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## Evaluation of job satisfaction in a sample of Spanish social workers through the 'Job Satisfaction Survey' scale

### Evaluación de la satisfacción laboral en una muestra de trabajadores sociales españoles mediante la escala 'Job Satisfaction Survey'

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#### ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to determine the level of job satisfaction experienced by social workers and to establish whether there are significant differences between the various levels of job satisfaction and a series of personal features and job characteristics. The participants were 947 social workers (861 women and 86 men) belonging to 35 of the 36 Professional Associations existing in Spain. The measurement tool used is the *Job Satisfaction Survey* scale, designed by Spector [2002. *Psicología Industrial y Organizacional: Investigación y Práctica* [Industrial and organizational psychology: Research and practice]. México: Manual Moderno]. The results show that the social workers surveyed experience moderate levels of job satisfaction ( $M = 115.8$ ;  $SD = 21.4$ ). The intrinsic factor that seems to have the greatest positive influence on job satisfaction is the nature of the job, while the extrinsic factors of pay, fringe benefits, and operating conditions are the ones that contribute most to job dissatisfaction, and social workers have no control over any of them.

#### RESUMEN

El objetivo de este estudio fue determinar el nivel de satisfacción laboral experimentado por los trabajadores sociales y examinar si hay diferencias significativas entre los diferentes niveles de satisfacción laboral y una serie de características personales y del puesto de trabajo. Los participantes fueron 947 trabajadores sociales, pertenecientes a 35 de los 36 Colegios Profesionales existentes en España (861 mujeres y 86 hombres). El instrumento de medida utilizado fue la escala *Job Satisfaction Survey* (JSS) diseñada por Spector (1997). Los resultados mostraron que los trabajadores sociales encuestados experimentan niveles moderados de satisfacción en el trabajo ( $M = 115,8$ ;  $DT = 21,4$ ). El factor intrínseco que mayor influencia positiva tiene sobre la satisfacción laboral sería la naturaleza del trabajo, mientras que los factores extrínsecos remuneración, beneficios y condiciones de trabajo son quienes más contribuyen a la insatisfacción laboral. Los factores que más contribuyen a la insatisfacción laboral son factores sobre los que los trabajadores sociales no tienen control.

#### KEYWORDS

Job satisfaction; social workers; Two-Factor Theory; Job Satisfaction Survey

#### PALABRAS CLAVE

Satisfacción laboral; trabajadores sociales; teoría bifactorial; Job Satisfaction Survey

## Introduction

Job satisfaction has recently been and currently still is a highly debated subject both in the academic world and in business (Meliá & Peiró, 1989). Its causes, determinants, and antecedents have been investigated in different professional sectors (Canal, 2013; Castillo & Prieto, 1990). In recent decades, in the field of social work, a considerable amount of research related to this topic has been conducted (Cole, Panchanadeswaran, & Daining, 2004; Flores, Miranda, Muñoz, & Sanhueza, 2012; Graham et al., 2012; Papadaki & Papadaki, 2006; Smith & Shields, 2013), but in Spain in particular few bibliographic references can be found (Cuesta, 2009; Gaspar, 1996; Gómez, 2013; Martín, Padial, Romero, & Serrano, 1996).

Lázaro (2009) points out that social work is a demanding profession, in which workers tend to develop their activities in organisations that are subject to the consequences of frequent changes in the political sphere, and suffer severe restrictions in resources. High levels of job dissatisfaction and burnout have been exposed, especially associated with organisational issues, lack of opportunities for professional career advancement, low salary, and little recognition of people's work (Bradley & Sutherland, 1995; Coffey, Dugdill, & Tattersall, 2004; Kadushin & Kulys, 1995; McLean & Andrew, 2000). Among the organisational issues, lack of funding, cutbacks, and staff turnover; lack of connections with other departments; the attitude of other professionals, and the problem of working in a bureaucratised environment have been noted (Cushman, Evans, & Namerow, 1995).

Butler (1990) considers job satisfaction to be an important area of study for social work, due to the humanitarian values of the profession, the preoccupation with the users' satisfaction and the economic impact of absenteeism from work. Jayaratne and Chess (1986) point out that job dissatisfaction can lead to burnout, with negative implications both for workers and for the quality of service provided. Along these lines, Hombrados and Cosano (2011) state that they consider satisfaction to be a significant predictor of behaviour, for example, for absence from work and career changes. Therefore, we concur with Staudt (1997), when she says that job satisfaction is a legitimate and important area of study in social work.

## Social work in Spain

Sarasa (1993), upon referring to the beginnings of the profession in Spain, emphasises that social aid was initially in the hands of specific Catholic groups and of the medical sector, and that its development was limited and its professionalisation took longer than it did in other European countries. Facing the need to address the social problems that afflicted Spanish society and to promote social welfare through social work professionals, in 1932 the first School of Social Work 'School of Social Aid for Women', which had its origin in the so-called 'social Catholicism', was created in Barcelona.

During the Second Republic (1931–1939), the development of social work was promoted, and it was characterised by the impetus of 'working and social legislation' (Álvarez, 1982). Given how short the period was, this development could not be fulfilled and a period of stagnation began, which lasted from the military coup of 1936 until the end of the 1950s. Franco's regime did not favour the advancement of professional training and practice in this field, instead it halted it, leaving social work in the hands of the Church and of the dominant political ideology. Until 1964, studies of social work were not recognised (Red & Brezmes, 2003).

In the 1970s, a political transition and the proclamation of the Constitution (1978) occurred. The establishment of a Social and Democratic State of Law and the consequent legal framework of citizens' rights and duties would be decisive factors in the advancement of social work. In 1983, training in social work obtained university status and was incorporated in university education as an Associate Degree in Social Work. The creation of a field of knowledge of Social Work and Social Services in June 1990 was the culmination of this process, bringing recognition as a scientific discipline with theoretical-practical contents, and promoting the creation of specific documents and literature.

Recently, in order to adapt the university system to the European Space of Higher Education (EEES), important changes have been made to standardise and recognise degrees and competences. A single-track system has been established for all degrees throughout the levels of Bachelor, Master's, and Doctorate, in place of the traditional Spanish dual system of short courses (Associate Degrees) and long courses (Bachelor Degrees). The process of transformation of the course of studies from Associate Degrees to Bachelor Degrees in Social Work has culminated in the launch, in 2008, of the Bachelor Degree in Social Work, within the EEES, with its own profile and differentiated by four years of study.

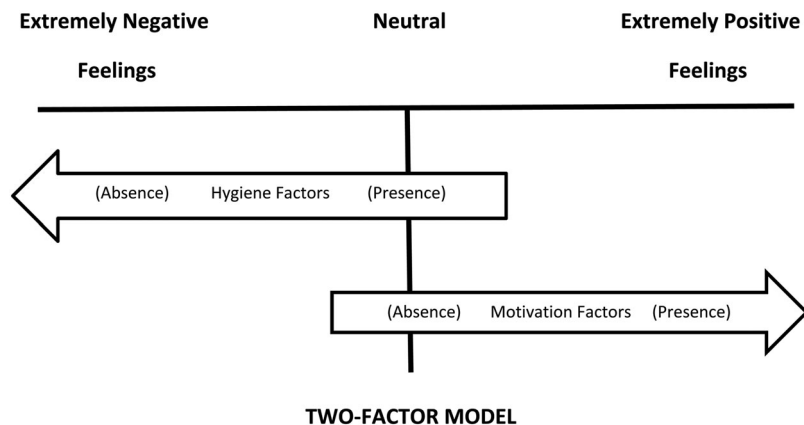
## Literature review

### *Job satisfaction*

Currently, there is no unanimously accepted definition of the concept of job satisfaction. Moreover, on many occasions, as shown by Harpaz (1983), each author has created a new definition for the development of their own investigation. The traditional model of job satisfaction focusses on all the feelings that a person has about their work (Locke, 1976; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). However, what makes a job satisfactory or unsatisfactory depends not only on the nature of the job but also on the expectations an individual has about what their job should offer. In contrast with the traditional view, Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) developed the Two-Factor Theory of job satisfaction.

The authors investigated job satisfaction among 200 engineers and accountants, using Flanagan's method of 'critical incidents' (1954). Their results showed that certain factors were normally associated with high-job satisfaction, while others were related to a higher frequency of job dissatisfaction. A detailed analysis of the results showed that, in general, the aspects that generated satisfaction were related to the possibility of development, opportunities for recognition, the ability to overcome challenges, the possibility of using creativity, opportunities for taking responsibility of one's own work, chances to work autonomously, and to gain promotions. These elements related to work contents were called 'motivational', or intrinsic factors. As for the aspects or 'incidents' that cause job dissatisfaction in those interviewed, the authors emphasised salary, job security, relationship with co-workers, working conditions, company policies, and technical aspects of supervision. These elements related with work context were named 'hygienic', or extrinsic factors.

Therefore, instead of considering job satisfaction to be a continuum that goes from complete dissatisfaction to complete satisfaction, Herzberg proposed two independent dimensions that cause, in different ways, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Thus, the presence of motivating factors would



**Figure 1.** Herzberg's two-factor model.

produce satisfaction and their absence indifference, whereas the presence of hygienic factors would generate indifference and their absence dissatisfaction. This view is summarised in [Figure 1](#).

A critique of Herzberg's theory is, first of all, a critique of the method used and the empirical results, even those obtained by Herzberg himself, are not so clear. In the 15 studies that Lévi-Leboyer (1975) analysed, at least 6 exceptions to the stated rule were found. Five factors of the context usually mentioned contribute to satisfaction and one factor of the content is mentioned more frequently as contributing to dissatisfaction. Finally, the Two-Factor Theory could be considered too simplistic to analyse such a complex reality. It is difficult to reduce the field of observation to two categories as clear-cut as satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and, on the other hand, we could consider other motivating and hygienic factors that are very different from those considered. Herzberg's fundamental contribution has been to stimulate the investigation on the contents of work, emphasising the importance, for the members of an organisation, of the internal factors.

### ***Job satisfaction in social work***

Compared with other occupations, social workers enjoy high-job satisfaction. A survey of a wide variety of occupational groups in the UK indicated that social work sits just within the top 20 groups that enjoy high-job satisfaction (Rose, 2003). The literature shows that the main sources of job satisfaction among social workers are related to intrinsic aspects of the job and the main sources of job dissatisfaction are related to extrinsic elements of the organisation of the job (McLean & Andrew, 2000; Papadaki & Papadaki, 2006).

Various authors indicate that social workers have a high degree of commitment to their work; they feel motivated by the contact with users and they perceive that their work contributes positively to changing people's lives (Eborall & Garmeson, 2001; McLean & Andrew, 2000; and Huxley et al., 2005). Hodge (2004) found that social workers describe their lives as interesting or exciting in a larger proportion than the general population does. Social workers also find satisfaction in a range of the tasks they carry out, in teamwork and multidisciplinary work, and in autonomy in professional performance (Balloch et al., 1995). The possibility of doing valuable work for the community and the development of positive relationships with colleagues also contributes to job permanence.

Among the main sources of dissatisfaction for social workers there are the way in which the department is managed, attention to suggestions, cutbacks and lack of career opportunities, relationships in the workplace, organisational structure, communication within the organisation, and the level of participation in decision-making (Balloch, Pahl, & McLean, 1998; Bradley & Sutherland, 1995).

In terms of demographic or personal factors, Petty, Brewer, and Brown (2005) examined job permanence, age, sex, marital status, and level of education in a sample of 332 workers of organisations for youth development. None of these variables were significant predictors of job satisfaction. Some studies have indicated that age is positively associated with satisfaction (Shapiro, Burkey, Dorman, & Welker, 1996; Storey & Billingham, 2001); however, other studies have found weak relationships between the two elements (Mannheim & Papo, 2000; Petty et al., 2005).

### **Objectives of the study**

This work is focused on determining the level of job satisfaction in a sample of Spanish social workers, using Spector's (1997) *Job Satisfaction Survey* (JSS), based on the Two-Factor Theory by Herzberg et al. (1959). More specifically, we aim to: (1) analyse the psychometric properties of the JSS scale in our sample; (2) determine the level of job satisfaction experienced by social workers in each of the dimensions that make up their activity, noting the hygiene factors and motivators that most influence the satisfaction level of social workers; and (3) examine if there are statistically significant differences between the various levels of job satisfaction of social workers and a series of personal variables or demographics, and the organisation in which they work.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 1455 surveys were sent to 35 of the 36 professional associations in Spain and 408 of these were rejected for being invalid (incomplete answers). A sample of 861 women (90.9%) and 86 men (9.1%) responded; their age range is between 21 years and 63 years, the average being 39.45 years ( $SD = 8.9$ ). A total of 64.7% of them work in the public sector, followed by 23.7% in the third sector, and 7.3% in the private sector. In relation to the environment of their activity, 63.5% of them develop their activity in specific services and 36.5% in basic services.<sup>1</sup> The sample is formed of social workers selected randomly among the 36 professional associations existing in Spain and their participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous.

### Procedure

A research project was developed, before proceeding to the application of the JSS scale, and was sent via email to the 36 professional associations of social work existing in Spain. In the project the objectives of the investigation were stated and the collaboration of the associations was requested. Given the number of professional associations that make up the collegiate structure of social workers in Spain and the different methods of territorial associations, the approval by the ethics committee in each professional association was not requested, allowing each board of governors of each professional association to verify the accuracy and quality of the investigation. All the professional associations, except one, approved in their board of governors to collaborate in the study.

The following step was for each professional association to send to its members a letter of introduction, in which the members' collaboration was requested and the procedure for participation was explained: they would follow a hyperlink to a self-administered survey on the internet. The invitation to participate was sent to the members through different means: email, newsletter, association website, and a mixed channel (using several of these procedures). The surveys were completed between 28 February and 31 May 2013.

### Instrument

The tool called the JSS, designed by Spector (1997), was used as a reference for the collection of data. In this case, a version translated into Spanish by Marion-Landais (1993) was used. The decision to use this scale was based on the fact that this tool measures all the variables identified in the literature on job satisfaction in social workers, and it is one of the most frequently used instruments in the field. The scale is made up of 36 items that measure 9 dimensions of job satisfaction: pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating conditions, co-workers, nature of work, and communication. Each dimension consists of four items measured using a Likert scale, in which respondents should choose one of six responses (1, disagree very much; 2, disagree moderately; 3, disagree slightly; 4, agree slightly; 5, agree moderately; 6, agree very much). Higher scores correspond to greater satisfaction; however, as some items are formulated in a negative manner it is necessary to carry out an operation called reverse scoring, in which a score of 6, which represents a strong agreement with an expression formulated negatively, actually corresponds to a score of 1 in terms of satisfaction.

The scale was preceded by a set of questions about personal and job characteristics:

- Personal features: sex, age, marital status, whether or not they have children, and if they suffer from a chronic illness
- Job characteristics: organisation in which they work, professional category, care field or sector, type of contract, size of the organisation, and seniority in the organisation

## Analysis of the data

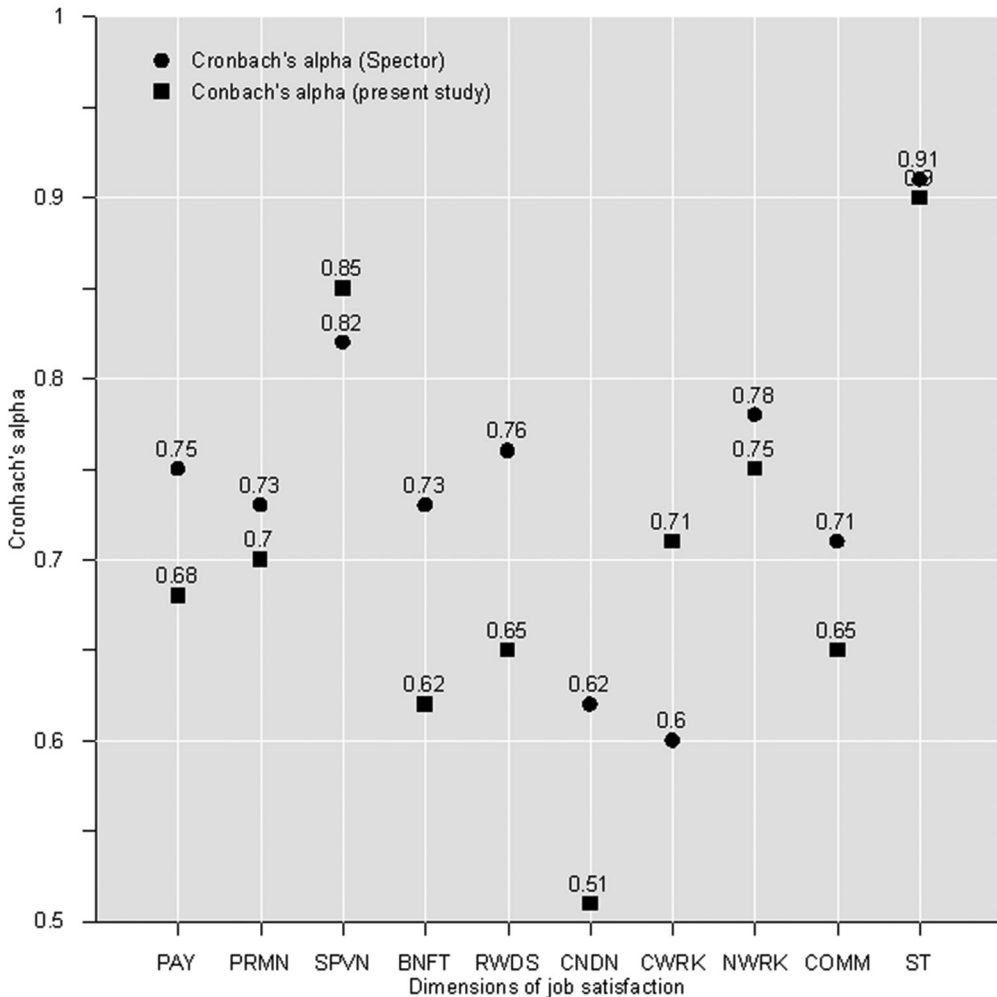
The data were coded and analysed using the SPSS programme, version 14.0 (SPSS Inc., 2006); LISREL, version 8.8 (Scientific Software International, 2006a); PRELIS, version 2.0 (Scientific Software International, 2006b); and WINSTEPS version 3.72.2 (Linacre, 2008). In order to know the psychometric properties, data are provided about their reliability in terms of internal consistency according to the Classical Test Theory (CTT) and about the reliability of the estimations of the items and of the people according to Rasch's Classification Scales Model (RSM). The results obtained in the scale were subjected to different types of analysis, both descriptive and comparative (student's *t*-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA)).

## Results

### Psychometric properties of the scale

#### Internal consistency according to CTT

The JSS scale, composed of 36 items, showed satisfactory psychometric qualities. Thus, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficient was calculated for each of the subscales that make up the test, as well as for



**Figure 2.** Comparison of the indexes of internal consistency of the JSS scale.

the total test, in order to compare the internal consistency obtained by Spector (1997). Figure 2 shows that the internal consistency in our study (0.90) is very similar to that found by Spector (1997) (0.91).

As for the dimensions of job satisfaction, we found higher rates of internal consistency in our study than in Spector's (1997) in two of the nine dimensions (supervision and relationship with co-workers). The opposite occurred in the cases of pay, promotion, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, working conditions, nature of work, and communication. The dimension that appeared to be least reliable was working conditions ( $\alpha = .51$ ). All the internal consistency coefficients obtained were significant ( $p < .01$ ).

### *Reliability of the estimates of the items and people according to RSM*

The psychometric properties of the items that comprise each dimension, which were treated as independent scales, are presented in Table 1. All the infit mnsq and outfit mnsq<sup>2</sup> values were kept within the range considered to be adequate (0.5–2.0; according to Linacre, 2002). The infit ranged between 0.72 and 1.35 and the outfit between 0.72 and 1.35. The items were distributed from –1.04 to 0.82 logits, by which we can confirm that the scale evaluates a wide range of results related to job

**Table 1.** Psychometric properties of the JSS scale with the RSM model.

	Items	Measure	Model SE	Infit mnsq	Outfit mnsq	Reliability	
						Items	People
Pay	1	.05	.04	1.29	1.30	.99	.86
	10	.79	.05	1.25	1.23		
	19	–.54	.04	.93	.92		
	28	.82	.05	.99	1.00		
Advancements and promotions	2	.68	.05	1.09	1.07	.65	.86
	11	.77	.05	1.02	1.05		
	20	.55	.05	.85	.87		
	33	.65	.05	.79	.78		
Supervision	3	–.13	.04	1.08	1.07	.94	.86
	12	–.62	.04	.88	.88		
	21	–.37	.04	1.14	1.13		
	30	–.27	.04	1.02	1.01		
Fringe benefits	4	–.12	.04	.72	.72	.97	.86
	13	.39	.04	1.07	1.07		
	22	.19	.04	.83	.83		
	29	.58	.05	1.21	1.19		
Contingent rewards	5	.06	.04	.78	.78	.95	.86
	14	–.16	.04	.83	.83		
	23	.27	.04	.90	.90		
	32	.32	.04	1.16	1.17		
Working conditions	6	.19	.04	1.06	1.05	.96	.86
	15	.13	.04	1.35	1.35		
	24	.60	.05	1.05	1.06		
	31	.64	.05	1.09	1.09		
Relationship with co-workers	7	–.82	.05	.86	.88	.92	.86
	16	–.38	.04	.98	.97		
	25	–.70	.04	.99	.98		
	34	–.54	.04	1.17	1.15		
Nature of work	8	–.33	.04	1.27	1.28	.97	.86
	17	–.95	.05	.90	.89		
	27	–1.04	.05	1.12	1.12		
	35	–.58	.04	.81	.81		
Communication	9	–.29	.04	.90	.89	.96	.86
	18	–.19	.04	.99	.98		
	26	.13	.04	.99	.98		
	36	.21	.04	.89	.96		

Source: Personally prepared.

Notes: Items = Item number according to its location in the scale; Measure = Indicates the position –in logits– of the item in the continuum (calibration of the difficulty of the item); Model SE = Standard error of each item; infit and outfit mnsq = Standardised statistics of information weighted by mean squares; Reliability = Index of reliability.



satisfaction. All the standard errors are similar and reasonably reduced, ranging between .04 and .05. Finally, the reliability of the items proved very suitable ( $\approx .90$ ) in almost all of the dimensions, except in advancements and promotions, which obtained a moderate reliability (.65). The estimates of people are all quite accurate (.86).

## Analysis of job satisfaction in social workers

### *Job satisfaction overall and by dimensions*

According to Spector (2002), job satisfaction can be addressed from a general approach conceived as a unique and general perception towards employment or, conversely, it can be addressed from an alternative approach in which the perception of satisfaction is the result of the evaluation of different aspects that comprise the job. In this investigation, the alternative approach has been chosen to observe the behaviour of job satisfaction in social workers.

When interpreting the scores obtained in the JSS scale, Spector (1997) explains on his website (<http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~pspector/scales/jsspag.html>) that there are no specific cut scores that determine whether an individual is satisfied or dissatisfied, although, given the need to draw conclusions, two approaches can be used: the normative approach and the absolute approach.

The normative approach compares the sample with a series of established norms for a small number of occupations. These norms do not come from representative samples, but rather from convenience samples mainly from North America and, therefore, should not be considered to be representative of other countries. The absolute approach picks with a certain logic a series of arbitrary cuts to represent dissatisfaction versus satisfaction.

Given that the scale uses six response options, we can assume that agreement with items worded positively (and disagreement with items worded negatively) represents satisfaction, while disagreement with items worded positively (and agreement with items worded negatively) represents dissatisfaction. For each of the items, the theoretical range would go from 1 to 6 and average scores of 4 or more would represent satisfaction, while average scores of 3 or less would represent dissatisfaction. Average scores between 3 and 4 exhibit ambivalence. For each of the subscales, the theoretical range would be from 4 (with a score of 1 on all the items on the scale) to 24 (with a score of 6 on all the items). In this case, scores of 4–12 reveal dissatisfaction, 12–16 reveal ambivalence, and 16–24 reveal satisfaction. For the total scale (36 items), the theoretical range would go from 36 (a score of 1 on all the items on the scale) to 216 (a score of 6 on all the items), the ranges would be 36–108 for dissatisfaction, 108–144 for ambivalence, and 144–216 for satisfaction.

Table 2 presents the level of job satisfaction of the social workers surveyed. In order to facilitate the analysis, variables are grouped relatively to hygiene factors and motivational factors, according to Herzberg's et al. (1959) Two-Factor Theory.

**Table 2.** Classification of social workers surveyed according to level of satisfaction.

		Average	SD	Dissatisfaction (4–12)	Ambivalence (12–16)	Satisfaction (16–24)
Motivators (intrinsic)	Nature of work	16.4	3.6	116 (12.2%)	400 (42.2%)	431 (45.5%)
	Contingent rewards	12.2	3.6	466 (49.2%)	396 (41.8%)	85 (9.0%)
	Promotion	9.7	3.4	762 (80.5%)	166 (17.5%)	19 (2.0%)
Hygiene factors (extrinsic)	Relationship with co-workers	15.7	3.6	166 (17.5%)	404 (42.7%)	377 (39.8%)
	Supervision	14.3	4.6	291 (30.7%)	376 (39.7%)	280 (29.6%)
	Communication	12.9	3.6	408 (43.1%)	412 (43.5%)	127 (13.4%)
	Pay	11.7	3.6	520 (54.9%)	357 (37.7%)	70 (7.4%)
	Fringe benefits	11.7	3.4	517 (54.6%)	381 (40.2%)	49 (5.2%)
	Operating conditions	11	3.1	615 (64.9%)	305 (32.2%)	27 (2.9%)
				<b>(36–108)</b>	<b>(108–144)</b>	<b>(144–216)</b>
<b>Overall Satisfaction</b>		<b>115.8</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>305 (32.2%)</b>	<b>568 (60.0%)</b>	<b>74 (7.8%)</b>

As shown in Table 2, the overall satisfaction of the social workers surveyed reaches an average of 115.8 with a standard deviation of 21.4, which suggests an equilibrium between motivators and hygiene factors. Among motivators, or intrinsic factors, the factor that has the greatest positive influence on job satisfaction would be the nature of work ( $\bar{x} = 16.4$ ), as Herzberg's et al. (1959) theory sets it out, which allows us to affirm that the content of the work is interesting to the survey participants and, therefore, they are satisfied with their profession.

The factors contingent rewards ( $\bar{x} = 12.2$ ) and promotion ( $\bar{x} = 9.7$ ) contribute unequally to the overall level of satisfaction. While contingent rewards have a moderate contribution to the overall level of satisfaction, the factor of promotion generates a lack of satisfaction, which is interpreted as workers not receiving an expected promotion or not having experienced any upwards changes in the position they occupy.

The hygiene, or extrinsic, factors pay ( $\bar{x} = 11.7$ ), fringe benefits ( $\bar{x} = 11.7$ ), and operating conditions ( $\bar{x} = 11.0$ ) are those that contribute most to job dissatisfaction, with these findings supporting Herzberg's et al. (1959) theory. Social workers perceive their salary, fringe benefits, policies, procedures, and rules to be inadequate. These factors represent potential areas of change in institutional policies to improve the job satisfaction of social workers.

Finally, the factors supervision ( $\bar{x} = 14.3$ ), relationship with co-workers ( $\bar{x} = 15.7$ ), and communication ( $\bar{x} = 12.9$ ) would be factors that do not generate dissatisfaction, but rather a lack of satisfaction, and constitute, therefore, areas for potential improvement.

### ***Job satisfaction in function of personal and job characteristics***

Prior to testing, the conditions of parametricity that are required to perform Student's *t*-test and the ANOVA were evaluated. The requirements in both cases demand comparison of the normal distribution of the quantitative variable in the groups being compared and the homogeneity of variances in the populations that the groups come from (Rubio & Berlanga, 2012). In the case of overall satisfaction, not having a normal distribution, we have transformed this variable through the system of standardised scores (normal scores) calculated directly in the programme PRELIS. To confirm the homogeneity of the variances in the groups being compared, Levene's test has been used. The variables sex, age, marital status, organisation in which participants work, field, company size, and seniority at work do not comply with this requirement, because, in those cases, the equality of variances was not assumed.

As shown in Table 3, no significant differences were found between the job satisfaction variable and the variables sex ( $t = -.491$ ;  $p = .624$ ), age ( $t = -.989$ ;  $p = .323$ ), marital status ( $t = .349$ ;  $p = .727$ ), contract type ( $t = -.471$ ;  $p = .638$ ), organisation in which they work ( $F = 2.225$ ;  $p = .109$ ), and size of the organisation ( $F = 0.138$ ;  $p = 0.871$ ). There are significant differences in the levels of satisfaction in the variable whether or not participants have children ( $t = -2.123$ ;  $p = .034$ ), whether they are suffering from a chronic illness ( $t = 2.439$ ;  $p = .015$ ), professional category ( $t = -3.718$ ;  $p = .000$ ), field ( $t = -5.163$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and seniority in the organisation ( $F = 3.333$ ;  $p = .036$ ).

In the case of seniority in the organisation, in order to determine among which groups of seniority these differences occur, the post hoc test of multiple comparisons of Games–Howell (1976) was applied for unequal variances. Thus, significant differences were observed between 2 groups; those who have fewer than 5 years of experience and those who have more than 15 years of experience (Table 4).

## **Discussion**

On the basis of the objectives we had set out and of the results we have found, we can now proceed to the discussion and assessment of the data. The initial objective was the analysis the psychometric properties of the JSS scale. The results obtained using the methods of the CTT, specifically the analysis of internal consistency, reveal an appropriate amount of reliability for the greater part of the

**Table 3.** Influence of personal and occupational factors on the level of job satisfaction.

	Variable	Category	N (947)	%	Average	SD	<i>t</i> or <i>F</i>	df	Sig.
Personal characteristics	Sex	Male	86	9.1	114.88	18.76	-0.491	-1.057	0.624
		Female	861	90.9	115.94	21.68			
	Age	Less than 40 years old	508	53.6	115.21	22.40	-0.989	-1.370	0.323
		Over 40 years old	439	46.4	116.58	20.23			
	Marital status	With a regular partner	661	69.8	116.01	20.53	0.349	0.557	0.727
		Without a regular partner	286	30.2	115.45	23.40			
	Have children	Without children	489	51.6	114.42	22.17	-2.123	-2.953	0.034
		With children	458	48.4	117.37	20.51			
Job characteristics	Chronic disease	No	773	81.6	116.65	21.65	2.439	4.374	0.015
		Yes	174	18.4	112.27	20.07			
	Entity they work for	Administration	613	64.7	114.49	19.91	2.225		0.109
		Private sector	69	7.3	118.58	23.18			
		Third sector	224	23.7	117.33	24.37			
	Professional category	Professional without authority	669	70.6	114.19	20.59	-3.718	-5.647	0.000
		Professional with authority	278	29.4	119.83	22.86			
	Field	General population	346	36.5	111.37	18.86	-5.163	-7.046	0.000
		Other sectors	601	63.5	118.42	22.38			
	Contract type	Permanent staff	620	65.5	115.61	21.06	-0.471	-0.689	0.638
		Interim/temp. staff	327	34.5	116.30	22.13			
	Company size	From 1 to 20	320	33.8	116.34	23.55	0.138		0.871
		From 21 to 50	150	15.8	115.39	20.37			
		More than 50	477	50.4	115.65	20.26			
	Seniority in the organisation	Less than 5 Years	303	32.0	118.36	23.66	3.333		0.036
		From 5 to 15 Years	406	42.9	115.12	20.98			
		More than 15 Years	238	25.1	113.88	18.82			

Notes: Independent *t*-test was used for the tests of difference between the two sub-groups. An (*F*) factor ANOVA test was used for the difference between three or more sub-groups.

dimensions, that even surpass that obtained by Spector (1997) for a much larger sample. In fact, in two of the dimensions (supervision and relationship with co-workers) significantly higher coefficients have been obtained. The Classification Scales Model (RSM) shows appropriate behaviour according to the hypothesis of Rasch's model. As for the reliability of the estimates, advancements and promotions stands out, since it obtained the lowest coefficient in comparison to the rest of the dimensions. The JSS scale provides sufficient evidence of reliability and validity to evaluate the job satisfaction of social workers.

Once the suitability of the scale used was confirmed, the next objective of the study was to determine the level of job satisfaction experienced by social workers in each of the dimensions that form their activity, noting the hygiene factors and motivators that most influence the level of satisfaction. The results obtained through the scale show that the majority of the social workers (60%) presented an attitude of ambivalence – neither satisfied nor dissatisfied – but with a strong tendency towards dissatisfaction (32.2%). Only 7.8% of the respondents were satisfied.

**Table 4.** Post hoc test of multiple comparisons of Games–Howell for unequal variances.

(I) Seniority at work	(J) Seniority at work	Mean difference (I–J)	Typical error	Sig.
Less than 5 years	From 5 to 15 years	3.23877	1.71242	.142
	More than 15 years	4.47828*	1.82663	.039
From 5 to 15 years	More than 15 years	1.23951	1.60407	.720
	Less than 5 years	-3.23877	1.71242	.142
More than 15 years	From 5 to 15 years	-1.23951	1.60407	.720
	Less than 5 years	-4.47828*	1.82663	.039

\*The mean difference is significant at .05 level.

Comparing the results obtained in this study with those provided by other investigators presents serious difficulties, given the great heterogeneity of tools and criteria used for measurement. Thus, for example, Cuesta (2009), in a study carried out in La Rioja (Spain) on a sample of 268 social workers and using the general scale of satisfaction of Warr, Cook, and Wall (1979), obtained an average score of 4.95 on a scale from 1 to 7. Abu-Bader (2000), in a sample of 218 social workers in Israel, using the *Index of Job Satisfaction* (IJS, Brayfield & Rothe, 1951), obtained an average of 66.2 (SD = 8.8) on a scale from 18 to 90. In Chile, Flores et al. (2012) obtained an average of 5.14 (SD = 0.7) on a scale from 1 to 7 on a sample of 146 social workers, using the Job Satisfaction Questionnaire S20/30 (Meliá & Peiró, 1989). Kadushin and Kulys (1995), taking a sample of 80 social workers working in hospitals with seriously ill patients in Cook County (Illinois, USA) indicate that 28% were very satisfied, 50% were somewhat satisfied, 21% little satisfied, and 1% not satisfied at all. Finally, Papadaki and Papadaki (2006), on a sample of 75 social workers in Crete (Greece) and using a questionnaire that included questions about different aspects of work (extrinsic and intrinsic), observed a rather high level of overall satisfaction: 42.6% were very satisfied, 1.6% were extremely satisfied, 37.7% were moderately satisfied, and only 18% were somewhat satisfied.

Reasons for satisfaction are related to motivators, or intrinsic factors, such as the nature of work ( $\bar{x}$  = 16.4), while the motives for dissatisfaction are related to hygiene, or extrinsic, factors, such as operating conditions, pay ( $\bar{x}$  = 11.7), and fringe benefits ( $\bar{x}$  = 11.7). This is in accordance with the review of the literature on the subject (Balloch et al., 1998; Bradley & Sutherland, 1995; McLean, 1999; Papadaki & Papadaki, 2006; Penna, Paylor, & Soothill, 1995) and supports Herzberg's et al. (1959) understanding of the factors that lead to satisfaction and dissatisfaction at work.

Furthermore, we examined if there are significant statistical differences between the various levels of job satisfaction of social workers, and a series of personal and professional variables.

Among the personal features, sex, age, and marital status have not proved to be significant to job satisfaction, confirming the results of Petty et al. (2005), although authors like Armentor and Forsyth (1995) have found an association with the factors sex and age. The only variables that have proved to be statistically significant to job satisfaction are whether or not the respondents have children and whether or not they suffer from a chronic illness, although evidence about these variables has not been found in the reviewed literature.

Finally, job satisfaction showed a statistically significant association with the following variables of the job position: professional category, with social workers manifesting higher levels of satisfaction in positions of responsibility; the service area or sector, where social workers who carried out their activities with specific groups of the population (the elderly, children, youth, drug addicts, the homeless, etc.) manifested higher satisfaction; and finally, their seniority in the organisation, where less satisfaction is observed in social workers with more years in their position.

## Conclusions

This study has provided empirical results to understand the job satisfaction of social workers. A feeling of ambivalence anticipating dissatisfaction was demonstrated in most of the participants. The results were obtained through the application of the Spector's JSS Scale (1997), adjusted to the classic distinction made by Herzberg et al. (1959) between intrinsic and extrinsic work factors. Herzberg et al. (1959) consider job satisfaction to be mainly the result of intrinsic factors, or motivators, while extrinsic, or hygiene, factors may be determinants of dissatisfaction.

Consistently with the Two-Factor Theory of Herzberg et al. (1959), the findings of this study indicate that the motivational, or intrinsic, factor that contributed most to job satisfaction of social workers is the nature of work, while the hygiene, or extrinsic, factors, those that do not generate satisfaction, but that, if unrealised, cause dissatisfaction are operating conditions, pay, and fringe benefits.

## Implications for practice

The results of this study have clear implications for the practice of social work. The consequences of low-job satisfaction are burnout and high turnover (Abu-Bader, 2000), which may lead to higher rates of absence from work, lower levels of performance, and, above all, lower quality of services. Therefore, and in agreement with the hypotheses of Herzberg et al. (1959), in order to provide better social services, managers and administrators should ensure the presence of motivational and hygiene factors, with the purpose of reaching greater job satisfaction in social workers.

## Strengths, limitations, and suggestions for future studies

Like all empirical investigations, this study is characterised by certain strengths and limitations. Among the limitations, we must highlight that: (a) the sample was not selected randomly and this would prevent generalising the results to the entire population of Spanish social workers; (b) the data were collected through self-reporting surveys, leaving the veracity of the responses to the judgement of the participants; (c) a transversal design was used, which means that we should be cautious about the basis of the data available; (d) the method used to evaluate job satisfaction – a qualitative methodology (e.g. through interviews or discussion groups) – could allow other factors to have an influence on satisfaction.

Among the strengths, we must highlight the composition of the sample, as the use of a wide national sample of social workers belonging to almost all the professional associations means that the results obtained may be considered relevant to the general profession. Another strength is the use of the JSS Scale, since this is one of the tools for measuring job satisfaction most frequently used (Giri & Kumar, 2010; Liu, Borg, & Spector, 2004; Watson, Thompson, & Meade, 2007), due to its trustworthiness and validity.

In light of the results obtained, and as a bearing for future investigations, the development of new empirical studies that analyse the evolution of satisfaction of social workers over time, as well as observing the links with other variables, is suggested. Future studies relating to job satisfaction should include quantitative and qualitative designs, in which the voice of the participants is heard (emic vision), with the objective of identifying other factors that have an influence on job satisfaction. Although this study has obtained important findings, more investigation is needed to replicate them. We recommend that a study be done of a random sample representative of social workers in Spain and in other industrialised countries, such as the UK, USA, Italy, or France. This is necessary, firstly, to be able to validate the findings of this study, and, secondly, to improve our knowledge of job satisfaction among social workers.

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## Notes

1. General or Basic Social Services: are directed at the entire population. Specialized Social Services: are directed at specific groups of the population (the elderly, children, youth, drug addicts, the homeless, etc.).
2. One of the underlying assumptions of Rasch's Model is its one-dimensional nature. In the analysis of Rasch's models, the lack of a one-dimensional nature is reflected in some poorly-adjusted indexes. Two adjustment indexes are generally used: the INFIT MNSQ and the OUTFIT MNSQ, each with a range from 0 to  $+\infty$ .

The ideal value for both is 1, which suggests that the observed variance is equivalent to the expected variance. INFIT or OUTFIT values of  $1 + x$  indicate  $(100 \times x)$  % more variance between the observed and predicted patterns by the model than what was expected if the data and the model were perfectly adjusted. For example, an INFIT MNSQ of 1.3 indicates that we have 30% more variation in the data observed than that predicted by the model. When the value is less than 1.0, there is less variation in the observed data than in the model (i.e. over

adjustment). An item with a large adjustment statistic generally indicates that it does not pertain to the unique construct that is being measured. While the INFIT is affected by unexpected patterns of response of the subjects located close to the position of the item in the scale, the OUTFIT is more sensitive to unexpected patterns of response of the subjects located far from the location of the item.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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