We were surprised to read that longstanding debates on the association between job strain (high-demand and low-control work) and coronary heart disease “were resolved” as the result of 1 meta-analysis of 13 cohort studies using “an individual-participant data meta-analysis approach” (1, p. 1). In fact, the conservative estimate of association provided was likely the consequence of biases towards the null. Although the authors (1) cited the Whitehall II study (1 of the 13 cohort studies) as an example of weaker associations between job strain and coronary heart disease associations in older (vs. younger) age groups (12), in fact, Whitehall II is an example of risk attenuation due to retirement. There is a much weaker association in the group aged approximately 62–72 years at the end of follow-up than in the group aged 49–61 years at the end of follow-up, a limitation acknowledged by the authors of that Whitehall II paper (12).

In summary, despite the promise of individual-participant data meta-analyses, such analyses are limited by the limitations of the included studies and may simply not be affordable or feasible in many areas of the world. Therefore, the longstanding debates in the job strain literature remain unresolved, awaiting a more comprehensive meta-analysis of the many existing cohort studies of this association that were not included in the current meta-analysis (3, 13).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is supported by the Center for Social Epidemiology, Marina Del Rey, California.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

REFERENCES


Paul A. Landsbergis¹, Marnie Dobson², and Peter Schnall²
(e-mail: paul.landsbergis@downstate.edu)

¹ Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, State University of New York-Downstate School of Public Health, Brooklyn, NY 11203
² Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA 92617

DOI: 10.1093/aje/kwt193.