

PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS AT WORK: CAN WE IGNORE PERSONALITY IN TIMES OF CHANGE?

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BACKGROUND

Ongoing change in workplaces makes working environment more and more complex and thus more and more stressful. Although role of personality in job adjustment is considered in case of stressful positions it is not regarded as the tool that might help to reduce psychosocial risks in ordinary professions.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether personality traits should be taken into consideration in psychosocial risk management as far as positions traditionally seen as "not stressful" are concerned. The study focused on psychosocial hazards at work and personal traits as predictors of psychological distress and non-psychotic mental disorders, with reference to Temperament Risk Factor Concept (Strelau, 2006).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The data were taken from 379 Polish judicial clerks (stratified sample, geographically adjusted, participants of the TEMIDA 2015 Study, CI 95%).

Psychosocial working environment was measured with Psychosocial Working Conditions (Cieslak & Widerszal-Bazyl, 2000). Personality was measured with Cloninger's Temperament and Character Inventory (Hornowska, 2003) and health status was screened with GHQ-12 (Makowska & Merez, 2001).

The health impact of job strain alone and with moderating effects of personality traits was estimated with logistic regression (selection based on the likelihood ratio for the model).

The hypothesis was that the second model provides better prediction of employee's distress due to moderating effect of novelty seeking, harm avoidance, persistence, self-directedness and/or cooperativeness.

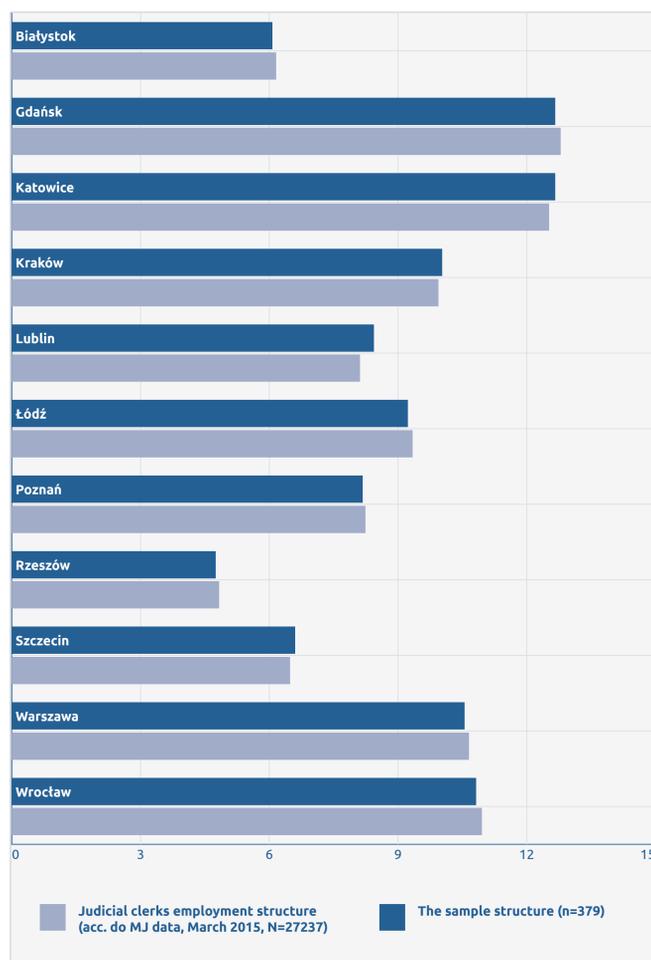


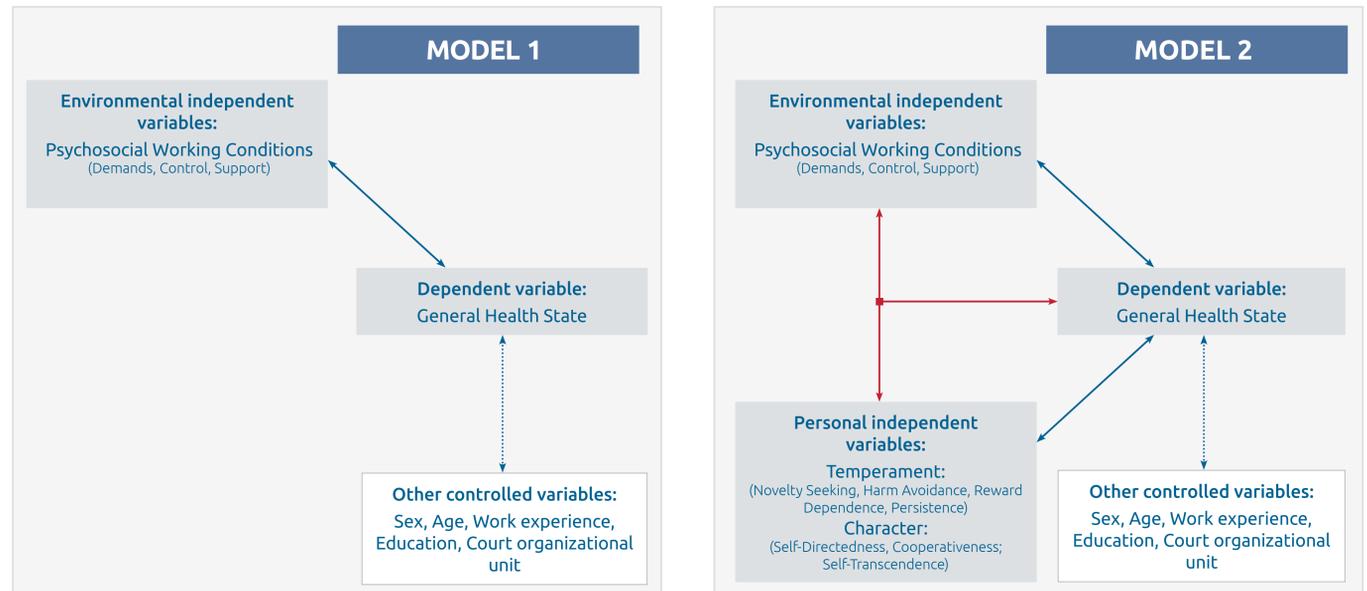
FIGURE 1. Sample & employment structure according to court jurisdiction area in %

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RESEARCH MODEL(S)

To explore health impact of occupational stress two models were built: first was a simple replication of Karasek's model and the second one includes Cloninger's psychobiological personality model as moderator of the health effect of stress.



RESULTS

MODEL 1 VERIFICATION

All the correlations between Karasek's model dimensions and general health were statistically important.

The model predicted 11,3% of the psychological disorder elevated risk according to GHQ-12 screening result.

The predictors were the control (9%; OR 0,19 - 0,50; CI 95%) and the Job strain. The interaction of demands and control is shown Fig.2.

MODEL 2 VERIFICATION

Personality traits also correlated with general health state, i.e. novelty seeking ($r= 0,153$, $p<0,01$), harm avoidance ($r=,257$, $p<0,01$), persistence ($r=0,198$, $p<0,01$), self-directedness ($r= 0,327$, $p<0,05$) and cooperativeness ($r= 0,186$, $p<0,05$).

Exploration of the second model proved that inclusion of personality traits improves the prediction up to 21,5% due to three personality traits:

- novelty seeking: **OR 0,89 - 0,99; CI 95%**
- harm avoidance: **OR 1,06 - 1,34; CI 95%** and
- self-directedness: **OR 0,89 - 0,96; CI 95%**

as well as two interactions of working environment and personality, i.e.:

- persistence with demands and
- harm avoidance with control.

None of the Karasek's dimensions, nor their combination remained a good predictor after personality traits inclusion into the model.

The hypothesis of better prediction of the second model is then confirmed. The nature of personality moderation effect is presented on Fig. 3 and 4.

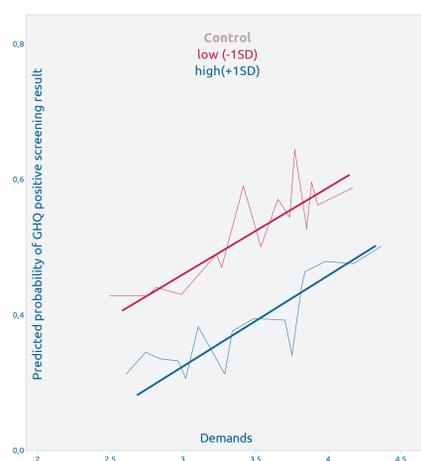


FIGURE 2. Additive influence of demand and control on health.

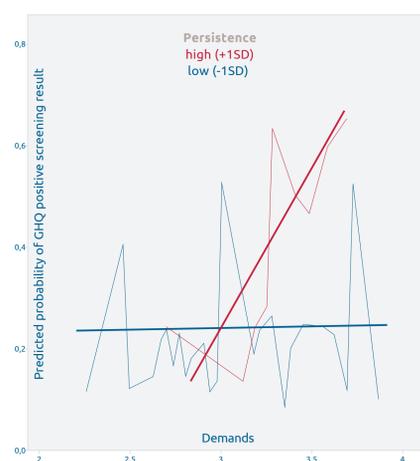


FIGURE 3. Vulnerability to mental disorders as a function of persistence and job demand: Temperament control of sensitivity to the environment.

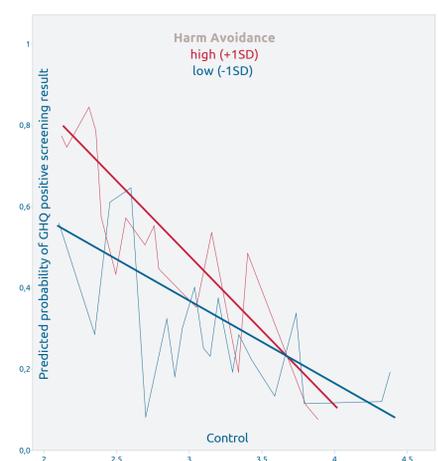


FIGURE 4. Vulnerability to mental disorders as a function of harm avoidance and the control: Temperament control of sensitivity to the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

- Personality seems to play functionally important role in job adjustment even in case of positions traditionally perceived as "not stressful".
- Persistence might be temperamental risk factor for judicial clerks facing highly demanding psychosocial working conditions.
- Harm avoidance can be temperamental risk factor if judicial clerk is exposed to low control at work.
- Further studies are needed to explore and better understand moderating role of personality on occupational stress and strain.

The data has been gathered within of the "Monitoring of occupational stress among judiciary staff and its health outcomes" project which is specific research project established by Stowarzyszenie Zdrowa Praca [Association for Occupational Health] and MOZ NSZZ "Solidarność" Pracowników Sądownictwa [Judicial Workers Inter-Company Trade Union Organization] and founded by EEA Grants within the framework of the "Citizens for Democracy" programme in Poland.