

Editorial

Work engagement in the post-COVID-19 era: an occupational mental health perspective

Occupational mental health originally aims at promoting workers' mental health and well-being. Contrary to what the name suggests, traditional occupational mental health has almost exclusively dealt with ill-health and poor well-being. However, since the emergence of positive psychology at the start of the 21st century, the ideas/concepts/constructs of human strength and optimal functioning have gained traction¹⁾. As a result, occupational mental health has begun to lean towards the more positive aspects of workers' health and well-being. One of these positive aspects is work engagement, which is considered the opposite of burnout in the workplace²⁾.

Since the concept of work engagement was introduced, empirical findings on its antecedents and outcomes have steadily accumulated. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of studies dealing with work engagement in the field of occupational health as well as psychology. Research has revealed that work engagement has favourable effects on workers' health, well-being, and job performance^{3–5)}. In addition to academic research, the concept of work engagement has also guided the labour and economic policy. For instance, work engagement has been included in the European Working Conditions Survey since 2015⁶⁾. In Japan, a special section on work engagement was included in the *2019 White Paper on Labour Economy*^{7, 8)}, and periodical assessment of work engagement has been recommended in health and productivity management⁹⁾.

However, research on work engagement is yet to answer many questions. For instance, do biological factors (e.g., gene, immune, and endocrine functions)¹⁰⁾ play a part in work engagement? Is there a relationship between work engagement and workplace and organisational productivity? If so, can this relationship be measured in terms of objective data? Additionally, which intervention strategy is appropriate to improve engagement?^{11, 12)} Can work engagement be detrimental to the health and well-being of workers and those around them? Are there any optimal levels of work engagement?¹³⁾ Is the concept of work engagement universal across cultures? What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had on work engagement? To answer these ques-

tions and improve workers' well-being, more interdisciplinary and international collaborations are needed.

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