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**Understanding the predictors of participation and the
barriers to employee involvement in workplace health
promotion programmes**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of**

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Joanna Edwards

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ABSTRACT

The benefits of workplace health promotion programmes for organisations are well documented. However, the problem of low employee participation has continued to challenge managers, and is an area that has received relatively little attention in health promotion literature, particularly in New Zealand. The purpose of this investigation is to develop a better understanding of the variables predicting, and the barriers preventing, employee participation in health promotion activities. Thereby assisting managers to maximise participation rates and develop successful workplace health promotion initiatives.

This research centred on identifying and assessing the predictors and barriers to employee participation in nine health promotion activities commonly offered in New Zealand organisations. The data collection process included an initial preliminary study, followed by a large online questionnaire completed by 883 New Zealand employees. These results led to developing an in-depth qualitative study, involving semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 20 employees, designed to triangulate and add further depth in understanding the factors that influence employee participation in health promotion programmes.

Research results determined that the likelihood of an employee participating is best predicted by their age, gender, perceived stress, job satisfaction, supervisor support, organisational health climate, and degree of perceived job flexibility. Conversely, the barriers preventing participation included activities scheduled at inconvenient times, a lack of information about the activities, excessive work and family commitments, low job flexibility, low self-efficacy, feeling embarrassed, and a lack of trust in supervisors. Maintaining participation was achieved through continuously changing activities, and constant communication with participating staff.

To maximise participation, the present investigation recommends that managers consider the organisation's environment, by way of managerial support and cultivating a positive organisational health climate, schedule activities during normal working hours and provide time off for employees to take part, allow greater job flexibility, fully subsidise any financial costs, and ensure all employee health information is secure. When attrition is present, managers would benefit from focusing on motivational strategies, introduce rewards and incentives, and demonstrate their own high motivation, commitment and enthusiasm to the programme.

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