

## Original article

# Relationship between grit and job satisfaction among Thai working adults who are currently undertaking their graduate studies in Thailand

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## Abstract

**Background:** Whether in health care or business organizations, most individuals spend a large part of their lives at work attempting to be successful therefore an understanding of factors involved in job satisfaction is relevant to improving the well-being of a large number of individuals in an important aspect of their lives.

**Objectives:** The basic premises underlying the study of the relationship between grit and job satisfaction are the belief that increasing job satisfaction will improve well-being of individuals, increase productivity and thus the effectiveness of organizations. The objectives of this study were to investigate the level of grit and association between grit and job satisfaction among Thai working adults who are currently undertaking their graduate studies in Thailand.

**Methods:** A sample size of 294 full-time working adults who are currently undertaking postgraduate degrees are randomly selected from four universities in Thailand: National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Naresuan University, Assumption University, and Bangkok University.

**Results:** Research findings revealed that Thai working adults who were currently undertaking their graduate studies in Thailand tended to be somewhat gritty with the mean score of 3.4. According to the Grit score for the two subscales, the results indicated the mean score of 3.1 for Consistency of Interest and 3.7 for Perseverance of Effort. In addition, there was a low positive relationship between grit and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.137, P = 0.019$ ).

**Conclusion:** As the level of grit increases, we can predict higher levels of job satisfaction. Therefore, it is important for individuals to learn to cultivate grit culture as it increases job satisfaction and will, in turn, improves the well-being of individuals, increase productivity and thus raises the effectiveness of organization, health-care or business organizations alike.

**Keywords:** Grit, job satisfaction, Thai working adults.

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The concept of grit is not new as researchers have long identified passion and hard work as distinguishing factors of successful individuals<sup>(1)</sup> but they became more popular after Angela Lee Duckworth, a professor in psychology from the University of Pennsylvania delivering a technology, entertainment, and design (TED) talk in April 2013 which has since been viewed by well over 25 million times. Duckworth is interested in intangible concepts i.e., such as self-control and grit to determine how they might predict both academic and professional success and defines grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals.<sup>(2)</sup> Based on her theory of "grit" as a predictor of success, "grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress".<sup>(2)</sup>

The importance of job satisfaction and grit in this study is obvious. Individuals should be concerned with the level of job satisfaction in their organizations and the role grit plays in success for at least four reasons. Firstly, there is clear empirical evidence that grittier people and satisfied employees are likely to perform efficiently and effectively than dissatisfied employees. Secondly, it has been shown that satisfied employees have better health both physically and mentally and live longer. Thirdly, there are also benefits for society in general i.e., satisfaction on the job carries over to the employee's life outside the job. Finally, there are few empirical studies about grit in Thailand and almost none about the association between job satisfaction and grit in the Thai context. This study aimed to close the gap in terms of evidence-based body of knowledge about grit in Thailand and moreover to explore deeper understanding of job satisfaction among Thai working adults who are currently undertaking their graduate studies. In fact, the goal of high job satisfaction for employees can be defended in terms of both dollars and cents and social responsibility and understanding grit and its relationship with job satisfaction helps how Thai working adults live better and healthier lives.

Grit, which refers to perseverance and passion to pursue long-term goals, has been seen as a predictor of better life outcomes, including subjective well-being.<sup>(3)</sup> This study therefore seeks to understand more about grit among Thai working adults in Bangkok and helps us realize more than just individual's potential but how we could do with it to become successful in life and at work. Furthermore, what is

the importance of knowing about an individual's attitudes towards his or her job? Although they do not have direct impact on behavior, attitudes strongly influence a person's performance in organizations. Therefore, good understanding of an individual's attitude system can provide insight into his or her behavioral actions and productivity. Employers should be interested in their employee's attitudes because attitudes give warnings of potential problems and because they influence behavior. It is conceivable that satisfied and committed employees have lower rates of turnover, absenteeism, and mental health problems. And most likely, grittier people are happier and more satisfied with life than others<sup>(3)</sup> and people with higher job satisfaction tend to perform better at work and in turn bring about productivity in the organizations.

In today's organizational complexity, job satisfaction has no doubt been a central topic in attempts to understand human behaviors and their performance in organization.<sup>(4)</sup> Research in the United States and most other developed countries generally indicated that most people are satisfied with their jobs.<sup>(5 - 7)</sup> while several studies conducted among U.S. workers over the past 30 years confirmed that more workers are satisfied with the jobs and found that average job satisfaction levels were consistently high from 1972 to 2006.<sup>(8)</sup> Speaking in terms of job satisfaction across different cultures, evidence suggests that employees in Western cultures tend to have higher levels of jobs satisfaction than those in Eastern cultures.<sup>(9, 10)</sup> One piece of study that provides the results of a global study of job satisfaction of workers in 15 countries shows the highest levels in Mexico and Switzerland and the lowest score in South Korea.<sup>(11)</sup> Research also indicated that satisfaction levels differ a lot, depending on which dimensions of job satisfaction we are looking at. Happy employees are more likely to be productive employees and of course organizations with more satisfied employees tend to be more effective than organizations with fewer. A review of 300 studies revealed the correlation between job satisfaction and job performance is quite strong.<sup>(12)</sup> In addition to this, research confirmed that interesting jobs that provide training opportunities, job variety, independence and control satisfy most employees<sup>(13 - 14)</sup> and a study in Europe found that job satisfaction is positively correlated with life satisfaction, in that your attitudes and experiences in life spill over into your job approaches and experiences.<sup>(15)</sup>

A cross-sectional study aimed to develop and validate a self-report measure of grit in a large sample of adults aged 25 years and older revealed that more educated adults were higher in grit than those with less educated adults of equal age.<sup>(2)</sup> Speaking in terms of grit and its role in predicting success, result from a longitudinal study of 140 eight-grad students found that self-discipline predicted academic performance more robustly than did intelligent quotient (IQ). In addition to this, self-discipline predicted which students would improve their grades over the course of the school year, whereas IQ did not.<sup>(16)</sup> A study that contributes to a better understanding of what leads some novice teachers to outperform others and remain committed to the profession is by Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth A. In their research entitled "True Grit: Trait-Level perseverance and passion for Long-term goals predicts effectiveness and retention among novice teachers" concluded that grittier teachers outperformed their less gritty colleagues and were less likely to leave their classrooms midyear.<sup>(17)</sup> In addition to this, the regression analysis from the United States and South Korea samples indicated that grittier people are happier and more satisfied with life than others, controlling for sociodemographic variables<sup>(3)</sup> A recent study which sought to explore the relationship between personality traits encompassed in 'grit' and lifestyle behaviors among adults in the United States during the early lockdown stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 confirmed that those with higher grit were more physically active, reported less sedentary time, and practices better dietary habits. Such findings suggest that grit may help individuals lead a healthier lifestyle during stressful or negative events such as a global pandemic.<sup>(18)</sup>

**Materials and methods**

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional design and uses structured questionnaire for data collection. A sample size of 294 full-time working adults who are currently undertaking postgraduate degrees is selected randomly from four universities in Thailand: National institute of development administration (NIDA), Naresuan University, Assumption University and Bangkok University. This study measures level of grit using the 12-item Grit scale (GRIT-S) which were developed by Duckworth and her associates.<sup>(2,19)</sup> The 12-item Grit scale (GRIT-S) has 2 subscales including Consistency of interest and perseverance of effort. Consistency of Interest statements are designed to recognize individuals who are persistent over time by sticking with a goal, while Perseverance of efforts statements signify individuals with passion to pursue that goal.<sup>(2)</sup> Collecting a total of 2,526 subjects from two United States Military Academy, West Point classes 2008 and 2010, they found acceptable reliability and validity within the Grit-S. Overall Grit-S internal consistency alphas ranged from 0.73 to 0.76, with Consistency of Interest subscale alphas ranging from 0.73 to 0.74 and Perseverance of Effort ranging from 0.60 to 0.65.<sup>(19)</sup>

**Results**

**Data analysis**

Using structured questionnaires, we would be able to explore and interpret research findings on key characteristics, attitudes, behaviors and common beliefs of Thai working adults who are currently undertaking their graduate studies in Thailand. The response rate from each type of tertiary institutes is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Number of questionnaire distribution from different universities.

Name of tertiary institutes	(N)	Percentage
Bangkok University (BU)	59	20.1
Assumption University (AU)	44	15.0
Naresuan University (NU)	78	26.5
National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA)	113	38.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>100</b>

In this study, the 12-item Grit Scale (GRIT - S) which were developed by Duckworth A. and her associates were used to measure "trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals". GRIT-S has 2 subscales including Consistency of Interest and Perseverance of Effort. Consistency of interest statements are designed to recognize individuals who are persistent over time by sticking with a goal, while Perseverance of Efforts statements signify individuals with passion to pursue those goals <sup>(2, 19)</sup> To be more specific, these 12 questions allow us to measure the level of grit and obtain a score that reflects how passionate and persevering individuals

see themselves to be.

Members of the sample had responded to the questions concerning grit. The responses are analyzed in each of questions as shown in Table 2. According to the survey results, Thai working adults who are currently undertaking their graduate studies in Thailand tend to be somewhat gritty with the mean score of 3.4 or score around 30.0% percentile compared to a large sample of American adults. <sup>(2)</sup> In terms of the Grit score for the two subscales, the results show the mean score of 3.1 for consistency of interest and 3.7 for perseverance of effort.

**Table 2.** Responses of sample by items.

	<b>Not like me at all</b>	<b>Not much like me</b>	<b>Somewhat like me</b>	<b>Mostly like me</b>	<b>Very much like me</b>
1. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.		24 (8.2)	79 (26.9)	120 (40.8)	71 (24.1)
2. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.	35 (11.9)	112 (38.1)	96 (32.7)	45 (15.3)	6 (2.0)
3. My interests change from year to year.	40 (13.6)	87 (29.6)	95 (32.3)	68 (23.1)	4 (1.4)
4. Setbacks don't discourage me.	8 (2.7)	34 (11.6)	87 (29.6)	107 (36.4)	58 (19.7)
5. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.	23 (7.8)	79 (26.9)	88 (30.0)	83 (28.2)	21 (7.1)
6. I am a hard worker.		7 (2.4)	61 (20.7)	124 (42.2)	102 (34.7)
7. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.	22 (7.5)	62 (21.1)	85 (28.9)	106 (36.1)	19 (6.5)
8. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.	11 (3.7)	26 (8.8)	47 (16.0)	128 (43.5)	82 (28.0)
9. I finish whatever I begin.	2 (0.7)	14 (4.8)	54 (18.4)	148 (50.3)	76 (25.8)
10. I have achieved a goal that took years of work.	11 (3.7)	46 (15.6)	101 (34.4)	94 (32.0)	42 (14.3)
11. I become interested in new pursuits every few months.	11 (3.8)	55 (18.7)	73 (24.8)	115 (39.1)	40 (13.6)
12. I am diligent.	3 (1.0)	38 (12.9)	121 (41.2)	77 (26.2)	55 (18.7)

### ***Association between grit and job satisfaction***

In this section, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient has been employed to measure the strength and the direction of the linear relationship between grit and job satisfaction. There was a statistically significant correlation between grit and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.137, P = 0.019$ ) This means that grit is positively correlated with job satisfaction and implies low positive relationship between these two variables. Therefore, as the level of grit increases, we can predict higher level of job satisfaction.

There was no statistically significant correlation between consistency of interest and job satisfaction ( $r = -0.053, P = 0.366$ ). This implies low negative relationship between these two variables. Consequently, one can expect that as the level of consistency of interest increases the level of job satisfaction would decrease.

There was a statistically significant correlation between perseverance of effort and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.279, P < 0.001$ ). This means that perseverance of effort is positively correlated with job satisfaction and implies low positive relationship between these two variables. Consequently, one can expect that as the level of perseverance of effort increases the level of job satisfaction would increase.

### **Discussion**

Research findings reveal that Thai working adults who are currently undertaking their graduate studies in Thailand tend to be somewhat gritty. When we look closer at the Grit score for the two subscales, the results indicate the mean score of 3.1 for consistency of interest and 3.7 for perseverance of effort. This implies the score around 30.0% percentile compared to a large sample of American adults.<sup>(2)</sup> It is therefore important to know the level of grit among Thai working adults as mentioned earlier that grittier people are happier and more satisfied with life than others. The satisfied and committed employees tend to have lower rates of turnover, absenteeism, and mental health problems.<sup>(3)</sup>

We found that there was a low positive relationship between grit and job satisfaction. This means that as the level of grit increases, we can predict higher level of job satisfaction. As argued earlier, increasing job satisfaction will improve well-being of individuals, increase productivity and thus the effectiveness of organizations be in health care or business organizations. There are a number of ways we could

cultivate grit culture in individuals and organizations. First, we could provide training that describes grit and growth mindset and how to build it. Second, we could create an environment that encourages and rewards people that dare to think positively and motivate them to take out-of-their comfort zone actions. There should be both opportunities and venues for individual to unleash their potentials and try new challenges. Finally, we can build the organizational culture that inspires and motives their people to embrace changes and take risks. If we could build grit in people, we could help increase their level of job satisfaction thus happiness, success, and self-fulfillment in their life.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the result of this study is consistent with the basic premises that increasing job satisfaction will improve well-being of individuals, increase productivity and thus the effectiveness of organizations. In essence, it should be noted that the study of the relationship between job satisfaction and grit is not always straightforward as one is dealing with complex human behavior in social, cultural and organizational situation which vary subtly from study to study. Moreover, it is even true that no one study is likely to be an answer to any specific problem. It is truly expected that this research would not provide any solutions to any conceptual or practical problems on job satisfaction, rather this study would reveal a number of important gaps in our understanding of the role and importance of grit and job satisfaction. Although, there are some limitations associated with this study, it is however expected that this research would contribute both theoretical and empirical evidence to the knowledge of job satisfaction and grit among working adults in the Thai context and produce some value materials and discussion on the society. Last but not least, it is strongly hopeful that this piece of work would provide much fertile ground for further research.

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### **Conflicts of interest statement**

Each of the authors has completed an ICMJE disclosure form. None of the authors declare any potential or actual relationship, activity, or interest related to the content of this article.

### Data sharing statement

The present review is based on the references cited. Further details, opinions, and interpretation are available from the corresponding authors on reasonable request.

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