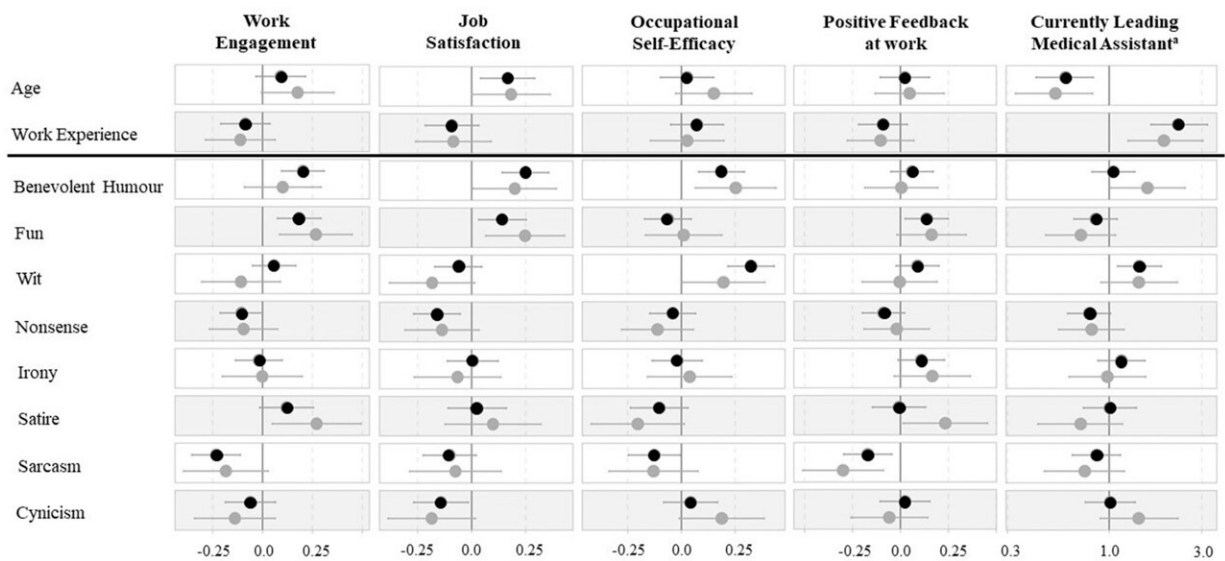


New study sheds light on the effects of humor in medical practices

June 3 2024, by Tom Leonhardt



Coefficients of hierarchical regressions of PPF on control variables and the comic styles. Credit: *BMC Primary Care* (2024). DOI: 10.1186/s12875-024-02363-y

A humorous remark at just the right time can go a long way. Benevolent humor helps medical assistants (MAs) cope positively with their stressful working day, according to a new [study](#) published in *BMC Primary Care*

by the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (MLU) and the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

The researchers surveyed more than 600 MAs to find out how they experience their work and what style of humor they use in their daily working lives. They found that if the respondents preferred light, well-intended humor, they were more satisfied with their work and received more [positive feedback](#). Dark humor, such as sarcasm, was more likely to have disadvantages.

MAs mostly work in [primary health care](#), especially medical practices. In Germany, working as an MA requires three years of vocational training. The daily work routine of MAs can be very demanding. They are responsible for [administrative work](#) and, for example, taking [blood samples](#) and applying wound dressings.

"Medical assistants are in very close contact with patients for most of the day. They have a lot of responsibility and experience a lot of stress," says Julia Raecke from BIBB, who is doing her doctorate at MLU.

It has long been known that humor can help health care workers cope with stress. "However, little is known about the consequences of different humor styles. We set out to investigate those, as it should make a big difference, whether MAs use puns or sarcasm when dealing with patients. Talking to people that are potentially sick requires a lot of empathy and verbal dexterity," explains Professor René Proyer, a psychologist at MLU.

The two researchers conducted an [online survey](#) of more than 600 MAs. The aim was to understand better the relationship between [job satisfaction](#) and different humor styles. In addition to the kind of humor

they prefer, respondents also provided information about their well-being in the workplace and how competent they feel at work.

If the respondents preferred positive and benevolent humor, they were in general also more satisfied with their work. But not only that, "MAs with a preference for light humor stated that they received more positive feedback and were more likely to feel that they were making a difference at work," says Raecke.

Surprisingly, presumably negative or dark humor did not score worse across the board. "Even though satire and irony are considered dark humor, we found no negative correlation with the respondents' well-being," adds Raecke.

In contrast, cynicism and especially sarcasm had negative effects. Yet, this does not mean that sarcasm should be condemned completely. "A short sarcastic remark among colleagues might help to release frustration," says Proyer.

According to the researchers, humor is one of several factors that influence well-being at work. "Knowing about the effects of humor and different styles can help to make conversations with patients more pleasant. That said, waiting rooms are not supposed to become comedy clubs. It's more about using humor consciously and appropriately," concludes Proyer.

The results of the study could help to develop new training programs. For example, Raecke is investigating whether the social and emotional skills of MAs can be improved with the help of online training.

More information: Julia Raecke et al, Medical assistants' comic styles and their potential for positive functioning at work: a cross-sectional study including a subgroup analysis, *BMC Primary Care* (2024). [DOI:](#)

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