



# Practical types of low-cost improvements addressing psychosocial factors in participatory workplace improvement programs

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# Acknowledgments

Funding for the conference made possible by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Conference Grant U13 OH011296 and Training Grant T42 OH009229

The views expressed in the presentation and materials do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

# Purposes -

As participatory approaches are increasingly applied for preventing work-related stress, it is useful to :

- Examine the types of low-cost improvements that contributed to reducing work-related stress in varied sectors;
- Discuss the support by occupational health teams that was effective for facilitating these improvements for preventing stress at work.

# Methods –

Practical types of low-cost improvements addressing psychosocial factors were reviewed by examining multifaceted improvements undertaken by recent participatory stress prevention programs.

The reviewed participatory programs for preventing overwork and stress at work:

- ✓ Small and medium-sized enterprises;
- ✓ Health care workplaces;
- ✓ Employees of local governments.

## Attention was drawn to:

- (1) Stepwise progress building on local good practices;
- (2) Simple action-oriented procedures for risk reduction;

# Participatory steps with the support of the occupational health team (in hospital sections)

Facilitators' meeting



Checklist application



Achievement workshop

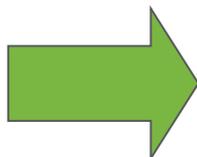


Group discussion in eah section



# “Workplace Dock” steps of local government workers (Kochi, Hokkaido, Kyoto)

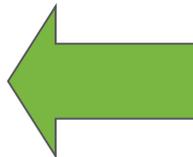
Facilitators’ seminar



Checklist application by individual workers



Brief workshop in each workplace



Planning actions at each workplace



# Broad-ranging low-cost improvements resulted from the participatory steps

Technical areas	Glass recycling	General hospital	Kochi Prefecture	Hokkaido Prefecture
A. Communication	6	4	44	79
B. Work schedules	3	15	8	24
C. Work methods	23	26	91	184
D. Physical environment	22	19	58	251
E. Mutual support	15	8	11	33
F. Preparedness	15	13	16	28
Total	84	85	228	635

# Achievements by “Workplace Dock” programs

## Kochi Prefecture

Year	2011	2013	2015
A. Communication	44	34	24
B. Work schedules	8	8	12
C. Work methods	91	74	66
D. Work environment	58	84	97
E. Mutual support	11	12	14
F. Preparedness	16	26	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>222</b>

## Hokkaido Prefecture

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016
Participating workplaces	12	49%	65%	77%
A. Communication	13	79	121	154
B. Work schedules	2	24	37	51
C. Work methods	14	184	201	255
D. Work environment	4	251	273	296
E. Mutual support	1	33	51	73
F. Preparedness	2	28	42	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>725</b>	<b>887</b>



New meeting space



A mobile side-table



Support by co-workers

The Mental Health Action Checklist commonly used corresponded to the six areas useful for stress prevention

Areas	Improvement actions
A. Work planning	Brief meetings, avoiding excessive tasks, sharing information
B. Working time	Limiting overtime, reducing night tasks, securing leaves/breaks
C. Work methods	Better workstations, mobile equipment, labels, avoiding mistakes
D. Work environment	Improved lighting/ventilation, Labeling chemicals, resting facilities
E. Social support	Communication, mutual support, team
F. Preparedness	counseling, coping training, emergency care

## The usage of the locally adjusted versions of the Mental Health Action Checklist was useful in the reviewed programs

Programs	Small enterprises	Health care	Workplace dock
<b>Main aims</b>	Immediate actions in multiple areas	Risk reduction in teamwork situations	Practical actions in work methods and teamwork
<b>Emphasis</b>	Local low-cost good examples	Multifaceted teamwork arrangements	Both physical, psychosocial aspects
<b>Action tools</b>	Good examples, Mental Health Action Checklist		

# Examples of action items in the action checklist

## I. Work planning in the work team

1. Hold a brief meeting before work to jointly plan the work assignments and time schedules
4. Use a notice board or shared files for sharing information among all workers



## II. Work methods and environment

9. Provide multi-level shelves, mobile racks, trolleys and lifters for handling materials
12. Prevent mistakes by using labels, signs and colours and providing guards and safety devices



## III. Mutual support at the workplace

18. Encourage a mutually supportive climate in which workers can consult with each other
19. Organize informal social gatherings and recreational activities more often.



# Participatory steps were simplified with the help of an action checklist (Kochi, Hokkaido, Kyoto)

- Each person fills in the Checklist

- Group discussions (90 min) about improvement actions (with the support of a facilitator)

- Action plans for improving workplace environment

- Implementation and reporting

- Mental Health Action Checklist (locally adjusted)

Support by the occupational health team



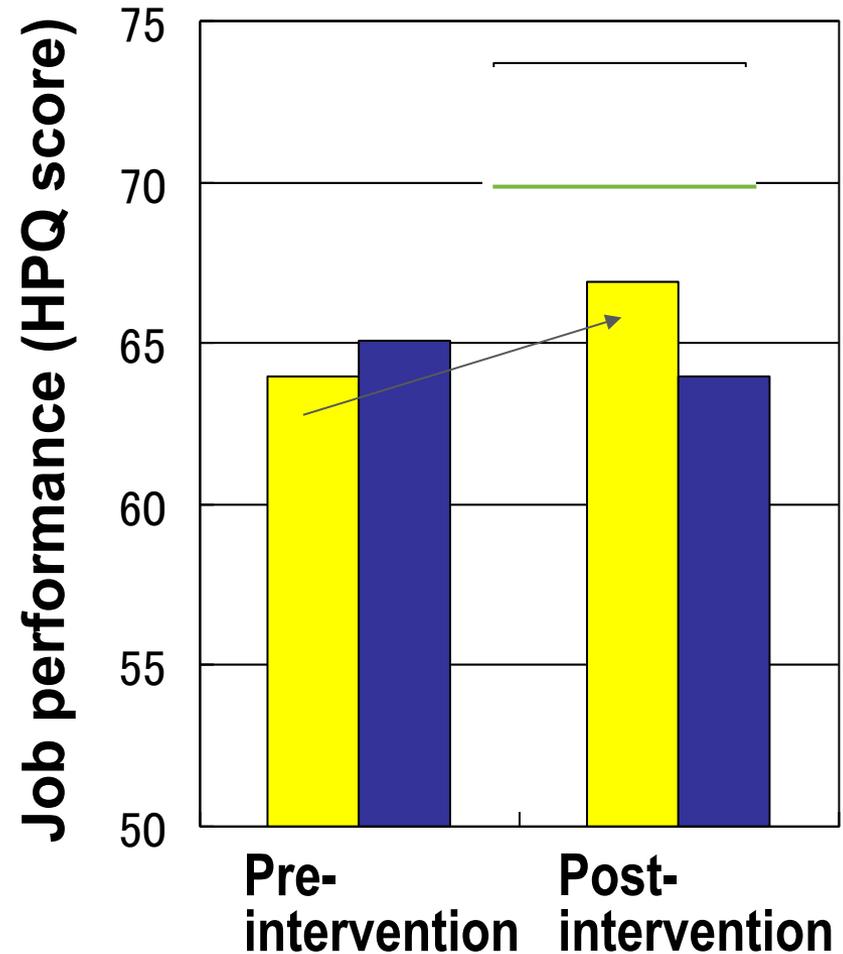
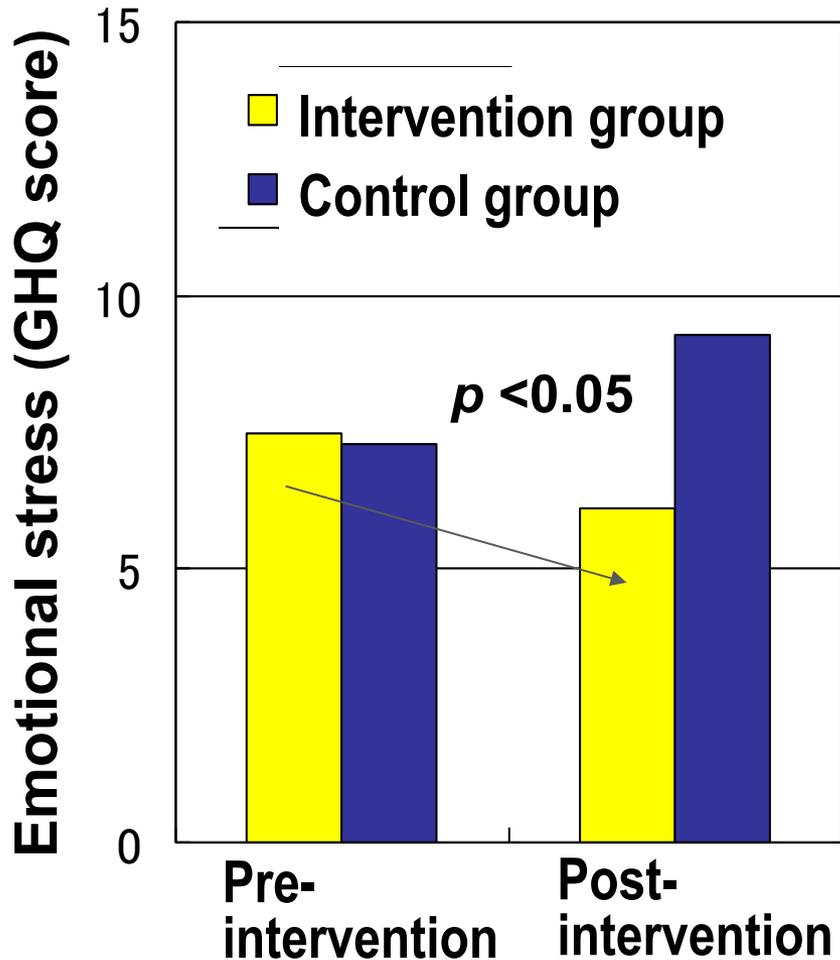
# Discussion:

- The sustained focus on low-cost improvements was useful in achieving multifaceted improvements addressing psychosocial factors. The low-cost actions addressing psychosocial factors were undertaken in combination with ergonomic measures.
- This was possible through simplified procedures relying on workshop-based group work using an action checklist reflecting local good practices.
- The involvement of “facilitators” (selected from among workers) who were trained in the use of the action checklist throughout the participatory steps particularly in small-scale workplaces.

This process was in line with the evidence-based guidelines for primary prevention in mental health (Yoshikawa et al., 2013)

Workplace process	Requirements for effectiveness
Use of <u>good practices</u>	Present local good practices emphasizing the feasibility of risk reduction in the local situation
Implementation of <u>multifaceted actions</u>	Focus on multifaceted improvements relevant to work-related risks (physical, psychosocial)
<u>Participatory planning</u> by workers/managers	Organize group work by workers/ managers of the participating workplaces

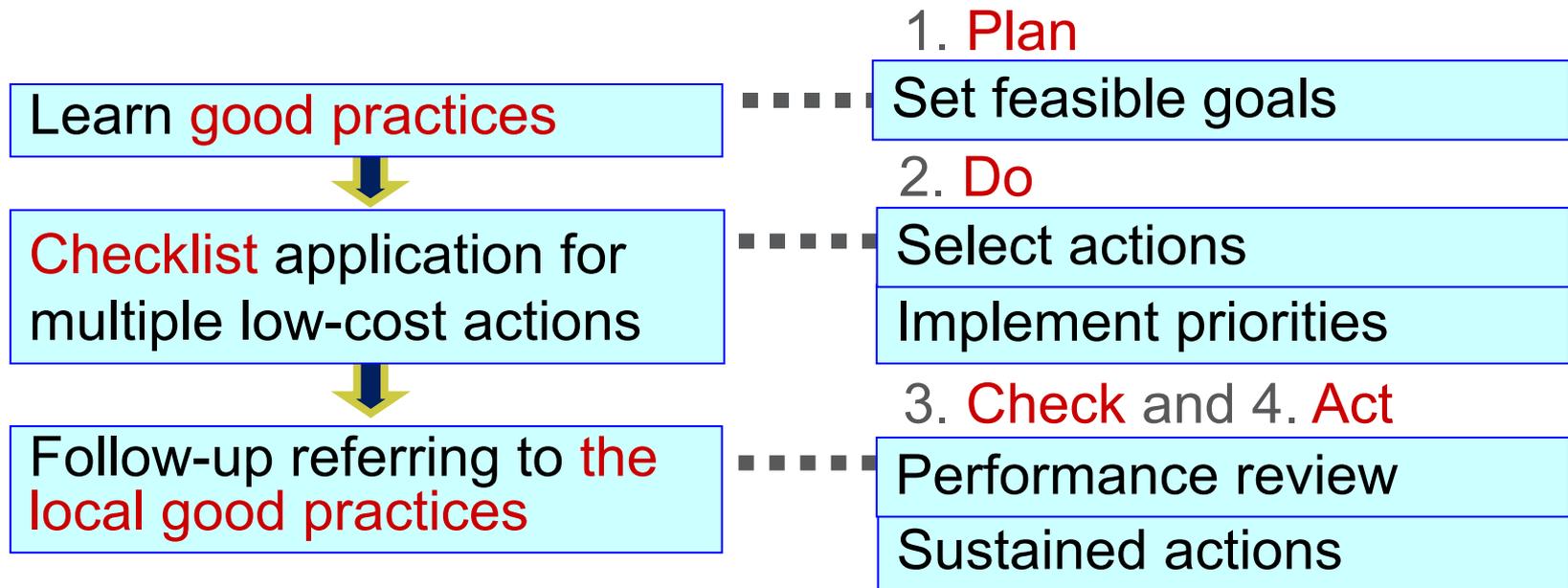
# Effects of participatory interventions on mental health by a cluster randomized controlled trial (Electrical device assembly workers, Tsutsumi et al., 2009)



# Intervention study results show the effectiveness of the participatory steps focusing on low-cost actions

“Workplace Dock” programs have been sustained for 3-5 or more years in different sectors.

The group work steps using the toolkit correspond to the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle of risk management



# Summary -

Lessons from effective applications of low-cost improvements show the importance of simplified procedures relying on “action tools” by:

- 1) Supporting workplace-level actions to build on local good practices.
- 2) Assisting workers in applying simple participatory procedures leading to reduction of the multifaceted stress-related risks.
- 3) Promoting the use of locally adjusted tools such as action checklists locally adjusted in various small-scale workplaces.

