

SPARKING CHANGE WITH UPSKILL HEALTH

April 26, 2016

ISSUE

- 49% of Canadians do not have the literacy and essential skills (LES) required for most jobs



Low LES levels hinder firms' productivity growth and the employment and wages of Canadian workers

- Participation in LES training remains low, particularly in the workplace
- Education and foundational skills like literacy are recognized as social determinants of health



Workers with low LES may be vulnerable to poorer health outcomes than those with higher skills

- Most of the research in this area is theoretical, and does not test interventions that might improve population health

Essential skills include:

- *Reading*
- *Writing*
- *Document Use*
- *Numeracy*
- *Computer Use*
- *Thinking*
- *Oral Communication*
- *Working with Others*
- *Continuous Learning*

BACKGROUND – UPSKILL

Participating firms ultimately realized an average ROI of 23 per cent in the first year alone

- Designed and implemented by SRDC 2010 – 2014; supported by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)
- **A rigorous test** of the effectiveness and ROI of workplace LES training
- **Customized LES training** based on industry certification and occupational standards for targeted occupations in the tourism accommodations sector
- A total of **88 firms (hotels) with 1,438 workers** were randomly assigned to either receive training or to the control group
- Results showed that **even modest investments in workplace LES training can lead to substantial gains** in skills and job performance, with accompanying increases in employment and earnings, and improvements in business outcomes



UPSKILL HEALTH - GOALS

- With support from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), SRDC used the rich UPSKILL dataset to explore the relationship of LES, health, job performance, and business outcomes
- Specific goals were to:
 - **Better understand** how LES and other factors can influence health
 - **Measure the health impacts** of workplace LES training in depth
 - **Measure the influence** of workers' health on job and organizational performance
 - **Examine subgroup differences** in health and performance outcomes

UPSKILL Health was **an exploratory study** designed to inform thinking about innovative ways to improve workplace health

METHODS

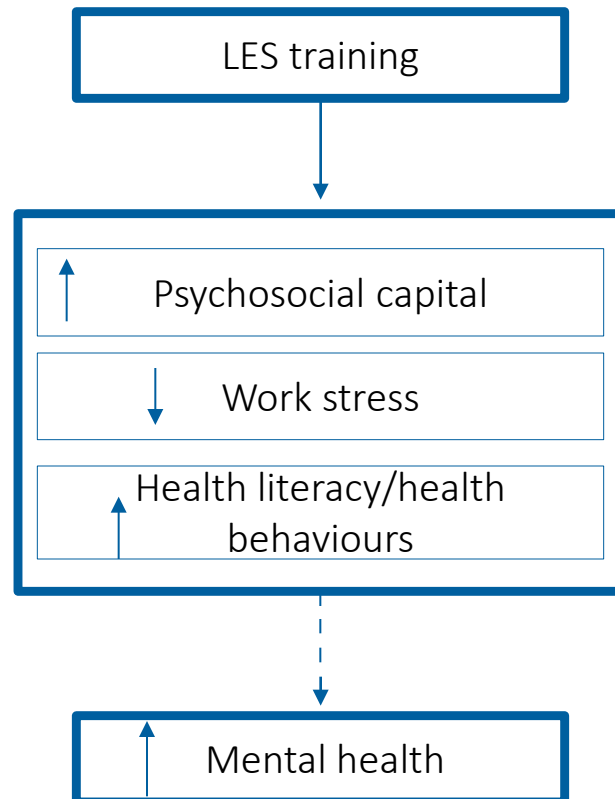
UPSKILL Health conducted:

- **a comprehensive analysis** of LES in relation to a wide range of variables (e.g., worker and firm characteristics, psychosocial variables, social capital, health literacy)
- **an in-depth analysis** of the impacts of LES training on workers' physical and mental health, and job performance, and how these correlate with business outcomes
- **focus groups and interviews** with UPSKILL participants and trainers to get their perspectives and experiences

UPSKILL Health used quantitative and qualitative inquiry and a literature review to achieve its goals

RESULTS

The health benefits of LES training tended to be *indirect*, and generally about mental health rather than physical health. Channels of influence included:

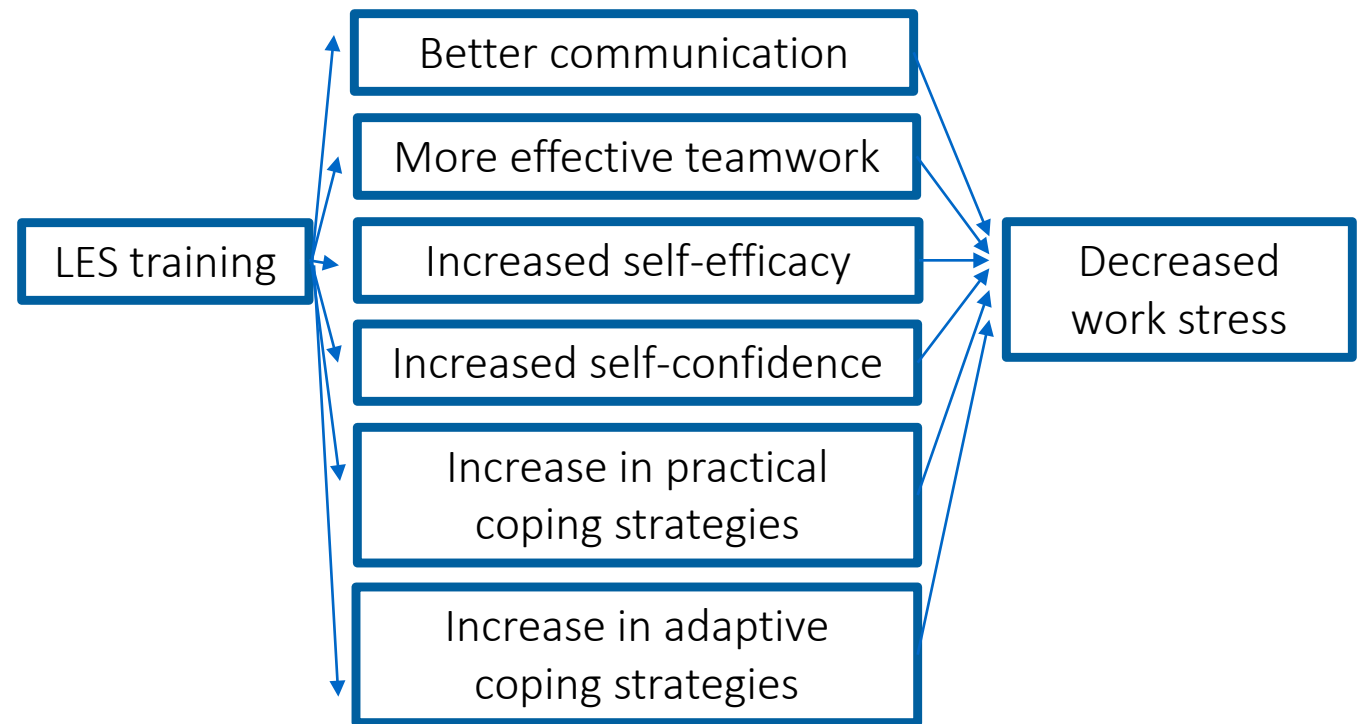


“Before, we had no confidence. After, we have more confidence for work. Before, we have stress, we have tension, everything.”
(Housekeeper)

RESULTS

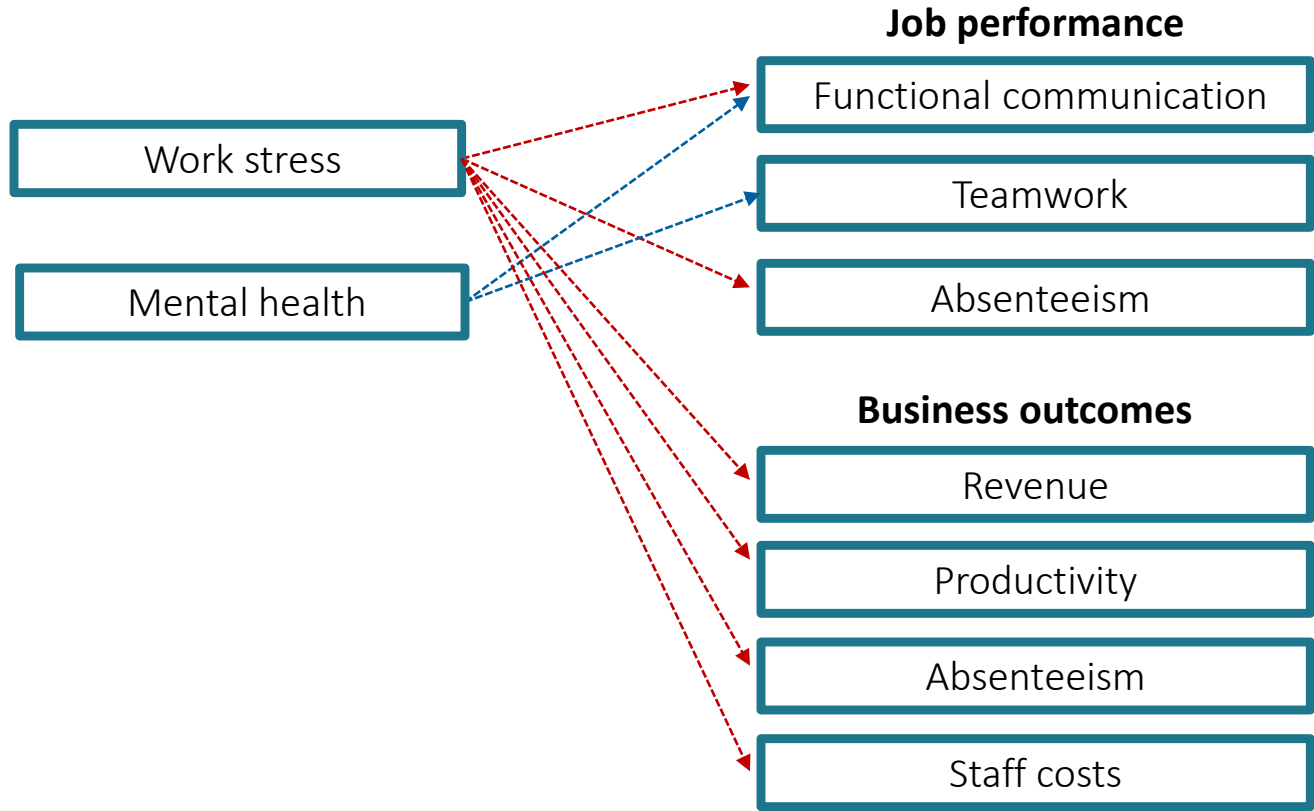
“...before the training, people were really hesitant to ask people for help... After the training, you learned more about other people, and you have more confidence about asking for help.”
(Front desk agent)

We found LES training decreased work stress via the following mechanisms:



RESULTS

UPSKILL Health was also able to link work stress and mental health to several indicators of job performance and business outcomes:



“People that took the course seemed to have a better relationship than new people... The training brought the team closer together. The training also helped me learn who to go to for things. We learned the downfalls and strengths of people [we] work with.” (Food and beverage server)

CONCLUSIONS

The workplace is an important life domain and an under-explored setting for health interventions

UPSKILL shows the potential for both workers *and businesses* to benefit from workplace LES training

- Work stress is an important influence on mental health, job performance & business outcomes
- LES training increased workers' psychosocial capital, skills and capabilities, which in turn ***promoted positive mental health in the workplace***
- Workplace interventions that increase skills and self-efficacy are promising ways to reduce work stress
- LES training influences **many social determinants of health**. Non-health interventions can have broad applicability for improving population health, even indirectly

IMPLICATIONS

- It is possible to do *rigorous* population health intervention research
- Taking an *upstream* approach - that focuses on the social determinants of health – is critical for improving population health and well-being
- Multi-sectoral and cross-departmental partnerships can leverage research breadth, depth, and relevance
- Aligning social and health perspectives in research and evaluation can support collaborative policy and program development

“My health has improved because my job pressure has reduced.”
(Food and beverage server)

NEXT STEPS

UPSKILL Health demonstrated the value and efficiency of working together across sectors to deepen and expand the evidence base

- Engaging in Knowledge Transfer and Exchange (KTE) activities
- Talking to target audiences about potential collaborations
 - Business community
 - Mental health community
 - LES training and service providers
 - Government
 - Researchers

QUESTIONS/SUGGESTIONS?

- Heather Smith Fowler hsmithfowler@srdc.org
- David Gyarmati dgyarmati@srdc.org
- Andrea Long andrea.long@phac-aspc.gc.ca

Thank you!