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# Job satisfaction factors for housekeepers in the hotel industry: a global comparative analysis

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study offers a global comparative analysis of variables associated with job satisfaction, specifically work-life balance, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and work relations on job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study analyzes these variants across 29 countries using International Social Survey Program data.

**Findings** – Findings indicate significant differences in job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across countries, lower job satisfaction for hospitality occupations compared to all other occupational categories, lower job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers than employees in other hospitality occupations, and a statistically significant positive impact of some elements of work-life balance, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and coworker relations on job satisfaction.

**Originality/value** – The hospitality industry is characterized by poor work-life balance, high turnover rates and limited rewards. Hotel housekeepers report lower levels of satisfaction than other hospitality workers in terms of work-life balance, pay, relationships with managers, useful work and interesting work. Housekeepers play an important role in hotel quality and guest satisfaction. As such, understanding and addressing factors contributing to job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers is critical for managers

**Keywords** Job satisfaction, Hospitality industry, Work-life balance, Housekeeping workers

**Paper type** Research paper

Job satisfaction, or the “pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976, p. 1304) results in outcomes such as stronger job performance (Harter *et al.*, 2002; Judge *et al.*, 2001; Ostroff, 1992; Ryan *et al.*, 1996), increased organizational citizenship behavior (Hoffman *et al.*, 2007; Koys, 2001), improved customer satisfaction (Schulte *et al.*, 2009; Vandenberghe *et al.*, 2009), moderately reduced absenteeism (Scott and Taylor, 1985; Steel and Rentsch, 1995) and decreased turnover (Hom and Griffeth, 1995; Griffeth *et al.*, 2000).

The hospitality industry is known for high employee turnover rates (Davidson *et al.*, 2010), poor work-life balance (Deery, 2008; Deery and Jago, 2009, 2015; Davidson and Wang, 2011; Wolfe and Kim, 2013; Yang *et al.*, 2012; Zopiatis and Constanti, 2007), and limited extrinsic and intrinsic rewards due to low pay, extended working hours, lack of professional growth opportunities, inadequate personal time and exhaustion (Deery and Jago, 2015; Groblena *et al.*, 2016). Job satisfaction is a critical issue for employers and managers in the hospitality industry in order to understand how to mitigate dissatisfiers and increase job satisfaction and motivation.

Globally, hotel housekeepers demonstrate significantly lower levels of satisfaction than other hospitality workers in terms of work-life balance, relationships with management, pay,

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perceptions of work being useful to society and interesting work (Andrade and Westover, 2020). High housekeeper turnover puts guest satisfaction and a hotel's quality and competitiveness at risk (Grobelna and Tokarz-Kocik, 2017). Studies on job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers primarily focus on working conditions in specific geographical locations (Eriksson and Li, 2009; Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Maumbe and Van Wyk, 2008; Powell and Watson, 2006). The current study examines country differences in job satisfaction among hotel housekeeping staff by examining work-life balance, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and work relations variables in 37 countries using International Social Survey Program data (ISSP, 2015). The purpose of the study is to identify similarities and differences in the variables that impact job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across countries with the goal of informing management practice. To our knowledge, this is the first global comparative study of job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers.

### Literature review

Research on job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers indicates a range of conditions and experiences. Individual characteristics (e.g. education level, ethnicity, immigrant status), work-life balance (e.g. flexible scheduling, work interfering with families), work relations (e.g. relationships with coworkers, management, and guests), extrinsic rewards (e.g. pay, benefits, professional growth) and intrinsic rewards (e.g. task variety and significance) all play a role. We next examine these and other relevant themes identified in the research.

#### *Demographic and contextual factors*

Hotel housekeepers are primarily women with low levels of education (Eriksson and Li, 2009; Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Powell and Watson, 2006) and are often immigrants (Krause *et al.*, 2010). In Denmark, housekeepers who are immigrants tend to have higher levels of education than their Danish counterparts but are underemployed due limited Danish language skills. In Wales, housekeepers may have some vocational training (Powell and Watson, 2006). In Las Vegas, Latina hotel housekeepers typically lack educational credentials as well as English language skills (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016). Unrecognized foreign credentials may also be an issue leading to under employment (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Knox, 2011). In the hotel industry in South Africa, higher levels of education were correlated with job tenure for white employees and with shorter tenure for black employees who moved to other opportunities (Maumbe and VanWyk, 2008). Length of service correlated with income increases for white but not for non-white employees.

The contexts in which housekeepers are employed varies greatly, including rural and urban hotel locations, the availability of government benefits and services which can offset other job disadvantages (Eriksson and Li, 2009), and historical, economic and political factors that contribute to dissatisfaction such as racial inequities (Maumbe and VanWyk, 2008). Urban hotel workers are more likely to be immigrants or ethnic minorities than those in rural locations (Eriksson and Li, 2009; Knox, 2011; Watson and Power, 2006).

#### *Job characteristics*

Common safety and health risks associated with hotel housekeeping, which potentially affect job satisfaction, include exposure to hazardous chemicals, physical demands such as heavy lifting and repeated bending (Eriksson and Li, 2009; Knox, 2011; Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Krause *et al.*, 2002; Lee and Krause, 2002; Powell and Watson, 2006); work-related physical pain that goes largely unreported (Lee and Krause, 2002); time pressure, job stress, and low job control (Lee and Krause, 2002; Krause *et al.*, 2002; Powell and Watson, 2006); lack of social status, invisibility due to work being perceived as unskilled, and limited promotion opportunities

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(Powell and Watson, 2006; Onsøyen *et al.*, 2009). Hotel housekeepers in Cardiff, Wales described their work as tiring, low paid, hard, dirty, repetitive, and uninteresting (Powell and Watson, 2006). In some situations, housekeepers supply their own cleaning resources rather than waiting for management to provide needed items (Knox, 2011).

### *Extrinsic rewards*

Extrinsic factors cause both job satisfaction and dissatisfaction for hotel housekeepers. Job satisfaction for housekeepers in Denmark is high due to comparatively good pay, scheduling flexibility, a congenial working climate, guaranteed work hours and task variety (Eriksson and Li, 2009). In Australia, room attendants are often paid by the number of rooms they clean and are not paid for a full workday if they do not complete their assigned number of rooms (Knox, 2011). If they complete rooms before they work time is up, they are required clean elsewhere in the hotel. In South Africa, job satisfaction among hotel employees as a whole is considered high although low pay, pay inequities, and long working hours contribute to dissatisfaction (Maumbe and Van Wyk, 2008). These studies illustrate that pay in one context can be a satisfier and in another, a dissatisfier.

Latina hotel housekeepers in Las Vegas reported positive aspects of work as coworker relations, flexible scheduling and hours, and simply having a job while dissatisfiers included lack of benefits, low pay, weekend work, unfair assignments, coworker discrimination, inadequate equipment, and heavy physical and repetitive work (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016). Economic rewards are highly valued (Powell and Watson, 2006). Low pay for housekeepers in Australia presents economic challenges and satisfaction with pay varies from feelings that it is inadequate to accepting that it is sufficient (Knox, 2011). Some extrinsic factors identified in these studies were satisfiers (e.g. scheduling, having a job), but most were dissatisfiers (e.g. lack of benefits, low pay, long hours, the nature of job tasks).

### *Intrinsic rewards*

Housekeeping staff work independently and autonomously, factors associated with intrinsic motivation (Deci *et al.*, 1999; Deci and Ryan, 2002; Pink, 2009). Housekeeper autonomy is also associated with organizational commitment, which leads to increased productivity and decreased turnover (Groblena and Tokarz-Kocik, 2017). Cardiff hotel housekeepers reported having their work monitored by a supervisor but also having “scope to determine the sequence and pace of tasks” (Powell and Watson, 2006, p. 301). Empowerment strategies involving room self-checks and decreased supervision, higher hourly compensation, and recognition points for positive guest reviews increased pressure but also pride in work, valuing guest interactions, visibility of work and guest tipping (Powell and Watson, 2006), reflecting both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.

Some Australian hotel housekeepers, particularly older workers, view independence and the physical nature of the work as advantages leading to satisfaction and pride (Knox, 2011). Housekeepers also report that they enjoy serving others, take pride in their roles, and establish personal goals to improve their work (Robinson *et al.*, 2015). They see visible results of their work and value their part in creating a positive image for the hotel. In the Cardiff study, 94% of housekeepers saw their work as useful and 62% were proud of their jobs (Powell and Watson, 2006). Initiatives such as room self-checking increase autonomy and trust (Kensbock *et al.*, 2013).

Increased visibility of work and recognition of its impact on guests is reflected in Hackman and Oldham's (1967, 1980) job characteristics model. Core job characteristics such as task significance lead to an increased sense of meaningfulness in one's work and intrinsic motivation. Task variety contributes to job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers in Denmark (Eriksson and Li, 2009), but in other contexts, work repetitiveness is a problem (Knox, 2011; Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Watson and Powell, 2016).

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Autocratic management and control as opposed to encouraging initiative and reduced autonomy are issues for housekeepers in parts of Australia (Kensbrock *et al.*, 2013). A Polish study showed that as workload increases, organizational commitment decreases (Groblena and Tokarz-Kocik, 2017). The same was true of role conflict resulting in unclear expectations. A New Zealand study found that in the hotel industry generally, respect, autonomy, task variety and task meaningfulness lead to career longevity (Mooney *et al.*, 2015).

### *Work-life balance*

Some aspects of work-life balance for hotel housekeepers are problematic such as working weekends (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016) or long hours for hospitality employees generally (Maumbe and Van Wyk, 2008); however, scheduling flexibility is a satisfier as it allows housekeepers, who are primarily female, to work around their children's school schedules (Eriksson and Li, 2009; Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Hunter-Powell and Watson, 2006). A comparison of housekeepers, front office, and food and beverage staff found that managers are considered central to work-life balance through their scheduling, teamwork, and cross-training functions (Robinson *et al.*, 2015). Australian room attendants perceived a positive work-life balance with a sufficient number of days off and convenient working schedules, allowing time for family and personal interest (Robinson *et al.*, 2015).

### *Worker relations*

Worker relations for hotel housekeepers contributes to job satisfaction when positive coworker connections are present (Eriksson and Li, 2009). Relatedness is a component of self-determination theory, which argues that feelings of connection and belonging strengthen motivation (Deci *et al.*, 1999; Deci and Ryan, 2002). In the Cardiff study, half of the participants indicated that if they lost their jobs, they would miss their friendships the most (Powell and Watson, 2006). The majority indicated being respected by supervisors and guests, but a third did not feel respected by other workers. This feeling was also evident in an Australian study in which housekeepers felt looked down on by other hotel workers due to the nature of their work (Robinson *et al.*, 2015) and in a study of Las Vegas hotel housekeepers (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016).

In other cases, workers feel discriminated against by management (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Maumbe and Van Wyk, 2008). Housekeepers also feel they are undervalued, not listened to, not involved in decision making, and that managers are unavailable (Kensbock *et al.*, 2013; Onsøyen *et al.*, 2009). Social interactions with customers may also prove problematic due to unwanted attention and harassment (Powell and Watson, 2006; Kensbock *et al.*, 2016).

Satisfaction with management and satisfaction and coworkers has been correlated with positive organizational behavior for hotel housekeepers in Croatia, potentially resulting in greater guest satisfaction (Ažić, 2017). A New Zealand study found that strong social connections among managers, coworkers, and guests led to the establishment of a positive professional identity and increased job tenure (Mooney *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, an Australian study identified that working relationships and being in a team environment were linked to satisfaction (Robinson *et al.*, 2015).

### *Summary*

As is evident in this review, previous research has focused primarily on demographic profiles, the nature of housekeeping work, and location-specific studies. Housekeepers typically have low levels of education and may be immigrants or from ethnic minority groups. Work-life balance, specifically work interfering with families, is generally not a dissatisfier. In fact, most of the studies reviewed indicated that housekeepers had sufficient flexibility in scheduling to accommodate their children's school schedules as well as time to spend with family. However,

in other cases, long hours and working weekends were problematic, both of which could interfere with families.

Findings on work relations with coworkers were mixed. Friendships and positive working environments contributed to job satisfaction but workers also experienced discrimination and harassment from coworkers and guests, and relationships with management were sometimes characterized by perceived and actual inequities and reluctance to request benefits such as sick days or report physical injuries, demonstrating a lack of trust. Extrinsic rewards in the form of pay is a dissatisfier in most contexts while intrinsic rewards in the form of task significance contribute to job satisfaction.

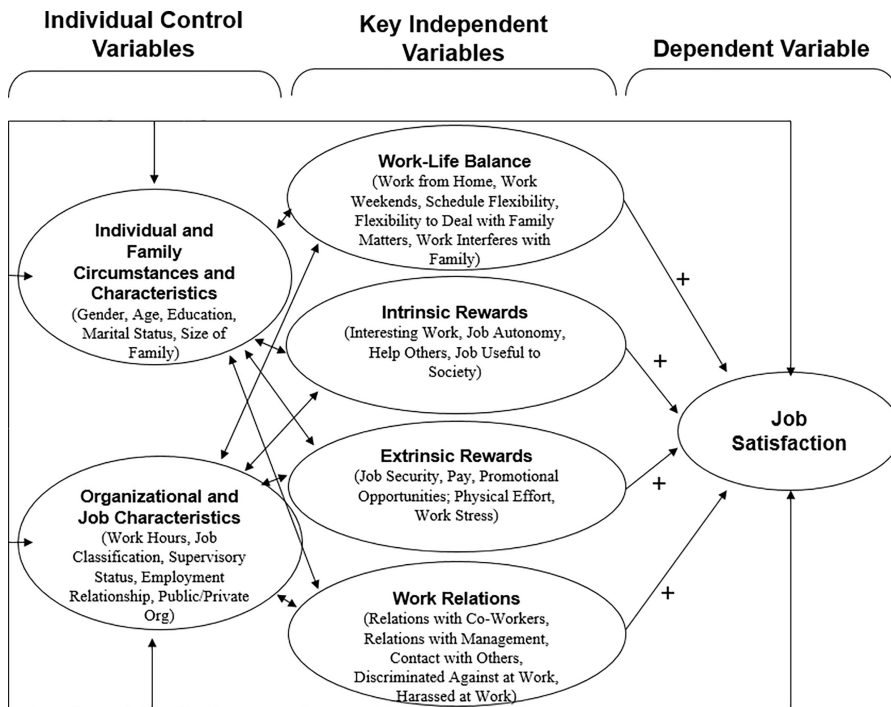
What researchers term as high or low levels of job satisfaction vary. [Hsieh et al. \(2016\)](#) considered that 54% of housekeepers being satisfaction with their jobs and 23% being dissatisfied to be low relative to findings of other studies. For example, 74% of hotel housekeepers in the Cardiff study reported high job satisfaction ([Powell and Watson, 2006](#)) and 79% of housekeepers in a San Francisco study similarly reported high levels of satisfaction ([Lee and Krause, 2002](#)). The Danish study identified high levels of job satisfaction overall ([Eriksson and Li, 2009](#)). In another study, 63.1% of South African hotel housekeepers reported being very satisfied or satisfied, which the researchers considered to be a high outcome ([Hsieh et al., 2016](#)).

It should be noted that the studies cited in this review are based on both qualitative and quantitative data to provide in depth understanding of job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers. For example, in the [Krause et al. \(2002\)](#) study of Las Vegas hotel housekeepers, participants were involved in formulating the research questions and developing the survey instrument as well as interpreting the results, thus the study was informed by the first-hand experiences of the participants. [Hsieh et al.'s \(2016\)](#) study of Latina hotel housekeepers in Las Vegas was based on interviews. The study of housekeepers in Wales consisted of a survey followed by interviews and observations ([Powell and Watson, 2006](#)). The Denmark study was comprised of case studies, including interviews with general managers and room attendants ([Eriksson and Li, 2009](#)). Methods for the Norwegian study were interviews and focus groups in order to obtain rich data about the participants' experiences ([Onsøyen et al., 2009](#)). [Knox's \(2011\)](#) study of four- and five-star hotels in Sydney, Australia was based on case studies with data collected through interviews and combined with quantitative data on hotel performance and employment records. In-depth interviews were the primary source of data for the study of Gold Coast hotels in Australia conducted by [Kensbock et al. \(2013\)](#), and memory work and semi-structured interviews in [Kensbock et al.'s \(2016\)](#) study. The New Zealand study by [Mooney et al. \(2015\)](#) consisted of interviews while the [Robinson et al. \(2015\)](#) study of housekeepers in Eastern Australian hotels was based on data from semi-structured interviews.

Thus, the findings discussed in this literature review tell the stories of the lived experiences and daily realities of housekeepers representing a variety of demographics and job profiles and working in a range of hotel types. While these studies provide insights into job satisfaction factors for hotel housekeepers in specific cities or countries (e.g. [Krause et al., 2002](#); [Lee and Krause, 2002](#); [Powell and Watson, 2006](#)), however, this review has established that global comparative studies have not been conducted.

### Theoretical framework and model

Over the previous half century, thousands of research studies have examined job satisfaction as an outcome variable, as well as its determinants. As seen in [Figure 1](#) below, we utilize a job satisfaction theoretical and empirical model developed by [Andrade and Westover's \(2018a, b\)](#); e.g. see also [Andrade et al. \(2019a, b\)](#), which synthesizes much of the literature to date on job satisfaction and its determinants. As has been done in many previous research studies, we



**Figure 1.**  
Factors influencing work characteristics and job satisfaction

include work-life balance, work relations, and other important intrinsic and extrinsic rewards variables, as well as organizational and job characteristics control variables. Additionally, we have included an occupation variable to explore differences in the model based on the type of hospitality management job the respondent currently holds.

## Research design and methodology

### Hypotheses

Based on the literature reviewed, hypotheses for the study are as follows:

- H1.* There will be statistically significant differences in the levels of job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across countries.
- H2.* Job satisfaction for employees in hospitality occupational categories will be lower than for employees in all other occupational categories, controlling for other work characteristic and individual factors.
- H3.* Job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers will be lower than for employees in other hospitality occupational categories, controlling for other work characteristic and individual factors.
- H4.* There will be statistically significant cross-national differences in the mean scores of the determinants of job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers.
- H5.* Work-life balance factors will have a statistically significant positive impact on the job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across nations.

- H6. Extrinsic rewards will have a statistically significant positive impact on the job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across nations.
- H7. Intrinsic rewards will have a statistically significant positive impact on the job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across nations.
- H8. Coworker relations factors will have a statistically significant positive impact on the job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across nations.

#### *Description of the data*

Following the approach of [Andrade and Westover's \(2018a, b\)](#); e.g. see also [Andrade et al. \(2019a, b\)](#), this research utilizes cross national comparative data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) 2015 Work Orientations Module IV [1], which uses multistage stratified probability samples in 37 individual countries around the globe [2] and asks questions about employees' work experiences, conditions, and perceptions. In this analysis, we focus on hotel housekeepers, with  $N = 408$ , all hospitality workers, with an  $N = 982$ , and all workers, with an  $N = 18,716$ . As Westover noted, "The International Social Survey Program Work Orientations modules utilized a multistage stratified probability sample to collect the data for each of the various countries with a variety of eligible participants in each country's target population" (2012a, p. 3). All ISSP Work Orientation variables are single-item indicators and the unit of analysis is individuals across each participating country. The sample of hotel housekeepers, by the 29 countries, is as follows in [Table 1](#).

#### *Operationalization of variables*

We use [Andrade and Westover's \(2018a, b\)](#); e.g. see also [Andrade et al. \(2019a, b\)](#) job satisfaction model (building on [Handel's \(2005\)](#) and [Kalleberg's \(1977\)](#) job satisfaction model, for comparing global differences in job satisfaction and its determinants across job types (e.g. see also [Spector, 1997](#); [Souza-Poza and Souza-Poza, 2000](#)). Following the approach of [Andrade and Westover's \(2018a, b\)](#); see also [Andrade et al., 2019a, b\)](#), we focused on a range of intrinsic, extrinsic, workplace relationships and work-life balance variables (in addition to a range of organization and individual control variables; [Table 2](#) below [3]).

Country	Sample size	Country	Sample size
Austria	7	Latvia	17
Belgium	24	Lithuania	10
Chile	23	Mexico	9
China	12	Philippines	4
Taiwan	19	Poland	23
Czech Republic	21	Russia	12
Estonia	24	Slovak Republic	17
Finland	14	Slovenia	7
France	3	South Africa	29
Georgia	11	Spain	34
Hungary	12	Suriname	16
Iceland	4	Sweden	7
India	6	United States	14
Israel	7	Venezuela	7
Japan	15	<i>Total</i>	<i>408</i>

**Table 1.**  
Hotel housekeeper  
sample, by country



*Control variables*

As indicated by Westover (2012b, p. 17) “the literature has identified many important individual control variables, due to limitations in data availability, control variables used for the quantitative piece of this study will be limited to the following individual characteristics: (1) Sex, (2) Age, (3) Years of Education, (4) Marital Status, and (5) Size of Family. . .” (2012b, p. 17). Additionally, control variables used in this analysis include: (1) Work Hours, (2) Supervisory Status, (3) Employment Relationship, and (4) Public/Private Organization (see Hamermesh, 2001; Souza-Poza and Souza-Poza, 2000).

*Statistical methodology*

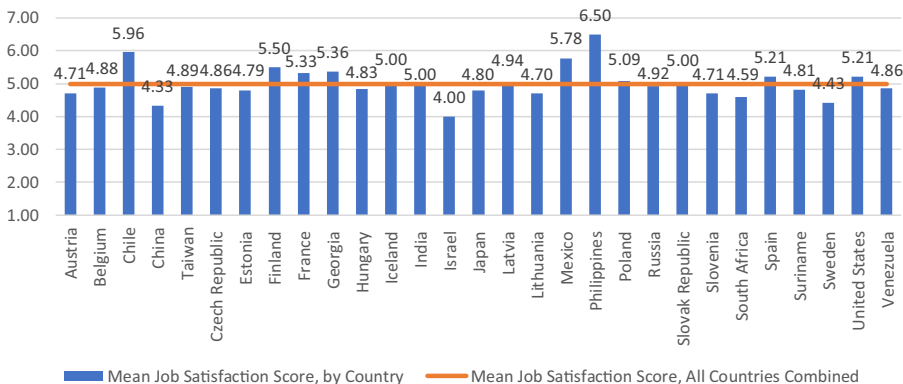
We analyzed ISSP Work Orientations data from individual respondents across 37 countries, first running appropriate bivariate and multivariate analyses [4] on all key study variables in order to make comparisons. Next, we ran an Ordinary Least Squares Regression (OLS) model for all main study variables and respondents in all countries, followed by an OLS regression model specific for all hospitality jobs lumped together. Finally, we ran OLS regression models for all hotel housekeepers in all countries.

**Results**

*Descriptive results*

Figure 2 shows mean job satisfaction scores for housekeepers, by country. The highest job satisfaction levels for housekeeping jobs is in the Philippines (6.50), Chile (5.96), with the lowest job satisfaction scores in Israel (4.00), China (4.33), and Sweden (4.43). Housekeepers in most nations have a mean job satisfaction scores in the 4.7 to 5.3 range (overall world-wide mean for all occupations is 5.32).

Tables 2 and 3 below shows the means of job satisfaction and other main study variables, broken down for housekeepers, all other hospitality occupations (11 total), and all jobs, regardless of occupation type for respondents in all 37 countries included in the 2015 wave of ISSP Work Orientations data. We also ran descriptive statistics for hotel housekeepers by country to be able to compare mean scores of main study variables (those results are available upon request). Of note is the general variation across countries for the different study variables and the difference between housekeepers with other hospitality jobs and when compared with all occupations. Housekeepers have lower overall job satisfaction than other hospitality workers, and much lower than workers across all occupations. Additionally, housekeepers have lower mean scores than other hospitality workers in 12 of the 19 work characteristics examined, with the biggest gap landing on “interesting work.”



**Figure 2.** Mean job satisfaction of housekeepers, by country

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
Job satisfaction <sup>1</sup>	"How satisfied are you in your main job?"
<i>Intrinsic rewards</i> <sup>2</sup>	
Interesting job	"My job is interesting."
Job autonomy	"I can work independently."
Help others	"In my job I can help other people."
Job useful to society	"My job is useful to society."
<i>Extrinsic rewards</i> <sup>3</sup>	
Pay	"My income is high."
Job security	"My job is secure."
Promotional opportunities	"My opportunities for advancement are high."
Physical effort <sup>4</sup>	"How often do you have to do hard physical work?"
Work stress <sup>5</sup>	"How often do you find your work stressful?"
<i>Work relations</i>	
Management-employee relations <sup>6</sup>	"In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between management and employees?"
Coworker relations <sup>7</sup>	"In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between workmates/colleagues?"
Contact with others <sup>8</sup>	"In my job, I have personal contact with others."
Discriminated against at work <sup>9</sup>	"Over the past 5 years, have you been discriminated against with regard to work, for instance, when applying for a job, or when being considered for a pay increase or promotion?"
Harassed at work <sup>10</sup>	"Over the past 5 years, have you been harassed by your supervisors or coworkers at your job, for example, have you experienced any bullying, physical, or psychological abuse?"
<i>Work-life balance</i>	
Work from home <sup>11</sup>	"How often do you work at home during your normal work hours?"
Work Weekends <sup>12</sup>	"How often does your job involve working weekends?"
Schedule flexibility <sup>13</sup>	"Which of the following best describes how your working hours are decided (times you start and finish your work)?"
Flexibility to deal with family matters <sup>14</sup>	"How difficult would it be for you to take an hour or two off during work hours, to take care of personal or family matters?"
Work interferes with family <sup>15</sup>	"How often do you feel that the demands of your job interfere with your family?"

**Note(s):** <sup>1</sup> Response categories for this variable include: (1) Completely Dissatisfied, (2) Very Dissatisfied, (3) Fairly Dissatisfied, (4) Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, (5) Fairly Satisfied, (6) Very Satisfied, (7) Completely Satisfied

<sup>2</sup> Response categories for these variables include: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree

<sup>3</sup> Response categories for these variables include: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree

<sup>4</sup> Response categories for this variable include: (1) Always, (2) Often, (3) Sometimes, (4) Hardly Ever, (5) Never

<sup>5</sup> Response categories for this variable include: (1) Always, (2) Often, (3) Sometimes, (4) Hardly Ever, (5) Never

<sup>6</sup> Response categories for these variables include: (1) Very Bad, (2) Bad, (3) Neither good nor bad, (4) Good, (5) Very Good

<sup>7</sup> Response categories for these variables include: (1) Very Bad, (2) Bad, (3) Neither good nor bad, (4) Good, (5) Very Good

<sup>8</sup> Response categories for these variables include: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree

<sup>9</sup> Response categories for these variables include: (1) Yes, (2) No

<sup>10</sup> Response categories for these variables include: (1) Yes, (2) No

<sup>11</sup> Response categories for this variable include: (1) Always, (2) Often, (3) Sometimes, (4) Hardly Ever, (5) Never

<sup>12</sup> Response categories for this variable include: (1) Always, (2) Often, (3) Sometimes, (4) Hardly Ever, (5) Never

<sup>13</sup> Response categories for this variable include: (1) Starting and finishing times are decided by my employer and I cannot change them on my own

<sup>14</sup> Response categories for this variable include: (1) Not difficult at all, (2) Not too difficult, (3) Somewhat difficult, (4) Very difficult

<sup>15</sup> Response categories for this variable include: (1) Always, (2) Often, (3) Sometimes, (4) Hardly Ever, (5) Never

**Table 2.**  
Key work characteristics related to job satisfaction

Variable	Hotel housekeepers	All hospitality occupations	All occupations	Job satisfaction factors
Job satisfaction	4.99	5.12	5.32	
Interesting work	3.00	3.39	3.83	
Job autonomy	3.64	3.55	3.82	
Help others	3.62	3.69	3.88	
Job useful to society	3.88	3.76	3.94	
Job security	3.56	3.66	3.77	
Pay	2.20	2.43	2.82	
Promotional opportunities	2.21	2.47	2.78	
Physical Effort	3.44	3.30	2.71	
Work stress	2.80	3.08	3.17	
Relations with coworkers	4.05	4.14	4.19	
Relations with management	3.88	3.95	3.91	
Contact with Others	3.97	4.20	4.23	
Discriminated against at work	1.80	1.79	1.82	
Harassed at Work	1.85	1.84	1.86	
Work from home	4.49	4.38	4.00	
Work weekends	3.44	2.69	3.14	
Schedule Flexibility	1.37	1.45	1.63	
Flexibility to deal with family matters	2.30	2.47	2.25	
Work interferes with family	3.99	3.78	3.66	
Age	48.11	42.38	43.37	
Education	11.11	11.90	13.34	
Size of family	3.27	3.18	3.23	
Sample size	408	982	18,716	

**Table 3.**  
Mean scores of job satisfaction and main study variables, 2015

As we examined the study variables with the greatest variations in means scores between housekeepers and other hospitality occupations, as well as across countries, our attention was drawn toward the following variables, as depicted in [Figures 3–5](#) below: Interesting Work, Useful Job, Pay, Relations with Management, and Work Interferes with Family. In each case, we see a clear linear relationship between the work characteristic of housekeepers and the corresponding job satisfaction. As interesting work, useful work, pay and relations with management improved, job satisfaction improves. Additionally, the more work interferes with family, job satisfaction declines.

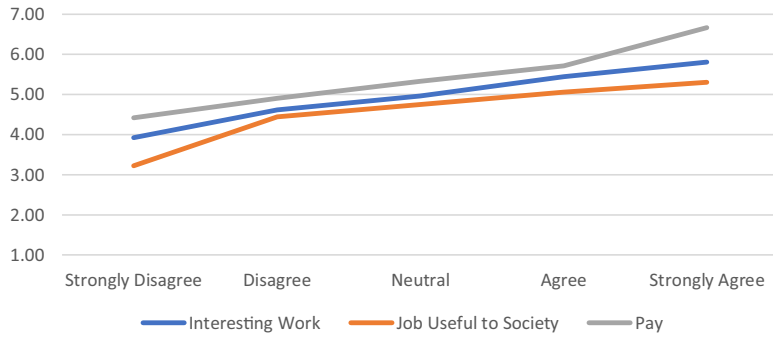
### *Regression results*

Following the approach of [Andrade and Westover's \(2018a, b\)](#); [Andrade et al. \(2019a, b\)](#), a step-wise regression approach was used to build the OLS model:

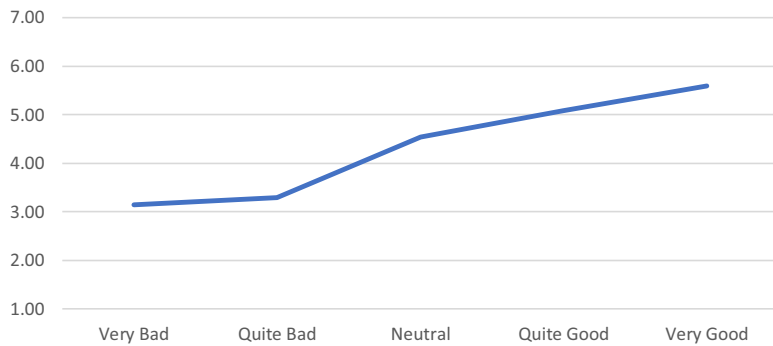
- (1) Model 1 – All control variables
- (2) Model 2 – All intrinsic rewards variables
- (3) Model 3 – All extrinsic rewards variables
- (4) Model 4 – All work relations variables
- (5) Model 5 – All work-life balance variables
- (6) Model 6 – Combined model of all key independent variables (intrinsic, extrinsic, work relations, and work-life balance) and the control variables on job satisfaction.

Nearly all variables were statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) when the individual control model and models 2–5 were run, with the exception of size of family and working weekends. However, in the combined model, working weekends was significant, while physical effort,

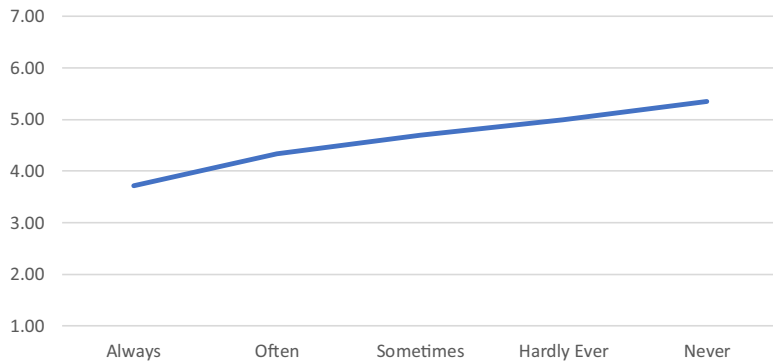
**Figure 3.**  
Mean job satisfaction  
by response to  
interesting work,  
useful job and pay



**Figure 4.**  
Mean job satisfaction  
score by response to  
relations with  
management



**Figure 5.**  
Mean job satisfaction  
score by response to  
work interferes with  
family



contact with others, working from home, and several individual control variables were not significant. Additionally, there were variations in *adjusted r-squared* values for the individual controls model and models 2–5 (with the separate intrinsic and extrinsic rewards models holding the strongest predictability), with the combined model (including all intrinsic, extrinsic, work relations, work-life balance, and control variables) accounting for nearly 43% of the variation in job satisfaction (*adjusted r-squared* = 0.428).

The above specified combined model was then run for workers across all job types, for all hospitality workers combined, and then for hotel housekeepers specifically. As can be seen in Table 3, there is a great deal of variation between occupational categories in standardized beta coefficient statistical significance for each of the intrinsic, extrinsic, work relations, and work-life balance job characteristics and control variables in predicting job satisfaction. Of particular note is that many of the statistically significant independent variables in the model for all workers were not significant in the model for all hospitality jobs and the model for housekeepers. Part of this is likely due to the relatively small *N* for the hospitality occupations generally, but housekeepers, specifically (where achieving statistical significance of a variable is more difficult). We also see some clear patterns of difference in the driving indicators of job satisfaction in housekeeping jobs and hospitality jobs when compared with those of all jobs in general.

For housekeepers specifically, only two intrinsic variables (interesting work and job useful to society), one extrinsic variable (pay), one work relations variable (relations with management) and one work-life-balance variable (work interferes with family) was statistically significant, as compared to the model for all occupations, in which intrinsic and extrinsic variables are the most significant and have the strongest standardized beta coefficients (the most impact on predictability of job satisfaction).

Variable	Hotel housekeepers	All hospitality occupations	All occupations
Interesting work	0.238***	0.255***	0.287***
Job autonomy	-0.008	0.041	0.019**
Help others	-0.030	0.010	0.022**
Job useful to society	0.171**	0.121***	0.037***
Job security	0.078	0.103***	0.063***
Pay	0.144**	0.123***	0.098***
Promotional opportunities	-0.016	-0.029	0.057***
Physical effort	-0.057	-0.015	0.005
Work stress	-0.069	-0.049	-0.086***
Relations with Coworkers	-0.007	0.08**	0.085***
Relations with management	0.262***	0.238***	0.225***
Contact with others	0.012	-0.014	0.010
Discriminated against at work	0.062	0.049*	0.037***
Harassed at Work	-0.030	-0.053*	0.019***
Work from home	0.043	-0.019	0.005
Work weekends	-0.072	-0.081**	-0.023***
Schedule flexibility	-0.025	-0.015	0.014*
Flexibility to deal with family matters	-0.011	0.002	-0.036***
Work interferes with family	0.158**	0.186***	0.097***
Gender	-0.044	0.012	0.005
Age	0.000	0.037	0.033***
Education	-0.121**	-0.063**	-0.045***
Marital status	-0.061	-0.064*	-0.028***
Size of family	-0.036	-0.037	-0.007
Work hours	-0.032	-0.006	0.006
Supervisory status	-0.014	-0.012	-0.004
Employment relationship	0.059	-0.059*	0.008
Public/Private organization	0.068	-0.064*	-0.028***
<i>N</i>	408	982	18,716
Adj. <i>R</i> -squared	0.43	0.44	0.43
<i>F</i>	0.000***	0.000***	483.58***

Note(s): Beta Values; Level of significance: \* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$

**Table 4.**  
OLS regression results  
of job satisfaction and  
main study  
variables, 2015

**Revisiting hypotheses**

This study looked at the housekeeping function across the globe for clues on differences in job satisfaction. We anticipated that universally accepted factors determining job satisfaction would exhibit low results for hotel housekeepers across the studied countries. This is largely borne out in the study results (see Table 5). Difference of means analysis demonstrates a statistically significant difference in mean scores across the 29 countries in the study (H1; see Figure 2). Additionally, results show that generally all countries face the same challenges. Outside of a few outliers among the 29 countries studied, all countries gave housekeeper job satisfaction scores lower than all other hospitality job categories and again lower still from all non-hospitality occupations (H2 and H3; see Tables 2 and 3).

Hypotheses	Variables	Support
H1: There will be statistically significant differences in the levels of job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across countries		Supported. $p \leq 0.001$
H2: Job satisfaction for employees in hospitality occupational categories will be lower than for employees in all other occupational categories, controlling for other work characteristic and individual factors		Supported $p \leq 0.001$
H3: Job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers will be lower than for employees in other hospitality occupational categories, controlling for other work characteristic and individual factors		Supported $p \leq 0.001$
H4: There will be statistically significant cross-national differences in the mean scores of the determinants of job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers		Supported $p \leq 0.001$
H5: Work-life balance factors will have a statistically significant positive impact on the job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across nations	Work from home Work weekends Schedule Flexibility Flexibility with family matters Work interferes with family	Supported $p \leq 0.001$ ("mixed" among variables – namely work interferes with family)
H6: Extrinsic rewards will have a statistically significant positive impact on the job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across nations	Pay Job security Promotional opportunities Physical effort Work stress	Supported $p \leq 0.001$ ("mixed" among variables – namely pay)
H7: Intrinsic rewards will have a statistically significant positive impact on the job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across nations	Interesting job Job autonomy Help others Job useful to society	Supported $p \leq 0.001$ ("mixed" among variables – namely interesting work and useful to society)
H8: Coworker relations factors will have a statistically significant positive impact on the job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across nations	Management-employee relations Coworker relations Contact with others Discriminated against at work Harassed at work	Supported $p \leq 0.001$ ("mixed" among variables – namely relations with management)

**Table 5.**  
Summary of  
hypotheses

Furthermore, results affirm statistically significant differences in the mean scores of the determinants of hotel housekeeper job satisfaction across countries (H4; see Tables 2 and 3). In terms of the statistical significance of job satisfaction determinants within the OLS regression analysis, all categories of independent variables employed in this study provided mixed results in relation to study hypotheses (H5, H6, H7 and H8; see Table 4). Overall, there are demonstrated cross-national differences in statistical significance and variable beta coefficient strength across each of the work-life balance (H5), extrinsic rewards (H6), intrinsic rewards (H7), work relations (H8) variables for hotel housekeepers, versus all hospitality workers and all workers. Within each variable category, some variables are statistically significant, while others are not. With the exceptions of education level (a control variable), all statistically significant variables across variable categories have a positive relationship with job satisfaction. Education has a negative relationship, meaning that as the education level of hotel housekeepers increase, job satisfaction decreases. Additionally, statistically significant cross-national differences in mean scores of main study variables further supports these hypotheses.

## Discussion

Housekeeping is the most critical function of a lodging operation. A clean room is often taken for granted by guests, but hospitality managers know that a room not cleaned properly will cause the greatest level of guest dissatisfaction. Housekeeping in a hotel is also the largest department in a hotel, and often the lowest paid department. This combination – most critical to operation and guest satisfaction while also the hardest to staff – is why it is considered the most difficult department to manage in a hotel.

Comparative OLS model comparisons and comparisons of mean score differences reveal lower satisfaction levels and work quality characteristics when compared to both “other hospitality occupations” and “all occupations” groups were. While this may be discouraging to lodging managers, considering the importance of the housekeeping function and the difficulty hiring and maintaining a strong housekeeping crew, it can be considered an opportunity for improvement. Incremental positive movement in any or all of these characteristics will improve job satisfaction and close the gap between housekeepers and other occupations.

For example, intrinsic rewards internalized by housekeepers (particularly helping other people and job useful to society) can be improved by the culture of the hotel and the narrative communicated to the staff. Extensive previous research has indicated the importance of intrinsic factors such as autonomy, empowerment (Groblena and Tokarz-Kocik, 2017; Kensbock *et al.*, 2013; Mooney *et al.*, 2015), work pride (Powell and Watson, 2006; Robinson *et al.*, 2015), and task variety (Ericksson and Li, 2009) as contributing to job satisfaction. There is a disconnect between the reality of the housekeepers self-reported scores on intrinsic factors and the fact that these positions are tremendously valuable to society. With little or no costs, management can create opportunities and initiatives for housekeeping staff to learn and internalize this value. Creating more opportunities for housekeepers to engage with guests (work relations/contact with others) can also be designed and managed to increase their interest in their work and understand the importance of their role.

Another area where improvement appears to be needed and obtainable is relations with coworkers and with management. Previous research indicates that good relations with coworkers positively impacts job satisfaction (Ericksson and Li, 2009; Powell and Watson, 2006; Robinson *et al.*, 2015) and is negatively impacted when housekeepers are not involved in decision-making, feel undervalued, or are not listened to by management (Kensbock *et al.*, 2013; Onsøyen *et al.*, 2009). While the overall scores in these factors were not necessarily terribly low (relations with management was significantly lower than others), they present

potential places for improvement where financial resources are not required. Instead good and creative management practices alone can create improvement.

Finally, one area often cited as an obvious target to increase job satisfaction is to increase wages. Previous studies have identified the importance of economic rewards to job satisfaction (Powell and Watson, 2006) and low pay as a dissatisfier (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Knox, 2011; Maumbe and Van Wyk, 2008) with some exceptions (Eriksson and Li, 2009). However, hoteliers are constrained by economic factors often outside their control when it comes to pay. Housekeepers are a fairly ubiquitous employee group where pay rates do not vary much among hotels in geographic areas. While housekeepers identify pay as a significant satisfaction factor in this study, this decision is outside the discretion of the hotels' management. This research identifies 19 factors that affect morale and job satisfaction. Therefore, managers can pursue factors other than pay to improve the job satisfaction of the critical housekeeping team.

### Limitations and future research

In this study, we did not have enough participants in each individual countries to run the OLS regression model by country and test the statistical significance of the determinants of job satisfaction across countries. Future research can seek for larger in-country samples of hotel housekeepers. Additionally, there is potential for an interesting study further examining the differing mean scores by country. In terms of country comparisons, a question worth pursuing is whether hotel housekeepers in developed countries have higher or lower job satisfaction in than those in developing countries. As well, future research could examine the role of cultural differences in understanding country differences and looking for ways to improve job satisfaction.

Additionally, as mentioned above, housekeeper pay is a challenging problem for hotel managers and owners. Due to the size of the housekeeping department, raising the wages of housekeepers is difficult to budget. And, raising the wages of this department then puts pressure on managers to raise wages for all the other line-level employees (e.g. front desk staff). Future research should address in more detail the impact pay has on job satisfaction for hotel housekeepers across countries. This research may also look at whether those paid more are also more productive in their overall job performance.

### Notes

1. ISSP Researchers collected the data using multistage stratified random sampling, using self-administered questionnaires, personal interviews, and mail-back questionnaires, depending on the country. For a full overview of the questions in the Work Orientations IV module and for a full summary and description of this research, see <https://www.gesis.org/issp/modules/issp-modules-by-topic/work-orientations/2015/>.
2. Countries include, in alphabetical order: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, China, Taiwan, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, India, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela.
3. Each variable is a single-item indicator.
4. All correlations, cross-tabulations, ANOVA, ANCOVA, post-hoc tests, and full descriptive statistics have not been included here due to space limitations, but are available upon request. Additionally, appropriate tests for multicollinearity were conducted. There are no issues with multicollinearity of variables in the OLS model. Additionally, all outliers were Winsorized in the initial data cleaning stages, prior to final models and analysis.



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