Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Differences in Work/life Balance and Stress at Work Between Male and Female Academic Librarians

Galbraith, Q., Fry, L., and Garrison, M. (2016). The Impact of Faculty Status and Gender on Employee Well-being in Academic Libraries. College & Research Libraries, 77(1), 71-86. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.77.1.71

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Evidence Summary

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A Review of:
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Abstract

Objective – To measure job satisfaction, personal fulfilment, work/life balance, and stress levels of male and female academic librarians.

Design – Survey.

Setting – ARL institutions.

Subjects – Male and female librarians who work in ARL institutions.

Methods – The survey was emailed to deans of 110 ARL libraries for completion by professional librarians. Participants were asked to rate their work/life balance, job satisfaction, stress at work, and personal fulfillment on Likert scales (1 low -7 high). Overall, 846 librarians from 25 ARL libraries responded to the survey. In total, 719 valid responses were analysed using a 2-tailed 2-sample t-test and multiple linear regression to explore variables.

Main Results – Results of this study indicate that differences exist between male and female librarians' well-being in academic libraries.

Differences in work/life balance and stress at work were most significant. However, at non-faculty institutions this difference was smaller between male and female librarians than faculty institutions. Hours worked per week and the number of years worked at the library were found to have a statistically significant impact on work/life balance. Data analysis also suggested that there is no association between gender and job satisfaction and personal fulfillment. Tenure at faculty institutions also did not have a statistically significant impact on job satisfaction.

Conclusion – The study concluded that support for workplace flexibility and well-being may make the most difference in reducing stress and promoting work/life balance by librarians at ARL institutions.

Commentary

Despite constant change to librarian roles and our library and information science practice over recent decades, little is known about how we experience our work and work-related issues such as stress and fulfillment. Student behaviour, our roles and work culture, and expectations of self are sources of stress identified in personal experiences (Farler and Broady-Preston, 2012; Larrivee, 2014). Linden, Salo and Jansson (2016) suggest that individuals and workplace interventions should work together to manage stress and burnout. Galbraith, Fry, and Garrison's study (2016) of how male and female librarians differ in their work experiences aims to fill this knowledge gap by focusing specifically on the potential impact of gender and faculty status on well-being.

Galbraith, Fry, and Garrison use a quantitative survey design with Likert scales to assess well-being as measured by work/life balance, job satisfaction, stress at work, and personal fulfillment. Appraisal of this study, using a checklist from the Centre for Evidence-Based Management, revealed that the overall research design was appropriate to achieve its aims. Description about how the survey was developed however, lacks transparency with authors basing the design on experience in organisational behaviour. Related literature was not cited in informing the design. Also, the authors do not indicate whether the survey was piloted prior to data collection. An appendix for the survey was mentioned within the article but was not found. The authors did demonstrate rigour in analysis by detailing how the sample was refined and the methods were applied to the survey data, including statistical significance.

The authors caution that the t-test results should be considered together with the multiple regression analysis for a more reliable insight into the relationships between gender, faculty status, and other variables on employee well-being. Although over 700 survey responses were considered valid and included in the analysis, less than 25% of ARL libraries were represented in the data sample. Further to this, the response rate is not known, therefore it is difficult to determine whether the unequal sample sizes between male and female librarians are representative of the target population. Results must be interpreted with caution and readers must note that the study relates specifically to ARL institutions and not libraries in general.

Results of this study provide an insight to the interplay between factors impacting on employee well-being in the LIS profession. Although the authors do not discuss specific practical applications, the results show that both male and female academic librarians are relatively personally fulfilled by the work they do. Library organisations should continue to converse, and work with employees, particularly in relation to workload expectations and the number of hours worked per week, to address concerns and identify supports and interventions that may be needed to enhance well-being at a local level.

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