Reviewer’s report

Title: A qualitative study of the interactions among the psychosocial work environment and family, community and services for workers with low mental health

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Reviewer: Sandra Pisaniello

Reviewer’s report:

This manuscript represents an investigation of the interactions among the psychosocial work environment and life domains, including family, community and access to support services and how they differ according to three factors (time, spaces, and power), for workers with low mental health. The paper is very well written and organised.

Minor Essential Revisions:

1. Under section ‘Wages and Conditions’, paragraph 7, the authors refer to respondents who belonged to the occupational groups of teaching and nursing as those who had access to leave and/or breaks compared to other occupational groups. Given the voluminous occupational health research that suggests otherwise, and that in fact rate teaching and nursing as occupational groups with comparatively higher levels of occupational stress, this finding could be reviewed and discussed. When reading further reflection, it was noted that “Kate” was a registered agency nurse rather than a hospital nurse employed on a permanent basis. This factor would likely make a difference to flexibility at work. It would be preferable if the first paragraph, line 1 under the title ‘Four vignettes: experience of domain interactions’ could be changed to ‘Kate, a registered agency nurse…’

2. Under Table 1 labelled “Participant Characteristics”, there is no category resembling working status (full time or part time) depicted in the title.

3. For consistency, under the heading ‘power’, paragraph 2, when introducing ‘Isla’, the authors do not indicate her occupational position until paragraph 6. They also do not indicate ‘Lily’s’ occupational position when she is introduced in paragraph 3.

Discretionary Revisions:

4. Methods, paragraph 3, the authors refer to use of the SF-12v2, although also refer to its use as a limitation. The period between the respondents’ survey completion and time period of low mental health while at work is not indicated and could be useful given that the SF only measures recall periods of 4 weeks and 1 week.

It is always possible that even a clinical tool may not accurately capture
participants with diagnosable mental illnesses (i.e., false positive or false negative), and in this case it is advisable to assess for sensitivity and specificity of the data, particularly for larger samples. This type of assessment may not be relevant for the type of research presented here, however.

History of low mental health and type of mental illness is also informative as it is unclear whether the psychosocial work environment is a main contributor to mental illness or if a past history of low mental health led to difficulty coping with the work environment.

Methods: Analysis section, paragraph 2:
5. It may be useful to provide a definition of ‘descriptive charting’ for readers
6. It may be useful to explain to lay readers why only one quarter of all transcripts were analysed for coding consistency.
7. The methodological position taken by the authors (e.g., antirealist) could be indicated briefly to provide an explanation for how quality of the research was assessed. For example, this may explain to the reader upfront why coding consistency was not assessed via inter-rater reliability using statistical analysis in lieu of the approach taken, or for why reflexivity, attention to negative cases, or other methods were not used to assess validity.
8. Discussion: Although the findings of other studies are taken into account in interpreting the results, the manuscript does not discuss in any depth the theory from which the study was framed (Brofenbenner’s ecological model of human development and Pocock et al’s., extension) in light of the conclusions or in interpreting the results. This is particularly salient as the generation of data appears to have been more theory driven than data driven, or has otherwise been guided by a priori aims.

Minor issues not for publication
Typographical errors:
In the Discussion section, paragraph 1, sentence 1 should read: ‘This study enabled exploration of how individuals….’

Under heading ‘Strategies that maintain mental health: implications for workforce and social policy’, paragraph 1, sentence 1 should read: ‘Our study suggests that workers use multiple strategies…’

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.