

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to evaluate the effects of paid employment and unpaid work in the home on the psychological and physical health of women. Four of the five studies were performed in Sweden, and four of the five also included male subjects. These five studies examine social and working conditions across a variety of exposure alternatives, from that of extreme underload (unemployment) to that of extreme overload (piece-rate factory production). Two of the studies used a case-comparison design. In Study I, two groups of Swedish women, 51 employed and 96 unemployed, were compared in terms of their scores on the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). Depression as measured by the BDI scores was over 3 times greater in the unemployed group but no relationship was observed with cortisol. Study III examined the psychosocial work environment of three garment manufacturing facilities located in a Caribbean industrial park where psychosomatic illness outbreaks had occurred. A multiple regression analysis identified work intensity, mental strain, work/home problems, education and sex as independent predictors explaining 33% of illness severity. Studies II, IV and V used random samples of the Swedish working population, collected by Statistics Sweden in 1976, 1977 and 1979. Study II was a cross-sectional study of 13,779 Swedish male and female workers which found that psychological job demands, work control and co-worker social support combined greater than multiplicatively in relation to cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevalence. The combination of high psychological job demands and low social support was found to be associated with elevated prevalence of CVD in both men and women. Study IV examined the differential distribution of work control within a random sample, $n=13,203$ of Swedish working men and women. Results indicated that the labor force continues to be highly sex-segregated with men having access to a larger and more diverse set of jobs than women. Work control was found to be consistently higher among men than among women - even in jobs which are traditionally considered "women's work." Study V examined the combined impact of the home and work environments on psychosomatic strain and physical illness in a sample of 12,772 women and men. In addition to the psychosocial work environment, measures of household work, children, and child care resources were examined. Using logistic regression, a log-linear path analysis found that for women exposure to adverse work and home characteristics was significantly associated with an increased odds of psychosomatic strain and physical illness. The pattern was different for men with work exposures exhibiting the most marked effects. Together, these studies indicate that working life has an impact on the mental and physical health of women which is of a comparable magnitude to that found in men. The results suggest that a balance of demands and resources is important both in the work and home setting. These findings also demonstrate that the sources of stress in women's lives are more diverse and diffuse than those experienced by men. These differences in the basic daily experiences of men and women suggest the need for more research on life course and gender linked experiences.

KEY WORDS: work, occupation, job, women, gender, sex, role, cortisol, depression, unemployment, control, stress, strain, cardiovascular disease, psychosomatic symptoms.

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