

Work-related stress among health professionals working in Swiss hospitals, nursing homes and home care organisations

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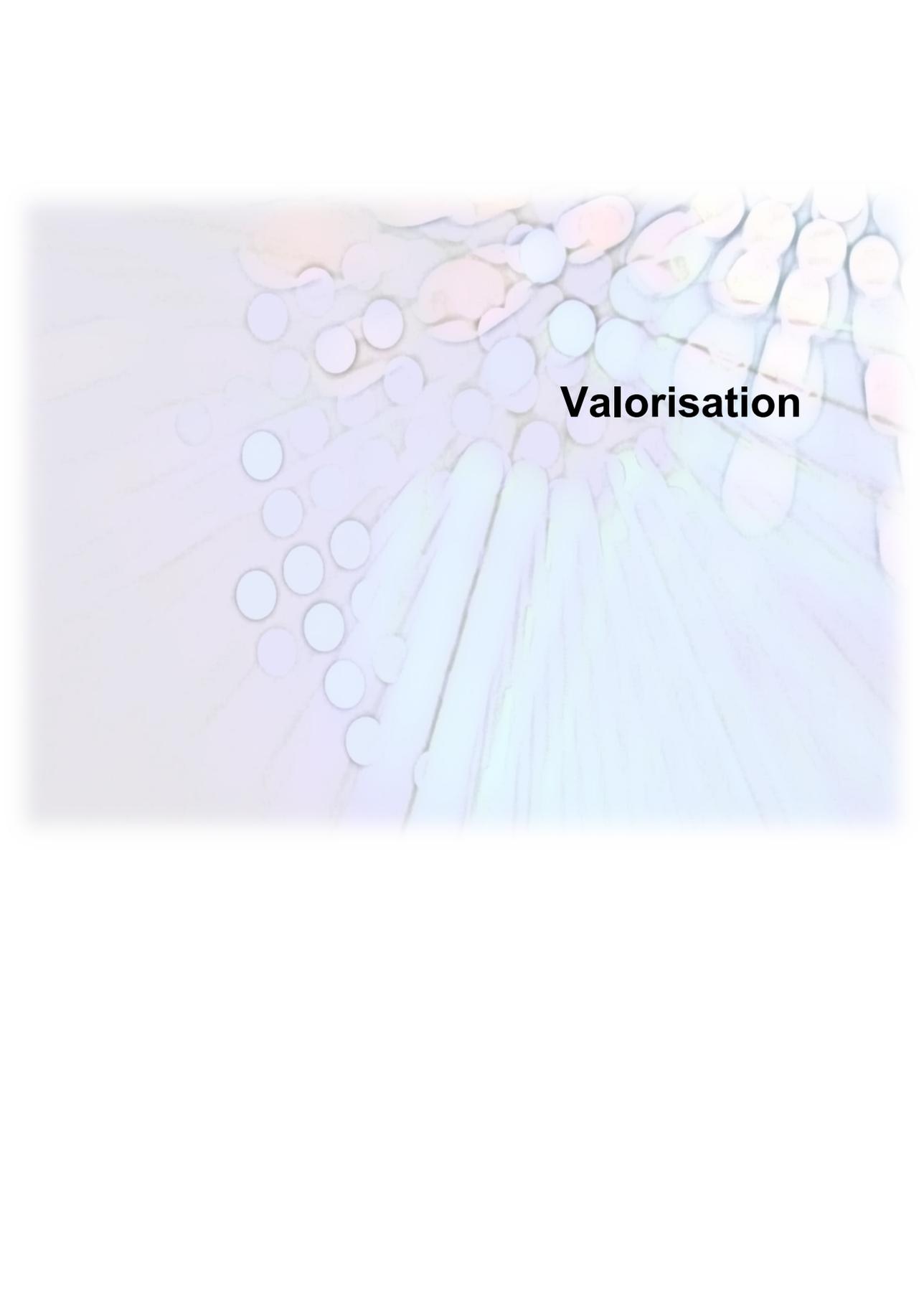
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Valorisation

Valorisation

This chapter on valorisation provides information on the potential value of this thesis' results for important stakeholders, the Swiss population in general, further research and education. Furthermore, the chapter concludes with information on activities and products resulting from our findings.

Relevance of this thesis

Stress at work has many adverse effects on health professionals' job satisfaction, health and well-being.¹⁻³ Furthermore, stress at work is associated with health professionals' increasing intention to leave the profession prematurely and generally reduces the attractiveness of practising a health profession.^{1, 4} Switzerland is, among other countries, currently struggling with a shortage of health professionals.⁵ However, the availability of well-educated health professionals is essential for a society's well-being and a shortage of these key workers can destabilise a country's entire health care system.⁶ The current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has clearly demonstrated the association of limited resources, healthcare burden and mortality in several countries, and how essential the role of health professionals is in such a time of crisis.⁷

Value for stakeholders, population, research and education

Reducing stress at work is therefore not only important to ensure that the healthcare system is adequately prepared for such events, but above all, that enough health professionals are always available in the healthcare sector. The results of this thesis identify important fields of action that should be taken in order to improve working conditions in the Swiss health care system, with a special focus on acute care and rehabilitation hospitals. This may contribute to combating the shortage of skilled health professionals and to ensure optimal health care for the Swiss population. The results of this thesis can therefore also be important for politicians and policy makers in their efforts to promote better working conditions (e.g. regarding compliance with legal breaks and rest periods in the Swiss health care sector).

In addition, this thesis provides important recommendations for organisational policies, and detailed suggestions on topics relevant to improving working conditions in the whole organisation as well as specific topics for different health professional disciplines and various levels of hierarchy. Furthermore, most relevant prerequisites for the effective implementation of prevention strategies in everyday clinical practice are discussed and are intended to support leaders with their implementation in their area of responsibility.

Our results, moreover, not only establish the need for further research regarding effective prevention and intervention strategies in order to reduce stress at work

among health professionals, but also reveal the need for a stronger focus on stress at work in health professionals' education. Health professional leaders in particular have an important role to play within their organisation to improve working conditions and reduce stress at work among their employees.⁸ Therefore, a special focus in their training and education on the assessment and reduction of stress at work as well as on their attitude and leadership behaviours is essential. In addition, the inclusion of legal aspects of working conditions and effective strategies on how to deal with stress at work in the basic education program of Swiss health professionals could support and strengthen their influence in improving their working conditions and coping strategies regarding stress at work

Target groups

The primary target group of this research were Swiss healthcare organisations (especially acute care and rehabilitation hospitals), their leaders, human resource teams and employees with a remit for occupational health. Health professional leaders received special focus because they are responsible for the protection and improvement of employees' health, wellbeing, job satisfaction and intention to remain in the organisation and in their profession. Also, they have a key role regarding establishing a positive and supportive organisational culture as well as the development and implementation of organisational policies towards better working conditions and prevention of stress at work.^{8, 9} In addition, health professionals working without management responsibility can also benefit, since our results shed light on the poorest working conditions, satisfaction and health-related outcomes and thus offer them evidence-based arguments for better working conditions in their daily work.

Activities and Products

The results of this thesis were part of the first data collection of the national STRAIN study (work-related stress among health professionals in Switzerland). The STRAIN study is a cluster randomised controlled trial (Clinical Trials registration: NCT03508596), conducted in the settings acute care, rehabilitation and psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes and outpatient care in all language regions of Switzerland. The strain study consists of three data collections ($T^0=2017/2018$, $T^1=2019$, $T^2=2020$) using a self-report questionnaire¹⁰ for employees and a questionnaire to assess institutional key figures. The data from the baseline measurement T^0 was analysed in Chapter 2-4 with a focus on acute care and rehabilitation hospitals (Chapter 2,3) and different hierarchies (Chapter 4). Furthermore, the results of the overall STRAIN study also focused on the extent of stress at work and stressors associated with relevant outcomes in other settings (psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, outpatient care). In addition to these quantitative data, a total of 24 focus group interviews with various health

professionals working in different settings of the Swiss health care sector were conducted to collect their ideas and recommendations on how to improve their working environment and reduce stress at work. Additionally, an extensive literature research was conducted in order to identify published international literature on effective prevention and intervention strategies to reduce stress at work. Therefore, 1400 studies (reviews, meta-analysis, intervention studies) and available guidelines were summarised and analysed as to their recommendations. Those three data sources (quantitative, qualitative, literature) served in developing the study intervention that focuses on the health professional leaders working in the lower, middle and upper management levels. The STRAIN intervention program was developed according to the intervention mapping approach from Bartholomew, et al.¹¹. The intervention mapping approach consists of 6 steps and leads towards evidence-based program development, implementation and evaluation.¹¹ The results of this thesis, among others, therefore directly supported the development of the STRAIN intervention program for leaders.

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