

Unhappy on the job

by Margot Shields

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The vast majority of Canadian workers were satisfied with their jobs in 2002, but approximately 1 in 12—that's 1.3 million—were not. According to data from the 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS): Mental Health and Well-being, just over 6% of workers were “not too satisfied” and 2% were “not at all satisfied.” Understanding what is behind these negative views would be helpful to both employees and their employers, given that many people spend a large share of their waking hours on the job.

Occupation

Men and women were equally likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs, although the connections between dissatisfaction and job characteristics sometimes differed by sex (Table 1). Relatively high proportions of men and women who worked in sales or service, or processing, manufacturing or utilities were unhappy on the job. The same was true for men in administrative, financial or clerical jobs. By contrast, comparatively low percentages of men and women in professional positions were dissatisfied. And among men in management, as well as those in farming, forestry, fishing or mining occupations, job dissatisfaction was particularly uncommon.

Shift workers dissatisfied

Men and women who worked evening or night shifts were more likely to report dissatisfaction than those who worked regular daytime schedules. The same was true for men who worked rotating shifts. By contrast, women who worked irregular shifts were more likely to be satisfied.

Table 1

Percentage reporting job dissatisfaction, by sex and selected characteristics, employed population aged 18 to 75, Canada excluding territories, 2002

	Total %	Men %	Women %
Total	8.6	8.4	8.8
Occupation[†]			
Management	5.7*	4.2*	8.3
Professional	5.3*	5.8*	4.9*
Technologist	7.4	7.2	7.9 ^E
Administrative/Financial/Clerical	10.7*	14.5 ^E	9.8
Sales/Service	11.4*	10.9*	11.8*
Trades/Transport/Equipment operating	8.0	8.1	F
Farming/Forestry/Fishing/Mining	4.4 ^{*E}	4.2 ^{*E}	F
Processing/Manufacturing/Utilities	16.7*	17.9*	14.7 ^{*E}
Work schedule			
Regular daytime [†]	7.7	7.0	8.5
Evening shift	14.9*	15.5 ^E	14.3*
Night shift	18.4*	19.1 ^E	17.3 ^{*E}
Rotating shifts	10.0*	10.5*	9.4
Irregular shifts	7.8	9.0	6.3*
Weekly work hours			
Part-time (1 to 29)	9.5	13.4*	7.9*
Regular (30 to 40) [†]	9.5	9.3	9.7
Long (more than 40)	6.8*	6.6*	7.3*
Self-employed			
Yes	4.2*	4.6 ^E	3.6 ^{*E}
No [†]	9.4	9.3	9.6
Personal income			
Less than \$20,000	12.0*	15.0*	10.4
\$20,000 to \$39,999 [†]	9.2	9.5	8.9
\$40,000 to \$59,999	7.4*	6.9*	8.2
\$60,000 or more	4.5*	4.6*	4.3 ^{*E}
Education			
Less than secondary graduation	8.4	9.1	7.3
Secondary graduation [†]	8.8	8.6	9.0
Some postsecondary	10.8	10.6	11.0
Postsecondary graduation	8.2	7.7	8.7
Age group			
18 to 24	13.6*	13.7*	13.5*
25 to 39 [†]	9.5	9.2	9.8
40 to 54	7.2*	6.9*	7.5*
55 or older	5.2*	5.7 ^E	4.4 ^{*E}

[†] Reference category is Total

[†] Reference category

* Significantly different from estimate for reference category ($p < 0.05$)

^E Use with caution (coefficient of variation 16.6% to 33.3%)

^F Too unreliable to be published (coefficient of variation greater than 33.3%)

Source: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey: Mental Health and Well-being

Men and women who had long workweeks (more than 40 hours) were less likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs than their counterparts with regular hours (30 to 40 hours weekly). Men who had part-time jobs were more likely to be dissatisfied than those working regular hours, but women working part time were more likely to be content with their job situation. In fact, this connection between part-time work and job satisfaction for women was the only relationship with working hours that persisted when other employment-related variables, age and personal income were taken into account in multivariate analysis (data not shown). This suggests that, rather than working hours, other aspects of the job—occupation and income, for example—account for the relationships observed in bivariate analysis.

Not surprisingly, few self-employed men and women were dissatisfied with their jobs.

Data sources

Estimates are based on data from the 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) (cycle 1.2): Mental Health and Well-being. The CCHS 1.2 covers people aged 15 or older living in private dwellings in the 10 provinces. Residents of the three territories, Indian reserves, institutions, and certain remote areas, as well as full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces, were excluded. Data collection began in May 2002 and took place over eight months. Most interviews (86%) were conducted in person; the remainder, by telephone. Selected respondents were required to provide their own information, as proxy responses were not accepted. The responding sample consisted of 36,984 people aged 15 or older; the response rate was 77%. More detailed descriptions of the design, sample and interview procedures can be found in other reports and on the Statistics Canada Web site.^{1,2} The analysis for this article was based on the population aged 18 to 75 who were employed at the time of the survey; 20,747 respondents met these conditions.

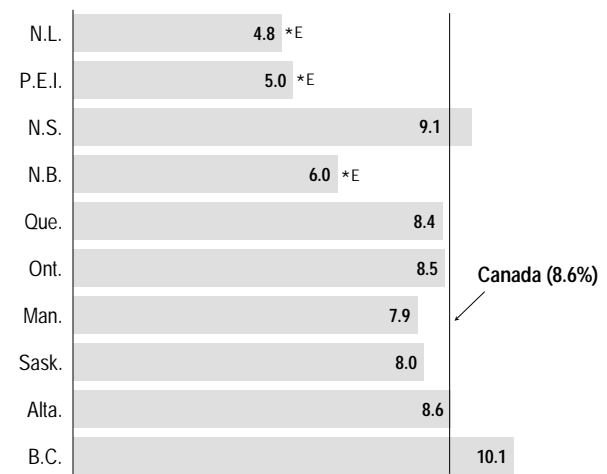
To account for survey design effects, standard errors and coefficients of variation were estimated using the bootstrap technique.^{3,5}

Money makes a difference

Personal income was related to job satisfaction, but the association was stronger for men. Compared with men earning \$20,000 to \$39,000 per year, those whose incomes were less than \$20,000 were over 50% more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs, while men making \$40,000 or more were less likely to be dissatisfied. For women, a significant advantage emerged only for those with an annual income of at least \$60,000. Education, another indication of socio-economic status, was not related to job satisfaction for either sex.

Age was related to job satisfaction. Compared with workers aged 25 to 39, younger workers were more likely, and older workers less likely, to be dissatisfied with their jobs. When other employment variables were taken into account, the only association that held was that women aged 55 or older were more satisfied with their jobs.

Chart 1
Percentage reporting job dissatisfaction, by province, employed population aged 18 to 75, Canada excluding territories, 2002



* Significantly different from estimate for Canada ($p < 0.05$)

E Use with caution (coefficient of variation 16.6% to 33.3%)

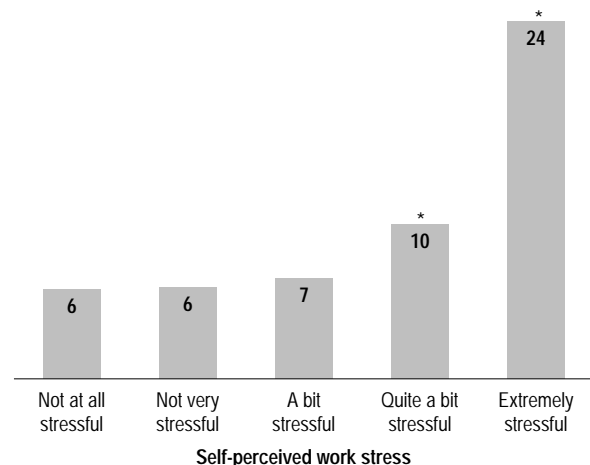
Source: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey; Mental Health and Well-being

Generally, job satisfaction levels did not vary by province. Comparatively small proportions of workers in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick did, however, express dissatisfaction with their jobs (Chart 1).

Links to stress

Clear associations emerged between the amount of job stress workers perceived and their job satisfaction levels. Approximately 1 out of 15 workers who found most days not at all stressful, not very stressful, or a bit stressful were dissatisfied. Among workers who found most days to be quite a bit stressful, the number dissatisfied increased to 1 in 10. And for workers who found most days extremely stressful, 1 in 4 were dissatisfied with their jobs (Chart 2).

Chart 2
Percentage reporting job dissatisfaction, by self-perceived work stress level, employed population aged 18 to 75, Canada excluding territories, 2002



* Significantly higher than estimate for "a bit stressful" ($p < 0.05$)
Source: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey; Mental Health and Well-being

Physical and mental health

A recent review of the literature concluded that job dissatisfaction was strongly associated with mental health problems such as burnout, low self-esteem, depression and anxiety, and moderately associated with subjective physical illness.⁶

Consistent with these studies, based on CCHS data, workers who were dissatisfied with their jobs had diminished perceptions of both their physical and mental health (Chart 3). Only 7% of workers who were very satisfied with their jobs reported

Chart 3
Percentage reporting fair or poor physical/mental health, by job satisfaction, employed population aged 18 to 75, Canada excluding territories, 2002



* Significantly higher than estimate for "very satisfied" ($p < 0.05$)
Source: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey; Mental Health and Well-being

Limitations

This study is based on cross-sectional data; therefore, a causal relationship between job satisfaction and health cannot be established. While it is possible that job dissatisfaction may lead to poor health, it could be that people in poor health are more likely to be unhappy on the job.

The questions

The estimates for *job satisfaction* were based on responses to the question, "How satisfied are you with your job: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not too satisfied, or not at all satisfied?" Respondents who indicated the last two categories were classified as being dissatisfied with their jobs. Those who were working at more than one job were asked to consider their main job (the one with the greatest number of weekly hours).

Self-perceived physical health was measured by asking, "In general, would you say your physical health is: excellent? very good? good? fair? poor?" A similar question was used to measure *self-perceived mental health*.

Number of disability days was measured in terms of bed-days and "cut-down" days over the past two weeks. Respondents were asked about days they stayed in bed because of illness or injury (including nights in hospital) and about days they had cut down normal activities because of illness or injury.

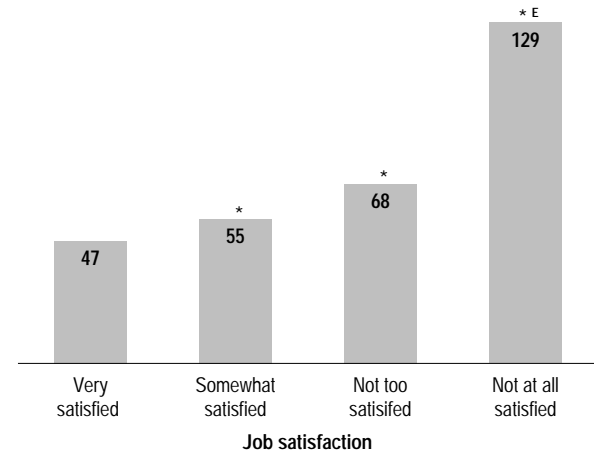
that their physical health was fair or poor. This increased to 10% for workers who were somewhat satisfied to 14% for those who were not too satisfied, and to 17% for those who were not at all satisfied. Differences in perceptions of mental health in relation to level of job satisfaction were even more pronounced. Only 3% of workers who were very satisfied with their jobs reported fair or poor mental health, compared with 22% for those who were not at all satisfied.

Disability days

Job dissatisfaction was related to the number of disability days workers had in the previous two weeks. Respondents were defined as having had a disability day if they had stayed in bed or cut down on things they normally did because of illness or injury. For every 100 workers who were very satisfied with their jobs, 47 disability days were reported, but for every 100 workers who reported that they were not at all satisfied with their jobs, the figure was 129 disability days (Chart 4).

Chart 4

Average number of disability days in past two weeks per 100 workers, by job satisfaction, employed population aged 18 to 75, Canada excluding territories, 2002



* Significantly higher than estimate for "very satisfied" ($p < 0.05$)

^E Use with caution (coefficient of variation 16.6% to 33.3%)

Source: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey; Mental Health and Well-being

In other studies, shift work,⁷ working hours⁸ and work stress⁹ have been linked to poor health. Therefore it is particularly relevant that in this study the associations between job dissatisfaction and diminished perceptions of physical and mental health and increased disability days persisted when examined in multivariate models that controlled for shift work, working hours and work stress, as well as other possible confounders (Table A). It has been suggested that job dissatisfaction is more strongly associated with an employee's mental health and well-being than any other work characteristic.⁶ This points to the importance of understanding what aspects of the job underlie dissatisfaction among workers.

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Table A

Adjusted odds ratios and regression coefficients relating job satisfaction to selected outcomes, employed population aged 18 to 75, Canada excluding territories, 2002

	Fair/Poor self-perceived physical health		Fair/Poor self-perceived mental health		Number of disability days in past two weeks	
	Adjusted odds ratio [‡]	95% confidence interval	Adjusted odds ratio [‡]	95% confidence interval	Regression coefficients [‡]	95% confidence interval
Job satisfaction						
Very satisfied [†]	1.0	...	1.0
Somewhat satisfied	1.3*	1.1, 1.6	1.8*	1.5, 2.2	0.05	-0.02, 0.12
Not too satisfied	1.8*	1.4, 2.4	3.1*	2.2, 4.3	0.15	-0.02, 0.33
Not at all satisfied	2.0*	1.3, 2.9	5.5*	3.8, 8.0	0.72*	0.17, 1.27

[†] Reference category

[‡] Controlled for sex, age, occupation, working hours, shift work, self-employment status, self-perceived work stress, personal income, education, heavy monthly drinking and low emotional support

* Significantly different from estimate for reference category ($p < 0.05$)

... not applicable

Source: 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey: Mental Health and Well-being