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The Influence of Age and Gender on Work-Life Balance and Job Satisfaction among Department Chairs at Academic Health Centers

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Abstract

Academic health centers provide education in health professions and patient care, and department chairs represent a key leadership group within these organizations. This retrospective study examined the factors of age and gender and their relationship with job satisfaction and work-life balance among department chairs at academic health centers within the northeastern region of the United States. Data analysis from 101 department chairs at academic health centers showed no statistically significant differences in mean scores for overall job satisfaction or for satisfaction with work-life balance by gender. Age demonstrated a positive association with overall job satisfaction and work-life balance, as increasing age was associated with overall job satisfaction. Job dissatisfaction was associated with age, not gender. Findings emphasize the need for interventions to enhance the retention and well-being of department chairs.

Keywords

Job Satisfaction, Gender, Age, Work-Life Balance, Department Chair

1. Introduction

Department chairs are important and influential stakeholders at academic health centers (AHCs). Department chairs can shape their department, including faculty and staff, and they play a crucial role in the larger world of healthcare, research, and education. Department chairs and faculty at AHCs are confronted with the challenge of applying for and receive grant funding, participating in clinical activity, teaching, completing administrative duties, and maintaining scholarly productivity while attempting to improve subjective well-being and

striving to achieve work-life balance (WLB) (Bonilha et al., 2019). Researchers have determined there is a reciprocal relationship between subjective well-being, which influences one's WLB, and job satisfaction (Berglund et al., 2016; Bowling et al., 2010).

Bowling et al. (2010) conducted meta-analytic regression analyses that tested the causal relationship between job satisfaction and subjective well-being. It was determined subjective well-being was significantly related to subsequent job satisfaction ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$) and job satisfaction was significantly related to subsequent subjective well-being ($\beta = .006$, $p < .01$). Therefore, individuals may have some aspects of the job they were not fully satisfied with; however, their overall job satisfaction remains positive which yields a positive relationship with their happiness and life satisfaction (Bowling et al., 2010). Department chairs at AHCs have a supportive role in hampering dissatisfaction among faculty while sustaining their own job satisfaction. Previous studies have examined the relationship between gender and job satisfaction; however, there is a gap in the literature investigating the relationship between gender, age, job satisfaction, WLB, and the likelihood of department chairs to step down.

To shed light on the experiences of department chairs across different demographic characteristics, this study uses archival data to further investigate and understand the multiple factors associated with job satisfaction and WLB of department chairs at AHCs. Understanding the relationship between gender, age, job satisfaction, and WLB may lead to the development of interventions that can be utilized by institutional management to improve job satisfaction in department chairs. These interventions may also result in decreased burnout, serve to encourage professional growth, improve retention, and enhance overall function of the department at AHCs for the chairs, faculty, and staff. We conducted a retrospective study to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between gender and job satisfaction of department chairs at academic health centers?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between age, job satisfaction, and work-life balance in department chairs at academic health centers?

2. Literature Review

Department chairs have multifaceted roles at AHCs. Each role has distinct expectations and job duties that affect the department chair's subjective well-being and overall job satisfaction. Much of the literature on AHC faculty in the areas of WLB and job satisfaction evaluates all faculty, early-career or mid-career academicians (Crawford et al., 2023; Ip et al., 2020). Few studies have focused solely on the experience of department chairs. WLB is measured by one's ability to balance professional duties and personal or leisure time to achieve harmony in emotional, physical, and spiritual health (Simmons, 2012). Both gender and age may play a role in the perception of WLB among managers. Thrasher et al. (2022) investigated the intersection of gender and age on WLB of managers, with males reporting sharp increases in WLB after age 50, and females showing

relatively consistent levels of WLB, regardless of age.

Bandura's social cognitive theory and Hagedorn's conceptual framework of faculty job satisfaction provided the theoretical framework that guided this study. Bandura (1986, 1991, 2018) stated that individuals utilize self-reflection to evaluate and control their experiences and thought processes. Self-reflection and evaluation are influenced by self-efficacy which may have a role in how academic department chairs solve problems, handle stress and burnout, and remain in their positions as leaders. Hagedorn (2000) proposed a conceptual framework to understand and categorize the factors contributing to the level of job satisfaction in faculty. The model hypothesized that job satisfaction is affected by the influence of triggers and mediators.

Triggers are comprised of important events in one's life that may be related or unrelated to one's job, such as changes in life stage or a change in rank or tenure (Hagedorn, 2000). Mediators are variables or situations that create an interaction effect by influencing the relationship between other variables or situations (Hagedorn, 2000). Mediators represent the complexity of job satisfaction and are further divided into the categories of motivators and hygienes, demographics, and environmental conditions. A worker's level of job satisfaction arises from a confluence of existing triggers and mediators and is depicted along a continuum ranging from disengagement at one end to job appreciation and active engagement at the other end. Job acceptance/tolerance falling midway. The influence of the demographic mediator of gender on faculty job satisfaction has been well researched over the past few decades and though there has been progress, gender inequity in terms of higher-level representation persists in academia, particularly in science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), and medicine (Gibbs et al., 2014; Plank-Bazinet et al., 2017; Spoon et al., 2023).

A growing body of research has identified institutional and personal factors that may contribute to the perceived WLB of faculty. Personal factors include age, gender, race, relationship/marital status, family status, and faculty satisfaction with work (Baptiste et al., 2017; Crawford et al., 2023; Denson et al., 2018; Denson & Szelényi, 2022; Spoon et al., 2023; Szelényi & Denson, 2019). Crawford et al. (2023) studied nursing faculty and found there was a moderate level of interference from work on personal life, with no significant relationships for age or gender. However, the authors found that Generation X had the highest level of intrusion of personal life on work (Crawford et al., 2023). Female academic surgical faculty were more likely than their male counterparts to be partnered with a full-time working spouse and to be primarily responsible for managing their households, which included activities such as childcare planning, meal planning, and grocery shopping (Baptiste et al., 2017). Delegation of household tasks to family and hired help, and a strong support system from family, friends and employees were identified as factors required to sustain an academic medical institution chair position as a woman, though participants reported that focus on the position becomes a priority over family, friends, and hobbies (Dunn,

2018).

Institutional factors include culture, institutional type, rank and discipline (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2015). Seventy-five percent of faculty reported higher academic rank a constant source of satisfaction at AHCs (Nausheen et al., 2018). Faculty and chairs also reported the lack of recognition for completing job responsibilities affected their job satisfaction and played a role in their decision to depart from their organizations (Girod et al., 2017; Nausheen et al., 2018; Reed, 2006). The changing nature of healthcare disciplines may add to the complexity of professorship in AHCs. The need to stay current with advances in the field was noted to be a specific challenge for professors in professional fields, such as those in the health professions. Wolf-Wendel & Ward (2015) reported these sentiments were expressed by faculty members in medical fields, such as nursing, where faculty are tasked with staying current on clinical procedures to keep students up to date on present-day interventions.

Spoon et al. (2023) found that workplace climate rather than WLB contributed to a desire of female faculty to leave a position. In both STEM and non-STEM fields, the investigators found that the odds of women faculty feeling pushed out of faculty positions was 44% higher than men. The most frequently cited reason for women leaving academia was related to workplace climate; on the other hand, men most frequently cited professional reasons, though workplace climate was also an influential factor (Spoon et al., 2023). Male pharmaceutical faculty were more likely than female faculty to report being extremely satisfied with their current job, and more likely to report being extremely satisfied with their WLB, as well as score lower on a standardized stress measure relative to their female counterparts (Ip et al., 2020). Webber & Rogers (2018) reported gender differences in academia persist, although more subtle in some instances, and equity has yet to be achieved. Webber & Rogers (2018) also indicated that non-tenured track women were more likely to report work satisfaction than tenured women, and older male faculty were more likely to report dissatisfaction in comparison to younger male faculty.

Age plays a central role in one's relationship with work and work identities. For example, it has been documented that age affects the social construction, reflexive evaluation, and definitive evaluation of one's job-proffered identities (Pace & Sciotto, 2021). In this study we explore how age affects a chair's experiences at work, arguing that for most, their job looks and is experienced differently as they get older. The purpose of this retrospective study was to determine if there are relationships between age and gender with WLB and job satisfaction among department chairs to assist in the retention of leadership at AHCs.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

Data from a previous study that predicted burnout from a linear combination of personal and cultural factors for department chairs at fifteen AHCs, in the

northeast region of the United States: New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania were assessed for this study (Antoine, 2022). A convenient sample of department chairs from the multiple fields of medicine, physician assistant, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, optometry, public health, respiratory therapy, recreational therapy, diagnostic medical imaging, medical informatics, and graduate studies were the target population.

3.2. Procedures

The secondary analysis conducted for this study qualified for exemption under Category 4 by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at State University of New York Downstate Health Sciences University and received IRB approval (Protocol Number: 1990282-1). The original analysis was completed during the 2021-2022 academic year and used a 28-question survey, collected on Qualtrics, that entailed of the Maslach Burnout Index-Human Sciences Survey created by Maslach et al. (2016) and a survey created by Gabbe et al. (2002, 2018) (Antoine, 2022). Responses to seven questions from the survey were utilized for analysis in this study. These questions were chosen as they related to age, gender, levels of job satisfaction (current, one year ago, and five years ago), satisfaction with WLB, and the likelihood of academic department chairs to step down from their position. Self-reported responses from a total of 101 department chairs were included in our sample and categorized into three groups: dissatisfied, neutral, and satisfied by their Median Satisfaction Score (MSS) to investigate how gender and age (independent variables) affected job satisfaction and WLB (dependent variables). To make clear comparisons between participants who were satisfied and dissatisfied, participants with neutral MSS were excluded from further analysis. This was done under the assumption that individuals with a neutral MSS may have different motivations, behaviors, or outcomes than the others.

3.3. Data Analysis

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare differences between gender and job satisfaction and to understand whether attitudes towards job satisfaction differ based on gender. Kendall' Tau was utilized to understand the strength of the relationship between age, job satisfaction, and WLB. The relationship between age, gender, WLB, and the probability of dissatisfaction with their job was also analyzed. A logistic regression was performed to understand the strength of the relationship between age and gender, job satisfaction, WLB, and the likelihood of academic department chairs at AHCs stepping down. Data analysis was completed utilizing IBM SPSS software (Version 27).

4. Results

Four of the 101 participants of the original study preferred not to state their gender or did not answer, 43 participants identified as male, and 54 participants identified as female. There was also a non-binary/third gender category not selected by any of the participants. The ages of participants ranged from 34 to 72

with the mean age of M = 55.06. This study included 101 participants as one submission was made after data analysis and completion of the original study. According to the results of our investigation, gender did not exert a notable effect on job satisfaction attitudes within department chairs at AHCs ($p > .05$). Both males and females recorded satisfaction scores from somewhat dissatisfied to somewhat satisfied and had a median satisfaction score of 3. Female satisfaction scores ranged from 2 to 3 [somewhat dissatisfied to somewhat satisfied], while male scores ranged from 2.5 to 4 [satisfied to very satisfied], suggesting greater variability in satisfaction levels among male respondents compared to female respondents. Consequently, the Mann-Whitney U test affirmed the absence of a statistically significant difference in median satisfaction scores between the genders ($p > .34$).

Comparing the level of job satisfaction one year prior to data collection between genders, both females and males have the same median job satisfaction score of 3, suggesting that, on average, both genders reported similar levels of job satisfaction at that time. A p-value of .59 suggests that there was no statistically significant difference in job satisfaction levels one year prior to data collection between genders. However, female respondents had satisfaction scores ranging from somewhat dissatisfied to somewhat satisfied compared to male respondents who reported satisfaction scores ranging from somewhat dissatisfied to very satisfied.

Data related to the level of job satisfaction five years prior to data collection was analyzed using an independent-samples Mann-Whitney U test with a p-value of .36 suggested that there was no statistically significant difference in job satisfaction levels five years ago between genders. The middle 50% of both female and male respondents had satisfaction scores ranging from somewhat satisfied to very satisfied five years before. While females had a slightly lower median job satisfaction score compared to males, the difference was not statistically significant. The p-value suggests that any observed differences in job satisfaction between females and males five years prior to data collection could likely be due to random variation. In addition, this study also found statistically significant differences in perceptions of WLB between men and women, $p = .04$. This could indicate potential differences in how males and females manage their personal and professional lives and suggests that gender can be used as a variable of WLB satisfaction.

An independent-samples Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to analyze the data related to the likelihood of a department chair/department head/program lead stepping down within the next 1 to 2 years. Female respondents rated their likelihood of stepping down as likely to very likely. In contrast, the median likelihood score for males was 3, suggesting that, on average, males are somewhat less likely to step down from their current role within the next 1 to 2 years compared to their female counterparts. Male respondents rated their likelihood of stepping down as somewhat likely to very likely. Based on the results of the Mann-Whitney U test, there is no statistically significant difference in the likeli-

hood of stepping down as department chair/department head/program lead within the next 1 to 2 years between genders. However, there is a trend suggesting that females are more likely to consider stepping down compared to males, although this trend did not reach statistical significance in this study. Further investigation with a larger sample size might be warranted to confirm this trend.

Table 1. Job satisfaction by age.

Kendall's tau_b		Age	Composite (satisfied)
Age	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.224**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
	N	100	100
Satisfy_med	Correlation Coefficient	.224**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.
	N	100	100
What is your level of job satisfaction currently?	Correlation Coefficient	.184*	.819**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	<.001
	N	99	99
What was your level of job satisfaction one year ago?	Correlation Coefficient	.182*	.821**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	<.001
	N	100	100
What was your level of job satisfaction five years ago?	Correlation Coefficient	.153*	.345**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	<.001
	N	100	100
How satisfied are you with the balance between your personal and professional life (i.e., work-life balance)?	Correlation Coefficient	.191*	.624**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	<.001
	N	100	100
What is the likelihood that you will step down as department chair/department head/program lead within the next 1 to 2 years? (clean)	Correlation Coefficient	−.145	.256**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.062	.002
	N	100	100

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). Correlation Coefficients shows you the strength of the correlation: 0 - .19 = very weak; .2 - .39 = weak; .40 - .59 = moderate; .6 - .79 = strong; .8 - 1 = very strong.

The results of the Kendall's tau_b analysis corroborated an important and very strong correlation between age and job satisfaction, tau_b = .224, $p < .01$ (see Table 1); the older one is, the more satisfied they are with their work. The relationships between age and other variables (except life-work balance satisfaction) were all positive, but they were all weak-significant. This implies that age has an intertwined influence on all those variables, but this correlation is far weaker than that with job satisfaction. A significant discovery of this study was the correlation between who were likely to step down and how satisfied they

were with their jobs. It was determined that department chairs who considered stepping down had significantly lower (tau_b = .145, $p > .05$). Although the correlation was weak, there was a slight trend that suggested younger individuals may be more likely to consider stepping down compared to older individuals.

To examine the impact of age and gender on job satisfaction, logistic regression was performed. Results demonstrated that even after holding age constant, department chair's age increased the odds of being dissatisfied. When holding gender constant, there was no significant odds difference for males and females. The results of the logistic regression revealed that when age is held constant, the odds of being dissatisfied increase marginally by .7% for every one-year increase in age. However, holding gender constant, the odds of being dissatisfied with their WLB and job satisfaction were not statistically significant for males compared to females implying that age influences job dissatisfaction while gender does not ($p > .05$). The results also showed a strong association between job satisfaction and WLB.

5. Discussion

There was a correlation between age, job satisfaction, and WLB, suggesting that as department chairs age, their satisfaction level increases. The results of this study also illustrated that gender does not significantly impact overall satisfaction in the job but does influence perceptions of WLB. Thrasher et al. (2022) found that as male and female managers age, the divide in perceived WLB expanded. This was reinforced in this study's findings on faculty in the later stages of their career. Given that age rather than gender played a significant role in predicting job satisfaction, AHCs should develop interventions to support the retention and well-being of department chairs as well as to consider both professional and personal factors in understanding job satisfaction among chairs. It is also prudent for AHCs to examine and develop strategies that will help to maintain and increase job satisfaction among younger department chairs through supportive measures such as mentorship and the promotion of healthy work culture (Freeman et al., 2020).

The results also demonstrated a strong association between job satisfaction and WLB. AHCs should explore methods to promote WLB. AHCs should implement policies and practices, such as mindfulness training, to aid in the reduction of burnout, and enhance the WLB of department chairs (Luken & Sammons, 2016). Improving WLB and job satisfaction of the department chair can aid in improving the overall function of the department as they fulfill their integral role in preventing job dissatisfaction among faculty and staff.

The negative correlation between leadership stepping down and job satisfaction was weaker than the other two correlations. However, AHCs should consider this relationship when assessing how to retain department chairs. When job satisfaction decreased, the likelihood that the chair considered stepping down went up; the trend line also suggested that females were more inclined to step

down than their male counterparts, which is supported by findings by Spoon et al. (2023). Even though the coefficient suggested that there was not a significant relationship between job satisfaction and the likelihood that department chairs will step down, the negative relationship suggests that AHCs should be aware of this when reviewing their leadership retention and succession planning.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the original sample of department chairs at AHCs in the northeast may not be generalizable to other regions of the country. The original sample size is small which also limits generalizability. Another limitation of this study was the mode of original data collection, as the researcher distributed a survey of questionnaires to participants via email. There was no guarantee of genuine reactions and responses to the questions among the participants. The study design is also a limitation. The neutral group of job satisfaction was excluded because it was assumed that neutral satisfaction levels do not significantly contribute to the outcomes of interest, and this might not always be the case

6. Conclusion/Future Research

This study underlines the significance of recognizing the challenges and needs of department chairs and how AHCs can help foster an environment to help them be effective leaders and fulfill their professional obligations. The findings of this study are an important step towards understanding the intersectionality of gender and age at AHCs and their correlation to WLB and job satisfaction. Future research can be conducted incorporating longitudinal data investigating long-term effects of interventions aimed at improving job satisfaction and retention of department chairs. Longitudinal data can also be utilized to track changes in job satisfaction and WLB over time. Future studies can also be completed to examine the trend of the likelihood of female department chairs stepping down within 1 - 2 years.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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