

AOA Releases 2002 Paraoptometric Survey

With the compilation of the AOA Paraoptometric Section January 2002 National/Salary and Benefit survey just who the average AOA paraoptometric is comes to light.

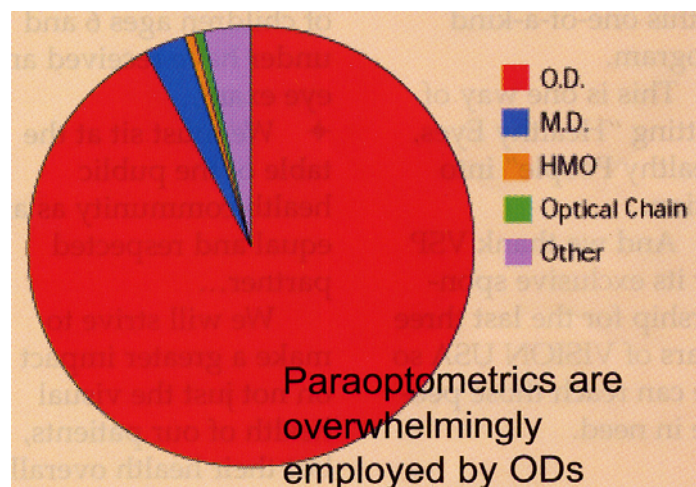
Employed in a suburban or rural setting in the United States by an OD, the average paraoptometric works 25-40 hours a week and earns more than \$20,000 annually, with health benefits coverage.

Clinical procedures/pretesting, ophthalmic dispensing, record keeping, and office duties remain the primary tasks of the average paraoptometric. Most importantly, the average paraoptometric reports being "very satisfied" in their present position.

Nearly half (45.1 percent) of the section's 2,100 members responded to the January mail survey that sampled the views, salary, and benefits of members of the AOA Paraoptometric Section. Results were released in June.

Showing an established yet growing field, the survey found that 43.2 percent had 11 years experience of more, and 36.5 percent with five years' experience or less. One in five (20.3 percent) have 6-10 years experience.

Staying true to the latter half of their names, more than nine of 10 (92.2 percent) paraoptometrics are employed by doctors of optometry. Most paraoptometrics (55.5 percent) worked for eye doctors who were sole proprietors, while approximately one in five (19.4 percent) worked for eye doctors in group practices. The balance worked in corporate or other practice settings.



Most paraoptometrics are engaged in a wide range of professional and related activities.

Clinical procedures and pre-testing activities are voted as the most important activities of paraoptometrics, with help in frame selection and dispensing tasks taking second place.

Small percentages listed vision therapy (5.8 percent) and laser vision counseling (4.0 percent) as their first primary task. More than one in three (37.5 percent) are involved in purchasing decisions for frames and contacts.

Paraoptometrics receive their training from various sources. Most receive training on the job (54.7 percent), though the Paraoptometric Section's Self-Study Course and formal technician and assistant programs account for a significant amount of professional training as well (29.8 percent).

The balance received training from formal technician or assistant programs or other sources.

Most employers (91.1 percent) are strong supporters of continuing education programs for their paraoptometric employees. Nearly nine in 10 pay some or all the costs of sending paraoptometrics to CE seminars.

Some 54 percent of the employers of responding paraoptometrics paid all expenses, including registration, travel, and related costs of education.

Nearly 80 percent of employers encouraged participation in local, state, or national paraoptometric associations, while more than 75 percent of employers helped finance participation in such organizations.

Nearly one in five (18.8 percent) have attended Congress, while almost two-thirds (61.9 percent) have attended a regional or local meeting.

Most paraoptometrics (78.4 percent) worked an average of 25-40 hours each week. But, one of every six (17.4 percent) worked 41 or more hours each week.

Most paraoptometrics worked in small communities—for example, the largest proportion of respondents (37.4 percent) worked in communities of 25,000 or less. Only 9 percent worked in rural or suburban communities of 500,000 people or more.

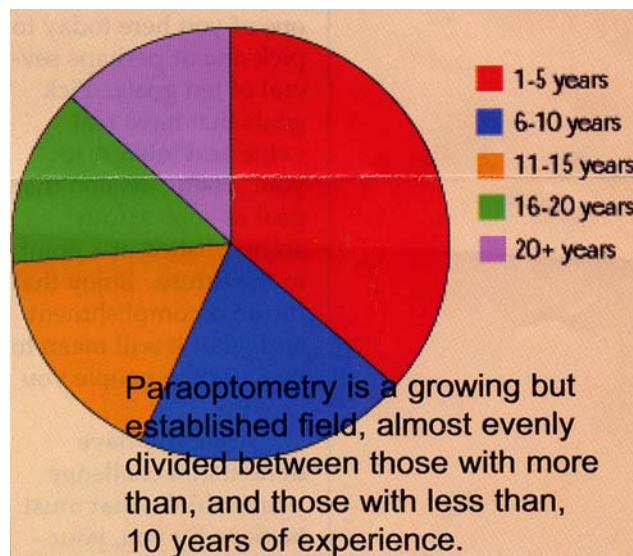
Because of their diverse working circumstances, annual paraoptometric salaries ranged from less than \$12,000 (7.6 percent) to more than \$30,000 (13.2 percent). More than half (53.8 percent) of those surveyed reported annual salaries greater than \$20,000.

Health benefit coverage was offered to two thirds (67.8 percent) of those surveyed.

Of those with health coverage, employers paid the entire premium 28.6 percent of the time. 60 percent of the employers of the paraoptometrics with health benefits contributed at least some portion of the costs of those benefits.

In addition to health insurance, other fringe benefits offered paraoptometric personnel included: retirement programs (41.5 percent), life insurance (15.7 percent), dental coverage (11.6 percent), pre-tax flex plans (11.2 percent), and disability insurance (10.4 percent).

Most paraoptometrics were also entitled to a wide range of paid compensation days, typically for holidays and vacations, sick leave, personal leave days, etc. About 78 percent of surveyed paraoptometrics received kinds of a cash bonus and/or incentive payments during the preceding 12 months.



Half of those surveyed (50.2 percent) reported that they were very satisfied with their present position, while more than 93 percent reported that they were at least somewhat satisfied with their positions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, increased compensation was the most important factor to increase job satisfaction among those surveyed.