

Case of Adult Learners and Work Satisfaction: Who's Behind Them?

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INTRODUCTION

Yearly the number of working adults registering under distance education program in various universities in the nation is on the upward trend. This can be seen as they are seeking and eager to acquire knowledge. Moreover with the globalization, the demand of working adults becoming knowledge workers is highly regarded. Their efforts were being paid off being promoted upon completing the distance education program. This promotion also will be tied with the incentive of an increase in their salary scale.

Proponents had said that every successful man there is someone special behind them – their spouse. This case study paper tries to shed some light in looking into distance education students' life on their spouse support in pursuit of their academic advancement. This paper will determine the degree of support from distance education students spouse in relation towards their work satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies on work satisfaction such as the work of Herzberg, Mauesner, and Synderman (1952) on motivation and hygiene factors can be referred. They indicated that motivation factors led to satisfaction on the job such as achievement, recognition, advancement, responsibility, growth, and work itself. Further hygiene factors led to job dissatisfaction such as regulations, supervisions, work conditions, salary, peers and subordinates relationship, personal life, and status. These factors had an impact on the workers' work satisfaction. A study by Hossain, Mamun, and Islam (2001) on senior level executives in Bangladesh discovered that there are some presence of Herzberg's motivators and hygiene factors.

Moreover Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory proposed five levels of human being needs in relation to workers' in achieving their work satisfaction. He stated that a worker needs to satisfy his or her needs at the lower level before he or she can move to another level in fulfilling their needs. Thus hierarchy of needs were comprised of psychological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization.

Adams' (1963) theory of inequity was based on an individual's perceived ration of inputs to outputs. The theory indicated that people compare their own input-outcome ratios to those of others. If the comparison was equal to the corresponding input-outcome ratio, then there was an equitable relationship. Further satisfaction resulted only when outcomes and inputs were seen as reasonable compared to other people.

Chellandurai (1999) indicated job satisfaction is an attitude people have about their job. Further, job satisfaction was defined as the feelings a worker has about his or her job or job experiences in relation to previous experiences, current expectations, or available alternatives (Balzer, Kihm, Smith, Irwin, Bachiochi, Robie, Sinar, & Parra, 1997; Smucker & Kent, 2004).

Meanwhile Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, and Weik (1970) categorized job satisfaction theories either into content theories or process theories. Content theories were based on various factors which influence job satisfaction. Further, process theories taken into account the process by which variables such as expectations needs and values, and

comparison interest with the job to produce job satisfaction.

Bovier and Perneger (2003) studied doctors practicing in Geneva, Switzerland on predictors of work satisfaction. They discovered that, in general, physicians were more satisfied with the following aspects of their current work situation: patient care, professional relation, and personal rewards (intellectual stimulation, opportunities for continuing medical education, and enjoyment at work).

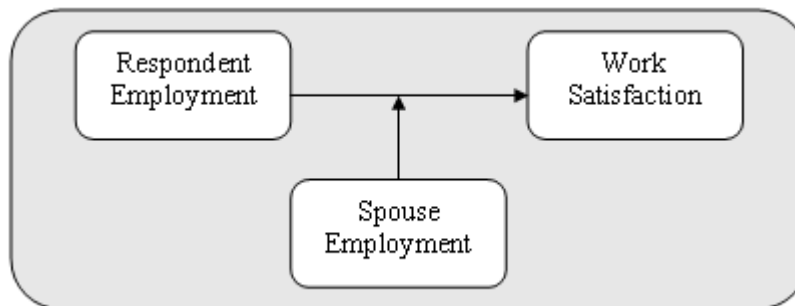
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the work satisfaction of distance education students in relation to their spouse support. The random sample of distance education students from School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia (SDE-USM) was sought through questionnaires.

The questionnaires were segregated into two parts of which sought demographic statistics and work satisfaction factors. The instrument was pegged against the Herzberg et al. (1952) and Maslow (1954).

Respondents' employment demographic will be analyzed toward their work satisfaction. Similarly, spouse employment demographic also will be considered as the moderating impact on the respondents work satisfaction. Data will be analyzed in the search of the level of work satisfaction with the spouse support and involvement. The framework of the study is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Employment-Work Satisfaction Framework



From the framework, data will go through selection of cases in comparing between respondent and spouse employment toward work satisfaction. Respondents will be selected based on gender and employment sector. Meanwhile, spouse employment will be based on housewife, public sector, and private sector.

Thus ten different pairs between respondent and spouse employment were generated. Male respondents from public and private sectors were paired with spouse employment status - housewife, public sector, and private sector. Six groups were identified from male respondents. On the other hand, four groups were identified on female respondents from public and private sectors were also paired between their spouses employed in the public and private sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic statistics of respondents were depicted in Table 1. Comparison between male and female respondents, male was represented by 52.7% and female by 47.3%. By age distribution, respondents that categorized between 26 to 30 years old contributed the most with 39%. As the nation is multiracial, respondents were group into Malay (47.3%), Chinese (41.5%), and Indian (7.4%).

Table 1: Demographic Statistics

Item	n	Percent
Gender		
Male	99	52.7
Female	89	47.3
Age (years old)		
21 to 25	16	8.5
26 to 30	73	38.8
31 to 35	52	27.7
Above 35	47	25.0
Ethnic		
Malay	89	47.3
Chinese	78	41.5
Indian	14	7.4
Others	7	3.7
Marital Status		
Single	66	35.1
Married	121	64.4
Others	1	0.5
Employment Sector		
Public	90	47.9
Private	95	50.5
Length of Service (years)		
Less than 6	61	33.0
6 to 10	68	36.8
11 to 15	33	17.8
More than 15	23	12.4
Spouse Employment Sector		
Housewife	14	11.3
Public	61	49.2
Private	45	36.3
Others	4	3.2

Based on the marital status, married respondents were represented by 64.6%. On the other hand, single respondents comprised of 35.1%. Further respondents indicated their employment either with public (47.9%) and private sector (50.5%). The remaining respondents were involved in business (1.6%). Based on length of service, majority of the respondents were in the range of 6 to 10 years (36.8%). Finally the respondents' spouse can be group into an employment of public (49.2%) and private (36.3%). The remaining spouses were either not working (fulltime housewife) represented by 11.3% and 3.2% involved in business.

Respondents were asked to indicate the value on their feeling on work satisfaction with the current employer is depicted in Table 2. Almost 70% (n=127) of them indicated that they were satisfied on the work satisfaction. Unfortunately there were still some respondents that were not satisfied (15%, n=28). The remaining respondents were on the fence as they were unsure on their work satisfaction (17.1%, n=32).

Table 2: Work Satisfaction

Item	n	Percent
Strongly agree	24	12.8
Agree	103	55.1
Unknown	32	17.1
Disagree	26	13.9
Strongly disagree	2	1.1

Based on the cross tabulation of demographics, male respondents indicated 76.8% that they were satisfied on the overall work, and females indicated 57.9%. In relation to age, the satisfied respondents were in the range of 31 to 35 years old (80.7%). By ethnic, Malays indicated their overall satisfaction on the work with 76.2%; followed by Indian (71.4%) and Chinese (57.7%). Further, married respondents indicated a high percentage on work satisfaction (70.9%) and unmarried indicated 63.7%. By sector, those respondents who work with the government indicated 77.5% as satisfied on their work;

meanwhile in the private sector only 60% had the same feeling. Respondents who work more than 15 years in service with their organization indicated a high percentage (78.3%) on work satisfaction. Overview of the crosstabulation is in Table 3.

Table 3: Crosstabulation of Work Satisfaction

Item	Work Satisfaction (%)
Gender	
Male	76.8
Female	57.9
Age (years old)	
21 to 25	50.0
26 to 30	61.1
31 to 35	80.7
Above 35	70.2
Ethnic	
Malay	76.2
Chinese	57.7
Indian	71.4
Marital Status	
Single	63.7
Married	70.9
Employment Sector	
Public	77.5
Private	60.0
Length of Service (years)	
Less than 6	54.1
6 to 10	73.1
11 to 15	72.7
More than 15	78.3

Based on comparison among pairs of male and spouse (6 groups) and female and spouse (4 groups). Mean of overall work satisfaction was compared in Table 4. Respondents that work in the public sector and the spouse as housewife indicate a high mean (3.6250; min=2, max=4) in terms of work satisfaction as compared with the other groups. This high mean can be seen from the perspective of cultural values of the East. Male respondent was highly regarded as the income earner of the family. Meanwhile, spouse is regarded as the caretaker of the family while the male respondent was at work. Thus as the spouse stayed at home and taking care of the family, the respondent could concentrate and contribute the most to his work. Therefore work satisfaction was realized as the highest among the paired-groups.

Table 4: Respondents-Paired Groups and Work Satisfaction

Respondent/ Employment Sector	Spouse Employment Sector	n	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
Male/Public	Housewife	8	2	4	3.6250	0.7440
Male/Public	Public	35	2	5	4.0571	0.7648
Male/Public	Private	6	3	5	4.0000	0.6325
Male/Private	Housewife	5	4	5	4.2000	0.4472
Male/Private	Public	10	2	5	4.0000	0.8165
Male/Private	Private	13	2	5	3.3077	1.0316
Female/Public	Public	13	2	5	3.8462	0.8006
Female/Public	Private	8	2	4	3.5000	0.7559
Female/Private	Public	2	2	4	3.0000	1.4142
Female/Private	Private	18	2	5	3.1111	1.0226

On the other hand, the lowest work satisfaction mean (3.1111; min=2, max=5) was female respondents that worked in the private sector and the spouse also worked in the private sector. This scenario can be interpreted as the commitment and even up to the level of workaholic of the female respondent and spouse to work in the more demanding working

environment. Based on the working culture in the private sector, workers are required to work to contribute the most to their organization as they were well paid as compare to those in the public sectors. Thus work stresses and demands can caused the female respondent to have a low work satisfaction, even worse if they were no morale supported by their spouse.

Interestingly, result indicated that male respondents worked in the public sector with the spouse worked in the private sector had the same mean (4.0000) with the group of male respondents worked in the private sector and the spouse worked in the public sector. Even both groups can be regarded as having a high mean in their work satisfaction. Both groups can be seen as more adaptive to one another and did motivate each other towards their work satisfaction.

Correlation analysis between demographic and work satisfaction were conducted. Results indicated that only length of service is significant (0.170, $p < 0.05$). Thus in order for a respondents to be satisfied with their work then he or she needs to work longer years. This result was relevant to the finding in Table 3 as majority of the satisfied was respondents with more than 15 year of service. Meanwhile, gender (-0.211, $p < 0.01$) and employment sector (-0.248, $p < 0.01$) indicated a negative correlation against overall work satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on the work satisfaction of working adult learners in relation to their spouse's support. It can be concluded that spouse played an important factor in determining the work satisfaction of working adult learners. Peace of mind for the working adult learners is needed to focus their concentration and commitment on the job.

Moreover male adult learners working in the public sector with a support from his fulltime housewife showed a high work satisfaction among working groups. For other working groups, they need to find ways of support among them by giving some thoughts and understanding on their spouses' work functions.

Moreover by having a quality of life among adult learners and their working spouses can contribute to a harmony in their marriage and working life. Thus work satisfaction among them can be achieved.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors acknowledge the research grant provided by Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang that has resulted this article (No.304/PJJAUH/635027).

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