

Hoven H, Wahrendorf M, Goldberg M, Zins M, Siegrist J

Cumulative disadvantage during employment careers – The link between employment histories and stressful working conditions

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ABSTRACT

Accumulated evidence on health-adverse effects of stressful psychosocial and physical work environments is considered a major breakthrough in recent social epidemiological research. However, research on adverse health effects of repeated exposure over time is lacking. In this contribution we analyse associations of characteristics of adverse employment histories with stressful psychosocial and physical current working conditions. We use data from the French CONSTANCES study and restrict the sample to employed men and women aged 45–60 (n = 23652). Current working conditions are assessed by effort-reward imbalance as well as stressful physical working tasks and positions. Previous employment histories (between age 25 and 45) are retrospectively assessed and measured by indicators of precarious, discontinuous and disadvantaged working careers. We found consistent associations of precarious, discontinuous or disadvantaged careers with strenuous physical working conditions and with low occupational rewards. However, low effort rather than high effort was associated with adverse employment histories. Therefore, associations with the effort-reward ratio turned out to be inconsistent. By extending the scope of analysis beyond single time-point measures, we identified three types of adverse employment histories among employees between age 25 and 45 in a stress-theoretical framework, and we demonstrated their associations with employees' current adversity at work between the age of 45–60.

KEYWORDS: Employment history; Work stress; CONSTANCES; Physical working conditions; Psychosocial working conditions

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