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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EVALUATION OF THE LEVELS OF PROFESSIONAL SATISFACTION AMONG BULGARIAN GENERAL DENTAL PRACTITIONERS: A PILOT STUDY

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Abstract

Background: In dental practice, the degree of professional satisfaction depends on a number of factors such as the duration of experience, personal characteristics of workers, factors of the working environment, income, socio-cultural factors such as the organization of the healthcare system and the attitudes of patients to dentists etc. The aim of this cross-sectional study was to evaluate the levels of job satisfaction of Bulgarian general dental practitioners.

Materials and Methods: Subjects of observation in the study were 80 Bulgarian general dental practitioners. The technical observation units in this study were individual and group practices for dental care located on the territory of Bulgaria.

Results: 90.8% of all respondents were satisfied with their practice of dental medicine. The highest percentage of lack of professional satisfaction was registered in the group of general dentists with over 30 years of experience - 6.6% versus 1.3% for the group with up to 10 years and the group up to 30 years.

Conclusion: Bulgarian general practitioners are with high average professional satisfaction and self-esteem from the practice of dental medicine - 90.8%.

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Introduction:-

Professional satisfaction is a complex issue dependent on so many variables, which at times and in different circumstances may be difficult to define and measure. Professional satisfaction can be defined as the fulfillment of a person's expectations from a particular profession (Petkova, 1993). In dental practice, the degree of professional satisfaction depends on a number of factors such as the duration of experience, continuous education, income, personal characteristics of workers, the factors of the working environment, some socio-cultural factors such as the organization of the healthcare system and the attitudes of patients to doctors, etc. (Stobbe et al., 2021). The question of satisfaction is a complex subjective indicator of work attitude, *multifactorially* defined and not uniquely affecting the individual (Assiry et al., 2022).

However, as any other profession, dentistry is a rewarding job as well. Various elements at dental work may give and increase job satisfaction – dentists' social recognition, position in society, self-realization, and many other factors in everyday practice (Sabitova et al., 2020). Career satisfaction has been described as the "positive emotional

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state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience." It is linked to various aspects of patient care and health system outcomes as well as to general life contentment and job performance (Petkova, 1993).

Vodenicharov's research on new graduate doctors is of interest. His data on the coincidence between the preconceptions about the medical profession and the post-graduation notion shows the following: complete coincidence - 24%, partial coincidence - 62%, lack of coincidence - 12%. According to the author, such a mismatch in concepts may become a source of subsequent disappointments, dissatisfaction, professional apathy, and the associated poor effectiveness and poor quality of doctors' work, medical staff turnover, etc. (Vodenicharov, 1980).

In the dental profession, professional satisfaction is related to the interest in the specialty. Along with this requirement, future dental practitioners need to have some dexterity and a preliminary idea of the nature of the profession. It is not uncommon for the preliminary view of the future profession to be covered by reality, and this is a prerequisite for future dissatisfaction with the chosen profession (Evtimov, 1976).

Therefore, it is extremely important that the motives for choosing the profession are well-understood and judged. Some older studies conducted in our country reported that a significant part of the students have no full idea of the nature of their future work (Topalova, 1983; Yolov, 1986). There is not recent research on this topic. **The aim** of this cross-sectional study was to evaluate the levels of job satisfaction among registered Bulgarian general practitioners of dental medicine according to the duration of their professional experience.

Materials and Methods:-

Subjects of observation in the study were 80 Bulgarian officially registered general dental practitioners. The technical observation units in the study were individual and group practices for dental care located in 10 cities on the territory of Bulgaria (Sofia, Varna, Vidin, Vratsa, Pernik, Mezdra, Teteven, Silistra, General Toshevo, Stara Zagora). A questionnaire-based study was carried out to assess the level of professional satisfaction among Bulgarian general dentists with different duration of experience. A questionnaire was prepared consisting of 10 questions related to various aspects of the level of professional satisfaction.

Inclusion criteria

were as follows: (1) a minimum of 1 year of professional experience and (2) membership to an official Bulgarian dental association. All dentists who were invited to participate in this study gave their consent. The information was obtained from an anonymous poll. The anonymity of the questionnaire was ensured. All participants completed correctly the proposed questionnaire. Data were collected and summarized for a period of 3 months (1st October-31st December 2021). The respondents were divided into 4 groups according to the duration of their professional experience: **Group 1** - with experience up to 10 years; **Group 2** - with experience up to 25 years; **Group 3** - with experience up to 30 years; **Group 4** - with experience over 30 years.

Statistical methods:

All data were processed with a SPSS 25.0 statistical package (SPSS, Inc. Chikago, IL). Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation was used to evaluate the results. The significance of the differences between the groups was examined by using t-test. α -level was set at 0.05 and $p < 0.05$ was considered as statistically significant.

Results:-

The results of the present study showed high level of professional satisfaction among Bulgarian dental practitioners. As seen in Table 1, 90.8% of all respondents are satisfied with their practice of dental medicine.

Table 1:- Professional satisfaction among Bulgarian dentists.

Professional satisfaction among dentists	Number	%
Yes	69	90,8
No	7	9,2
Total	76	100,0

The results in Table 2 show the distribution of the job satisfaction according to the duration of experience. A high percentage of professional satisfaction was observed in all groups. Equally high than 80% was the rate of career

satisfaction with dental practitioners with varying duration of experience, without statistically significant difference between the four groups ($p > 0.05$).

The highest percentage for lack of professional satisfaction was registered in the general dentists group with over 30 years of experience - 6.6% versus 1.3% for the general dental practitioners group with up to 10 years and for the general dental doctors up to 30 years.

Table 2:- Distribution of professional satisfaction among Bulgarian dental practitioners by duration of work experience.

Cross-table			Professional satisfaction		Total
			Yes	No	
Experience	Up to 10 years	Number	7	1	8
		% experience	87,5%	12,5%	100,0%
		% professional satisfaction	10,1%	14,3%	10,5%
		% general	9,2%	1,3%	10,5%
	Up to 25 years	Number	7	0	7
		% experience	100,0%	0,0%	100,0%
		% professional satisfaction	10,1%	0,0%	9,2%
		% general	9,2%	0,0%	9,2%
	Up to 30 years	Number	12	1	13
		% experience	92,3%	7,7%	100,0%
		% professional satisfaction	17,4%	14,3%	17,1%
		% general	15,8%	1,3%	17,1%
	Over 30 years	Number	43	5	48
		% experience	89,6%	10,4%	100,0%
		% professional satisfaction	62,3%	71,4%	63,2%
		% general	56,6%	6,6%	63,2%
General	Number	69	7	76	
	% experience	90,8%	9,2%	100,0%	
	% professional satisfaction	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	
	% general	90,8%	9,2%	100,0%	

Discussion:-

Job satisfaction of dental practitioners is important because of the consequences of low satisfaction among them, such as health problems for the dentists themselves, as well as less satisfied patients and poor clinical outcomes. The dentist with low job satisfaction appeared to be the most vulnerable to all burnout dimensions. For that reason it is important to highlight the aspects that improve well-being in dentistry to reduce burnout, which would lead to greater work engagement and better attention to patients (Molina-Hernández et al., 2021; Slabšinskienė et al., 2021).

In an older study conducted by E. Evtimov, extremely low levels of satisfaction and strongly negative attitudes of Bulgarian dental practitioners towards their own profession were reported, growing with the accumulation of professional experience (Evtimov, 1976). A decade later Yolov reported 67.28% of professional satisfaction among dentists (Yolov, 1986). In recent study Avramova and Yaneva (2013) found that general dental practitioners in Bulgaria demonstrate high levels of professional satisfaction - about two-thirds of them are satisfied with their own job (66.5%) and 29.8% are partially satisfied. The summarized data of these two groups is close to results found in the present study (90.8%). According to Avramova (2014) a complete professional satisfaction was inherent in the dentists up to 30 years of age. The practitioners with up to 10 years of experience, as well as the group with over 30 years, had partial satisfaction. Only about 4% were dissatisfied and in particular those with work experience of up to 20 years. The author concluded that a higher degree of full professional satisfaction is associated only with the opportunity and sufficient time for continuing education.

Job satisfaction varies between dentists and countries (Sabitova, 2020). According to the results found in this investigation, 90.8% of Bulgarian dental practitioners are satisfied with their practice of dental medicine. Similar data for high percentage professional satisfaction - 80.7% and only 1.6% lack of it among Latvian general

practitioners were found in a study carried out by Puriene et al. (Puriene,2007). Slightly lower job satisfaction was reported among Pakistani dentists – 71% (Barket et al, 2017). According to Kaipa et al. (2017), high levels of satisfaction were found in Indian dentists with 1-5 years of experience.

Professional satisfaction greatly enriches dental practitioners and gives them pleasure, joy and motivation for even more quality work and constant pursuit of improvement and development of their clinical experience. There are several key factors responsible for high professional satisfaction, such as the working environment, the payment, relations between colleagues etc. (Barket et al., 2017; Kapoor et al., 2014). According to Assiry et al. (2022) a higher percentage of satisfaction among dentists in Saudi Arabia was seen with the “fellow and colleague’s workers” dimension. At the same time, the income was the aspect with which the dentists showed extreme dissatisfaction.

A recent study found that dentists working in group practices were happier with income, benefits and culture at the workplace, and are exposed to less work-related stress compared to dental practitioners in stand-alone practices (Lo Sasso et al., 2015). In contrast, other authors report that dental practitioners working in group practices are less satisfied with some aspects of their career in terms of income (Starkel et al., 2015).

In a systematic review and meta-analysis of data from 79 studies with 45 714 participants, Sabitova et al. (2020) found that 60% of physicians and dentists were satisfied with their job, but 32% of them working mainly in middle-income countries exceeded the high threshold for job burnout.

Conclusion:-

Despite the fact that Bulgaria is a country with low to middle income for dentists, a high level of professional satisfaction among Bulgarian general dental practitioners and their self-esteem from the practice was found - 90.8%. Although this study presents a limited sample size, this information may be helpful in planning a further large-scale career satisfaction survey of both general practitioners and endodontists.

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