

Balance and meaning in the occupational patterns predict subjective health and work attendance among men and women in Sweden

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In occupational therapy and occupational science health is understood to be influenced by engagement in occupations. Engagement in occupations includes structural aspects such as balance and an experiential aspect i.e. occupational meaning. Balance includes both occupational balance i.e. balance between employment, domestic work, and leisure activities, and balance between the personal and contextual resources the individual is able to mobilize and the demands of their occupational patterns. Imbalance leads to stress, and stress is one of the major reasons to the increasing long-term sick leave in Sweden. There would be considerable gains for the individual, the workplace, and society if this could be reduced and health promoted.

Accordingly the objectives of this study were to analyse whether balance and meaning were predictors of subjective health and work attendance, and whether the predictors were the same for both genders. A random sample of 2286 women and 397 men in a working population in Sweden answered a postal survey twice with two years interval.

The results showed that good subjective health among the women was predicted by occupational meaning, occupational balance, and balance between resources and demands in their occupational patterns, even after adjustments for socio-demographics. Among the men low stress at work, and balance between resources and demands of their occupational patterns predict good subjective health even after adjustments for socio-demographics.

Among the women balance between resources and demands in their occupational patterns, low work stress, balance between employment and domestic work, and occupational meaning predicted balanced work attendance even after adjustments for socio-demographic factors. A low level of work stress predicted balanced work attendance among the men.

The results showed gender differences but the results should be interpreted with some caution since only 14 per cent of the participants were men. The results of this study indicate that it is of importance for occupational therapists to consider occupational balance and balance between resources and occupational demands as well as occupational meaning to promote good health among both women and men.