

Attitudes of optometrists towards their profession

Chris N French and
Don F C Loran

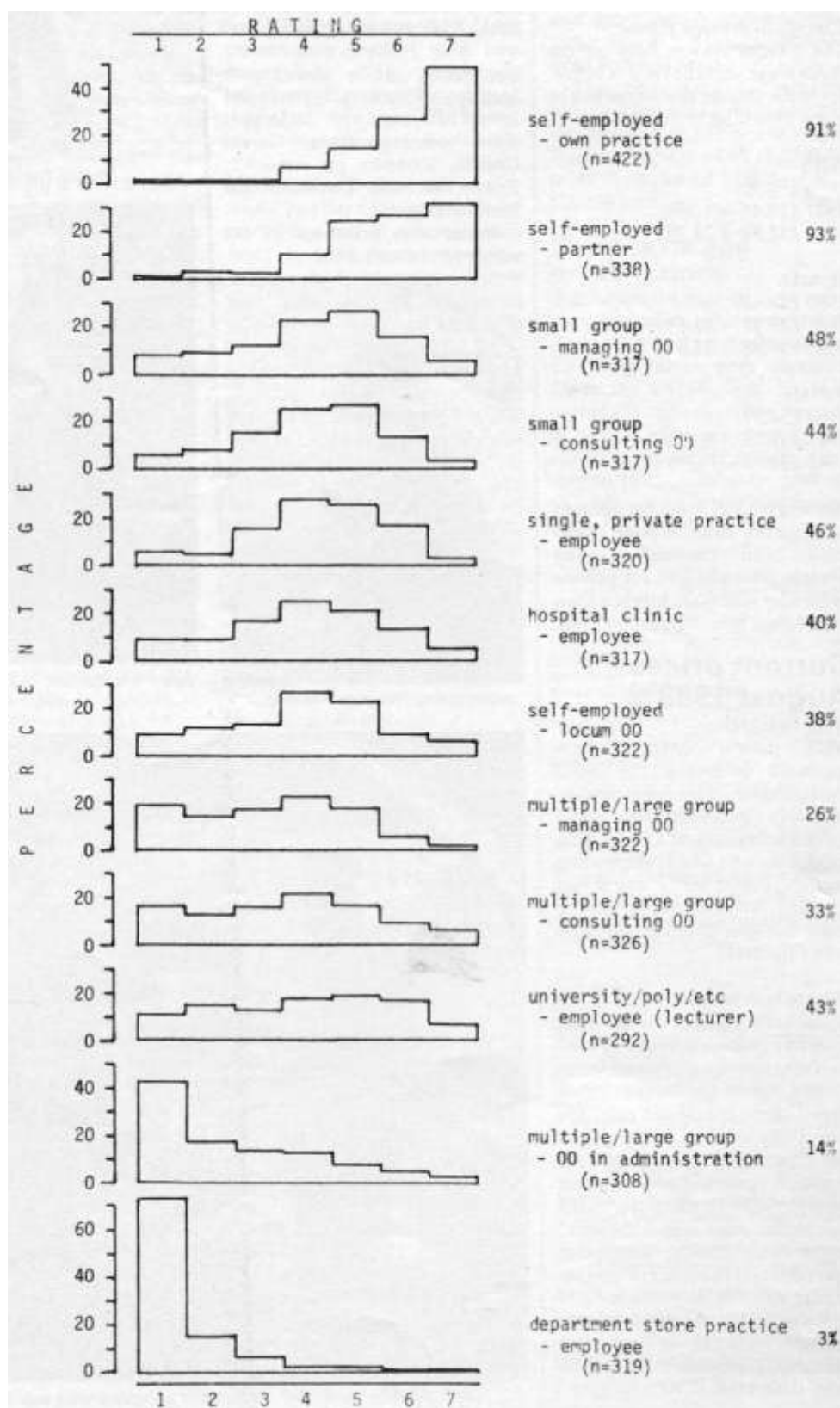
Part two (continued from September 16)

Modes of employment

Our first questions were directed towards the various types of employment open to ophthalmic opticians. Members of the sample were asked to rate their own satisfaction on a 7-point scale for 12 different jobs. If they were not currently employed in a particular job then they were asked to imagine themselves so employed and rate their likely satisfaction. The results are given in Figure 5. The rating of 1 is associated with 'Very dissatisfied', 7 with 'Very satisfied', 2 to 6 with intermediate attitudes and 4 is the neutral mid-point. The ratings have been weighted according to the respondent's age and sex in order to represent an unbiased sample of the registered population, and null responses have been ignored.

The simplest way to examine the results is to look first at the proportion of positive ratings (5 to 7) indicating satisfaction with a particular type of work. These are given on the right side of Figure 5 and make clear that United Kingdom OOs believe they gain greatest satisfaction from owning or being a partner in their own practice

Fig 5 — Registered OOs' satisfaction with various modes of employment. The histograms (right) show the relative frequency of ratings on a seven-point scale by registered OOs in the sample. Their responses have been weighted according to their age and sex in order to estimate the opinions of the GOC population. The questionnaire asked, 'If you found yourself in the following type of employment how satisfied would you feel? If it is your present employment how satisfied are you?' A rating of 1 indicates 'very dissatisfied', 7— 'Very satisfied' and 4 is the mid-point. 'Don't knows' have been ignored. The weighted proportion indicating positive satisfaction (ratings 5, 6 and 7) is indicated by the percentage figure on the right-hand side. The number of responses on which each histogram is based is given in parenthesis



with 90 per cent showing satisfaction for such employment. It is equally clear that working as an OO in a department store practice is seen as least satisfactory with only three per cent expressing satisfaction. 'In administration for a large group' also resulted in a small proportion of only 14 per cent showing satisfaction.

Perhaps the main observation to come out of Figure 5 is the broad range of attitudes shown by optometrists. There were a very few who would actually be very dissatisfied if they owned their own practice and some who would be very satisfied if they worked in a department store practice, although these were the exceptions. The broad range of attitudes means that the variation in opinions towards the other eight jobs was less dramatic although still significant. The authors take solace in the observation that there are a few who appear to look favourably on an ivory tower job. (Contrast this with the students' attitudes!)

Of course, with more than half the respondents self-employed it is perhaps not surprising that such work comes out 'top'. It is to be expected that people will seek out work that they prefer, although *a priori* one cannot rule out envious attitudes. In Figure 6 we can look at people's attitudes towards their own, present employment. Again, the responses have been weighted so as to match the GOC Register population. The results for optometrists with their own practice are little changed from Fig 5 in contrast to those for other jobs. For these, without exception, the proportion expressing satisfaction with a job is higher when those not so employed are excluded. The weighted average for all groups combined is a remarkable 82 per cent and no job has a satisfaction rate of less than 60 per cent. The third most satisfying mode of employment appears to be a consulting OO in a small group and there is the suggestion of less satisfaction amongst those managing than consulting for both small and large groups, but there appears little difference amongst the remaining four types of employment. Leaving aside those with their own practice, the variation in satisfaction between the other seven jobs appears marginal at most.

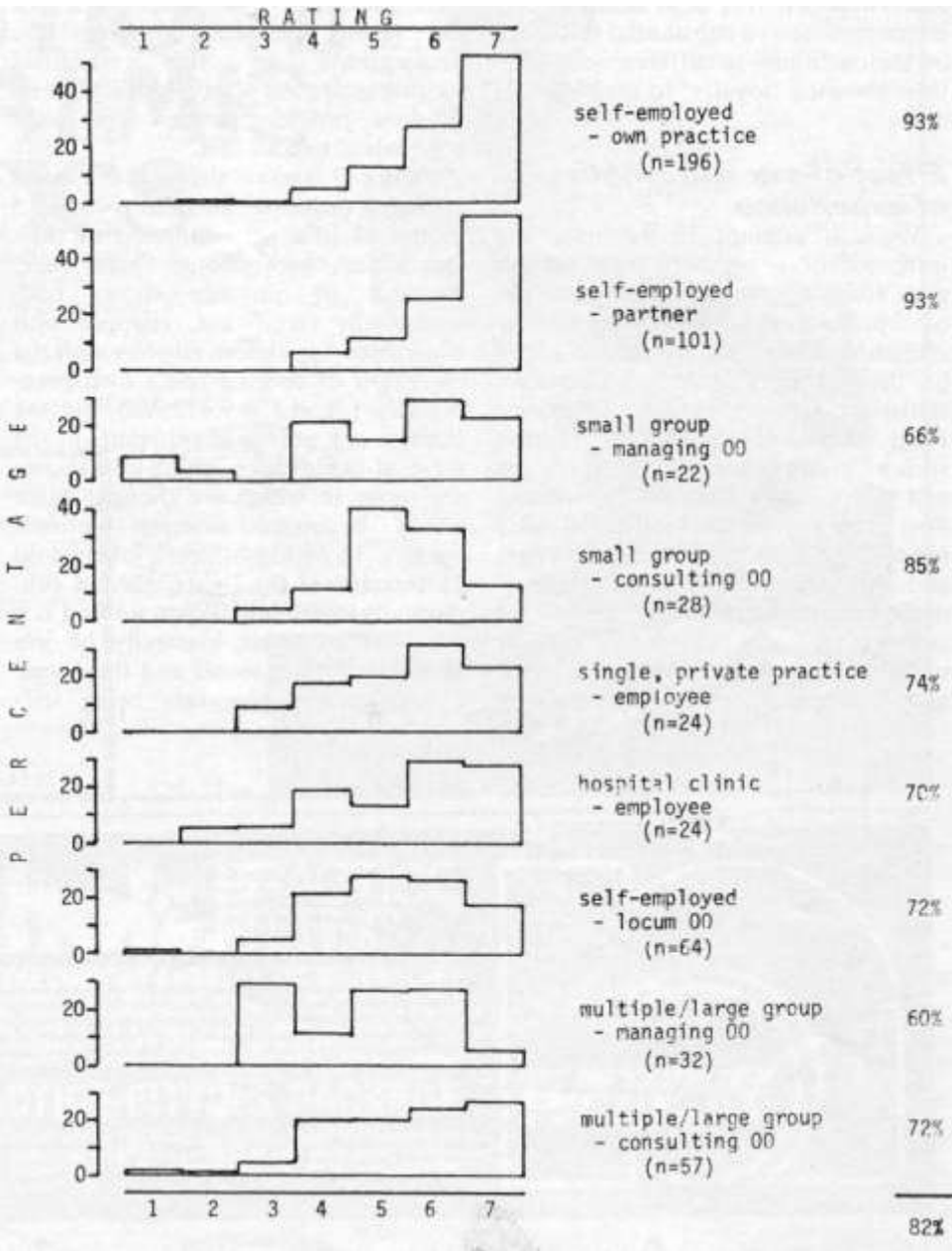


Fig 6—Registered OOs 'satisfaction with their own employment. These histograms show the relative frequency of satisfaction ratings by registered OOs for their own employment. Responses have been weighted according to each respondent's age and sex in order to simulate the aggregate attitudes of the GOC population. A rating of 1 indicates 'Very dissatisfied' and 7—'very satisfied'. Null responses have been ignored. The weighted proportion indicating positive satisfaction (5, 6 and 7) is given by the percentage figures on the right. The numbers of OOs on which the histograms are based are given by the figures in parenthesis

Figure 6 does not include ratings for three types of employment—ophthalmic opticians in administration for a large group, in a department store practice and in a teaching institution—as there were only a handful of respondents in these categories (n = 3, 5 and 7). Despite this, we would specu-

late on the basis of this data that if we had sufficiently large samples we would find that OOs employed in these capacities were just as satisfied as those in the other jobs barring the two main self-employed categories.

The comparison between Figure 5 continued on page 14

and 6 makes it very clear that people's employment has a substantial influence on their attitudes to different jobs with their showing 'loyalty' to their chosen niche.

Effect of sex and length of experience

We can attempt to minimise the influence of a person's own job on their attitude towards the various types of professional employment by excluding those attitudes which relate to their present posts. Preliminary statistical analyses reveal interactions which show, not unexpectedly, that such attitudes relate to a person's sex and length of professional experience. For this reason and also because female opticians tend to be younger and less experienced than males—there are relatively few older women amongst OOs (see Figs. 2 and 3)—it is sensible to carry out separate analyses on the male and female responses. We

have used analysis of variance to screen the results because, although the assumptions of this statistical technique are not always perfectly met, it does provide perhaps the most convenient overall test.

Figure 7 shows the average male attitudes (arithmetic mean) towards 5 of the 12 jobs as a function of their length of professional experience. Analysis of variance shows real, statistically significant, changes with experience for almost all jobs with the exception of owning one's own practice ($F = 1.6$, d.f. = 9,412, ns), but the changes are not so 'significant' in the sense of being large. The 5 jobs shown are those in which we thought there would be most interest amongst readers. Inclusion of more jobs would have confused the figure without substantially altering it. What we find is a more-or-less stable hierarchy of job attitudes. First, second and third year undergraduates also rate being self-

employed and owning their own practice highest and at a level not very different from that of their qualified peers. Being an OO in administration or working as an OO in a department store practice are again rated lowest by undergraduates. There appears to be little change over the three years of university training except that there is reliable evidence that work in a department store practice becomes even less popular during this time. The main difference, otherwise, between the qualified and unqualified attitudes is that working as a consulting OO for a small or large group is viewed more favourably by the students and this difference is maintained even if the qualified group is expanded to include those currently employed in this way. But we feel that not too much should be read into this particular shift in opinion.

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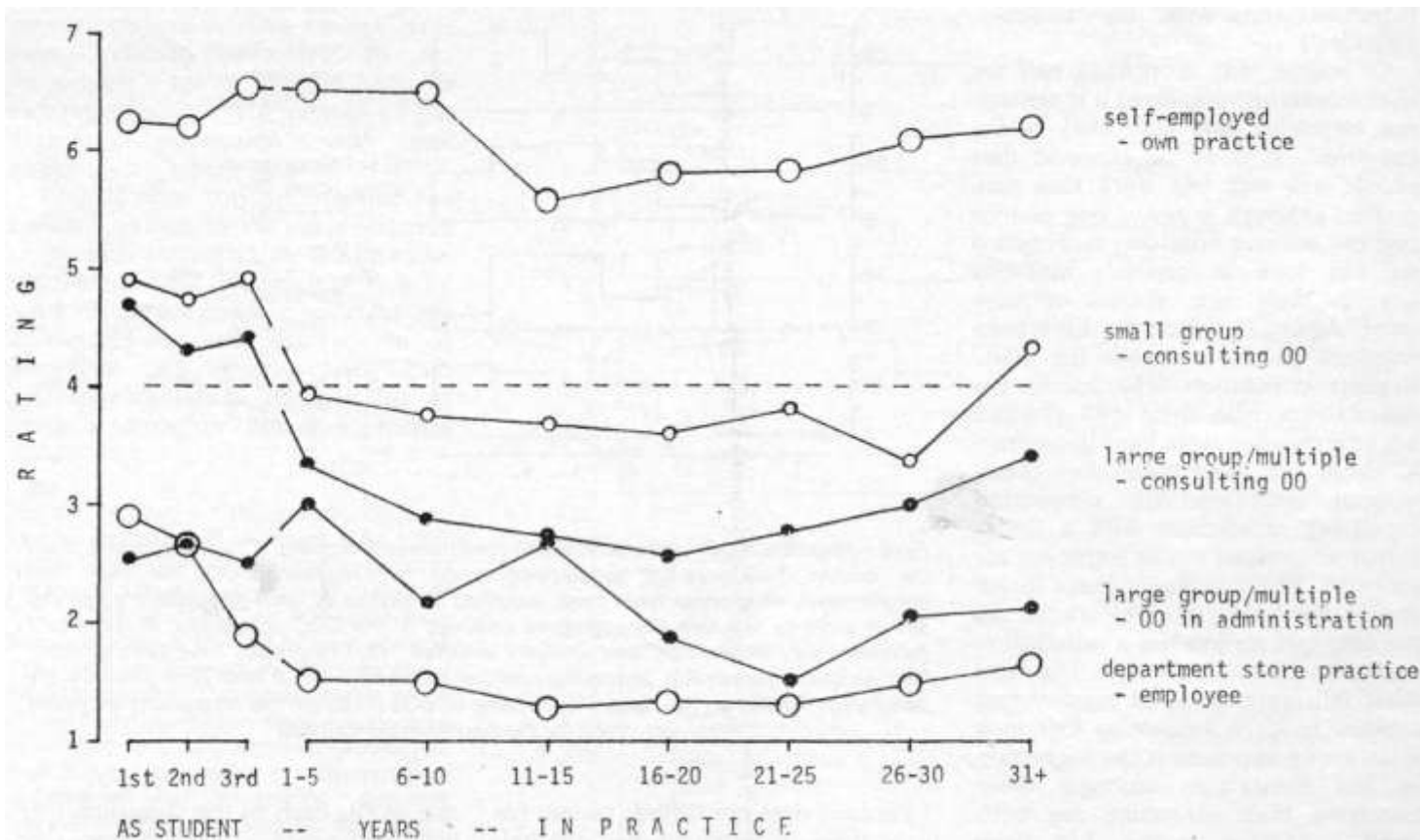


Fig 7—Expected job satisfaction and length of experience. These graphs show male attitudes towards 5 types of OO employment as a function of the number of years of experience in the profession. Each point represents an arithmetic mean of ratings where 1 indicates 'very dissatisfied' and 7 'Very satisfied'. Where the ratings were of a qualified OO's own jobs these were excluded from consideration. Analysis of variance shows that most curves depart from a horizontal line. Levels of statistical significance are $R < 0.001$ for three jobs but just $R < 0.05$ for being in administration and not significant for owning one's own practice

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Equivalent graphs to those in Figure 7 for women would give us similar results but due to the small numbers we would not be able to place too much confidence in the estimated attitudes of the more experienced women.

Table 1 concentrates on the attitudes of the student OOs and a comparison of male and female attitudes. While the hierarchies for men and women here are very similar, there are a few differences. Female students appear to have a very slightly more favourable attitude towards working for a multiple or large group ($P < 0.05$) and perhaps even working in a hospital clinic (ns), but the most dramatic difference lies in their more positive attitude towards working as a self-employed locum ($P < 0.001$). This is to be expected as women would be far more likely to see locum work in their plans for having children and bringing up a family, and our sample showed that women are more likely to take up such work than men. Amongst the students, the differences in attitude towards working for a large group, small group, single private practice and hospital appear very small. Amongst students, average attitudes towards these types of employment were significantly more favourable than towards being an OO in teaching, administration or a department store. Of course, one thing that the last three have in common is that they are definitely minority employments undertaken by relatively few OOs.

For all jobs the satisfaction rating curves (Fig. 7) seem to be slightly U-shaped, they decline towards middle age (male and female menopause?) before increasing again. What we have here is a snap shot of the attitudes of people at different stages in their careers. It may be that if we were to follow the same group of people through the various stages of their career we would find this same picture. On the other hand it may be that what we have here is at every stage different types of people with consequently different attitudes. It is difficult to choose between these two views. Some people have expressed the fear that what they call the 'wrong' type of people are now being recruited to Optics—people who want to be employees rather than self-employed.

Table 1
Students' expected satisfaction with various potential employments in optometry

	male		female		
self employed					
— own practice	6.3	1.1	6.0	1.5	ns
— partner	5.5	1.3	5.6	1.3	ns
small group					
— managing OO	5.0	1.5	5.2	1.5	ns
— consulting OO	4.9	1.4	5.2	1.3	ns
large group/multiple					
— managing OO	4.6	1.6	< 5.1	1.4	*
— consulting OO	4.5	1.4	4.9	1.3	ns
single, private practice					
— employee	4.9	1.5	4.7	1.5	ns
hospital clinic					
— employee	4.1	1.6	4.5	1.7	ns
self employed					
— locum OO	3.2	1.6	< 4.2	1.6	***
university/poly etc					
— employee (lecturer)	3.4	1.9	3.4	1.8	ns
large group/multiple					
— OO in administration	2.6	1.5	2.9	1.7	ns
department store practice					
— employment	2.6	1.5	2.7	1.4	ns

*The question posed was as follows 'If you found yourself in the following type of employment how satisfied would you feel? Indicate your degree of satisfaction on the seven-point scales by ticking one of the seven circles on each line. The number 1 is to be associated with 'Very dissatisfied', 7 with 'Very satisfied', 2 to 6 with intermediate degrees of feeling and 4 is the mid-point/ The table gives the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the ratings by male and female student OOs. The statistical significance of the male vs. female t-test comparison is indicated by ns (not significant), * ($P < 0.05$) and *** ($P < 0.001$). The number of ratings being averaged varies from 89 to 115. "Don't knows" and other null responses have been ignored*

Well, it is true that the undergraduates appear to have slightly more favourable attitudes to working for small and large groups but it may well be that these attitudes will change fairly quickly after qualification. For those with just 5 years of experience they are already very similar to those with many more years of experience. There has been relatively little change in admissions procedures in the seven years that this encompasses (French, 1982) and we therefore tend to take the

view that what we have here are differences symptomatic of *attitude changes within* a group of OOs rather than of *attitude differences between* groups.

Further it seems to us that the similarities across the range of experience shown in Figure 7 are more striking than the differences. For all age and sex groups, owning one's own practice is rated most highly.

to be continued

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