

## Managing preventive occupational health and safety activities in Danish enterprises during a period of economic recession

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## **Trends in managing occupational proactive safety activities in enterprises during a period of economic recession**

Not much research has focused on working environment factors and national economy. This has for example been documented by a systematic analysis of the content of two influential journals within the area occupational health psychology where it was found that only a very limited number of the research papers published in the journal paid attention to the impact of economic factors on occupational factors at the work place [1]. None the less, in a UK work force survey initiated during times of economic recession it was found that a significant part of the workers share the opinion that the economic conditions have an influence on working environment factors like for example relationship to colleges or working longer and harder [2]. Moreover, in the Stormont study it was found that a several psychosocial factors are negatively correlated with the onset of economic recession [3]. One of the conclusions brought forth in the study is that there is a need for more focus on the management of proactive safety activities in enterprises during a period of economic recession. From a theoretical point of view models explain that a number of working environment psychosocial factors is negatively related to economic stress in two ways. First, workers may be affected directly, for example, dependent on their ability to cope with economic stress. Second, workers may be affected indirectly by for example enterprise organisational changes with respect to managing occupational pro-active safety activities. An interesting research question is whether the onset of a general economic recession has had an impact on companies' proactive occupational activities? In particular we will discuss trends from the five year period that might reveal change in practises in the administration of the so-called work place assessments in Danish companies and public organisations. Likewise we will discuss trends on preventive actions, attitudes and knowledge related to the management of occupational risks within the area of psychosocial work environment and occupational accidents. In 2005 the Danish government launched an action programme that focus on occupational health and safety activities. The goal of the plan was during a five year period to put focus on four so-called "problem" areas: psychosocial work environment, occupational accidents, noise at the workplace and muscle-skeletal distress. In addition, it was decided to follow the development of Danish enterprises' occupational safety activities through the five year period based on a questionnaire based study. A baseline for the study was established in 2006. The 2006 sample consists of 9720 companies and public institutions. In 2011 the questionnaire was applied again. The 2011 sample consists of 6724 companies and public institutions. Both samples are stratified according to employee size and industrial sector. The questionnaire studies are cross sectional and the participating enterprises are randomly selected from the Danish register of companies that have to pay taxes or otherwise by law are obliged to register. The response rate in 2006 and 2011 respectively was 76% and 44%. The difference in response rate is most likely due to the general economic recession during the data collection period – some companies might not be so willing to reply on questionnaires if they are struggling to survive. Moreover, it might be due to differences in data collection techniques. The results indicate that the enterprises in 2011 have had more focus on managing psychosocial risk factors that they did in 2006. In addition, in 2011 more companies and public organisations have worked out psychosocial work environment actions plans as part of their work place assessment activities. With respect to the management of proactive activities within the area of occupational accidents the picture is a bit different. As such in 2011 fewer companies and public organisations have prepared occupational accident actions plans as part of their work assessment. In addition, it is found that

fewer companies than in 2006 have initiated safety rounds on a regular basis. With respect to prevent machine accidents there has been an increase in proactive activities only in a few single areas, while there has been a decrease in several categories of proactive activities with respect to prevent falls.

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