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STRESS AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

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Abstract: *The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between stress and job satisfaction among Romanian academics. Stress was indicated by the levels of depression and anxiety. 70 university teachers participated in the study. Burns Anxiety Inventory, Burns Depression Inventory and Warr Job Satisfaction Scale (adapted by Travers and Cooper) were used to collect data from respondents. The results indicated that: a) there is a negative correlation between stress and job satisfaction; b) women report a high level of anxiety and depression and a low level of job satisfaction and are found to be significantly different on these scales from their male counterparts; c) academics with tenure have substantially greater job satisfaction than their colleagues without tenure. Academic title or the types of the faculty do not produce significant differences among subgroups of teachers within the measured variables.*

Keywords: *occupational stress, job satisfaction, academic environment*

1. INTRODUCTION

Although, work activity has a strong and long formative potential upon human, it can also be an important source of stress with major consequences for both the individual and the organization he works in. Work environment affects employee's physical, emotional and social health, producing states of depression, irritability, substance ingestion, and somatisation. Deterioration of health drives to diminution of employee's job performance, translated in difficulties in concentration, decision making, assertive communication, difficulties in team work and human relations management. The tasks that university teachers are expected to undertake have changed significantly in recent years and increasingly their work is perceived as pressured. The topic of stress and its relation with job satisfaction is important because its

job related implications for job related behaviours such as productivity, absenteeism or turnover. Research findings suggest that there is a linear and negative association between occupational stress and overall job satisfaction [10, 22, 5, 6, and 12].

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research aims to investigate the relationship between stress (measured by the level of anxiety and depression) and job satisfaction among 70 Romanian academics, and to highlight the individual differences in experiencing stress and job satisfaction depending on demographic factors.

To emphasize the dynamic and complex nature of stress phenomenon, we used, as research instruments Anxiety Burns Inventory, Depression Burns Inventory, and Warr Job

Satisfaction Scale (adapted by Travers and Cooper) [21].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Stress level. Emotional abilities are the individual’s internal resources, with a great role in protection and maintenance of emotional health. The lack of these abilities (demonstrated by the tendency to overstate the events and to exacerbate the negative aspects of the experiences, self blame, failure generalization, permanent worry towards events that never took place, and irritability) leads to incapacity to adapt to demanding or stressful situations and a poor quality of life. A high level of anxiety and depression are indicators for emotional health degradation as an effect of occupational stress. Table 1 indicates the means and standard deviations obtained by our research group for these two variables. We registered a moderate level of anxiety and depression for the entire group:

Variables	Mean	Std. dev.
Anxiety	20.22	13.17
Anxiety - feelings	4.45	2.86
Anxiety - thoughts	5.31	4.73
Anxiety – physical symptoms	10.42	7.14
Depression	9.41	5.70

Table 1. Emotional health indicators

Gender produced significant differences among investigated subgroups. In comparison with their male counterparts, women obtained significant greater means for the two analysed variables. Thus, the general score for anxiety is significant higher for women as group ($t=4.21, p<.000$). Decomposing this score in the main three components (anxious feelings, anxious thoughts, and physiological symptoms) we observed that, although anxious thoughts ($t=3.94, p<.000$) and anxious feelings ($t=3.81, p<.000$) are significant higher for feminine gender representatives, the third component, physiological symptoms ($t=3.46, p<.001$) is the one that makes really the difference (figure 1). Women somatise more

and their fight for attaining higher expectations than men has its greater physiological and emotional costs. Also, the general level of depression is significant higher for women ($t=4.16, p<.000$). The results are similar to the ones presented in the literature

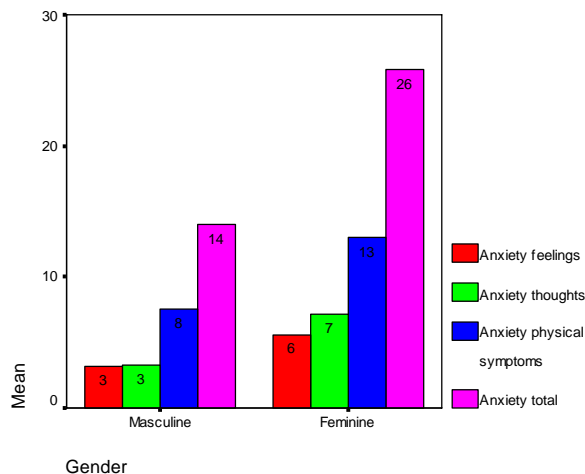


Fig. 1 Anxiety indicators by gender

Results regarding the role of gender in experiencing stress are contradictory. There are studies which sustain that women are more stressed than men. Dey [8] affirms that women report more stress compared to men especially regarding aspects like time pressure, lack of personal time, work overload, family role management. Smith et al. [19] discovered that women register a higher level of stress than men, and the main sources are role ambiguity and role conflict. Blix et al. [2] discovered that the score mean for stress is significant higher for women, almost a third of them taking into consideration a job change, towards only 9 percent of men. Thorsen [20], Boyd and Wylie [3], Gmelch et al. [12], Sharpley [17], Bradley and Eachus [4], and McInnis [14] discovered that the women’s stress level of is significant higher in comparison to men.

Other studies sustain the contrary, that men are more stressed than women. Thus, Currie [7] argues that the higher level of stress for men is due to the fact that women hold inferior positions where there are fewer responsibilities, although their volume of work is bigger at didactic level. Dua [9] didn’t identified significant gender differences regarding occupational stress, but, in his study, men report as stress factor the work volume



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while women place as main source of stress work politics.

Finally, there are studies that sustain that there are not considerable differences between men and women in experiencing stress. Abouserie [1], Kinman [13], Gmelch and Burns [10], Winefield and Jarrett [23], Winefield, et al. [24] found no relationship between stress and gender, race, academic title or remuneration.

Age and tenure have minimal effects on discussed variables. Although the differences are not statistically significant, we detected a progression of the anxiety scores depending on age. Individuals from the young segment (24 – 35 years) of organizational adult age, manifest fewer anxiety symptoms. That is because, at this age, individuals mobilize themselves easier, their professional motivation is stronger, now being the time when first work motives appear, when individuals set professional goals to attain. On the other side, ageing brings a visible reduction of biological vigour for individuals from over 50 years category, although intellectually, their abilities achieve superior levels because of the accumulated experience.

3.2. Job satisfaction

In this study we considered job dissatisfaction as a direct response to stress. The inventory used comprised questions which are scored from 1 to 7, meaning that for any subject the job satisfaction score could range from 15 to 105. The mean score for the academicians in this sample was 73.87, with 11.95 standard deviation; this value is much closed to the mean score for normative population of 74.6 (Warr et al., 1979, after Travers and Cooper) [21]. When comparisons are made with other occupational groups like tax officers – 62.0 – (Cooper and Roden, 1985, after Travers and Cooper) [21] or nurses –

72.8 – (Cooper and Mitchell, 1990, after Travers and Cooper) [21], our findings show that university teachers have a relatively high job satisfaction. Teachers from Britain pre university system record a mean of 59.6 [21] which mean that teachers are very dissatisfied with their job. A number of advantages that university system offers could explain these differences in job satisfaction: much more freedom and flexibility concerning the programme and curriculum, freedom in following your own research interests, travelling abroad for scientifically purposes, a greater variety of work, students' bigger motivation towards the learning process.

For a detailed image upon academic job satisfaction we present the results for each of the 15 items in the scale that measured different aspects of the job (table 1).

As the table shows, academics are revealing the highest levels of dissatisfaction with extrinsic aspects of the job (i.e. rate of pay, relations between management and teachers in the faculty, their fellow teachers, and working hours). Aspects of the job that teachers are satisfied with are those that deal with freedom to choose their own working methods, job security, and opportunity to use their abilities.

In his study of job satisfaction in ten universities in Britain, Stevens [19] obtained similar results. The main aspects of the job that teachers are satisfied with are: work itself, (5.48), decisional freedom (5.54), relations with colleagues (5.59). Those aspects that teachers are less satisfied with are: chances of promotion (3.69), financial satisfaction (3.85), and total earnings (3.95).

Data analysis revealed that women tend to report lower levels of global job satisfaction ($t(68) = 2.99$; $p < .004$) and significantly lower levels of satisfaction with the majority of the aspects of the job, except the aspect that deals

with freedom to choose their own way of working. Some reasons for these results are related to the fact that women in this sample are younger, have a lower experience in the field and are occupying inferior academic positions compared to their male counterparts.

The relationship between job satisfaction and age or job tenure is linear, meaning that job satisfaction tends to increase with age and with experience. The overall job satisfaction score is lowest for university teachers who are under 35 years of age (overall job satisfaction score 71) and it increases progressively for each older age group, with a final satisfaction score of 77 for university teachers over 50 years of age. Also, the results showed that university teachers with tenure are generally more satisfied with their jobs, with an overall job satisfaction score of 78, than the inexperienced university teachers, whose overall job satisfaction score is only 71.

Some explanations stand for the linear and positive association between overall job satisfaction and age or job tenure. First, according to Oshagbemi [16], as they grow older, until the retirement age, people change in their cognitive structures, meaning that they possess greater stability and ego strength. In addition teachers who over 50 years of age hold superior scientific titles and academic positions, but also managerial responsibilities, which makes their job more rewarding. Theory of accommodation could be another explanation. Thus, if at the beginning of their career young people have high expectations, after having stayed in their jobs for some time, they tend to adjust their work values to the workplace conditions, resulting in greater job satisfaction. Also, the longer people spend their time in a workplace or a professional context, the better they can predict and avoid the frustrations produced by that environment [15].

In his study among British universities, Stevens [19] identified a positive association between overall job satisfaction and work productivity; this could explain the lower level of job satisfaction of those people who are at the beginning of academic career. In universities work productivity is measured by the research output, the number of publications

in peer-reviewed journals representing the measure instrument for productivity. Or, this is an issue that creates difficulties for teachers with low levels of academic and research experience, which means that, in order to obtain academic credentials, they have to perform jobs with lower levels of job satisfaction than more experienced academics with similar levels of productivity.

Some significant differences emerge when each individual aspect of job satisfaction is examined.

Financial satisfaction is by far the lowest for academics without tenure ($F = 9.67$; $p < .000$) and increases progressively for the other categories of seniority. It is known the fact that the pecuniary aspect is more attractive for readers and professors and that there is a large discrepancy between the inferior and superior academic positions. Personal chances of promotion represent another issue with high levels of dissatisfaction for debutants than for those with academic experience ($F = 7.67$; $p < .001$). The quality of human relations registers a contradictory dynamic when is related to seniority: a mean of 4.0 for those of 1- 6 years of seniority, 5.3 for the 7 – 15 years seniority segment, and 4.5 for 16 – 40 years category. These results are regular for the beginners since the entrance into a profession corresponds to professional adaptation and integration and implicitly to the creation of interpersonal networks. But this doesn't hold for the last segment of seniority where professional integration, as a psycho social phenomenon, should have got to maturity. We obtained similar results for the aspect dealing with the amount of given responsibilities, the most satisfied being the middle segment of seniority (with a mean of 5.0), followed by seniors (with a mean of 4.5) and beginners (with a mean of 3.5). One possible explanation is that, for the beginners, the specific tasks (didactic, research and administrative activities) lap over the effort of achieving the scientific status (71% of the aspirants for the doctoral diploma pertain to this category).

3.3. Relations between variables

Analyses indicate that there is a linear and negative association between occupational



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stress and overall job satisfaction, as found in the literature [10, 22, 5, 6, and 12]. Thus, overall job satisfaction correlates negatively with the anxiety level ($r = -.240$; $p < .01$) and with the depression level ($r = -.447$; $p < .01$).

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research revealed that: there is a negative correlation between stress and job satisfaction; women report a high level of anxiety and depression and a low level of job satisfaction and are found to be significantly different on these scales from their male counterparts; academics with tenure have substantially greater job satisfaction than their colleagues without tenure. Academic title or the types of the faculty do not produce significant differences among subgroups of teachers within the measured variables.

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Job satisfaction item	Min.	Max.	Mean	St. dev.
The freedom to choose your own method of working	3.00	7.00	6.15	.87
Job security	1.00	7.00	5.48	1.17
The opportunity to use your abilities	3.00	7.00	5.45	1.13
The physical working conditions	3.00	6.00	5.27	.89
Your immediate boss	1.00	7.00	5.22	1.42
The way your faculty is managed	2.00	7.00	5.15	1.17
The amount of variety in your job	1.00	7.00	5.10	1.40
The recognition you get for good work	1.00	7.00	4.88	1.11
Your chance of promotion	2.00	7.00	4.80	1.23
Working hours	1.00	7.00	4.72	1.42
The attention paid to your suggestions	1.00	7.00	4.67	1.34
Your fellow teachers	1.00	7.00	4.61	1.57
Relations between management and teachers in your faculty	1.00	7.00	4.48	1.34
The amount of responsibility you are given	1.00	7.00	4.34	1.45
Your rate of pay	1.00	6.00	3.80	1.79

Table 1 *Academic job satisfaction*