

Job Satisfaction Dimensions in Public Accounting Practice

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Abstract

This paper investigates gender differences in reported job satisfaction and career choices revealed by a postal survey of accountants from the Queensland Division of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia. Of particular interest are levels of satisfaction with remuneration and promotion. Two moderating factors of career age and firm size are also considered. Consistent with prior research, female accountants reported dissatisfaction with their opportunities for promotion. However, unlike prior research there was no evidence of a gender effect in remuneration levels, and in reported satisfaction with remuneration. Nor were there differences in satisfaction across age bands, and public accounting firms of different size. The link between satisfaction levels of female accountants and their career choices of leaving their current employer, moving to part-time employment, or leaving the accounting profession was also investigated. Consistent with a large body of organisational and accounting research, low levels of job satisfaction were associated with higher turnover intentions for female accountants.

1. Introduction

In recent years that has been much discussion about gender effects and the so-called "glass ceiling" for women in public accounting and elsewhere (e.g. Hooks and Cheramy, 1989, Pillsbury, Capozzoli and Ciampa, 1989, Reed, Kratchman and Strawser, 1994). Gender issues

are subject to high levels of scrutiny within the accounting profession because men and women are recruited to the profession in almost equal numbers, yet only a small proportion of women reach the higher levels of the profession such as senior manager and partner. There appears to be an inability to retain as many partners and managers as desirable (e.g. Pillsbury *et al.*, 1989; Ferguson and Wine, 1993; Schwartz, 1996). There is concern that women comprise a significant proportion of those leaving the profession, with the issue described as the "corporate flight of women managers" (Hooks and Chermay, 1994).

A large body of research exists on the barriers that not only inhibit female accountants' career progression, but may also lead to their turnover. The variables considered include family obligations, negative stereotypes of women, poor career planning, lack of mentors, and unwillingness to conform to organisational norms. One finding to emerge from this literature is that the motivation of women accountants toward career advancement and rewards is different to men (Kelsall and Leung, 1995; Dann, 1995; Hoddinott and Jarratt, 1998; Morley, Bellamy, Jackson and O'Neill, 2002). Women tend to place less emphasis on status, financial reward and position. They place greater emphasis on gaining recognition from others, achieving a balanced lifestyle, and job satisfaction. This paper investigates job satisfaction as a key career expectation of female accountants in public accounting practice in Queensland, and explores potential career outcomes associated with reported levels of satisfaction. The career outcomes include not only turnover intentions, but also alternate career choices such as moving to part-time employment or leaving the profession altogether.

Irrespective of any gender effects, an investigation of job satisfaction of accountants

Key words: job satisfaction; turnover intentions, public accounting practice

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in public practice is an important end in itself. It is desirable from a behaviouralist view and it is important for employers because of its direct and indirect links with work motivation and job-related performance.¹ Consequently, the first objective of this paper is to add to the existing knowledge of the career expectations of public accountants in Australia through an investigation of their levels of job satisfaction. The second objective is to investigate possible differences in job satisfaction between male and female accountants. To date, there has only been one Australian study of gender differences in job satisfaction by Morley *et al.* (2002). The current study will add to the small pool of existing research. Of particular interest are differences in the levels of job satisfaction for documented areas of gender difference. These areas include lower levels of remuneration for women in the Australian accounting profession (Morley, Bellamy, Jackson, and O'Neill, 2003), and lower levels of representation in management level positions (Kelsall and Leung, 1995; Hoddinott and Jarratt, 1998).

Two moderating factors are age and firm size. There is evidence that career expectations change as accountants mature. This is particularly the case for women who have been found to exhibit more willingness to seek to balance career and personal life at mid-career age (30 to 49 years) (Kelsall and Leung, 1995, Dalton, Hill and Ramsay, 1997; Hoddinott and Jarratt, 1998, Morley *et al.*, 2002). The third objective of this paper is to examine the levels of job satisfaction of accountants of early-career age, mid-career age and advanced-career across gender. An additional influence considered is the prevailing work environment in larger public accounting firms. This has been highlighted as a factor in reducing satisfaction levels for female accountants of mid-career age

(Kelsall and Leung, 1995; Dalton *et al.*, 1997). To date, there has been no investigation of job satisfaction for male and female accountants across career ages that controls for firm size. Consequently, the fourth objective of the paper is to undertake such an investigation.

Finally, prior research suggests that job satisfaction is a major career expectation of women. It follows that job satisfaction plays an important role in motivating female accountants' career choices. The fifth objective of this paper is to examine the possible outcomes that result from different levels of satisfaction amongst female accountants, including turnover intentions, and alternative courses of action such as seeking part-time employment or leaving the profession all together.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section two outlines the research questions. The research method is discussed in section three, the results and discussion of results are contained in section four and concluding comments follow in section five.

2. Gender and Job Satisfaction

There have not been many studies of the levels of job satisfaction amongst Australian public accountants. The supervisory factors affecting job satisfaction amongst junior-level accountants at non-Big Five and Big Five firms have been investigated by Clabaugh, Monroe and Soutar (2000). No significant differences in satisfaction levels were found. Also, Stedham, Yamamura, Taylor and Nelson (2002) have undertaken a comparative study of the relation between the levels of job satisfaction and organisational factors for accountants in Australia and the U.S.A. The organisational factors considered include autonomy, feedback on performance and access to job-related information. Despite the cultural similarities between Australia and U.S.A., significant differences were found in how the organisational variables related to the satisfaction dimensions.

There has only been one Australian study by Morley, *et al.* (2002) that has investigated gender differences among accountants in their level of current job satisfaction. They drew on prior U.S. research that argued if gender-specific barriers to women's career progression exist, they could be expected to contribute to

1 The identified relations between job satisfaction and work motivation and job-related performance are complex and are not necessarily direct. While satisfaction may be correlated with employees' behaviour, it does not automatically follow that satisfaction causes the behaviour (Lawler and Porter, 1969). It can be argued however, that even if satisfaction proves not to be part of the causal chain, it remains an important construct. Its correlation with behaviour may make it a useful symptom of or clue to organisational dysfunction, or it may affect work-related behaviour indirectly (Balzer *et al.*, 1990).

lower levels of job satisfaction among females relative to males (e.g. Albrecht, Brown and Field, 1981; Dean, Ferris and Konstans, 1988). Morley's *et al.* (2002) survey of a random sample of members of CPA Australia revealed gender differences in attitudes to promotion, levels of ambition and career planning, particularly amongst males and females of mid-career age. Of relevance to this study was the finding that 'men were more satisfied with their jobs than women, with most (82%) being satisfied or very satisfied compared with just over half (57%) of women' (Morley *et al.*, 2002, p. 68).

Gender differences in reported job satisfaction levels of Queensland public accountant are investigated in the first research question. The rationale of prior research is adopted. That is, gender-specific barriers to career advancement may be reflected in reported lower levels of job satisfaction amongst female accountants relative to male accountants. The research question is stated as follows.

Research question 1:

Do women report lower levels of satisfaction than men in public accounting practice?

Job satisfaction is a multi-dimensional construct. If only overall satisfaction is assessed, which may be positive (negative), the aspects of the job that are perceived as negative (positive) are ignored. Two dimensions of potential dissatisfaction for women in public accounting are the 'gender imbalance' (Hoddinott and Jarratt, 1998) and gender differences in remuneration (Morley, *et al.*, 2003). The so-called 'gender imbalance' describes the lack of female accountants in senior positions within accounting firms in Australia. Ferguson and Wines (1993), Kelsall and Leung (1995), Hoddinott and Jarratt (1998) and O'Neill, Bellamy, Jackson and Morley (1998) have documented it in independent studies. For example, Hoddinott and Jarratt (1998) examined the career progression of females in public accounting practice in New South Wales. They found that the gender balance between males and females was at equilibrium when both entered the profession at 20-22 year of age at the junior or trainee level. However, this changed as males and females progressed to managers, seniors and principals.

They observed the participation rate for women at these senior levels 'averages just 23% and for men 77%. Further at the level of principal the percentage of women is only 11%, compared with men at 89%' (Hoddinott and Jarratt, 1998, p. 62). The second research question considers this issue further and is stated as follows:

Research question 2:

Do women report lower levels of satisfaction with promotion opportunities than men in public accounting practice?

Significant differences in the remuneration received by male and female accountants appointed at the same level have been widely documented. Hoddinott and Jarratt (1998) and O'Neill *et al.* (1998) have compared the remuneration levels of male and female accountants and found that on average women earn less than their male counterparts. For example, at the levels of managers/seniors and principals in the study by Hoddinott and Jarratt (1998), men received on average over 30 per cent higher salaries than women. More sophisticated analysis has also been undertaken by O'Neill *et al.* (1998) and Morley *et al.* (2003). These studies identified gender effects in accountants' remuneration even after controlling for the length of experience, level of responsibility and the type of work done.² Morley *et al.* (2003, p. 33) concluded that their findings provided 'evidence of discrimination against women in deciding on individuals' salaries.' It follows that the documented gender difference in remuneration levels would lead to less satisfaction with remuneration amongst female accountants than males. This is considered in the third research question.

Research question 3:

Do women report lower levels of satisfaction with remuneration than men in public accounting practice?

The career expectations of accountants change with age. As accountants move from an early career phase (under 30 years old), to mid-career (30 to 49 years) career choices are required on career progression versus quality of

² Morley *et al.* (2003) found this effect in all but the taxation and information technology areas of specialisation.

life considerations (Kelsall and Leung, 1995; Dalton *et al.*, 1997; Hoddinott and Jarratt, 1998; Morley *et al.*, 2002). Women in particular face pressures from the trade-off between work and non-work obligations at this stage in their careers. It has been documented that in response to these pressures, women on average, are more inclined than men to forgo career success if it threatens personal happiness and balance in their life (Kelsall and Leung, 1995; Hoddinott and Jarratt, 1998; Morley *et al.*, 2002).

Only one study has considered the levels of job satisfaction for male and female accountants across career stages. In their survey of CPA Australia members, Morley *et al.* (2002) found that *inter alia*, although job satisfaction scores increased with age, men were on average more satisfied than women. This was particularly the case in the 30 plus age group. Variation in the levels of job satisfaction and career stage for male and female accountants is investigated in the fourth research question of this paper. The career stages considered are early-career (under 30 years), mid-career (30 to 49 years) and advanced-career (50 years or more).³

Research Question 4:

Are there differences in the reported levels of satisfaction for accountants of early, mid or advanced career age?

The prevailing work environment of accounting firms has been identified as a significant factor in the ability to balance work and non-work commitments. In particular, women in mid-career have been identified as more dissatisfied with the large firm environment (Big Six/Big Five⁴), and more likely to move into smaller accounting practices (Kelsall and Leung, 1995; Dalton *et al.*, 1997). A major contributing factor is the smaller firm work environment that provides them with the opportunity to balance work and non-work commitments. For example, smaller firms have been characterised largely on the basis of anecdotal evidence as less stressful, with greater work diversity, more job

flexibility, and greater job security (Gaertner and Ruhe, 1981; Ardoin, 1986; Patten, 1995). In contrast, large accounting firms are described as highly competitive, with accountants driven by extreme work pressure manifesting in long working hours and extensive travel commitments (Dalton *et al.*, 1997). The competitive, long hours and highly stressful conditions are not conducive to balancing work and non-work commitments.

There has not been an investigation of the levels of job satisfaction for male and female accountants across career stages that controls for firm size.⁵ Prior research suggests that women of mid-career age (30 to 49 years) are more likely to report lower levels of job satisfaction than male accountants when employed in large accounting firms⁶ (Kelsall and Leung, 1995; Dalton *et al.*, 1997). This issue is investigated further in the fifth research question.

Research Question 5:

Are there differences in the reported levels of satisfaction on various dimensions of the job for accountants of early, mid or advanced career age after firm size is taken into account?

The approach adopted in this paper has been that reported job satisfaction levels provide preliminary insights into how the career expectations of female accountants in public practice are being met. A flow on question is what are the likely career outcomes for female accountants who are dissatisfied with their job in general or with a dimension of the job such as promotion opportunities or remuneration? Of concern to the profession is the loss of women accountants, particularly those of mid-

³ These career stages are drawn from Morley *et al.* (2002).

⁴ At the time most of this research was undertaken, it was a Big Six/Big Five public accounting firm environment.

⁵ Morley *et al.* (2002) did control for the impact of firm size and respondent's age on reported job satisfaction levels. However, their main focus was on gender differences in satisfaction and they did not explore any firm size effects.

⁶ A distinction is drawn in this paper between small firms and large firms on the basis of the number of partners. Small firms are defined as having less than 15 partners and large firms as having 15 or more partners. This measure of size was developed in consultation with staff from the Membership Services section of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (ICAA), who are allowed access to their membership for this study. Further details of sample selection are provided in section three.

career age who have well-developed skills bases. A desire to leave may manifest in an intention to move to another firm, but a survey of female chartered accountants in Victoria by Kelsall and Leung (1995) has found that it may also result in a move to part-time employment, or from the accounting profession entirely. This issue has not previously been investigated for Australian accountants, and it is considered in this paper. Specifically, the sixth research question is concerned with what dimensions of job satisfaction are more closely associated with the formation of intentions to pursue different career choices amongst female accountants. The choices investigated include moving to another firm, moving to part-time employment or leaving the accounting profession. It is stated as follows.

Research Question 6:

Are women accountants who are less satisfied with the job in general, or aspects of the job more likely to express an intention to leave their current employment, to move to part-time employment or to leave the accounting profession?

3. Research Method

This section outlines the development of the questionnaire used to collect the data, the survey sample, and the sampling process.

3.1 Questionnaire Development

A six-page questionnaire was pre-tested on employees from two public accounting firms, one large and one small, to control for ambiguity in questions, length, and relevance. It contained two sections on career choices and job satisfaction, and a third section collected demographic data.⁷

Section one contained the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) designed by Smith, Kendall and Hulen (1969). It is a cumulative-point, adjective check list scale constructed to measure five separate aspects of employees' satisfaction that include work on present job,

present pay, opportunities for promotion, supervision, and co-workers. To investigate the possible gender differences in overall job satisfaction levels, the job in general (JIG) scale developed by Smith *et al.* (1987) was also included in the questionnaire. The JIG scale uses the same response format as the JDI and measures a respondent's overall evaluation of their job as a weighting of all the components of job satisfaction relevant to them (Smith *et al.* 1987).⁸

Section two contained a measure of turnover intentions based on the Intention To Quit (ITQ) index developed by Jackofsky (1982).⁹ The modified ITQ comprises three questions on a five point Likert scale relating to a respondent's intention to quit over the short-term, ranging from 'before long' (item 1), through 'soon' (item 2) to 'within the next several months' (item 3). Responses to the three questions were averaged to provide an overall estimate of a respondent's intention to quit their current employment (Dean, Ferris and Konstans, 1988). The estimated reliability of the modified ITQ scale was high, with a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.94.

The second section also included a question on a five point Likert scale on the possible career choices by participants who were considering leaving their current positions. The options are drawn from the Kelsall and Leung (1995) study of the career paths of female chartered accountants in Victoria. They were wait and see if the situation gets better, move to another firm, do something different, and move to part-time employment.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Process

The survey sample comprised 400 accountants who were employed in public practice on a full-time basis in large and small firms. They were drawn from the membership of the Queensland Division of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (ICAA). Access to

7 The current investigation was part of a larger study by Herbohn (2004) of the impact of mentoring on the career processes of accountants. As a result, the questionnaire also collected information relevant to mentoring experiences. However, only the sections of the questionnaire relevant to job satisfaction are discussed in this paper.

8 Balzer *et al.* (1990) note that the JIG scale was constructed to reflect the global, long-term evaluation of the job. It is intended to reflect not only the five principal facets and the importance of each to the individual, but also their interactions and the contributions of other long-term situation and individual factors that make a person satisfied or dissatisfied with their job.

9 A more detailed discussion of the modification is contained in Herbohn (2004).

these members was conditional upon approval of the survey instrument, sample size and distribution technique by the ICAA's Membership Services. Upon approval, staff from ICAA Membership Services randomly selected the survey sample from their member mailing list and distributed the survey kit. The survey kit comprised a covering letter, a copy of the survey instrument and a reply paid envelope. Staff at the ICAA pre-numbered each of the reply paid envelopes, which were addressed to the researcher, thus ensuring confidentiality for any responses made.¹⁰

A total of 191 responses were received, after staff from the ICAA Membership Services followed up non-responses with a second mail-out. Thirty incomplete questionnaires were excluded to give a total of 161 usable responses. This represented a response rate of 40.25 per cent. Late responses were used as a proxy for non-respondents to test whether the survey responses were representative of the total population (Oppenheim, 1966). No statistically significant differences were found between the mean variables of late responses and the remaining responses, indicating that non-response bias was not significant.

4. Results

The respondent population comprised 99 males (62%) and 62 females (39%). The average age was 33 years and the mean annual base salary was \$51,928. The primary areas of responsibility of respondents included taxation 55 (34%), management advisory services 24 (15%), information system services 24 (15%), auditing 16 (9%), insolvency 8 (5%) and a combination of more than one of these areas 34 (21%). The organisation level categories included 45 graduates/accountants (28%), 38 managers (24%), 11 senior managers/associates (7%), 44 partners (27%) and 23 others (consultancy-based employment – 14%). Responses were drawn from large public accounting firms (56 responses) and smaller public accounting firms with less than 15 partners (105 responses).

Accountants who participated in the survey reported generally high levels of satisfaction

with their job in general and with aspects of their job measured by the Job Descriptive Index (JDI). These results are summarised in Table 1. Although it is not possible to define an absolute level of job satisfaction above which respondents can be identified as satisfied, Balzer *et al.* (1990) suggest that in practice there is a limited range on each JDI scale that characterises people who feel neither good nor bad about their job. A score of 27 out of a possible score of 54 on each JDI scale has been identified as this middle range. Consequently, 'scores well above 27 (i.e. 32 or above) indicate satisfaction, while those well below 27 (i.e. 22 or below) indicate dissatisfaction' (Balzer *et al.*, 1990, p. 23). On this basis, the mean scores reported in Table 1 indicate that accountants in Queensland public practice on average are satisfied with their job in general, the type of work, present remuneration, promotional opportunities, supervision received, and co-workers.

An analysis-of-variance (ANOVA) was used to test the significance of the impact of gender on reported satisfaction levels with job dimensions, while controlling for the impact of age, organisational level, size of employer and area of specialisation (Puri, 2002). The results are reported in Table 1.

The mean satisfaction levels of women in Queensland public accounting practice are lower for their job in general and on every aspect of job satisfaction except for remuneration. However, only the reported satisfaction of women with opportunities for promotion is statistically significantly lower than the satisfaction of men with this aspect of the job ($F=6.612$; $p=0.024$).¹¹ In general, the results reported in Table 1 are not consistent with the rationale underlying the first research

10 Aggregated survey data was made available by the author to respondents and the ICAA upon request.

11 The controlled for variables were insignificant with two exceptions. First, age, organisational level, and area of specialisation were significant in the ANOVA with satisfaction regarding remuneration levels as the dependent variable. This indicates significant differences in satisfaction with remuneration across age, organisational level and specialisation. Second, organisation level was significant in the ANOVA with satisfaction regarding opportunities for promotion, which suggests significant differences in satisfaction with promotion opportunities across organisational levels. These results are discussed in more detail in sections 4.1 and 4.2.

Table 1
Reported job satisfaction levels of respondents with the job in general and different dimensions of the job

| Panel A: Reported job satisfaction for all respondents | | | | |
|--|-------|------|------|-------|
| Job satisfaction dimensions: ¹ | Mean | Min. | Max. | SD |
| Work on present job | 34.99 | 3 | 52 | 9.61 |
| Present pay | 37.02 | 4 | 54 | 12.64 |
| Opportunities for promotion | 31.01 | 2 | 54 | 15.98 |
| Supervision | 38.46 | 4 | 54 | 12.58 |
| People on the present job | 41.94 | 9 | 54 | 10.34 |
| Job in general (JIG) | 42.59 | 2 | 54 | 10.29 |

| Panel B: ANOVA for gender impact on job satisfaction dimensions ² | | | | |
|--|----------------|---------|--------|--------|
| Job satisfaction dimensions: | Mean JDI score | | Gender | |
| | Males | Females | F | P |
| Work on present job | 35.61 | 34.03 | 2.601 | 0.131 |
| Present pay | 36.37 | 37.94 | 0.149 | 0.706 |
| Opportunities for promotion | 33.10 | 28.14 | 6.612 | 0.024* |
| Supervision | 38.69 | 38.12 | 0.106 | 0.751 |
| People on the present job | 41.07 | 42.02 | 0.008 | 0.929 |
| Job in general (JIG) | 42.73 | 42.42 | 0.438 | 0.519 |

1. Job satisfaction dimensions were measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and Job In General (JIG) index. Responses are scored to produce an aggregate score on each aspect of satisfaction from 0 to 54. The higher the score, the more satisfied a respondent is with the aspect of their job. The scoring worked as follows. Respondents indicated agreement or disagreement with each phrase or adjective relating to the five aspects of job satisfaction by marking a 'yes', 'no', or 'cannot decide'. A 'yes' response to a positive adjective or phrase such as 'challenging' receives a score of three, while a 'no' response to a positive adjective or phrase receives a score of zero. A 'yes' response to a negative item such as 'boring' receives a score of zero, and a no response to a negative item receives a score of three. Each 'cannot decide' response is assigned a score of one.
2. An ANOVA was used to test for a gender effect for reported job satisfaction levels while controlling for age, organisational level, size of employer and area of specialisation. The F tests reported are for the significance of the impact of gender on the reported satisfaction levels with aspects of the job.
3. *Significance at $0.01 < x \leq 0.05$ level.

question that gender-specific barriers to women's career progression contributes to significantly lower job satisfaction levels. The second and third research questions consider reported satisfaction with promotion opportunities and remuneration. The results in Table 1 are consistent with the predicted lower satisfaction of women with promotional opportunities, but not remuneration. Each of these dimensions of satisfaction – promotion and remuneration – is explored in turn.

4.1 Satisfaction with opportunities for promotion

Low representation of women in senior management positions within the accounting

profession is well documented. The lack of career progression of female accountants to senior levels occurs despite relatively equal numbers of males and females entering the profession at the graduate/trainee accountant level. The career progression of respondents within the randomly selected sample of public accountants in this study is summarised in Table 2. Only 27 per cent of women surveyed had reached senior management levels (senior manager, associate, manager or principal) compared to 47 per cent of male respondents. This difference in career progression across gender was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.560$; $p=0.018$).

Table 2
Reported satisfaction levels with opportunities for promotion across gender and organisational level

| Panel A: Gender distribution across organisational levels | | | | |
|--|---|------------|---------------|------------|
| | Females | | Males | |
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| Non-senior management ¹ | 35 | 73 | 48 | 53 |
| Senior management ² | <u>13</u> | <u>27</u> | <u>42</u> | <u>47</u> |
| | <u>48</u> | <u>100</u> | <u>90</u> | <u>100</u> |
| Excluding: 'other' ³ | <u>14</u> | | <u>9</u> | |
| Total | <u>62</u> | | <u>99</u> | |
| $\chi^2 = 5.560^*$ (0.018) | | | | |
| Panel B: Satisfaction with promotion opportunities of accountants across organisational level | | | | |
| | Mean JDI score on promotion opportunities for the whole sample⁴ | | | |
| Organisational level: | | | | |
| Graduate/accountant | 29.86 | | | |
| Manager | 33.00 | | | |
| Senior Manager /Associate | 34.32 | | | |
| Partner /Principal | 34.58 | | | |
| Other ³ | 24.43 | | | |

1. Non-senior management = graduate/accountant and manager.
2. Senior management = senior manager/associate and partner/principal.
3. 'Other' includes consultancy-based employment on either a full-time or part-time basis.
4. Satisfaction with opportunities for promotion was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI).
5. *Significance at $0.01 < x \leq 0.05$ level.

The second research question considers whether this apparent gender difference in career progression is reflected in reported satisfaction levels. As previously shown in Table 1, gender had a significant impact on satisfaction with opportunities for promotion ($F=6.612$; $p=0.024$) after controlling for the impact of other confounding variables including age, organisational level, area of specialisation and firm size. That is, the mean satisfaction with promotion reported by women (JDI score of 28.14) was significantly lower than the mean satisfaction levels reported by men (mean JDI score of 33.10), after controlling for relevant demographic and work related factors. These results are consistent with the predictions of the second research question.

The ANOVA also showed that respondents' organisational level had a significant main

effect on satisfaction with promotional opportunities ($F=4.613$; $p=0.017$).¹² In fact, organisational level accounted for a greater amount of variation in satisfaction with promotion (partial eta squared statistic=0.606) than did gender (partial eta squared statistic=0.355).

The impact of organisational level on satisfaction with career progression is considered further in Table 2. The mean satisfaction score for respondents in the 'other' category – consultancy based employment on either a full-time or part-time basis – was the lowest for any organisational level (i.e. mean score of 24.43 out of a possible 54). A mean

¹² The F tests for controlled variables were not reported in Table 1 because the focus of the testing was on gender effects.

score of 24.43 suggests dissatisfaction amongst respondents with opportunities for career progression when compared with Balzer's *et al.* (1990) dissatisfaction benchmark of a JDI score of less than 27. The mean satisfaction scores for respondents at the level of manager, senior manager/associate, and partner/principal were all above the benchmark of 32, which indicates satisfaction (Balzer *et al.*, 1990). Accountants at the entry level of graduate/accountant had a mean JDI score of 29.86. This suggests that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the opportunities for promotion.

4.2 Satisfaction with remuneration levels

Differences in remuneration levels between male and female accountants have been documented in previous research. As background for an investigation of satisfaction with remuneration, the remuneration levels of Queensland accountants were assessed for gender differences. The results are reported in Table 3. The mean base salary of men was \$58,507 per annum compared to \$42,059 per annum for women in Queensland public accounting practice. Males dominated the higher remuneration bands. Twenty-four percent of men surveyed earned greater than \$70,000 per annum (base salary) compared to only 4 per cent of women. The difference in remuneration levels across gender was statistically significant.

These results need to be interpreted with caution. There is the potential for other variables that may account for the level of remuneration to confound any gender effect. Other variables that have been found to have an influence on remuneration include the organisational level attained (Nolan and Brown, 1983; Morley *et al.*, 2003), the size of the employing organisation (Nolan and Brown, 1983), the area of specialisation (Morley *et al.*, 2003) and the age of the respondent (Hoddinott and Harratt, 1998; Morley *et al.*, 2001). An ANOVA was used to test for a gender impact on the annual base salary of accountants after controlling for respondents' age, organisational level attained, size of employing firm, and area of specialisation. The *F* tests are reported in Table 3.

Gender was not significant as a main effect on annual base salary, nor was it significant in any interactions with the controlled for factors.

Firm size also did not have a significant impact. Instead, organisational level, age and area of specialisation had significant main impacts on the level of remuneration reported by respondents.¹³ To explore this further, the mean salaries of respondents are considered across organisational level, age and area of specialisation in Table 4.

From Table 4, the mean base salary of accountants increased with organisational level from \$36,147 at the graduate accountant level to \$84,444 at the level of partner/sole practitioner. The positive correlation between remuneration and organisational level was statistically significant ($r_s=0.342$, $p=0.000$). The average level of remuneration also increased with age. Early career accountants on average earned \$42,591 while accountants of advanced career reported a mean base salary of \$102,286. The positive relation between remuneration and age was significant ($r_s=0.380$, $p=0.000$). Accountants with a specialisation in insolvency reported the highest levels of remuneration, with a mean base salary of \$64,116. In contrast, accountants who specialised in more than one area reported the lowest base salary of \$44,926.

These results suggest that the initial gender difference in remuneration levels - the significantly higher average remuneration levels of males compared to females - may actually be due differences in the *distribution* of males and females across organisation level, age and area of specialisation. For example, a significantly larger proportion of males surveyed had reached senior management levels compared to female accountants ($\chi^2=5.560$, $p=0.018$). This would mean that men on average earn more due to their organisational position. The majority of female respondents were clustered in the early career age band (i.e. 67%), while the majority of males were located in the mid-career age group (53%) ($\chi^2=13.374$, $p=0.001$). Since remuneration levels increased with career age, males would on average report larger annual base salaries than female respondents by virtue of their age. Finally, a gender related effect

13 Age accounted for most of the variation in annual salary (partial eta squared = 0.941), followed by organisational level (partial eta squared = 0.803), and then area of specialisation (partial eta squared = 0.795).

Table 3
Remuneration levels across gender, organisational levels, age, specialisation
and size of employing firm

| Panel A: Remuneration levels across gender | | | | |
|---|----------------|--------------|---------------|------------|
| | Females | | Males | |
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| Remuneration bands: | | | | |
| Less than \$30,000 | 11 | 21 | 2 | 3 |
| \$30,000-49,999 | 28 | 54 | 41 | 52 |
| \$50,000-69,999 | 11 | 21 | 15 | 19 |
| \$70,000-99,999 | 1 | 2 | 15 | 19 |
| \$100,000-149,999 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| \$150,000-249,999 | --- | --- | 2 | 3 |
| More than \$250,000 | --- | --- | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> |
| | <u>52</u> | <u>100</u> | <u>78</u> | <u>100</u> |
| | Females | Males | | |
| Mean annual base salary | \$42,059 | \$58,507 | | |
| t-statistic | 2.861 | | | |
| | (0.005)* | | | |

| Panel B: ANOVA for gender impact on remuneration levels | | |
|--|----------|----------|
| | F | P |
| Dependent variable: Annual base salary | | |
| Factors: | | |
| Gender | 0.002 | 0.962 |
| Organisational level | 14.925 | 0.000** |
| Age | 6.546 | 0.001** |
| Area of specialisation | 8.550 | 0.002* |
| Size of employing firm | 1.212 | 0.294 |

1. An ANOVA was used to test for a gender effect for annual base salaries while controlling for age, organisational level, size of employer and area of specialisation. The F tests reported are for the significance of the impact of gender on the annual base salaries of respondents.
2. Thirty-two of the respondents (10 females, 21 males) left the section of the questionnaire requiring remuneration details blank.
3. Satisfaction with remuneration was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI).
4. **Significance at $x \leq 0.001$ level.
*Significance at $0.001 < x \leq 0.005$ level.

Table 4
Remuneration levels across organisational levels, age and area of specialisation

| Factor | Mean annual base salary | Males | | Females | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | No. | % | No. | % |
| Organisational level: | | | | | |
| Graduate/accountant | \$36,147 | 22 | 28 | 21 | 40 |
| Manager | \$51,862 | 21 | 27 | 13 | 25 |
| Senior Manager /Associate | \$58,375 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 6 |
| Partner /Principal | \$84,444 | 23 | 29 | 4 | 8 |
| Other ¹ | \$38,108 | <u>7</u> | <u>9</u> | <u>11</u> | <u>21</u> |
| | | <u>78</u> | <u>100</u> | <u>52</u> | <u>100</u> |
| | $r_s = 0.342$ (0.000)*** | $\chi^2 = 5.560$ (0.018)* | | | |
| | Mean annual base salary | Males | | Females | |
| | | No. | % | No. | % |
| Age bands: | | | | | |
| Early career (<30 years) | \$42,591 | 31 | 40 | 35 | 67 |
| Mid-career (30-49 years) | \$56,554 | 41 | 53 | 16 | 31 |
| Advanced-career (> 49 years) | \$102,286 | <u>6</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>2</u> |
| | | <u>78</u> | <u>100</u> | <u>52</u> | <u>100</u> |
| | $r_s = 0.380$ (0.000)*** | $\chi^2 = 13.374$ (0.001)*** | | | |
| | Mean annual base salary | Males | | Females | |
| | | No. | % | No. | % |
| Area of specialisation: | | | | | |
| Insolvency | \$64,116 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 4 |
| Management and Advisory Services | \$55,676 | 11 | 14 | 6 | 12 |
| Information systems | \$55,041 | 8 | 10 | 11 | 21 |
| Taxation | \$52,679 | 30 | 38 | 14 | 26 |
| Auditing | \$47,633 | 9 | 12 | 6 | 12 |
| > one of the above | \$44,929 | <u>14</u> | <u>18</u> | <u>13</u> | <u>25</u> |
| | | <u>78</u> | <u>100</u> | <u>52</u> | <u>100</u> |
| | | $\chi^2 = 7.882$ (0.163) | | | |

1. 'Other' includes consultancy-based employment on either a full-time or part-time basis.
2. Thirty-two of the respondents (10 females, 21 males) left the section of the questionnaire requiring remuneration details blank.
3. Spearman rank correlations were run between the factor under consideration and annual base salaries. The correlation coefficient is reported with its significance in parentheses.
4. Chi-square test for differences in distribution of males and females across factors under consideration are reported, with significance levels in parentheses.
5. *** Significance at $\alpha \leq 0.001$ level; ** Significance at $0.001 < \alpha < 0.01$ level; * Significance at $0.01 \leq \alpha \leq 0.05$ level.

for the area of specialisation is not clear. There was a slightly larger proportion of males than females engaged in the more highly remunerated areas of insolvency (8% compared to 4%), and management advisory services (14% compared to 12%). However, the proportion of males to females across different specialisations was not significant ($\chi^2=7.882$, $p=0.163$).

The third research question was informed by prior evidence that there are differences in the remuneration of males and females after controlling for experience, level of responsibility and type of work done (e.g. Morley *et al.* 2003). On this basis it was predicted that women would report lower satisfaction levels with remuneration. The results of this paper are not consistent with this prediction on two counts. First, there was no evidence of a significant gender difference in remuneration levels of Queensland public

accountants after controlling for demographic and work environment factors.

Second, from Table 1 there was no significant gender impact on satisfaction with remuneration levels ($F=0.149$; $p=0.706$) in an ANOVA that controlled for age, organisational level, area of specialisation and firm size. Instead, respondents' satisfaction with their remuneration was significantly effected by age ($F=4.129$; $p=0.004$), organisational level ($F=3.277$; $p=0.046$), and area of specialisation ($F=2.530$; $p=0.082$). Reported satisfaction with remuneration across age, organisational level and specialisation is explored further in Table 5.

From Table 5, respondents' satisfaction with remuneration increased with organisational level. The mean JDI score for remuneration was 34.73 at the graduate level, which rose to 38.84 amongst partners and sole practitioners.

Table 5
Reported satisfaction with remuneration across age, organisational level, and area of specialisation

| Factor | Mean Satisfaction with remuneration (JDI) ¹ |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Organisational level: | |
| Graduate/accountant | 34.73 |
| Manager | 36.76 |
| Senior Manager /Associate | 36.73 |
| Partner /Principal | 38.84 |
| Other ² | 38.35 |
| Age bands: | |
| Early career (< 30 years) | 35.97 |
| Mid-career (30-49 years) | 37.01 |
| Advanced-career (> 49 years) | 43.09 |
| Area of specialisation: | |
| Insolvency | 34.00 |
| Management & Advisory Services | 38.52 |
| Information systems | 36.08 |
| Taxation | 35.56 |
| Auditing | 38.67 |
| > one of the above | 38.91 |

1. Satisfaction with remuneration was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI). Responses are scored to produce an aggregate score on each aspect of satisfaction from 0 to 54. The higher the score, the more satisfied a respondent is with the aspect of their job.
2. 'Other' includes consultancy-based employment on either a full-time or part-time basis.

Table 6
Job satisfaction levels of accountants across career age groups and gender

| Panel A: Distribution of survey sample across career age bands | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| | Males | | Females | | Total | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Career age groups: | | | | | | |
| Early career (< 30 years) | 32 | 32 | 37 | 60 | 69 | 43 |
| Mid-career (30-49 years) | 57 | 58 | 24 | 38 | 81 | 50 |
| Advanced-career (> 49 years) | 10 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 11 | 7 |
| | <u>99</u> | <u>100</u> | <u>62</u> | <u>100</u> | <u>161</u> | <u>100</u> |

| Panel B: Mean reported satisfaction levels across gender and career age bands | | | | | | |
|---|--|--------|----------------|--------|---------------------|--------|
| | Mean score on job satisfaction dimension | | | | | |
| | Early-career age | | Mid-career age | | Advanced-career age | |
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Satisfaction dimensions:¹ | | | | | | |
| Work on present job | 38.20 | 32.23 | 34.98 | 36.00 | 42.00 | 21.00 |
| Present pay | 35.23 | 36.59 | 35.45 | 40.58 | 45.00 | 24.00 |
| Opportunities for promotion | 36.65 | 31.50 | 29.40 | 22.10 | 38.60 | 34.00 |
| Supervision | 40.13 | 36.17 | 36.27 | 42.43 | 44.70 | 18.00 |
| People on the present job | 39.81 | 40.62 | 42.13 | 45.22 | 49.00 | 20.00 |
| Job in general (JIG) | 40.97 | 42.19 | 42.84 | 43.21 | 47.80 | 32.00 |

1. Job satisfaction dimensions were measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and general job satisfaction was measured using the Job in General (JIG) index.

Satisfaction levels with remuneration also increased with respondents' age. The average JDI satisfaction score was 35.97 for early-career age respondents, which increased to an average score of 43.09 for advanced-career age accountants. There is no clear pattern in satisfaction levels across areas of specialisation. For example, accountants working in insolvency reported the lowest satisfaction with remuneration levels (mean score 34.00), despite on average earning the highest annual salaries. Similarly, accountants specialising in information systems earned the third highest level of remuneration, but reported the second lowest satisfaction levels with remuneration (mean score of 36.08).

4.3 The Impact of Accountants' Career Stage

A documented awareness of female accountants, particularly of 30 plus years of age, to choices between career progression and quality of life may lead to lower satisfaction

levels compared to males. The fourth research question considers this issue. Sixty per cent of female respondents were of early career age (< 30 years), followed by 38 per cent at mid-career age (30-49 years). The majority of male respondents (58%) were of mid-career age, and then early career age (32%). In the advanced career age group (49+ years), there was only one female respondent compared to 10 male respondents (10%). Table 6 presents a summary of these demographic details. ANOVAs with the five dimensions of job satisfaction as the dependent variable in each case, did not find career age to be significant.¹⁴ Nor, was age significant in any interactions with other variables including gender, organisational level, area of specialisation and firm size. In terms of the fourth research question, there is no evidence of differences in job satisfaction

¹⁴ The one exception was that satisfaction with remuneration was significantly impacted by age. This result was previously explored in section 4.2.

between males and females accountants from different age groups.

This result is not consistent with prior evidence that job satisfaction increases with age, and that men are more satisfied than women, particularly in the over 30 years age groups (Morley *et al.*, 2002). Although age was not significant for reported satisfaction levels in this study, Table 6 reports satisfaction levels across age and gender for completeness.

General job satisfaction job increased with age for men who reported mean Job-In-General (JIG) scores of 40.97, 42.84 and 47.80 respectively for early-career, mid-career and advanced-career age bands. Satisfaction also increased with age for women, who reported mean JIG scores of 42.19 for early career age and 43.21 for mid-career age. Since there was only one female respondent of advanced career age it is not possible to generalise about this age group. There was also a general upward trend in reported satisfaction with the specific job dimensions of work on present job, remuneration, supervision, and colleagues as the age of respondents increased. This trend was evident for men and women accountants. For the remaining job satisfaction dimension of opportunities for promotion, men and women of mid-career age reported lower satisfaction levels (mean scores of 29.40 and 22.10 respectively) than either early-career age (mean scores of 36.65 and 31.50 respectively) or advanced career age respondents (mean scores of 38.60 and 34 respectively) of the same gender.

4.4 The Impact of Employing Firm Size

The prevailing work environment within firms of different size may be related to gender differences in job satisfaction amongst accountants of a particular age group. Specifically, women of mid-career age have been identified as less satisfied than men in the same age band due to the difficulties of balancing work and non-work commitments within a large firm environment. The fifth research question considers this issue.

The survey comprised 105 accountants employed in small firms (i.e. firms with less than 15 partners), of whom 57 per cent were of mid-career age, 36 per cent were of early-career age, and 7 per cent were of advanced-career age. In contrast, more respondents from large firms with more than 15 partners were of

early-career age (55%), while the remainder were of mid-career age (38%) and advanced-career age (7%). Sample details are reported in Table 7.

ANOVAs with the five dimensions of job satisfaction as the dependent variable in each case did not find show firm size to be significant. Nor, was firm size significant in any interactions with other variables including age and gender. In terms of the fifth research question, there is no evidence of differences in the satisfaction of accountants from firms of different size, irrespective of their career stage and gender.

Although firm size is not significant for reported satisfaction levels in this study, satisfaction levels across firm size, for men and women in the mid-career age group are reported in Table 7 for completeness. Mean satisfaction scores for women of mid-career age employed in large firms were actually higher than for men on general job satisfaction, remuneration, supervision and colleagues. Only satisfaction levels with the work and promotional opportunities were lower. Within small firms, mid-career aged women were more satisfied than men with their job in general, remuneration, supervision, colleagues and also the type of work. They were only less satisfied with the available opportunities for promotion.

4.5 Job Satisfaction and Career Outcomes For Female Accountants

Female accountants on average emphasise job satisfaction over status and financial reward (Dalton *et al.*, 1995; Kelsall and Leung, 1995; Hoddinott and Jarratt, 1998). An interesting issue that has not previously been investigated is whether job satisfaction levels are related to alternate career choices. This issue is considered in the sixth research question.

The associations between reported job satisfaction levels of female accountants in Queensland public practice and their potential career choices are summarised in Table 8. General job satisfaction and satisfaction with the nature of work, and the quality of supervision were significantly associated with lower turnover intentions as measured by the modified Intention To Quit (ITQ) index. Higher scores for these aspects of job satisfaction were also significantly associated with a higher reported intention to wait to see if the situation improved.

Table 7
Job satisfaction levels reported by male and female accountants of different age groups employed in firms of different size

| Panel A: Distribution of respondents across age bands within large and small firms | | | | |
|---|--|--------------|--|--------------|
| | Small firms (< 15 partners) | | Large firms (≥ 15 partners) | |
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Career age group: | | | | |
| Early-career age | 38 | 36 | 31 | 55 |
| Mid-career age | 60 | 57 | 21 | 38 |
| Advanced-career age | 7 | 7 | 4 | 7 |
| | <u>105</u> | <u>100.0</u> | <u>56</u> | <u>100.0</u> |

| Panel B: Job satisfaction levels for males and females of mid-career age employed in large and small firms | | | | |
|---|--|----------------|--|----------------|
| | Small firms (< 15 partners) | | Large firms (≥ 15 partners) | |
| | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| JDI dimensions:¹ | | | | |
| Work on present job | 42.18 | 42.75 | 44.44 | 45.50 |
| Present pay | 33.23 | 36.20 | 39.12 | 35.00 |
| Opportunities for promotion | 36.37 | 40.80 | 33.41 | 39.50 |
| Supervision | 28.77 | 21.41 | 30.67 | 25.00 |
| People on the present job | 36.67 | 42.12 | 35.65 | 43.75 |
| Job in general (JIG) | 40.95 | 45.05 | 44.82 | 46.00 |

1. Job satisfaction dimensions were measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and Job In General (JIG) index. Responses are scored to produce an aggregate score on each aspect of satisfaction from 0 to 54.

It is not surprising that this career choice identified by Kelsall and Leung (1995) is associated with the same dimensions of job satisfaction as the ITQ index because an expressed intention to wait for the situation to improve is really an indicator of turnover intentions. The second career alternative 'move to another firm' is also a measure of turnover intentions. However, only low levels of general job satisfaction were significantly associated with the intention to pursue this career alternative. For the remaining career choices of 'move to part-time employment' and 'do something different to accounting', no significant association was found with any dimension of job satisfaction for women in Queensland public accounting practice.

5. Discussion and Concluding Comments

Accountants employed within Queensland public accounting firms are on average generally satisfied with their jobs. Their mean responses also suggest satisfaction with specific dimensions of the job including the nature of their work, remuneration levels, quality of supervision, and colleagues.

Female accountants reported lower satisfaction levels with their job in general, type of work, colleagues, quality of supervision, and opportunities for promotion than did their males counterparts. However, only satisfaction with promotions was significantly lower amongst females. On this basis, there is little evidence of gender differences in satisfaction that might be symptomatic of gender-specific barriers to

career progression and ultimately the retention of women within public practice.

These results contrast with the only other Australian study of gender differences in the job satisfaction of accountants. Morley *et al.* (2002) found that females are significantly less satisfied than males with aspects of their careers that included the opportunity for development of skills, the extent of control over their own work, the organisational culture, the flexibility and control they had over their working hours, interpersonal relations with other staff, support to develop both professionally and personally, development of skills which will assist in future career

progression elsewhere, and their current employers' procedures for promotion and opportunities for equal promotion.

A contributing factor to the inconsistency between the current study and Morley *et al.* (2002) may be the different survey sample sizes. In the current study, 400 public accountants in only one Australian state were surveyed, with ultimately 161 useable responses received. In contrast, Morley *et al.* (2002) surveyed 3000 public accountants Australia-wide from many sectors including public practice, industry and government, with a total of 1,181 usable responses received.

Table 8
Association between reported job satisfaction levels of female accountants and potential career choices

| | Potential career choice ¹ | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | ITQ ² | Wait and see if the situation gets better | Move to another firm | Move to part-time employment | Do something different to accounting |
| JDI dimensions:³ | | | | | |
| Work on present job | -0.413 (0.001)** | -0.266 (0.047)* | -0.162 (0.233) | -0.195 (0.150) | -0.118 (0.387) |
| Present pay | -0.195 (0.130) | -0.117 (0.389) | 0.055 (0.688) | 0.124 (0.363) | 0.051 (0.709) |
| Opportunities for promotion | -0.003 (0.985) | -0.028 (0.839) | -0.113 (0.418) | -0.120 (0.388) | -0.015 (0.915) |
| Supervision | -0.489 (0.000)*** | -0.315 (0.019)* | 0.176 (0.200) | -0.084 (0.543) | -0.180 (0.189) |
| People on the present job | -0.190 (0.143) | -0.163 (0.234) | 0.023 (0.870) | -0.020 (0.885) | -0.130 (0.343) |
| Job in general (JIG) | -0.482 (0.000)*** | -0.400 (0.002)** | 0.136 (0.018)* | -0.073 (0.592) | -0.063 (0.643) |

- The career alternatives are drawn from the study of Kelsall and Leung (1995). A five-point Likert scale was used for career alternatives that ranged from 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree. A low score on the scale of 1-5 indicates a higher likelihood of the respondent aspiring to the particular career choice.
- The ITQ index is drawn from Jackofsky (1982), and uses a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree. Since the ITQ contained items concerned with a respondent leaving their current position, the lower the score, the lower the turnover intentions of the respondent.
- Job satisfaction dimensions were measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and Job In General (JIG) index. Responses are scored to produce an aggregate score on each aspect of satisfaction from 0 to 54. The higher the score, the more satisfied a respondent is with the aspect of their job.
- Spearman rank correlation coefficients are reported with significance levels shown in parentheses directly below.
- * Significance at $0.01 < x \leq 0.05$ level.
** Significance at $0.001 \leq x \leq 0.01$
*** Significance at $x < 0.001$

Future research using a large sample of accountants would be useful to bring clarity to the mixed evidence on gender differences in satisfaction.

5.1 Satisfaction with Promotion and Remuneration

The one area of significant gender difference identified amongst Queensland public accountants related to opportunities for promotion. Women reported significantly lower satisfaction with promotion opportunities than men, after controlling for age, organisational level, firm size and area of specialisation. Morley *et al.* (2002) similarly found that females were less satisfied than males with promotion procedures and the availability of equal promotion opportunities.¹⁵ The emerging evidence from Morley *et al.* (2002) and the current study suggests a potential problem with the advancement opportunities available to women within the Australian accounting profession. It is an issue that warrants further research. Ideally, this would involve the collection of primary data relating to promotion opportunities rather than reported perceptions via surveys of accountants. However, data access will be difficult given the sensitive and confidential nature of the required data.

While gender was a significant main effect on satisfaction with promotion opportunities, a respondent's organisational level was also important. Dissatisfaction with promotion was concentrated amongst accountants in consultancy-based employment on either a part-time or full-time basis. A potential reason for the dissatisfaction of respondents engaged in consulting may be that this group comprises accountants who have been unable to progress to senior management levels and have consequently left to start their own consultancy. The group may also include females who have sought part-time employment to balance work

and non-work commitments. There is some support for this since a larger proportion of female respondents were engaged in consulting (i.e. 23%) relative to males (9%). Unfortunately, a limitation of the survey methodology used in this study is that it is not possible to explore these potential reasons further. It is an interesting area for future investigation.

Another potential area for gender differences in satisfaction relates to remuneration. Based on the annual salaries reported by survey respondents, on average female accountants earned significantly less than males. However, the gender effect dissipated when other variables that influence remuneration were controlled for in the analysis. In fact, annual salaries increased with respondents' age and organisational level, and there were differences in remuneration for accountants in different specialisations. It follows that gender differences in remuneration levels were due to the distribution of male and female accountants across age bands, organisational levels and specialisations. For example, on average males earned more because a larger proportion of them were employed in senior positions and a larger proportion of them were of mid-career age and advanced-career age relative to females. Also, a larger proportion of males than females were engaged in the more highly remunerated areas of insolvency, and management advisory services.

The lack of evidence of disparity in remuneration between male and female accountants in Queensland public practice contrasts with the results of prior research. Morley *et al.* (2003) found a significant and separate gender difference in the remuneration of Australian accountants after taking into account the impact of organisational position, job function, experience, firm size, interruptions to career (number of parental leave absences), work fraction (part-time, full-time), and sector. The issue of gender bias in remuneration packages is important, and in light of the mixed results from the current study and Morley *et al.* (2003), future research on this issue is worthwhile.

Male and female accountants in Queensland public practice reported comparable levels of satisfaction with their remuneration. This is consistent with the inability to identify a gender

¹⁵ Morley *et al.* (2002) used a Likert scale of '1=very dissatisfied' to '5=very satisfied' to measure satisfaction levels. The mean scores on promotion procedures and equal promotion opportunities for women were 2.90 and 3.21 respectively. For men, the mean score for satisfaction on promotion procedures was 3.16 and the mean score on equal promotion opportunities was 3.53. The differences were statistically significant at less than 0.001.

bias in remuneration. Rather than gender, respondents' organisational level, age and area of specialisation significantly impacted on satisfaction with remuneration. Satisfaction increased as accountants progressed through organisational levels and as they became older. Also, accountants engaged in insolvency were least satisfied with current remuneration levels compared to accountants specialising in auditing who were most satisfied. Interestingly, Morley's *et al.* (2002) investigation of satisfaction with job aspects also revealed no significant difference between the satisfaction levels of men and women with their remuneration package. Similar to the current study in which the mean satisfaction score of women with remuneration (37.94 out of 54) was actually higher than the mean score for men (36.37 out of 54), Morley *et al.* (2002) found that women reported higher mean satisfaction scores with remuneration (3.44 out of 5) than men (3.39 out of 5). However, the differences in both studies were not significant.

5.2 Career Age and Firm Size

Average job satisfaction amongst accountants increases with age (Hoddinott and Jarratt, 1998; Morley *et al.*, 2002). A similar upward trend in satisfaction with the job in general and the dimensions of the nature of work, remuneration, quality of supervision and colleagues was found amongst Queensland public accountants. However unlike prior research, the general increase in satisfaction as accountants mature was not significantly greater for men than for women.

A sensitivity of female accountants, particularly of mid-career age (30 to 49 years), to the trade-offs between work commitments versus non-work obligations and quality of life has been previously documented. In the current study, it was expected to manifest itself in lower reported satisfaction for women compared with men. No evidence was found to support this proposition even amongst accountants of mid-career age. The lack of significant results may reflect the small survey sample. For example, there were only 54 male respondents and only 24 female respondents of mid-career age. Future research using a larger sample of public accountants of mid-career age would be valuable.

There is Australian and U.S. evidence that the prevailing work environment of large public accounting firms is not conducive to balancing work and non-work commitments. Women of mid-career age who are more likely to have family commitments, have been identified as more dissatisfied with the large firm environment and thus more likely to move to smaller firms (Kelsall and Leung, 1995; Dalton *et al.*, 1997). The current study is the first direct investigation of this issue. No evidence was found to support gender differences in satisfaction levels for Queensland accountants working in large firms compared to small firms. Firm size had no significant impact on reported satisfaction levels as an independent variable, or in any interaction with age and gender.

A possible factor in the insignificant results is the firm size category of large and small.¹⁶ It may have been more informative to use a Big Three/Big Four and non-Big Three/Big Four size variable. Another contributing factor may be the small survey sample size. An interesting area for future research would be to collect data on the potential influence of the prevailing work environment in large Big Three public accounting firms from a large survey sample. Semi-structured interviews with men and women, particularly of mid-career age, could supplement the survey results. The interview data would provide in-depth insights that are not possible from postal surveys, and would also alleviate size classification issues.

5.3 Career Outcomes

Prior research has focussed on the issue of whether there are gender differences in job satisfaction (Reed *et al.*, 1994; Morley *et al.*, 2002). The rationale has been that such differences are a reflection of underlying issues including gender-barriers to career progression and an inability to retain women in public practice. The current study extended this research in a new direction by investigating the consequences, if any, of different levels of satisfaction for the alternate career choices considered by females. There is a large body of evidence from organisational and accounting

¹⁶ This size categorisation was selected in consultation with staff from ICAA Membership Services, who assisted in the distribution of the survey.

research that low job satisfaction levels are associated with high turnover intentions (e.g. Reed *et al.*, 1994; Bullen and Flamholtz, 1985; Albrecht *et al.*, 1981). Thus, one obvious career choice to investigate was turnover intentions. Females in Queensland public accounting practice who reported low levels of satisfaction with their job in general and the dimensions of work and supervision were significantly more likely to express an intention to quit, and not remain in their current position to see if their situation improved.

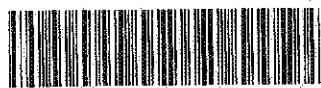
Prior research by Kelall and Leung (1995) documented frustration amongst women accountants because of their inability to advance to senior positions in the same proportion as men. One identified consequence was that on average these females become dissatisfied and leave the accounting profession altogether. In the current study, women were found to be less satisfied than men with the opportunities for advancement. However, no significant association was found between females' reported satisfaction with promotion opportunities and an intention to leave the accounting profession to try something different. Further, low satisfaction levels with promotion opportunities were not associated with an intention to quit or to move to part-time employment.

These results pose an interesting question for future consideration. Why is there no apparent flow-on from female accountants' dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities to their career choices? Does this reflect what researchers such as Morley *et al.* (2002) have described as attitudinal barriers to women's career progression in accounting? They found female accountants to be less ambitious and less inclined to plan for career success than their male counterparts. An interesting issue is whether such gender attitudinal differences contribute to an apparent lack of intention of dissatisfied females to proactively seek to change their situation by leaving their employer or even leaving the accounting profession.

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