In his keynote address at this year’s Academy conference in Rome, Cary Cooper talked about organizational interventions. One of the central points of his address was that “We have enough science on what causes people to get ill in the workplace ... We know the problems, what we now have to do is get the solutions”. He argued that whereas we can predict fairly precisely which aspects of a job will have adverse (or positive) consequences for worker health and well-being, prediction is only a first step towards effective promotion of health and well-being at work. Unfortunately, whereas new interventions are continually being designed and published, their appeal and success does not seem to be on a par with the societal need for practically useful and effective interventions. We do not need “more of the same”; rather, we should examine how the success of existing organizational-level interventions can be enhanced as well as focus on truly innovative approaches to improving worker health and well-being.

At the time when Professor Cooper held his address, the editorial team of Work & Stress, extended with Guest Editor Karina Nielsen from the National Research Centre for the Work Environment in Copenhagen, Denmark, was already working on a special issue of Work & Stress on intervention research. This issue, which has now been published, brings together five papers that go beyond traditional intervention research and which we hope readers will find inspiring. Two of these papers address methodological challenges regarding the design, implementation and evaluation of organisation-level interventions. In the introductory paper to this special edition, The future of organizational interventions: Addressing the challenges of today’s organizations, Karina Nielsen, Toon Taris and Tom Cox focus on issues that researchers must keep in mind if they want to increase and...
evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention. In a second paper, Conducting organizational-level occupational health interventions: What works?, Karina Nielsen, Raymond Randall and colleagues discuss the planning, implementation and evaluation of organizational-level occupational health interventions. Together, these two papers show that a structured approach to designing, implementing and evaluating interventions is most likely to have an impact on the target variables.

Two other contributions present overviews of research on interventions that target risk factors that are not traditionally studied in intervention research. In their paper Leadership development as an intervention in occupational health psychology, Kevin Kelloway and Julian Barling propose that leadership development is a viable intervention in OHP. In the second overview paper, Organisational interventions for balancing work and home demands: An overview, Paula Brough and Michael O’Driscoll focus on the work-family interface. These two papers have in common that they convincingly show that the key concepts (i.e., leadership and work-family balance) profoundly affect worker health and well-being and that they can be addressed successfully – even if doing so is not always easy.

The final paper, Policy-level interventions and work-related psychosocial risk management in the European Union by Stavroula Leka, Aditya Jain, Gerard Zwetsloot and Tom Cox, discusses the context in which organizational interventions are conducted. Drawing on the findings of the PRIMA-EF project, a policy oriented-research programme, they review the regulations and policies in the European Union that are relevant for intervention research.

Together, these five papers present a broad overview of both challenging and promising issues in the area of organizational intervention research. “Challenging”, in that these papers should be considered starting points for future research rather than providing conclusive answers to research questions, and “promising” in that the approaches discussed in this special issue hold considerable potential to substantially improve the health and well-being of employees. There are still many uncharted areas in intervention research, but it is likely that further research will bring us closer to our goal of improving employee health and well-being.

Toon Taris, Scientific Editor of Work & Stress

- The papers in this edition of Work & Stress, which are listed below, can be accessed from the Work & Stress web site: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713697904~db=all

Papers in special edition of Work & Stress on interventions, volume 24 part 3, 2010:

- E. Kevin Kelloway and Julian Barling. Leadership Development as an Intervention in Occupational Health Psychology. 260-279.

Work & Stress 2010 part 4

Work & Stress Volume 24 part 4 (2010) will contain the following papers:

- Multilevel relationships between organizational-level incivility, justice and intention to stay, by Barbara Griffin, Australia
- Crossover of distress due to work and family demands in dual earner couples: A Dyadic Analysis, by Lieke ten Brummelhuis, The Netherlands, Jarrod Haar, New Zealand and Tanja van der Lippe, The Netherlands
- Work-family conflict and crossover in volunteer emergency service workers, by Sean Cowlishaw, Lynette Evans and Jim McLennan, Australia
Welcome to the Winter 2010 issue of the Academy newsletter. This edition includes an interview from an Australian colleague, Bill Pappas, a research article from a team led by Nicky Payne at the University of Bedfordshire, and a section on new books. However we begin with news of a recently published special issue of Work and Stress on the important subject of organizational interventions.

In our regular interview feature we hear from one of our Australian colleagues. Bill Pappas, who is the psychologist with an Australian State Occupational Health and Safety Regulator, writes of his route into OHP both as a practitioner and as an academic, which provides Bill with a unique perspective. Particularly interesting are Bill’s thoughts on those who work with organisations, for example, the need to be aware of the politics of the organisation. These insights are helpful to those working as practitioners, but also those of us who conduct research with organisations.

Nicky Payne and colleagues report a qualitative study exploring the effects of work on health behaviours (including smoking and exercise) from an employee perspective. Such studies are important as they allow for ‘bottom up’ analysis of how organisations may facilitate health behaviours, such as providing gym membership, or disrupt them; for example, long working hours may have an impact on healthy eating. The article identifies implications for employers, including careful consideration of working hours. We are always keen to hear from researchers and practitioners who have new work to report – please see the call for submissions on page 16.

We are also very pleased to launch a new book review section. The Book Reviews Editor, Gail Kinman, has provided a list of books that are available for review and will be glad to hear from those interested in reviewing those or other recently published books.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of the newsletter. I wish to thank our contributors and also the editorial team for their invaluable assistance in putting this edition together. If you would like to contribute news of your research, your practice, publications or any other relevant developments please see the Call for Submissions on the final page of this Newsletter.

If you would like to contribute news of your research, your practice, publications or any other relevant developments please see the Call for Submissions.

Kate Sang, Editor on behalf of the Editorial Team.

email: k.sang@uea.ac.uk
**Interview**

Bill Pappas is the organisational psychologist with an Australian State Occupational Health and Safety Regulator, and is also founding convener of the Australian Psychological Society’s Interest Group for Occupational Health Psychology. Here he explains his route into Occupational Health Psychology, describes the Australian context of OHP, and outlines some of his views on the field.

**Bill Pappas**

**How did you become interested in Occupational Health Psychology?**

When I first began working at age 15, I initially completed a printing apprenticeship before returning to evening school and then university. I started working on a law degree but was distracted by a unit I took in psychology (which I found much more interesting), so I re-enrolled in a psychology degree. After completing my post-graduate qualifications in psychology, I began work as a lecturer at the Hawthorn Institute of Education at The University of Melbourne as a lecturer, where I was fortunate enough to be supervised by a Geoffrey Drummond, a very experienced organisational psychologist, and Patricia Strong, a clinical psychologist. We offered a post-graduate programme for managers and administrators, and one of the more popular units was a stress management programme, based on Karasek’s Demand-Control model. In addition to lecturing we provided consulting services to schools, colleges and university departments that were in the process of restructures. This was back in the mid 1980s and people were unaccustomed to significant workplace restructures in Australia at that time.

Through these restructure processes we found ourselves dealing with a lot of stress in the workplace. We did our best to work through the problems and issues of change-related stress, with the skills and knowledge we had at that time. It was going to be another decade, the 1990s, before significant job losses became a feature of restructures, and workplace stress was recognised as a significant problem. I remember reading some of Cary Cooper’s early literature to pick up ideas and strategies that I could use.

This period was followed by 10 years operating my own consultancy employing eight staff on organisational change programs. Concurrent with this, I began lecturing in organisational behaviour and organisational development in a masters program in the evening, and as most of you will know, one of the best ways to learn a subject is to teach it. Then there was four years as a Staff Development Manager for the Department of Justice (prisons, courts, emergency services, consumer affairs, etc.) and two years working for a union on behalf of members who were going through organisational changes, restructures and downsizing.

For the past two-and-a-half years I have been employed as an Organisational Psychologist by one of the Australian State Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Regulators.

I guess we all have had a different journey to the field of occupational health psychology and mine, no doubt like that of many others, was a long and winding road (to quote the Beatles) rather than a direct route. But all through this journey, occupational health and safety was always an important part of what I was doing.

**The Australian context of OHP**

Australia is a country with roughly the land mass of the contiguous USA, but with a population of around 22.5 million (or 14% of the USA population), most of which is clustered into the 7 major capital cities. Outside of Antarctica, it is the world’s most sparsely populated continent. Initially Australia comprised a number of separate colonies (later States) and territories. The Commonwealth of Australia was
formed in 1901; however the States have tended to maintain their relative independence with (dare I say) a certain degree of suspicion and competition between them. OH&S has remained largely the responsibility of these separate States, and they have been guided in shaping their separate laws by UK legislation. In this way, most OH&S law and enforcement is largely controlled by the State Governments, with the Federal Government having some minor input.

I mention this because the process of harmonising the various State and Territory laws under a single law is currently in progress, and scheduled to take effect in January 2012. Under a voluntary, Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreement the new OH&S legislation will replace 10 separate OH&S State Laws across Australia, and more than 400 separate OH&S regulations and codes of practice. However this process has not been without its difficulties, and at the present time one State (Western Australia) has indicated that it will not join the others, and a second State (New South Wales) is threatening to withdraw.

So this is the regulatory environment across OH&S in Australia. It is somewhat problematic and complex (particularly for multi-national enterprises), and something that the Federal Government is desperately trying to change through the harmonisation of laws into this single piece of legislation.

As an interesting aside, Australia was in the fortunate position of not being exposed to the global financial crisis in the way that it impacted on populations in Europe and North America. Being positioned in the Asia-Pacific region, and as a major supplier to markets in Asia, the Australian economy continued to grow over the past few years, so the workplace issues resulting from the global crisis is something we hear about, but have comparatively little experience of. However, during this period, workplace psychosocial injuries (in the form of claims against the OH&S insurance schemes), and mental health issues have continued to grow in number.

When it comes to the state of research and practice, I believe we are fortunate in having more than our fair share of world-class researchers and practitioners in the Occupational Health Psychology field. Most readers will be familiar with the work of Australians from their contribution to the OHP journals and textbooks. I’m sure many of you would recognise their names and may even have worked with them; however, I’m not going to name them because in doing so I am sure I will overlook others who should rightly belong in any list I could provide. So I acknowledge them and their work.

**What advice would you give those early in their careers?**

I currently supervise a Doctoral candidate named Kathryn Page. Some readers may remember Kathryn as the André Büssing Memorial Prize winner at the Rome EAHOHP Conference earlier this year [see June Newsletter, pages 5–6.] As well as supervising Kathryn’s projects within the workplace, I also discuss my views of my ‘piece’ of the OHP world, some of which I will relate below.

A point I have made with Kathryn is that in my role you need to understand the political environment in which I work. Being able to influence key stakeholders and sell your ideas is critical to success. It’s obviously essential that you are competent in your work, and believe in what you are doing, but sooner or later you need to get others to believe in it as well. Otherwise it’s probably not going to progress very far. Working within the ‘political agenda’ (for want of a better term) is something I emphasise, and it’s something we probably don’t get exposed to during our studies. As part of this process, I always saw networking as a critical skill and practice, but my two years experience with the unions certainly sharpened my awareness of the importance of this skill. So, a piece of advice I would offer would be to develop an understanding of influencing strategies, how and when to use them, and also the importance of building and maintaining your networks of support.

I also believe you have to be willing to change and adapt. We older psychologists were brought up in a time when the rate of change was much slower and with some degree of certainty we believed that things would remain relatively stable over our careers. Nowadays we really are on a lifelong journey of learning. From this perspective we live in much more exciting times. For this reason I try to remain future focused and look for new opportunities. Kathryn has been a great asset in providing the energy and the enthusiasm for presenting new ideas and seeing new opportunities. So I would like to think we have both learned a lot from each other.

I would also recommend looking for as many different types of opportunity as you can find. Work with other psychologists and professionals outside your area of interest or expertise. They often have interesting ways of looking at the world and doing things that can provide different, but effective, answers. I recently sat through a one-day workshop on aviation
Psychology, and walked out with a head full of ideas that I could possibly use. While I doubt that I will ever work in the field of aviation psychology, some fantastic ideas were presented from their perspective that I could adapt.

**Where do you see OHP going in the future?**

The immediate future for me is to develop nationally the Australian Psychological Society (APS) Occupational Health Psychology Interest Group. This is something I began around 18 months ago to try to bring together practitioners and researchers across Australia. As a member of both the EAOHP and the [American] Society for Occupational Health Psychology I was a little envious of the way in which both those groups have been able to organise, inform and represent psychologists and others working in this field of OHP.

In Australia we are working from a smaller membership base, spread across a large continent. This can create a sense of fragmentation and isolation through what has been called ‘the tyranny of distance.’ It also means we haven’t been able to present as a united voice to decision-makers and funding agencies as well as our European and North American colleagues. Hopefully this can be rectified to some extent by the establishment of an OHP Interest Group within the APS (which is the major professional organisation).

Two recently published books, Stavroula Leka and Jonathan Houdmont’s, *Occupational Health Psychology* (2010), and James Quick and Lois Tetrick’s 2nd edition of the *Handbook of Occupational Health Psychology* (2010), confirmed the importance of psychology’s contribution to the understanding and practice of OH&S and helped keep my enthusiasm for the field when things were starting to get difficult in organising an Australian OHP group.

The promotion of wellbeing and positive psychology have seen significant developments in Australia (no doubt in parallel with overseas movements towards community health) and most Australian State regulators have established units to promote this new direction of psychological health promotion and prevention. My concern here is that the public health professionals are taking ownership of this space, with psychologists coming in late. I believe this is an area where we could be having greater input. It also potentially represents an area that will be heavily funded by Government in the future.

I noted recently that NIOSH used the term Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing, acknowledging a broadening of the field beyond health. When first proposing an interest group for OHP in Australia, I realised it would make more sense to those psychologists and decision makers outside the field of OHP if I included ‘safety and wellbeing’ in the description and terms of reference of the group, if not in the title. Other groups had already laid claim to the words ‘health psychology’ and the term ‘occupational health’ created some confusion for those unfamiliar with OHP. I also see this as not just a broadening of the title, but as a way of establishing a presence in, and identification with, some of the new directions the occupational health movement is taking. In Australia, as elsewhere, psychological harm prevention, wellbeing and resilience seem to be converging, and there seems to be a space that the psychologists in Australia are not filling as effectively as they could.

Having spent part of this year working with ergonomists, and looking at workplace injury claims data, there is a need to determine the links between musculoskeletal disorders and stress in a way that can be used by the OH&S regulators. In the insurance business a clear distinction is still made between mind body, which is very obvious when I go through the injury claims data. There have been some efforts to change this way of thinking, but the mutual relationship between mind and body still hasn’t been accepted the way it should be, and determining the interaction between physical injuries and stress is probably long overdue.

I would conclude with the perennial observation that from a regulator’s point of view, there is need to bring the work of the researchers and practitioners closer together. Naturally, most of our best researchers are also skilled in designing and implementing intervention programs, but there still remains the challenge of getting the theory into practice.

**Contact:** bill_pappas@worksafe.vic.gov.au

**Bill Pappas** works for a State Government Occupational Health and Safety regulator with the focus on psychosocial injury prevention. He has been registered as an Organisational Psychologist for the past 25 years, and across this time has been drawn closer to OPH as his field of preferred practice. Recently Bill established the first Occupational Health Psychology interest group in Australia, and he is currently working at building this group.
**Next EAOHP conference:**

![Zürich 2012](image)

The European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology in collaboration with the Division of Public and Organizational Health (POH) of the University of Zurich and the ETH Zurich would like to invite you to the 'Cultural Capital of Switzerland', Zurich, to attend the 10th conference of the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology. The event will take place 11 -13 April, 2012, at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology - ETH Zurich

In our complex, fast changing service and knowledge society, health is strongly influenced by the continuously changing interaction between organizations and their employees. Occupational health psychology aims to improve this interaction and thus can simultaneously contribute to individual, organizational and public health. The conference will address how to balance interventions and outcomes on these levels and thus how to increase equal health opportunities in our society.

**Keynote speakers.** The programme will include a distinguished line-up of keynote speakers. Those confirmed so far include Wilmar Schaufeli, University of Utrecht, and Georg Bauer, ETH Zurich/University of Zurich, Switzerland

**Call for papers opens: 18 April 2011**

[http://eaohp.org/conference.aspx](http://eaohp.org/conference.aspx)

Georg Bauer, Conference Chair

Tom Cox, President, EAOHP

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Division Public & Organizational Health
Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Zurich and Center for Organisational and Occupational Sciences, ETH Zurich
Recently published books

The Newsletter is introducing a book reviews section. Newsletter readers (whether or not they are Academy members) are invited to contribute reviews of the following books or of other recently published texts relating to research, practice and education in occupational health psychology and related fields.

In the short descriptions below we have in most cases provided the publishers’ recommended prices, but you may find that prices are lower from other sources.

Books received

**Handbook of Employee Engagement, Perspectives, Issues, Research and Practice**


This book contains contributions from a wide range of scholars and consultants on state-of-the-art topics key to the science and practice of employee engagement. They include?? It presents perspectives to help researchers and practitioners identify, evaluate and apply the key theories, measures and interventions associated with employee engagement. The Handbook will serve as a platform for research and practice on employee engagement. Combining a balance of academic perspectives and practical applications, the Handbook is intended to serve as a platform for research and practice on employee engagement.

**The Individual in the Changing Working Life**


Working life has been the subject of great change in recent years, with increased opportunities and autonomy for individuals. However these benefits can coincide with greater demands and responsibilities, increasing the pressure to work outside traditional working hours and so creating conflict between work and family life. With some 40 contributors, this book contributes towards our understanding of contemporary working life, considering how recent changes have affected the work climates, attitudes and well-being of individuals. Combining traditional theoretical frameworks with innovative research, it discusses both the positive and negative effects of contemporary working life on organizations and employees. International experts in the field of work and organizational psychology present strategies to prevent negative working conditions and help individuals achieve a healthy work–life balance.

**Insidious Workplace Behaviour**


Insidious Workplace Behaviour (IWB) refers to low-level, pervasive acts of deviance directed at individual or organizational targets. Because of its inherently stealthy nature, scientists have paid little attention to IWB, so we know very little about it. The present volume – the first to showcase this topic – presents articles by researchers who share the most current thinking about IWB. Contributors [who include??] examine, for example, the many forms that IWB takes, focusing on its antecedents, consequences, and moderators. They also highlight ways in which leaders can manage and constrain IWB so as to attenuate its adverse effects. Contributors also discuss the special problems associated with researching IWB and strategies for overcoming them.

**Coping with Work Stress: A review and critique**


This book highlights current research relating to the coping strategies of individuals and organizations, and provides best practice techniques for dealing with the growing epidemic of stress and lack of overall well–being at work. The book reviews and critiques the most current research focusing on workplace stress and
provides “best practice” techniques for dealing with stress in the workplace. Its scope extends beyond stress to cover broader issues of well-being at work.

**Tackling Depression at Work: A Practical Guide for Employees and Managers**


**Managing Trauma in the Workplace: Supporting Workers and Organisations**

By Noreen Tehrani. Routledge 2010. Pp 352. ISBN: 978–0–415–55893–8. Paperback £19.99 This book looks at the impact of trauma not only from the perspective of both the employees and their organisations. In addition to describing negative outcomes from traumatic exposure it offers solutions that will build a more resilient workforce and also lead to individual and organisational growth and development. Contributions are from international experts working in a variety of professions including teaching, the military, social work and human resources. The book is in four parts, which explore the nature of organisational trauma; traumatized organisation and business continuity; organisational interventions; building resilience and growth.

**Managerial Ethics: Managing the Psychology of Morality**


**Happiness at work: Maximising your Psychological Capital for Success**

By Jessica Pryce-Jones. Wiley-Blackwell 2010. Pp 254. ISBN: 978-0-470-74946-3. Paperback £12.99 This book looks at happiness and unhappiness from a fresh perspective. It draws on up-to-date research from around the world to present the causes and consequences of low job satisfaction and gives helpful suggestions and strategies for how to get more enjoyment from work. Practical suggestions cover how to improve a job without moving out of it, advice about changing jobs, and how to alter typical styles of thinking which affect your attitudes. The subject is distinctive in combining two areas that are usually looked at separately – self-help approaches to making yourself happy and issues within organizations that affect well-being.

**Dyslexia in the Workplace (2nd Edition)**

By Diana Bartlett and Sylvia Moody. Wiley-Blackwell 2010 Pp 328. ISBN: 978-0-470-68375-0 Hardback £60. ISBN: 978-0-470-68374-3. Paperback £27.99. Dyslexia in the Workplace is written both for dyslexic adults and for the professionals concerned with helping them, including psychologists, therapists, researchers, disability advisors and welfare officers. It also offers advice to employers on how to help dyslexic staff. The book covers the nature of dyslexic difficulties and their effects, both practical and emotional. Dyspraxic difficulties are also discussed. Assessment tests are described and reviewed and recent research is summarised. Detailed advice is given on tackling the difficulties; topics covered include work organisation and effective work methods, reading and writing for work purposes, oral presentation and interaction, and dealing with the emotions associated with dyslexia. Guidance is also given on the disability legislation.

**Books for review and reviewing for the Newsletter**

If you would like to review one of the above books we would be pleased to hear from you. You do not need to be an Academy member to provide a review. We would also be glad to consider suggestions of other recently published books for review.

To authors and publishers: we would be glad to hear about newly published books and books in preparation.

In all cases please contact the Book Reviews Editor, Gail Kinman, at gail.kinman@beds.ac.uk.
Work, Stress, and Health 2011
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For additional information, please contact: Wesley Baker, Conference Coordinator, American Psychological Association, Public Interest Directorate, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242, 202-336-6033 (phone), 202-336-6117 (fax), WSHConference@apa.org (email)
Bob Sinclair goes to Rome!

When in Rome...Go to an OHP Conference, said Bob Sinclair, Past President of the Society for Occupational Health Psychology, reporting on his visit to the Academy’s Rome conference. Writing in the latest SOHP newsletter, Bob said "With so much interesting research, many wonderful people, and a truly impressive venue, what could I say that would truly capture how I felt about attending this conference? After much reflection, I decided that the best thing I could say about it was this: They served wine on the conference breaks!"

He went on to say that he had been pleased to have the opportunity to hear Cary Cooper give his keynote and meet “one of the most productive OHP scholars in the world”. During the conference Robert also participated in an invited meeting that focused on the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER), a large scale survey of European businesses from 31 countries. He felt that it was a very interesting discussion, and expects that that we will begin to see many interesting articles out of this research program in the years to come.

Robert was impressed that all those who attended the conference received a copy of Contemporary Occupational Health Psychology: Global Perspectives on Research and Practice, edited by Jonathan Houdmont and Stavroula Leka, published by Wiley-Blackwell on behalf of the European Academy and the SOHP. Robert has already found several of the chapters useful for his own research.

In his concluding comments Bob said that every time he attends an OHP conference he is reminded that we are in the midst of a renaissance for OHP, and that the quality and sophistication of OHP scholarship continue to grow. As the conference demonstrated, we have many reasons to be excited about the future.

Robert’s full article can be found on page 12 of the October 2010 issue of the SOHP newsletter: see http://sohp.psy.uconn.edu/

The conference was also reported in the June edition of the Academy Newsletter: see http://eaohp.org/

Zürich conference news

The programme of the Academy’s next conference (see ad on page 7) will include a distinguished line-up of keynote speakers. Those confirmed so far will include Wilmar Schaufeli of Utrecht University, the Netherlands and Georg Bauer, ETH Zurich/University of Zurich, Switzerland.

Contribute to the Newsletter!

This is your newsletter! We do our best to cover what interests you, but we need your input.

We welcome contributions of all kinds – for instance, conference announcements, reports of symposia, accounts of work in progress, letters to the editor, and news of people and their research, including new professional appointments and contracts.

You don’t have to be an EAOHP member to contribute. We will publish any item that is of interest to Newsletter readers (who number some 1000 individuals worldwide). If English is not your native language then we will help you prepare your item.

If you have a contribution for the newsletter then just send it to a member of the Newsletter team or, if you are undecided, contact Kate or Mary first to discuss whether it is suitable.

The next newsletter for this year will be distributed in October/November.

To contact Kate Sang or Mary Tisserand see back page of this Newsletter.
Research shows that work can have a negative impact on health behaviours such as exercise, eating, smoking and alcohol consumption. Most of this research is quantitative, focusing on a narrow range of work factors related to work stress, including high job demands and low job control, long work hours, hassles and negative affect (e.g. Jones et al., 2007; Lallukka et al., 2004; Payne et al., 2005). Some qualitative research has shown that other factors such as lack of time, convenient facilities and job flexibility and cultural norms are barriers to exercise (e.g. Fletcher et al., 2008; Tavares & Plotnikoff, 2008). However, this research has only examined single health behaviour in isolation. Thus, we conducted a research study using qualitative methods to examine employees' perceptions and experiences of the disruptive and/or facilitative impact of work on four health behaviours: smoking, alcohol consumption, healthy eating, and exercise. This approach should provide a more complete picture of the range of work factors that are implicated, allowing for an exploration of whether the impact of work is similar or different across health behaviours; this will be useful for theory building and to inform health promotion initiatives.

**Method**

Using a critical incident approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 UK employees of a large information technology company to examine the negative and positive impacts of work on each of the four health behaviours. Fourteen participants were men and the mean age was 35 years. The participants worked in a variety of roles e.g. administration, sales, computing and design consulting. Most of them had a high degree of autonomy and flexibility in terms of work hours and work environment (that is, working from either their place of employment, from home or from client sites).

**Findings**

Using thematic analysis, four themes were identified from the interview transcripts; the work environment, business events, being busy at work, and work stress. The themes ran across the four health behaviours, with a different emphasis and different patterns of subthemes for each one; for example, business events was not found to influence smoking, and being busy at work was not found to influence consumption of alcohol. Work primarily had a detrimental impact on the four health behaviours. However, within each theme, employees also identified ways in which work helped them to behave healthily.

Three subthemes were identified under the first theme, *the work environment*. The first subtheme was policy. The smoking ban in the UK that operates in all public places, including the workplace, generally helped employees to reduce smoking, and flexible working facilitated exercise. The second subtheme was convenience and temptation. While subsidised corporate membership of a nearby gym was considered to facilitate exercise by some employees, the lack of on-site facilities was criticised. Similarly, while some employees felt that the onsite canteen provided them with a proper meal each day, most felt that it provided convenient access to 'unhealthy' food and limited 'healthy' options, thus putting temptation of unhealthy food in people's way.

The third subtheme was cultural workplace norms. Eating, drinking and smoking were seen by some employees to be part of socialising with colleagues. However, this is not necessarily detrimental; for example if people are drinking within the daily recommended allowance for the UK (i.e. 3-4 alcohol units of alcohol for men and 2-3 for women), the social aspect of this could be beneficial.

Three subthemes were identified under the second theme, *business events* (which included lunches, dinners and travel). The first subtheme was routine. Travelling for business breaks the 'normal' routine, which is especially problematic for exercise. The
Second subtheme was convenience and temptation. Business events change the availability of facilities for healthy behaviour, such as exercise, and instead put the temptation of free food and drink in people's way. The third subtheme was cultural workplace norms. Eating and drinking are part of socialising at business events, although some employees reported deliberately not drinking at business lunches in order to 'keep a clear head'.

Under the third theme, being busy at work, two subthemes were identified. The first was time. For many employees, being busy at work and working long or unsociable hours resulted in a sense of having a lack of time to exercise, but many reported that this may be an excuse. Lack of time also led to employees feeling they did not have time to eat 'properly' at work and/or after work, although not being busy enough and being bored was also a problem for some employees. Additionally, some said that being busy at work controlled their eating and thus had a positive influence. Being busy also had a positive influence on smoking because smokers felt they did not have time to smoke. The second subtheme was tiredness. Many reported being too tired to exercise or to spend time preparing food, and that they would prefer to do something else outside work hours. However, many also felt that if they pushed themselves to exercise it would make them feel better.

Under the fourth theme, work stress, two subthemes were identified. The first was bad days. Respondents said that smoking, drinking and 'comfort' eating may be used to cope with 'bad' or 'stressful' days at work (although some ate less rather than more when under stress). However, a positive impact of work stress on health behaviour was reported; this was using exercise as an 'adaptive' response in coping with work stress (although some individuals exercised less when under stress). The second subtheme was good days, with some employees reporting more inclination to exercise or to have a drink after a good day at work.

Implications

The findings may have several implications for practice. Firstly, careful consideration of work scheduling is required, since both working long hours and being too busy, as well as being bored, may be detrimental to healthy behaviour. Secondly, secondary prevention of stress is also important. For example, since many participants believed that exercise would make them feel better, this could be part of advocated stress management training. Thirdly, providing a work environment that facilitates healthy behaviour is especially important. For example, employers could provide more convenient facilities for exercising (e.g., a work-site gym), coupled with allowing flexibility in working hours in order to use these facilities. Also, (especially for companies favouring innovative working practices) employers should provide easy access to healthy and tempting convenience foods on-site, both in and out of normal working hours. Finally, cultivating supportive cultural workplace norms that facilitate exercise and choosing healthy behaviours should be encouraged. However, it should be noted that if social drinking and eating are not in excess, they may be more beneficial than detrimental, especially psychologically.

Conclusions

While individual employees clearly have a responsibility for their own health behaviour, the findings of this study suggest that workplace interventions are needed that target both individual responses and organizational factors. They should be considered alongside policies relating to occupational stress, work life balance and flexible work initiatives.

References


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Nicola Payne is a Health Psychologist and Principal Lecturer at Middlesex University, London, where she is MSc Health Psychology Course Director. Her main research interests relate to work-life balance, especially the impact of work on individual and family health behaviours, how users of assisted reproductive technology manage work-life issues, and the work experience of people affected by cancer.
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