

CAREER SATISFACTION AMONG MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY
ALUMNI

by

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This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Optometry

Ferris State University
Michigan College of Optometry

April, 2011

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Has been approved

April, 2011

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Ferris State University
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ABSTRACT

Background: The purpose of the research is to determine the most significant predictors of career satisfaction among optometrists who graduated from the Michigan College of Optometry (MCO) at Ferris State University over the past 31 years while examining differences across gender, tenure, and practice modality. Current research shows that career satisfaction among health care professionals seems to vary immensely. Though much research has been conducted for other professions regarding career satisfaction, data for optometrists is currently lacking. *Methods:* Career satisfaction will be assessed using an online survey sent to all MCO alumni with current e-mail addresses (n = 502). Satisfaction regarding a number of factors will be evaluated. *Results:* Although there were no significant satisfaction differences between men and women, there were significantly more women working fewer hours and netting less income. Optometrists with regard to tenure show an accumulation of benefits over time, including increased vacation time and higher salaries. Also, there are significant differences in satisfaction between self-employed and employed optometrists; however, both modalities have clear benefits. *Conclusions:* Overall, optometrists are satisfied with their career choice without drastic differences among gender, tenure, or mode of practice. More commonly the differences across these domains included income, schedule, and benefits, with those practicing longer, working more hours, and owning a multi-doctor practice having the highest income and benefit levels.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Dr. Renée Mika for being our faculty supervisor and for all of her help in the organization and development of this project. Additionally, we would like to thank Dr. Vandana Rajaram for assisting with the statistical analysis at the conclusion of the survey. Thank you to Amy Otteson for her hard work in the distribution and collection of the survey and responses, and to Dr. Carter for providing the alumni e-mail addresses. Thank you to Dr. Cron for allowing us to help contribute to the school's continuing accreditation process. We would like to thank all of the anonymous Michigan College of Optometry Alumni who completed our survey and contributed to our research project. Finally, we would like to thank our husbands and families for all of their support during this project and throughout the educational process. Their patience and understanding during this busy time has been incredible and they are a key factor in our completion of this program.

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INTRODUCTION

There are many factors for students to consider when selecting a career path, one at the forefront being satisfaction. Students often find themselves asking the question, “Will I be happy?” The goal of this study was to determine whether or not optometrists are satisfied with various aspects of their careers, comparing gender, tenure, and their mode of practice. Prior to this study, the investigators believed that overall women would be more satisfied with their jobs than men, specifically due to the flexibility that this career affords those who wish to be mothers and wives as well as doctors. Additionally, it is likely that satisfaction will increase with tenure for a doctor, as their independence and income will both increase over time. Finally, optometrists who are self-employed are more likely to be satisfied than those who are employed, due to the freedoms often associated with being self-employed.

It is important to understand satisfaction of current optometrists for those who are considering the career and those who are close to graduating. Additionally, it is helpful to be able to provide future optometrists with in depth career expectations as they enter the profession. Students want to know whether or not they are likely to be satisfied in their careers, how long it may take for them to reach a level of satisfaction, and what particular components of their profession are associated with higher levels of satisfaction, such as income, independence, and scheduling flexibility.

There are few resources available for optometrists, specifically, regarding career satisfaction. One study of an HMO found optometrists to be dissatisfied with many aspects of their career, and so it is important to have information available to optometrists who plan to practice in other modes of practice. When compared to the other medical

employees at the HMO, optometrists were found to be the least satisfied in areas such as pay, vacation, sick leave, retirement, control over the pace of work, workload, task variety, amount of responsibility, and continuing education. Overall, this survey found that optometrists were less satisfied with their job in general, and one third of them specified that they would not take that job if offered again. This is very unfortunate, but was limited to one specific HMO in one specific part of the country. It is therefore important for students and optometrists alike, to have more information available to them, to assure them that optometry is a satisfying career.¹

There are currently many studies that assess career satisfaction across various domains, such as gender, years in practice and professional accomplishments. With regard to overall satisfaction between genders, there is variation in the literature regarding who is more satisfied. For instance, there are several studies that show no difference in satisfaction between men and women healthcare providers^{2,3,4} but there are others that demonstrate higher satisfaction among males.^{5,6} However, despite this variability, men and women tend to be similarly satisfied with their careers, with respect to specific factors such as parenthood,² management,³ hours worked^{2,4} and career success.² When women are less satisfied, it tends to be problems with recognition of good work, distribution of workloads, and job variety.⁷

Interestingly, it has also been demonstrated that women become more satisfied the longer they are in their career, while men did not.³ However, despite this difference between men and women, many studies have not shown an overall increase in satisfaction with increased tenure.⁵ It seems that satisfaction is based more on a

physician's position in the hierarchy of health care, rather than how long they have been practicing.⁷

Of the studies that look at career satisfaction and age, rather than tenure, there have been those that have found no significant differences,⁸ and those that have found that younger physicians were more satisfied than older physicians.⁹ However, while increasing age was a predictor of lower satisfaction with communication within the organization, younger medical trainees were less satisfied with their working conditions, pay, and benefits.⁸ Also, there has been an overall difference between younger and older practitioners, often related to the mode of practice, rather than the age.⁹

Additional research supports satisfaction varying with mode of practice,^{3,10} but does not necessarily state that these differences lie solely between public and private settings.^{7,11} These differences in satisfaction may be attributed to variability in salary due to the location of the practice,¹² or to the increased autonomy associated with being in a private practice setting.¹¹ Additional differences also tend to correlate with hierarchy rather than mode, and it is not necessarily possible to extrapolate between the two.⁷

Currently, most satisfaction information available to optometrists is based on other healthcare professions. The aim of this survey was to conduct a pilot study on an acceptable method with which to evaluate career satisfaction among optometrists. The survey also functions to evaluate the differences across the domains of gender, tenure, and mode of practice which can give future optometrists a realistic idea of satisfaction.

METHODS

Participants

The sample population (n = 695) is a convenience sampling that includes all Michigan College of Optometry graduates who have provided e-mail addresses to the Ferris State University Alumni Department. Of the surveys sent out, 193 were undeliverable, resulting in a possible 502 responses.

Instrument

The survey consists of 50 items, ten pertaining to demographic information and current practice status. Mode of practice was broken down into several categories, including self-employed optometrists, which includes those having a greater than 50% controlling share in the company. The main body of the survey consists of 26 validated items from an initial bank of 38 questions from “The development of a measure of job satisfaction for use in monitoring the morale of community nurses in four trusts,” by Michael Traynor and Barbara Wade. These questions cover “Personal Satisfaction,” “Satisfaction with Workload,” “Satisfaction with Professional Support,” “Satisfaction with Pay and Prospects,” and “Satisfaction with Training.”¹³

The satisfaction items are preceded by a stem question, “How satisfied are you with this aspect of your career,” adapted from the aforementioned study. The responses are provided using a five-point Likert scale beginning with very dissatisfied (1), and ending with very satisfied (5). Six additional questions correspond to satisfaction with the demographic characteristics from the beginning of the survey. A complete version of the survey can be viewed in Appendix A.

Procedures

Upon approval from the university's institutional review board, the survey was distributed to the participants and tracked electronically by the Ferris State University Institutional Research and Testing Department. Along with the survey a cover letter was provided to all doctors ensuring them of confidentiality. A copy of the cover letter is available in Appendix B. The electronic survey was available for four weeks after distribution with two reminder e-mails sent. Upon closure of the survey, a thank-you message was sent to all participants.

Statistical Analysis

For the purpose of statistical analysis, the data was analyzed using SPSS. Chi-squared values were calculated for each of the three domains and the demographic and satisfaction items. For those items with statistical significance ($p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$), standardized residuals were calculated to determine where the statistical significance lies within each comparison. The standardized residual evaluates the difference between the observed and expected frequencies of responses and then converts it into a Z score. Any value less than -1.96 indicates that there were fewer subjects than expected, whereas values greater than +1.96 indicate there were more subjects than expected.

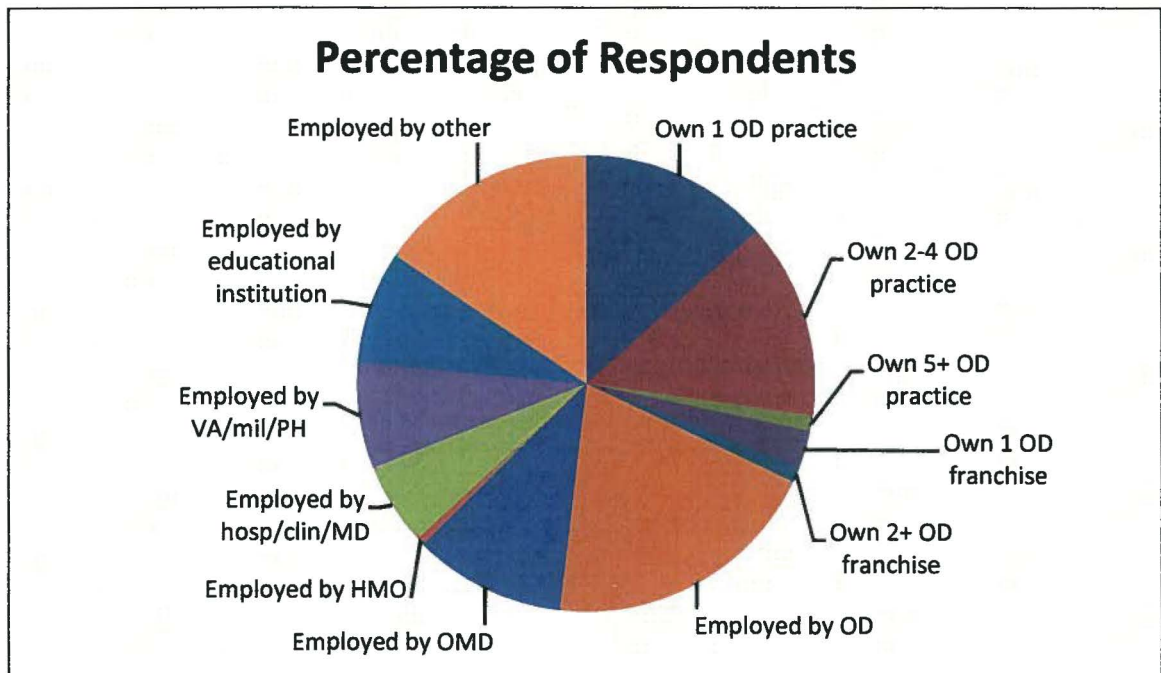
RESULTS

Participants

The survey was distributed to 502 Michigan College of Optometry alumni with a response rate of 31.1% ($n = 156$ responses). Of those who responded 77 were men (49.4%) and 79 were women (50.6%). The responses were also analyzed according to

tenure and mode of practice. These results are available in Figure 1 and 2. There was an appropriate distribution of respondents across the various levels of tenure, however, the mean tenure was within the 5<10 year category. There were 60 (39.0%) self-employed optometrists, and 127 (82.5%) employed with thirty-three respondents reporting working in both categories. Those 33 responses were excluded from the statistical analysis.

Figure 1: Distribution of respondents with regard to tenure



More men (40.3%) have been in practice longer than 20 years when compared to women (11.4%). Conversely, for those in practice less than two years, women (21.5%) were found to predominate over men (9.5%). These findings can be visualized in Figure 3.

For respondents in practice less than 2 years, 4.2% were self-employed while the other 95.8% were employed; this changes gradually up to 10 to less than 15 years when 50% are both self-employed and employed. These results are also available in Figure 4.

Figure 2: Distribution of respondents with regard to mode of practice

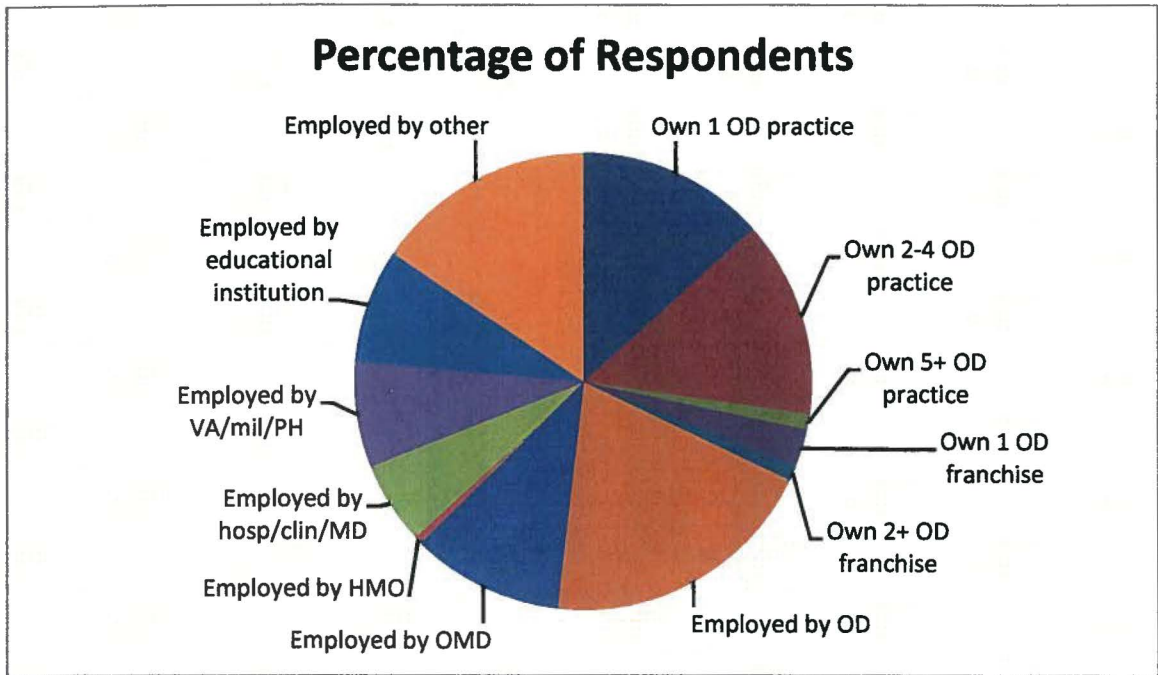
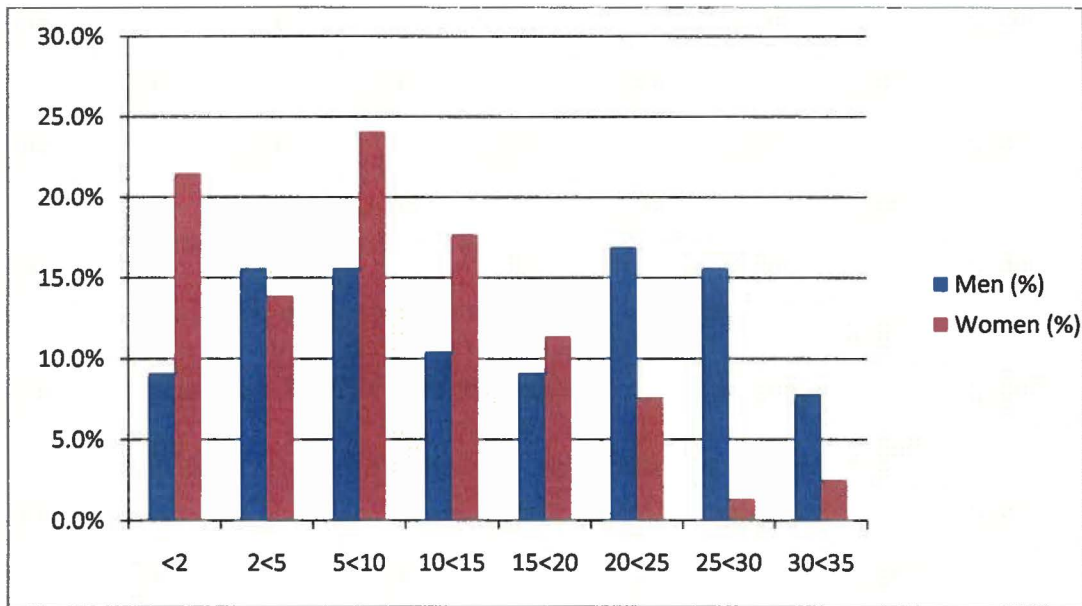
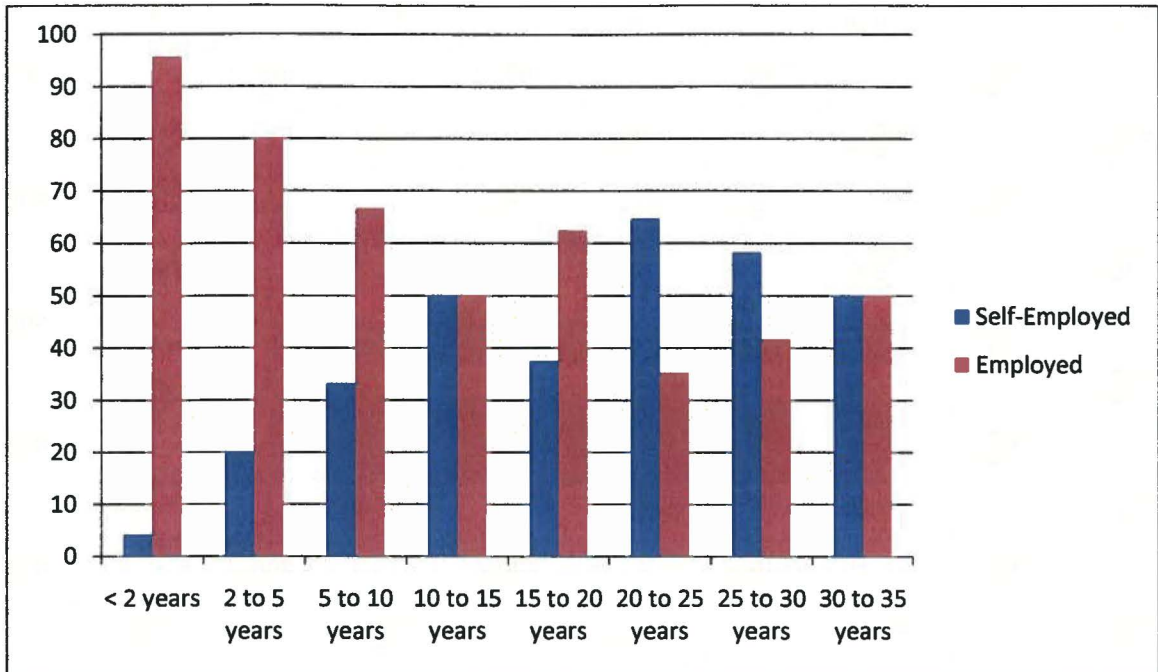


Figure 3: Distribution of men and women with regard to tenure.



The results were analyzed according to the three main domains, gender, tenure, and mode of practice. All significant findings with regard to satisfaction across each domain can be found in Table 1.

Figure 4: Distribution of practice mode with regard to tenure



Gender

There were no significant differences in career satisfaction items when comparing men and women. However, there were differences in work schedule and salary, with women working and earning less than men. There were significantly more men than women working 40<50 hour work weeks. Where 83.3% of women work less than 40 hours, 83.2% of men work 32 to 40 hours weekly. Additionally, the majority of women reported earning less than \$50,000, whereas more men reported earning \$100,000<\$150,000. Of the doctors who made less than \$50,000, 82.7% reported working less than 40 hours a week, and 58.6% were working less than 32 hours per week. There were only five individuals working more than 40 hours a week and earning less than \$50,000.

Table 1: Statistically Significant Satisfaction Items

Question	Comparison	P-Value	Significant Category
Contribution to patient care	Years	0.033	Less than 2 years: very dissatisfied
	S-Employed	0.042	1 OD franchise: neither 5+ OD practices: somewhat dissatisfied
Extent work is varied/interesting	S-Employed	0.010	5+ OD practices, and 1 OD franchise: somewhat satisfied
Sense of accomplishment from work	S-Employed	0.002	1 OD franchises: some dissatisfied
Decide how to care for my patients	Mode	0.000	Self employed: very satisfied
My workload	Employed	0.013	Employed by "Other:" somewhat dissatisfied
Amount personal growth/development	S-Employed	0.009	1 OD franchise: somewhat dissatisfied
Overall staffing levels	Years	0.029	30 to 35 years: very dissatisfied
	Mode	0.031	Self-employed: very satisfied
Monetary compensation for contribution	Years	0.020	Less than 2 years: neither 30 to 35 years: very dissatisfied
Prospects for promotion	Employed	0.007	VA/Military/Public Health: somewhat and very satisfied
Match between career description/performance	Employed	0.010	Employed: neither VA/Military/Public Health: very satisfied
Amount of job security	Mode	0.011	Self Employed: very satisfied
	Employed	0.009	VA/Military/Public Health: very satisfied Employed by "Other:" not very satisfied
Opportunity to advance	Employed	0.011	Employed by "Other:" somewhat dissatisfied
Satisfaction with commute time	S-Employed	0.001	5+ OD practice: somewhat dissatisfied 2+ OD franchise: somewhat dissatisfied 1 OD franchise was neither
	Employed	0.011	Hospital/Clinic/Multidisciplinary: very dissatisfied Education: very satisfied
Satisfaction with additional benefits	Employed	0.001	VA/Mil/Ph: very satisfied

Tenure

Significant findings for tenure included net salary, vacation time, and satisfaction with monetary compensation. Though not significant, those in practice less than two years were found on average to earn between \$50,000 and \$65,000 and were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their monetary compensation. Those in practice 5 to less than 10 years significantly reported earning \$65,000 to less than \$75,000, while those in practice for 20 to less than 25 years reported \$90,000 to less than \$100,000 and greater than \$150,000. Additionally, those in practice 30 to less than 35 years reported earning greater than \$150,000; however, results indicated they were very dissatisfied with their monetary contribution.

Those in practice for less than two years received 6-10 days of vacation time last year. Those in practice for two to less than five years, reported five or less days of vacation, whereas those in practice 20 to less than 25 years, reported more than 21 days.

Mode of Practice

Analyses were run comparing self-employed and employed optometrists, but additionally, directly comparing within the two groups. There were significant findings among various aspects of work schedule. More employed Military/VA/public health optometrists reported working 40 to 50 hours weekly when compared to the other employed optometrists, though 80.2% work less than 40 hours weekly, and 0-1 weekend hours per month. When comparing all self-employed practices, those with a single optometrist worked either 0-1 or 11+ weekend hours, whereas group practices worked mostly 0-1 weekend hours. Additionally, those employed by optometrists were found to either work 0-1 or 11+ weekend hours, whereas those employed by ophthalmologists or a

hospital were likely to work 0-1 weekend hour per month. Optometrists employed by “Other” reported working significantly more 11+ weekend hours than 0-1 weekend hours.

Also with regard to scheduling, of the self-employed optometrists, owners of a one optometrist franchise were not allotted any vacation days last year whereas optometrists owning a solo practice were allotted 6-10 days. The most common allotted vacation time was zero or 16-20 days, with 21.8% responding in each category.

Net take home salary was also significant with self-employed optometrists earning greater than \$150,000. Over 50% of self-employed optometrists reported earning more than \$100,000, whereas 82.6% of employed optometrists reported less than \$100,000. Optometrists employed by a military/VA/public health were very satisfied with their additional benefits whereas optometrists employed by “Other” were more likely to not have dental/health or life/disability insurance.

Optometrists employed by “Other” were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with their workload. Self-employed optometrists owning a five or more optometrist practice, and franchise owners of a one optometrist practice were dissatisfied with the extent to which their work is varied and interesting. Additionally self-employed franchise owners of a single optometrist practice reported being dissatisfied with their sense of accomplishment derived from work and with their amount of personal growth and development from work.

Self-employed optometrists and optometrists employed by military/VA/public health were more satisfied with the amount of job security they have, whereas those employed by “Other” less likely to be satisfied. Additionally, self-employed optometrists

were more likely to be satisfied with their opportunities to decide how to care for patients.

Optometrists employed by the military/VA/public health were significantly more likely to be satisfied with their prospects for promotion and with the match between their career description and actual performance, whereas optometrists employed by “Other” were dissatisfied with their opportunities to advance their career.

First Satisfied with Salary

In addition to differences among each domain, another area of interest was to see if there were any differences for first being satisfied with income. There were no statistically significant findings for any domain with regard to the first time someone was satisfied with their salary. Between men (54.6%) and women (61.8%) there was very little difference. With regard to tenure, those in practice for less than two years showed 47.6% being satisfied and 23% being dissatisfied with the amount of time between graduating and first being satisfied with their salary. Overall, 58.3% of respondents were satisfied with the time it took them to first be satisfied with their salary.

Overall Satisfaction

An overall satisfaction level was also calculated for each respondent by averaging their responses to the satisfaction questions. This data was then analyzed across the domains. There were no statistically significant differences found among gender, tenure, or mode when looking at overall satisfaction levels from the responding optometrists. When averaging all satisfaction responses from all optometrists, the overall satisfaction level was somewhat satisfied, which included 53.2% of the population. Among all of the respondents 78.2% were overall satisfied with their career based on the various

satisfaction items, and only 3 of the 156 respondents, representing less than 2%, being overall dissatisfied.

DISCUSSION

Using the validated questions from a previous nursing survey,¹³ this made an initial pilot study able to have more withstanding results. The items chosen were believed to have the highest association with optometry, and have already been tested for reliability and validity. Previous studies tended to focus on one core comparison and career satisfaction, the present study dives into three domains and several career and satisfaction items. The differences in optometry and career satisfaction were evaluated based on gender, tenure, and mode of practice.

With regard to gender, despite the differences in hours and salary, there were no significant differences in satisfaction; however, this is still an important finding. Previous research has shown various findings with overall no differences in career satisfaction between men and women.² The survey findings remain consistent with the literature. However, throughout the literature, women were less satisfied with workload, amount of job variety, and recognition for good work, though this did not show in the present survey.⁷ Despite a small sample size, there were approximately the same number of women and men who responded. It is possible that there is a significant difference in various satisfaction items, but the sample size is not strong enough to draw it out. A larger study may be necessary to determine whether or not differences with regard to specific items of satisfaction do exist between male and female optometrists. The literature often states the women tend to be less satisfied due to their challenges with

finding a work-home balance.³ It would be interesting to determine whether this is also present with optometrists, who tend to have more flexible schedules than other health-care professionals.

The significant differences between men and women, found in the present survey, included weekday scheduling and net salary. As expected, fewer women than men work 40 to less than 50 hour work weeks. Female doctors are more likely to be part-time, and less career-oriented so that they are able to be at home more and raise a family.² Women put in more time doing household chores than their significant others, therefore find it more difficult to work full-time and do at home activities.³ The present study also found women to work less than men, and are therefore expected to earn less overall. Previous studies examined women with children and found that they were more satisfied with their work-life balance than compared to men. Also physicians with children regardless of gender tend to be less satisfied with their career than those without children.² Further research would be beneficial to review optometrists with children and their schedules, salaries, and their respective satisfaction.

When looking at tenure, some literature did not show significant associations with levels of career satisfaction based on years in practice or age.⁵ However, another study found that younger women were more dissatisfied than older women with career satisfaction in general, but this was based on age rather than tenure.³ Younger health care professionals in lower authority positions are less satisfied with management and work organization or work flow, possibly due to the fact that they are not in the authoritative positions, and do not have the ability to make changes. In the present study, overall there were few differences in career satisfaction for tenure.

Significant differences within the tenure domain include, but are not limited to, net salary and vacation time. The results revealed a statistically significant finding for doctors in practice 30 to 35 years that are very dissatisfied with their monetary compensation. However, with further investigation, the longer a doctor is in practice beyond 20 years the more likely they are to be employed rather than self-employed. That being said, this trend may explain the increase in lower income for some of the more established doctors, which correlates with their dissatisfaction for their monetary compensation. Those who recently graduated were not dissatisfied with their monetary compensation, despite a trend for lower salaries. This may indicate that students and new optometrists enter their profession with a realistic expectation of what they will be earning upon graduation. The present study does not have a way to determine which recent graduates are in a residency, earning approximately \$30,000. However, one third of those in practice less than two years were in the less than \$50,000 category, it is very likely that these are in residency positions, based on reports of approximately one third of the recent graduates obtained residency positions. In addition to income, another benefit of interest is vacation time, and along with the trend of increasing benefits over time, vacation time also increases. An accumulation of benefits over time can be expected, though it did not result in a difference in satisfaction between those less and more tenured.

When comparing self-employed and employed optometrists it is important to remember that 33 of the responding optometrists, almost 25% of the entire population, self reported in both categories and therefore were not included in this analysis. Future

research in this area would be beneficial to see for someone working in both modes, if there is one that optometrists are more satisfied with and why.

There are benefits to working either as a self-employed optometrist or an employed optometrist. This survey's results helped point out some of the self-employed benefits, such as salary, job security, and autonomy. Additionally, they were more satisfied with their amount of job security when compared to employed individuals. They are also more likely to be more satisfied with their opportunities to decide on patient care. Research supports the finding that private health care professionals are more satisfied than public employees due increased autonomy associated with their position.¹¹ Private health care professionals were more likely to be satisfied overall, and public employees were more dissatisfied with work management or organization and leadership.³ Other work has found that there is a relationship between perceived autonomy and solo practice for primary care providers.¹⁴

Among self-employed optometrists there were additional differences in specific satisfaction items. Of those in a solo franchise there is a slight variation with regard to sense of accomplishment. It is difficult to determine exactly why, but it is possible this could be future research, with a larger sample size of franchise owners. There were several findings that stood out among franchise owners that is different than other private practice settings, and it is unknown if there are differences in contracts, being associated with a retail store, or even having an overhead company specify patient care. It is likely that those responding with a sense of dissatisfaction for personal growth and development are the same individuals who responded dissatisfied with the amount of job variety and interest.

Additionally, there were differences with regard to weekend schedule. Self-employed optometrists depending on the particular hours of their practice are likely to work either 0-1 weekend hours in a month, or more than 11 hours. This finding is indicating that there is probably a split between practices that are open on the weekends and those that are not. Optometrists in a solo practice are most likely either open on the weekends and have to work more than 11 hours, or they are not open at all. The more doctors in a practice, the fewer weekend hours they are working, most likely because it is easier to share weekend responsibilities. Even though there are optometrists working on the weekends, most are satisfied with their weekend schedule, demonstrating that they realize the importance of being available to their patients.

Though not a significant finding, it is interesting to discuss the variations in salary among self-employed optometrists. Solo private practices showed a lot of variation regarding salary; however, group practices were more likely to make over \$100,000. Additionally, franchise owners seem to be dissatisfied compared to non-franchise owners, which again, brings up the question what is the difference between the two.

Employed optometrists can expect to work fewer hours than self-employed optometrists. Additionally, those employed by ophthalmologists, military/VA/public health, or in a hospital/clinic/multidisciplinary setting, can expect not to have to work on the weekends, though those employed by an optometrist or other/commercial/corporate setting, frequently work several weekend hours. Interestingly, those employed by an educational institution reported various amounts of weekend hours, leading to the question, are they doing educational work or are they working at another office or location seeing their own patients.

Overall the doctors at working in military/VA/public health, hospital/clinic/multidisciplinary, or educational institutions, tend to have better benefits, hours, and satisfaction, over those employed by optometrists and ophthalmologists. This is supported by research indicating that academic clinicians are more satisfied than full-time clinicians, with full-time clinicians working at least 28 hours per week in patient care without participating in teaching or research.⁵ Military/VA/public health or hospital/clinic/multidisciplinary optometrists, though they work full-time hours, many of them are typically involved in teaching or research, and more satisfied, which coincides with the literature.⁵

One recurrent finding was the increased satisfaction by military/VA/public health doctors who report a good schedule, benefits, and more overall satisfaction with several career items. Overall, this group of doctors was more satisfied with their prospects for promotion, when compared to other employed optometrists. There are specific steps that can help a doctor advance pay grades within these government employee settings. The literature indicates that there is a greater level of satisfaction among health care professionals who are in higher positions of authority when compared to their junior colleagues.⁷ This is more likely to result in higher levels of satisfaction than simply having a longer tenure.⁷ Military/VA/public health doctors are very satisfied with the match between their career description and their actual performance, although, there were very few employed optometrists overall who were dissatisfied. Also, more military/VA/public health optometrists were satisfied with their job security and additional benefits than employed doctors. However, with all of the findings supporting this mode of practice as highly satisfied, the only area where there was a significantly

larger difference was regarding additional benefits. With this being said, military/VA/public health doctors appear to be the most satisfied group of optometrists, based on the number of items that were found to be statistically significant.

A limitation to the study includes the breakdown of the different modes of practice. The category listed as “Other,” is not very descriptive, though it is assumed that they are those optometrists employed by commercial, or corporate companies. That being said, these optometrists tend to be more dissatisfied, unknown as to why, but speculation could involve patient schedule, having to see more patients in a given day, which was another question that was not covered in this survey, and can be studied in future research. Usually an employed optometrist’s schedule is dictated by the company, although most are satisfied with their autonomy and their ability to decide how to care for patients. Educational and hospital/clinic/multidisciplinary optometrists are more similar to military/VA/public health optometrists than the other categories.

There were no significant findings for any of the domains and their satisfaction with the time between graduation and first being satisfied with their salary. It is difficult to interpret this finding; this was a pilot study, and it may be beneficial to change this question from a satisfaction response to numerical response. Prior to sending the survey, the hope was to determine how long it took individuals to become first satisfied with their salary. This is complicated to assess because many people start employed in a corporate setting and may be satisfied initially, but may later enter into a private setting, and be dissatisfied again until the practice grows. There were no significant differences between self-employed and employed optometrists, but it is important to recognize it is still unknown if they started and stayed within that mode of practice.

In addition to looking at all of the results, it is important to note that when looking at the an average of all of the satisfaction responses to provide an overall satisfaction score, optometrists as a whole are satisfied with their career. This is an important finding as future optometrists wonder whether or not they are making the right decision. There were no differences for any of the domains, indicating that men and women are equally satisfied overall, as well as those with varied amounts of tenure, and in different modes of practice. However, this study is not able to be used to guide future optometrists in any specific direction regarding mode of practice. This may actually be beneficial, because the study is demonstrating that regardless of what type of practice you are in, if you are a man or a woman, or you have been practicing for one or thirty-one years, you have a pretty good chance at being satisfied, wherever you are in your career.

Limitations

As previously mentioned, this is a pilot study, and there are various areas with room for improvement. One challenge specifically includes the breakdown for mode of practice. There may have been confusion regarding independent contractors as they did not have a specific response, and therefore it is difficult to determine how they chose to respond. Independent contractors are not the same as a franchise owner, and are technically self-employed unlike other commercial settings. Additionally, there was not a specific choice for those employed by corporate or commercial chains, but rather there was an overall “Other” category.

As previously mentioned, there were a few questions that could be reworded or included, such as the time to first satisfaction with salary. Also, it is important to note that there was a relatively small sample size for this pilot study, and therefore it is difficult to

draw broad conclusions across the domains, and it is necessary to conduct a much larger study.

Future Research

This study opens several doors to new areas of research. Within gender alone, there is a wealth of data yet to be discovered. Looking at optometrists, men and women with children and how that affects their career and their satisfaction. Students often wonder whether they should go private or corporate, and this study showed benefits for each, but further studies could do comparisons of individuals who have been or are involved with both. This study included all Michigan College of Optometry alumni, which may be distributed throughout the country, though this was not specifically reported. Future research could also determine if there are variations among optometrists in different regions of the United States.

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that this was a smaller study with limitations, it demonstrates that optometrists overall are satisfied with their careers and the various aspects included. Although this was a pilot study limited to one school, there is lots of valuable information provided for future optometrists, as well as potential for future studies. With modifications this study would be a great way to assess optometry satisfaction across the country, although it is difficult to determine whether the results are similar for other schools of optometry without further research.

There were no significant differences for satisfaction items between men and women. Even though there were not differences in satisfaction, it is still important to note

that women work and earn less than their male counterparts. In regard to tenure, there were significant findings demonstrating that with increased tenure one can expect an accumulation of benefits including higher salaries. There are definite benefits to both self-employed and employed modalities. Overall, self-employed optometrists can expect higher incomes, more autonomy and job security. Employed optometrists as well, can have almost equally high salaries when compared to self-employed, however, on the average, they experience better benefits and work fewer hours.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

2010 MCO 4th Year Survey

Please take a few minutes to complete the following questions. If any do not pertain to you, please

leave them blank. If you are retired, you will be routed to the end of the survey.

Thank you!

Gender:

- Male
- Female

Number of years in practice:

- <2
- 2 to <5
- 5 to <10
- 10 to <15
- 15 to <25
- 25 to <35
- ≥35

Select all that CURRENTLY apply to you:

Retired
Self-employed, >50% controlling share:

- Owner of 1 OD Practice
- Owner of 2-4 OD Practice
- Owner of 5+ OD Practice
- Franchisee, 1 OD
- Franchisee, 2+ OD

Employed by:

- OD
- OMD
- HMO
- Hospital/Clinic/Other Multidisciplinary
- Military/VA/Public Health
- Educational Institution
- Other

Select the size of the community where you currently practice the MAJORITY of the time:

- > 500,000
- 100,000 to 500,000
- 25,000 to 100,000
- < 25,000

What is your average commute time?

- <15 minutes
- 15 to <30 minutes

- 30 to <60 minutes
- ≥60 minutes

How many weekday hours (Monday-Friday) do you work, on average, in a week?

- ≤32 hours
- 33 to <40 hours
- 40 to <50 hours
- 50 to <60 hours
- ≥60 hours

How many weekend hours (Saturday-Sunday) do you work, on average, in a month?

- 0-1 hours
- 2-4 hours
- 5-7 hours
- 8-10 hours
- 11+ hours

Please select your current NET (take-home) salary range, EXCLUDING benefits:

- <\$50,000
- \$50,000 to <\$65,000
- \$65,000 to <\$75,000
- \$75,000 to <\$90,000
- \$90,000 to <\$100,000
- \$100,000 to <\$150,000
- ≥\$150,000

Please select all of the following that are included in your benefits:

- Health and/or Dental Insurance
- Other Insurance (ie: life, disability, liability)
- Bonuses
- Employer contribution to pension plan
- Time off and reimbursement for professional development
- Paid licensing and association fees
- Paid vacation time
- Paid sick leave

How much vacation time were you allotted last year?

- 0 (none)
- < 5 days
- 6-10 days
- 11-15 days
- 16-20 days
- > 21 days

Please use this scale to answer the following questions:

1	2	3	4	5
Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied

“How satisfied are you with this aspect of your career?”

- Personal gratification derived from my work
- Opportunities to utilize my skills and talents
- My contributions to patient care
- Extent to which my career challenges me
- Extent to which my work is varied and interesting
- Sense of accomplishment derived from work each day
- Standard of care given to my patients
- Quality of my work with patients
- Amount of personal growth and development achieved from my work
- Amount of time available to complete my work-related tasks
- Time available for patient care
- My workload
- Overall staffing levels
- Opportunity to decide how to care for my patients
- Amount of time spent on administration
- Support available to me in my career
- People who work with me each day
- Amount of pay I receive
- Monetary compensation for my contribution to this profession
- My prospects for promotion
- Match between my career description and my actual performance
- How secure my future looks within this profession
- Amount of job security I have
- Opportunities to advance my career
- Time off to attend courses
- Funding for courses
- Commute time to work
- Weekday schedule
- Weekend schedule
- Satisfaction with the amount of time between graduating and
FIRST being satisfied with my salary
- Additional benefits
- Vacation time

**Satisfaction with my optometry school education in preparing me for ENTRY
LEVEL practice following graduation, in the areas of:**

- Basic Sciences
- Binocular Vision
- Contact Lenses
- Pediatrics

- Disease
- Practice Management
- Primary Care
- Self-directed lifelong learning

Additional comments:

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER

Dear Doctor,

We are inviting you to participate in a research project to study career satisfaction. Along with this letter is a website link to a short questionnaire that asks a variety of questions regarding career satisfaction. Please look over the questionnaire and kindly complete it via the website. It should take 15 minutes to complete. If you are currently retired, or not working, please take a minute to fill out the beginning of the survey only.

The results of this project will help MCO students, as well as the optometric profession in knowing what to expect when entering the field. Through your participation we hope to understand which aspects of optometry provide the most career satisfaction. We hope that the results of the survey will be useful for students and optometrists alike, and we hope to share our results with MCO, and the state of Michigan, via the Michigan Optometric Association.

Your participation is voluntary – there is no penalty if you choose not to participate. We guarantee that all responses will be reported anonymously and in aggregate, and that all information will remain strictly confidential.

If you would like a summary of our findings, feel free to contact Nicole at nicolembg@gmail.com. Your consent is implied by completing the survey.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about participation in this study, you may contact Dr. Mika (mikar@ferris.edu). The Ferris State University Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC) has approved this study. If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this study you may contact the HSRC via e-mail (humansubjectsresearchcommittee@ferris.edu) or by telephone at (231-591-2759).

Sincerely,

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