

Job Satisfaction in South Africa: The Quest for Job Quality

Bongiwe Mncwango

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2061-8847>
Human Sciences Research Council,
South Africa
bmncwango@hsrc.ac.za

Andries Masenge

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8372-2356>
Department of Statistics, University of
Pretoria, South Africa

Charles Puttergill

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8659-3454>
Department of Sociology, University of
Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

Job satisfaction is a key determinant in ensuring and maintaining a productive workforce. It is an outcome of the interaction between individual personal characteristics, work values, needs and expectations on one hand and work rewards or outcomes on the other hand. Job quality, in turn, ensures decent working conditions and livelihoods for workers. In this study, we investigated the distribution and determinants of job satisfaction of employed workers in South Africa, drawing on data collected through nationally representative surveys on social attitudes conducted in 2005 and 2015. The findings indicate that what workers seek (value) in a job exceeds their actual experience (outcomes), although the gap between expectation and outcome in the baseline survey has narrowed in the end-point survey. Furthermore, workers tend to favour job outcomes and rewards that are extrinsic in nature over intrinsic ones in current labour market conditions, yet shifts are discernible over time. Where extrinsic needs are satisfied, the importance of intrinsic ones increases.

Keywords: job satisfaction; job quality; work values; work rewards; South Africa

Introduction

Global forces altering the nature of work have increasingly rendered the two conventional measures of the labour market, namely, labour force participation and (un)employment rates, insufficient to capture the contemporary global labour market situation. Although these measures highlight the extent of unemployment and the quantities of jobs created, they do not indicate the kinds of jobs created or how working conditions have changed over time. The shortcomings of these indicators are even more apparent in developing countries in which labour markets are characterised by substantial heterogeneity in the distribution of working conditions and outcomes (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018b). These conditions require assessing and monitoring the state of job quality in countries. In this study, job quality is conceptualised as the sum of job attributes that affect worker well-being, with the worker being best positioned to evaluate the ways in which the job affects personal well-being (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011; Warhurst et al., 2017). Focusing on job quality therefore requires more than measuring income and hours worked quantitatively. Towards this end, Lugo (2007) and Cassar (2010) advocate incorporating elements of work such as job security, opportunities for upward mobility, and autonomy in conceptualising job quality.

There is a growing consensus that job quality is as important as the number of jobs created, given the clear link between quality employment opportunities and economic expansion. The focus on job quality is primarily driven by the recognition that high-quality jobs are positively related to improving individual well-being, labour market participation, productivity and overall economic performance, consequently providing benefits to individuals, organisations and countries (Del Carpio et al., 2017; Scarpetta et al., 2016; World Bank, 2019). In developed countries, efforts to improve job quality are more prevalent than in developing countries.

In contrast, in developing countries, increasingly, a substantial proportion of jobs is failing to meet global minimum standards and to cushion individuals against poverty. High levels of unemployment and the significant number of workers trapped in a cycle of low-quality jobs associated with low productivity, poor pay, and limited opportunity to access training and education impede overall economic growth in developing countries (ILO, 2020). Consequently, a significant proportion of those in paid employment has jobs that do not allow them to support themselves and their families adequately in a context in which working conditions have reportedly stagnated or declined, with no substantial increase in wages recorded (Kenny, 2020). In South Africa in particular, more than half of the population (56%) live in poverty (World Bank, 2018). The lack of focus on securing quality jobs in developing countries is unfortunate since a stronger focus on quality employment, often described as well-paid, secure and safe jobs, would benefit them in overcoming poverty and decreasing inequality (Lopez-Acevedo, 2013).

Globally, employment creation is at the heart of government policies to eliminate poverty and address persistent inequalities. Extant literature on determinants of unemployment identifies race, age, gender, geographic location and education as key factors and underpin substantial efforts by the South African government to bolster labour market participation and inclusive economic development (Banerjee et al., 2008; Bhorat et al., 2020; Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2015). Although much attention has been focused on quantitatively increasing jobs, the South African labour market situation remains bleak. This represents a paradox where, alongside the ideals of inclusive economic development, stark inequalities remain a problem. It can be argued that many South African workers suffer from poor job quality. In this instance, income and working conditions are important. Perhaps then a more concerted focus on job quality is the missing link to tackling inequality and poverty alleviation.

South Africa continues to face the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment and persistent inequality, earning the country the status of being the most unequal in the world. The labour market remains primarily responsible for inducing and reproducing inequality. First, most individuals rely on it for their main source of income. Second, labour market income contributes more than 70% of overall income inequality in South Africa (Hundenborn et al., 2016; Leibbrandt et al., 2017). According to the analysis of Mtapuri and Tinarwo (2021, pp. 113, 115), labour market incomes account for the bulk of the Gini coefficient between 2006 and 2015, significantly contributing to inequality. They contend that the Gini coefficient increased from 58.3% in 1994 to a high of 68% by 2015.

Labour Force Survey data for the two survey years analysed reveal that the unemployment rate dropped from 26.7% in the third quarter of 2005 to 24.5% in the fourth quarter of 2015 (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA] 2005, 2016b). Correspondingly, the labour force participation increased marginally from 56.5% to 58.5%, and the absorption rate from 41.4% to 44.5%. In 2015, the expanded unemployment rate, which includes discouraged workers, stood at 33.8%. The situation has not improved following the surveys analysed. Only two in five working-age adults (15–64 years old) had a job at the end of 2019, totalling 16.4 million, with more than 6 million people (29%) of the working-age population being unemployed. The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected the South African labour market, increasing the percentage of the unemployed to exceed 32% (Stats SA 2019, 2021). The Labour Force Survey data for the fourth quarter of 2022 recorded an unemployment rate of 32.7% (43.1% if the expanded definition is considered), an absorption rate of 39.4% and a labour force participation rate of 58.5%. These survey results reaffirm the challenging work environment in South Africa.

Research on the changing nature and conditions of work is central to investigating workplaces in South Africa and speaks to the issue of job quality (Theron, 2005; Webster et al., 2008; Webster & Von Holdt, 2005). These studies document sector-focused trends in changing forms of work organisation and its implications for

employee participation, the declining role of labour movements, and increasing the prevalence of precarious work (Bischoff et al., 2021; Buhlungu, 2010; Kenny, 2020; Magoqwana & Matatu, 2012; Von Holdt, 2003). Increasingly precarious and low-wage labour exacerbates disparities in material conditions and overall income inequality as work conditions deteriorate (Barchiesi, 2008; Kenny & Webster, 2021).

Although data are available on the employment status of South Africans, less is known about the nature of the jobs they hold and their perceptions about their employment situations. Insight into how South Africans define work, which work attributes they value the most apart from earnings and what they expect from engaging in paid work activities is limited (Mncwango, 2016b). It is against this background that we analysed the main drivers and determinants of job satisfaction as a subjective indicator of the quality of work. Towards this end, we used data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey in 2005 and 2015 to examine the distribution of job satisfaction as a gauge of job quality in South Africa.

Kalleberg (1977) highlights the affective association workers have with a job. Numerous factors have an impact; potentially being sources of (dis)satisfaction and varying between workers and shaped by individual values, needs and expectations on one hand, and work rewards or outcomes on the other hand. This further implies that job satisfaction is a weighted average of the valued aspects of work a job provides. Clark (1997, p. 191) argues that

Higher job satisfaction may then be a function of improvements in the objective aspects of a job, reduced expectations or desires regarding the job, realigning values so that dissatisfying aspects of the job are downplayed, while those that please are given weight.

The analysis adds to this literature by focusing on workers subjective evaluations of their work. In the literature, workers' subjective evaluations manifest in perceptions, and attitudes towards their work and are linked to labour market behaviour such as absenteeism, job quitting, early retirement, overall productivity and the individual well-being. Job satisfaction is an important predictor of labour market decisions such as commitment, resignations and job mobility (Clark, 1998; Clark, 2015; Freeman, 1978; Green, 2010; Lévy-Garboua et al., 2007; Pelly, 2023). Such insights into work-related attitudes, values and aspirations are critical in a context characterised by rising industrial action regarding fair wages, tensions in trade unions about adequate representation of the needs of working poor people, concerns about basic conditions of employment, and demands for a living wage.

Satisfied workers are more productive and committed to the goals of the organisation which help to boost organisational performance and success (Bakotić, 2016; Clark, 2011; Hult & Svallfors, 2002; Millán et al., 2013; Utami et al., 2020). Job satisfaction therefore has implications for individual workers, organisations and the country's economic development trajectory.

Objectives

The key objective was to analyse the nature, determinants and trends in subjective perceptions of job quality as measured through job satisfaction among formally employed South Africans in 2005 and 2015. Job satisfaction is determined by the interplay between individual needs and the work environment (Drummond & Stoddard, 1991). This perspective highlights the role of both work values (expectations) and outcomes (rewards). Two research questions were explored:

- To what extent are South African workers satisfied with their jobs?
- What impact do socio-demographic factors, work values and work outcomes have on job satisfaction?

Survey Design

The data were obtained from the 2005 and 2015 survey round of the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS)¹ of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). For these surveys, a multistage stratified random sampling method employing a three-stage process to yield a representative sample of individuals reflective of the overall population was adopted. First, small area layers served as primary sampling units. They were drawn, using the estimated number of dwelling units with probability proportional to size. Second, individual dwelling units (or visiting points) were drawn with an equal probability. Third, using a Kish grid, a single respondent, 16 years or older was selected (<http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/departments/sasas>). Analysis was restricted to the employed persons (working full-time, casual or part-time). In the two surveys analysed, this sampling procedure yielded 890 (2005) and 926 (2015) respondents. However, there are 103 cases with missing values in the 2005 dataset, and 149 cases with missing values in the 2015 dataset. Therefore, the number of complete cases used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for 2005 is 787, and for 2015, 778.

A single questionnaire item using a Likert scale measured the dependent variable of interest—job satisfaction. The respondents were asked: “How satisfied are you in your main job?” The unbalanced ordinal scale in the 2005 questionnaire was transformed into a continuous scale out of 100 using the formula reported below. This standardised the 2005 scale, enabling comparison with the balanced 2015 scale.

$$\left[\frac{(\text{Actual raw score} - \text{lowest possible score})}{\text{Possible raw score range}} \right] \times 100$$

Information was collected on the following 10 socio-demographic independent variables: age cohort, gender, race, marital status, living standard measure (LSM),

1 The lead author is part of a team designing and managing the work orientations module of this survey.

educational attainment, occupational level, trade union membership, geographic location and province. Workers' views on the attributes they regard as important in a job was measured on a five-point scale by asking them to rate the following seven characteristics: job security, high income, advancement opportunities, an interesting job, independence, helpfulness to others, and usefulness to society of a job. These preferences provides an indication of what they expected from a job (work values). They were also asked to rate on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree whether their primary job delivers with regard to the following six attributes: job security, high income, advancement opportunities, an interesting job, independence, and usefulness of a job to society. These responses provided an indication of what they experienced in a job (work outcomes).

In conducting the surveys, all ethical protocols required by the HSRC were adhered to. Following this protocol, before starting the fieldwork, all local authorities and stakeholders were informed about the survey, and fieldworkers trained. Letters of introduction and the questionnaire were translated from English into Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Tshivenda, Xitsonga and Setswana. The respondents were clearly informed of the purpose of the survey, that their participation was voluntary, that they had the right to withdraw from participating at any stage, and that their responses were treated confidentially. No financial inducements were offered.

Findings

Table 1 provides an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the survey samples for both rounds, reporting the raw tally and percentage of each attribute.

Table 1: Sample description: 2005 and 2015

Socio-demographics		2005		2015		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	425	54.0	415	53.3	840	53.7
	Female	362	46.0	363	46.7	725	46.3
	Total	787	100.0	778	100.0	1 565	100.0
Age	16–34	327	41.7	309	39.7	636	40.7
	35–54	383	48.8	374	48.1	757	48.4
	55 and above	75	9.6	95	12.2	170	10.9
	Total	785	100.0	778	100.0	1 563	100.0
Race	Black African	451	57.3	404	51.9	855	54.6
	Coloured	103	13.1	153	19.7	256	16.4
	Indian/Asian	83	10.5	86	11.1	169	10.8
	White	150	19.1	135	17.4	285	18.2
	Total	787	100.0	778	100.0	1 565	100.0
Marital status	Never married	307	39.0	278	36.2	585	37.6
	Previously married	74	9.4	146	19.0	220	14.2
	Married	406	51.6	343	44.7	749	48.2
	Total	787	100.0	767	100.0	1 554	100.0

Socio-demographics		2005		2015		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Education level	Primary schooling	186	23.8	72	10.8	258	17.8
	Secondary education	454	58.1	515	77.2	969	66.9
	Post-secondary education	141	18.1	80	12.0	221	15.3
	Total	781	100.0	667	100.0	1 448	100.0
Trade unionship status	No	547	69.7	579	76.3	1 126	72.9
	Yes	238	30.3	180	23.7	418	27.1
	Total	785	100.0	759	100.0	1 544	100.0
Living standard measure	Low	235	30.4	15	2.1	250	16.8
	Medium	229	29.6	260	36.4	489	32.9
	High	310	40.1	439	61.5	749	50.3
	Total	774	100.0	714	100.0	1 488	100.0
Province	Western Cape	125	15.9	130	16.7	255	16.3
	Eastern Cape	60	7.6	54	6.9	114	7.3
	Northern Cape	66	8.4	48	6.2	114	7.3
	Free State	87	11.1	47	6.0	134	8.6
	KwaZulu-Natal	124	15.8	137	17.6	261	16.7
	North West	49	6.2	51	6.6	100	6.4
	Gauteng	101	12.8	198	25.4	299	19.1
	Mpumalanga	77	9.8	57	7.3	134	8.6
	Limpopo	98	12.5	56	7.2	154	9.8
	Total	787	100.0	778	100.0	1 565	100.0
Geographic type	Urban	510	64.8	658	84.6	1 168	74.6
	Rural	277	35.2	120	15.4	397	25.4
	Total	787	100.0	778	100.0	1 565	100.0
Occupation level	Armed forces	0	0.0	26	3.6	26	1.8
	Managers	73	9.6	68	9.4	141	9.5
	Professionals	70	9.2	104	14.4	174	11.8
	Technicians and Associate Professionals	52	6.9	67	9.3	119	8.1
	Clerical support workers	90	11.9	52	7.2	142	9.6
	Services and sales workers	95	12.5	92	12.8	187	12.7
	Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	21	2.8	27	3.8	48	3.2
	Craft and related trades workers	78	10.3	73	10.1	151	10.2
	Plant and machine operators, and assemblers	42	5.5	53	7.4	95	6.4
	Elementary occupations	236	31.2	158	21.9	394	26.7
	Total	757	100.0	720	100.0	1 477	100.0

Slightly more employed men than women were sampled in the surveys, with the gap between them narrowing over time. Middle-aged workers were the largest age cohort, followed by the young workers (youths), and then the older workers. Notably over time the proportion of the employed youth decreased slightly, while that of the older workers increased slightly. With regard to racial composition, black African workers constituted more than half of the employed workers sampled, followed by white workers and coloured workers (changing their respective positions between the two years), and Indian or Asian workers. Taking the overall population demographics into consideration, the proportion of white and Indian or Asian workers sampled reflected a more favourable employment situation for these groups, whereas that of black African workers underlined the weaker employment situation they face.

In the samples, between a half and two fifths of the employed respondents are married, more than a third have never been married, and between one tenth and a fifth have been previously married. Between the two sample periods, the proportion of employed workers sampled who have at least some secondary level of education increased from over a half to over three quarters, whereas those with primary schooling or less dropped from a quarter to just over one tenth. This reflects the investment in schooling, and an increasing requirement that workers advance in it. Union membership, although declining slightly in the period, remained around a quarter of the employed workers sampled.

There were disproportionately more employed respondents in the high LSM segment (categories 8–10), rising from just below two fifths to over half in the period. This was expected as the study sampled the employment status of the respondents (see Ntloedibe and Ngqinani (2020) for discussion on LSM categories and cut-offs). The proportion in the medium LSM segment (categories 5–7) increased from under a third to over a third, whereas those in the low LSM segment (categories 1–4) decreased from under a third to below a twentieth. It should not be surprising that the proportion of employed workers sampled in elementary occupations which have the lowest remuneration dropped from just under a third to below a quarter over this period. Correspondingly, the proportions in occupations requiring more skill and training, such as professionals, technicians and associate professionals, plant and machine operators/assemblers, skilled forestry workers, fishery workers, agricultural workers and workers in the armed forces increased over this period. In addition, the proportion of employed respondents living in urban areas increased from just below two thirds to over four fifths in this period, reflecting both migration to urban areas and the better employment opportunities there.

Further analysis using SPSS 27 for Windows was undertaken. First, a CFA was conducted to determine the validity of the scales, followed by a multigroup CFA to determine their comparability. Second, the reliability of the instruments for two survey years 2005 and 2015, respectively, was determined by Cronbach's alpha. Third, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests checked the normality of distributions and univariate analyses and post hoc tests explored the impact of demographic variables and job

attributes on job satisfaction. Based on these outcomes, Spearman's rho correlations were run on the data. Fourth, a set of general linear models (GLMs) was used to determine which factors had an impact on job satisfaction in the survey years.

Scales for the items on work values were recoded in reverse so that the numerical value 1 corresponded to "not important at all", and 5 to "very important". The same procedure was followed recoding items on work outcomes so that the numerical value of 1 corresponded to "strongly disagree", and 5 to "strongly agree". In developing scales, the listwise method was used to remove cases with missing data. Only cases with complete data were used (see Table 1). A scale, with intrinsic and extrinsic subscales, was created for work outcomes and work values. The reliability of the survey instrument's internal consistency was assessed calculating Cronbach's alpha for the constructs (see Table 2).

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha values for the constructs

Scale	2005	2015
Work values (7 items)	0.767	0.776
Extrinsic work values (3 items)	0.647	0.624
Intrinsic work values (4 items)	0.734	0.776
Work outcomes (6 items)	0.794	0.780
Extrinsic work outcomes (3 items)	0.779	0.783
Intrinsic work outcomes (3 items)	0.788	*

* Too few cases.

The Cronbach's alpha results for these scales exceeded 0.7 in most instances, suggesting good internal consistency. Although the extrinsic work values scale was below this conventional rule of thumb, at 0.647 in 2005 and 0.624 in 2015, it was still in the acceptable range, according to Taber (2018). The intrinsic work outcomes scale had too few cases in 2015 to assess its internal consistency, therefore the results from this scale for the survey round should be treated with caution.

A CFA on the 2015 data validated the constructs. The Mardia test did not establish multivariate normality. Consequently, a Satorra-Bentler adjustment was performed, using the RStudio 1.2. package 0.6–7 lavaan. Although the first model did not have good fit indices (CFI, TLI \geq 0.90, RMSEA $<$ 0.08, SMR $<$ 0.08 and Cmin/df value between 1 and 5), the second one reported in Table 3 met these criteria (Parry, 2020).

Table 3: Confirmatory factor analysis

	Chi-square	df	Cmin/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Model 1	401.371	71	5.653	0.884	0.851	0.084	0.057
Model 2	253.091	69	3.668	0.937	0.916	0.063	0.048

The configural, metric and scalar invariance for the model were determined. These results are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Multigroup CFA: Summarised results of measurement invariance

2005 vs 2015	Chi-Square	df	Adjusted chi-square	SRMR	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Chi-sq diff	Df diff	Pr(>Chisq)	CFI (diff)	RMSEA (diff)
Configural	553.218	138	4.009	0.048	0.926	0.902	0.062					
Metric	564.323	148	3.813	0.051	0.925	0.913	0.065	11.105	10	0.349	0.001	-0.003
Scalar	619.152	158	3.919	0.042	0.919	0.906	0.066	54.829	10	0.000	0.006	-0.001

The summary results indicate that the configural invariance was established (CFI, TLI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08). The metric invariance was also established (probability value 0.349 > 0.05 significance level). This established that there was no difference between the configural and metric model. The respondents therefore interpreted the questions the same way. However, the scalar variance was not established (p -value < 0.05). Therefore, the constructs were not measured/interpreted the same way in 2005 and 2015, as a result, it was not possible to pool the data of the two survey rounds. Consequently, independent models were compiled for each year.

Job Satisfaction Levels Between 2005 and 2015

The first question of interest considers the state of job satisfaction among employed workers in South Africa. Table 5 reports the means for job satisfaction together with the levels of reported job satisfaction. The mean increased from 65.7 in the baseline survey (2005) to 71.49 in the end-point survey (2015). The data suggest that the majority of employed South African workers are moderately satisfied with their jobs, illustrated by the box-and-whisker plots in Figure 1.

Table 5: Distribution of job satisfaction, 2005 and 2015

Year	N	Mean	Completely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither nor	Fairly satisfied	Very satisfied	Completely satisfied
2005	787	65.7	5.0%	9.3%	8.6%	27.1%	29.6%	20.4%
2015	778	71.49	6.6%	5.9%	6.9%	28.9%	33.5%	18.1%

A chi-square statistic, $X^2(5) = 12.522$, $p < .05$, provides evidence that the observed differences in the evaluation of job satisfaction was statistically significant across the survey years.

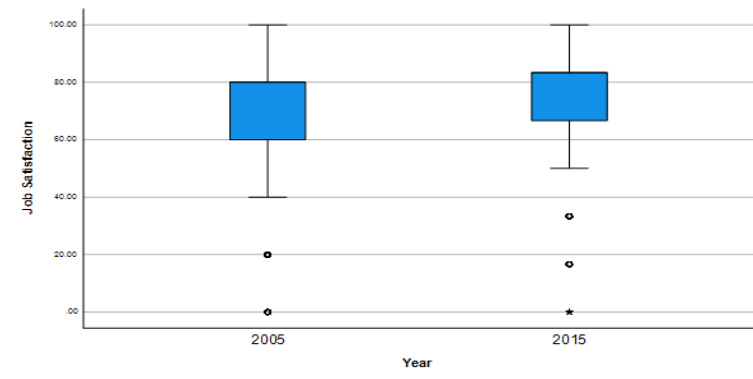


Figure 1: Job satisfaction, 2005 and 2015

Relationship Between Job Satisfaction, Work Values and Work Outcomes for 2005 and 2015

The results from the Spearman's rho to assess the degree of correlation between work factors—work values, work outcomes, and job satisfaction in 2005 and 2015 are reported in Table 6.

Table 6: Correlation coefficients between job satisfaction and work values and work outcomes dimensions

Work factors	Job satisfaction	
	2005	2015
Work values	-.047	.054
Extrinsic work values	-.102*	-.030
Intrinsic work values	-.015	.100*
Work outcomes	.542*	.504*
Extrinsic work outcomes	.468*	.434*
Intrinsic work outcomes	.494*	.452*

* correlation coefficient is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

In 2005, the negative correlations between job satisfaction and work values overall and intrinsic work values, respectively, were below the .1 threshold and were not statistically significant. However, the extrinsic work values had a weak negative correlation with job satisfaction, $r = -.102$, $p < 0.01$. This inverse relationship implies that the greater the importance attributed to an extrinsic work characteristic, the lower the level of satisfaction would be. High expectations, therefore, potentially lead to disappointment.

In 2015, the positive correlation with job satisfaction for work values overall and negative correlation for extrinsic work values, respectively, were below the .1 threshold and not statistically significant. Only the intrinsic work values had a weak positive correlation with job satisfaction, $r = .100$, $p < 0.01$. This direct relationship between the intrinsic work values and job satisfaction implies the greater the importance attributed to an intrinsic work characteristic, the higher the level of job satisfaction is likely to be.

In both survey years, the work outcomes, together with the subdomains, ie intrinsic and extrinsic work outcomes, are positively correlated with job satisfaction. They are statistically significant at the 1% level. The relationship between these constructs is strong for the overall scale and moderate for the subscales. In all three instances, the strength of the correlation declined slightly in the end-point survey, compared to the baseline survey. The intrinsic work outcomes bear higher correlation coefficients denoting a stronger effect on job satisfaction during both survey years. The results suggest that workers reporting favourable work outcomes (intrinsic and extrinsic) are likely to report higher job satisfaction.

General Linear Model for Job Satisfaction, 2005 and 2015

The impact of the 10 socio-demographic factors, namely, race, gender, age, marital status, education level, trade union membership status, LSM segment, occupational group, geographic type, province, and work-related factors (work values (intrinsic and extrinsic) and work outcomes (intrinsic and extrinsic)) on job satisfaction in South Africa was considered in the model (see Table 7). Gender, marital status, educational level, occupational category, and geographic type have no significant influence on job satisfaction levels during both years ($p > 0.05$). Only β coefficients that were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) were discussed. The models yield an F statistic 13.147 with p -value < 0.01 in 2005, and 9.603 with p -value < 0.01 for 2015. Concerning the effect of race, Indian/Asian workers registered greater satisfaction in 2005, ($\beta = 9.995$; t statistic = 2,825; $p < 0.05$) than workers of other racial groups. This implies that on aggregate Indian/Asian workers were in 2005 9.995 in units more satisfied in their jobs relative to white workers, the reference group. With regard to the effect of race on job satisfaction in 2015, using white workers as the reference group, black African workers were 5.033 units less satisfied than white workers (β value of = -5.033, t statistic = -2.022, p -value = $p < 0.05$). During this period, the lower job satisfaction levels of black African workers compared to white workers were statistically significant.

The β coefficients of young workers and middle-aged workers were negative denoting that young workers and middle-aged workers were less satisfied than older workers (young workers: $\beta = -.8.171$; $t = -2.720$; middle-aged workers: $\beta = -.6.031$; t statistic = -2.203, both with $p < 0.05$). This implies that young workers were 8.171 units less satisfied relative to older workers. Similarly, middle-aged workers were 6.031 units less satisfied in their jobs compared to older workers. Concerning the effect of the

workers' LSM, with the high category serving as reference group, the model produces a β value of $= -8.057$; a t statistic $= -2.715$; with p -value $= .003$ for the medium LSM, which was statistically significant (< 0.05) in 2015. The beta coefficient value for the medium LSM was negative denoting that they were 8.057 units less satisfied in their jobs than those in high LSM.

In 2015, of all the provinces workers in KwaZulu-Natal registered considerably less satisfaction levels, with a β value of -10.818 , t statistic $= -2.177$ with p -value $= .030$ ($p < 0.05$), which is statistically significant. This implies that workers in this province were 10.818 units less satisfied than workers in Limpopo, which is the reference category.

There was a statistically significant but negative relationship between extrinsic work values and job satisfaction in 2005. The $\beta = -6,750$ indicates that one unit increase in extrinsic work values resulted in a 6.750 unit decrease in job satisfaction (t statistic $= -2.445$; p -value $= .015$). Therefore, the greater the value attached to extrinsic attributes of a job expressed, the lower the job satisfaction.

Table 7: An expanded GLM for job satisfaction, 2005 and 2015

	Parameter	2005							2015						
		β	Std. Error	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		Partial Eta Squared	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		Partial Eta Squared
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound						Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
	Intercept	53.697	13.373	4.015	0.000	27.441	79.952	0.022	56.302	11.281	4.991	0.000	34.138	78.465	0.046
Gender	Male (ref female)	-2.643	1.830	-1.444	0.149	-6.236	0.949	0.003	-5.552	1.792	-3.088	0.758	-4.072	2.967	0.000
Age cohorts	16-34 (ref 55 and above)	-1.927	3.665	-0.526	0.599	-9.123	5.268	0.000	-8.171	3.003	-2.720	0.007	-14.071	-2.270	0.014
	35-54	1.644	3.377	0.487	0.626	-4.986	8.274	0.000	-6.031	2.738	-2.203	0.028	-11.410	-0.653	0.009
Race	Black African (ref White)	-1.581	3.043	-0.519	0.604	-7.556	4.394	0.000	-5.033	2.489	-2.022	0.044	-9.922	-0.144	0.008
	Coloured	2.112	3.436	0.615	0.539	-4.634	8.858	0.001	-1.865	2.820	-0.661	0.509	-7.407	3.676	0.001
	Indian/Asian	9.995	3.539	2.825	0.005	3.048	16.943	0.011	2.186	3.055	0.716	0.475	-3.816	8.189	0.001
Marital status	Never married (ref married)	-0.316	2.227	-0.142	0.887	-4.687	4.056	0.000	-1.330	2.264	-0.587	0.557	-5.778	3.119	0.001
	Previously married	3.624	2.937	1.234	0.218	-2.142	9.391	0.002	-0.389	2.372	-0.164	0.870	-5.048	4.271	0.000
Educational level	Primary schooling and below (Ref More than secondary ed ref)	-2.355	3.403	-0.692	0.489	-9.035	4.326	0.001	-0.206	4.149	-0.050	0.960	-8.357	7.946	0.000
	secondary education and less	-2.620	2.195	-1.194	0.233	-6.929	1.689	0.002	2.563	2.650	0.967	0.334	-2.643	7.769	0.002
Trade union status	No (ref yes)	0.753	1.926	0.391	0.696	-3.029	4.536	0.000	3.311	2.231	1.484	0.138	-1.072	7.694	0.004
LSM segment	Low (ref high LSM)	-5.023	3.535	-1.421	0.156	-11.964	1.918	0.003	-8.746	8.966	-0.975	0.330	-26.360	8.869	0.002
	Medium	2.370	2.534	0.935	0.350	-2.604	7.344	0.001	-8.057	2.715	-2.968	0.003	-13.391	-2.723	0.017
Province	Western Cape (ref Limpopo)	-0.746	3.893	-0.192	0.848	-8.390	6.898	0.000	-5.808	4.865	-1.194	0.233	-15.366	3.750	0.003
	Eastern Cape	-3.531	4.215	-0.838	0.403	-11.807	4.745	0.001	-3.044	5.639	-0.054	0.957	-11.383	10.774	0.000
	Northern Cape	1.359	4.362	0.312	0.756	-7.205	9.923	0.000	-4.703	6.066	-0.775	0.439	-16.621	7.214	0.001
	Free State	-1.503	3.977	-0.378	0.706	-9.311	6.304	0.000	-1.490	6.261	-0.238	0.812	-13.791	10.811	0.000
	KwaZulu-Natal	-4.723	4.109	-1.150	0.251	-12.790	3.344	0.002	-10.818	4.970	-2.177	0.030	-20.582	-1.054	0.009
	North West	-8.490	5.245	-1.619	0.106	-18.788	1.807	0.004	-5.922	6.464	-0.916	0.360	-18.621	6.778	0.002
	Gauteng	-1.653	4.017	-0.412	0.681	-9.540	6.233	0.000	-7.160	4.842	-1.479	0.140	-16.672	2.353	0.004
	Mpumalanga	-1.061	4.102	-0.259	0.796	-9.114	6.992	0.000	-9.064	5.659	-1.602	0.110	-20.181	2.053	0.005
Geographic type	Urban (ref rural)	-4.217	2.745	-1.536	0.125	-9.606	1.173	0.003	0.562	2.849	0.197	0.844	-5.035	6.158	0.000
Occupational category	Skilled workers (ref manager)	-3.361	3.334	-1.008	0.314	-9.907	3.185	0.001	-0.878	3.053	-0.288	0.774	-6.876	5.119	0.000
	Semi-skilled	-1.112	3.110	-0.358	0.721	-7.218	4.994	0.000	0.576	2.660	0.217	0.829	-4.651	5.803	0.000
	Elementary occupations	-5.293	3.690	-1.434	0.152	-12.536	1.951	0.003	-0.680	3.406	-0.200	0.842	-7.371	6.012	0.000
Work values	Extrinsic work values	-6.750	2.761	-2.445	0.015	-12.172	-1.329	0.008	-3.292	2.224	-1.480	0.140	-7.661	1.078	0.004
	Intrinsic work values	-0.980	1.631	-0.601	0.548	-4.183	2.223	0.001	-1.391	1.469	-0.947	0.344	-4.277	1.496	0.002
Work outcomes	Extrinsic work outcomes	7.081	1.239	5.715	0.000	4.648	9.513	0.044	6.873	1.110	6.192	0.000	4.693	9.054	0.070
	Intrinsic work outcomes	8.164	1.380	5.918	0.000	5.456	10.873	0.047	6.708	1.429	4.695	0.000	3.901	9.515	0.041

A positive and statistically significant relationship was found between the extrinsic and intrinsic work outcomes and job satisfaction in both sample years ($p < 0.001$). In 2005, one unit increase in extrinsic work outcomes resulted in a 7.081 unit increase in job satisfaction ($\beta = 7.081$; t statistic = 5.715). The corresponding increase in job satisfaction 2015 was lower at 6.872 units per one unit increase in extrinsic work outcomes ($\beta = 6.873$; t statistic = 6.192). Similarly, one unit increase in intrinsic work

outcomes resulted in an 8.164 increase in job satisfaction levels ($\beta = 8.164$ with t statistics = 5.918) in 2005 and in 2015, in a 6.708 unit increase in job satisfaction ($\beta = 6.708$; t statistic = 4.695).

For the two sample years, job outcomes had the greatest effect on job satisfaction. In 2005, the combined effect of extrinsic and intrinsic work outcomes was able to explain about 9.2% of variability in job satisfaction (Eta Squared (η^2) = 0.044 for extrinsic and 0.047 intrinsic work outcomes). In 2015, the extrinsic work outcomes had an Eta Squared (η^2) = 0.070 indicating that the moderate proportion of variance² of 7% in the level of job satisfaction was explained by extrinsic outcomes of the respondent. The $\eta^2 = 0.041$ indicates that the small 4.1% of the variance in the level of job satisfaction was explained by the intrinsic work rewards of the worker. These results suggest that job satisfaction during both survey years was influenced positively by the rewards workers are obtaining from their work, with extrinsic outcomes having more influence.

Discussion

The study employed job satisfaction as a proxy measure of job quality. Job satisfaction is an important part of overall life satisfaction among the working-age population. In addition, it has implications on productivity, turnover, absenteeism and mobility (Clark, 1996, 1998; Pelly, 2023; Warr, 1999). Using the question “How satisfied are you with your main work?” in the SASAS surveys of 2005 and 2015, levels of job satisfaction among employed South Africans were explored. This enabled considering the extent to which workers’ socio-economic characteristics, work values and work outcomes influence their job satisfaction.

The first objective was to explore the levels of job satisfaction among the South African employed between 2005 and 2015. The mean for job satisfaction increased from $\bar{x} = 65.7$ in 2005 to $\bar{x} = 71.49$ in 2015. These results suggest that South African workers are more satisfied with their jobs over time. The percentage of respondents indicating varying degrees of satisfaction with their job (being fairly, very or completely satisfied) increased from 77.1% in 2005, to 80.5% in 2015. Those respondents who reported a neutral stance to job satisfaction dropped from 8.6% in 2005 to 6.9% in 2015. Correspondingly, the proportion expressing a degree of dissatisfaction decreased from 14.3% to 12.5%.

The second objective was to assess the degree of correlation between work values, work outcomes and job satisfaction. The results from the Spearman’s rho correlations indicate that the extrinsic work values correlated negatively with job satisfaction in 2005. This inverse relationship, although statistically significant, was extremely weak. It did not

2 The rule of thumb thresholds: $\eta^2 = 0.01$ denotes a small effect, 0.06 a medium effect and 0.14 a large effect (Kotlik et al., 2011).

hold in 2015. In 2015, there was a weak positive correlation between intrinsic work values and job satisfaction. With regard to work outcomes and their subdomains, intrinsic and extrinsic work outcomes, there were statistically significant correlations with job satisfaction across the two survey years. However, the correlation between intrinsic job outcomes and job satisfaction in 2015 should be treated with caution as it was not possible to validate this scale (see Table 2). The work outcome scale was positively and strongly correlated with job satisfaction. The extrinsic and intrinsic work outcomes were positively but moderately correlated with job satisfaction. The correlations of varying magnitude provided preliminary evidence that work outcomes were a possible predictor of job satisfaction in the South African context, an observation that requires further analysis.

The third objective was to determine the main predictors of job satisfaction in the South African context. GLMs estimated this impact, taking into consideration the 10 socio-economic factors, and also work values and work outcomes. The models were repeated for the baseline and end-point survey years. The GLMs confirmed that race was a predictor of job satisfaction during both survey years. In 2005, the satisfaction levels of Indian/Asian workers were higher than those of white workers, who were the reference category. In 2015, the model produced a negative coefficient denoting that black African workers had lower levels of satisfaction with their jobs compared to white workers. In fact, black African workers had a negative β coefficient across the two survey years, but the effect was only statistically significant in 2015. It suggests that their less favourable position in the labour market had an impact on their level of job satisfaction, a matter that needed further exploration as their expectations were not being met.

In discussing an observed gender job satisfaction differential, Clark (1996, 1997) claims that job satisfaction cannot be explained by the different jobs that men and women do or by sample selection where those who are not satisfied would opt out of employment. He argues that where the gender differential in job expectations is less likely, the gender differential in job satisfaction disappears. Such groups include the young highly educated professionals and those working in male-dominated workplaces. In addition, authors such as Clark (1997) suggest that the differences might be owing to women feeling satisfied because of their overall improved conditions in the labour market.

Different explanations have been cited to explain the job satisfaction gender gap. It has been argued that men value extrinsic work rewards such as earnings more, whereas women place more emphasis on intrinsic work rewards and quality workplace relations (Andrade et al., 2019). This suggests that men and women have different views on what job attributes are important and that women typically have lower income expectations compared to men (Hunt & Saul, 1975).

No statistically significant gender differences in job satisfaction levels were found in this study as reported in other contexts cited above. This absence in gender differences in job satisfaction is unexpected in the South African labour market context, given the

significantly unequal labour market outcomes between men and women. Although women's educational attainment has increased over time, this is not matched by their labour market outcomes as measured through participation, progression and earnings. Although there has been a substantial increase in the numbers of women in skilled occupations in the country, women continue to be disadvantaged as the proportions of those in low-skilled occupations and insecure jobs have also increased. South Africa is identified as one of the countries characterised by high wage inequalities and women continue to dominate the lower earnings categories (Department: Women, 2015). According to the global wage report of the ILO, South African women in full-time employment earn slightly over 22% less than men (ILO, 2018a). A gender gap in labour market outcomes is also widely reported by South African scholars (Bhorat & Goga, 2013; Casale & Posel, 2005; Ntuli, 2007; Posel & Casale, 2019). Mosomi (2019) is of the view that the priority should be to raise the proportions of women occupying executive positions to narrow the existing wage gap.

Given the absence of statistically significant differences in job satisfaction between the genders, the study findings, therefore, do not confirm research suggesting that men are typically more satisfied than women (Weaver, 1974). In addition, the study also does not offer empirical support to the paradox of a satisfied worker, observed elsewhere, where women report greater job satisfaction than men despite having worse off jobs (Clark, 1997).

With reference to age, in 2005 no significant relationship was found between age and job satisfaction. However, in 2015, age could explain 0.023 of variance in job satisfaction which was fairly weak (Eta Squared (η^2) = 0.023). Nonetheless, job satisfaction increases linearly with age, with the young workers being the least satisfied and the older workers being the most satisfied. The 2015 model revealed that being young or middle-aged was negatively related to job satisfaction. The older workers exhibited significantly higher levels of job satisfaction compared to young workers ($\beta = -8.171$) and middle-aged workers ($\beta = -6.031$). This finding is also reported by Warr (1992).

The finding that young workers were the least satisfied could be attributed to generally poor labour market prospects of youths relative to older workers in the South African labour market and possible mismatches between their educational level and their expectations of work and opportunities available to them. Youth unemployment remains one of the country's pressing socio-economic challenges. In 2016, it accounted for almost over 60% of the total number of unemployed people (Stats SA, 2016a). Youth unemployment remains persistently high with 60.7% of the 15–24 age group and 39.8% of the 25–34 age group remaining unemployed in the second quarter of 2023 (Stats SA, 2023). Moreover, those in employment tend to be overrepresented in poor quality jobs in specific sectors such as retail trade, agriculture, finance, and community and services (Stats SA, 2021). Behind these trends are structural impediments where young people lack sufficient education, skills and work experience demanded by the employers. Skills

and qualification mismatches have also become prevalent in the South African labour market (Grapsa et al., 2018; Mncwango, 2016a). Mismatches have been linked to lower job satisfaction levels (Allen & Van der Velden, 2001; Green & Zhu, 2010).

Although higher satisfaction is expected among the older workers with more job experience and security, low satisfaction among the youth is contrary to studies reporting a U-shaped relationship between age and job satisfaction. Proponents of the U-shaped job satisfaction pattern expect the youth to be more satisfied because of limited labour market experience against which to judge their work (Clark et al., 1996; Kalleberg & Loscocco, 1983). A reassessment occurs as they accumulate more work experience resulting in a reduction in job satisfaction for middle-aged workers. Older workers, in turn, generally have established careers. They are expected to have reduced expectations and aspirations, leading to increased job satisfaction levels. The self-selection effect has also been cited as an explanation, where the expectation is that more experienced dissatisfied adult workers would find it easier to find alternative satisfying jobs. Although this pattern is not supported in the current study, some of the explanations may apply to the more positive level of job satisfaction experienced by the older workers.

Highly educated workers are more likely to get better jobs. However, when wage and job characteristics are considered, the positive education effect disappears. Well-established literature suggests that education conditions workers expectations as they enter the workplace resulting in a “curse of high aspirations” (Blanchflower & Oswald, 1999; Long, 2005; Verhofstadt & Omev, 2003). This suggests that high levels of education induce higher aspirations and expectations, and less satisfaction. Therefore, when job conditions do not correspond to educational attainment, the net effect of education levels on worker satisfaction is negative. Such a negative relationship between job satisfaction and education is reported by Clark (1996) and Clark and Oswald (1996). The analysis did not find any statistically significant differentials in job satisfaction levels by education attainment among the working South Africans. Similarly, the occupational category (often linked to educational attainment) did not affect the workers’ determination of job satisfaction. Here the expectation is that workers in higher occupational categories (managers, skilled workers, semi-skilled and elementary occupations) would report greater job satisfaction. Again, this finding is not demonstrated in the data analysed despite the significant inequalities characterising the South Africa labour market.

In addition, researchers contend that marital status influences the level of job satisfaction among individuals. Some studies indicate that married workers tend to be most satisfied with their jobs than unmarried workers (Clark, 1996; Sanur & Eyüboğlu, 2013). On the contrary, other studies report lower job satisfaction levels among married people relative to unmarried people (Gazioglu & Tansel, 2006). The current study found no statistically significant differences in the level of satisfaction between married, previously married (for example, divorced, separated) and unmarried workers.

Although unmarried workers had the lowest job satisfaction scores, lower than the married and the previously married workers both in 2005 and 2015, the observations were not confirmed by the univariate tests of variance which revealed that differences between the marital status groups are not statistically significant for both years ($p > 0.05$).

Furthermore, the study found no statistically significant differences in workers' job satisfaction levels by LSM, contrary to existing South African evidence that indicates disparities in socio-economic outcomes, particularly employment outcomes (for example, labour market participation and wages) and by geographic location and type (Havemann & Kearney, 2010; Knight, 2004; Kingdon & Knight, 2006; Mlatsheni & Vimal, 2017; Stats SA, 2016a, 2016b). It was only in the province of KwaZulu-Natal that the job satisfaction level differed significantly from the reference group Limpopo in 2015.

Existing literature reports a negative relationship between trade union membership status and job satisfaction. The analysis found no statistically significant effect of trade union membership status on the overall job satisfaction. Although the descriptive analysis revealed non-union members having slightly higher job satisfaction scores than union members throughout, the univariate test of variance determined that these mean differences are not statistically significant. This finding therefore does not support the findings from other countries, particularly the USA and the UK, that union members are either less satisfied (Blanchflower & Oswald, 1999; Borjas, 1979; Freeman, 1978; Gazioglu & Tansel, 2006; Miller, 1990) or more satisfied (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2020) with their jobs.

The study found a statistically significant but negative relationship between the extrinsic work values and job satisfaction for 2005. This implies that workers who place more value on extrinsic attributes of a job such as earnings, promotion opportunities and job security are less likely to be satisfied. The impact of the extrinsic work values was subsequently negligent in 2015. Regarding extrinsic work values, Kalleberg (1977, p. 128) argues that "valuation of this dimension reflects a workers' desire to obtain present and future monetary awards". The fact that in 2005 South African workers oriented themselves towards extrinsic work values to attain goals outside of work may reflect deficiencies or absences of these characteristics in their workplace contexts at the time, particularly regarding monetary compensation. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, extrinsic rewards become less important as workers' attention shifts to more intrinsic work values (for example, autonomy and personal development) once their material needs are met. However, Gesthuizen et al. (2019) note that extrinsic work values is generally not conducive to achieving job satisfaction, because a greater emphasis on extrinsic values relative to intrinsic values is detrimental to overall life satisfaction.

Relatedly, with regard to work outcomes, the study found that the combined effect of extrinsic and intrinsic work outcomes was able to explain about 12.2% in 2005 and 11.1% in 2015 of variability in job satisfaction, respectively³. A positive and statistically significant relationship was found between the extrinsic and intrinsic work outcomes and job satisfaction both in 2005 and 2015. This means if work outcomes improve, the level of job satisfaction increases. These results indicate a statistically significant and positive relationship between work outcomes and job satisfaction over time, and that an improvement in job outcomes improves job satisfaction levels—both extrinsic and intrinsic. The results further indicate that extrinsic rewards have a greater impact on job satisfaction.

Limitations

Three key factors should be taken into consideration when reflecting on the results reported for this exploratory study. Since data from 2005 and 2015 survey rounds were used, the impact of more recent changes in the world of work, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic, is not considered. The evaluations were subjective and relied on self-reporting. The high level of satisfaction reported does raise the question on whether there has been a positive response bias, reflecting social desirability. Furthermore, it should be noted that this study relied on the SASAS infrastructure, which, while yielding the advantage of scale and a nationally representative sample, limits the number of items that can be asked in the work-orientation module of the survey. In this regard the study should be regarded as being exploratory and a reference point for subsequent expanded studies.

Conclusion and Implications

This study provided an empirical analysis of job satisfaction levels of South Africans at two distinct points in time, 2005 and 2015. A single measure of job satisfaction was used, which is subjective in nature where workers provide an overall assessment of satisfaction with their jobs. The GLM provides estimates demonstrating determinants of job satisfaction in South Africa. It therefore contributes to work, which seeks to examine factors responsible for job satisfaction in the South African context. This is particularly crucial as job satisfaction serves as a vital indicator of people's well-being in the workplace and plays a pivotal role in their overall quality of life (Clark, 2015).

The main results can be summarised as follows: marital status, occupational category and education level had no effect on job satisfaction. The geographic variables, namely, province and geographic type (whether rural or urban) also did not play a role in determining job satisfaction (except for KwaZulu-Natal in 2015). The study found that

3 However, once again the results for intrinsic work outcomes in 2015 and their relationship to job satisfaction should be treated with caution as it was not possible to validate the scale.

race (across all years), age and LSM segment appeared as important socio-economic determinants of job satisfaction. Furthermore, the impact of work values was negative and rather inconsistent. Holding extrinsic work values was found to depress job satisfaction levels in 2005. A clear finding relates to the positive impact of work outcomes on heightening job satisfaction levels. In all, the positive effect of work outcomes on increasing job satisfaction was evidently demonstrated. That is, work outcomes were able to account for much of variability in job satisfaction levels of the employed South Africans. This result may have significant policy implications for policymakers and private and public sector employers to enhance the working conditions which will in turn motivate their employees to work hard in achieving organisational goals and objectives. Currently, extrinsic work values have a greater impact than intrinsic work values. This in turn may be related to the fact that many workers still prioritise the satisfaction of material needs.

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