

Job Satisfaction of Saudi Female Employees: An Exploratory Study

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This study is intended to investigate the job satisfaction among women employees in Saudi Arabia. A questionnaire was designed for this study and distributed in the three main regions in the Kingdom in private companies as well as governmental agencies in three different sectors: health, education and banking. Overall, women workers were found satisfied with their jobs.

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction has been widely studied over the years. Tziner and Vardi (1984) define work satisfaction as an effective response or reaction to a wide range of conditions or aspects of one's work such as pay, supervision, working conditions, and/or the work itself. Others define it as an effective orientation towards anticipated outcome (Wanous and Lawler, 1972), a statement that describe the feelings of employees about their work (Arches, 1991), or an employee's affective reactions to a job based on comparing actual outcomes with desired outcomes (Cranny et al., 1992). It is generally recognized as a multifaceted construct that includes employee feelings about a variety of both intrinsic and extrinsic job elements (Howard & Frink, 1996). Intrinsic determinants pertain to the nature of, and activities inherent to, a position or set of tasks, such as intellectual stimulation or feeling or accomplishment. Extrinsic determinants focus on external factors such as relations with co-workers or job security. So, job satisfaction is a subjective variable which does not lend itself readily to quantification. It is experienced when employees fulfilled whatever needs or considerations they deem important in their work.

Porter and Steers (1973) argued that the extent of employee job satisfaction reflects the cumulative level of met worker expectations. That is, employees expect their job to provide a mix of features (e.g., pay, promotion, autonomy) for which the employee has certain preferential values. The range and importance of these preferences vary across individuals, but when the accumulation of unmet expectation becomes sufficiently large there is less job satisfaction and greater probability of withdrawal behaviour. The preference for intrinsic and extrinsic determinants is not entirely random; they are systematically related to employees' demographic characteristics, the most important of which seems to be gender.

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In Saudi Arabia, the largest economy among the Gulf States, women are joining the work force and participating in the economic development. Saudi women are 51 percent of the population, but represent only 7 percent of the total workforce and work mainly in education, medical and banking fields. The Government is creating additional jobs for Saudi educated women as a step to reduce the unemployment rate among women which is estimated to be 26.3 percent of the total number of working women (Abdul Ghafour, 2007).

This study attempts to determine the women job satisfaction in the private and government sectors in Saudi Arabia in the health, education and banking sectors.

2. Literature Review

Job satisfaction is an important part of overall life satisfaction among the working age population. Considerable research has been done related to job satisfaction. Most research efforts to explain this organizational behavior topic have been dominated by the person-environment fit paradigm (Mottaz, 1985; Kristof, 1996), which states that the more an employee's work environment fulfills his/her needs, values, or personal characteristics, the greater the degree of job satisfaction.

Aspects of the work situation have been shown to be determinants of job satisfaction (Arvey et al., 1991). Zeitz (1990) found that perceptions that employees have about numerous aspects of their work environment (management climate, job content, reward fairness, employee influence on work group, and promotion opportunities) explained job satisfaction. This study also found distinct patterns of work satisfaction at different age levels for non-college graduates (U shape), non-elite professionals (downward sloping) and elite professionals (upward sloping). Personal characteristics such as age, gender, education level, and pay grade did not contribute incrementally to explaining the variance in work satisfaction beyond that explained by variables describing the job situation.

Reiner and Zhao (1999) examined two sources of job satisfaction: demographic characteristics (example: age, race, gender, educational level) and work environment characteristics (example: task identity, autonomy, skill variety, task significance, feedback). The results from the research of Agho et al. (1993) suggested that the importance of environment or situational characteristics and job characteristics are influencing employees' satisfaction.

A qualitative study (Bussing et al., 1999) suggested that job satisfaction is developed through assessment of the match between expectations, needs, and motives and the work situation. Based on this assessment, a person builds up satisfaction (steady feeling of relaxation as a result of met expectations and needs) or dissatisfaction (feeling of tension as a result of unsatisfied needs and expectations) with his work. In case of dissatisfaction, employees may maintain or reduce their level of aspiration. Maintaining aspirations in the face of work dissatisfaction can result in pseudo work satisfaction, fixated dissatisfaction and constructive dissatisfaction. Fixated and constructive work dissatisfaction may result in mobilization of an employee's problem-solving behavior (Bussing et al., 1999).

Major and Konar (1986) argued that, through the socialization process, men and women develop different attitudes toward occupational achievement and work contentment which often lead to systematic inter-gender variations in perceptions and behavior. Weaver (1980) found a positive association between job satisfaction and education, age, income, and occupation.

There is general agreement in the literature about employees' satisfaction with their work life, that there are two types of factors that affect it: demographic and work environment. Most studies have consistently indicated a strong positive linkage between

these two constructs and job satisfaction. However, these variables impact has not been studied in Saudi Arabia with representative samples of male and female employees.

3. Methodology

To investigate Saudi women job satisfaction, this study employs the following research methodology.

a. Sample

The data used for the study consisted of 500 women employees randomly selected from companies and governmental institutions throughout the Kingdom. A questionnaire was distributed in the different regions of the country. Three-hundred and Seventy (356) completed surveys were returned which provided 71 percent response rate.

b. Selection of Instruments

Based on literature review, the questionnaire was divided in two parts: the first part included general information about the employee (gender, age, educational background, income, etc.) and the second part was designed to assess employee perceptions about intrinsic factors (example: responsibility, job importance, autonomy) and extrinsic factors (example: financial rewards, promotion opportunities, supervisor, work conditions) that have an effect on job satisfaction, using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree".

c. Reliability of the Instrument

Based on Cronbach's alpha, the reliability coefficient score obtained for the overall measures is 0.914. This study support previous research reported in the methodology section of this study with regard to the high reliability of the instrument used.

4. Findings

The main purpose of this research was to understand the determinants of the work performance among women employees in Saudi Arabia. It also sought to identify demographic variables that have influence on the work performance.

A. Demographic Variables

Table 1: Sample Demographics (N=356)

Variable	Count	%	Variable	Count	%
Age			Status		
Less than 20	3	1	Married	248	70
20 – 30	120	34	Divorced	18	5
30 - 40	140	39	Single	83	23
40-50	83	23	Widow	7	2
Over 50	10	3			
Education			Monthly Income*		
Elementary	0	0	< SR 1,000	14	4
Intermediate	2	1	SR 1,000 - 4,999	82	24
High School	14	4	SR 5,000 - 9,999	85	24
Diploma	42	12	SR 10,000-14,999	84	24
University Degree	281	79	SR 15,000-19,999	74	22
Other	17	5	Over SR 20,000	7	2
Job Experience			Company Size		
Less than 1	40	11	Less than 10	17	5
1 – 5	115	32	10 – 50	119	33
5-10	53	15	50-100	43	12
10-15	53	15	100-250	36	10
15-20	48	14	250-500	59	16
Over 20	47	13	Over 500	82	24
Region			Company Activity		
Eastern	307	86	Health	91	26
Western	36	10	Education	233	65
Central	13	4	Banking	32	9
Company Type			Week Working Hours		
Government	253	71	Less than 29	64	18
Semi-Government	10	3	30 – 35	154	43
Private	93	26	36-39	33	9
			40-48	87	25
			Over 48	18	5

* SR means Saudi Riyal. US\$ 1.00 = SR 3.75

The distribution of respondents (Table 1) by job sector showed that the majority of the respondents (71%) were governmental employees, aging between 30-40 years old (39%) and 70% of them are married. Concerning the educational level, 79% said that the highest degree they earned was a Bachelor degree. Only 17 respondents (5%) finished their graduate studies. As far as monthly income is concerned, 24% of the respondents reported earning less than SR 5,000, 22% made between SR 5,000 and 20,000 and only 2% are earning more than SR 20,000. The majority (32%) has been employed for the duration of between 1-5 years. Only 13% of the respondents have an experience of over 20 years-period. Response to the item "Company Activity" was used to determine the discipline area of respondents. The majority (65%) of the respondents are in the educational sector, followed by the health sector (26%) and banking (9%).

B. Importance of Job Satisfaction Factors

Table 2 shows the ascending rank-order respondents' ratings of the importance of various factors included in the survey concerning job satisfaction. A five point Likert-type

scale was used as the response format for the job satisfaction variables, with assigned values ranging from 1 being "Strongly Disagree" to 5 being "Strongly Agree".

The respondents had mentioned a number of factors that lead to their dissatisfaction (Mean less than 3), such as promotion, compensation, clarity of organizational goals as well as career development compared to others in similar position in other companies (Mean=2.4). Other factors ranking high in importance (Mean superior to 3) are the respondents' relationship with supervisor and co-workers, and authority. Other reasons that respondents have mentioned to be important in their responses include the climate and the training activities in the institution. Apparently, Saudi female workers are quite satisfied with their jobs.

Table 2: Importance of Job Satisfaction Factors

	Variable	Mean	SD
1	People get ahead as fast as others do in other places	2.4	1.157
2	The goals of this organization are not clear to me	2.54	1.182
3	I find I have to work harder at my job than I should because of the incompetence of people I work with	2.65	1.171
4	I can interrupt my work at any moment	2.67	1.247
5	I am satisfied with the company's compensation program	2.67	1.327
6	There is really enough chance for promotion on my job	2.69	1.297
7	Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted	2.79	1.399
8	I am satisfied with my chances for promotion	2.79	1.266
9	I am challenged by the people I work with	2.86	1.25
10	I often feel that I do not know what is going on within the organization	2.93	1.115
11	I believe I can move up in the company and earn more	2.97	1.354
12	Work assignments are often not fully explained	2.98	1.103
13	I, myself, decide when to take leave	2.99	1.353
14	I am receiving enough resources to get my job done	3.00	1.228
15	The future of this institution has been well communicated to all employees	3.03	1.084
16	I get the training I need to further develop my skills	3.04	1.139
17	The future objectives of the institution are consistent with my personal objectives	3.13	1.183
18	Career development is taken seriously in my institution	3.14	1.153

19	There are helpful ways of preventing conflicts from getting out of hand in this institution	3.15	1.116
20	Conflicts are constructively/positively resolved in the organization	3.16	1.129
21	The training I receive is of high quality	3.16	1.137
22	There is little bickering and fighting at work	3.17	1.161
23	There is little conflict between departments	3.18	1.139
24	I feel I am paid fairly for the work I do	3.19	1.42
25	We are generally encouraged to resolve our conflicts rather than let them simmer	3.19	1.204
26	There are appropriate orientation procedures in this institution	3.19	1.059
27	Raises are acceptable	3.22	1.328
28	I have received the training I needed to do a good job	3.24	1.126
29	There is an adequate means of appraising my performance	3.27	1.077
30	Communications seem good within this organization	3.28	1.043
31	I, myself, decide the way the work is done	3.32	1.194
32	I feel my job is secure	3.33	1.296
33	The future of this institution is bright	3.33	1.074
34	The vast majority of the employees share a clear understanding of where the institution is going and what it is trying to achieve	3.37	1.008
35	I am given enough information to get my job done	3.39	1.163
36	I have enough authority to do my job	3.41	1.146
37	My responsibilities are clearly defined	3.44	1.212
38	There is an opportunity to work for this institution until I retire	3.44	1.315
39	We all feel we are part of the institution	3.44	1.108
40	My supervisor shows enough interest in the feelings of subordinates	3.47	1.225
41	My superior is fair and supportive	3.54	1.213
42	I can develop my career within this institution	3.56	1.125
43	My supervisor is quite competent in doing his job	3.61	1.178
44	My supervisor is fair to me	3.61	1.214
45	I, myself, decide the order of work activities	3.62	1.133
46	I am clear about the part I play in helping this	3.77	0.922

	institution achieve its goals		
47	I enjoy working with my colleagues	3.83	1.02
48	I can set my own pace of work	3.91	0.878
49	The people I work with are friendly	3.93	1.078
50	I respect my supervisor	4.16	1.022

We further explored the underlying factor structure in the variables through principal components analysis with varimax rotation. We retained factor loadings of 0.5 and above. The results are in Table 3. Thirty Nine of the variables loaded on eleven factors that together accounted for 64 per cent of the variance. Additional work will be done later in further exploring the factor structure for use in subsequent analysis.

Table 3: Factor Structure of Importance of Job Satisfaction Variables

	Factor Loading
Supervision	
My supervisor is quite competent in doing his job	0.852
My superior is not fair and supportive	0.848
My supervisor is unfair to me	0.841
My supervisor shows little interest in the feelings of subordinates	0.752
I respect my supervisor	0.530
Promotion	
There is really too little chance for promotion on my job	0.780
Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted	0.769
I believe I can move up in the company and earn more	0.713
I am satisfied with my chances for promotion	0.709
People get ahead as fast as they do in other places	0.657
Direction	
The future of this institution is bright	0.682
The vast majority of the employees share a clear understanding of where the institution is going and what it is trying to achieve	0.658
I am clear about the part I play in helping this institution achieve its goals	0.630
The future objectives of the institution are consistent with my personal objectives	0.575
Conflicts Management	
Conflicts are constructively/positively resolved in the organization	0.687
We are generally encouraged to resolve our conflicts rather than let them simmer	0.678
There are helpful ways of preventing conflicts from getting out of hand in this institution	0.653
There is little conflict between departments	0.514
Training and Learning	
I have received the training I need to do a good job	0.850

The training I receive is of high quality	0.849
I get the training I need to further develop my skills	0.817
Autonomy	
I decide myself the way the work is done	0.753
I decide myself the order of work activities	0.703
I can interrupt my work at any moment	0.674
I decide myself when to take leave	0.604
Communication	
I feel that I know what is going on within the organization	0.794
Work assignments are often fully explained	0.717
The goals of this organization are clear to me	0.638
Relationship with colleagues	
I can set my own pace of work	0.713
I enjoy working with my colleagues	0.592
The people I work with are friendly	0.554
Resources	
My responsibilities are clearly defined	0.619
I am given enough information to get my job done	0.557
I am receiving enough resources to get my job done	0.513
Challenge	
I find I have to work harder at my job than I should because of the incompetence of people I work with	0.701
I am not challenged by the people I work with	0.661
Financial Rewards and Career Development	
Raises are acceptable	0.648
I am satisfied with the company's compensation program	0.567
There is an opportunity to work for this institution until I retire	0.557

C. Work Loyalty

Table 4 shows the level of loyalty of the women employees to their current job. First, the respondents were asked if they are loyal to their actual company using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 being "Very Low" to 5 being "Very High". The majority confirmed their loyalty to their actual company (Mean=3.75, SD= 0.974). Second, when the respondents were asked if they are offered a higher salary by another company, are they going to leave the actual company, the majority (Mean=3.34, SD=1.336) of the respondents said that they would leave their actual companies if they are offered higher salaries.

Table 4: Respondents' Job Loyalty

	Mean	SD
Do you think that you are loyal to the actual company?	3.75	0.974
If you are offered a higher salary by another company, are you going to leave?	3.34	1.336

D. Overall satisfaction

Finally, the respondents were asked about their overall job satisfaction using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 being "Very Low" to 5 being "Very High". Table 5 shows that the majority (Mean=3.24, SD=0.970) confirmed their satisfaction with their current job.

Table 5: Respondents' Job Overall Satisfaction

	Mean	SD
Overall, are you satisfied with your job?	3.24	0.970

5. Summary and Conclusions

The results of this study show that women employees in Saudi Arabia are overall satisfied with their job. They perceived their work as challenging and secure. They feel comfortable working with their co-workers. Also, they get enough resources and support from their superiors. However, the study shows that the respondents are still demanding on the promotion and compensation systems in their companies. So, it is important for managers to take into consideration the results of this study to adjust the work settings to reach full satisfaction and loyalty, thus, reducing job turnover intentions.

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