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University Employees as a High-Risk Population for Occupational Health Issues: Evidence from Austria and the Czech Republic

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Employment in higher education entails significant demands and may pose risks to occupational mental and physical health. Specifically, in the Czech Republic, the long-standing underfunding of tertiary education imposes an additional burden on both academic and non-academic university employees, potentially increasing their psychological vulnerability. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the impact of adverse working conditions on vulnerability to burnout and occupational health issues, measured by the Arbeitsbezogenes Verhaltens- und Erlebensmuster inventory. Adopting an international comparative framework, the research focuses on Czech university employees ($n = 1439$) and their Austrian counterparts ($n = 1342$). The most significant finding of this study is the high proportion of psychologically vulnerable individuals among university employees. Two-thirds of Czech participants and half of Austrian participants fall into psychologically vulnerable profiles, which may lead to long-term occupational health issues. Specifically, the most prevalent profile among Czech university employees is the excessively ambitious pattern A, characterized by excessive professional motivation and insufficient coping capacity. In contrast, Austrian university employees mainly display the unambitious pattern S, characterized by minimal effort at work, which poses no risks to occupational health. Predictive values of specific working conditions, such as pay, job insecurity, working hours, adequacy of institutional facilities and resources, perceived pressure, quality of leadership, or interpersonal relationships at the workplace, are discussed. In conclusion, university employees may be considered a highly vulnerable population. Policymakers should strive to enhance working conditions in higher education to alleviate daily burdens on employees and ensure accessibility of counselling and psychological interventions.

Are you currently an Early Career Researcher?

Yes, I am within 6 years of receiving my Ph.D.

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