

## Work values and job satisfaction of practitioners working with persons with disabilities: the role of psychological flexibility

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### Abstract

Various research found that values related to work are associated with job satisfaction, while psychological flexibility was found to be significantly related to well-being and satisfaction in various aspects of life and activity. The current article summarizes the results of a research study that had as its main objective to investigate the association between psychological flexibility with work values and job satisfaction, in Romanian professionals working with persons with disabilities, a challenging activity, marked by chronic stress at work, and thus exposed to the risk of burnout. A number of 42 professionals completed measures of psychological flexibility, work values, and job satisfaction that were adapted to the Romanian language. Our results showed that those professionals who tended to value external rewards in their work with persons with disabilities, such as salary and other material benefits, status, prestige, and flexible hours tended to have lower satisfaction in their work. Psychological flexibility, especially the ability to live in the present moment, cognitive defusion, and contact with own values, was associated with higher job satisfaction, while psychological inflexibility tended to be associated with lower satisfaction in working with persons with disabilities.

**Keywords:** work values, job satisfaction, psychological flexibility, disability services

### Introduction

Working with persons with disabilities is considered a meaningful professional activity, and many of the professionals in this field are starting their careers with enthusiasm, involvement, and authentic care for their beneficiaries (Roach, 2009). However, teachers are often predisposed to burnout, as they are facing many challenges and are experiencing organizational distress for long periods of time (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). Stress is a universal human experience and is related to both pleasant experiences and unpleasant ones. Work can be an important source of stress and organizational distress is provoked when the tasks in the workplace are overcoming the employee's capacities, resources, and needs (WHO, 2020). It is a substantial problem for both freelancers and employees in organizations and it is encountered by teachers from both special and mainstream educational settings (Roach, 2009). Given the severity of the impact it has on a person's effectiveness at work, more recently, the preoccupation to find resources in the face of professional distress and burnout increased, with the rise of the positive psychology approach. One of the main factors that reduce the risk of teacher burnout in special educational settings is job satisfaction (Park & Shin, 2020), as revealed by meta-analysis studies on burnout.

In the case of teachers and professionals working in special education, stress can be defined as the result of confrontation between roles, responsibilities, and the teacher's resources. Several sources of job strain were identified in the case of special education teachers: the continuous changes of

policies, the large number of administrative tasks, the high diversity of learners they work with, in terms of emotional, social, neurodevelopmental and physical profiles (Strydom, Nortje, Beukes, Esterhuysen, & van der Westhuizen, 2012). In a sample of Italian teachers from mainstream schools, the low recognition of the professional value of the profession by society was a source of stress (Maeran, Pitarelli, & Cangano, 2013), while work-life balance was related to professional satisfaction.

Chronic work-related distress, that cannot be successfully managed, can lead to burnout, a psychological syndrome that involves high risks for both professionals and beneficiaries (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). It involves the mismatch between the demands of the workplace and the professional's capacities and resources (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Recently, the World Health Organization included burnout in the International Classification of Disorders (ICD-11, WHO, 2022). Burnout refers to phenomena that can be grouped into three dimensions: (1) exhaustion and lack of energy, (2) mental distancing from work, with negative feelings and cynicism related to work, and (3) reduced professional efficacy (Maslach, 2003). A Gallup poll conducted on 7500 full-time employees found that 23% of the total number experienced burnout in the workplace very often or always, while 44% experienced it, although less often (Wigert & Agrawal, 2018). Politics and practices within organizations need to be developed in agreement with research on causes, consequences, and correlates of professional distress.

Job satisfaction is an important aspect related to stress management, prevention of burnout, and job performance. A classic definition of job satisfaction (Locke, 1976) includes the positive subjective experience of a person in relation to experiences at work, and it is influenced by various factors. Various external factors, such as demographic characteristics, income, work conditions, schedule, workspace flexibility, work-family enrichment as well as conflict between work and family duties have been associated with job satisfaction in various professions, including teaching professions (Ray & Pana-Cryan 2021, Davidescu, Apostu, Paul, & Casuneanu, 2020; Tsakiridou & Kolovou, 2018, Maeran, Pitarelli, & Cangano, 2013, Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011, McNall, Masuda, & Nicklin, 2010), but an important point of focus would be the research of internal motivators that contribute to the attainment of a good level of positive experience at work, such as cognitive flexibility, self-efficacy (Aydin & Odaci, 2020), loyalty and commitment to work (Sakalli Demirok, 2018), and psychological flexibility (Kuo, Ye, Chen, & Chen, 2017). The importance of the level of satisfaction is high, as a fair level of satisfaction is required in the occupational field, in order for a person to have good performance and efficacy at work (Aydin & Odaci, 2020), in various fields, including education.

Although there is a concern that teachers, especially those working in special educational settings, may experience high levels of distress and burnout, some authors (Darcy, Kuszniok, & Lester, 1995) found no significant differences regarding the overall job satisfaction level between teachers working in special education and teachers in regular settings. Several studies reported results obtained in various cultures. A team of Greek researchers (Tsakiridou & Kolovou, 2018) found that special education professionals experience an overall high level of professional satisfaction, despite the sometimes-important drawbacks of the profession, such as the low wages. A sample of special education teachers in Sri Lanka also scored high on job satisfaction (Ketheeswaran, 2018), although the author found that attitudes of various stakeholders and policies regarding disabilities might influence the level of satisfaction with work that teachers experience. In turn, a team of South African researchers (Strydom et al., 2012) found that special education teachers had only an average level of job satisfaction.

Career behavior is often regarded in the light of work values. A large number of research studies in the area of positive psychology argued that values and virtues are important aspects of resilience in the face of distress and dysfunctions (Roşan, 2016), by increasing satisfaction with life through various positive outcomes related to self, and family and others, work and activities. The positive psychology perspective on values is that they relate to well-being and satisfaction as long as they are intrinsic to the actions that people undertake in their daily lives (Peterson & Seligman, 2002, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). According to the authors, distress and dysfunctions are reduced by the practice of one's values.

Although there is no unitary definition of values, various authors classified universal human values by purpose that motivates people (Schwartz, 1994), while others grouped values in categories, such as intrinsic, extrinsic, social, and status-related (Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999). Work values represent beliefs about work contexts that serve as a base of evaluation for the characteristics of a certain job (Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999). They refer to the level of worth and the significance that one attributes to own work (Knoop, 1994) and are a subjective assessment of the qualities that one seeks in occupation (Super, 1970), as well as those aspects of the job that are meaningful to invest in. Matsuki and Nakamura (2019) found that values (defined qualitatively in agreement with job specificity) influence employee satisfaction in the retail and service industries in Japan.

Several other studies conducted in the Asian culture (cited by Matsuki and Nakamura, 2019) structured and classified work-related values and found that, while values might influence satisfaction with work, they are different among individuals and are difficult to measure. Previous research studies argued that intrinsic values (such as achievement, quality of work, acknowledgment, responsibility, the meaningfulness of work, influence over own work, ability to use one's knowledge, independence in work, status, and esteem, being valued and having a contribution to society) are significantly related to satisfaction with work (Knoop, 1994).

Although ethics in the educational professions is a topic of interest, a smaller number of studies focused on values related to work in teaching professions. Olszewski (2021) underlies the importance of critical examination of values in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic when teachers had to adapt to a novel context and offer solutions in order to continue the learning process. Previously, Carr (2010) examined the principles and values associated with good teaching, as being part of the teachers' character and personality and asserted that values and virtues such as honesty, integrity, justice, wisdom, and patience were among those related to effective relating with students and practicing of the profession. A study on the associations between teachers' professional values, attitudes, and concerns about the profession conducted in Turkey (Aktan, Toraman, & Orakci, 2020) showed that professional concerns are lower in teachers with high levels of professional values and positive attitudes towards the profession. The authors emphasized the importance of studying values in the teaching profession, considering their critical role in both career choice and the performance in profession.

Psychological flexibility as a personal resource was found to moderate the relationship between stress at work and its outcomes, such as the development of burnout (Ruiz & Odriozola-Gonzalez, 2017), as well as to moderate the association between work overload, job satisfaction, and negative affect toward work (Novaes, Ferreira, & Valentini, 2018), proving that personal resources might constitute protective factors in the face of difficulties encountered at work. The role of psychological flexibility in the management of professional distress for teachers would be worth exploring.

Psychological flexibility is at the core of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT, Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001, Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999), a form of evidence-based therapy, supported by research on the functioning of the human mind within the relational framework. ACT proved to be effective in behavioral change, and a variety of psychological difficulties, including occupational distress (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, Lillis, 2006). Psychological flexibility predicts a number of characteristics related to job efficacy and healthy functioning in the workplace (Ruiz & Odriozola-Gonzalez, 2017).

Six basic processes converge to explain psychological flexibility in ACT:

(1) acceptance, referring to the non-judgmental attitude towards both positive and negative life experiences, the acknowledgement, ability to be present with each experience, without an explicit goal to change it (Hayes et al., 2006);

(2) cognitive defusion, consisting of the ability to consider thoughts and verbal productions as they are, observing them, noticing without taking them literally and investing them with authority and consequences (Hayes et al., 2006);

(3) self as context, referring to the ability to observe the self as experiences occur, but distinct and not defined by these experiences, containing flexible components, modelled by the context (Hayes & Lillis, 2012, McHugh & Stapleton, 2021) and more than a sum of behaviors;

(4) values, that are understood in many ways, on multiple perspectives, and are central in ACT. Values give direction, meaning, add purpose to the difficult work that specialists perform, are freely chosen consequences, verbally constructed, of some activity patterns. They are intrinsic to behaviors and when they impregnate behaviors they lead to positive results (Hayes, 2005). Values imply responsibility, the ability to resist temptations, while the life lived according to one's values is an important target.

(5) committed action referring to the engagement in actions in agreement to one's goals and directions in life, actions that can contribute to the fulfillment of one's goals, based on values (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999); and

(6) present moment, referring to the process of deliberately, yet flexibly, focusing on the lived experience in the here-and-now. It means mindful attention to the surroundings in a particular way, intentionally, without judgement and by being grounded (Kabat-Zinn & Salzberg, 2004), a natural, accessible and available way to focus on the experience (Kabat-Zinn & Salzberg, 2004), leading to a special state of awareness, acceptance of everything that the person lives, as the events occur, without assessment, with kindness, curiosity and availability towards vulnerability.

These six processes are grouped in a model of psychological flexibility called the hexaflex model (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999). The main goal of ACT is to increase the individual's capacity to persistently follow goals and objectives in the desired direction, using experiential strategies, such as metaphors, paradox, and exercises, with the purpose of undermining the literal meaning of language and to emphasize its diminished adequacy to describe the reality of direct experience (Hayes et al., 2006). Experiential avoidance implies reducing, eliminating, and controlling negative thoughts, with detrimental effects on health (Purdon, 1999). There is scientific proof that openness and acceptance mediate good long-term results (Hayes et al., 2006), while the attempt to suppress negative thoughts and emotions can lead to negative effects.

In light of current research in the field, the present study has as its objective the investigation of the relationship between professional values, psychological flexibility, and job satisfaction in specialists working with persons with disabilities. We hypothesize that specialists who have a

higher level of psychological flexibility and professional values will also have a higher level of job satisfaction.

## Method

### Participants

A small number of 42 participants were included in the current study, recruited online from professionals working with persons with disabilities, in Cluj Napoca and Sibiu, two cities from Romania. The participants were working in special schools, NGOs, private practice, inclusive schools, or as personal assistants with children and adults with disabilities.

Regarding their profession, 26 of the total number were working in special schools, 10 as therapists in private practice, and the rest as therapists in NGOs or associations for people with disabilities, and personal assistants for children with disabilities. With respect to the field of work, 31 of the participants were working in the public sector, while 10 were from the private sector, and 1 was working in another sector. Regarding the years of experience in the field, 14 of the participants were at the beginning of their careers, with 1-2 years of experience, 5 had between 3-5 years of experience, 10 had between 6-10 years, while 13 were experienced professionals, with more than 10 years of experience. A number of 16 practitioners were working with low to moderate disabilities, 20 with severe to profound disabilities, and the rest of 6 with other degrees of disability severities. Given the small and heterogenous sample size, we considered the study as a pilot investigation of the association between variables, and not as a general situation regarding job satisfaction in the field of special education.

### Measures

In order to investigate the type and intensity of values associated with work, we adapted a list from the Work Values Inventory (WVI, Thomas Jefferson University, 2019), a self-assessment measure of a large number of values related to the work environment, such as autonomy, benefits, competition, expertise, flexibility, honesty, intellectual stimulation, leisure, peace, personal growth, pride, safety, salary, status, etc. The measure is used in the career service for the career planning process, in order to help candidates clarify their priorities related to the workplace and find appropriate placements. A number of 50 values are assessed regarding their importance within the workplace, on a 4-point Likert scale, from 1 (not necessary) to 4 (extremely important). The respondents are also asked to rank their most important five values and to reflect on their work and the values they chose. In the current research, we only used the list of values.

Job satisfaction was assessed using the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS, Spector, 1994), a self-assessment instrument comprising 36 items and 9 subscales (Pay, Promotion, Supervision, Fringe Benefits, Contingent Rewards, Operating Procedures, Coworkers, Nature of Work, and Communication). Each item is rated on a 6-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) and around half are reverse-scored. The survey targets the attitudes that employees have regarding several components of their job and can be used in various types of organizations in the private and public sectors. A total score can be computed for the whole instrument and a score for each of the nine facets, each comprising 4 items, can also be obtained. Higher scores reflect better job satisfaction.

Psychological flexibility was assessed with the Multidimensional Psychological Flexibility Inventory (MPFI, Rolfs, Rogge, & Wilson, 2016), a measure with 60 items, assessing several

components of psychological flexibility and inflexibility, based on the six components of the Hexaflex model (Rolffs, Rogge, & Wilson, 2016). Each item of the inventory is assessed on a 6-point Likert scale, from 1 (never true) to 6 (always true) and a composite score can be computed for flexibility and inflexibility, as well as for each of the subscales of the two dimensions: (1) flexibility: acceptance, present moment, self as context, defusion, values, committed actions, and (2) inflexibility: experiential avoidance, lack of contact with the present moment, self as content, fusion, lack of contact with values, inaction. Higher scores correspond to higher levels of the characteristics they assess. The authors reported high levels of internal consistency for the instrument.

### **Procedure**

The permission was obtained to use the measures from their authors. These two measures were adapted in Romanian language. The Job Satisfaction Survey was already available for free use in research projects, in Romanian language. The participants completed online a battery containing the demographic questionnaire and the three measures. The battery was uploaded on Google Forms platform and before the completion of the battery, the participants were informed about the goals of the study, so they could decide if they consented to participate or not.

### **Design**

The current research adopted a correlational design to investigate the associations between constructs. The SPSS 20 software was used for data interpretation.

### **Findings and discussion**

Professional satisfaction in our sample was not significantly different depending on the participants' profession (special education teachers, therapists, personal assistants), field of work (public, private, other), years of experience (beginners, medium expertise, experienced professionals) and the severity of disabilities they work with.

As seen in table 1, a significant correlation was found between global job satisfaction and total psychological flexibility score. Also, the total psychological flexibility significantly correlated with the components of job satisfaction. The significant correlation with the Coworkers subscale emphasizes the importance that colleagues and professional relationships have in the organization, especially for persons with higher psychological flexibility, who tend to invest in satisfactory relationships with their peers at work.

**Table 1. Correlations between psychological flexibility/ inflexibility and job satisfaction**

|      | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5      | 6     | 7     | 8     | 9      | JSS   | PlnF  | PF     | 10    | 11    | 12    | 13     | 14    |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| 2    | .50** |       |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| 3    | .60** | .30*  |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| 4    | .75** | .62** | .47** |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| 5    | .63** | .42** | .63** | .68** |        |       |       |       |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| 6    | .45** | .37** | .28*  | .60** | .58**  |       |       |       |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| 7    | .59** | .35*  | .83** | .55** | .74**  | .42** |       |       |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| 8    | .46** | .27   | .65** | .30*  | .31*   | -.03  | .47** |       |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| 9    | .49** | .27   | .83** | .45** | .80**  | .36*  | .83** | .52** |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| JSS  | .80** | .60** | .84** | .79** | .86**  | .58** | .86** | .60** | .83**  |       |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| PlnF | -.14  | .05   | -.10  | -.05  | -.35*  | -.00  | -.29* | -.30* | -.32*  | -.23  |       |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| PF   | .31*  | .32*  | .30*  | .32*  | .27*   | .01   | .36** | .39** | .33*   | .39** | -.15  |        |       |       |       |        |       |
| 10   | .29*  | .31*  | .40** | .30*  | .28*   | -.01  | .40** | .50** | .41**  | .43** | -.21  | .84**  |       |       |       |        |       |
| 11   | .06   | .22   | .29*  | .16   | .19    | .01   | .26   | .24   | .30*   | .26   | .07   | .60**  | .52** |       |       |        |       |
| 12   | .27   | .26   | .20   | .29*  | .17    | -.03  | .23   | .23   | .17    | .27   | -.04  | .83**  | .69** | .39*  |       |        |       |
| 13   | .26   | .24   | .25   | .27   | .24    | .09   | .33*  | .30*  | .31*   | .34*  | -.34* | .88**  | .73** | .54** | .73** |        |       |
| 14   | .37** | .32*  | .22   | .32*  | .27    | -.02  | .30*  | .33** | .28*   | .36*  | -.12  | .85**  | .65** | .34*  | .60** | .66**  |       |
| 15   | .23   | .22   | .14   | .21   | .17    | -.01  | .22   | .30*  | .17    | .25   | -.03  | .80**  | .51** | .31*  | .57** | .56**  | .75** |
| 16   | -.02  | .37** | .07   | .04   | -.12   | .03   | -.08  | -.00  | .01    | .04   | .51** | .33*   | .12   | .40** | .17   | .18    | .31*  |
| 17   | -.04  | -.10  | -.05  | -.02  | -.24   | -.01  | -.21  | -.29* | -.31*  | -.19  | .77** | -.01   | -.03  | .12   | .16   | -.15   | -.07  |
| 18   | -.06  | -.04  | -.05  | .03   | -.16   | .12   | -.16  | -.29* | -.16   | -.12  | .84** | -.22   | -.28* | -.05  | -.13  | .42**  | -.11  |
| 19   | -.15  | .00   | -.16  | -.08  | -.40** | .04   | -.27  | -.32* | -.37** | -.26  | .88** | -.28*  | -.24  | -.10  | -.14  | -.47** | -.22  |
| 20   | -.32* | -.04  | -.18  | -.21  | -.46** | -.20  | -.34* | -.25  | -.36*  | -.35* | .71** | -.37** | -.33* | -.08  | -.25  | -.35*  | -.41* |
| 21   | -.08  | -.06  | -.12  | .01   | -.27   | -.01  | -.29* | -.24  | -.31*  | -.21  | .83** | .22    | -.24  | -.05  | -.03  | -.40** | -.12  |

NOTE: Subscales of the JSS: (1) Pay, (2) Promotion, (3) Supervision, (4) Fringe Benefits, (5) Contingent Rewards, (6) Operating Procedures, (7) Coworkers, (8) Nature of Work, and (9) Communication. JSS – Total score for JSS, Subscales of the MPFI: PlnF – total score Psychological Inflexibility, PF – total score Psychological Flexibility, Psychological Flexibility subscales: (10) present moment, (11) acceptance, (12) self as context, (13) defusion, (14) values, (15) committed actions; Psychological Inflexibility subscales: (16) experiential avoidance, (17) lack of contact with the present moment, (18) self as content, (19) fusion, (20) lack of contact with values, (21) inaction.

\*significant (p<.05) \*\*strongly significant (p<.01)

Several components of the psychological flexibility correlate with various aspects of satisfaction with work: the ability to stay in the present moment tended to be significantly associated with high satisfaction with payment, promotion, supervision, benefits and rewards at work, as well as with colleagues and communication in the organizational context. The higher ability to be present (mindfulness) was also related significantly with the overall job satisfaction in professionals working with persons with disabilities, revealing that connecting with the present moment can lead to higher enjoyment of the experiences at work.

On the other hand, psychological inflexibility correlated negatively with some components of job satisfaction in our sample of professionals that work with persons with disabilities. We found significant negative correlations between experiential avoidance and satisfaction with promotion opportunities, between lack of contact with the present moment and satisfaction with the nature of work (the actual tasks that a person has), between self as content and satisfaction with the nature of work, between cognitive fusion and satisfaction with rewards (appreciation, valuing, rewards for doing the work well), relationships with coworkers, nature of work and communication at the workplace. Lack of contact with own values was negatively associated with satisfaction with payment, with rewards, coworkers and communication, while inaction as component of the

psychological inflexibility was negatively associated with satisfaction with rewards, coworkers, and communication. From the components of psychological flexibility and inflexibility, the fusion/defusion and the contact with values seemed to be the most significantly associated with job satisfaction among professionals in our group.

Regarding the correlation with values at work, our results were very interesting. Thus, we found that professionals who tended to value leadership, salary, stability, status, hours (expectancy to have fixed number of hours with no overtime), expertise, flexibility, promotion, power (ability to influence with own work), travelling (changing geographic location for the job), tended to score lower on job satisfaction, as seen in table 2. No other significant correlations were identified between values and job satisfaction in our sample of professionals working in the field of special education and disabilities.

**Table 2. Significant correlations between values at work and job satisfaction**

|             | Job satisfaction (JSS) |
|-------------|------------------------|
| Leadership  | -.381**                |
| Salary      | -.278*                 |
| Stability   | -.311*                 |
| Status      | -.448**                |
| Hours       | -.287*                 |
| Expertise   | -.392*                 |
| Flexibility | -.271*                 |
| Promotion   | -.259*                 |
| Power       | -.280*                 |
| Travelling  | -.342**                |

\*significant (p<.05) \*\*strongly significant (p<.01)

Significant correlations were found between Values subscale from the MPFI and creativity as a value at work from the WVI ( $r=.299$ ,  $p<.01$ ), meaning that persons that tend to have higher contact with own values in life tended to value more those activities that imply using novel ways and finding new solutions. Another significant correlation was found between the Values subscale of the MPFI and the item Hours from the WVI ( $r=-.332$ ,  $p<.01$ ), meaning that persons that are in contact with their own values in life tend to seek to a smaller extent value in those workplaces that have a fixed number of hours and do not require extra work hours.

## Discussions

According to previous research studies, values at work were associated with job satisfaction in various professional fields. Also, professionals with higher psychological flexibility tend to be more satisfied and effective in their work, among other beneficial outcomes. Our study was focused on finding associations between work values, job satisfaction and psychological flexibility in a number of professionals that activate in the field of disability assistance.

We found that general, as well as various components of the psychological flexibility (conceptualized according to the ACT model, Hayes, 2005) are significantly associated with job satisfaction in general and with being satisfied with various aspects of the job (payment, promotion, supervision, benefits, rewards, coworkers, nature of work and communication), but not with others (namely, the operating procedures within the organization). Thus, being in contact with



present moment, enjoying the here-and-now, as well as cognitive defusion (the ability to see thoughts as products of the mind and not as realities, the ability to observe thoughts and letting them go rather than being caught in them), and values proved to be the most important components of psychological flexibility that are related to satisfaction with one's work in our sample. Acceptance as component of psychological flexibility in ACT, defined as direct, full contact with psychological experiences, without judgement and defense, was not significantly associated with job satisfaction in our study.

Colleagues tend to become significant resources, and relational contexts become an important source of well-being and professional satisfaction in special schools and other settings in which professionals work with persons with disabilities. In order to value the importance of the relationships at the workplace, one has to be psychologically flexible and to be able to enjoy the interactions with colleagues.

Psychological inflexibility, on the other hand, was negatively associated with aspects of the satisfaction with work. Experiential avoidance tended to be associated with dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities, while lack of contact with the present moment with dissatisfaction with the nature of work, and self as content with dissatisfaction with the nature of work. Cognitive fusion was among the components of psychological inflexibility that was most related with aspects of job dissatisfaction. It seems that persons who tend to be caught in their thoughts and see their thought as realities instead of observing thoughts and internal processes without getting lost in them tend to be less satisfied with aspects of their jobs (rewards, relationships with colleagues, job tasks, communication at work). Other two aspects of psychological inflexibility that were important correlates of job dissatisfaction were the lack of contact with own values and inaction. Values are important aspects of the satisfaction with one's work, but the nature of these values seems to make the difference. Values give direction, they give difficult work a meaning, but they also contribute to obstacles related to work. Values are not necessarily connected with immediate pleasures, they are rather associated with the meaning a person attributes to work, and sometimes they are intrinsically connected with vulnerabilities (Hayes, 2005). Therefore, it seems that the search for immediate outcomes in work or power and status-related benefits (such as leadership, immediate benefits, rewards, salary, stability, status, fixed number of hours, having an expert position, flexibility without seeking approval, promotion, power, changes in location for the job) tended to be associated with lower professional satisfaction in our sample of professionals in the field of disability psychological and educational assistance. The results show that the more a professional tends to seek these types of immediate benefits, the less job satisfaction the professional might have.

## Conclusion

The current study adds to knowledge related to the association between job satisfaction, work values and psychological flexibility in the field of disability work. As working with vulnerable persons implies a great amount of strain from the part of professionals, finding resources in work could contribute, in our opinion, to the prevention of professional distress, job fatigue and burnout. It is therefore of high relevance to identify those factors that represent intrinsic motivations for those who choose to activate in the field of services dedicated to persons with disabilities.

In testing the associations between psychological flexibility, work values and job satisfaction, we found that various components of psychological flexibility (especially being able to live in the

present moment, cognitive defusion, contact with own values) are related to job satisfaction for professionals working with persons with disabilities. At the same time, we found that focusing on external rewards and valuing external benefits of the work (material, financial rewards, status, power, expertise, flexibility) can be related to lower satisfaction with work in this field. The current report opened the way towards more in-depth research on job satisfaction in the field of special services for persons with disabilities in Romania. Also, several the clinical implications could be relevant, mainly referring to the implementation of prevention and intervention strategies targeting psychological flexibility (such as, ACT, Hayes, 2005), as a possible way to approach professional burden and distress, and prevent burnout in this field of work.

Among the limitations of the present study, the small number of participants and Romanian cities from which they were recruited is the most important. A larger number of participants can lead to more consistent and reliable results. Therefore, our conclusions should be regarded as a preliminary exploration of the associations between the constructs and not a general view on the situation of the professionals working with children with disabilities.

As future directions, the inclusion of other measures for the values, in order to identify correlates of job satisfaction would be interesting to investigate. Other classifications of the work values could be useful in determining the association between job satisfaction and values, with practical implications on the self-awareness, personal, and professional development of practitioners in the field of special education and other disability-related services. Also, the replication of our results on larger samples could be useful in order to determine the validity of our conclusions and enrich the knowledge on the general situation of the professionals working with children with disabilities.

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