

Qualitative studies on the experience of noise in communication-intensive workplaces before and after a participatory intervention

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ABSTRACT

Personnel in communication-intensive workplaces are exposed to noise, occasionally so high they risk hearing-related disorders. Still, intervention studies are few, with ambiguous results. To increase the impact and sustainability of the interventions, we used a participatory method in which personnel and managers at one preschool and one obstetrics ward were actively involved in the intervention process. To identify work environment problems to target in the intervention, we performed qualitative focus group interviews prior to the intervention among 16 personnel and managers. Four main themes emerged from the inductive thematic analysis: a challenging and harmful sound environment, the sound environment causing hearing-related symptoms and health effects, a good sound environment not being prioritised, and resourceful and motivated personnel. As the participatory intervention entailed implementation of several changes, we also performed interviews post-intervention among nine personnel and managers from the preschool and the obstetrics ward where interventions had been implemented. Five main themes emerged from the inductive thematic analysis: increased awareness of the sound environment and risks to hearing and health, increased control over the sound environment, influence of the building and interior design, other factors influencing the intervention process (concurrent work environment issues such as stress, and limited resources), and motivation to maintain the positive changes. We conclude that the personnel perceive a risk to their hearing and health and that sound environment improvements should be prioritised in communication-intensive workplaces. A participatory approach may facilitate motivation and empowerment to change, but resources and support are needed for comprehensive and effective implementation.

Keywords (3-6): Occupational noise, communication-intensive workplace, hearing health, participatory intervention, qualitative interviews.