

## *Job satisfaction of public social workers*

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**Abstract:** *The profession of a social worker is one of the most important professions for the functioning of a household and society as a whole. A key feature of this type of activity is that an employer does not have economic benefits associated with the tasks that a social worker performs. The study aims to determine the components of job satisfaction of public social workers and to conduct a quantitative analysis of the dependence of these components on factors of the external (professional) environment. The research methodology is focused on considering the object as a system. To achieve a goal, other studies were analyzed with the allocation of categorical data of satisfaction components and external (professional) environment factors. Using the statistical method, categorical data are presented in the form of frequencies to conduct a quantitative analysis of the dependence of satisfaction components on external (professional) environment factors, using the correlation coefficient. The study focused on two categories - job satisfaction and the external (professional) environment. The most significant components of job satisfaction are interpersonal relationships and commitment to an organization; the most significant factors of the external (professional) environment are the interaction of social workers with different population groups and compliance with the law and regulations. On the other hand, the least significant components of job satisfaction are social connections and wages, and the least significant factors of the external environment are professional burnout and personal life. A positive relationship was established between the components of job satisfaction and factors of the external (professional) environment. This indicates that job satisfaction components have an inverse relationship with external environment factors such as rules and norms. The research results are applicable in the field of public policy development, as well as for managers of public institutions, in particular, human resource management.*

**Keywords:** public sector, emotional work, personnel, productivity, work environment components.

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### Introduction

In the context of globalization, the organizational environment has undergone significant changes. Digital technologies, the global market, the economic crisis require organizations to be flexible, less costly, and more efficient to provide quality services. This is especially true for public social services during the financial crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Androniceanu and Marton, 2021). To cope with the challenges of today and remain competitive in the domestic market, institutions need to go beyond traditional management and reorient towards the use of joint management, namely teamwork, as a single coherent system in which institution's employees are the most valuable asset (Qing, Asif, Hussain, & Jameel, 2019). An increase in employees' productivity leads to an increase in the quality of services provided to the population by state institutions. The satisfaction and commitment of government workers to their work is a precondition for achieving this goal (Cantarelli, Belardinelli, & Belle, 2016). This is the main reason why almost all institutions want to increase employee satisfaction with their job duties, which as a result will improve the productivity of activities and strengthen the competitiveness of an institution in society. Cantarelli et al. (2016) conducted an in-depth analysis of job satisfaction in public administration, analyzing a total of 249 case studies. Scientists found that initially job satisfaction in management and psychology was characterized as a positive emotion that arises as a result of job evaluation, but later this concept expanded and began to correlate both with feelings (emotional reaction) of a person and with various aspects of the performed activity, such as:

- individual characteristics (education, motivation, career growth, gender);
- the complexity of the work performed (skill set, variety of tasks, autonomy);
- job characteristics (interpersonal communication, reward system);
- professional environment (payment, job security).

Jung (2018) argues that if an employee of an institution works diligently within their competencies, the productivity and efficiency of this institution do not increase. For the development and functioning of an institution, it is necessary that its employees show initiative in their work. The scientist believes that the effectiveness of an institution depends on the behavior of the participants and their interpersonal relationships (a sense of trust and loyalty among team members), especially among social workers. It is these specialists who provide state guarantees in the form of services for different groups of the population, with whom they interact in the workplace. From a human resources (HR) management perspective, institutions need to find ways to ensure employee satisfaction with their work, because the higher the employee satisfaction, the higher the performance. Job satisfaction among specialists working in the social protection service increases when their activities are focused on results (Stepenko, Dreval, Chernov, and Shestak,

2021; Jung, 2018; Androniceanu et al., 2020). Qing et al. (2019) have proven that employees with a higher perception of their work are more satisfied than employees who consider their work less valuable. This theory shows that employees with high confidence in their success are much more autonomous than employees with low confidence. The autonomy and decision making give employees a sense of control over their activities and lead to greater satisfaction since employees are highly motivated to do more work on their own. Jiang, Wang, Chui, and Xu (2019) state that social workers constantly have to maintain a positive public image. Consequently, professional identity and job satisfaction are significant factors for social workers compared to other professions. Therefore, if a social worker is proud of his/her status in society and identifies him/herself as a social worker, he/she will be satisfied with his/her work.

The profession of a social worker in different countries of the world has shown different satisfaction and recognition at the level of society. In the United States, the sphere of social protection of the population (Roh, Moon, Yang, & Jung, 2016) is one of the fastest-growing professions that have career growth. In China, the profession of a social worker (Jiang et al., 2019) is new, so the public image of social work has not yet developed, and the professional identity of a social worker has an unfavorable status, which affects the low rating of this profession in China and low efficiency in social institutions. Important factors of the undeveloped social sphere in China are low wages and a low level of management to create a positive professional environment, which negatively affects job satisfaction. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), like China, is a country that has a new specialist - a social worker, but the status of a social worker in the social security service is considered prestigious in the Emirate society. A social worker in the UAE (Department of Community Development, 2020c) is understood as a specialist with educational qualifications - a bachelor's degree in social work and 2 years of work experience in related areas. The license is issued by the Department of Community Development (DCD) for 24 months and then it may be renewed for an unlimited period. A social specialist (Department of Community Development, 2020b) supports individuals, families, or groups of people (children, retirees, persons with special needs) with social problems by assessing their needs and interacting with them/or their guardians to explore methods and solutions that can help them adapt to society or integrate into a labor market. Social workers of UAE government institutions contribute to the professional development, social or personal well-being of a beneficiary. Thus, social services in the Emirates are provided by competent professionals with the necessary qualifications and experience.

The primary focus of previous studies was to examine the direct impact of job satisfaction on institutional performance. Job satisfaction components that have a connection with the external (professional) environment and the activities of public social workers, in particular in the UAE (Department of Community Development, 2019), have been little studied. Therefore, this study combines theoretical and empirical mechanisms for studying this effect.

The study aims to determine the components of job satisfaction using the example of social workers in public institutions and to conduct a quantitative

analysis of these components' dependence on external (professional) environment factors.

The study aims to:

- 1) update the concept of job satisfaction of public social workers and highlight the components;
- 2) identify the factors of the external (professional) environment;
- 3) conduct a quantitative analysis of the dependence of job satisfaction components on external (professional) environment factors.

## 1. Materials and methods

To quantify the dependence of job satisfaction components on external environment factors, the study used the following methods: analysis, systems approach, and statistical method. The studies were reviewed for the period 2016-2020 using the official website of DCD in Abu Dhabi (Department of Community Development, 2019). The research includes three stages that meet the study tasks:

- at the first stage, studies were analyzed, with the help of which the concept of job satisfaction was updated, with the subsequent allocation of its components, taking into account the professional activities of public social workers. Thematic analysis was based on the following studies (Al-Buainain et al., 2019; Al-Zoubi & Al-Tkhayneh, 2019; Alshehhi, Abuelhassan, & Nusari, 2019; Bond, 2020; Cantarelli et al., 2016; Jabeen, Friesen, & Ghoudi, 2018; Jiang et al., 2019; Jung, 2018; Pereselkova, & Korennaya, 2016) and conducted with the aim of understanding the management of the professional environment and highlighting job satisfaction components - tab. 2. The average value ( $\Sigma x \geq 3$ ) in Table 2 was selected to determine the significance of job satisfaction components; the threshold value ( $\Sigma x_i \geq 3$ ) was used to measure various components of job satisfaction;

- at the second stage, through a thematic review of previous studies (Al-Buainain et al., 2019; Alshehhi et al., 2019; Bond, 2020; Cantarelli et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2019; Jung, 2018), external (professional) environment factors were identified (Table 3); these factors correlate with the concept of job satisfaction (Table 1) and its components (Table 2). The average value in Table 3 ( $\Sigma y \geq 3$ ) was chosen to determine the significance of the external (professional) environment factors; the threshold ( $\Sigma y_i \geq 3$ ) was used to measure various factors of the external (professional) environment;

- at the third stage, the correlation coefficient was used to determine the dependence of job satisfaction components ( $\Sigma x_i \geq 3$ ) on external (professional) environment factors ( $\Sigma y_i \geq 3$ ) (Table 4). The correlation coefficient R reveals the presence/absence of a relationship between the variables x and y. R-values are in the range - 1.0 to + 1.0. If R is positive, the relationship between x and y is positive. If R is negative, the relationship between x and y is negative. If the R-value is close to zero, this indicates that there is no connection between the x and y variables. To calculate the correlation coefficient, an Excel program was used with the following characteristics of the CORREL function (range 1; range 2): data range 1 represents job satisfaction components ( $\Sigma x_1; \Sigma x_2; \Sigma x_4; \Sigma x_5; \Sigma x_6; \Sigma x_7; \Sigma x_8; \Sigma x_{10}$ , excluding  $\Sigma x_3$  and  $\Sigma x_9$  values since they are less than the set threshold  $\Sigma x_i \leq 3$ ); data range

2 represents environmental factors ( $\Sigma y_1; \Sigma y_2; \Sigma y_3; \Sigma y_4$ , excluding  $\Sigma y_5$  and  $\Sigma y_6$ , respectively). The correlation coefficient equation has the following form:

$$R = \frac{n \Sigma xy - (\Sigma x)(\Sigma y)}{\sqrt{[n \Sigma x^2 - (\Sigma x)^2][n \Sigma y^2 - (\Sigma y)^2]}} \quad (1)$$

Demonstration of the theoretical model in practice is carried out using the Visio program - Fig. 2. The algorithm for calculating the added value (on the example of a social service state institution in the UAE) for a year is based on the ratio of external (professional) environment factors and job satisfaction components:

- factors of the external (professional) environment are considered through the indicators: the number of families that received financial assistance (FAF) and the number of families that joined the society and gained financial independence (FFI);

- components of job satisfaction are considered through indicators: the number of corporate events held in the institution (CE) and work experience in the institution (WE).

Value added is equal to the difference between the actual result obtained from the activities of a social worker and job satisfaction components.

The actual result obtained from social workers' activities (ARO):

$$\bullet \text{ARO} = \text{FAF} * \text{FFI}. \quad (2)$$

Calculation of value added (VA) of a state social service institution:

$$\bullet \text{VA} = \text{ARO} - \text{CE} - \text{WE}. \quad (3)$$

Research limitations. The study explored and updated the concept of job satisfaction in public sector, but this issue was not considered for a particular country.

The research object is the process of adapting the phenomenon of satisfaction to the conditions of the professional environment.

The research subject is the dependence of job satisfaction components on the external (professional) environment.

## **2. Results**

As the external environment and the needs of the employed people in the field of social protection change, institutions need new approaches in the development and retention of personnel, as well as the creation of a professional image of an institution; this can increase the status of employees in society and contribute to the quality of services provided. In this context, job satisfaction is both an economic and a social category and is one of the key objectives of institutional management. Currently, there is no uniform concept of job satisfaction. Scientists use different interpretations of this concept, depending on the indicators and criteria used (Pereselkova & Korennaya, 2016). To actualize this concept, it is necessary to have an objective understanding of the existing terminology in world practice (Table 1).

**Table 1. Basic concepts of job satisfaction in the field of public social protection institutions**

<b>Author/s</b>	<b>Concept definition</b>
Cantarelli et al. (2016)	Job satisfaction is seen as a category that determines the professionalism of an institution through the services it provides to the public.
Jung (2018); Andjarwati et al., (2019)	Job satisfaction is a positive emotional response that an employee experiences when performing their job duties or during working hours.
Jiang et al. (2019); Patterson et al., (2020)	Job satisfaction is associated with working conditions, organizational commitment, and community acceptance.
Al-Zoubi and Al-Tkhayneh (2019)	Job satisfaction is the link between personal expectations and outcomes.
Pereselkova and Korennaya (2016)	Job satisfaction is defined as a positive attitude towards professional activity, a repeatedly experienced pleasure from the work performed, and employee's expectations of receiving this pleasure in the future.

*(Source: Authors)*

In general, a thematic review of the basic concepts of job satisfaction (Table 1) shows that the category of job satisfaction consists of different aspects that are associated with the emotional component, the assessment of a specific job, and organizational conditions. Summarizing the considered basic concepts, it can be stated that job satisfaction is a relationship between actual, desirable, and expected results.

The activities of social workers of public institutions in the UAE are based on providing assistance to the community aimed at implementing social security policies and improving the living standards of citizens who cannot provide adequate income for a decent life (Department of Community Development, 2019). In this regard, the allocation of job satisfaction components (Table 2) was based largely on studies conducted in this country.

**Table 2. Job satisfaction components of public social workers**

<b>Components</b>	<b>Potential for future growth</b>	<b>Recognition</b>	<b>Forming connections in the outside world</b>	<b>Organizational commitment</b>	<b>Duties performed</b>	<b>Interpersonal relationships</b>	<b>Working conditions</b>	<b>Public image of the profession</b>	<b>Salary</b>	<b>Healthy professional environment</b>
<b>Authors</b>										
Cantarelli et al. (2016)				1	1	1		1		1
Jung (2018)				1	1					1

### Job satisfaction of public social workers

Components Authors	Potential for future growth	Recognition	Forming connections in the outside world	Organizational commitment	Duties performed	Interpersonal relationships	Working conditions	Public image of the profession	Salary	Healthy professional environment
Jiang et al. (2019)	1			1		1	1	1	1	
Roh et al. (2016)				1		1				1
Al-Zoubi and Al-Tkhayneh (2019)	1	1				1	1			1
Pereselkova and Korennaya (2016)	1				1	1	1		1	1
Jabeen et al. (2018)	1			1		1		1		
Alshehhi et al. (2019)		1			1	1	1			
Bond (2020)	1	1	1	1						
Al-Buainain et al. (2019)		1			1			1		
$\Sigma x=10$	$\Sigma x1=5$	$\Sigma x2=4$	$\Sigma x3=1$	$\Sigma x4=6$	$\Sigma x5=5$	$\Sigma x6=7$	$\Sigma x7=4$	$\Sigma x8=4$	$\Sigma x9=2$	$\Sigma x10=5$

Note. The average value for job satisfaction components is  $\Sigma xi \geq 3$ .

(Source: Own determination)

As shown in Table 2, job satisfaction components, such as interpersonal relationships and organizational commitment, are of greatest importance. Other significant components that have a positive effect on work are potential for future growth, duties performed, a healthy professional environment, as well as recognition, working conditions, and the public image of the profession. The least significant satisfaction components include the economic aspects of work, namely, connections and wages. The average level of job satisfaction is 5.1 at  $\Sigma x=10$ , which indicates that public social workers in the Emirates are satisfied with their professional activities.

Based on the results of the above studies and the DCD data (Department of Community Development, 2020b), the following external environment factors were identified (Table 3), which correlate with the concept of job satisfaction and its identified components, taking into account the principles of public policy in the UAE.

**Table 3. External (professional) environment factors**

Author/s	Interaction with different population groups	State policy in relation to human resources	Compliance with laws and regulations	Labor legislation	Professional burnout	Personal life
Cantarelli et al. (2016)]	1	1				
Jung (2018)	1		1			
Jiang et al. (2019)	1	1	1	1		
Roh et al. (2016)	1		1		1	
Al-Zoubi and Al-Tkhayneh (2019)	1		1			
Pereselkova and Korennaya (2016)	1			1		
Jabeen et al. (2018)				1		1
Alshehhi et al. (2019)				1		
Al-Buainain et al. (2019)	1					
$\Sigma y=10$	$\Sigma y1=8$	$\Sigma y2=3$	$\Sigma y3=5$	$\Sigma y4=4$	$\Sigma y5=1$	$\Sigma y6=1$

Note. The average value for external environment factors is  $\Sigma y_i \geq 3$

(Source: Own determination)

As one can see from Table 3, the most significant factors of the external (professional) environment are:

- interaction with different population groups - social worker's correct behavior under all circumstances;

- compliance with laws and regulations - social specialist shall communicate and perform professional duties within national jurisdiction. The average value of external (professional) environment factors is 5.6 at  $\Sigma y=10$ , which indicates the importance of the selected factors for a public social worker's professional activity. In addition, among the considered factors related to the professional activities of public social workers, it can be seen that the least significant factors of the external (professional) environment ( $\Sigma y_i \leq 3$ ) include professional burnout and personal life.

This study tests the dependence of job satisfaction components ( $\Sigma x_i \geq 3$ ) on external environment factors ( $\Sigma y_i \geq 3$ ) using the correlation coefficient. Table 4 visualizes the initial data for the presence/absence of a relationship between variables (x and y).



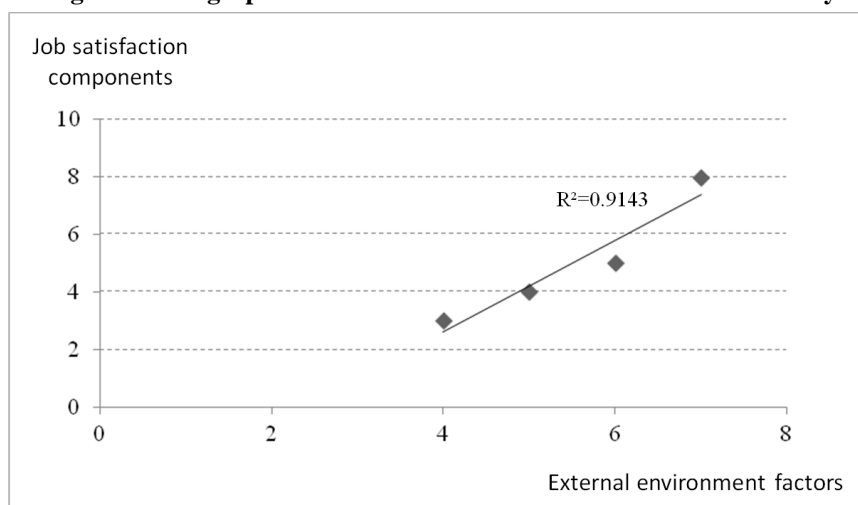
Table 4. Initial data

Job satisfaction components at $\Sigma x_i \geq 3$	Values (X)	External environment factors at $\Sigma y_i \geq 3$	Values (Y)
Interpersonal relationships	7	Interaction with different population groups	8
Organizational commitment	6	Compliance with laws and regulations	5
Potential for future growth, duties performed, a healthy professional environment	5	Labor legislation	4
Recognition, working conditions, public image of the profession	4	State policy in relation to human resources	3

(Source: Own determination)

The calculation of the correlation coefficient is carried out using Excel, which is the most reliable method of quantitative assessment. Figure 1 shows the correlation function using the data in Table 4, where data range 1 represents variables x and data range 2 represents variables y. The graph of the correlation function shows a positive relationship between the variables x and y, with  $R=0.9143$ .

Figure 1. The graph of correlation function between variables x and y



(Source: Own determination)

Summing up, it can be stated that a state institution that ensures a healthy working environment for its social workers receives committed employees who are motivated to achieve results. In this context, it is important to outline the following advantages: employee satisfaction reflects positively on interaction with beneficiaries and reduces the risk of violations of national legislation.

Demonstration of the theoretical model in practice is carried out using the algorithm for calculating the added value of a state social institution based on the correlation of external (professional) environment factors and job satisfaction components (Figure 2). Indicators of external (professional) environment factors, taking into account the activities of social workers of public institutions in the UAE, include:

- the amount of allocated financial assistance to families (FAF);
- the number of families who joined the society and gained financial independence (FFI).

The indicators of job satisfaction components are as follows:

- the number of corporate events held per year (CE);
- work experience of an employee in an institution (WE).

The amount of value added by a public institution for the reporting year is calculated using the formula:

The added value is equal to the difference between the actual results of a social worker's performance in terms of the factors of the external (professional) environment (FAF, FFI) and the indicators that make up job satisfaction (CE and WE).

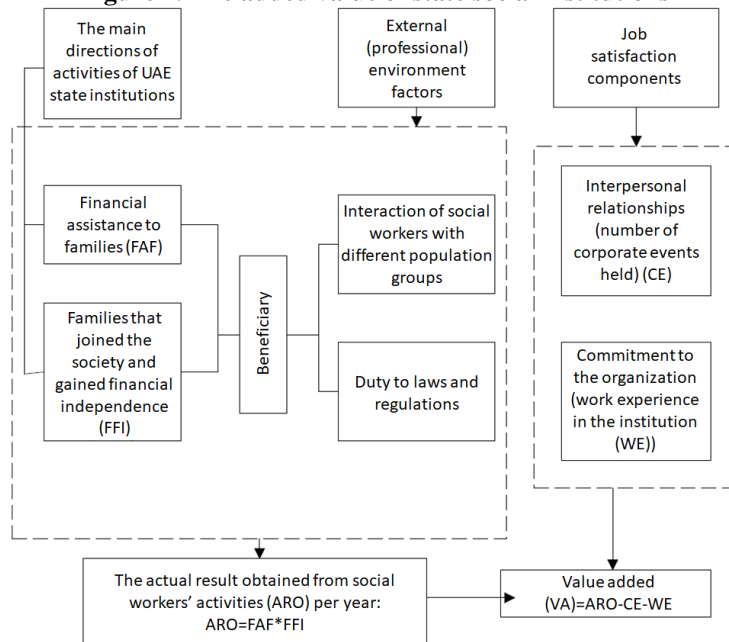
Determination of the actual result of a state institution:

•  $ARO = FAF * FFI$ ; (4)

Calculation of value added (VA):

•  $VA = ARO - CE - WE$ . (5)

**Figure 2. The added value of state social institutions**



(Source: Authors)

The calculation of the added value of a state social institution was due to the need to understand an institution's activities in the context of the relationship between social workers' job satisfaction and their external professional environment (a country's social sphere). The basis of the proposed theoretical approach in the study is the assessment of value added in the practice of state social institutions. In this context, it is advisable to emphasize that the social services of different countries have a certain specificity associated with the organization of labor and professional problems, as well as with the state of economic development. Therefore, these facts must be taken into account when calculating the value added of a state social institution. In terms of value added calculations, this issue is the subject of further research.

### **3. Discussion**

In this study, the concept of job satisfaction of public social workers in the UAE is updated and its components are highlighted. With the help of quantitative analysis, the dependence of these components on external (professional) environment factors was verified. A review of studies on job satisfaction concept showed that all the definitions indicated an emotional component in relation to personality and professional activity. Salsberg, Quigley, Acquaviva, Wyche, and Sliwa (2018) characterize the social profession as one of the large-scale professions in the field of social services, which implies performing different roles in management, community organization, assessment, training, and policy. In this context, Allas and Schaninger (2020) highlight two aspects that characterize the quality of a workplace: 1) working conditions; 2) lack of interpersonal fear. In the present study, public social workers in the Emirates (Department of Community Development, 2019; U.ae, 2021) focus on three main aspirations to achieve government-mandated social outcomes: a decent life for all UAE citizens; a close-knit family as the foundation of a tolerant and inclusive community; an active and responsible community. The level of satisfaction with the work of social workers in the UAE is 5.1, which indicates a positive result regarding the individual qualities of an employee. Geisler, Berthelsen, and Muhonen (2019) confirm the present study results on job satisfaction components and state that commitment to work and interpersonal relationships force public social workers to stay in this profession and contribute to a positive attitude towards this profession. Judge, Weiss, Kammeyer-Mueller, and Hulin (2017) characterize organizational commitment as an affective state that is based on the conformity between personal values and institution's values. Tokareva, Kovalenko, Gafurova, and Tokarev (2016) found that trusting relationships in a team form a free and positive opinion about colleagues, which contributes to internal cohesion and ensures a healthy professional environment in an institution. It can be assumed that organizational commitment and interpersonal relationships have a significant impact on the professional performance of social workers. A thematic review of studies on job satisfaction components and their dependence on external (professional) environment factors was carried out. It was

revealed that public social workers interact with different population groups and are obligated to do it within the framework of laws and regulations. It is important to note that previous studies (Department of Community Development, 2020a; Jackson, 2020; van Hulsen, Rohde, & van Exel, 2020) considered external (professional) environment factors - ecology (climate change, air pollution), occupational burnout, interaction with vulnerable population groups, the COVID-19 pandemic, while the present study considered external (professional) environment factors at the individual level of a social employee. The present research results showed that significant external environment factors in the context of job satisfaction of social workers are interaction with vulnerable population groups and obligations to comply with laws and regulations. At the same time, professional burnout and personal life are the least significant external (professional) environment factors. Vydrová and Bejtkovský (2018) argue that the management of a public institution directly affects workers' social maturity and intelligence, shaping the professional environment in the workplace. Belas, Belas, Cepel, and Rozsa (2019) confirm the importance of a healthy professional environment in a public institution, applying the following research algorithm: defining the concept of a professional environment and assessing significant factors in the public sector that affect the quality of the professional environment. The study results showed what factors need to be improved to achieve a perfect system of social factors affecting the professional environment.

In the current study, a quantitative analysis was carried out to check the dependence of job satisfaction components on external (professional) environment factors. The quantitative analysis was carried out using the correlation coefficient between the job satisfaction variables and variables of external (professional) environment.

Based on the above theoretical and empirical data, a positive relationship between job satisfaction components and external (professional) environment factors was revealed. To understand the theoretical approach of the study, the calculation of value added was applied in practice on the example of a state social institution in the UAE.

#### 4. Conclusions

The study revealed a statistical relationship between job satisfaction components of public social workers and external (professional) environment factors. It has been established that job satisfaction is an indicator of an institution's performance, which includes a relationship between actual, desired, and expected results. In general, it can be stated that a social worker provides state-guaranteed services to society and state social institutions contribute to ensuring decent life for all citizens and residents of a given country. It was found that public social workers in the UAE pay the greatest attention to interpersonal relationships and commitment to an organization, while the influencing external (professional) environment factors

are communication with different population groups and compliance with laws and regulations.

The practical results can be applied by advising managers of public sector institutions, in particular those located in the UAE, on what strategies should be used to increase job satisfaction among social workers.

Further work could be focused on calculating value added in the practice of public social institutions, followed by an analysis of the relationship between job satisfaction and job outcomes.

### Authors Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the experimentation, read and approved the final manuscript.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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