

Psychological morbidity and job satisfaction amongst medical interns at a Nigerian teaching hospital

Medical internship (houseman ship) is regarded as both educational as well as formative insofar as attitude to work, job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, and future career directions are consolidated.¹ Equally important is the fact that this is also believed to be the most stressful period of medical practice.²

It has been reported that medical interns have lower overall job satisfaction, less job autonomy, with 19% being considered as probably having psychological morbidity.³ Job satisfaction is an important determinant of physician retention and turnover, and may also affect performance.⁴

The aim of this study was to investigate the level of psychological morbidity and job satisfaction among medical interns at a Nigerian teaching hospital.

A cross- sectional survey was conducted among medical interns at University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Ilorin in November 2005. All medical interns who had completed at least a rotation out of the 4 rotations they were expected to undertake were included in the study.

The questionnaire comprised of 3 parts. The first part was a questionnaire to elicit socio- demographic and work related characteristics of the doctors. Psychological morbidity was measured using a standard instrument, the 12- item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ 12). The GHQ is a self- administered screening instrument designed to measure psychological distress.⁵ It can be scored 0-12 and a score of 3 or more is suggestive of a probable case of psychological disorder. It has previously been used in this environment.⁶

Job satisfaction was measured using the 10- item Warr-Cook- Wall job satisfaction scale.⁷ The scale provides a short, reliable, valid and easy to use measure of job satisfaction. It has a seven point likert type rating scale for each item tested, and assesses the degree of job satisfaction ranging from "extreme dissatisfaction" (score=1) to "extreme satisfaction" (score=7). The items used include amount of responsibility, freedom to choose own method of working, amount of varieties in your job, colleagues and your fellow workers, physical working conditions, opportunity to use your ability, your rate of pay, recognition you get for your good work, your hours of work, and overall job satisfaction. Data were analysed with SPSS version 11.0.

Thirty- eight out of the fifty medical interns meeting the inclusion criteria at the time of the study, completed and

returned questionnaires , giving a response rate of 76%. The mean age (\pm SD) of the doctors was 26.3 ± 1.8 years. The majority (92.1%) were within the age range of 25-30 years. Thirty-six (94.7%) were single, more than three quarters (76.3%) felt their remuneration was not commensurate with the service rendered, and 60.5% felt their work load was burdensome. Twelve (31.6%) had a GHQ scored of 3 or more, suggesting probable psychological morbidity.

Table I shows the mean and the standard deviation scores of the doctors on each aspect of job satisfaction assessed. Higher levels of satisfaction were reported for relationship with fellow workers, amount of variety in the job and opportunity to use ability. Lower levels of satisfaction were reported for physical working conditions, hours of work, and rate of pay.

There was no correlation between GHQ score and gender, assessment of remuneration or perception of work load.

It is important to note that 31.6% of these doctors probably had psychological morbidity. This is more than the 25% and 19% reported for consultants and medical interns respectively, but less than 45% reported for general practitioners in United Kingdom.^{3,8} The level of psychological morbidity recorded in this study appears to be rather on the high side and though the immediate reason for this is not known, it may be because the

Table I: Job satisfaction in order of importance

<i>Dimension*</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Your fellow workers	5.13	1.26
Amount of variety in your job	4.68	1.44
Opportunity to use your ability	4.61	1.60
Overall job satisfaction	4.47	1.35
Amount of responsibility you given	4.05	1.66
Recognition you get for your good work	4.05	1.66
Freedom to choose your own method of working	3.37	1.44
Your rate of pay	2.92	1.68
Your hours of work	2.71	1.37
Physical working conditions	2.42	1.46

*Each dimension scored 1-7; the higher the score the higher the satisfaction.

environment under which these medical interns practice is more stressful. Comparison with medical interns from different health institutions in the country, as well as consultants and general practitioners, would provide further context for the results.

On the job satisfaction scale, working with colleagues and fellow workers, the amount of variety in their job and opportunity to use their abilities were rated high by the medical interns. On the other hand, physical working conditions, hours of work and rate of pay were rated low. On the basis of factor analysis, four dimensions of job satisfaction have been suggested to assess the "intrinsic" aspects of job satisfaction (freedom, responsibility, variety, ability).⁷ Two of these (variety and ability) were among the 3 aspects rated high in this study. Also, the lowest levels of job satisfaction derived from "extrinsic" job factors mentioned by Warr et al⁷ (hours of work and rate of pay), were also among the 3 aspects rated low by the respondents in this study.

Our findings on the aspects that give medical interns greatest satisfaction and dissatisfaction, are similar to the report of Lambert et al.¹

This preliminary study gives some indication of psychological functioning in this group of medical interns as well as issues that should be reviewed and addressed regarding job satisfaction. Clearly the data is limited but will hopefully serve as a basis for further and more comprehensive study.

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