

Severe depressive symptoms and the risk of long-term sickness absence and work disability

Ute Bültmann and Reiner Rugulies
National Research Centre for the Working Environment
Copenhagen, Denmark

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Mental health and sickness absence



- Growing concern about the proportion and socio-economic consequences of *long-term* sickness absence and work disability
- Question: Impact of mental health problems on long-term sickness absence and work disability?

The DREAM register

- DREAM = register-based evaluation of marginalization
- Register from Ministry of Employment, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Education
- National register on social transfer payments
 - sick leave compensation, disability pension, early retirement pension, unemployment benefits etc.
 - for all residents in Denmark on a weekly basis

Merging DWECS & DREAM



Depressive symptoms and the risk of long-term sickness absence

A prospective study among 4747 employees in Denmark

**Bültmann, U., Rugulies, R., Lund, T., Christensen, K.B.,
Labriola, M. & Burr, H.**

**Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology, 2006,
41(11), 875-880**



Study design and methods

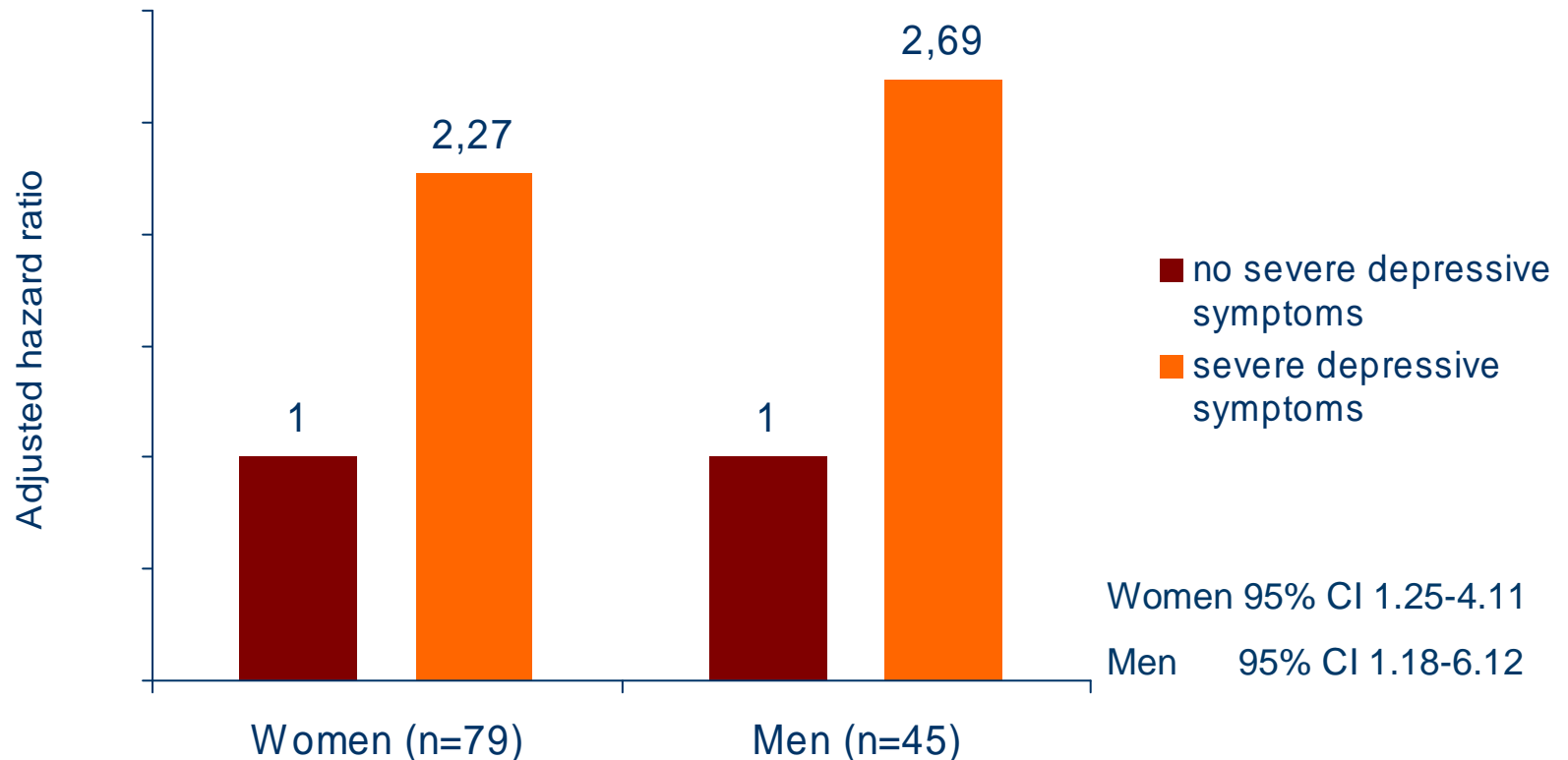
- Data from DWECS 2000: n=4747 employees
 - n=2194 women and n=2553 men
- Depressive symptoms: Mental Health Inventory-5 (SF-36); severe depressive symptoms ≤ 52 points
- Long-term sickness absence: Onset of LTSA during 78 weeks of follow-up in DREAM (Jan 1, 2001–June 30, 2002)
- Analyses: Cox proportional hazard modeling with stepwise adjustment for covariates

Results:

Depressive symptoms and LTSA

- Cumulative 78-week incidence of long-term sickness absence: 7.6% (n=362)
 - 8.9% (n=196) in women and 6.5% (n=166) in men
- Depressive symptoms score (as per quartile)
 - no significant effects and no clear trends in men & women
 - effects occurred mostly in employees with high levels of depressive symptoms
- At baseline, 124 employees were classified as having severe depressive symptoms
 - 3.6% (n=79) women and 1.8% (n=45) men

Severe depressive symptoms and LTSA



Adjusted for age, education, cohabitation, number of children at home, presence of a diagnosed disease, and lifestyle factors

Severe depressive symptoms as risk factor of work disability

Bültmann, U., Christensen, K.B., Burr, H., Lund, T. & Rugulies, R.

preliminary results



Study design and methods

- Data from DWECS 1995: n= 5361 employees
 - n=2567 women and n=2794 men
- Severe depressive symptoms: Mental Health Inventory-5 (SF-36) \leq 52 points
- Granted work disability pension: onset of WD during 9 years of follow-up in DREAM (Jan 1, 1996 – December 31, 2004)
- Analyses: Cox proportional hazard modeling with stepwise adjustment for covariates

Results:

Severe depressive symptoms and work disability

- Cumulative 9-year incidence for a granted work disability pension: 1.6% (n=87)
 - 2.2% (n=56) in women and 1.1% (n=31) in men
- At baseline in 1995, 173 employees were classified as having severe depressive symptoms
 - 4.3% (n=110) women and 2.3% (n=63) men
- Severe depressive symptoms predict work disability pension in women only

Conclusions

- Severe depressive symptoms, as measured with the MHI-5, increased the risk of future long-term sickness absence in the Danish working population
- ...and of future disability pension in women only
- Prospective studies with reliable and accurate register data on social transfer payments, BUT no information available about diagnoses (sickness absence and work disability)

Future challenges

- Relevant topic calling for action!
 - to identify relevant actors and mechanisms that facilitate or hinder return to work in employees with mental health problems
 - clarify the role of the health care system, the workplace system, the legislative and the insurance system
 - develop tools and interventions that help employees with mental health problem to return to work

**Thank you very much for
your attention!**

Contact

Ute Bültmann
utb@nrcwe.dk

Reiner Rugulies
rer@nrcwe.dk

National Research Centre for the Working Environment
Copenhagen, Denmark

