

USING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS TO DETERMINE THE CAUSES OF DISTRESS AT WORK

With a clear and systematic data collection and analysis, qualitative research methods can create new or add a deeper understanding of theories and/or quantitative data.



STRAW-PROJECT
Research about STress At Work



DISTRESS AT WORK

Work-related stress affects wellbeing and health. It can cause anxiety, sleep deprivation, depression, and cardiovascular and gastrointestinal disorders.^{1,2}



The professional consequences include poor job performance, unsteady work relationships, and low work engagement.³

Intervention research focuses primarily on protective measures for the employees, instead of primary prevention strategies which aim to modify or eliminate stressors.^{4,5}

Qualitative research methods allow the identification of occupational stressors from the perspective of employees. Research in which key stakeholders are involved are found to yield the most favorable and feasible approaches for the settings.^{2,3,4,5}

Employees and management understand stress and burnout differently and can recommend diverse experiences, causes, and solutions for stress at work. Both should be considered to be included in the study.^{2,5}



CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

To explore the sources of stress, a phenomenological approach is best suited to retrieve the meaning employees give to their experience with stress at work.⁴

Interviews and focus groups are used to gather information and to share perspectives on the topic. To ensure consequent data collection an interview/focus group guide with key questions should be used, while still giving participants the opportunity to explore other themes.^{2,5}



ANALYZING RESULTS

A thematic data analysis, preferably linked with a theoretical framework, is considered to be the standard for a high quality interview or focus group analysis.¹ Using research triangulation to identify the codes and categories secures credibility of the study.²





RECURRING RESULTS

Overlapping themes from five different qualitative studies on contributing factors of occupational stress or burnout are:

- High job demands – Unbalanced workload^{1, 2, 4, 5}
- Poor social work environment – Unsteady work relationships^{1, 4, 5}
- Poor leadership and management^{3, 5}
- Poor job control^{1, 2}
- Job insecurity^{1, 3}

Four of the five articles also proposed solutions based on the employees perspective:

- Review workloads (increase staff numbers, decrease workshifts, ...) ^{1, 3}
- More support and feedback from superiors ^{2, 3, 4}
- Improve the communication within the organization ³
- Provide opportunities for personal connection with peers ⁴



GOOD PRACTICES

To maintain a high standard qualitative study, following guidelines are proposed:

- Analysis based on theoretical framework^{1, 2}
- Research triangulation^{1, 2, 3, 5}
- Ensure privacy and open discussions by separating participants from the same organization²



QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITHIN THE STRAW-PROJECT

A focus group study to better understand stress at work among office-based workers served as a preliminary study for the STRAW-Project. This factsheet was made with the intention of exploring qualitative studies with the same subject and research method. Elena Colman worked on the results analysis and paper development.



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