

Abstract

Background

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic presented major difficulties for many self-employed people because it caused pressures such as decreased customer demand, production stagnation, disruptions in supply chains and increased uncertainty. The vast amount of the studies of self-employed people during the pandemic have focused on traditional pathogenic effects. Hence, overall aim of this thesis is to explore how self-employed people experienced and used internal and external salutogenic resources to navigate the pandemic, from a business challenge and an individual well-being perspective.

Methods

Different methods of data collection and analysis were employed in the thesis. For study I, a qualitative design was used to explore whether a sense of coherence was experienced, and any general resistance resources were used by small business managers in Sweden and Norway during the pandemic. For study II, a cross-sectional quantitative design was employed to investigate the well-being of self-employed people in Europe during the pandemic and whether their well-being was influenced by factors representing four socio-ecological levels. Lastly, study III applied a mixed-method design including comparative policy analysis and interviews to gain an understanding of how different governmental financial support measures aimed to aid the resilience of Swedish and Canadian self-employed people and improve their ability to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. Study I was analysed through a deductive content analysis, study II was analysed using independent sample t-tests, correlations and linear regression, and study III used comparative policy analysis and inductive content analysis.

Results

Findings from the interviews in study I demonstrated that it was important for the participants to comprehend and manage challenges during the pandemic in a resourceful manner, and to see meaningfulness in their situations. In study

II, the findings highlight that the socio-ecological factors of resilience, social support, doing useful work and experiencing rules as clear affected the self-employed people's well-being, and that these factors may be even more important for those who had difficulties running their business. Study III found that self-employed people in both Sweden and Canada who 10 were unable to telework were relatively less resilient during the pandemic. The interviews revealed that many self-employed people in hard-hit industries were dissatisfied with government financial support measures and found them to be unfairly distributed. In addition, the self-employed people who experienced difficulties running their businesses reported reduced well-being, which had a negative effect on their business survival.

Conclusion

While the three studies in this thesis had different foci, they collectively provide insights into the internal and external salutogenic resources that influenced how self-employed people navigated the pandemic. A sense of coherence, resilience and well-being were deemed important for handling the pandemic well, for both the individuals and their businesses. The research also indicated the interconnectedness between self-employed people and their businesses. For instance, financial difficulties may lead to increased stress and pressure to make decisions to sustain the business. Reduced well-being, in turn, made it harder to adapt and adjust positively to adversity. The importance of supporting factors at multiple socio-ecological levels was also highlighted, and these may be particularly important to those who had difficulties running their businesses.