

Title: Work organization and its effects on the health of Chinese workers with English as a second language

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Abstract:

Work organization consists of three contexts: (a) the external context/factors (e.g., national economic environment), (b) the organizational context/practices (e.g., human resource policies), and (c) the work context/process (e.g., psychological job demands). The investigation of work organization may lead to more effective prevention and intervention for work-related injury and illness. Although Chinese ESL workers are one of the largest groups in Canada's workforce today, little is known about their perspectives on work and health. The purposes of this qualitative phenomenological study are to gain a better understanding of the meaning of work organization to Chinese workers with ESL and to explore their lived experience on how work organization affects their health.

Ten in-depth face to face interviews were conducted with Chinese ESL workers (5 males and 5 females; ages ranged from 22 to 41 years) who were employed in English-speaking

workplaces. Interviews were translated and transcribed before importing them into NUD*IST, a qualitative data management software program. The transcripts were then coded, and categories were developed based on the codes. Subsequently, eight themes were identified from the categories.

These eight themes were: 1) the definition of work organization was perceived to be at an impersonal and distant level; 2) effective communication was highly valued; 3) work culture had a considerable impact on the workers' behaviours; 4) job autonomy enhanced workers' mental well-being; 5) resignation towards one's health was commonly expressed; 6) individual characteristics (e.g., age and personality) were viewed as factors affecting one's health; 7) employers' priority was focused on making profits rather than improving (or protecting) workers' health; and 8) recognition and appreciation by supervisors, co-workers, and clients were needed for more positive mental well-being.

Overall, the results show that work organization impacts upon the health of Chinese ESL workers. Although the findings are generally consistent with the existing literature, two unique findings from this study are that Chinese ESL workers demonstrated resignation towards their own health, and they viewed individual characteristics as factors affecting their health. Workplaces, especially those that involve Chinese ESL workers, need to place greater emphasis on implementing effective health and safety approaches to maximize the health of these workers.