

# **Occupation-specific Versus General Self-report Measures to Assess Psychosocial Workplace Exposures:**

**Dilemmas and Potential Solutions to Bridge the Gap**

# Problems with Generic Questionnaires on the Psychosocial Work Environment

Generic questionnaires have a common weakness in their remoteness from actual work experiences, and therefore, are often not helpful for assessing *within-occupation* variance, the very level at which intervention strategies are developed, in practice.

# Occupation-specific Questionnaires

- Can provide rich, detailed information: useful in identifying key areas for intervention

BUT THEY

- Generally cannot measure job stressors across various occupations

# Occupation-specific OSI

- All are developed within the OSI framework, allowing between-occupation comparisons
- Concentrate upon the variable features—operationalized to the specific occupation
- Omit questions about the fixed aspects of a given line of work

# How Occupation-Specific OSI are Developed

- Review the relevant single occupation literature
- Apply the General OSI to workers in that occupation
- Obtain qualitative data from workers willing to put in the extra time to comment on their answers to the General OSI.
- Collate with answers to open-ended questions.
- Used all available external assessment data

*A Hermeneutic process*

# OSI for Professional Drivers

**Omits superfluous questions about fixed features of driving, e.g.:**

- need for high levels of sustained attention to avoid serious , even fatal consequences
- need to make rapid decisions,
- no control of rate of incoming signals, etc.

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*About 1/2 length of General OSI*

# OSI for Professional Drivers

**Operationalizes many of the variable features in relation to the traffic environment, e.g.**

City driving vs. long route driving:

High flow vs. low flow of new information

Special Hazards:

Driving flammable cargo, narrow winding roads,  
threat of violence from passengers

# OSI for Professional Drivers

- Good internal consistency (Cronbach  $\alpha=0.84$ )
- Good face validity - applied among 327 professional drivers
- Between-group criterion validity:  
Total OSI 2x> than for referent groups at lower cardiac risk
- Within-group criterion validity:  
Total OSI predicts smoking intensity among drivers
- Helps identify modifiable stressors likely to contribute to risk of hypertension and IHD:  
Long work hours and time pressure

# Why an OSI for Physicians?

## Pivotal position of physicians:

- decide about fitness for work
- can make recommendations to improve patients' working conditions

## Physicians themselves *increasingly* face:

- ↓ decision-latitude, ↑ demands (managed care).
- Heavy underlying burden of the work

## Aim of OSI for Physicians:

- Empowerment tool to improve own working conditions
- Translate this into better insight by physicians into working conditions of patients.

# Underlying Work stressors among Physicians

## Examples

- Need to make complex and complicated decisions (high demand on the decision-making level)
- Serious, potentially fatal consequences of a wrong decision (TAV)
- Receiving contradictory or unclear information

# Examples of Variable Work Stressors among Physicians

## Flow of new information:

Patient load and setting (ER/ICU vs. outpatient)

## Possibility of postponing decisions:

Setting (ER/ICU vs outpatient)

## Need for rapid task execution:

Performance of invasive procedures or urgent care

## Strictness on the decision making level:

Control over policies re: hospitalization, procedures, etc.

## Control over pace of task performance:

Control over number of patients, scheduling, other duties

# OSI for Physicians

- Initial pilot-testing completed among N=12 physicians, of various profiles
- Good internal consistency (Cronbach  $\alpha=0.77$ )
- Good face validity
- Mean total OSI= $76.3 \pm 6.3$
- Mean total High Demands= $21.3 \pm 3.8$

# The Human-Computer Interaction

*Clerical work relies ever more heavily upon computer technology. While potentially increasing productivity, there are specific stressors that arise from the human-computer interaction, to which clerical workers are exposed (Smith 1999).*

# Examples of Computer-related Work Stressors:

- ↑ workload: ↑ information flow
- ↓ control - ↑ supervision: electronic monitoring
- Disaster potential: sending wrong file, opening a virus-infected file
- Impediments to task performance: cumbersome or incompatible types of software, slow access time to Internet, computer breakdown

# OSI for those who work daily with Computers

- Pilot testing on-going
- Appears to have good face validity
- Stressors likely to be familiar to the students enrolled in the OHP course
- Exemplifies the advantages of using a specific OSI to write up an occupational history, especially to identify key modifiable stressors