



December 1986

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### Recommended Citation

Meller, Y. and Macarov, D. (1986) "Social Workers' Satisfactions: Methodological Notes and Substantive Findings," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 4 , Article 5.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol13/iss4/5>

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SOCIAL WORKERS' SATISFACTIONS: METHODOLOGICAL  
NOTES AND SUBSTANTIVE FINDINGS

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Abstract

The use of instruments derived from industrial research to investigate the work satisfactions of social workers can lead to distortion of results. Responses from ninety-one social workers in nine agencies indicates sources of satisfactions and dissatisfactions not present in industrial settings, and -- in contradistinction to the "dual-factor" or "bipolarity" theory -- both satisfactions and dissatisfactions arising from the same source in some cases.

The most important factors affecting workers' satisfactions were the ability to achieve results, their relationships with clients, their relationship with members of multidisciplinary staffs, and presence or absence of sufficient time and resources.

The "higher order" needs -- recognition, responsibility, and advancement -- found in industrial research do not appear in these responses.

There are implications for social work education in these findings.

## Introduction

The service sector of the economy, including social work, has shown little research interest in workers' feelings, motivations and satisfactions, as compared to the industrial sector. Whereas industry became concerned with workers feelings almost fifty years ago -- primarily as a presumed influence on productivity -- and has continually broadened that concern, only recently has the service sector, particularly the human services, and especially social work, expressed research interest in workers' feelings, attitudes, and work patterns -- an interest basically spurred by concern about burnout. One result of this relative neglect has been that researchers in the services must, perforce, use methodology and instruments devised in and for industrial settings, with predictable resultant distortions.

This article will summarize the forces which influenced industrial relations research and the directions which it took; report on an exploratory study in social work which emphasizes the inapplicability of current industrial research methods for the services; and discuss the substantive findings of that study.

## Sources and Directions in Industrial Relations Research

Industrial relations research had its roots in the "scientific management" school of Taylor, (1) around the turn of the century, which saw workers basically as tools to be manipulated. this viewpoint was challenged by the reported findings of the Hawthorne studies,(2) which emphasized the importance of workers' feelings -- and importance which, incidentally, has itself been challenged. (3) Nevertheless, the basic findings of the Hawthorne experiments -- which came to be known as the "human relations" school of

industrial research -- were extended by Herzberg and his associates, (4) who sought the sources of workers' satisfactions and dissatisfactions by asking them to think of days on which they were particularly satisfied or dissatisfied at work, and to enunciate the reasons.

Herzberg found that satisfactions and dissatisfactions were not the obverse of one another; that they come from different sets of sources. satisfaction can be increased or decreased without affecting satisfaction, and dissatisfaction can be removed without increasing satisfaction. This came to be known variously as the "bi-polarity," or "two-factor", or "dual-factor" theory. Herzberg further found that satisfactions come from the work itself, and are the fulfillment of "higher order" needs, in Maslow's (5) terms, while dissatisfaction stem from the conditions surrounding the work.

Based on sources of satisfaction reported by Herzberg and his replicators -- which, it should be remembered, were responses by thousands of industrial workers to open-ended unstructured questions -- industrial relations research began to refine these sources, i. e., to relate different sources to demographic factors, or structural factors, or to personality variables; as well as dissecting the given sources in sub-categories, such as external/internal, equity/equality, attribution, valence-instrumentality-expectancy, goal achievement, and other so-called process theories. (6)

Almost ten years ago Locke (7) identified over three thousand such studies in the literature, and there are those who believe that there are at least an equal number of unpublished studies.(8) This is in sharp contrast to the total of 684 studies of all aspects of social work appearing in social work journals

between 1956 and 1984, (9) of which only a handful were concerned with social workers' satisfaction. Jayarante and Chess studied satisfaction directly (10), while others studied them as part of other phenomena: attrition (11), turnover (12), Stress (13), and careers (14).

It should be noted that the Herzberg methodology and finding have not gone uncriticized, (15) but the great bulk of industrial relations research is based squarely on the satisfaction which Herzberg elicited with his open-ended questions.

One result of the plethora of research set off by Herzberg is a set of instruments with reliability coefficients and validity indices which have been published in a number of places. (16) It is to these scales, or to parts of them, that social workers perforce must turn as they seek for recognized instruments with which to conduct research into the work patterns and satisfaction of social workers. However, since these instruments were derived from the expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction of industrial workers, there is reason to question their applicability and their validity as they apply to service workers in general and to social workers in particular.

Consequently, as part of a larger study designed to explore the impact of social workers' satisfaction on the quality of their relationship with clients, it was decided to include Herzberg-type open-ended questions, to allow the social worker respondents to express the sources of their satisfaction and dissatisfaction, without making a priori assumptions about them.

## Sources of Social Workers' Satisfaction

### Methodology

### The Sample:

Since one of the hypotheses in the larger study was that varying amounts of social workers' satisfaction would exhibit themselves primarily in workers' relationships with clients (rather than in provision of resources or changes in procedures), agencies were sought in which the major method of treatment consisted of client-social worker relationships. Nine public agencies meeting this requirement were identified in Jerusalem. These included a mental health out-patient department; a substance-abuse service; three hospitals' a service for women in distress; two local personal social service departments; and the social work department of an industrial concern. The total sample included all the social workers in these settings -- ninety-one in number -- with the exception of a few who were unavailable. Their ages ranged from 22 to 65, with the median being 31. Years of professional experience ranged from one to 13, with a median of 6. Educational levels included BSWs, MSWs, and Ph.Ds. Ninety percent of the sample were female. Given the restricted locality from which this sample was drawn, and the particular kind of agency to which the sample was confined, it is clear that this sample should not be considered representative of all social workers in Israel, and certainly not of those elsewhere.

### The Instrument:

The Herzberg-type questions were the final two of a forty-two question form, and consisted of the following, in Hebrew:

"Think of a normal day at work when you felt quite satisfied. What was the source of your satisfaction?"

"Think of a normal day at work when

you were quite dissatisfied. What was the source of your dissatisfaction?"

#### Data-handling:

The responses to these two questions were categorized by independent judges. The number of times each category was mentioned, and by how many people, and as a satisfier or dissatisfier, was computed and graphed. Due to the nature of the sample and the nature of the questions, tests of statistical significance were considered irrelevant, and consequently were not used. (17)

#### Findings:

##### Sources of worker satisfaction/dissatisfaction

One of the salient findings of this study is the fact that when given the opportunity through open-ended questions to identify the sources of their work satisfaction and dissatisfaction, social workers named factors in a large part different from those found in industrial and indirect service settings (Table 1). Although some respondents mentioned more satisfaction/dissatisfaction sources than did others, the great majority of the sources mentioned were unique to the human services, or had different meanings than did the same items in industrial settings.

Social workers mentioned thirteen sources of satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and of these, nine were not mentioned by industrial and indirect service workers queried by Herzberg. In addition, as will be noted below, there is question concerning the content of the common response, "achievement." If sources consisting of less than ten percent of the total responses (regardless of whether they denoted satisfiers or dissatisfiers) are omitted (Table 2), then four of the five sources given

by social workers are different from those given by other types of workers.

It should be noted that Herzberg considered only the responses, and not the number of respondents. Since each respondent could, and usually did, give more than one response, it is of some importance to also consider how many respondents mentioned each item. This information is contained in Table 3. When only those items mentioned by 50% or more of the respondents ( in contradistinction to the number of responses ) are considered, then there remains only one item which is common to industry and to social work, subject to the same reservation concerning "achievement" mentioned above. Thus, whether judging by the number of responses or the number of respondents, the important sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction reported by social workers are almost totally different from those which make up the bulk of industrial relations research studies.

For example, the importance or relationships with clients, alluded to in 15% of the total responses and by 62% of the respondents, not only never arose in the ten studies quoted by Herzberg, (18) but is almost never included in studies of work satisfaction generally. Examination of almost five hundred worker-satisfaction scales (19) indicates only one response even remotely connecting workers' satisfactions with clients. This lists "respect from customers" as a satisfier. (20) Nothing else is even distantly related to relationship with clients.

The same is true of satisfaction and dissatisfaction arising from relations with multidisciplinary staffs. This was mentioned in 13% of the responses, and by 74% of the sample, but is nowhere included in the 500 scales mentioned above, nor in any industrial research studies in the literature.



Similarly, while 10% of the social workers' responses and 55% of the sample spoke about the availability or lack of availability of time and resources, this factor is completely absent in industrial research studies.

While the factor "variety of work" given in 10% of the responses and by 48% of the sample could conceivably be subsumed under Herzberg's category "the work itself," the latter usually contains repetitiveness as only a part of a reaction that is often explained to include a sense of self-fulfillment from proper use of one's knowledge and skills' or the feeling of working on something useful or valuable for society; or pleasure arising from the activity itself. Since social workers did not specify any of these items, nor the work itself as a totality, it is the factor or variety which makes this response unique.

Only in the case of "achievement," or "achieving results," given in 19% of the responses and by 85% of the respondents, is there overlap between industrial studies and the one reported here. Herzberg defines achievement as "successful completion of a job, solutions to problems, vindication, and seeing the results of one's work." Whether social workers meant the same thing is open to question, since achieving results in their terms probably means being of help to the client. However, enough similarity exists in the responses as given to consider this as the same item in both industrial and service settings.

#### Satisfaction vis-a-vis Dissatisfaction

The second salient finding in this study is the listing by social workers of some factors as both satisfiers and dissatisfiers. It is of the essence in Herzberg's bi-polarity findings and conclusions that one set of factors gives rise to satisfaction, while another

set of factors is the source of dissatisfaction. In this study, however, of The thirteen items mentioned by ten percent of more of the respondents, only four ("variety," "relations with colleagues," "bureaucratic pressures," and "salary") had as much as 75% of the responses on one side or the other (Table 3). Conversely, nine of the thirteen were both satisfiers and dissatisfiers, by this formula. further, as regards five of them, the same respondents listed them as both satisfiers and dissatisfiers, in rations ranging from 16% to 41% (Table 3). This is a clear contradiction of the theory on which the great bulk of studies based on Herzberg's findings are founded.

### Social Workers Satisfactions

In addition to the finding that the sources of satisfaction in social work differ in large part from those in industry, and that the qualities of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not as distinct in social work as they are in other settings, this study also gave social workers an opportunity to enunciate the sources of the satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This section discusses their responses.

Eighty-five percent of the social workers interviewed reported receiving satisfaction from their ability to achieve results by and for their clients, or dissatisfaction from inability to do the same. This is in line with Fisch's (21) finding that one of social workers' reasons for leaving their jobs is their inability to function for their clients' benefits as they feel they should. Since in many industrial settings efforts to increase workers' satisfaction are through the previously mentioned job enlargement, job enrichment, and other variations of "process theory," (22) these findings indicate that increasing social workers' satisfaction requires a very diff-

erent focus. Insofar as they are enabled to help their clients more successfully through provision of more time and resources, through more training, through changes in policy and administration, or through other means, their own work satisfactions will be increased. This, incidentally, supports some rather recent findings in industrial research that rather than satisfactions leading to more, harder, or better work, such work may itself create satisfactions for workers. (23).

Certain client characteristics -- their unwillingness to help themselves, and their inordinate demands on the time and energy of the worker. (24) changing this aspect is much less under the control of agencies, and even of workers themselves. To the extent that social work education leads students to think of clients as invariably wanting a good relationship with the worker, and grateful for help given, this stereotype is susceptible to change. However, it should be noted that this item contained slightly more satisfiers than dissatisfiers -- contact with clients can be a source of satisfaction. Moreover, 41% of those mentioning this item were selective, seeing it as a source of satisfactions in some cases, and dissatisfactions in others.

Where relationship with multidisciplinary staffs is concerned, this is probably not unique to social workers, since members of other human service professions work together with a variegated staff. Handless, for example, studied the relationship of nurses to doctors, among other things. (25) In the agencies studied in the present research there was a high proportion of interdisciplinary relationships -- with probation officers, homemakers, nurses, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and others. Since relations with outside agencies were reported on separately, these multiprofessional teams seem to be within the agencies studied, and thus the

relationships -- positive or negative -- are on-going and stable. The findings suggest, therefore, that there are some agencies where the relationship is good and others where it is not. The existence of the former would seem to suggest that the latter are amenable to purposeful change efforts.

Although the availability of time and resources was mentioned in total by 55% of the respondents, and 75% of those mentioning it found it to be a dissatisfier, yet 25% found this to be a satisfier. The used terms like "having time to do a good job," or "being able to meet time schedules." That the majority were dissatisfied, however, supports Dressel's finding that this is primarily a source of dissatisfaction. (26) This area too, is at least theoretically amenable to change, although it is probable that had agencies been able to provide more time and/or resources, they would have done so.

Although no other factors were mentioned by as much as 50% of the sample, 10% of the responses mentioned the variety of the work. As discussed previously, it is not clear from the responses exactly what aspect of variety is meant, or most important -- clients, problems, methods, or activities. This area warrants further investigation.

Further, it is noteworthy that neither supervision, administration, nor bureaucratic pressures constituted 10% of the responses, or were mentioned by 50% of the respondents. Supervision, however, was clearly a satisfier for most of those mentioning it, just as bureaucratic pressures were unanimously seen as dissatisfiers, with administration -- including staff meetings and in-service training -- about equally divided. If all of these are combined into an overall supervision/administration category, they amount to 16% of the responses, and are somewhat on the dissatis-

fier side.

Relations with other services are clearly dissatisfiers, while relations with colleagues are satisfiers. Salary was mentioned in only 2% of the responses, but was in every case a dissatisfier.

Finally, the "higher order" needs postulated by Herzberg, including recognition, responsibility, and advancement, do not appear in social workers' responses. The first two may be embedded, so to speak, in the job, with self-recognition or recognition by clients replacing the need for outside recognition, and responsibility being inherent in the many decisions made in the course of social work practice, as well as in the relative freedom given social workers to conduct practice within a framework of judgements and decisions. The lack of "advancement" as a factor may be an artifact of the Israeli situation, where job descriptions and ranks are legally determined in public agencies, and promotion is usually either through a collective work agreement, or on the basis of seniority.

Summarizing this section, it is clear that many of the sources of satisfaction given importance in industrial relations studies do not appear in social work, or do not become determinants of satisfaction among social workers.

### Summary

In this study of practicing social workers, open-ended questions were asked about the sources of their satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The methodology proved useful in that it resulted in identification of satisfaction sources not found in industrial or indirect-service research; in the absence of several sources customarily found there; and in differences concerning the distinction between

satisfactions and dissatisfactions. Social workers saw achieving results; relations with clients; and relations with multidisciplinary staffs as sources of both satisfactions and dissatisfactions, while the variety of work was a clear satisfier, and lack of time and resources a dissatisfier. No other factors were mentioned in ten percent of the responses, or by fifty percent of the respondents.

Many of the sources of social workers' satisfactions seem amenable to influence or manipulation in a planful manner. However, more investigation seems indicated into the content of workers' relationships with clients; the exact meaning of "achieving results;" the components of variety in social work; and the dynamics of multidisciplinary staff relations.

As research into work patterns in the services continues, it seems important that exploratory, hypothesis-seeking studies be undertaken, rather than adopting the assumptions, hypotheses, findings, methodology, and instruments developed in and for industrial research.

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Table 1.

Sources of Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction  
(total responses)

---

Industrial Workers	Social Workers
<u>Similar</u>	
Achievement	Achieving results
Supervision -- technical	Supervision
Supervision -- relations	
Company policy/administration	Administration
Salary	Salary

---

<u>Dissimilar</u>	
Recognition	Relations with Clients
Work itself	Relations Multi-disciplinary staff
Responsibility	Variety of work
Advancement	Relations other services
Working conditions	Relations colleagues
	Bureaucratic pressures
	Participation in decisions
	Relations clients families

Table 2

Sources of satisfaction/Dissatisfaction  
(constituting ten percent or more of total  
responses)

---

Industrial Workers

Social Workers

Similar

Achievement

Achieving results

---

Dissimilar

Work itself  
Recognition  
Responsibility  
Advancement

Variety of work  
Relations with  
clients  
Relations Multi-  
disciplinary  
Availability of  
time/resources

Table 3  
Social Workers' Satisfaction/Dissatisfactions as Responses to Herzberg-type Questions

N = 91 respondents 524 responses				DISSATISFIERS											SATISFIERS											Total responses	
respondents mentioning item	#	%	dissatisfier #	%	number of responses											#	%										
					50	40	30	20	10	0	10	20	30	40	50												
respondents listing as both satisfier and dissatisfier	77	85	18	23	41 achieving results											54	95	18									
					37 relations clients											43	80	15									
	56	62	24	41	32 relations multidis.											35	67	13									
	67	74	-	-	9 variety of work											43	52	10									
	44	48	8	18	37 avail. time/resources											13	50	10									
	50	55	-	-													50	10									

respondents mentioning item	#	%	respondents listing as both satis- fier and dissatis- fier	#	%	DISSATISFIERS											SATISFIERS					Total	
						number of responses											number of responses					#	%
						50	40	30	20	10	0	10	20	30	40	50	27 relations other services 15					42	08
34	37	8	24														9 supervision 22					31	06
31	34	7	16														2 rel. coll. 25					27	05
27	30	-	-														12 admin 11					23	04
23	25	-	-														19 bur. press.					19	04
19	24	-	-														5 part dec 11					16	03
16	18	-	-														3 rel fam 9					12	02
12	13	-	-														10 salary					10	02
10	11	-	-																			10	02