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Review Article

Towards a Sustainable Working Life for Optometrists in Private Facility Setting: Factors Explaining Why They Remain in Work and Profession

Shadrack M^{1*} and Stephen O²¹Department of Public Health, Maseno University, Kenya²Department of Computing and Informatics, Strathmore University, Kenya***Corresponding author:** Shadrack Muma, Department of Public Health, Maseno University, Kenya**Received:** October 30, 2020; **Accepted:** November 17, 2020; **Published:** November 24, 2020**Abstract**

Background: There is insufficient research on how optometrist experiences their working conditions and environment. Therefore this study was designed to predict the level of job stress, job dissatisfaction and optometrist's intention to leave the workplace. The aim was to describe and explore success factors explaining why private practicing optometrists remain in work and profession.

Methods: A qualitative, descriptive and explorative study based on a theory-driven approach was conducted. Data collection took place from August to November 2019. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in which six optometrists working in private optical setups in Kisumu County were involved. The sense of coherence and its three dimensions: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, were used as a tool to structure the analysis of the qualitative data. Hence, a theory-driven and a data-driven approach with qualitative content analysis of manifest and latent content were used.

Results: The results showed that a sense of meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensibility influenced factors such as: having fun at work, being acknowledged, having enough time to involve in their private activities, being autonomous, respect of their rights by employers, being appreciated by employers, and having a balance between work and leisure time.

Conclusion: One precondition of improving optometrist's health and well-being was having clear leadership in Optometric Association of Kenya to facilitate proper working environment for the optometrists being that they haven't received recognition from the government. Another precondition was having a sense of coherence in relation to both optometrists regardless of the training level. Experiencing job satisfaction and being acknowledged for one's good work were important; acknowledgement by employers that the optometrist are significant in their business and therefore should be prioritized by good rewards for the services they deliver to the patients. In this way, the optometrists will feel acknowledged and could create a sense of meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensibility in their work.

Keywords: Profession; Optometrists; Manageability

Background

Emergence of optometry profession in Kenya is of great importance in delivering primary eye care services to the growing population of Kenya. Human services, in the present case, private primary services centres settings, are characterized by high complexity owing to the interaction between patients, optometrists and the organization management. Optometrists play a pivotal role in the healthcare and should be recognized so as to deliver quality services without fear and consistently feel motivated. In the developed countries, optometry is a recognized profession, regulated and deemed useful in provision of primary eye care services depending on the level of training [1]. A study conducted in Asia revealed that 20-50% of optometrists intended to leave their current job during the next year [2]. In general, nine percent of the optometrists intended to leave optometry, most of them after only a few years in the profession.

With this knowledge in mind and given the fact that demographic data show an increasing population of Kenya that will doubtless be in need of healthcare, it is extremely important to explore factors that may promote optometrists feelings of wellbeing at work and that encourage them to stay in the profession, that is, it is important to discover what factors promote a sustainable working life for optometrists. However, despite increasing interest in the risk factors for stress-related diseases among optometrists, there is less research on factors promoting a sustainable working life for optometrists. Therefore, the present study intends to fill the knowledge gap that exists concerning factors that may increase optometrist's willingness to stay in the profession.

Previous research

There is extensive research on how optometrists experience their working conditions and environment; optometry work has

been shown to involve low job stress due to the number of hours an optometrist should work [3]. However this situation is reverse in the Kenyan context, where there is job dissatisfaction and intention to leave the workplace [4]. As well as burnout and intention to leave the profession [5]. In a cross-sectional study in an Indian private optical clinic setting, three in six optometrist thought frequently about leaving the profession [6]. According to [7]. Temporal, physical, emotion and mental workloads and job stressors were strongly and positively associated with fatigue symptoms. A similar scenario was seen among Nigerian optometrist, where two main paths were found from job stress to intention to leave the hospitals where they work at [8]. Job stress directly affected job satisfaction and depressed mood, which in turn affected intention to leave the work environment. Intention to leave the hospital preceded intention to leave the profession. These results highlight how important it is for optometrists to be able to deal with stress, in both the short and the long term. Workplace stress, work environment and job satisfaction were the focus of a study among newly graduated optometrists [9]. Which showed that higher levels of workplace stress were associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety as well as lower levels of resiliency and job satisfaction.

This leads to ideas from stress management and resource-oriented research, which highlights people's ability to manage stress and stay well [10]. It becomes increasingly important to ask not only how optometrists survive at work, but also how they thrive [11]. One way to look at this is to explore how optometrists create and maintain a sense of coherence and find strategies for managing stress [12]. Salutogenesis is a dynamic and flexible approach with a persistent focus on being able to manage stress [13]. In an African context the level of the three dimensions of sense of coherence varied; manageability was strongest and decreased the total sense of coherence. The meaningfulness dimension was weakest. On a national level, optometrist reported stronger sense of coherence than the general population, and stronger in an international comparison of optometrists. Hospital optometrists found their work difficult to manage, but meaningful [14]. Among community optometrists who thrive, the critical role of job engagement in the face of adversity has been described [15]. Habitual introspection and reflection concerning job engagement helped optometrists make positive, adaptive adjustments in their working life. The self-tuning exhibited by these optometrists strengthened their mental health and evoked their job engagement WMA Declaration of Helsinki, 2019. Sasso and colleagues [12]. Describe factors involved in optometrists intention to leave their job. Dissatisfaction was the most important reason for intention to leave the job (45.6%) and of these 34.6% intended to leave the optometrist profession.

Aim: The aim of the study was to describe and explore factors explaining why private practicing optometrists remain in work and profession.

Methods

Design

A salutogenic theory approach was applied in this qualitative, descriptive and explorative study, based on individual interviews with optometrists [16]. The study design was adopted to gain a deeper understanding of success factors promoting a sustainable

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (N=6).

Variable	N=6
Age (years)	
Mean	4
Range	25-37
Median	416
Sex	
Male	6
Female	0
Marital status	
Single	1
Married/cohabitation	5
Number of years as a optometrists, mean	
Mean	7
Range	5.5-6
Median	4

working life for optometrists. This new knowledge can help in studying optometrist's subjective understanding of the dimensions of the sense of coherence, that is, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. The qualitative, descriptive and exploratory approach is appropriate when researchers wish to gather a maximum amount of information within a particular domain [17].

Setting and Context

The study was conducted at a private primary eye care setting in Kisumu County, Kenya.

Participants

The participants (N=6) were optometrists working at different primary eye care centres in Kisumu and with long experience working as an optometrist (mean 7 years). The interview inclusion criteria were: understanding and speaking English and at least five years of experience working as an optometrist. The participants' socio demographic variables are shown in (Table 1).

Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (N=6).

Data collection

The optometrists who consented to participate were contacted by telephone by an interviewer to schedule a time for the interview. The four interviewers had previous experience conducting interviews for research studies. Data collection took place through in-depth face-to-face interviews conducted at the centres where the participants worked. A theory- driven interview guide was employed, using semi-structured and open-ended questions about factors important for explaining why optometrists remain in work and profession. The interviews lasted between 50 and 100 minutes (mean 75 minutes) and provided a rich material of more than 100 pages of transcribed text. During the interviews, the participants were asked about factors that positively affect job satisfaction, about factors that pull them to remain in the profession, about organizational and individual conditions that are important to them to remain in working life, about their learning experiences and changes they wish to see in their future career.

Data analysis

Six experienced optometrists participated in an individual, digitally recorded, semi-structured interview. The study design is based on the salutogenic theory and the collected data was analyzed both theory-driven as well as inductively. Three phases were employed: 1) a deductive approach was used to create the interview guide, using questions derived from the salutogenic theory and its core concept sense of coherence [18]. 2) an inductive approach was adopted to analyze data using qualitative content analysis [14]. And 3) a deductive approach was employed to theoretically discuss the findings [13].

Data were transcribed verbatim and subjected to qualitative content analysis of both the manifest and latent content. Initially, the entire text was read several times to achieve an overall understanding. In the next step, the texts were reduced into meaning units related to the study aim. The meaning units were condensed, retaining their most significant parts. Thereafter, the condensed meaning units were abstracted and labeled with a code. The codes were continually adjusted to make the inductive process more rigorous [12].

Based on the patterns emerging from the analysis, the codes were deductively structured into the dimensions of the sense of coherence, that is, meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensibility, which thus constitute the themes in the presentation of the results [19].

Ethical considerations

The optometrists were informed about the study both orally and in writing. Informed consent was obtained from the optometrists willing to participate in the study. They were told that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the interview and the study at any time without giving a reason. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the facility managers. The study obtained ethical approval from Maseno University Ethics Review.

Results

According to salutogenic theory interview guide and data-driven analysis of the interviews, the results are presented in relation to the three dimensions of the core concept of sense of coherence: meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensibility. This means that the participating optometrists have provided a deeper understanding of the content of the three dimensions of sense of coherence. The optometrists described factors explaining their ability to remain in work and profession, that is, factors that strengthen them in everyday life (Table 2).

Factors explaining why private practicing optometrists remain in work and profession.

Meaningfulness

In the workplace, the optometrists are in a context that is important to them and feels straightforward. The optometrists have a need for acknowledgment from colleagues, patients and their relatives; as such acknowledgement makes the usefulness of their work efforts clear to them and increases the meaningfulness of their work. In this way, the optometrists feel they are productive; they can see the results of their own work. The optometrists also need to be included in meaningful healthcare teams that are characterized by job satisfaction and humor.

Table 2: Factors explaining why private practicing optometrists remain in work and profession.

Theme	Subtheme
Meaningfulness	-Job satisfaction and have fun at work
	-Being acknowledged and feeling productive
Manageability	-Having a manageable workload
	-Having varying tasks
	-Work-leisure balance
	-Good interactions and strong leadership
Comprehensibility	-Feeling valuable, needed and doing good work
	-Being committed
	-Feeling pride in the professional role

Feeling job satisfaction and having fun at work

The optometrists see job satisfaction as one of the most meaningful factors for remaining in the workplace for a long time. This can involve job satisfaction in the team or the joy felt when a patient expresses something positive.

Job satisfaction for me, it's getting someone to smile. Try to spread positive emotions. Be happy and make it easier for others. Having fun at a workplace marked by humor is also something the optometrists describe as important to remaining in the workplace for many years. This can entail, for example, using humorous jargon in the team, colleagues having a twinkle in their eyes or being able to laugh together. The optometrists also describe how important it is to have work that is meaningful; they go to work with a positive feeling.

Being acknowledged and feeling productive

According to the optometrists, the meaningfulness of their work increases when they are acknowledged. It is often patients who provide this acknowledgment, either directly or when the optometrists have contributed to patients' improved health. But it can also be colleagues or relatives who acknowledge the optometrists. But, it's not always so, there are others too. Most of the time I've done something good every day and I feel good about being seen and acknowledged and seeing and acknowledging others.

The optometrists have a great need to feel productive and useful in their work. They can provide self-acknowledgement, especially when patients recover and see well. Then they see how their involvement has contributed to the positive outcomes.

Feeling togetherness and secure in the work team

Feeling togetherness and secure in the work team is central to optometrists experience of meaning at work. Cohesion means a great deal to the optometrists, that is, working as a team and solving problems together, especially in precarious care situations. The optometrists experience togetherness when they are accepted, involved and part of the work team. They feel they are not alone and have full responsibility for care provision. They feel they are part of a greater whole.

Manageability

High demands are placed on the optometrists as regards being able to manage their day-to-day work. These high demands concern both more routine tasks and stressful situations, but the optometrists

find ways to cope with the different care situations. Factors that make the work situation manageable include receiving support from colleagues and managers, being involved and being able to interact with colleagues and other healthcare professionals. A good balance between work and leisure makes the work more manageable. An additional factor is being able to mentally leave work duties behind at the end of the workday.

Having a manageable workload

Optometrists typically in Kenyan context have a high workload and must prioritize tasks if they are to cope with a variety of care situations. Having a manageable workload means that there is a readiness for unexpected and emergency events.

When the workforce is sufficient and the workload is balanced, there is time for important tasks other than pure physical care or emergency care. This means that optometrists have the opportunity to take more time to create care relationships with patients and can perform qualitatively good optometry. This allows them to finish their workday with a higher level of satisfaction.

Having varied tasks

Optometrist's professional role involves a variety of everyday tasks and challenges. Although many tasks are based on experience and routine management, optometrists are exposed daily to challenges and trials. The optometrists feel their tasks are positive challenges in that they create variation, which means working as a nurse never becomes monotonous. No days are identical; there are encounters with different people, patients and situations.

Having a work-leisure balance

If optometrists are to recover properly and cope with their work, they need to find a balance between work and leisure. This means having an active leisure time and feeling good at home, while having the energy to deal with patients. If you have a good home life and leisure time, it's reflected in your work, and then you can do a good job. If you've had a good weekend at home and feel that it's given something, then you're more rested and positive when you come to work.

The optometrists need to be able to leave their duties behind and feel they are "finished" with them at the end of the workday. This entails being able to leave their work behind, both physically and mentally, so that it does not accompany them home and affect their leisure time.

Work must not take over so that I can't cope with my spare time, and the same thing, the leisure time should be energizing and help me cope even better at work, so that there's a balance there. The optometrists report a need to have work schedules that enable a balance between work and leisure. When there are opportunities to have individual schedules, the chance of improving the balance between work and leisure is increased.

Having good interactions and strong leadership

Interacting with others is an important precondition for managing the work situation. In interaction with others in the team, the optometrists have the opportunity to get support, which helps them handle different care situations.

In order for optometrists to develop good manageability, clear leadership is needed and, thus, a clear and strong manager. Such leadership provides security and is a precondition for the work team to function satisfactorily.

Comprehensibility

Creating sustainable work situations for optometrists means making these situations comprehensible. Comprehensibility is created when the optometrists can reflect on their role and the work they do. Comprehensibility helps the optometrists understand that they are needed and that they are providing good care for their patients. The optometrists need varying tasks, so that their work is not trivial and monotonous. Optometrists develop and learn when they face new challenges on a daily basis. In this way, the professional role is constantly evolving. The optometrists are proud of their professional role, and their professional role and function are valuable in the

Healthcare organization

Feeling valuable, needed and doing good work: The optometrists understand that their professional role is of great value owing to the knowledge they have and the tasks they perform, which involve great responsibility. They feel needed and that they are contributing something important to patients' health.

To me, my professional role means feeling I am capable. Having sufficient knowledge so that I can help people and have the energy to help when someone is powerless.

It's the best profession in the world. Being able to help someone who needs it and to alleviate problems or support or treat in the best way.

Feeling pride in your professional role: The optometrists are proud of their professional role and the responsibility it entails. According to the optometrists, their expertise is also of great value, and this further strengthens their pride. The optometrists are proud of and have positive attitudes toward the work they do and its effects.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to describe and explore factors that contribute to the explanation of why most optometrists in Kenya remain in work and profession independent of hardships in working life for optometrists in private practice settings. The main findings, extracted from the analysis of the interviews, showed that optometrists express a strong feeling of togetherness and pride in their profession, even under conditions involving stress and a high workload. They highlight the importance of giving social support to and getting support from colleagues and patients; both giving and getting support help them manage in everyday life. They are engaged in their mission to do the best they can for their patients, which gives them meaning in life and as professionals.

The results reveal that optometrists perceive a sense of coherence and that this is important to their well-being. The present findings on optometrists engagement in patient care and work in general are in line with previous research among optometrists, showing that optometry gives life meaning through the essence of job engagement [17]. Aspects of job engagement were feeling a calling, a zest for work and vitality.

The optometrists also clearly describe a care-related driving force that is the source of their great commitment to their work. There are also clear altruistic elements involved, such as wanting to contribute something extra and not just to perform tasks in a technical or routine manner. This also influences their experience of doing something good and giving that 'little extra,' which is largely based on personal commitment to patients' needs. The optometrists experience a strong affinity with the working group and the collective, from which they receive a great deal of support and energy, which help them cope with everyday tasks.

Although the optometrists in the present study report feeling highly committed to their work and patients, they must not get too involved. The optometrists try to set limits – an approach they have developed over a long period to prevent work-related stress and ill health. In this way, they identify strategies for managing stress and creating and maintaining a sense of coherence [16]. Factors that can maintain optometrist's good health in stressful work environments are: strengthening optometrist's professional pride; stressing the great value of their knowledge and duties; reinforcing their feeling of being needed and doing well; creating a sense of coherence which promotes meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensibility in work. Previous research has stressed the importance of job engagement, support from colleagues, personal characteristics and self-knowledge [20].

The results demonstrate that, to achieve good recovery, the optometrists need to be able to leave work behind them, both physically and mentally, after their workday. The optical shop manager can give optometrists the opportunity to take some time for reflection before the end of the workday.

According to the optometrists in the present study, having reduced workload, varied tasks, individual schedules, clear leadership and co-operation between optometrists and other professionals were factors that contribute to a good working climate and meaningfulness. These factors are important for optical shop managers to consider in their efforts to support optometrist's meaningfulness in their work and make optometrists work manageable. The present results are in line with findings from [16]. study, which showed how primary eye care managers can create a good working climate for optometrists by giving them opportunities to participate in decision-making, develop their skills and provide social support; such a working climate can encourage optometrists to remain in the job, as valuable assets in the organization.

By raising awareness of the importance of the three dimensions meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensibility for optometrists and optical shop managers, we can acquire an understanding of and knowledge about these dimensions and develop skills that promote a better workplace and work environment [20]. One way to create a better workplace is based on a description of improving working methods at workplaces [20-25]. The first step involves processing theoretical knowledge concerning factors that can improve the working environment by discussing and reflecting in the working group. Based on discussions and reflections, a learning process is developed in the working group that can be integrated into the work. The third step involves processing the experience-based knowledge and revising working methods and forms of work that

hinder a good working climate.

The benefit of the present study is that the results can form the basis for a national study on success factors that promote a sustainable working life for optometrists. In future research on success factors promoting a sustainable working life, it would also be valuable to include larger samples.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The most important strength of the present study is that it expresses the optometrist's perspective; their perceptions are valuable and needed in optometry research. Use of a salutogenic approach – from designing the study and interview guide through the data analysis – can also be considered strength.

One limitation of the present study may be that all of the participating optometrists were male and that they all worked in optical shops owned by individuals.

Implications for Optometry Practice

To create a good workplace for optometrists, the optical shop manager can develop action programs for various activities, such as individual schedules, skills development, cooperation between optometrists and other professionals to reduce the workload and strengthen clear leadership. The action programs can promote a sustainable working life and prevent optometrists from terminating their employment. In this way, optometrists can develop experience-based knowledge generated through many years of working with patients and teams at the same workplace. This also applies to familiarity with technical skills and the caring approach. Moreover, experience-based knowledge is an important basis for person-centered care and patient safety.

Conclusion

Clear leadership on the part of the optometric Association of Kenya is an important prerequisite for increasing optometrist's job satisfaction and ability to develop a sustainable working life. Optometrists must feel an affiliation with both the working group and the organization. If optometrists are to feel secure and joyful in their work, it is essential that they be acknowledged for their work performance, not only by patients but even by colleagues, other professionals and the optical shop owners. In this way, optometrists can achieve meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensibility in their work.

Ethics and Consent to Participate

Those who decided to participate in the study gave their written informed consent before the interviews took place. The participants were told that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time with no reason required.

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