

EFFECTS OF SPOUSAL SATISFACTION AND SELECTED CAREER FACTORS ON JOB SATISFACTION OF EXTENSION AGENTS

Michael Hebert, Associate County Agent
Joe W. Kotrlik, Associate Professor
Louisiana State University

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) has employees in all parishes of the state, a state director, state program leaders, supervisors and subject matter specialists. These staff members work with local clientele to develop and deliver programs based on the needs of individuals and businesses. Sometimes, the needs of local clientele put a large demand on the Extension worker's time. The time spent at work beyond normal business hours means time spent away from the family. This is a concern because it affects the work-family relationship and has been acknowledged by Extension at the federal and state levels (Extension Committee on Policy: Task Force on Families, 1981.)

The effect of individual job responsibilities upon the family is known as the work-family relationship. This relationship was addressed by the National Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) Task Force on Families:

Adapting and changing programs to meet the current needs of clientele has important implications for internal management and personnel policies of the Extension organization itself. Continued efforts must be made to increase employee productivity and reduce the high organizational cost of turnover. Extension organizational managers need to critically examine policies and practices in relation to their effects upon the family life of Extension employees.

Renewed efforts to recognize and be attentive to human and family needs of Extension workers at all levels will result in improved job satisfaction, increased productivity, and continued programming effectiveness among the workers who have made Extension the world's best informal educational system (ECOP Task Force on Families Position Statement, 1981, p.3.)

As this quote suggests, Extension is concerned about the rate of field personnel resignations. Church and Pals (1982) study of Idaho Extension agents who had resigned revealed one of the most frequently cited reasons for resigning was the evening and weekend work. This finding indicated that the evening and weekend work of Extension agents may interfere with family life.

People resign from the Extension Service for as many reasons as there are people who resign. One possible reason is the absorptiveness of the job. Highly absorptive jobs require a great amount of time commitment and involvement by the agent (Kanter, 1977). This influences the quality of the family life of Extension agents because Extension work has been confirmed as a highly absorptive occupation (St. Pierre, 1984). Human contact occupations, such as Extension work, have potential to influence family life more than other occupations.

According to St. Pierre (1984), Extension agents perceive their jobs to affect their lives more negatively than positively. The perception a person has of the spouse's job can greatly influence their job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This could affect job performance and productivity in a positive or negative way.

Researchers have studied the variables that affect job satisfaction, including morale, burnout, the perception that people have of their jobs, and other variables related to job satisfaction (Church & Pals, 1982; Kanter, 1977; Marshal, 1987; St. Pierre, 1984). However, these studies did not focus on the question of how spouses can affect the job satisfaction of their mate.

Little is known about the effect that county Extension work has on family life, especially spouses, and conversely, the effect that spouse's opinions have on agent job satisfaction. A need existed to determine how spouses of LCES agents perceived their mates' job and to determine if these perceptions are related to spousal satisfaction. Also, a need existed to determine if the perceptions of the spouse influenced the degree of job satisfaction of the agent.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose was to determine if the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service agents' spouses' satisfaction with the agents' job had an impact on the job satisfaction of Extension agents. The objectives were to:

1. Determine the spouses' satisfaction with the Extension agent's job in the LCES.
2. Determine if any relationships existed between selected career related variables and the spousal satisfaction score (SSS).
3. Determine the job satisfaction level of LCES agents as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire.
4. Determine if selected variables explain a significant proportion of the variance in the general job satisfaction level of LCES agents as measured by the short form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire.
5. Determine what variables explain the variance in spousal satisfaction scores as measured by the spousal satisfaction scale.

Methodology

Population and Sample: The population consisted of the 229 Extension field agents employed for two or more years by LCES, and their spouses. Using Cochran's sample size formula (Snedecor and Cochran, 1980), the minimum sample size needed was determined to be 92. A simple random sample size of 152 was used to accommodate any refusals or frame errors.

Instrumentation: Three instruments were used. Instrument "A" (Perceptions of the LCES by Extension Agent's Spouse) was administered to the spouses of Extension agents and contained demographic questions about the spouse and the spousal satisfaction scale which measured the spouse's satisfaction with the Extension agents job. The content of this scale was selected after a review of the literature, including the instruments developed by St. Pierre (1984) and Schultz (1986). Instrument "A" included a spousal satisfaction scale from which the spousal satisfaction score (SSS) was developed. The scale consisted of 16 questions related to the spouses' satisfaction with the LCES. Possible responses ranged from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5).

Two instruments were administered to the agents. The Agent Profile Instrument (Perceptions of the LCES by Extension Agents), Instrument "B", and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ), Instrument "C". The Agent Profile Instrument consisted of questions developed after the review of literature. The instrument secured demographic information about the LCES agents. The MSQ was used to measure job satisfaction of the agents. Possible responses on the MSQ ranged from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5).

Content validity of instruments "A", "B" and "C" were assessed by an advisory panel consisting of graduate students, faculty, Extension agents, and Extension agents' spouses. The panel indicated that the instruments possessed content validity. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the spousal satisfaction scale and the MSQ.

Data Collection: Two mailouts were used to collect the data. All non-respondents were contacted by phone and asked to return their completed questionnaire. After the mailouts and phone follow-up, 11 couples from the non-respondent group were surveyed by phone. Out of 152 agents and their spouses surveyed, 127 (83.6%) completed and returned their questionnaires.

Data Analysis: Inferential t-tests were used to determine if differences existed between the agents' job satisfaction scores and the spousal satisfaction scores by response mode - mail and phone. No differences were found and the data were combined for analysis. The data for objective one, spousal satisfaction score, and objective three, agent job satisfaction score, were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The data for objective two, (relationships), was analyzed using Pearson product moment and Spearman Rho correlations. The correlations were interpreted according to the set of descriptors proposed by Hinkle, Wiersma, and Jurs (1979). Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which factors explained the variance in job satisfaction scores of agents (objective 4) and spousal satisfaction scores (objective 5). In the regression analyses, variables that

contributed one percent or more to the explanation of variance in the dependent variable were included as significant explanatory variables. The alpha level for all statistical tests was set a priori at .05.

Findings

Description of the Sample: The average age of the spouses of Extension agents was 41.22 years and the average age of the agents was 41.62 years. There were 39 (30.7%) female agent respondents and 88 (69.3%) male agent respondents. Most of the responding couples (120 or 94.5%) indicated they were white while seven (5.5%) were black. Of the 127 responding couples, 116 (91.3%) had children. Sixty-three (57.5%) had at least one child under 12 years old living at home.

Most (107 or 84.3%) of the spouses worked for wages/salary outside of the home. Over two-thirds (90 or 70.9%) of the spouses worked full-time while 17 (13.4%) had part-time jobs. All of the spouses had a minimum of a high school education. Nearly two-thirds had earned either an undergraduate college degree (49 or 38.6%) or a graduate degree (28 or 22%).

The average number of years that agents had worked for the LCES was 15.34. Most of the respondents (117 or 92.10%) reported working over 40 hours per week while one-fourth (32 or 25.3%) worked over 50 hours per week and 20 (15.8%) reported working 60 or more hours per week. The respondents indicated they spent an average of 1.92 nights away from home each month. Agents, on the average, are away from home 1.58 nights per week during the family dinner hour.

Almost half (59 or 46.46%) indicated they worked primarily in the area of agriculture and thirty-six (28.35%) of the agents were responsible for the 4-H Club program. In addition, 23 agents (18.11%) spent most of their time working with the adult home economics area. Nine of the agents were responsible for areas other than agriculture, 4-H, and home economics. These areas were fisheries, rural/community development and special projects.

Objective 1—Spousal Satisfaction Score of LCES Agents' Spouses: The data in Table 1 shows the responses to the questions that comprised the Spousal Satisfaction Scale. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .89 was calculated for the scale which indicated that the scale had a high level of internal consistency.

The spouses reported their highest level of satisfaction with the geographic location of their spouse's work ($M = 4.00$), the amount of vacation time available in their spouse's work ($M = 3.95$), and the work flexibility their spouse had with the in-office schedule ($M = 3.90$). They reported their lowest level of satisfaction with the stress level of the agents' job ($M = 2.58$), their spouse's salary ($M = 2.76$), and the number of hours the agent works each week ($M = 2.77$).

The data in Table 1 shows a mean score of 53.40 for all respondents. The data in Table 2 show that almost one-half (61 or 48.03%) of the spouses were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the agent's job while over one-third (51 or 40.16%) of the spouses were satisfied. The distribution of the Spousal Satisfaction Scores is presented in Table 2.

Objective 2—Factors Related to Spousal Satisfaction: The second objective was to determine if any relationships existed between selected variables and the Spousal Satisfaction Score. The data were analyzed using Pearson and Spearman Rho correlations. The agents' general job satisfaction, was moderately correlated with the Spousal Satisfaction Score ($r = .59$). As the agents' general job satisfaction increased, the spouses' satisfaction with the agents' job also increased. Two other variables, whether the agent was a 4-H agent or an agriculture agent, had a low level of correlation with the Spousal Satisfaction Score ($r_s = -.42$ and $r_s = .33$ respectively). Spouses of Four-H agents had lower levels of spousal satisfaction than spouses of other types of agents. The other variables studied had little, if any, correlation with the Spousal Satisfaction Score (Table 3).

Objective 3—Job Satisfaction of Cooperative Extension Service Agents: Objective three was designed to secure information on the level of job satisfaction of LCES agents as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Short Form). The questionnaire measured agents' general, intrinsic, and extrinsic job satisfaction. Raw scores for each MSQ scale (intrinsic, extrinsic, and general satisfaction) were converted to percentile scores using the normative data for "Professional, Technical, and Managerial Engineers." A percentile score of 75 or higher was interpreted as a high degree of satisfaction; a percentile score of 25 or lower represented a low level of satisfaction and scores in the middle range of percentiles (26 to 74) indicated average satisfaction (Weiss, et al.,

Table 1
Response to the Spousal Satisfaction Questionnaire (N = 127)

Category	<u>M</u>	SD
How satisfied are you with:		
the job security that your spouse has?	3.77	.99
your spouse's present salary?	2.76	1.17
the number of hours your spouse works each week?	2.77	1.11
the amount of travel your spouse is required to do?	3.00	1.08
the benefits your spouse receives from the LCES?	3.39	1.10
your spouse's opportunities for advancement and promotion?	2.93	1.14
the enjoyment you derive from your spouse's employment?	3.50	0.96
the way Extension work affects your family life?	3.13	1.11
the work flexibility your spouse has with the in-office schedule?	3.90	0.86
your spouse's co-workers?	3.68	0.98
your spouse's satisfaction with his/her job?	3.51	1.11
the LCES as a family oriented employer?	3.06	1.16
stress level of spouse's job?	2.58	1.20
the prestige you receive from your spouse's job?	3.47	0.91
the amount of vacation time available in your spouse's work?	3.95	0.94
the geographic location of your spouse's work?	4.00	1.00
Total	53.40	10.39

Note. Range = 16 - 80. \bar{m} = 46.53 for Four-H agent's spouses; \bar{m} = 56.98 for agriculture agent's spouses; \bar{m} = 55.57 for home economics agent's spouses. 1967). A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .86 was calculated for the scale which indicated that it possessed a high level of internal consistency.

Table 2
Spousal Satisfaction Score

Score category	Interpretation	<u>N</u>	%
16.00 to 24.49	Very Dissatisfied	1	0.79
24.50 to 40.49	Dissatisfied	13	10.23
40.50 to 55.49	Neither Satisfied nor dissatisfied	61	48.03
55.50 to 71.49	Satisfied	51	40.16
71.50 to 80.00	Very Satisfied	1	0.79
Total		127	100.00

Note. \bar{M} = 53.40; \bar{SD} = 10.39.

General Satisfaction: Results indicate that Extension agents have a general satisfaction mean score of 75.42 on a scale that ranged from 20 to 100. When scores were compared to the norm group, Extension agents general job satisfaction level was at the 35th percentile, indicating a moderate level of satisfaction. Scores from the respondents ranged from a low of 47 to a high of 96.

Intrinsic Job Satisfaction: The mean score was 50.10 on a scale that ranged from 12 to 60. When this score was compared to the norm group it revealed that the mean intrinsic satisfaction score fell at the 56th percentile indicating a moderate level of intrinsic satisfaction among Extension agents.

Extrinsic Job Satisfaction: The mean score was 18.10 on a scale that ranged from 6 to 30. When the mean score was compared to the norm group it revealed that the mean extrinsic satisfaction score fell at the 25th percentile indicating a low level of extrinsic satisfaction among Extension agents.

Table 3
Pearson and Spearman Correlations Between Selected Variables and the Spousal Satisfaction Score

Category	Coefficient	p	Correlation ^a
Agent job satisfaction	.59 ^b	.001	Moderate
4-H agents	-.42 ^c	.001	Low
Agriculture agents	.33 ^c	.001	Low
Years agent employed	.28 ^b	.001	Little, if any
Evenings worked	-.26 ^b	.003	Little, if any
Hours worked per week	-.26 ^b	.003	Little, if any
Family life cycle stage	-.18 ^b	.046	Little, if any
Education of spouse	-.12 ^c	.163	Little, if any
Difference in ages	.11 ^c	.222	Little, if any
Home Economics agents	.11 ^c	.234	Little, if any
Nights away from home	-.08 ^b	.361	Little, if any
Spouse's employment	-.04 ^c	.639	Little, if any
Gender of Spouse	-.03 ^c	.749	Little, if any
Race of agent and spouse	-.09 ^c	.304	Little, if any

Note. N = 127.

^aThe interpretations of correlation coefficients in this column are based on the descriptors proposed by Hinkle, Wiersma, and Jurs (1979); ^bPearson Correlations; ^cSpearman Rho Correlations.

Objective 4—Multiple Regression Analysis of Job Satisfaction Scores: The fourth objective was to determine if selected variables explained a significant proportion of the variance in the general job satisfaction of LCES agents as measured by the short form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. A variable was included in the final explanatory model if it explained one percent or more of variance in addition to the variance already explained by other variables in the model. The variables used in this analysis are in Table 3 and the results of the analysis are in Table 4.

Table 4
Multiple Regression Analysis of Job Satisfaction Scores (N = 127)

Source of Variation	SS	dF	MS	F	F Prob.
Regression	4203.57	2	2101.78	39.34	.001
Residual	6625.31	124	53.43		
Total	10828.88	126	2155.21		
Variables in the equation					
Variables	R ²	R ² Cum.	F	F Prob.	
Spousal satisfaction score	.353	.353	68.27	.001	
Four-H agent	.035	.388	39.34	.001	

Note. Variables that were not significant explanatory variables were: education level, evenings agent worked, nights away from home each month, whether agent was an agriculture or home economics agent, number of children living at home, and hours agent worked each week.

The strongest predictor of job satisfaction of LCES agents was the Spousal Satisfaction Score. It was responsible for explaining 35% of the agent job satisfaction score. This finding has great importance because it shows that the spouse's satisfaction with the agent's job explains a large percentage of the variance in the agent's satisfaction with the job. Ogden (1978) implied that if an employee's spouse

is unhappy at home, this will have negative effects on what the employee does at work. The more dissatisfied the employee's spouse is, the more it is going to distract the employee from the job. Consequently, an agent whose spouse is satisfied with the agent's job is more likely to feel the same toward his/her job.

An agent, whose major area of responsibility is 4-H youth work, was found to be the second strongest predictor of agent job satisfaction. This variable explained an additional 3.5% of the agent's job satisfaction score. Four-H agents had lower levels of job satisfaction than other agents. In his study of LCES 4-H agents, Marshal (1987) revealed that 4-H agents had a low level of general job satisfaction. St. Pierre (1984), noted that Four-H agents perceived their jobs to be significantly more absorptive than other agent types mainly because of the timing of the youth agents' work (evenings and weekends).

Objective 5—Multiple Regression Analysis of the Spousal Satisfaction Score: The fifth objective was to determine what variables explain the variance in spousal satisfaction scores as measured by the spousal satisfaction scale. A variable was included in the final explanatory model if it explained one percent or more of variance in addition to the variance already explained by other variables in the model. The analysis revealed that four variables explained a significant amount of the variance in spousal satisfaction. These variables were the extrinsic satisfaction of the agent ($R^2 = .398$), responsibility for 4-H youth work (additional $R^2 = .039$), the hours the agent works each week (additional $R^2 = .018$), and the years the agent has been employed by the LCES (additional $R^2 = .012$). These data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Multiple Regression Analysis of Spousal Satisfaction Scores (N = 127)

Source of Variation	SS	dF	MS	F	F Prob.
Regression	6343.17	4	1585.79	26.69	.001
Residual	1249.35	122	59.42		
Total	13592.52	126	1645.21		
Variables in the equation					
Variables	R^2	R^2 Cum.	F	F Prob.	
Extrinsic satisfaction	.398	.398	82.49	.001	
Four-H agents	.039	.4378	48.05	.001	
Hours worked each week	.018	.455	34.18	.001	
Years employed by LCES	.012	.467	26.69	.001	

Note. Variables that were not significant explanatory variables were: spouse's education level, evenings worked by agent, nights away from home each month, agent's intrinsic satisfaction, whether agent was an agriculture or home economics agent, number of children living at home, and hours agent worked each week.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Spousal satisfaction accounts for 35% of the variance in the job satisfaction scores of agents. Almost one-half of the spouses (48.03%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the agent's job. Since it appears that spousal satisfaction helps to explain agent's job satisfaction, it is recommended that the LCES consider implementing programs to increase the satisfaction levels of agents' spouses. As an example, the LCES may wish to implement a spousal orientation program for the spouses of new agents.

Four-H agents' spouses have lower levels of spousal satisfaction than other types of agent ($M = 46.53$). The regression analysis of agents' job satisfaction scores revealed that whether an agent was a Four-H agent was a significant explanatory factor in the analysis of agents job satisfaction. The regression analysis of spousal satisfaction scores revealed that hours worked was a significant explanatory factor in the analysis of spousal satisfaction. Since the nature of the Four-H agents job

requires the agent to work long and irregular hours, the problem of low levels of spousal satisfaction possessed by Four-H agents' spouses may not have a solution. However, it is recommended that further study be conducted to verify this finding. If this finding is confirmed by further research, the LCES should attempt to determine if a feasible way of alleviating this problem exists.

LCES agents had low extrinsic job satisfaction scores. It is recommended that the LCES focus attention on improving the status of those factors that make up extrinsic job satisfaction. These factors are recognition received, chances for advancement, salary, "company" policies, and decision making.

Spouses are least satisfied with the agents salary, stress level and the number of hours worked by the agent each week. The number of hours the agent works as opposed to the salary received may create stress on the job which adversely affects spousal satisfaction. When possible, compensatory time or flex scheduling should be granted to those agents working beyond the 40 hour work week.

Agents have a moderate level of job satisfaction. In order to improve spousal satisfaction with the Extension agent's job, efforts need to be focused on improving agents' general job satisfaction. When possible, extrinsic factors should be addressed first because the extrinsic factors explained a large portion of the variance in spousal satisfaction. Agents also scored lowest in extrinsic job satisfaction.

References

Church, L. J., & Pals, D. A. (1982). Before you resign...consider the facts. Journal of Extension, Sept./Oct., 43-49.

Extension Committee on Policy. Task Force on Families. (1981). Extension's role: Strengthening American families, a position statement. Washington, D.C.: author.

Hinkle, D.E., Wiersma, W. & Jurs, S.G. (1979). Applied statistics for the behavioral sciences. Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Co.

Kanter, R. M. (1977). Work and family in the United States: A critical review and agenda for research and policy. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Marshall, T. S. (1987). Job satisfaction of 4-H agents of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service. Unpublished masters thesis, Louisiana State University

Ogden, R. W. (1978). How to succeed in business and marriage. New York: Amacom.

Schultz, J. B. (1986). Work and family inventory. Unpublished manuscript, Iowa State University, Department of Home Economics Education, Ames.

St. Pierre, T. (1984, Winter). Addressing work and family issues among Extension personnel. Journal of Home Economics, 42-47

St. Pierre, T. (1984). The relationship between work and family life of county extension agents in Pennsylvania. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University.

Weiss, D.J., Davis, R.V., England, G.W., & Lofquist, L.H. (1967). Manual for the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Work Adjustment Project, Industrial Relations Center.