

Biographical Differences and Job Satisfaction of Catholic Primary School Staff

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Abstract

Job satisfaction of teachers has long been a focus of attention for educational researchers. Arguably, this is because of links between job satisfaction and organisational behaviour issues such as commitment, absenteeism, turnover, efficiency and productivity. Job satisfaction of school employees may be related to personal characteristics, such as age, gender and years of experience. This study reports relationships between biographical variables and job satisfaction of staff members in Catholic primary schools. The sample consisted of 356 staff members of Catholic primary schools in New South Wales, Australia. Data were collected using a questionnaire survey. Comparison of means and multivariate analysis were employed to test the research hypotheses. Biographical differences, particularly age, sex and position, were related to several job satisfaction variables. The results are discussed in terms of implications for schools and future research concerning job satisfaction in the context of schools.

Introduction

Job satisfaction has been described as favourable or positive feelings about work or the work environment (Furnham, 1997). Conversely, job dissatisfaction has been defined as unhappy or negative feelings about work or the work environment (Furnham, 1997). Job satisfaction of teachers has been the focus of considerable research in recent decades (De Nobile, 2003; Dinham & Scott, 1998). Given the links that have been established between job satisfaction and employee commitment, turnover, absenteeism, productivity and occupational stress (De Nobile & McCormick, 2005; Luthans, 2002; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Spector, 2000), such interest is, perhaps, not surprising.

It is evident that levels of job satisfaction felt by teachers in similar work environments can vary from one individual to another. Demographic factors may play a role in the level of job satisfaction perceived by teachers (Bedeian, Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Bogler, 2002; Crossman & Harris, 2006; Niehoff, 1997). In particular, literature suggests four variables that may have significant interactions with teacher job satisfaction, namely; gender, age, experience/tenure and position (Bedeian et al, 1992; Dinham & Scott, 1996; Koustelios, 2001).

Gender is frequently investigated as a biographical variable in studies of job satisfaction (for example, Crossman & Harris, 2006; Ma & MacMillan, 1999). The literature is far from conclusive about the nature of the relationship between gender and job satisfaction. In their recent study of teachers in various types of schools, Crossman and Harris (2006) reported males were slightly more satisfied than females. Conversely, Bedeian et al (1992) and Klecker (1997) found females were more satisfied with a range of job dimensions. Hill (1994) found male head teachers to be

more dissatisfied with aspects of work than their female counterparts. Koustelios (2001) reported that female teachers (both primary and secondary) were more satisfied with working conditions than males. Working conditions was, however, one of several variables investigated in that study and no other statistically significant relationships with gender were identified. Other studies have reported similarly limited findings (Scott, Cox & Dinham, 1998; Ma & MacMillan, 1999). In all these studies, the effect sizes were small. Other biographical variables may play a role. Klecker (1997) reported that gender differences in job satisfaction were influenced by age group.

Age can have a significant relationship with job satisfaction, but the nature of the relationship is not straightforward. Crossman and Harris (2006) identified significant differences in job satisfaction between age groups, but the levels fluctuated from highest among teachers aged 22-30, lowest among the 31-40 age group and higher again (but not as high as 22-30 group) for the 41-50 age group. Mertler (2002) reported similar fluctuations. Lowther, Gill and Coppard (1985) found that overall job satisfaction of teachers increased, more or less consistently, with age. The study by Bedeian et al (1992) suggested that years of experience in the job may be a better predictor of job satisfaction than age.

Years of experience has also been described as tenure, number of years teaching or length of service (Bedeian et al, 1992; Crossman & Harris, 2006; Klecker, 1997). For the purposes of this study, years of experience was deemed the most appropriate term for the biographical variable describing groups categorised by experience. As with age and gender, the results of previous literature regarding teachers are not conclusive.

The study of teachers by Koustelios (2001) found years of experience was a predictor of satisfaction with supervision and promotion, but the nature of the relationship was somewhat unclear. In a study of middle and high school teachers, Mertler (2002) reported fluctuating results. Teachers with up to five years and eleven or more years experience reported higher job satisfaction than those with 6-10 years experience. Interestingly, the most experienced teachers were more satisfied than the least experienced. This suggested a curvilinear relationship. The recent study by Crossman and Harris (2006) reported similar findings, with satisfaction high for early career teachers, steadily lower for those with between 6 and 20 years experience and rising for teachers with more than 20 years experience. Again, teachers in the most experienced age group were more satisfied than the least experienced.

Position refers to employment classification in schools. A number of positions exist in Australian primary schools besides classroom teachers (non executive). These include executive staff (including principals), teacher's aides, clerical staff, itinerant staff and maintenance staff to name a few. Research into the relationship of position with job satisfaction of staff in schools is, at present, scanty. A series of studies of Australian and English teachers identified that those in promotion positions were more satisfied with various aspects of work than classroom teachers (Dinham & Scott, 1996; 2000; Scott, Cox & Dinham, 1998; 1999). Studies comparing job satisfaction of non-teaching staff with teachers are scarce.

There is lack of consistency of findings with regard to biographical variables and job satisfaction. The amount of research systemically investigating the relationships of these variables with job satisfaction is rather limited. There exists, therefore, a need to investigate how biographical differences are related to job satisfaction of primary school staff.

Method

The effect of biographical variables (gender, age, experience and position) on job satisfaction of Catholic primary school staff members was investigated using data from a larger study (De Nobile, 2003). Given the findings of previous research, four hypotheses were tested:

H1: Gender is related to job satisfaction

H2: Age has is related to job satisfaction

H3: Years of experience is related to job satisfaction

H4: Position of staff members is related to job satisfaction

Sample

Three hundred and fifty six staff members (teaching and non-teaching) from Catholic primary schools belonging to six Catholic diocesan school systems in New South Wales, Australia participated in the study. Participants were drawn from 52 schools, selected on a stratified random basis to ensure similarity with the general population in terms of school size and location (urban and rural). The sample was closely representative of the population. Eighty six percent were female, 14% were male. Eighty eight percent were teaching staff (classroom teachers, specialist teachers and executive teachers) while 12% were non-teaching staff. Non-teaching staff included teachers aides, counsellors, clerical staff and maintenance staff.

Measures

A questionnaire survey was used to collect data relating to a number of variables. A full description of these is reported elsewhere (De Nobile, 2003).

Job satisfaction was measured using an adapted version of the Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TJSQ) developed by Lester (1987). Some items from the original version of the survey were omitted as they referred to aspects of work not pertinent to the larger study, leaving 51 of an original 77 items. Each item comprised a statement regarding supervision, recognition, working conditions, colleagues, responsibility and the work itself. The wording of some of the remaining items was modified to reflect the vernacular of Australian schools. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A general job satisfaction item was added. This required respondents to indicate how satisfied they were with their job, generally, on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

Biographical data were also collected. Respondents were required to indicate their gender (male or female), age (20-30, 31-40, 41-50 or 50+ years), years of experience

in the current role (0-5, 6-10, 11-15 or 15+ years) and position on staff (teacher, executive, teacher's aide, other non-teaching).

Analyses

Data were entered into an SPSS database. Factor analysis was conducted to identify job satisfaction dimensions. Multiple regression was used to look for significant effects of biographical variables on job satisfaction. All statistically significant results with more than two categories were tested with the post-hoc Scheffe tests with significance level at .05. Means of significantly different groups were compared and the Cohen's *d* statistic calculated.

Results

Factor Analysis

Principal axis factoring, with varimax rotation, of the TJSQ items yielded a nine factor solution that accounted for 58.5% of the variance. The factor solution is explained in greater detail elsewhere (De Nobile, 2003). Results are displayed in Table 1, followed by a brief description of each factor.

Table 1: Factor solution for TJSQ items.

Factor name	Number of items	Eigenvalue	Reliability (alpha)
Supervision	13	14.33	0.94
Colleagues	9	3.46	0.83
Relationship with the principal	4	2.47	0.82
Working conditions	5	1.80	0.81
Work itself	5	1.63	0.69
Responsibility for work	4	1.35	0.69
Job variety	3	1.27	0.50
Feedback	2	1.19	0.50
Relationships with the students	2	1.18	0.64

Supervision comprised items about assistance, support and recognition from the principal. *Colleagues* concerned satisfaction with working with other staff members in the school. *Relationship with the principal* referred to ways in which principals related to staff members. *Working conditions* concerned satisfaction with various aspects of the work environment such as comfort and physical site. *Work itself* was concerned with intrinsically satisfying aspects of the job. *Responsibility* comprised items about satisfaction with accountability for one's own work. *Job variety* concerned scope for innovative practice and routine. *Feedback* referred to satisfaction from feedback about work from superiors and coworkers. *Relationships with the students* concerned satisfaction derived from interactions with students.

Biographical differences

Biographical data were re-coded into dummy variables and used in a multiple regression on each of the factor scores for job satisfaction as well as general job satisfaction. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of significant biographical differences in job satisfaction (bold).

Variables	df	R ² Change	F	
Supervision				
Age	3	.051	5.71	***
Position	3	.048	5.63	***
Colleagues				
Age	3	.042	4.68	***
Position	3	.028	3.19	*
Relationship with the principal				
Age	3	.074	8.69	***
Position	3	.024	2.78	*
Working conditions				
Position	3	.027	2.98	*
Work itself				
Sex	1	.023	7.65	**
Age	3	.065	7.55	***
Job variety				
Age	3	.051	5.76	***
Feedback				
Position	3	.046	5.23	***
General job satisfaction				
Sex	1	.024	7.82	**
Age	3	.040	4.61	***
Position	3	.030	3.45	*

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

These results indicate that significant differences, based on sex (gender), age and employment position in school, exist for this sample in several dimensions of job satisfaction. While biographical variables account for small amounts of variance, these are significant, with age and position accounting for most of the variance. The results offer support for Hypotheses 1, 2 and 4. Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

What follows is a more detailed analysis of the biographical differences for different dimensions of job satisfaction and general job satisfaction based on comparison of means between groups. Significant differences identified above are depicted in graphic form, based on factor score means, in Figures 1-14.

Supervision

Figure 1 shows satisfaction with supervision by age group. It can be seen that staff member satisfaction with supervision increases gradually with age for the first three groups. However, the Scheffe test indicated that staff members aged 41-50 years were significantly more satisfied with supervision than those aged 20-30 ($d = 0.70$). Staff

aged 51 and over were also significantly more satisfied with supervision than the 20-30 year olds, but the effect size was considerably smaller ($d = 0.46$). This might be explained by successful experience. The older staff members may have received more recognition and praise from their principals due to greater self-confidence or the accumulation of successful experiences that may be expected to occur with age. It could also be that, because of their experience, they are likely to be less closely supervised than their younger colleagues.

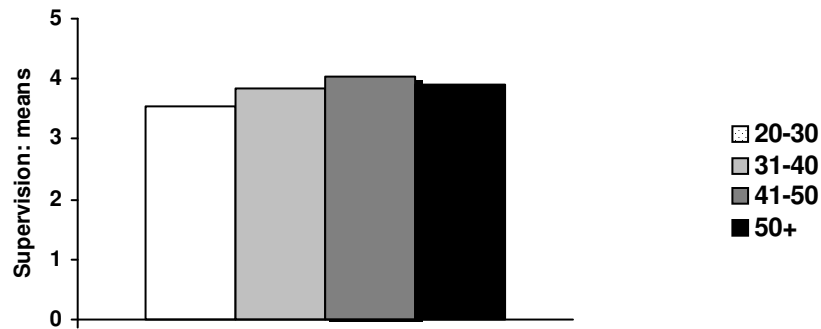


Figure 1: Means of satisfaction with supervision by age.

In terms of employment position (Figure 2), executive teachers were more satisfied with supervision than regular classroom teachers ($d = 0.57$). Executive teachers are generally more likely to interact with the principal due to their being part of a school leadership team and, therefore, have greater opportunities to receive recognition and support from the principal. Interestingly, teacher's aides were the most satisfied with supervision ($d = 0.97$). This relationship is difficult to explain and warrants further investigation, perhaps by way a qualitative investigation of the relationships between teacher's aides and their principals.

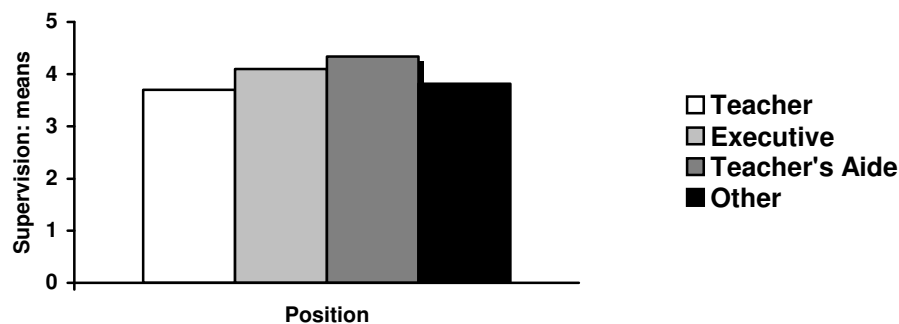


Figure 2: Means of satisfaction with supervision by position.

Colleagues

Figure 3 shows satisfaction with colleagues by age group. Satisfaction with colleagues appears to increase with age, with staff members aged over 50 significantly more so than the youngest age group ($d = 0.53$). This could reflect a development of collegial relationships over time or the accumulation of generally positive experiences in relations with other colleagues.

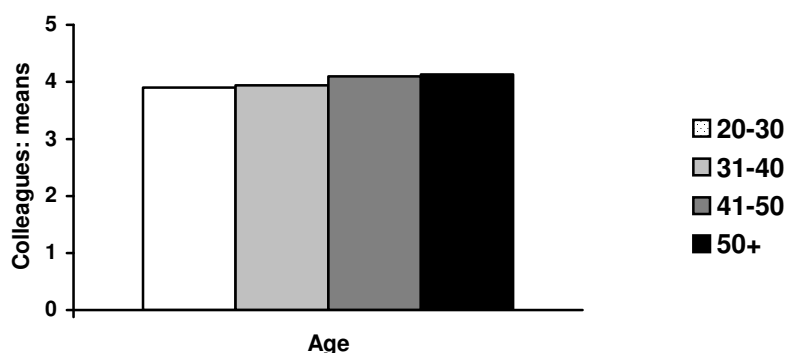


Figure 3: Means of satisfaction with colleagues by age.

Satisfaction with colleagues by position is shown in Figure 4. Teacher's aides were significantly more satisfied with colleagues than classroom teachers ($d = 0.98$). This may reflect the fact that teacher's aides may work with a number of teachers and may develop close relationships with particular teachers as they work together in the classroom. Other staff were significantly less satisfied than teacher's aides ($d = 0.93$). In fact, they were the least satisfied with colleagues compared with all the other groups. This may be due to a lack of opportunity to work closely with other staff. Clerical staff, for example, may spend large periods of their working day experiencing little interaction with other staff members.

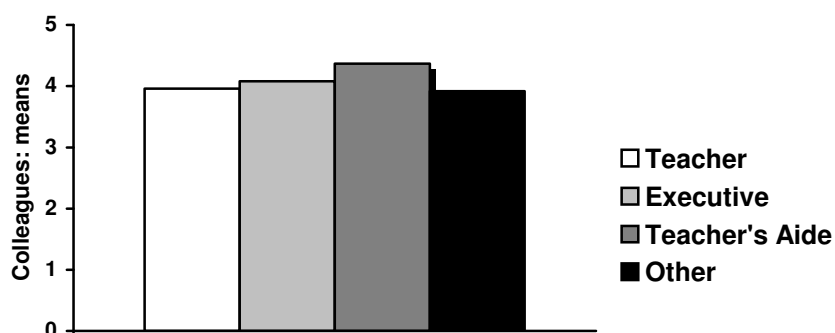


Figure 4: Means of satisfaction with colleagues by position.

Relationship with the principal

Satisfaction with relationship with the principal by age group is shown in Figure 5. This job satisfaction dimension appears to increase steadily for the first three age cohorts. Staff members aged 31-40 were significantly more satisfied than their 20-30 year old colleagues ($d = 0.54$), while the magnitude of difference was greater between the youngest cohort and the 41-50 age group ($d = 0.75$). Staff members aged over 50 were significantly more satisfied with relationship with the principal than their 20-30 year old contemporaries ($d = .51$). As these results are similar to those for satisfaction with supervision, and given the fact that both satisfaction dimensions have to do with aspects of how principals relate to staff, the same explanations may apply. Accumulation of experience and self-confidence, combined with less likelihood of close supervision, may be behind the steady upward trend.

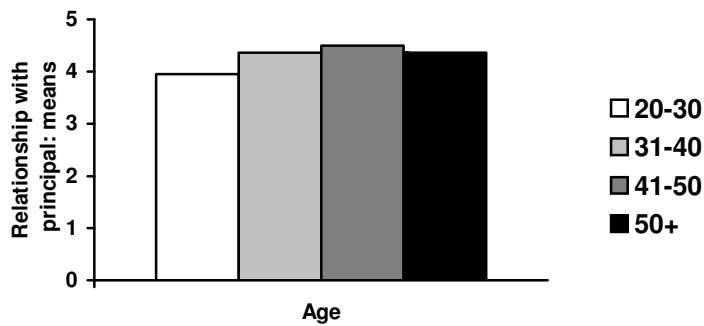


Figure 5: Means of satisfaction with relationship with principal by age.

Satisfaction with relationship with the principal by position is shown in Figure 6. While significant differences were suggested by the multiple regression (see Table 2), Scheffe tests did not reach significance. The results are, however, similar to those for satisfaction with supervision.

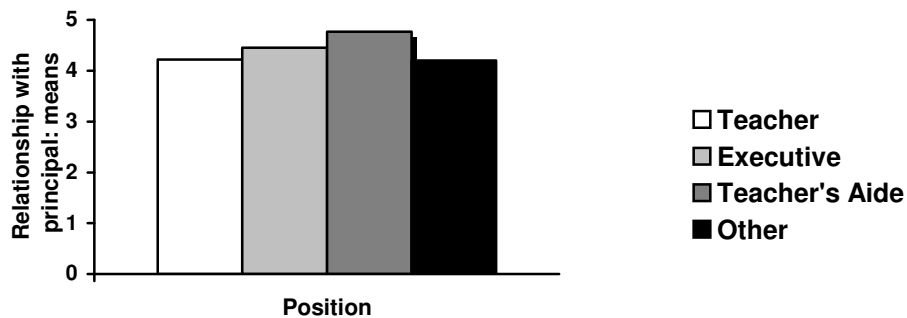


Figure 6: Means of satisfaction with relationship with principal by position.

Working conditions

Figure 7 shows satisfaction with working conditions by position. The only statistically significant difference is between teachers and teacher's aides, with teacher's aides by far the more satisfied ($d = 1.03$). Teacher's aides might enjoy their work with students without the administrative burdens, such as programming, assessment and documentation, that classroom teachers face. However, further investigation is needed to explain the reasons behind this finding.

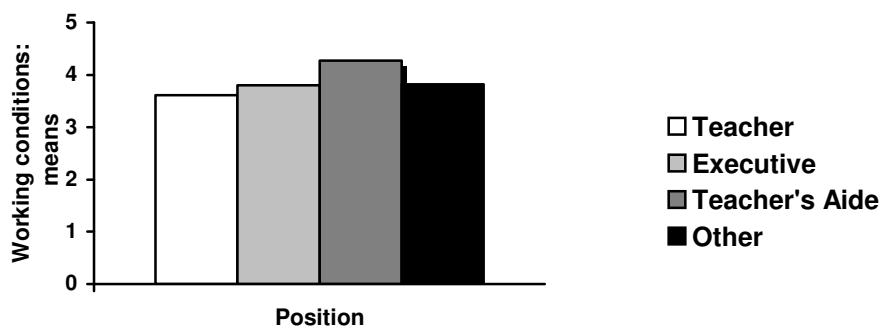


Figure 7: Means of satisfaction with working conditions by position.

Work itself

Satisfaction with work itself by sex is shown in Figure 8. Females were significantly more satisfied with work itself than males, but the effect size was small ($d = 0.36$). While females were more satisfied, it should be noted that the means for both groups were high, indicating that both groups were, in the main, satisfied or very satisfied with the work itself.

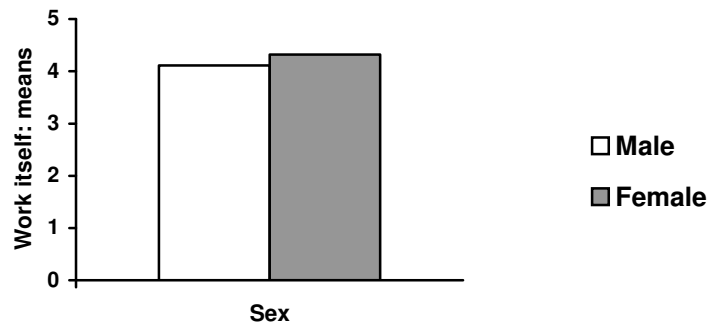


Figure 8: Means of satisfaction with work itself by sex.

Figure 9 shows satisfaction with work itself by age. Scheffe tests identified that staff members in 41-50 and 50+ age groups were significantly more satisfied with work itself than the 20-30 age group ($d = 0.59$ and 0.60 respectively). In general, older teachers, for example, would have been teaching longer than younger ones. Longevity of career, combined with successful experience may explain why older staff members are more satisfied with this dimension. It may also be possible that older staff members were better able to appreciate the value of their job either because they had become comfortable with their role.

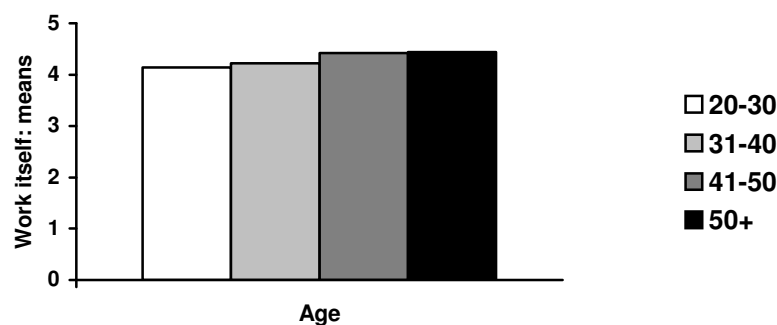


Figure 9: Means of satisfaction with work itself by age.

Job variety

Satisfaction with job variety by age is shown in Figure 10. Staff members in the 31-40 and 41-50 age groups were significantly more satisfied with job variety than the 20-30 age group ($d = 0.44$ and 0.56 respectively). It is reasonable to assume that older staff members, especially teachers, would have greater variety of experiences, for example,

because of opportunities to change classroom practice and additional responsibilities including executive roles.

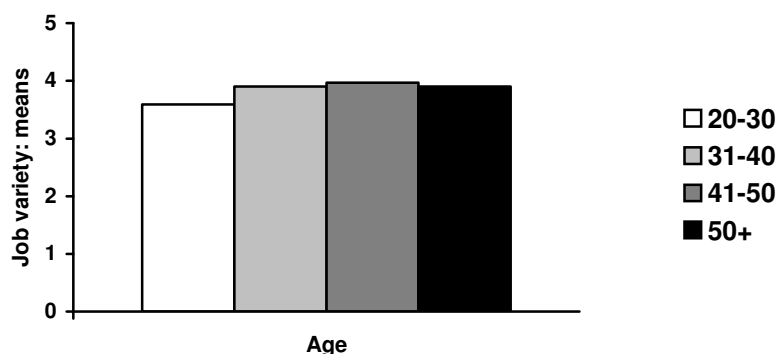


Figure 10: Means of satisfaction with job variety by age.

Feedback

Figure 11 shows satisfaction with feedback by position. Scheffe tests revealed three statistically significant differences. Executive staff members were significantly more satisfied with feedback than regular classroom teachers ($d = 0.44$). Executive staff members tend to work more closely with principals and classroom teachers as members of a school leadership team. Therefore, the higher level of satisfaction with feedback may be the result of more frequent interaction with principals or other staff. Executive staff members were also significantly more satisfied with feedback than other non-teaching staff ($d = 0.78$). Again this could be the result of opportunity to interact, but because the other non-teaching group included clerical staff, maintenance personnel and others, it is difficult to explain. A more detailed study of position by sub-categories of non-teaching staff separately would yield a better explanation for this difference.

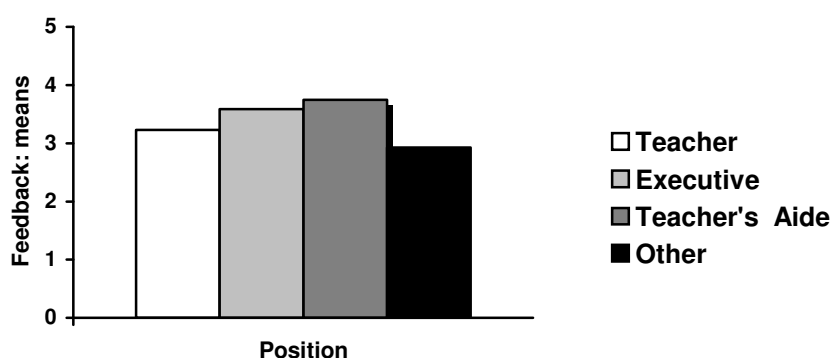


Figure 11: Means of satisfaction with feedback by position.

The largest difference was between teacher's aides and other non-teaching staff ($d = 1.02$). Teacher's aides work closely with teachers, often in the same classroom or as part of a team. Viewed in this light, the high level of satisfaction with feedback could be explained as a result of close interaction. However, exactly why teacher's aides are

the most satisfied of all the groups with feedback is a question that only further systemic research may answer.

General job satisfaction

Sex, age and position accounted for some differences in general job satisfaction. Figure 12 shows general job satisfaction by sex. Females reported significantly more general job satisfaction than males ($d = 0.40$). Primary schools, at least in New South Wales, have predominantly female staff members and primary teaching has been described as a female oriented profession (Ramsey, 2000). Given this, the higher general satisfaction of female staff members might be attributable to work environments that have become more suited to them than their male colleagues.

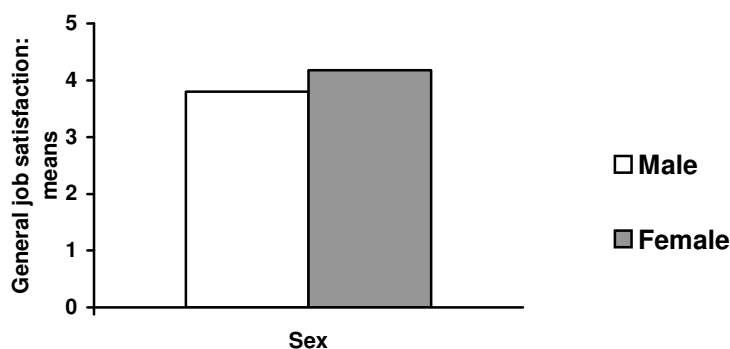


Figure 12: Means of general job satisfaction by sex.

Means of general job satisfaction by age are shown in Figure 13. Staff members in the 41-50 and 50+ age groups were significantly more satisfied than the 20-30 and 31-40 age groups ($d = 0.49, 0.59, 0.41$ and 0.52). Older staff members may experience more overall job satisfaction due to positive relations with colleagues established over years and the professional support that may bring or an accumulation of successful experience.

A disturbing trend in recent times has been the significant number of teachers who leave the profession during the first 5 to 10 years (Ramsey, 2000; Williams, 2002). Staff members in this sample aged between 20 and 40 are within that range of experience, and, given that satisfaction is a known predictor of turnover (Spector, 2000) the findings reported here may point to a link with the reported turnover.

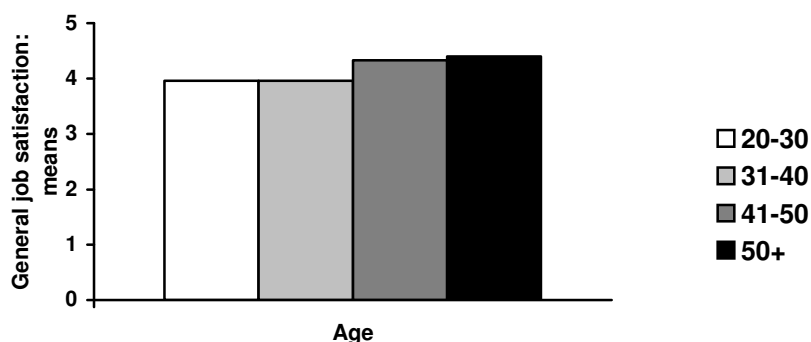


Figure 13: Means of general job satisfaction by age.

Figure 14 shows means of general job satisfaction by employment position. Teacher's aides were significantly more satisfied than classroom teachers ($d = 1.07$). Given that teacher's aides were the most satisfied in all comparisons by employment position, this is perhaps not surprising. It could be that teacher's aides derive much satisfaction from many aspects of their work or that they feel they are doing something they really want to do or like doing.

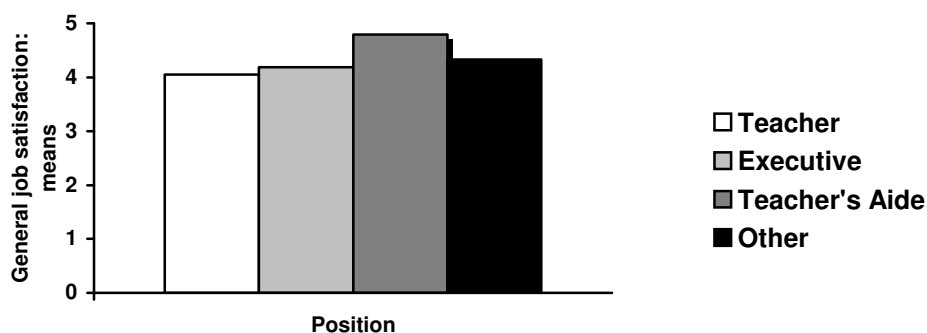


Figure 14: Means of general job satisfaction by position.

Discussion

This study has identified three biographical variables related to job satisfaction of staff members in Catholic primary schools. These variables were, namely, sex, age and position. Providing further support for associations reported in previous literature (Bedeian et al, 1992; Koustelios, 2001). It was anticipated that years of experience would also have an effect on job satisfaction (Crossman & Harris, 2006; Koustelios, 2001), but, for this sample, the proposition was not sufficiently supported by statistical evidence. No biographical effects were identified for two job satisfaction dimensions: Responsibility for work and Relationships with the students.

Where sex was a significant predictor of job satisfaction, female staff members were more satisfied than their male colleagues. It is suggested that this could be due to primary schools being more feminised workplaces compared to secondary schools

(ILO/UNESCO, 2000; Ramsey, 2000). The results reported here are similar to those of other studies (for example, Bedeian et al, 1992; McCormick & Solman, 1992).

Where age was a significant predictor of job satisfaction, older staff members (aged 31 or over) were generally more satisfied with various aspects of work than younger colleagues, particularly those in the 20-30 age group. This is in line with results of other studies (for example, Lowther et al, 1985), but contradicts others (for example, Crossman & Harris, 2006).

Where position was a significant predictor of job satisfaction, it was quite clear that teacher's aides were the most satisfied, especially compared to other non-teaching staff members. Reasons for this warrant further investigation, but this might be due to personal characteristics such as orientation to a type of job or a desire to work with children. If one holds the proposition that general job satisfaction is the sum of satisfaction with various dimensions (Lowther et al, 1985; Singh & Billingsley, 1996), then it could be expected that executive teachers would have the second highest level of general job satisfaction. However, the fact that other non-teaching staff were the second most generally satisfied supports literature that cautions against this approach to the estimation of general job satisfaction (Ferrari, 1981; Spector, 2000). Classroom teachers were, in the main, less satisfied than their executive colleagues. This finding is consistent with other studies (for example, Dinham & Scott, 2000; McCormick & Solman, 1992).

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that the biographical variables of sex, age and employment position may be related to a number of dimensions of job satisfaction. The results have implications for schools and for further research.

The number of male teachers and their retention in primary schools has been raised by recent government instigated reports as a cause for concern by (MCEETYA, 2003; Ramsey, 2000). The MCEETYA (2003) study suggested that better remuneration, reduced workload and improved employment conditions may help retain male teachers. This is a challenge for school systems, especially Catholic diocesan systems, as budgetary resources and other factors will often restrict the degree to which the above suggestions can be implemented. However, the finding of this study that males are less satisfied than females needs to be considered by school systems in attempts to attract and retain male staff in primary schools.

The issue of lower job satisfaction of younger staff members needs to be addressed. The literature suggests that classroom teachers in particular may be vulnerable to job dissatisfaction and subsequent intention to leave the profession (MCEETYA, 2003; Ramsey, 2000; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). Younger teachers will often face more challenges in their role due to limited experience and the fact that teaching skills develop over time (Marsh, 2004) and this will challenge their self confidence and influence their attitudes to the job. There are several known ways in which job satisfaction of teachers may be improved. Greater access to professional and collegial support, mentoring programs and increased input into decisions made in the schools have all been associated with increased levels of job satisfaction (De Nobile, 2003). These things are generally the responsibility of principals and school systems.

However, peers can also help, or be encouraged to help, by providing more frequent collegial support and opportunities to interact personally and professionally.

The satisfaction of classroom teachers (as distinct from executive teachers) has also been identified in this study as a possible cause for concern. Executive staff members derived more satisfaction from most dimensions of job satisfaction, but particularly those involving interaction with the principal (Supervision, Relationship with the principal and Feedback). Perhaps increased opportunity for classroom teacher–principal interaction would be helpful. Opportunity to discuss issues with the principal and principal approachability are factors that have been associated with higher job satisfaction (De Nobile, 2003).

Teacher's aides carry out a wide variety of roles in primary schools ranging from administrative roles to one on one instruction. The high level of satisfaction reported by teacher's aides was an unexpected, but positive finding. Job satisfaction of teacher's aides has not been extensively investigated in Australia. While some explanations were attempted for the results reported here, it is an area that should be investigated further. A quantitative study supported by substantial quantitative methodology to help explain the associations is recommended.

Job satisfaction is a significant phenomenon in schools. Lowered job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are believed to influence staff member commitment, morale and turnover and this is particularly salient to the teaching profession. It is in the interests of schools and school systems to ensure that levels of job satisfaction are high so that schools are places of relative stability and student learning, arguably the main focus of schools, is not hindered.

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