

## ABSTRACT

Bergman, B. (1997). *Women among men. Gender-Related Stress and Health Hazards Affecting Women Working in a Male-Dominated Industry*, Department of Psychology, Göteborg University.

Self-reported ill health is more common among middle-aged women at work than among men. At the same time, employment appears to promote women's health. How is it that women still get ill? The purpose of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of gender-related stress and health problems for women working in a male-dominated industry.

Five studies are included in this thesis. Study I investigated psycho-social characteristics of the work environment and work environment induced stress on and off the job. Both men and women, managers and non-managers participated. The main results showed that the male managers' blood pressure and catecholamine output dropped sharply at 5 p.m. In contrast, the female managers' blood pressure remained high and their norepinephrine excretion actually increased after work. The female manager's inability to unwind after work reflects their heavy total workload, e.g. the demands they experience from duties at home, often in conflict with demands related to their paid job. Their cholesterol values were higher than the cholesterol values of the female clerical workers.

In study II the effects on changes in health over time for 47 middle-aged women were analysed concerning changes in work-role quality and quality of life. The results showed that changes in work-role quality and quality of life were significantly associated with changes in self-reported health over time. As work-role quality and quality of life improved symptoms of somatic disorders such as musculo-skeletal and gastro-intestinal problems declined; as work-role quality and quality of life worsened, symptoms of somatic disorders increased. Two categories labelled "*Organisation and Culture*" and "*Leadership*", describing qualitatively different aspects of working life of importance for health, were grounded in interview data. Combinations of variations in these categories were related to women's perception of their health.

Study III dealt with perceived stressful situations at work from the working women's own point of view and resulted in a tentative model describing the interviewed women's perceptions of coping with the workplace culture in a male-dominated industry.

In study IV, on the basis of the qualitative data, a questionnaire was developed and evaluated after presentation to 104 women. The main result was a model retained from confirmative factor analysis. It included 16 dependent variables and three latent variables or dimensions. The intercorrelations between the two latent dimensions "*General negative view of women*" and "*Need of mental strength*", supported the proposed model of a general dimension called "*workplace culture*".

Finally, in study V, the relationships between self-reported health on the one hand and gender-related issues and physiological measures on the other hand were investigated. 61 women participated. A stepwise regression analysis with self-reported somatic health as the dependent variable resulted in two predictors, namely the variables "workplace culture" and the blood lipid ratio LDL/HDL, explaining 50% of the variance. A group of women with illusion of health was diagnosed as distressed by the physician. Compared with a group diagnosed as healthy they significantly more often experienced "negative view of women", "need of mental strength" and "poor social support". A clinical diagnose acted as a moderator variable in identifying persons with psychological defences.

**Key words:** Gender-related female health, workplace culture, leadership, gender-related female questionnaire, self-reported health, blood lipids

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