

Abstract:

Objectives. To assess whether there are mental and physical health benefits of being employed in a workplace where there is a union or staff association recognized by the management or being a member of such a union.

Methods. Using four waves [W2 (2010-11), W4 (2012-13), W6 (2014-15), W8 (2016-18)] from Understanding Society (UKHLS), we use a propensity score matching method and apply a latent growth modeling on the original dataset and on the matched dataset to estimate the impact of change in union presence and union membership between wave 2 and wave 4 for the employed population on the change in mental health (Mental Component Summary – MCS) and physical health (Physical Component Summary – PCS), after controlling for socioeconomic characteristics, age and sector of activity.

Results. Collective negotiation within the workplace plays a statistically significant role in supporting workers' mental and, to a greater degree, physical health. Being unionized does not add up significant physical health benefits but a slight positive effect on mental health is observed.

Conclusion. About 50 per cent of the employed population is not represented by a labour union at company level and this has negative effects on health. A major health policy issue is also about promoting collective negotiation at the workplace and more research is needed about the impact of implementing such type of negotiation. The study shows the benefits of using a longitudinal approach when analysing the impact of union presence and union membership on workers' health.

Key words: Trade Union; Latent Growth Curve; Unionization; Occupational Health; Understanding Society