

## CAREER CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN SATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS

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**Purpose:** The aim of this study is to create a characterisation of the careers of women satisfied with their work.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The quantitative study was conducted by survey (CAWI) using an online questionnaire on a sample of 517 women. The questionnaire included single and multiple choice, open-ended questions. The survey lasted 9 months (February-October 2022) and included economically active women working in medium or large enterprises in south-eastern Poland. Responses were elicited through a 'snowball' effect and invitations to participate in the survey sent to organisations meeting the criteria. Statistical analysis included descriptive characteristics and tests of intergroup comparisons.

**Findings:** On the basis of the research carried out and the results obtained, it is possible to indicate the characteristics of the professional career of a woman demonstrating satisfaction with her work. She is a woman aged 35, with children and living in the Małopolskie Voivodeship. She is employed as an independent specialist or holds an executive position in health care, services or financial activities and earns more than 10 500 PLN gross per month. She has significant professional experience gained in her previous work in three different organisations. Her professional career is of great importance to her and she ensures its regular development by taking courses to develop her hard skills and by training independently from her work in the organisation.

**Research limitations/implications:** The results refer only to the surveyed group, without the possibility of generalisation. The division of female respondents into groups according to job satisfaction may be a simplification that does not take into account the complexity of shades of satisfaction. The research covers only a fragment of the subject of job satisfaction among women, constituting an introduction to further research, e.g. broadening the scope of job satisfaction among women, referring to an aspect other than professional career, examining satisfaction in different regions of Poland or comparing results on a national scale. It would also be interesting to conduct an analogous study among men and analyse gender differences.

**Originality/value:** In view of such a diverse approach to the topic of job satisfaction, however, there are few Polish studies relating to the context of women's careers, set in the realities of the domestic labour market. Therefore, it seems justified to take up the topic of women's careers demonstrating job satisfaction discussed in the article.

**Keywords:** job satisfaction, career satisfaction, career, women's career.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

In today's world, job satisfaction plays a key role in both professional and personal lives, influencing overall happiness and mental health. As the labour market evolves, increasing attention is being paid to the quality of working life and how work fits into the wider life context of employees. Women who find satisfaction in their work are often better able to cope with challenges and are more successful in completing their tasks. Job satisfaction therefore becomes not only an end in itself, but also an important part of building a long-term career. The results of the Women in the Workplace 2023 report show that women who are satisfied with their work are more motivated to take on new challenges and pursue professional development. This attitude also fosters more effective and innovative teams, which ultimately leads to better performance for the organisation as a whole. Analysing the careers of women who are satisfied with their jobs provides insight into what elements of their careers are conducive to success and how they can be supported on their path to professional fulfilment.

Bourezg et al. (2024) studied job satisfaction among women in the Middle East. Yang and Choi (2022) devoted their study to the career orientation and life satisfaction of married women. The impact of race, gender identity and their interaction on career satisfaction was the focus of a study by Pattani et al. (2022). Subsequent researchers have focused on the impact of equity on female managers' perceptions of career prospects and job satisfaction across sectors (Suh, Hijal-Moghrabi, 2022) and women's developmental networks and career satisfaction (Chang et al., 2021). Yusuf and Farradina (2021) investigated the mediating role of social support in the relationship between responses to workplace bullying and job satisfaction among women, and Kurup et al. (2020) the mediating effects of factors influencing the job satisfaction of female academics in higher education. Patwardhan et al. (2018) studied the factors influencing career advancement and satisfaction of female managers in the Indian hospitality industry. The subject of Chu's (2018) study was work motivation and job-related satisfaction based on a comparison of perceptions of female police officers in Dubai and Taipei. Takawira (2018) analysed the role of career satisfaction-oriented characteristics in women's career development, and Arasu Balasubramanian and Lathabhavan (2018) linked women's beliefs about the glass ceiling to employee satisfaction.

In view of such a diverse approach to the topic of job satisfaction, however, there are few Polish studies relating to the context of women's careers, set in the realities of the domestic labour market. In view of this, it seems justified to take up the topic discussed in the article on the careers of women demonstrating job satisfaction. The aim of this study is to create characteristics of professional careers of women satisfied with their work. In view of such a goal, a research question was formulated referring to what characteristics the careers of women who are satisfied with their work have.

Job satisfaction is a key employee attitude affecting organisational performance. The systematic study of this phenomenon began less than 100 years ago. In the 1930s, at the Hawthorne Western Electric Company plant, a study was conducted on employee wellbeing, referred to as 'sentiment' or 'tone' (Kozusznik, 2007; Wright, Cropanzano, 2007). The term 'job satisfaction' emerged in the 1950s (Wright, 2006), becoming an important part of work and organisational psychology. There are many definitions of job satisfaction (Sowińska, 2014). Locke (1976) defined it as the result of perceiving work to enable the achievement of important values for the individual. Homburg and Stock (2004) describe it as the result of comparing the desired standard of the work environment with the actual one. Aguinis, Henle and Ostroff (2001) and Aydintan and Koc (2016) emphasise the emotional aspect of satisfaction, defining it as an affective response to a work situation. Bubble (2000) sees it as an affective response to tasks performed. Lewicka (2010) sees it as a positive attitude towards duties, colleagues and the work environment.

Job satisfaction includes cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects (Paliga, 2021). Rakowska and Maćik (2016) distinguish four aspects: physical working conditions, economic working conditions, interpersonal relationships and tasks and activities performed. In the Polish literature, the terms 'job satisfaction' and 'job satisfaction' are often used interchangeably, but the differences may relate to the duration of the experience. Judge and Klinger (2008) argue that the emotional component of satisfaction is short-lived, making it difficult to measure. Zalewska (2003) notes that researchers focus on the cognitive component, neglecting the emotional one. Job satisfaction is divided into general and specific levels. General refers to an individual's attitude towards work, while specific refers to the evaluation of a specific job factor (Sergiovanni, 1966; Zalewska, 2003; Wolowska, 2013). Factors influencing satisfaction include economic aspects, working conditions, interpersonal relationships and tasks performed (Miąsek et al., 2015). Satisfaction assessment should take into account the weight given to each aspect (Paliga, 2021).

Job satisfaction theories are divided into dispositional, situational and interactional theories (Judge et al., 2001). Dispositional theories examine the importance of individual characteristics such as positive and negative affectivity and the five-factor model of personality (Judge, Larsen, 2001). Situational theories focus on the role of organisational factors such as pay, promotion, relationships with colleagues, supervision, recognition, working conditions and management (Smith, Kendall, Hulin, 1969; Locke, 1976; Mendoza, Maldonado, 2014). Management practices and managerial behaviours, such as social support and resources, are important for satisfaction (Brown, Peterson, 1993; Mendoza, Maldonado, 2014). Nguyen et al. (2003) indicate that satisfaction depends not only on absolute income but also on the benchmark. Factors affecting satisfaction include job stability, psychological contract, promotion opportunities, participation in training, working conditions and autonomy (Guest, 2004; Chi, Gursoy, 2009; Squires et al., 2015). Haffer (2015) proposes a model in which organisational capability leads to job satisfaction, which results in organisational commitment among

employees. These potentials include leadership, communication, trust, employee rewards and development, working conditions, the role of managers, ethical standards, interpersonal relationships and talent management. Interactional theories analyse the fit between the individual and the work environment (Locke, 1976; Mottaz, 1986; Muchinsky, Monahan, 1987; Kristof, 1996). Job satisfaction results from the work values important to the individual and provided by the organisation. Supplemental fit refers to the similarity of goals and values, and complementary fit refers to the mutual complementarity of resources (Muchinsky, Monahan, 1987). Mismatches lead to tension and lower job satisfaction.

Career satisfaction reflects how an employee evaluates his or her work situation and is a subjective response to various aspects of his or her job, expressing a sense of personal career success (Marzec, 2011, 2018). Gattiker and Larwood (1986) distinguished several dimensions of career satisfaction, such as success related to position, interpersonal relationships, hierarchy, finances and overall life success. The assessment of this satisfaction is influenced by both contextual and individual factors. Individual factors include expectations, career perceptions, personality traits, age, gender, education level, work experience and life situation (Ng et al., 2005; Wieck et al., 2009). Career satisfaction is also closely related to objective career success, measured by, among other things, salary, position and number of promotions (Marzec, 2018). Key contextual factors influencing career satisfaction include organisational conditions such as organisational atmosphere and culture, career development opportunities, support from superiors and organisational resources (Ng et al., 2005).

Research among business sector employees in Greece and China has shown that career satisfaction is also influenced by professional networking, as it creates opportunities for success both inside and outside the organisation (Bozionelos, Wang, 2006). Marzec (2018) conducted a study on the impact of professional networks on career satisfaction of employees of municipal and community cultural centres. The results of this research showed that there was a positive relationship between professional networks, both internal and external, and career satisfaction. In particular, professional contacts outside the organisation were found to have a strong relationship with job satisfaction.

Zalewska (2009) indicates that gender influences satisfaction with relationships with colleagues, perceived pleasure and tension at work. Men are more satisfied with their relationships with colleagues, feel more pleasure at work and feel less intense and less tension than women (Warat, Kowalska, 2018). Sedlak & Sedlak's National Job Satisfaction Survey (2022) shows that men are slightly more satisfied with their jobs than women, with both groups declaring the same level of engagement at work. The biggest differences concern remuneration, cooperation with the supervisor, autonomy, communication and working conditions, which men rated better. Men declared lower levels of job stress. Women did not rate any aspect of work better than men. Andrade, Westover and Peterson (2019) point out that some studies show that women are more satisfied with their jobs than men, although others suggest no significant differences. Key aspects of satisfaction include extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, work

relationships and work-life balance. Men place more emphasis on extrinsic rewards, which can reduce their satisfaction. Women derive more satisfaction from working in a more senior position, staying in the position longer and feeling more pride in their promotion. Relationships at work are another factor. Research by Kessler, Spector and Gavin (2012) found that female professors in the US and Canada experience greater job satisfaction when it is based on teaching rather than research. Women are more satisfied when the workplace is dominated by women, which may be due to a lower risk of unfair treatment. Work-life balance is also important, especially for women who have to balance work and family life. Despite speculation of higher satisfaction for women, Andrade, Westover and Peterson (2019) show that there are no consistent gender differences in job satisfaction. Relationships at work are more important for women, while men value work-life balance more. Research by Vladisavljević and Perugini (2019) explains the gender paradox of job satisfaction, where women declared higher satisfaction despite poorer working conditions. This is due to lower job expectations. Women are more satisfied with their jobs than men, although exceptions occur in Central and Eastern Europe, where men report higher satisfaction. Differences disappear among women growing up in countries with gender equality. Research confirms that women are more satisfied in work environments where women predominate, while their satisfaction decreases in 'typically male' jobs.

## 2. Methods

In order to collect empirical data, a quantitative study was conducted using a survey method, the CAWI technique. This study used an online survey questionnaire, created using the Google Forms platform, which used single-choice and multiple-choice questions and an open-ended question format. Some of the questions used a five-point Likert scale, consisting of the answers: "definitely not", "rather not", "hard to say", "rather yes", "definitely yes". The survey consisted of a section of questions on job satisfaction and a metric. The survey was conducted over a nine-month period (February 2022 - October 2022), in the form of disseminating a relevant link to the online survey on the Google Forms platform. In the first instance, organisations and the women working in them were targeted, to which the author had direct access. Then, using a 'snowball' effect, the women taking part in the survey were asked to continue to share the survey with further organisations, thereby inviting further respondents to participate. At the same time, the author popularised the survey through e-mails containing an invitation to take part in the survey, sent to organisations meeting the established sample selection criteria. Organisations were selected on the basis of rankings of medium and large companies, prepared by such portals as: <https://nowiny24.pl/> (Golden Hundred of Companies 2021),

<https://www.obserwatorium.malopolska.pl/> (List of 500), <https://www.forbes.pl/> (Forbes Diamonds 2021).

The research sample consisted of economically active women ( $n = 517$ ), currently working in medium or large enterprises, living in two voivodeships: Małopolskie or Podkarpackie. The choice of voivodeships was dictated by their economic diversity, socio-cultural conditions and economic differences. Podkarpackie and Małopolskie Voivodeships are located in the southern part of Poland, which is characterised by a diverse economic structure and level of development. In addition, the choice of Podkarpackie and Małopolskie Voivodeships was also due to the scarcity of previous research on job satisfaction and women's careers in these regions.

Once the empirical material was collected, the data was statistically analysed using descriptive characteristics and intergroup comparison tests - the variables analysed in the study were of two types: quantitative and categorical. Quantitative variables were understood as all responses given by respondents on a five-point Likert scale, and their characteristics included the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, median, first and third quartile values, and minimum and maximum values. This part of the analysis began by dividing the female respondents into two groups depending on their sense of job satisfaction. On the basis of the items related to this question, only those women who answered 'rather yes' or 'definitely yes' in each of the satisfaction-related items were included in the satisfaction group. Such women, satisfied with each of the surveyed aspects of their work, accounted for 21.6% of the surveyed group. After comparisons were made, those results that proved to be statistically significant were selected for presentation and discussion.

### **3. Results**

The women who were satisfied with their jobs tended to be older - their average age was 35.5 years, while the average age of the other group was 33 years. Older women may have more work experience, which influences their greater job satisfaction. Experience can lead to better positions, higher salaries and a greater sense of confidence in their duties. They were also more likely to live in the Małopolskie Voivodeship (67%) than in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship (33%). Higher satisfaction among women from the Małopolskie Voivodeship may be due to better working conditions, greater opportunities for professional development or a better labour market in this region compared to the Podkarpackie Voivodeship. The vast majority of women declaring satisfaction with their work had children (46.2%), while among women dissatisfied with their work, 27.8% had children. Women with children may feel more satisfied with their job if their job allows them to reconcile work and family life, which may be due to more flexible working hours, employer support or better social benefits.

Women declaring a gross monthly salary above PLN 10,500 were more often satisfied with their work (15.1% vs. 2.3%). Women who were dissatisfied with their jobs were more often those earning less than PLN 4500 gross per month. The remuneration amounts that least differentiated the level of job satisfaction among the respondents (with a slight predominance towards dissatisfied women) were the range  $> \text{PLN } 6,000 \leq 7,500$  gross per month (9.4% vs. 9.9%). Higher pay is a strong motivator and can lead to greater job satisfaction. Women earning over PLN 10,500 gross may feel more appreciated and motivated to work.

Women who were satisfied with their work more often held top management positions (7.1% vs. 1.9%), and were more often independent employees or specialists (31.3% vs. 22.7%). Women who were dissatisfied with their work more often worked in executive positions - white-collar (48.4% vs. 38.4%) and blue-collar (8.1% vs. 4%). Women in higher management and specialist positions may feel greater job satisfaction due to greater autonomy, prestige and decision-making opportunities.

Analyzing the organization's activity profile, it can be indicated that women who were satisfied with their work were most often employed in health care and social assistance (20.6%), services (16%), and financial and insurance activities (13.2%). Women who were not satisfied with their jobs most often worked in public administration (19.6%) and education (16%). Industries such as health care or finance may offer better working conditions, more satisfying responsibilities, salary levels and greater opportunities for career development compared to public administration or education.

Women who were satisfied with their job changed their job more often. During their professional activity, they worked on average in 3 different organizations, while those who were dissatisfied worked in 2 different organizations. Women who changed their workplace more often could find more suitable conditions for themselves, which could contribute to their greater satisfaction.

For 91.5% of women who were satisfied with their jobs, their professional career was important or definitely important. Its absolute unimportance was more often declared by women who were dissatisfied with their job (4.4% vs. 0.9%). For women who value their careers, job satisfaction is often higher because they are more committed to their work and strive to achieve their career goals.

Regardless of the level of job satisfaction, all women declared taking actions aimed at developing their professional careers, but these actions were different for each group. Women who were satisfied with their work more often took up courses on developing hard skills (67.9% vs. 46.8%) and took up training conducted independently of their work in the organization (47.2% vs. 34%). Women developing hard skills can increase their value on the labor market, which leads to greater opportunities for promotion and salary increases. Their effectiveness in their current job may also increase, which benefits both them and their employers. Women undertaking training regardless of work can develop skills that are valued in the labor market, which increases their competitiveness and career development

opportunities. Dissatisfied women were more likely to learn foreign languages (39.5% vs 26.4%) and take up internships abroad (5.5% vs 0%). Women learning foreign languages can gain new employment opportunities, both at home and abroad. This can lead to greater career mobility and job opportunities in international companies. Internships abroad can open the door to new, international professional experiences. Women who decide to pursue internships abroad can gain valuable skills and contacts that will help them in their further careers.

#### **4. Discussion**

The research results indicate that women who were satisfied with their work were older (average age 35.5 years) compared to the dissatisfied group (average age 33 years). Older women, with more professional experience, are more likely to achieve higher positions, which affects their job satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the literature that highlights work experience as a key factor influencing job satisfaction (Ng et al., 2005; Wieck et al., 2009). As employees increase in experience, they are often promoted, which increases their compensation and sense of value at work (Gattiker, Larwood, 1986). The research noted that women from the Małopolskie Voivodeship were more often satisfied with their work (67%) than those from the Podkarpackie Voivodeship (33%). Better working conditions and the labor market in Małopolska may result in higher professional satisfaction. Similar results were obtained by Suh and Hijal-Moghrabi (2022), who found that the regional context and working conditions have a significant impact on the perception of job satisfaction. Women with children were more satisfied with their jobs (46.2%) than those who did not (27.8%). A job that allows you to reconcile work and family life may increase satisfaction. This observation is consistent with the findings of Yang and Choi (2022), who also pointed out the importance of work flexibility and employer support for married women. Women earning more than PLN 10,500 gross were more satisfied with their jobs (15.1% vs 2.3%), while dissatisfied women more often earned less than PLN 4500. Salary as a strong motivating factor influences job satisfaction, which is consistent with the literature that emphasizes the importance of salary for job satisfaction (Nguyen et al., 2003; Chi, Gursoy, 2009). Women in senior management and specialist positions were more satisfied with their work (7.1% vs 1.9% and 31.3% vs 22.7%). The greater autonomy and prestige of these positions contributes to a higher level of satisfaction, as confirmed by the research of Suh and Hijal-Moghrabi (2022) and Judge et al. (2001). The most satisfied women worked in health care, services and finance, while the dissatisfied women worked in public administration and education. Better working conditions in sectors such as health care and finance can lead to greater satisfaction, as reflected in the literature (Bozionelos, Wang, 2006; Marzec, 2018). Women who were satisfied with their work

were more likely to change employers (an average of 3 different organizations), which allowed them to find more appropriate working conditions. Takawira's (2018) research also highlights the importance of career mobility for career satisfaction. For 91.5% of satisfied women, their professional career was important, which indicates greater commitment to work. Women who value their careers are more committed and satisfied with their work, which is confirmed by research by Marzec (2018) and Wright and Cropanzano (2007). Satisfied women were more likely to take courses on hard skills (67.9% vs. 46.8%) and work-independent training (47.2% vs. 34%). This increases their value in the labor market and opportunities for advancement, which is consistent with the literature on the impact of professional development on job satisfaction (Squires et al., 2015; Paliga, 2021). The research results are largely consistent with the literature on the subject, confirming the importance of age, salary, working conditions, professional mobility and the importance of professional career for job satisfaction. Some aspects, such as the importance of work flexibility and employer support for women with children, are also confirmed in the literature. Differences in job satisfaction across industries and the impact of job change on satisfaction are also consistent with previous research findings.

## 5. Summary

Based on the research conducted and the results obtained, it is possible to indicate the characteristics of the professional career of a woman who shows satisfaction with her work. She is a 35-year-old woman with children and living in the Małopolskie Voivodeship. She is employed as an independent specialist or holds a position among the management staff, in health care, services or financial activities and earns over PLN 10,500 gross per month. He has significant professional experience gained in his previous work in three different organizations. Her professional career is very important to her, which is why she takes care of its regular development by taking courses developing her hard skills and training conducted independently of her work in the organization.

Professional experience, region of residence, having children, remuneration, job position, industry of employment, frequent changes of workplace, importance of professional career and development activities undertaken - all these elements are important characteristics of the professional careers of women satisfied with their work. Employers who take these factors into account can create more favorable working conditions, attracting and retaining satisfied employees, which ultimately contributes to better organizational efficiency and stability.

The research conducted is not free from limitations. First of all, it should be noted that the obtained results can only be applied to the studied group, without generalization. Dividing the respondents into two groups based on their sense of job satisfaction may introduce some simplifications. This does not take into account the different shades of satisfaction and

dissatisfaction, which may be more complex. The examined aspects do not exhaust the topic of women's job satisfaction, but constitute only a part of it, which can be treated as an introduction to the full research. However, this limitation indicates a possible direction for future research, which could focus on expanding the scope of job satisfaction among women or relating it to an aspect other than professional career. It could also be interesting to examine women's job satisfaction in other regions of Poland and compare the results obtained or conduct research on the entire country. It also seems interesting to conduct a similar study among men and examine differences in job satisfaction resulting from the gender aspect.

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