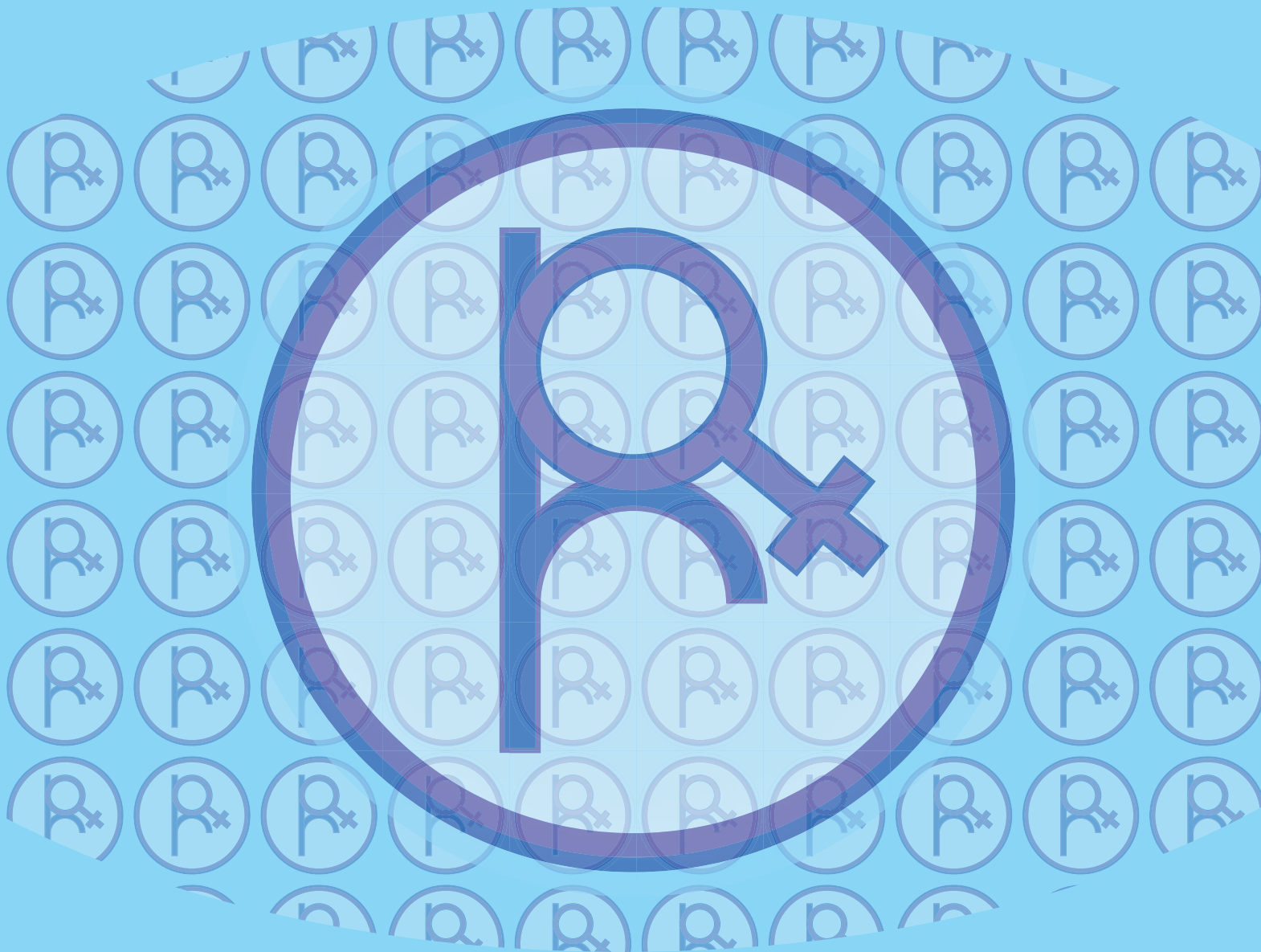


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Wellbeing and Workplace Culture in Public Relations  
and Communication Industries in Croatia



**Marija Geiger Zeman, Geran-Marko Miletić, Mirela Holy**

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Creative Media and Communications Research Ltd, 4 Cobden Place, LS12 5LJ, Leeds, United Kingdom

&

EUPRERA Bd. Du Jubilé 71 bte 3, 1080 Brussels, Belgium

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Wellbeing and Workplace Culture in Public Relations and Communication Industries in Croatia

**Authors :**

Marija Geiger Zeman

Geran-Marko Miletić

Mirela Holy

**Cover Page design**

Christian Goodman

**Layout and Formatting**

Martina Topić

**EUPRERA REPORT Series Editor**

Martina Topić

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## CONTENT

Introduction: The Importance of Wellbeing Research	3
Overview of the National Context: PR and Communication Industry in Croatia	5
Survey and Data Source	7
Sample: Employees and Freelancers	9
Sample: Employees in the Public/Private sector	14
Results	17
Employer Engagement	17
Work Culture and Relationships	18
Employee Engagement	19
Work-Life Balance	20
Work-Life Conflict	21
Job Satisfaction, Wellbeing, and Networking	22
Perceived Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment	23
Wellbeing at Work and Job Satisfaction: A Short Literature Overview	23
Subjective Wellbeing at Work, Job Satisfaction and Occupational Status	24
Wellbeing at Work, Job Satisfaction and Work-Life Balance/Conflict	25
Wellbeing at Work, Job Satisfaction and Interpersonal Relationships	26
Wellbeing at Work and Job Satisfaction in the PR and Communication Sector in Croatia: Results of a Regression Analysis for Predicting Job Satisfaction	28
A Summary of Results	30
<i>Background</i>	30
Methods	31
Results	31
<i>Implications (Theoretical, Practical, Social)</i>	32
Conclusion	33
References	33

## **Introduction: The Importance of Wellbeing Research**

The importance and significance of wellbeing as a corporate goal and desired life ideal is increasingly visible. Alexandrova and Fabian (2022, p. 3) emphasize that “in the zeitgeist of the twenty-first century, “wellbeing” occupies a special place”. Wellbeing issues are present in the academic community and non-academic sectors, such as “public policy, commercial self-help, and HR management” (Alexandrova & Fabian 2022, p. 3; Geiger Zeman et al, 2024). After the crisis caused by the global pandemic COVID-19, the post-pandemic period followed, which was marked by new challenges in the labour market - high inflation, rising costs of living, measures of rationalization, and reduction of the number of employees - which generated a number of health and mental problems among employees (additional duties, chronic stress, burnout, anxiety, exhaustion, etc.) and generally reduce well-being at work. In the context of the recent situation, research shows that “wellbeing is just as valuable to workers as their pay” (Kelly, 2023), that is, “the future of work is employee well-being” (Meister, 2021).

Wellbeing can be defined and measured in different ways, as indicated by the multitude of different definitions and conceptualizations of well-being (Das et al., 2020). As Hone, Schofield, and Jarden (2016 cited in Jarden & Roache, 2023, p. 1) emphasized “although several researchers and research teams have developed theoretical, conceptual and operational models of wellbeing, and there is general agreement that wellbeing is a multi-dimensional concept, that is where the consensus ends”. Models for measuring well-being include various components, for example, relationships, meaning, “happiness, kindness, fun and safety” (Jarden & Roache, 2023, p. 2), while the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi’s report (2009, cited from Perron et al, 2021, p. 236) highlighted “material living conditions” (“income, consumption and wealth”), “health; education; personal activities” and “work; participation to political life and governance; social connections and relationships”; (actual/future ) environment and “economic and physical insecurity”.

Wellbeing is a multidimensional concept that combines subjective and objective dimensions. The objective dimension of well-being is “determined by health, education, employment, social relations, (natural and built environment, civic engagement and governance, housing and leisure” (WHO and European Regional Bureau cited from Perron et al, 2021, pp. 236-237). Subjective well-being “emphasizes a comprehensive, multidimensional measure of an individual’s mental, physical and spiritual health” (Jackson et al, 2022, p. 2). To avoid difficulties caused by terminological confusion and the use of the terms happiness, life satisfaction, and subjective well-being as synonyms, there is a tendency (in psychological literature) to define “happiness” and “life satisfaction” as components of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 2002 cited from Cannas et al, 2019, p. 185). The term happiness represents the affective element of subjective well-being, while life satisfaction denotes the cognitive element (Cannas et al, 2019; Perron et al, 2021).

In numerous research, the concept of well-being is associated with different and specific domains (e.g. health, family, finances, etc.) of life and society. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) (n.a.), “Workplace Wellbeing relates to all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organization”. Following this definition, employment is an important topic in the research of well-being in the field of work. Well-being at work, as well as the well-being of employees, is an interdisciplinary research topic - economists investigate employee well-being in terms of working hours, income, advancement opportunities, (social and/or health) insurance, psychologists focus on relationships in the work organisation, feelings of trust and/or security while sociologists investigate “evaluation aspects related to control and autonomy, as well as personal development” (Petcu et al., 2023, p. 2).

According to Petcu et al. (2023, p. 3) “understanding the interrelationships between workplace wellbeing and subjective wellbeing is essential to designing occupational health and

safety policies, but also to improving employee satisfaction and well-being”. Satisfied employees who believe that they are respected and that they are treated fairly are more satisfied with their work and are more committed to the realization of organisational goals, which ultimately has a positive effect on the organisation's financial results (Wilcox & Knootz, 2022; Colenberg et al., 2019; Petcu et al., 2023). Research has shown that “job satisfaction and well-being at the workplace increase employees' performance” (Cannas et al., 2019, p. 183).

Job satisfaction is a key topic along with well-being, because today's employees have aspirations towards working in organisations where “they feel more relaxed and satisfied” (Memon et al, 2019, p. 382). According to Weiss, Weiss, Rudolph and Zacher (2022, p. 2) job satisfaction is “an indicator of domain-specific subjective well-being in the occupational context” but also “one of the most widely investigated work outcomes” because it is “positively linked to job performance (Judge et al., 2001; Riketta, 2008) and life satisfaction (Iverson & Maguire, 2000; Judge & Watanabe, 1993)” (cited from Weiss et al, 2022, p. 2).

### **Overview of the National Context: PR and Communication Industry in Croatia**

The Croatian public relations (PR) industry had a much shorter period of development than the PR industry in developed Western capitalist countries. Namely, in the West, according to Grunig and Hunt (1984), PR has developed intensively since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely since 1900, when the first PR agency was founded. In 1923, Bernays also published the first textbook on public relations and at the University of New York, he launched a study on public relations (Tkalac Verčič, 2015). In former communist and socialist countries, PR has been developing after the fall of the Iron Curtain, i.e. since the 1990s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The historical development of the public relations industry in Croatia is comparable to the development of the PR industry in other transition countries where, due to the communist or socialist state system, there was no need for such forms of promotion as are present in market

capitalism, and they are approximately 90 years behind the USA and other Western capitalist countries.

The development of the public relations industry in Croatia began with the declaration of independence in the early 1990s, first in public authorities, and then in the mid-1990s in the private sector with the establishment of the first PR agencies and PR departments in corporations (Holy, 2019). During socialism, there were examples of hiring public relations specialists from the 1960s in the hotel industry, the consumer goods industry, and publishing, and in the mid-1950s the PR agencies Ozeha and Interpublic were founded, but these were rudimentary forms of promotion (Osredečki, 1995). Although the development of the public relations industry in Croatia has been visible in the last thirty years through an increase in the number of public relations employees in the private and public sectors, the professionalization and specialization of the activity are also visible through the initiation of a large number of public relations studies at undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate level, the implementation of professional and scientific research and the organisation of professional and scientific conferences (Holy, 2019). The public relations sector is still lagging behind developed Western capitalist countries. This is also evident from the fact that no research has been conducted on job satisfaction and well-being among Croatian PR experts in Croatia.

The research “Women in the Public Relations Industry in Croatia” conducted in 2020 by Polić and Holy (2020) as part of the ‘Women in Public Relations project’ initiated by Dr. Martina Topić at EUPRERA, investigated, among other topics, job satisfaction among Croatian female public relations experts, but well-being was not the central topic of the research. The research showed, similar to research results conducted in other transition countries, that women in the Croatian PR industry have long working hours, an imbalance between work and private life, and unequal opportunities for career advancement. Women are exposed to sexist comments and actions and often have to behave differently to be taken seriously. The interviewees pointed

out that in the last few years, there has been a noticeable improvement in the office culture (dress code and office banter), but most of the interviewees emphasized that they are excluded from making important business decisions. The research showed that most of the participants do not recognize women in higher positions as role models, which points to the queen-bee phenomenon, i.e. women in higher positions often hinder younger women in their advancements. The interviewees also emphasized that women tend to judge women more than men. The research confirmed the existence of deep-rooted gender stereotypes, especially in terms of the desirability of certain characteristics, and how most respondents perpetuate the patriarchal dogma according to which certain characteristics are “naturally masculine” and others “naturally feminine”, that is, they do not recognize these characteristics as universal human characteristics (Polić & Holy, 2020).

### **Survey and Data Source**

The Croatian team consists of Dr Marija Geiger Zeman, Dr Geran-Marko Miletić from the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar (Zagreb), and Dr Mirela Holy from VERN' University (Zagreb). The research team joined the implementation of the research Wellbeing in Public Relations and Communication Industries in February 2023. Due to the later involvement, the members of the Croatian team did not participate in the conceptualization of the research and the creation of the research instrument. In cooperation with Dr Zdenko Zeman (Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, Zagreb) and Dr Brigita Miloš (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Rijeka) received questionnaire was modified and adapted to the local context.

The online research was conducted in the period from April to July 2023. The online questionnaire with an invitation was sent to:

- professional organisations of PR and communication experts (HURA, HUOJ, Croatian Association of Independent Professionals)



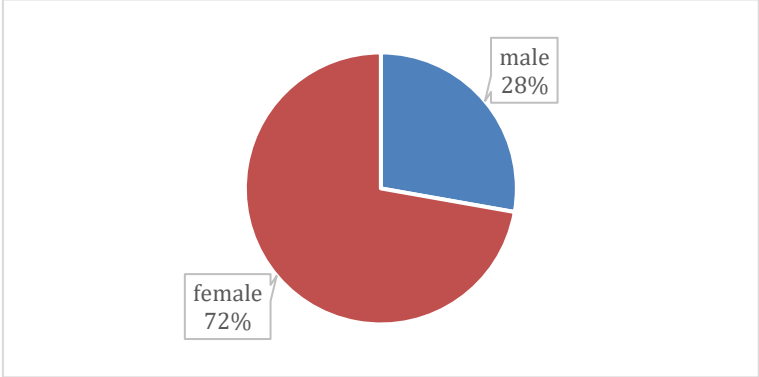
- creative hub and online market of freelance jobs (Bizkoshnica and Freelance.hr).

Also, research was advertised on social networks LinkedIn and Twitter (personal account of research team member Dr Mirela Holy). Participating in the survey took 15 minutes. The biggest challenge for the research team and the primary limitation of the Croatian part of the research is the low response rate (72 respondents out of which 66 were employed participants, and six of them were freelancers). The description of the sample includes data for employees and freelancers, however, due to the small number of freelancers who responded to participate in the research, the report will present data related to employees only.

The data will be presented at a descriptive level and results of the regression analysis for predicting job satisfaction will be presented. Despite challenges related to the low response rate, the data can serve as a good starting point for determining the main trends and conceptualization of further research.

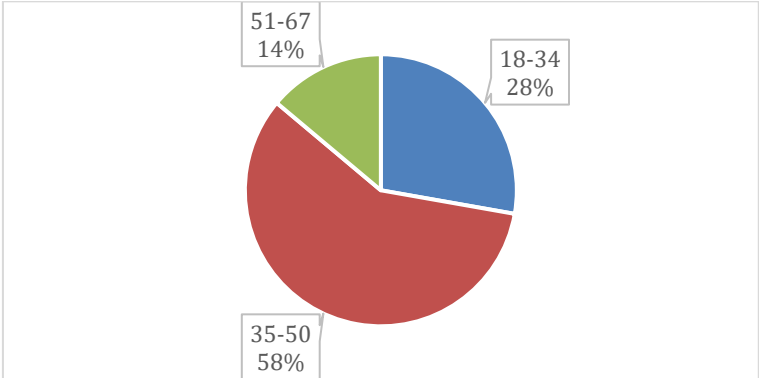
**Sample: Employees and Freelancers**

Figure 1: Gender structure



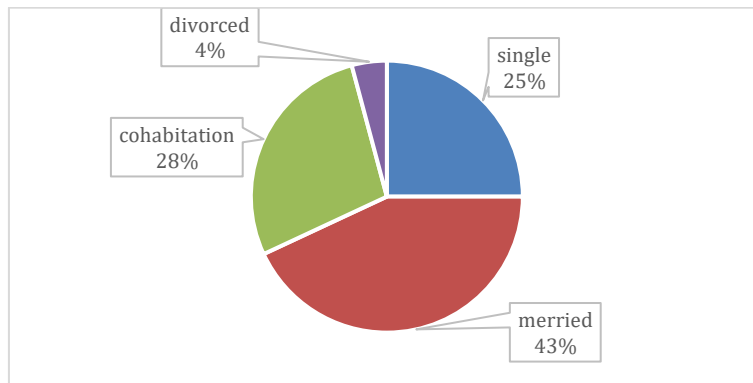
The gender structure of the sample is relatively homogeneous - 72% of women and 28% of men participated in the research.

Figure 2: Age structure



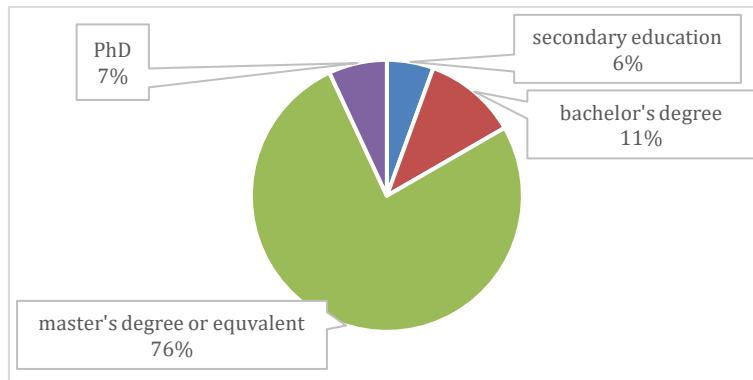
The age structure figure shows that 28% of respondents aged 18-34, 58% of respondents aged 35-50, and 14% of respondents aged 51-67 participated in the research.

Figure 3: Marital status



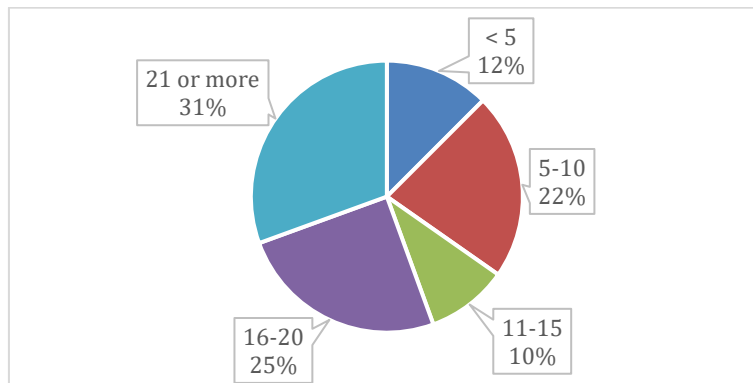
Most respondents were married (43%), 25% of respondents were single and 28% lived in cohabitation with a partner.

Figure 4: Educational structure



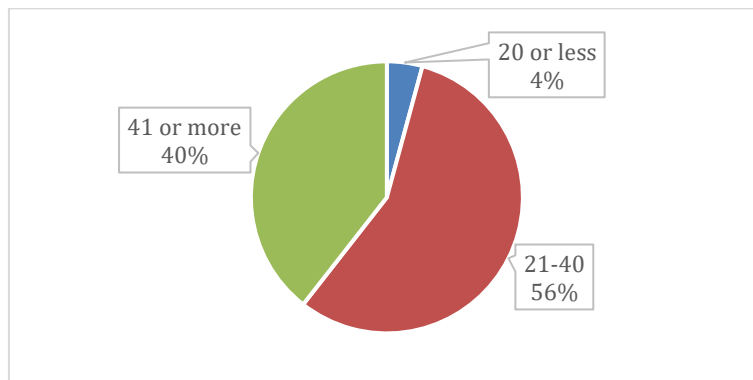
The educational structure figure shows that 6% of respondents have completed high school, 11% have a BA, 76% of respondents have an MA or equivalent and 7% of respondents have a doctorate.

Figure 5: Years of work experience



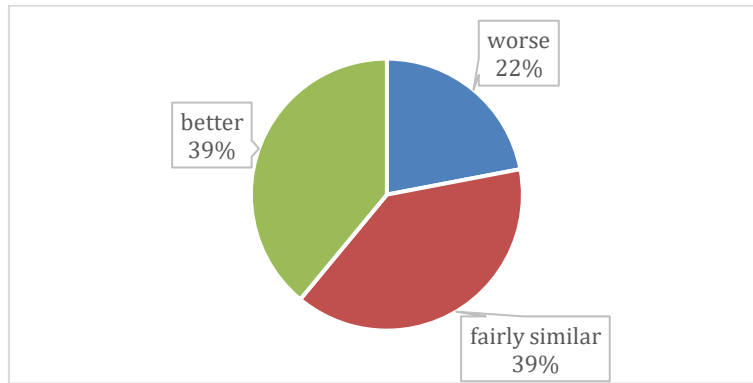
Related to years of work experience, the sample is very heterogeneous - 12% of respondents have less than five years of experience, 22% of respondents have 5-10 years of experience, 10% have 11-15 years of experience, 25% have 16-20 years of experience and 31% of respondents have 21 or more years of work experience.

Figure 6: Number of working hours per week



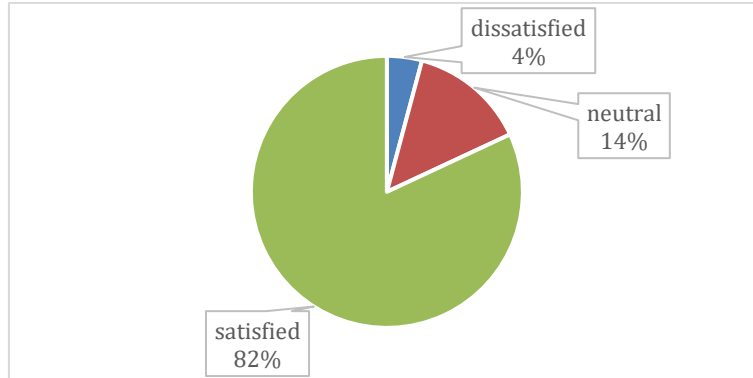
The majority of respondents (56%) work 21-40 hours per week, 40% of respondents work 41 or more hours per week, while 4% of them work 20 or fewer hours per week.

Figure 7: Average monthly income compared to the average of the sector



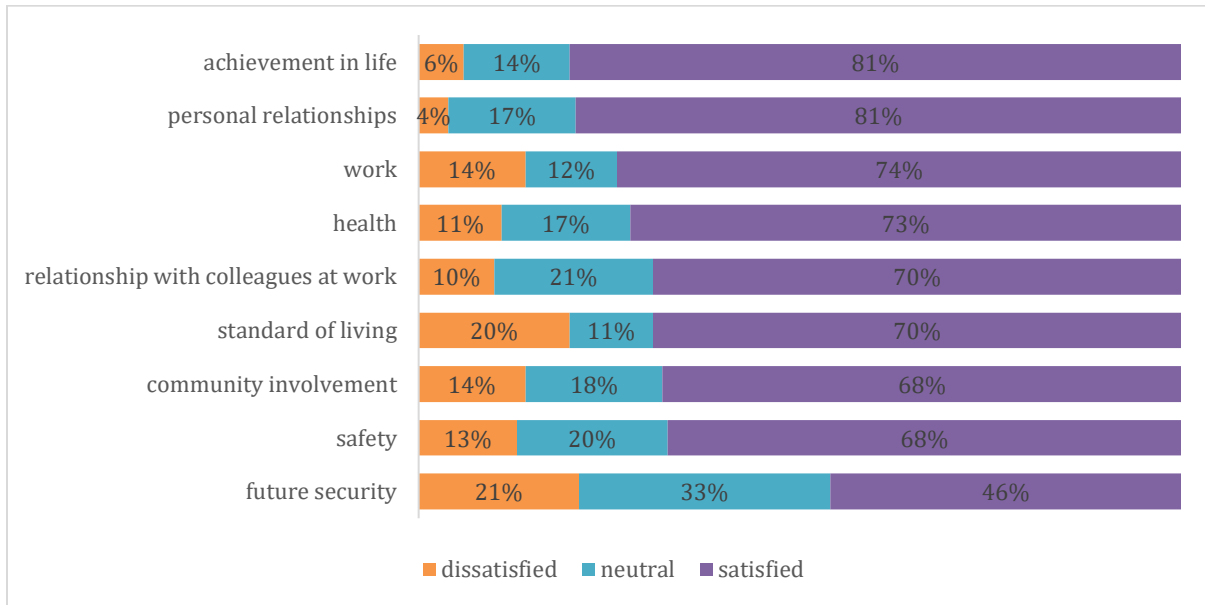
The research shows that 39% of the respondents think that they have a better average monthly income compared to the average of the sector, 39% of the respondents think that they have a fairly similar average monthly income compared to the average of the sector, while 22% of the respondents think that they have a worse monthly income than the average in the sector.

Figure 8: Satisfaction with a life as a whole



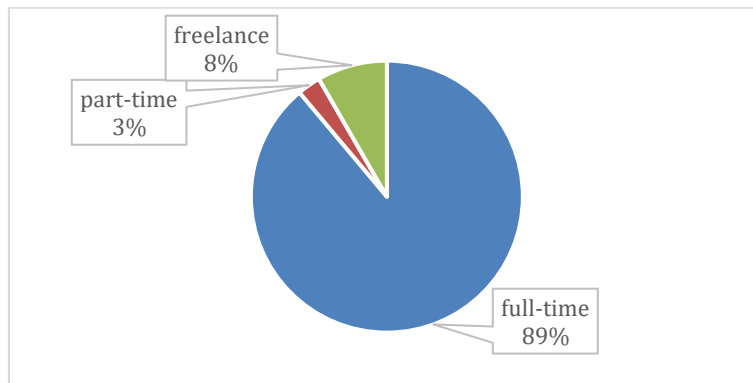
Related to the life satisfaction sample is homogeneous - 82% of respondents were satisfied with their life as a whole, 14% of respondents were neutral on this issue, while 4% of respondents are dissatisfied with their life as a whole.

Figure 9: Satisfaction with specific aspects of life



The research data showed a high percentage of satisfaction in the following areas in respondents' lives: 81% of respondents are satisfied with their achievements in life, 81% are satisfied with personal relationships, 74% are satisfied with work, 73% with health, 70% with relationships with colleagues at work, 70% are satisfied with the standard of living, 68% with community involvement and 68% with safety. In addition to that, 46% of respondents are satisfied with future security, while 21% are dissatisfied, or 33% are neutral regarding this specific aspect. It is interesting to point out that 13% of respondents are dissatisfied with safety, 14% of respondents are dissatisfied with work, and 14% of respondents are dissatisfied with their community involvement.

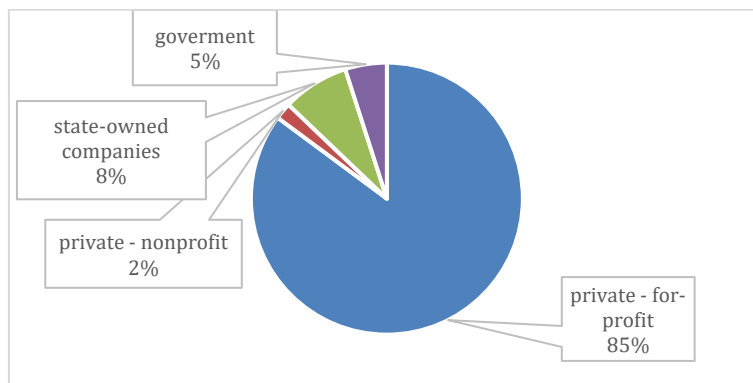
Figure 10: Working status



The sample is homogeneous in terms of working status: 89% of respondents are employed full-time, 3% of respondents are employed part-time and 8% of respondents are freelancers.

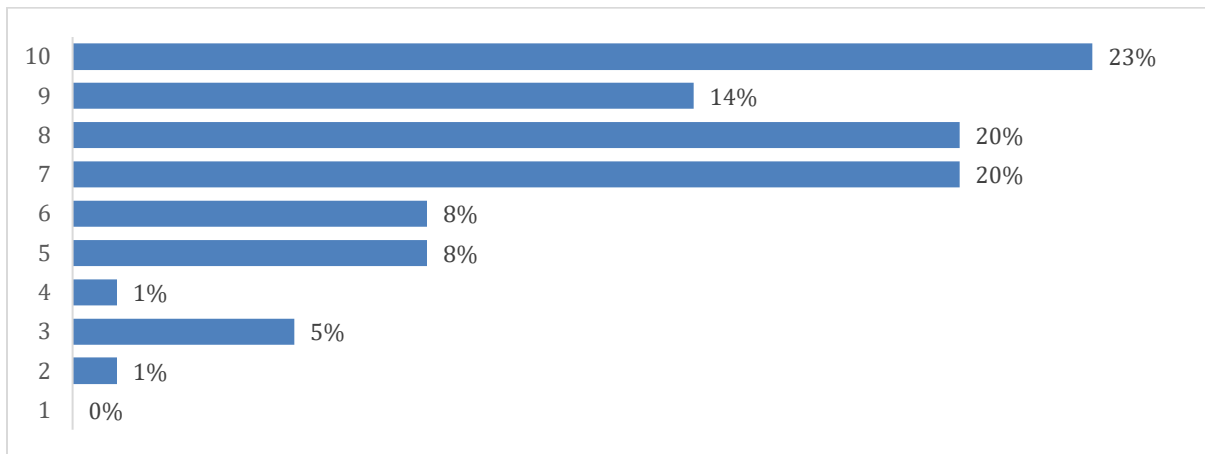
**Sample: Employees in the Public/Private Sector**

Figure 11: Sector of employment



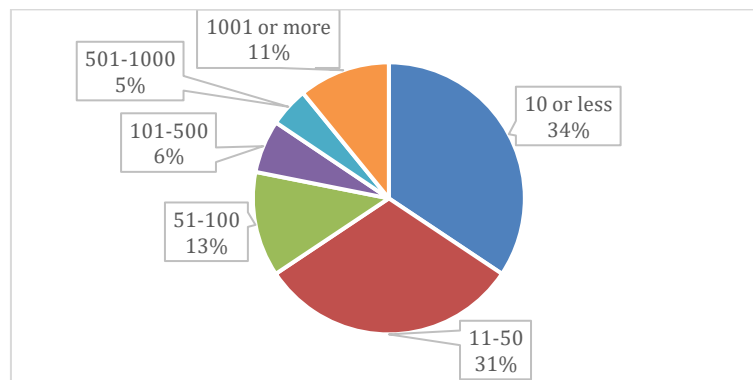
Most respondents (85%) are employed in the private-for-profit sector, 8% work in state-owned companies, 5% for the government, and 2% work in the private non-profit sector.

Figure 12: Job rank



The respondents occupy different ranks in the work organisation. Evaluating the job rank from 1-10, 23% of respondents marked their job rank with 10, 14% of them marked with 9, 20% marked their job rank with 8 and 7, 8% of respondents marked their job rank with 6 and 5, 1% of respondents work in a position marked with 5, and 5% in a position marked with 3. 1% of respondents work at job rank 2, and no one works at the lowest rank marked with 1.

Figure 13: Number of employees in the work organisation

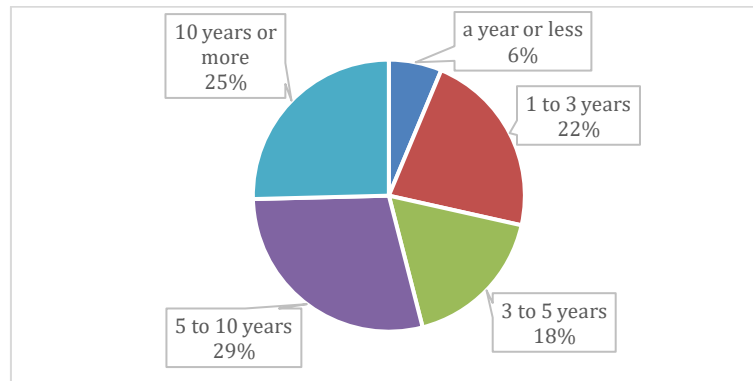


Respondents are employed in work organisations with different numbers of employees - 34% work in organisations with 10 or fewer employees, 31% work in organisations with 11-50 employees, 13% in organisations with 51-100 employees, 6% in organisations with 101- 500



employees, 5% in organisations with 501-1000 employees and 11% of respondents work in organisations with 1001 and more employees.

Figure 14: Years of employment in the work organization



In terms of employment in the work organisation the sample is heterogeneous - 6% of respondents have been working for a year or less in the working organisation, 22% have been employed in the current work organisation for one to three years, 18% of respondents have been working in the work organisation for three to five years, 29% have been working for five up to 10 years, and 25% of respondents have been working in their current work organisation for 10 or more years.

## Results

### *Employer Engagement*

Figure 15: Employer Engagement

My line manager...	Never	Rarely or sometimes	Often or very often
is understanding or sympathetic.	9%	23%	68%
juggles tasks or duties to accommodate my responsibilities as the working parent or main carer.	25%	45%	30%
listens to my private/personal problems.	25%	52%	23%
shares ideas or advice for my private/personal problems.	33%	48%	19%
helps me to figure out how to solve a private/personal problem.	40%	42%	19%
critical of my efforts to combine work and family responsibilities.	75%	22%	4%
shows resentment of my needs as a working parent/carer.	77%	21%	2%
holds my parenting/carer responsibilities against me.	73%	27%	0%

Source: Geiger Zeman et al (2024)

Although the majority of respondents (68%) have superiors who often/very often show understanding and sympathy, a significant number of respondents work with superiors who rarely or sometimes show understanding and sympathy (23%), while slightly less than 10% of them have superiors who never until so. Supportive behaviour on the part of a superior is most evident in adapting work tasks to fulfill family obligations or listening to private problems (75%). It is important to point out that 75% of respondents point out that their supervisor is never critical of their efforts to combine work and family responsibilities, 77% show resentment towards their needs as a parent/carer, 73% believe that their supervisor never holds their parenting/carer responsibilities against them. A smaller percentage of respondents (less than 5%) have experienced frequent criticism, indignation, and direct objections due to the influence of private life on the world of work by a superior (Geiger Zeman et al, 2024).

*Work Culture and Relationships*

Figure 16: Work Culture and Relationships

	Disagree	Neither agree neither disagree	Agree
In general, my colleagues in this organisation are accommodating of family-related needs or other personal concerns.	3%	18%	79%
In the event of a conflict, employees are understanding when their colleagues have to put their family or other personal concerns first.	11%	14%	75%
Co-employees in this organisation are sympathetic toward employees' domestic responsibilities.	5%	23%	72%
Colleagues in this organisation encourage others to be sensitive to employees' family and personal concerns.	9%	23%	67%

Source: Geiger Zeman et al (2024)

The results show that most respondents work in an environment where interpersonal relations based on understanding, mutual support, solidarity and sensitivity are maintained. For example, 79% of respondents claim that their colleagues are ready to accommodate family-related needs and personal concerns, 75% receive understanding from colleagues in cases of conflict between work and family and personal concerns, 72% of respondents work with colleagues who are sympathetic toward employees' domestic responsibilities, while 67% of them point out that their colleagues encourage others to be sensitive to the family and personal problems of other employees. About 3-11% disagree with these experiences (Geiger Zeman et al, 2024).

## *Employee Engagement*

Figure 17: Respondents' feelings about the particular organisation for which they are now working

	Disagree	Neither agree neither disagree	Agree
I focus hard on my work.	0%	3%	97%
I share the same work values as my colleagues.	9%	26%	65%
I share the same work goals as my colleagues.	8%	26%	66%
I share the same work attitudes as my colleagues.	17%	23%	60%
I feel positive about my work.	8%	15%	77%
I feel energetic in my work.	6%	26%	68%
I am enthusiastic in my work.	8%	28%	65%

Source: Authors' calculation

Most respondents (97%) stated that they are very focused on their work. Positive attitudes and optimism towards work are also evident in the high percentages associated with the claims: 77% of respondents feel positive about their work, 68% of respondents feel energetic in their work and 65% of respondents are enthusiastic in their work. The percentage of sharing work values with colleagues (65%), sharing the same work goals with colleagues (66%) and sharing the same work attitudes with colleagues (60%) is relatively high.

**Work-Life Balance**

Figure 18: Balancing work and life

	Disagree	Neither agree neither disagree	Agree
I can easily choose to do some of my work at home instead of my usual place of employment.	32%	9%	58%
I have enough time for my family (partner, parents, children).	25%	26%	49%
In my free time, I still deal with my work duties.	32%	20%	48%
I have enough time for my friends.	34%	22%	45%
I have much control over when I want to take a few hours off.	37%	19%	45%
I have much control over the way I balance working and domestic responsibilities.	26%	34%	40%
I have much choice over when I begin and end each workday.	45%	22%	34%
Because of my work, I have no free time.	43%	25%	32%
Because of my work, I neglect my family or friends.	57%	22%	22%

Source: Geiger Zeman et al (2024)

A large number of respondents face challenges in balancing work and private life - 58% of respondents can choose to do part of their work at home, 49% have enough time for close family, and 45% for friends. Despite this, some respondents believe that they “don't have free time because of work”, but those who think the opposite, 32% versus 43%. About 48% of respondents are “engaged in work activities in their free time. Also, the majority of respondents (about 45%) cannot influence when their working day will start or end” (Geiger Zeman et al, 2024).

*Work-Life Conflict*

Figure 19: Work-Life Conflict

	Disagree	Neither agree neither disagree	Agree
When I get off work, I am often too frazzled to participate in non-work activities/responsibilities.	22%	25%	54%
I am often so emotionally drained when I get off work that it prevents me from contributing to my non-work responsibilities.	26%	22%	52%
Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I get off work I am too stressed to do the things I enjoy.	39%	14%	48%
The problem-solving behaviours I use in my job are not effective in resolving problems in my non-work activities.	28%	33%	39%
The time I must devote to my job keeps me from participating equally in my non-work responsibilities and activities.	46%	20%	34%

Source: Authors' calculation

The majority of respondents are faced with work-life conflict - 54% of respondents are too exhausted after work to participate in non-work activities, 52% are emotionally exhausted to participate in non-work activities, 48% are under stress due to which they cannot participate in activities they normally enjoy.

*Job Satisfaction, Wellbeing and Networking*

Figure 20: Respondents' satisfaction with their work and life and the role of networking

	Disagree	Neither agree neither disagree	Agree
I find real enjoyment in my job.	15%	20%	65%
Most days I am enthusiastic about my job.	11%	29%	60%
Overall speaking, I feel well satisfied with my job.	14%	23%	63%
In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.	32%	28%	40%
I am satisfied with my life.	8%	23%	69%
So far, I have gotten the important things I want in my life.	15%	25%	60%
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	36%	22%	42%
Networking is part of my job.	8%	12%	80%
Networking positively affects my wellbeing.	10%	25%	65%

Source: Authors' calculation

More than half of respondents agree with the statement regarding enjoyment (65%), enthusiasm (60%) and satisfaction with their job (63%). Statements related to life satisfaction show that 40% of respondents consider their life to be close to their ideal, however, 32% of respondents disagree with this, while 28% of them neither agree nor disagree. Despite (larger/smaller) deviations from the ideal, 69% of respondents are satisfied with their life, and 60% of them feel fulfilled (they have gotten the important things that they want in their life). The statement about the possibility of living their life again and the possibility of changing almost everything divided the answers - 36% of respondents disagreed, and 42% of respondents agreed. Regarding the importance of networking, 80% of respondents believe that networking is part of their job, and 65% of respondents believe that networking has a positive effect on their well-being. With this statement, 25% of respondents neither agree nor disagree.

## Perceived Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Figure 21: Gender Discrimination and sexual harassment

	Never	Rarely or sometimes	Often or very often
In my professional career, I have encountered unwanted sexual comments, attention, or advances by a superior or colleague.	35%	32%	32%
I have perceived gender-specific biases or obstacles to career success or satisfaction by gender in my work environment.	31%	52%	17%
In my professional career, I have been left out of opportunities for professional advancement based on gender.	48%	42%	11%
In my professional career, I have had increased opportunities for professional advancement based on gender.	57%	38%	5%

Source: Geiger Zeman et al (2024)

According to research data, 35% of respondents have never experienced unwanted sexual comments, attention, or advances from a superior or colleague, however, 32% of respondents rarely/sometimes or often/very often had gender discriminatory experiences. 52% of respondents rarely/sometimes perceive gender-specific prejudices or obstacles in career success or satisfaction. It is interesting to note that 42% of respondents rarely/sometimes miss opportunities for professional advancement due to gender, while 38% of respondents had greater opportunities for professional advancement due to gender. Based on the collected data, it is difficult to conclude what is the cause of such an assessment, but this issue certainly deserves attention in future research (Geiger Zeman et al, 2024).

### Wellbeing at Work and Job Satisfaction: A Short Literature Overview

According to Herzberg, Mausnes, Peterson, and Capwell (1957, cited from İşgör & Haspolat, 2016, p. 195) job satisfaction is “meeting the needs of individuals in their occupation such as success and recognition, and their being rewarded in a sense” while Locke defines job satisfaction as “*a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job*”



*and job experience*” (Locke, 1976 cited in Yang, 2012, p. 33). Luthans (1995, cited from İsgör & Haspolat, 2016, p. 195) connects job satisfaction with personal feelings but also includes dimensions such as “salary and promotion” (according to Toker 2011, cited from İsgör & Haspolat, 2016, p. 195). Numerous studies show that “the most important determinants of job satisfaction”: an interesting job, good relationships with supervisor/manager and colleagues, high income, possibility of independent work, and clearly defined opportunities for advancement (Faragher et al, 2005, p. 106).

### ***Subjective Wellbeing at Work, Job Satisfaction, and Occupational Status***

Work organisation is hierarchically differentiated and structured, so “occupational status” - “the ranking of formal positions that individuals occupy in a given organizational hierarchy” - “is one of the most central features at work and in organizations” (Weiss et al, 2022, p. 2). Higher occupational statuses are associated with a number of benefits (e.g. greater autonomy in work, prestige, better working conditions, motivating work tasks) and access to significant resources (e.g. greater opportunities for further advancement, power, higher salary) which contributes to better subjective well-being and greater job satisfaction (Weiss et al, 2022, p. 2).

Indicators such as salary, position, promotion, and supervision are important in research on satisfaction at work (Putra & Asnur, 2020). Stimulation that positively affects the work motivation of employees can be internal/external and immaterial/material (Putra & Asnur, 2020, p. 569). Rademacher and Stürmer (2021, p. 152) emphasize the importance of researching job satisfaction among younger generations of communication professionals. Through research, Rademacher and Stürmer (2021, p. 152) determined that today's generations (X, Y, Z) are more oriented towards “their inner motivation and purpose-driven jobs” and that “future PR professionals feel that inner motivation positively affects their job satisfaction, job performance and ethical decision-making.”

The relationship between gender and job satisfaction is complex, especially in the categories of occupational status and pay compensation. The international EUPRERA survey of PR experts (Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 86) showed that general job satisfaction is high, although it is falling compared to the results of earlier research - the most positive evaluations were assigned to: “interesting and manifold tasks”, “feeling valued by superiors and clients”, “security and stability of the job” and “high status” (2018, p. 86); most respondents were satisfied with pay compensation, good good-life balance and career opportunities (2018, pp. 86-87). It is important to emphasize that: 1) all dimensions of job satisfaction are rated lower by women; 2) job satisfaction is higher among employees positioned at higher ranks (Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 87).

### *Wellbeing at Work, Job Satisfaction and Work-Life Balance/Conflict*

Work-life balance is difficult to achieve in today's working conditions (Kelly et al., 2014), but it must be emphasized that it is not a new phenomenon, as this topic has been the focus of research since the 1970s. Issues of work-life balance/conflict do not only belong to the domain of work but are also public health and well-being issues.

Björk-Fant, Bolander and Forsman (2023, p. 1) emphasize that the “workplace offers an ideal setting to support mental health promotion of a large share of the population” - for employees, “their families”, their communities, and society. The Social Determinants of Health Framework highlights that “fair employment and decent work are important social determinants of health” (cited in Björk-Fant et al, 2023, p. 1).

“Work-life balance is an important component of job satisfaction” (Gainey & Clenney, 2006, cited from Whitehall, 2018, p. 44). Research by Aviva, UK's leading Insurance, Wealth, and Retirement Businesses (2022) shows new trends in the world of work from the position of employees and their new priorities and values: 1) “More workers said they were attracted to their current role for the work-life balance (41%) than the salary (36%). This is a switch in rankings

compared to 2019, before the pandemic”; 2) “Almost 9 in 10 (88%) employees said workplace benefits (other than salary) improve their overall happiness”; 3) “Nearly 9 in 10 employees (87%) said they want to see improvements to their workplace benefits package over the next 12 months.” New trends indicate different needs and value priorities of employees who affirm work-life balance, happiness, better working conditions, etc.

### ***Wellbeing at Work, Job Satisfaction, and Interpersonal Relationships***

An important aspect of well-being is interpersonal relationships (between employees, between employees and supervisors or organisations) (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020; Geiger Zeman et al, 2024). Earlier research showed that “safety and good relationships with supervisors and co-workers are the biggest satisfiers” (Inayat & Khan 2021, p. 2). Social support (“emotional, functional or instrumental, structural”) that can be obtained from different: 1) “networks (personal, professional, community)”; 2) “sources (family or relatives, spouse, friends, neighbours, supervisors, co-workers, the organization)”; 3) “domains (work, home or non-work)” have positive/”protective” effects on psychological, mental, psychological, emotional and occupational well-being (Hämmig, 2017, p. 393). The social environment at the workplace and vertical and horizontal interpersonal relationships among employees is extremely important for the well-being of employees and their health (Eakin & MacEachen, 1998; Colenberg et al., 2019). Colenberg et al. (2019, p. 328) emphasized the importance of “social aspects of employee well-being”. Despite the importance of this topic, Colenberg et al. (2019, p. 328) stated that, unlike research on physical and mental well-being, the “conceptualization and measurement of social well-being at work are in its infancy”. Social aspects of employee well-being have been researched mostly partially, with the focus being primarily on conflicts, loneliness, professional isolation, etc. (Colenberg et al., 2019, p. 328). To get a deeper and better insight, Colenberg et al. (2019, p. 328) emphasized the importance of a “holistic view” that will include positive and negative

experiences of employees' social wellbeing. In the work environment as a stable context, it is possible to develop, encourage, and maintain different types of formal and informal relationships (e.g. “workplace friendships” have positive effects on “job satisfaction, job involvement, job performance, team cohesion, organizational commitment, and decreased intentions to turnover” (Reich & Hershcovis 2011, p. 6).

In addition to horizontal social relations with colleagues at work, employee relations with superiors are significant (Geiger Zeman et al, 2024). According to a Gallup survey, half of the employees in the USA looked for a new job because of a bad boss (according to Artz et al, 2018, p. 2). Bosses or supervisors are persons in a position of power, so if they do not perform their professional role adequately, they have a negative impact on the wellbeing of employees and their work performance (Artz et al, 2018). It is about “abusive supervision” (Tepper, 2000, cited in Artz et al, 2018, p. 3) or “destructive leadership” (Einarsen et al, 2007, according to Artz et al, p. 3). Such forms of destructive/abusive leadership are associated with low supervisor support, which negatively affects the mental health of employees (e.g. depressive symptoms, anxiety disorders, etc.) (Hämmig, 2017, p. 394; see Geiger Zeman et al, 2024). Leaders have a crucial role in establishing, maintaining, and affirming positive social relations among employees, whereby the positive influence of transformational leaders, i.e. transformational leadership that “intellectually stimulates and inspires followers” is especially emphasized (Bass & Riggio, 2006 cited from Reich & Hershcovis, 2011, p . 10), develops “trust among team members” and positively affects team cohesion (Reich & Hershcovis, 2011, p. 10). Leaders encourage the development and maintenance of positive interpersonal relationships among employees with their other qualities and characteristics: “procedural fairness”, “effective relational coordination” based on “high quality communication” which “involves frequent, timely, and accurate communication that emphasizes problem-solving rather than blaming or avoidance strategies”, “fostering mutual respect for each individual's competence”, etc. (Reich & Hershcovis, 2011, p.

10-11). According to Yang (2012, p. 42), p. 1) supervision based on transformational leadership significantly positively affects intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction; 2) intrinsic job satisfaction increases when employees perceive a “higher degree of inspirational motivation and idealized influence on the part of their supervisors”; 3) extrinsic job satisfaction increases when employees perceive “inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and individual consideration.”

### **Wellbeing at Work and Job Satisfaction in the PR and Communication Sector in Croatia: Results of a Regression Analysis for Predicting Job Satisfaction**

Relying on the regression analysis, we wanted to determine to what extent interpersonal relationships, the prestige/attractiveness of the workplace, and the level of workload contribute to explaining job satisfaction.

The criterion variable job satisfaction was measured through one direct question about the degree of satisfaction, while the three predictor dimensions were covered by two variables each. Interpersonal relationships are affected by agreeing with two statements, one describing the relationship with a superior (the person who is my immediate superior is understanding or compassionate), and the other with colleagues (satisfaction with the relationship with colleagues). The prestige/attractiveness of the job is affected by the relative value of the salary (the amount of income in relation to the average of the sector), and the rank within the organisation. The third dimension, workload level, was measured by agreement with two statements describing the way private and work life are balanced (when I finish work, I am often too exhausted to participate in extracurricular activities/responsibilities; because of my work I don't have free time). In addition to the mentioned predictor sets in the regression model, we also used gender as the only control variable.

The results of the linear regression analysis presented in table 1 reveal that the set of predictor variables used in the model explains 36% of the variance in job satisfaction. While controlling for all the mentioned predictors, only the variables related to interpersonal relationships were statistically significantly - and positively - related to the degree of satisfaction. In other words, of the three analysed predictor sets, neither the prestige of the job nor the level of workload, but only interpersonal relationships were relevant factors in job satisfaction. As expected, people who are satisfied with their relationship with their colleagues and those whose immediate superiors show understanding or compassion were more satisfied with their work.

Table 1: Results of regression analysis

		Beta
<b>CONTROL VARIABLE</b>	Gender	-0,051
<b>JOB PRESTIGE</b>	Relative income	0,171
	Job rank	0,074
<b>WORKLOAD LEVEL</b>	When I get off work, I am often too frazzled to participate in non-work activities/ responsibilities.	-0,231
	Because of my work, I have no free time.	-0,011
<b>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>	Satisfaction with relationship with co-workers	0,432**
	My line manager is understanding or sympathetic.	0,231*
adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0,364
F		5,502**

## **A Summary of Results**

### *Background*

This research follows on from EUPRERA's 'Women in Public Relations' research initiated by Dr Martina Topić, which was conducted in Croatia by Polić and Holy (2020) using in-depth interviews with 21 respondents employed in the public relations industry in Croatia. The mentioned research was the first in Croatia to investigate women's attitudes and opinions in the Croatian public relations industry about their professional experience in the PR industry, office culture and leadership through gender equality lenses. The research showed that although the PR industry in Croatia is dominated by female employees (76.84%), the sector still prevails in so-called masculine patterns. Results showed that women in the Croatian PR industry have long working hours, weighted work-life balance and complex and unequal career progression opportunities. Women are often exposed to direct or indirect gender discrimination (sexist comments and practices; they need to behave differently to be taken seriously). However, some improvements are visible because some elements of office culture (dress code, banter) are not so patriarchally gender biased as before. The majority of participants, on the other hand, still reported exclusion from essential business decisions.

This research study covered well-being issues. Dr. Martina Topić, who led EUPRERA's research team, decided to conduct new research focused only on well-being in the public relations industry in 2023, in which the Croatian team was also involved. Namely, well-being issues are insufficiently researched within the public relations industry and considering the increasing number of employees in the public relations industry, there is a social need for research into this research problem. It should also be emphasized that Croatia, as a transition country, that is, a country that until the 1990s of the last century had a socialist and not a market

economy, has a relatively short tradition of public relations and, therefore, a far smaller number of research on this sector.

### *Methods*

Unlike the qualitative research using the in-depth interview method conducted in 2020, this research used the quantitative method of an online survey questionnaire distributed through social media and Croatian professional associations with a membership of communication experts. A total of 72 respondents answered the questionnaire, of which 72.2 percent were women and 27.8 percent were men. These percentages correlate with gender representation within the membership of the Croatian Public Relations Association and the overall gender picture of the Croatian public relations sector. The research covered the following topics: Employer Engagement, Work Culture and Relationships, Work-Life Balance, Work-Life Conflict, Job Satisfaction, Wellbeing and Networking, and Perceived Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment. The most significant percentage of respondents, 23.1 percent, declared themselves as persons holding the highest job rank in the organisation, which likely had an impact on the survey results.

### *Results*

It is established that most respondents work in a working environment where relationships are still based on solidarity and mutual support; have problems in harmonizing work and life; at some stage of their career witnessed or personally experienced some forms of gender discrimination or sexual harassment. Positive results regarding topics of Employer Engagement and Work Culture and Relationships can be connected with the fact that a significant percentage of respondents work in the highest positions in the organisation. Based on research data, it is possible to conclude that the majority of respondents have positive feelings and attitudes



related to their work and that about 60% of them share the same work values, work goals, and work attitudes with their colleagues. Regarding Work-Life Balance and Work-Life Conflict topics, the results are not so positive. Namely, the bulk of respondents face challenges in balancing work and private life, and the majority of respondents are engaged in work activities in their free time. An impressive percentage of respondents are satisfied with their jobs (74%), which can also be connected to the fact that many of them work in high positions in the organisation. Research data related to Job Satisfaction, Wellbeing, and Networking indicate a relatively high percentage of job satisfaction and work as a source of joy and enthusiasm (about 60%). Although the majority of the respondents are satisfied with their lives (69%) and feel fulfilled (60%), there is a desire for change in a smaller part of the respondents. As for networking, the majority of respondents (80%) believe that it is an important aspect of work, which has a positive effect on slightly more than half (65%). The last research topic, Perceived Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment, showed that more than one-third of respondents (35%) have never experienced unwanted sexual comments, attention, or advances from a superior or colleague, and almost one-third of them (32%) rarely/sometimes or often/very often had gender discriminatory experiences. However, 42% of respondents rarely/sometimes miss opportunities for professional advancement due to gender. Results are more gender positive than in other sectors which can be connected to the fact that public relations are feminine industry.

#### *Implications (Theoretical, Practical, Social)*

This research is the first related to the well-being issues in the Croatian public relations and communication industry so results can serve as valuable information for the management in the communication agencies, PR and marketing departments in the corporations and education organisations to improve work culture and relationships. However, due to the relatively small sample of respondents, we suggest the implementation of further research, both quantitative and

qualitative, in order to obtain more precise and in-depth information about this increasingly significant social issue.

### Conclusion

The research showed that the surveyed communication experts are mainly satisfied with their work and their relationships with superiors and colleagues and that they are mostly not exposed to gender bias and sexual harassment at work. The biggest challenge for respondents when it comes to well-being in the public relations industry is the relationship between work and private life because their private life suffers because of the workload. The limitation of this research, in addition to the relatively small number of respondents, is the relatively high percentage of respondents who are employed in the highest positions in the organisation.

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