

## Pilot Study

# Work Experience of Healthcare Professionals in India: An Observational Pilot Study

**Bhakti Murkey<sup>1</sup>, Suresh Kumar Mehta<sup>2</sup>, Mahendra Warhade<sup>3\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Assistant professor, <sup>2</sup>Professor and Head, <sup>3</sup>Senior Consultant

Department of Psychiatry, Pacific Medical College and Hospital,  
Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

\*Corresponding author Email: rajwarhade1234@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

*With growing prevalence of occupational dissatisfaction and stress in healthcare professionals in India, there is a parallel rising concern for adverse influence on the doctor's own health, the patient's care, and reduction in overall quality of healthcare system in the country. This study is a brief survey of personal experiences, opinions, and beliefs in a group of 350 healthcare professionals in an urban setting in India. The study aims to explore the underlying attitudes and practices in doctors working in India in the current circumstances, as opposed to global affairs. Interestingly, the results display a unique blend of gratitude and disappointments in many doctors who continue to show up to work every day as frontline warriors; saving lives and serving humanity.*

**KEYWORDS:** Work satisfaction, Healthcare

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### BACKGROUND

The quality of healthcare delivery is a direct outcome of the quality of healthcare service provider – his knowledge, attitude, and practices. Patient behaviour in terms of cordial conversation as well as treatment adherence is known to be affected by the patient's satisfaction with the treating doctor. The general population deserves high quality healthcare, which can be delivered only when the most integral aspects of healthcare system – the doctors are productive, contented and consistently available<sup>1</sup>. And the doctor's quality of care is known to be affected by his personal satisfaction with his work and workplace<sup>2,3</sup>. On an individual level, a high level of dissatisfaction and job stress can impair one's mental and physical health, including quality of life and quality of work<sup>4</sup>. Job satisfaction is also identified as a major influencer of retention of existing doctors and future

recruitment of new ones. There is very little research on exploring level of work satisfaction in doctors, especially in Indian context. Hence, this study was conducted with the aim of studying the qualitative work experience of doctors in India and discussing its potential implications on our healthcare system and service provision.

### METHODOLOGY

**Participants:** Doctors from various fields of healthcare (allopathy, ayurveda, homeopathy) were recruited using the snowball sampling method, through social network of the authors. A sample of 350 doctors was recruited over a period of 30 days.

**Assessment Tool:** A semi-structured proforma was developed on the basis of standard and validated

questionnaires for assessing work satisfaction – namely, the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale-10 and SEHC (Satisfaction of Employees in Healthcare) proforma<sup>5,6</sup>. The following items were included in the same:

*E-mail address:*

*Name (optional):*

*City: Age: Gender:*

*Marital status:*

*Highest Qualification:*

*Speciality:*

*Years of service in healthcare:*

*Sector: Public/ Private/ Both public and private/ Self-employed*

*Nature of work: Full-time/ Part-time/ Contractual*

*Number of working hours per week (approximate):*

*I have been previously diagnosed with a medical condition – If yes, please specify details*

*I am on formal treatment for the same – if yes, please specify details*

*I have been previously diagnosed with a psychiatric condition – If yes, please specify details*

*I am on formal treatment for the same – if yes, please specify details*

*I indulge in the use of psychoactive substances – If yes; please specify details (name, frequency)*

*Based on how you feel about it over the past one year, please answer YES or NO for each of them:*

1. *I am in the healthcare profession by choice*
2. *I carry out meaningful work every day*
3. *I like my work*
4. *I feel proud and grateful to be in this line of work*
5. *I am happy with the financial return that my work gets me*
6. *I feel valued and respected at work*
7. *My job does justice to my qualification and training*
8. *I feel motivated to go to work every day*
9. *I can make autonomous decisions at my work*
10. *My work allows me professional growth and development*

11. *My network of colleagues and fellow professionals supports me*

12. *My work-life balance is satisfactory*

13. *My work is very challenging*

14. *I am able to cope effectively with my work stress*

15. *I feel stressed out due to the nature of my work*

16. *I feel stressed out due to the duration of my working hours*

17. *I have developed physical ailments in my line of work*

18. *I have developed mental health concerns in my line of work*

19. *I want a better job in the same line of work*

20. *I want to change my line of work*

21. *I have been humiliated, hurt or treated unfairly by common people at my work*

22. *I am not happy with the way doctors are perceived in society today*

23. *Doctors in these times need to be business-minded in order to sustain themselves*

24. *I will encourage my children to pursue this line of work if they wish to*

25. *Doctors in other countries are happier than Indian doctors*

**Procedure:** With informed consent and confidentiality agreement, demographic details were recorded for each participant, followed by their responses to each question on the semi-structured proforma. This data was collected through online circulation of a Google form on WhatsApp. The presence of any comorbid physical and mental health concern, and ongoing treatments was screened for. The data was summarized as a qualitative summary of findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey compiled the information gathered from all 350 doctors, of which 56% comprised of male participants. The age of participants ranged between 23 and 71 years, with a mean age of 36.4 years. Nearly 60% of the participants were either married or in a relationship. More than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the participants were medical graduates and another 1/3<sup>rd</sup> had a postgraduate qualification. The years of service in the participants ranged from 1 year to 40 years, with a mean duration of 12.6 years of service in healthcare.

While most of the participants were from the field of Psychiatry, other participant doctors belonged to various medical and surgical speciality of healthcare like Dermatology, Anaesthesiology, Critical Care Medicine, Biochemistry,

Internal Medicine, Paediatrics, Family Medicine, Pathology, Chest Medicine, Obstetrics, Otolaryngorhinology (ENT), General Surgery, Orthopaedics and Ophthalmology. A small section of the participants also belonged to Super-speciality branches like Cardiology, Radiation Oncology or Plastic Surgery; and few others, belonged to medical internship or allied health professions (Dentistry, Ayurveda, or Homeopathy).

More than half of the participants were working in the private healthcare sector and another 1/3<sup>rd</sup> in private and public sectors, both. The mean years of service provided by all doctors in the survey was 12.7 years, ranging from 1 year experience of internship to more than 50 years in senior practitioners. Up to 70% of doctors worked full-time in their professions and the mean duration of working hours for the group was 48.8 hours per week (ranging from 6 hour shifts per day for interns, to 24\*7 on-call duties of >84 hours/week).

Nearly 1/4<sup>th</sup> participants had been previously diagnosed with a **medical condition** and of those, 1/4<sup>th</sup> proportion was taking formal treatment for the same. Most commonly reported morbidities were hypertension, diabetes mellitus, ischemic heart disease, Covid-related illnesses, hypothyroidism, dyslipidaemia, PCOD, migraine, spondyloses, and even malignancies, psoriasis, or epilepsy.

Only 7% of the participants reported to have been diagnosed with a **mental health condition** in their lifetimes, of which only 10% were on formal psychiatric treatment. Commonly reported diagnoses were clinical depression and anxiety disorders. When asked about psychoactive substance use, only 11 % reported to have ongoing use of alcohol or cigarette smoking.

A whopping majority of 87% of the doctors shared that they were in the healthcare profession **voluntarily**, and 84% felt that their work was **meaningful**. An 8<sup>th</sup> of the sample population felt equivocal about their feelings towards their work but the rest of them said that they liked it. More than 90% of doctors felt **pride and gratitude** for being in the healthcare profession, even if only 43.5% felt that it gave them reasonable **financial returns**. In fact, more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the participants felt that the money earned was not good enough in return for their inputs and hard work.

More than 76% doctors felt valued and respected in their line of work and an equal portion felt **satisfied** that their jobs did justice to their qualification and expertise. About 3/4<sup>th</sup> of doctors said that they felt **motivated** to go to work every day and an equivalent portion felt that they could make autonomous workplace **decisions** by themselves.

More than 80% doctors agreed that their work offered them ample opportunities for **professional growth** and an equal proportion felt encouraged and **supported** by their colleagues and fellow professionals. 2/3<sup>rd</sup> proportion of participants felt happy with their **work-life balance**, while nearly 15% expressed clear dissatisfaction with the same.

Although the group appeared to express overall satisfactory experiences with their careers, a majority of them (76%) acknowledged their work to be challenging. While 70% of the participants felt that they could cope effectively with their **work-stress**, others reported feeling stressed out either due to nature of their work (49%) or duration of their working hours (41%), or both. Majority of doctors denied developing any **physical health** ailments owing to their work, but 28% of them admitted to the same. Similarly, 24% doctors reported to have developed **mental health** concerns in their line of work. Only 12.5% doctors felt the need to change their professions, while >46% felt the **need for better jobs**, albeit in the same line of work.

Most doctors denied having hurtful or **humiliating experiences** at workplace, but nearly 19% shared having such detrimental experiences. A considerable 22% of doctors were not sure about these experiences being unfair or frankly negative. Nonetheless, > 80% doctors agreed that healthcare professionals were not perceived well in today's society. While 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of them were equivocal about their opinions, about 47% doctors felt that healthcare professionals need to be **business-minded** in order to sustain themselves in today's era.

In view of their mixed experiences, 22% doctors firmly refused to encourage their children to pursue healthcare profession for themselves, while >54% doctors were still supportive of the idea. When asked about happiness quotient of doctors practicing in **other countries** as compared to India, about 90% doctors felt that the former group was happier than the latter, even though 27% of them were not sure how they felt about it.

## SUMMARY

This interesting take of healthcare providers in contemporary Indian era prompts us to reflect upon the changing trends of doctor-patient relationship today. Taking into consideration the occupational health hazards of this profession, there could be potential dearth of quality healthcare providers in the coming years. These service providers now demand tangible returns for their efforts and the risks they take during their lifetimes in this field, over and above the returns they get on emotional or humanitarian grounds. Research has established a strong association between work dissatisfaction and adverse work environment, in turn affecting the standards of healthcare delivery<sup>7</sup>. For those of us who are already surviving in this boat, there is much scope for quality improvements in workplace culture, interpersonal efficiency, and work-life balance in healthcare settings in India.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors thank all the doctors who took their valuable time out from busy working hours in order to contribute to this survey.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** None

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** None

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