

Evidence of Disillusionment of Younger Cohorts in Higher Education in India

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Abstract

With increasing demand for quality education, it is imperative for universities to attract and retain good faculty. This study explores the effect of demographic and some external factors on faculty satisfaction. The analysis is based on a nationwide survey of full-time faculty across 1,000 colleges and institutes in India. Results show that senior faculty is more satisfied than younger ones. Policy makers in higher education and university administrators should take this input to take corrective steps to ensure teaching as a career remains attractive and competes successfully with other career options available to young eligible graduates.

Keywords

faculty, universities, higher education, academics, satisfaction, gender, age, marital status

The challenges to Indian higher education are unique to India within its context of widely disparate cultures, value systems, existence of a strong caste system in the society, rapid development of only some sectors of the economy, student orientation for job focused courses, and so on (Shahaida, Rajashekar, & Nargundkar, 2009). There are issues of both quantity and quality, though the total number of universities and colleges increased appreciably since independence in 1947. The number of universities has increased by more than three times and the number of colleges has increased by nearly five times over the previous 25 years (University Grants Commission, 2013). This has naturally resulted in a concomitant increase in faculty in academics and more student enrolments, and while these numbers are significant by themselves, they have not kept pace with the number of aspiring students and their growing ambitions. On the issue of student–faculty ratio, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) indicates a skewed distribution among differently graded colleges. While the All India Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) for regular mode, excluding distance education is 21, there is a large variation among states, some of them showing as high a PTR as 50 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2015–2016).

Many of the existing universities are mediocre at best, unable to attract or retain competent faculty. Even the better ones face acute faculty shortage. As a result, there is severe competition among the students to get into the few coveted universities while well-to-do students prefer to go abroad, even accepting admission into average universities. In terms of quality, the higher education system is still unexceptional considering the possibilities. There is hardly any institute mentioned in the top 200 of the world by any of the ranking

systems like the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* or *QS World University Rankings*, and so on.

Why is Faculty Satisfaction Important?

Considering the local demand, it is a great opportunity for Indian universities to expand their footprint and improve quality, but for a number of reasons they are unable to make progress. In fact, many universities, specially the new private ones, have invested a great deal in good infrastructure and are advertising heavily, yet they are unable to attract the best faculty and students and create a mark. The role of academic leadership and the faculty profile have been highlighted as two of the main criteria for educational excellence (Chaudhry, 2008). Moreover, one of the important responsibilities of a good academic leader is to attract and retain good faculty. Undoubtedly, the private universities, specially the new ones, need to focus on academic leadership and faculty quality.

The recognition of the role of faculty in creating a reputation for the university is unequivocal. All stake holders in the education system accept that good faculty is critical to learning and development of students and is instrumental in developing critical and independent thinking, building confidence and overall making them successful members of the

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society. The competence of the academic staff in terms of knowledge, qualifications, teaching expertise, and communication skills is one of the quality dimensions in higher education (Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996). Little wonder then that the success of an institute depends upon its ability to attract, recruit, and retain good faculty (Mazzarol, 1998). The role of faculty is also important in creating an environment for student learning and engagement, perhaps even playing the principal part in student learning (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Assessment literature too is full of evidence suggesting faculty's role in student assessment, which is a reflection of the student's learning outcomes and the institution's focus (Banta, 1999; Foley, Mackey, & Terry, 1996; Schilling & Schilling, 1998).

The level of satisfaction of the faculty of any institution is a basic factor in how much they apply themselves and give back to the job and also to their decision to stay or leave. A lower overall faculty job satisfaction (including organizational satisfaction and career satisfaction) can affect productivity and quality of work (Tack & Patitu, 1992) and is likely to result in the faculty leaving their institution (John C. Smart, 1990). However, most educated young professionals in India perceive academics as their last resort and even when they join, they get disillusioned when they come up against the system (Agarwal, 2006).

Previous Research

Very little research has been conducted on the academic profession in India. The U.S.-centric body of literature on faculty job satisfaction has largely focused on gender and has consistently brought out the gender inequalities. The discrimination against women has been revealed in many studies. Moore and Sagaria (1993) find that women are discriminated against men while hiring. Those that are hired are taken into lower levels, are put in nontenure track positions that lack job security and are lower paid (Harper, Baldwin, Gansneder, & Chronister, 2001) and are promoted less often (Bain & Cummings, 2000) and more slowly (Bentley & Blackburn, 1992). In addition, female faculties also have to deal with heavier teaching loads (Park, 1996; Xie & Shauman, 1998). Not surprising then that many studies have found female faculty members to have lower overall satisfaction levels than their male counterparts (Bilimoria et al., 2006; Hult, Callister, & Sullivan, 2005; Olsen, Maple, & Stage, 1995; Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006; Tack & Patitu, 1992). However, this is not a consistent outcome in all studies as Okpara, Squillace, and Erondu (2005) and Oshagbemi (1997) show female faculty to be more satisfied with their jobs, or Ward and Sloane (2000) who did not find gender to be a significant variable affecting overall satisfaction levels.

Marital status too has been studied for its impact on faculty satisfaction with mixed results. Some studies have

found that married faculty are reportedly more satisfied (Cetin, 2006; Hagedorn, 2000; Leung, Siu, & Spector, 2000), while others have shown that marriage has a negative impact on satisfaction (Bryson, Bryson, & Johnson, 1978). King, Murray, and Atkinson (1982) in a national survey of Canadian adults, find that while women are more satisfied, the married ones show even higher satisfaction compared to the unmarried ones or divorcees.

The relationship between age and job satisfaction in business situations has been examined in many studies over the years. Again, the results have been found to be mixed. Many studies have found age to significantly affect job satisfaction. In a comprehensive review of literature up to 1955, Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, and Capwell (1957) discuss a "U" shaped relationship between age and job satisfaction. In another comprehensive review of 185 studies, Rhodes (1983) reported that age and job satisfaction may be best described as a positive linear relationship. Muchinsky (1978) however found that public utility workers over 50 years were less satisfied on four out of five aspects of job satisfaction under study. In a study of academic staff in United Kingdom, Hickson and Oshagbemi (1999) found age to be negatively related to job satisfaction for teaching activity but positively related for research activity. In a study of full-time teachers in American universities, Okpara et al. (2005) found younger academics to be less satisfied than their senior counterparts.

The effect of dependents on satisfaction has also been considered by some researchers. Carr et al. (1998, p. 536) have found that women with dependent children tend to publish less, have lower perception of their career progress, and were less satisfied with their careers. Taking care of children and other dependents like aged parents, referred to as "lifestyle stressors" by Tack and Patitu (1992), is shown to affect women faculty.

It is generally found that faculty turnover is higher, expressing lower satisfaction, at institutions that have to cope with financial hardship and face enrollment challenges (Cameron, Whetten, Kim, 1987; Cameron & Zammuto, 1983). The same is also true for institutions with poor governance and autocratic in nature (Bowen & Schuster, 1986; Smart, 1990). These factors are reflected to some extent in the higher education structure in the country.

In India, there are six types of universities/university-level institutions broadly falling either under central or state governmental control or private (University and Higher Education, 2016). Private universities are seen as being more authoritarian and having a more competitive work ethic, while government controlled institutions are perceived as indifferent with standardized workloads and pay structures. Most private institutions also have to maintain a tight leash on finances as their student enrollments are strained. These differences could affect the satisfaction lev-

els of faculty and is assumed as another independent variable in this study.

We have reduced the six different types of ownership structures to three for simplification in tune with management homogeneity. Central and state government universities are taken in one category, called "Government," aided and unaided private universities are combined in the second category, namely "Private" and the autonomous institutions, including deemed universities are taken as the third category, called "Autonomous." Most autonomous institutes in the country have a positive reputation for performance, perhaps due to their independence from onerous university regulations.

Some gender based studies have also explored the effect of discipline on satisfaction levels, but have concentrated mainly on engineering and natural sciences areas (Callister, 2006; Long, Allison, & McGinnis, 1993), perhaps because of the noticeable pay differences. Ward and Sloane (2000) have shown that inequality in pay across disciplines can affect job satisfaction. Hagedorn (2000) has underlined the effect of discipline on faculty satisfaction and its influence on retention and turnover (Xu, 2007). Therefore, we use discipline as another independent external factor in our study.

Rank and tenure status are some other variables that have been found to affect faculty satisfaction (Adkins, Werbel, & Farh, 2001; Tack & Patitu, 1992; Ward & Sloane, 2000). Generally, higher ranks are found to have higher satisfaction levels (Herzberg et al., 1957) and a similar tendency is found in the field of education (Oshagbemi, 1997). Okpara et al. (2005) have found that women faculties above the rank of associate professor are more satisfied than their male counterparts of similar rank. In the Indian system, it is seen that the rank may not accurately depict the status of the faculty as it is often due merely to the chronological seniority and other local factors. Thus, we decided to take teaching at a postgraduate (PG) level as opposed to teaching at an undergraduate (UG) level as a surrogate for the distinction or eminence of the faculty as is indicated by rank, especially in Western countries.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Given the existing conditions affecting faculty job satisfaction, an understanding of faculty satisfaction levels among different demographic segments could be a first step in targeting efforts to increasing satisfaction among the most disaffected sections and indeed, to also find out the reasons for relative higher satisfaction among other segments. The demographic variables chosen for the survey were gender, age, marital status, and family size as measured by the number of dependents. In addition, we explore three external factors, viz. type of university, disciplinary affiliations and whether the faculty is teaching at UG or PG level, that have shown relevance in previous research.

These variables have been explored earlier by researchers as mentioned above, albeit in other countries with different context, cultures and systems. We begin with a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the main effects between the dependent and the seven independent variables and formulate our hypothesis as the following:

Null Hypothesis: The mean level of job satisfaction remains the same for all demographic independent variables and the external variables of discipline of the faculty, the type of institution where they work and whether the faculty teaches at UG or PG level.

Data

Data for this study were taken from a comprehensive field survey conducted by the Department of Management Studies of Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, in 2013, on the status of the academic profession in higher education in the country. In this cross-sectional study, responses to a structured questionnaire were taken from a universe of 673 Universities and 34,000 colleges, covering almost the entire country, with the objective of determining the change in academic profession over the past. Data were collected using stratified and convenience sampling technique. 2,300 responses were received, out of which 252 responses were found to be invalid.

After filtering out part-time, guest, adjunct, visiting faculty, and persons in nonacademic administrative positions like placements, business development, and so on, 1,434 cases have been analyzed. Descriptive statistics of the final sample, cross-tabulated with gender and marital status, have been summarized in Table 1.

The difference in sample size for the individual variables is less than the total sample size in the data due to unresponded cases. To be able to run an ANOVA with the age variable, it was converted to 3 nominal levels. The first level is for less than or equal to 27 years which roughly corresponds to a young person, usually unmarried, just starting off in his or her career. The second level is from 28 up to 40 years where most respondent are married, more or less settled into their careers and less vulnerable to consider a career change at this stage. The third level is of 41 years or older respondents, who have firmly chosen academics as their profession with little chance of changing. This age group is most expected to show highest levels of satisfaction.

Number of dependents has been limited to five categories. If the findings of Tack and Patitu (1992) are corroborated, that taking care of more dependents creates more stress, which in turn affects satisfaction, we believe that the difference in stress, and thus satisfaction level is expected to be most discernible within the dependent range of zero to four. Similarly, discipline of the faculty has been limited to four categories based on previous

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Across Gender and Marital Status.

	Female				Male				Total
	Married		Single		Married		Single		
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	
	403	28.1	139	9.7	756	52.7	136	9.5	1,434
Age_Bracket									
<27 years	6	6.7	48	53.3	7	7.8	29	32.2	90
27-40 years	194	29.9	50	7.7	327	50.5	77	11.9	648
>41 years	106	24.5	11	2.5	309	71.5	6	1.4	432
No. of dependents									
0	7	3.3	119	56.1	3	1.4	83	39.2	212
1	98	52.4	2	1.1	84	44.9	3	1.6	187
2	116	36.5	10	3.1	174	54.7	18	5.7	318
3	50	24.9	3	1.5	139	69.2	9	4.5%	201
4 or more	34	12.1	5	1.8	218	77.9	23	8.2	280
Discipline									
Medicine	23	48.9	1	2.1	21	44.7	2	4.3	47
Management	66	30.7	29	13.5	97	45.1	23	10.7	215
Engineering	27	16.0	21	12.4	86	50.9	35	20.7	169
Arts and Humanities	281	28.9	87	8.9	529	54.4	76	7.8	973
Type of institution									
Government	203	30.5	57	8.6	348	52.3	58	8.7	666
Private	145	23.1	71	11.3	342	54.5	69	11.0	627
Autonomous	13	36.1	2	5.6	17	47.2	4	11.1	36

studies that have shown higher satisfaction in the engineering domain as compared to arts and sciences areas. Assuming that higher salaries for professional domains likely play an important role in satisfaction levels, we have maintained separate categories for medicine (category A), management (category B), engineering (category C), and clubbed all other fields, including arts, humanities, natural and physical sciences, social science, home science, and so on into category D.

Some authors have advocated taking multiple elements of job satisfaction into account to correctly assess this dimension (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Locke, 1976). Oshagbemi (1999) reports that a single measure tended to overestimate the level of satisfaction and downplayed dissatisfaction and indifference. In this survey, however, the data were collected for a wider purpose where assessing the level of satisfaction was not the principal objective. As, in the present case, we are only concerned with the relative degree of satisfaction reported by the respondents across different segments, and not with the absolute level of satisfaction, we take support from the studies of Scarpello and Campbell (1983), who have noted the likelihood of an overall measure job satisfaction being more comprehensive and steady than a composite variable comprising of multiple factors. While we justify the use of a single global measure of job satisfaction for the current study, it should not be seen as discounting the

importance of a multidimensional construct of the job satisfaction variable.

To empirically validate the single job satisfaction response, we checked its correlation with a few related supplementary questions. A person who indicates a high level of satisfaction should also indicate a high level of readiness to recommend academics as a profession to his friends and colleagues.

The four associated questions to job satisfaction were (response on a 5-point Likert-type scale):

- If there were choices, my inclination to change (from teaching profession) would be . . .
- This is a bad time for any young person to begin an academic career in my field . . .
- If I had it to do over again, I would not become an academic . . .
- I will recommend teaching profession to my friends/family if asked . . .

A bivariate Pearson's correlation was carried out for responses for each of these questions with the response for their job satisfaction levels. The result is reproduced in Table 2, which shows correlation of job satisfaction with all the associated questions at significance of levels less than .01, validating the job satisfaction response, at least in consistency.

Table 2. Correlations.

	Satisfaction	Change	Bad time	Not again	Recommend
Satisfaction					
Pearson Correlation	1	-.123**	-.178**	-.146**	.101**
Sig. (two-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.001
N	1,421	1,330	1,400	1,373	1,024

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

Findings

Previous research shows that of all the demographic variables, gender seems to be the most consistent factor affecting faculty job satisfaction. Most of these studies have shown job satisfaction to be higher among male faculty members compared to females, though the results are not consistent across all the studies. Marital status also has been found to affect satisfaction levels at job, but depending on the study, the impact has been either positive or negative. However, our study does not show any significant difference by marital status. Number of dependents also turns out to be an insignificant factor.

In fact, we find that the only demographic variable significantly affecting overall satisfaction levels is age with an F ratio of $F(3,1073) = 3.78, p = .010$ (Table 3).

However, we had created three artificial categories for age based on popular perceptions of relevant age brackets. But age is originally a continuous variable, and as our ANOVA analysis shows a distinct possibility of age playing a role in perception levels of satisfaction in the faculty, we decided to run an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression between satisfaction as a dependent variable and age in years as the independent variable. The linear regression equation (Table 4) was found to be significant with an F ratio of $F(1, 1142) = 24.84, p < .000$ with an R^2 of .021. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 1.809 which is considered acceptable for assuming independence of errors as required for OLS.

Two of our nondemographic variables also showed significance—discipline of the faculty, $F(4,1073) = 6.67, p = .000$, and type of the institute, $F(2,1073) = 12.14, p = .000$. However, unlike some previous studies, status or distinction of the faculty did not seem to affect the satisfaction levels in this investigation.

Post hoc comparison using the Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test for satisfaction as affected by discipline of faculty indicated that the mean satisfaction level for faculty in medical field ($M = 3.39, SD = .29$) was significantly less (at $p < .01$) than those in management field ($M = 4.09, SD = .26$) and in arts and humanities field ($M = 4.18, SD = .25$), but was not significantly different from those in engineering field ($M = 3.99, SD = .26$).

Table 3. ANOVA (Dependent Variable: Satisfaction).

Source	df	F	Sig.
Gender	1	0.222	.638
Marital status	2	0.331	.718
Age_Bracket	3	3.777	.010
No. of dependents	4	0.590	.670
Discipline of faculty	4	6.667	.000
Type of institute	2	12.141	.000
UG/PG	1	1.909	.167

Note. R Squared = .073 (Adjusted R Squared = .058). ANOVA = analysis of variance; UG = undergraduate; PG = postgraduate.

Table 4. Regression (Dependent Variable Faculty Satisfaction).

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	SE		
1				
(Constant)	3.343	.128	26.100	.000
Age	.016	.003	4.984	.000

Note. R Squared = .021 (Adjusted R Squared = .020).

Faculty in engineering field showed lesser satisfaction than their counterparts in arts and humanities. For others, there was no significant difference in satisfaction levels.

Tukey's HSD test for satisfaction as affected by the type of institution indicated that the mean satisfaction level for faculty in private institutions ($M = 3.79, SD = .24$) was significantly less (at $p < .01$) than those in government universities ($M = 4.09, SD = .24$); however, the satisfaction levels at autonomous institutions did not differ significantly with government or private institutions.

Discussion

Our results for gender not being a factor affecting the mean levels of satisfaction are surprising considering a deeply rooted gender bias in the society at various levels. India ranks 125 out of 188 in Gender Inequality Index (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2015) and yet female faculty are not less satisfied compared to their male

peers. Perhaps there are reasons, possibly socio-psychological in nature, which may explain this outcome and suggests an area for further research in the future. It's possible that the female faculty find the academic profession to be more attractive due to the respect attached to it, the associated social outcome and manageable workloads even though pay may be lower and promotions rare. However, men look for higher pay and quicker career progression even though it may require sacrificing work–life balance to get there. The female participation in the workforce in India is estimated to be only 27% in 2016 as per the World Bank (n.d.) report, thus, putting a higher obligation on the men to earn more. This is a cultural manifestation where women folk are expected to stay at home and men are the bread winners, except in liberal families where the women have the family support to be independent. Clark (1997) offers another solution to the unexpected lack of lower job satisfaction levels reported by women by suggesting that if they expect less from their jobs, they are likely to be relatively more satisfied with the job. He further notes that as the surveys are conducted only on employed persons, it precludes those who may be dissatisfied enough to have left the work force. In other words, in a social milieu where women are generally patronized for leaving their home for work, they will be more likely to leave their employment even for minor dissatisfaction, while men would be under more pressure to continue to work. Thus the women who remain in work force are expected to show a higher level of satisfaction on average, as compared to men.

Though the limited studies exploring the marital status and satisfaction have found a relationship, there is a lack of a convincing argument explaining it. Our study shows no such relationship and in the absence of any compelling rationale, our findings may be considered factual.

It has been shown that the numbers of dependents have an impact on job outcomes and leads to stress. Dependents require attention in varying degrees, which takes up limited mind space which in turn affects the job, or at least a perception that one is unable to give 100% to the job. This can give rise to a feeling that it is affecting one's career, or it may indeed be so. It may be thus argued that more dependents will only exacerbate the situation and levels of satisfaction could be expected to drop. However, we do not find faculties with less or no dependents to be any more satisfied than others with more dependents. We propose that the continuance of the joint family system, even if in decline, might be providing the vital support resulting in better stress management by the families with larger number of dependents so that it does not become a factor affecting the satisfaction levels at work.

Previous studies on relationship between age and satisfaction has thrown all conceivable results, from no significant relationship to positive linear, negative linear, and nonlinear. This leads us to believe that age as an explanatory variable for satisfaction may be moderated by the type of

organization (Bernal, Snyder, & McDaniel, 1998), type of job, and the regional environment. Our study shows age to have a positive linear relationship ($B = .016$) with overall job satisfaction in the context of our educational system.

Lower satisfaction among younger people in higher academics is an area of concern and opens a subject of enquiry into its causes. It is conceivable that this is a reflection of disillusionment among them and the policy makers need to reflect on the reasons thereof and make amends so that the new entrants to the field, with energy and enthusiasm, are available along with the mature and experienced academics to balance the demographic profile and to ensure a continuous availability of quality faculty. The higher education system in India has been examined in some detail by Agarwal (2006) and he comments upon its discouraging state and has noted many flaws in areas ranging from governance to reservations for certain communities to supply and demand. It is possible that the older faculties have come to terms with these discouraging realities and/or these realities have crept up on them slowly without realization, and they are not unduly perturbed by it. Not to mention that senior faculties would generally be holding a higher position with better remunerations and social standing (Saleh & Otis, 1964). However, if our surrogate measure of the faculty teaching at an UG or PG level is indicative of eminence and social standing of the faculty, then it would appear that social standing is not leading to higher satisfaction, because the results do not show difference in satisfaction levels of faculty teaching at UG or PG level. In contrast, the younger qualified professionals look for parity in comparative job opportunities and would feel more dissatisfied working in a field which is dogged with several issues.

Overall satisfaction is also different for the type of institution and the disciplinary affiliation of the faculty. Going by anecdotal evidence, we would expect the faculty in government colleges to be more satisfied because of higher income to responsibility ratio compared to their peers in private colleges. It is generally believed that faculty and student outcomes in government colleges are not clearly defined or even measured, which makes the faculty apathetic and indifferent over time, salary remaining the same. However, the better private colleges may not only pay more but also have stringent parameters for performance and publications while the mediocre ones do not pay well. We expect faculty in private colleges to be less satisfied. Our study shows that private university faculties are less satisfied than the government ones but there is no significant difference from their autonomous colleagues. In fact, satisfaction levels at autonomous institutes are not different from the satisfaction levels at other types of institutes. This implies that the satisfaction levels at autonomous institutes vary over a larger range than at other types of institutes.

Some previous studies have shown disciplinary affiliation of the faculty to affect her satisfaction which could be

due to salary differentials as proposed by Ward and Sloane (2000). In India, salaries of the government staff including government universities is fixed by the government based on the recommendations of the pay commission. This sets a sort of benchmark for the private universities as well and pay differentials based on discipline of the faculty are not common. It was thus surprising to see that the faculty in the field of medicine is less satisfied than faculty in business and commerce or faculty in arts and sciences. We interacted on a limited basis with some faculty in medicine and learnt that in addition to their teaching load, they also have outpatient department/surgery duties as well and yet earn much less than those who have their own practice. Some private college faculties are also known to have their own practice on the side or work at some private hospital. This brings in extra earnings, but at the cost of long working hours. Many medical colleges, including government and private, lack infrastructure like modern labs, equipment, proper sanitation, and so on, which by definition is much more complex than even at engineering colleges. These could be leading to stress, frustration, and dissatisfaction.

The biggest take away for the policy makers from this study is the lower satisfaction levels among the younger faculty cohorts. The academic lifestyle is no longer perceived to be either as attractive or as prestigious as it once was. Further research needs to be conducted to identify the causes and take corrective action to make academics a desirable vocational choice. This should also help the administrators in maintaining age diversity and continuity in work force because a dissatisfied employee is more likely to consider a job change (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986) which is further accentuated for younger employees because of their higher mobility.

Limitations of the Study

One of the evident limitations of the present study is that the satisfaction level dependent variable is self-reported. We have tried to mitigate this with validating this response with responses to other related questions. There is a slight skew in favor of the female faculty in our sample. Instead of 32% female teachers at the university level, our sample has 38% female respondents.

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