



The State of Global Worker Satisfaction

HCI Research Brief

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Employers around the world would generally agree that they want a highly satisfied and highly productive workforce. However, many employees not only lack engagement but may actively exhibit counterproductive work behaviors due to job dissatisfaction (Gallup, Inc., 2017; Iliescu et al., 2017). In one large-scale national study in the U.S., only about a third of employees reported being engaged in their work (Gallup, Inc., 2017). To decrease the undesirable outcomes of job dissatisfaction such as absenteeism, turnover, and lowered productivity (Chen et al., 2011; Griffeth et al., 2000; O’Keefe, 2014; Ybema et al., 2010), increased understanding is needed about the interplay of workplace conditions, job characteristics, employee attitudes, and job satisfaction.

To better understand these issues, HCI Research Associates conducted a series of comparative global studies on job satisfaction, across various demographic dimensions, including age, gender, occupational type, organizational type, and supervisory status. The studies are based on cross-national data from the most recent wave of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), which is administered across 37 countries.

For a full summary and description of this research, see <https://www.gesis.org/issp/modules/issp-modules-by-topic/work-orientations/2015/>.

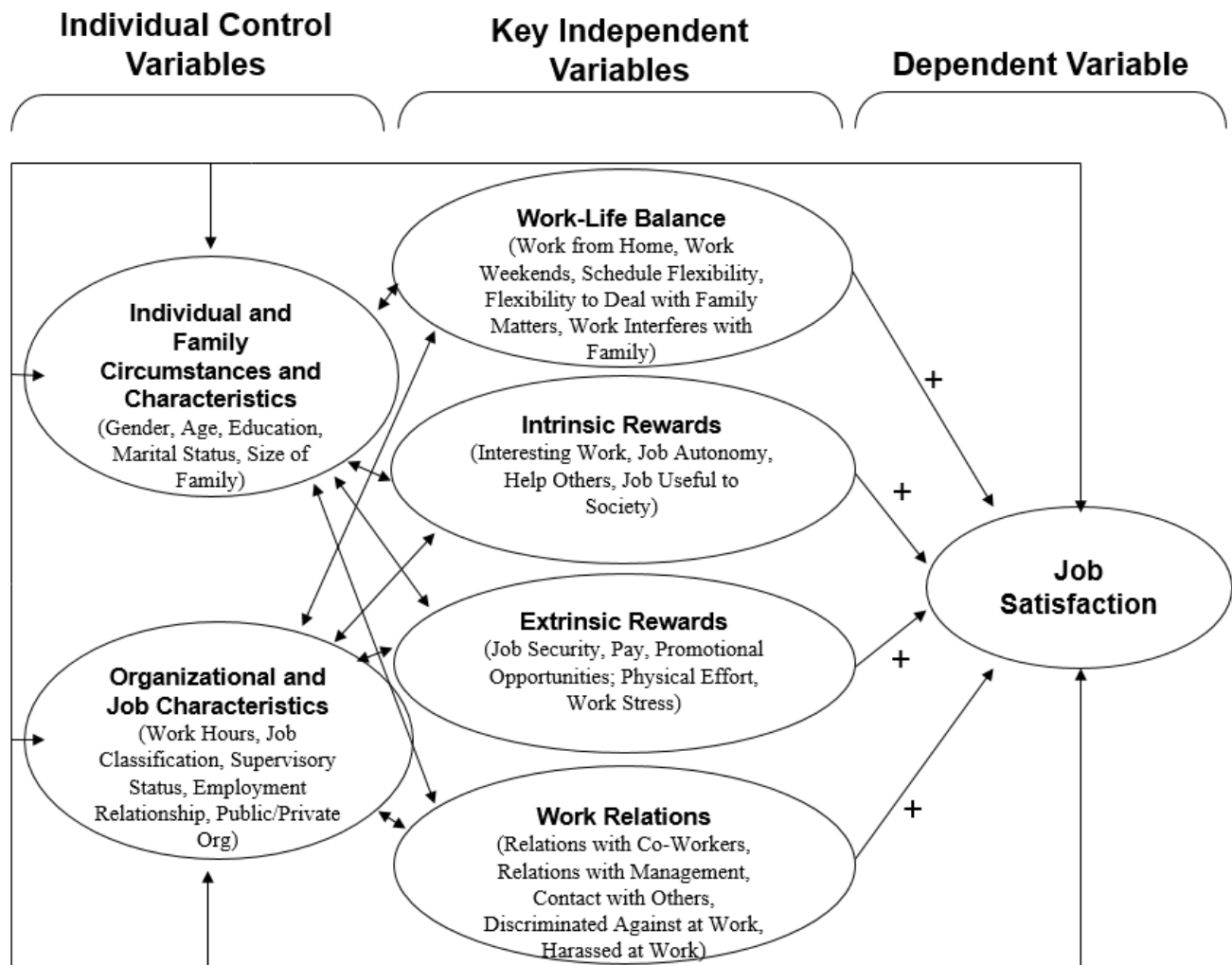
World Map of Study Countries



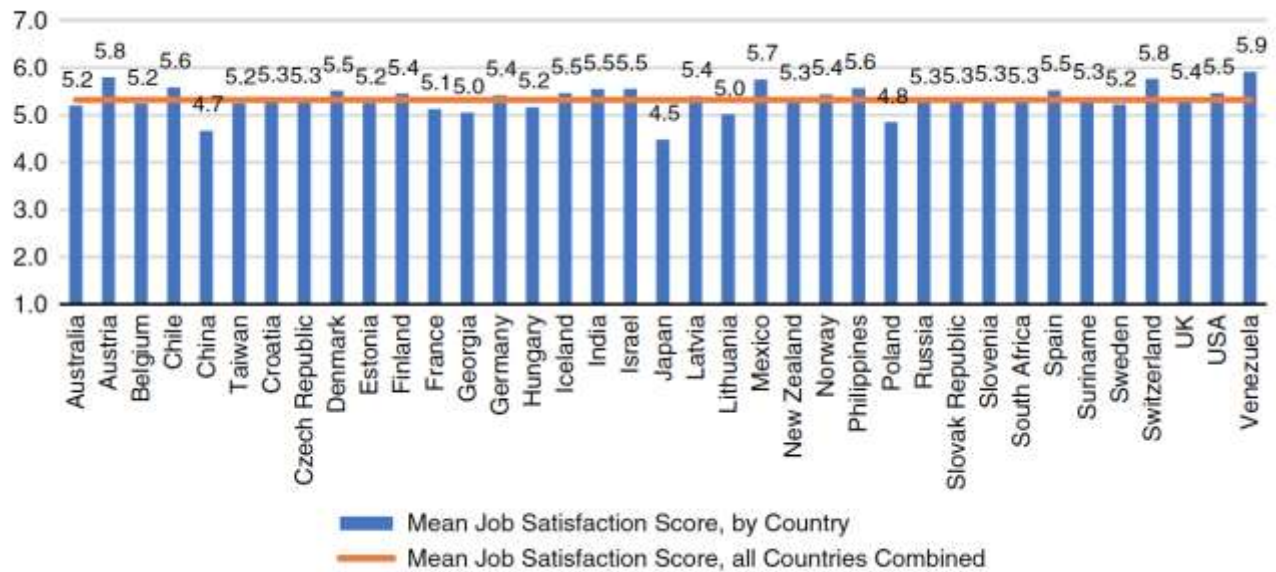
- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Australia | 14. Germany | 27. Russia |
| 2. Austria | 15. Hungary | 28. Slovak Republic |
| 3. Belgium | 16. Iceland | 29. Slovenia |
| 4. Chile | 17. India | 30. South Africa |
| 5. China | 18. Israel | 31. Spain |
| 6. Taiwan | 19. Japan | 32. Suriname |
| 7. Croatia | 20. Latvia | 33. Sweden |
| 8. Czech Republic | 21. Lithuania | 34. Switzerland |
| 9. Denmark | 22. Mexico | 35. United Kingdom |
| 10. Estonia | 23. New Zealand | 36. United States |
| 11. Finland | 24. Norway | 37. Venezuela |
| 12. France | 25. Philippines | |
| 13. Georgia | 26. Poland | |

These studies focused on *intrinsic rewards* such as having an interesting job, job autonomy, helping others, and jobs being useful to society; *extrinsic rewards* such as pay, job security, promotional opportunities, physical effort, and work stress; *work relations* between management and employees and coworkers, discrimination, and harassment; and *work-life balance* evidenced by conditions such as working from home, working weekends, schedule flexibility, flexibility to deal with family matters during work hours, and work interfering with family.

The Research Model



Across the studies, the highest job satisfaction levels were found in Venezuela, Switzerland, Austria, and Mexico (means between 5.7-5.9 on a scale of 7), while most countries had mean scores in the 5.2-5.4 range (the worldwide mean is 5.3). Poland, China, and Japan had the lowest mean job satisfaction scores (4.5-4.8) (Andrade et al., 2019). Interesting work, pay, work stress, relationships with co-workers and management, and work interferes with family are significant factors in job satisfaction in nearly every country (Andrade & Westover, 2018).



Wide variation is evident in the average age of the workforce of each country sample (average for all countries is over age 43) with New Zealand and Australia having the oldest average workforce (over 49 years old) and Mexico having the youngest (over 36 years old). Iceland and France have the highest average years of education (over 15 years each), while the Philippines has the lowest (just over 9 years of formal education); the average for all countries is a little over thirteen years of formal education. India has the largest average family size of 5.6, while Austria has the smallest at 2.32 (the average for all countries is 3.23). Australia has the lowest average hours worked per week (just under 37) and China the highest (49.43), with the average across countries being approximately 41 hours per week. (Andrade & Westover, 2018a).

HCI Research Associates have conducted a number of specific studies using ISSP data. For key findings, please see the following studies and their accompanying HCI Research One Sheets. Summaries of main findings also follow.

- Work-Life Balance (Andrade, Westover, & Kupka, 2019)
- Generational Cohorts (Andrade & Westover, 2018a)
- Age (Andrade & Westover, 2018b)
- Gender (Westover, Andrade, & Peterson, 2019)
- Occupations (Andrade & Westover, 2019)
- Hospitality Workers (Andrade, Miller, & Westover, 2020)
- Private/Public Organizations (Andrade & Westover, 2020b)
- Profit/For-Profit Organization (Andrade & Westover, 2020a)
- Housekeepers (Westover, Andrade, & Miller, 2020)
- Supervisor Status (Westover, Andrade, & Peterson, 2020b)

Key Findings of Studies

Work-Life Balance

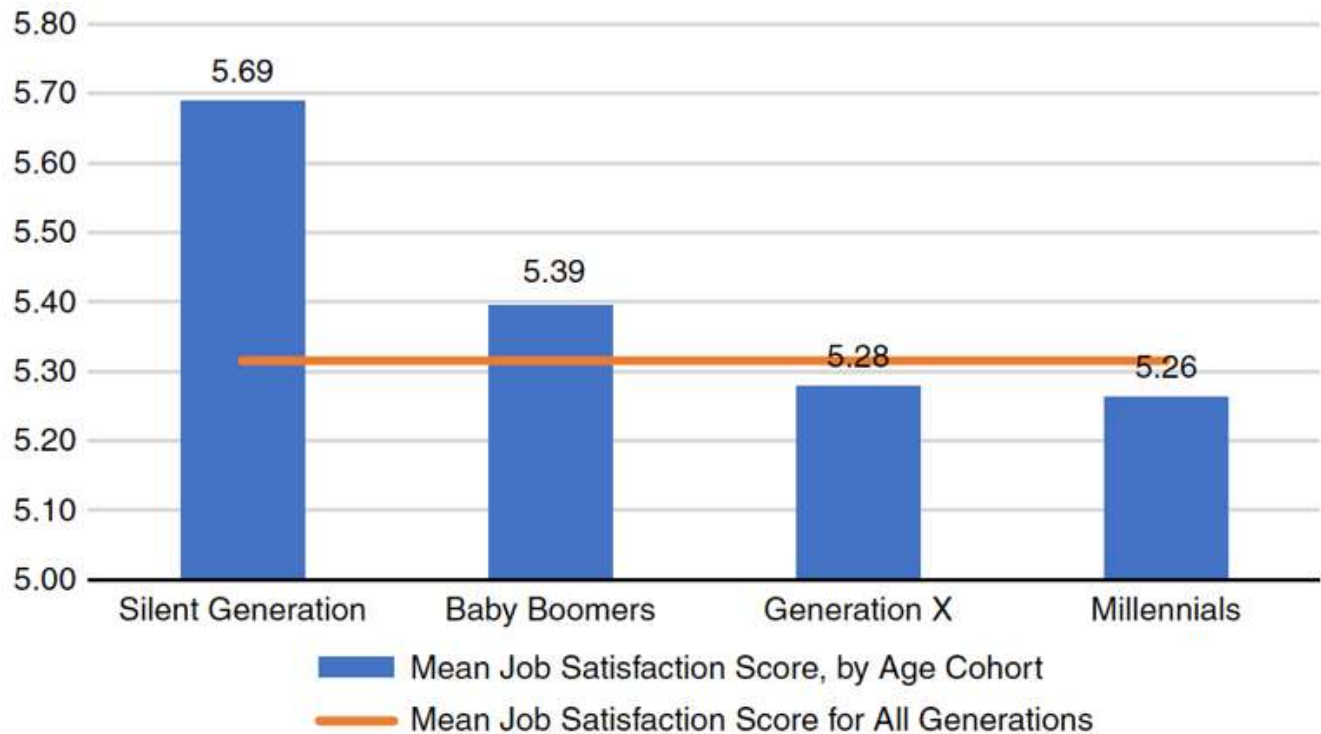
- Intrinsic rewards have the most positive impact on job satisfaction and extrinsic rewards the second highest impact.
- Few workers have the flexibility of working from home with the Philippines and India being exceptions and those in the Czech Republic, Austria, Latvia, and Japan being the least likely to work from home.
- Most workers sometimes work weekends with those in China, the Philippines, Mexico, Japan, and India being most likely to do so and those in Austria, Israel, Sweden, and Switzerland the least likely.
- Most workers have a regular schedule or shift; those in Russia, Croatia, Hungary, and South Africa have the most standardized schedules and those in the Philippines the most volatile.
- Most workers can take a couple hours off during work hours to deal with family or personal matters; those in New Zealand, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and the United States have the most flexibility and those in Russia, Japan, the Slovak Republic, France, and Venezuela the least flexibility.
- Most workers do not perceive that work interferes with family life; interference is mostly likely to occur for workers in India and least likely in Georgia, Suriname, Taiwan, Hungary, Estonia, and Austria.
- Overall, findings are positive in terms of global work-life balance practices. Reasons for country variations were not collected as part of the data and cannot be easily determined as some countries that have similar findings do not have similar cultural orientations.



(See Andrade, Westover, & Kupka, 2019)

Generational Cohorts

- Workers in the silent generation have the highest levels of job satisfaction (mean = 5.69 on a scale of 1-7) with baby boomers slightly less satisfied (mean = 5.39), and generation X and millennials nearly identical (means of 5.28 and 5.26 respectively). Most silent generation workers, born between 1918 and 1942, are past retirement age, suggesting that they may be viewing their levels of satisfaction in retrospect.

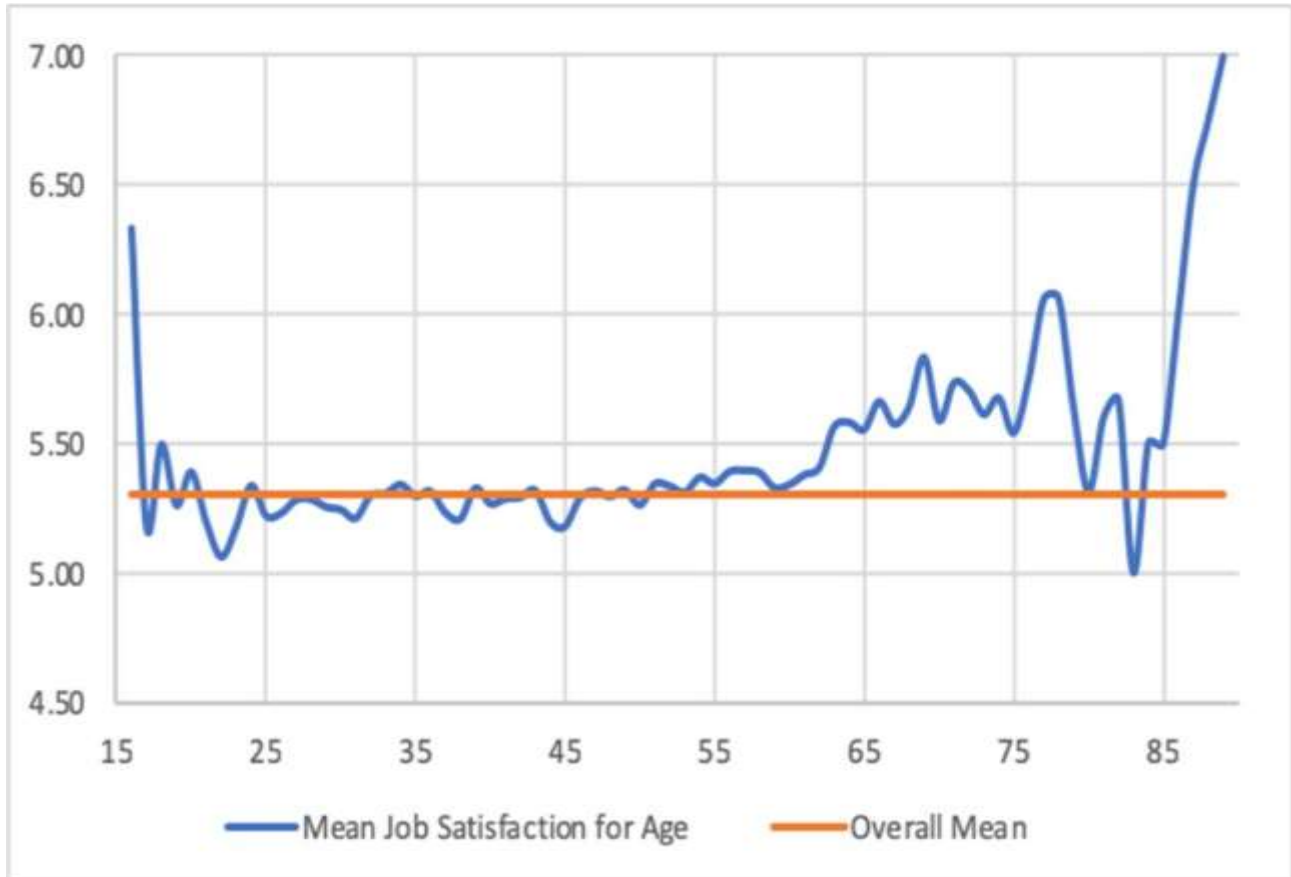


- Across all generational cohorts, the older you get, the more satisfied you are with your job. However, age is only statistically significant for Baby Boomers.
- Statistically significant cross-generational differences are evident in the levels of job satisfaction across generations and statistically significant cross-generational differences in the determinants of job satisfaction with most differences between the silent generation (now retired) and the other three generations.
- The silent generation are known for their loyalty and sacrifice while baby boomers are considered to be optimistic and engaged in their work. Generation X values responsibility and autonomy in the workplace and unstructured hours while millennials enjoy challenges but question authority and seek a mentoring role with their supervisors.
- In essence, supporting the work preferences and values of each generation can increase job satisfaction.

(See Andrade & Westover, 2018a)

Age

- Job satisfaction levels for workers in all 37 countries appears fairly consistent with only minor increases and decreases from age 25 to the time of retirement. However, mean job satisfaction levels decrease for those in their late 70s to early 80s, followed by a steep increase for the final years of work life.



- The impact of age on job satisfaction varies by country with age being statistically significant in only eleven of the thirty-seven countries, specifically Austria, Taiwan, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, India, Japan, Latvia, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the UK.
- While there is a positive relationship between age and job satisfaction in nearly every case where age is a statistically significant control variable (e.g. the older one gets, the more satisfied one is with one's job), in 2 of the 10 countries (Austria and India), age has a negative relationship with job satisfaction (e.g., as one ages, job satisfaction decreases).
- Overall, age has a positive impact on job satisfaction. As workers increase in age, their job satisfaction also increases.

(See Andrade & Westover, 2018b)

Gender

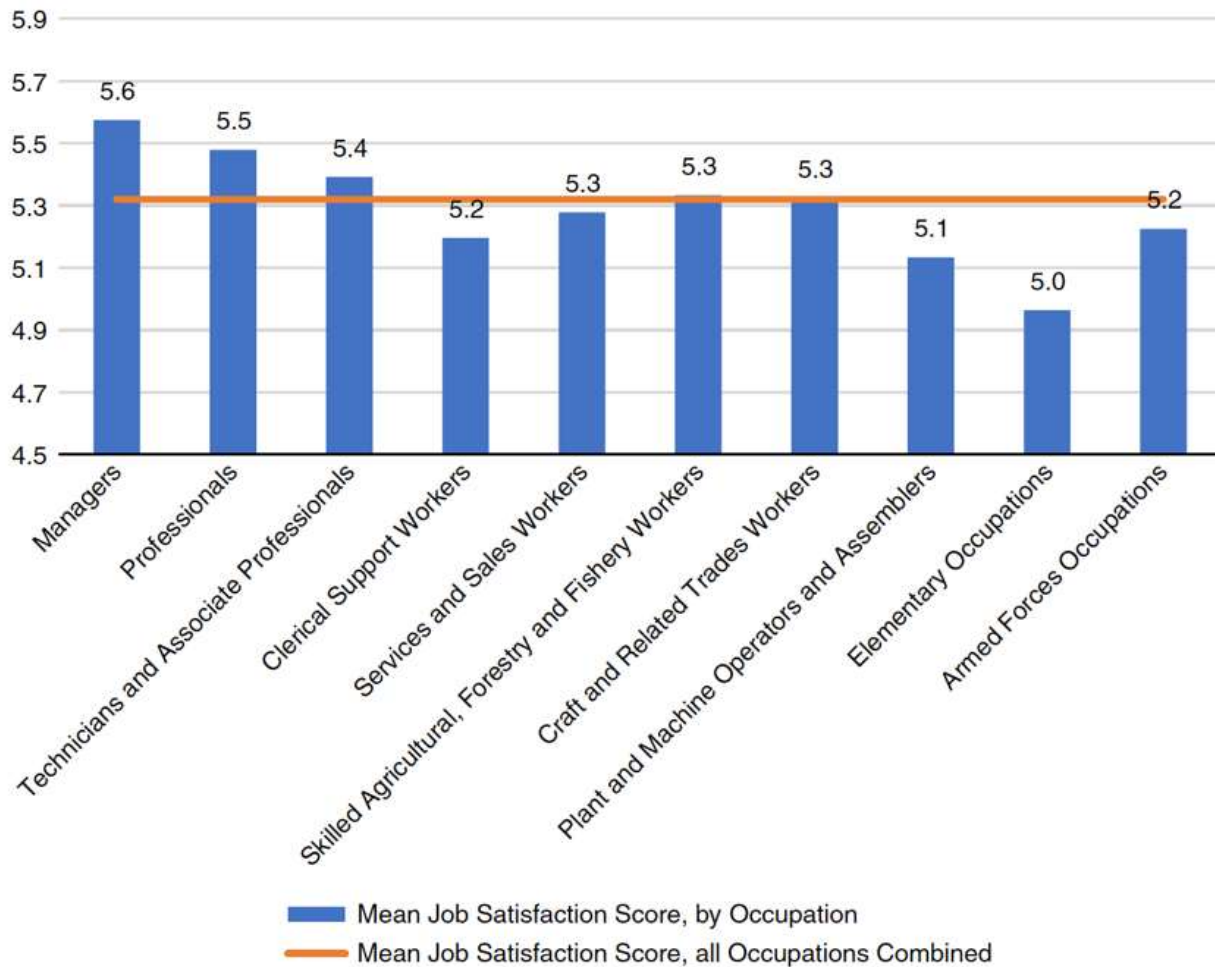
- Overall mean job satisfaction scores for men and women across countries are similar but slightly higher for men, suggesting that gender differences are becoming less relevant to job satisfaction than in the past.
- Job satisfaction for men and women are equally affected by extrinsic rewards, possibly because women have become primary breadwinners rather than providing supplemental income; thus factors related to pay, stability, and opportunities for growth are important.
- Men and women both find satisfaction in doing work that is interesting, offers autonomy, and is useful to society, but work being helpful to others is not a factor in job satisfaction for men. This suggests that men have more of an instrumental orientation to work than women.
- Being harassed at work was significant to job satisfaction for men, but not for women. Although surprising, this may be because women are not harassed to the extent they are commonly perceived as being or they may be suppressing or accepting harassment conditions.
- Personal contact with others is a significant factor in job satisfaction for men but not women. Men may have fewer personal networks outside of work while women may have more.
- Working weekends and schedule flexibility are significant factors in job satisfaction for men, but not women, possibly because hours worked are higher for men and they need more flexibility to deal with issues that come up as they have limited free time.



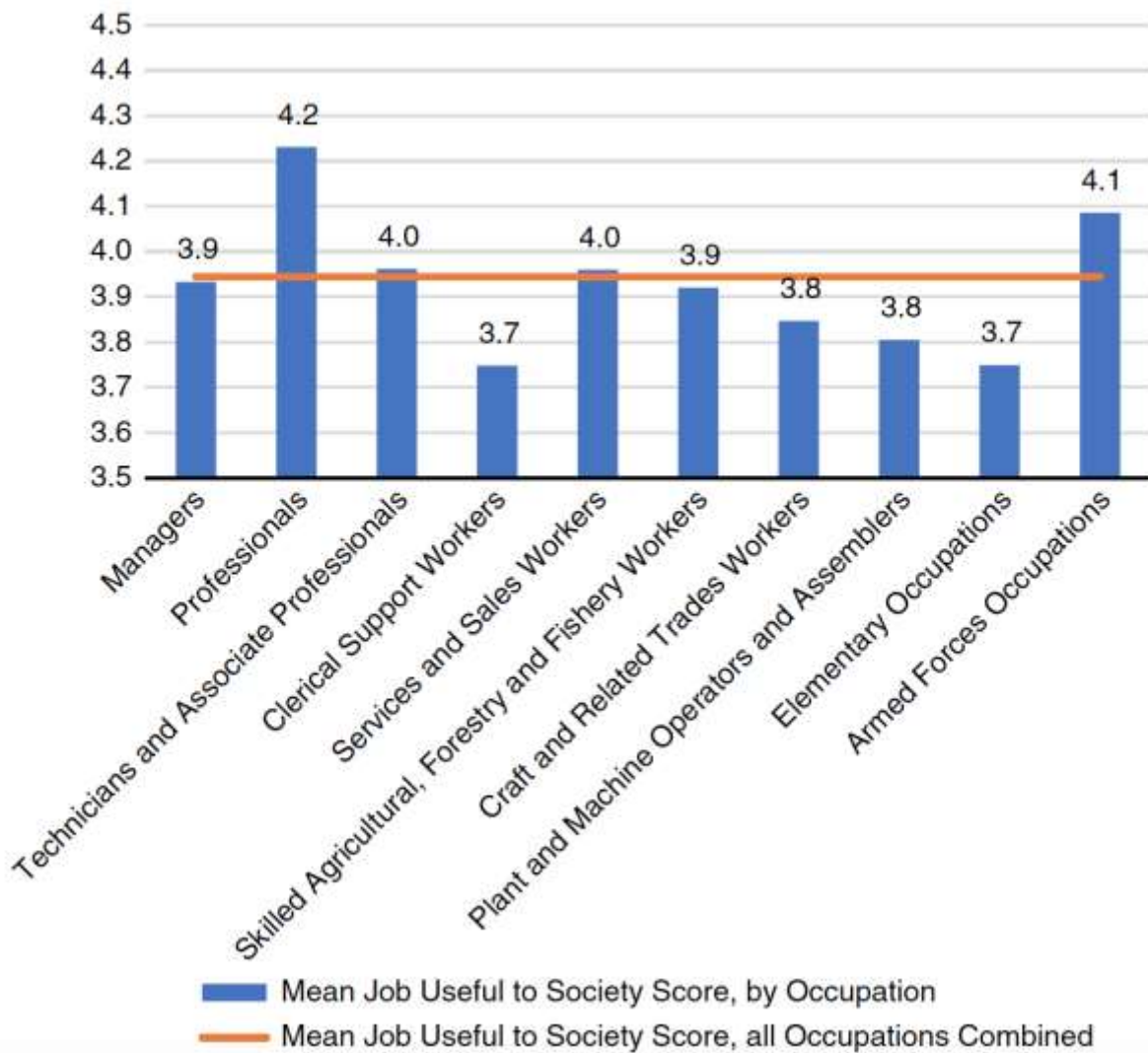
(See Westover, Andrade, & Peterson, 2019)

Occupations

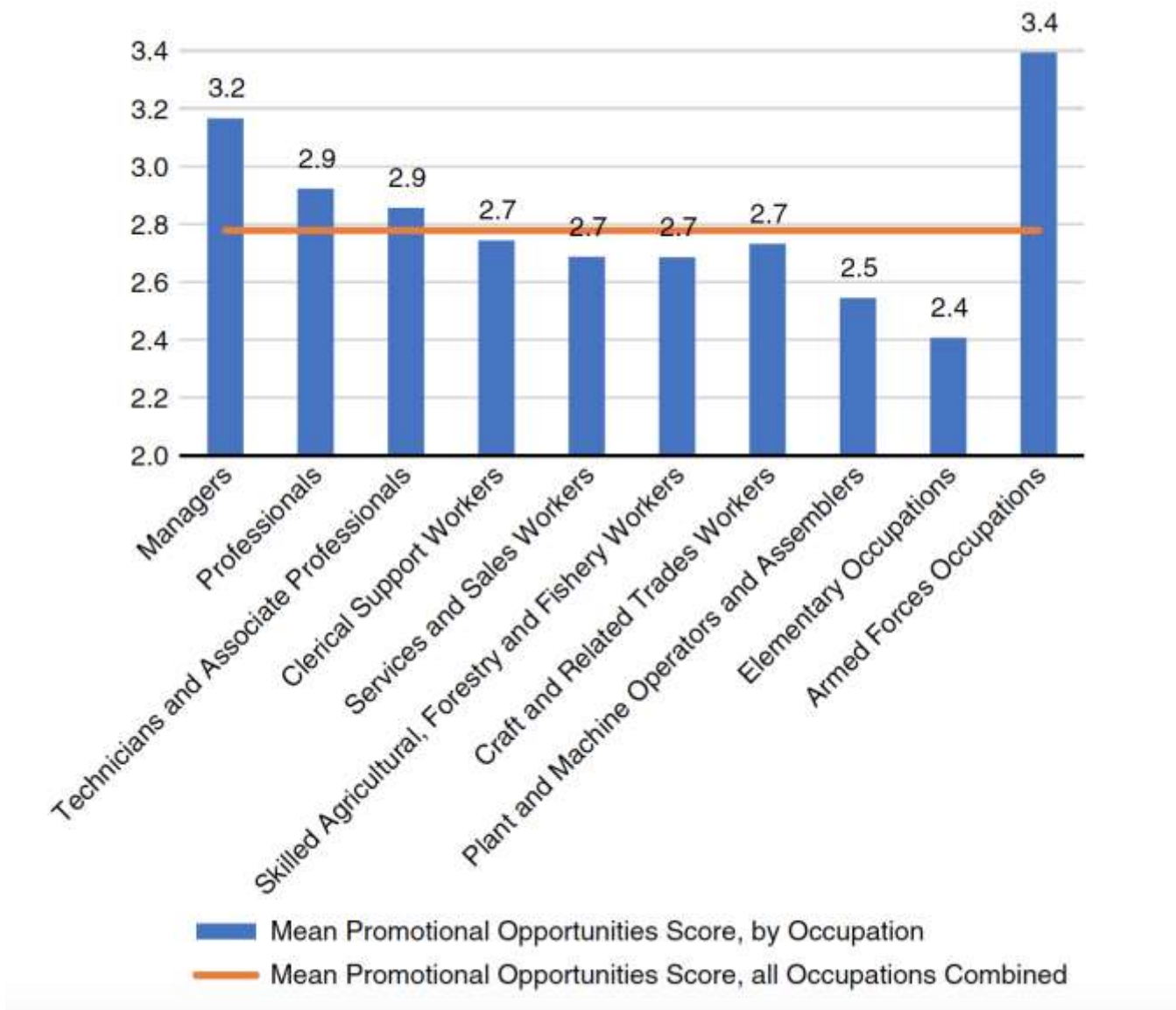
- Findings indicate more differences than similarities among countries and occupations.
- The highest job satisfaction levels are for *managerial* and *professional* jobs (means between 5.5 and 5.6 on a scale of 1-7).
- *Clerical support workers, armed forces occupations, plant and machine operators and assemblers* and those in *elementary occupations* have the lowest average job satisfaction scores (means between 5.0 and 5.2 on a scale of 1-7).



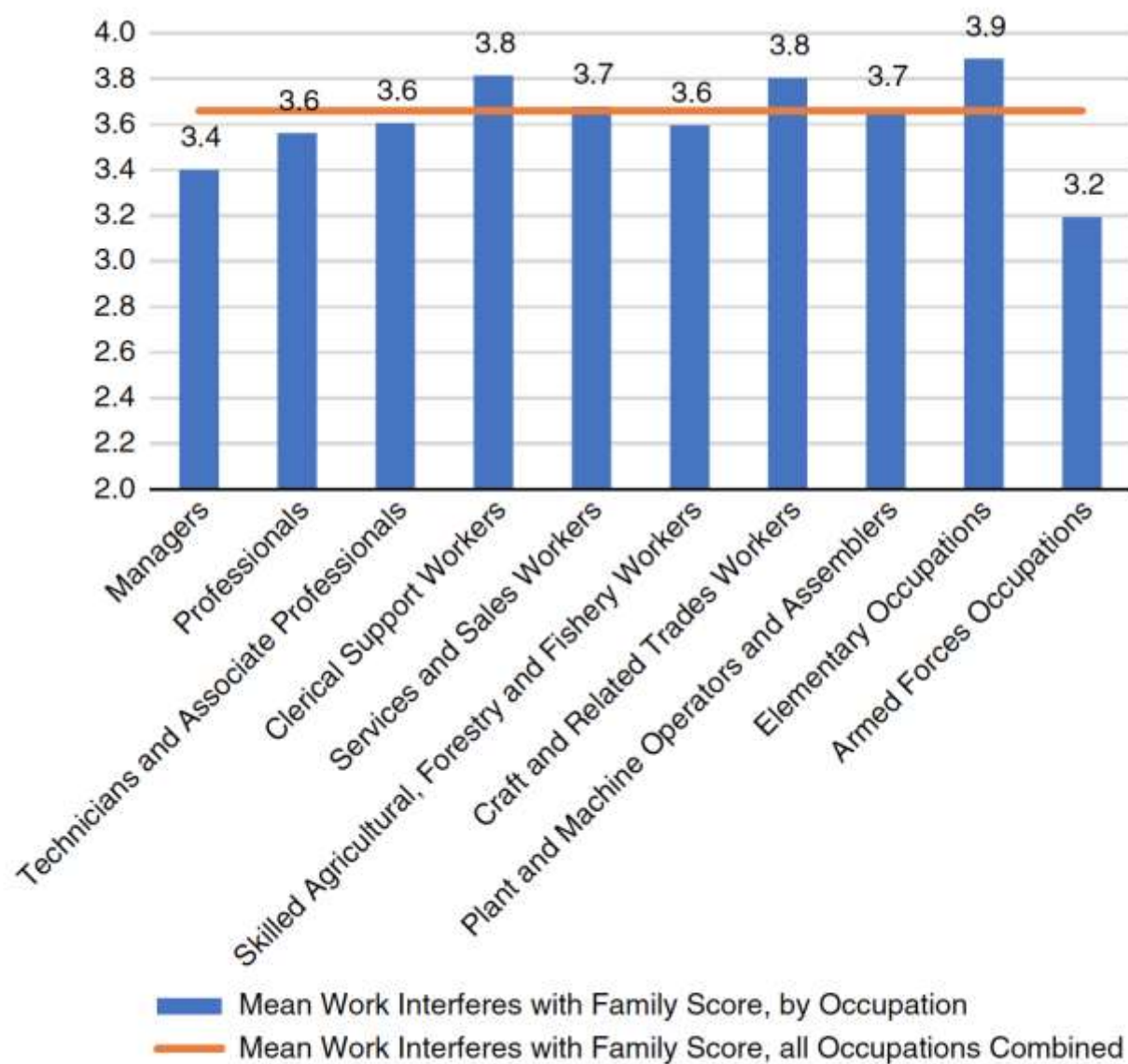
- Employees in *professional* and *armed forces* occupations tend to see their jobs as being useful to society more so than employees in *clerical support* or *elementary* occupations.



- Employees in *armed forces* occupations and *managerial* jobs see the greatest promotional opportunities, while those in *plant and machine operators and assemblers* and *elementary occupations* (e.g., cleaners, laborers, service workers) perceive the lowest promotional opportunities.



- Employees in *armed forces* occupations and *managerial* jobs have fewer concerns with work interfering with family, while those in *craft and related trades*, *clerical support* and *elementary occupations* report the highest levels of work interfering with family.

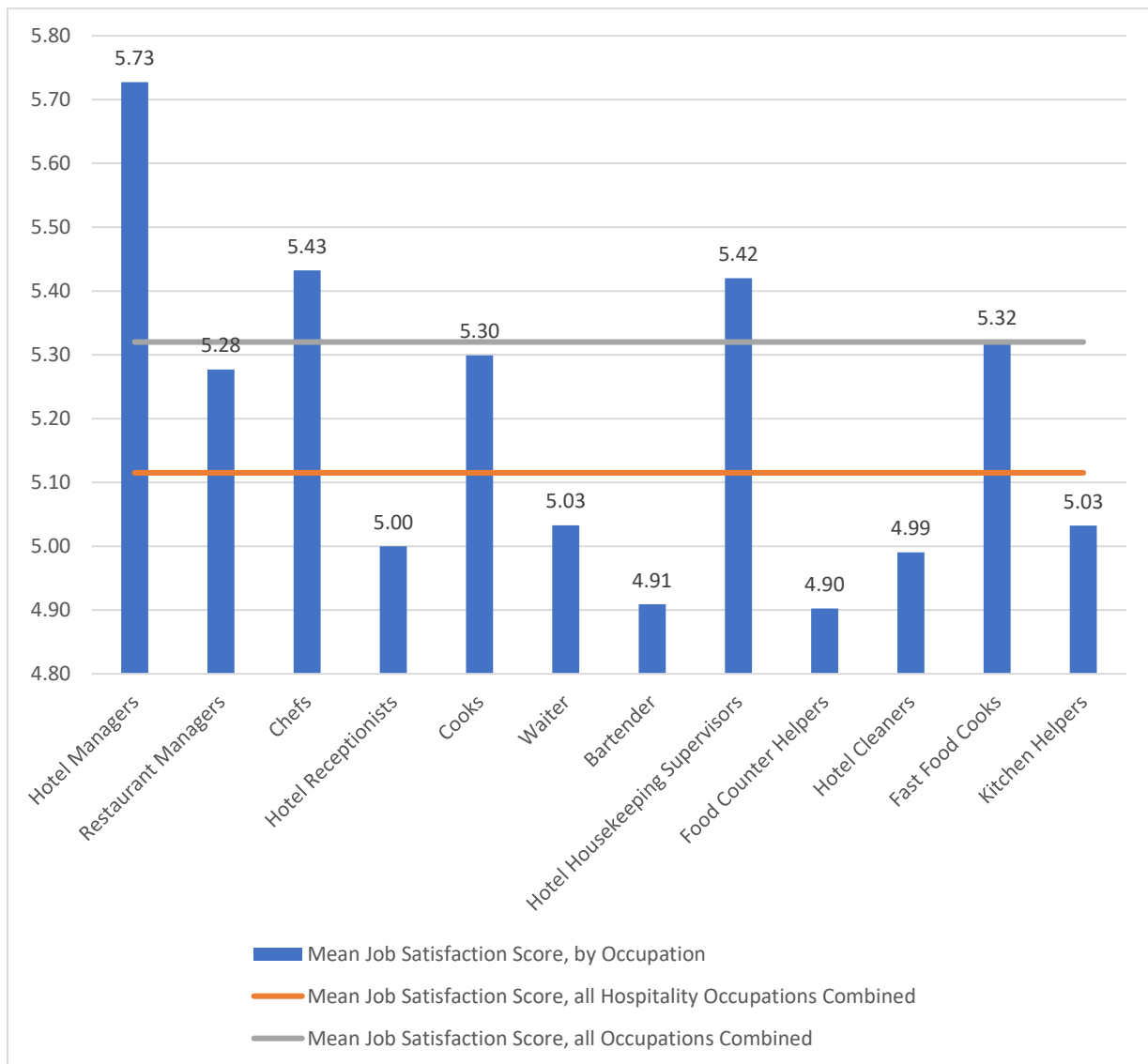


- Managers must consider how to improve job satisfaction for workers in occupational categories with low levels of job satisfaction by—
 - Adopting strategies such as flexible work environments (e.g. flexible scheduling and working from home).
 - Creating opportunities for advancement by providing training, coaching, or mentoring to assist employees in acquiring additional skills and build their capacity for supervisory or managerial roles.

(See Andrade & Westover, 2019)

Hospitality Workers

- The hospitality industry is invested in the job satisfaction of employees due to the challenges of hiring and retaining productive employees and because happy employees equate to happy guests.
- The role of work relations and work-life balance in hospitality jobs is more central to job satisfaction than for all other occupations.
- The highest job satisfaction levels for hospitality workers are for hotel managers (5.73 on a scale of 1 to 7); several hospitality occupations have a mean job satisfaction scores in the 5.2 to 5.4 range with the overall worldwide mean at 5.32. Bartenders, food counter helpers, hotel cleaners, hotel receptionists, waiters, and kitchen helpers have the lowest mean job satisfaction scores (between 4.91 to 5.03).



- Working weekends has a significant impact on job satisfaction for hospitality workers, while physical effort, contact with others, and working from home are not significant factors.

- For hotel housekeeper supervisors, the primary indicator of job satisfaction is not having work interfere with family.
- Being harassed or discriminated against at work has a strong, negative impact on job satisfaction for food counter helpers and hotel receptionists.
- Significantly lower mean scores for hospitality employees compared to other employees in all other sectors raises the question as to why an industry experiencing global growth is so low in employee job satisfaction.
- The following need to be considered—
 - Work-life balance and intrinsic factors such as interesting work and work being useful to society; what can employers do to mitigate work-life balance issues and increase intrinsic motivation?
 - Job security; what can employers do to increase employee trust and confidence in continued employment?
 - Health and well-being; how can employers decrease work-related stress and the toll of difficult physical labor?

(See Andrade, Miller, & Westover, 2020)

Private/Public Organizations

- There is a significant difference in mean job satisfaction scores between employees in public (5.41 on a scale of 1 to 7) and private sector (5.29) employees.
- Mean scores for *interesting work*, *helping others*, *job being useful to society*, and *job security* are all significantly higher for public sector employees than private sector employees.
- Mean scores for *having contact with others*, *working weekends*, and *having flexibility to deal with family matters* are significantly higher for public sector employees than for private sector employees. Only *physical effort* is significantly higher for private sector employees.
- *Helping others* has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction for public sector employees but not for those in the private sector, *job autonomy and job being useful to society* are significant factors for job satisfaction for private but not public sector employees, being *harassed at work* has a significant negative impact on job satisfaction for public but not private sector employees, and being *discriminated against at work* is a significant negative factor on job satisfaction for private but not public sector employees.
- Overall, job satisfaction is significantly higher for public workers compared to private workers and for specific aspects of work-life balance (e.g., work weekends, flexibility to deal with family matters), intrinsic motivation (e.g., interesting work, help others, job useful to society), extrinsic motivation (e.g., job security), and work relations (e.g., contact with others).
- Strategies are needed to improve work-life balance such as by implementing flexible schedules and family friendly policies; to ensure that work is perceived as meaningful, interesting, and useful and that jobs are secure; and to help employees make personal connections in the workplace.

(See Andrade & Westover, 2020b)

Profit/For-Profit Organizations

- The mean scores for job satisfaction for-profit and nonprofit employees (for-profit = 5.27 on a scale of 1 to 7; nonprofit = 5.39) are significantly different.
- The mean scores for intrinsic job characteristics such as *interesting work*, *helping others*, and *job being useful to society* are significantly higher for nonprofit than for-profit workers; mean scores for the extrinsic factor of *job security* is also significantly higher for nonprofit than for-profit employees.
- The mean scores for *contact with others*, *working weekends*, and *flexibility to deal with family matters* are also significantly higher for nonprofit employees than for for-profit employees. Only *physical effort* is significantly higher for for-profit employees.
- *Helping others* has a positive significant impact on job satisfaction for nonprofit employees but not for-profit employees; *autonomy*, *job being useful to society*, and *contact with others* are significant predictors of job satisfaction for-profit employees but not nonprofit employees.
- These findings contradict previous research, which indicates that factors such as autonomy, contributing to society, and connecting with others are more salient to job satisfaction for nonprofit workers than for-profit workers.
- The study reveals more commonalities than differences in job satisfaction factors for workers in for-profit and nonprofit organizations across countries, perhaps because workers seek environments aligned to their values and preferences.
- Managers need to consider how to encourage both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as enhance work-life balance and work relations in order to realize the benefits of a satisfied workforce. Autonomy, schedule flexibility, and task variety all lead to motivation, and consequently, to innovation, creativity, and improved performance.



(See Andrade & Westover, 2020a)

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