

# Women of Vision survey

## Part 2: Job satisfaction and future plans

**W**hile gender gaps in salaries and job prospects are of obvious interest (Part 1: Working Practices, 22.10.10) the Women of Vision survey examines many other issues that have important implications for recruitment and manpower in the profession.

In April this year the university optometry departments convened a meeting of employers and other stakeholders to discuss a recruitment slump that has seen the number of applicants to optometry halved since the mid-1990s, while the number of university places has doubled (News, 16.04.10).

There were calls for an urgent industry-wide campaign to increase the number and quality of applicants to optometry and dispensing courses. A working group was formed to raise awareness of optometry and optics as a career choice, to improve the calibre of applications to universities and to target specific parts of the country where posts are hardest to fill.

Recruitment to the profession is one side of the story but retaining eye care practitioners is an equally important manpower issue. Since women now make up a majority of optometry and dispensing students, the reasons for their choice of career, satisfaction with their job and future career plans are of more than of passing interest.

The Women of Vision survey, jointly conducted by *Optician* and CIBA Vision, therefore looks not only at where women work and what they earn, it also examines their motivations for entering, working and staying in their chosen profession.

Part one explained how the survey was conducted and compared our sample with other available demographic data. The maximum response to any one question was 808 replies and just over half (54 per cent) were from women.

All results reported here apply to our sample rather than to the profession as a whole. The base is those replying to each question and differences are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level or higher unless stated.

In our second article reporting on women in the workplace, **Alison Ewbank** looks at their motivation for entering the profession, the elements of work they most enjoy and their plans for the future



The women surveyed cited contact lens practice as the most enjoyable element of work

### Choice of career

We asked our sample to cite their top three motivating factors for choosing a career in optometry or dispensing optics from a given list or to specify.

- The top three career motivations for women are the opportunity to work in a healthcare profession, professional status and the opportunity to help others

- Women are more motivated by working in a healthcare profession than men (58 per cent vs 46 per cent) and men are more motivated by salary (42 per cent vs 32 per cent)

- The opportunity to work part time and have flexible hours is more important to women than men (20 per cent vs 2 per cent, and 10 per cent vs 2 per cent respectively)

- Asian/British Asian women are more likely to be motivated by the opportunity to work part time (27 per cent) than the rest of the sample (11 per cent) and no Asian/British Asian

men cited this as a motivating factor

- Men are more likely to cite 'family member in the profession' as a reason for choosing their career than women (18 per cent vs 9 per cent).

### Career and job satisfaction

We asked the sample to state how satisfied they were with their chosen career both overall and for various attributes, such as current job, current salary, work/life balance and future career prospects (Table 1).

We then looked for significant differences between women in men for those who were 'satisfied' ('extremely satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied') or dissatisfied ('quite dissatisfied' or 'extremely dissatisfied'), and also compared those who were 'extremely satisfied' with specific attributes.

- Overall, most women are satisfied with their chosen career and are as likely as men to be satisfied (both 86 per cent)

- Women are also as likely as men to be extremely satisfied (38 per cent vs 37 per cent)
- Equal proportions of women and men are dissatisfied (14 per cent)
- Women with children are less likely to be extremely satisfied with their current job than women without children (42 per cent vs 49 per cent)
- Women and men are equally likely to be extremely satisfied with their current salary (20 per cent)
- Women tend to be more satisfied with their work/life balance than men (27 per cent vs 21 per cent extremely satisfied, although this difference is not significant)
- Women are less likely to be extremely satisfied with their future career prospects than men (16 per cent vs 24 per cent), irrespective of whether they have children
- Asian/British Asian women are less likely to be extremely satisfied with their future career prospects (8 per cent) than other women (17 per cent), or the rest of the sample (20 per cent).

## Work enjoyment

Next we asked which elements of their work practitioners most enjoyed and why, each from a given list with the option to specify.

- Contact lens work is the most enjoyable element of work cited by women, followed by paediatrics and dispensing, while men favour dispensing, contact lens work and managing the business
- Women's enjoyment of contact lens work varies with years qualified, with most enjoyment after 6-10 years in practice
- Women are significantly more likely than men to enjoy paediatrics (39 per cent vs 29 per cent) and less likely to enjoy dispensing (36 per cent vs 47 per cent) or management (28 per cent vs 41 per cent)

**TABLE 1 Job satisfaction**

Extremely satisfied figures

	Total	Men	Women	Women with children	Women without children
<b>Current job</b>	35%	35%	35%	*42% vs women without kids	*49% vs women with kids
<b>Work/life balance</b>	24%	21%	27%	27%	27%
<b>Current salary</b>	20%	20%	20%	25%	17%
<b>Future career prospects</b>	20%	*24% vs women vs women with kids	*16% vs men	*16% vs men	*16% vs men

\*significant difference

Base: all answering each question

- Women are more likely than men to say 'fulfilment in helping others' is the reason for finding these elements of their work enjoyable (76 per cent vs 67 per cent), while men are more likely to say 'monetary rewards' (15 per cent vs 5 per cent).

## Self perception in the workplace

To examine practitioners' perceptions of their work we asked them to state their level of agreement ('agree strongly' or 'agree slightly') or disagreement ('disagree slightly' or 'disagree strongly') with a series of statements about themselves.

- Almost all men and women agree 'My work allows me to make a difference to the lives of my patients' (98 per cent)
- Women are as likely as men to agree 'My job requires I learn new things' or 'My professional development is important to me'
- Women are less likely than men to strongly agree 'I like to be the first to try new products, practices and procedures' (28 per cent vs 35 per

cent) or 'I am quick to embrace new practices and procedures and lead by example' (45 per cent vs 53 per cent)

- Women are more likely than men to strongly agree 'I feel vulnerable to the possibility of litigation in relation to my work' (31 per cent vs 24 per cent)
- Only a minority of men and women (19 per cent) agree with the statement 'I do not feel there are any risks associated with my work'.

## Future plans

Finally we asked our sample what career changes they were likely to undergo over the next five years (Figure 1) and at what age they expected to retire from full-time practice.

- Many men (47 per cent) and women (41 per cent) say they are likely to reduce their working hours over the next five years
- Nearly one in five of our sample (19 per cent) say they expect to leave the profession altogether within five years, falling to 14 per cent in the under 55s
- A higher proportion of women than men say they are likely to increase

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their hours (13 per cent vs 5 per cent) or take a temporary career break in the next five years (11 per cent vs 5 per cent), and women are also more likely to leave their current employer within that time (30 per cent vs 22 per cent)

- Women with children are less likely to say they will open their own practice/franchise within five years than are all ECPs (9 per cent vs 16 per cent)

- On average, women are aiming for a retirement age of 59 years while men would like to retire at 63 years.

## Discussion

Our survey found significant gender differences in motivation for entering the profession, in career satisfaction and future plans. These differences are important, since, if women's expectations are unmet, if they are dissatisfied with their chosen career or do not enjoy their work, they may be more likely to reduce their working hours or leave the profession altogether.

Concerns about the number and quality of new entrants to the profession should therefore be equally directed at understanding their aspirations and at retaining practitioners once they are qualified.

We found that women are primarily motivated by working in a healthcare profession and the opportunity to work part time, rather than by salary. Once in practice, they enjoy the elements of their work that build a rapport with the patient and bring them particular fulfilment in helping others, such as contact lens fitting and paediatrics.

## CLOSE CONTACT

Guests at a Women of Vision dinner hosted by CIBA Vision to launch the survey findings were not surprised to hear that contact lenses are the most enjoyable part of women's work, although some questioned whether those who had recently qualified had the same interest as established practitioners.

Daska Barnett, with a practice in west London that has an all-women team, argued that contact lens work was less stressful on a clinical level and the patients were different. 'They're motivated, they're interested, they appreciate your professionalism, they want to pay you fees and you see them on a regular basis.'

Jo Cashell recently took over an independent practice in south east London and observed that women's motivations for preferring contact lens work were different from men's. 'We're more likely to build up a relationship over time whereas blokes are more likely to say, "I want cash in the till now".'

Hayley Wainer, whose practice in the City of London has a high proportion of its turnover from contact lenses, agreed that contact lens work was particularly fulfilling for women: 'It's to do with contact with people, it's a relationship, it's taking them through the whole journey. We like that as girls.'

They perceive themselves as less likely to be early adopters and feel more vulnerable to the possibility of litigation than men.

Women's career paths may be more varied than men's but there is little evidence that they lack ambition, even if unrealised. They have similar expectations of owning a practice or franchise and, interestingly, moving to another part of the country. And they are at least as likely as men to say they will study for a further qualification or undertake management training.

Some future plans are more surprising but may be attributed in part to demographic differences between our sample and the wider profession. In particular, the higher age profile of our sample may be reflected in the proportion of men and women who say they plan to cut down on work (43 per cent) or leave the profession within

five years (19 per cent).

Looking only at those aged 55 years or under, these figures do fall slightly, to 39 per cent and 14 per cent respectively, suggesting that nearing retirement may be part, but not all, of the story. What respondents say they plan to do, and what they actually do, may also be very different.

It is interesting that, overall, women in our sample are no more likely than men to say they plan to leave the profession within five years. However, when asked specifically about retirement, women expect to retire, on average, four years earlier than men, at 59 years.

Women, in particular, may need to revise their expectations of early retirement in light of forthcoming changes to the state pensionable age. Other changes in prospect, such as the ending of universal child benefit, could potentially have an impact on working hours of women in future.

In conclusion, our survey reveals a series of paradoxes about women in the workplace. We found that women are as satisfied as men with their chosen career, even though they earn less in real terms and are less likely to hold managerial positions.

Flexibility of working days and hours is important to women yet very few work anything other than full days in practice. Childcare usually falls to women to organise but they tend to be happy with their work/life balance. And although building a rapport with patients is important to women's enjoyment of their work, they are more likely to move jobs or take a career break than men in the profession.

Further, qualitative research, particularly among recent recruits to the profession, would help us to improve our understanding of their aspirations, and the implications for future manpower and recruitment. ●

**Figure 1 Future plans**

Which of the following are you likely to do over the next five years?

