

**Satisfaction with Supervisor among Extension Program Assistants**

Dr. Suzanna Windon  
The Pennsylvania State University,  
Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education  
209 B Ferguson Building, University Park, PA, 16802  
Email: [sxk75@psu.edu](mailto:sxk75@psu.edu); phone – 814.863.3825

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### Introduction

In the 1970s, Cooperative Extension organizations dramatically increased recruitment of paraprofessionals (Extension program assistants), with resulting significant benefit to the Extension system (Boyce, 1970; Parsons & Kiesow, 1975). Extension program assistants are employed by Ohio State University Extension to help Extension educators. Extension program assistants are responsible for recruiting individuals for an educational program. They use standardized curriculum materials to provide informal teaching and standardized evaluation instruments to assess program participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. [State] Extension has 367 full-time Extension educators and program assistants, with almost 50% classified as program assistants. Previous studies in the Extension field found that satisfaction with supervisor is a key indicator of employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention (Carter et al., 1990; Strong & Harder, 2009). Almost all studies of Extension employees' satisfaction with work investigated Extension educators as a subject of study; however, no research examines satisfaction with supervisor among Extension program assistants. This study aimed to rectify the oversight in the literature by examining the extent to which Ohio State Extension program assistants are satisfied with their supervisors and determining if specific demographics of Extension program assistants.

### Theoretical Framework

The supervisor can play an important role in the well-being of an employee because quality of supervision influences the employee's satisfaction with work (Adebayo & Ogunsina, 2011). Previous studies found that factors such as informal and formal feedback, job security, degree of ambiguity, work conflicts, satisfaction with work, and turnover intention all relate to satisfaction with supervisor (Adebayo & Ogunsina, 2011; DeConinck & Stilwell, 2004). According to Scarpello and Vandenberg (1987), satisfaction with supervisor indicates the degree of satisfaction with the immediate supervisor and differs from being satisfied with the work environment and the work itself. Moreover, the authors emphasized that "currently available job satisfaction questionnaires are inadequate for measuring the satisfaction with the supervisor construct . . . they intended to assess satisfaction with multiple job facets, only one of which is supervision" (p. 448). McCaslin and Mwangi (1994) concluded that Extension agents' demographic characteristics do not contribute to their level of overall job satisfaction. Sorensen and McKim (2014) found very little effect of demographic variables on agricultural teachers in Oregon. Bengtson and Harder (2017) studied dyadic relationships between County Extension directors and Extension agents in Florida, finding that the relationships between employees and supervisors influenced the employees' satisfaction with work and work productivity.

### Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that affect satisfaction with supervisor among Ohio State Extension program assistants. Two research objectives guided this study: (1) Describe program assistants' perceptions in terms of satisfaction with their supervisors. (2) Determine whether program assistants' satisfaction with supervisor differed based on demographic characteristics that included educational level, gender, marital status, having children at home under 18 years old, years of services, program areas, and age.

The target population for this study was Ohio State Extension program assistants. The overall response rate was 84% ( $N = 153$ ). Satisfaction with supervisor was measured using Scarpello and Vandenberg's (1987) SWMSS instrument because of its potential to link supervisor behavior and actions with employee satisfaction. Scarpello and Vandenberg (1987) reported an internal consistency coefficient of .95. All 18 items of the original instrument were used in this study to assess Extension program assistants' satisfaction with supervisor. Instrument items included: "The way my supervisor listens when I have something important to say" and "The way my supervisor treats me when I make a mistake." Responses to each item were collected using a five-point Likert scale: 1 = *very dissatisfied*, 2 = *dissatisfied*, 3 = *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*, 4 = *satisfied*, and 5 = *very satisfied*. The Cronbach's alpha for the SWMSS instrument in this study was .96. An independent *t*-test was conducted to determine if group means for total scores on the measured construct differed for the two groups of respondents (early and late). Results showed no statistically significant difference between early and late respondents on the measures of employee satisfaction with supervisor.

### **Data Analysis**

A descriptive statistic was utilized to describe the first research objective. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the existence of statistically significant differences in the means between satisfaction with supervisor and the demographic variables: level of education, children under 18 living at home, program area, years of service, gender, and age. The overall design limited the scope of the study and limits the generalizability of the obtained results because only employees of a single Extension organization in the state of Ohio participated.

### **Findings**

Extension assistants rated themselves as slightly satisfied with their supervisors ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = .94$ ). Participants reported their highest satisfaction with the way their supervisors listen to them, support them in dealing with other managers, and their fairness in appraising job performance. Overall, respondents were dissatisfied with the way their supervisors inform them about work changes, show concern for their career progress, and the frequency with which they were recognized for doing a good job. Satisfaction with supervisor was not related to program assistants' demographic variables.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This study makes a unique contribution to the research in the field of Extension organization development and employee satisfaction with supervisor. Findings suggest that the Ohio State University Extension organization should assess program assistants' satisfaction with their supervisors and offer leadership professional development for the middle-level managers who serve in supervisory roles. It is important to continue pursuing research and scientific discussion related to the relationship between supervisor and subordinate. In a general sense, outcomes of the present study suggest that there should be further investigation of the effect of supervisor output and feedback on employee performance. Moreover, there is a need to examine how a supervisor's professional development can improve an employee's satisfaction with supervisor. Future research should explore how interpersonal trust among supervisors and subordinates affects employees' career progress.

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