

AN ASSESSMENT OF CHILD CARE WORKERS' JOB SATISFACTION USING THE JOB DESCRIPTIVE INDEX

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ABSTRACT: Job satisfaction is one of the most highly researched organizational variables. It has been shown to be both significantly and positively related to organizational commitment and lower turnover. In the child care field, job satisfaction of direct child care workers (CCWs) is especially critical because high turnover cost can financially cripple a struggling organization and disrupt the continuity of care for children.

This article reports the results of 200 Texas CCWs' job satisfaction using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI). The JDI measures five facets of satisfaction: supervision, co-workers, the job itself, pay, and promotional opportunities. Overall the CCWs surveyed were satisfied with their supervision, co-workers, and the job. They were dissatisfied with their pay and promotional opportunities. Recommendations for improving CCW job satisfaction are made by the author.

Introduction

Job satisfaction is one of the most highly studied variables in organizational and management literature. It is defined as the feeling that an employee has about his or her job in relation to previous experiences, current expectations, or available alternatives (Balzer & Smith, 1990). In 1992, Cranny, Smith, & Stone estimated over 5,000 dissertations and research articles had been published using job satisfaction as the major variable of job interest. This is not surprising since job satisfaction has been shown to be consistently and positively related to organizational commitment and reduced turnover (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Mobley, 1977).

In the child care field few would minimize the importance of job satisfaction among direct child care workers (CCWs). The impact of the CCW in the therapeutic milieu of children's homes, residential treatment centers, and psychiatric hospitals has long been recognized (Trieschman, Whittaker, & Brendtro, 1969). Yet in spite of their importance, little has been done to promote CCWs' job satisfaction.

Two decades ago Krueger emphasized the importance of job satisfaction for CCWs and suggested potential causes. He stated, "the major concerns still are: low wages, overly demanding working conditions, inadequate decision involvement, limited opportunities for advancement, and minimal public support and recognition" (Krueger, 1982). This research verifies that some of the causes Krueger suggested remain in child care

organizations today. It reports the results of a job satisfaction survey of 200 Texas CCWs and offers recommendations for increasing satisfaction.

The JDI

One of the most frequently used instruments for the measurement of employee job satisfaction is the Job Descriptive Index or JDI (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). The JDI measures five facets of job satisfaction: the work itself, pay, opportunities for promotion, supervision, and co-workers. Each scale consists of words or short phrases about which the respondent is asked to answer "yes," "no," or "T" (sometimes yes and sometimes no).

The JDI was revised in 1987 to reflect the current language employees use to describe their jobs. After the revision, reliability remained high. The JDI has an average internal consistency of .88 (Smith, Balzer, Brannick, Chia, Eggleston, Gibson, Johnson, Josepson, Paul, Reilly, & Whalen, 1987).

JDI scores range from 0 to 54, the higher score indicating higher job satisfaction. There is no single score that serves as the demarcation point between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. However, the authors of *The User's Manual* suggest scores above 32 can be used to indicate satisfaction and scores below 22 can be used to indicate dissatisfaction. Scores between 22 and 32 should be considered neither satisfied or dissatisfied (Balzer & Smith, 1990). The authors also suggest that median scores, along with the 25th and 75th percentiles, be reported since the distribution of scores may bias a mean score.

Research Method

As a part of a larger research project, 200 Texas CCWs were given the JDI. The personal demographics of the CCWs completing the JDI are found in Table 1. In addition to the normal descriptive characteristics, the researcher asked the CCWs why they were in the field. Eighteen responded that they were in child care because they needed a job, 42 said they liked children, and 102 indicated they had a sense of mission about the work. Thirty-eight responded they were working in child care for some other reason.

Table I
CCW demographics of the research population (n=200).

Sex		
Male		47%
Female		53%
Race		
White		71.5%
African American		16%
Hispanic		8%
Other		3.5%

Marital Status	
Single	26%
Married	62%
Divorced	9.5%
Separated	1.5%
Widowed	1%

	Mean	Median	Mode	Range
Age	35.8	32	24	20-68
Education (yrs.)	14.24	14	12	12-23
# of Children Raised	1.5	1	0	0-7
CCW Experience (yrs.)	4.5	3	3	.1-35
Last Job (yrs.)	4.3	2	1	.1-35
Longest Job (yrs.)	6.9	5	3	.4-35

The CCWs were from six organizations. One was a state facility; one was a private, for-profit organization; and the other four were private, nonprofit organizations. Two organizations used shift workers entirely, three used live-in staff entirely and one used a combination of both. The characteristics of the employing organizations are given in Table 2.

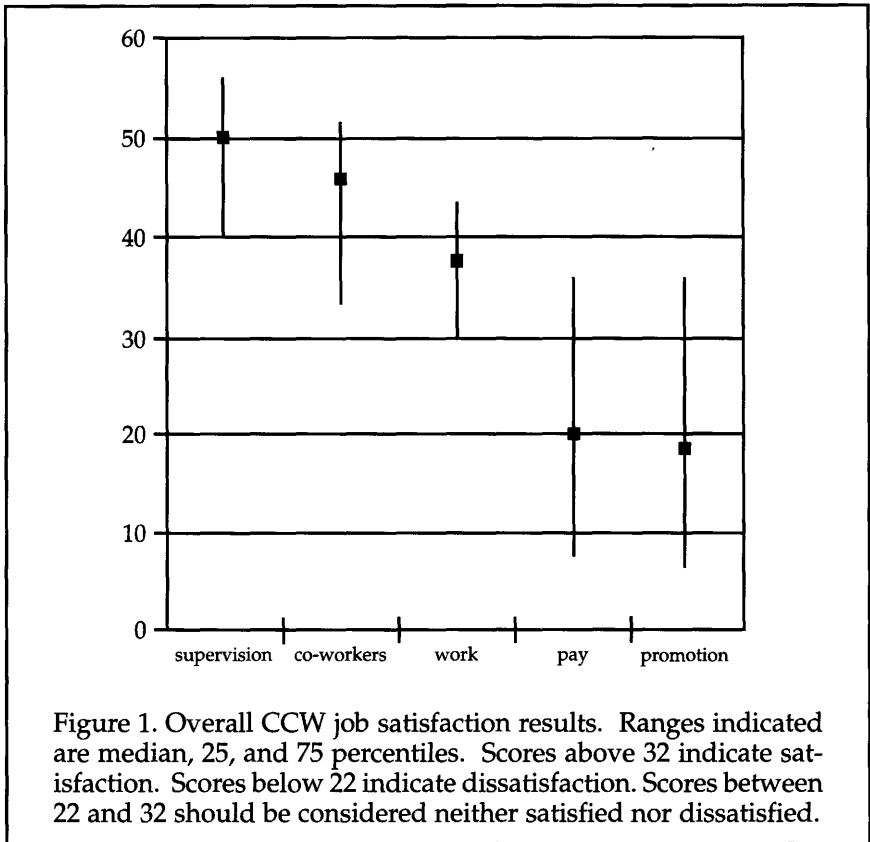
Table 2
Organization characteristics of the research population (n=6).

Service Provided	
Residential Group Care (live-in staff)	52.5%
Residential Treatment (shift staff)	47.5%

	Mean	Median	Mode	Range
CCW Tenure (months)	30.6	15	2	1-234
Salary (in thousands)	14.84	15	16	10-19.5
Avg. # Children in Unit	10.9	10	10	5-22
Avg. # Staff on Duty	2.4	2	2	1-4
Avg. Days on Duty	7.02	5	8	2-20
Avg. Days Off	3.29	2	2	1-10

Results

Since the JDI produces large amounts of information, the results are best seen when displayed graphically. Figure 1 gives the overall findings of the research.



Satisfaction with Supervision.

To measure this facet the JDI asks questions such as, "asks my advice," "tactful," and "tells me where I stand." The CCWs of the surveyed population rated satisfaction with supervision higher than any other facet of satisfaction. The score of 40 for the lower 25th percentile of the aggregate population is well above the score (32) that is needed to indicate satisfaction. When the surveyed population is subdivided into the demographic characteristics of sex, race (White, African American, or Hispanic), type of work (live-in or shift), and reason for work (needed a job, liked kids, or mission), the lower 25th percentile of all groups were still in the satisfied range.

Satisfaction with co-workers.

Likewise, the overall satisfaction with co-workers was also high. To measure this facet the JDI asks questions such as, "stimulating," "lazy," and "active." The score of 34.25 for the lower 25th percentile of the aggregate population is also above the score that is needed to indicate satisfaction.

However, three subgroups (African-Americans, liked kids, and needed a job) had their lower 25th percentile score fall in the neutral range.

Satisfaction with the work itself

Satisfaction with the work itself of the aggregate population was mostly in the satisfied range. To measure this facet the JDI asks questions such as, "routine," "respected," and "too much to do." The lower 25th percentile of all but two subgroups was in the neutral range. The positive exception was Hispanic CCWs who were in the satisfied range. The negative exception was from those who are only in the field because they needed a job. This group's scores were mostly in the neutral range. Only the top 75th percentile scored in the satisfied range. The bottom 25th percentile was in the dissatisfied range. This finding also serves as additional verification of the validity of the measurement instrument. A CCW who is working with kids out of necessity would not be expected to find it very satisfying.

Satisfaction with pay.

As Krueger predicted, CCWs are dissatisfied with their pay. To measure this facet the JDI asks questions such as, "fair," "barely live on income," and "less than I deserve." The median aggregate population score fell in the dissatisfied range. Only the subgroups of male, white, live-in, and in the field due to a sense of mission had median scores that fell in the neutral range.

Satisfaction with promotional opportunities.

CCWs' satisfaction with promotional opportunities was even lower than satisfaction with pay. To measure this facet the JDI asks questions such as, "promotion on ability," "dead-end job," and "infrequent promotions." Most of the subgroup's median scores fell in the dissatisfied range. Only African-Americans, Hispanic, live-in, and mission oriented had scores in the neutral range. While promotional opportunity is a dissatisfier for most CCWs, it should be noted that the median scores of the surveyed population was virtually the same as the JDI's normed population of 1,737 workers from various occupations. This would indicate that, while child care organizations are not providing promotional opportunities that satisfy their staff, they also are not distinguishably different from other employers.

Recommendations

When observing the overall poor satisfaction that CCWs have in regard to pay and promotional opportunities, child care administrators must determine if this situation is acceptable. For many administrators the answer may be yes by default. If the situation is beyond an organization's control, why commiserate over it? Recruiting, training, and losing CCWs is just a part of the business. But does it have to be?

One reason CCWs are generally low paid is because the position has few requirements. As a case in point, Texas CCWs are only required to be 18 years of age or older, have a high school diploma or GED, and not be convicted of a crime against a person. These limited requisites, combined with the fact that many organizations struggle to survive (and managed care will intensify this situation), leave pay and promotional opportunities of CCWs off an administrator's priority list. However, the time and resources needed to correct this problem may even be cheaper than an organization's current expenditures.

Career ladders.

Even the smallest organization has the ability to design a career ladder based on competency, not just tenure, in a manner that will increase a CCW's job satisfaction. For example, in most states inservice training hours are required annually. The number of hours usually depends on the acuity of the population served. These required training hours could serve as the foundation for a career ladder.

Building a career ladder begins with organizational leaders determining appropriate skills that CCWs need to be most effective with their particular population and outlining a reasonable time frame for their mastery. Based on the particular skills needed, training curriculum must then be selected. Fortunately, many high-quality training curricula are now being marketed for a one-time purchase price and are available in various formats: video, CDROM, and/or print. Once this training is purchased it is a permanent resource for all staff. Training becomes a competency-based step on a career ladder when supervisors determine how they will observe and measure the CCW's new skill(s). After a CCW has appropriately demonstrated mastery over the new skills, a pay raise and job title change can follow.

The raise and job title does not have to be extravagant or overly burdensome to an organization. The fact that dissatisfaction with promotional opportunities is greater than dissatisfaction with pay seems to indicate that most CCWs accept that low wages are a part of the job. Nevertheless, CCWs need to have their skills appreciated and recognized by the organization. A \$500 raise and a change in job title from CCW I to CCW II or Houseparent to Senior Houseparent cost the organization little and might have a profound impact on raising satisfaction. It can also greatly enhance the perfunctory annual evaluation process that occurs in many organizations.

Certification efforts.

A better, although admittedly much more difficult solution for raising CCW satisfaction with pay and promotional opportunities, would be the adoption of a statewide or national certification that measures progressive child care skills. Such a certification should be built on the mastery of a general curriculum, evidence of commensurate skills, and years of experience. It could then be tied to the career/pay ladder mentioned above.

This curriculum should minimally include basic child development, communication skills, and discipline concepts. Requirements would progressively increase for different certification levels. This training and skill development should also be generic enough to serve as the foundation for specific organizational models of care training (e.g., teaching-family, positive peer, etc.).

Such a project is currently underway in Texas. In 1996, the Child and Youth Care Worker Certification Institute began offering CCW certification. While the success of this effort is yet to be determined, it is surely hampered without the support and cooperation of the major Texas providers who do not have to fight for their daily survival. To participate in such an effort would require an initial investment of resources (time and money) and would force the voluntary compliance with the standards of a regulating body outside the organization. The immediate impact of such a commitment would probably be more negative than positive (e.g., higher salaries, additional training cost, increased supervisory expense, possibly a higher CCW selection criteria, etc.). However, the long-term outcome of having thousands of trained CCWs available throughout the state and/or nation would benefit all providers (and especially the children). Over a five-year period, the HR savings from breaking the cycle of continual recruiting and training new staff would greatly off-set the start-up cost.

Peter Senge emphasizes the critical mistake organizations make when they unintentionally sacrifice their future by focusing on short-term goals or needs (1990). Low salaries and poor promotional opportunities have always been a part of residential children's services and continue to serve as a dissatisfier for CCWs. Their continuance depends on the willingness of organizational leaders to look past the initial investment necessary to address the problems and focus on the future benefits of having qualified and satisfied CCWs caring for their children. Only then can the negative cycle of hiring, training, losing, and recruiting CCWs hope to be broken.

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