Time to create healthy jobs

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Health and wellbeing at work

- Quality of jobs matter, not just because we spend lots of our time in them but because health and wellbeing linked to it (Eurofound 2012).
- Creating healthier jobs has featured in public policy at various times since the Industrial Revolution.
  - Protect children (and women) (Factory Acts 1830-40s), maternal and infant health over WWI (McCarthy 2020), save workers’ lives in 1960s (Lavery 2015).
- Currently estimated that around 1.6m workers suffer work-related ill health (LFS 2019-20) with cost calculated at £14.7-18.3bn (but ‘new’ cases only and some diseases omitted) (HSE 2011); could be as high as £60bn pa (Black 2008).
- Covid has reminded us of jobs’ impact on physical and mental health – from frontline to home workers.
What needs to happen?

• Shift from remedial to preventative interventions
  ► Current interventions focus on symptoms not causes – more mindfulness and drugs rather than better jobs.
  ► Calls for Occ Health to pre-emptively deal with problems caused by jobs (SOM 2017).
  ► UK Government’s 2017 Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices recommended that government should adopt a ‘more proactive approach to workplace health’.

• Recognise that ill-health occurs from the ‘work’ and ‘employment’ that comprises jobs.
  ► Notable that Karasek & Theorell’s prescription for creating healthy work is ‘restructuring work environments’; work design typical focus from 1940s to 1970s.
  ► But employment type/patterns matter too:
    • Non-standard employment linked to higher mental ill-health and mortality rates (Piwowar-Sulej & Bak-Grabowsk 2020; Balogh et al. 2020);
    • Shift work linked to higher mental ill-health and cancer risks (Jaradat et al. 2017; McElvenny et al. 2018).

• The outcome will be jobs that are sustainable health wise, lessen public healthcare costs and lower employer absence costs
Good work dimensions

Terms of employment
- Job security
- Minimum guaranteed hours
- Underemployment

Health, safety and psychosocial wellbeing
- Physical health and injury
- Mental health

Social support and cohesion
- Peer support
- Line manager relationship

Work-life balance
- Over-employment
- Overtime

Pay and benefits
- Pay (actual)
- Satisfaction with pay

Job design and nature of work
- Use of skills
- Control
- Opportunities for progression
- Sense of purpose

Voice and Representation
- Trade union membership
- Employee information
- Employee involvement