



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

Umeå University Medical Dissertations, New Series No 2212

WORK-RELATED STRESS AMONG MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES IN RURAL NORTHERN SWEDEN

Sofia Asplund

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för
avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i
Triple Helix, Umeå universitet, fredagen den 25 februari 2022, kl. 14:00.
Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

Fakultetsopponent: Docent, Magnus Åkerström, Institutet för stressmedicin,
Västra Götalandsregionen & Göteborgs universitet

Department of Nursing

Organization

Umeå University
Department of Nursing

Document type

Doctoral thesis

Date of publication

18 November 2022

Author

Sofia Asplund

Title

Work-related stress among municipal employees in rural northern Sweden.

Abstract

Background Many rural municipalities in Sweden are facing challenges like depopulation, decreased economy, and difficulties in recruiting staff. Living and working in rural areas may involve adverse working conditions and higher risks of ill-health. The Swedish municipal sector employs almost 20% of employees in the labour market, where school, and the care of older people are the dominating areas. The municipal sector has the highest rate of long-term sick leave compared to other sectors in the labour market, mainly due to stress-related disorders such as exhaustion disorder (ED). Therefore, it is important to focus on organisational and psychosocial work environment, work-related stress, and health in the municipal sector of rural northern Sweden.

Aim The overall aim was to explore organisational and psychosocial work environments, work-related stress, and health among municipal employees in rural northern Sweden.

Methods Study I and II had a quantitative approach, a cross-sectional design, and used a questionnaire for collecting data. Participants were employees (n =1093) in the municipal sector in rural northern Sweden. The questionnaire contained instruments measuring the organisational and psychosocial work environment, perceived stress, self-rated exhaustion disorder (s-ED), and physical activity. Quantitative data were analysed using logistic regression (I), and partial least squares regression (II). Studies III and IV had a qualitative approach. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 15 employees with high self-reported stress (III), and with 15 managers (IV). Qualitative data were analysed using inductive qualitative content analysis.

Results The results showed that 21.5 % of the municipal employees reported s-ED. Cognitive problems, sleep problems, depressive symptoms, high stress, poor self-rated health, and stomach problems were the health-related factors most strongly associated with s-ED (I). There were significant differences between the s-ED and the non-s-ED group in all but one of the 32 organisational and psychosocial environmental work factors. Various demands—i.e., quantitative, and emotional, —and work conflicts were important factors associated with s-ED. Social support, resources, and time for work and reflection were important factors associated with non-s-ED (II). The employees with high self-reported stress experienced feelings of suffering when they worked in an organisation with high demands and low resources, control, and support. They also experienced negative effects on health and family life (III). The managers struggled inside slimmed-down organisations with a substitute shortage and reduced means, were burdened by conflicting demands, and experienced health and family life impairments. They expressed the importance of motivation, social support, and coping strategies (IV).

Conclusion This thesis illuminates adverse psychosocial working conditions among municipal employees in two municipalities in the rural context of northern Sweden. It also provides important insights of employee's experiences of work-related stress, and managers' situation in municipal organisations with shrinking resources. It seems important that various demands are balanced by sufficient resources; such as staff, social support, and economic resources in order to prevent work-related stress. Findings from this thesis can contribute to future interventions, aiming to prevent work-related stress and improve occupational well-being.

Keywords experiences, managers, municipal employees, occupational health, organisational and psychosocial work environment, rural area self-rated exhaustion disorder, work-related stress

Language

English

ISBN

print: 978-91-7855-936-7
PDF: 978-91-7855-937-4

ISSN

0346-6612

Number of pages

89 + 4 papers