

# We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

**6,900**

Open access books available

**186,000**

International authors and editors

**200M**

Downloads

**154**

Countries delivered to

**TOP 1%**

most cited scientists

**12.2%**

Contributors from top 500 universities



**WEB OF SCIENCE™**

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index  
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?  
Contact [book.department@intechopen.com](mailto:book.department@intechopen.com)

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.

For more information visit [www.intechopen.com](http://www.intechopen.com)



# Professional Pride and Dignity? A Classic Grounded Theory Study among Social Workers

Heidi Branta, Tina Jacobson and Aida Alvinius

Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/68018>

---

## Abstract

Social workers working with individuals, who are vulnerable and in need of help in different situations, face great demands. They need to be able to respond to people with different kind of needs, yet at the same time handle organizational requirements. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to contribute to an increased understanding of the phenomenon of job satisfaction, its meaning for professionals in the field of social work, and what affects job satisfaction. The study was performed in accordance with classic grounded theory, and all data were collected through three semistructural interviews. The results of the study generated a theoretical model that illustrates how the phenomenon of "work satisfaction" can be understood and reached through a process of balancing, maintaining, and recreating professional pride and dignity in the field of social work. The discussion ends with suggestions for further studies, methodological discussion, and proposals for practical implications.

**Keywords:** social work, grounded theory, work satisfaction, professional pride, dignity

---

## 1. Introduction

Choosing social work as a profession is an active choice that means representing or working with vulnerable people within a change process. This is true of whatever organization or activity one operates in. Börjesson [1] states that social work occurs on several levels at the same time: partly at individual and family level but also at group, organizational, and structural level. This means, in our view, that the social work professional must be able to operate on several levels at the same time, sometimes under contradictory conditions. For many social workers, this means representing and supporting clients while having to fulfill the imposed

organizational demands. All of these perceived demands influence social workers' job satisfaction, i.e., how they feel about their work. Social workers must be able to shelter their own feelings and those of others. According to researchers Fineman [2]; Hareli & Rafaeli [3]; and Hochschild [4], the fact that people manage their emotions, both in daily life and in working life, means emotions are objects, not only for psychological but also sociological research. Further, researchers highlight that the ability to manage one's own emotions and those of others is especially important in professions where interpersonal contact occurs between people, in that the professional must be able to manage his or her own emotions as well as those of the client, Fineman [2]; Hareli & Rafaeli [3]; Hochschild [4]; and Weibull [5].

Grandey et al. [6] are of the view that working under these conditions may mean professionals find themselves dealing with an inner conflict as to their personal feelings and the emotions advocated by the organization. Further, Grandey [7] discusses the emotional imbalance, also called emotional dissonance, which can, in the long run lead to professionals suffering from purely health-related problems, such as physical pain, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization.

Pooler et al. [8] are of the view that previous research has focused on burnout and depression, but that there is a lack of research on social workers from a salutogenic perspective. In their study, Söderfeldt et al. [9] also discuss work-related ill health in terms of burnout, the risk of which is high for professionally active social workers. This is due to the work often involving both difficult and burdensome client-related circumstances that the social worker must be able to manage (Söderfeldt et al. [9]). Shier and Graham [10] highlight another aspect of importance for social workers' wellbeing in terms of creating a good rapport with clients, as well as positive interaction with them. However, previous research has found an increased risk of burnout in social workers who become too involved with their clients. Another factor highlighted by the authors as important for social workers' wellbeing is "interactions with supervisors." This means the relationship between managers and their staff is good, thus having a positive effect on the social workers' wellbeing (Shier & Graham [10]).

Shier and Graham [10] also highlight that simply blaming social workers' high work load for burnout will not suffice, as the picture is more complicated. They go on to highlight previous research that acknowledges a link between the degree of job satisfaction a social worker experiences and their perception of the quality of work done in relation to their clients. The authors claim that social workers who enjoy a great level of job satisfaction deliver better quality work with clients (Shier & Graham [10]). It is also of great importance that the professionals have job satisfaction in order to deliver the best conceivable help to the client. In following theoretical outline above, we may state that social work can continue to be studied from an organizational and emotional perspective on a number of levels.

Job satisfaction among social workers is a well-researched subject from a number of perspectives according to Barber [11]; Cole et al. [12]; Farmer [13]. Most national as well as international studies focus on how job satisfaction among social workers can be raised as discussed by Farmer [13], and the relationship between leadership and social workers' job satisfaction as in the works of Fisher [14] and Holosko [15]. Other researchers have studied burnout, stress, and job satisfaction (e.g., Siefert et al. [16]). However, according to most of the abovementioned

studies, there is more to probe. Fisher [14] especially points out the need for more explorative research focusing on job satisfaction among social workers. Despite the quality research available, we have identified a need for inductive, explorative studies in the Swedish context that can bring to light further dimensions. *The purpose of this study*, therefore, is to contribute to increased understanding of the phenomenon of job satisfaction, its meaning for professionals in the field of social work, and what affects job satisfaction.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Design and choice of method

The methodological approach of this study is qualitative, explorative, and inductive. This means we follow guidelines in generating theory, namely grounded theory, as we aim to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of job satisfaction in a qualitative, multifaceted way. The method of grounded theory (hereinafter GT) was developed in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss. Today, there are three main branches of GT, and it can no longer be seen as a uniform method. The three main branches of GT that differ from each other are represented by Glaser's classic grounded theory method—Strauss and Corbin's [17] version and Charmaz' [18] constructivist version. We will follow the classic version and have been inspired by Glaser's previous and more recent [19–23] works. Thus, we have chosen informants, performed interviews, and analyzed them on the basis of Glaser's empirically close classical version. More concretely, we have maintained an open mind in coding, categorizing, and abstracting theory by extracting a core variable without a prior literature study. Instead, the literature study was performed in tandem with the development of the theoretical model, which is completely in accordance with Glaser's [19] recommendations. Thus, we have not given consideration to other varieties of GT.

### 2.2. Selection of informants

In order to find interview participants, we employed two different selection processes: the Snowball principle and theoretical sampling. Through our contacts in the field of social work, we gained access to the first interviewee, corresponding to "snowball selection," as detailed by Esaiasson et al. [24], also known as a Convenience sample Morse [25]. Consequently, the selection was not random, as one contact led us to the next. In line with GT, the selection process then switched to what Glaser calls theoretical sampling. This type of selection means switching to looking for informants who can reinforce or develop a theory as given in Morse [25].

We interviewed three people representing widely different arenas (a school welfare officer, a habilitation officer, and a probation inspector) within the field of social work. The informants who participated in the study were all men, two of whom held degrees in behavioral science and one in social studies. All the informants work in different places in the public sector and perform different tasks. One of the informants has 25 years of work experience in the field, whereas the other two are relatively newly qualified, with 3 years' and 7 months' professional experience,

respectively. Three interviews may seem inadequate, but the performed interviews have followed all the principles of GT and a full analysis has been conducted, so a small number of interviews are desirable. According to *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory* by Bryant & Charmaz [26], the authors state, "the better data quality, the fewer number of interviews." As the developed model also follows the principle of theoretical saturation, as highlighted by Glaser & Strauss [27]; Glaser [19]; and Glaser [20], demands of trustworthiness, and generalizability, we argue that three interviews are sufficient to achieve the aim and formulate problems. Glaser himself warns, according to Holton and Walsh [28], about data overwhelming when collecting too much data. It is more important to make a meaningful analysis than to collate too many interviews.

### **2.3. Data collection**

Data were collected from the interviews, each of which lasted 45–60 minutes. The interviews were based on a semistructured interview guide, with themes that concern job satisfaction in general. The themes contained in the interview guide were the following:

- Background questions
- Definition of job satisfaction
- Positive factors that influence job satisfaction
- Negative factors influencing job satisfaction
- Areas for improvement
- The context's influence on perceived job satisfaction
- Other

We have also made use of situationally adapted follow-up questions such as "tell us or describe more," "what is meant by that?" Glaser and Strauss [27] maintain that the informants should be given the opportunity to formulate their own reasoning and answers with as little regulation from the interviewer as possible. Consequently, we devised inductive and open interview questions. The interviews were conducted either at the respondents' place of work or in other, more neutral locations, such as libraries. All the interviews were recorded with dictaphones and mobile phones and then transcribed verbatim prior to analysis. Meaningful nonverbal communications such as laughter or deep sighs were also transcribed for a holistic understanding of the data.

### **2.4. Data analysis**

Hartman [29] and Glaser [19] maintain that there are three phases of generating theory in GT: the open phase, the selective phase, and the theoretical phase. In the first phase (open phase), the aim is to find and identify different codes and categories in the empirical material. This is done by coding the already transcribed empirical data. Coding is done for each separate interview by identifying units of meaning. Each new thought or feeling is delimited and

noted in the margin Hartman [29]. Such initial coding of raw data has been performed and presented as examples, such as below:

*... I've spoken to my bosses about it and they support my point of view, and they think it's good...*

This quote was coded in a first step and labeled “support from managers.” In the second step, the code “support from managers” was sorted with several similar ones under one umbrella category labeled “Support—give and take,” meaning support can be both given and received from different parts of the organization. The category “support—give and take” was sorted under an overarching category, “Meaningfulness and task focus” in a third step. In Hartman’s view [29], the open phase ends when one can no longer identify new categories in the collated data, and “theoretical saturation” has been achieved. In the selective phase, the researcher makes a selection with a view to finding a core category—Hartman [29]. The core category is unveiled in the process of the researcher reflecting over the essence of the interviews, i.e., what the respondents highlight as being most central (Glaser & Strauss [27]; Hartman [29]). After sorting codes, categories, and overarching categories, we discovered, in the fourth and final step, the following core category: “job satisfaction can be understood as a process in which the individual balances, establishes and recreates professional pride and dignity.” The core variable, with its foundation of overarching categories, categories, and codes, forms the basis of the GT upon which job satisfaction as perceived by our informants is understood. The analysis phase concludes with an illustration of the theory in a theoretical graphic model presented in the results.

### 3. Results

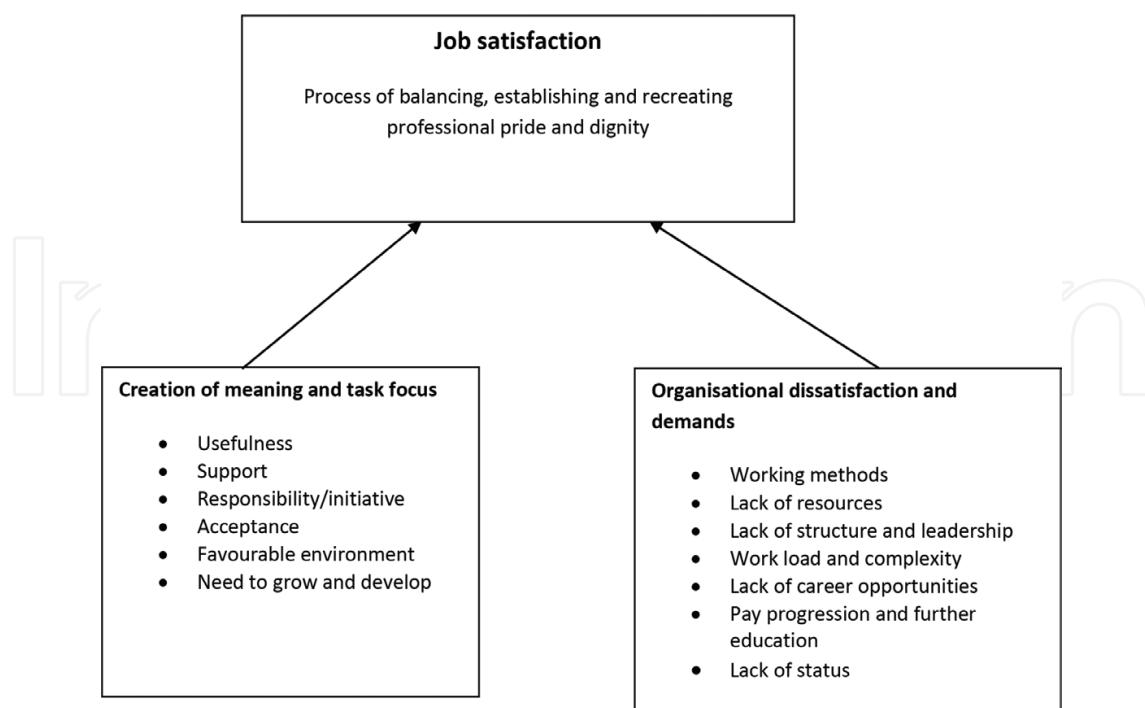
Social workers are constantly faced with having to make tough decisions while dealing with limitations in their ability to act. The informants spoke about the joy and opportunities arising in the field as much as the difficulties and challenges that social work confronts them with. The interview analysis reveals that job satisfaction can be understood and achieved through a process of balancing, establishing, and recreating professional pride and dignity. In this context, we maintain that professional pride is the individual’s personal sense of pride in his/her work, the profession he or she is active in, and the efforts he or she makes within the professional framework. In other words, balancing, establishing, and recreating pride in daily work is a process, whether one is content with one’s job or not. Both positive and negative aspects influencing professional pride and dignity also influence job satisfaction. In our view, there is also a responsibility at organizational level to create the conditions necessary to conduct work tasks in a dignified way so that the professional can work and have a sense of professional pride.

Dignity at work is thus created via the organization through the conditions given to the individual, while professional pride is a feeling that is created by the individual or individuals within a particular professional group. The core category “job satisfaction can be understood and achieved through a process of balancing, establishing, and recreating professional pride” contains two overarching categories: creation of meaning and task focus on the one hand and

organizational dissatisfaction and demands on the other. Between both of these overarching categories, we find the individual taking a position toward organizational dissatisfaction and demands while at the same time aiming for the creation of meaning and task focus. The process of achieving job satisfaction occurs when the individual is able to maintain balance between the two extremes. The individual runs the risk of demolishing his or her sense of job satisfaction if organizational dissatisfaction and demands tip the balance. In contrast, a sense of job satisfaction is built up in that the individual senses the creation of meaning and task focus. When he or she balances the positive and negative sides, a process arises in which the individual tries to establish, balance, and recreate professional pride and dignity. The overarching categories and subcategories will be described in more detail in the text that follows. The entire model is presented below (**Figure 1**).

### 3.1. Creation of meaning and task focus

The overarching category “Creation of meaning and task focus” concerns the individual’s method of finding meaning in his or her profession, the profession’s usefulness in society, and focusing on the task that involves helping other individuals. Creation of meaning and task focus is characterized by the actions, strategies, and innate strengths of the individual who builds up and/or maintains a sense of job satisfaction. There are six subcategories for the overarching category Creation of meaning and task focus: Usefulness, Support, Responsibility/initiative, Acceptance, Favorable environment, and Need to grow and develop. A general description of these follows below and the codes are named in the definition of each category. All the categories have been illustrated with carefully selected quotes.



**Figure 1.** Model of job satisfaction as a process of establishing, balancing, and recreating professional pride and dignity.

### 3.1.1. Usefulness

During the interviews, all the participants raised the importance of feeling “useful” to others, feeling needed, and being conscious of doing good. This has been highlighted in various ways, for example, one informant describes the positive changes he has seen and contributed to in clients:

*... So I've contributed to something positive in their lives, that they've become stronger individuals who can manage without me and I've done something good—I've contributed something good, I've strengthened them and it, when it happens [...] I get a sense of meaning—then I feel I've contributed to a positive change in the client's life and I feel I want to go to work and I'm happy doing what I do. (Informant 2)*

### 3.1.2. Support

This means both giving and receiving support, either on an individual or a collegial level, or equally, receiving it on an organizational level, for example, through managers or a change in guidelines. All support in this context includes emotional support, which includes sheltering your feelings and those of others. The interviews reveal that support was of central importance to all the participants.

*... so it becomes my roll to give feedback to the teachers, of course [...] A sounding board [...] I'm responsible for giving them someone to bounce ideas off in terms of their roles as teachers and how to handle their mentorship... [...] The teachers come and vent their despair at times... So even the counsellor's in the line of fire on occasion... (Informant 1)*

### 3.1.3. Responsibility/initiative

This may mean taking responsibility/initiative formally or informally, for example, by fulfilling the formal responsibilities of the job not only from an organizational perspective but also by taking the initiative to attain work goals that create job satisfaction for the individual in the long run. All our informants highlighted the importance not only of shouldering responsibility and fulfilling their job remits but also of delivering more than what is formally required, in terms of taking personal initiative.

*“but that won't work”, we say to our manager then—then we're kind of the ones keeping an eye on it and sometimes we take on the boss's role perhaps, saying, “that has to be sorted out, and that has to be sorted out” ... and so we forget that well no, it's them who's boss, not us. (Informant 1)*

### 3.1.4. Acceptance

The circumstances in which social work takes place can sometimes hamper an individual's scope of action, and to cope with this, the informants highlighted the need to develop a strategy, namely acceptance. Thus, their approach to this limitation on their scope of action is to accept the circumstances in order to continue to feel job satisfaction nonetheless. All the participants highlighted this strategy in their interview statements.

*there are always some shortcomings in a place of work. I don't think you can be 100% happy in your job and I don't think that's the point either. (Informant 3)*

### 3.1.5. Favorable environment

A favorable environment is partly made up of not only the social environment but also the purely physical one. By social environment, we mean good atmosphere and colleagues, whereas the physical environment refers to a pleasant office space. The informants highlight the importance of feeling at ease in a social context but also that there are conditions affecting comfort in the physical environment. One illustrates the importance of the social environment for job satisfaction thus:

*that all your colleagues are on track and committed and [...] there's a lot of room for and ability to discuss everything, that all the cards can be laid on the table, so to speak [...] but also having fun.*  
 (Informant 1)

### 3.1.6. Need to grow and develop

Working with people in the context of social work is about creating change—something that is also of central importance to those working in the field. Here we refer to the need for personal growth and development, a need that manifests itself in working life, and highlighted as key by all our informants.

*further education in, that's a positive [...] if we got any other work assignments [...] or if we wanted to do something else in the probation service then, then further education is good. Personally, I think the correctional services are quite generous with their training programmes, in my experience. There's quite a lot on offer.* (Informant 3)

## 3.2. Organizational dissatisfaction and demands

The overarching category “Organizational dissatisfaction and demands” refers to negative aspects and different types of failings characterized by limitations in, for example, scope of action on an organizational level, which in turn affects job satisfaction. There are six subcategories in the overarching category Organizational dissatisfaction and demands: Working methods, Lack of resources, Lack of structure and leadership, Work load and complexity, Lack of career opportunities, Pay progression and further education, and Lack of status. Each of these is described below.

### 3.2.1. Working methods

The demands made on an organizational level do not always align with the actual working methods of those in the field. This was highlighted by our informants in different ways, for example, two felt that the given directives were not compatible with the practical work. A third informant described how different interpretations of the directives led to different working methods among practitioners because they utilized their scope of action in different ways.

*We're supposed to mainly work in a preventative and health-promoting way [...] and not interventions as much [...] we're not quite there yet, even if it's difficult to know exactly what's preventative and health-promoting.* (Informant 1)

### 3.2.2. Lack of resources

Budget has a big impact on all areas of social work. Having to deal with limited resources can generate frustration as the resources might not stretch to meet the actual needs. All the informants highlight and relate to this.

*There's nothing to say that a four-cornered room with 30 pupils and a teacher is a particularly good learning environment, but that's the situation now. And we don't have money for anything else in particular either, so that's why we have to work on that basis and see what we can do in that environment. (Informant 1)*

### 3.2.3. Lack of structure and leadership

Structure and fixed directives are very important in social work, as the job can in many ways involve encroaching on an individual's integrity. A lack of such directives may mean the professionals apply their own interpretations of laws, rules, and directives, which in the long term may lead to endangering the legal rights of the individual. All the informants expressed a strong desire for clarity on a structural and leadership level. One clearly stated that a lack of leadership had such great consequences for him, he chose to quit.

*Things are quite turbulent at the leadership level. New bosses come in, existing bosses quit, colleagues quit and new ones come in. I would have preferred a more decisive leadership—although not a dictatorship—but a more decisive leadership. Some don't do their jobs like they should, they would have been told to do their job. At the moment, the managers have a tendency to want to be liked by everybody while being in charge at the same time. That's my experience. (Informant 3)*

### 3.2.4. Work load and complexity

Social work is a multifaceted activity that requires flexibility and adaptability, as the work is much more complex than it can appear to be at first. The professional must be able to operate on an individual level in the meeting with clients, but even on a structural level, according to organizational circumstances. At the same time, they must frequently manage heavy workloads. All our informants described this aspect, as well other complexities of their work.

*there are hoards of pupils with problems in some classes and it's a tough job for the mentors [...] it can be anything from honor-related violence [...] to criminal acts involving the students in things that can be really dangerous. And there they're in contact with the police and have to go to trial and stuff. And when there's conflict in class when they've reported one another [...] and the police are involved in the investigation and at the same time we're supposed to have some kind of functional lesson. (Informant 1)*

### 3.2.5. Lack of career opportunities, pay progression, and further education

Financially pressured organizations have less scope for personal development in terms of career opportunities, pay progression, and further education through work. All our informants express this in some way, with two highlighting a lack of all three aspects as relevant, whereas one described shortfall in only career opportunities and pay progression.

*And we don't get any further training... [...] and if there is, as a new employee I won't be first in line—it's the ones who've worked a long time who get to go [...] so if I stay here I won't get any new knowledge in the next few years and that also contributes to lack of personal development—not taking in new knowledge—then you're not satisfied either and then you might want to go somewhere else to progress [...]“... I've been to university for three and a half years and earn 24,500 kronor—my brothers haven't spent a day at uni and earn up to 30,000 kronor. (Informant 2)*

### 3.2.6. Lack of status

This category encompasses loss of legitimacy on a structural and professional level. All our informants agreed that their work is not valued highly enough in terms of pay or in relation to the work's complexity and scope. Moreover, they said that working with vulnerable people in society is not held in high enough esteem.

*We've got a school psychologist who I suppose has a fairly similar job to mine, but has a different position then. [...] They value him differently. But then he has a different education, doesn't he? (Informant 1)*

## 4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to contribute to an increased understanding of the phenomenon of job satisfaction, what it means for professionals in the field of social work, and what influences job satisfaction.

Our main analysis demonstrates that job satisfaction can be understood theoretically as a process in which social workers try to establish, balance, and recreate professional pride and dignity in their profession. This is an important inductive theoretical contribution to this study and also constitutes our core category. In many ways, social workers are a vulnerable group who must handle various types of risk associated with their individual tasks and that of operations per se—Parton [30]; Fraser et al. [31]. In order to manage these everyday risks, professional pride and dignity are important in preserving psychosocial health—Aronsson & Lindh [32]; Björkman & Carlsson [33]. From our research we maintain that professional pride and dignity deepen the dimension of job satisfaction within social work. Moreover, our study contributes to the existing knowledge on emotional labor, working environment research, and other organizational studies concerned with social work. Professional pride and dignity thus appear to be a prerequisite for social workers to fulfill both the demands of the organization and the client's needs, while maintaining job satisfaction.

Our main conclusion fulfils the aim of the study and responds to our first question in general. Subsequent conclusions are further concretized as answers to our two last questions, i.e., what influences job satisfaction positively or negatively and how do these answers relate to professional pride and dignity. Here follows a summary of the model's foundation stones.

The factors positively influencing job satisfaction are when the professional feels he or she is being useful, giving and receiving support, is allowed to take responsibility/initiative, is

working in a favorable environment, and feels a need to grow and develop. These positive aspects correspond to subcategories in the positive overarching category called creation of meaning and task focus in our theoretical graphic model. Factors negatively influencing job satisfaction are when the professional feels working methods are an obstacle; there is a lack of resources, structure, and leadership; work load and complexity are a hindrance; the professional feels there is a lack of career opportunities; pay progression and further education; and lack of status. These negative aspects correspond to subcategories of the overarching category called organizational dissatisfaction and demands. The analysis reveals that the individual must be able to maintain balance between the extremes of creation of meaning and task focus and organizational dissatisfaction and demands. From our analysis, we find the informants highlight both favorable and unfavorable aspects associated with job satisfaction. Both of these overarching categories (Creation of meaning and task focus and Organizational dissatisfaction and demands) correspond to extremes in our theoretical graphic model. Job satisfaction increases when the individual feels that the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones. In contrast, the individual risks losing his or her sense of job satisfaction if the negative aspects tip the balance. This is also confirmed by previous research in which a number of studies point to individuals achieving great job satisfaction, but still being dissatisfied with some aspects of their work tasks—Månsson [34].

#### 4.1. Positive aspects

The factors that have a positive impact on professional pride, and consequently job satisfaction, include various forms of support (although primarily emotional support) and personal influence over work (control). Personal influence over work is labeled in our results as Responsibility/initiative, as these are the terms used by our informants. These concepts of support and control correspond with dimensions found in the “Demands-control-support model”—Karasek & Theorell [35]. The more influence and social support the employee perceives, the easier it is to manage stress. The informants perceived that they did good things for people and that their work was meaningful. This can be explained on the basis of Antonovsky’s theory KASAM, namely, “a sense of context,” which consists of three components: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness—Antonovsky [36]. The positive factors identified in the study can be seen in the light of Antonovsky’s concepts as “breath of fresh air factors,” which in turn contribute to recreating and establishing professional pride and job satisfaction in the long term.

Social support was particularly important in contributing to increased job satisfaction, but primarily in terms of emotional support from colleagues. Theorell [35, 37] maintains that emotional support is especially important for achieving job satisfaction, and it can compensate for other shortcomings in the workplace. Several studies on the public sector have highlighted that leaders at a higher organizational level greatly impact on employees’ perceptions of job satisfaction—Barber [11]; Cole et al. [12]; Farmer [13]. Bitektine [38] is of the view that if managers exercise positive leadership and support their employees, this contributes to the perception of the workplace as attractive. The employees are then more likely to stay with the organization and support it. Legitimacy for the organization in the long run—Bitektine

[38]. On the other hand, if managers convey a negative feel or exercise destructive leadership, this is reflected in employees having greater intention to change their place of work or actually change it—Rydstedt & Österberg [39]; Bogler [40]; Siegel [41]; Fors Brandebo et al. [42, 43]. This brings us to our topic for discussion, namely the negative factors that negatively impact on job satisfaction.

#### 4.2. Negative aspects

Factors negatively impacting on job satisfaction and professional pride include lack of resources, lack of status, lack of organizational control (lack of leadership), etc. According to Karasek [35] and Theorell [35, 37], abovementioned can be explained as a lack of instrumental support. All the informants in our study spoke of the importance of having good managers and a good organizational leadership. One informant highlighted the lack of positive leadership in terms of unclear direction at an organizational level, and has consequently chosen to leave his place of work. This action can be seen as a sanction from the employee toward the organization. Choosing to change their place of work can be seen as an indication that the individual does not have confidence in the organization, which in turn may affect the organization's legitimacy. Bitektine [38] discusses this in terms of "legitimacy judgement." Such judgement of legitimacy evolves from a three-step process, the first step being that the evaluator (in our case, the informant) forms a perception of the organization or a group of organizations. The next step is for the evaluator to form a judgement or evaluation based on his or her perception. In the third and final step, this prior evaluation leads to a response that expresses itself through actions, for example, in terms of acceptance, support, avoidance of or sanctions against the organization. When the evaluator's response toward the organization is positive, he or she can instead provide support to the organization, thus contributing to increased legitimacy through his or her commitment—Bitektine [38].

Bitektine [38] discusses the fact that the evaluator may be a coworker, or even someone directly or indirectly coming into contact with the organization or the professional. Further, Bitektine [38] states that the evaluator not only judges legitimacy but also status and the social rank of the actors, either generating privileges or discrimination. All our informants pointed out that social work is not valued highly enough in society. According to our theoretical model, a lack of status leads to the risk of plummeting levels of job satisfaction, which in the long run negatively impacts on the social worker's professional pride and dignity. In our view, the link between professional pride and dignity can be discussed in relation to the degree of legitimacy. Thus, if professionals feel a high level of legitimacy in their work, their sense of professional pride and dignity increases, which in the long term can result in an increased sense of job satisfaction. Conversely, a low level of legitimacy brings with it a risk of declining job satisfaction. Beddoe [44] has studied the problem of professional identity and the link between continued training and status in "health social work" in New Zealand. Here it became apparent that the professionals were concerned that a lack of continued education in social work would negatively impact on the identity and status of the profession—Beddoe [44].

#### 4.3. Discussion of methodology

In accordance with GT, we have taken an open-minded approach to this study and tried to be free from preconceived ideas. We have not gone in with any preunderstandings of the concept of job satisfaction as a phenomenon. At the outset, we did not anchor ourselves in theory but approached the study inductively and exploratively, in accordance with Glaser and Strauss [27]. As several researchers describe it, GT revolves around “an open mind, not an empty head”—Alvinius [45]; Alvinius et al. [46]; Pole & Lampard [47].

Our first informant had many years’ work experience in different areas of social work and was chosen in the hope that he (or she) could contribute relevant information to the study. Theoretical saturation of data could be seen as early as the second interview, in that we could see different facets of the studied phenomenon. This led us from snowball selection to theoretical sampling, meaning the interview questions were supplemented with follow-up questions concerning aspects that arose from the first interview. After analyzing the data from the first interview, our theoretical graphical model was developed. The data from the two last interviews were then used to confirm the developed model. Glaser and Strauss [27] maintain that data collection should cease when new data no longer influences or changes the core variable. On the one hand, Glaser [19, 20, 48] states that the researcher should not collect too much data, otherwise theoretical saturation may be achieved after only one interview. On the other hand, Glaser [20, 23] maintains that saturation can never be achieved as we live in a constantly changing world. Furthermore, Glaser [19, 20, 48] states that if the researcher wishes to come one step closer to “the truth,” the phenomenon must be studied over time.

The Classic GT method suits us as we are motivated by a curiosity and desire to understand our fellow humans and their different subjective experiences. Hartman [29] maintains that GT is most suitable for use by researchers who are driven by curiosity in the area under investigation and who are open to seeing what really happens in people’s experience and environment. It is our belief and hope that this approach marries well with our philosophy. We also consider our use of GT to follow the Glaserian version of GT, as supported by our supervisor. This is important to mention in regard to the risks highlighted by Glaser and Holton [49], namely that many qualitative researchers are said to employ GT, but in fact employ qualitative data analysis (QDA).

Glaser [20] states that it is common that inexperienced users of GT struggle with abstracting data and “establishing theory.” Thus, according to Glaser [20], the researcher must be able to manage a large amount of data with a view to creating meaningful interpretations. As inexperienced users of GT, we gained assistance in managing this amount of data from our supervisor. The theoretical graphic model was also developed with her support, thus enabling us to sort the data and establish theory. Performing the process together in this way can be seen as strength of this study. The core category of the study could, therefore, be applied to similar professions within the field of social work. In practical terms, it means a number of active social workers would be able to “recognize themselves” in the process of establishing, balancing, and recreating job satisfaction, even if the subcategories or codes were exchanged for similar ones. On this basis, the theory has lasting value and generalizability.

Nevertheless, more studies over time are needed in order to validate the conclusions. For example, the model can be operationalized and transformed into a survey and thus reach a larger selection group.

#### **4.4. Conclusion, suggestions for further research, and practical implications**

The main theoretical contribution of our study is the relationship between job satisfaction and the process of balancing, establishing, and recreating professional pride and dignity. There is already a great deal of research on job satisfaction among social workers, focusing on issues such as leadership, stress, and burnout (Barber [11]; Siefert et al. [16]; Cole et al. [12]; Fisher [14]; Holosko [15]; Farmer [13]). Despite the existing knowledge, this study has filled a gap in understanding the phenomenon of job satisfaction among social workers in general and in relation to professional pride. Fisher [14] maintains that a knowledge gap exists and calls for more explorative research with a focus on job satisfaction among social workers. Forsgren [50] also calls for knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of job satisfaction among social workers in general and particularly in relation to professional pride.

Suggestions for future studies may include operationalizing the study model in a survey and validating the model. Other methods, such as discourse analysis or phenomenology, could also be used to further close the methodological knowledge gaps. Our study investigates the phenomenon of job satisfaction on the basis of the informants' narratives, which has been our chief aim. Another suggestion for further research could be to study the phenomenon of job satisfaction from a genus perspective. From a practical point of view, this study could be used as an educational and discussion resource to highlight the dilemma surrounding the relationship between professional pride and dignity and job satisfaction in the field of social work.

#### **Author details**

Heidi Branta<sup>1</sup>, Tina Jacobson<sup>1</sup> and Aida Alvinius<sup>2\*</sup>

\*Address all correspondence to: aida.alvinius@fhs.se

1 Department of Social and Psychological Studies, Karlstad University, Karlstad, Sweden

2 Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership, Swedish Defence University, Stockholm, Sweden

#### **References**

- [1] Börjesson B. (2008). Förstå socialt arbete. Malmö: Liber.
- [2] Fineman S. (2008). The emotional organization: Passion and power. Malden, MA: Blackwell publishing Ltd..
- [3] Hareli S. & Rafaeli A. (2008). Emotion cycles: On the social influence of emotion in organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 28, 35-59.

- [4] Hochschild A.R. (1983/2003). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feelings*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- [5] Weibull L. (2012). Emotion matters: Emotion management in Swedish Peace Support Operations. *Doktorsavhandling*. Karlstads universitet, Fakulteten för ekonomi, kommunikation och IT, Avdelningen för arbetsvetenskap, Karlstad University, Karlstad, Sweden.
- [6] Grandey A.A., Diefendorff J. & Rupp D. (2013). *Emotional labor in the 21st century: Diverse perspectives on emotion regulation at work*. New York: Routledge.
- [7] Grandey A.A. (2000). Emotional regulation in the workplace: A new way to conceptualize emotional labor. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 5(1), 95-110.
- [8] Pooler D.K., Wolfer T. & Freeman M. (2014). Finding joy in social work II: Intrapersonal sources. *Social Work*, 59(3), 213-221.
- [9] Söderfeldt M., Söderfeldt B. & Warg L.E. (1995). Burnout in social work. *Social Work*, 40(5), 638-646.
- [10] Shier M.L. & Graham J.R. (2010). Work-related factors that impact social work practitioners' subjective well-being: Well-being in the workplace. *Journal of Social Work*, 11(4), 402-421.
- [11] Barber G. (1986). Correlates of job satisfaction among human service workers. *Administration in Social Work*, 10(1), 25-38.
- [12] Cole D., Panchanadeswaran S. & Daining C. (2004). Predictors of job satisfaction of licensed social workers. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 31(1), 1-12.
- [13] Farmer D. (2011). Increasing job satisfaction among social workers. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(18), 1-8.
- [14] Fisher E. (2009). Motivation and leadership in social work management: A review of theories and related studies. *Administration in Social Work*, 33(4), 347-367.
- [15] Holosko M. (2009). Social work leadership: Identifying core attributes. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 19(4), 448-459.
- [16] Siefert K., Jayaratne S., & Chess W.A. (1991). Job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover in health care social workers. *Health and Social Work*, 16, 193-202.
- [17] Strauss A. & Corbin J.M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- [18] Charmaz K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: Sage Publications LTD.
- [19] Glaser B.G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- [20] Glaser B.G. (2011). *Getting out of the data: Grounded theory conceptualization*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- [21] Glaser B.G. (2014a). *Applying grounded theory: A neglected option*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

- [22] Glaser B.G. (2014b). "Applying grounded theory." *Grounded theory review. An International Journal*, 13(1), 46-50.
- [23] Glaser B.G. (2015). *Choosing grounded theory: A GT reader of expert advice*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- [24] Esaiasson P., Gilljam M., Oscarsson H. & Wängerud L. (2003). *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*. [Practical Methodology: The art of Studying Society, the Individual and the Market] (2nd ed.). Stockholm, Sweden: Nordsteds Juridik AB.
- [25] Morse J. (2007). Sampling in grounded theory. In Bryant A. & Charmaz K. (red.). *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*. Sage Publications LTD, Los Angeles: 229-243.
- [26] Bryant A. & Charmaz K. (2007). *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*. London: Sage Publications LTD.
- [27] Glaser B.G. & Strauss A.L. (1967). *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- [28] Holton J.A., & Walsh I. (2016). *Classic grounded theory: Applications with qualitative and quantitative data*. SAGE Publications, Los Angeles.
- [29] Hartman J. (2001). *Grundad Teori: Teorigenerering På Empirisk Grund*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- [30] Parton, N. (1996). Social work, risk and "the blaming system". *Social Theory, Social Change and Social Work*, Routledge, London: 98-114.
- [31] Fraser M.W., Richman J.M. & Galinsky M.J. (1999). Risk, protection, and resilience: Toward a conceptual framework for social work practice. *Social Work Research*, 23, 131-144.
- [32] Aronsson G. & Lindh T. (2004). *Långtidsfriskas arbetsvillkor*. En populationsstudie. Stockholm: Elanders Gotab.
- [33] Björkman M. & Carlsson I. (2007). *Känsla av sammanhang på arbetet. Vilka faktorer på arbetsplatsen och hos individen främjar arbetsterapeutens upplevelse av ett meningsfullt arbete?* Lunds Universitet. Malmö: Arbetslivsinstitutet.
- [34] Månsson E. (2006). *Att vara nöjd med i sitt arbete—vad betyder det? En antologi om human servicearbete*s, Arbetslivsinstitutet, Stockholm: 37-57.
- [35] Karasek R. & Theorell T. (1990). *Healthy work: Stress, productivity, and the reconstruction of working life*. New York: Basic books.
- [36] Antonovsky A. (2005). *Hälsans mysterium*. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.
- [37] Theorell T. (2003). *Är ökat inflytande på arbetsplatsen bra för folkhälsan?* Rapport nr 2003:46. Statens Folkhälsoinstitut, Stockholm, Sweden.
- [38] Bitektine A. (2011). Toward a theory of social judgment of organizations: The case of legitimacy, reputation and status. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(1), 151-179.

- [39] Rydstedt L.W. & Österberg J. (2013). Psychological characteristics of Swedish mandatory enlisted soldiers volunteering and not volunteering for international missions: An exploratory study. *Psychological Reports*, 112(2), 678-688.
- [40] Bogler R. (2001). The influence of leadership style on teacher job satisfaction. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 37(5), 662-683.
- [41] Siegel P.G. (2013). Ethical leadership and organizational commitment in the Canadian armed forces: An analysis of perceived supervisor ethical leadership as a predictor of organizational commitment in a Canadian armed forces sample. Halifax, Nova Scotia: A Management Research Project Submitted to Saint Mary's University.
- [42] Fors Brandebo M., Jonsson E., Wallenius C., Österberg J. & Larsson G. (2012). *Arbetsstillfredsställelse hos anställda soldater: Uppfattningar efter ett års tjänstgöring*. Karlstad: Institutionen för Säkerhet, Strategi och Ledarskap, (ISSL) Försvarshögskolan.
- [43] Fors Brandebo M., Österberg J. & Berglund A.K. (2014). *Militära ledares förmåga att öka eller bibehålla anställdas arbetsstillfredsställelse: Praktiska handlingsstrategier*. Karlstad: Institutionen för Säkerhet, Strategi och Ledarskap, (ISSL) Försvarshögskolan.
- [44] Beddoe L. (2013). Health social work: Professional identity and knowledge. *Qualitative Social Work*, 12(1), 24-40.
- [45] Alvinius A. (2013). Bridging boundaries in the borderland of bureaucracies: Individual impact on organisational adaption to demanding situations in civil and military contexts. Doctoral Dissertation. Karlstad: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Social and Psychological Studies, Karlstad University Studies.
- [46] Alvinius A., Starrin B. & Larsson G (2016). Reflexive serendipity grounded theory and serendipity in disaster management and military research. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 12(3), 28-42.
- [47] Pole C.J. & Lampard R. (2002). Practical social investigation—Qualitative and quantitative methods in social research. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- [48] Glaser B.G. (2014). "Applying grounded theory." *Grounded theory review. An International Journal*, 13(1), 46-50.
- [49] Glaser B.G. & Holton J. (2004). Remodeling grounded theory. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum. Qualitative Social Research*, 5(2). 2004. Artikel 4. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/607>
- [50] Forsgren E. (2009). *Socialsekreterare och stolt? En kvalitativ studie om socialsekreterares yrkesstolthet*. Linköpings universitet, Linköping, Sweden.

