



Original Article

# Work motivation among occupational therapy graduates in Malaysia



Siaw Chui Chai\*, Rui Fen Teoh, Nor Afifi Razaob, Masne Kadar

Occupational Therapy Programme, School of Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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## KEYWORDS

Graduate;  
Occupational  
therapy;  
Professional  
development;  
Work motivation

**Summary** *Objective/Background:* Occupational therapy that focuses on servicing clients demands motivated workers for quality service delivery. The objectives of this study were: (a) to determine the level of work motivation among occupational therapy graduates in Malaysia and (b) to determine if there is a difference in work motivation among these graduates based on work sector, job position, length of work experience, and gender.

*Methods:* This cross-sectional study recruited occupational therapy bachelor's degree graduates using an online survey. The Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (WEIMS) was used to measure level of work motivation.

*Results:* Responses from 82 (60.3%) graduates (male: 26.8%; female: 73.2%) were analysed. Sixty-two (75.6%) graduates worked locally and 20 (24.4%) worked in foreign countries. The average Work Self-Determination Index (W-SDI) score for WEIMS is +11.38 with 78 (95.1%) of graduates demonstrated a self-determined motivational profile and 4 (4.9%) demonstrated a nonself-determined profile. Graduates in the private sector ( $13.10 \pm 6.47$ ) show significantly higher W-SDI score compared to those in the public sector ( $9.40 \pm 6.06$ ),  $p = 0.01$ . W-SDI scores appeared higher among clinician ( $11.67 \pm 6.40$ ), case manager (13.33), and others ( $14.90 \pm 8.23$ ); and those with work experience of 5–6 years ( $13.11 \pm 6.90$ ) and less than one year ( $12.65 \pm 7.12$ ). Male ( $10.29 \pm 6.86$ ) and female ( $11.79 \pm 6.39$ ) graduates shared equally high score. There is no significant difference in W-SDI score based on job position, length of work experience, and gender.

*Conclusion:* Occupational therapy graduates have high work motivation as evident by their self-determined profile. Only work sector imposes difference in work motivation among these graduates. Copyright © 2017, Hong Kong Occupational Therapy Association. Published by Elsevier (Singapore) Pte Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

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\* Corresponding author. Occupational Therapy Programme, School of Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Jalan Raja Muda Abdul Aziz, 50300 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Fax: +60 3 26810200.

E-mail addresses: [sc.chai@ukm.edu.my](mailto:sc.chai@ukm.edu.my) (S.C. Chai), [teohruifen@gmail.com](mailto:teohruifen@gmail.com) (R.F. Teoh), [fifie.razaob@ukm.edu.my](mailto:fifie.razaob@ukm.edu.my) (N.A. Razaob), [masne\\_kadar@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:masne_kadar@yahoo.co.uk) (M. Kadar).

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## Introduction

Work motivation is said to be linked to the delivery of quality of service by enhancing workers' performance as well as directing them towards personal and cooperation goals (Alhassan et al., 2013; Elmadag, 2006; Peters, Chakraborty, Mahapatra, & Steinhart, 2010). Highly motivated workers is the key component of successful health system performance (Peters et al., 2010). Occupational therapy, a profession that focuses on servicing clients with different needs demands motivated workers for quality service delivery. Although there are many studies on work motivation among health care workers (Alhassan et al., 2013; Bernhard, 1984; Bennett & Franco, 1999, pp. 1–45; Hoonakker et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2010; Raming, 2009), similar study relevance to occupational therapy is hardly available.

There are two major types of motivation, i.e., intrinsic motivation (IM) and extrinsic motivation (EM) (Gray & Starke, 1988; Irum, Sultana, Ahmed, & Mehmood, 2012; Nawab, Bhatti, & Shafi, 2011; Raming, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). IM refers to doing something because it is interesting or enjoyable; EM refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). IM although is considered as the best motivator as it has a significant effect on performance, persistence, and well-being that satisfies innate psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000), both types of motivation have the potential to enhance performance of a person (Gray & Starke, 1988; Nawab, Bhatti, et al., 2011).

Investigating work motivation specific to occupational therapy is important because it links closely to the effort that they put to improve the quality of care and client's safety (Alhassan et al., 2013). To do this, understanding of the elements that inform motivation is important. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), there are three psychological needs: (a) need for autonomy; (b) need for competence; and (c) need for relatedness (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conditions that support these three needs are the basis to maintain a person's IM and promote internalization of EM. Achieving maintenance of IM and internalization of EM allows a person to become more self-determined (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT maintains that motivation can be distinguished based on the degree of autonomy (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Tremblay, Blanchard, Taylor, Pelletier, & Villeneuve, 2009). IM has the highest autonomy and can lead to the most positive outcomes. Depending on the respective levels of autonomy, EM is further divided into four types: (a) integrated regulation (INTEG) – where a person identifies the value of an activity to the extent that it becomes part of his/her sense of self; (b) identified regulation (IDEN) – where a person has greater freedom and volition in an activity because the behaviour matches his/her personal goal and identities; (c) introjected regulation (INTRO) – where behaviour or activity is taken in by a person but has not been accepted as a part of him/her; and (d) external regulation (EXT) – where the certain activity is done to obtain a reward. Both IM and EM are intentional and stand in contrast to amotivation (AMO) which means lacks of intention and motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Tremblay et al., 2009).

Malaysia has enjoyed rapid expansion in both public and private healthcare sectors since the past decade. For

instance, in 2012, there were 225 private hospitals in Malaysia and by 2018, the number is projected to increase to 239 (Teo, 2013). The healthcare expansion has created many job opportunities for the field of occupational therapy especially among graduates with a bachelor's degree. Many graduates with various lengths of work experience have been recruited for different job positions in public or private sectors. Work motivation among these graduates may be different if they value the characteristics of each sector differently. Private sector is known to attract workers in terms of: (a) trust gaining from clients; (b) good working conditions; and (c) having own autonomy in certain aspects of their management (Peters et al., 2010). Public sector offers better values from the aspects of employment benefits and superior's recognition (Peters et al., 2010). Both sectors offer equally attractive values, but, workers in public sector enjoy lesser autonomy and show lower motivation compared to their counterparts as reported in Pakistan (Irum et al., 2012) and Australia (Keane, Lincoln, Rolfe, & Smith, 2013). Work motivation is speculated to be influenced by job position as different job positions have different characteristics of work. Peters et al. (2010) identifies seven major characteristics of work that can influence work motivation: (a) work itself; (b) relationship at work; (c) workplace condition; (d) personal development opportunities; (e) pay/rewards; (f) management; and (g) organisational policies (Peters et al., 2010). Work environment that provides feedback, learning opportunity, reward, and recognition tends to increase workers' motivation and satisfaction (Guzman, 2007; Hoonakker et al., 2013). Work experience is an important element for workers' performance as it consists of both quantitative and qualitative components that can be translated into related skills, motivations, and knowledge. Although length of work experience may affect work motivation in many aspects (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998), some studies show that length of work experience does not impose any difference in motivation (Urošević & Milijić, 2012; Whitehouse, Hird, & Cocks, 2007).

Work motivation may be related to demographic variables such as gender (Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000). Men and women have different motivation against salary and work–family relationship (Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007). Study shows women although tend to be more motivated in terms of intrinsic work motivation, difference in work motivation between genders remains insignificant (Eskildsen, Kristensen, & Westlund, 2004).

Given work motivation is very important and yet there is no solid information relevance to the field of occupational therapy, the objectives of our study were: (a) to determine the level of work motivation among occupational therapy graduates in Malaysia, and (b) to determine if there is a difference in work motivation among occupational therapy graduates in Malaysia based on work sector, job position, length of work experience, and gender.

## Methods

### Design and participants

This cross-sectional study was conducted through an online "Survey Monkey". The study surveyed occupational therapy

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