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Psychiatry Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/psychres

Assessing the relation between career satisfaction in psychiatry with lifelong learning and scientific activity

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 November 2013

Received in revised form

11 March 2014

Accepted 29 March 2014

Available online 5 April 2014

Keywords:

Career satisfaction

Jefferson scale of physician lifelong learning

Lifelong learning

Psychiatry

ABSTRACT

Lifelong learning (LLL) is an essential feature for the doctor to keep clinically updated and has been described as an indicator of competence and professionalism. The aim of this study was to evaluate the association between career satisfaction in psychiatry, lifelong learning, and commitment in scientific activities, taking into account other personal and professional effects. The survey was sent to 453 national psychiatrists and 190 surveys (41.9%) were completed online and validated. The Jefferson Scale of Physician Lifelong Learning (JSPLL) was used to assess the level of LLL for each doctor. The results of the analysis of JSPLL showed that participants more satisfied with their career have greater motivation and invest more in the LLL. Furthermore, participants who were more satisfied with their career had a higher percentage of scientific activity in the last year. Multiple linear regression with these two effects in the model revealed a positive association between career satisfaction in psychiatry, LLL and the publication of scientific papers, leading to the main conclusion that satisfaction with a career in psychiatry has a significant correlation with LLL and with involvement in scientific activities.

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1. Introduction

Research on satisfaction with a career in medicine is important because career satisfaction is a key factor in a physician's physical, psychological, and social well-being. Therefore, this has a positive impact on the quality of the health care provided to patients. Despite the importance and consequences of career satisfaction in psychiatry, it has received little attention in research. Dissatisfaction with one's professional life is related to burnout (Govardhan et al., 2012; Kumar, 2011; Rossler, 2012), and can harm the doctor–patient relationship, leading to worse treatment outcomes (Lasalvia et al., 2009; Priebe et al., 2004).

In psychiatry, the physician must make a sustained effort to keep up-to-date with medical and scientific developments in the relevant area of expertise (Lewis, 1998; Panda and Desbiens, 2010). Thus, physicians must be lifelong learners throughout their professional careers, taking time to keep abreast of advancement in

their specialty. This task is increasingly difficult in a society where scientific, technological, and social changes occur quickly.

The need for continuing professional development is recognized by several national and international medical organizations, as well as by some documents that highlight the importance of continuing medical education (Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), 1999; Epstein and Hundert, 2002; Gonnella et al., 2004). Lifelong learning (LLL) is extremely valued in the medical practice, and has been described as an indicator of competence and professionalism (Arnold, 2002; Duff, 2002; Nelson, 1998). Thereby, medical associations, scientific societies, medical schools, and various medical institutions promote initiatives that aim to impart knowledge and provide professional development training for physicians. However, the relation between career satisfaction and continuing professional development has received little attention. Therefore, the aim of this paper was to investigate this link in the field of psychiatry.

In summary, this study evaluates the association between career satisfaction in psychiatry, LLL in the field of medicine, and involvement in scholarly and scientific activities (i.e. publication and review of scientific papers, participation in research projects, and organization of conferences or scientific meetings). In

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addition, we also focus the relation between career satisfaction in psychiatry and gender, age, length of practice, and overall grade achieved in medicine.

2. Methods

For the purposes of this study a questionnaire was designed in order to collect the following demographic data: final grade achieved in medicine (from 10 to 20, national scale), time of clinical practice and scientific activity in the last year. The assessment of overall satisfaction with a career in psychiatry was measured with a single question as follows: *How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your medical career?* Participants answered to this question using a Likert scale, ranging between 1 (*not at all satisfied*) and 10 (*totally satisfied*). In order to assess the physician's LLL, we used the Jefferson Scale of Physician Lifelong Learning (JSPLL) (Hojat et al., 2003, 2006, 2009a, 2009b). This is a self-report scale consisting of 19 items that evaluate motivation and investment in LLL. The answers were classified in a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

The scale of 19 items measures four subscales (or dimensions) with explicit meaning. The first subscale relates to professionalism, motivation and beliefs related to learning (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 14). The second subscale relates to academic activities (items 5, 9, 10 and 15). The third subscale concerns the attention given to learning opportunities (items 6, 14, 17 and 18). Finally, the fourth subscale relates to technical skills for finding information (items 7 and 19). Overall scores were calculated by the sum of respective items. Higher scores means greater participation in LLL. This scale has been validated for the Portuguese medical population (Salgueira et al., 2009).

2.1. Participants

An e-mail invitation to participate in this survey, with unique hyperlink, was sent to all 453 psychiatrists members of the Portuguese Society of Psychiatry and Mental Health. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the questionnaire was confidential and anonymous. 190 surveys (41.9%) were returned completed and validated and form the base of our analysis.

To simplify the identification and interpretation of the relationship between satisfaction and other variables, the data was divided into three groups based on levels of career satisfaction. Participants were categorized as "least satisfied" (scores 2–6), "moderately satisfied" (score of 7), and "very satisfied" (scores 8–10) with their careers (Hojat et al., 2010).

2.2. Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, statistical modeling and tests for groups in order to investigate the hypotheses of the research. The methods were chosen as they were the most suitable to the different types of response scales of the survey; correlation analysis, stepwise regression and ANOVA were considered. Nonparametric approaches were used whenever the assumptions of the parametric tests failed.

Although most of the scales had already been validated in the Portuguese population, a preliminary analysis of the internal consistency was conducted (Salgueira et al., 2009). For the 19-items of the Jefferson Scale, the Cronbach's (α) reliability coefficient of 0.842 was obtained, which corresponds to a high internal consistency of the scale. The chi-square (χ^2) test was used to test the association between all the categorical variables, while linear correlation coefficients, Pearson and Spearman, were applied for variables in the interval and ratio scales. An exploratory factor analysis was performed using the Jefferson scale to assess how well the four subscales are reflected by this sample. One-way analysis of

variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the independent variable (factor) satisfaction (low, moderate, and high) with all of the previous variables entered as dependent variables, namely the total JSPLL and the four sub-scales. Subsequent post-hoc tests (Tukey and Duncan) were performed (Table 1). Finally, multiple regression was used to identify variables that best predicted the career satisfaction and scholarly activity in the context of LLL. For all statistical analyses, we used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA), version 20.0.

3. Results

The 190 completed answers to the survey (valid response rate of 41.9%) are divided into men (46.8%) and women (53.2%), aged between 25 and 73 years old ($M=39.5$, $S.D.=12.2$ years). The mean time completed in medical practice was 14.35 years ($S.D.=12.13$). The Final mean grade in the degree in medicine was 15.03 ($S.D.=1.3$), meaning a rating on the border of Very Good (in a 20 point maximum). The mean level of satisfaction with the medical profession was 6.69 ($S.D.=1.7$). While three subjects showed the minimum level of satisfaction observed (2), five subjects revealed the maximum of the scale (10).

As mentioned before, the criterion used by Hojat was adopted (Hojat, 2010) to define three groups of satisfaction. The number of participants included in each career satisfaction group was as follows: 73 participants (38.4%) were placed into the less satisfied group (LS); 58 (30.5%) into the moderately satisfied group (MS); and 59 (31.1%) into the very satisfied group (VS). Note that even though the MS group registered a score of 7, this was two points above the midpoint of the scale (5), suggesting that members of this group were satisfied with their careers.

Regarding participation in scientific activities (Table 2), it appears that MS participants participated in the least scientific activity in the last year. In the case of scientific paper publication, the differences between the MS group and the LS and VS (see Table 2) were significant ($p=0.042$).

In order to investigate LLL variables significantly correlated with satisfaction with medical career, a multiple linear regression was conducted, using different methods of variable selection (trying all variables and sequential methods) The full model has the following predictor variables: age, final grade in medicine (degree), total time of clinical practice, overall JSPLL score, all five JSPLL subscales, and gender (as a dummy variable).

The overall model was significant and explains 5.9% (adjusted R^2) of the variability in satisfaction. The total JSPLL score was the only significant predictor of satisfaction ($b=0.066$, $p=0.000$). Considering these results, a new model was tested with the four JSPLL subscales as predictors in order to identify which dimension contributes most for the satisfaction. In order to limit problems of collinearity in the model and to identify, if possible, which subscales are determinant for career satisfaction, the total JSPLL score was omitted from the model. In this second analysis, the

Table 1
Comparison of mean scores on the scales in the three groups of career satisfaction ANOVA.

Variable	Less satisfied (LS)	Moderately satisfied (MS)	Very satisfied (VS)	F	p	Difference between groups (post-hoc tests or multiple comparisons)
JSPLL (total)	57.9	59.5	62.7	8.76	0.00**	VS > MS=LS
JSPLL Subscales						
I. Professionalism, motivation, and beliefs related to learning	30.8	31.8	32.3	4.74	0.010*	VS > LS
II. Active participation in academic research activities	9.8	9.7	11.1	6.75	0.001**	VS > MS=LS
III. Active behavior in updating professional knowledge and skills	11.5	11.9	12.8	3.13	0.045*	VS > MS=LS
IV. Technical skills for information search	5.8	6.1	6.4	8.76	0.00**	VS > LS

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

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