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**Job Satisfaction among Employees of a Youth Development Organization**

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This article describes an exploration of the relationship between overall job satisfaction and demographic variables that aimed to inform the recruitment, selection, training and retention of employees in youth development organizations. The general findings indicate the need for future research in this area in order to combat job dissatisfaction that often leads to high employee turnover in the field.

**The Special Youth Carer Program: An Innovative Program for At-Risk Adolescents in Foster Care**

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*Robyn Gilbertson, David Richardson, and James Barber*

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# Job Satisfaction among Employees of a Youth Development Organization

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this study was to explore the association between overall job satisfaction and selected demographic variables among 332 employees of a youth development organization. The Job Satisfaction Index (JSI) was used to measure the level of job satisfaction, and demographic information was obtained via a questionnaire developed by the researchers. Data analysis procedures included descriptive statistics, Spearman's *rho*, Pearson *r*, *t* tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Results indicated no significant relationships or differences ( $p = 0.05$ ) between job satisfaction and demographic variables. These findings have implications for future research on job satisfaction and employee retention in youth development organizations.

**KEY WORDS:** job satisfaction; youth organizations; employees.

Youth development organizations with a primary emphasis on serving underprivileged, high-risk youth have been in high demand (Franze, Foster, Abbott-Shim, Francis, & Lambert, 2002). Accompanying the demand for these organizations has been an ongoing need for employees to operate them. Employee turnover has been extremely high for youth development organizations serving high-risk youth; annual turnover rates frequently have exceeded 30% (Franze et al., 2002; Halpern, 1999). Turnover has occurred at any time during the year and often unexpectedly (Clugston, 2000). Moreover, job vacancies at youth development organizations sometimes have

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Regarding the effects of job dissatisfaction on individuals, Drummond and Stoddard (1991) suggested that low job satisfaction might be a great source of frustration, anxiety, and depression for employees. Furthermore, the degree of job satisfaction experienced by an employee has been associated with that person's quality of life, physical well-being, and psychological well-being (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Fisher, 2000; Heslop et al., 2002; Locke, 1976).

### **Job Satisfaction and Selected Demographic Factors**

Research has shown that demographic factors can affect job satisfaction (Heslop et al., 2002; Lambert, 1991; Locke, 1976; Mack, 2000; Pugliesi, 1995; Ting, 1997). Although focusing on employee demographics or characteristics shifts the burden away from the organization to the employee, it has been important to study how demographic variables have affected job satisfaction so that a complete understanding of the concept can be gained. A summary of major findings on the relationship between job satisfaction and selected demographic characteristics follows.

#### *Company Tenure*

Newly employed employees as well as employees, who have been with a company for 10 year or more have tended to report high job satisfaction (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Clugston, 2000; Heslop et al., 2002; Locke, 1976). Likewise, employees who have been with a company between 3 and 7 years have exhibited lower job satisfaction than other groups of company tenure (Drummond & Stoddard, 1991). In one study, employees with less than 3 years with a company reported higher satisfaction than those who had worked for the company 3–6 years while employees who had worked 7 or more years reported the highest amount of job satisfaction (Bransford, 1991). Moak (1992) examined the influence of age, gender, race, level of education, and company tenure on job satisfaction; none of the five variables were significantly related to job satisfaction. Pugliesi (1995) also found company tenure to not be related to job satisfaction.

#### *Age*

Considerable discrepancies have been reported regarding the relationship between age and job satisfaction. Mack (2000) and Ting (1997) asserted that job satisfaction increased with age. Indeed,

research has suggested positive relationships between job satisfaction and age (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Hulin & Smith, 1965; Lee & Wilbur, 1985; Pugliesi, 1995; Sandkam, 1996). Older employees have reported higher levels of job satisfaction than have younger employees (Bedelan, Ferris, & Kacmar, 1992; Kuo-Tsai, Sylvia, & Brunk, 1990; Lee & Wilbur, 1985). However, other researchers have not found a significant relationship between age and job satisfaction (Moak, 1992; Niblock, 1999).

Herzberg (1968) believed that a U-shape function existed between age and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction at a young age was originally high, dipped in middle age, and returned to high status later. Morale was high for young employees entering the workforce and then slowly dropped due to boredom and a perception of decreasing opportunities before rising again as the employees continued their jobs.

### *Gender*

Differences between gender and job satisfaction also have been evident (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Firebaugh & Harley, 1995; Kellough, 1990). In some studies, women have reported being more satisfied with their job than have men (Cranny et al., 1992; Hulin & Smith, 1965; Kuo-Tsai et al., 1990). Lambert (1991) found that female teachers reported higher job satisfaction than male teachers. However, Herzberg (1968) believed that job satisfaction for women depended upon different factors than those that affected men. According to Pugliesi (1995), gender did not affect job satisfaction. Several studies did not find conclusive evidence regarding gender differences and satisfaction (Moak, 1992; Sandkam, 1996).

### *Marital Status*

Previous research has indicated possible differences in job satisfaction based on marital status (Sandkam, 1996). Lambert (1991) and Kellough (1990) found that married employees were more satisfied with their jobs than were single employees. However, Mack (2000) reported that marital status had no effect on job satisfaction, and Thomas and Talpade (1999) found that married teachers had a lower level of job satisfaction than did single teachers. Other studies have indicated mixed results regarding marital status and job satisfaction (Bedelan et al., 1992; Hulin & Smith, 1965; Lee & Wilbur, 1985; Moak, 1992).

## *Education*

With increasing numbers of employees earning college degrees, the differences between education and job satisfaction should be examined (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Findings about the relationship between education and job satisfaction have been mixed. Employees with more education often have had higher levels of job satisfaction than have employees with less education (Lee & Wilbur, 1985; Mottaz, 1984; Ting, 1997). Furthermore, more educated employees often have had more job alternatives than have less educated employees (Ting, 1997). However, some employees with higher levels of education have found themselves overqualified for their current positions. Overqualification for a job due to one's level of education has demonstrated a negative effect on job satisfaction (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) found a negative relationship between education and job satisfaction, and Niblock (1999) found employees with bachelor's degrees or higher had lower job satisfaction than those who only had a high school diploma or GED. Other studies found that level of education did not have an effect on job satisfaction (Kuo-Tsai et al., 1990; Moak, 1992).

## **Studies Involving Youth Development Organizations**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1995) estimated that approximately 80,000 day care centers, including nonprofit organizations, look after 5 million preschool and school-age children. More women than ever before, especially single parents, have joined the workforce, which has further increased demand for after-school programs (Clugston, 2000).

Employees of after-school youth development programs have been important role models, especially for high-risk youth (Franze et al., 2002; Murphy, 1986; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995). The support of a teacher, counselor, or other adult outside of the immediate family often has contributed to improved outcomes in life for high-risk youth (Shassian & Hampl, 2000). Most importantly, these programs have provided safe places for large groups of youth, who are likely to get involved with gangs, criminal activities, drugs, or teen pregnancies (Hirsch, Roffman, Deutsch, Flynn, Tondra, & Pagano, 2000). However, employees directly involved in the after-school programs for high-risk youth have performed difficult and stressful jobs (Halpern, 1999). Many staff working at these particular programs have stayed only 1 or 2 years. Many left

once they earned a college degree or moved on to a higher-paying job position (Murphy, 1986). Kersey (1998) reported high levels of job satisfaction for youth development professionals who were involved with youth of middle-class families. However, there has been a paucity of research devoted to job satisfaction among employees of youth development organizations serving underprivileged, high-risk youth.

## Methods

This study examined whether an association existed between job satisfaction and demographic characteristics of counselors, teachers, and office staff at a nonprofit organization that provides youth development programs to underprivileged, high-risk youth. A description of the methods used to explore this association follows.

### *Selection of Population*

The population for this study consisted of employees at one of the leading youth development organizations in America throughout the 20th century (Hirsch et al., 2000). This organization has had a long-standing presence in inner-city neighborhoods. Serving nearly 3 million youth, this organization has more than 2,000 facilities across the United States (Shassian & Hampl, 2000). This study focused on the 350 employees at facilities in City X, a medium-sized city located in the southeastern United States. Approximately 80% of the youth served by the organization live in urban or inner-city areas; 56% are from minority families, and slightly more than one half are from single-parent families (Hirsch et al., 2000).

### *Sampling Frame and Procedure*

A list of all current employees was obtained from the organization's main office in City X. This list was the sampling frame. The entire population was used so the sample could be as large and representative as possible (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Thus, all 350 employees in City X were invited to participate. However, only those employees who volunteered to respond to the survey were the participants. A total of 332 employees participated in this study.

### *Instrumentation*

We chose the Job Satisfaction Index (JSI), developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951), to measure job satisfaction. The JSI measures

overall job satisfaction. It consists of 18 statements, which include 8 negative and 10 positive statements. Participants responded to each statement using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing *strongly disagree* and 5 representing *strongly agree*. Negative statements were reverse scored, so that a value of 1 indicated *strongly agree*, and a value of 5 indicated *strongly disagree*. Thus, the possible range of mean scores for a sample population was 1–5 with the neutral score at 3. A mean score above the neutral point of 3 represented job satisfaction, and a mean score below 3 represented job dissatisfaction.

The JSI requires only 5–10 min to complete. Soler (1998) reported that the JSI has been used extensively to measure overall job satisfaction among diverse populations working in many different occupations. The JSI has proven to be a reliable and valid measure of job satisfaction. Brayfield and Rothe (1951) tested the validity of their instrument through content, criterion-related, and construct validity. They reported a reliability coefficient of 0.87. We also conducted our own reliability analysis of the JSI using the Cronbach Alpha. The Cronbach Alpha determined how all statements on the JSI related to one another in content. The reliability analysis of the research data yielded an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.98.

### *Demographic Questionnaire*

We designed the demographic section of the survey. It was comprised of questions about participants' age, company tenure, gender, marital status, and level of education. Participants selected the option under each category that best described their level of education, marital status, and gender. Participants were asked to report their age and company tenure at the youth development organization. Participants who had worked less than 1 year at the youth development organization were requested to mark 1 year for company tenure.

### *Data Collection*

The data were gathered during visits to the organization's various program sites in City X during a 2-week period. The JSI was handed out during scheduled employee meetings. The front page of the survey explained the purpose and importance of the study and assured participants of anonymity and confidentiality. The demographic section of the survey was included on the first page. The second page of the survey consisted of the 18 JSI statements.

After the JSI was completed, participants were instructed to enclose their completed survey in an empty envelope and seal it. Participants



were then asked to place their envelopes in a designated box, which was located in the same room where they completed the JSI. They were instructed not to put their name or any other identifying information on the JSI or demographic section. Neither the investigators nor the supervisors were in the room during the time participants completed the JSI. Supervisors completed the JSI after everyone else to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

### *Data Analysis*

Quantitative procedures were used to examine the association between job satisfaction and demographic variables. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Spearman's *rho*, Pearson *r*, *t* tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to determine if any significant associations with job satisfaction existed.

Tabulation of frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to demonstrate results for each item of the JSI as well as for each level of the demographic variables. Furthermore, results of all statistical procedures were accepted as statistically significant at the 0.05 level. To test for significant differences, the sample population had to be within the alpha level of 0.05 of the population proportion with a 95% level of confidence.

## **Findings**

### *Level of Job Satisfaction*

The possible total mean scores for the JSI ranged from 1 to 5. A high mean score (4 or 5) represented the satisfied end of the scale and a low mean score (1 or 2) represented the dissatisfied end of the scale. The overall mean score was 3.53 ( $SD = 1.14$ ), which fell on the satisfied end of the scale. Only 10% of participants had a mean score of 1.55 or lower (dissatisfied end of scale), and 25% had a mean score of 4.56 or higher. Overall, 75% of the participants were very satisfied with their job. In general, the employees at the youth development organization had a high level of overall job satisfaction.

### *Company Tenure and Job Satisfaction*

Company tenure at the youth development organization ranged from new hire to 21 years; the mean length of company tenure was 4.25 years. The majority of participants (67%) had worked at the

youth development organization for 5 years or less. Table 1 contains a summary of responses to the question regarding length of company tenure.

The relationship between company tenure and job satisfaction was analyzed using the Spearman rho correlation at the 0.05 probability level. Results were (Spearman's  $\rho = -0.108$ ). The organization's participants regardless of their age appeared to be satisfied with their job. There was a negative Spearman  $\rho$  correlation of  $-0.108$  or 1% common variance to show this relationship was not statistically significant. As a result, the younger participants did not appear to be more satisfied with their job than the older participants. No company tenure category revealed a significant higher or lower level of job satisfaction than from the others. The null hypothesis of no relationship between company tenure and job satisfaction was not rejected.

### *Age and Job Satisfaction*

The ages of the participants ranged from 18 years to 54 years. Because an employee must be at least 18 years of age to work at the youth development organization, no participants were under the age of 18 years. Results indicated that the average age of participants was 27 years. Table 2 displays a summary of the ages of employees at the youth development organization.

We used the Pearson  $r$  correlation to examine the relationship between age and job satisfaction. Although there was a negative Pearson  $r$  correlation of  $-0.082$  ( $p = 0.142$ ), the correlation was not significant at the 0.05 level. Thus, there was no significant relationship between age and job satisfaction among employees at the youth development organization.

**Table 1**  
**Summary of Company Tenure**

Company tenure	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative (%)
1 year or less to 5 years	221	67	67
6–10 years	81	24	91
11–15 years	21	6	97
16–21 years	6	2	99
No response	3	1	
Total	332	100	100

**Table 2**  
**Summary of Participants' Ages**

Age	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative (%)
18–22 years	50	15	15
23–27 years	139	42	57
28–32 years	105	33	90
33–40 years	24	7	97
Over 40 years	4	1	98
No response	8	2	
Total	332	100	100

### *Gender and Job Satisfaction*

Of the 332 employees who participated in the study, 234 (70%) were women, and 98 (30%) were men. Whereas the mean score on the JSI for the men was 3.56 ( $SD = 1.11$ ), the mean score for women was 3.45 ( $SD = 1.22$ ). We used a  $t$  test to test for significant difference between the means. Results indicated a difference in the means,  $t(330) = 0.880$ ,  $p = 0.379$  (two-tailed); however, this difference was not significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, gender was not significantly related to job satisfaction.

### *Marital Status and Job Satisfaction*

Although marital status consisted of several classifications (e.g., single, married, separated, divorced, or widowed), we collapsed marital status into two categories: married and not married. The not-married category included individuals who were single, separated, divorced, or widowed. Whereas 104 (31%) participants reported being married, 228 (69%) participants were not married. The mean score for the not-married group was 3.54 ( $SD = 1.15$ ), and the mean score for the married group was 3.52 ( $SD = 1.12$ ). We used a  $t$  test to examine differences between the means. The results of the  $t$  test indicated no significant difference at the 0.05 level:  $t(330) = -0.150$ ,  $p = 0.881$  (two-tailed).

### *Education and Job Satisfaction*

Participants chose from five options to describe their educational status: (a) less than high school diploma, (b) high school graduate or

**Table 3**  
**Analysis of Variance for Level of Education**

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Squares	<i>F</i>	Significant Differences
Between groups	1.706	2	0.853	0.653	0.521
Within groups	430.145	1.31	1.307		
Total	431.852	331			

GED, (c) 2 years of college or associate degree, (d) bachelor's degree, or (e) graduate degree. None of the participants chose less than high school diploma. A total of 57 (17%) participants reported having a high school diploma or GED, and 140 (43%) participants reported having 2 years of college or an associate degree. We collapsed the bachelor's degree and graduate degree categories into one category; 135 (40%) participants fell into this category. Participants with a high school diploma or GED had a mean JSI score of 3.69 ( $SD = 1.10$ ), compared to a mean score of 3.51 ( $SD = 1.13$ ) for participants with 2 years of college or an associate degree and a mean score of 3.49 ( $SD = 1.18$ ) for participants with a bachelor's or graduate degree. We used ANOVA to test for significant differences. Results from the ANOVA indicated no significant differences. Table 3 displays results from the ANOVA.

### Discussion

Job satisfaction is an important area to research because of its association with withdrawal behaviors such as job turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Fisher, 2000; Heslop et al., 2002; Locke, 1976; Porter & Steers, 1973; Vroom, 1964). Because little research has been conducted on job satisfaction among employees in youth development organizations, this study represents an initial step toward gaining a thorough understanding of how job satisfaction impacts this population. The overall mean score of 3.53 ( $SD = 1.14$ ) on the JSI suggests that employees of the youth development organization have a relatively high level of job satisfaction. Although this finding is in line with Murphy's (1986) finding that youth development professionals were satisfied with their job, it is somewhat

contradictory to Anderson's (1989) report that employees in youth development organizations had lower levels of job satisfaction than employees in other career fields.

Results from this study also indicate no significant relationships or differences between job satisfaction and demographic variables. These results support previous findings that demographic characteristics are not significant predictors of level of job satisfaction (Brewer & McMahan-Landers, 2003a; Moak, 1992; Pugliesi, 1995). Furthermore, these results suggest that job-related variables other than demographic variables play a major role in determining level of job satisfaction. Numerous factors determine one's level of job satisfaction, including pay, coworkers, operating procedures, the work itself, and supervision (Spector, 1997). Because the JSI measures overall job satisfaction only, it is not adequate for identifying how participants feel about specific factors of job satisfaction. Consequently, it is unclear how specific factors influenced the study's results.

Participants in this study might have been influenced by their reaction to the work itself. Employees of youth development organizations are strongly committed and challenged to think independently about how to apply skills and resources to positively impact the youth, whom they serve (Shassian & Hampl, 2000). Employees who work in youth development organizations receive their greatest source of job satisfaction from doing what they consider meaningful work; their job satisfaction is derived from seeing and participating in youth success, from knowing that their impact on the youth is life-changing, and from providing an environment for underprivileged, high-risk youth to achieve success and fulfillment (McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994). Thus, the nature of the work itself could have positively influenced their level of job satisfaction regardless of other variables that could have had a negative impact. This would be in line with Herzberg's (1968) motivation-hygiene theory in which he theorized that motivators such as work itself lead to job satisfaction.

### **Recommendations**

Given the findings of this study, demographic variables cannot be judged to be an adequate predictor of job satisfaction. However, results from this study should not be generalized to other populations. The challenges for future research in job satisfaction provide many different paths for researchers to follow. Additional research could focus

on demographic variables not examined in this study, such as race, income, job position within a field, number of children, the age of the youngest child, and part-time or full-time employment status. Such research would help to better understand why and when employees are most likely to respond positively and negatively to their job. In conducting such research, future researchers might consider other data collection methods than the ones used in this study. For example, personnel records could provide information about demographic variables. Collecting data from additional sources might make response bias less likely to occur. We also would recommend replication of this study using another youth development organization. With additional research, an improved understanding of the level of job satisfaction among employees directly involved with youth development organizations could emerge.

Although demographic characteristics have been a useful moderating variable for examining job satisfaction (Heslop et al., 2002; Lambert, 1991; Pugliesi, 1995; Ting, 1997), there are various other variables that also impact job satisfaction. Future research should seek to identify and explore other variables that affect job satisfaction among employees of youth development organizations. For example, what elements of the job design have a positive impact on job satisfaction? Which elements have a negative impact? How do relationships with coworkers affect level of job satisfaction? Which supervisory behaviors have a positive effect on job satisfaction? Which supervisory behaviors have a negative effect? Finding the answers to such questions will contribute to understanding and promoting job satisfaction among employees of youth development organizations.

As the mission of youth development organizations is to provide a nurturing, enriching environment for underprivileged, high-risk youth, future research addressing job satisfaction in relationship to service effectiveness or youth outcomes in these types of programs would be highly desirable. Because this study focused on overall job satisfaction, little information about satisfaction with specific aspects of youth development jobs was gleaned. Future research should utilize instruments that assess different factors of job satisfaction, such as Spector's (1997) Job Satisfaction Survey. Also, an in-depth, follow-up study focusing on youth development organization employees, who have left the profession could help to determine specific factors that contribute to their job dissatisfaction. Based on such information, new policies and interventions could be developed to combat dissatisfaction, perhaps resulting in benefits to employees, organizations, and the youth that they serve.

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