

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Valued Living, Fulfilled at Work: Investigating Job Satisfaction and Associated Psychological Processes Among Physicians

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Abstract

Objective: Job satisfaction of physicians is closely related to patient satisfaction, the quality and efficiency of medical care, and the enhancement of physicians' well-being. While there is a consensus on the global rise in job dissatisfaction among physicians, most studies in this field have primarily concentrated on the association between job satisfaction and depression, burnout, and work productivity. The number of studies examining the relationship between psychological processes and job satisfaction is limited. This study aimed to examine the impact of self-esteem, thwarted belongingness, and values on job satisfaction among medical professionals.

Methods: A total of 196 physicians, aged between 18 and 65, who were working in state or private hospitals all over Türkiye at the time of the study (between December 2022 and February 2023), were included in this cross-sectional study. Data were collected using a sociodemographic form, Valuing Questionnaire (VQ), Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire (INQ), Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES) and Job satisfaction scale (JSS).

Results: A positive correlation was found between job satisfaction (JSS) and valued living (VQ) ($r=0.621$; $p<0.001$), while negative correlations were found between thwarted belongingness (INQ-TB) ($r=-0.352$; $p<0.001$) and self-esteem (RSES) ($r=-0.400$; $p<0.001$). Multiple linear regression analyses demonstrated that VQ and work experience are significant predictors of Job Satisfaction (JSS) ($p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.449$).

Conclusion: Findings of this study highlight the crucial role of personal values and work experience on job satisfaction. Incorporating personal values into future interventions is vital for enhancing job satisfaction among physicians.

Keywords: Belongingness, Values, Work Experience, Physicians, Job Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the physical and psychological difficulties of healthcare workers (HCWs) have increased all over the world (1,2). Although various structural changes were made in the healthcare system, physicians still face several psychosocial stressors such as increased workload, long hours of work, being on duty, demands of patients, exposure to violence at the workplace, and emotional distress because of poor interactions with patients and colleagues (3). Studies have shown that the risk of suicide, burn-out, minor mental disorders, and hypertension is higher among HCWs than in other

occupational groups and the general population (4,5).

Job satisfaction is one of the concepts affected by ongoing psychosocial processes. Locke defines job satisfaction as a pleasant or positive emotional state resulting from one's consideration of his or her job or job experience (6). Research has shown that as job satisfaction decreases, employees' physical and mental health problems increase. Among female employees, a significant negative correlation was found between headaches, gastrointestinal issues, and job satisfaction (7). Another study among nurses indicated that a

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high level of job satisfaction is one of the protective factors against the development of anxiety symptoms (8). According to a recent study, higher levels of job satisfaction were positively associated with physicians' physical and mental health and well-being. However, it was negatively associated with burn-out and resignation numbers (9).

Job satisfaction has importance not only for physicians' well-being but also for the patients they serve. Several studies have focused on how job satisfaction might affect patient care. Higher job satisfaction among physicians positively correlated with patient satisfaction and quality of care (10). Additionally, it was related to less self-reported suboptimal patient care and self-reported likelihood of making errors (11,12).

Job satisfaction and work climate are significantly influenced by values (13,14). Studies that assess the impact of values on job satisfaction or work motivation examine two concepts: work values and personal values. According to Taris and Feij (15) work values are 'enduring beliefs that prefer a specific way of conduct or end state over its opposite, thus influencing an individual's attitudes, judgments, and behaviors'. Work values are primarily related to goals within the work environment and often shaped by external factors such as job requirements and organizational culture (16). On the other hand, personal values extend beyond the workplace and encompass a broader spectrum including family, relationships and personal development. They are more process-oriented rather than goal-oriented and are not affected by external events (17). A similar process-oriented approach to values is found in ACT, which forms the basis for the definition of values in this study. In the context of ACT, values are defined as 'freely chosen, verbally constructed consequences of ongoing, dynamic, evolving patterns of activity' (18). Values are portrayed as a compass that guides a person to live life fully and in a meaningful way, recognizing them as a fundamental precursor of workability (19). There is a limited number of studies demonstrating the positive relationship between job satisfaction and values among physicians (20). Only a few of them have examined values within a broader spectrum in the context of job satisfaction. Eliason et.al. investigated personal values, which assess a broader spectrum of life, and practice satisfaction among 1224 family physicians. They showed that "motivation to help those close to you" as a value type were found positively correlated with practice satisfaction (21).

In addition to values, it is also important to evaluate how belongingness relates to job satisfaction. The need for belonging is one of the most fundamental requirements for human well-being. Studies have shown that factors such as belonging, employee engagement, and stress significantly influence job satisfaction (22,23,24). Thwarted belongingness is defined as a distressing mental state that encompasses a sense of loneliness and emerges when the need for connectedness is not fulfilled (25,26). Recent studies among healthcare staff suggest that having a strong sense of belonging at work might counteract the negative impact of organizational challenges on overall well-being (23,24). In a study conducted with 79 nursing home employees, belongingness, stress, and work engagement were predictors of job satisfaction (27). Additionally, in a separate study with 156 mental health staff, workplace belongingness emerged as a significant predictor of both compassion satisfaction and low levels of burnout (22).

One concept that holds significance in the dissatisfaction literature but has not well-researched among clinicians is self-esteem. It is well known that individuals with high self-esteem have more confidence in their abilities and higher resources to cope with adverse events (28). Self-esteem significantly affects the job performance of professionals, and individuals with low self-esteem are generally more sensitive to burnout (29). Given the demanding and unpredictable nature of working hours, the overwhelming responsibilities, and the stress-inducing work conditions, self-esteem emerges as a crucial factor for physicians. Research suggests a positive correlation between high self-esteem and job satisfaction among healthcare professionals (30). However there is a limited body of research specifically investigating this connection among physicians in Türkiye.

Job satisfaction is essential not only to improve the well-being of the physicians but also for the mutual satisfaction of physicians and patients and to improve the quality and efficiency of medical care. Numerous studies have shown that physicians' job satisfaction is an important measure to maintain the stability of the primary health care team and prevent brain drain (31,32). When taking into consideration the importance of job satisfaction for physicians, patients, and the entire healthcare system, it is essential to evaluate the possible related psychological factors. While research explored the relationship between job satisfaction, depression, burnout, and work productivity, only a few studies specifically investigate the relationship between

psychological processes and job satisfaction (33).

Research on the role of psychological processes such as personal values, thwarted belongingness and self-esteem on job satisfaction among physicians is quite limited. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, there is no study in Türkiye that investigates the relationship between values at a more personal level and job satisfaction among physicians, and evaluates all these processes holistically. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate how self-esteem, thwarted belongingness, and values affect job satisfaction in the medical profession. It has been hypothesized that higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of thwarted belongingness, longer work experience, and increased alignment with one's values would positively predict job satisfaction.

METHODS

Design

This cross-sectional study targeted physicians in Türkiye. An online survey was used to investigate levels and potential determinants of job satisfaction and the survey was spread via social media networks and vocational listservs using a snowball technique.

Participants

The target population was physicians currently working in an institution in Türkiye. The inclusion criteria were determined as being between ages 18-65 and being an active physician in an institution. The exclusion criteria were being on sick leave, not working actively, or working in private practice. The survey reached 656 physicians, and 208 of them completed it. 12 of these participants were excluded from the study because they were working in private practice. In the end, this cross-sectional study sample consisted of 196 physicians.

Procedure

Data was collected between December 2022 and February 2023 from state or private hospitals all over Türkiye. The study survey was designed using the Google® Forms platform. Participants were recruited via several social media networks and vocational listservs using a snowball technique. The surveys were distributed to participants along with a one-time link to the information sheet about the study, consent form, and questionnaires. The shared link was deactivated when the sample size exceeded the number indicated by G Power analyses ($n=129$).

Measurements

1. Valuing Questionnaire (VQ): VQ was developed by Smout et al. (2014) to measure one's

valued living during the last week (34). VQ is a 7-point, 10-item scale consisting of two subscales: progress and obstruction. While the higher scores of the progress subscale indicate living more consistently with values, higher scores of the obstruction subscale represent more disruption in one's valued living. Total VQ scores were calculated by reversing obstruction subscale items and summing progression items. Turkish validity and reliability study of VQ was conducted by Aydın et al., and Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.78 (35). For this study the Cronbach's alpha of VQ was 0.82.

2. Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire (INQ): The scale was developed based on the interpersonal psychological theory by Van Orden et al. (36). It is a 7-point, 10-item scale with thwarted belongingness (first five items) and perceived burdensomeness (last five items) subscales. In this study, thwarted belongingness (TB) subscale was used. Higher scores of the INQ-TB subscale indicate greater thwarted belongingness. A validity and reliability study of Turkish INQ was conducted by Eskin M. et al. (2020) and Cronbach's α value of the thwarted belongingness subscale was 0.79 (37). For this study the Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.79.

3. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES): The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was developed by Rosenberg M. (1965) (38). It is a 63-item self-report scale with 12 subscales. The Rosenberg Self Esteem scale was translated and validated by Çuhadaroglu (1986), and its internal consistency was excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$) (39). In this study a 4-point, 10-item self-esteem subscale was used and the Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.68. Self-esteem scores range from 0 to 6. Higher scores indicate poorer self-esteem.

4. Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS): The job satisfaction scale was developed by Kuzgun et al. to determine how satisfied an individual is in their work context on the basis of Herzberg's 'Two Factor Theory' (40). JSS is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 20 items. JSS items are related to the suitability of professional activities with the qualifications of the individual, taking responsibility, and opportunities for development. Total scores range from 20 to 100. Higher scores indicate higher job satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha of the original scale was 0.90. For this study the Cronbach's alpha of JSS was calculated as 0.87.

Statistical Analyses

Final data were transferred from Google® Forms to Microsoft Excel® 2021 version 16.57. IBM SPSS v.25 was used to analyze the data. The normality was verified by using the histograms, Q-Q Plots, and Kolmogorov – Smirnov Test. In order to assess the internal consistency reliability of the measures used in this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. Tolerance and VIF values were evaluated to determine if the data met the assumption of collinearity, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. A priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power version 3.1.9.6 to determine the minimum sample size required to test the study hypothesis. Results indicated the required sample size to achieve 95% power for detecting a medium effect, at a significance criterion of $\alpha = 0.05$, was $n = 129$ for multiple linear regression. Descriptive statistics of the data are presented with n (%) and, as the variables were found to be normally distributed, mean $\pm$ SD scores are utilized. After descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the sociodemographic characteristics, Pearson's correlation coefficient was performed to examine the relationship between the variables. Multiple linear regression analyses were carried out to determine the predictors of job satisfaction. The 'enter' method was employed for variable selection, where all predictor variables were simultaneously entered into the regression model. The independent variables for the multiple regression were the total scores of VQ, INQ, RSES self-esteem subscale, and work experience. These total scores were included in the analysis as possible independent variables predicting JSS scores. Statistical significance was determined using a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval of the study was given by the Bakirkoy Dr. Sadi Konuk Training and Research Hospital. The reference number is 2022-17-22 on 05.09.2022. Informed consent was obtained from each participant after the study purpose and procedures were explained.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Our research was carried out on a broad spectrum sample from clinical and non-clinical discipline such as internal medical sciences (internal medicine, neurology, psychiatry, pediatrics) and surgical medical sciences

(general surgery, neurosurgery, pediatric surgery, plastic surgery, obstetrics & gynecology, orthopedics, ophthalmology and anesthesiology). Out of 196 participants, 17 (8.67%) were medical practitioners, 98 (50.00%) were residents, 77 (39.28%) were senior physicians and 4 (2.04%) were associate professors or professors. The mean age of participants was 32.6 ± 6.74 (24-60). We asked two questions only to residents about the social and academic support they seek. Out of the residents surveyed 69.38% ($n=68$) of 98 answered "no" to the question "Do you find your lecturers/ senior physicians socially supportive?". Also 63.26% ($n=62$) of them answered "no" to the question "Do you find your lecturers/ senior physicians supportive in terms of academic knowledge sharing?". The characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample characteristics of participants ($n = 196$)

Characteristics	n	%
Marital status		
Single	71	36.2
Married	115	58.7
Divorced/separated	8	4.1
Living together	2	1.0
Sex		
Man	75	38.3
Woman	121	61.7
Are you satisfied with your economic situation and financial gain?		
Yes	32	16.3
No	164	83.7
Do you think you are respected by the people you serve?		
Yes	42	21.4
No	154	78.6

Results of Correlations

Table 2 shows Pearson's correlations among job satisfaction and other variables. A strong positive correlation was found between JSS and VQ ($r=0.621$, $p < 0.001$). Also JSS scores showed negative correlation with thwarted belongingness (INQ-TB, $r=-0.352$, $p < 0.001$) and self-esteem (RSES, $r = -0.400$ $p < 0.001$).

Results of Regression Analysis

To explore the predictors of job satisfaction, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted (Table 3). The predictors were identified as VQ, INQ-TB, RSES and work experience. While valued living (VQ) and work experience had a positive predictive effect on the total scores of JSS ($p < 0.001$), thwarted belongingness (INQ-TB) and self-esteem (RSES) did not have a significant contribution (Table 3). The model explained 44.90% of the total variance ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

	Mean±SD	r/p	1	2	3	4	5
1.Job satisfaction	62.9 ±11.4		-				
2.Thwarted belongingness	19.7 ± 6.36	r	-0.352	-			
		p	< 0.001				
3.Self-Esteem	1.55 ± 1.04	r	-0.400	0.377	-		
		p	< 0.001	< 0.001			
4.Valued Living	29.7 ±10.2	r	0.621	-0.415	-0.530	-	
		p	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001		
5.Work experience	7.65 ±6.52	r	0.288	-0.031	-0.109	0.061	-
		p	< 0.001	0.331	0.065	0.198	

Correlation matrix; SD:Standard deviation

Table 3. Predictors of Job Satisfaction

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	B	Standard error	β	t	p	95.0% CI for β	
							Lower	Upper
JSS	INQ-TB	-0.184	0.106	-0.103	-1.722	0.087	-0.221	0.015
	VQ	0.602	0.073	0.536	8.223	< 0.001	0.407	0.664
	RSES	-0.556	0.704	-0.051	-0.789	0.431	-0.178	0.076
	Work experience	0.431	0.093	0.246	4.604	< 0.001	0.141	0.351

Multiple linear regression analysis; Adjusted R²=0.449, $p<0.001$; JSS: Job satisfaction scale, INQ-TB: Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire-Thwarted belongingness, VQ:Valuing Questionnaire, RSES: Rosenberg self-esteem scale ; β : Standardized coefficient, B:unstandardized coefficient; CI: Confidence Interval

DISCUSSION

Healthcare workers across the globe are experiencing significant levels of stress due to their heavy workloads, leading to remarkable rates of burnout and resignation, particularly among physicians. According to Definitive Healthcare's findings in the USA, approximately 334,000 healthcare providers, including 117,000 physicians, exited the workforce in 2021. Many of them attributed their departure to burnout and stressors related to the pandemic, as reported in Modern Healthcare (41). Similarly, a recent report by the Medical Defence Union (MDU) in the UK, offering legal assistance to around 200,000 healthcare workers in the UK, reveals that four out of ten professionals are likely to resign because of "unbearable" demands. The MDU report indicates that up to 40% of physicians and dental professionals may have left the health service by 2028 (42). These findings demonstrate the vital importance of investigating the challenges faced by physicians that can lead to burnout and exhaustion. Job satisfaction plays a crucial role in protecting healthcare workers from burnout and ensuring their well-being, as well as influencing their relationship with patients. Based on the existing literature, this study aimed to evaluate the potential impact of self-esteem,

thwarted belongingness and values on job satisfaction among a sample of 196 physicians.

Our results demonstrated that valued living was strongly correlated with job satisfaction and was the strongest predictor of job satisfaction, along with work experience. Although the effect of values on job satisfaction has been demonstrated in previous research among healthcare professionals (31,43-45), only a few works have been conducted among physicians (20,21,47).

In line with the results of our study, two studies show that contact with values increases job satisfaction (20,43). Bouwkamp-Memmer et al. investigated the relationship between work values and job satisfaction of 340 family physicians (46). In their research, in which they evaluated work values in 6 dimensions, they concluded that these dimensions were related to job satisfaction. But they identified a hierarchy of work values in this relationship in decreasing order of importance: Autonomy, Service, Lifestyle, Academic pursuits, Management and Prestige. They highlighted the motivation of family physicians to help others and contribute to the field of medicine at the expense of work-life balance. In another study Eliason et al. investigated the impact of personal values on practice satisfaction (21). They reported that family physicians who were in contact with the value of benevolence had

higher levels of professional satisfaction, and they also found higher levels of satisfaction among physicians who were involved in the education of medical trainees. Considering that higher contact with values is associated with higher functionality (19), it is expected that values, regardless of their type, are also associated with higher job satisfaction. However, both studies found that some value sub-dimensions such as hedonism and prestige were negatively associated with job satisfaction. These unclear results on values may be due to the fact that the studies assessed not only process-oriented but also goal-oriented dimensions mentioned above. This study differs from others in examining the concept of value based on an entirely process-oriented approach. Besides, the holistic assessment of the concept of value without restricting it to the work context is another innovative aspect of this study. Our results indicate that to increase job satisfaction, it is crucial to increase one's contact with values and behaviors guided by these values. These results suggest that future studies investigating job satisfaction among physicians should collect data not only on work values but also on personal values.

The significance of work experience on job satisfaction is widely acknowledged. Jayasuriya et al. conducted research on health workers and their work environment. The results indicated a significant difference in the level of job satisfaction based on age and years of experience in the profession (47). Similarly, in another research by Kabbash et al., the findings revealed a significantly positive correlation between age and years of work experience with the total job satisfaction score among secondary and tertiary care physicians (48). In both studies, age and years of experience appear to be important factors influencing job satisfaction among the respective groups of healthcare workers. Older and more experienced individuals generally exhibited higher job satisfaction compared to their younger and less experienced counterparts. Consistent with this literature, our results indicated that work experience was one of the predictors of job satisfaction among physicians. This result implies that as physicians gain more experience in their profession, their overall job satisfaction tends to increase. Further studies are required to identify variables that might be helpful in increasing professional experience beyond non-modifiable factors such as age and years of experience in the profession.

Thwarted belongingness and poorer self-esteem were associated with lower levels of job satisfaction in our study, but they did not contribute to predicting job satisfaction. Thwarted belongingness refers to the

perception of not belonging to a social context and lack of meaningful relationships with others (49). There are several studies examining the role of belongingness on job satisfaction in different occupational workers. For example, Skaalvik and Skaalvik found a significant positive effect of belongingness on job satisfaction among teachers (50). Similarly, Spehar, I. et al. obtained that experiencing a sense of belongingness at work was positively associated with higher job satisfaction among the total of 278 employees (51). The number of studies evaluating belongingness among healthcare workers is limited, and there have been no studies among physicians based on our search. In their research among psychiatric hospital staff, Lynch et al. showed a positive effect of belongingness on job satisfaction (52). Similarly, another research among psychiatric workers indicated the relationship between a perceived lack of collegial support and burnout (53). Additionally, Miller et al. found that higher levels of social support are associated with greater job satisfaction, stronger commitment to the profession, decreased stress and burnout (54). Our study is the first study that evaluates this relationship between thwarted belongingness and job satisfaction among physicians. According to our results, consistent with the literature, job satisfaction showed a negative relation with thwarted belongingness. This result indicates that when physicians experience higher levels of thwarted belongingness, they are more likely to have lower job satisfaction. In other words, feelings of not belonging to a social group or experiencing isolation may contribute to decreased job satisfaction. Additional research, involving a larger sample of participants and also an exploration of work-related belongingness, is necessary for a better understanding of the relationship between job satisfaction and thwarted belongingness. Nonetheless, the finding emphasizes the importance of addressing physicians' social needs to enhance their job satisfaction and overall well-being in the workplace. This result underscores the significance of managing the work environment of physicians to suit their social needs.

The relationship between self-esteem and job satisfaction has been a subject of considerable investigation within the realm of organizational psychology (55) as well as in healthcare professionals (30,56). In existing literature, a positive correlation between higher self-esteem and increased job satisfaction has been identified within samples comprising both nurses (30) and doctors (57). The results of our study in a sample of physicians align with this literature.

Several limitations of this study must be considered when interpreting the results for future research. First, the study's cross-sectional design did not allow the interpretation of causal inference for the results. Second, self-report measures were used to assess psychological processes and job satisfaction. Third, the use of the snowball technique may have hindered the random selection of participants. It is important to consider that they may not fully represent the overall sample. On the one hand, unlike other studies the data was collected from various specialties. Such variety can lead to a better representation of the physician sample. Further research with a larger sample size is needed among physicians to gain a better understanding and to conduct effective interventions aimed at increasing job satisfaction. Fourth, the belongingness scale we used in this study did not include an item specifically assessing belongingness to the work context. Although this study determined the importance of thwarted belongingness, further studies are needed to evaluate especially the role of belongingness to the workplace on job satisfaction among physicians.

CONCLUSIONS

Results of this study shows that physicians' job satisfaction is related with self-esteem, thwarted belongingness, contact with values and work experience. Notably, contact with values and work experience emerged as significant predictors of job satisfaction.

Relying solely on workplace arrangements may be insufficient to increase professional satisfaction and prevent burnout among physicians. It is essential to target not only work-related but also personal values when developing interventions to improve the job satisfaction of physicians. Further research is needed for the development of personalized intervention models aimed at enhancing job satisfaction among physicians. The insights from our study could serve as a foundational framework for such endeavours.

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