

Original Research Article

Assessment of work environment factors influencing job satisfaction among mortuary staff in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Background: Job satisfaction has been widely studied as a key factor that influences efficiency and effectiveness among healthcare workforces. However, one notable category that has been largely overlooked by researchers are the mortuary staff in part because of the stigma surrounded in the topic of death leading to them working in deplorable work environments. This study sought to address this gap by examining work environment factors influencing job satisfaction among mortuary staff in selected public and private mortuaries in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Methods: Cross sectional study design, adopting qualitative and quantitative data collection was used in this study. A sample size of 193 respondents were selected from public and private mortuaries. Key Informant interviews were used to provide additional qualitative data.

Results: The study revealed that the overall satisfaction level was 44.7%. Chi-square analysis revealed significant relationship between; marital status ($p=0.033$) and solidarity among employees in the department ($p=0.024$). However, other factors such as provision of the right tools and equipment ($p=0.061$), appropriateness of daily working hours ($p=0.265$) and level of staffing ($p=0.264$), were not statistically significant in this study.

Conclusions: The study revealed a suboptimal job satisfaction level among mortuary staff in Nairobi County. This research calls for a better understanding of the dynamics of job satisfaction among mortuary staff by facility administrators as well as policy makers. Such information is integral to future policy development and decisions about appropriate strategies for intervention.

Keywords: Work environment, Job satisfaction, Mortuary staff

INTRODUCTION

The topic of job satisfaction has been widely assessed by scholars among various categories of healthcare workers and presented on published accounts. In many instances, job satisfaction has been seen to influence organizational variables such as productivity, quantity and quality of work.¹ While many scholars have worked on

investigating and ascertain job satisfaction levels across various cadres of healthcare workers in the world, one notable category that has been largely overlooked are the mortuary staff.² The mortuary staff and the funeral industry at large is highly ignored by researchers in part because of the stigma surrounded in the topic of death.³ Additionally, very few people are willing to undertake profession in the funeral industry, hence those who are

willing are overworked and their job satisfaction level is affected negatively.⁴

Despite the progress made by African countries regarding studies on job satisfaction models, they are mostly based on theoretical grounds heavily borrowed from High Income Countries (HIC) including the US, UK and Asia.⁵ Additionally, majority of the existing literature on mortuary staff narrowly focus on their occupational safety aspect, and few on their job satisfaction levels.⁶ In many LMIC settings, mortuary staff are largely neglected and work in deplorable conditions that may result to low morale while performing their duties.⁷ Similarly, when it comes to priority setting in healthcare institutions, majority of the resources, which are still limited, are allocated for curative services, leaving out departments such as the mortuary. This was ascertained in a study carried out viewing the conditions in the public mortuary facilities in Uganda.⁸

Within the Kenyan setting, mortuary staff have been one of the highly understaffed categories of health workers. According to the Funeral Service Association of Kenya (FSAK), the current number of qualified mortuary attendants stands at approximately 200 against the targeted 1000 countrywide.⁹ Additionally, mortuary staff, especially those in public facilities, operate in poor working environment with lack of proper equipment exposing them to health hazards and reducing their levels of job satisfaction.¹⁰ With the global healthcare landscape undergoing rapid transitions and countries striving to achieve Universal Healthcare Coverage (UHC), it is pertinent that they look for efficient and effective ways of delivering their health services and utilisation of their human resources.¹¹ One of the studies carried out across 29 African countries indicated that workforce inadequacy was the top tier health workforce drawback.¹² Therefore, the mere availability of mortuary attendants is not enough, it additionally calls for their occupational satisfaction and empowerment for them to deliver their services efficiently and effectively.¹³

METHODS

For this study, descriptive cross sectional study design was applied since it gives an image of a population at the time and makes it possible to draw conclusions.¹⁴ Additionally, a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques was used to complement and enhance the quality of data collected for analysis. The study was done in Nairobi City County which has the highest population in the Country of 4,397,073.¹⁵ The study's time frame was between September 2021 to September 2022. The study population included 193 mortuary staff working in the selected public and private mortuaries in Nairobi City County for more than six months who were present during the time of the study and had given informed consent. These mortuaries were selected due to their high-level capacity of operation. The study excluded mortuary

staff working in public, private and institutional mortuaries in Nairobi City County who had worked for less than six months or were unwilling to take part in the study. Stratified sampling was applied to ensure representativeness with each mortuary facility, and further staff gender, constituting a stratum. Using the lists obtained from each of the facility, a sample was randomly drawn from each stratum to ensure that they stood an equal chance of being picked. Additionally, ten Key Informant Interviews were carried out targeting one mortuary superintendent from each of the ten facilities in order to obtain additional information that was used to inform the study.

Quantitative data analysis was done using SPSS statistical software for analysis, version 2.0. Chi-square was used to calculate inferential statistics at a confidence interval of 95% and p value of 0.05. Results were presented using frequency tables and percentages. The analysis of qualitative data from Key Informant Interviews (KII) drew on the Framework Approach and the entire dataset was coded using NVIVO. The coded sections were later organised into thematic charts to facilitate identification of patterns in responses. All participants were approached for interview only after authorization from the institution authorities and informed consent was sought from the mortuary staff recruited for the study.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Regarding the gender of the respondents, the study found that majority were male 99 (65.1%), while the females were 53 (34.9%). These results corroborated with that of the key informants, majority of whom indicated that the profession is majorly dominated by men. "A lot of workers in this profession are men, even though the previous years have witnessed ladies warming up to the profession, majority of workers, especially at the morgues are men-Key Informant 5, Public Facility."

The study further indicated that most of the respondents were aged between 30-39 55(36.2%), followed closely by those between the ages of 20-29 47 (30.9%). In terms of level of education, majority of the respondents had reached certificate level 50 (32.9%). Concerning the years of experience, most of the respondents had between 6-10, 56 (36.8%). The results depicted that majority of the workers at 91 (59.9%) were married (Table 1).

Influence of work environment on job satisfaction

Those who were interviewed felt that the work environment plays a key role in the job satisfaction level with some making a comparison between the public and private sectors. One respondent said; "There is a saying that you are the product of your immediate environment. The physical setting has a high impact on your productivity and ultimately job satisfaction. There is a

stark difference in some of our public and private mortuaries or funeral homes, and you can even see this reflecting from the workers-Key informant 6, Public Facility.”

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n=152).

Variables	Response	N	%
Gender	Male	99	65.1
	Female	53	34.9
Age (years)	20-29	47	30.9
	30-39	55	36.2
	40-49	29	19.1
	≥50	21	13.8
Level of education	No formal education	3	1.9
	Primary level	16	10.5
	Secondary level	37	24.3
	Certificate	50	32.9
	Diploma	27	17.8
Years of experience	Bachelor's degree	19	12.5
	2-5	19	12.5
	6-10	56	36.8
	11-15	43	28.3
Marital status	16-20	23	15.1
	≥21	11	7.2
	Single	41	26.9
	Married	91	59.9
	Divorced	13	8.6
	Widowed	7	4.6

To further establish the influence of work environment on job satisfaction, respondents were asked a series of questions. When asked whether the management provides the right tools and resources, there was an almost mixed view from respondents with 49 (32.2%) disagreeing and 45 (29.6%) agreeing with the statement. Majority of the respondents at 53 (34.9%) also disagreed with the statement that the management is keen on providing and even replacing their work gear. The results showed that majority of the respondents 48 (31.6%) agreed that cleanliness level and ventilation of the buildings was well done. This was however followed by those who disagreed at 39 (25.7%). One of the respondents from a private facility who agreed with the statement illustrates; “For us you cannot even tell you are in a morgue. We thoroughly clean the facility at regular intervals and after every procedure. The preservation of bodies is also up to international standards-Key Informant 12, Private Facility”. 55 (36.2%) of the respondents agreed that the work environment is also free from hazardous materials that may cause injuries. However, in a sharp contrast, 69 (45.4%) respondents strongly disagreed with the appropriateness of the workload and the working hours at their facilities. Similarly, majority of the respondents felt that the level of staffing was not relevant to the workload, with 65 (42.8%) strongly disagreeing. Regarding the general solidarity among the employees, majority of the

respondents at 51 (33.6%), strongly agreed that this was the case (Table 2).

Table 2: Work environment factors among respondents (n=152).

Independent variables	Response	N	%
The management provides the right tools and resources I need to do my job	Strongly disagree	26	17.1
	Disagree	49	32.2
	Neutral	17	11.2
	Agree	45	29.6
	Strongly agree	15	9.9
The management provides the correct protective gear and work clothing	Strongly disagree	45	29.6
	Disagree	53	34.9
	Neutral	7	4.6
	Agree	33	21.7
The offices and buildings I use for my daily activities are clean and well ventilated	Strongly agree	14	9.2
	Strongly disagree	28	18.4
	Disagree	39	25.7
	Neutral	15	9.9
The workplace is free from hazards that may cause injuries	Agree	48	31.6
	Strongly agree	22	14.5
	Strongly disagree	17	11.2
	Disagree	40	26.3
The daily working hours and workload are appropriate	Neutral	16	10.5
	Agree	55	36.2
	Strongly agree	24	15.8
	Strongly disagree	69	45.4
The level of staffing in the mortuary department is relevant to the workload	Disagree	34	22.4
	Neutral	8	5.3
	Agree	27	17.8
	Strongly agree	14	9.2
There is solidarity among employees working within the mortuary department	Strongly disagree	65	42.8
	Disagree	33	21.7
	Neutral	9	5.9
	Agree	29	19.1
	Strongly agree	16	10.5
	Strongly disagree	16	10.5
	Disagree	25	16.4
	Neutral	13	8.6
	Agree	47	30.9
	Strongly agree	51	33.6

Association between work environment factors and job satisfaction

From the bivariate analysis between work environment factors and job satisfaction among the mortuary staff, majority of the respondents from those who were satisfied disagreed that the institution provided the right tools and the right protective gear for them to carry out their duties efficiently and effectively, 21 (30.9%). While majority of the respondents 22 (32.4%) who were satisfied agreed that the buildings were clean and well ventilated, there was an almost equal tie between those who agreed and those who disagreed with the effort that their organizations put in place to eliminate workplace hazards, at 21 (30.9%) and 18 (26.5%) respectively.

Table 3: Association between work environment factors and job satisfaction.

Independent variable	Respondent response	Dependent variable (mortuary staff job satisfaction), Frequency (%)		Statistical significance
		Satisfied (n=68)	Dissatisfied (n=84)	
The management provides the right tools, protective gear and resources I need to do my job	Strongly disagree	14 (20.6)	12 (14.2)	$\chi^2=9.033$, df=4, p=0.061
	Disagree	21 (30.9)	28 (33.3)	
	Neutral	9 (13.2)	8 (9.5)	
	Agree	18 (26.4)	27 (32.1)	
	Strongly agree	6 (8.8)	9 (10.7)	
The offices and buildings I use for my daily activities are clean and well ventilated	Strongly disagree	14 (20.6)	14 (16.7)	$\chi^2=3.814$, df=4, p=0.432
	Disagree	16 (23.5)	23 (27.4)	
	Neutral	6 (8.8)	9 (10.7)	
	Agree	22 (32.4)	26 (30.9)	
	Strongly agree	10 (14.7)	12 (14.2)	
The workplace is free from hazards that may cause injuries	Strongly disagree	8 (11.8)	9 (10.7)	$\chi^2=4.251$, df=4, p=0.375
	Disagree	18 (26.5)	22 (26.2)	
	Neutral	10 (14.7)	6 (7.1)	
	Agree	21 (30.9)	34 (40.5)	
	Strongly agree	11 (16.2)	13 (15.5)	
The daily working hours and workload are appropriate	Strongly disagree	26 (38.2)	43 (51.2)	$\chi^2=5.243$, df=4, p=0.265
	Disagree	16 (23.5)	18 (21.4)	
	Neutral	4 (5.9)	4 (4.8)	
	Agree	13 (19.1)	14 (16.7)	
	Strongly agree	9 (13.2)	5 (5.9)	
The level of staffing in the mortuary department is relevant to the workload	Strongly disagree	24 (35.3)	41 (48.8)	$\chi^2=5.264$, df=4, p=0.264
	Disagree	15 (22.1)	18 (21.4)	
	Neutral	6 (8.8)	3 (3.6)	
	Agree	13 (19.1)	16 (19.0)	
	Strongly agree	10 (14.7)	6 (7.1)	
There is solidarity among employees working within the mortuary department	Strongly disagree	10 (14.7)	6 (7.1)	$\chi^2=11.244$, df=4, p=0.024
	Disagree	13 (19.1)	12 (14.2)	
	Neutral	8 (11.8)	5 (5.9)	
	Agree	17 (25.0)	30 (35.7)	
	Strongly agree	20 (29.4)	31 (36.9)	

The results showed that from the respondents who were satisfied, majority of them strongly disagreed with the appropriateness of their workload 26 (38.2%), as well as the level of staffing in relation to the workload 24 (35.3%). However, there was no correlation between these two factors and job satisfaction ($p=0.265$) and ($p=0.264$) respectively. However, there was a significant relationship between workplace solidarity and job satisfaction ($p=0.024$), majority of the respondents 20 (29.4%) from those who were satisfied strongly agreed that there was solidarity among the employees working within the mortuary department (Table 3). One of the key informants interviewed also shared the same thoughts, they illustrate; “This profession forces you to act as a family. We have various welfares and social groups just to encourage each other since we go through similar experiences. This largely helps us to cope with our situation and the work environment-Key Informant 13, Private Facility”.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to assess influence of work environment on job satisfaction among mortuary staff. From the analysis, the study revealed that most of the respondents were male. This can be attributed to the fact that there is still high level of segregation based on gender and the mortuary attendant profession is majorly male dominated. These results were consistent with two studies done in the United States of America (USA) that sought to analyze the gender stereotyping in the funeral industry; even though the Civic Right Act forbid employment discrimination based on age, gender and race, the funeral industry still did not meet these employment standards.^{16 17} Similarly, the situation in Kenya displays the stark difference of male versus female employees in the funeral industry through its healthcare workforce report.¹⁸ The study revealed that there was no significant relationship between gender and job satisfaction. However, different results were observed in a

study that was analyzing occupation segregation based on gender where men were more satisfied.¹⁹ In terms of age, the study showed that most respondents were between 30-39 years. This can be attributed to the fact that the later years have witnessed more people warming up to the mortuary profession unlike in the past years where the profession was heavily discriminated. These results have also been depicted in the workforce report in Kenya.¹⁸ There was no statistically significant association between age and job satisfaction as per the study. However, literature denotes different findings with some indicating that there is no correlation between age and job satisfaction²⁰, while others show that older professionals are more satisfied.²¹ Satisfaction in older professionals was linked to factors such as increased benefits and remuneration packages as well as an established relationship with the management.

The study showed that majority of the respondents felt that the management did not provide the right tools and resources for their work. However, there was no significant relationship between provision of the right tools and resources and job satisfaction. These results were however different to that of a study done in Nigeria with the aim of ascertaining factors that highly influence the job satisfaction among physicians.²² The results showed that workers tend to be more satisfied with their workplace if they are given the right resources since it promotes efficiency and effectiveness in operation. Besides getting the right tools for operation, a key factor that would affect workers in occupations where there is high rate of infections is getting the right working gear. The results portrayed that the management lagged in provision and even replacement of their work gear. Despite this, there was no significant relationship between provision of the right working gear and overall job satisfaction. Although, a study done in Jordan showed that employees were more satisfied if they had the right working gear and as a result, they treated and interacted with the customers better.²³

Critical to job satisfaction is the provision of good working conditions including cleanliness and well-ventilated buildings. The results however showed no correlation between job satisfaction and working conditions. Arguments have been brought forth by studies such as one done in Indonesia which linked industrial unrest with poor working conditions.²³ However, giving a different point of view, some studies have shown that if working conditions are “too favourable”, some employees may take advantage of this and lower their productivity levels.²³ The results showed that majority of the respondents felt that their workload was inappropriate since they worked for long hours. The results were further supported by views from most of the respondents who felt that they were understaffed. Further to this, there was no correlation between workload, staffing levels and job satisfaction. Studies done in other countries have however revealed different results, owing to the fact that there is

still stigma around mortuary staff especially in African setting.^{24,9}

Solidarity and social support among employees was seen to have a statistically significant relationship with their job satisfaction. The results additionally showed that majority of the respondents agreed that there was solidarity amongst them. Healthcare workers especially in high stress occupation such as mortuary attendants have been seen to benefit largely from support from their management and even more from their colleagues.²⁵ Additionally, such support has been argued to create a sense of togetherness and identity among these workers hence promoting their job satisfaction levels.²⁶ Critical to this would be management of healthcare organizations setting environments that provide room for social support.²⁶

Limitations

One of the limitations was that accessibility to the hospital premises and morgues was a challenge due to formalities that are required before carrying out a study as well as the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting to delays in acquiring information. There was also lack of effective communication and interaction with most respondents due to the nature of their work this is because they were busy most of the time while others were on night duty hence little time for interacting one on one and filling the questionnaires. Due to time and resource constraints, the study was limited to mortuary staff working in public and private facilities in Nairobi City County hence there was no comparative study done with other counties and countries.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study revealed that mortuary staff in Nairobi County are experiencing low levels of job satisfaction. This study emphasizes the necessity for facility administrators and policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of the factors affecting job satisfaction among mortuary staff. This understanding is crucial for shaping future policies and making informed decisions regarding effective intervention strategies.

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