

Author's Accepted Manuscript

Health and well-being at work: The key role of supervisor support

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www.elsevier.com/locate/ssmph

PII: S2352-8273(16)30179-3
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2017.04.002>
Reference: SSMPH157

To appear in: *SSM - Population Health*

Received date: 19 December 2016
Revised date: 6 April 2017
Accepted date: 6 April 2017

Cite this article as: Oliver Hämmig, Health and well-being at work: The key role of supervisor support, *SSM - Population Health*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2017.04.002>

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Abstract

This study aims to explore whether and in what way social support from different sources and domains makes an additional or different and independent contribution to various health and work-related outcomes. Cross-sectional data were used from an employee survey among the workforces of four service companies from different industries in Switzerland. The study sample covered 5,877 employees of working age. The lack of social support from a spouse, relatives, friends, direct supervisors, closest colleagues at work and other co-workers in case of problems at work and at home were assessed and studied individually and jointly as risk factors with respect to a total number of ten outcomes. Health-related outcomes covered poor self-rated health, musculoskeletal disorders, stress feelings and burnout symptoms. Work-related outcomes included feeling overwhelmed at work, difficulty with switching off after work, job dissatisfaction and intention to turnover. Social support from multiple sources in contrast to only individual sources in both life domains was found to be more frequent in women than in men and proved to be most protective and beneficial with regard to health and well-being at work. However, after mutual adjustment of all single sources of social support from both domains, a lack of supervisor support turned out to be the only or the strongest of the few remaining support measures and statistically significant risk factors for the studied outcomes throughout and by far. Being unable to count on the support of a direct supervisor in case of problems at work and even at home was shown to involve a substantially increased risk of poor health and work-related outcomes (aOR = up to 3.8). Multiple sources of social support, and particularly supervisor support, seem to be important resources

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