

Commentary

Commentary: Comparative Analysis of Psychosocial Risks and Leadership in Municipal Government Agencies: A Study Based on NOM-035-STPS-2018 in Zacatecas, Mexico

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Description

This study contributes to the fields of organizational psychology, occupational health and public administration by providing empirical evidence on psychosocial risk factors and job autonomy in the Mexican municipal government sector. Its relevance lies in its framework based on NOM-035-STPS-2018, an official regulation in Mexico aimed at identifying, analyzing and preventing psychosocial risk factors in the workplace. One of the study's main contributions is shifting the focus of psychosocial risk analysis from the business sector to the municipal public sector, an area that has been scarcely studied in Latin America, particularly in terms of its organizational complexity. The authors argue that employee well-being in public institutions depends on more than individual resilience; it is also shaped by structural work conditions such as workload, working hours, autonomy, and leadership style.

This perspective is consistent with robust theoretical models such as Karasek's Demand-Control Model and the Job Demands-Resources Theory, which suggest that high demands combined with low control led to increased stress and higher levels of occupational exhaustion. The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational, and comparative design involving 235 public servants from six departments of the Zacatecas City Council: Municipal Presidency, Public Safety, Civil Protection, House of Culture, Municipal DIF, and INMUZAI. Reference Guide III of NOM-035 was used because it allowed a quantitative evaluation of key dimensions, including work environment, activity-related factors, time organization, leadership, and organizational climate. Similarly, robust statistical procedures such as Welch's ANOVA, Games-Howell post hoc tests, and correlation analyses enhanced the reliability of the results. The findings clearly demonstrated that psychosocial risks are not equally distributed among the departments analyzed.

Public Safety and Civil Protection emerged as the most vulnerable departments, showing critical workload levels, long working hours, and low autonomy. This is consistent with the operational, reactive, and highly demanding nature of these roles. However, the study provides a more nuanced perspective by suggesting that risk is not solely explained by the type of work, but also by the command and supervision model. In particular, Civil Protection showed a more negative perception of leadership, illustrating how hierarchical structures may become a source of occupational stress. An especially important finding is that poor leadership is strongly associated with low job control ($\rho=0.701$). This is one of the article's key contributions, as it demonstrates that perceptions of authoritarian or dysfunctional leadership are closely linked to reduced work autonomy. In organizational terms, this means leadership not only shapes workplace climate but also affects employees' subjective capacity to act effectively, feel empowered, and maintain control over their tasks. This relationship has significant implications for occupational mental health, particularly in bureaucratic environments where decision-making is highly hierarchical.

In contrast, the Municipal DIF appears to function as a protective environment. Although its staff perform emotionally demanding tasks such as psychological care and social work with vulnerable populations, they reported lower psychosocial risk levels and better leadership indicators. This suggests that humanistic leadership, combined with social support and organizational clarity, can buffer emotional strain at work. The contrast between DIF and Public Safety reinforces the idea that leadership acts as a moderating factor in occupational stress.

Another particularly relevant aspect of the study is the identification of a systemic problem related to poor job recognition. Unlike other

domains, this variable did not significantly differ across departments, suggesting that insufficient recognition of employee performance is a widespread issue throughout the municipal administration. This finding is important because it indicates that a culture of recognition, positive feedback, and belonging remains underdeveloped. From a psychosocial perspective, this lack of recognition may undermine professional identity and promote institutional detachment, cynicism and burnout. The cross-sectional design of the study does not allow causal conclusions; therefore, the findings should be interpreted in associative terms. Additionally, self-reported data may be affected by social desirability bias, especially in hierarchical environments where workers may underreport risk perceptions. However, these limitations do not weaken the study; rather, they highlight opportunities for future longitudinal and mixed-methods research to further explore subjective experiences of autonomy and leadership.

Conclusion

Overall, this research is highly relevant and strongly grounded in both theory and empirical evidence. Statistical findings are translated into practical recommendations for public policy and organizational management. Proposed interventions include shift redesign in Public Safety, coaching programs for middle management, and non-monetary recognition strategies. These recommendations go beyond diagnosis and position NOM-035 at the center of a strategic approach to occupational mental health. The study clearly demonstrates that occupational health in the municipal public sector should be understood as a structural condition in which leadership, autonomy, and recognition are essential dimensions of well-being. This research provides empirical evidence from Zacatecas and offers a useful analytical model for other municipalities in Mexico and Latin America. It is undoubtedly a rigorous and socially necessary study that contributes to strengthening public policies aimed at dignifying work and protecting the mental health of those who sustain public service.