Occupational stress management programmes: a practical overview of published effect studies

Van der Hek H, Plomp H N

Authors' objectives
To assess the effectiveness of occupational stress programmes in the prevention and treatment of job stress.

Searching
PsycLIT, MEDLINE, and Social Planning/Policy and Developmental Abstracts were searched from 1987 to 1994 using the following keywords: 'occupational (or 'job' or 'work') stress' in combination with 'intervention' ('programme', 'program', 'therapy' or 'management'). Readers are referred to an earlier review on stress management programmes for pre-1987 studies (see Other Publications of Related Interest).

Study selection

Study designs of evaluations included in the review
The authors do not specify the study designs included (some studies had control groups and some did not).

Specific interventions included in the review
Interventions aimed at the individual included relaxation, meditation, biofeedback, cognitive coping strategies and counselling, and Employee Assistance Programmes.

Interventions aimed at the individual-organisational interface focused on relationships at work, person-environment fit, role issues, workers-participation and autonomy.

Interventions aimed at the organisation included the development of organisational structure, selection and placement, training, consideration of physical and environmental factors, job (re)structuring, health concerns and resources.

Participants included in the review
The participants included community health workers, health care professionals, white collar workers, post-office employees, hospital cleaners, safety officers, hi-tech personnel, highway maintenance workers and teachers.

Outcomes assessed in the review
The individual outcomes included mood states, psychosomatic complaints, subjective experienced stress, physiological parameters, sleep disturbances, life-satisfaction.


Organisational outcomes included productivity, turn-over, absenteeism, health insurance claim and recruitment.

How were decisions on the relevance of primary studies made?
The authors do not state how the papers were selected for the review, or how many of the authors performed the selection.

Assessment of study quality
The research design used in each study is documented, with particular reference to whether a control group was used and length of follow-up. The authors do not state how the papers were assessed for validity, or how many of the authors performed the validity assessment.
Data extraction
The authors do not state how the data were extracted for the review, or how many of the authors performed the data extraction.

Methods of synthesis
How were the studies combined?
The studies were combined by a narrative review with studies presented in tabular format.

How were differences between studies investigated?
The studies were discussed with respect to their target group(s), outcomes measured and type of intervention.

Results of the review
Twenty-four studies were included: 20 studies focused on the individual, 2 on the individual-organisational interface, and 2 on the organisation. The number of participants was not specified.

Most of the studies showed some kind of effect but no consistent overall picture emerged. Organisation-wide approaches seemed to have an effect on all levels of outcome, i.e. individual, individual-organisational interface and the organisation.

Authors' conclusions
It is impossible to determine which specific interventions are most effective and should be recommended. There is some evidence that organisation-wide approaches show the best results on individual, individual-organisational interface and organisational parameters; these comprehensive programmes have a strong impact on the entire organisation. Considerable heterogeneity of studies makes it difficult to compare studies and there is a need for better conceptualisation and theoretical reflection on stress-management programmes. There is also a need for research on the cost-effectiveness of stress-management interventions.

CRD commentary
There is limited information on the methods of this review. The amount of information given on each individual study varies: detailed information is presented on each stress-management programme but little is provided on the study design. The results given for each study are also difficult to interpret from the tables as no effect sizes or percentage changes are given.

Bibliographic details

PubMedID
9156467

Other publications of related interest

Indexing Status
Subject indexing assigned by NLM

MeSH
Adaptation, Psychological; Biofeedback, Psychology; Cognitive Therapy; Humans; Occupational Diseases /psychology;
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Record Status
This is a critical abstract of a systematic review that meets the criteria for inclusion on DARE. Each critical abstract contains a brief summary of the review methods, results and conclusions followed by a detailed critical assessment on the reliability of the review and the conclusions drawn.