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Research Notes

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Factors Impacting Job Satisfaction and Commitment in the Early Childhood Workforce

Job satisfaction is one of the most widely researched topics in psychology. Its popularity is not difficult to understand; the topic has immediate relevance to our own lives. With the latest wave of educational reform, the issue has taken on heightened importance. Across the educational spectrum, work satisfaction is related to organizational and professional commitment. Thus, understanding the factors that influence job satisfaction is central to attracting and retaining an effective and committed workforce. The present study was designed to provide a profile of the early childhood workforce to understand the specific job facets that contribute most to professional fulfillment. The study also examined differences in satisfaction and commitment related to educators' roles and the types of programs in which they worked.

Sample and Instrumentation

The sample for this study included 3,579 center-based assistant teachers, teachers, component coordinators, assistant directors, and directors representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In terms of educational level, 61% of directors, 43% of assistant directors, 71% percent of component coordinators, 42% percent of teachers, and 13% of assistant teachers held a bachelor's degree or higher.

The *Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey* (ECJSS) was used to measure five facets of job satisfaction—co-worker relations, supervisor relations, the nature of the work itself, working conditions, and pay and promotion opportunities.¹ The ECJSS also measures employees' commitment to the organization, their commitment to the profession, and the perceived degree of congruence between their current and ideal job. In completing the ECJSS, respondents indicated their degree of agreement from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with ten statements in each job facet subscale. A low score on any subscale represented negative attitudes toward that job facet; a high score represented positive attitudes. Data were collected electronically in spring 2010.

Findings

Table 1. ECJSS Means, Standard Deviations, and Range of Scores (N = 3,579)

Table 1 summarizes the means and standard deviations for each ECJSS scale. Co-worker relations surfaced as the most positive facet of respondents' job satisfaction; pay and promotion opportunities surfaced as the facet in which workers were least satisfied. Respondents' total job satisfaction (the composite of the facet scores) was significantly related to organizational commitment ($r = .51, p < .001$) and the extent to which current conditions were congruent with the worker's ideal ($r = .60, p < .001$).

Scale	M	SD	Range
Job Satisfaction	187.98	26.77	84 – 247
Co-worker relations	39.73	6.72	10 – 50
Supervisor relations	39.25	8.54	10 – 50
The work itself	39.10	5.42	14 – 50
Working conditions	38.17	6.91	10 – 50
Pay and promotion	31.73	7.86	10 – 50
Congruence with Ideal	17.24	4.57	5 – 25
Commitment to the Organization	8.13	1.87	0 – 10
Commitment to the Profession	9.12	1.40	1 – 10

An analysis of the items comprising each job facet provided further evidence of the areas that respondents viewed as most positive in their respective jobs. The following were the ten items in the survey that were viewed as most positive:

- I make an important difference in the lives of my students. (94%)
- My co-workers care about me. (80%)
- My work gives me a sense of accomplishment. (89%)
- My supervisor respects my work. (79%)
- I feel I am respected by the parents of my students. (88%)
- The center's policies and procedures are clear. (79%)
- My work is stimulating and challenging. (87%)
- I feel encouraged and supported by my colleagues. (78%)
- My colleagues are enjoyable to work with. (81%)
- My work schedule is flexible. (78%)

Only 43% of respondents felt their pay was adequate and only 40% anticipated a raise during the next year. Additionally, 44% of respondents felt that opportunities to advance were limited and only 54% felt they were given helpful feedback about their performance.

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Overall, it appears that the early childhood educators who participated in this study were committed to their organizations and to the early childhood profession. Indeed, over 75% reported that they took pride in their center and 82% indicated that they put extra effort into their work. In addition, fully 85% stated that they would choose a career in early childhood education again.

Differences by Role and Program Type

Table 2 provides the means and standard deviations of scale scores by role. Significant differences between assistant teachers, teachers, component coordinators, assistant directors, and directors were noted in their reported levels of job satisfaction, congruence with ideal, commitment to the organization, and commitment to the profession. On three of these scales, the differences were quite strong: job satisfaction ($F = 8.48, p < .0001$); commitment to the organization ($F = 31.27, p < .0001$); and commitment to the profession ($F = 7.40, p < .0001$).

In general, directors scored significantly higher in all areas than their teaching staff. Given the degree of control that directors have over the factors that impact their professional fulfillment, it is understandable why they hold more favorable perceptions about their work than those in teaching positions. Among the teaching staff, assistant teachers expressed more positive job satisfaction than teachers.

Program type also proved to have a strong effect on the job satisfaction of individuals. Those working for nonprofit centers scored higher on the job satisfaction scale than those in the for-profit sector ($F = 11.33, p < .001$). Those working in faith-based programs scored higher on both the job satisfaction and organizational commitment scales than individuals working for Head Start or public school sponsored programs.

In sum, it appears that early childhood educators are very committed to their centers and to the profession. Only 15% of the respondents in this study felt they were in a dead-end job. Co-worker relations, supervisor relations, and the nature of the work itself were the areas in which workers feel most positive. Additional research is needed to understand how work attitudes change over time and how the facets of satisfaction relate to demonstrated performance on the job.

References

1. Bloom, P. J. (2010). *Measuring work attitudes in the early childhood setting* (2nd edition). Wheeling, IL: McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University.

Table 2. Scale Scores by Role

Role and Scale	M	SD
Assistant Teachers (n = 351)		
Job satisfaction	189.83	28.12
Congruence with ideal	17.67	4.69
Commitment to the organization	7.91	1.87
Commitment to the profession	8.91	1.45
Teachers (n = 1,243)		
Job satisfaction	184.96	28.30
Congruence with ideal	16.81	4.65
Commitment to the organization	7.81	2.05
Commitment to the profession	9.15	1.45
Component Coordinators (n = 361)		
Job satisfaction	185.13	27.58
Congruence with ideal	16.57	4.67
Commitment to the organization	7.76	2.00
Commitment to the profession	8.91	1.45
Assistant Directors (n = 230)		
Job satisfaction	188.72	25.88
Congruence with ideal	17.38	4.61
Commitment to the organization	8.14	1.86
Commitment to the profession	9.16	1.49
Directors (n = 1,262)		
Job satisfaction	191.42	23.88
Congruence with ideal	17.67	4.31
Commitment to the organization	8.62	1.51
Commitment to the profession	9.35	1.18

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