

Original research article

JOB SATISFACTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS: PUBLIC VS. NON-PROFIT SECTOR

Barbora Tvarohová, Alena Hricová *

Prague College of Psychosocial Studies, Department of Social Work, Prague, Czech Republic

Abstract

Background: Job satisfaction shapes the quality, stability, and continuity of social services. Evidence from the Czech context comparing the public and non-profit sectors using a validated instrument remains scarce.

Aim: To compare overall and domain-specific job satisfaction of social workers employed in the public and non-profit sectors in the Czech Republic, and to identify socio-demographic and organisational correlates.

Methods: Cross-sectional online survey (April–July 2025) of 510 qualified social workers (244 public, 266 non-profit) using the Czech version of the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS, 36 items, nine domains). Independent-samples *t*-tests, Spearman correlations, Kruskal–Wallis tests, ANOVA, and binary logistic regression were calculated in Jamovi 2.6.26.

Results: Non-profit workers reported higher overall satisfaction ($M = 143.21$, $SD = 26.94$) than public-sector workers ($M = 132.45$, $SD = 28.73$), $t(508) = -4.337$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.384$. Significant sector differences emerged in eight of nine JSS domains, with the largest effects for communication ($d = 0.447$), operating conditions ($d = 0.385$), and pay ($d = 0.336$). Job satisfaction correlated negatively with perceived stress ($r_s = -0.468$) and intent to leave ($r_s = -0.520$); each one-point JSS increase reduced the odds of intent to leave by 3.7% ($OR = 0.963$).

Conclusion: Czech non-profit organisations outperform public bodies across nearly all facets of job satisfaction. Investing in internal communication, working conditions, supervision, and reward systems is likely to improve retention in both sectors.

Keywords: Czech Republic; Job satisfaction; Non-profit sector; Public sector; Social work; Supervision

INTRODUCTION

Social work is a regulated helping profession that supports individuals and communities in crisis, and exposes practitioners to chronic emotional, ethical, and administrative demands. Across Europe, social services are facing a long-term workforce shortage that translates into longer waiting times, higher caseloads, and a deterioration in the quality of direct work with clients (Havlíková et al., 2022). Job satisfaction has therefore become a strategic indicator of service quality, since it is consistently associated with motivation,

performance, perceived stress, sickness absence, and intent to leave (Judge and Kam-meyer-Mueller, 2012; Lizano and Mor Barak, 2015).

Job satisfaction is generally defined as a positive affective and evaluative attitude toward one's work that arises from a comparison between expectations and perceived reality (Spector, 2022). Empirical research distinguishes between global satisfaction and satisfaction with specific facets such as pay, promotion, supervision, coworkers, the nature of work, communication, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, and operating conditions (Spec-

tor, 1985). Theoretically, the construct is anchored in Herzberg's two-factor model, which separates hygiene factors (pay, supervision, working conditions) from motivators (recognition, growth, meaningful work) (Herzberg, 1987), and in the demand–control–support framework which links psychosocial work characteristics to wellbeing (Kristensen et al., 2005).

In the Czech context, the qualifications and tasks of social workers are governed by Act No. 108/2006 Coll. on Social Services. Direct social work is delivered by both public bodies (mainly municipal and regional social affairs departments) and a heterogeneous landscape of non-profit providers (registered NGOs, church-based organisations, and other non-state non-profit entities). Although these sectors share the same legal definition of the profession, they differ markedly in funding stability, formal hierarchy, autonomy of work, and the use of supervision (Hricová et al., 2023). International evidence on sector differences is mixed: some studies show higher intrinsic motivation and satisfaction among non-profit employees, driven by mission alignment (Handy and Katz, 1998), while others find that public-sector workers benefit from job security and clearer career paths (Ng and Feldman, 2010). Czech evidence using a validated instrument is, however, scarce.

This study addresses that gap. Its primary aim is to compare overall and domain-specific job satisfaction of qualified social workers employed in the Czech public and non-profit sectors. Its secondary aim is to examine how socio-demographic characteristics (age, tenure, income, region, and position) and organisational factors (access to supervision) relate to satisfaction, and how satisfaction is associated with perceived stress and intent to leave. The main contribution of the study is that it is the first large-scale Czech sector comparison of social-worker job satisfaction using a validated multidimensional instrument, with direct implications for supervision, communication, and retention policy.

- The first specific objective was to compare overall and domain-specific job satisfaction of social workers in the public and non-profit sectors.
- The second specific objective was to examine the associations between job satisfaction and age (a), tenure (b), net income (c),

region (d), job position (e), and access to supervision (f).

In addition, the relationships between job satisfaction, perceived stress, and intent to leave were examined as exploratory associations relevant to retention.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design and setting

A cross-sectional, anonymous online survey was conducted between April and July 2025 in the Czech Republic. The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms. The study was designed according to general ethical principles for non-interventional research; participation was voluntary, fully anonymous, and respondents could discontinue at any time. Informed consent was obtained on the introductory page of the questionnaire. The study was conducted under the supervision of the Department of Social Work, Prague College of Psychosocial Studies.

Participants and sampling

Participants were recruited through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. Invitations were distributed in closed Facebook groups for Czech social workers, in professional associations, and through the authors' professional networks. Inclusion criteria were: (a) being a qualified social worker as defined in §110 of Act No. 108/2006 Coll., (b) currently working at least part-time as a social worker, and (c) being employed by a public-sector body or a non-profit organisation in the Czech Republic. Workers from the private commercial sector ($n = 19$) and one respondent with an unclear employer category were excluded from the analytical sample.

The final sample consisted of 510 social workers (244 public sector, 266 non-profit). Women represented 82.5% of respondents; the most frequent age band was 25–44 years; 82.9% worked full-time. Job positions covered rank-and-file social workers, methodists, team leaders, deputy heads, directors and other roles defined in the Act.

Instruments

Job satisfaction was measured with the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), originally devel-

oped by Spector (1985, 2022). The instrument contains 36 items grouped into nine domains (pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating conditions, coworkers, nature of work, and communication). Each were scored on a six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Reverse-coded items were recoded prior to analysis. The total score ranges from 36 to 216 points; higher scores indicate higher satisfaction. The Czech translation by Franěk and Večeřa (2008) was used with permission. The questionnaire was complemented by socio-demographic items (sex, age, region, tenure, position, sector, employment regime, supervision access, net monthly income), single-item measures of perceived stress and intent to leave the profession (six-point Likert), and four open-ended questions on perceived strengths, weaknesses, suggestions for improvement, and reasons for staying in the field.

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed in Jamovi 2.6.26. Internal consistency was estimated with Cronbach's α . In line with standard psychometric interpretation, $\alpha \geq 0.80$ was treated as good reliability and $\alpha \geq 0.70$ as acceptable reliability. The total JSS scale showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.93$). Domain-level reliability information is reported in Table 1; operating conditions ($\alpha = 0.50$) and contingent rewards ($\alpha = 0.63$) fell below the conventional threshold and are therefore interpreted with caution (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Sector differences in continuous variables were tested with independent-samples *t*-tests; Cohen's *d* quantified effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). The whole-sample JSS mean was compared with Spector's international reference value using a one-sample *t*-test. Categorical comparisons used chi-square tests. Relationships between job satisfaction and ordinal or continuous independent variables were examined with Spearman correlations; group comparisons across more than two categories used Kruskal–Wallis *H* tests and one-way ANOVA where assumptions held. Effect sizes were added for the second-objective analyses (Spearman's r_s , epsilon-squared for Kruskal–Wallis tests, and eta-squared for ANOVA). The relationship between job satisfaction and intent to leave was reported as a descriptive ordinal association and was additionally modelled with binary

logistic regression (intent to leave dichotomised at ≥ 5 on the six-point scale). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$; all tests were two-tailed. Common-method bias was mitigated by anonymity, neutral item wording, and reverse coding of half of the JSS items (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

RESULTS

Sample characteristics

Of the 510 qualified social workers, 244 (47.8%) worked in the public sector and 266 (52.2%) in non-profit organisations. Women represented 82.5% of the sample. Almost half of respondents (47.1%) were aged 25–44 years; 82.9% were employed full-time. Net monthly income, tenure, and regional distribution were comparable between sectors, with no significant differences in declared income (χ^2 test, $p > 0.05$).

Sector differences in job satisfaction (first objective)

Total JSS scores indicated moderate satisfaction in both sectors but were significantly higher in non-profit organisations ($M = 143.21$, $SD = 26.94$) than in public-sector services ($M = 132.45$, $SD = 28.73$), $t(508) = -4.337$, $p < 0.001$, with a small-to-medium effect size ($d = 0.384$). The whole-sample mean ($M = 138.06$, reconstructed $SD \approx 28.30$) was close to the international JSS norm of approximately 136.9 reported by Spector (2022). A one-sample comparison did not indicate a statistically significant deviation from this reference value, $t(509) = 0.93$, $p = 0.354$.

Sector differences were significant in eight of nine JSS domains (Table 1, Fig. 1). Effect sizes were small to medium, and largest for communication ($d = 0.447$), operating conditions ($d = 0.385$), and pay ($d = 0.336$). The only domain with no significant sector difference was fringe benefits ($p = 0.130$). Importantly, non-profit respondents reported higher pay satisfaction even though declared net monthly income did not differ significantly between sectors.

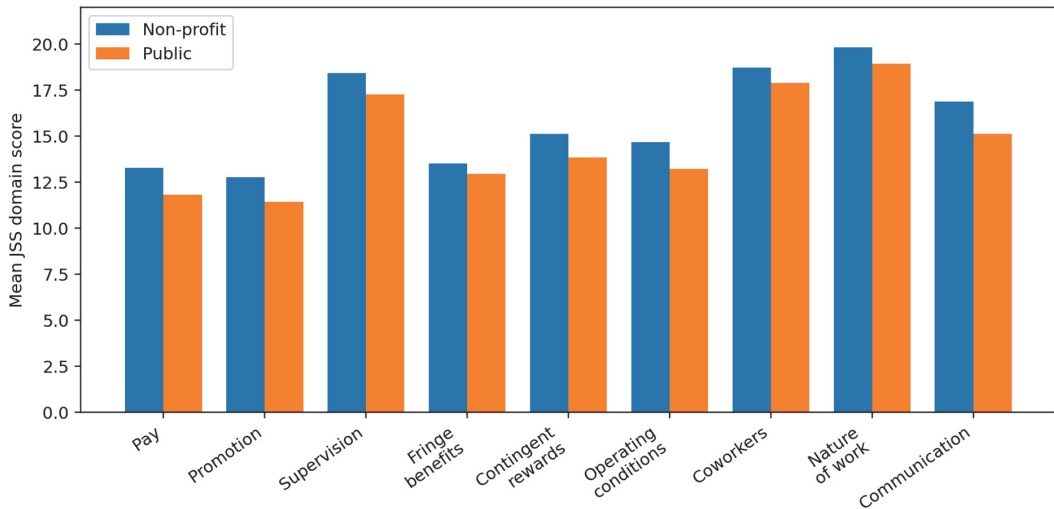
Socio-demographic and organisational correlates (second objective)

Job satisfaction showed only weak associations with most socio-demographic factors

Table 1. Sector differences in JSS domains and total score (NPO $n = 266$, public $n = 244$)

Domain	M (NPO)	M (Public)	$t(508)$	p	Cohen's d	Reliability (α)
Pay	13.28	11.82	-3.788	<0.001	0.336	$\alpha \geq 0.70$
Promotion	12.76	11.43	-3.572	<0.001	0.316	$\alpha \geq 0.70$
Supervision	18.42	17.26	-2.871	0.004	0.254	$\alpha \geq 0.70$
Fringe benefits	13.51	12.95	-1.518	0.130	0.134	$\alpha \geq 0.70$
Contingent rewards	15.12	13.84	-3.263	0.001	0.289	$\alpha = 0.63$
Operating conditions	14.68	13.21	-4.348	<0.001	0.385	$\alpha = 0.50$
Coworkers	18.73	17.89	-2.643	0.009	0.234	$\alpha \geq 0.70$
Nature of work	19.84	18.93	-3.006	0.003	0.266	$\alpha \geq 0.70$
Communication	16.87	15.12	-5.045	<0.001	0.447	$\alpha \geq 0.70$
Total JSS	143.21	132.45	-4.337	<0.001	0.384	$\alpha = 0.93$

Note: NPO – non-profit organisations. Public – public-sector employers. Independent-samples t -tests, two-tailed. Reliability information is added in response to the reviewers: the total JSS scale showed excellent reliability, the two subscales below the conventional threshold are reported explicitly, and the remaining subscales reached at least acceptable reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.70$).

**Fig. 1. Mean JSS domain scores by sector**

(Table 2). Age ($r_s = 0.087$, $p = 0.048$) and net income ($r_s = 0.198$, $p < 0.001$) were positively but weakly correlated with overall satisfaction. Tenure showed no significant association ($r_s = 0.042$, $p = 0.341$), and regional differences were not significant either ($H(13) = 18.24$, $p = 0.149$; $\varepsilon^2 = 0.009$).

Job position, by contrast, was a meaningful organisational factor ($H(5) = 21.67$, $p < 0.001$; $\varepsilon^2 = 0.031$): methodists reported

the highest mean satisfaction ($M = 151.2$), whereas rank-and-file social workers reported the lowest ($M = 135.4$). Access to supervision was the strongest organisational correlate ($F(3, 506) = 8.92$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.050$): respondents who attended supervision regularly reported the highest mean satisfaction ($M = 144.7$), while those without any supervision scored substantially lower.

Table 2. Associations between job satisfaction and socio-demographic and organisational variables

Variable	Test statistic	<i>p</i>	Effect size
Age (a)	$r_s = 0.087$	0.048	$r_s = 0.087$
Tenure (b)	$r_s = 0.042$	0.341	$r_s = 0.042$
Net income (c)	$r_s = 0.198$	<0.001	$r_s = 0.198$
Region (d)	$H(13) = 18.24$	0.149	$\epsilon^2 = 0.009$
Job position (e)	$H(5) = 21.67$	<0.001	$\epsilon^2 = 0.031$
Supervision access (f)	$F(3, 506) = 8.92$	<0.001	$\eta^2 = 0.050$

Note: r_s – Spearman correlation; H – Kruskal–Wallis statistic; F – ANOVA statistic; ϵ^2 – epsilon-squared; η^2 – eta-squared. Effect sizes below 0.01 were interpreted as negligible, around 0.01 as small, and around 0.06 as moderate.

Job satisfaction, stress, and intent to leave

Job satisfaction correlated significantly and negatively with perceived stress ($r_s = -0.468$, $p < 0.001$) and with intent to leave the profession ($r_s = -0.520$, $p < 0.001$). As intent to leave was measured using a short ordinal scale, this correlation is interpreted descriptively; the main inferential analysis used binary logistic regression. In this model, with high intent to leave (≥ 5 on the six-point scale) as the dependent variable and total JSS as the predictor, each one-point increase on the JSS reduced the odds of high intent to leave by 3.7% (OR = 0.963, 95% CI [0.952, 0.974], $p < 0.001$). The model correctly classified approximately three quarters of respondents.

DISCUSSION

The present study provides the first large-scale Czech comparison of job satisfaction between public-sector and non-profit social workers based on a validated multidimensional instrument. Its main contribution is the identification of concrete organisational levers – especially communication, operating conditions, and systematic supervision – that may support retention in Czech social services. Three findings stand out.

First, non-profit workers reported significantly higher overall satisfaction and higher scores in eight of nine JSS domains. Although the effect for the total score was small to medi-

um ($d = 0.384$), it may still have practical relevance given the study context. This advantage of non-profit organisations is consistent with international literature that emphasises mission alignment, intrinsic motivation, and value congruence in non-profit settings (Borzaga and Tortia, 2006; Handy and Katz, 1998). It also fits Herzberg's two-factor framework: non-profit workers appear to benefit not only from "motivators", such as meaningful work, but also from comparatively better experiences with hygiene factors such as communication and operating conditions (Herzberg, 1987).

Second, the largest sector gap appeared in communication ($d = 0.447$), followed by operating conditions and pay. The communication finding contrasts with parts of the international literature, which typically highlights autonomy and meaning as the dominant differentiators (Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Lizano and Mor Barak, 2015). This suggests that, in the Czech public administration context, hierarchical and bureaucratic information flows are perceived as a significant burden by frontline social workers. The fact that non-profit workers also reported higher pay satisfaction despite comparable declared incomes is consistent with the distinction between objective remuneration and perceived fairness a recurring observation in the satisfaction literature (Spector, 2022).

Third, organisational factors clearly outweighed individual demographics. Age, tenure, and region had only weak or non-signif-

icant associations with satisfaction, while job position and especially access to supervision emerged as stronger correlates. Regular supervision was associated with the highest mean satisfaction. This in line with prior Czech and international evidence that points to supervision as a protective factor against burnout and a key retention mechanism in social services (Havlíková et al., 2022; Lizano and Mor Barak, 2015). The strong negative association between satisfaction and intent to leave ($r_s = -0.520$) – supported by logistic regression showing a 3.7% reduction in the odds of high intent to leave per JSS point – underlines the practical relevance of these findings for human resources management.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that public-sector employers should prioritise investments in internal communication, working conditions, transparent reward systems, and especially the systematic implementation of supervision. Non-profit organisations, while comparatively better positioned, still face a non-trivial proportion of workers reporting high stress and intent to leave, which calls for continued attention to workload, financial sustainability, and career development.

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design precludes any causal inference about the direction of relationships between satisfaction, stress, and intent to leave. Convenience and snowball sampling through online channels limits external validity, and may have produced self-selection bias toward more engaged respondents. Two JSS subscales (operating conditions, contingent rewards) showed Cronbach's α below the conventional 0.70 threshold, partly reflecting cultural and linguistic difficulties of the Czech translation (e.g., colloquial expressions for workplace bickering or for an organisation framed as a "firm", which fit poorly with Czech public-sector and non-profit contexts). Self-report methodology entails common-method bias, mitigated but not eliminated by reverse coding and anonymity (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Punch, 2015). The sector dichotomy simplifies

a heterogeneous reality: church-based providers were grouped with non-profits, and the small private-sector subgroup was excluded. The geographical distribution of respondents was not representative of all Czech regions. These limitations point to the need for longitudinal, multi-method, and cross-cultural follow-up studies, and for further psychometric work on the Czech JSS.

CONCLUSION

In a sample of 510 qualified Czech social workers, non-profit employees reported significantly higher overall job satisfaction than public-sector employees, showing a consistent advantage across eight of the nine domains, with the largest gaps seen in communication, operating conditions, and pay. The whole-sample mean did not differ significantly from Spector's international reference value. Job position and, above all, regular access to supervision were the most relevant correlates of satisfaction, whereas age, tenure, and region played only a marginal role. Job satisfaction was robustly and negatively associated with perceived stress and with intent to leave the profession, with each additional JSS point reducing the odds of high intent to leave by approximately four per cent. The results highlight internal communication, working conditions, transparent reward systems, and systematic supervision as the most promising levers for improving retention and the quality of social services in the Czech Republic, particularly in the public sector.

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Ethical aspects and conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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* **Corresponding author:** Alena Hricová, Prague College of Psychosocial Studies, Department of Social Work, Prague, Czech Republic; e-mail: Ali.Kajanova@email.cz
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