



Predictors of job satisfaction among individuals with disabilities: An analysis of South Korea's National Survey of employment for the disabled



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the influences of personal, vocational, and job environment related factors that are associated with job satisfaction of individuals with disabilities in South Korea. Data for wage-based working employees from a nationwide survey were obtained, which resulted in a total number of 417 participants. The six hypotheses and mediation effects of personal and work related environmental factors were tested using the structural equation modeling drawn from existing research evidence. Results revealed that (a) life satisfaction and job related environments directly influenced job satisfaction; (b) the relationship between personal experience and job satisfaction was mediated by life satisfaction for both mild/moderate and severe/profound disabilities group; and (c) the mediating role of job environment between vocational preparedness and job satisfaction was only observed for individuals with mild/moderate disabilities. Summary of findings and implications for future research and practices are discussed.

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What this paper adds

The goal of this study was to investigate predictors of adults with disabilities' job satisfaction in South Korea. We employed a structural equation modeling approach that allowed us to examine complex relationships among personal and job-related variables. Hypotheses and conceptual models were developed based on existing research, and model testing for each hypothesis was conducted for all 417 employees with disabilities. We found that personal experience and life satisfaction of individuals with disabilities played meaningful roles in their job satisfaction. In addition, individuals with disabilities who had more vocational preparedness were more likely to apply their vocational knowledge and skills to their current work and experience positive outcomes. These findings imply that experiences of inequity and discrimination in the classroom can lead to diminished satisfaction later in life. Also, this study supports the importance of providing individuals with disabilities with ongoing vocational education and opportunities to develop knowledge and job skills throughout their lives.

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1. Introduction

Only 37.6% of South Korean adults with disabilities are employed, far below Korea's employment rate for people without disabilities (59.5%; [Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2013](#)), and far below the average employment rate for people with disabilities in the European Union (EU: 47.3%; [Eurostat, 2014](#)). The notably poor unemployment rate of people with disabilities is one of the critical, long-lasting concerns in the area of disability policy and special education services in Korea. To address this concern and promote the social responsibilities of employers (e.g., government agencies in public and private enterprises), the Employment Quota System for the Disabled was signed into law in 1991. This law requires employers to hire a certain number of people with disabilities based on the agency and business size. If employers do not implement the requirements of the employment quota (e.g., public companies with over 50 employees must fill at least 3% of their positions with workers with disabilities) they will incur a fine ([Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2013](#)).

Although the Employment Quota System has played an important role in improving the employment rate and attitudes and the actions of employers regarding the employment of persons with disabilities across countries ([Chun, 2011](#); [OECD, 2003](#); [Yasui, 1995](#)), several concerns still exist. The physical placement of an employee with a disability in a workplace does not necessarily guarantee access to accommodations and or modified facilities. Without additional supports, some employees with disabilities may be unable to fulfill their job responsibilities and as a result experience less success in the workplace ([OECD, 2003](#)). This is of great concern because increased employment does not always translate into an increased quality of life for individuals with disabilities ([Chun, 2011](#)). For example, in the United States, there has been a great deal of controversy about the use of the sub-minimum wage certificate issued by the Department of Labor (i.e., Section 14 (c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act), which permits employers to pay people with disabilities a reduced rate. This law has allowed many employers (e.g., [Goodwill; Alba, 2013](#)) to pay people with disabilities pennies per hour, leading to resentment from some employees with disabilities who feel that they are being exploited and abused ([Alba, 2013](#)). Thus, increasing employment cannot initially be viewed as an unqualified good; rather, our goal of increasing employment for people with disabilities should be informed and tempered by an understanding of the conditions under which people with disabilities are most likely to experience satisfaction with their work, and whether current policies and practices promote those conditions.

As such, being physically placed in the workplace might not guarantee improved access to accommodations and modified facilities for employees with disabilities to fulfill their tasks ([OECD, 2003](#)). In the past and in current practices, more attention was given to the disability types (e.g., intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities) or severity (e.g., mild disabilities, severe disabilities) of disability and impairment, rather than the social or vocational barriers that are faced by individuals with disabilities ([OECD, 2003](#)). This implies that the increased employment rate might be nothing but a temporary measure to evaluate the effectiveness of the system ([Mori & Sakamoto, 2014](#)). Other factors requiring more consideration include personal (e.g., attitudes and experiences of individuals with disabilities) and social factors (e.g., job environment, vocational services) that influence the successful operation of such systems and long-term effects of employees with disabilities (e.g., job and life satisfaction, quality of life) ([Gazioglu & Tansel, 2006](#)). Thus, such personal and social factors and relations are among the factors that might vary within different cultural systems and countries ([Yasui, 1995](#)).

The primary goal of this study is to examine factors that may predict adults with disabilities' job satisfaction in South Korea, as well as the extent to which these factors are commonly present for Korean employees with disabilities. Although a number of studies have investigated those factors impacting the functioning and effectiveness of an Employment Quota System in other countries, such as U.S. (e.g., [Hernandez, Keys, & Balcazar, 2000](#)), European countries (e.g., [Gazioglu & Tansel, 2006](#); [Greve, 2009](#)), and Japan ([Mori & Sakamoto, 2014](#)), little research has investigated employment of people with disabilities in South Korea. Additionally, most studies of vocational or job related factors for individuals with disabilities primarily included participants with mild or moderate disabilities, providing relatively little insight into factors that lead to satisfactory employment for individuals with more significant disabilities. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the factors that contribute to job satisfaction among adults with severe disabilities in South Korea. We begin by reviewing research that demonstrated the reasons for the importance of job satisfaction and identified factors that contribute to job satisfaction. We subsequently present our analysis of the 6th Panel Survey of Employment for the Disabled.

2. Job satisfaction: Why does it matter and what contributes to it?

Job satisfaction refers to "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" ([Locke, 1976, p. 1304](#)) or "the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs" ([Spector, 1997, p. 2](#)). An individual's satisfaction at work plays a significant role in their individual work performance; in the aggregate, employees' satisfaction influences the performance of the organization as a whole ([Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007](#)). Further, employees' job satisfaction is related to the health of their personal relationships outside of work ([Chen, Brown, Bowers, & Chang, 2015](#)), their evaluations of themselves and their worth ([Pagan & Malo, 2009](#); [Wu & Griffin, 2012](#)) and their personal health and well-being ([Belkic & Savic, 2013](#)). Thus, understanding job satisfaction is important for understanding whether employment contributes to an individual's overall quality of life.

Scholarship within the field of organizational behavior has identified a number of factors that contribute to job satisfaction, including personal relationships and well-being ([Belkic, 2003](#)), work environment ([Hamermesh, 2001](#); [Judge & Church, 2000](#); [Judge & Klinger, 2007](#); [McAfee & McNaughton, 1997](#)) and so on. However, this research has not disaggregated results for adults with disabilities. Adults with disabilities' efforts to successfully fulfill their work roles may be affected by

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