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### Title

“STUDENT EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION IN RETAIL AND WAREHOUSE INDUSTRIES”

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“STUDENT EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION IN RETAIL AND WAREHOUSE  
INDUSTRIES”

By

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors  
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## ABSTRACT

This project will describe the factors of job satisfaction of student employees working in the retail or warehouse industry. The impact of these factors will help explain the relationship of well-being and mental health (which is used interchangeably) and job productivity of students working the night shift. Understanding these relationships will inspire the retail and warehouse industries to foster a better work environment in the Inland Empire. A background of these industries is provided to understand the role and function that they play in today's generation. For our analysis, we obtained data from an anonymous survey of undergraduate students from the University of California, Riverside. The results indicate whether students are working full-time or part-time, their work schedule is one of the factors that determine their satisfaction at work.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my faculty mentor, Dr. Joab Corey, who encouraged me and motivated me to complete this research project on time despite the many obstacles we encountered. This project would have not been completed without his guidance, his inquiry, his effort, and most importantly, his confidence in me. I am grateful for his flexibility because he would accommodate his schedule to be able to meet with me to discuss my questions and concerns. Additionally, I appreciate that he took the initiative in helping me with extra resources and contacting people when I could not reach them. I am thankful for everything he did during my last two years of undergraduate.

I would also like to thank my family and friends who checked on me when they did not hear back from me for days. Lastly, this project would have not been completed without the support of the participants who were involved in the research.

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## BACKGROUND: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF WORKING AND STUDYING FULL-TIME

The notion of working full-time and studying full-time has become an essential topic as students try to find a “work-life” balance. As a student and employee myself, “work-life” balance is challenging because in some instances I have to prioritize work over school. Consequently, this selection process affects my mental health in addition to other factors that will be explained below. For example, my occupation, the people I work with, and the working environment are variables that affect my mental health. Although this paper focuses on both retail and warehouse student employees, my experience focuses on the warehouse industry. I am interested in understanding how my experience is similar or different to other students from the University of California, Riverside (UCR), who work in the retail or warehouse industry because both industries can be mentally and physically demanding. Thus, working in a manufacturing warehouse taught me an important lesson: high demand affects the mental health of student employees, but no one seems to notice.

I have been working full-time for a manufacturing warehouse for four years. The first two years required me to adjust my school and sleep schedule because I was working the night shift (10 hours a day). I enjoyed this shift because my manager and the people I worked with were very supportive. The other two years, on the other hand, changed drastically. The night shift changed to the morning shift. There were new supervisors and a new management team who wanted higher work productivity by increasing the speed of machines and demanding faster performance from the employees without receiving additional benefits or monetary compensation for the intense work demands. This new transition led to myself as well as other student employees and non-students, based on my conversations with them, to feel more stressed, overwhelmed, pressured, and more prone to making mistakes at work. These feelings

serve as the primary motivation for this study, which seeks to discuss the factors that affect job satisfaction among students and how it impacts their mental health and performance at work.

Prior to describing the factors that lead to job satisfaction, it is important to explain a brief history of what retailers and warehouses do and explain the context of job satisfaction for this paper. Although both retailers and warehouses have different characteristics, they share similar features regarding the mental health of the employees.

### *Retailer History and Definition*

The growth of retailers stems back from the late nineteenth century as communities created their own shops to meet their financial needs (McKee, 2014). This was an era of desperation and chaos because it is the period of World War II. As a result, people who created their independent and small businesses needed to expand as more people were competing for scarce resources. Fortunately, the creation of new technology helped some businesses to be successful and now we have a variety of different retailers across the country.

Retail is universally understood as the final step in the distribution process, in which retailers are organized to sell merchandise in small quantities to the public (Borkar & Paul, 2015). For example, the most popular retailers are Target, Walmart, and small stores located at malls because customers have a direct access to select a product and purchase it immediately. The new era of retailers has become more challenging to attract as more people are applying to them. However, there is the general stigma of young adults and students holding negative beliefs about the retail industry because of lower pay and not enough hours to work (Knight et al., 2006). Additionally, students who have worked for the retail industry have claimed that they predominantly have negative and ill-informed views about working full-time in the industry

(Broadbridge, 2003). This mentality entails that students do not see retail as a career option. Some students are working there to gain experience and others remain there until they get a better job.

### *Warehouse History and Definition*

The warehouse industry is rooted into a few important events throughout history. The Age of Agriculture, the Industrial Era, and The Renaissance are all events that help support the process of warehousing (Ackerman, 1997). The Age of Agriculture relates to the concept of social welfare as it brings the idea that companies are responsible for the safety and well-being of their employees. On the other hand, the Industrial Era marked the new transition of technology. New transportation, such as railroads, were created to improve and facilitate the high demand of goods by transporting them from one place to another. This new transition created chaos among small businesses, but it opened opportunities for other individuals to try a new job at a warehouse, especially in the Inland Empire (IE). It has been said that the Inland Empire is a logistics hub because it is the center of many warehouses. This region possesses land that is affordable and available to individuals who want to expand their business. However, this is concerning for the Inland Empire because more land will increase the number of warehouses and more jobs will be available for people. It is important to note that high demand from these warehouses will lead employees to give more of what they cannot give such as time, energy, and effort.

A warehouse involves different functions such as stockpiling, product mixing, consolidation, distribution, and customer satisfaction (Ackerman, 1997). Generally, the most popular warehouse is Amazon, which is known for its fast-paced working environment and fast



delivery process. This gives consumers an idea of what it is like to work in a warehouse, but the complete details are missing for individuals who do not work there.

### *Job Satisfaction and Well-being Definition*

For many years, well-being and job satisfaction have been used interchangeably because they relate to many aspects of how individuals feel about themselves. However, definitions will be provided to have a clear understanding of their meaning. The World Health Organization defines well-being as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1946). This definition is used universally and depending on the context, it might have a different meaning. For example, well-being in the context of work is concerned with the psychological, physical, and social functioning of an employee’s experience at work (Guest, 2017). In other words, an individual’s well-being depends on how the person is feeling at the moment at work. Furthermore, job satisfaction differs from well-being in that it focuses on feelings and attitudes about one’s job. These attitudes can be positive or negative. It also relates to motivation in the sense that it encourages employees to direct their behavior to a specific goal and act upon it.

The concept of well-being alternates and varies with time and setting. For example, at work, most students work less or more than 29 hours per week. This means that they are exposed to repetitive work or strenuous activities and are more likely to experience fatigue or stress.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There exists an extensive literature on what factors of job satisfaction impact the mental health of employees, but there is a lack of information about how the factors of job satisfaction affect student employees in the retail and warehouse setting as well. The first source of evidence

is from Moro-Egido et al. (2010). A study was conducted to see how satisfied full-time and part-time students are with their employment status and degree program. However, our study differs by analyzing different factors of job satisfaction and its relation to working both full time and part time during various work schedules. A second source of evidence is from Rode et al. (2005). They conducted a study that included satisfaction with various life domains, but they failed to consider satisfaction in the context of work (retail and warehouse industry) and in the context of shifts (morning, afternoon, evening, or night shift). A third source of evidence is from Ferri et al. (2016). They conducted a cross-sectional analysis to identify if nursing students, in particular, experience lower job satisfaction and more risk factors relating to their health. Again, our project differs in that it focuses on general undergraduate students who work both full time and part time during various work schedules. A fourth source of evidence that supports this study is from Arthur Brooks, the President of the American Enterprise Society. His research focuses on understanding the secrets of happiness and what leads to unhappiness. In his video “The Secret to Happiness”, he states that 89% of Americans love their job. Consistent with his research, our study indicates that students’ favorite aspect of their job is forming valuable relationships with people. He defines the happiness formula as “love people, use things” because that is one secret to being less unhappy. Furthermore, Dr. Brooks explains that spending time with your boss and being stuck with traffic are aggravators of unhappiness. Research has also supported that 84% of American workers quit their bosses, not their jobs (Society for Human Resource Management). Contrary to our research, spending time with a boss does not lead to less job satisfaction, but being stuck in traffic is the least favorite aspect of some students.

### *Various Work Schedules*

Various work shifts allow individuals to choose the shift they prefer. Some individuals work better in the morning while others work better in the afternoon or evening. Students who work full-time often choose the graveyard shift because it does not overlap with their activities during the day. However, the night shift is often seen as an unappealing shift for students because they usually stay awake for longer hours. Working at night often interferes with the sleep cycle of students. This shift pressures students because they might only be getting 4 or 5 hours of sleep a day and sometimes they do not have the time to complete their domestic activities.

### **Hypothesis**

On the basis of the relevant literature reviewed, we proposed one hypothesis and a potential hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 1:* Whether students are working full-time or part-time, their work schedule is one of the factors that determine their satisfaction at work.

*Hypothesis 2:* Whether students are working full-time or part-time, relationships are another factor that determines their satisfaction at work.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

In this study, 24 participants were involved in the research. The participants are between the ages of 18-22 (83%), 23-32 (0%), and 33+ (17%). The participants are undergraduate students from the University of California, Riverside from all majors. Some of the demographics include a combination of Hispanic and Latino (44%), Caucasian (28%), Asian (28%), African American (6%), Middle Eastern (6%), and Native American (0%). The population is

predominantly female with 67%, male 28%, and 6% who prefer not to state their gender. Additionally, this study involves a specific criterion of participants working for the retail industry and warehouse industry only. Participants had the opportunity to select what work shifts they currently hold such as morning, afternoon, evening, or graveyard. In addition, they also selected how many hours a week they work. For example, work part-time (29 hours or less a week) or full-time (30 hours or more a week).

## **Materials**

This study was approached by conducting an online survey through Qualtrics. The survey consists of 20 questions and should take between 5-10 minutes to complete. The reason for using a survey is to give students the opportunity to share their experiences and concerns about the workplace and job satisfaction. Qualtrics is the best software to receive their responses because it provides confidentiality. To maximize confidentiality, the survey is anonymous because we want to minimize any potential psychological or social risks.

## **Measures**

Furthermore, the survey consists of one Likert scale divided with four subsequent sections. A 5-point Likert scale is used to measure statements of agreements with “strongly disagree” being point 1 and “strongly agree” being point 5. The Likert scale is also used to measure statements of satisfaction with “extremely dissatisfied” being point 1, and “extremely satisfied” being point 5. The Likert scale is also used to measure statements of frequency with “Never” being point 1, and “always” being point 5. Additionally, with “Never” being point 1, and “Daily” being point 5. This point system indicates how likely students agree with something, how frequently they experience a behavior at work, and how satisfied they are. The survey

includes open-ended questions in addition to a measurement from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Worker Well-Being Questionnaire (WellBQ) to assess the well-being of students.

## **Procedure**

The sample is identified as a convenience sample. The sample was recruited by emailing a few faculty from the University of California, Riverside. The email politely asked the faculty to share the anonymous link to the survey with their current students during Spring 2024. The survey is voluntary, so only the students who were interested and met the criterion were able to complete the survey after agreeing to participate in it. Furthermore, I completed a training program called Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) to be able to collect the data. The survey took place at participant's homes, on campus, or any other location they preferred, and they had two weeks to complete it. Prior to the start of the procedure, the first section of the survey involves an informed consent form. Students were required to read and agree with the terms before accessing the actual questions, otherwise they would not have access to it. The survey asked participants about their demographics, about their satisfaction with their job, and a few questions relating to their well-being. Other important details to note is that data collection happened during the spring quarter of 2024. Participants were not rewarded for their participation and did not receive any monetary or course credit incentives. Lastly, there is no specific experimental design because this study is non-experimental (the population was not divided into an experimental group or control group). Similarly, a correlational study was designed to look at the relationship between three variables separately: job satisfaction, supervisor and coworker support, and student's fatigue. For example, we looked at the relationship between overall job satisfaction and supervisor support, overall job satisfaction and

coworker support, and lastly, overall job satisfaction with student's fatigue. Additionally, a chi-square test of independence was used to test whether two categorical variables are related to each other. The three variables are job satisfaction, work schedule, and employment status.

## RESULTS

To reiterate, the hypothesis we tested is whether students are working part-time or full-time, their work schedule is one of the biggest factors that determines their satisfaction at work. The statistical test used to analyze this hypothesis is a chi square of independence as demonstrated in *Figure 1*, on page 20. The relation between job satisfaction, work schedule (including multiple shifts), and employment status of students is statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 12) = 11.3, p < 0.0007$ . Similarly, the observed data provides significant evidence against the null hypothesis. Originally, our sample size was 24, but there were changes with the data because 7 participants started the survey and failed to complete the study. Therefore, the sample decreased to 17, but it was changed when analyzing the chi square to fit the right categories.

### **Correlations**

Furthermore, it was predicted that relationships are another factor that determines the satisfaction of students. Thus, three different correlations using Pearson were analyzed to test the relationship between three variables described below.

### **Overall Job Satisfaction with Supervisor Support**

As shown in *Figure 3*, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the job satisfaction of students and the emotional support and work assistance they receive from their supervisor. There was a weak, positive correlation between the two variables,  $r(15) = 0.25$ ; however, the relationship was not significant,  $p > .32$ . There is a

pattern between the student job satisfaction and supervisor support, but the relationship is not strong enough to make accurate predictions. Nonetheless, student job satisfaction does not appear to be associated with the type of support they receive at work.

### **Overall Job Satisfaction with Coworker Support**

As shown in *Figure 4*, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the job satisfaction of students and the support they receive from their coworkers. There was a weak, positive correlation between the two variables,  $r(15) = 0.35$ ; however, the relationship was not significant,  $p > .16$ . There is a pattern between the job satisfaction of students with the coworker support, but the relationship is not strong enough to make accurate predictions. Nonetheless, student job satisfaction does not appear to be associated with the type of support they receive from their coworkers.

### **Overall Job Satisfaction with Student's Fatigue**

As shown in *Figure 5*, a Pearson correlation was computed to assess the job satisfaction of students and how often they experience fatigue while working. There was a weak, positive correlation between the two variables,  $r(15) = 0.25$ ; however, the relationship was not significant,  $p > .32$ . There is a pattern between the satisfaction of students with how often they experience fatigue (which was sometimes), but the relationship is not strong enough to make accurate predictions.

### **Open-ended Questions**

Results for the first ended question “What is your favorite aspect of your job and how does this affect your job performance?” reveal that most students enjoy making new relationships and they enjoy professional development opportunities. Results for the second ended question

“What is your least favorite aspect of your job and how does this affect your performance?” reveal that most students dislike their short hours of work and traffic. The third open ended question “In your opinion, what aspect of your job do you believe your employer/manager could change to best influence your performance?” reveal that students want fair compensation, a better work environment, more hours and better management.

## DISCUSSION

The first part of the results regarding the chi-square test of independence reveal that the null hypothesis is rejected: there is no association between the variables of job satisfaction, work schedule, and employment status. Therefore, we accept the alternative hypothesis that whether students work part-time or full-time, their work schedule is a factor of how satisfied they are at work. This result directly supports those reported by Arthur Brooks. The people who are satisfied at work, regardless of the shift they work for, are happy with their schedule. Particularly, they are satisfied because they have the flexibility and freedom to choose the shift they desire as some of the students work part-time. The results also describe that 82% of students work the afternoon shift. This opens the opportunity for them to go to school in the morning or in the evening, but it all comes down to individual preference. Additionally, most retail stores and warehouses are flexible with students for many reasons. They do not have to pay benefits to them, so they are encouraging them to apply because they will gain hands-on experiences and knowledge. In return, part-time students can have extra activities and they save money when they are not commuting to work. On the other hand, full-time employees are satisfied with their work schedule depending on the different activities that they have in their lives.

The second part of the results are relevant because three correlations were analyzed with three different variables. The first correlation describes job satisfaction and the emotional support



and work assistance from a supervisor. The results indicate a non-significant, weak positive correlation because the sample size is very small. However, this result can be interpreted as having a potential chance of the variables being related if the sample was higher. If this is the case, then these results would support the research of Alexandra Va. For example, students who do not have the support of their supervisor are more likely to feel less motivated to do their work. These students would fall under the category of the Leader-Member Exchange model (LMX) because there are in-groups (those who receive the support of the supervisor) and out-groups (those who are not receiving any attention). Because an employee's performance is a representation of a supervisor's training, better leadership should be implemented. An effective supervisor is someone who regularly checks for understanding and demonstrates sense giving (helping employees find meaning and purpose of the context provided). An ineffective supervisor will encourage students and employees to quit them instead of their job.

The second correlation describes job satisfaction and coworker support. Again, the results reveal a non-significant, positive correlation between the two variables due to the sample size. However, this result can be interpreted as having a potential relationship between the two variables. If so, then students can count on their coworkers for any support when they need it. Feeling supported by coworkers can have an impact on how an individual behaves at work. Students and workers, in general, work together to meet the strategic goals of a company. Coworkers are often seen as a resource because individuals usually interact with them regarding personal life or work problems. Regardless of the conversation they have, the type of support that is demonstrated is of essence. Support encourages individuals to work harder and motivates them to think highly of themselves. Hence, consistent with Arthur Brooks research, people need to love people and use things.

The third correlation describes job satisfaction and fatigue. The results indicate a non-significant, positive correlation between these two variables. The interpretation of this result can be done in two ways. First, 41% of students strongly agreed with the statement that their work is meaningful to them and 50% declared that they sometimes experience fatigue during work. The students that find meaning in their work enjoy being surrounded with their coworkers and enjoy developing relationships. However, they are experiencing fatigue based on the work that they do. Most of these students work for the retail and warehouse industry. Therefore, they are exposed to physical labor, lifting, standing, and walking for long hours. Second, a different interpretation of these statistics would indicate that people who love their job experience fatigue because of their earned success, which is considered one of the biggest determinants of happiness by the study conducted by Arthur Brooks (Brooks, 2014). Similarly, people value the experiences and memories they create because it is a fundamental aspect of their identity and who they are as a person.

### **Limitations and future directions**

Ideally, I was hoping to get significant results because the statistics from the responses were high. However, the sample consists of only 24 participants which brings many complications to test whether this study has validity and reliability. Certainly, this study does not generalize to the whole population of the students from the University of California, Riverside. Additionally, the sample size impacted the research outcomes and the statistical analyses that were used. I was only able to get 24 participants because there was a delay with the IRB approval. Also, participants did not receive any monetary incentives for participating in this study. There was no direct benefit to them because this study was designed to provide an informational and general understanding of the factors of job satisfaction. Moreover, the study

included a specific criterion. The participants were limited to only current undergraduate students and who work for the retail and warehouse industry. Making the survey accessible to all students would have increased the sample size, but the focus would be lost. Lastly, three of the questions from the survey were open ended. I wrote those questions myself because I was interested in knowing the opinion of the students. Therefore, the study lacks validity because what I intend to measure might be measuring something else. This study also lacks inter-rater reliability (consistency of measurement across raters) and test-retest reliability (the extent to which the score is about the same over time).

This study also recommends directions for future research. Participants should be rewarded for participating in any study because the probability of them participating will be higher. Similarly, future researchers should have an appropriate number of participants to have consistent findings. Although this project identified that work schedule is a factor of job satisfaction, a different factor such as race or age should be considered to generate different interpretations. Lastly, this study is not intended to make any interventions or implement any policies. Because this paper focuses on job satisfaction in general, future researchers should identify specific factors that lead to less job satisfaction. An understanding of job satisfaction, whether students are satisfied or unsatisfied, is crucial for encouraging work performance and organizational change. Lastly, a potential question that this study raises for readers is whether demographics play a factor in job satisfaction at work. This paper ignored demographics, but future directions should implement it.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, this study found mixed findings about the specific factors of job satisfaction of students working in the retail and warehouse industry. There are positive correlations with

student students being satisfied with their work schedule and the relationships they form at work. The significance of this project is to spread and provide these results to organizations so that they can foster a better work environment for their student employees in the Inland Empire. The Inland Empire is a logistics hub because of the number of warehouses and retail stores it has. In other words, individuals and students who need a job will most likely apply to them, but they need to know what they are getting themselves into.

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## FIGURES

*Figure 1.* Chi-square test of independence results.



Figure 2. This histogram shows that students are somewhat satisfied with their job. Point 1 = extremely dissatisfied and point 5 = extremely satisfied.

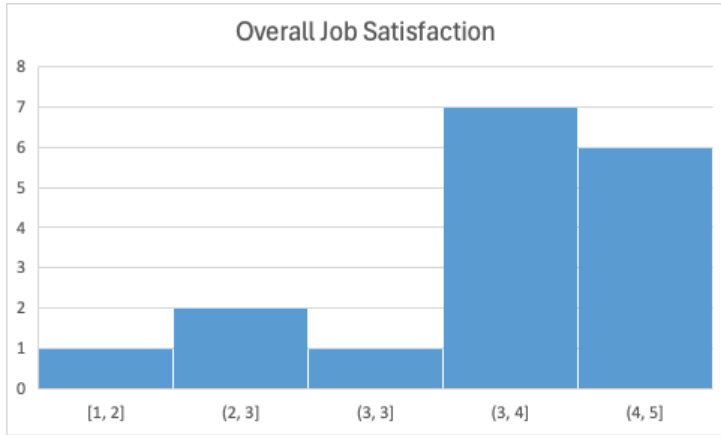




Figure 3. This histogram shows that students somewhat agree with counting on their supervisor for emotional support and work assistance. Point 1 = strongly disagree and Point 5 = strongly agree.

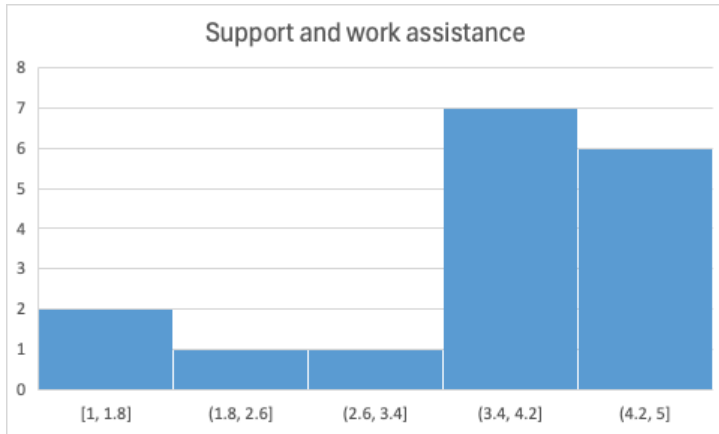


Figure 4. This histogram shows that students strongly agree with counting on their coworkers for support when they need it. Point 2.00 = strongly disagree and Point 5 = strongly agree.

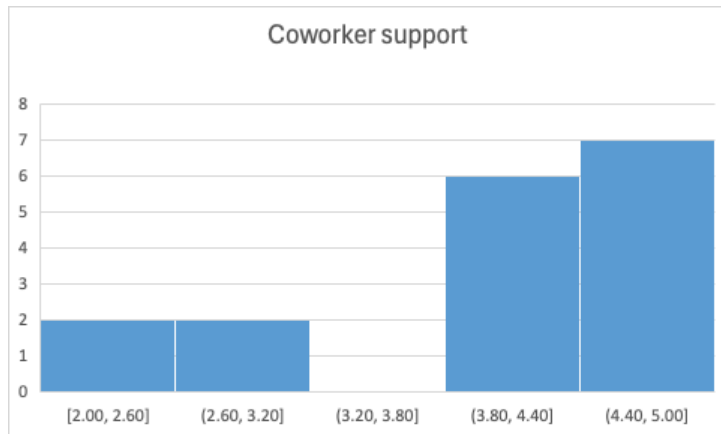


Figure 5. This histogram shows that students strongly agree that the work they do is meaningful to them. Point = strongly disagree and Point 5 = strongly agree.

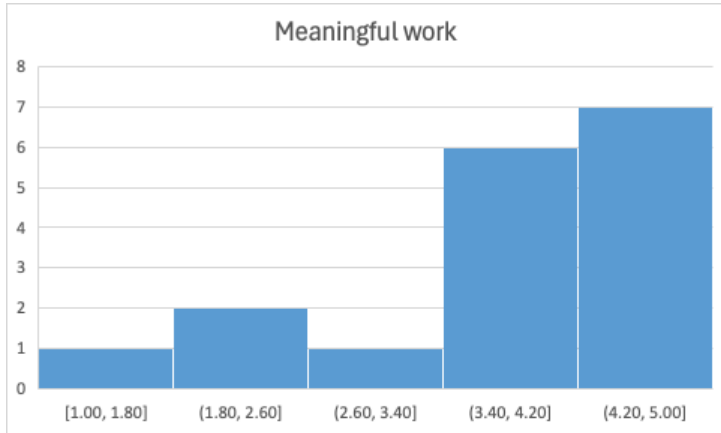


Figure 6. This histogram shows that students sometimes experience fatigue when they are working. Point 0.80 = never and Point 4.00 = always.

