Amendment and correction

Scand J Work Environ Health 2010;36(6):514

Re: Theorell T (reviewer). Unhealthy Work – Causes, Consequences, and Cures [book review]. Scand J Work Environ Health. 2010;36(5):432.

The following book review was accidentally omitted from the previous paper issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health.* The printer apologizes for this error.

Unhealthy Work – Causes, Consequences, and Cures. By Schnall PL, Dobson M and Rosskam E, editors. Amityville (NY): Baywood Publishing Company; 2009. ISBN 978-0-89503-335-2. Pre-publication price: US$7 (inside US), US$12 (Canada) and US$15 (global). The book can be ordered from baywood@baywood.com, http://www.baywood.com.

This book is a very useful summary and analysis of knowledge regarding working conditions that impair the health of millions of employees across the world. Its focus is mainly a North American one, but it also brings in an international perspective. It is a thought-provoking look at the alarmingly bad and worsening working conditions faced by masses of employees and how these impact on physical (mainly cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes) and mental illness (mainly depression) as well as lost productivity. It is a sad story, which illustrates that production of knowledge is certainly not enough to stop destructive changes in working life.

There is extensive documentation from epidemiological science supporting the conclusion that unrewarding, psychologically demanding work, which gives the employees no decision latitude, increases the risk of developing poor health. It is a tragedy that this knowledge is largely disregarded. A chapter in *Unhealthy Work* addresses this fact by asking "How can we make relevant stakeholders more interested in this science?" Cardiologists do not appear to be very interested; this is probably explained by the fact that the patient seeks advice from the cardiologist as an individual, and the doctor cannot influence the working conditions of that individual. Therefore it is natural for the cardiologist to disregard knowledge about the association between bad working conditions and cardiovascular disease. Not even union representatives know much about the concepts and all the knowledge that has been collected in the field.

Although we cannot boast that we care very much about employees' health in Europe, the climate is slightly different. At least in Scandinavia and northern Europe, trade unions and cardiologists care a little more about collective working conditions and their effect on health. For instance, in the European guidelines for cardiological disease, work stress is mentioned as a factor to be examined. European trade unions, often in collaboration with employer federations, work on documents for improved working conditions and there are also guidelines from the European Union, which the Swedish researcher Lennart Levi has been very active in promoting. Another recent development is a greater understanding of the role of leadership in psychosocial working conditions; management development programs take this issue into account when examining ways to achieve collective improvement of working conditions.

The authors would have found more relevant material from Europe if they had looked more carefully. This is particularly relevant for the chapters on interventions where collective worksite interventions, for instance in the form of Participatory Action Research (PAR), are more common in Europe than North America.

However, what really seems to count is money. There is one chapter in the book entitled "Work, Psychosocial Stressors, and the Bottom Line" about the costs associated with work environment-related employee illness. Of course, the first thing that comes to mind are the direct costs of employer insurance. What many employers do not consider, however, are the indirect costs related to increased workplace absenteeism/sick leave, short- and long-term disability management, diminished productivity at work in the form of presenteeism, increased employee turnover, and law suits related to stress and mental health issues. Many who read the book will be surprised at the enormous costs that result from poor employee health caused by bad work environments.

For me, however, an even more profound bottom line is the human suffering related to ill health caused by a poor work environment. This suffering has a knock-on effect for families. It probably triggers divorce and mishandling of children during their upbringing. It is time to do something. Reading *Unhealthy Work* is a good start. It is my hope that it will be read in wide circles.

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