



Decreasing the negative effects of work-related stress

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WHAT DID WE DO & WHY?

This implementation study examined the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral therapy-based, standardized intervention (Williams Lifeskills Program). Previous research has found this program to be effective in reducing anger, depression, and anxiety in the general population and in people struggling with cardiovascular diseases. In this study, we wanted to see if this intervention is effective in reducing work-related stress, stress-related physical symptoms, and mental health symptoms in working people whose work environment remains unchanged. The intervention consists of sixteen 45-minute (or eight 90-minute) sessions, focusing on: identifying problem situations, decision making, decreasing negative thoughts and emotions, problem solving, self-assertion and ability to say 'no', relaxation techniques, building empathy, and communication skills. Altogether 89 individuals were assessed both before and after the intervention on their general and work-related stress, anxiety-, depressive-, and subjective physical symptoms, as well as well-being, overall life satisfaction, life meaning, and coping skills.

OUR FINDINGS WHAT'S NEXT?

Organization-level indicators of work stress (amount of efforts required and rewards provided by the workplace) did not change over the course of the study. However, participants' perceived general stress decreased and coping skills improved significantly. All stress-related symptoms (anxiety, depression- and physical symptoms) decreased significantly as well, and well-being (e.g., perceived meaning in life, overall life satisfaction) improved significantly. Further, when dividing the sample into low- and high work stress subgroups, the results showed that the intervention was more effective for participants with higher levels of work-stress.

The literature suggests that the environmental (organization-level) and individual (e.g., coping resources) aspects of work-related stress have an additive effect on mental and physical health. Therefore, we propose that the assessment of both of these areas are necessary not only when conducting risk assessments but also when evaluating the effectiveness of interventions designed to reduce work stress and its negative consequences. Our study also indicates that work-related stress can be decreased even if workplace management is not willing or able to support organization-level changes.

TAKE-AWAY MESSAGES

- Chronic work-related stress has a negative impact on employees' physical and mental health.
- Most ideal when individual- and organizational-level interventions are offered simultaneously to decrease work-related stress and its negative consequences.
- A short, well-structured, multimodal coping skills training can significantly reduce overall stress level and stress-related symptoms even if the work environment remains unchanged.

Stauder, A., Cserhádi, Z., & Konkoly Thege, B. (2018). Decreasing the negative effects of work-related stress in unchanged working environments. *European Journal of Mental Health*, 13(2), 163–183. doi: 10.5708/EJMH.13.2018.2.4

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