



# JOB SATISFACTION AND STRESS AMONG THE VETERINARIANS OF KERALA STATE IN INDIA\*

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Received - 10.07.12

Accepted - 19.09.12

## Abstract

*A study was undertaken to know the important aspects of job situation in terms of stress factors which influence job satisfaction. The two top ranking stress factors found were prescribing costly medicines to poor livestock owner and large animal practices especially attending dystocia. However majority of the veterinarians perceived medium level of stress.*

**Key words:** Job stress, Job dissatisfaction, Job situation, Veterinarians

The salience of job stress as an area of research has been due in part to the magnitude of its effects. In addition to being associated with a variety of physical diseases including hypertension, (O'Connor *et al.*, 2000), high levels of job stress can have a negative effect on emotional well being (Paterniti *et al.*, 2002). At the organizational level, high levels of job stress have been linked to low levels of productivity (Gandham, 2002). In general, job stress has been viewed as an antecedent of job satisfaction and the two constructs have been treated as related yet distinct (Stanton *et al.*, 2002). An inverse relationship between job stress and job satisfaction among various populations has been reported constantly in literature (Cotton *et al.*, 2002 ; Heslop *et al.*, 2002). The veterinary profession has been identified by a number of studies as a stressful occupation (Gardner and Hini, 2006; Heath, 2002).

A better understanding of the stressors in veterinary practice may allow for identification of strategies to improve the working conditions of veterinarians with resulting benefits for the quality of veterinary health care. This paper specifically explores the perception of veterinarians regarding job dissatisfaction as a potential cause of stress.

## Materials and Methods

A simple random sample of 460 veterinary surgeons and 135 senior veterinary surgeons were selected from a list of 920 veterinary surgeons and 270 senior veterinary surgeons who perform both clinical and extension functions in the Department of Animal Husbandry of Kerala. A structured schedule prepared by consulting veterinarians themselves was sent to the selected respondents by mail or distributed at monthly meetings. A total of 170 veterinary surgeons and 47 senior veterinary surgeons returned the filled up questionnaires. The study sample hence consisted of 155 veterinary surgeons and 45 senior veterinary surgeons. Data provided by this sample was collated and analysed.

Job satisfaction referred to the degree of satisfaction that the veterinarian derived out of the various aspects of his/her job such as professional activities, salary, job security and recognition. Possible areas of stress due to job dissatisfaction were identified through

\* Part of the MVSc thesis submitted by the first author to the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Pookode, Wayanad

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extensive review of literature and expert opinion. The perception of veterinarians about the most important aspects of their work situation that influenced job satisfaction was arrived at through extensive personal interviews with 20 veterinarians. A scale was then constructed to assess the stress experienced by veterinarians due to job dissatisfaction on the work place.

The scale consisted of eight stressors. The respondents were asked to indicate their feeling regarding the importance of the stressors on the work place on a five point continuum viz: - almost always true, mostly true, sometimes true, rarely true and not at all true with scores of 4,3,2,1 and 0 respectively. The minimum and maximum scores that a respondent could obtain were 0 and 32. The respondents were then classified into three categories viz., high, medium and low applying the Dalenius- Hodges cumulative root f method.

## Results and Discussion

In response to items that indicate potential causes of stress, it is evident from Table 1 that majority of the respondents (50.5%) experienced medium level of stress due to job dissatisfaction. Thirty-one per cent of the respondents were highly dissatisfied with their jobs while 18.5 per cent respondents experienced low level of stress due to dissatisfaction with their jobs. Lehal (2007) reported that there was a significant relationship between job stress and job satisfaction. Low job satisfaction has been reported to be associated with high level of stress (Hollingworth, *et al.*1988; AbdulHalim, 1981; Leigh *et al.*1988). Landsbergis (1988) also reported that high level of work stress were associated with low level of job satisfaction.

Data in table 2 indicate that prescribing costly medicines to poor livestock owners was the most stressful factor under job satisfaction. Salleh *et al.* (2008) observed that among the major factors of stress

identified, viz:- job integrity conflict, security, adaptability and support, the factor job integrity conflict had the highest beta value and hence was the most important factor that was associated with stress. This is in consonance with the findings of the present study that from the eight items on job satisfaction, the item which reflected the job integrity conflict of the veterinarian, the difficulty of prescribing a costly medicine to a livestock owner who would find difficulty in buying it was the most important cause of job dissatisfaction and stress for the veterinarian. The second item that was a source of stress among veterinarians was large animal practice, generally and especially cases of dystocia that are difficult to handle due to physical problems like back pain. Hansez *et al.* (2008) also observed that veterinary surgeons faced a number of professional risks associated with animal care which included musculoskeletal disorders due to uncomfortable working positions especially in rural practice settings.

These views were endorsed by Jeyaretnam *et al.* (2000) and Reijula *et al.* (2003). In many instances, the success of the clinical cases would require physical exertion and veterinarians have to perform them despite physical discomfort since a failure to do so would entail loss of face. Similar findings were made among veterinarians in New Zealand where physical demands of the job were more of a stressor in large animal practice (Gardner, 2009). Reijula *et al.* (2003) showed that inadequate facilities and assistance were major risk factors for injuries and musculoskeletal disorders in veterinarians. Manual handling/lifting or moving animals, rectal palpation, feet-trimming, obstetric procedures and surgical procedures lasting less than one hour were veterinary procedures associated with musculoskeletal problems in veterinarians according to Cattell 2000, O'Sullivan and Curran 2008 and Scuffham *et al.* 2010. Scuffham *et al.* (2010)

**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents based on level of stress due to job dissatisfaction N =200

| No | Category        | Frequency | Percentage |
|----|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| 1. | <18(Low)        | 37        | 18.5       |
| 2. | 18 -24 (Medium) | 101       | 50.5       |
| 3. | >24 (High)      | 62        | 31         |
|    | Total           | 200       | 100        |

**Table 2.** Item-wise mean scores of dimension- Job satisfaction

| No | Statements  | Mean Score | Rank |
|----|---|------------|------|
| 1  | Prescribing costly medicines to poor livestock owners is stressful.   | 3.41       | 1    |
| 2  | Large animal practice especially attending to dystocia is difficult to handle.  | 2.97       | 2    |
| 3  | I often find it embarrassing to travel by public transport in soiled dress after attending cases.                                     | 2.82       | 3    |
| 4  | I find it difficult to work efficiently because of the inadequacy of emergency medicines in the dispensary.                           | 2.65       | 4    |
| 5  | Lack of transportation and consequent difficulty in implementing schemes.   | 2.57       | 5    |
| 6  | Due to lack of proper transport facilities and remoteness of many places attending the outpatient cases is tiring and time consuming. | 2.52       | 6    |
| 7  | My job does not provide a means by which I am able to keep abreast of new developments in diagnosis and treatment.                    | 2.49       | 7    |
| 8  | I do not enjoy freedom in taking decisions about setting targets in my panchayat.   | 2.45       | 8    |

*Analysis of various items of Job satisfaction*

suggested that multi-modal interventions, such as the use of training in combination with the use of mechanical lifting aids, would be effective as long-term preventive strategies against musculoskeletal problems. (Silverstein and Clark, 2004).

Table 2 also reveals the difficulty in working efficiently because of the inadequacy of medicines which was perceived as the fourth important stressor contributing to job dissatisfaction among veterinarians in Kerala. So also, not being able to keep abreast of new developments in this field was perceived to be a cause of stress among the veterinarians. This finding is endorsed by Sallehet *et al.* (2008) who observed that the need to keep up with technological changes was a major cause of stress in the broad area of career development. The arduous nature of the veterinary profession reflected in other studies is also seen in the findings of the present study.

Past research among veterinarians has suggested that proactive measures with a view to creating awareness about job resources such as external support in planning, extra help in administration and in clinical work are important in improving work in the veterinary profession. Several countries such as UK, USA, Canada and Norway have begun concerted attempts to adopt stress management interventions specifically for

veterinarians. Similar measures in our country could also be instrumental in improving well being in the veterinary profession.

#### Acknowledgement

The authors are thankful to the Dean, College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Mannuthy for the facilities provided.

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