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## JOB SATISFACTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN SRI LANKA: A SURVEY STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

*This survey was conducted to study the multivariate aspects of job satisfaction of selected social workers in Sri Lanka, by examining the different indicators that affect their professional well-being. Founded on qualitative studies with fifteen entities of active social workers, the research ascertains the principal factors influencing job satisfaction, including organisational environment, satisfaction with salary, control of workload, professional autonomy, and possibilities for career advancement. The findings reveal that great dissatisfaction with salary compensation compared to workload and responsibility, with the respondents reporting poor work-life balance due to over-demand. While most of the respondents were content with organisational recognition and appreciation, most of them cited low levels of decision-making autonomy as a major inhibitor to job satisfaction. Career development was a paramount influencer, though most of the respondents reported few promotion opportunities within their organisations. The research demands widespread policy reform, more professional status, more career advancement opportunities, and improved reward systems in light of the multifactorial nature of social workers' job satisfaction in Sri Lanka. The implications of the findings are significant for organisational management, policymakers, and the social work profession in general, highlighting the need for systemic changes in favour of this critical workforce.*

**Keywords:** Professional Autonomy, Work-Life Balance, Career Development, Organisational Policy, Workforce Retention

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## **Introduction**

The social work profession is a diverse one with a mission to promote well-being and quality of life for vulnerable people. Despite serving society, it's also central to promoting social work Ethics to maintain professional standards and lessen the ethical issues and dilemmas faced in day-to-day practice. Ethics are really important to any profession (Jayawardana, B. H., & Nanayakkara, K., 2018). Their quality of service provision is immediately connected with their job satisfaction because it influences the quality of service, professional commitment, and staff retention (Moorhead et al., 2019). International literature has established robust relationships between job satisfaction and numerous professional outcomes such as reduced burnout, reduced turnover intentions, and improved service quality (Kim, H., & Stoner, M., 2008; Tham, 2023). But these correlations must be examined in the specific socioeconomic and cultural context of Sri Lanka to build effective interventions.

Sri Lanka's current economic problems have placed increasing pressure on social service systems and professionals who work in them. Increasing demands for services, coupled with limitations in resources, create severe tensions that influence job satisfaction potentially (Jayasuriya, 2020). This study aims to examine how social workers respond to these issues and identify what determinants cause or reduce their professional satisfaction.

Organisational environments significantly affect the social worker's job satisfaction, such as organisational culture, administrative support, available resources, and policy guidelines (Shier et al., 2012). Environmental factors shape the everyday professional existence and could support or hinder effective practice. This study examines the effect of organisational environments in Sri Lankan social service organisations on social workers' well-being and job satisfaction and presents recommendations for potential organisational changes.

Work-life balance has become more and more recognised as a key aspect of job well-being across all areas of employment (Kalliath, T., & Brough, P., 2008). For social workers, who are often subjected to emotional demands and heavy workloads, it is particularly difficult to achieve balance. This research investigates how Sri Lankan social workers balance competing professional and personal demands and what this implies in terms of job satisfaction and overall well-being.

Career development channels and professional advancement opportunities play a significant role in long-term job satisfaction and employee retention (Poon, 2004). Limited advancement opportunities lead to stagnation and lower motivation levels, particularly for senior professionals. The present study determines the character of career development opportunities amongst social workers in Sri Lanka and the determinants of their job satisfaction and professional commitment.

Pay and benefits, while not the sole determinants of job satisfaction, are essential to workforce stability and professional respect (Smith, D.B., & Shields, J., 2013). Equitable pay meets both functional living needs and represents symbolic organisational and societal respect for the profession. This research reviews social workers' perspectives regarding whether or not salaries are sufficient in the current economic climate in Sri Lanka and discusses potential avenues for amelioration.

The theoretical framework employed in this study is Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which distinguishes hygiene factors (for example, remuneration and working conditions) and motivators (for example, acknowledgement and accomplishment) in the explanation of job satisfaction (Crainer, S.2003). It is a helpful theoretical framework for explaining various factors affecting social workers' job satisfaction in Sri Lanka and developing specific recommendations for change.

The value of this research goes beyond intellectual curiosity, touching on real-world considerations for social service agencies, professional organisations, schools and universities, and public policymakers. By recognising the distinct variables that facilitate or detract from job satisfaction among Sri Lankan social workers, this research gives an empirical basis to designing evidence-informed interventions to promote this critical workforce and enhance service to at-risk populations.

The current research aims to conduct a comprehensive examination of the job satisfaction of Sri Lankan social workers with specific objectives of determining the determinants of their professional satisfaction, exploring the impact of organisational settings on their well-being, and determining how career development can contribute to greater job satisfaction. Based on qualitative research that includes case studies of social workers in practice, this research provides fascinating insights into the attitudes and experiences of this crucial professional group, contributing to the limited existing literature on social work job satisfaction in Sri Lanka.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore in-depth opinions about job satisfaction among Sri Lankan social workers. Fifteen case studies were conducted with practising social workers who had at least one year of working experience. The population consisted of five females and ten males representing diverse roles within the profession, including psychology counsellors, project coordinators, project assistants, social workers, and school social workers. This purposive sampling technique enabled representation across various social work practice areas and settings.

Information was gathered through semi-structured interviews based on the most prominent job satisfaction factors of workload management, work-life balance, remuneration and benefits, recognition and autonomy, organisational climate, and development opportunities. Interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and were recorded with participants' consent. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Ethical

considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and providing the right of withdrawal at any point for the participants.

Data analysis employed a thematic analysis approach as outlined by (Braun, V., & Clarke, V.2006). . This included familiarising data, initial coding, theme searching, reviewing themes, labelling and defining themes, and final analysis. To enhance credibility, member checking was employed to guarantee that participants had the opportunity to read and validate the accuracy of their interview transcripts and initial analysis. Investor triangulation also involved several researchers in the analysis to minimise individual bias and enhance interpretive validity.

## **Results**

### ***Demographic Profile of Participants***

Participants were fifteen social work practitioners whose job designations crossed various areas of services in Sri Lanka. Females outnumbered males with a ratio of five females (33.3%) and ten males (66.7%), and all had one year of working experience in the social work profession. Participants were diverse and represented job designations from psychology counsellors to project coordinators, project assistants, general social workers, and school social workers, providing a representative overview of the social work profession in Sri Lanka.

### ***Job Scope and Responsibilities***

Respondents indicated diverse jobs that demonstrate the multi-dimensional practice of social work in Sri Lanka. These jobs involved dispensing emotional care to clients, fostering relationships between patients and families, enhancing community ability, evaluating and assessing programs, teaching communities about social problems, coordinating intervention programs, and connecting communities with the appropriate resources. This multiplicity of jobs attests to the demanding and complicated practice of social work in the Sri Lankan context.

### ***Work-Life Balance***

The predominant issue from the data was the sheer challenge of striving to achieve a work-life balance. The majority of respondents emphasised that it was "impossible" to balance business life and personal life due to overwhelming workloads that were not possible to accomplish during working hours. One participant stated, "The amount of work scheduled for the day cannot be accomplished within our designated hours, forcing us to sacrifice personal time." Many reported losing opportunities for personal development, additional education, and even basic family interactions due to work demands. A smaller subset of participants indicated some success in achieving balance through structured monthly planning, though this represented the minority experience.

### ***Compensation and Benefits***

Findings on compensation showed overall dissatisfaction with the level of wages. Most of the respondents freely stated that their wages were insufficient in the context of the economy in Sri Lanka and did not adequately compensate for their services to their organisations. As one participant described, "We provide far more service to our organisation than our salary compensates for." Inadequacy of salaries was put down as a key factor in reduced job satisfaction.

In the area of non-monetary benefits, experiences varied more. A majority of the participants expressed satisfaction with the benefits provided by their organisations, while fewer were dissatisfied with benefit packages. That shows diversity in how different organisations structure their compensation beyond base pay.

### ***Desired Incentives for Increased Job Satisfaction***

Respondents identified several incentives that would make them satisfied in their work, including shift and night allowances, promotion opportunities, reduction in workload, salary increase, provision of national and international training for professional growth, and official recognition of their efforts. These are signs of economic and professional development aspirations among social work professionals.

### ***Recognition and Appreciation***

Most participants reported a good experience with recognition from organisational management and client communities. They reported being valued by seniors in their organisations and being recognised by client communities. Such recognition was a significant positive factor on job satisfaction amid difficulty elsewhere.

### ***Professional Identity and Social Recognition***

All members concurred regarding the importance of greater social awareness regarding the social work profession, its responsibilities, and its value. They emphasised that greater public awareness of their professional role would do a great deal towards improving job satisfaction. They also alluded to the importance of organisational recognition of professional qualifications as well as networking among social workers on a wider basis.

### ***Professional Efficacy and Success***

All the respondents expressed a sense of being productive in the services they provided to individuals, which revealed a great sense of professional efficacy. This indicates that despite the many challenges that the respondents experienced, they had faith in what they could achieve through their services, which positively affected their job satisfaction.

### ***Professional Autonomy and Decision-Making***

One of the strongest and most persistent negative themes in the sample was universal agreement about restricted professional autonomy. Each of the participants described constraints on freedom to make independent decisions at work, which they understood as severely limiting their capacity to operate effectively on the community's behalf. One participant suggested, "This lack of independence has been a major factor affecting my job satisfaction." This theme was one of the most prevalent and strongest negative themes influencing job satisfaction in the sample.

### ***Organisational Support and Environment***

Most of the participants reported positive organisational leadership support, primarily when they experienced work-related issues. In addition, most were content with their physical working environment and job performance means. Such organisational factors were supportive in enhancing job satisfaction among the participants.

### ***Organizational Policies***

While the participants overwhelmingly reported positive experiences with their work environments and resources, they found that current organisational policies were deficient. Most believed that current policies unnecessarily constrained their work, depleting their ability to provide effective client and community services. This policy constraint theme was intricately entangled with concerns for restricted professional autonomy. Career Development

### ***Career Development***

All the respondents identified career development as a major job satisfaction determinant. All of them regarded it as essential in ensuring opportunities for professional growth that would enhance their commitment and satisfaction in the profession. Most of them reported that their organisations had some training workshops, though varying in size and quality.

Candidates also indicated career advancement-specific training needs, e.g., exposure to current knowledge and best practices, English language proficiency training, report writing skills, project planning skills, and exposure to networking with other professionals. The needs comprise technical skill development as well as overall professional competencies.

### ***Promotion Opportunities***

One of the key findings was restricted promotion opportunities within organisations. The majority of the respondents said there were "very narrow" career development opportunities in their organisations. This limited extent of a well-defined route of promotion was widely acknowledged as a reason for lower job satisfaction and as a possible determinant of long-term career retention in the profession.

These results collectively present a complex picture of job satisfaction among social workers in Sri Lanka, with professional commitment and many structural pressures at odds with one another. Participants demonstrated strong professionalism and competence, but considerable challenges with workload, remuneration, professional autonomy, and career advancement opportunities.

## **Discussion**

### ***Multidimensional Nature of Job Satisfaction***

This study determines that social worker job satisfaction in Sri Lanka is complex and comprises interrelated professional attributes that all impact general satisfaction. This implies conceptual models such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Crainer, S.2003). which differentiates between hygiene factors (such as working environment, remuneration) and motivators (such as achievement, recognition) for analysing job satisfaction. The results demonstrate that both groups contribute significantly to the professional life of social workers in Sri Lanka, though with contrasting outcomes.

The results show that while some of the hygiene factors—notably, salary adequacy and control over workload—are prime causes of dissatisfaction, motivational determinants such as professional competence and social esteem are prime positive counterweights. This intricate mixture of fluctuating determinants of satisfaction produces a multi-dimensional picture in which social workers can be satisfied in one or more respects and face considerable difficulty in one or more others. This refined picture transcends crude satisfaction/dissatisfaction binaries, supporting more sophisticated theoretical explanations such as the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which postulates professional well-being to be derived from the balance between work demands and resources available.

The multi-dimensionality of job satisfaction described in this study underscores the necessity for similarly multi-faceted approaches to aid the social work workforce of Sri Lanka. Programs focused on individual dimensions in isolation, such as pay without working on autonomy or workload without including career development, will likely be insufficient to produce meaningful increases in total job satisfaction. Organisational management and government policymakers interested in enhancing social worker retention and competency are key takeaways from this discovery.

### ***Work-Life Balance and Workload Management***

The sheer challenges in work-life balance are among the most concerning findings of this research. The near-universal experience of unmanageable workloads that cannot be met within official working hours indicates structural issues within Sri Lankan social service organisations. This finding aligns with international research pinpointing workload as a primary predictor of job satisfaction and burnout among social workers (Kim, H., & Stoner, M. 2008;2008; Maslach et al., 2001).

The consequences of poor work-life balance extend beyond short-term job dissatisfaction, with the potential for physical and mental health, family relationships, and long-term career sustainability consequences. Long-term work-life imbalance is a predictor of emotional exhaustion, which increases intentions to leave and reduces service quality (Lizano & Barak, 2015). The observed limited engagement in professional development activities due to workload pressures also has worrying implications for skills development and career progression within the sector.

This finding suggests a compelling necessity for organisational changes in workload distribution, staffing ratios, and time management within social service organisations in Sri Lanka. Effective interventions may include establishing standard caseload sizes, providing administrative support for documentation and coordination tasks, and creating protected time for professional development activities. Such changes would require organisational leadership commitment and perhaps policy changes at systemic levels to ensure adequate resources and staffing.

The small number of participants who reported having achieved some work-life balance through structured monthly planning indicates a potential protective factor. This planning skill can be facilitated by organisations through training and mentoring, in conjunction with addressing the structural determinants of excessive workload. The development of organisational cultures valuing employee wellbeing and placing boundaries around work demands is another key area for intervention (Kalliath, T., & Brough, P., 2008).

### ***Compensation Adequacy and Economic Context***

The overall dissatisfaction with levels of income among the sample respondents must be understood against the specific economic context of Sri Lanka, which has suffered from severe economic challenges over recent years. The perception that compensation is incommensurate with professional efforts or meets primary economic needs is a significant cause of job dissatisfaction, as identified in social worker retention studies as a global issue (Smith, D. B., & Shields, J.2013).

Apart from the instrumental consequences for individual workers, low pay has symbolic significance regarding how the profession is valued in society. Beliefs that their occupations are not sufficiently valued economically may support other issues and be part of reduced professional identity and engagement in the long term. This symbolic feature aligns with occupational prestige and professional respect literature (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), which suggests that pay inadequacy could have implications beyond short-term financial problems.

Resolution of compensation problems involves taking into account both overall salary scales and relative pay concerning similar educational requirements in other occupations. Creating open salaries that account for professional credentials, experience, and tasks could increase perceptions of fairness and sufficiency. Along with this, applying the



proposed incentives like shift pay and performance-linked bonuses could remedy at least some financial issues without necessitating fundamental salary restructuring, which could be difficult within budget-restricted organisations.

The more optimistic perspectives of non-monetary benefits suggest an organisational possibility of creating benefit packages as a means for enhancing overall compensation satisfaction. Research suggests that effectively designed benefit structures can mediate pay dissatisfaction to some extent, particularly when they address specific workforce needs (Dale-Olsen, 2006). For Sri Lankan social workers, professional development benefits, flexible work scheduling benefits, and wellness benefits may be particularly useful based on the listed needs.

### ***Professional Autonomy and Decision-Making Authority***

The frequency with which the participants concurred that they possess limited professional autonomy is the most striking and unsettling result of this study. Professional autonomy, the authority to make independent judgments and determine in fields of expertise, has been extensively referred to as the greatest impact on job satisfaction in all social professions, including work (Lee et al., 2013). The current findings point toward a significant restraint on this essential aspect of professional practice in the Sri Lankan context.

Lack of control of decision-making likely signals organisational types controlled hierarchically and proceduralized to limit professional discretion. While procedural standardisation to some extent performs essential functions in encouraging service uniformity and excellence, more than constraint of professional judgment can undermine effective practice, particularly in a profession like social work necessary to run responsive and context-sensitive interventions.

This challenge is one that organisational leadership has to overcome by critically examining existing decision-making models to identify the possibilities of greater professional freedom without losing necessary accountability. Solutions include establishing consultation models rather than approval models for day-to-day choices, establishing clear professional discretionary areas, creating participative decision-making processes acknowledging practitioner expertise, and establishing organisational cultures valuing professional judgment.

Additionally, professional organisations and education institutions have heavy duties to provide adequate professional autonomy and enable practitioners to be capable of employing and justifying professional judgment. Increasing the professional identity and standing of social work in Sri Lankan society could help gain more recognition for the professional expertise and thus with higher jurisdiction over decision-making within the organisation.

### ***Recognition and Professional Identity***

The highly favourable recognition experiences from clients and organisational leaders are a significant buffer factor likely to mitigate other job dissatisfaction sources. The finding is consistent with research that recognition is a main motivational construct resulting in job satisfaction and professional commitment (Judge et al., 2001; Crainer, S.2003). Feeling valued for work accomplished does appear to provide substantial support to social workers who deal with numerous diverse professional issues.

However, the emphasis of participants on the need for increased societal awareness of the social work profession signals a lack of broader social recognition that has been felt. This issue of professional identity and public awareness is symptomatic of problems faced by the social work profession globally, particularly where the limits, expertise, and contributions of the occupation may be ill understood or valued ( Weiss-Gal & Welbourne, 2008).

The relationship between job satisfaction and professional recognition operates through several mechanisms. Recognition affirming professional purpose and identity relates to feelings of value and meaning in work. Secondly, public acknowledgement of professional responsibilities and expertise facilitates proper expectations and interactions, which may reduce role conflicts and mismatches, lowering job satisfaction. Furthermore, broader professional recognition can be translated into more status and money for the profession in total, fixing some of the structural problems that have been encountered in this research.

Strategies to foster professional recognition may include public education campaigns about social work contributions and functions, advocacy by professional associations to enhance the profession's public image, and organisational policies that recognise and publicise social work achievements and effects. Social work education programs educating social workers can contribute as well by focusing on professional identity building and educating practitioners on communicating their expertise and worth effectively to various stakeholders.

Participants' call for expanding professional networks among social workers further suggests another key dimension of professional identity. Effective professional networks create strong collegial support, knowledge sharing opportunities, and collective advocacy capability (Beddoe, 2011). Enabling the formation of such networks, both official professional associations and unofficial communities of practice, is one significant method of enhancing recognition and overall job satisfaction throughout the profession.

### ***Organisational Environment and Policies***

The findings in terms of organisational settings paint a multifaceted picture where respondents indicated being content with physical settings and resources, but not content with organisational policies. The variance highlights the importance of examining more

than a single aspect of organisational contexts when determining their impact on job satisfaction.

The reported satisfaction with physical resources and settings in this study is a positive result and suggests that material practice conditions are generally fulfilled in many settings. This contrasts with the outcome of some studies in certain settings that identified large shortages of resources as the main barriers to effective practice in social work (Hussein, 2018). The concerns over organisational policy setting constraints on practice effectiveness do reflect some real structural restraints other than physical resources.

Organisational policies inform practice parameters, specify procedural standards, enact accountability measures, and translate organisational priorities into practice. If misaligned with professional values or practice realities, these policies can generate strong tensions for practitioners to work between conflicting demands (Lipsky, 1980). The expressed perception that current policies constrain effective service delivery indicates that such misalignments might be prevalent among Sri Lankan social service organisations.

This finding implies more participatory policy development processes that, in significant ways, respond to practitioner knowledge and expertise. Organisations must examine existing policies to eliminate unnecessarily restrictive characteristics and develop more responsive structures that facilitate professional discretion with appropriate accountability.

Moreover, open discussion of policy rationales and regular review processes to ascertain policy impacts would be capable of addressing practitioner complaints.

The relationship between policy strictures and the already discussed boundaries on professional discretion warrants particular attention. These two problems are entwined and likely compound each other, shaping practice environments where social workers feel that their professional expertise and judgment are undervalued and underutilised. Addressing both simultaneously through wide-ranging organisational changes would be more fruitful than addressing either in isolation.

### ***Career Development and Professional Growth***

The cross-professional acknowledgement of career development as a predictor of job satisfaction represents the call for professional development opportunities as a force in workforce maintenance and performance. This finding is repeated by far-reaching studies in the recognition of developmental opportunities and job satisfaction in professions (Poon, 2004). For Sri Lankan social workers, the finding shows both the applicability of this factor and extremely high differences in prevailing opportunities.

The specific training needs observed by participants—availability of current knowledge, language skills, report writing skills, and professional networking—are indicative of both

technical skill development and overall professional competencies. This range of development needs is reflective of the multidimensionality of social work practice and the diverse capacities required for productive service delivery. Meeting these diverse needs requires holistic models of professional development beyond the traditional training workshop.

The reported absence of career advancement opportunities is a particularly disconcerting result with significant implications for long-term job satisfaction and turnover. Clear-cut paths of advancement provide recognition for establishing expertise, potential for increased responsibility and reward, and tangible evidence of organisational investment in employees (Ng, T. W. H., Eby et al., 2005). Their absence can result in professional stagnation and lowered long-term commitment to organisations or even the occupation as a whole.

Overcoming such challenges requires multifaceted action from various stakeholders. Organisations must establish more structured career ladders with clear promotion criteria and accompanying salary increases. Professional associations can establish expertise and specialised skill development acknowledgement programs as other advancement avenues beyond traditional organisational hierarchies. Schools and universities can assist by offering affordable continuing education and advanced certification offerings attuned to practising professionals' imperatives and constraints.

The relationship between career growth opportunity constraints and compensation dissatisfaction warrants particular attention. Where career growth prospects are limited, compensation becomes an even more salient component of retention and satisfaction, since it is one of the foremost available pathways for earning recognition of emerging competence and commitment. This relationship suggests that attempts to intervene on either facet independently may be insufficient; comprehensive interventions addressing both compensation types and careers would be more likely to meet with success.

### ***Gender Aspects of Social Work Satisfaction***

Although gender-specific patterns were not precisely highlighted in the overall findings, sample stratification (33.3% female, 66.7% male) invokes serious questions about gender aspects of social work satisfaction in Sri Lanka. This gender ratio diverges from the female-dominated trend prevailing in much of social work environments across the globe (Hussein, 2018), suggesting possibly distinctive gender relationships within Sri Lankan social work environments.

The international literature has revealed several gender-specific determinants of job satisfaction, including differential expectations and work-family conflict experiences, gender-based discrimination and harassment, and gendered reward and promotion strategies (Ng & Feldman, 2010). While gender differences for satisfaction dimensions were not explicitly investigated in this research, these prospects are worthwhile and need consideration while interpreting outcomes and developing the responsive intervention.

The work-life conflict challenges as reported by the participants may have different impacts based on gender, particularly where there are dominant traditional gender role expectations. Women social workers might incur cumulative stresses from professional and domestic responsibilities, thereby increasing work-life conflicts (Lizano & Barak, 2015). Similarly, career development challenges might mix with gender-based discrimination to create uniquely challenging obstacles for women professionals pursuing their careers.

Future research should rigorously investigate possible gender variation in job satisfaction determinants among Sri Lankan social workers, providing further differentiated understanding of the intersection of gender and professional lives in this specific cultural setting. Policymakers and leaders within organisations should consider possible gender dimensions when developing interventions to enhance job satisfaction so that interventions will be effective with possibly diverging needs and experiences of male versus female social workers.

### ***Professional Efficacy and Meaning Despite Constraints***

One particular finding amid other difficulties was the universal reporting of feeling successful at offering community services, despite signs of strong professional efficacy convictions in the face of structural constraint. The reporting of having a positive impact despite challenge reflects the value-based essence of social work practice and is a key resilience factor likely to counteract other sources of job dissatisfaction (Stalker et al., 2007).

The perceived efficacy-job satisfaction interface operates through several mechanisms. Efficacy beliefs make professional identity and meaning stronger, drawing on intrinsic motivation that partially offsets extrinsic adversity. Additionally, concrete positive impacts on clients and communities provide emotional returns, supporting perseverance amid adversity. Lastly, efficacy experiences build professional confidence and resilience, possibly enhancing the capability for survival within organisational and structural adversity.

This awareness points out that despite addressing structural challenges, social workers are reminded to remain grounded in the meaning and impact of their efforts. Organisational systems of tracking and validating service impact should be established, channels for direct client comment should be provided, and bureaucratic mandates should not replace entirely direct service efforts that so commonly provide the most tangible sense of value.

The tension between professional efficacy that is high and these aforementioned limits on professional freedom is especially relevant. This conflicting combination—being effective at service delivery while simultaneously experiencing pressures on professional judgment—is an indication that practitioners may be finding ways to cope with organisational limits creatively to produce client outcomes. Organisations could even

become more satisfying and effective by recognising this proficiency and giving more latitude for its expression through added professional autonomy.

### ***Integrated Theoretical Understanding***

The findings of the research can be integrated into one theory out of a few theoretical frameworks. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Crainer, S.2003). is a good place to begin, differentiating hygiene factors (salary, working conditions, organisational policies) and motivators (recognition, achievement, growth opportunities) in producing satisfaction. The results present the importance of both categories, with specific issues emerging over a range of hygiene factors (notably salary adequacy and work-life balance) which appear to be generating significant dissatisfaction despite some positive motivational factors.

This can be extended by the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), where occupational well-being is understood as the result of the balance between work demands (workload, emotional demands, conflicts of roles) and available resources (autonomy, social support, possibilities of development). The results indicate the potential for unbalanced balance for the majority of social workers in Sri Lanka, with high demands (most significantly workload) on the part of limited resources in some areas (most significantly autonomy and career growth).

Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) contributes to the understanding, suggesting that experts try to keep up, maintain, and accumulate resources, with resource loss having a more powerful impact proportionate to resource gain. The reported challenges in various resource domains—time, financial adequacy, professional control, career development—suggest vulnerability to patterns of resource depletion likely to lead to burnout and decreased professional commitment in the long term.

Synthesising these theoretical perspectives provides a wide foundation on which to comprehend the complex determinants of social workers job satisfaction in Sri Lanka and construct suitable interventions. Synthesising in this manner highlights the multifaceted construct of job satisfaction and the requirement to intervene on a multitude of interdependent factors to bring about suitable improvements in workforce wellbeing and retention.

### ***Implications for Practice and Policy***

The outcomes of this research carry significant implications for various stakeholders who care about enhancing the social work workforce in Sri Lanka. For organisational managers, the conclusions emphasise the necessity to tackle workload allocation, enhance professional freedom, foster more encouraging organisational policies, refine clearer career progression opportunities, and improve reward structures. Specific approaches may include adopting standard caseload limits, establishing collaborative decision-making practices, establishing clear, transparent promotion criteria, and fostering more competitive reward packages.

For professional associations, the findings highlight the need for professional recognition advocacy, work terms, and proper autonomy. Associations can establish campaigns to raise public awareness of the profession, establish professional standards such as proper decision-making powers, campaign to change policy addressing workload and pay issues, and arrange professional development opportunities focusing on recognised training needs.

For education schools, the results suggest preparing professionals for the conditions to which they will be exposed and equipping them with tools to effectively deal with those conditions. Professional advocacy, self-management strategies, exercising ethical decision-making within constrained contexts, and effective communication of professional knowledge are included in education coursework. Institutions could also develop accessible continuing education programs to cover the determined training needs of the participants.

For policymakers, the lessons highlight the need for system-level policy changes regarding social worker remuneration, workload standards, and professional discretion. Policy interventions may involve establishing minimum salary standards for trained social workers, setting caseload limits in line with international best practice, offering funding arrangements for learning in professional continuity, and building regulatory systems that give full recognition to social work experience and expertise.

### ***Limitations and Future Research Directions***

In offering these insights, this study has several limitations that should be considered in interpreting the findings and that point to directions for future research. The relatively small sample size ( $n=15$ ) limits the generalizability of findings, though this is consistent with the qualitative case study design employed. Additional research with larger, more representative samples would offer a richer sense of how the themes uncovered manifest in different settings and subgroups within the social work profession in Sri Lanka.

The gender balance of the sample (33.3% women, 66.7% men) may not reflect the gender distribution of the social work workforce in Sri Lanka and could limit the study's power to identify gender-specific job satisfaction trends. Future research should specifically test for potential gender differences in satisfaction determinants and experiences and provide more information on this front.

The cross-sectional nature of the study provides a snapshot of perceptions at a single point in time, limiting understanding of how job satisfaction varies across professional careers and in response to changing organisational and societal factors. Longitudinal research tracking satisfaction trends over time would provide a valuable understanding of these temporal factors and the durability of different interventions in producing sustained change.

The reliance on self-report information through interviews, while providing rich subjective information, is also susceptible to social desirability bias and not triangulated with objective measures or organisational perceptions. A more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics underlying job satisfaction would be provided by subsequent research employing multiple data sources—e.g., observational data, organisational measures, and leader perceptions.

The focus on current social workers excludes workers who have left the profession due to dissatisfaction, which might underrepresent the most severe satisfaction problems. Research exploring turnover trends and sampling ex-social workers would provide important additional insights into workforce attrition causes.

Future research must also experiment with potential variations in determinants of job satisfaction in different practice settings, geographical areas, and career stages in Sri Lanka. Comparative research exploring similarities and differences in social worker satisfaction in Sri Lanka and other South Asian or developing nations would also provide valuable contextual understanding of which concerns are specific to the Sri Lankan context versus shared across similar economies or cultural environments.

### ***Conclusions and Future Suggestions***

The current research has provided nuanced insight into the complex landscape of job satisfaction of social workers in Sri Lanka, a field characterised by deep dedication to service amidst significant structural difficulties. The study reveals that although social workers derive satisfaction from successful client outcomes and organisational recognition, they face significant difficulties in terms of work-life balance, sufficiency of remuneration, professional autonomy, and career development opportunities. These overlapping factors yield a multifaceted picture of professional experience requiring multistranded approaches to change.

The consistent identification of unsustainable workload and lack of work-life balance as significant concerns highlights the need for reform in workload management in social service agencies. Maximum caseload standards, administrative assistance with documentation, and safeguarded time for professional development would serve to alleviate these concerns. Agencies also need to foster cultures that value employee well-being and establish reasonable boundaries around work expectations, with the recognition that sustainable practice is beneficial to practitioners and to the communities they work with.

The widespread dissatisfaction with the adequacy of salaries, particularly in the current economic climate in Sri Lanka, underscores the need for compensation reforms that take long-overdue recognition of professional qualifications and contributions. The creation of open salary scales with regular adjustments for economic conditions, the introduction of recommended incentives such as shift allowances and performance bonuses, and the



enhancement of benefit packages would reduce financial grievances while expressing proper appreciation for the contributions of the profession.

The widespread worry over constrained professional autonomy is one of the most significant findings of this research, highlighting the need for organisational reforms that allow for an appropriate place for professional judgment and decision-making. Organisations need to reassess existing approval processes, seek opportunities for more practitioner discretion, design collaborative models of decision-making, and cultivate cultures valuing professional expertise. Professional associations should foster rightful autonomy as an essential component of successful practice, and training institutions should prepare practitioners with skills to articulate and assert professional judgment convincingly.

The demonstrated need for more public knowledge about social work profession, which reflects the importance of collective efforts to promote professional identity and visibility. Professional associations should lead the advocacy campaigns to increase public understanding of social work contributions; establish clear professional standards; and create platforms for social workers to share their expertise and impact with broader audiences.

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