

Enhancing mental health of employees working long hours through flexible time arrangements

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Work intensification (ESWC, 2007)

One of the most prevalent emerging psychosocial risk

- 62% European workers complain about working too fast
- 36% work to tight deadlines
- 45% can not decide about breaks at work
- 70% have no enough time to complete their work

Long hours culture return in Europe

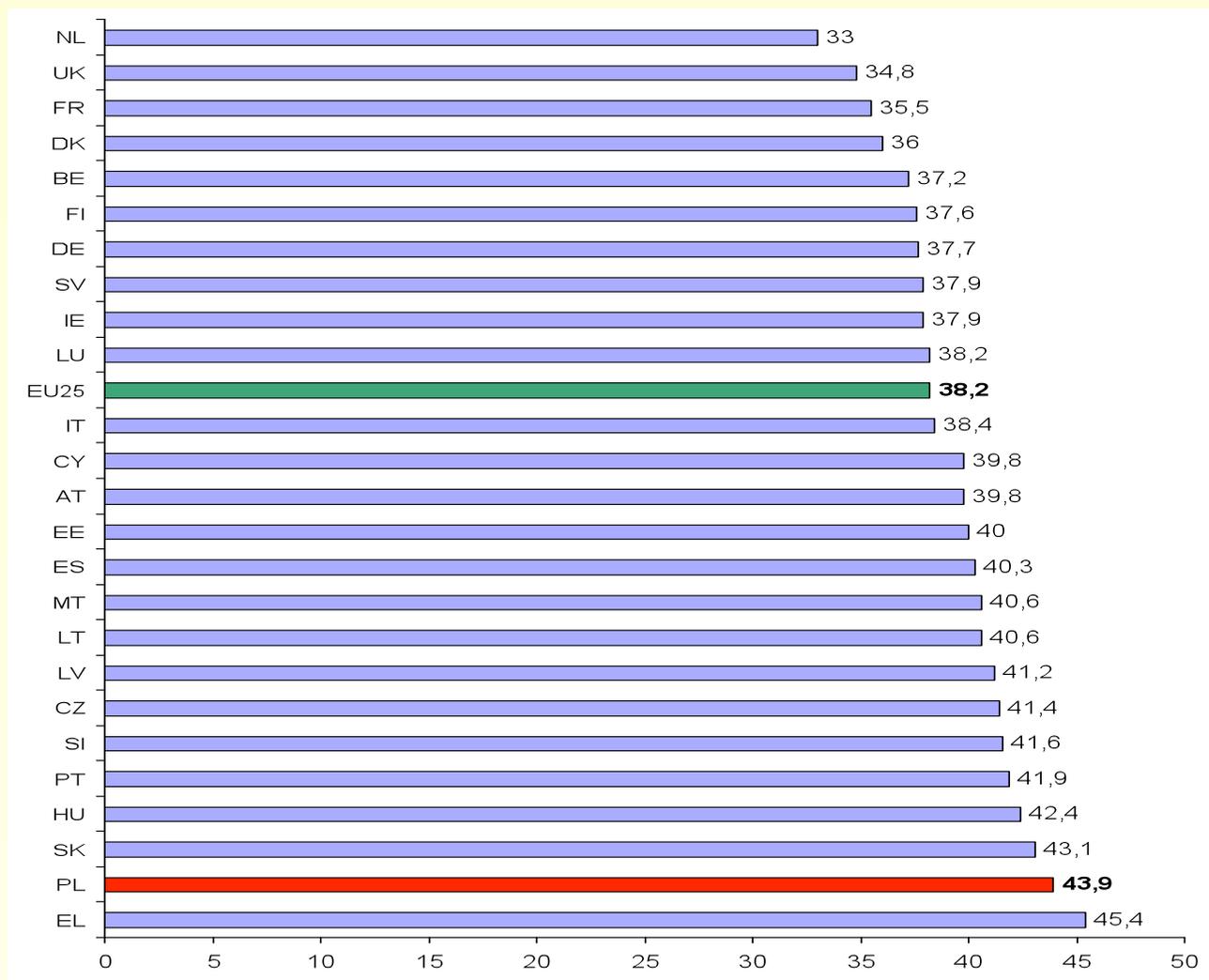
The British Trade Union announced in June 2008 the incidence of long working hours had increased among UK workers from 2007 to 2008 and “after a decade of progress, the battle against the long hours culture has stalled”

(<http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/longhoursreturn.pdf>)

Long hours culture return in Europe

In the Netherlands the number of reported overtime hours has increased substantially (from 4 hours to 6 hours) over the period from 2003 to 2007 (Bakhuys Roozenboom, M et al. 2008)

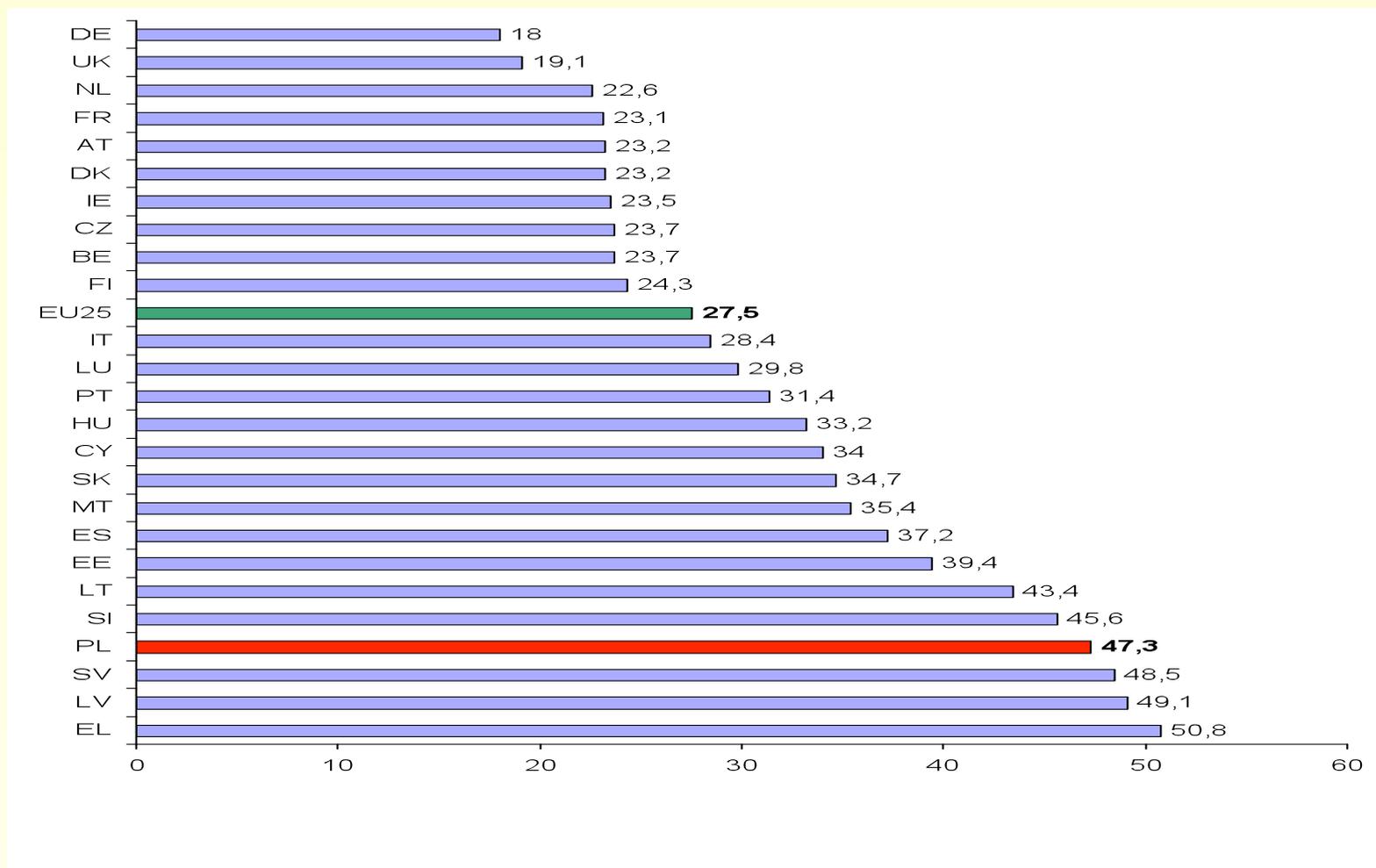
The average working time in Europe 25 (ESWC, 2007)



Working time not fitting family or social commitments EU25 (ESWC, 2007)

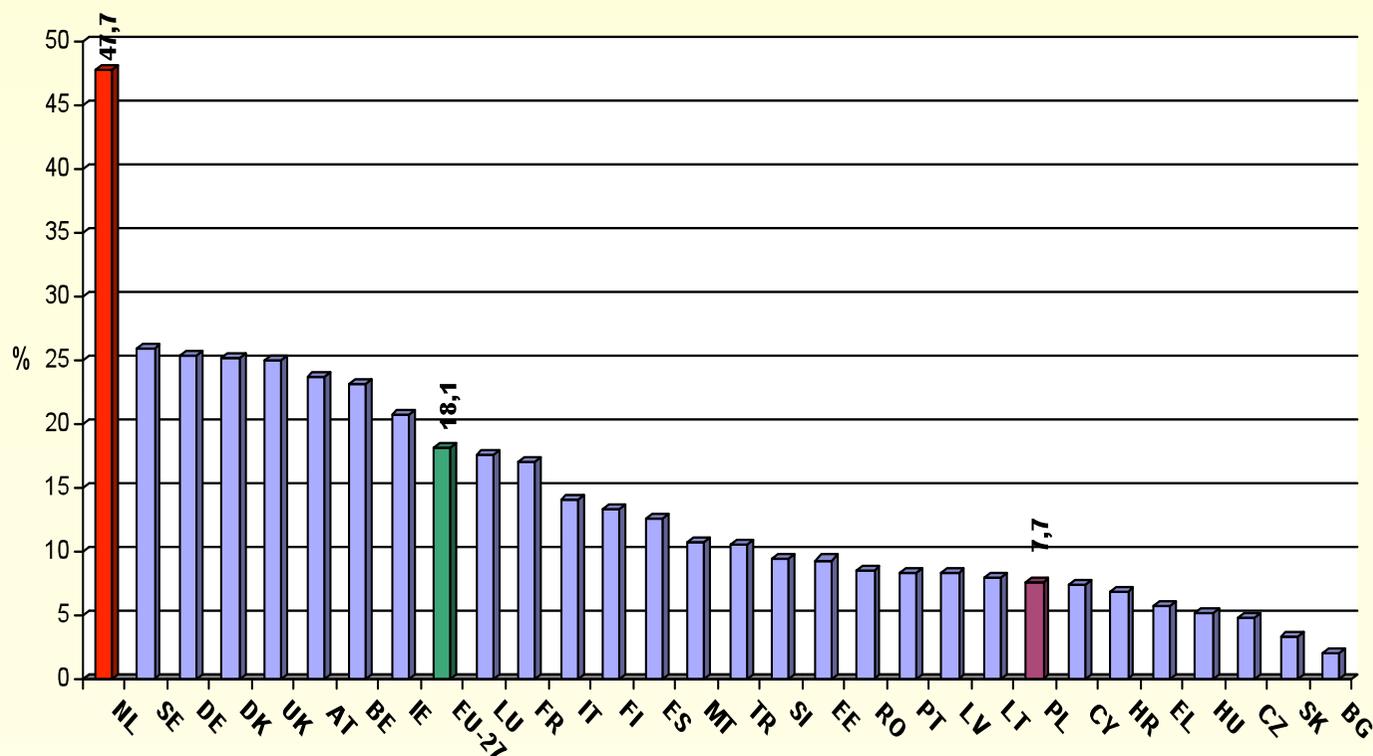


Work having negative impact on health in EU25 (ESWC, 2007)



Working time shorter than 8 hours daily

Procent pracowników UE-27 zatrudnionych w niepełnym wymiarze czasu pracy



Eurostat. Data in focus. 35/2010. *European Union Labour Force Survey – Annual results 2009.*

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/publication?p_product_code=KS-QA-10-035

Flexible working time

Employees are allowed:

- to decide when to start and finish time of work on a day-to-day basis, and when to take a brake but not allowed for variations in the length of the daily work schedule
- to decide on much broader variability of working time, even in the length of the working day or working week (Costa et al., 2001).

Flexible working time in the EU-27

During the last 4 years an increase in flexible working time implementation has been observed across Europe.

In the EU-27, 56% of enterprises employing more than 10 workers have implemented flexible working time.

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1005.htm>

Research on flexible working time

- Existing research confirms positive relationship between worktime flexibility and **work satisfaction, job engagement, and work-family balance** (Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006; Casey & Grzywacz, 2008; Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Ng, Vandenberg, DeJoy & Wilson, 2006).
- High worktime control has been found to be related to a **lower cholesterol level** (Thomas & Gangster, 1995), **fewer physical symptoms as well as lower level of distress and burnout** (Galinsky, Bond & Friedman, 1996; Halpern, 2005; Jansen & Nachreiner, 2004; Thomas & Gangster, 1995).

Research on flexible working time

In the Finish prospective study on 16 139 workers of public sector has been found that control over working time moderates the effects of work strain and effort-reward imbalance on sickness absence. The effect was especially strong among female employees (Ala-Marsula et al., 2005).

Research on flexible working time

Despite substantial practical interest, the evidence base linking flexibility to health-related outcomes is still relatively weak!!!

Longitudinal studies exploring the link between worktime control and health are still very rare!!!

Aim of the study

- To examine the potential role of flexible working time on different mental health dimensions such as: somatic complaints, anxiety, social dysfunction and depression
- To determine which age and gender group working long hours benefit most from flexible worktime?

Method

- **Flexible working time** – two item scale about possibility of deciding when to start and finish work and when to take a break
- **Mental health** - GHQ-28 (Goldberg & Williams, 1991) diagnosing:
 - somatic complaints,
 - anxiety and insomnia,
 - social dysfunction,
 - depression.

Sample

309 Polish employees performing clerical work for more than 8 hours daily

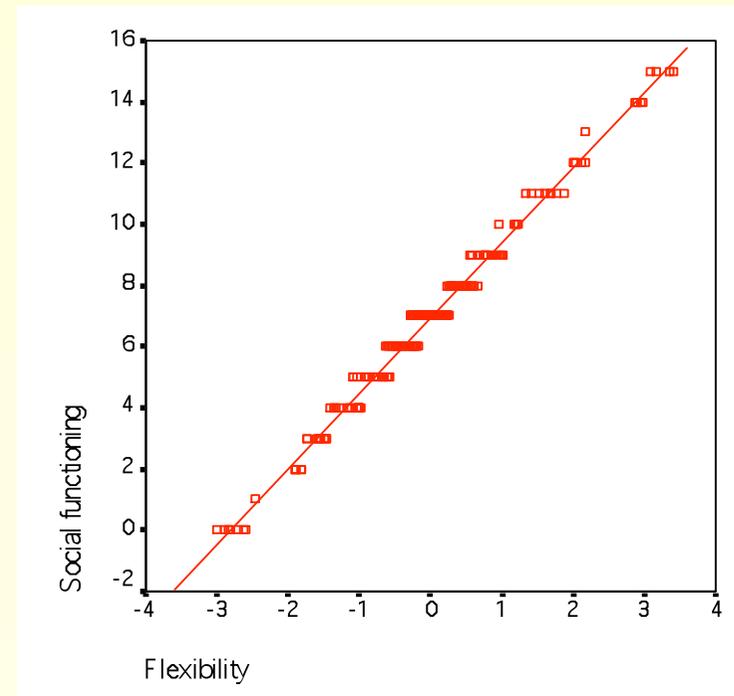
Longitudinal data resulting from having completed the questionnaires in both 2008 and 2009.

The sample was composed of 159 men and 150 women.

The average age was 35,00 years, ($SD=8,7$).

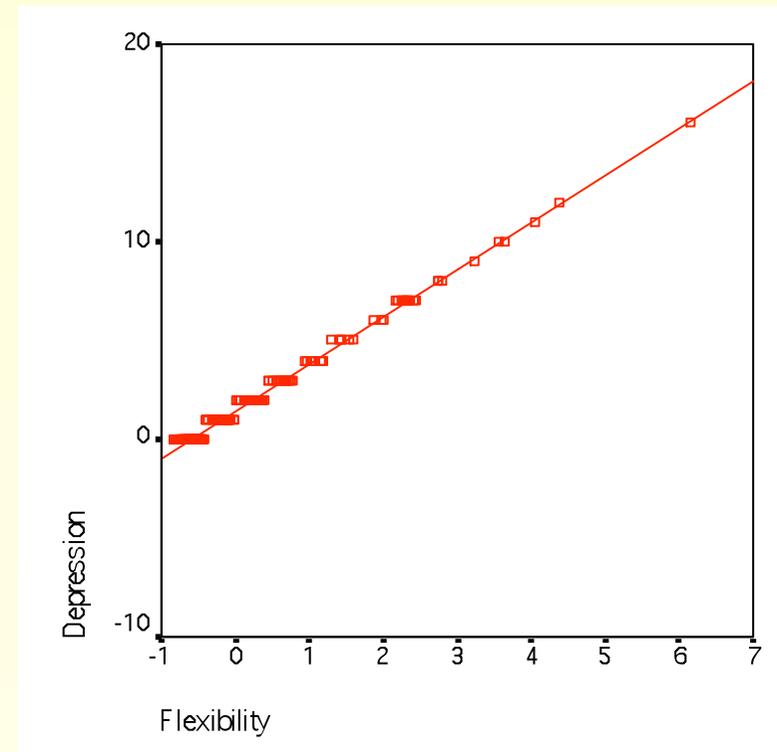
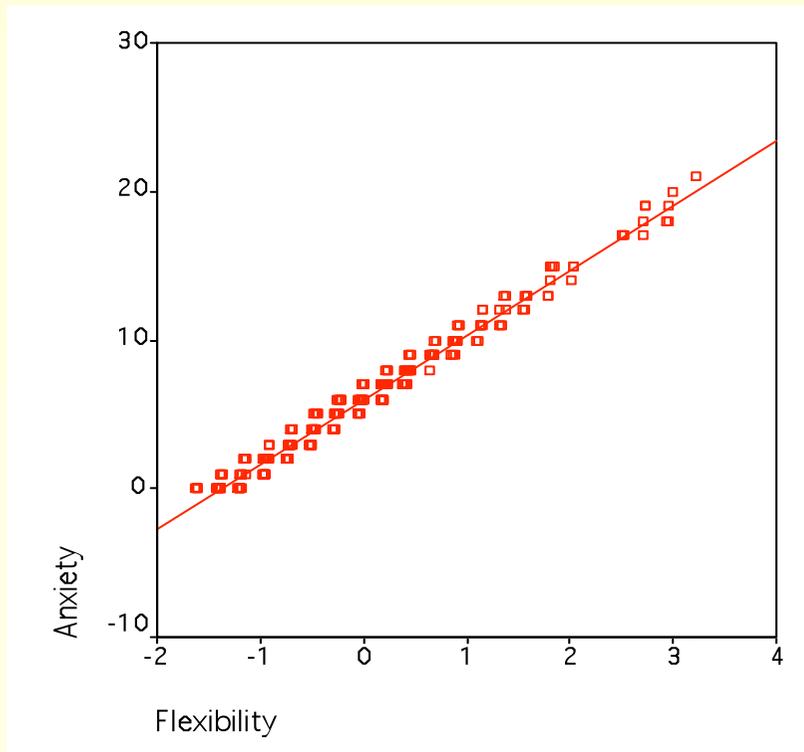
Results

Flexibility as predictor of positive shift in somatic complaints and social functioning



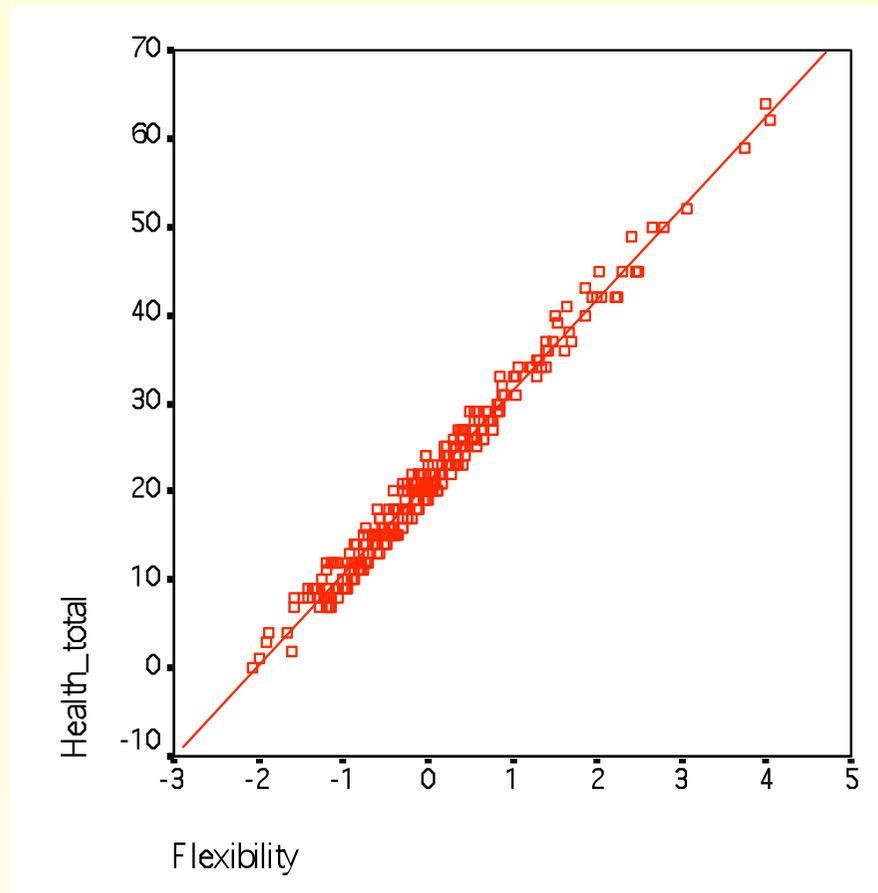
Results

Flexibility as predictor positive shift in anxiety and depression



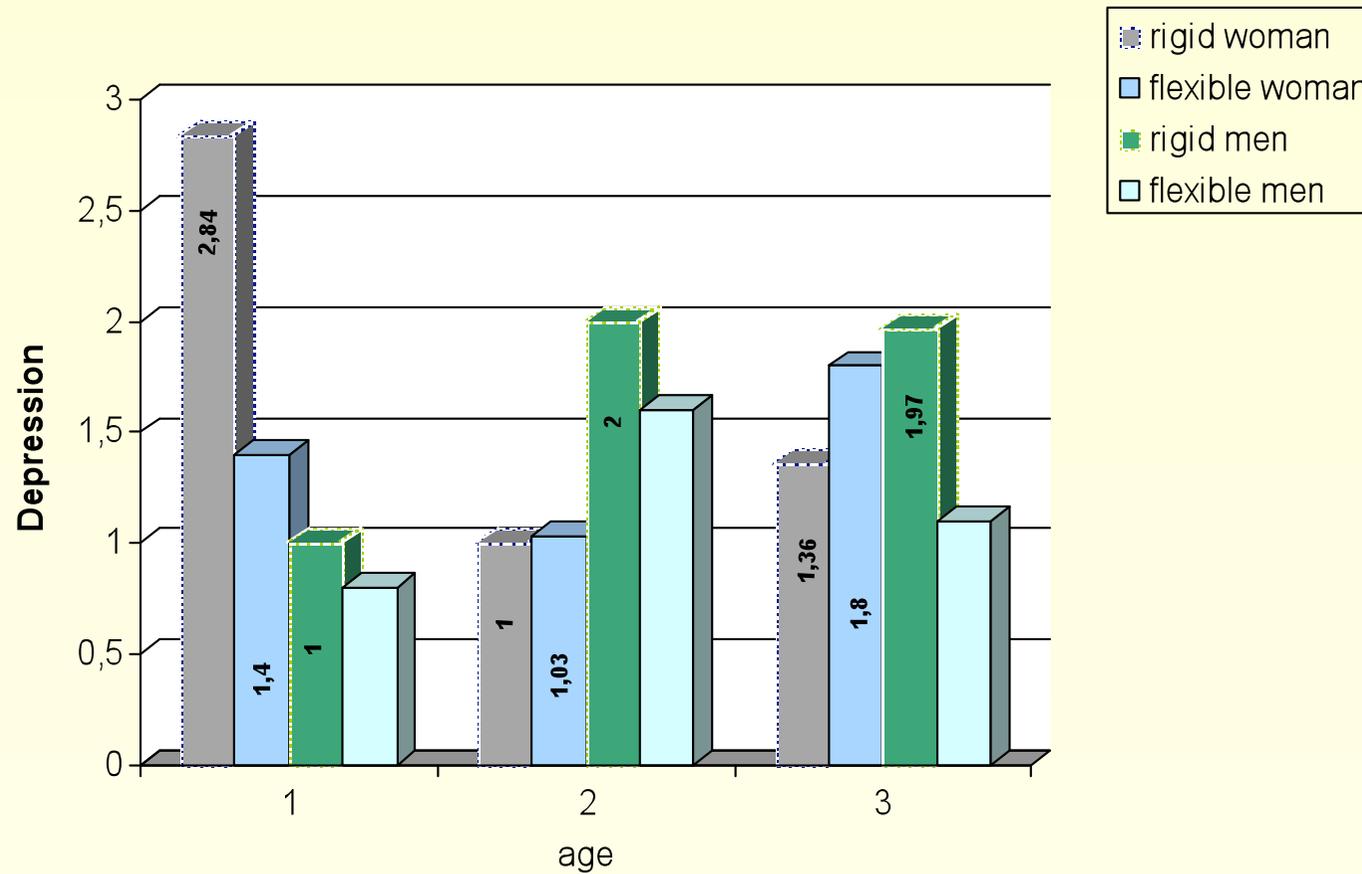
Results

Flexibility as predictor of positive shift in total health complaints



Results

Depression depending on working time flexibility, gender and age



Age 1 -18-29
Age 2 -30-39
Age 3 -40-60

Results summary

- 1. Increased worktime flexibility is associated with:
decreased overall indicator of health complaints
decreased somatic complaints
decreased social dysfunction**
- 2. Worktime flexibility has a significant influence
on decreased depression in the youngest group of
female workers aged 18-29 comparing to females
not having flexible working time**

Conclusions

- Providing employees with flexible working time may promote mental health in strenuous work life.
- Men and woman are not homogenous groups on matters related to workplace flexibility.
Is that the particular case for older worker
- Female workers, especially in the prime-age group, do benefit more from flexible time arrangements than men in terms of preserving their mental health

Limitations

- Relatively small number of study participants, particularly in the group of elderly workers
- The study has not identified the reasons for a high level of depression among the female workers in prime-age group