

Background

Social capital can be viewed as an individual or a collective attribute, with structural and cognitive components, and it can be distinguished as bonding, bridging and linking. However, there is no uniformity across studies in terms of its measurement and while extensively studied at the community level, studies in occupational settings are sparse.

Objectives: To explore the construct validity of a short measure of social capital at work (SCW) and investigate its association with self-rated health and psychological distress.

Methods

A random sample of 10% of all nurses in Cyprus, recruited during a nationwide educational programme, responded to the Greek version of an 8-item scale, originally used in the Finnish Public Sector Study. The goodness of fit of the unidimensional, two- and three-factor solutions were compared in confirmatory factor analyses. Multivariable linear and logistic regression models were used to investigate the association of SCW with self-rated health (Visual Analogue Scale) and psychological distress (GHQ-12 ≥ 4).

Results

As many as 29.8% of the 362 participants rated their health < 69 on VAS 0-100 and one in four scored ≥ 4 on the GHQ-12. The three-factor solution of bonding ($\alpha=0.76$), bridging ($\alpha=0.78$) and linking ($\alpha=0.89$) was the only acceptable fit as indicated by all goodness of fit indices (GFI=0.956, CFI=0.967, RMSE=0.091). Higher odds of psychological distress were observed among those in the lowest tertile of social capital (adjOR=1.93 95%CI=0.88, 4.75), particularly with regards to bonding social capital (adjOR=2.71 95%CI=1.08, 6.79), adjusted for age, gender, income, marital status, length of employment, housing tenure and residential instability. On average, low bonding and linking social capital were also significantly associated with poorer self-rated health.

Conclusions

Associations with self-rated health and psychological distress were stronger with bonding (“getting along”), and linking (“vertical power differentials”) social capital, however this may reflect a weakness of the measure to fully capture bridging (“getting ahead”) social capital (2 items). While this aspect might need strengthening, the scale generally appears largely consistent with a multidimensional scale of bonding, bridging and linking social capital.

Key messages

- A short measure of Social Capital at Work showed good psychometric properties in a different setting and language.
- It may be a promising tool for assessing the health effects of workplace social capital in future epidemiological studies.

Association of social capital at work with self-rated health and psychological distress

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