JOB SATISFACTION AMONG THE ACADEMIC STAFF OF A SAUDI UNIVERSITY: AN EVALUATIVE STUDY

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Objective: To explore the state of job satisfaction among the academic staff of King Faisal University – Dammam (KFU-D), and detect the areas and groups at a higher risk of being dissatisfied.

Method: A fully-structured 5-option Likert-type Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (JSQ) composed of an evaluative item and eleven domains making a total of 46 items was used. It was distributed by internal mail to all the 340 academic staff, 248 of whom returned completed questionnaires (response rate = 72.9 %).

Findings: The overall mean Job Satisfaction Rate (JSR) was 73.6 %. The highest JSR's were found in three domains (“Supervision”, “Responsibility”, and “Interpersonal Relationships”), and the lowest in four others (“Salary”, “My Work Itself”, “Working Conditions”, and “Advancement”). The JSR was significantly lower among Saudi nationals, females, those below age 40, those from clinical medical and Dentistry departments. Multiple Regression identified six independent variables which jointly explained 25 % of the variance in job satisfaction (p < 0.0001). These were: being an expatriate, above the age of 50, serving the university for less than one or more than ten years, and, not from a clinical department of Medicine or Dentistry.

Conclusions: Most staff were satisfied with many aspects of their jobs, but there was significant dissatisfaction with several job-related aspects and demographic features. Appropriate

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Background: Job satisfaction is a major determinant of job performance, manpower retention and employee well-being.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, academic staff, King Faisal University, Dammam, Saudi Arabia.
interventions are indicated. Further studies are needed to confirm the present findings and to monitor future trends.

**Key Words:** Job satisfaction, Academic staff, Job performance, University education, Saudi Arabia

**INTRODUCTION**

Job satisfaction (JS) is conceptualized as a general attitude toward one’s job and one's contentment with it. As a primary denominator of well-being, self-image and productivity, JS is a central concern not only to employees, but also to employers and human resource agencies. Its association with such work-related problems as burnout, absenteeism and turnover is well established.

Two types of JS measures have been implemented - single-item and multiple-item instruments. The former typically asks a general question such as “On the whole, would you say that you are satisfied or dissatisfied with your job?” The latter scales are more detailed covering various aspects of one’s attitude toward one’s job adding up to an overall JS score. While single-item measures readily provide an overall judgment, multiple-item ones have the additional merit of eliciting specific causes and aspects of job dissatisfaction.

Several local studies have addressed job satisfaction among healthcare professionals in Saudi Arabia, mostly among nurses and/or physicians. Their reported findings varied considerably across different occupational settings and professional groups. We have not come across any study on job satisfaction among academic staff of any Saudi university.

**OBJECTIVES**

The present study aimed to explore the level of JS among the academic staff of King Faisal University – Dammam (KFU-D). The specific objectives were to (1) estimate the overall level of JS, and (2) explore job-related and demographic correlates of JS. The anticipated results might, hopefully, help in developing target-oriented policies and programs.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

**Sample and Questionnaire**

In the autumn of 2007, a fully-structured questionnaire was anonymously dispatched via internal college mail to all 340 academic staff in the five KFU-D colleges. The first part covered basic demographic and professional identification data, including gender, age, citizenship, academic credentials, college and department affiliations, and duration of service in KFU-D.

The second part was a modified version of Herzberg’s Job Satisfaction Scale (JSQ) containing 46 Likert-type 5-option items coded from 1 to 5 to indicate a response of either “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neutral”, “Agree”, or “Strongly Agree” respectively.

The first item was an overall evaluation of one’s own job satisfaction, reading: “In general, I am satisfied with my job”. The other 45 items were subdivided into 11 domains of job satisfaction – namely, “Administrative Policies”, “Interpersonal Relationships”, “Salary”, “Working Conditions”, “Supervision”, “Job Security”, “My Work Itself”, “Achievement”, “Recognition”, “Responsibility”, and “Advancement”.

**Measures**

The outcome measures were: (1) Item Satisfaction Score (ISS) which is an integer number ranging from 1 to 5 for responses ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. (2) Mean Domain Score (MDS) which was the average of all the ISS of the specified job domain, and (3) Job Satisfaction Rate (JSR) which was the percentile proportion of subjects giving the item a score of either 4 or 5, denoting a response of either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”.

**Statistical Analysis**

Data entry and data analysis used SPSS version 15. There were missing data in one to two items on 13 (5.2%) questionnaires. Computations were carried out on valid data. Bivariate comparisons of continuous dependent variables (ISS and MDS) across independent subject groups used means and standard deviations, and were tested for significance by F-values and degrees of freedom. The JSR as a percentile dependent variable was...
compared across categorically dichotomized independent variables in two-by-two cross-tabulations tested for significance by Pearson’s Chi-Square, and for effect size by the Odds Ratio and its 95% Confidence Interval. Multivariate analyses used Stepwise Linear Regression estimated by $R^2$ and tested by F-value. Findings were considered statistically significant if $p < 0.05$.

**RESULTS**

**Responders**

Two hundred forty eight academic staff returned completed questionnaires achieving a response rate of 72.9%. It ranged across colleges from 56.7% in the College of Nursing to 77.3% in Medicine. By colleges, the whole sample was composed of 60.5% from the College of Medicine, 13.6% from Nursing, 10.9% from Applied Sciences, 8.1% from Architecture, and 6.9% from Dentistry. Male were 62.2% and expatriates were 61.5%. By academic titles, 17.8% were professors, 27.6% associate professors, and 54.6% assistant professors. By age groups, 26.1% were below 40, 36.6% in group 41 to 50, and 37.3% above 50 years. By duration of service at KFU-D, 36.0% had been in their position for less than five years, 22.9% for six to ten years, and 38.1 for over ten years.

Compared with their male counterparts, significantly more female staff were Saudi ($p < 0.05$), younger ($p < 0.00001$), had shorter duration of service ($p < 0.001$), and, lower academic titles ($p < 0.01$). Within the female subgroup, significantly lower JSR was found in Saudis, those below the age of 50, with less than 5 years service, in a clinical medical department, and not in the college of nursing.

The expatriates were more frequently males ($p < 0.05$), older ($p < 0.0001$), with higher academic titles ($p < 0.05$), with shorter duration of service ($p < 0.01$), less represented in the clinical departments and more represented in the preclinical departments of the College of Medicine. All the staff of the College of Nursing were females, and all the staff of the College of Architecture were males.

**Job Satisfaction Rate (JSR)**

About three quarters of KFU-D academic staff (73.6%) said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs. This observed JSR ranged across domains from 16.1% in “Salary” to 84.9% in “Supervision” (Table 1). All inter-domain correlations were positive and significant ($r = +0.68$ to $+0.30$), except for the correlation between “Salary” and “Responsibility” which was not significant ($r = +0.14$).

By gender, (Table 1), females had significantly lower job satisfaction than males in the overall JSR, as well as in five domains (“Supervision”, “Responsibility”, “Interpersonal Relationships”, “Administrative Policies”, and “Achievement”). There were no significant gender differences in the remaining six domains.

By citizenship (Table 2), Saudi nationals had significantly lower job satisfaction than expatriates in the overall JSR as well as in eight domains. The exceptions were “Advancement”, “Recognition”, and “Salary” in which there were no significant differences.

Table 3 provides the Odds Ratios of being satisfied by demographic and service variables. Compared with their counterparts, for expatriates the odds of being satisfied with their jobs were more than three. It was nearly twice for males; for those above the age of 60 it was seven times; three times for those with less than one year service; and for those in preclinical medical, it was more than three times. However, for those below the age of 40 and for the clinical medical and dental, the odds were significantly lower (0.50, 0.37 and 0.41 respectively).

Within the female subgroup, the highest JSR was found in the Nursing College where all the staff were females ($p < 0.001$), and the lowest JSR was found among the females who were Saudi nationals ($p < 0.0001$), below age 50 ($p < 0.05$), or, clinical medical staff ($p < 0.05$).

By academic titles, no significant differences in job satisfaction were found among professors, associate, and assistant professors.

**Item Satisfaction Scores (ISS)**

The overall mean ISS for all the 46 JSQ items was 3.86 on the one to five-point Likert scale. The highest ISS was 4.4 for the item that read “I am ready to make an extra effort to accomplish my work”. The lowest one was 1.9 for the item that read, “My salary is higher than in other universities”. As a whole, 14 items (31%) scored above the overall mean; three quarters of these came from the three domains of “Supervision”, “Responsibility”, and “Interpersonal Relationships”. At the other extreme, nine out of the lowest 10 items came from the three domains of “Salary”, “Working Conditions”, and “Advancement”.

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### Table 1: Mean domain scores (MDS) and JSR by gender

| JS Domain                  | MDS  | All  | Male  | Female | Significance |
|----------------------------|------|------|-------|--------|--------------|
| Supervision                | 4.21 | 84.9 | 89.7  | 76.8   | 0.01         |
| Responsibility             | 3.95 | 77.1 | 82.6  | 69.4   | 0.0001       |
| Interpersonal relationships | 3.48 | 70.9 | 73.9  | 65.9   | 0.05         |
| My work itself             | 2.27 | 65.9 | 68.1  | 62.2   | Ns           |
| Job security               | 3.61 | 60.6 | 61.6  | 58.4   | Ns           |
| Achievement                | 3.51 | 55.4 | 60.5  | 48.1   | 0.01         |
| Administrative policies    | 3.30 | 49.3 | 53.9  | 41.9   | 0.01         |
| Working conditions         | 2.87 | 36.0 | 36.8  | 34.4   | Ns           |
| Advancement                | 3.05 | 34.9 | 37.6  | 30.3   | Ns           |
| Recognition                | 2.96 | 33.8 | 35.5  | 31.1   | Ns           |
| Salary                     | 2.25 | 16.1 | 15.1  | 17.8   | Ns           |

"In general, I am satisfied with my job" 2.87 36.0 36.8 34.4 Ns

### Table 2: Mean domain scores (MDS) and JSR by citizenship

| JS Domain                  | MDS  | All  | Saudi | Expatriates | Significance |
|----------------------------|------|------|-------|-------------|--------------|
| Supervision                | 4.21 | 84.9 | 79.0  | 88.7        | 0.01         |
| Responsibility             | 3.95 | 77.1 | 69.1  | 82.7        | 0.0001       |
| Interpersonal relationships | 3.48 | 70.9 | 60.2  | 77.6        | 0.0001       |
| My work itself             | 2.27 | 65.9 | 60.4  | 69.2        | 0.01         |
| Job security               | 3.61 | 60.6 | 53.4  | 65.1        | 0.01         |
| Administrative policies    | 3.51 | 55.4 | 44.0  | 63.0        | 0.0001       |
| Achievement                | 3.30 | 49.3 | 37.2  | 56.7        | 0.0001       |
| Working conditions         | 2.87 | 36.0 | 20.4  | 45.6        | 0.0001       |
| Advancement                | 3.05 | 35.1 | 33.7  | 34.2        | Ns           |
| Recognition                | 2.96 | 33.8 | 33.7  | 34.2        | Ns           |
| Salary                     | 2.25 | 16.1 | 13.8  | 17.3        | Ns           |

"In general, I am satisfied with my job" 3.81 73.6 75.7 70.4 0.05

### Table 3: Overall job satisfaction rates (JSR) by staff characteristics

| Staff category | Yes  | No   | OR   | 95% CI | Significance |
|----------------|------|------|------|--------|--------------|
| Demographic    |      |      |      |        |              |
| Male sex       | 77.1 | 68.1 | 1.76 | 1.12 – 7.45 | 0.05        |
| Expatriate     | 82.0 | 58.9 | 3.19 | 1.67 – 6.09 | 0.0001      |
| Age <40 years  | 63.0 | 77.4 | 0.50 | 0.25 – 0.89 | 0.01        |
| Age >60 years  | 94.7 | 71.3 | 7.26 | 1.01 – 54.76 | 0.05        |
| College        |      |      |      |        |              |
| All medical    | 72.6 | 75.0 | 0.89 | 0.47 – 1.68 | Ns           |
| Preclinical    | 88.5 | 68.5 | 3.53 | 1.41 – 8.85 | 0.01        |
| Clinical       | 60.0 | 80.1 | 0.37 | 0.19 – 0.71 | 0.001       |
| Dental         | 63.7 | 78.2 | 0.41 | 0.23 – 0.83 | 0.05        |
| Nursing        | 78.1 | 72.8 | 1.34 | 0.54 – 3.30 | Ns           |
| Applied sciences | 79.2 | 72.9 | 1.41 | 0.50 – 3.99 | Ns           |
| Architecture   | 69.1 | 73.9 | 0.79 | 0.23 – 2.69 | Ns           |
| Service in KFHU|      |      |      |        |              |
| Service >10 years | 88.3 | 68.7 | 3.49 | 1.39 – 8.32 | 0.01        |

### Table 4: Multiple regression of job satisfaction rate with independent variables

| Variable         | B      | SEB    | Beta   | T      | Sign T |
|------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Nationality      | 4.49   | 1.14   | 0.255  | 3.94   | 0.000  |
| Age >50 years    | 2.72   | 1.28   | 0.142  | 2.12   | 0.035  |
| Clinical medicine| -3.16  | 1.12   | -0.175 | -2.81  | 0.005  |
| Dental           | -5.25  | 2.13   | -0.144 | -2.47  | 0.014  |
| Longer service   | 4.54   | 1.77   | 0.153  | 2.56   | 0.011  |
| Constant         | 14.71  | 2.11   | -      | -      | -      |

Multiple R = 0.517, R²=0.268, Adjusted R²=0.249
Standard error = 7.448, F=14.374, p<0.0001
Multiple Regressions
Table 4 summarizes the results of the multiple regression equation. A group of five independent variables conjointly contributed to explain the 24.9% of the variance in the overall JSR (p < 0.0001). These variables were: being an expatriate, above the age of 50, not from a clinical department of Medicine, and not from the College of Dentistry.

DISCUSSION
Two main findings emerged from the present study. First, most KFU-D academic staff were fairly satisfied with their jobs. Second, job satisfaction varied widely across job domains and demographic characteristics.

Citizenship was a major correlate of JS, nationals being considerably less satisfied than expatriates. Various socio-cultural, environmental, and job-related factors might be implicated. Socio-cultural factors affect attitude, motivation, expectation, and tolerance to institutional commitment. Psychosocial influences include marital status, home atmosphere, domiciliary obligation, social commitment, and recreational pursuits. Job-related factors include workload, remuneration, promotion, appreciation and fairness, as well as the freedom of choice and availability of alternatives. The dynamic interplay of these factors might be of some relevance to the observed lower job satisfaction among nationals.

The second differentiating variable was gender; females were significantly less satisfied than their male counterparts. Similar findings have been reported from diverse socio-cultural settings, including New Zealand, Russia, and Pakistan.

The fact that gender was rejected in the final step of the Multiple Regression equation (Table 4), implies that the significantly lower job satisfaction of females in bivariate analyses was presumably not an intrinsic feminine attribute, but a confounding effect subsumed in multivariate analysis by the independent variables which survived the final step. These variables were: citizenship, age, college, and duration of service (Table 4). Thus, it was not ‘femaleness’ per se that was primarily associated with low job satisfaction, but, the female over-representation in variable values associated with increased job dissatisfaction that made females less satisfied with their jobs.

Several investigators have attributed lower female job satisfaction to rival job-family commitments, duties in child bearing and rearing, as well as inadequacy of spousal support. In our local setting, the prevailing gender segregation in education, work and socialization retards smooth female involvement in the less segregated occupational settings like higher education and clinical occupations. This is supported by our finding significantly higher job satisfaction among the female academic staff in the all-female College of Nursing in comparison with their counterparts in other colleges.

Moreover, job satisfaction was significantly higher among the female staff who were either expatriate, above middle age, or had longer duration of service. Furthermore, females’ lowest job satisfaction was in the domains of “Administrative Policies”, “Interpersonal Relationships”, “Responsibility”, “Supervision”, and “Recognition” (Table 1).

Age and duration of service in the university were both associated with higher job satisfaction (Table 3). Several studies have reported similar findings. Indeed, age and duration of service were, as expected, positively correlated (r = + 0.486; p < 0.001). Yet, they managed to make separate significant contributions to the explanation of variance in the multiple regression of job satisfaction (Table 4). Presumably, though the two share a common group of subjects, a sizable proportion of recent recruits belong to relatively older age groups.

As job dissatisfaction is a frequent cause of rapid turnover, those who were satisfied with their jobs remained in it. The decision to remain in the job was not based on the hope of developing job satisfaction with time. These issues are beyond the scope of the present study. They deserve prospective longitudinal studies.

The clinical medical staff had the lowest JSR in comparison with all of the other staff categories. Concurrently, preclinical colleagues in the same College had the highest JSR among all the university staff. Similarly, low job satisfaction rates among clinical staff were reported from many countries, including USA, UK, Egypt, and Pakistan. Investigators have variably attributed this to such job-related problems as excessive clinical overload, overnight emergency duties, strained doctor-patient relationships, accidental mishaps, medical errors, medico-legal accountability and litigation risks.

On the other hand, these job-related problems frequently encroach on extra-job duties and concerns, including family life, recreational
pursuits, social interactions, and continuous professional development. Besides, higher remunerations in the lucrative private practice and in some high-salaried special hospitals increase feelings of underemployment.

The present study found all categories of staff most dissatisfied with their salaries. Table 1 shows that “Salary” lies at the bottom of all job domains, constituting less than half the score of its immediately preceding domain (16.1 and 33.8 percent respectively). The position of pay as a foremost determinant of job satisfaction has been emphasized in many studies.19,25-29

The unanimity and equality of dissatisfaction with salary rendered insignificant all demographic and job-related inter-group comparisons with salary. Two exceptions were observed. Low as it was, salary ranked significantly higher in preclinical medical staff, and those recruited during the last year, and significantly lower among clinical medical staff or those with more than 15 years service. Presumably, new recruits are now offered comparatively higher salaries than their predecessors, yet not to the extent that was comparable to the satisfactoriness of other domains.

In summary, although the majority (73.6%) of KFU-D academic staff expressed fair overall satisfaction with their jobs, this ranged extremely widely between domains from 84.7% in “Supervision” to as low as 16.1% in “Salary”. The subgroups at higher risk for job dissatisfaction were nationals, females, younger, and clinical medical or dental staff. Appropriate interventions to improve job satisfaction are highly commendable.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study was a pioneer investigation of job satisfaction among university academic staff in Saudi Arabia. The overall job satisfaction rate of 73.6% is fair in comparison with some studies from other countries. The domains of “Supervision”, “Responsibility” and “Interpersonal Relationships” were satisfactory, but the domains of “Salary”, “Recognition”, “Advancement” and “Working Conditions” have much room for improvement. The staff subgroups at higher risks for job dissatisfaction were national citizens, females, younger, and clinical medical or dental staff. Further studies are needed to confirm these findings. Periodic monitoring of future trends in job satisfaction in KFU-D are suggested to evaluate the outcomes of remedial interventions.

LIMITATIONS

1. The employed job satisfaction questionnaire in its present version had not been formally validated in a local pilot study prior to its application in the present investigation.
2. Though the response rate of 72.9% is higher than reported in most other studies, the dropouts might not be an unbiased category, and caution should be exercised in evaluating marginally significant findings.
3. This study was conducted in only one, albeit leading, university in this country. Generalizing the findings to other academic institutions in the public or private sectors is not warranted.

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