

**Job Satisfaction Challenges Among Recent and Mid-Career Law School Graduates:
Gender Variance and its Implications for Legal Organizations**

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SLAS 6013: Qualifying Seminar, Spring 2025

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May 5, 2025

Abstract

This research investigates job satisfaction issues affecting recent and mid-career law school graduates, especially concerning gender differences within the legal sphere. Currently, lawyers suffer from high occupational stress, long working hours, and an inflexible working environment, which leads to high turnover, especially among female lawyers. In this research, gender differences in job satisfaction among attorneys will be examined based on family and career considerations and mental wellbeing. It has been established from prior research that male and female attorneys do not differ much in terms of overall job satisfaction, although this does mask the fact that women experience greater discrimination, fewer opportunities for promotion, and higher levels of burnout and attrition, which require additional intervention. This paper identifies Herzberg's Two-Factor, Expectancy, and Self-Determination Theory as key frameworks for understanding job satisfaction determinants. Research indicates that organizational support measures, including mentorship, flexible workplaces, and clear promotion policies, help lessen gender inequality. Moreover, diversity and inclusion strategies, parental equality leave, and disconnection right can improve work satisfaction and women attorneys' retention. Law firms that want their work to be effective and their skirmish material not to go wanting need to tackle gender issues in the legal profession – not just to guarantee fairness and equity, but also because it is the right thing to do. Legal organizations can by supporting a supportive and inclusive workplace, work to reduce burnout, increase job satisfaction and enable equitable career advancement opportunities for all of the organization's professionals.

Keywords: Job Satisfaction, Workplace Support, Legal Profession, Gender Disparities, Career Advancement.

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Introduction

Background of the Problem

Employee job satisfaction is an important aspect that influences workplace productivity and employee turnover. Simply speaking, it is the positive or favorable affective response people have towards their jobs or job experiences and affects job performance, commitment, and burnout (Andrade et al., 2019). The legal occupation is demanding and formal, and the lawyers work long hours in order to meet the required standards of the task, which leads to low job satisfaction (Boiarintseva & Richardson, 2019). This paper aims to assess the impact of gender, job stress, and professional commitment on job satisfaction among law school graduates. There is conflicting evidence and conclusions on the link between gender and job satisfaction; nevertheless, the results vary (Andrade et al., 2019). With that in mind, the job satisfaction results show that women have a higher Job Descriptive Index (JDI) than men, even though their remunerations were relatively low (Andrade et al., 2019). Such inequalities call for increased research within the legal profession regarding the antecedents of job satisfaction.

Problem Statement

This quantitative research paper aims to determine the relationship between gender, job stress, professional commitment level, and job satisfaction among graduates from law school. Furthermore, this research focuses on workplace support structures as the mediating variables of gender differences. This is done by establishing how these support structures promote or demote the above-stated outcomes. These comprise the promotion of mentorship, flexibility at the workplace, and management support that defines how legal personnel perceive and handle challenges in their workplace.

Employment in the legal sector involves dealing with stress, working for extended hours, and combining challenging tasks, leading to job burnout and attrition (Stewart-Richardson 2017).

Work pressure, which means stress and intensity of work, has been known to lead to breakdown as well as withdrawal from work, especially among women lawyers who are also wives and mothers (Eaton et al., 2019). On the other hand, the antecedent to job stress, professional commitment that entails passion and investment in work, may also enhance job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). It is necessary to find out how and in what ways these factors influence male and female attorneys differently with the view of increasing the method of increasing workplace retention of these attorneys as well as improving their quality of life.

This paper concentrates on the legal profession in North America, specifically in the United States and Canada. These countries offer the right environment as they have structured legal systems, a relevant path to education, and documented issues of gender imbalance in legal practices (Boiarintseva & Richardson, 2019). The paper focuses on analyzing job satisfaction dynamics that correspond to the changes during the last decade to meet the modern tendencies in the legal field, such as attentiveness to work-life balance and gender-sensitive approaches. The proposed participants are expected to be drawn from law school graduates practicing in private practice, corporations, and government legal services. This paper will consider first-, second-, and third-tier attorneys, including new graduate hires, associates, midlevel lawyers, and equity partners. In this case, gender remains one of the significant factors of focus that considers how male and female attorneys experience job satisfaction in their workplaces.

Significance of Study

In this paper, cross-sectional survey data from the attorneys will be used to assess their job satisfaction, workplace stress, and professional involvement. Regression analysis will be used to comprehend the effects of gender, job pressure, and the availability of supportive structures at the workplace on job satisfaction. These can be work characteristics such as mentorship, work-life balance policy, and leadership involvement that are explored as moderators for gender differences in job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Additionally, this paper applies the JD-R model to address the following: Working hours, caseloads, flexibility, and supervisory support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). All of this supports the hypothesis that resources available for job stress results in better legal workforce retention. This research will aim to identify the job satisfaction of legal workers with a focus on gender, working pressure and professionalism. The findings will expand upon the best practices that will fit all legal practices in regard to the workplace diversity of lawyers, the turnover of the legal workforce and stress, as well as the level of satisfaction male and female attorneys (Andrade et al., 2019; Boiarintseva & Richardson, 2019). This research aims to contribute to the literature about gender parity and career contentment and establish a roadmap for successful parity for both genders in law firms.

Literature Review

Gender Disparities in Job Satisfaction

Literature has been done on the job satisfaction of attorneys with more emphasis on gender disparities in working situations and results. Research indicates no significant differences in overall job satisfaction between men and women, but the culture, discrimination, support structure, and work-life balance contribute to job satisfaction (Andrade et al., 2019). Qualitative data was collected from the International Social Survey Program from 2015, where the average job satisfaction for male workers was 5.34 and for female workers was 5.29, showing that gender does not influence the satisfaction level of a worker (Andrade et al., 2019). It is, however, important to note that there was a difference according to the job facet, where women expressed lower satisfaction with extrinsic motivation such as pay and promotions (Andrade et al., 2019).

Significant inequalities mark workplace conditions of the legal profession. A recent survey among 2863 members of the California Lawyers' Association and the D.C. Bar, conducted by Anker and Krill (2021), reported that women practicing law experience higher stress levels, depression, and hazardous drinking compared to men. For example, concerning risky drinking, the findings showed that women (55.9%) engaged in risky drinking more than men (46.4%), and 34% of women had hazardous drinking behaviors, while 25.4% of men did the same (Anker & Krill, 2021). While women may indicate similar levels of general job satisfaction, they experience greater mental health costs, which may result in dissatisfaction and turnover in the long run (Anker & Krill, 2021). Also, it remained pertinent that more women, 25%, reported having contemplated leaving the legal profession over mental health issues than men, 17% (Anker & Krill, 2021). These findings underscore the necessity for focused intervention in terms of creating and implementing gender-sensitive workplace support programs in order to improve the health and wellbeing of lawyers.

Workplace support is one of the main determinants of job satisfaction. A structural equation model conducted by Mascarenhas et al. (2022) among 171 employees at a higher education institution found that work engagement had a significantly higher relationship with job satisfaction for female employees, and perceived organizational support was a stronger predictor for male employees. The current findings suggest that it is possible to state that creating a positive climate is particularly important for enhancing female employees' job satisfaction (Mascarenhas et al., 2022). The occupation may be inflexible in terms of working time and volunteer working environment and might not provide adequate support to female lawyers, resulting in high levels of dissatisfaction.

Therefore, the empirical study on job satisfaction in relation to work-life balance holds significant importance, especially for female legal practitioners. Anker and Krill (2021) demonstrated that work-family conflict was the most prominent factor that led women to consider quitting the legal profession, where a high level of work-family conflict increases the likelihood of quitting by 4.60 times. On the other hand, for men, the main cause of turnover was overcommitment to work. These studies imply that female lawyers may encounter challenges of work-family conflict, which they find unpalatable, leading to exits from the profession (Anker & Krill, 2021). To some extent, this aligns with the study by Andrade et al. (2019), which indicated that women valued the ability to attend to family issues more than men in determining job satisfaction.

Also, the quality of relationships in the workplace with co-workers and managers has an impact on gender and job satisfaction. A survey conducted by the International Social Survey Programme (2015) revealed that women had a slightly lower perception of their relationships with co-workers and management than men (4.18 vs. 4.19 and 3.90 vs. 3.92, respectively) and

revealed signs of workplace disparity (Andrade et al., 2019). Furthermore, although there was no significant difference in the discrimination score, with men and women scoring around 1.82 on a scale of 1 to 5, women scored slightly higher on harassment (1.84 vs. 1.88 for men) (Andrade et al., 2019). These results imply that gendered prejudice and the employees' atmosphere can have a certain impact on women's satisfaction at work, regardless of potential numerical indices.

These are some of the challenges that organizational interventions to enhance the job satisfaction of attorneys need to address. Mascarenhas et al. (2022) pointed out that such cultures include an active culture, equal opportunities for career progression, and adequate work-life policies. In the same vein, Anker and Krill (2021) suggested that organizations need to acknowledge the mental health matters of women attorneys and stress-related burnout episodes. Given the proven correlation between job satisfaction and retention combined with performance, eradicating such disparities is ethically reasonable and imperative in law firms and legal organizations.

Despite the gender similarity in the mean overall job satisfaction scores among male and female attorneys, there is a clear and stark differentiation in other aspects of workplace experience, mental health toll, mobility, and work-life balance. Female lawyers have lower career satisfaction, higher turnover rates, more gendered work pressure, and more conflict between work and family demands than male lawyers (Andrade et al., 2019; Anker & Krill, 2021; Hersch, 2023; Mascarenhas et al., 2022). To overcome these challenges, it is essential to advance and implement policies related to workplace gender equality promotion, mental health provision at workplaces, and flexible working arrangements to enhance the quality of work and career paths among women practicing law.

Job Pressure and its Effect on Satisfaction

The legal career is well-known for being stressful, highly loaded with workload, and requiring many working hours; these factors result in low job satisfaction. Significant research has been conducted on the relationship between occupational stress and job performance that negatively impacts career satisfaction and well-being (Nisar & Rasheed, 2020; Meyer, 2024). It was discovered that legal careers come with certain demands that affect women, particularly how they undertake and balance their work and family responsibilities, leading to stress, stagnation, and exit (Maits, 2020; Sanders, 2023). Managing job stressors and gender differences also remains fundamental for enhancing organizational satisfaction and retention.

Stress at work is an inherent factor in legal practice due to the demanding working schedules, pressure of clients, and intense competition amongst law firms. This study of 271 police employees indicated a negative association between occupational stress and career satisfaction, suggesting that stress hampers work efficiency and leads to high turnover (Nisar & Rasheed, 2020). It is the same with lawyers who experience work pressure, short deadlines, and billed hours that hinder job satisfaction (Meyer, 2024; Kundal & Singh, 2024). These pressures are intensified by the culture of professionalization promoted by law firms that demand attorneys always be available for their clients.

In a survey with South African women attorneys, Meyer (2024) found that the competitive culture in the legal profession is unsuitable for women with families because they are forced to either quit, demote, or remain stagnant on the career ladder while their male counterparts advance. The study included interviews with 27 attorneys employed in three large corporate law firms to show that women who became mothers suffered from reduced work opportunities, promotions, and earnings (Meyer, 2024). Additionally, a study on the gender gap in legal employment concluded that female lawyers work in lower-tier positions and are

dissuaded from pursuing executive roles because of stereotyping by law firms (Sanders, 2023; Kundal & Singh, 2024). As a result, this observation can be attributed to the experiences of female law students in India who expect gender constraints in career progression due to organizational cultures that embrace male counterparts.

The nature of work in the legal profession is stressful, and this has a bearing on the well-being of the legal profession, as indicated by the rates of anxiety, depression, and burnout. Stress was a recurring aspect of the five female attorneys practicing in the male-dominated legal sectors discussed; the female attorneys often work beyond their working hours to meet organizational demands (Maits, 2020). Some of the findings made by participants included the need to control expectations from the clients while at the same time dealing with the dilemma of work-life balance. The stigma stemming from the enhanced commitment to career demands hinders the well-being of female attorneys, causing more turnover (Maits, 2020; Meyer, 2024; Nisar & Rasheed, 2020). These findings align with another study on police occupational stress, where the participants experiencing high stress also noted low career satisfaction and work efficiency. Burnout is a manifestation of occupational stress in the legal profession. Legal practitioners in high-stress environments show signs of burnout, poor productivity, and job alienation (Sanders, 2023).

A mixed-method study was conducted in small law firms with eight participants to understand the gaps in gender pay and promotion, and women reported being scrutinized, paid less and promoted less than men (Sanders, 2023). Another study of women attorneys in South Africa also highlighted that the women lawyers who practice law experience high levels of burnout, especially those practicing law in an environment dominated by male colleagues and those still working while balancing other family responsibilities (Meyer, 2024).

Employees claimed they felt the need to work long hours to demonstrate their commitment to the job, which causes stress and hampers career advancement.

Many law firms' workloads are aligned with the billable hour system that drives organizations to support productivity while neglecting employees. When investigating differences in gender within firms, the research authors established that the legal profession requires attorneys to be always on call, beyond regular working hours for their clients (Meyer, 2024; Maits, 2020). Evaluating the extensiveness of billable hours indicates how much work interferes with personal life, thus being unhealthy. Research comparing the experiences of male and female attorneys further revealed that women attorneys struggle to meet these expectations more than their male counterparts because of societal expectations of caregiving (Meyer, 2024). Women request non-standard employment relationships, leading to limited promotions and career advancement.

The attrition rates of legal professionals are relatively high, and occupational stress and burnout are cited as the leading reasons for attorneys to leave their profession. A longitudinal study on career advancement in law firms showed that women lawyers are more likely to leave the profession before attaining partnership than their male counterparts due to the nature of the legal profession (Meyer, 2024). Similar results were found in a study on gendered experiences in law schools, where the female participants were apprehensive about their future careers. They said that the culture of overwork and gender stereotyping remains rife in legal practice (Kundal & Singh, 2024). The study revealed that although female candidates continue to join law schools, their professional retention is significantly low because of various factors.

Essentially, the existence of implicit biases in legal workplaces makes it worse in terms of occupational stress and job satisfaction. The analysis of gender differences in small law firms revealed that female lawyers experience microaggression, limited sponsorship, and exclusion from many networking events that hinder their growth (Sanders, 2023). Also, in the qualitative studies of female lawyers working in corporate law firms in South Africa, women were denied leadership positions due to discrimination, where promotions were done in favor of male counterparts in the workplace (Meyer 2024). These barriers hinder career advancement and exacerbate female attorneys' negative emotions and turnover intentions.

However, as occupational stress is a challenge among legal professionals, the latter adapts to the pressure by developing ways of handling it. According to a phenomenological study on female attorneys, it was found that these women stated that mentorship is one of the essential major components that can help them stay in the workforce and lessen job burnout (Maits, 2020). Lack of social support and working conditions conducive to stress were considered major contributors to stress levels, and participants underlined the need for peer support networks, flexible working arrangements, and well-being programs sponsored by employers. Nevertheless, these resources remain a luxury because firms focus on the workforce's efficiency over the employees' welfare (Sanders, 2023). The analysis also points out the need to adopt physical and administrative structures in the workplace to mitigate stress in the workforce and improve organizational commitment among attorneys.

The working conditions of the legal profession include high occupational stress that affects job satisfaction through increasing turnover rates due to burnout and gender bias (Meyer, 2024; Nisar & Rasheed, 2020; Sanders, 2023). The research emphasizes the necessity of system changes such as flexible working conditions, gender equality in leadership, and the promotion of

legal measures to help attorneys cope with stress (Meyer, 2024; Nisar & Rasheed, 2020; Sanders, 2023). Without these reforms, the legal profession is set to lose more workforce, especially female lawyers who encounter even heightened barriers because of gender, societal roles, and discrimination at the workplace.

Professional Engagement and Career Satisfaction

Motivation, recognition, and job satisfaction are some of the most significant variables that define interaction and dedication in the working arena and career span. When discussing job satisfaction, it is critical to describe the theoretical aspects that may help to understand how and why work motivation and overall satisfaction with the job increase. According to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, there are motivator factors such as recognition, professional growth and advancement, and personal interest that improve job satisfaction, while hygiene factors include organizational policies and environment with its corollary focus on reducing job dissatisfaction (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Empirical evidence from a large sample of the legal workforce also validates this framework by establishing that lawyers with high recognition of authority and control in their work exhibited higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhaya, 2021). Motivation theories enable legal organizations to increase the levels of job satisfaction and career span among their employees.

Employee engagement activities are essential in creating motivation and satisfaction in the workplace. It has been established that structured mentorship, career development, and diversity-based policies can improve job retention and professional satisfaction. Regarding equality, the analysis of retention and promotion policies revealed that offering a mentorship program and clear promotion requirements increased retention rates and decreased gender gaps (Markovic & Plickert, 2023). Finally, policies in work flexibility and family-friendly measures,

including the extension of paid parental leave, also help achieve work-life balance and facilitate long-term employee commitment (Foley et al., 2024). Engagement strategies focus on better-enhancing employee satisfaction, reducing gender differences, and serving as a major tool in long-term employee retention.

Gender inequalities in career advancement and job satisfaction persist in most organizational fields. According to quantitative research applying cross-sectional survey data collected from 9,068 full-time attorneys in Texas, there is a substantial gender pay disparity as women attorneys earn \$35,000 less than men on average at the median even though they are equally qualified and experienced (Markovic & Plickert, 2023). The study also revealed that although high academic achievement strongly influenced male lawyers' earnings, it had little effect on female lawyers' earnings, thus pointing towards prejudice undervaluing women lawyers' human capital (Markovic & Plickert, 2023). Another comparison made on US legal professionals revealed that although women have improved in inputs in terms of legal education and employment, outcomes such as career progression and salary parity remain limited (Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhaya, 2021). Gender inequality in legal professions persists; hence, there is a need to fix inequality in compensation, promotions, and representation in the workplace.

Research findings show that cultural and structural factors lead to female exits in the workplace. For instance, with regards to employment status, it was established that out of a sample of graduates of Harvard Law School, only 60% of the female respondents were fully employed fifteen years after graduation, while a significantly higher percentage of the male respondents were fully employed (Bambauer & Rahman, 2019). A survey of 25,979 alumni of the Law School of the University of Michigan demonstrated that women had more career interruptions for childcare by approximately 5 years (Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhaya, 2021).

The study also indicated that this career break resulted in lower promotions and lifetime earnings compared to male legal professionals, as gender stereotyping affects career commitment (Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhaya, 2021). To examine the seemingly paradoxical position of women attaining an education and entering the legal workplace only to languish in limbo, one must consider both structural and cultural factors.

Further insight into how much motivation and job satisfaction have on career direction can be gained from expectation theory and self determination theory of motivation. This is consistent with the expectancy theory that argues that people will expend more effort if he or she believes that more effort will lead to better performance, which, in turn, will lead to a certain outcome or of reward (Soyoung & Sungchan, 2017). A quantitative study on 3000 employees of US federal organizations revealed that employees who possessed a high work unit performance perception exhibited increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment, reflected by increased hopes of reward expectancy (Soyoung & Sungchan, 2017). Similarly, self-determination theory postulates that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the keys to intrinsic motivation, which is important for career commitment (de Andrade Baptista et al., 2021). A study on workplace motivation identified that decision-making authority and professional development participation significantly demonstrated positive results on job satisfaction and turnover intentions (de Andrade Baptista et al., 2021). The use of motivation theories would improve the levels of job satisfaction and career commitment, therefore decreasing turnover among employees.

However, research aimed at increasing workplace engagement and promoting gender equality has not effectively eliminated this issue. Research shows that women in law who excel academically experience barriers to career progression and remuneration. In studying salary

differentiation in the legal market, the researchers compared the salaries of females, high performers, low performers, and males with the same qualifications (Markovic & Plickert, 2023). The results showed that women, particularly high performers, earned less than high and low-performing males, even when net of occupation and human capital characteristics (Markovic & Plickert, 2023). Also, a systematic study of gender bias in the legal profession indicated that women lawyers were more likely to experience implicit bias, exclusion from high-profile cases, and lower chances of promotion than their male counterparts (Bambauer & Rahman, 2019). Gender bias in law still exists in the form of excluding women from promotion, equal pay for equal work, and choice of high-profile cases.

In professional environments, strategies to enhance interest and commitment must contend with formal and informal prejudices. Organizations that establish formal mentorship, clear promotion methods, and equal remunerations have high employee satisfaction and retention rates (Choroszewicz & Kay, 2022; Lai et al., 2024). Also, actions like implementing a reasonable number of working hours on digital platforms and increasing the time allowed for parental leave have been found to help close the gender gap in career advancement and increase long-term job satisfaction (Foley et al., 2024). To that end, it is crucial to identify that ending the miseducation of female professionals involves both narrow changes to the organizational systems and processes that hire, promote, evaluate, and reward females in the workplace and broader cultural shifts regarding the types of work women should do, the value of that work, and the types of workers that women are and could be.

Workplace Support Structures: Mentorship, Flexible Work Arrangements, and Management

Work support resources, such as mentoring, work flexibility, and adequate management, are essential in overall professional fulfillment and career involvement. They form part of the organizational factors that define the working environment and affect the employee's job satisfaction. As Herzberg highlighted in his two-factor theory, physical and psychological needs are the main sources of motivation; the need for achievement and recognition will enhance satisfaction, while dissatisfaction may result from hygiene factors, including company policies, interpersonal relationships, work environment, and other factors (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Promotional provisions improve contentment with work, while deficient organizational factors lead to discontentment and demotivation.

A mentor has been labeled as a guide in the workplace, responsible for the development and satisfaction of a professional. The literature estimates that workers who participate in mentorship programs feel more satisfied in their jobs and have better chances for developmental prospects than their counterparts without access to such a program (Kay & Wallace, 2009; Choroszewicz & Kay, 2022). Alshmemri et al. (2017) focus on 453 foreign-trained nurses to determine that while job satisfaction is related to various elements of support and recognition, mentorship is a key factor that supports it. In the same way, when women were provided with a formal mentor, they reported increased levels of career satisfaction in the legal profession, but lack of access to informal mentoring threatened their career mobility in the long run (Hersch & Meyers, 2018). Mentoring improves job satisfaction and professional advancement, but lack of it hinders career advancement.

Another important feature of workplace support structures is flexibility at work. Several new opportunities have appeared as digital technologies make it possible to combine work and

personal life so efficiently. However, the concept of "connectivity compulsion" asserts that as a result of having digital tools, people can expect even more connectedness, which results in job pressure and unhappiness rather than gaining more freedom (Foley et al. 2024). In a study conducted in Australia with 63 legal professionals, many participants noted higher work intensification due to digital presenteeism, which blurs the work-life boundary (Foley et al., 2024). Regarding flexibility in the public sector, workers stated that flexibility benefits the enhanced work-life balance, but they face difficulties in demarcating time and separating interactions with clients and colleagues (Soyoung & Sungchan, 2017). While thus providing flexibility for work-life balance, digital presenteeism, on the other hand, escalates work pressure and erases boundaries.

In the modern world, achieving and maintaining professional fulfillment is impossible without properly managing available resources. According to Alshmemri et al. (2017), employees have a higher level of motivation and engagement when they find that their managers are supportive and honest. Alshmemri et al.'s (2017) systematic review of job satisfaction research on Saudi nurses reported that employees' policies and supervision quality were predictive of retention. Furthermore, the expectancy theory establishes that employees will be more motivated when they expect their efforts to yield worthwhile rewards (Soyoung & Sungchan, 2017). This applies to various competitive fields, where organizational career advancement and performance-based rewards help to boost employees' commitment.

Organizational Response to Gender-Specific Challenges

Gender-related issues in the workplace continue to be a challenge even as the workplace evolves to offer equal opportunity to its employees across the gender divide.

Female representation remains a challenge in leadership positions and promotions, and some

organizations compensate women less (Choroszewicz & Kay, 2022). Hersch and Meyers (2018) conducted a longitudinal survey among US law graduates, where females from elite institutions and men reported the same level of satisfaction, while the women from lower-ranked law schools described themselves as less satisfied due to a lack of opportunities to advance in their roles. This implies that unequal distribution of power still impacts individuals' career paths.

Thus, gender disparity is significantly presented in the legal profession. A survey conducted among female patent attorneys in Australia and New Zealand revealed that 75% of respondents encountered clients' bias during their practice, and 41% of respondents experienced workplace sexual harassment (Lai et al., 2024). Some of these challenges led to lateral career mobility, with women moving to in-house positions or starting their respective practices since the legal environments were hostile (Lai et al., 2024). Likewise, in a recent survey among female lawyers, over half of the respondents pointed to the "boys' club" as an obstacle to women's progress, proving the endurance of the gendered nature of exclusion (Lai et al., 2024). Discrimination and marginalization of female lawyers in the legal profession negatively impact career development and workplace contentment.

Flexible work arrangements have been promoted to address gender disparities, particularly for employees balancing professional responsibilities with caregiving duties. However, as shown in this article, such arrangements, while enabling individuals to balance work and family, perpetuates gendered employment patterns. Another study on digital connectedness in legal professions revealed that women assumed digital overwork stress, with 60% of women represented in the study complaining of increased stress due to pressure from clients (Foley et al., 2024). To tackle such issues, some call for implementing a 'right to disconnect' to prevent flexibility caused by digital technology from harming the employee (Foley

et al., 2024). Implementing a "right to disconnect" policy can alleviate stress due to overworking and inequality based on gender.

Analysis

Theoretical Implications and Practical Interventions

The literature review sheds light on several important themes related to the job satisfaction of attorneys based on gender variance. There are four key theoretical frameworks that can be used to analyze these themes from three distinct perspectives individual, organizational and societal the four theoretical frameworks are Herzberg's Two Factor theory, Expectancy theory, Self Determination theory and Equity theory. This multifaceted analysis sheds light on the myriad forces involved in whether a lawyer will be happy doing their job.

Individual Perspective: Psychological Factors and Career Motivation

In the individual perspective the job satisfaction of the legal professional is largely dependent upon the psychological factors and career motive. The Two Factor theory given by Herzberg is a powerful knowledge base on which to understand the dynamics of these variables by separating motivator and hygiene factors. Consequently, according to this theory, satisfaction is derived from the motivator variables of recognition, achievement and growth opportunities, and loss of satisfaction is brought about by the hygiene variables such organizational policies, working environment, and interpersonal relationships if the motivator variables fail (Alshmemri et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2022). In fact, even though female attorneys suffer more negative job conditions in the workplace than do their male counterparts, they report the same overall job satisfaction because their satisfaction comes from intrinsic motivators (achievement and recognition) that may offset their dissatisfaction with hygiene factors.

For example, the individual perspective brings out how personal expectations and values do matter in job satisfaction. The findings and the literature suggest the differences between the priorities of male and female attorneys. For example, women, in general, generally place greater value on flexibility and work-life balance than men (Andrade et al., 2019; Anker & Krill, 2021). Since those values vary, so does the satisfaction outcome, even for similar working conditions. This is because female attorneys have higher stress when organizations neglect to accommodate their work-family balance needs, resulting in higher turnover rates among the women facing the work-family conflict (Anker & Krill, 2021).

However, Self Determination Theory (SDT) adds further to this individual perspective by focusing on three innate psychological needs autonomy, being competent and being related to others. According to de Andrade Baptista et al. (2021), satisfaction of these needs is essential to intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being, according to SDT. Indeed, the literature shows that legal careers limit the ability of women to satisfy these needs. Female attorneys often lack case selection autonomy, have fewer opportunities to showcase competence by taking on visible assignments, or have weaker relatedness, having been excluded from the network (Bambauer & Rahman, 2019; Sanders, 2023). Using this theoretical lens, this theory explains why women may be less motivated in legal environments that are male-dominated that do not support these fundamental psychological needs.

Organizational Perspective: Structural Factors and Workplace Culture

For legal professionals, the psychological factors and the motivations for career are important factors that influence job satisfaction from an individual point of view. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides an important base of knowledge for understanding the dynamics of these variables by discerning between motivator and hygiene factors.

In line with this theory, satisfaction is generated by the motivator factors of recognition, achievement, and growth opportunities, whereas the loss of satisfaction is caused by hygiene factors like organizational policies, work environment, and interpersonal relationships if the former is inadequate (Alshmemri et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2022). The reason why, despite experiencing more negative workplace conditions, female attorneys report similar overall job satisfaction as their male counterparts is that their satisfaction comes from intrinsic motivators (such as achievement and recognition) that may offset dissatisfaction with hygiene factors.

For example, the individual perspective brings out how personal expectations and values do matter in job satisfaction. The findings and the literature suggest the differences between the priorities of male and female attorneys. For example, women, overall, generally place greater value on flexibility and work-life balance than men (Andrade et al., 2019; Anker & Krill, 2021). Since those values vary, so does the satisfaction outcome, even for similar working conditions. This is because female attorneys have higher stress when organizations neglect to accommodate their work-family balance needs, resulting in higher turnover rates among the women facing the work-family conflict (Anker & Krill, 2021).

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be less motivated in legal environments that are male-dominated that do not support these fundamental psychological needs.

Societal Perspective: Cultural Norms and Institutional Factors

From a societal perspective, cultural norms and institutional factors that create systemic pressures have a crucial influence on gender differences in legal professionals' job satisfaction. These underlying dynamics are well explained by the framework of Equity Theory, which focuses on individuals' perceptions of fairness from the other's point of view (Andrade et al., 2019). According to this theory, people evaluate their situation on the basis of situational inputs (effort, qualifications) and situational outcomes (rewards, recognition) relative to the referent others. Dissatisfaction and attempts to restore equity occur when inequity is perceived.

The literature reports some very glaring equity issues within the legal profession. Women attorneys continuously face discrimination, harassment, and implicit biases, resulting in inequitable conditions (Lai et al., 2024). An example is that 75% of female patent attorneys were victimized by client bias and 41% by workplace sexual harassment (Lai et al., 2024). The fact becomes a fundamental sense of inequity that no matter what workplace factors exist, they bring down job satisfaction.

Equity perceptions are also subject to more general broader societal expectations regarding gender roles. Societally, women attorneys are pulled in two different directions, as they are expected to be meritorious in both the professional and traditional caregiving duties. Thus, this double standard establishes an equity imbalance since male attorneys do not, in most cases, experience counterbalancing double pressure. Research suggests that women lawyers have more career interruptions for childcare than, on average, about five years (Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhyaya, 2021). One of the most significant factors that affect career progression and

lifetime earnings is these interruptions, which affect job satisfaction and job equity in the long term.

Professional norms and legal frameworks also shape equity perceptions. Traditionally, the legal profession values long and dedicated hours and constant availability, which is onerous to women with caregiving responsibilities (Meyer, 2024; Maits, 2020). At the same time, the great challenge stems from insufficient institutional support, like absence of a parental leave policy and the lack of protection at the workplace against discrimination. According to the literature, countries and organizations with more institutional support for gender equality (e.g., strong parental leave policies and anti-discrimination measures) also have higher rates of female attorney retention (Lai, Zhengg, & Zheng, 2024).

Integration of Theoretical Perspectives

In the integration of these three perspectives—individual, organizational, and societal—with the use of multiple theoretical frameworks, the complexity and multiplicity of the gender difference in the job satisfaction of legal professionals is made evident. These perspectives work in opposition and reinforce each other to build systemic patterns that determine an individual's career outcomes and satisfaction.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory explains why people are motivated, and the Expectancy Theory illuminates how organizations shape their motivations. By linking individual and organizational perspectives, the Self-Determination Theory suggests how workplace environments hamper or facilitate the meeting of basic psychological needs. Finally, the third perspective, Equity Theory, ties all three to one another by closing the loop regarding how perceptions of fairness (based on individual value, organizational practice & social norms) decide job satisfaction.

This integrated analysis implies that coordinated interventions at multiple levels are necessary for facing gender differences in job satisfaction. For organizations, they explain why a high level of certainty is necessary, and at the individual level, attorneys require personal resources and strategies to deal with their career challenges. At the organizational level, law firms need to make structural changes in order to create more equitable and supportive environments. Becoming policies realize wider cultural movements and economic shifts at the societal level to reduce the systemic pressure.

Practical Implications for Legal Organizations

Several practical implications for legal organizations in order to increase job satisfaction and reduce gender disparities are deduced from the theoretical analysis. However, first, organizations need to create developed mentorship programs with formal support structures, especially for women and minorities who do not have fair access to informal networks. Consistently, the research identified that having an effective mentor leads to career satisfaction and career progression (Yu & Lee, 2021; Choroszewicz & Kay, 2022).

The second one is that organizations should adopt flexible work arrangements that actually fulfill different needs as opposed to putting new pressure on them. This includes the establishment of 'right to disconnect' policies that protect employees from digital overwork while still allowing what the literature refers to as professional and personal responsibility (Foley et al., 2024). These are particularly important to implementing such policies for female attorneys, whose burdens in terms of caregiving may be disproportionate.

The third is that organizations should heed transparent, merit-based promotion and compensation systems that reduce the impact of implicit biases. There are clear criteria for advancement and equity audits to regularly force the impact of disparities before they become

ingrained (Markovic & Plickert, 2023). Organizations should also prepare their own specific diversity and inclusion initiatives that tackle known barriers to women's advancement in the legal profession.

The fourth is an organization should create a supportive culture that values well-being as well as performance. It also includes acknowledging and responding to the high prevalence of mental health concerns in the legal profession, which disproportionately impairs women (Anker & Krill, 2021). There are programs aimed at improving work-life balance, stress management, and boosting people's psychological well-being, which in turn boost job satisfaction while reducing stress, burnout and employee attrition.

Based on theoretical perspectives, there is a pathway for legal organizations to use these practical interventions to develop more equitable and satisfying environments for all attorneys, irrespective of whether they are female or male. Legal organizations can reduce disparities in job satisfaction by addressing the particular people, groups, and organizations that determine how a job is done.

Ethical Implications

The fact that gender disparities persist in legal professionals' job satisfaction brings up serious ethical problems that go beyond the path of individual experiences and permeate into the wider society. They can be analyzed through the ethical dimensions of justice, well-being, professional integrity and organizational responsibility. The ethical implications to be understood in these aspects imply that there is a moral obligation to deal with the issue of gender differences in job satisfaction in the field of law.

Justice and Fairness

From an ethical standpoint, not treating gender equally in the workplace of law is a fundamental injustice in conflict with the core principles of fairness and equality. Basic ethical principles of merit-based treatment are violated when female attorneys are discriminated against, harassed, and have restricted opportunities for advancement in their careers despite equal qualifications and contributions to their firms (Schönberger, 2019). In the literature, it is found that the patterns of such injustice are deeply troubling— women attorneys earn less on average and suffer from greater barriers to promotion and more harassment and discrimination (Markovic and Plickert, 2023; Lai et al., 2024).

These are the marks of a failed distributive justice system that must bring the allocation of benefits and burdens equitably. If the legal profession consistently denies women's contributions but makes demands disproportionate to their contribution and does not respect distributive justice principles, then it fails. Additionally, when promotion and compensation decisions are based on gender bias as opposed to standards, procedural justice is violated (Heise et al., 2019). These injustices not only harm the individual lawyers but also undermine the ethical basis of the legal profession. This is essentially a committed calling to uphold justice and equality.

These ethical concerns cannot be ignored because structural inequalities that remain beyond the legal profession extend to a wider society. Law firms and legal institutions greatly affect cultural norms and practices as they are social actors with influence. These institutions tacitly accept gender disparities and legitimize discrimination more widely, so they do contribute to systemic injustice (Schönberger (2019), Kline (2023)). By contrast, legal organizations that actively promote gender equality as an ethical exemplar can show that fairness and equal opportunity in a high-pressure professional environment is not a fantasy.

Wellbeing and Mental Health

Concerns about health, mental health, and well-being, which are human goods of the highest order, and which organizations have a moral responsibility to protect, also have implications for the ethical nature of gender disparity. This is simply because female attorneys (Anker & Krill, 2021) have always been subjected to ample stress, depression and hazardous drinking as compared to their male colleagues. These mental health disparities are an ethical concern because they indicate that conditions of work are harming women unequally in the legal profession.

From this utilitarian ethical perspective (or, more generally, from an ethical perspective dedicated to maximizing overall well-being), these disparities are a moral failure. Legal organizations are creating systematic conditions of lower well-being for female attorneys for little increase in happiness in aggregate. In addition, from a deontological point of view, where people are viewed as the ends, not the means, in establishing ethical principles such as individuals need to be treated as ends in themselves as opposed to mere means to organizational aims (Heise et al., 2019; Holt et al., 2024), these discordances are unethical.

The ethical issues pertaining to workplace inequalities and their contribution to sustainability and the future prospect of legal careers in the long run also affect particular relationships to mental health. Not only is it a personal tragedy to 25% of women attorneys who contemplate leaving the profession because of mental health problems (versus 17% of men), but it is also a loss of talent and diversity for the profession (Anker & Krill, 2021). An organization's ethical responsibility is to offer sustainable career paths in which individuals are not forced to choose between professional success and personal wellbeing.

Professional Integrity and Client Service

It also raises such ethical questions as whether or not gender disparities have an impact on professional integrity and the quality of the service to the clients. Competence, diligence and zealous representation are the basis on which the legal profession is based. Thus, when workplace conditions systematically put female attorneys at a disadvantage through excessive stress, limited opportunities, or little support, the conditions in the workplace do not uphold these core ethical values (Hofer & Achury, 2021; Whawell, 2022).

The high turnover rates of female attorneys create a break in the relationship with clients and institutional knowledge, which may diminish the quality of legal services provided. Additionally, such gender biases that keep women from having the chance to work on high profile cases or move up the ladder prevents clients from the benefit of diverse perspectives and talents which could have helped with problem solving and advocacy (Kline, 2023). Failure to address these problems harms the companies' female employees work with and places the organizations at risk of violating their ethical obligations to clients.

Additionally, research suggests that diversity of legal teams increases opportunities to derive better outcomes for clients when applying diverse perspectives to difficult challenges (Hofer & Achury, 2021). Such a reduction in the diversity of legal teams at senior levels, for example, may reduce the quality of legal services if the gender disparities reduce diversity of thought. Thus, dealing with gender inequity in terms of work satisfaction is not simply a matter of corporate management because it is also a matter born of principle and professional integrity, as well as client service.

Organizational Responsibility and Leadership

If you are in a legal organization, there is a specific ethical responsibility to address gender disparities in job satisfaction because you are in a position of influence and this is an obligation of your work. Law firms and legal departments are 'stewards' of an honorable profession with special ethical obligations. If when these organizations fail to deal with known inequalities that negatively affect female attorneys, they turn a blind eye to their moral duty as leaders of within the profession (Kline, 2023; Schönberger, 2019).

The extent of this responsibility goes beyond compliance with anti-discrimination laws, or even simply enacting policies aimed at making workplaces equitable, but to act and truly create equitable workplaces. Ignoring or denying gender equality and the correlating results in job satisfaction can lead these organizations to further support existing structural inequality thereby allowing it to continue as a cruel norm (Heise et al. 2019; Holt et al. 2024).

On the other hand, organizations which are making an active effort in reducing these disparities through mentorship; flexible work arrangement and inclusive policies are fulfilling their ethical leadership responsibilities.

Transparency and accountability also fall under the concept of ethical leadership. Acknowledging, measuring and remedying gender disparities for the better is an ethical duty of legal organizations. Organizations that do not collect or share gender data, that do not have measurable goals of improving conditions, or that don't share gender data, get away with not being accountable and keeping bad conditions going (Schönberger, 2019). It implies an honest appraisal of the organizational shortcomings and the commitment to act on them.

In short, the ethical issues relating to gender disadvantages in job satisfaction for legal professionals are complex and numerous. Such disparities violate basic principles of justice and fairness, harm wellbeing and mental health, undermine professional integrity and client service,

and are a significant failure at the level of organizational responsibility and leadership. For this, it is essential to have the comprehensive and people centered actions to answer the ethical questions at the individual, organizational and societal levels to bring forth a legal profession that exactly bridges its ethical ideals. To do nothing about these issues plagues individual attorneys and leads to the destruction of the legal profession's moral fiber.

Policy Recommendations

Therefore, it is recommended that legal organizations adopt the following policy measures to improve job satisfaction and retain law school graduates, particularly women. First, the development of sustainable mentorship models can be a great boost to the effort of closing the gender satisfaction gap, as support and guidance, especially on how to overcome some gender barriers that women may meet as they take their respective careers, is important (Yu & Lee, 2021). Also, flexible work arrangements can help the staff balance work and other demands, thus reducing stress and improving the work-life balance (Mundy & Seuffert, 2020). Additionally, organizations should enhance gender equity in career progression so that career reviews and promotions are done without bias and for the right reasons that can solve status differences between genders (Andrade et al., 2019). If appropriately implemented, all these policies help promote diversity in the workplace and satisfaction and continuity in legal careers.

Finally, legal organizations should adopt other practices, such as mentorship programs and work arrangements, to reduce gender differences and increase satisfaction in the workplace. Mentorship programs are essential tools to support and enhance the professional development of lawyers, especially women who may encounter difficulties in masculine work settings (Yu & Lee, 2021). These programs help develop leadership skills and cultivate system support, mitigating feelings of loneliness and improving professional wellbeing. On the same note,

flexible work arrangements enable the workforce to manage organizational and family obligations, increasing work-life balance (Mundy & Seuffert, 2020). These policy measures should be implemented to ensure a positive organizational culture and manner that supports gender equality in legal organizations so as to enhance the retention rate among the workforce and their level of satisfaction.

Also, it helps improve satisfaction and turnover in legal firms' workplaces. By being approachable to their team members and offering them support and positive feedback, managers can decrease stress levels and increase a sense of belonging within the workplace. Such managerial support also meets the employees' intrinsic motivational needs, as explained by Herzberg's Two Factor Theory, hence enhancing job satisfaction (Lee et al., 2022). Furthermore, supportive feedback and creating chances for growth are the crucial steps that enrich gender gaps within legal fields and provide equal opportunities for professional promotion (Andrade et al., 2019). Through these supportive management practices, legal organizations enhance the subordinates' satisfaction level and retain them by considering their employees' peculiarities regardless of gender differences.

Last, the finalized workplace policies must be continuously reviewed to suit every employee's complicated requirements and ensure equality in the workplace. In conclusion, focusing on evaluating the effectiveness of the mentorship programs and other flexible work arrangements implemented within the workplace means that any shortcomings in addressing gender issues will be highlighted during the evaluation process, thus increasing the job satisfaction of employees of all genders. The firm's human resource management policies should follow Herzberg's Two Factor Theory patterns that require alteration of organizational policies given new trends in legal fields and employees' expectations, as posited by Lee et al. (2022).

Such assessments help legal organizations introduce changes necessary for their staff and the organization to become more fair and less stressed and advance its members' careers (Andrade et al., 2019). Thus, it is imperative to actively explore and adapt the policies recurrently to maintain job satisfaction and employee turnover, especially regarding gender disparities in the legal profession.

Summary

Job satisfaction is an important aspect that is a determinant of retention and the productivity of individuals, especially in the legal profession for fresh graduates from law school and mid-career employees. This paper focuses on some of the gender gaps with regard to job satisfaction through assessing the role of job pressure, the role of the work environment support system, and working commitment. Various research works that have been conducted have revealed that male and female attorneys are equally content with their careers, but various factors, such as work-to-family conflict, emotional depletion, and promotion prospects (Andrade et al., 2019). Gendered experience captures how men and women engage in their careers as female lawyers suffer from higher stress, prejudice, and mentorship in workplaces, resulting in high turnover (Boiarintseva & Richardson, 2019). Focusing on the gender gaps in job satisfaction is important to increase retention and fairness in employment of legal positions.

The general legal practice is best known for being a highly stressed job where workers are subjected to undue pressure due to high workload, client pressure, and lengthy working hours. Previous research has shown that job stress negatively affects job satisfaction and increases turnover intent, especially among female employees (Nisar & Rasheed, 2020; Meyer, 2024). Additional stress factors are unique to female lawyers: gender roles' expectations within society and within the family lead to decreased career progression and professional burnout

(Maits, 2020; Sanders, 2023). Studies have also revealed that the over-competitive legal profession is unfavorable for women, as they are more likely to receive fewer high-profile cases or receive promotions (Kundal & Singh, 2024). In addition, the demands of having to bill hours lead to work-life imbalance, and this has created a situation in which many women leave the practice before attaining partnership.

However, these challenges can be managed by embracing professional engagement to reduce job dissatisfaction and burnout. Intrinsic motivation, recognition, and autonomy are key factors determining the job satisfaction of attorneys and their long-term organizational commitment (Dau-Schmidt & Mukhopadhaya, 2021). Workplace support structures such as a mentorship program, flexibility at the workplace, and management support are crucial in promoting job satisfaction and career advancement (Choroszewicz & Kay, 2022). Though these resources are still limited and not evenly distributed, for instance, women experience a shortage of mentors and gendered discrimination at the workplace (Hersch, 2023). The studies have pointed out that law firms ought to adopt structured mentorship and transparent promotion policies to increase female legal profession staff retention and satisfaction.

With reference to the existing theoretical frameworks, namely Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and the Expectancy Theory, it is possible to identify the key factors affecting gender-based differentiation of job satisfaction. According to Herzberg's theory, motivation factors such as recognition and promotion lead to job satisfaction, while hygiene factors such as company policies and working environment cause job dissatisfaction (Alshmemri et al., 2017). The Expectancy Theory posits that if employees are to be motivated, there must be perceived valence between efforts, performance, and rewards; however, this valuation is dampened for women primarily because of the promotion and remuneration practices that favor men (Soyoung &

Sungchan, 2017). According to the Self-Determination Theory, autonomy, competence, and relatedness are equally present and necessary in professional life, especially in highly stressful legal occupations where a support system can greatly determine satisfaction at work (de Andrade Baptista et al., 2021). Evaluating such theories aids in eradicating gender differences in talent management while enhancing legal careers.

Based on such findings, legal organizations must develop and enact strong policy measures to enhance gender equality and job satisfaction. It is acknowledged that mentorship programs can be beneficial to female attorneys in availing them of career guidance, development prospects, and support networks (Yu & Lee, 2021). Some policies, including working from home, flextime, and parental leave, have beneficial impacts on stress and balancing work, making women lawyers reduce their turnover rates (Mundy & Seuffert, 2020). Promotion and salary increases should be granted fairly to address the problem of some promotions and remunerations based on gendered presumptions (Andrade et al., 2019). According to Choroszewicz and Kay (2022) and Lai et al. (2024), there has been evidence that shows that firms that engage in structured diversity programs to tackle gender disparities tend to have higher levels of employee satisfaction and a better ability to retain their employees in the long run.

The potential consequences of continuing to observe gender differences in job satisfaction are rather ethical. Historical imbalances in work-related environments cause stress, mental health issues, and high turnover among women lawyers (Heise et al., 2019; Holt et al., 2024). If not dealt with, these issues breach legal organizations' principles of discriminating against employees and being unfair in the workplace (Schönberger, 2019). Second, a lack of affirmative support measures demoralizes employees and undermines a diverse presentation of professions and of lawyers (Hofer & Achury, 2021). For these reasons, to maintain ethical

standards, firms should ensure that they practice gender equity and ensure that careers of their workers are sustainable.

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