Understanding the work and health research landscape

In this study we looked at three key questions:

1. What is the level of spend on work and health research in the UK since 2015?
2. What is this spent on, in terms of type of research and topic?
3. What are the main priorities for future work and health research in the UK?

Methods

In order to answer these questions, the study:

1. Reviewed available databases and information from key research funders
2. Classified research according to funder and host, methods used, topics, etc.
3. Contextualised findings through 15 interviews with researchers and funders

Key findings

1. What is the level of spend on work and health research in the UK since 2015?

   - £31 million invested in work and health research by not-for-profit and public funders
   - 56% of that funding went to research conducted by academics
   - less than 1% of all funding was spent on scholarships or fellowships

2. What is this spent on, in terms of type of research and topic?

   TOP 5 METHODOLOGIES USED:
   - Clinical trials / Randomised control trials
   - Evaluations of interventions
   - Longitudinal studies
   - Cross-sectional studies
   - Scoping reviews

   TOP 5 TOPICS EXAMINED:
   - Mental health (49%)
   - General long-term physical disability (11%)
   - General health and wellbeing (9%)
   - Lifestyle areas (8%)
   - Occupational health (7%)

3. What are the main priorities for future work and health research emerging from interviews?

   - Work and health implications of the COVID-19 pandemic
   - Role of occupational health services
   - Implementation research
   - Interventions in the workplace

Key conclusions

- Future attempts to map the work and health research landscape should include smaller funders (also from private sector)
- Work and health interventions can be costly so their cost-effectiveness for commissioners needs to be evaluated
- More funding is also needed to develop career paths & support for work and health researchers, to ensure there is future research expertise in this area

Adapted from Work and health research funding review (2015–2020) by Joanna Hofman, Susan Guthrie, Annemari de Silva, Lillian Flemone, Lucy Gilder, William Phillips, Natalie Picken, Mann Virdee, RR-A1164-1, 2021 (available at www.rand.org/t/RRA1164-1). To view this infographic online, visit www.rand.org/t/IGA1164-1. RAND Europe is a not-for-profit research organisation that helps improve policy and decision making through research and analysis. RAND Europe’s publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND is a registered trademark.

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