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A Comparative Study of the Job Orientation of Occupational Therapists in Korea: 2002 and 2013

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to verify the changes within job orientation among occupational therapists over the past 10 years in order to predict the directionality of job orientation going forward and provide basic data for improvement. A total of 233 subjects participated in the study: 86 subjects in 2002 and 147 in 2013. The mean difference between job orientation in 2002 and 2013 indicates that within the professionalism variable, occupational commitment (t=2.38), professional determination (-2.94), job autonomy (-2.88), and employability (-4.94) were higher in 2013; within the attitude towards the workplace variable, distributive justice (2.18), and promotional opportunity (3.56) were higher in 2002; within the job security variable, job stability (-2.73), and job satisfaction (-3.37) were higher in 2013. The results of the study indicate general improvements in the attitudes towards professionalism and job security variables in 2013. However, because the job satisfaction results were low, efforts must be exerted to continuously improve job orientation. In addition, variables regarding the workplace are continuously moving lower and there is a need of measures to address the situation. It will require aggressive policy efforts to ensure distributive justice and promotional opportunities are available for members of these organizations.

Keywords
Occupational Therapist; Political; South Korea; Job Orientation.

Introduction

Occupational therapy emerged in South Korea during the 1950s following the Korean War, due to the increase in patients requiring rehabilitation [1,2]. Since then, a national state examination for occupational therapists was introduced in 1969 and has produced 10,071 occupational therapists as of 2014 [3,4]. Specifically, the number of therapists increased from 416 in 2000 to 2,260 in 2006, resulting in the highest growth rate among health care workers at that time [5]. Currently, there are 31 institutions with a four-year program and 29 institutions with a three-year program, producing a total of over 1,500 occupational therapists each year [3]. By 2020, it is predicted that the supply of occupational therapists will exceed demand [6] and such oversupply will lead to low-cost labour, having a negative impact on the job orientation of occupational therapists in the labour market [7].

Job orientation can be defined as the affective response to work by members of an organization based on workplace employment relationships, which greatly affects the productivity and effectiveness of the entire organization [8,9]. Therefore, even though rapid quantitative growth of occupational therapists has led to the outward expansion of the field, this growth will have a

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negative impact on job orientation. Thus, job orientation (or the affective response to work) during the process of quantitative growth in the labour market must be continuously studied. Numerous studies have been done on the duties of occupational therapists [10-12], but because analysis was mainly conducted on the technical aspects of their duties, there was a lack of understanding of job orientation from a variety of angles.

Currently, the institutions where occupational therapists are working include university hospitals (60%), community hospitals (25%), and other institutions (15%) [3]. In contrast, 10 years ago over 90% of occupational therapists were working in or around university hospitals [13]. This is why the data were collected mainly from university hospitals [13]. Although the ratio of occupational therapists working in the community has increased in recent years, the subjects in this study were limited to occupational therapists working in university hospitals in order to perform a time series analysis. The time series data analysis observes long-term trends and can explain the causes of fluctuations [14]. In prior studies examining the duties of occupational therapists in South Korea, the time series analysis had not been utilized. Therefore, there has been a lack of basic data required to accurately predict the duties of occupational therapists in the future. Through this study, periodic research on the job orientation of occupational therapists will be possible, which will allow us to predict the job orientation of future professionals.

This study will compare the job orientation of occupational therapists based on data collected in 2002 and in 2013. The year 2002 is the point in time when quantitative growth in occupational therapists first started, and 10 years later, 2013 marks the period when the areas of occupational therapy have become diversified along with the rapid growth of association members [3]. By comparing these two periods, we can identify the changes in job orientation among occupational therapists over the past decade. Furthermore, the comparison can be utilized to predict the directionality of the job orientation of occupational therapists and to provide basic data for future improvements.

Methods

Participants

A total of 233 subjects participated in the study: 86 subjects in 2002 and 147 in 2013. In terms of social characteristics of the participants, there were 17 male subjects in 2002, representing 20%, and 56 male subjects in 2013, representing 38%; therefore, there were fewer male than female respondents in both time periods. The average age was 28.40 and 28.53, respectively; subjects with spouses were 35% and 26%, respectively; and, the average years of education were 16.55 and 16.17, respectively. The mean differences were verified with regard to the demographic characteristics in order to check the homogeneity of the two groups. As a result, the number of males was significantly greater in 2013 than 2002 for the demographic variable of gender, and no significant differences were found in the other variables (Table. 1).

Table 1. General Characteristics of Study Subjects

Variable	Year 2002(n=86)		Year 2013(n=147)		*t*
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	

Gender(male)	0.20	0.40	0.38	0.49	-2.21*
Age(years)	28.40	5.07	28.53	5.51	-0.14
Marital Status(married)	0.35	0.48	0.26	0.44	1.13
Level of education(years)	16.55	1.64	16.17	0.84	1.75

*$p<0.05$

Measures

In this study, job orientation was largely divided into four dimensions. First, the concepts regarding specialized jobs, studied by Kerr, von Glinow, and Schriesheim (1977), were analysed [15]. These include job autonomy, professional determination, a sense of calling, occupational commitment, and employability. The most important of these is autonomy [16], defined as professionals taking control and making decisions regarding their duties based solely on their own knowledge and experience [17]. Professional determination is defined as a strong commitment to the professional field and the belief that the only ones who can evaluate the field are those with expertise [18]. The term "sense of calling" has been most often used in a religious sense, referring to vocations as a calling from God, but in modern days, it is defined as an awareness of the meaning and purpose of one's profession [19]. Furthermore, a sense of calling includes regarding one's profession as a purpose in life based on a subjective perception [20]. Therefore, having a sense of calling for one's career means feeling satisfaction and happiness through one's work and having a sense of purpose to give to society [20]. Occupational commitment can be explained as the relative amount of intensity of involvement in one's profession [21]. This study used McCloskey & McCain (1987)'s three elements [22] that defined the term as emotional attachment, identification and involvement with a profession. Employability is how one feels about the possibility of getting employment outside the organization if necessary [23]. Additionally, it refers to the possibility of a person's various abilities and knowledge being used in a new or another organization. This study aimed to evaluate changes in job orientation between the two periods among these professionals, focusing on the above variables. Second, attitude towards the workplace was analyzed; it includes promotional opportunities, distributional justice, and procedural justice. Promotion refers to an increase in major organizational compensation including employment security, wage, benefits, influence, and status [24]. It also includes protection for workers from outside labor market competition and the functioning of an encouraging internal career experience [25]. Distributional justice refers to the fairness of the distributed results, and procedural justice refers to the fairness in the procedures and means used to obtain the results [26]. Third, the concept of job security, which is job stability based on employment continuity in an organization was analyzed. In career research, are there actual threats to job security from one's job stability? Even if there are not, does the extent to which one objectively or subjectively feels unstable about one's career relate to the continuity of the actual career? Alternatively, should job security be focused around problems

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related to the characteristic changes in one's current career, regarding the possibility of actual unemployment? Furthermore, is unemployment recognized as a serious problem? Job stability is a multi-dimensional concept consisting of such problems [27]. Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) defined organizational commitment as "the commitment to work hard and to remain as a member of the organization based on strong positive beliefs regarding the pursuit of the goals and values of the organization"[8]. According to Locke (1976) [28], who studied job satisfaction, satisfaction is "the positive emotional state a member of the organization has about one's duties." Finally, turnover intention was analyzed. This is a relatively recent concept, which is an alternative variable to turnover (that looks solely at turnover) [29, 30] and refers to the intention of employees to cut off their current employment relationship of their own accord [31]. Turnover intention can be divided into organizational and occupational turnover intention. Organization turnover intention is the intent to leave one's current workplace and occupational turnover intention is the intent to leave the profession itself [32].
The details of the survey questions used in this study are shown in Table 2. The internal reliability of the questionnaire is as follows: sense of calling was low at 0.58, but the rest were high, distributed between 0.68 and 0.96.

Table 2. Characteristics of the Job Orientation Tools Used in the Study

Variable		N	Mean	S.D.	α	Reference
Professionalism	*Occupational commitment*	3	2.36	1.17	0.84	McCloskey & McCain, 1987
	Sense of calling	2	2.59	1.03	0.58	Dik, Eldrige& Steger, 2008
	Professional determination	2	2.12	0.74	0.96	House, 1981
	Job autonomy	2	2.24	0.84	0.94	Breaugh, 1985
	Employability	2	2.01	0.55	0.95	Johnson, 2001
Attitude towards the workplace	*Distributive justice*	2	2.93	1.20	0.91	Price, 1997
	Procedural justice	2	2.81	1.14	0.83	Mcfarlin& Sweeney, 1992
	Promotion opportunity	2	3.31	0.81	0.88	Price, 1997
Job security	*Job stability*	2	2.50	1.24	0.68	Klandermans& van Vuuren, 1999
	Job satisfaction	3	2.69	1.07	0.91	Brayfield & Rothe, 1951
	Organizational commitment	3	2.53	1.04	0.83	Porter et al., 1974

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Turnover intention	*Organizational turnover*	2	2.70	1.10	0.88	Mobley, 1982
	Occupational turnover	2	2.83	1.29	0.92	Mobley, 1982

Procedures

Ethics approval was obtained from the Kangwon National University Human Research Ethics Committee. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed to a total of 120 occupational therapists working at university hospitals, with 95 returned and 86 included in the final analysis for the 2002 data. An Internet survey using the Google Docs tool was conducted to collect the 2013 data. Emails were sent to the total occupational therapist contact list. Data collected from 147 subjects working at a university hospital were used for the final analysis. Therefore, data from a total of 233 subjects were ultimately used for this study.

Data Analysis

SPSS win 19.0 was used to propose descriptive statistics for this study to examine factors such as general characteristics and job orientation characteristics for the participants of the study as well as general characteristics regarding the assessment tools. Furthermore, an independent t-test was conducted with the significance level set at 0.05 in order to verify the by year average differences regarding the subtopics of job orientation.

Results

A verification of the average difference on the job-related variables was performed in order to confirm the homogeneity of the two groups. In addition, the job-related variables were separated into current workplace experience and total occupational therapist experience for a detailed examination of this process. A career experience refers to the continuous working period of the subject without leaving the affiliated workplace, for which there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The employment status is a dichotomous variable with permanent and temporary employment being the two attributes and refers to whether the employment status of the subject at the affiliated workplace is stable or marginal [33]. Permanent employees, in comparison with temporary employees, do not struggle with job insecurity and have various better working conditions. Thus, they tend to have a relatively stable job. The results of comparing the two groups indicated that permanent employment in 2002 was higher in a statistically significant manner. Remuneration refers to the financial compensation that the employees regularly receive in exchange for their work [34]. The average difference between the groups regarding this was analyzed to be statistically significantly higher in 2013. However, a multidimensional comparison is required, which considers elements such as the increase of all wage earners and the domestic economic growth rate of South Korea over the span of the decade. Furthermore, there was no significant difference between the two groups when analyzing the results regarding pay satisfaction. The value amounted to 1.96, which was analyzed as dissatisfaction (Table 3).

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Table 3. Verified Results of the Average Difference by Year

	2002 year (n=86)		2013 year (n=147)		*t*
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Current workplace experience[1)]	38.53	38.60	45.79	55.05	-0.80
Total occupational therapist experience[2)]	58.22	53.97	73.23	73.22	-1.35
Employment status[3)]	0.79	0.41	0.40	0.50	4.56***
Remuneration[4)]	164.83	65.35	231.91	95.97	-4.28***
Pay satisfaction [5)]	1.96	0.69	1.96	0.46	0.08

***$p<0.001$
1)Number of months, 2)Number of months, 3) 0=Temporary employee, 1=Permanent employee, 4) Ten thousand won, 5) 1=Very dissatisfied ~5=Very satisfied

The average difference regarding job orientation for 2002 and 2013 is separated into professionalism variables, attitude towards the workplace variables, job security variables, and turnover intention variables. This study focused on the following statistically significant variables. In professionalism, four items, excluding sense of calling, were significantly higher in 2013. The four items were occupational commitment (t=-2.38), professional determination (-2.94), job autonomy (-2.88), and employability (-4.94). Analysis regarding attitude towards the workplace revealed that distributive justice (2.18) and promotion opportunity (3.56) factors were significantly higher in 2002. This implies that the organizational environment of occupational therapists grew worse in 2013. Regarding job security, it was analyzed that job stability (-2.73) and job satisfaction (-3.37) were significantly higher in 2013. Finally, there were no statistically significant differences in turnover intention (Table 4).

Table 4. Verified Average Difference regarding Job Orientation by Year

Variable		**2002 year (n=86)**		**2013 year (n=147)**		***t***
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Professionalism	*Occupational commitment*	1.97	1.13	2.47	1.23	-2.38**
	Sense of calling	2.17	0.97	2.55	1.18	-1.88
	Professional determination	2.28	1.06	2.83	0.99	-2.94**
	Job autonomy	2.45	1.05	3.00	1.04	-2.88**

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	Employability	1.92	0.72	2.77	1.05	-4.94***
Attitude towards the workplace	*Distributive justice*	3.51	1.07	3.09	1.10	2.18*
	Procedural justice	3.30	1.09	2.96	1.06	1.77
	Promotion opportunity	3.57	1.02	3.09	0.54	3.56***
Job security	*Job stability*	2.20	1.11	2.79	1.32	-2.73**
	Job satisfaction	2.14	0.87	2.72	1.10	-3.37***
	Organizational commitment	2.43	0.95	2.66	1.07	-1.27
Turnover intention	*Organizational turnover*	2.80	1.09	3.17	1.11	-1.84
	Occupational turnover	3.57	1.15	3.38	1.28	0.85

*$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$

Discussion

This study utilizes data from 2002, the noted starting point of quantitative growth for occupational therapy, along with data from 2013, to analyze the changes in job orientation for the field of occupational therapy. However, the impact on job orientation of the rapid quantitative growth of occupational therapy in recent years was not analyzed in accordance with the flow of time; thus, changes could not be confirmed. Therefore, this study desires to determine these factors and propose policy options for needed changes.

In terms of the results, there were statistically significant differences in gender, with males being 38% in 2013 and 20% in 2002. Research from Jung and Cha(2009) [6] indicated that the gender ratio of members who joined KAOT was 18.1% male and 81.8% female, and this was not significantly different from the 20% in 2002. However, the male ratio increases to 38% indicates a growth in the entry of male occupational therapists into university hospitals. Whether this is representative of a change in the total gender ratio, or possibly the culture of the university hospital in preferring men, requires further research. Furthermore, a detailed analysis from a feminist perspective is required on this topic due to the fact that women make up the majority of occupational therapists.

For employment status, temporary employees increased in 2013 compared to 2002. The employment status is a dichotomous variable with permanent and temporary employment being the two attributes and refers to whether the employment status of the subject at the affiliated workplace is stable or marginal [33]. According to the research by Han et al. (2008) [11], 65.2% of the occupational therapists working at a hospital between 2005 and 2006 were permanent employees. The results of this study indicate a downward change in permanent employment from

79.0% in 2002 to 40% in 2013. This confirms that there was a gradual change in the employment status of occupational therapists continuously working at a hospital to temporary employees. Based on the year 2002, the ratio of permanent employment in 2006 declined by 13.8% and this ratio continued to decline in 2013 by 25.3%. We believe this issue is caused by the oversupply of labor. According to a report by Jung and Cha (2009) [6], the total number of occupational therapists in 2000 was 416, and this number dramatically increased to 2,260 in 2006. Reports indicate that there are 10,071 occupational therapists in 2014 [3]. Not only do temporary employees suffer from greater job insecurity compared to permanent employees, but their overall working conditions are also worse and they have a tendency towards low job satisfaction and high turnover intention levels [35]. As professionals dealing with the rehabilitation of patients with severe conditions, the duties of occupational therapists require a high level of professionalism. However, the transition of employment status to temporary employment creates distractions from patient care caused by the fear of unemployment, thereby decreasing the quality of service. Therefore, the employment status of occupational therapists that provide direct service to the public must change to permanent employment.

There are many variables that impact job satisfaction and turnover intention, but Taylor's management principles [36] consider wage to be the key factor in promoting motivation among workers. When examining wage from an inducement-contribution perspective, a high wage is one of the most powerful incentives that enable employees to increase their contribution and raise their job satisfaction and it functions as an inhibiter of turnover intention [37]. From this perspective, though the wages of occupational therapists working at university hospitals increased between 2002 and 2013, when compared to the overall average wage of other workers with a four-year university degree of 3,178,000 KRW, the average wage of an occupational therapist of 2,319,000 KRW was lower than other occupations [38]. On average, the occupational therapists participating in this study had 16.17 years of education and had graduated from a four-year college or higher. It was analyzed that this difference caused the average satisfaction rate regarding income level to be low at 1.96. It is true that professional careers are occupations that prioritize customer service ahead of financial compensation due to the nature of the work [39]. However, the rapid spread of material civilization has diluted much of the profession-specific sense of calling and may have increased financial motivations that were not present before [32]. Therefore, a low wage, which is a key factor influencing one's job, decreases the sense of calling and job satisfaction and increases turnover intention. This phenomenon will cause a decline in rehabilitation services and will lead to a drop in satisfaction. Therefore, a levelling effect with other occupations regarding the income of occupational therapists must occur in order for there to be excellent rehabilitation services.

The difference between 2002 and 2013 regarding the tasks of occupational therapists was examined from the perspective of professionalism, attitude towards the workplace, job security, and turnover intention. When examining the professionalism of the occupation using the five items proposed by the functionalist Greenwood (1957) [40], four items, excluding sense of calling, significantly increased statistically in 2013. In detail, occupational commitment, which is an individual's attachment to their work [41], increased (t=-2.38); and professional determination, which as a strong commitment to the professional field, also increased (-2.94), forming a positive sentiment among colleagues. Job autonomy is the first item emphasized in order to grow as a professional [16]. Autonomy is the ability to fully determine and control a task based on the individual's own knowledge and experience. The level of job autonomy (-2.88) among occupational therapists is improving, and this implies that occupational therapists are utilizing their own knowledge and experience in a significant manner during their work in clinical practice.

Finally, employability is the concept of determining whether the professional skills gained at the current workplace can be used when transferring to a new job [23]. Employability of occupational therapists was the variable that saw the most improvement (-4.94). This confirms that there is a growth in professionalism regarding occupational therapy techniques.

In terms of attitude towards the workplace, distributive justice (2.18) and promotional opportunity (3.56) were analyzed as statistically significant and higher in 2002. This indicates a decline in the work environment of current occupational therapists in 2013. Distributive justice concerns the fairness of outcomes distributed to the individual [26]. The average was 3.51 in 2002 and dropped to 3.09 in 2013; this signifies that the current health care system, along with various processes that limit occupational therapy based on medical insurance coverage, is having a negative impact on the field. Promotion refers to the accompanied increase of major organizational compensations such as employment security, wages, fringe benefits, influence, and status [24], and also includes the protection of workers from outside labor market competition and the functioning of an encouraging internal career experience [25]. The results of analyzing whether these opportunities for promotion were given through a fair process, determined that the opportunities for occupational therapists were becoming increasingly inadequate. This acts as a limiting factor for growth in the workplace.

Job stability, which is statistically significant for job security, is a sub-concept of subjective job security and determines whether an individual can continue their work. According to research by Ashford et al. (1989) [42], employment instability increases when there are serious changes to the organization, and this is reported to have a decreasing effect on organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Furthermore, recent research around flexible labor and subjective job stability has been conducted, based on flexible labor being perceived as unstable labor, but the analysis reveals a weak correlation [43]. However, job stability has increased for domestic occupational therapists in South Korea, although the average for 2013 was 2.79, which is a low attitude score for job stability. This phenomenon may be caused by the increase in flexibility in the labor market as a large number of the employed are transitioning to temporary employment, creating a continuous sense of job insecurity. In addition, job satisfaction (-3.37), which is a positive emotional state of the organizational member regarding one's own job [28], increased statistically significantly in 2013. This signifies a positive attitude towards one's own job even though other conditions have worsened. There were no statistically significant differences in turnover intention, however, the level of willingness to change occupation decreased in 2013, along with an increase in organizational turnover intention.

This study examined changes in job orientation for occupational therapists over a 10-year period. However, a period of 10 years is too long a time in the context of a rapidly changing occupational therapist workforce, and there are limitations to identifying sensitive changes. Therefore, an analysis with a three-year data collection cycle is recommended for occupational therapists' job orientation in the future. Additionally, the initial data of this studyfocused on university hospitals, places where various occupational therapy services are occurring, but analysis of these factors was not possible. Therefore, in the future, the research design should include all the various fields of occupational therapy. Based on this data, time series analysis should be performed on job orientations that change with the flow of time to predict the attitude of future occupational therapists.

Conclusion

As examined above, overall variables around attitudes towards professionalism and job security generally increased in 2013, but attitudes towards the workplace decreased compared to 2002. Moreover, the field needs policy endeavors that can ensure distributive justice and promotional opportunities for occupational therapists. In addition, the overall average scores for job orientation are at a moderate level, between 2.01 and 3.31, and active efforts for the improvement of educational institutions, including associations, are required.

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Declaration of conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare

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