Occupational Stress in Workers and Managers in Steelworks in China

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Occupational stressors and strains of 121 Chinese steelwork employees and 122 managers were measured using the Chinese version of the Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI). It was found that factors intrinsic to the job, Type A behavior, logic, and organizational structure and climate were the main predictors of mental ill-health and physical ill-health in managers. Organizational structure and climate and relationships with other people were important predictors for workers. Management processes and organizational forces were the strongest predicting factors of job satisfaction in both samples. On certain OSI scales and subscales, managers scored statistically higher than workers. It is proposed that these results reflect the enormous economic and social changes currently taking place in China, together with certain features inherent in Chinese organizational and managerial processes.

KEY WORDS: China workers; managers; occupational stress.

INTRODUCTION

Job stress can result in acute disruptions of psychological or physiological homeostasis (Margolis, Koes, & Quinn, 1974). These acute reactions, if prolonged, are thought to cause a variety of illnesses, for example, hypertension, coronary heart disease (CHD), alcoholism, and mental illness (Cartwright & Cooper, 1994; Hurrell & Murphy, 1992; Schnall, 1990). The cost of workplace

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stress is currently extremely high. In the U.K. nearly 500 people die each day from coronary heart disease, which accounts for 70 million lost working days each year to industry and commerce (Cartwright & Cooper, 1994).

In the U.K. and other developed countries, occupational stress has been one of the more important occupational health issues, highly emphasized by occupational physicians, health policymakers, and company managers. However, until recently, workplace stress has received scant attention from occupational health researchers, managerial executives, and even government policymakers in China. Chinese occupational health research and practice has been more concerned with the effects of chemical and physical factors on employee health. Hence, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship of occupational stressors and strains, identifying differences between workers and managers in the Chinese steelworks industry.

METHOD

Subjects

Respondents in this study came from a major state-owned steelworks in Henan province in China. Subjects were randomly selected from the staff and workers' lists provided by the personnel division of the factory. Questionnaires were distributed to subjects by the investigators and collected back after 1 week. The final valid sample consisted of 121 workers (male 69, female 52) and 122 managers (male 102, female 20). Average ages and lengths of service of workers and managers was, respectively, 29.99 years old, 11.01 years, 37.08 years old, and 17.98 years.

Measures

Subjects were asked for the following information: sex, age, marriage status, number of children, length of service, post of job, expected date of promotion, any further work during spare time, and exercise habits.

A Chinese version of the Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI) (Cooper, Sloan, & Williams, 1988) was used. The theoretical and empirical development of the OSI has been fully documented (e.g., Cooper, Sloan, & Williams, 1988a; Rees & Cooper, 1992) and its validity demonstrated (Robertson, Cooper, & Williams, 1990). The validity of the Chinese version of the OSI has also been established using a Chinese sample (Siu, Cooper, & Donald, 1997). The OSI is a self-completion questionnaire based on a model of stress which incorporates four key elements: the source of job pressure; the individual who may be expe-