

# Social Support, Quality of Services, and Job Satisfaction: Empirical Evidence from Palestinian Social Workers

*Najwa Sado Safadi*

This study examines the predictors of job satisfaction among public sector social workers in occupied Palestinian territories. Using a quantitative design, data were collected in summer of 2016 through a paper-based, self-administered questionnaire ( $N = 237$ ). Using hierarchical multiple regression, the three models explained 15 percent to 32 percent of the variance in job satisfaction. In the final model, coefficient indicated that monthly income, contract work status, service orientation, and supervisory support are related to job satisfaction. Respondents with more children and lower salaries showed lower levels of job satisfaction. Respondents who are working as temporary contract workers, who have positive attitudes toward the social work profession, and who have positive attitudes toward supervisory support are more likely to be satisfied with their job. Implications for administrative practice and policy are presented.

KEY WORDS: *job satisfaction; Palestine; service effectiveness; service orientation; social support*

Job satisfaction has received extensive attention from scholars in different disciplines (Griffin, Phillips, & Gully, 2017; Jex, 2002) and is considered one of the most salient job-related attitudes held by workers that influences organizational productivity and staff effectiveness (Aamodt, 2016; Griffin et al., 2017). Job satisfaction includes aspects such as satisfaction with salaries, promotions, supervisors, directors, and benefits. In work-client relationships, job satisfaction and other positive work attitudes significantly contribute to quality of services and beneficiaries' well-being (Hasenfeld, 2010). High levels of job dissatisfaction, job stress, and burnout have the potential to affect the interaction between social services providers and clients (Hasenfeld, 2010). Therefore, establishing a supportive work environment is essential to enhancing the positive attitudes of workers and job satisfaction. Positive work conditions indicate the organization's interest in workers, their needs, and their well-being (Glisson, 2009).

In an attempt to create a suitable work environment and enhance staff effectiveness, scholars have examined predictors of job satisfaction. Results of studies from developed nations revealed that burnout (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013; Muhammad & Hamdy, 2005); supervisor

and coworker support (Delp, Wallace, Geiger-Brown, & Muntaner, 2010; Hammig, 2017; Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013); organizational factors such as salary, compensation, and promotion opportunities (Abu-Bader, 2005; Mansour, 2014); and job security (Delp et al., 2010) are all related to job satisfaction.

Yet service providers in conflict zones like the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) have unique experiences. Social workers are responsible for providing quality of services and promoting the well-being of citizens with limited resources and in an unsafe environment (Blome & Safadi, 2016; Safadi & Easton, 2014). A number of scholars have examined the effect of this environment on the personal and professional lives of social helpers (Blome & Safadi, 2016; Lindsay, 2007), but few studies have examined the effect of work-related factors among Arab social workers in Israel (Abu-Bader, 2005; Haj-Yahia, Bargal, & Guterman, 2000), and no studies were found that examined the topic within the Palestinian context in the West Bank. Therefore, in an attempt to rectify the gap, the primary aims of this study were to (a) investigate the contribution of demographic factors (that is, age, education, marital status, parental status, gender, contract worker, monthly income) to job satisfaction and

(b) assess how organizational factors (that is, perceived services effectiveness, service orientation, supervisory support, and peer support) are related to job satisfaction.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Framework

Job satisfaction reflects workers' attitudes and feelings toward their job setting (Griffin et al., 2017; Jex, 2002). Workers' perceptions strongly influence their behaviors including desire to provide good services, absenteeism, and turnover (Aamodt, 2016; Griffin et al., 2017). Aamodt (2016) argued that there is no one theory that can fully explain workers' satisfaction. However, several scholars have classified predictors of job satisfaction in a model that includes factors at different levels: individual, relational, and organizational (Aamodt, 2016; Griffin et al., 2017; Vinokur-Kaplan, 2009). Individual differences include factors related to workers themselves, such as demographic traits, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Relational aspects include relationships with managers, supervisors, and colleagues. Organizational aspects include salary, promotions, benefits, and opportunities (Aamodt, 2016; Griffin et al., 2017; Vinokur-Kaplan, 2009). Griffin et al. (2017) pointed out that attitudes toward different aspects of work are more influential on job satisfaction than individual differences. Guided by this framework, job-related attitudes, this article classified the study variables under three models: The first model examines the influence of individual factors (age, education, marital status, parental status, contract work, and monthly income), the second model focuses on perceived service orientation, and the third model investigates the relational factors (supervisory and coworkers support) and organizational factors (perceived quality of service on worker satisfaction).

### Demographic Characteristics

A number of scholars have examined the relationship between individual characteristics and job satisfaction among social services providers in different settings such as child welfare, eldercare, and health care staff, mostly in developed nations. The results of previous studies are mixed. A number of studies have shown no association between job satisfaction and individual characteristics including age (Aloisio et al., 2018; Borzaga & Tortia, 2006; Chaoa, Ku, Wang, & Lin, 2016), gender (Aloisio

et al., 2018; Barth, Lloyd, Christ, Chapman, & Dickinson, 2008; Borzaga & Tortia, 2006; Chaoa et al., 2016), income (Barth et al., 2008; Borzaga & Tortia, 2006), and marital status (Delp et al., 2010).

Other studies have reported a significant relationship between age and job satisfaction; older workers are more likely to be satisfied. This result could be due to the limited opportunities available for older people to find better alternatives in the job market (Delp et al., 2010). Also, it is reported that education contributes to job satisfaction; those who have a higher level of education are less likely to be satisfied compared with their colleagues with a lower level of education. This result may be related to the high expectations people with higher levels of education have regarding their jobs in terms of salary, job autonomy, and promotions (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). Moreover, some evidence supports the relationship between gender and job satisfaction; men are more likely to express job satisfaction compared with women (Franěk, Mohelská, Zubr, Bachmann, & Sokolová, 2014). Others have reported no significant relationship between employment status and job satisfaction (Witte & Cuyper, 2006).

### Service Orientation and Job Satisfaction

Service orientation assesses social workers' attitudes toward their profession (Blau, 1985; Landsman, 2008). Service orientation is an important factor to ensure service continuity and quality (Giffords, 2009). Research results have reported that professional commitment is a significant predictor of job satisfaction; social workers who have positive attitudes toward their profession are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs (Kim & Hopkins, 2017). Many studies have examined service orientation as a dependent variable. The results of these studies have indicated that job satisfaction (Shamina, 2014); autonomy (Giffords, 2009); job tenure, marital status, supervision, and role ambiguity (Blau, 1985); and income, suitability of training, social work degree, and experience (Simons, Bonifas, & Gammonley, 2011) are significant predictors of professional commitment.

### Social Support and Job Satisfaction

Social support has been considered a protective factor against negative work-related attitudes such as job dissatisfaction, burnout, turnover (Hammig, 2017; Mansour, 2014; Muhammad & Hamdy, 2005), and job stress (Kim & Lee, 2009; McGilton, Hall,

Wodchis, & Petroz, 2007). Social workers are less likely to report burnout if they discuss their stress with their supervisors (Kim & Lee, 2009). Indeed, previous research found a strong association between social and workplace support and job satisfaction; social services providers who receive support from supervisors, coworkers, or relatives are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs compared with those who do not receive social support (Abu-Bader, 2005; Delp et al., 2010; Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013). Barth et al. (2008) found a positive association between job satisfaction and quality of supervision and urban status among child welfare workers; those receiving a higher level of supervision and living in urban areas were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs.

### Service Effectiveness and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction and work-related attitudes also play a critical role in employees' assessments of the quality of services they provide to clients and communities (Vinokur-Kaplan, 2009). From the studies reviewed, little is written to investigate the relationship between perceived quality services and job satisfaction. Most research has examined perceived service effectiveness as a dependent variable. Within this context, empirical data supported the contribution of job satisfaction to perceived service effectiveness; social services providers who are satisfied with their job are more likely to evaluate their services to clients positively (Chaoa et al., 2016; Yoon, Choi, & Park, 2007). Others found that positive organizational climates (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998), constructive team cultures (Glisson & James, 2002), and job mastery (Haj-Yahia et al., 2000) have a significant effect on perceived quality of services provided by social services providers. A study by Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) reported a negative association between service coordination and quality of services; more service coordination leads to lower quality of services. This result could be explained by negative effect of the coordination teams, which may lead some social workers to abandon many of their tasks because they consider the tasks to be a function of the coordination teams (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). Berkel and Knies (2016) found that caseload size and performance management are negatively associated with perceived quality of services.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This study examined three main research questions: (1) Are demographic characteristics (for example, age, education, marital status, parental status, gender, contract worker, monthly income) related to job satisfaction? (2) Is perceived service orientation related to job satisfaction, after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics? (3) Are perceived service effectiveness and social support (supervisory support, fellow worker support) related to job satisfaction, after controlling for demographic characteristics and perceived service effectiveness? Based on the conceptual framework, I hypothesized that there is a relationship between job satisfaction and sociodemographic characteristics, perceived service orientations, perceived service effectiveness, and social support.

## METHOD

### Data Source and Participants

This study is part of a larger project focused on the quality of professional life among public sector social workers in OPT (for more details, see Easton, Safadi, Wang, & Hasson, 2017). Using a cross-sectional design, nonprobability purposive sample, data were collected in the summer of 2016 through a paper-based, self-administered questionnaire from 237 social workers out of 256 social workers who were registered in Palestinian Authority Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) official record in 2016. Participants in the study consisted of social workers at MOSD who were working in one of the 12 directorates in the West Bank main cities such as Jenin, Tulkarm, Nablus, Ramallah, Jerusalem area (Abu-Dies), and Bethlehem. MOSD is the leader of social protection and the largest provider of social services for vulnerable and marginalized people. The instrument included 102 questions about several aspects related to social workers' well-being and attitudes about topics such as life satisfaction, mental health issues, organizational commitment, and exposure to violence. The questionnaire was developed in English, then translated into Arabic by a nationally certified Arabic language instructor with teaching and translation experience in the United States and the Middle East. Also, two faculty members at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem performed quality checks of the translated instrument.

For recruitment, I sent a letter to MOSD to obtain consent to collect data. After receiving

permission from MOSD and a list of names of the directors of local MOSD offices, I contacted each officer director by phone, explaining the study and making arrangements to visit each local agency office in various cities. During visits to each directorate, I met social workers in a group and provided information about the purpose of the study and fully explained the rights of participants. The survey generally took between 30 and 40 minutes to complete. Also, I obtained human subjects approval from the institutional review board at a major U.S. research university.

### Data Analysis

Univariate statistical analysis was performed to describe the study sample. Bivariate analysis was used to examine the correlation between the study variables. Then hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to examine the unique contribution of sociodemographic characteristics, service effectiveness, service orientation, and social support to job satisfaction. Sociodemographic variables were entered in the first step, perceived service effectiveness was entered in the second step, and service orientation and social support (supervisor support and fellow worker support) were entered in the third step. Diagnostic analyses were used and showed that the regression assumptions were met. Missing data ranged from low (0.4 percent) for marital status to high (18.6 percent) for contract worker status (see Table 1).

### Measurement

**Job Satisfaction.** The measure developed by Cullen, Link, Wolfe, and Frank (1985) consists of three items that include questions such as, “How satisfied would you say you are with your job?” and “If you were free to work anywhere, what would your choice be?” Responses were summed to produce a total score (range = 0–6), with higher scores signifying more job satisfaction. The measure demonstrates an acceptable level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .72$ ).

### Independent Variables

**Demographic Variables.** These variables included age, education, marital status, parental status, gender, contract worker (annual contract), and monthly income.

**Service Effectiveness.** This measure was developed by the research team and consists of four items, such as “Ministry of Social Affairs cash

transfers are adequate to meet the needs of families.” Response choices were based on a four-point scale, ranging from 0 = strongly disagree to 3 = strongly agree. The measure demonstrated an acceptable level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .61$ ).

**Service Orientation.** This measure was developed by Landsman (2000, 2008) and includes three items that assess attitudes of social workers toward the social work profession, such as “By serving as a social worker, I feel I am making a difference in people’s lives.” Response choices were based on a scale ranging from 0 = strongly disagree to 3 = strongly agree. An index was created; higher scores indicated higher levels of service orientation. The measure demonstrated an acceptable level of reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .71$ ).

**Supervisory Support.** This variable consisted of four items created by Cullen et al. (1985) that weigh the perception of respondents regarding the level of supervision support and encouragement respondents receive from their supervisors, such as “My supervisors often compliment us when we do our job well.” One item from the original scale was omitted to improve reliability level (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .83$ ). Response choices were based on a four-point scale ranging from 0 = strongly disagree to 3 = strongly agree. Responses were summed to create a total score (range = 0–6), with higher scores indicating higher levels of supervisory support.

**Peer Support.** This measure was made up of four items developed by Cullen et al. (1985) assessing how much support and encouragement workers receive from their colleagues, such as “My fellow workers often compliment someone who has done his or her job well.” One item was omitted to obtain acceptable level of reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .74$ ). Response choices were based on a four-point scale, ranging from 0 = strongly disagree to 3 = strongly agree. Responses were summed to create an index, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived support from peers.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Characteristics

Descriptive results about study participants are presented in Table 1. Results showed a mean age of 38.35 ( $SD = 10.71$ ). Most of respondents have a bachelor’s degree (85.8 percent), are married (78.4 percent), have children (84 percent), and are female (69.7 percent). One-fifth of respondents

**Table 1: Characteristics of Social Workers (N = 237)**

Demographic Background	Range	M (SD)	%	Missing Data (%)
Age (years)	25–58	38.35 (10.71)		3.8
Education				1.7
Secondary diploma			0.4	
College diploma			3.9	
BA degree			85.8	
MA degree			9.9	
Marital status				0.4
Married			78.4	
Never married			6.1	
Divorce/widowed/separated			5.5	
Have children				10.1
Yes			84	
No			16	
Gender				3.8
Male			30.3	
Female			69.7	
Contract worker (temporary contract)				18.6
Yes			19.7	
No			80.3	
Individual monthly income (\$)	324–1,836	829.71 (207.76)		3.8
Service orientation	0–9	6.78 (1.47)		1.3
Supervisory support	0–9	4.4 (2.02)		1.3
Fellow workers support	0–9	4.2 (1.89)		2.1
Services effectiveness	0–11	4.5 (1.96)		2.5
Job satisfaction	0–6	3.6 (1.85)		1.7

Note: Income is measured in U.S. dollars, converted from Israeli Shekels using XE Currency Converter (1ILS = 0.27 USD) on August 2, 2018.

are contract workers (19.7 percent). The average monthly personal income was \$829.71 ( $SD = 207.76$ ).

### Correlation Results

Correlation results indicated low to moderate significant associations between study variables. Specifically, the results revealed that job satisfaction was positively associated with age ( $r = .17, p < .05$ ), monthly income ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ), supervisory support ( $r = .45, p < .01$ ), peer support ( $r = .21, p < .01$ ), and service effectiveness ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ). Younger social workers, and those with higher levels of income, positive attitudes toward supervisory support, positive attitudes toward peer support, and positive attitudes toward quality services, are more likely to report a higher level of job satisfaction.

### Regression Results

Results of hierarchical multiple regression are presented in Table 2. Results provide evidence that the three models are significant in predicting job

satisfaction. Results of the first model indicated that sociodemographic characteristics predict job satisfaction and explained 15 percent of the variance [ $R^2 = .149, F(7,145) = 3.63, p < .001$ ]. It found that monthly income is associated with job satisfaction ( $\beta = .31, p < .000$ ); those with lower levels of income are more likely to express a low level of job satisfaction. Contract work is also associated with job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.23, p < .05$ ); temporary contract workers are more satisfied compared with permanent workers.

The results of the second step showed that the perceived service orientation model is significant in predicting the dependent variable [ $R^2$  change = .006,  $F(1,144) = 3.30, p < .05$ ]. The coefficient statistics showed that only contract work and monthly income are associated with job satisfaction.

Social support and service effectiveness were entered in the third step. The results showed that the model was significant [ $R^2$  change = .166,  $F(3,141) = 10.103, p < .000$ ]. The coefficient statistics revealed that having children ( $\beta = -.18, p < .05$ ),

**Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Predicting Job Satisfaction (N = 237)**

Model	Factor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Δ	β	t	F
Model 1		.386	.149*	—			3.63**
	Age				.07	0.79	
	Education				-.15	-1.83	
	Marital status				.02	0.18	
	Have children				-.16	-1.70	
	Gender				.03	0.29	
	Temporary contract worker				-.23*	-2.78	
	Monthly income				.31***	3.63	
Model 2		.393	.160*	.006			3.30*
	Age				.08	0.89	
	Education				-.15	-1.86	
	Marital status				.03	0.28	
	Have children				-.17	-1.81	
	Gender				.01	0.161	
	Temporary contract worker				-.24*	-2.91	
	Monthly income				.32**	3.70	
	Service orientation				-.08	-0.98	
Model 3		.566	.32***	.166			6.01***
	Age				.10	1.27	
	Education				-.09	-1.22	
	Marital status				.02	0.21	
	Have children				-.18*	-2.03	
	Gender				.06	0.78	
	Temporary contract worker				-.25**	-3.43	
	Monthly income				.26**	3.36	
	Service orientation				-.15*	-2.07	
	Supervisory support				.43***	5.06	
	Fellow workers support				-.05	-0.68	
	Services effectiveness				.02	0.62	

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

contract work ( $\beta = -.25, p < .01$ ), monthly income ( $\beta = .26, p < .01$ ), service orientation ( $\beta = -.15, p < .05$ ), and supervisory support ( $\beta = .43, p < .000$ ) are significantly associated with job satisfaction. Respondents with higher levels of income and fewer children are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. In addition, those working as temporary contract workers are more satisfied compared with their peers. Moreover, respondents who have positive attitudes toward the social work profession are less likely to be satisfied with their jobs. Furthermore, those who have positive attitudes toward supervisory support are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs.

## DISCUSSION

This study investigated predictors of job satisfaction among public sector social workers in OPT. The results of this study indicate that having chil-

dren is negatively related to job satisfaction. Respondents with more children are less likely to be satisfied with their job. This result might be related to workers' monthly income and other benefits, which in turn affect workers' well-being and dignity. Low salary, lack of work benefits, and large families decrease the ability of parents to provide their children with necessities. Contrary to the results reported by other scholars (Barth et al., 2008; Borzaga & Tortia, 2006), this study provided evidence on the association between monthly income and job satisfaction; workers with low monthly income reported low levels of job satisfaction. Workers' expectation of work is to receive a salary sufficient to meet the needs of their families; not getting what they expect may create feelings of dissatisfaction with their jobs.

In addition, contrary to the study of Witte and Cuyper (2006), the current results support the

relationship between contract worker and job satisfaction. Although contract workers (temporary workers for specific period of time) do not enjoy the same benefits, compensation, and other workers' rights as permanent workers, they are more satisfied in comparison with permanent workers. This finding can be linked to the importance of obtaining a job for contract workers compared with their permanent counterparts (Beckmann, Binz, & Schauenberg, 2007). Another explanation might be related to the desire of contract workers to be promoted to a permanent status. Therefore, contract workers may have a high inclination to work hard, devote more time and effort to work, and display high levels of satisfaction (Beckmann et al., 2007).

Findings also provide evidence for the relationship between supervisory support and job satisfaction. Participants with positive attitudes toward supervisory support are more satisfied with their jobs, similar to the results of Abu-Bader, 2005; Delp et al., 2010; and Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2013. Support from supervisors reflects the interest of managers in the workers' well-being and creates a sense of comfort within the workplace, which often leads to better interactions with clients and improved services. In a study by Blome and Safadi (2016), social workers emphasized the role of supervision they received in alleviating the pressures and negative feelings that arise during the work.

Finally, contrary to Kim and Hopkins's (2017) results, this study showed a negative association between service orientation and job satisfaction; those with a positive attitude toward the social work profession are less likely to be satisfied with their jobs. It could be that the expectation of social workers from MOSD (as the largest provider of social services for citizens in OPT) is to provide sufficient social assistance to help people meet their needs. However, MOSD cannot provide sufficient services to people due to limited financial resources (Safadi & Easton, 2014). This gap between the expectations of social workers and the insufficient resources provided by MOSD may have an impact on the level of social workers' satisfaction with their jobs.

### Implications

The results of this study emphasize implications for management practice and policy. Establishing strategies that aim to create positive shared per-

ceptions and values toward the work performed is needed. Top staff management need to reexamine the salary scale and assess whether it is sufficient for a quality standard of living considering the place of residence. Sufficient salary is crucial to satisfy the needs of workers' families and to promote dignity (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). The results also emphasized the vital role of supportive supervision in promoting workers' satisfaction with their jobs. Therefore, there is a need to support supervisors, enhance their roles, and if needed, provide training that can strengthen supervisors' ability to effectively respond to workers' needs and expectations and maximize their motivation. In terms of administrative policies, this study supports hiring or promoting employees for a supervisor position who hold positive attitudes toward the supervisory roles and understand the relationship between the quality of supervision and the quality of services.

### Strengths and Limitations

This study contributes to knowledge about the predictors of social workers' job satisfaction in OPT. It emphasized the importance of providing quality work conditions, including a good salary and quality supervision. However, because the study of job satisfaction is complex and depends on a wide range of factors that cannot be included in one study (Aamodt, 2016), some limitations should be addressed for future investigations. First, this study examined the level of social workers' job satisfaction. Scholars have argued that workers may be satisfied with one aspect of their jobs but not with another. For example, workers may be satisfied with their salary but not with benefits (Aamodt, 2016). Therefore, more research is needed on this topic to examine the different aspects of job satisfaction. Another limitation is related to the study sample, which included only social workers from the public sector. Investigating the topic from the perspective of social workers at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (the second largest provider of social services to Palestinians living below the poverty line) and nongovernmental organizations may provide additional evidence about factors that affect social workers' job satisfaction. The third limitation is related to the predictors of job satisfaction; this research included a number of essential factors, but an exploration of a broader array of factors, including leadership styles and job

characteristics, could expand the understanding of social workers' job satisfaction in OPT. **SW**

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**Najwa Sado Safadi, PhD, MSW**, is assistant professor, School of Psychology and Social Work, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Al-Daayeen, Qatar; and Department of Social Work, Al-Quds University, Jerusalem, Palestine. Address correspondence to Najwa Sado Safadi, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies/School of Psychology and Social Work, Al-Tarfa Street, Al-Daayeen, Qatar; e-mail: najwa.safadi@dohainstitute.edu.qa or nsafadi@staff.alquds.edu. The author would like to express her sincere thanks to the leadership at the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) (formerly the Ministry of Social Affairs) of the Palestinian National Authority for their support of this project. The author also extends her deepest appreciation to social workers in MOSD for the time, knowledge, and experience they provided in the course of this study. The author is extremely grateful to Dr. Scott Easton and Dr. Wendy Whiting Blome for their support to review this article. Financial support for the project was received from Boston College through the Office of the Provost and the School of Social Work. Translation support was received from Ms. Ikram Estefan Easton (translation director), Ms. Ghazlan Aldeweesh (translation assistant), and Dr. Mohammad A. Thawabteh and Dr. Omar Y. Najjar (translation quality analysts).

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