Stress studies fill in the gaps

**Workplace stress on civil servants in London – Marmot et al (1977)**

**Aim:** To investigate the effects of high control level and low control level on stress and illness. In context of sample used (Civil Servants) it was assumed that high grade employees would experience high demand and low grade employees would experience low control.

**Procedure:** Civil service employees in London were invited to take part and 7,372 agreed to take part by filling in a questionnairre (asking about their grade, sense of control, social support, etc) and by having a health check to assess signs of stress. They were reassessed five years later.

**Results:**

* 1. Higher grade workers developed fewer cardiovascular problems.
* 2. Lower grade workers expressed a lower sense of job control and less social support.
* 3. Workers with cardiovascular disorders were more likely to be low grade workers but they were also more likely to be stressed and be overweight

**Conclusions:** Low control is related to higher stress and greater risk of cardiovascular disease, but high job demand is **not** linked to greater stress and illness

**Evaluation of Marmot et al**

* Sample was biased (only London based civil servants) so may not be generalisable to other cultures/countries or professions
* Lower grade workers are also more likely to smoke, live in stressful environments and have poor diets (due to their lower social status) and these could have contributed to their higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease, rather than their level of control at work
* However, further research (e.g. Johansson et al, 1978) does support lack of control as a risk factor for high stress levels

**Workplace stress in a sawmill – Johansson et al (1978)**

**Aim:** To investigate the effect of repetitiveness, high demand and lack of control on levels of stress at work.

**Procedure:** 14 employees in a Swedish sawmill were studied.  Their work was highly skilled and they had no control over the pace at which their work was carried out (machine paced). They were compared with a group of group of 10 low stress workers who had more control over their work.

They levels of adrenaline and noradrenaline (stress hormones) in their urine was measured both at work and in their free time, and their number of illnesses and absences from work were recorded.

**Results:** The people in the high stress group had higher levels of stress hormones whilst at work than those in the low stress group, and their levels of illness and absenteeism were also higher

**Conclusions:** Repetitiveness, high demand and lack of control were linked to higher levels of stress, which increased illness and absenteeism.

**Evaluation of Johansson et al**

* Measure of stress hormones in the urine is an objective measure of stress levels - reduces the chance of investigator effects and has higher validity than self report measures of stress levels
* The results of the study were useful to psychologists - the researchers made practical suggestions to lower absenteeism and reduce workload - they suggested job rotation and allowing workers a higher level of control
* This was a natural experiment using correlational data so cause and effect cannot be established
* Biased sample - may not be generalisable to other groups