The associations among psychosocial working conditions and change in common mental disorders: a follow up study

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Background

Common mental disorders (CMD) are prevalent in working populations. Previous studies have found associations between psychosocial working conditions and CMD. However, longitudinal studies including simultaneously several psychosocial working conditions are lacking. The aim was to examine the associations of several psychosocial working conditions with worsening and improving mental health, as indicated by common mental disorders (CMD) among ageing employees over a 5–6 year follow-up considering for covariates.

Methods

The Helsinki Health Study baseline survey data in 2001–2002 (N = 5819) and follow-up survey data in 2007 (N = 4805, response rate 73 %) among 40-60-year-old employees of the City of Helsinki were used. CMD were measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). Psychosocial working conditions included job strain, organizational justice, work-family interface, social support and workplace bullying. Socio-demographic and other confounding factors were included as covariates. Logistic regression analysis was used to examine the associations among psychosocial working conditions and CMD. However, long-term disadvantage e.g. poor economic situation have not been studied. Family conditions have a long term effect on poor adult mental health, and economic situation in mid-adulthood and whether family conditions in adolescence to mental health and economic situation in mid-adulthood via heavy alcohol use were statistically significant. Also marital status was statistically significant.

Results

All psychosocial working conditions except social support were associated with worsening CMD when adjusted for age and gender only. In contrast, only job strain, family-to-work conflicts, social support and workplace bullying were associated with improving CMD. Adjusting for socio-demographic and other confounding factors had weak effects on the associations, and adjusting for psychosocial working conditions had stronger effects on the associations. When adjusted for all covariates, family-to-work (OR 1.41, 95% CI 1.04-1.91) and work-to-family conflicts (OR 1.99, 95% CI 1.42-2.78) and...
workplace bullying (OR 1.40, 95% CI 1.09-1.79) were associated with worsening CMD, and family-to-work conflicts (OR 1.65, 95% CI 1.66-2.34) and social support (OR 1.47, 95% CI 1.07-2.00) with improving CMD.

Conclusions
Adverse psychosocial working conditions contribute to employees’ mental health. Preventing workplace bullying, promoting social support and teaching coping with work-to-family and family-work conflicts could help employees maintain their mental health and stay longer in work life.

Key message
- Teaching employees’ to cope with family-work conflicts, promoting social support and reducing workplace bulling would help to promote employee mental health and contribute to longer work careers.