Unravelling Stress Factors Among General Practitioners in Training During Weekend On-Call Duties: A Qualitative and Quantitative Causal Analysis

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Context: In recent years, the mental well-being of medical trainees is a growing concern. Particularly, out-of-hours services adversely affect occupational stress. Considering the continuity of healthcare, it is of high interest to identify the key contributors to occupational stress during weekend on-call duties among General Practitioners (GPs) in training. As such, the mental health of young doctors can be better understood and prioritized.

Onderzoeksvraag: We aim to identify the main stress factors related to a weekend on-call shift among GPs in training. We map out their relations with and causal effect on stress during an on-call shift.

Methode: We establish a Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG) to present the current evidence base of the cause-effect relationships between an on-call shift and occupational stress. To this end, we performed a literature review and qualitative focus group discussion. Furthermore, we conducted an observational survey to collect data on the identified stress factors, which we used to perform a regression analysis and isolate causal effects.

Resultaten: We leveraged a DAG to structure the stress factors identified in literature and group discussion, allowing us to estimate causal effects in an observational study. The study revealed that weekend on-call duties increase occupational stress in GPs in training. Interruptions to leisure time, the fear of potential errors, and anticipatory and vigilant behaviour to potential calls emerged as key contributors to elevated stress levels in our analysis.

Conclusie: Our study revealed the importance of internal stress factors and their role in occupational stress during an on-call shift, emphasizing the need to focus on coping mechanisms in medical training and a structural empowerment of physicians in the organisation of out-of-hours care.