondents).

Some examples of increased contracting costs cited by the respondents include the following:

- A Kansas City VA registered nurse special rate application noted that from April 1, 1988, to March 31, 1989, the hospital spent $103,635 contracting for registered nurses.
- An official at the St. Louis VAMC reported that the medical center had spent $360,558 contracting for nurses in fiscal year 1989, and had already spent $183,408 on such contracting in the first quarter of fiscal 1990.

Although agencies reported these contracting costs, we did not determine the extent to which those costs were greater than (or less than) the cost of hiring regular employees.

Summary and Conclusions

This report focuses on what agency officials believed to be the causes and effects of federal recruitment and retention problems in selected occupations within selected areas and agencies. It concentrates on 11 occupations within 16 metropolitan areas across 8 major agencies and dozens of subagencies. It does not, however, cover all federal white-collar occupations, metropolitan areas, or federal agencies; therefore, the results cannot be directly extrapolated to the government as a whole or the many localities where federal employees work. Also, the discussion of the causes of recruitment and retention problems is based on the perceptions of agency personnel officials and line managers, not on the perceptions of employees who actually left or applicants who declined job offers.

Nevertheless, the results of this study are consistent with previous studies of federal recruitment and retention. For example, a May 1990 MSPB governmentwide survey of employees who resigned from the federal government found that "compensation and advancement" was the most frequently mentioned reason for their resignations. Also, several of the FEB studies have noted the same types of operational effects caused by recruitment and retention problems as we found in this review. We therefore believe that the results of this review, in conjunction with previous studies, permit certain conclusions to be drawn that are, if not directly applicable, at least instructive with regard to the rest of the workforce.

Many Factors Affect Federal Recruitment and Retention

The questionnaire respondents indicated that many different factors affect federal recruitment and retention; chapter 2 of this report discussed each of those factors individually. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 summarize the employment conditions that the respondents said affect recruitment and retention in the selected occupations, areas, and agencies. Some of the conditions were believed to have primarily negative effects on recruitment and retention (i.e., encourage a person to leave or decline federal employment); other factors were believed to be primarily positive inducements (i.e., encourage a person to stay in or accept federal employment); still others were said to have a mixture of both effects.

Figure 4.1: Respondents Said Pay, Job Availability, and Job Security Were Primary Reasons to Stay in or Leave Federal Employment

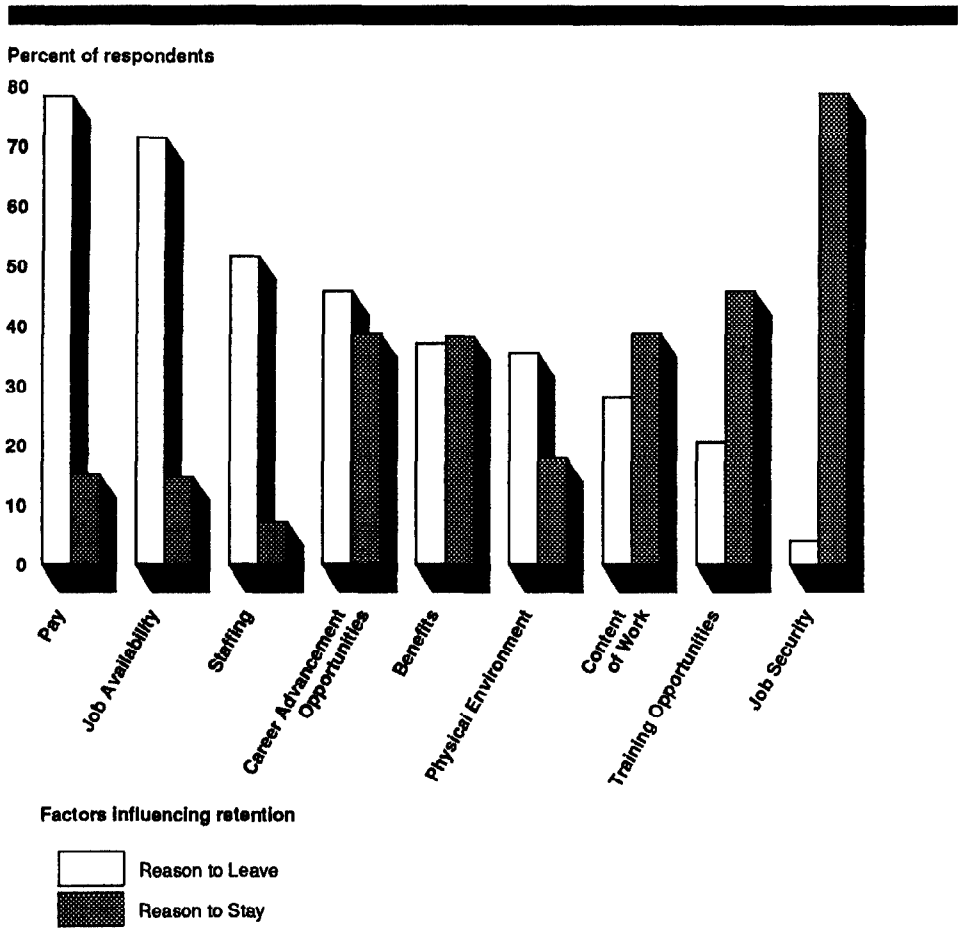
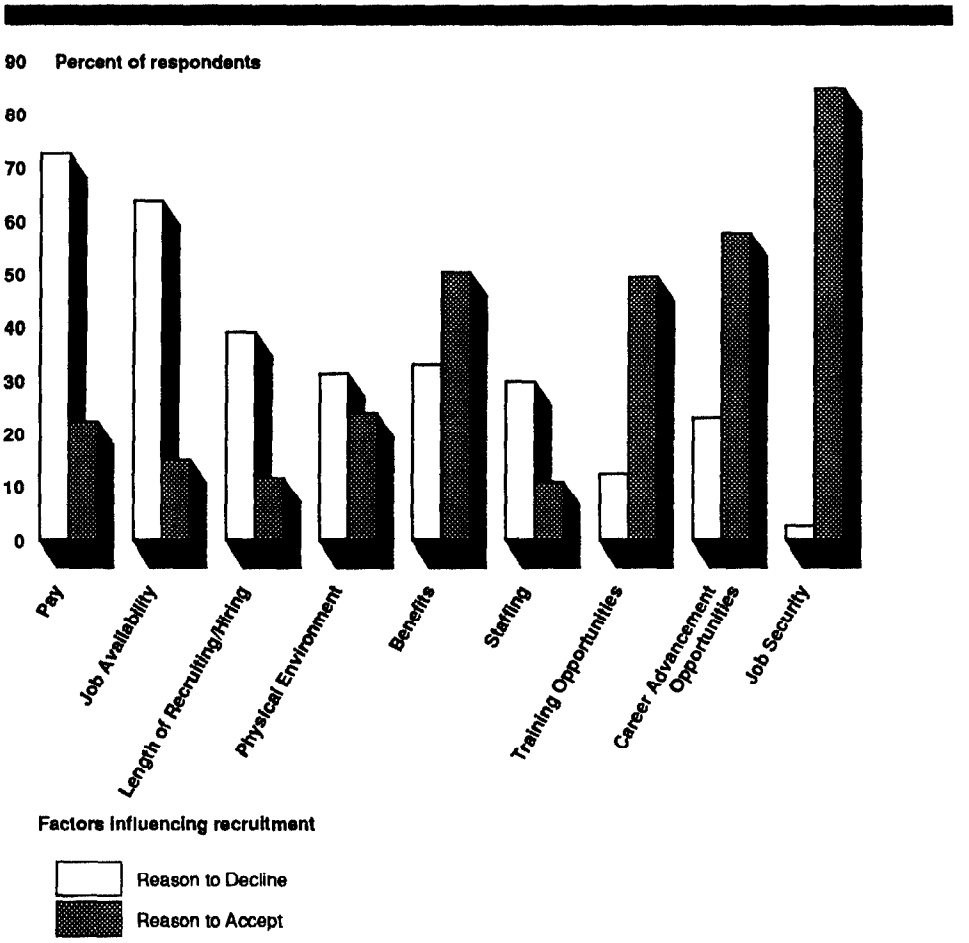


Figure 4.2: Respondents Said Pay, Job Availability, and Job Security Were Primary Reasons to Accept or Decline Federal Employment



Written comments the respondents provided on the questionnaires made it clear that the factors often have a combined effect. The respondents also indicated that immediate action was necessary to alleviate the recruitment and retention problems they faced. For example, a respondent for the pharmacist occupation in New York wrote the following:

"The inability to hire and retain quality pharmacists is hampering pharmacy service from giving cost effective, quality of care service to our veterans. Pharmacy is unable to do clinical programs due to (the) lack of expertise in its staff. Our lack of tuition reimbursement for C.E. (continuing education) credits; health insurance (is) not paid by employer; pay (is) not equal to private sector, even in special rates; the pay (dis)parity between staff, supervisors, and assistant and chief of pharmacy is not being maintained. Dietitians are required to cover approximately 100 patients. Pharmacists are required to cover 150 to 200 patients. (The) private sector expects

160 prescriptions per day; we require 240 to 350 prescriptions per day. (The) private sector starts pharmacists in hospitals (with) 4 weeks vacation; we start (with) 2 weeks. This could go on and on. Nothing has been done, nothing is being done. The time may be here that we cannot get pharmacists; the damages are that great. A very comprehensive, exacting program needs to be set now; not 6 months, not a year, now."

Pay Reform Needed to Address Recruitment and Retention Problems

Although a variety of factors appear important to federal recruitment and retention, certain factors are more important than others. Federal pay and the availability of nonfederal jobs were almost universally considered to be the most important reasons to leave and to decline federal employment. Federal job security, reportedly the most important reason for staying in or accepting federal jobs, was viewed almost exclusively by the respondents as a stay/accept factor. All the other factors were regarded as having, at least to some extent, a mixed effect on recruitment or retention decisions.

These three primary factors—federal pay, nonfederal job availability, and federal job security—appear to interrelate in recruitment and retention decisions. The data suggest that because nonfederal pay is substantially higher than federal pay, applicants' and employees' perceptions of the importance of federal job security is diminished when nonfederal jobs are plentiful. Where these conditions exist, current employees are more likely to leave, and prospective employees are more likely to decline federal job offers. As a respondent for the clerk typist occupation in Los Angeles said,

"As long as salary and benefits are greater and available in the private sector, and the forecast for a corrective change is not evident, quality applicants will continue to avoid federal employment. Whatever incentives that may have been available in the past to federal employees (such as job security, reasonably priced health and life insurance benefits, and cost of living adjustments that at least kept pace with the increased cost of benefits) have gone. The end result is we have become the employer of last resort for those employees who have been picked over and rejected by the private sector employer."

On the other hand, where fewer nonfederal jobs are available, federal job security becomes more important, and the pay disparity is devalued. Under these conditions, federal employees are more likely to stay, and prospective employees are more likely to be attracted to the federal government.

Of the two factors that appear to be uniformly and negatively affecting federal recruitment and retention—federal pay and the availability of

nonfederal jobs—only federal pay is directly under the control of federal policymakers. Efforts to address recruitment and retention difficulties in these (and perhaps other) occupations, areas, and agencies should therefore be focused first on the pay issue.

The importance of federal pay to recruitment and retention was, according to the respondents, both direct and indirect. Some respondents said federal pay levels directly prevented them from filling budgeted positions or from keeping employees from leaving to accept more lucrative offers. In other cases, pay had a more subtle effect on recruitment and retention. For example, the respondents repeatedly said that employees use federal training opportunities—generally seen as a benefit of federal employment—as a means of qualifying for higher-paying nonfederal jobs.

Furthermore, federal pay also helps to explain why federal career advancement opportunities, while viewed as a reason to join the federal government, were also viewed as a significant reason to leave. In those federal jobs where opportunities for advancement beyond the journeyman level are limited (e.g., attorneys and police), employees who are dissatisfied with their pay reportedly leave for equivalent but better paying nonfederal positions. The responses suggest that if the federal/nonfederal pay disparity were eliminated, training and career advancement might properly be featured as virtues of federal employment.

The widespread perception of the importance of pay to recruitment and retention difficulties suggests that overall pay reform is needed to address the problems reported in the occupations, areas, and agencies we reviewed. Federal pay was regarded as an important reason to leave by respondents in many areas of the country for all occupational categories.

Moreover, variations in the perceived importance of pay by geographic area suggest that locality-based adjustments in the current uniform federal pay system are also needed. Agencies in the highest cost/pay areas were clearly experiencing more serious recruiting and retention difficulties than agencies in lower cost/pay areas.

In making locality pay adjustments, the data suggest that factors other than the absolute federal/nonfederal pay differential in an area should be considered if federal recruitment and retention difficulties are to be addressed in the most efficient manner. For example, areas where nonfederal employment is plentiful will likely have greater recruitment

and retention difficulties than other areas with the same federal/nonfederal pay differential but relatively scarce nonfederal job opportunities.

The questionnaire results also indicate that pay reform alone may not be sufficient to improve recruitment and retention in all occupations. For example, while low pay rates for nurses reportedly contributed to the occupation's recruitment and retention problems, the respondents regarded understaffing as an even more important cause. Thus, staffing reform (i.e., more employees to handle the workload) may also be necessary to address nursing shortages in federal facilities.

Recruitment and Retention Problems Are Adversely Affecting Service Delivery and Needlessly Increasing Agency Costs

The information provided by the respondents clearly indicated that they viewed federal recruitment and retention difficulties in the selected occupations as real and as having an adverse effect on federal agency operations. They believed that service delivery and agency productivity had been reduced and a variety of hidden costs associated with recruitment and retention problems had been incurred. The problems were reported in virtually every location and occupation.

We believe our findings, while limited in their immediate scope and applicability, suggest a much larger problem with ominous implications for the American public. If the recruitment and retention difficulties the officials reported continue to worsen, it seems reasonable to assume that service delivery and productivity would further decline, and unnecessary costs would continue to increase. It also seems reasonable to assume that in such an environment there would be more instances of taxes not being collected because of the lack of experienced attorneys and examiners; of environmental and industrial safety hazards not being investigated or addressed before problems occur because the staff trained by federal agencies were hired away by private companies; and of VA hospitals being forced to provide suboptimal care to patients because qualified staff are lacking. In sum, needed public services would continue to be delivered less and less effectively and efficiently.

Although the cost of pay reform will be at least partially offset by the elimination of hidden costs associated with recruitment and retention difficulties, pay reform will be expensive. But we believe that expense is preferable to allowing the further deterioration of government services. By helping to remedy these conditions, we believe pay reform will provide benefits not only to the federal workforce but to the public which that workforce serves.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objectives of this study were to determine agency officials' views of the causes and effects of retention and recruitment difficulties in selected occupations, areas, and agencies in the federal government. To accomplish these objectives, we first selected the occupations, areas, and agencies that served as the focus of the study. We then administered questionnaires to agency officials and conducted follow up interviews with those officials.

Selection of Occupations to Be Included in the Study

We obtained federal workforce data from OPM's Central Personnel Data File (CPDF) on all full-time permanent white-collar employees in the federal government as of December 31, 1986. This data set covered 1,420,446 employees in a total of 435 occupational series; most were in the General Schedule (GS) (1,238,203 employees) or the General Merit (GM) (121,674 employees) pay systems.

We then identified 213 occupations with at least 1,000 federal employees and calculated quit rates for each of the occupations for the 2-year period ending December 31, 1988.[1] The average quit rate across all the occupations was 6.2 percent for the 2 years. We decided that an occupation had a "high" quit rate if its quit rate was at least 50 percent above this 6.2 percent average—that is, 9.3 percent or higher.

We initially identified 30 "high quit rate" occupations. (See table I.1.) From this list we identified the occupations used in our study in the following manner. First, we eliminated the three trainee positions in which high quit rates could be expected. Second, we selected occupations that were generally representative of the career fields in which the high quit rate occupations were located (security, clerical/technical, health, and other professional). For example, about half of the permanent occupations with high quit rates came from the health profession; 4 of the 11 occupations we selected were health care occupations (nurse, practical nurse, pharmacist, and medical clerk).

In choosing particular occupations within fields, we generally chose those with higher quit rates and larger numbers of employees. Therefore, in choosing between two security occupations, police and guard, we

[1] "Quit," as used in this study, applies only to employees who voluntarily resigned from their government jobs. It does not include any of several other possible forms of employee separation, including retirement, transfers to other federal agencies, deaths, or dismissals. Quit rates were calculated based on those employees on board as of December 31, 1986, for the 2-year period ending December 31, 1988. Thus, the quit rates do not include employees who entered the government after December 31, 1986, but left prior to December 31, 1988.

picked police because it had both a higher quit rate and a higher number of job incumbents. We selected three of the four "other professional" occupations (industrial hygienist, environmental engineer, and general attorney) that were not grouped under any of the other three permanent job categories. We excluded the fourth occupation, patent examiner, because all the employees were located in Washington, DC; there was no geographic dispersion to allow our analysis of locality variations.

We ultimately chose to focus our review on the following 11 occupations: pharmacist, industrial hygienist, environmental engineer, general attorney, clerk typist, data transcriber, tax examiner, medical clerk, registered nurse, practical nurse, and police.

Table I.1: Selection of Occupations Based Upon Quit Rate, Number of Employees, and Occupational Field

Occupational field/ occupation	Occupation code	Average quit rate	Number of employees (12/31/86)	Selected for study
Security				
Police	0083	9.84	6,502	Y
Guard	0085	9.58	5,608	N
Clerical/technical				
File Clerk	0305	10.44	18,841	N
Clerk-Stenographer	0312	10.81	3,488	N
Clerk Typist	0322	13.80	38,867	Y
Data Transcriber	0356	23.50	12,258	Y
Communications Relay Operator	0390	20.99	1,510	N
Tax Examiner	0592	10.32	19,170	Y
Health				
General Health Science	0601	10.91	1,650	N
Physician Assistant	0603	16.41	1,091	N
Nurse	0610	15.21	36,250	Y
Practical Nurse	0620	17.69	12,078	Y
Medical Supply-Aide & Tech.	0622	10.25	2,019	N
Dietitian & Nutritionist	0630	10.76	1,403	N
Medical Technologist	0644	11.33	4,917	N
Medical Technician	0645	10.33	1,927	N
Diagnostic Radiol. Tech.	0647	13.61	2,689	N
Medical Machine Tech.	0649	10.24	1,982	N
Pharmacist	0660	13.37	3,134	Y
Pharmacy Technician	0661	12.93	2,335	N

(continued)

Occupational field/ occupation	Occupation code	Average quit rate	Number of employees (12/31/86)	Selected for study
Medical Record Technician	0675	10.85	2,350	N
Medical Clerk	0679	12.94	9,660	Y
Dental Assistant	0681	10.42	2,639	N
Other professional				
Industrial Hygienist	0690	11.98	1,077	Y
Environmental Engineer	0819	9.51	2,524	Y
General Attorney	0905	11.70	13,766	Y
Patent Examiner	1224	10.89	1,331	N
Trainee				
General Student	0099	16.72	1,986	N
Health Aid & Technician	0699	11.97	4,077	N
Student Trainee	0899	13.69	3,003	N

Identification of the MSAs

Whereas the selection of the occupations used in the study was based on their having high quit rates, selection of the MSAs used in the study was based primarily on their having large numbers of employees in the selected occupations. Using the CPDF data base, we first identified all MSAs with at least 1,000 federal white-collar employees as of December 31, 1986. Of the more than 300 MSAs in the country, 153 met these criteria. We then decided to focus on at least 10 percent, or 16, of these MSAs with above average numbers of employees in the greatest number of the selected occupations. All of the MSAs we selected had above average numbers of employees for at least 7 of the 11 occupations we surveyed.[2]

Using this method, we chose the following 16 MSAs: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, New York, Norfolk, Philadelphia, St. Louis, San Antonio, San Diego, and San Francisco.

[2]Detroit, ranked 16th on our list of MSAs with above average numbers of employees in 7 of the 11 occupations, was selected over 2 other MSAs, Honolulu and Cleveland, which also had above average numbers in 7 of the 11 occupations. We chose Detroit and excluded the other two MSAs because (1) Detroit had more total federal employees in the 11 selected occupations than Cleveland (1,282 versus 1,216 respectively), and (2) Honolulu was outside the continental United States and also had fewer employees in the 11 occupations than Detroit (983 versus 1,282).

Selection of Agencies and Subagencies

Like the selection of the MSAs, the selection of the agencies for the study was done on the basis of the number of employees in the identified high quit rate occupations in the agencies rather than the agencies' quit rates. First, for each of the selected occupations in each MSA, we listed the number of federal employees in each agency.[3] Agencies selected for analysis in an MSA for an occupation had at least 10 percent of the occupational total for that MSA. For example, for data transcribers in Los Angeles, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was selected for the study because VA had 15.5 percent (25 out of 161) of the data transcribers in the Los Angeles MSA. However, VA did not make the list for data transcribers in the Chicago MSA because it employed fewer than 10 percent (9 out of 157) of the data transcribers in the Chicago MSA.

Using this approach, an agency in a given MSA could have been selected for anywhere from 1 to all 11 occupations. In an effort to cover the largest number of employees and occupations possible with our available staff, we generally chose to contact those agencies that (1) had higher percentages of employees in a given occupation within the MSA and (2) made the list for more than one occupation within the MSA.

Eight different major agencies were selected for the study: the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Departments of the Air Force, Army, Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor, Navy, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs.

The unit of analysis in this study was the personnel office responsible for the occupation within the agency and the MSA. In most instances, the relevant personnel office was not at the major agency level (e.g., the Department of the Army) but at the subagency level (e.g., Army Health Services Command). Therefore, we used the CPDF data base to identify subagencies within the selected occupations, MSAs, and agencies. (One agency, EPA, did not have subunits in the CPDF data base, so our analysis for EPA was done at the agency level.) In deciding which subagencies to survey, we only included subagencies with at least 10 employees in an MSA for an occupation. We also picked enough subagency locations in an MSA and occupation to cover at least half of the employees in the major agency. The subagencies and agencies selected for analysis within each MSA are shown in appendix III.

[3]The universe of agencies was identified using the two-digit code for "major agency" in the CPDF data base. Thus, for example, the Department of the Treasury was listed but not the Internal Revenue Service.

In some cases, the two subagency selection criteria conflicted because elimination of subagencies with fewer than 10 employees made it impossible to cover at least half the employees in the major agency. For example, the CPDF data indicated that there were 40 data transcribers at Army in the Baltimore MSA, which accounted for more than 10 percent of all data transcribers in the Baltimore MSA. However, the only subagency with at least 10 data transcribers was the Army Test and Evaluation Command, which had 14. Because we wanted to cover at least half of an agency's employees in a given occupation and MSA, we decided not to include any data transcribers for Army in Baltimore. We decided to exclude the general attorney occupation at Army in Baltimore and the data transcriber occupation at Army and at Air Force in San Antonio for the same reason.

There were other cases where agencies that had met the agency selection criteria for a given occupation and MSA were eliminated because none of the agency subunits had at least 10 employees. This occurred with environmental engineers at Air Force in San Antonio and at Army in Kansas City, and with industrial hygienists at Navy in both Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

In most cases the personnel office at the subagency level was the lowest level personnel unit in an agency within an MSA. However, in other cases there was more than one personnel unit within a subagency. At the VA's Department of Medicine and Surgery, for example, the relevant personnel office for the selected occupations was usually at each hospital.[4] In cases where there was more than one hospital within the MSA's Department of Medicine and Surgery, we generally surveyed each one.

Subagency Sites Can Have High or Low Quit Rates

Although the 11 selected occupations in this study all had high national quit rates, some of the individual agencies and subagencies surveyed had low quit rates in the occupations because the MSAs and agencies/subagencies were selected on the basis of the prevalence of employees rather than their quit rates. Information from low quit rate areas and agencies are as important as information from high quit rate areas and agencies. While the high quit rate MSAs/agencies/subagencies can tell us why people are quitting and what effect this is having on agency operations, the low quit rate sites can provide complementary information on

[4]The Department of Medicine and Surgery is now known as the Department of Veterans Health Services and Research Administration. During the 1987-88 time period, though, it was known as the Department of Medicine and Surgery.

why some MSAs/agencies/subagencies are, on average, better able to retain employees in a particular occupation than their counterparts elsewhere in the country.

To accommodate both high and low quit rate sites, we developed separate high and low quit rate questionnaires. The questionnaires were similar in most respects, although some questions were asked only in high quit rate sites. (See app. II for a copy of the high quit rate questionnaire and to see the questions that were asked only in high quit rate sites.) Similarly, certain questions were asked only in those sites reporting recruiting problems.

The questions were developed based on issues raised in the relevant literature. For example, the factors believed related to retention (question 2) and recruitment (question 16) were drawn from studies of recruitment and retention correlates. Since the studies noted that pay, benefits, content of the work, physical environment, and other variables could influence recruitment and retention, we asked the respondents to note what they believed to be the effect of those factors on recruitment and retention for the selected occupation in their agency and location.

A total of 271 questionnaires were completed by agency focal points. Of these, 199 were completed for high quit rate occupations/agencies/areas, and 72 were completed for low quit rate sites. A total of 199 questionnaires were completed for sites with recruiting problems, and 67 were completed for sites without recruiting problems.[5]

Table I.2 shows the distribution of the 271 questionnaires across the 16 MSAs in this review.

[5]Respondents were classified as having a "problem" recruiting if they reported having trouble recruiting to "some extent," a "moderate extent," a "great extent," or a "very great extent." For five of the questionnaires, no determination of whether the respondents did or did not have a recruiting problem could be made because the respondents said they did not know whether their agencies had trouble recruiting for the selected occupation in the area and agency.

Table I.2: Number of Questionnaires by MSA

MSA	Number of questionnaires
Atlanta	16
Baltimore	13
Boston	15
Chicago	26
Dallas	11
Denver	24
Detroit	8
Kansas City	19
Los Angeles	14
New York	37
Norfolk	15
Philadelphia	24
St. Louis	11
San Antonio	14
San Diego	16
San Francisco	8
Total	**271**

To simplify our analysis, we grouped the 16 MSAs into high, medium, or low "cost/pay" categories by using the simple average of a cost-of-living index and a "pay relative" index. The cost-of-living index relates the cost of living in an MSA to that of a median cost-of-living city; the pay relative index relates the average white-collar pay of an MSA to the national average white-collar pay.[6] We grouped the MSAs into categories as follows: "high cost/pay MSAs" (New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, and San Diego); "medium cost/pay MSAs" (Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Atlanta); and "low cost/pay MSAs" (Dallas, Denver, Kansas City, St. Louis, San Antonio, and Norfolk).

Table I.3 shows the distribution of the questionnaires across the different cost/pay groupings.

[6]The cost-of-living index was calculated using April 1989 data from Runzheimer International for an average federal employee ($30,000 wage earner, family of four, 3-year homeowner). Pay relative data are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for office clerical, technical, and professional workers during 1988.

Table I.3: Number of Questionnaires by MSA Cost/Pay Groupings

MSA grouping	Number of questionnaires
High cost/pay	90
Medium cost/pay	87
Low cost/pay	94
Total	**271**

Table I.4 shows the distribution of the questionnaires across the 11 occupations included in our survey.

Table I.4: Number of Questionnaires by Occupation

Occupation	Number of questionnaires
Clerk Typist	72
Data Transcriber	22
Environmental Engineer	11
General Attorney	17
Industrial Hygienist	10
Medical Clerk	28
Pharmacist	23
Practical Nurse	24
Police	30
Nurse	21
Tax Examiner	13
Total	**271**

As with the MSAs, we also grouped the 11 occupations into broad categories for analysis. We classified the occupations as "professional" (general attorney, pharmacist, industrial hygienist, and environmental engineer); "clerical/technical" (clerk typist, data transcriber, tax examiner, and medical clerk); "nursing" (nurse and practical nurse); and "police." Table I.5 shows the number of questionnaires completed for each of these occupational groups.

Table I.5: Number of Questionnaires by Occupational Groupings

Occupational grouping	Number of questionnaires
Professional	61
Clerical-Technical	135
Nursing	45
Police	30
Total	**271**

Administering the Questionnaires

In each selected location, management officials at the agency (EPA), subagency, or hospital (VA) level were contacted by our regional staff and asked to designate a focal point responsible for completing each questionnaire. That focal point was commonly a personnel official and in many instances provided responses for more than one occupation at the facility. Therefore, the number of focal points or respondents (175) was less than the number of questionnaires administered (271). The focal points were encouraged to obtain input from line managers responsible for the occupations being surveyed; thus, the number of individuals involved in the preparation of the questionnaires was larger than the number of respondents.

After receiving the completed questionnaires, our regional staff conducted follow-up interviews with the focal points and, in many cases, the agency line managers who had helped the focal points complete the questionnaires. The objectives of the follow-up interviews were to (1) verify responses on the written questionnaires (making any necessary changes), (2) obtain documentation to support the responses wherever possible, and (3) probe for additional information. The follow-up interviews were done between December 1989 and May 1990.

Combined Results of High and Low Quit Rate Questionnaires

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), an agency of the Congress, is studying ways for agencies to improve the recruitment and retention of federal employees. Questionnaires are being sent to personnel specialists at agencies where quit rates are high and where quit rates are low. In this study, "quit" refers to voluntary separation from the federal government, and does not include retirements, transfers, or other types of separations. We have focused on occupations such as clerk-typists, nurses, and engineers. You have been selected because your agency/area has a relatively large number of people in one of the occupations we have selected.

Please complete the enclosed questionnaire for the occupation identified in question 1. You should answer these questions by thinking about the sub-unit within the agency for which you, as a personnelist, are responsible. You should obtain input from line managers responsible for this occupation in completing this questionnaire either by discussing the issues with them or by having them help you answer the questions. The questionnaire should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. In the event the return envelope is misplaced, the return address is:

U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
Mr. Curtis Copeland
441 G Street, N.W, Room 3820
Washington, D.C. 20548

If you have any questions about this questionnaire or the larger project, please call Curtis Copeland at (202) 275-8101.

Thank you for your help.

RESPONDENT INFORMATION

Agency _____

Subagency _____

City _____

Name of Respondent _____

Title _____

Phone number _____

Years in Current Position _____

* * * * *

I. RETENTION

1. In this study, we obtained data on quit rates for federal employees on board as of December 31, 1986 for the 2-year period ending December 31, 1988. According to our data the _____ occupation had a relatively high quit rate nationally and in your agency and area (over about 9 percent for 1986 cohort over the 2 year period.)

   To your knowledge, is this generally correct? (CHECK ONE.)

   1. 88.9% Yes (CONTINUE TO QUESTION 2)

   2. 6.3% No (ATTACH ANY DATA OR OTHER EVIDENCE TO INDICATE A LOW QUIT RATE FOR THIS OCCUPATION IN YOUR AGENCY AND AREA AND SKIP TO QUESTION 11.)

   3. 4.8% Don't know/Unable to judge (CONTINUE TO QUESTION 2.)

   N=271

*ALTHOUGH DATA ARE PRESENTED FOR BOTH HIGH AND LOW QUIT RATE QUESTIONNAIRES, THE HIGH QUIT RATE QUESTIONNAIRE FORMAT HAS BEEN USED TO CONVEY THESE RESULTS. PERCENTAGES FOR QUESTIONS IN THIS APPENDIX DO NOT ALWAYS ADD TO 100 PERCENT DUE TO ROUNDING.

2. To the best of your knowledge, how important are the following factors in causing employees to stay or leave this occupation in your agency? (CHECK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW.)

FACTORS	Very important reason to stay	Somewhat important reason to stay	No effect on stay/ leave decision	Somewhat important reason to leave	Very important reason to leave	Don't know/ Unable to judge
1. Pay compared to the nonfederal sector (private sector, state/local governments, etc.) N=254	7.9%	7.1	5.9	22.4	55.9	.8
2. Benefits (leave, retirement, health insurance, etc.) compared to the nonfederal sector N=254	15.4%	22.8	22.0	21.7	15.4	2.8
3. Content of the work (challenging assignments, autonomy, etc.) N=254	13.8%	24.8	30.7	19.7	8.3	2.8
4. Staffing (number of staff assigned to handle the workload) N=254	2.4%	4.7	37.0	28.0	23.6	4.3
5. Difficulty of the work (degree to which it is demanding/technical for average employee) N=254	3.5%	15.7	54.7	15.0	6.3	4.7
6. Physical environment (attractiveness of work setting, availability of support equipment, etc.) N=254	2.8%	15.0	44.9	26.8	8.7	2.0
7. Psychological environment (compatibility with colleagues, management style, etc.) N=254	7.9%	22.8	31.1	23.2	7.9	7.1
8. Reputation/image of the federal government as an employer N=254	3.5%	16.9	49.2	21.7	4.7	3.9
9. Reputation/image of the agency (versus other agencies) as an employer N=254	7.5%	21.3	49.6	15.4	3.5	2.8
10. Portability of FERS retirement system N=254	.8%	8.3	64.6	7.9	1.6	16.9
11. Training opportunities available N=254	7.9%	37.8	29.9	13.0	7.5	3.9
12. Career advancement opportunities available N=254	9.8%	28.7	14.6	26.0	19.7	1.2
13. Job security (stability of government as an employer) N=254	35.4%	43.3	16.5	1.2	2.8	.8
14. Availability of jobs outside the agency in your area N=254	5.5%	9.1	9.4	32.7	38.6	4.7
15. Travel required in job N=253	.4%	5.1	82.2	2.0	.4	9.9
16. Commuting requirements (location of job in the area) N=254	3.1%	14.2	49.6	20.5	6.7	5.9
17. Other (specify) _____ N=42						

3. How long has your agency been experiencing a high-quit rate in this occupation? (CHECK ONE.)*

1. [ ] Less than 1 year
2. [ ] 1 year to less than 3 years
3. [ ] 3 years to less than 5 years
4. [ ] 5 years to 10 years
5. [ ] 10 years or more
6. [ ] Don't know/No basis to judge

4. Compared to 3 years ago, are quit rates in this occupation, in this agency/area, higher, lower, or about the same?

N=254

1. 11.8% Much higher
2. 23.6% Somewhat higher
3. 39.8% About the same
4. 13.0% Somewhat lower
5. 6.3% Much lower
6. 5.5% Don't know/No basis to judge

5. To the best of your knowledge, are quit rates in your agency for this occupation higher, lower, or about the same as those of large and medium/small private firms, state government, local governments, nonprofit organizations, or other federal agencies in your area? (CHECK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW.)

		Agency quit rate much higher	Agency quit rate somewhat higher	Agency quit rate about the same	Agency quit rate somewhat lower	Agency quit rate much lower	Don't know/ No basis to judge
1. Private sector	N=254	15.7%	16.1	9.8	2.8	2.0	53.5
2. State government	N=254	7.9%	10.6	16.1	3.5	1.6	60.2
3. Local governments	N=254	9.1%	8.7	16.1	2.4	.8	63.0
4. Nonprofit organizations	N=254	3.9%	5.5	9.1	1.6	.4	79.5
5. Other federal agencies	N=254	2.8%	9.4	29.9	3.1	3.5	51.2

6. In the last 3 years, to what extent, if at all, have employees who left this occupation in your agency gone to each of the following employment sectors? (CHECK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW.)**

Sectors		Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know/ No basis to judge
1. State government	N=191	1.0%	2.1	7.3	14.1	53.9	21.5
2. Local government	N=191	2.1%	6.3	5.8	10.5	54.5	20.9
3. Private sector	N=191	39.8%	29.3	12.6	9.4	3.7	5.2
4. Nonprofit organizations	N=191	3.1%	3.1	5.8	5.2	38.7	44.0
5. Other federal agencies	N=191	8.4%	13.6	18.3	31.9	19.9	7.9
6. Other (specify) _____	N=26						

*DATA NOT PRESENTED BECAUSE QUESTION DIFFERENT FOR HIGH AND LOW QUIT RATE QUESTIONNAIRES.
**HIGH QUIT RATE QUESTIONNAIRE DATA ONLY--LOW QUIT RATE RESPONDENTS WERE NOT ASKED THIS QUESTION.

7. In your opinion, were the employees who have quit this occupation in your agency in the last 3 years, superior performers, a mix of superior and poor performers, or all poor performers? (CHECK ONE.)

N=188

1. 0% All were superior performers
2. 21.8% Most were superior performers
3. 71.8% A mix of superior and poor performers
4. 1.6% Most were poor performers
5. 0% All were poor performers
6. 4.8% Don't know performance of those who quit

8. To what extent, if at all does the high quit rate in this occupation create any of the following operational problems for your agency? (CHECK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW.)*

Operational Problems		Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know no basis to judge
1. Reduced service delivery	N=191	22.5%	32.5	16.2	13.6	12.0	3.1
2. Increased training costs	N=190	25.8%	29.5	18.4	17.4	5.3	3.7
3. Increased recruiting costs	N=191	28.3%	28.3	19.9	9.9	11.0	2.6
4. Upper-level people doing lower-level work	N=191	22.0%	31.4	22.0	11.5	11.5	1.6
5. Increased contractor costs	N=190	7.4%	1.6	5.8	4.7	46.8	33.7
6. Increased use of overtime pay	N=191	22.5%	28.8	15.7	14.7	14.1	4.2
7. Reduced productivity	N=190	19.5%	32.1	18.4	18.4	9.5	2.1
8. Other (specify) _____	N=17						

9. Does this occupation receive special pay rates in your agency and area? (CHECK ONE.)**

N=254

1. 49.6% Yes (CONTINUE TO QUESTION 10.)
2. 49.6% No
3. .8% Don't know/No basis to judge

(SKIP TO QUESTION 11.)

*HIGH QUIT RATE QUESTIONNAIRE DATA ONLY--LOW QUIT RATE RESPONDENTS WERE NOT ASKED THIS QUESTION.
**RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTION ARE INCORPORATED IN A SEPARATE REPORT ON THE SPECIAL RATES PROGRAM (GGD-90-118).

10. In your opinion, how effective or ineffective have the special rates been in reducing turnover in this occupation in your agency? (CHECK ONE.)*

N=126

1. 26.2% Very effective
2. 54.8% Somewhat effective
3. 5.6% Neither effective nor ineffective
4. 3.2% Somewhat ineffective
5. 7.1% Very ineffective
6. 3.2% Don't know/No basis to judge

II. RECRUITMENT

11. Does your agency collect any data on a regular basis to indicate whether your agency is having trouble recruiting new employees for this occupation? (CHECK ONE.)

N=271

1. 59.4% Yes (CONTINUE TO QUESTION 12.)
2. 34.3% No — (SKIP TO QUESTION 13.)
3. 6.3% Don't know/ No basis to judge — (SKIP TO QUESTION 13.)

12. Which of the following types of data does your agency collect on a regular basis to indicate whether there is a recruiting problem for this occupation? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

N=161

1. 94.4% Number of vacancies
2. 76.4% Time needed to fill positions
3. 57.1% Number of offers per hire
4. 78.9% Number of applicants
5. 21.1% Other (specify) _____

13. To what extent, if at all, is your agency/area having trouble recruiting new employees for this occupation? (CHECK ONE.)

N=271

1. 19.6% Very great extent — (CONTINUE TO QUESTION 14.)
2. 22.1% Great extent — (CONTINUE TO QUESTION 14.)
3. 21.8% Moderate extent — (CONTINUE TO QUESTION 14.)
4. 10.0% Some extent — (CONTINUE TO QUESTION 14.)
5. 24.7% Little or no extent — (SKIP TO QUESTION 16.)
6. 1.8% Don't know/ No basis to judge — (SKIP TO QUESTION 16.)

14. How long have you had difficulty recruiting for this occupation in your agency/area? (ENTER NUMBER OF MONTHS.)

N=199

1. .5% Less than 1 year
2. 20.1% 1 year to less than 3 years
3. 39.2% 3 years to less than 5 years
4. 25.6% 5 years to 10 years
5. 12.6% 10 years or more
6. 2.0% Don't know/No basis to judge

*RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTION ARE INCORPORATED IN A SEPARATE REPORT ON THE SPECIAL RATES PROGRAM (GGD-90-118).

15. To what extent, if at all, do the recruiting difficulties in this occupation create any of the following operational problems for your agency? (CHECK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW.)

Operational Problems		Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some extent	Little or no extent	Don't know no basis to judge
1. Reduced service delivery	N=199	19.1%	31.2	24.6	15.6	6.5	3.0
2. Increased training costs	N=199	18.1%	27.6	19.6	19.6	12.6	2.5
3. Increased recruiting costs	N=199	25.6%	26.6	23.6	12.1	10.6	1.5
4. Upper-level people doing lower-level work	N=199	18.1%	32.7	23.6	15.6	9.5	.5
5. Increased contractor costs	N=198	5.6%	2.5	7.1	7.1	48.5	29.3
6. Increased use of overtime pay	N=199	21.6%	31.2	19.6	10.6	14.1	3.0
7. Reduced productivity	N=199	20.6%	28.6	22.6	19.1	7.5	1.5
8. Other (specify) _____	N=18						

16. To the best of your knowledge, how important are the following factors in a person's decision to accept or decline an employment offer in this occupation in your agency? (CHECK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW.)

	Very important reason to accept	Somewhat important reason to accept	No effect on accept /decline decision	Somewhat important reason to decline	Very important reason to decline	Don't know/ Unable to judge
1. Pay compared to the nonfederal sector (private sector, state/local governments, etc.) N=269	10.4%	11.9	3.7	19.3	53.2	1.5
2. Benefits (leave, retirement, health insurance, etc.) compared to the nonfederal sector N=269	14.1%	36.1	15.2	21.2	11.9	1.5
3. Content of the work (challenging assignments, autonomy, etc.) N=269	11.2%	32.3	37.9	11.2	3.7	3.7
4. Staffing (number of staff assigned to handle the workload) N=269	1.5%	9.3	52.4	20.1	9.7	7.1
5. Difficulty of the work (degree to which it is demanding/technical for average employee) N=269	3.0%	19.3	57.2	11.9	3.7	4.8
6. Physical environment (attractiveness of work setting, availability of support equipment, etc.) N=269	1.5%	22.3	40.5	23.8	7.4	4.5
7. Psychological environment (compatibility with colleagues, management style, etc.) N=269	4.8%	21.6	47.2	11.2	3.0	12.3
8. Reputation/image of the federal government as an employer N=269	5.6%	29.0	32.0	26.4	3.3	3.7
9. Reputation/image of the agency (versus other agencies) as an employer N=269	8.2%	29.4	40.9	15.2	2.6	3.7
10. Portability of FERS retirement system N=269	1.5%	12.3	62.5	1.5	1.1	21.2
11. Training opportunities available N=269	9.7%	39.8	33.5	8.6	3.7	4.8
12. Career advancement opportunities available N=269	14.1%	43.5	17.8	15.2	7.8	1.5
13. Agency recruiting techniques (i.e. use of job fairs, campus recruiting, etc.) N=269	5.2%	23.0	48.7	3.7	1.1	18.2
14. Length of the recruitment/hiring process N=269	3.3%	8.2	42.8	27.1	11.9	6.7
15. Job security (stability of government as an employer) N=269	28.3%	56.5	10.8	1.9	.7	1.9
16. Availability of jobs outside the agency in your area N=269	4.1%	10.8	14.5	32.7	30.9	7.1
17. Travel required in job N=267	.7%	4.9	82.0	1.9	.4	10.1
18. Commuting requirements (location of job in the area) N=269	4.1%	13.8	50.9	14.1	7.8	9.3
19. Other (specify) _____ N=34						

17. Compared to 3 years ago, has recruiting for this occupation become more difficult, easier, or stayed about the same? (CHECK ONE.)

N=269

1. 21.2% Much more difficult
2. 27.1% Somewhat more difficult
3. 30.9% Stayed about the same
4. 10.8% Somewhat easier
5. 6.3% Much easier
6. 3.7% Don't know/No basis to judge

18. In your opinion, how effective or ineffective have the following OPM programs been in improving recruitment for this occupation? (IF THE PROGRAM IS USED IN YOUR AGENCY AND AREA, BUT YOU DON'T KNOW THE PROGRAM'S EFFECTIVENESS, INDICATE "DON'T KNOW". IF THE PROGRAM IS NOT USED IN YOUR AGENCY AND AREA, OR IF YOU ARE NOT SURE IF IT IS USED, INDICATE "NO BASIS TO JUDGE".)

OPM Programs	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Very ineffective	Don't know	No basis to judge
1. Special rates* N=270	18.9%	25.2	4.4	.4	1.9	.7	48.5
2. Delegated examining authority N=269	15.6%	10.4	2.6	.0	1.5	4.5	65.4
3. Delegated hiring authority N=270	33.3%	23.7	1.9	.0	1.5	3.7	35.9
4. Advanced step appointment N=270	11.1%	15.6	3.7	.0	.7	1.9	67.0
5. Outstanding scholar program N=270	1.5%	3.0	3.3	.0	.0	3.3	88.9
6. Other (specify) N=37							

19. In your opinion, is the quality of the newrecruits over the past 3 years higher or lower than the quality of recruits in previous years? (CHECK ONE.)

N=270

1. 2.6% Much higher
2. 18.1% Somewhat higher
3. 38.5% About the same
4. 24.8% Somewhat lower
5. 12.6% Much lower
6. 3.3% Don't know/No basis to judge

*RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTION ARE INCORPORATED IN A SEPARATE REPORT ON THE SPECIAL RATES PROGRAM (GGD-90-118).

II. COMMENTS

20. Please give us any additional comments you may have on this subject in the space below.

N=271

Comments: 50.6%
No comments: 49.4%

Thank you for your cooperation

Agency Installations/Occupations Focused on in This Review

Listed in table III.1 are the agency installations visited in our review and the occupations covered in each installation. Each installation represents the lowest level personnel office for a particular occupation at an agency in a particular geographic area. In most cases, the relevant personnel office was at the subagency level (i.e., below the major department or agency) or lower. The installations are shown by MSA and, within each MSA, by agency, subagency, and occupation. Where more than one occupation is listed for a particular subagency, separate questionnaires were administered at that installation for each occupation. For example, in surveying the Adjutant General subagency at Army in St. Louis, we administered separate questionnaires for the data transcriber and clerk typist occupations.

In some MSAs, each medical center or hospital within the Department of Veterans Affairs' Medicine and Surgery subagency had independent personnel authority. Where this occurred, we went below the subagency level to administer separate questionnaires at each hospital. For example, in the New York MSA, the Department of Medicine and Surgery is divided into four hospitals with independent personnel authority: the Bronx VA Medical Center, the Brooklyn VA Medical Center, the FDR VA Hospital, and the Manhattan VA Medical Center. We therefore administered separate questionnaires at each hospital for each of the 6 VA occupations surveyed in the New York MSA—i.e., a total of 24 questionnaires in all.[1]

A similar breakout within subagencies occurred in other agencies. For example, the Department of the Treasury's IRS subagency in Atlanta is further divided into the regional office, the district office, and the service center. We administered separate questionnaires at each location for the clerk typist, data transcriber, and tax examiner occupations. All subagencies, as applicable, are identified in the installation listings in table III.1.

A total of 271 questionnaires were completed in this review. Each of those questionnaires is represented by a separate occupation in table III.1.

[1]We covered all VA hospitals and VAMCs in each of the selected MSAs except for Los Angeles. There, we covered the West Los Angeles VAMC, the largest VAMC in the Los Angeles MSA, but did not cover the Sepulveda or Long Beach VAMCs.

Table III.1: Audit Sites for the Review by MSA, Agency, Subagency, and Occupation

MSA	Agency	Subagency	Occupation
1. Atlanta	Labor	OSHA	Industrial Hygienist
	Treasury	IRS (Regional Office)	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber Tax Examiner General Attorney
	Treasury	IRS (District Office)	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber Tax Examiner
	Treasury	IRS (Service Center)	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber Tax Examiner
	VA	Veterans Benefits	Clerk Typist
		Medicine and Surgery	Clerk Typist Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
2. Baltimore	Army	Test and Evaluation Command	Clerk Typist
		Army Forces Command	Clerk Typist
		Corps of Engineers	Clerk Typist
		Armament Munitions and Chemical Command	Clerk Typist
		Health Services Command	Industrial Hygienist Environmental Engineer
		Material Readiness Activities	Environmental Engineer
	HHS	SSA	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber General Attorney
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Police Pharmacist Medical Clerk
3. Boston	Army	Army Forces Command	Clerk Typist
		Army National Guard	Clerk Typist
		Corps of Engineers	Clerk Typist
		Health Services Command	Medical Clerk
	EPA	EPA	General Attorney
	VA	Medicine and Surgery (Boston VAMC)	Police Clerk Typist Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Medicine and Surgery (Bedford VA Hospital)	Police Clerk Typist Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk

(continued)

MSA	Agency	Subagency	Occupation
4. Chicago	EPA	EPA	Environmental Engineer General Attorney
	HHS	SSA	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber
	Labor	OSHA	Industrial Hygienist
	Treasury	IRS	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber Tax Examiner
	VA	Medicine and Surgery (Hines VA Hospital)	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Medicine and Surgery (West Side VAMC)	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Medicine and Surgery (Lakeside VAMC)	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
5. Dallas	EPA	EPA	Clerk Typist Environmental Engineer General Attorney
	Labor	OSHA	Industrial Hygienist
	Treasury	IRS	Clerk Typist General Attorney Tax Examiner
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist
6. Denver	Air Force	Air National Guard	Police
		Air Training Command	Clerk Typist
		Accounting and Finance Center	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber
		Air Force Legal Services Center	Data Transcriber
	Army	Health Services Command	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
	EPA	EPA	Environmental Engineer General Attorney
	Labor	OSHA	Industrial Hygienist
	Treasury	U.S. Mint	Police

(continued)

MSA	Agency	Subagency	Occupation
		IRS	General Attorney Tax Examiner
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Veterans Benefits	Clerk Typist
7. Detroit	Treasury	IRS	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber Tax Examiner
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Police Clerk Typist Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Veterans Benefits	Clerk Typist
8. Kansas City	Army	Training and Doctrine Command	Clerk Typist
		Corps of Engineers	Clerk Typist
		Health Services Command	Medical Clerk
	EPA	EPA	Environmental Engineer General Attorney
	Treasury	IRS	Data Transcriber Tax Examiner
	VA	Medicine and Surgery (Kansas City VAMC)	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Medicine and Surgery (Leavenworth VAMC)	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
9. Los Angeles	Navy	Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet	Police
		Sea Systems Command	Clerk Typist
		Naval Medical Command	Clerk Typist
	Treasury	IRS	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber General Attorney Tax Examiner
	VA	Medicine and Surgery (West Los Angeles VAMC)	Police Clerk Typist Data Transcriber Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
10. New York	EPA	EPA	Environmental Engineer
	HHS	SSA	Data Transcriber

(continued)

MSA	Agency	Subagency	Occupation
	Labor	OSHA	Industrial Hygienist
	Treasury	IRS (New York Regional Office)	Clerk Typist
		IRS (Manhattan District)	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber General Attorney Tax Examiner
		IRS (Brooklyn District)	Data Transcriber
		IRS (Brookhaven Service Center)[a]	Data Transcriber Tax Examiner
		Customs Service	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber
	VA	Medicine and Surgery (Bronx VAMC)	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Medicine and Surgery (Brooklyn VAMC)	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Medicine and Surgery (FDR VA Hospital)	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Medicine and Surgery (Manhattan VAMC)	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
11. Norfolk	Navy	Atlantic Fleet	Police Clerk Typist
		Naval Sea Systems Command	Police Clerk Typist
		Naval Medical Command (Environmental Health Center)	Industrial Hygienist
		Naval Medical Command (Portsmouth Naval Hospital)	Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Medical Clerk Industrial Hygienist
		Naval Supply Command	Clerk Typist
		Naval Facilities Engineering Command	Clerk Typist
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Nurse Practical Nurse Medical Clerk
12. Philadelphia	EPA	EPA	Environmental Engineer General Attorney

(continued)

MSA	Agency	Subagency	Occupation
	HHS	SSA	General Attorney
	Labor	OSHA	Industrial Hygienist
	Navy	Sea Systems Command (Naval Ships Engineering Station)	Clerk Typist
		Sea Systems Command (Naval Shipyard)	Clerk Typist Police
		Electronic Systems Command	Clerk Typist
		Supply Systems Command	Clerk Typist
		Facilities Engineering Command	Environmental Engineer
	Treasury	U.S. Mint	Police
		IRS (District Office)	Data Transcriber General Attorney Tax Examiner
		IRS (Regional Office)	General Attorney
		IRS (Service Center)	Data Transcriber Tax Examiner
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
		Veterans Benefit	Clerk Typist
13. San Antonio	Air Force	Logistics Command (Kelly AFB)	Police Clerk Typist
		Training Command (Randolph AFB)	Clerk Typist
		Training Command (Lackland AFB)	Clerk Typist
		Systems Command	Practical Nurse Medical Clerk
	Army	Army Forces Command/Health Services Command	Clerk Typist
	Treasury	IRS	Data Transcriber
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk

(continued)

MSA	Agency	Subagency	Occupation
14. San Diego	Navy	Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (North Island)	Police Clerk Typist
		Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (Public Works Center)	Police
		Air Systems Command	Clerk Typist
		Naval Medical Command	Clerk Typist Industrial Hygienist Nurse Practical Nurse Medical Clerk
		Facilities Engineering Command	Environmental Engineer
		Marine Corps	Clerk Typist
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
15. San Francisco	EPA	EPA	Environmental Engineer
	Treasury	U.S. Mint	Police
		IRS	Clerk Typist General Attorney
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Clerk Typist Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk
16. St. Louis	Army	Aviation Systems Command	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber General Attorney
		Adjutant General	Clerk Typist Data Transcriber
	VA	Medicine and Surgery	Police Clerk Typist Nurse Practical Nurse Pharmacist Medical Clerk

[a]Although it is technically not in the New York MSA, IRS officials said that we should include the Brookhaven Service Center in Nassau-Suffolk MSA for the data transcriber and tax examiner occupations because most of the employees in these occupations in their region were at Brookhaven.

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