



E54 An Analysis of Forensic Scientists' Job Stress and Satisfaction

*David R. Foran, PhD**, Michigan State University, Forensic Science Program, 560 Baker Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824; *Kristie Blevins, PhD*, Eastern Kentucky University, 521 Lancaster Avenue, Stratton 467, Richmond, KY 40475; and *Ruth Waddell Smith, PhD*, Michigan State University, School of Criminal Justice, 560 Baker Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the results of an extensive, nation-wide survey of the factors that influence forensic scientists' job satisfaction and levels of stress.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by identifying both human and workplace factors that affect job satisfaction for forensic scientists and by providing recommendations for supervisors so positive factors can be accentuated while negative factors may be overcome.

Numerous studies of workplace performance and job satisfaction among criminal justice system professionals were performed, with a goal of identifying factors that positively or negatively influence employee interactions, levels of stress, job retention, personal fulfillment, and overall satisfaction with one's employment. The findings from such studies can be valuable to administrators and supervisors and were used to improve work conditions, resulting in increased performance; however, job satisfaction and stressors were not examined among forensic scientists, in spite of the fact that these scientists are an integral part of the criminal justice system, and regularly interact with other members of that community. Further, forensic scientists may face many of the same hurdles encountered by others in the criminal justice community, such as long hours, strict deadlines, limited resources, and outcomes of their work that can have far-reaching impacts on both individuals and society.

In the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) supported study presented here, 899 forensic scientists at the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD-LAB)-accredited local, state, and federal public laboratories, along with accredited private laboratories, were surveyed in 2012 using an electronic format sent to all accredited laboratories, using a paper format in 2013 to increase representation. Demographic factors such as sworn or civilian, sex, and forensic area of expertise were considered, as were workplace factors such as organizational makeup, work environment, job expectations, and time demands.

In general, forensic scientists' levels of job satisfaction were moderate to high, in keeping with other professionals in the criminal justice system. Satisfaction levels did not differ significantly based on being sworn or civilian, or by forensic subdiscipline. Linear regression models showed significant relationships between a lack of managerial support and increased levels of stress, as did negative relationships with prosecutors, longer work hours, and ambiguity about job expectations. Individuals in different forensic subdisciplines identified different factors that resulted in increased stress and, in general, females reported more stress than did males. Outside of work, a variety of different methods were used to cope with stress, which in general were not considered negative (such as increased smoking or drinking).

The overall results of this study indicate that while forensic scientists generally enjoy and find satisfaction with their jobs, there are a number of steps their supervisors could take to improve workplace conditions and reduce stress for the scientists.



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