

Psychology, Work and..., Health? Yes, We Can

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The working world is a complex phenomenon in a state of continuous change. As a result of the socioeconomic changes that have taken place in recent decades, the profile of critical incidents, occupational diseases, injuries, and job accidents has changed. In the new organizational settings, psychosocial risks and their consequences have come to play a prominent role because they are increasingly involved in job absenteeism and health disorders related to the job activity [1]. Based on the literature, we can conclude that psychosocial risks at work, job stress, and their consequences -including mental health problems, depression, cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal disorders, diabetes, and others- are a very important financial burden to companies and governments, with high social costs [2].

The EU Labour Force Survey developed between 1999 and 2007 concluded that nearly 28% of participants, approximately 55.6 million European workers, think their mental well-being has been affected by exposure to psychosocial risks [3]. In Spain, the direct health costs of mental and behavioural disorders attributable to the job activity was estimated at between 150€ and 372€ million in 2010, and the number of days of sick leave caused by temporary mental illness related to workplace conditions was equivalent to a cost of 170.96€ million [4]. Some authors have concluded that job stress and its consequences (e.g. job burnout) can be considered a public health matter [5,6].

Psychosocial risks at work and job stress

The psychosocial factors are work conditions related to the work organization, job contents, design and content of tasks, and work environment that influence job performance and may affect workers' health. Frequently, the expression organizational factors is used interchangeably with psychosocial factors to refer to working conditions that may lead to stress [7].

However, psychosocial factors can positively or negatively affect the development of job performance and individuals' quality of working life. When the influence is negative, the consequences are harmful to performance and health, and associated with safety problems and the development of stress at work. In these situations, psychosocial factors are considered psychosocial risks at work -i.e., working conditions that lead to stress. Many studies have concluded that psychosocial risks at work are working conditions that may deteriorate workers' mental and physical health while they perform their work and even outside of the work shift [8]. At present, psychosocial risks at work are one of the main causes of occupational accidents and diseases [9].

Occupational Health Psychology

Psychology has not been immune to the global changes in occupational health matters in recent decades, or to the resulting problems affecting individuals, groups, and labour organizations.

The academic discipline or branch of knowledge dedicated to research on job stress, psychosocial risks at work, and the quality of working life is Occupational Health Psychology (OHP). The term "Occupational Health Psychology" was coined by Jonathan Raymond and

colleagues in 1990 [10]. It is a special area of focus in the science and practice of psychology, related to health psychology. The purpose of OHP is *"healthy workplaces, defined as ones in which people may produce, serve, grow, and be valued. Specifically, healthy workplaces are ones in which people use their talents and gifts to achieve high performance, high satisfaction, and well-being"* [11].

According to Cox, Baldursson and Rial-González [12], the roots of OHP lie between psychology and health psychology. OHP is the health psychology of work. It is the contribution of applied psychology to occupational health, especially in work and organizational psychology, health psychology, and social and environmental psychology. As a result, the organizational, social, and psychological aspects of occupational health are the questions that mainly interest occupational health psychologists. Occupational health psychologists consider their professional field differently from a medically-oriented approach.

OHP aims to develop people's health and, at the same time, design healthy environments, as these two fronts are inseparable. According to Quick [13], there are three intervention levels:

1. The first level is intervention on the organization and work environment, paying particular attention to organizational demands, occupational risks, and both direct and indirect costs of health problems (e.g. organizational design, flexible working time arrangements, or participative leadership).
2. The second level is related to psychology and individual behaviour. It pays special attention to behavioural, medical, and psychological health problems (e.g. workaholism and coping strategies).
3. The third level focuses on the work-family interface (e.g. work-family balance, work-family conflict, and work-family enrichment). Encouraging the balance between work and non-work life facilitates entry into the labour market and enables workers to remain at their jobs.

Perspectives for the future

Future research on psychosocial factors at work and job stress should take into consideration external factors that have an effect on the organization of work, and internal factors linked to developments in the nature of scientific inquiry [14,15]. External factors are: economic developments (e.g. globalisation of the economy), economic policies (e.g. deregulation), legislation (e.g. occupational safety and health legislation), technological innovation (e.g. information and communication technology), social changes (e.g. increased cultural diversity), and demographic changes (e.g. aging population) [16].

These changes influence labour organizations because they have to restructure and modify the organizational design and psychological climate, taking into consideration the relationships between work and family and traditional forms of recruitment. In addition, organizations will also change the design of jobs and tasks, interpersonal relationships, occupational roles, and career designs [17]. Internal factors include: fundamental explanatory research, descriptive research that presents facts, the development of instruments for organizational application, intervention research, and organizational change research [14,16].

Taking the changes into consideration, researchers must rethink the approaches to studying job stress by reviewing the traditional models and looking for new approaches and methods. It seems appropriate to include sociodemographic variables, such as gender or age, and carry out methodological changes by including multilevel analysis, longitudinal studies, and research designs with an applied perspective.

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