

Job Satisfaction among Library Support Staff in Alabama Academic Libraries

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The study emphasizes library support staff, a largely neglected group, and discusses a survey of the job satisfaction of these employees in academic libraries in the state of Alabama. The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) was used as the survey instrument, and the resulting satisfaction scores were related to the variables of size of city, sex, variability of working hours, type and size of institution, staff, department, historic race of the institution, and automation status of the library's functions. The null hypothesis could not be rejected for most variables, reaffirming conclusions of other studies that demographic factors do not influence job satisfaction. The need for better compensation and opportunities for promotion for academic library support staff is emphasized, as well as the need to relate satisfaction to quality of work-life issues.



Job satisfaction is an area that has been extensively studied in the business world since the 1930s, yet forty years passed before library-oriented studies began. The majority of these studies have focused on professional and paraprofessional librarians, and thus the needs and attitudes of library support staff have been largely overlooked. The present study explores some factors that may contribute to job satisfaction among support staff in academic libraries.

More than 6,000 articles on job satisfaction had been written by 1984, prompting the question: why embark on another study?¹ As Patricia Cain Smith, Lorne M. Kendall, and Charles L. Hulin point out, little evidence exists successfully linking job satisfaction and productivity, so that frequently discussed topic is hard to support as a valid reason for additional research.² However, Beverly P. Lynch and Jo Ann Verdin, in their study of job satisfaction in libraries, indicated a need for

more studies that would be "conducted within the framework of the work itself."³ Few studies have been conducted in libraries, and many unexplored facets of job satisfaction in this context remain.

Aside from purely scientific reasons for such research, there is a humanitarian reason as well. Employees who must spend eight hours a day at a job should enjoy what they are doing, as Smith, Kendall, and Hulin, and Susanne Wahba indicate.^{4,5} Studies in improving the quality of working life, such as those indicated in Charles Martell's 1981 article, have pointed out the need for redesign of work systems.⁶ This redesign involves an attention to the needs of the employee, as well as the needs of the organization. Although the factors explored in the present study cannot be controlled by library managers, knowledge that dissatisfaction exists can assist further studies in disclosing and improving problem areas within the organization. Attention needs to be paid to satisfaction in connection with the ten-

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Interest is added to the results by the location in which the study was conducted, and its possible relation to job satisfaction. In 1987, Alabama had a personal income per capita of \$10,673, ranking forty-fifth among the fifty states, as compared with the U.S. average of \$13,876.⁷

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Before continuing with the discussion, a few definitions are in order. The first is "job satisfaction" itself. The subject of job satisfaction is complex and has been defined in many ways. One author defines it as "the individual's emotional reactions to a particular job," while another refers to it as "the feeling an employee has about his pay, his work, his promotion opportunities, his co-workers, and his supervisor."^{8,9} Michael Beer defines job satisfaction as "the attitude of workers toward the company, their job, their fellow workers and other psychological objects in the work environment." He adds that "[a] favorable attitude toward these indicates job satisfaction and vice versa."¹⁰ Smith, Kendall, and Hulin define job satisfaction as "the feelings a worker has about his job."¹¹

Another phrase frequently used in this study is "support staff," meaning library employees whose educational level does not include the master's in library science (M.L.S.), and whose positions support the functioning of the M.L.S.-degree librarians. Included in the definition are clerical and paraprofessional employees.

Job satisfaction has been frequently de-

bated, discussed, and researched since Robert Hoppock wrote *Job Satisfaction* in 1935.¹² Most of the literature has coalesced around several major theories, including Maslow's need hierarchy theory, Herzberg's dual-factor or motivation-hygiene theory, and the theory of work adjustment. Readers interested in the general literature of job satisfaction are referred to the bibliography compiled and edited by Ruth M. Walsh and Stanley Birken, *Job Satisfaction and Motivation: An Annotated Bibliography*.¹³

In addition to general research on job satisfaction, more specific factors have been studied to determine their effects. As in this study, age, sex, and environmental characteristics have been explored, as well as community characteristics, organizational size, and geographical factors. Some of the references detailing these specific factors are mentioned throughout this article.

Satisfaction studies in libraries have been few, and those studying non-M.L.S.-degree staff are almost nonexistent. One study by Lynch and Verdin used all full-time library employees as subjects, and dealt with the factors of the work itself, age, sex, occupational group, tenure, supervisory level, career commitment, and library department.¹⁴ They tested the null hypotheses of the relationships between these factors and job satisfaction, and found that: (1) job satisfaction was unrelated to sex; (2) older employees were more satisfied than younger workers; (3) people with more experience tend to be more satisfied; (4) those planning to stay in the same library are more satisfied; (5) nonsupervisors have lower satisfaction than supervisors; (6) reference department employees are more satisfied than any other department except acquisitions; and (7) professionals were more satisfied than library support staff members. This last finding contrasts with Lawrence Prybil's report of no significant difference among occupational levels.¹⁵ Asadollah Azad's 1984 dissertation explored the job satisfaction of paraprofessionals, primarily comparing satisfactions in public and technical services departments.¹⁶

STUDY DESIGN

For the present study, the Job Descriptive Index (JDI), developed by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin, was used as the instrument. The Index consists of six scales, *Work on Present Job*, *Present Pay*, *Opportunities for Promotion*, *Supervision*, *Co-workers*, and *Job in General*. The scores for these scales are not combined, although many researchers have done so. The authors maintain that the individual factors are not equally weighted and cannot be satisfactorily combined.¹⁷

Each scale consists of eighteen questions, except for *Present Pay* and *Promotions*, which have nine. Responses are yes, no, or a question mark indicating indecision. Validity of the JDI has been established through various trials, details of which can be found in Smith, Kendall and Hulin's *The Measurement of Satisfaction in Work and Retirement*.

The prospective institutions for the present study were chosen from member libraries of the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries, a consortium of public and private four-year college and university libraries in the state. Directors of fifteen of the seventeen libraries permitted their employees to participate and provided the investigator with lists of their library support staff. From these lists, a stratified random sample of 185 subjects was chosen, and copies of the JDI were sent to them. Included in the packet was a series of demographic questions related to the variables, a letter explaining the survey, and an envelope for return of the instrument. To maintain demographic statistics on town size, etc., a code number was written on the survey. Interestingly, despite assurances in the cover letter of anonymity, several respondents from one institution cut off or obscured the code number upon returning the instrument.

Information about size of the town, size of the institution, size of the library's staff, whether public or privately owned, and the library's automation status was determined from the *American Library Directory*.¹⁸ The remaining replies came from the subjects themselves.

The study dealt with seventeen variables and their effect on job satisfaction. The null hypothesis was used in analyzing the variables. These factors can be divided into several groups, as follows:

Demographic variables (size of the town or city in which the institution is located);

Characteristics of the institution (public or private, its size, if historically black or white);

Characteristics of the library (size of the library staff, if the library's functions were automated or not);

The subject (sex, age, educational level, income, number of years in library work); and

The job itself (full- or part-time, day- or nighttime, fixed or variable hours, department in which the employee works, department size, amount of time spent working on a computer terminal).

RESULTS

The return rate was 64 percent, with subjects from sixteen libraries participating, including separate law or medical libraries from some institutions. The surveys were scored, and the data entered using SYSTAT—the System for Statistics, published by SYSTAT, Inc.¹⁹

In these instances, the null hypothesis can be rejected; in all others, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. These results are similar to those in Steven Seokho Chwe's 1978 study, which also found that demographic variables have no effect on job satisfaction.²⁰

The size of the institution was found to have a significant effect on satisfaction with supervision ($P < .05$), but not on the other scales. Employees in libraries in small schools (less than 3,000 students enrolled) were most satisfied with supervision, while those in medium-sized institutions (3,000–9,000) were least satisfied. Beer, in his article "Organizational Size and Job Satisfaction," cites interviews conducted by James Worthy in 1950 which "indicated that organizational size was the single-most important variable responsible for low job satisfaction."²¹ Worthy went on to state that "morale and job satisfaction are related to integration (co-

hesiveness) and that integration is related to structural complexity and in turn organizational size."²² Other studies cited by Beer indicate the same principle. A Morse and Reimer study implies that "decision-making levels become more and more remote as the organization becomes larger."²³

Medium-sized schools, in many cases, are in a state of transition from small to large. In small schools, more socialization takes place; people are able to learn more about each other and to become more familiar with their supervisors. In larger schools it may be obvious that contact with supervisors cannot be as personal. But in transitional organizations, workers who were employed at the library when it was smaller may feel that they have less contact with their supervisors than they formerly did. This new situation leads to frustration and feelings of being left out or slighted.

In addition, schools of this size may be implementing or planning to implement automation, a change that has a major effect on employees. In their book on managing organizational change, Patrick E. Connor and Linda K. Lake quote John Adams: "All changes are irksome to the human mind, especially those which are attended with great dangers and uncertain effects."²⁴ While the advent of automation cannot be said to be a great danger (although some might even argue with that), it does have "uncertain effects" for those whose jobs are involved.

Lester Coch and John R. P. French, Jr. found that "resistance to change is a combination of an individual reaction to frustration with strong group-induced forces."²⁵ They found that group resistance to change can be reduced or eliminated through the use of communication in group meetings.²⁶ This idea is repeated by Martell, who said that "information should be available when and where it is needed. Traditionally, management has hoarded information and distributed it only when necessary to maintain its source of power. This practice needs to be severely limited."²⁷ Better communication may solve, or improve, many dissatisfactions in medium-sized organizations. The institution of work groups instead of the

traditional division of labor frequently used at clerical levels in libraries may be another answer, enhancing socialization as well as providing employees with more responsibility.

The way the question on supervision is asked in the Job Descriptive Index makes it difficult to determine what level of supervision is being addressed in terms of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The statement in the JDI instructions says "Think of the kind of supervision you get on your job," but does not specify which level.

Women were more satisfied on all the scales than men.

In this study, there were more significant differences in sex than in any other variable. Women were more satisfied on all the scales than men. Men's norms were an average of 14.01 lower than JDI norms, while women's were an average of 6.17 lower. The lowest difference in both men's and women's scores came in the area of Present Pay, 19.19 points lower than the JDI norms for men, 12.53 lower for women. This bears out H. Jack Shapiro and Louis W. Stern's finding that "non-professional women are more satisfied with their pay than are non-professional men."²⁸

Michael J. Kavanagh and Michael Halpern studied university employees and compared the job satisfaction and life satisfaction of men and women at professional and nonprofessional levels. They compared their results to a 1957 study by Brayfield and Wells, which found "no significant relationships between life and job satisfaction for females."²⁹ In the 1973 study, however, strong relationships were found, especially at job level one (nonsupervisory, nonprofessional, or clerical). They theorize that "the organizational climate and attitudes found in a university environment would be more supportive of the women's movement than those found in many other organizations."³⁰

The 1975 study by Shapiro and Stern also looked at job satisfaction of males and

females at both the professional and non-professional levels.³¹ In the nonprofessional sample, which included clerical workers, men were more satisfied with the work itself than women, while the women were more satisfied with supervision.

A 1975 article by Wahba discusses job satisfaction in terms of need fulfillment, need deficiency, and perceived need importance. She found that "women have significantly higher deficiencies than men in four areas: security, autonomy, esteem, and self-actualization needs," areas that were defined in the works of Maslow.³² Wahba explains this difference by saying that women have a "stronger desire or expectation . . . for a higher degree of security" than men.³³ She relates the need fulfillment score to job satisfaction, and the need deficiency score to both the "personal expectations of need fulfillment and the actual fulfillment from the job."³⁴ Wahba's study dealt with professional librarians.

Lynch and Verdin, in a study that included all full-time employees, concluded that there is no significant difference between male and female employees in job satisfaction.³⁵ George P. D'Elia reached the same conclusion.³⁶ However, Smith, Kendall, and Hulin uncovered substantial differences in male and female norms, explaining that "women are less satisfied overall than men because they receive less with which to be satisfied," but that "with a comparable level of income, women are more satisfied than men." They theorize that the reason is possibly because of different frames of reference.³⁷

Does the answer lie in the fact that only 14 percent of the respondents were men? Although attitudes are changing, as the references cited above suggest, older ideas about the "proper place" for men and women may still exist in a region such as Alabama, which still adheres to traditional values that consider the male the source of the family paycheck. In a low-paying profession with little opportunity for advancement, possibly still viewed by some as "women's work," men become discontented. A person who is the sole support of his or her family cannot afford to work at the support staff level in a li-

brary. This may be the reason the majority of library workers in the state are female.

In the area of income, there was no significance, except in the scale of *Opportunities for Promotion*. Employees earning less than \$8,000 per year (mostly part-timers) were least satisfied with their opportunities for promotion, while those in the \$9,000-\$9,999 range were most satisfied. Part-time personnel generally have fewer opportunities to be promoted. Reduced working hours limit organizational opportunity. The data gathered does not explain why those in the \$9,000 range were most satisfied.

Most of the scales in the "years worked in the library" variable were not significant, with the exception of *Opportunities for Promotion* ($P < .05$). The most satisfied in this area, in partial contrast with the results of Lynch and Verdin's study, were those who have worked less than one year at the library; the least satisfied were the employees with ten or more years of service.³⁸ At the support staff level, little opportunity for advancement usually exists. The study by Kavanagh and Halpern found that as job levels increase, job satisfaction decreases.³⁹ One explanation they give for this seemingly contradictory finding is that stress rises as job levels increase. In this case, stress may also rise when job levels stop increasing, bringing about frustration and lower morale.

As figure 3 shows, fully 24% of the library workers surveyed earned less than the Alabama per capita income listed in the *Statistical Abstract* in 1987; about 75% earned less than the U.S. per capita income. Scores on the *Present Pay* scale for this survey were much lower than the JDI norms, as mentioned earlier, and the reason is evident. These results are markedly different from the ten-year study of job satisfaction in industry that reported higher scores in the South than any other region.⁴⁰

Most employees in the survey worked only in the library in which they were presently employed. Only about a quarter of them had worked elsewhere, suggesting that they view their library employment as a job, not a career, and that they do not seek to move to other libraries as professional librarians do. One-third of

Sex: female: 86%
male: 14%

Median salary range:
\$10,000 to \$14,999 per year

Median number of years worked
in that particular job: 4-6

Subjects having worked in
libraries other than the one
in which she/he was presently
employed: 25%

Median age: 30-39

Average highest educational
level attained: some college
courses without completion of
a degree.

FIGURE 1
Demographic Results

95% probability level
Opportunities for
Promotion and income
Work on Present Job and
sex
Supervision and size of
the institution

99% probability level
Opportunities for
Promotion and years in the
library
Supervision and sex
Job in General and sex

FIGURE 2
Significance of Dependent
and Independent Variables

these employees have worked in their particular job and library between one and three years. Whether their work-related plans include subsequent library work is unknown. Employees with less than one year's service are the most satisfied with opportunities for promotion, while those with more than ten years are least satisfied. As mentioned previously, employees are limited in how far they can advance without an M.L.S. degree.

One area in which no relationship with

Salary	Percentage
\$25,000+	0%
\$15,000-24,999	21%
\$10,000-14,999	55%
\$ 7,000- 9,999	20%
\$ 5,000- 6,999	0%
\$ 0- 4,999	4%

FIGURE 3
Percentage of Respondents in Salary Ranges

satisfaction was found was time spent on a computer terminal, probably because the question on the survey was not clear enough. The form of the question was "What percentage of your present job is spent at a computer terminal?" Note that it did not specify day, week, or month.

Employees with less than one year's service are the most satisfied with opportunities for promotion, while those with more than ten years are least satisfied.

The effect of video display terminal radiation on employees has been a frequently discussed topic in the past few years, but these articles are primarily concerned with health effects. They do not address the question of satisfaction, except in relation to job stress. An article by Robert I. Sutton and Anat Rafaeli in 1987 suggests that working at a terminal is a more complex issue than just measuring satisfaction and the percentage of time spent at that terminal. Their research found that for clerical employees, "characteristics of work stations may not be occupational stressors."⁴¹ They discuss intrusions, noise, and heat as factors to be accounted for in determining satisfaction with work stations. A 1981 article also shows that VDT-workstation-related stress is a complex topic.⁴² The need for further research in this area increases as library automation becomes more widespread.

CONCLUSION

The most urgent problems brought up by this survey are compensation and opportunities for promotion. Money is tight for education in Alabama, as it is in many states. While immediate supervisors have little, if any, control over salaries, they can make the department a better place in which to work by keeping these findings in mind. Supervisors can encourage employees who wish to pursue a degree or complete one, ensuring that they receive time off for such activities. Supervisors can be supportive of new ideas for improving the work place. Although not a panacea, positive attitudes can go a long way toward helping increase job satisfaction.

In organizations that are undergoing change, particularly those automating the library, the communication process needs to be examined. Quality of work-life issues must be addressed when reorganization takes place, if managers wish to keep dissatisfaction to a minimum. The need is great for librarians to become familiar with principles dealing with quality of work-life and management of organizational change. Martell points out that organizations, including libraries, are at an "elementary stage in their use of modern organization design techniques," and that the "perceptual and technical skills required to develop and implement contemporary work system design may not yet exist within librarianship."⁴³

A study with as many variables as the present one naturally generates more questions than it answers. Would a repetition of the study with a larger sample yield similar results? Studies performed in other states would also be enlightening. More information is needed about the work attitudes of the library support staff workers. Do they view their library employment simply as a job, rather than as a career? Do they see their library jobs as "women's work"? How do the male employees feel about their roles in the library? Do the jobs males have differ from the ones females do?

Job satisfaction in libraries continues to be a rich area for study, and each investigation generates further areas for study. The fact that most of the null hypotheses could not be rejected does not invalidate the study. The literature of library satisfaction studies is enriched by each bit of knowledge added to it, and results of some past studies are confirmed by the present study. The satisfactions of academic library support staff in one of the poorer states have been explored; in general, they correlate with norms established for the Job Descriptive Index used in the survey. Library managers at all levels who wish to be successful should examine their library in the context of job satisfaction studies, as well as quality of work-life and change management principles, to discover what changes would help raise the level of satisfaction of the very human people who work for them.

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