

Female forensic scientists more stressed than males

August 18 2016, by Thomas Holt , Andy Henion



Forensic scientists generally are stressed but happy with their jobs -- and female scientists are particularly stressed, finds a federally funded study led by Michigan State University criminologist Thomas Holt. Credit: Michigan State University

Women may be at the forefront of the fast-growing forensic science field, but they're also more stressed than their male counterparts, indicates new research led by a Michigan State University criminologist.

Females working in forensic science labs were almost two times more likely to report high stress levels than males, according to the study, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. Forensic scientists aid criminal investigations by collecting and analyzing evidence such as fingerprints, ballistics and DNA.

"It's not clear why female scientists reported more stress than males," said Thomas J. Holt, MSU professor of criminal justice, "though it may stem from differences in the experiences of female scientists who are not sworn law-enforcement officers working in a quasi-military structure where more males are sworn officers, particularly in supervisory roles."

Employment for forensic science technicians is expected to grow 27 percent between 2014 and 2024, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Fueled by shows like "CSI" and "Bones," the field has surged in popularity, particularly among women, who greatly outnumber men in undergraduate and graduate forensic science programs.

At MSU - home of the nation's first forensic science program, started in 1946 - Holt led one of the first studies to examine the job satisfaction and stress of forensic scientists. The researchers surveyed 670 scientists in 25 states; 62 percent of participants were women.

Overall, forensic scientists were happy with their jobs, but also stressed. "The fact that forensic scientists appear to have as much stress as police and corrections officers was somewhat surprising," Holt said.

Specific findings include:

- About 78 percent of participants reported mid to high levels of jobs stress, with female forensic scientists reporting higher levels than males. This finding is consistent with past research that found higher stress levels among female police officers.
- About 84 percent of forensic scientists reported mid to high levels of job satisfaction.
- Scientists who testified more often in court were happier with their jobs. About 51 percent of participants had testified one to five times in the previous year, and about 27 percent had testified six or more times.
- Forensic scientists worked on average about 42 hours per week. Despite dwindling state and local budgets, Holt noted that law enforcement and prosecutors are placing increasing emphasis on the use of forensic evidence and that forensic science labs are under pressure to clear case backlogs such as rape kits.

"Managers of forensic science labs should consider ways to minimize the overtime that scientists work, though this may be difficult if scientists must work more than 40 hours a week to clear backlogs or because of state mandates and a lack of trained staff to more evenly distribute hours," Holt said.

He added that well-defined policies and clear lines of communications should be established across the whole organization - from [forensic science](#) laboratories to police departments to prosecutors' offices.

"This can give [forensic scientists](#) direct access to upper management and foster trust between all parties," Holt said.

Provided by Michigan State University

Citation: Female forensic scientists more stressed than males (2016, August 18) retrieved 26

April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-08-female-forensic-scientists-stressed-males.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.