

# Workstyle and overcommitment in relation to neck and upper limb symptoms

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## Abstract

In former studies associations were found between a high-risk workstyle and neck and upper limb symptoms. A high-risk workstyle implied: taking shorter or fewer breaks or even skip breaks, working through pain, anticipating the possible negative reactions of colleagues, and making high demands on one's own performances at work. In the present study we examined in a population of European office workers whether a high-risk workstyle was a mediator in the relation of work-related exposure (job demands and VDU-work) and overcommitment with neck and upper limb symptoms. The Sobel Test was applied to test the intermediate effects of four different workstyle dimensions and of the total workstyle score. It showed that most mediated effects were statistically significant, meaning that the workstyle dimensions acted as a mediator in the relation between work-related exposure and symptoms as well as in the relation between overcommitment and symptoms. Given the results with the total workstyle score, 34% of the effect of prolonged VDU-work, 64% of the effect of Job demands and 84% of the effect of overcommitment was mediated by workstyle. However, due to possible bias in the assessment of the workstyle factor Working Through Pain, the results should be drawn with care.

*Keywords: workstyle, VDU-work, overcommitment, job demands, mediation, neck and upper limb symptoms*

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## 1. Introduction

Initially, most research on neck and upper limb symptoms focused on work-related physical exposure. Nowadays psychosocial factors receive more attention and are considered as independent risk factors for musculoskeletal symptoms [1]. Next to psychosocial work characteristics and physical factors, it has been suggested that personality traits could contribute to the onset of neck and upper

limb symptoms: associations have been found between musculoskeletal symptoms and type A behavior [2], neurotic perfectionist traits [3] and overcommitment [4].

It is unknown how a personality trait could lead to symptoms. It probably will not cause these effects directly, but the relation might be mediated through unhealthy behavior. A concept that operationalizes this kind of behavior is "workstyle". The concept of workstyle is derived from the