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Keynote Speech - Abstract

The life course in quantitative research on work transitions

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Good work is fundamental to life - as is good health. Work and health are interdependent, that means work is a determinant of health and health is a determinant of work. In view of changing demographics, work and labor markets, as well as social contexts, the key challenges to be addressed in work and health research and practice are 1) to minimize ill-health and its effects on work functioning, 2) to ensure good physical and psychosocial work environments and 3) to accomplish these challenges across the widening socio-economic gradient and across the life course.

Why a life course lens when looking at work and health? The working life is preceded by childhood and adolescence with schooling and training and followed by retirement and older age. Life course transitions, taken together with health transitions (both prior and during working life), health outcomes, labor market experiences, and labor market transitions create an individual's working life course.

To date, detailed knowledge about the transitions people make, e.g., the transition from school to work, transitions during working life such as changing careers or the transition out of work towards retirement - and the impact of these transitions on trajectories of health, well-being and work functioning is lacking. Hence, to deepen our understanding of transitions and the dynamic interplay between work and health, a life course perspective is needed. Transitions are complex in terms of conceptualization and measurement. Relevant questions to be addressed concern: what are important transitions? how to measure transitions? what constitutes a "successful" transition?

If we in work and health research succeed in adopting a life course perspective and translating our findings into relevant policy and practice measures, we together - researchers, health care professionals, employers and policy makers - can make a difference towards "healthy working lives".