

Do we want a kind of work that doesn't ruin our lives?

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Do we want a kind of work that doesn't ruin our lives? Credit: SINC

The way people's work is organised can harm their health by causing a range of ailments, from cardiovascular disease to problems with mental health. A new research study shows that the best way of working allows employees a greater level of participation, as well as providing greater possibilities for adapting working conditions to their needs, greater recognition of their work and fair treatment.

"We have studied the relationship between exposure to psychosocial risks and the kind of labour management practices used to hire, use, develop, hold onto or dismiss workers", Clara Llorens Serrano, lead author of the study and a researcher at the Trade Union Institute of Labour, Environment and Health (ISTAS-CCOO), tells SINC.

The study, published in the journal *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, shows that a good working environment is related to participatory employment methods that enable employees to learn new skills, [work](#) under permanent contracts that do not make them feel easily expendable or at risk of being fired, salaries paid according to the number of hours worked and tasks carried out, as well as a working week of between 31 to 40 hours, finishing at 2pm.

The survey, carried out between October 2004 and July 2005 on 7,612 people employed by others in Spain, funded by the Fund for Health Research, showed that "the better the labour management practices used in organising work, the better the psychosocial environment of the workplace will be, with fewer cases of health-related problems".

"Our analysis and previous evidence shows that psychosocial risks are related to the labour management practices used. These can be a key factor in the link between psychosocial risks and health, and are a prime target in terms of preventing the appearance of workplace stress and making changes to the organisation of work", Llorens points out.

Key factors for an ideal working environment

The most significant results show how a democratically-functioning workplace and the use of methods to enable direct participation by workers in carrying out their daily tasks leads to a better working atmosphere.

The strongest associations can be found in factors relating "control" (workers' degree of influence over their work, chances to use and learn new abilities and skills during the course of the work done, and to feel their work has meaning, etc.), "social support" (receiving help and feedback from colleagues and supervisors in carrying out their work, team spirit, tasks and having a clear area of individual responsibility), as

well as "compensations" (recognition for the work done and fair treatment).

The authors of the study say the labour management practices used to design work tasks and methods should take account of workers' abilities and knowledge as well as their training needs and autonomy.

"This could significantly reduce or eliminate some of the psychosocial risks in Spain, a country where Taylorism (the most widespread and persistent way in which work is organised in the country) ignores workers' professionalism and the fact that they are people with the ability to learn and make decisions", the Catalan researcher concludes.

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