



MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: A RAPID REVIEW

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Mental health in perspective

- It is the leading cause of sickness absence
- In the UK, a report found that **70 million sick days** a year are attributed to mental health
- An estimated £25 billion forgone in gross value added to the UK economy in losses through **absence, turnover and productivity**
- The HSE reported **one in four people** will have a mental health problem at some point

Mental health: has it received the attention it deserves?

- Physical OHS has been the dominant focus for construction organisations and researchers
- It has been argued there is a ***clear business case*** for implementing positive mental health strategies and preventing mental illness
- High production pressures, dangerous work, complex decision-making, long supply chains involving transient work, insecure temporary contracts, and long working hours are all factors that can affect worker mental health

An industry at risk?

- ***Mental distress*** in construction workers is ***double that of the level of the general male population***
- Male construction workers have ***a higher rate of suicide*** when compared to males in other occupations
- This has ***prompted workplace-based suicide prevention*** through intervention programs, such as Mates in Construction

Research approach

- A *rapid review* was undertaken
- A useful approach when there is a ***lack of relevant research in a topic***
- Also when a review is ***restricted by time or space***
- Aim was to review the ***current understanding on mental health and wellbeing*** within the construction industry

Research method steps

- **Defining inclusion/exclusion parameters**
 - Studies from 1999 onwards
 - Journal quality – Q1 and Q2 ranked in Scimago)
 - Exclusion of grey literature (risk of missing unpublished literature)
 - Only studies in English (risk missing literature in other languages)
- **Consultation with a librarian for database selection –**
ICONDA and Science Direct (Elsevier)
- **Screening, selection and application of a quality framework; and,**
- **Discussion of papers selected through the process.**

Results: the samples

- Relevant studies were found across many continents: Australia, America, Africa, Asia, and Europe.
- 40% investigated the mental health of construction workers (e.g. trades)
- 40% construction professionals (e.g. project managers, architects, engineers)
- 20% had both in their research sample

Results: research approaches

- Typically focused on the ***negative aspects of mental health***; these included stigma, psychosocial risk factors, stress and burnout.
- The majority of studies have focused on the ***assessment/testing*** of the mental health wellbeing of construction employees
- ***Dominance of quantitative methods***, rooted in positivist traditions; and therefore makes a call for the mobilisations of other research methodologies

Conclusions made from the studies

- High levels of ***workplace stress***:
 - Architects more than engineers
 - internal more than consultants
 - construction project managers suffered from high levels of job burnout
- ***Harassment and discrimination*** were experienced by all surveyed South African construction professions.
- A Dutch study found a substantial amount of bricklayers and supervisors ***at risk of common mental disorder***
- Studies concluded there was need for improvement!

How to improve?

- Few studies have explored effective ways to implement improvements
- Early prevention?
One study reported a technology that can determine early detection of worker stress
- Organisational changes?
Long work hours and six-day work schedules found to being a major factor influencing poor lifestyle behaviours
- Worker engagement?
One study suggest ideas for the promotion of health and wellbeing should come from the workforce

Conclusions



- Mental health has been identified as a ***key contributor to escalating costs globally.***
- Hence, there is a ***business case for it,*** and arguably it should receive ***more attention than it has***
- Research methodological approaches have been ***narrow in terms of method and scope*** (focusing on assessing the negatives)
- Findings suggest there is a ***need for improvement in both blue and white collar*** construction employees
- Further research is required (under-theorised area!), particularly in how to make successful improvements