

Occupational Health Psychology

NEWSLETTER

OHP
Interest Group



Newsletter of the Australian Psychological Society, Occupational Health Psychology Interest Group

Issue 1 | August 2011

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From the Acting Convener

Welcome to this first edition of the Australian Psychological Society, Occupational Health Psychology Interest Group Newsletter. It's taken a little longer to get into circulation than was initially anticipated; however, hopefully it was worth the wait. After this edition, we will be looking for a member to take on the Newsletter Editorial role. So to any budding Editors out there, here is your opportunity.

The Newsletter will be reporting on current areas of interest for Occupational Health and Safety educators, researchers and practitioners across Australia, as well as news from our colleagues overseas. Your contribution and feedback is very important and welcomed in this endeavour.

As this is the first edition, perhaps it's appropriate to begin with a short history of the group to date.

According to my colleague Dr Peter Cotton, the idea of establishing an Occupational Health Psychology group in Australia had been discussed for some time, but for various reasons it never happened. So with a little enthusiasm, and a lot of ignorance (!), I suggested the idea of an Australian OHP group some two to three years ago. I visited Professor Paul Spector at the University of South Florida and spoke with him about the field of Occupational Health Psychology in the USA. Paul was one of the original group responsible for establishing the American Society for Occupational Health Psychology, and wrote a very informative paper on their first planning meeting back in 2001. I must confess I was a little envious of the resources that were available in the USA compared to where we were starting in Australia, but certainly inspired by the meeting with Paul and reading his paper.

Earlier this year I was fortunate to meet with Professor Tom Cox from Nottingham University. Tom is the Chair of the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology (established in 1990) and Editor of the highly regarded *Work and Stress* journal (established in 1987). Tom was also very supportive of the formation of an Australian group. Tom felt our group should link into the established international network of occupational health psychology researchers, educators and practitioners he had been involved in developing.

In Australia, I was grateful for the support of the Australian Psychological Society and their staff, and the College of Organisational Psychology who provided much needed practical help and encouragement in the early stages of forming the group. In particular, Fernanda Alphonso, the College of Organisational Psychology Chair at the time, and her committee were very supportive and helpful.

Dr Peter Cotton and Prof Maureen Dollard, two leaders in the field of Occupational Health Psychology in Australia, were also great supporters during the formation of the group. And from various States a number of individuals volunteered their help and support to get the group started. In particular, Kath McEwen and Denise Keenan from South Australia, Scott McLennan from Queensland, Diana Bull from NSW, Suzi Keser from the ACT, and Eleanor Wertheim and Kathryn Page from Victoria.

To these people and many others I have not identified by name, we owe our thanks for embracing the idea that establishing the group was important, and believing it could and should happen.

Perhaps history, like beauty, is in the eye (or the mind) of the beholder. The view of the journey so far is that of this writer. Full responsibility is accepted for the way in which events are reported here, and apologies are offered in advance to anyone who has a different recollection of history.

In concluding can I say we have made a beginning and we look forward to a rewarding future.

Bill Pappas

OHP Membership.

Although the OHP Interest Group is the newest APS interest group, we are already 125 members strong. All Australian States and Territories are represented by the membership, which includes researchers, educators, practitioners and students from across the field of occupational health, safety and wellbeing.

We know there are still many more potential members out there that we haven't been able to contact yet, who are unaware of the group's existence. We welcome new members so if you have any colleagues who would be interested in being a member, please email the following link to the application form.

<http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/APS-Interest-Groups-application-form.pdf>

The Australian Psychological Society marketing people have also offered to design and print an Occupational Health Psychology Interest Group brochure. Hopefully these should be available shortly for members to distribute to their colleagues, students, etc.

An Interview with ... Dr Kathryn Page



Each newsletter will feature an interview with an Interest Group member. This issue we interview early career psychologist Dr Kathryn Page.

Kathryn completed her Doctorate in Organisational Psychology at Monash University, Victoria. For the last six years, Kathryn has explored how best to define, assess, and develop positive mental health at work. She is particularly interested in the design and evaluation of interventions, with a focus on employee wellbeing, engagement, stress, resilience, psychological flexibility, mindfulness, and behaviour change. Kathryn has presented her work at various international conferences including the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology conference in 2010 where she was awarded the *Andre Bussing Memorial Award* for outstanding early career achievement.

Kathryn is now working as a consulting psychologist with PeopleScape, a Melbourne-based assessment and development firm. She is also a Research Fellow in the area of Work, Health and Wellbeing in the Melbourne School of Population Health at the University of Melbourne.

What attracted you to the field of Occupational Health Psychology?

I have been passionate about the area of employee wellbeing and mental health since I began my research in 2005 – thanks to the two mentors I like to call my intellectual “parents” - Prof. Bob Cummins (Deakin University) and Dr Dianne Vella-Brodrick (Monash University). Through Bob and Dianne’s research in quality of life and positive psychology respectively, I became fascinated with the concept of subjective or psychological wellbeing. I was (and still am!) particularly interested in employee wellbeing. Although trained in organisational psychology, I relate much more strongly to occupational health psychology because of its emphasis on promoting employee health and wellbeing. To me, OHP has the ‘make a difference’ factor – hugely important to me.

You successfully completed your Doctorate of Psychology 9 months ago, what has been the response to your work since you ceased being a student and started full time employment?

I have been really surprised at the interest my work has generated - both academically and practically. I think this is testament to the growing understanding of wellbeing as a resource we need to protect and promote – whether from an individual, an organisational, or a societal perspective. What started out as a ‘pet project’ for me has now become a full time job. I feel blessed to have an opportunity to do what I love every day. In my consulting role this involves coaching managers on wellbeing related issues, developing teams to be healthier, more engaged and more effective, and consulting to organisations and government about how to create positive work environments and prevent stress. I’m also excited to be back in the academic space. Now that I’m (semi!) recovered from my doctorate, I’m happy to be starting something new – now looking at system level stress prevention programs under the leadership of A/Prof. Tony LaMontagne at Melbourne University.

As an early career psychologist in the field of Occupational Health Psychology, what do you think the future may hold for others like yourself?

I’d like to think that OHP will be a burgeoning field in Australia in the next 10 years. Given the increasing prevalence and cost of stress, mental illness and lifestyle disorders like cancer and CVD, and the important role organisations can play in preventing some of these diseases, we need more psychologists working as part of multidisciplinary teams to combat these issues. I’d love to see every organisation have access to comprehensive employee health and wellbeing and stress prevention programs – in addition to the legislative requirements of OH&S. Whilst we still have a long way to go on this, we are making lots of progress which is exciting.

Career-wise, where would you like to think you would be in 5 years time?

I really love where I am at right now so hopefully I will be doing the same thing but with another five years under my belt. I don’t think I will ever get to the point where I think I know enough... In fact, maybe I’ll even be back doing another degree sometime in the next 5 years... my family would kill me - but they wouldn’t be surprised!

For people interested in entering the field and students part way through their studies, what suggestions would you have?

There is some amazing work being done by Australian OHP scholars – for example, Maureen Dollard, Paula Brough, Tony LaMontagne, Andrew Noblet, Peter Cotton, Angela Martin, and others definitely start reading! Also check out the great applied initiatives happening in various government departments, not-for-profits and universities, for example WorkHealth/ WorkSafe, Comcare, Beyond Blue, University of Tasmania (e.g., Business in Mind), Department of Health (e.g., MHPro), the McCaughey Centre (a collaboration between Melbourne University and VicHealth), etc. I’d also suggest attending one of the many international conferences they hold in this field, such as the European Academy of OHP conference (in Switzerland next year), the USA’s Society of OHP conference, or the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP). They are a brilliant opportunity to meet new people and learn from some of the best academics and students in the world... plus a good excuse to head overseas... Or if you’re limited for time, check out one of the great books available in the area such as the Handbook of OHP (Quick & Tetrick, 2010) or anything by Prof Cary Cooper (a legend in the field). Or else any edition of *Work and Stress* or the *Journal of OHP*.

APS Endorses the Health Benefits of Work

The following article was originally published in InPsych June 2011, and is reproduced here with the permission of the APS and the author, Dr Peter Cotton.

APS endorses health benefits of work

The APS has endorsed, and is now a signatory to, the Australian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM) Position Statement, Realising the Health Benefits of Work.¹ This important new document summarises evidence showing that work is a determinant of health in exactly the same way as lifestyle and genetic factors.

Risk factors associated with not working

For the working age population, not being at work is a progressively increasing health risk factor. Indeed, not working for six months or more has been found to be an equivalent health risk factor to smoking 10 packets of cigarettes each day. Accordingly, long-term worklessness is now considered to be one of the most significant public health risk factors. When a person is off work for 20 days, the prospects of them successfully returning to work are 70 percent; when they are off work for 45 days, the chances of getting back to work are 50 percent. However, when a person is off work for 70 days, the chances of successfully resuming work declines to 35 per cent. Thus, the overarching theme of the Position Statement is that, generally, work is good for health.²

Australian statistics

In Australia we currently have an emergent problem with increasing levels of 'discretionary' absenteeism (as opposed to 'medically indicated' absenteeism). Indeed, requests for GP sickness certification have increased by 70 per cent over the past nine years – and this is over and above industrial relations and legislative changes. Further, there are now more Australians on Disability Support Pensions (DSP) than there are on unemployment benefits. The growth in DSPs is largely attributable to conditions that are traditionally regarded as not being totally incapacitating for work such as milder mental health disorders (anxiety and depression) and chronic musculoskeletal pain.

Implications for psychologists treating those not attending work

Too many health professionals still regard extended periods of time off work as being beneficial for wellbeing, and return to work as a process that occurs subsequent to the completion of their treatment. As the AFOEM Position Statement makes clear, good practice involves: (1) minimising time off work as far as is practically possible; and (2) integrating return to work expectations and initiatives as an essential core component of all treatment regimes. To paraphrase Professor Gordon Waddell, actually returning to work is typically the most effective treatment in and of itself!

Dr Peter Cotton FAPS
Strategy and Innovation Group, Medibank
WorkSafe and Transport Accident Commission, Victoria

1. Downloadable from: www1.racp.edu.au/index.cfm?objectid=5E2C3448-0957-60C9-FAA30410E29589E8
2. The one qualification to be made here is that we are referring to work that is at least of reasonable 'psychosocial quality'. As Peter Butterworth and colleagues at ANU have recently shown, work that is of very poor psychosocial quality (i.e., low control, high demand and complexity, job insecurity and unfair pay) can be as deleterious to health as long-term worklessness (Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 2011, doi:10.1136/oem.20101.059030).

Conference Reports

Report 2nd Asia Pacific Expert Workshop on Psychosocial Factors at Work, Malaysia, June 7 & 8

The 2nd Asia Pacific Expert Workshop on Psychosocial Factors at Work held in Johor Bahru on the 7th and 8th of July 2011 was hosted by Monash University, Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine & Health Sciences, Clinical School Johor Bahru (Chair).

This workshop followed the first one convened in Darwin in July 2010, hosted by the Centre for Applied Psychological Research, University of South Australia (Chair/Co-convenors Prof Maureen Dollard, Dr Michelle Tuckey, UniSA, Assoc Prof Paula Brough, Griffith University). The workshop brought together academics and policy makers from the Asia Pacific region to discuss psychosocial factors at work, share knowledge and build greater networks and opportunities to prevent psychosocial work injury, and contribute to better working arrangements in the region. Twenty eight delegates attended the workshop from Australia, Japan, and different parts of Malaysia including Sabah and Sarawak.



Among the key outputs from the two day workshop were:

- The development of a position statement intended to act as a signpost to suggest and advise that workplace counselling services be included as intervention in the Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA) Act 1994, thus promoting work environment that fulfils the psychosocial needs of employees.
- Collaborative research - initiated and planned on an ARC linkage project called “***The Australia Malaysia project on psychosocial safety climate in hospitals***”. This collaborative research plan would open up opportunities for sourcing international research grants and an increase in the number of HRD students.
- Developing human capacity building through joint PhD students.
- Training – with an increase of HDR students there would be more training for these students in research methodology and innovation.
- The workshop unanimously agreed to hold the 3rd Asia Pacific Expert Workshop on Psychosocial Factors at Work in Tokyo, Japan to be chaired by Associate Professor Dr. Akihito Shimazu from the University of Tokyo in August 2012.

The 2nd Asia Pacific Expert Workshop on Psychosocial Factors at Work was endorsed as a highly successful international workshop that has initiated international collaborative research arrangements on psychosocial factors at work.

Maureen Dollard

Stress and Health 2011. Orlando, Florida, May 19-22,

This bi-annual conference is convened by the American Psychological Association, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the Society for Occupational Health Psychology. The theme for the conference was, 'work and well-being in an economic context.'

The conference papers really did highlight the broad range of subject areas that make up Occupational Health Psychology, from research through to the practical workshops and presentations. Of all the many countries represented (including our own OHP Interest Group member Carlo Caponecchia from the University of NSW), it was interesting to listen to the Chinese Occupational Health Psychologists presenting on the particular challenges facing them. One speaker called China the 'factory of the world,' and pointed out how some of the Western Countries' workplace problems haven't declined, but rather they have just been exported to China along with the work.

It was good to see Robert Karasek (Demand/Control Model) recognised for his outstanding contribution to the field, and also to hear his acknowledgement of Maureen Dollard from South Australia, as one of the people that has been an important colleague.

Stavroula Leka from Nottingham University was recognised with the early career award for her significant contribution to the field of Occupational Health Psychology. Her contribution to the field has been nothing short of amazing, both in terms of the volume and quality of work she has produced in recent years. Stavroula's recognition was well deserved.

Bill Pappas

Industrial and Organisational Psychology Conference, Brisbane, June 23- 26

The theme for the 9th Industrial and Organisational Conference held in Brisbane was, 'connectivity in a dynamic world, human connections in a world of rapid change.' The conference was a great success. Organisers did a fantastic job despite the fact that the preparations were interrupted by the devastating floods that engulfed a large part of Queensland, including the City of Brisbane, some months earlier. Then they had to contend with a volcanic dust cloud that grounded many flights to the conference.

The quality of the papers and the presentations was outstanding. And I'm sure many others that attended noticed that the field of Occupational Health Psychology was a significant presence at the conference.

A number of members of the Occupational Health Psychology Interest Group presented, and this reinforced for me just how many talented people we have in Australia. It was also heartening to see many students and early career psychologists presenting their work. It certainly gives confidence to the older members of the group to see the future in such capable hands.

The Occupational Health Psychology Interest Group organised a Practice-oriented Forum which was well attended and received. Peter Cotton, Rhonda Brand, Jennifer Loh and Kathryn Page presented on 'Organisational level interventions for the prevention of psychological injuries.'

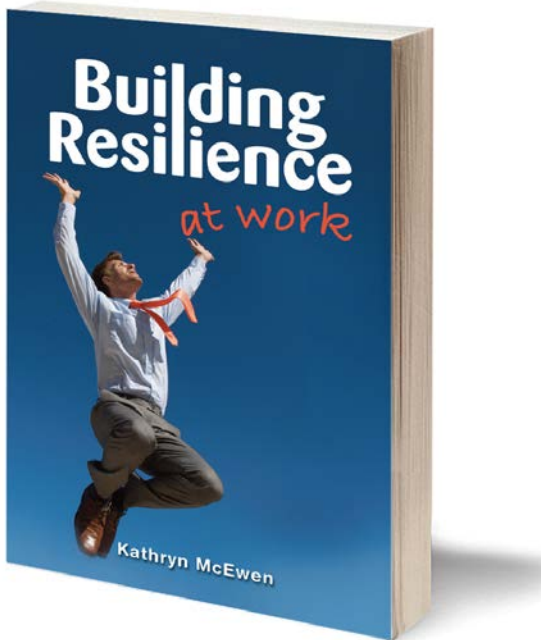
The 10th Industrial and Organisational Conference is scheduled for Perth in 2013. We plan on having early discussions with the organisers to ensure even stronger representation at this conference.

Bill Pappas

Members' books and publications

Each edition we will be presenting details of books and other publications by our member colleagues. In this first Newsletter, two of our members' recently published books are featured.

“Building resilience at work” by Kathryn McEwen (2011), Australian Academic Press



“How do we build resilience?” It’s a question increasingly common in conversations with managers when discussing occupational health. The focus seems to have moved away from managing stress to strategies to prepare for continual challenge and change.

South Australian Interest Group member and Organisational Psychologist Kathryn McEwen has attempted to provide some direction in this area through her new book *Building Resilience at Work*. Released by Australian Academic Press at the recent IOP conference it is a practical guide for employees on how to build personal workplace resilience.

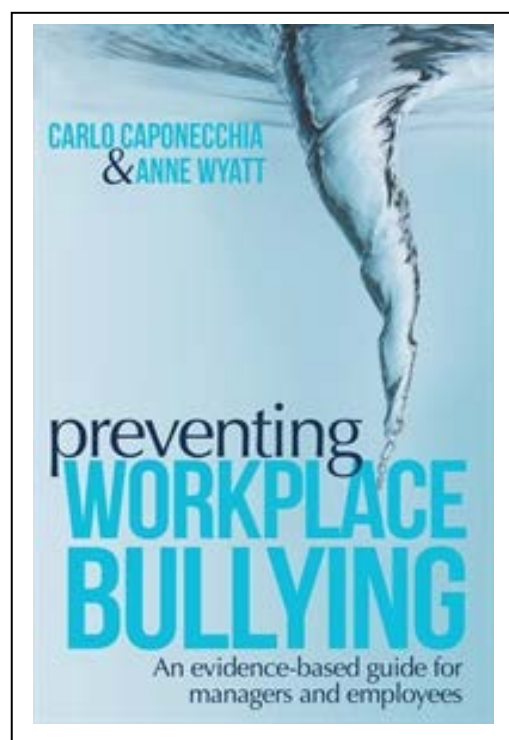
Kathryn works in private practice and collaborates with the University of South Australia through research, teaching and provision of student placements. The book is based on psychological models and theories, in particular positive psychology, but is concise, jargon-free and easy to read.

Available through the publisher at www.aapbooks.com

“Preventing workplace bullying: An evidence based guide for managers and employees” by Carlo Caponecchia and Anne Wyatt (2011), Allen & Unwin

In Australia it is now widely acknowledged that workplace bullying is a significant occupational health and safety hazard that has the potential to threaten physical and psychological well-being. This new book demonstrates how organisations need to develop and continually improve their strategies for managing workplace bullying using the risk management framework. A method to assist organisations in evaluating the control procedures employed for workplace bullying is developed.

This book goes beyond the hitherto simplistic approaches to workplace bullying that focus much on personality and ‘blame’ individuals. It seriously questions the melodramatic ‘psychopaths in the workplace’ literature and provides a systemic, systematised model of causation and intervention. Issues around defining workplace bullying, and distinguishing it from other related unacceptable behaviours are outlined, along with coverage of the legal approaches around the world. Case studies are used throughout to exemplify the issues. The book contains important information for researchers, practitioners, managers and regulators who deal with workplace bullying, as well as for employees who may find themselves experiencing such behaviours.



Contact: Dr Carlo Caponecchia carloc@unsw.edu.au

First Annual General Meeting

As a first step to formalising the Occupational Health Psychology Interest Group we need members to nominate for Committee positions.

We are very keen to hear from members who are interested in playing a more active role in the group. Contact Acting Coordinator, Bill Pappas at ohpsychology@gmail.com if you want to contribute as a Committee member or representative, or discuss any aspect of a committee position.

The Committee positions while very important to the building of the group are not particularly onerous and would probably mean a commitment of no more than an hour or two a week.

Call for Nominations

The first Annual General Meeting of the Occupational Health Psychology Interest Group is scheduled for the **Australian Psychological Society Conference in Canberra, on Friday 7th October**. The AGM will be held during the lunch recess and the venue and time will be available closer to the Conference.

The meeting will seek to fill the following positions:

- National Convener
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- State and Territory Representatives
- Student Representative
- Newsletter & Website Editor

You do not have to attend the AGM to stand for a position, however you must return the Election Nomination Form to APS National Office by Friday 30th September 2011. The returning details are on the Election Nomination Form below.

An [Election Nomination Form](#) has been attached to this Newsletter for your convenience.

Reports from the National/State/Territory Representatives

(Reserved for next edition)

Forthcoming Conferences and Workshops

October 4-8, 2011

APS Annual Conference, Theme, 'From theory, through evidence to practice.' Canberra, Australia

December 12-13, 2011

Older Workers & Work Ability Conference, Melbourne, Australia

March 18-23, 2012

International Congress of ICOH 2012. Theme 'Occupational health for all: From research to practice.' Cancun, Mexico.

April 11-13, 2012

European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology 10th Conference. Theme, 'the contribution of occupational health psychology to individual, organizational and public health.' Zurich, Switzerland.

If you are aware of conferences that would be of interest to members, please let the Editor know so they can be included in the Newsletters.

Occupational Health Psychology Interest Group workshops and professional activities
These will be reported in the next edition of the newsletter. Please let the Editor know of any planned workshops and activities in your area so these can be promoted to members.

Opportunities in Occupational Health Psychology

If you would like to publicise a job vacancy, professional supervision, study or research position, or similar opportunity in Occupational Health Psychology, send the details to the Newsletter Editor.

Links

The links below are for the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology and the (American) Society for Occupational Health Psychology sites.

- <http://eaohp.org/default.aspx>
- <http://sohp.psy.uconn.edu/>

If you know of other websites that would be of interest to members, please let the Editor know so we can include them in future Newsletters.

Members' questions and answers (Ask members a ?)

In future Newsletters there will be an opportunity to have your questions answered by other members. This is one way we can utilise the vast experience and knowledge the membership of the group has. Student members can utilise this section to ask for assistance with their research.

Letters to the Editor

Maximum 200 words please

Suggestions for improvement

Finally, thank you for your support with these first steps. There is obviously a lot of scope for improving this Newsletter, and the Editor of this edition has no previous experience as an Editor (surprise! surprise!).

Please consider contributing to the next edition, and we encourage your suggestions for change and improvement.

If you would like to nominate for the position of Editor, please submit a nomination form. Your offer would be greatly appreciated by the Acting Coordinator and membership. It is anticipated that 2 editions of the Newsletter will be produced each year.

Warmest regards

Bill Pappas
Acting Coordinator

ohpsychology@gmail.com