



COPSOQ International Network: Co-operation for research and assessment of psychosocial factors at work

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Background

There is a growing body of scientific evidence that exposures to psychosocial risks constitute an important work environment characteristic (Leka and Jain, 2010). International informations as the European Working Condition Surveys (EWCS) series show the importance of workers' exposure to job strain across EU, ranging from the lowest risk in Scandinavian welfare regimes to the highest in Southern countries (Sultan-Taïeb et al., 2010; Dragano et al., 2011); together with the deteriorating trend of the psychosocial working environment specially referring to high demands and work intensity, emotional demands, lack of autonomy, ethical conflicts, poor social relationships, job and work insecurity and poor work-life balance as well (Eurofound, 2012).

The setting, implementation and evaluation of preventive actions at workplace level and preventive policies in general need the systematic collection, recording, analysis and dissemination of key information on the exposures to risks at the workplaces. This need constitutes an important challenge due to both the magnitude and diversity of the labour sector and the scientific and technical requirements of information systems including the international comparability.

Models and Questionnaires

At the scientific and technical level, the measurement of psychosocial risk at the workplace is a complex issue. Most measurement instruments

are based on questionnaires, most popular examples include the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ, Karasek et al., 1998) and the Effort-Reward Imbalance Questionnaire (ERI, Siegrist, 1996), both linked to specific single theories.

The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) (Kristensen et al., 2005) represents a comprehensive achievement, which is not linked to one single theory. Firstly developed in 2000 it has had an important international recognition and dissemination in few years. Conceptually, it includes the main dimensions of the most influential psychosocial theories at work, including the Job-Strain and Effort-Reward Imbalance models, but also other theories and aspects ignored in previous tools, for instance emotional demands, role clarity, etc. This open and general conception makes COPSOQ useful in any workplace either in the industrial or in the services branch. Among psychosocial risk assessment tools COPSOQ is unique, because it includes population-based reference values to assess the need for action and to help the decision making process on preventive measures at the workplace level. This feature helps to overcome the practical limitation, due to the absence of exposure limit values (cut-offs) in the psychosocial arena – in contrast to the popular Threshold Limit Values (TLV) used traditionally in industrial hygiene.

After its initial development in Denmark, COPSOQ has been adapted to more than 20 languages and

countries, so that COPSOQ is probably one of the most widely used tools to measure a broad scope of occupational exposures to psychosocial hazards at the workplace. Especially in Denmark, Spain, Sweden, and Germany, the questionnaire has been adopted as a standard for measuring the psychosocial work environment and it's being used as a regular tool for risk assessment at the workplace level. COPSOQ has been used so far in thousands of enterprise based risk assessments of psychosocial factors and in about 30 scientific research projects including some comparative studies among selected countries (Hasselhorn et al., 2003; Moncada et al., 2010; Dupret et al., 2012) and in one project involving all the 27 EU countries plus 3 EFTA countries (Nübling et al., 2011).

The COPSOQ-Network – Aims

International cooperation and coordination in the further development of standard criteria for the assessment of psychosocial factors in general and the COPSOQ in particular was the main reason for the founding of the COPSOQ-Network in 2009. It consists of ca. 50 scientists from 20 countries and is headed by a steering committee consisting of the authors of this article.

The network aims to facilitate the co-operation among several and diverse groups in Europe and worldwide linked to governments, universities and research institutions, enterprises and social agents. The further development of COPSOQ and the production of a harmonized content will allow

international comparability of exposures to psychosocial stressors and therefore contribute to the harmonization of international information and statistics in this area.

Activities of the Network

At the international level strong ties have developed between researchers and others from a large number of countries. Scientific production of such collaboration can be seen in the special issue of the Scandinavian Journal of Public Health that includes 13 original articles on diverse aspects; to date more than 130 peer reviewed papers using COPSOQ have been published internationally.

Four COPSOQ conferences have also taken place so far: Copenhagen in 2007, Freiburg in 2009, Barcelona in 2011, and Ghent in 2013, furthermore a workshop on the ICOH-WOPS

in Amsterdam in 2012. Meetings were attended by groups from 20 different countries linked to governmental institutions, universities and research institutions, enterprises and social agent; so constituting a highly interdisciplinary network.

Specific Objectives for the period 2013-2015 are:

1. Review results of analyses of working conditions and health and labour market participation where COPSOQ has been used.
2. Review results of methodological / psychometrical analyses concerning COPSOQ.
3. Determine the core aspects/ scales to be used in international comparisons.
4. Clarify all methodological and normative issues related to the use of such scales in comparative analysis.

5. Discuss and plan international collaborative surveys and data comparisons.

6. Improve and maintain the website of the network.

On the network's homepage www.copsoq-network.org information concerning these conferences and the network's activities as well as COPSOQ-related publications are available.

Der korrespondierende Autor erklärt, dass kein Interessenkonflikt vorliegt.

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Abstract

COPSOQ is a comprehensive questionnaire on psychosocial factors at work which is internationally widely used since approx. 10 years for risk assessments in organisations. The International COPSOQ-Network was established in 2009 by scientific and empirical users of the COPSOQ. Main aim is the international scientific exchange concerning the use of COPSOQ. A second goal lies in the coordination of research and further development of the questionnaire (content and measurement qualities), to facilitate international comparison studies. Further information: www.copsoq-network.org

Einleitung

COPSOQ ist ein inhaltlich umfassender Fragebogen zu psychosozialen Faktoren am Arbeitsplatz, der seit ca. zehn Jahren in vielen Ländern zur Gefährdungsbeurteilung eingesetzt wird. 2009 wurde das Internationale COPSOQ-Netzwerk gegründet; es besteht aus wissenschaftlichen und praxisorientierten Anwendern des COPSOQ. Ein Ziel ist der internationale wissenschaftliche und forschungspraktische Austausch von Anwendern des COPSOQ. Ein zweiter Fokus liegt auf der Koordination der Forschung und inhaltlichen wie psychometrischen Weiterentwicklung des Fragebogens, um durch eine koordinierte Strategie internationale Vergleichsstudien zu ermöglichen und zu forcieren. Informationen unter www.copsoq-network.org

Keywords:

psychosocial work environment = Psychosoziale Faktoren, risk assessment = Gefährdungsbeurteilung, COPSOQ = COPSOQ, international network = Internationales Netzwerk, harmonized development = koordinierte Entwicklung