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Work environment and school dropout

What are the effects of the psychosocial work environment?

Workshop on 'Young Workers and Wellbeing at Work'

Wellbeing at Work, Copenhagen, May 26th 2014

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Background

School dropout in Vocational Education and Training

- **'A dual education system'** - alternating between school-based learning and being an apprentice at a (private) firm.
- **Large focus on dropout from VET** - especially dropout from the 'basic programme' ('grundforløb') (Koudahl 2005)
- **Large focus on lack of apprenticeships** for continuing in the 'main programme' ('hovedforløb') (see e.g. Humlum & Jensen 2010)
- **Less focus on** the nature of learning in the private firms (Tanggaard 2005) – and on the **psychosocial work environment for apprentices** (Undervisningsministeriet 2009) – no specific pedagogical requirements to take in apprentices.
- Important because **some reports point to bad 'psychosocial work environment' as an understudied problem** (Koudahl 2005) – in contrast to work accidents among apprentices that have been more in focus recently (see e.g. Nielsen & Sørensen 2009, Rasmussen et al 2010, Nielsen et al 2012)

The case of Asbjørn

‘Maybe it was a good idea to treat us properly!’

"I do not expect to be here after I graduate I'm not crazy about the way you are treated as an apprentice, not at all - I think you get some shitty jobs ... I have to brew coffee for the others. I must sweep the floor. I think it 's all right to sweep, but I must also clean up after the others in the workshop. I can't see anything reasonable in that an apprentice must clean up after the others in the kitchen on Fridays. When we get the rolls, then I put the butter in place, although I do not even use it. The others they just hurl their dishes in the sink , and I will make it right for them - it pisses me off! I can not see anything reasonable in that I should do these tasks just because I'm an apprentice. And I have said it to him [my manager], and he says, 'That's life - to be an apprentice!'. But he hopes we will be there when we've finished the apprenticeship. He can forget about it, I told him. I said to him that if he had aspirations that we should continue, it might be an idea to treat us properly. ... Of course it is an apprentice to drive the cars in the evenings and things like that, and of course, I also sweep and empty the bins if the 'sweepboy' (fejdreng) is not there, but I must go around and collect other people's shit they've thrown on the floor it. I like what I am doing, I love plate work, I like it so."

Wellbeing at work and turnover intentions

- Psychosocial work environment (pswe) important for turnover intentions – changing job, retiring etc. (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner 2000)
- Dropping out of school is phenomenologically related to turnover (Ciftcioglu 2010)
- Bad pswe would thus raise risk of dropping out
 - Especially those aspects of the pswe that has to do with the social relations between apprentice and manager/co-workers (because of the asymmetric power relations)

Aim of this presentation

1. Is work environment mentioned as an important reason for dropping out when asking VET students about their considerations for dropping out or their actual decision to drop out? And how important is it compared to other reasons?
2. Does psychosocial work environment factors reported while enrolled in a VET programme predict dropping out of school subsequently?

Methods and Materials

West Jutland Cohort Study - VestLiv

- Birth cohort study of all adolescents living in Ringkjøbing County (in april 2004) born in 1989 (N = 3,681) and 1983 (N = 3,250).
- 3 rounds of data for 1989 cohort (age 15, 18 and 21) and 2 rounds for 1983 cohort (age 20 and 27).
- Self-reported information on school drop-out measured in round 3 and 2 respectively including questions 30 different reasons for dropping out/considering dropping out.
- Linked to educational register with information on drop-out.
- Cox proportional hazards regression calculating hazard ratios for time to drop out measured in days from time of answering the questionnaire till date of dropping out.

Results

Most important reasons for dropping out among VET-students. Pct.

How significant was the following reasons for your considerations/decision to drop out of your education? (N = 380)	Cohort	No significance	Small significance	Average significance	Big significance	Very big significance
Did not learn/develop enough	89	44	11	18	13	14
	83	56	14	12	12	7
Lack of feedback from teachers	89	47	15	19	10	8
	83	59	15	10	11	5
Found a different education	89	53	10	13	9	15
	83	60	5	7	12	15
Too much homework	89	55	15	17	7	7
	83	71	16	6	4	3
Manager treated me badly	89	60	11	11	5	14
	83	61	7	10	8	15
Felt outside at the education	89	63	13	12	6	6
	83	65	13	11	9	3
Economic problems	89	65	14	10	5	5
	83	75	10	8	4	4
Trouble finding an apprenticeship	89	66	8	8	5	13
	83	60	6	9	7	18
Relation to co-workers too bad	89	66	9	9	7	9
	83	63	10	12	10	6
Psychological problems	89	67	7	7	6	11
	83	77	6	9	4	4

Results

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Results

Psychosocial work-environment and school dropout

Cox proportional hazards regression

1132 observations (participants enrolled on an education at the time of answering the 2010 questionnaire) with 98 dropping out in an approximate 1 year follow-up (max 329 days).

313868 total days at risk

Tentative analysis using only 1989 cohort and only education at age 21 (autumn 2010)

Results

Psychosocial work-environment and school dropout

	Crude Hazard Ratio	Adjusted Hazard Ratio
Overall evaluation of education		
Dissatisfaction with education	1.64 (1.35-1.99)	1.52 (1.17-1.97)
Subjective evaluation of academic skill (high = bad skills)	1.36 (1.07-1.73)	1.26 (0.94-1.66)
Considering dropping out (yes vs no)	2.54 (1.56-4.13)	1.83 (1.09-3.07)
Factors at work		
Being yelled at	7.73 (0.99-60.6)	---
Quantitative demands	2.32 (0.83-6.53)	---
Work pace	2.43 (1.27-4.63)	2.14 (1.07-4.27)
Wrong info from management	2.14 (0.84-5.48)	---
Bad work climate	9.41 (2.25-39.34)	8.85 (2.11-37.10)
Repititive work tasks	1.83 (0.98-3.43)	---
Heavy lifting	2.96 (1.57-5.57)	2.35 (1.20-4.59)

Conclusions

1. Psychosocial work environment and especially the quality of the social relations between apprentices and co-workers/managers are important for drop out from VET when asking VET students themselves about their drop out
2. Prospective analyses show that work environment factors are associated with an increased hazard of dropping out in an approximately 1-year follow-up.
3. More focus should be given to improve the pswe of apprentices and help companies tackle the education of young workers better