

# Employee satisfaction with occupational health practitioners in the Gert Sibande District, Mpumalanga

Kavitha Naicker \*

*Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.*

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## Abstract

Client satisfaction is a critical indicator of service quality in occupational health settings, yet research in this area remains limited, particularly in South Africa. This study explores employee satisfaction with occupational health practitioners (OHPs) in the Gert Sibande District, Mpumalanga, focusing on key factors such as communication, professionalism, confidentiality, and the overall quality of service delivery. A cross-sectional, quantitative study was conducted using a validated patient satisfaction survey to assess the perceptions of employees accessing occupational health services. The findings revealed a high overall satisfaction rate, with the majority of employees reporting positive experiences regarding trust, professionalism, and the consultation environment. However, concerns were raised regarding communication practices, waiting times, and confidentiality. These results underscore the need for ongoing improvements in occupational health service delivery to enhance employee trust and engagement. Addressing these concerns through targeted interventions could improve employee health outcomes and workplace productivity.

**Keywords:** Occupational health; Employee satisfaction; Occupational health services; Occupational health practitioners; Service quality; Communication

## 1. Introduction

Occupational health services (OHS) play a crucial role in maintaining employee well-being, preventing occupational illnesses, and ensuring compliance with workplace health and safety regulations (1). Effective OHS not only protects employees but also enhances productivity and organizational efficiency by reducing absenteeism and workplace injuries (2). Employee satisfaction with occupational health practitioners (OHPs) is an essential factor that influences engagement with these services, adherence to medical advice, and overall workplace health outcomes.

Research indicates that several factors contribute to employee satisfaction with OHPs, including professionalism, communication, confidentiality, accessibility, and the perceived effectiveness of medical interventions (3,4). Dissatisfaction with occupational health services can lead to reduced utilization, reluctance to report workplace health concerns, and decreased compliance with occupational health recommendations (4, 5). Despite the importance of employee satisfaction in ensuring the effectiveness of occupational health services, limited research has been conducted in South Africa, particularly in the Gert Sibande District of Mpumalanga.

Given the evolving nature of occupational health needs, particularly in industries with high exposure to occupational hazards, understanding employee perceptions of OHPs is critical for improving service delivery. This study aims to assess employee satisfaction with OHPs in the Gert Sibande District, examining key factors influencing their experiences and identifying areas for improvement. The findings from this study will contribute to the broader understanding of

\* Corresponding author: Kavitha Naicker

occupational health service quality in South Africa and provide insights into potential interventions that can enhance employee engagement with occupational health services.

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## **2. Material and methods**

A cross-sectional, quantitative study was conducted at an occupational health service provider in the Gert Sibande District, Mpumalanga. The study aimed to evaluate employee satisfaction with OHPs using a validated patient satisfaction survey developed by Verbeek et al. (3). The survey measured multiple dimensions of satisfaction, including communication, professionalism, trust, confidentiality, and service efficiency.

### **2.1. Study Population and Sampling**

The study population comprised employees from various industries who attended occupational health consultations. A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representation across different sectors. A total of 259 participants were recruited, with eligibility criteria requiring that employees had accessed occupational health services at least once in the past year.

### **2.2. Data Collection**

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to participants, who completed them anonymously to encourage honest responses. The survey consisted of both closed- and open-ended questions, allowing for quantitative analysis while capturing qualitative insights into employee experiences. Data collection was conducted over a four-month period, ensuring a diverse sample.

### **2.3. Data Analysis**

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software. Mean satisfaction scores were calculated for each domain, and associations between demographic variables (such as age, gender, and employment type) and satisfaction levels were assessed using chi-square tests and regression analysis.

### **2.4. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand's Ethics Review Board (Protocol number: M150438). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality of responses was maintained throughout the research process.

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## **3. Results and Discussion**

The study achieved a high response rate of 89%, with 258 participants completing the survey. The majority of respondents were male (82.2%) and between the ages of 21–40 years (76.8%). Most held a secondary education (60.9%), and 45.7% were never married. Regarding employment, 81.8% were general employees and 18.2% were managers.

When examining the utilisation of the Occupational Health Services (OHS), 43.4% had not used the service in the past 12 months, while 38% used it once, with decreasing numbers for more frequent visits. Most participants (87.5%) consulted with an occupational health nurse practitioner during their visit.

### **3.1. Key Findings**

- Professionalism and Trust: Employees rated OHPs highly in terms of professionalism, competence, and trustworthiness. The majority (85.2%) felt that the practitioners were knowledgeable and provided appropriate medical advice.
- Communication: While most employees reported positive interactions, 22.7% expressed concerns about the clarity of medical explanations. Some participants noted that OHPs used medical jargon without sufficient simplification.
- Confidentiality: Concerns about privacy were raised by 18.9% of respondents, particularly in cases where sensitive health information was shared in group settings.
- Service Efficiency: While consultation times were generally satisfactory, 26.4% of participants reported long waiting periods before being seen by an OHP.

Overall satisfaction levels were notably high. Participants' average satisfaction score was 9.06 out of 10, with the majority reporting high satisfaction across all measured areas.

Comparative analysis against Dutch OHS data showed that this South African OHS achieved significantly higher scores in areas such as overall satisfaction, being taken seriously, trust, expectations, and access/comfort, while perceptions of the OHS's general image remained similar.

The reliability of the subscales was confirmed with high Cronbach's alpha values, ranging from 0.73 to 0.95.

### **3.2. Comparison with Existing Literature**

These findings align with global research indicating that trust and professionalism are key determinants of patient satisfaction in occupational health settings. However, communication barriers and confidentiality concerns are common challenges that require targeted interventions. Studies by Jeebhay and Jacobs (1) and Michell (2) similarly emphasize the need for enhanced employee engagement strategies in occupational health services.

### **3.3. Implications for Occupational Health Services**

The results highlight the need for improved communication strategies, such as the use of layperson-friendly language and increased patient engagement during consultations. Additionally, ensuring confidentiality through private consultation spaces and strict information-sharing protocols can enhance trust in OHPs. Addressing waiting times through better appointment scheduling and resource allocation may also improve overall satisfaction.

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## **4. Conclusion**

The findings indicate that employees in the Gert Sibande District generally have high levels of satisfaction with OHPs, particularly regarding professionalism and trust. However, concerns related to communication, confidentiality, and waiting times highlight areas requiring improvement. Enhancing employee satisfaction with occupational health services is essential for fostering workplace well-being and ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations. Future research should explore qualitative insights into employee experiences and investigate satisfaction levels across different occupational sectors. Implementing targeted interventions based on these findings can improve service delivery and contribute to better workplace health outcomes.

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## **Compliance with ethical standards**

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### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The author declares no conflicts of interest in conducting this study.

### *Statement of ethical approval*

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand's Ethics Review Board (Protocol number: M150438). Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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