



**OKLAHOMA**  
**Human Services**

# **Protecting the OKDHS Workforce:**

## **The Impact of Hope on Employee Burnout, Commitment, and Job Satisfaction**

**2023 Employee Engagement Survey**

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## Executive Summary

The Oklahoma Human Services (OKDHS) Workforce 2023 Engagement Survey Results report provides insights and assessments relating to leadership efforts to become a hope-centered state agency. The results presented in this report focus on individual hope and collective hope in the OKDHS workforce. Target indicators identified by OKDHS leadership include burnout, affective commitment, workgroup goal achievement, job satisfaction, and the intent to remain at OKDHS. The data for 2023 represents the fourth year of assessing OKDHS goal of being a hope-centered and trauma-informed organization. This report highlights the impact of hope within OKDHS and supports the agency's vision of becoming an elite employer.

### OUTCOMES OF INDIVIDUAL HOPE:

- OKDHS employees report moderately high levels of hope.
  - 56.7% report high hope.
  - Average score is 55.03 (SD = 6.59).
- Individual hope scores have *increased* statistically over the first three years with a slight decrease in the fourth year.
- Individual hope scores were significantly associated with lower burnout.
- Individual hope scores continue to show significant association with indicators of well-being.

### OUTCOMES OF COLLECTIVE HOPE:

- OKDHS employees report high levels of collective hope.
  - 86.3% report high collective hope (a near 2% increase over 2022).
- Collective hope scores demonstrated *lower* levels of burnout.
- Collective hope scores demonstrated *higher* job satisfaction and the intent to remain at OKDHS.
- Collective hope scores demonstrated *higher* workgroup goal achievement.
- Collective hope scores demonstrated *higher* affective commitment to OKDHS.

### OVERALL OUTCOMES:

- OKDHS continues to demonstrate the importance of using hope as a framework for action on workforce outcomes.
- Hope is a significant predictor of OKDHS employee burnout, job satisfaction, and intent to remain in 12 months.
- Leadership efforts to nurture a culture of hope show that the OKDHS workforce perceives the agency can cast a vision toward the future, the workforce can identify pathways toward shared goals, and there is a shared energy to pursue this vision.

### Conclusion:

The science of hope is well established as an important coping resource and protective factor for employees. OKDHS continues to be a national leader, demonstrating hope's positive impact on a state agency's mission. Increasingly, other US state human service agencies are engaging in hope-centered efforts using OKDHS as the national model.

## **Hope Centered and Trauma-Informed Executive Vision Statement**

*As a Hope-Centered and Trauma-Informed organization, we recognize that childhood trauma negatively affects many in Oklahoma. We believe that hope provides a unified framework to create a positive organizational culture for our customers and staff. We strive to infuse our values, policy, practices, structure with the science of hope by setting the pathways for success and creating an environment for our customers and staff to thrive. As leaders, we use the science of hope to build a hope-centered organization by developing, modeling, and serving in a manner that nurtures the hope for tomorrow.*

*--OKDHS Leadership February 2020*

### **The Science of Hope:**

Hope is the belief the future can be better than the present and that we have the power to make this future a reality. Snyder's (2002) hope theory has emerged as the leading framework for conceptualizing hope as both a coping resource and positive psychological strength that promotes well-being. In this context, hope is a future based orientation where one can identify the pathways to goal achievement and marshal the motivation to pursue those pathways.

While desired goals are the cornerstone of hope theory, the focus is given to the two components of pathways thinking and agency thinking. *Pathways* thinking refers to the ability to identify strategies or plans on how to achieve one's goals. The hopeful employee can identify multiple pathways to the desired goal and effectively conceive alternative pathways or solutions to potential barriers. *Agency* thinking refers to the mental energy employees use to focus attention and energy toward their goal pursuits. The hopeful employee has the agency to self-regulate their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions when pursuing their desired goals. Ultimately instilling positive expectations regarding the pursuit of desired goals becomes the essence of hope.

Overall, the experience of hope has a positive influence on health and well-being. Those with higher hope tend to have lower levels of depression and higher positive affect and self-esteem. Hopeful individuals are less likely to ruminate on trauma experiences making it easier to exert willpower toward positive outcomes (cf. Hellman, Pharris & Munoz, 2022).

This year, the survey focused on the relationship between hope and collective hope on measures related to burnout, affective commitment, job satisfaction, and intent to remain within the next 12 months.

Burnout is an emotional state characterized by mental exhaustion and disengagement from work and is a concerning state for human service professionals. Frequent exposure to violence, death, child maltreatment, adult maltreatment, and family conflict are all known contributors to secondary trauma among human service professionals which can have a direct correlation to burnout, performance, and satisfaction.

Burnout is often linked to decreased commitment to work, lower job performance, and higher turnover. Employees who are suffering from burnout are less likely to engage empathy and other relationship building skills that are often needed for a family to engage in service delivery fully.

Attention to strategies that aim to reduce harm and use interventions that improve the work environment and promote retention and employee well-being has been a collective action call among human service leaders for decades. Research on hope consistently demonstrates that hope, and collective hope, provide a mechanism to buffer against the stress associated with work. In fact, prior studies on hope have found that higher hope employees have a distinct mindset and action strategies that buffer against adversity and allow them not simply to survive but thrive in human service work settings. When faced with adversity, employees who have higher hope have better performance outcomes and overall well-being because they are motivated to pursue goals, find multiple pathways to achieve those goals, and sustain energy to accomplish those goals (Petersson & Bryson, 2008; Pharris, Munoz & Hellman, 2022).

The following data presented in this report continues to provide insight into the status of the workforce in Oklahoma Human Services. Specifically, the report details the overall hope of the workforce, and the impact that individual and collective hope have on measures of burnout, affective commitment, job satisfaction, and potential turnover.

### **Hope-Centered State Agency**

#### **OKDHS Activities of Hope Ambassadors:**

- The OKDHS Director remains a proactive advocate of hope science.
- OKDHS has a dedicated Hope Team (Hope Ambassadors) to assist Hope Navigators with goal implementation, conducts internal training sessions, serves as the agency liaison with Dr. Chan Hellman and Dr. Angela Pharris, and works directly with the OU Hope Research Center for on-going evaluation.
- Hope Ambassadors conducted internal strategic planning sessions using the hope framework.
- Hope Navigators have implemented hope science into all Family Meetings in Child Welfare.
- Continued demand for tailored hope science training for districts, teams, and units in Child Welfare.
- Continued demand for in-person hope science training for front line supervisors who want to use the science in their one-to-one meetings and group meetings.
- Increasing demand from community partners to have hope awareness training.
- Hope Navigator teams are creating hope goals, implementing goals and pathways, then working to identify the next goal to integrate the science of hope.

## Method

**Procedure and Participants:** All employees from OKDHS were invited to complete an anonymous online survey as part of the annual employee engagement survey process. The specific procedures and demographic profile of participating OKDHS staff is available in the 2023 Employee Engagement Survey Results. Over 3,000 (3,423) OKDHS staff participated in the hope section of the online survey.

## Measurement

*Adult Hope Scale.* The Hope Scale is an 8-item scale that measures the extent to which the respondent feels motivated to obtain goals and whether they can construct pathways to attain those goals (Snyder et al., 1991). A total Hope score is derived by adding the scores from the eight items. An 8-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = definitely false to 8 = definitely true, is used to measure the responses. Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Hellman, Pittman, & Munoz, 2013), the reliability estimates for the total Hope Scale for this sample were adequate ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Collective Hope.* A 6-item scale was developed to assess the extent that employees can identify common goals, find the pathways to collective goal attainment, and dedicate the collective mental energy toward those pathways within their division. Respondents were presented a 6-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Definitely False to (6) Definitely True. Reliability estimates for the Collective Hope Scale was strong ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

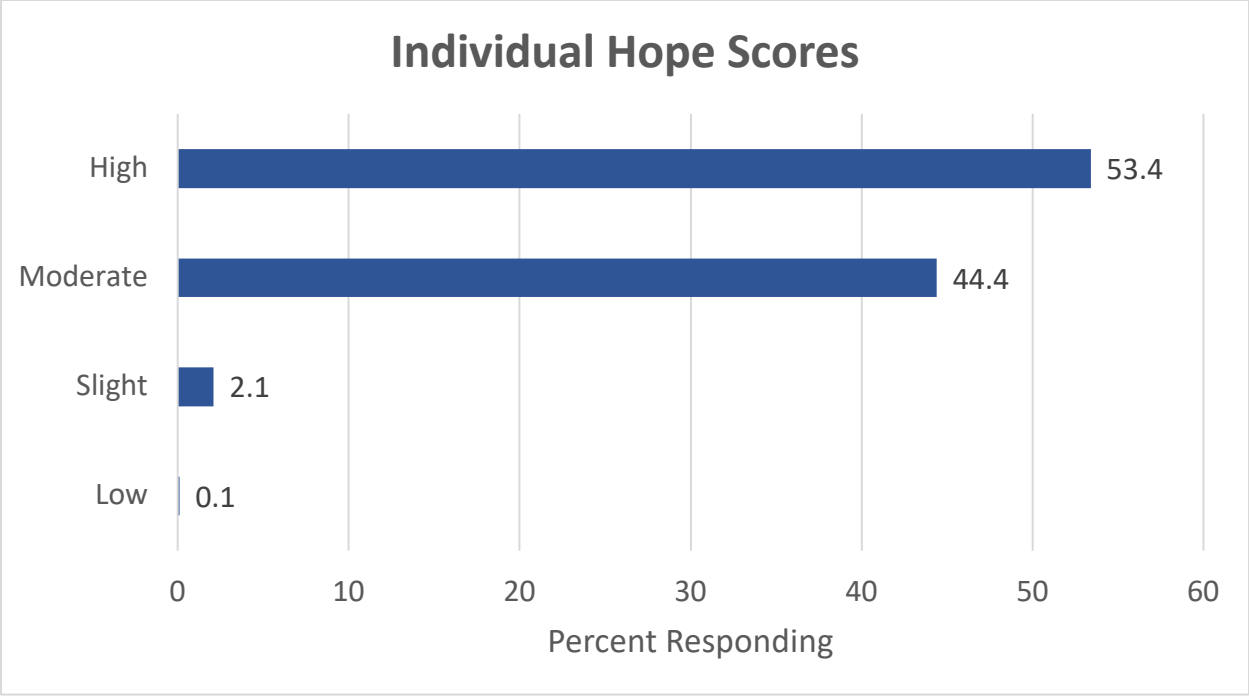
*Burnout* was measured using the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI; Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, & Kantas, 2003) to assess *exhaustion* and *disengagement*, classic symptoms of burnout. The OLBI has 16 items presented in a 4-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree). Eight items measure *disengagement*. A representative example of the eight disengagement items asks the respondent if they always find new and interesting aspects in their work. There are eight items, which measure *exhaustion*. A representative example of the exhaustion items asks the respondent if there are days they feel tired before they arrive at work or feel emotionally drained by the work. Internal consistency reliability for the burnout scale was .91.

*Affective Commitment* refers to the emotional attachment employees hold toward the agency. Affective commitment is enhanced when employees feel their personal values are aligned with the mission of the agency. The affective commitment scale is a six-item measure developed by Meyer and Allen (1984). The scale uses a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree). A representative example item includes, “This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.” Internal consistency reliability for this measure was .81.

## Analyses

Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviation, frequency distributions) are used to summarize the responses for the survey questions. Cronbach’s alpha was computed to assess the score reliability estimates for the set of scaled items. In other words, it measures the extent that

which the questions consistently measure the concept. Generally, the higher the Cronbach's alpha score, the range is between 0 to 1, and the closer to 1 indicates good reliability. Finally, to examine the connection of hope to important employee indicators of burnout, job satisfaction, job performance, and intent to remain within 12 months, the Analysis of Variance was computed to examine differences between levels of individual hope (Low, Slight, Moderate, and High) and differences between levels of collective hope (Low, Moderate, and High). An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is a statistical test to determine if there are statistically significant differences between the groups.



*Hope is the belief that the future will be better, and you have the power to make it happen.*

**Key:**

- High hope score range      56 – 64
- Moderate hope score range   40 – 55
- Slight hope score range      17 – 39
- Low hope score range        08 – 16

The graph above provides the Individual Hope scores for OKDHS employees across all divisions. On average ( $M = 55.03$ ;  $SD = 6.59$ ), participants are at the upper end of moderate hope. Indeed, 53.4% of participants scored in the high hope category. This finding suggests OKDHS employees can find pathways toward their goals and have the willpower needed to pursue these goals.

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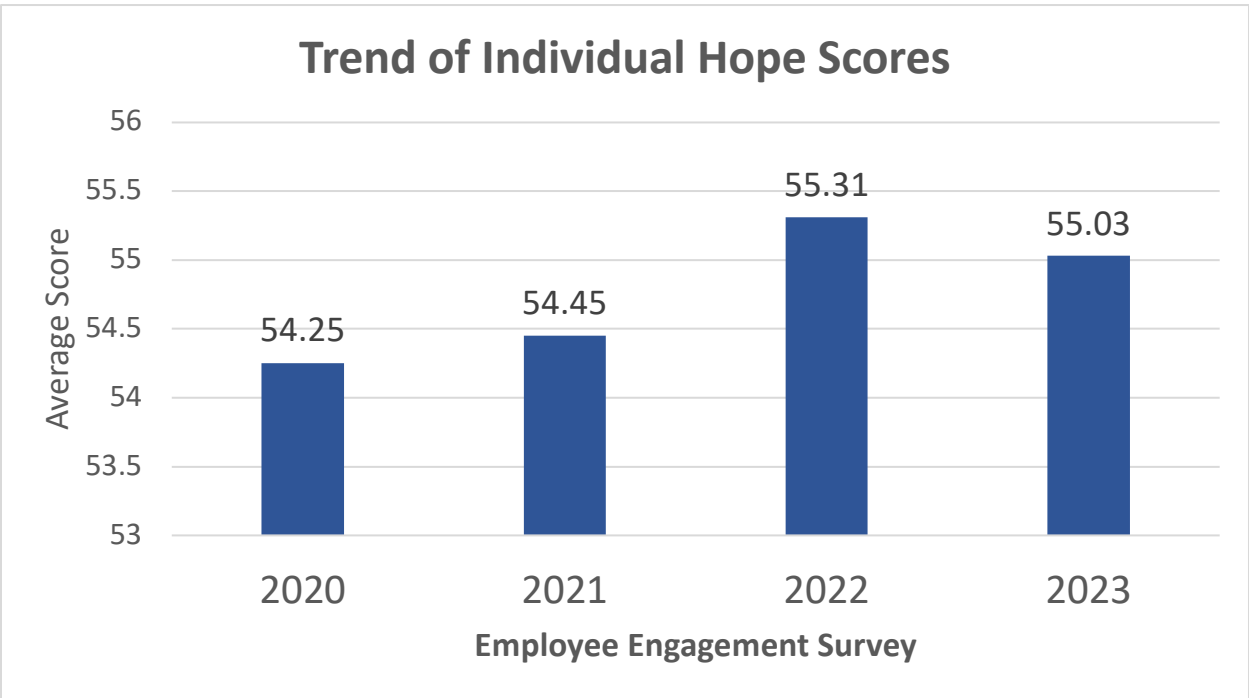
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*Hope is the belief that the future will be better, and you have the power to make it happen.*

The graph above provides the four-year trend of Individual Hope scores for OKDHS employees. On average, participants are moderately hopeful about their future, with an increase in 2022 over the previous two years and a slight decline in 2023. This finding suggests OKDHS training, awareness, and efforts around hope are contributing to OKDHS employees’ ability to find pathways toward their goals and the willpower needed to pursue these goals.

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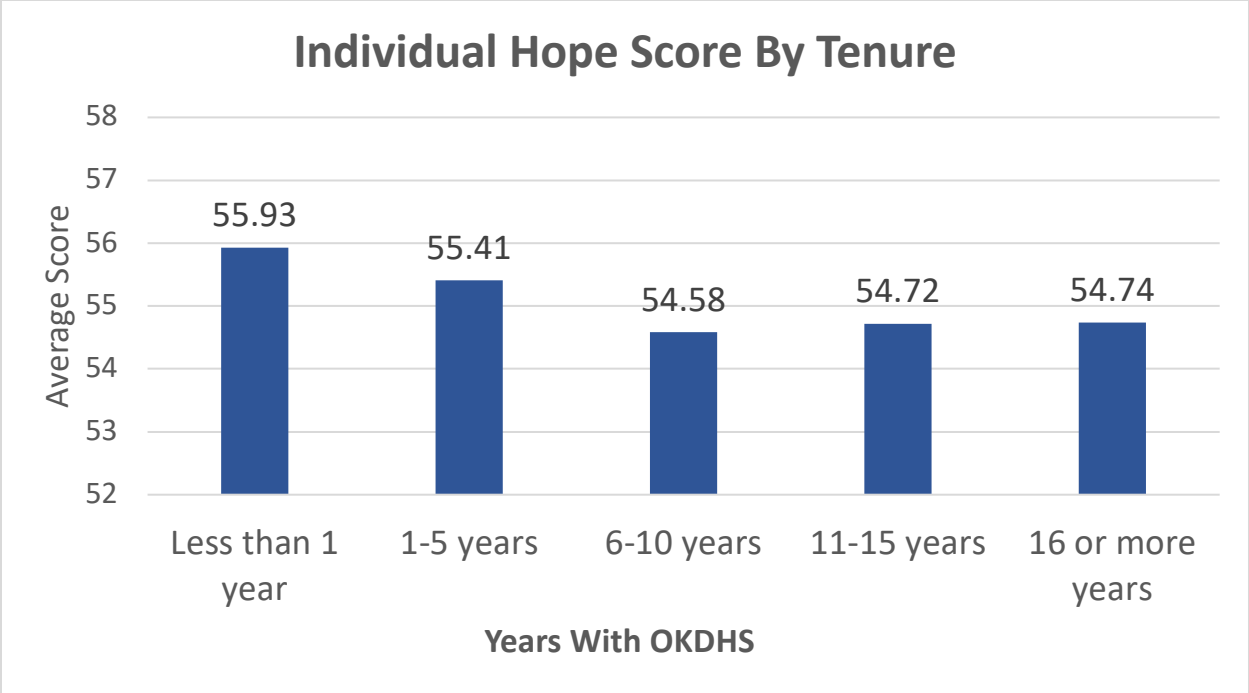


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*Hope is the belief that the future will be better, and you have the power to make it happen.*

The graph above provides the Individual Hope scores for OKDHS employees based on years of service. On average, participants are moderately hopeful about their future across the categories of tenure. Interestingly, new employees in their first year report high hope on average. Then, as their tenure continues, they apparently settle into moderate hope. This finding suggests OKDHS employees can find pathways toward their goals and have the willpower needed to pursue these goals irrespective of their years of service.

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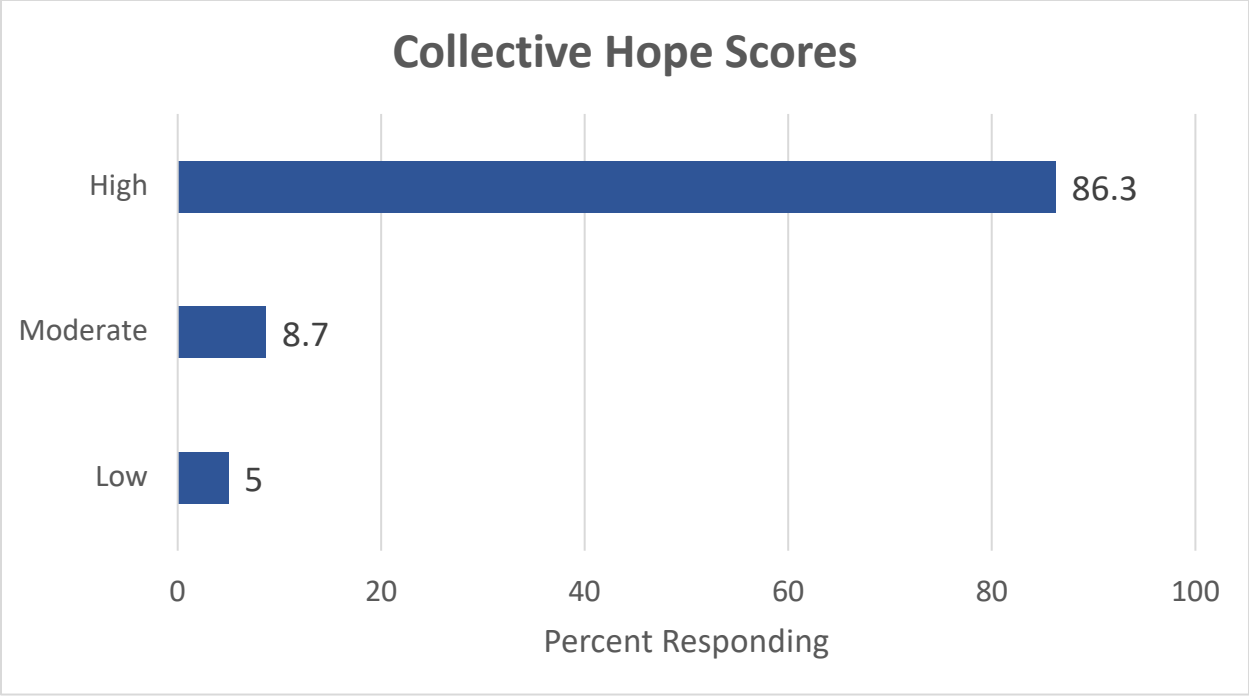
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*Collective Hope is the belief the organization can generate the collective willpower to pursue a shared vision.*

**Key:**

- High hope score range            24 – 36
- Moderate hope score range    19 – 23
- Low hope score range            06 – 18

The graph above illustrates responses to Collective Hope scores for OKDHS employees by hope category. A total of 86.3% of respondents had a high level of collective hope, indicating they believe their division has shared goals, can find resources to achieve the goals and has the willpower to pursue those goals together. Additionally, this represents a slight increase compared to 2022 where 84.1% reported high collective hope scores. On average (M =28.56; SD =5.74), participants scored high on their belief OKDHS can identify pathways and marshal the collective willpower to pursue its goals.

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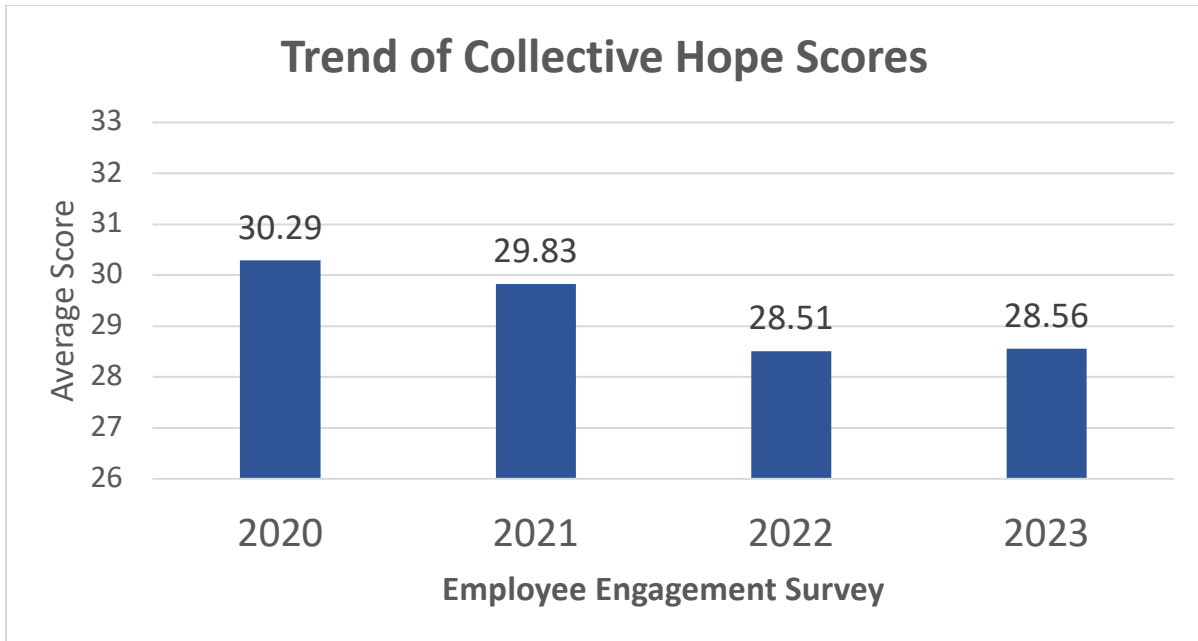
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*Collective Hope is the belief the organization can generate the collective willpower to pursue a shared vision.*

The graph above provides the four-year trend of Collective Hope scores for OKDHS employees. On average participants continue to have high collective hope indicating they believe their division has shared goals, can find resources to achieve the goals and has the willpower to pursue those goals together. This shared belief of agency goals, pathways, and willpower suggests the leadership can be confident in setting an aspirational vision toward the future.

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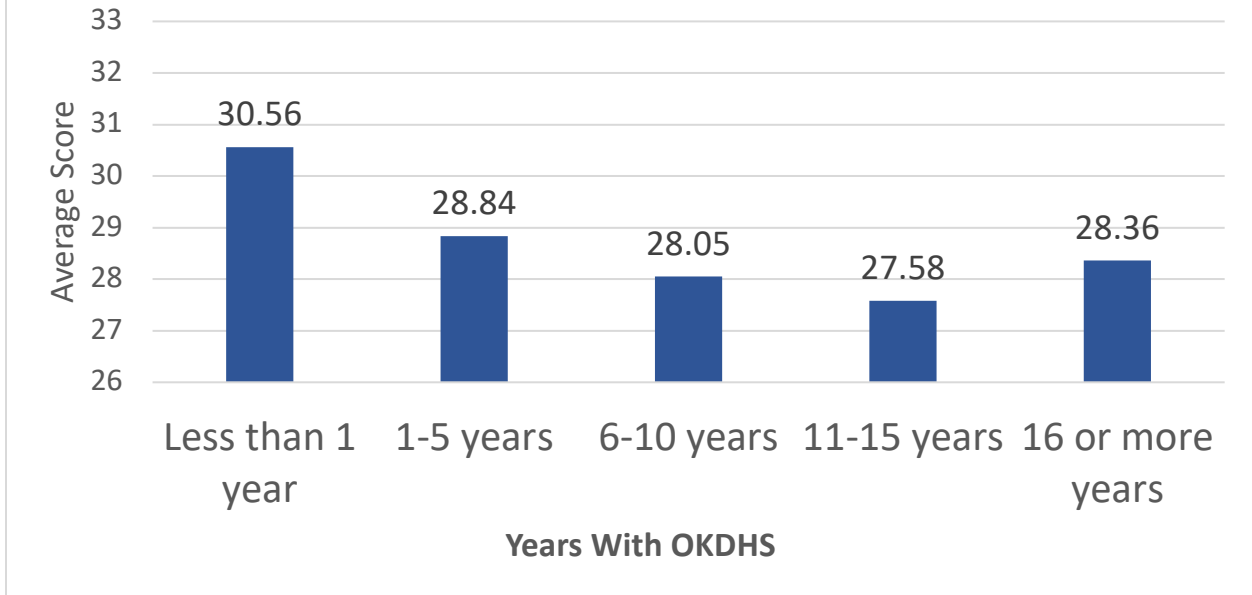


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## Collective Hope Score By Tenure



*Collective Hope is the belief the organization can generate the collective willpower to pursue a shared vision.*

The graph above provides the Collective Hope scores for OKDHS employees based on years of service. On average, participants have high collective hope across years of service. Similar to individual hope, it is interesting that new employees in their first-year report high hope on average. As their tenure continues employees settle into a relatively stable (yet high) collective hope.

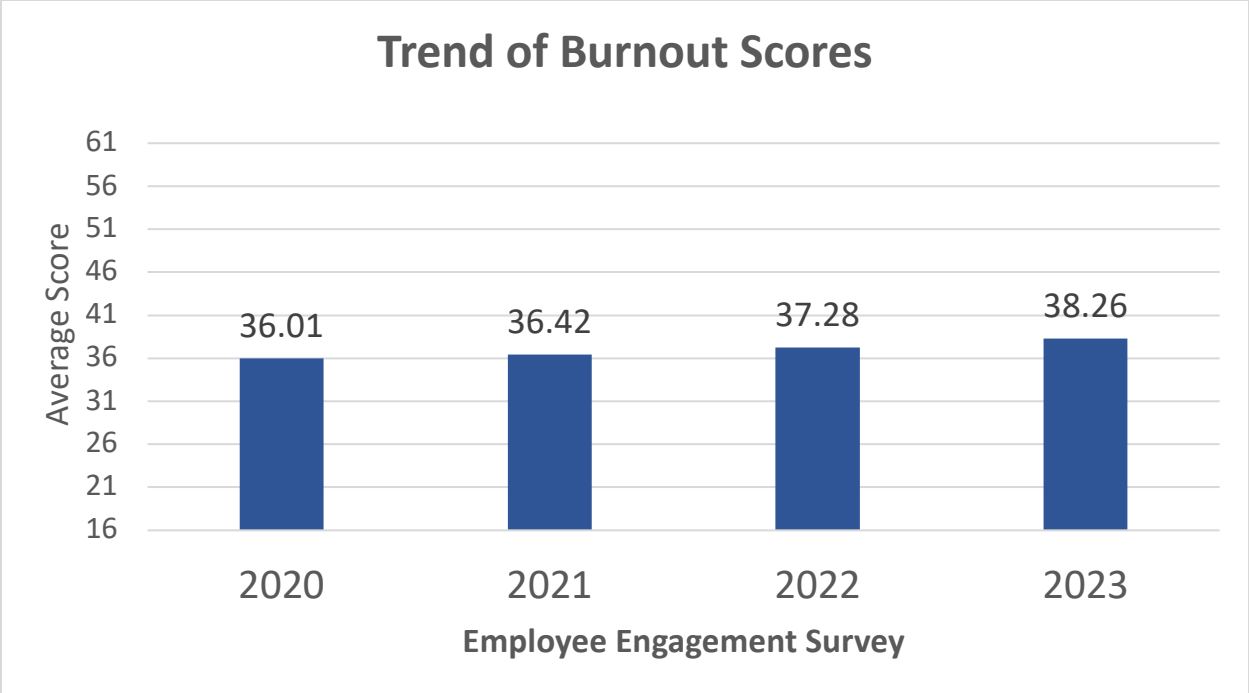
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*Burnout refers to the emotional exhaustion that results from extended exposure to job demands that exceed the internal and external resources to cope with stress.*

The graph above provides the four-year trend of Burnout scores for OKDHS employees. On average scores have shown a slight increase over the past four years indicating an overall moderate experience of burnout. Given the significant positive effect of individual and collective hope on burnout (see following graphs), leadership efforts to build protective strategies for the workforce are warranted to promote workforce well-being.

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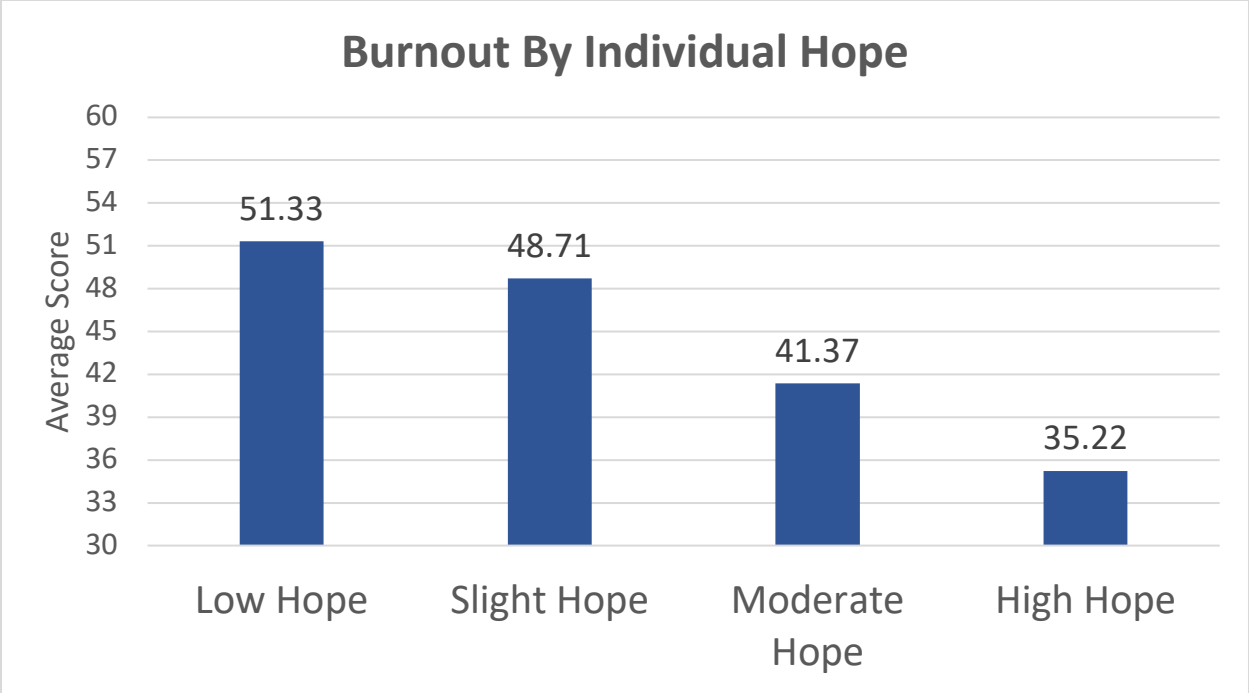
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*Burnout refers to the emotional exhaustion that results from extended exposure to job demands that exceed the internal and external resources to cope with stress.*

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to compare the mean scores of the level of Burnout among the participants based upon their level of hope. As seen in the graph, higher levels of hope experience lower levels of burnout [F (3, 2939) = 144.22, p < .001,  $\eta^2$  = 0.13].

It is important to remember that hope is malleable and can be activated when employees find pathways and generate willpower toward their goals. Efforts that focus on helping effective employees see OKDHS as a pathway toward their goals are warranted.

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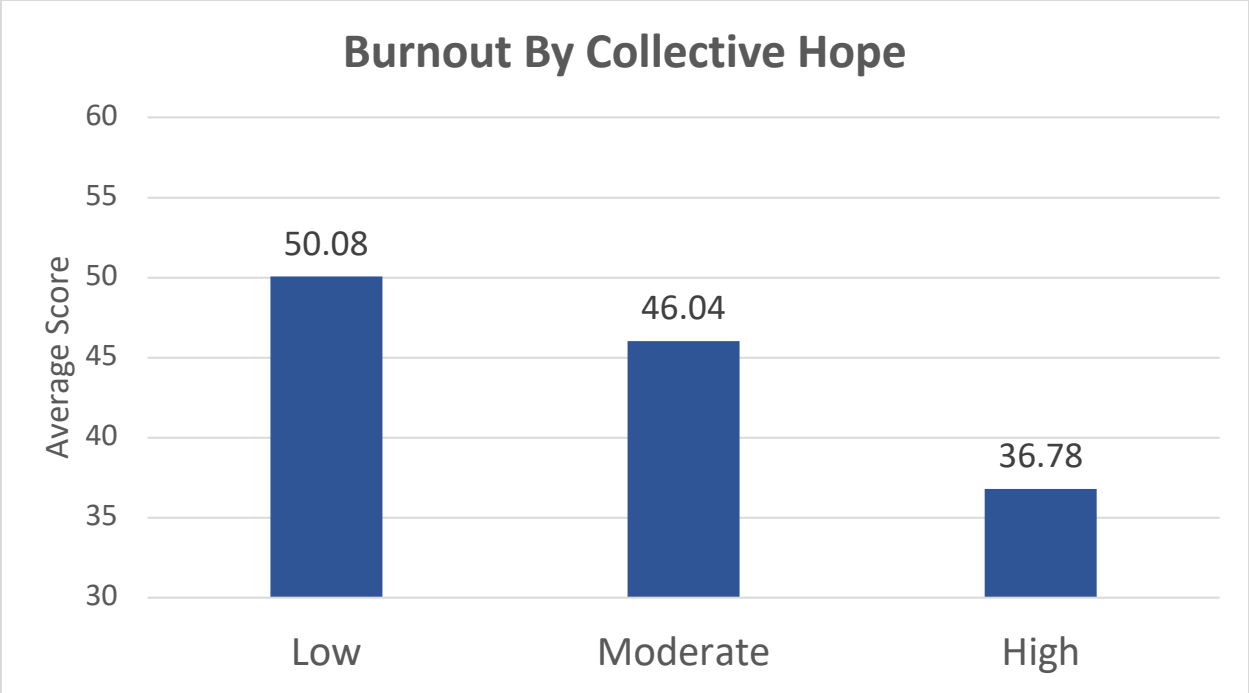
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*Burnout refers to the emotional exhaustion that results from extended exposure to job demands that exceed the internal and external resources to cope with stress.*

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the level of Burnout across employee level of collective hope. As seen in the graph above, higher levels of collective hope result in lower levels of burnout among the workforce [F (2, 2923) = 269.51, p < .001,  $\eta^2$  = 0.16].

Both individual hope and collective hope are malleable. While the drivers of individual hope might be outside OKDHS capacity to influence (e.g., family, leisure, spiritual connection), collective hope is specifically under the influence of the agency. Efforts to communicate the vision of goal attainment, helping employees find strategies to overcome barriers to their job, and supporting a shared energy (we can mentality) will continue to show positive association to workforce well-being.

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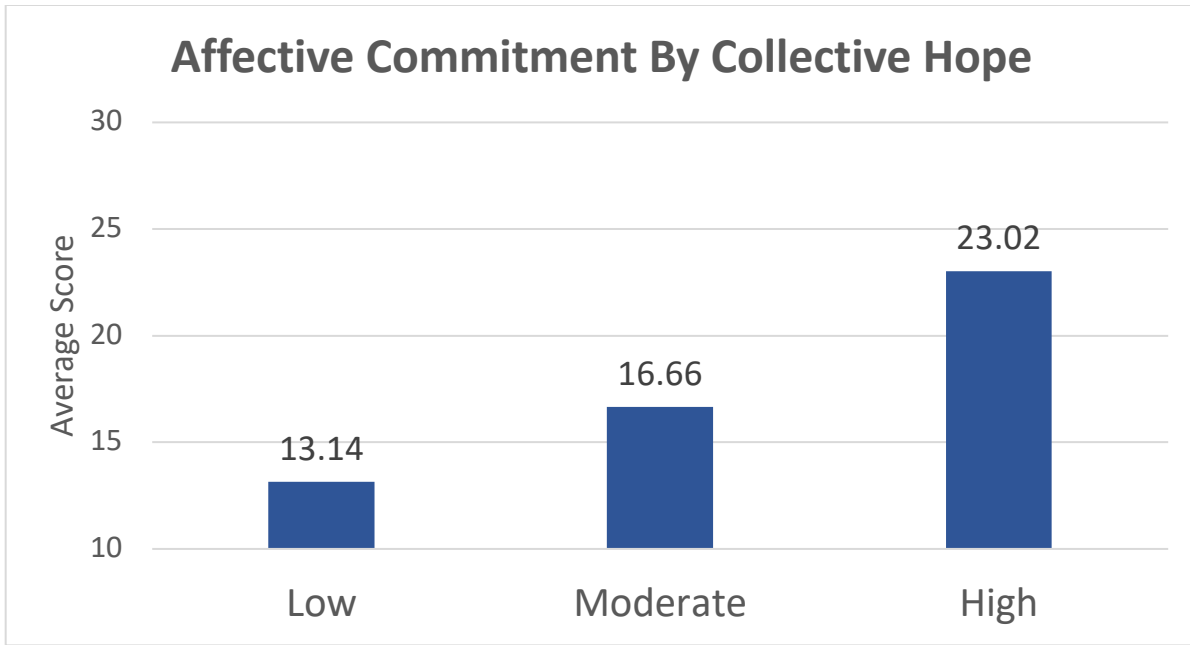
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*Affective commitment refers to an emotional bond to the agency. This commitment is enhanced when an employee feels their personal values align with the agency's mission*

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare affective commitment by levels of collective hope. As seen in the graph, higher levels of collective hope result in significantly higher levels of affective commitment among the workforce [F (2, 2963) = 319.27, p < .001,  $\eta^2$ = 0.18].

Affective commitment has long been established as a significant predictor of workplace outcomes. Research demonstrates a strong association between affective commitment and performance, turnover, and job satisfaction. As an emotional bond held by the employees, affective commitment is a strong predictor of these outcomes compared to commitment based upon growing investments (e.g., tenure with the organization), or a sense of moral obligation. Results from this survey demonstrate the importance collective hope plays on creating a framework to improve workplace outcomes.

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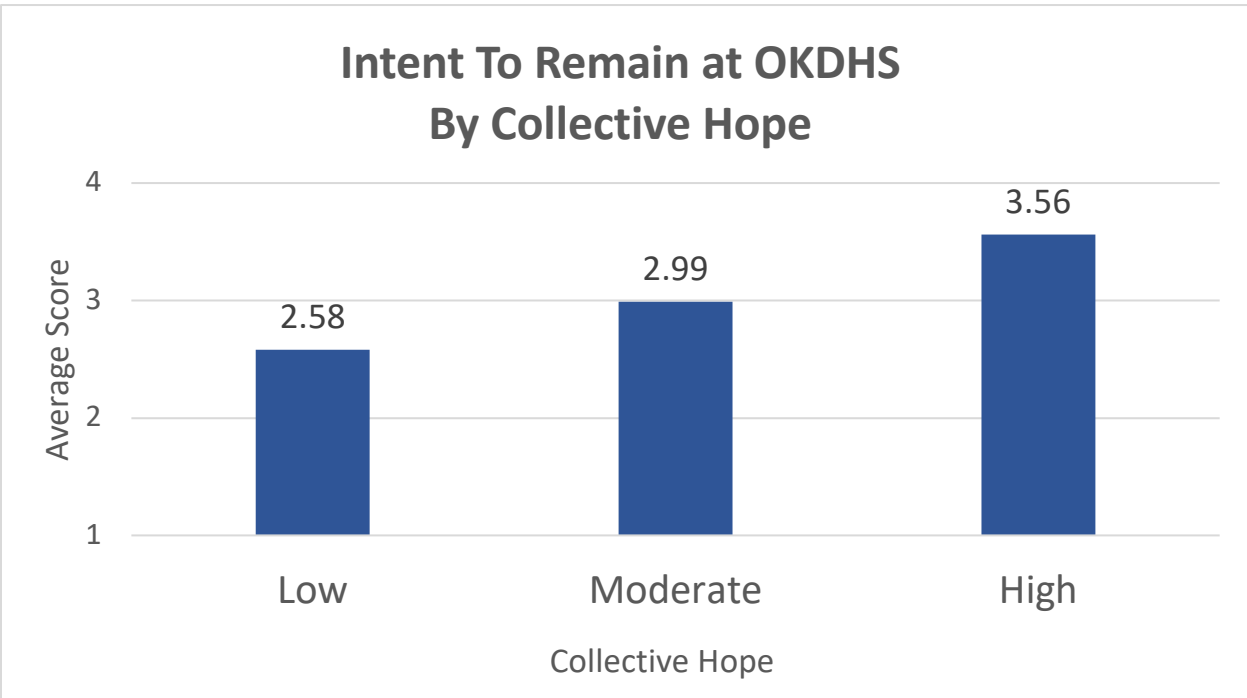


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A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the Intent to Remain at OKDHS among the level of collective hope. As seen in the graph above, increasing collective hope scores show significantly higher intention to remain at OKDHS [F (2, 2989) = 154.20, p < .001,  $\eta^2$  = 0.09].

The robust research evidence shows that an employee’s intention to leave the organization is the strongest predictor of actual turnover and other withdrawal behaviors (e.g., disengagement). In 2022, OKDHS reported a 22% reduction in turnover. Continued efforts to nurture collective hope in the workforce should continue to promote both employee and organizational well-being.

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*Collective Hope is the belief the organization can generate the collective willpower to pursue a shared vision.*

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare workgroup goal achievement by collective hope. As seen in the graph, higher levels of collective hope produced a higher likelihood of workgroup goal success [F (2, 2979) = 170.20, p < .001, η<sup>2</sup> = 0.10].

In past research with OKDHS, collective hope was positively associated with trust in leadership, trust in team members, higher team cohesion and improved communication. These results extend the benefits of collective hope by improving goal attainment at the workgroup level.

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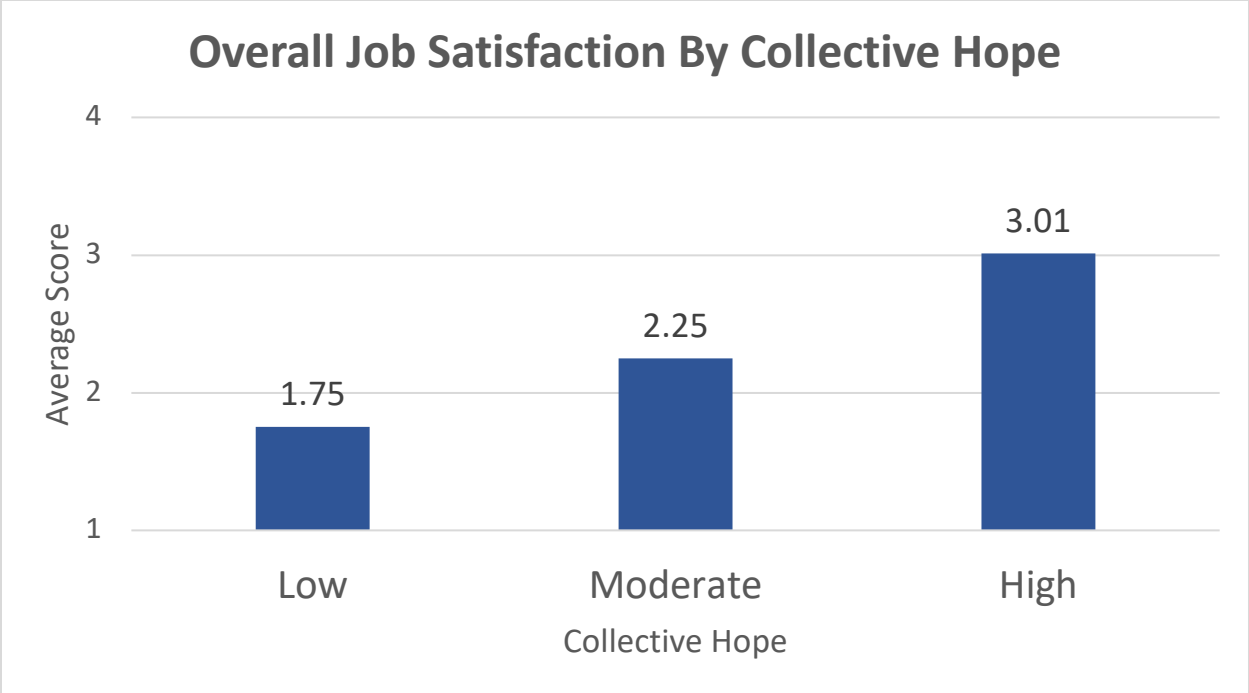
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*While job satisfaction consistently predicts turnover behaviors.*

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare levels of job satisfaction by collective hope scores. Consistent with other findings, higher levels of collective hope positively impacted job satisfaction among the OKDHS workforce [F (2, 2991) = 275.50, p < .001,  $\eta^2 = 0.16$ ].

While individual hope continues to be the stronger predictor of individual well-being, collective hope scores are a better predictor of job satisfaction (an indicator of workforce morale).

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## **Conclusions & Recommendations**

Oklahoma Human Services continues to make progress towards the goal of becoming the first hope-centered state agency. OKDHS is in its fourth year of using hope as a framework for action across all divisions. This work focuses on using the framework of hope as a strategy for positive impact throughout the workforce and improving client outcomes.

Over the first three reporting periods, OKDHS employees demonstrated an increase each year in their individual hope scores. During the fourth year there was a slight decline from 2022. The results of the 2023 survey demonstrate the workforce continues to report moderately high levels of hope. Consistent with the science of hope, OKDHS employee hope has a significant association with the levels of burnout, affective commitment, job satisfaction, and intent to remain at OKDHS.

While individual hope is recognized as one of the strongest predictors of well-being, the drivers of hope may be outside the agency's capacity to influence (e.g., family, leisure, spiritual connections). Therefore, collective hope was developed by the research team to represent the employee's perception the agency can cast a clear vision of the future. Collective hope is high when employees perceived the workforce has the ability to identify pathways toward the shared goal and has the ability to dedicate a shared energy toward the pathway pursuits. Collective hope was developed to be influenced by the organization.

The findings in this report demonstrate that Collective Hope has a significant positive impact on workforce well-being (e.g., lower burnout, higher affective commitment, increased goal achievement). OKDHS has emerged as a national leader in the human services on using hope as a framework for action. While other US human service state agencies are undertaking these efforts as well, OKDHS is at the forefront of using hope as a framework for action.

Designing and sustaining strategies to deploy a hope-centered and trauma-informed practice model at OKDHS demonstrates positive impact for the workforce.

### **Recommendations:**

This report demonstrates that hope is a protective factor for the OKDHS workforce. In order to leverage these positive findings, the following recommendations are offered for consideration.

1. Be aspirational! The results of this fourth survey demonstrate high levels of both individual and collective hope among the workforce. Leaders can take advantage of this important drive to design aspirational goals for the agency's future.
2. Continue to expand the number of employees trained as Hope Navigators across programs within divisions. Hope Navigators can manage the implementation of hope strategies within the division and champion a hope-centered and trauma-informed organizational culture.
3. Identify strategies to offer Hope Awareness workshops for new staff and recurring refresher opportunities for employees. Embedding the hope training into employee onboarding can align the new employee in the mindset of hope at the onset of employment. A hope-centered socialization process for new and existing employees

along with the continued strategic communication plan will contribute to a culture of hope across OKDHS.

4. Identify hope navigators within leadership positions with the specific focus on building hope-centered leadership strategies. These strategies can then be deployed into a leadership academy to prepare new leaders and to support existing leaders.