

ICH&HPSY 2020

5th International Conference on Health and Health Psychology

WELL-BEING AT WORK: A STUDY WITH SOCIAL EDUCATORS

Rosina Fernandes (a), José Sargento (b), Emília Martins (c)*, Francisco Mendes (d)

*Corresponding author

(a) Escola Superior de Educação e CI&DEI – Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Rua Maximiano Aragão
3504 - 501 Viseu, Portugal, rosina@esev.ipv.pt

(b) Escola Superior de Educação e CI&DEI – Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Rua Maximiano Aragão
3504 - 501 Viseu, Portugal, jsargento@esev.ipv.pt

(c) Escola Superior de Educação e CI&DEI – Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Rua Maximiano Aragão
3504 - 501 Viseu, Portugal, emiliamartins@esev.ipv.pt

(d) Escola Superior de Educação e CI&DEI – Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Rua Maximiano Aragão
3504 - 501 Viseu, Portugal, fmendes@esev.ipv.pt

Abstract

Employee health and well-being are on organizations leaders' agendas, including in the social area. So, this study aimed to explore the associations between job satisfaction and other well-being at work variables (success, salary, and occupation's prestige) in a recent social sector profession. Also, intended to reflect on its importance in promoting health and well-being in workers who daily deal with other's suffering. This quantitative study involved 74 employed Portuguese Social Educators, 94.6% female with mean age of 30.12 ± 8.94 . A questionnaire was specifically prepared for this research project, given the scarcity of studies about well-being at work in Social Education area. SPSS 25 was used for data analysis, assuming a 95% confidence level. Job satisfaction was positively correlated ($p \leq .05$) with success and prestige. Salary was relevant ($p \leq .05$) to job satisfaction, regardless of whether the professionals were working in the training area. In those who were, job satisfaction was also correlated with the desire to keep the job ($p = .002$). Participants with higher success, career satisfaction and prestige were more optimistic about professional future ($p \leq .05$). Given the Social Educators intervention in high risk and social vulnerability contexts, work benefits such as access to counselling or other health initiatives preventing occupational stress and burnout, may be an effective alternative to salary increase, often difficult to social organizations. Its effect on satisfaction and success, together with growing social recognition of profession is essential for these workers well-being.

© 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, social educators, well-being, work



1. Introduction

Ensuring employee's well-being is a growing concern for organizations today, as its positive effect on worker productivity is proven (Warr & Nielsen, 2018). It is also known that dissatisfaction with work leads to job absenteeism and subsequent abandonment. So, identify the factors associated with well-being in the workplace is essential for the survival and prosperity of organizations (Bakotić, 2016). In fact, according to Aazami et al. (2015), job dissatisfaction is a factor of stress at work that influences employee's physical (sleep disturbances, headaches and gastrointestinal problems) and psychological health (psychological distress). Indeed, workers are the most valuable resource in organizations, so the identification of factors that affect their professional performance is crucial (Ansaripour et al., 2017).

The 2019 results of the national study carried out annually in the United Kingdom, by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), on well-being at work, point out the importance of organizations' investment in strategies that promote a good work environment, positive interpersonal relationships, physical activity and financial well-being. In fact, the well-being at work model proposed in this context (CIPD, 2019) includes five domains: health (physical and mental), work (work environment, management, job requirements, autonomy, salary and other benefits), values/principles (leadership, ethics and inclusion of diversity), the social/collective dimension (worker interpersonal relationships) and personal growth (career development, learning / training, emotion and creativity). An organization that meets these dimensions will certainly promote workers well-being.

Indeed, workplace has a significant influence on the health and well-being of workers (Aazami et al., 2015). In the well-being construct, we can explore its context-free dimension, which implies assessing life satisfaction and global happiness, or what is experienced by the person in a specific sector of life, such as family, health, leisure or work. When exploring job-related well-being, job satisfaction is assessed, which includes different facets, such as satisfaction with salary, supervisor, tasks performed, among other elements of the work context (Warr & Nielsen, 2018). Thus, job satisfaction refers to the appreciation, comfort, or satisfaction with work experience (Ali, 2016). This is a multidimensional construct, so it is essential to investigate its multiple facets and effects at several levels (Aazami et al., 2015).

One of the most relevant dimensions in job satisfaction are the benefits provided by the employer, specifically salary, although the possibility of promotion is also valued, to a lesser extent (Malik et al., 2012). Higher wages are generally associated with greater job satisfaction (Medgyesi & Zolyomi, 2016). Asekun (2015) also points to the importance of the salary with regard to the desire to remain in the organization and to the positive relationship between satisfaction with the salary and satisfaction with the work, which predicts the job abandonment. According to the CIPD report (2019), in addition to salary, there are other ways of enhancing well-being at work, namely through counselling services and support programs for workers, especially in highly stressed professional areas, such as in the social sector.

However, there are other relevant variables associated with job satisfaction, as stated by the authors above, namely social recognition and involvement/commitment to work. Ansaripour et al. (2017) add that job satisfaction is related to dimensions such as worker self-esteem, and it is essential that organizations promote strategies that enhance professional success, with a proven effect on work performance. The authors clarify that success (which refers to the accumulated positive results that emerge from work experience) differs from person to person, and may include dimensions such as career progression, skills

development, profession social recognition/prestige or even salary. Regardless of personal meaning, it is important to consider its significant relationship with job satisfaction.

The association between socioeconomic status and health is also well documented. What is not so explored is the role of the profession in this relationship, which can be both beneficial (self-affirmation) or harmful (stress at work). In this sense, professional prestige is an explicit indicator of profession's social status, decreasing the likelihood that the professional reports worse health and well-being conditions (Fujishiro et al., 2010). Indeed, job satisfaction tends to increase with higher occupational prestige (Medgyesi & Zolyomi, 2016). According to Telega (2017), the higher professional prestige, the greater resistance to stigma associated with mental health problems such as burnout, depression, among others.

Regarding sociodemographic variables, generally the least satisfied with work and with lower levels of job well-being, are men, of middle age and with secondary education (Medgyesi & Zolyomi, 2016). These variables have been widely studied in general, however, happiness (or subjective well-being) in social work, is rarely researched, especially in a recent profession at European context, such as Social Educators. Indeed, research on the negative effects associated with these social sector professions is more frequent, exploring dimensions such as burnout (Hussein, 2018), stress (Barck-Holst et al., 2019) and low salary (Lane & Flowers, 2015), than the understanding the positive aspects of human functioning in this area, such as well-being.

According to Diener (2000), subjective well-being refers to the way we evaluate our life, in terms of satisfaction, with a predominance of positive affects over negative ones. Given the relevance of work in our lives, it is expected that the professional dimension has an influence on subjective well-being. Indeed, literature confirms this link between satisfaction with life and satisfaction with work (Unanue et al., 2017).

In the last decade, studies such as those of Graham and Shier (2010), although in social professionals without specifying the training area, point to the importance of subjective well-being factors such as: job opportunities in the area, professional's ability to recognize their limitations in ensuring successful intervention, characteristics of some specific practices associated with social intervention, principles that characterize social work and professional self. This study also pointed out some important implications for these professionals training institutions, employers in the area and future research on this sector. It is in this latter dimension that our work emerges, obviously with repercussions for training and employment in the sector. Given the relevance of the social sector in any economy, it is surprising that little attention is paid to these workers well-being, namely on recent professions in this area, such as Social Educators.

Social Education is an area that emerges from the meeting point between two sectors: the educational and the social (Carvalho & Baptista, 2004). These professionals work in the field of prevention and resolution of situations of social vulnerability, using pedagogical strategies. The daily confrontation with risky life circumstances, characterized by suffering and full of obstacles/challenges, requires professionals to have a set of skills that enhance resilience, essential to the exercise of functions in this area. Indeed, research points out the importance of effective coping skills in social workers well-being (Conway, 2016). If personal and professional skills are not accompanied by work contexts favourable to the well-being of these professionals, we will certainly encounter psychological problems with repercussions on the productivity of organizations.

The 2018 UK Stress and Working Conditions Report (Ravalier, 2018) found that social workers compared to the national average are exposed to chronically more deficient working conditions (except for the support received by peers, which was relatively positive), with effects on dissatisfaction with work and intention to leave work. These results affect not only the employee's health, as widely demonstrated in the literature, but also the organization's functioning. This report also points out strategies to improve working conditions in this area, which are transversal to other cultural contexts, such as reducing the number of cases being monitored by a professional; case sharing among professionals specially in difficult situations; decrease in repetitive administrative tasks; improved reflexive supervision; physical conditions of the workplace ensured; among others.

In fact, it is essential to understand how we can improve the living conditions, which result from professional situations, of those who work to improve others' lives. The implementation of policies and practices that promote better working conditions is essential to promote the adjustment between employment and workers (Aazami et al., 2015), also in social sector.

2. Problem Statement

As previous explored, employee health and well-being are on organizations leaders' agendas, including in the social area. So, understanding associations between job satisfaction and other well-being at work variables is crucial.

3. Research Questions

Job satisfaction in the social area, especially in Social Educators, is related to which other well-being at work dimensions? In this equation, is working in the training area important?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the association between job satisfaction and other well-being at work variables (success, salary, and occupation's prestige) in a recent social sector profession - social educator. Also, intends to reflect on its importance in promoting health and well-being in workers who daily deal with other's suffering.

5. Research Methods

This is a quantitative and exploratory study based on a non-experimental design.

5.1. Participants

Participated in our study 74 employed Portuguese Social Educators (Table 01), 94.6% female with mean age of 30.12 ± 8.94 . Most lived in households of only two elements on average (2.35 ± 1.29) and had no children (77%). Concerning professional variables, the majority (97%) worked for others, in institutions non (48.4) or (37.5) for-profit purposes, with temporary (42.4%) or permanent (57.6%) contracts, mainly on a full-time basis (83.3%). On average, career was characterized by only two jobs (2.05 ± 1.40) and

current salary was around 843.67 € (\pm 584.71), with the minimum wage in the country currently being 635 €.

Table 1. Sample characterization

Socio-demographic and professional Background		n		%	
Gender	Male	4		5.4	
	Female	70		94.6	
Children	Without	57		77	
	With	17		33	
Employment	Self-employment	2		3	
	Work for others	64		97	
Company	For-profit company	24		37.5	
	Non-profit company	31		48.4	
	Public administration	9		14.1	
Employment bond	Non-effective contract	28		42.4	
	Effective contract	38		57.6	
Work regime	Part-time	11		16.7	
	Full-time	55		83.3	
		Min	Max	M	DP
Age		21	62	30.12	8.94
Household members		0	5	2.35	1.29
Number of jobs		1	9	2.05	1.40
Salary		340	5000	843.67	584.71

5.2. Instruments

A questionnaire was specifically prepared for this research project, given the scarcity of studies about well-being at work in Social Education area. The first part of the questionnaire included sociodemographic and professional questions necessary to sample characterization. The second part explored aspects related to work well-being, namely job satisfaction, professional success, occupational prestige, satisfaction with career and importance attributed to work, through questions answered on a 4 points Likert scale (1 = not at all to 4 = very). Participants were also asked about their willingness to change job (yes/no) and professional future perspective (1= pessimist to 5 = optimistic). The instrument needs validation, even though the questions have already been used by the authors in other research projects, presenting valid results when related to instruments such as the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, widely used in this area of job well-being.

5.3. Procedure

Participants were contacted via e-mail sent by the responsible of the employability support office of the higher education institution in which they graduated. Ethical conditions were guaranteed, specifically

anonymity and confidentiality, through an electronic consent. The questionnaire was sent by e-mail in electronic format using the LimeSurvey tool. SPSS 25 was used for data analysis, assuming a 95% confidence level in the nonparametric correlation analyses (Spearman Rho) performed.

6. Findings

Despite being relatively satisfied with their current job ($2.68 \pm .87$) and the career path so far (2.05 ± 1.40), considering that they are successful at the professional level ($2.38 \pm .94$), most of the participants showed willingness to change job (74.2%). The main reason being dissatisfaction with salary, followed by family reasons, willingness to change region, difficulty in career progression/few professional perspectives and searching for a more attractive job (Table 02).

Table 2. Descriptive results

Well-being at work	n		%	
Willingness to change job				
No	17		25.8	
Yes	49		74.2	
	Min	Max	M	DP
Job satisfaction	1	4	2.68	.87
Professional success	1	4	2.38	.94
Occupational prestige	1	4	2.05	1.40
Satisfaction with career	1	4	2.59	.87
Importance attributed to work	3	4	3.54	.50
Professional future perspective	1	5	3.68	.86

Adequate levels of our participants' well-being are important for the productivity of the social organizations in which they work (Warr & Nielsen, 2018) that intend to provide social support to people in situations of vulnerability. The dissatisfaction seems to be essentially with salary, which in this sample is, on average, only slightly above the national minimum wage, although the dispersion of results in this variable has been wide. We know that this dissatisfaction can lead to abandonment (Bakotić, 2016) and that lower salary is generally associated with greater job dissatisfaction (Medgyesi & Zolyomi, 2016). In fact, most participants, despite presenting adequate levels of work well-being, revealed willingness to change job, precisely due to salary. This is a result similar to Asekun's study in 2015 and, more specifically in the social area, to Ravalier research in 2018 that points out these professionals' dissatisfaction associated with the intention to leave the job.

In addition, this dissatisfaction can create problems, as we saw in the literature review (e.g. Aazami et al., 2015), in workers' health, including psychological distress. This is a profession that already raises problems at this level, given the daily confrontation with other people's hard life circumstances. In this context, we recall the CIPD model (2019) that alerts precisely to the importance of meeting the requirements of the functions performed, which, in this case, refer to psychological aspects. It is also emphasized the relevance of the organization in promotion of personal and professional growth (CIPD, 2019), which in this sample also seems to be a weak aspect, given the reasons presented by the participants for their intention

to quit their current job (the few professional perspectives and possibilities for career advancement). In fact, these are the main reasons generally associated with dissatisfaction with work (Malik et al., 2012).

These results are reinforced by the statistically significant correlations found between salary and other work variables. Salary was relevant ($p \leq .05$) to job satisfaction (as cited in Medgyesi & Zolyomi, 2016), regardless of whether the professionals were working in the training area. In those who were, job satisfaction was also correlated with the desire to keep the job ($p = .002$) which is important given the relationship proven in the literature (Asekun, 2015) between dissatisfaction with work due to low salary and willingness to change job. In fact, in this social area, low salary generally emerges as a factor generating dissatisfaction (Lane & Flowers, 2015).

It was also found that job satisfaction was positively correlated ($p \leq .05$) with success (as cited in Ansari-pour et al. 2017) and professional prestige (in line with the results of Medgyesi and Zolyomi, 2016). This, in turn, the higher it is, the lower the probability of health problems and low levels of well-being (Fujishiro et al., 2010), as well as stigma associated with mental health problems, in professionals particularly vulnerable to difficulties at this level (Barck-Holst et al., 2019; Hussein, 2018; Telega, 2017).

Participants with higher success, career satisfaction and prestige were more optimistic about professional future ($p \leq .05$). In fact, these variables appear frequently related, that is, more success is generally associated with greater job and career satisfaction, as well as more prestige associated with the profession performed (Ansari-pour et al., 2017). These inferential results are shown in Table 03.

Table 3. Inferential results

Well-being at work	Spearman test	Well-being at work				
		Professional success	Occupational prestige	Satisfaction with career	Importance attributed to work	Professional future perspective
Job satisfaction	Rho	.75	.57	.66	n.s	n.s.
	p	.000	.000	.000		
Professional success	Rho	---	.73	.75	n.s	.30
	p		.000	.000		
Occupational prestige	Rho	.73	---	.68	n.s	.25
	p	.000		.000		
Satisfaction with career	Rho	.75	.68	---	.25	.31
	p	.000	.000		.027	.006
Importance attributed to work	Rho	n.s	n.s	.25	---	n.s
	p			.027		

Legend: n.s. = non significative

7. Conclusion

Ansari-pour et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of identifying factors that affect the professional's performance. In our study, financial benefits are highlighted, so it will be important to promote the reflection of those responsible for organizations in this area, regarding alternative forms of compensation, if the salary increase is not possible, especially because about half of the participants work in non-profit social institutions. The establishment of protocols with companies that can offer welfare

services (example, gyms, psychological support services, or other health initiatives) can be an effective strategy with effect in workers motivation and in preventing occupational stress and burnout, given the Social Educators intervention in high risk and social vulnerability contexts, as also suggested in the CIPD report (2019). Its effect on satisfaction and success, together with growing social recognition of profession is essential for these workers well-being.

The well-being of professionals in the social field is highlighted in several studies as fundamental to their practice, given the coping and resilience skills required in their professional lives (Conway, 2016). Therefore, meeting the recommendations that are being suggested in the literature (Ravalier, 2018), resulting from studies with professionals in this sector, seems to us to be essential.

In this paper, we seek to explore different variables associated with work well-being, given that job satisfaction is a multidimensional construct. In addition to the importance of the salary, namely in the wish to change job, we verified the significative relationship between job satisfaction and professional success as well as with occupational prestige, and also the role of importance attributed to work and optimism with professional future. As emphasized by Aazami et al. (2015), it is essential to continue investigating job satisfaction multiple facets and effects at various levels. We add that this research is crucial especially in professionals that have been little studied, such as Social Educators.

Given the relationship between satisfaction with life and satisfaction with work (Unanue et al., 2017), the results of our study, although with limitations associated with the small sample size and the instrument without validation, point to the importance of research in this area. The main goal for the organizations is to outline strategies with broader effects in these professionals' lives, to promote well-being in those who are in a situation of fragility.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgment to the Centre for Studies in Education and Innovation, CI&DEI - Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (IPV) for their financial support in paper publication.

References

- Aazami, S., Shamsuddin, K., Akmal, S., & Azami, G. (2015). The Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Psychological/Physical Health among Malaysian Working Women. *The Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 22(4), 40–46. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4683848/pdf/mjms-22-4-040.pdf>
- Ali, W. (2016). Understanding the Concept of Job Satisfaction, Measurements, Theories and its Significance in the Recent Organizational Environment: A Theoretical Framework. *Archives of Business Research*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.14738/abr.41.1735>
- Ansari-pour, S., Fasihi, S., MohaMMadi, B., Ganji, F., Shirian, N., & Malekpour-Tehrani, A. (2017). The Role of Job Performance on Career Success and Self-esteem of Staff. *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research*, 11(10), LC14-LC16. <https://doi.org/10.7860/JCDR/2017/24235.10788>
- Asekun, W. (2015). Survey of pay satisfaction, job satisfaction and employee turnover in selected business organizations in Lagos, Nigeria. *Global Journal or Social Sciences*, 14, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjss.v14i1.1>
- Bakotić, D. (2016). Relationship between job satisfaction and organisational performance. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 29(1), 118–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2016.1163946>

- Barck-Holst, P., Nilsson, Å., Åkerstedt, T., & Hellgren, C. (2019). Coping with stressful situations in social work before and after reduced working hours, a mixed-methods study. *European Journal of Social Work*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2019.1656171>
- Carvalho, A., & Baptista, I. (2004). *Educação social: Fundamentos e estratégias*. Porto: Porto Editora.
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (2019). *Health and well-being at work*. London: CIPD. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/health-well-being-work>
- Conway, L. (2016). *Mental Health Social Workers: The State of their Well-Being and Support*. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website: https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/570
- Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 34–43. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1b2a/60c638bb5ac8b982c2ece09140f971c8c608.pdf?_ga=2.124536963.848569084.1596640092-1468872027.1595799069
- Fujishiro, K., Xu, J., & Gong, G. (2010). What does “occupation” represent as an indicator of socioeconomic status?: Exploring occupational prestige and health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 71, 2100-2107. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/47644305_What_Does_'Occupation'_Represent_as_an_Indicator_of_Socioeconomic_Status_Exploring_Occupational_Prestige_and_Health
- Graham, J., & Shier, M. (2010). The social work profession and subjective well-being: The impact of a profession on overall subjective well-being. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40, 1553-1572. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcp049>
- Hussein, S. (2018). Work Engagement, Burnout and Personal Accomplishments Among Social Workers: A Comparison Between Those Working in Children and Adults' Services in England. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 45(6), 911–923. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-018-0872-z>
- Lane, S., & Flowers, T. (2015). Salary Inequity in Social Work. *Affilia*, 30, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109915572843>
- Malik, M., Danish, R., & Munir, Y. (2012). The Impact of Pay and Promotion on Job Satisfaction: Evidence from Higher Education Institutes of Pakistan. *American Journal of Economics, Special Issue*, 6-9. <https://doi.org/10.5923/j.economics.20120001.02>
- Medgyesi, M., & Zolyomi, E. (2016). *Job satisfaction and satisfaction in financial situation and their impact on life satisfaction*. Social Situation Monitor Research Note 6/2016. Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion 2016.
- Ravalier, J. (2018). *UK social workers: Working conditions and well-being*. UK: British Association of Social Workers. https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/basw_42443-3_1.pdf
- Telega, L. (2017). *Exploring relationships between occupational prestige, perceived public stigma, mental health experiences of stigma, and professional help-seeking in the general Canadian population* (Master Thesis). Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Retrieved from https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/bitstream/handle/1974/22762/Telega_Lyndsey_A_201709_MS.pdf
- Unanue, W., Gómez, M., Cortez, D., Oyanedel, J., & Mendiburo-Seguel, A. (2017). Revisiting the link between job satisfaction and life satisfaction: The role of basic psychological needs. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 680. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00680>
- Warr, P., & Nielsen, K. (2018). Wellbeing and work performance. In E. Diener, S. Oishi, & L. Tay (Eds.), *Handbook of well-being*. DEF Publishers.