

Job Quality: The Impact of Work Organisation on Health

Michael Quinlan and Philip Bohle

Introduction

This chapter examines the relationship between a key element of job quality, namely work organisation and health. In particular, it focuses on how a form of work organisation, precarious work, can damage the health, safety and wellbeing of workers and the wider community. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first provides a short historical overview of research linking job quality to health. The second examines evidence regarding the health effects of precarious work and efforts to explain them. The third section examines the policy and research implications of this evidence and the broader debates they raise about job quality. The intention is not only to demonstrate that work organisation can lead to poorer health but also to illustrate the processes through which it does so and to examine the implications for interventions to improve job quality. The evidence presented demonstrates that programs to improve job quality are seriously constrained if they do not address key elements of work organisation.

Historical overview of work organisation and health

Arguably, one of the most profound effects of work is its impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of workers. There is extensive evidence that a key element of job quality, work organisation, significantly influences not only the health and wellbeing of workers themselves, but also that of their families and communities. 'Work organisation' is an umbrella term for various organisational and social factors ranging from those within the workplace (such as task design, payment systems and authority structures)

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demands on them and ensuring a greater degree of employment security and regulatory protection are critical steps towards meaningful improvements in job quality. It will be very difficult to achieve these changes in the present political climate because making job quality a central social policy objective conflicts with the dominant neo-liberal policy discourse – a set of policies and practices that encourage poor quality and unhealthy jobs. These policy settings need to be challenged. It is also essential that disciplinary silos be broken down to provide more integrated analysis of the determinants of job quality. In this regard the authors have argued for a stronger engagement between different fields and a clearer focus on job quality among scholars from many disciplines.

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