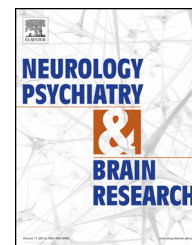


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# High work ability and performance in psychiatric health care services: Associations with organizational, individual and contextual factors

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Continuing development in the German healthcare system has a strong influence on the work situation of hospital clinicians working in Psychiatric Medicine. Since the job demands for psychiatrists are growing, there is a strong need to promote, preserve and restore doctors' work ability. The aim of this study was to assess the prevalence of psychiatrists' work ability and to examine relations between work ability, job performance and organizational as well as individual resources (e.g. work engagement) of doctors working in psychiatric hospitals. **Methods and materials:** The current survey investigation was conducted as a cross-sectional. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire and the Work Ability Index were used to evaluate psychiatrists' work engagement, working conditions and work ability. **Results:** Psychiatrists reported high levels of work ability and work engagement. Significant associations have been found between doctors' sources of work engagement, work ability and organizational factors (e.g. possibilities for development, income, etc.). Moreover, significant differences in gender, age and marital status have been analyzed with regard to perceived work ability scores. **Conclusion:** The study results reflect the positive effect of supportive working conditions and work engagement on the preservation of psychiatrists' work ability. Our research suggests that strengthening psychiatrists' work ability and work engagement will contribute to a more sustainable workplace, in terms of both individual and hospital performance. Innovative strategies for physicians' personal development and improving capacity and performance of clinicians working in Psychiatric Medicine are strongly required.

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## 1. Introduction

To date, there is an overall trend of rising mental disorders found in the general population.<sup>1</sup> Against this background psychiatrists working in hospitals have an outstanding role and function in providing psychiatric diagnostic and treatment of mental disorders.

The current world of work in hospitals, characterized by constant change and developing economic insecurity<sup>2,3</sup> has resulted in greater demands, working with restricted time resources and consecutive pressure being placed on psychiatrists.<sup>4–6</sup> In order to properly balance issues of accessibility to treatment and quality of treatment with the need for cost containment, the involvement of psychiatrist, in the diagnostic and treatment of the patient is strongly required.<sup>7</sup>

Even though it is known that different work-related factors influence health and sick-leave outcomes, little research has focused on how job demands, individual and social resources or motivational concepts like work engagement that may moderate or modulate effects of potentially negative work characteristics on psychiatrists' work ability.

Therefore our research interest is to focus on relations between perceived work ability and organizational as well as personal factors (e.g. job resources, work engagement, etc.). Previously published research findings illustrated that work ability and work engagement are necessary requirements to ensure a high-quality medical health service. It is demonstrated without exception that work engaged employees reported less job strain and take less sick leaves due to work and stress-related diseases.<sup>8,9</sup>

### 1.1. Work ability

Work ability is hereby defined as "the sum of factors enabling an employed person in a certain situation to manage his/her working demands successfully".<sup>10</sup> Particularly in health care jobs work ability is a precondition to cope with demanding tasks in different work conditions (e.g. high patient loads, working under pressure). In fact, previous studies have indicated that deficient work ability is related to reduced productivity at work,<sup>11,12</sup> increased sickness absence<sup>13,14</sup> and early retirement.<sup>15</sup> Personal resources (e.g. self-esteem, resilience) and working conditions (e.g. job resources) have been analyzed as predictors for work ability in several settings.<sup>11</sup> However, the motivational concept of work engagement has not been studied sufficiently as a predictor for work ability, especially for the health care services.

### 1.2. Work engagement

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling motivational state of work-related well-being.<sup>16</sup> Work engaged employees are thought to identify themselves with their work, experiencing high levels of

- deep absorption by their work.<sup>17,18</sup>

Work engagement has been associated to a variety of positive institutional outcomes, for example, job commitment, productivity, job satisfaction, and low turnover intention.<sup>16,19,20</sup> Research findings indicated that work engagement could act as a protective factor against burnout.<sup>21–23</sup>

### 1.3. Objective

The main aim of the study was to evaluate psychiatrists' work ability and to examine on whether the motivational concept of work engagement and other supportive job demands are associated with work ability among psychiatrists working in German hospitals. In order to maintain and promote physicians' work engagement and work ability on a high level, the identification of additional personal and work-related factors is important. To ensure quality in health care service, it is important to study on psychiatrists' work ability, performance and factors that are related these outcomes. In the further course interventions can be developed to improve physicians' health, performance and quality of health care service in Psychiatric Medicine.

Our research questions were as follows:

1. Are psychiatrists' socio-demographic variables (e.g. age) and individual resources associated with their work ability?
2. Are psychiatrists working conditions associated with their work ability?
3. Does psychiatrists' work engagement relate to work ability even after adjusting for socio-demographic variables and working conditions?
4. Do organizational and/or personal factors (such as job resources, work engagement, self-efficiency, status of apprenticeship, etc.) act as significant predictors of psychiatrists' work ability?

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Study design and setting

The study is designed as a cross-sectional questionnaire evaluation. Data collection took place between 2010 and 2012 in eight Psychiatric Units in four regions of Germany. Hospitals included five state hospitals and three private owned hospitals. Chosen hospital departments are similar in size (500 beds and more), number of patients per unit, employed medical staff (e.g. residents, junior-doctors, nurses). Based on information of the German Federal Office of Statistics in 2012, they are comparable to other German hospitals.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.2. Study-sample and data collection

In a first step we presented our study design to the clinic management, heads of the clinical departments, then to physicians' supervisors and psychiatrists. After this procedure we scheduled dates for administering the survey. We asked the clinicians to fill out the questionnaire within 3 weeks and to return them to boxes placed in physicians' rooms. Reminders were sent to increase the response rate. In total,

- vigor,
- (total) dedication,

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