

Abstract

The world of work is changing. This change manifests itself through various developments, such as individualisation, flexibilisation or dissolution of boundaries, which also shape the discourse on the subjectification of work. Changing work requirements and demands made by employees are closely entwined with changes in health burdens of working people. While workplace accidents decline, an increasing emergence of work-related diseases can be observed. Contemporaneously, long-term health maintenance and employability is gaining importance as access conditions to welfare state benefits is becoming increasingly restricted.

The prevention of accidents and illnesses at workplace level is historically rooted in the Austrian welfare state. Workplace disease prevention is based on regulations of occupational health and safety (OHS) as well as statutory accident insurance. Interpretation and communication of these regulations through legally mandated institutions strongly influence companies' OHS prevention measures. However, in the face of tertiarisation processes and the subjectification of work, traditional prevention discourses and prevention practices are liable to exclude growing parts of the working population.

The study examines the contradictions between a paternalistic-technocratic tradition of workplace disease prevention on the one hand, and workplace realities as well as psychosocial stresses in the context of subjectivised service work on the other hand. Current prevention discourses are empirically examined using qualitative methods. A focus is laid on the central state mediation bodies, the Labour Inspectorate and the Austrian Workers' Compensation Board. Based on this analysis, possible starting points for a more comprehensive integration of psychosocial risks into OHS prevention strategies are illustrated.

