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WORKING ON STRESS

EUROPEAN WEEK FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK
http://osha.eu.int/ew2002/

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Much effort has been spent to date on defining stress and carrying out research on different aspects of the topic. It is now time for taking this work forward into practical action. This is what the 2002 European Week for Safety and Health at Work is all about. The slogan for European Week is 'Working on stress' – taking action to help prevent work-related stress. This magazine is an early resource for the Week, with lots of practical information to help people get started. It complements and builds on other information sources already available from the Agency on work-related stress. The emphasis is now on action!

European Week will take place in October 2002, but the campaign is running all year. The Agency is joining forces with the Spanish and Danish Presidencies for a series of activities throughout the year. The Agency will make more resources available to further help efforts as the year progresses. With our Good Practice Awards scheme we aim to show by example that work-related stress can be successfully tackled. Keep an eye on our website http://osha.eu.int/ew2002/ for more news!

Everyone involved in occupational safety and health matters is encouraged to take part in the Week, which has the backing of all Member States, the European Commission and Parliament, trade unions and employers' federations.

This issue of the Agency Magazine firstly sums up key players' views and priorities. The emphasis is firmly on helping to promote activity and a series of 'real life' case studies from a variety of organisations across Europe, from SMEs to large enterprises, demonstrate that work-related stress can be successfully tackled. The 'noticeboard' presents some of the latest initiatives on work-related stress in Member States. There are also details of Agency and European Commission activities to date and resources that are available. And to complete the picture, one of the main causes of work-related stress – bullying – is explored, including action that can be taken to reduce its occurrence.

'Working on stress' is all about taking action to successfully tackle work-related stress. There are good examples to follow. We look forward to playing our part and helping promote activity.

Foreword

The statistics on work-related stress highlighted in this magazine speak for themselves. Clearly this topic is one of the major challenges currently facing us all – as employers, employees, prevention professionals, policy-makers, researchers and so on, in all sectors and in organisations both large and small.

The implications are clear – work-related stress can cause people misery, both at work and at home, and significantly affect an organisation's bottom line. Therefore there are many reasons to take action. Some people have been put off doing something because they see work-related stress as a very complex issue that is impossible to tackle. This is not the case and this magazine as well as other Agency, EU and Member State activities aim to help people at work successfully deal with this issue.

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ANNA DIAMANTOPOULOU

European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs

$\mathcal{E}$urope under stress

Nearly one in three European workers is affected by work-related stress according to European surveys

Member State health and safety authorities have identified 'stress' as one of the most important emerging risks, along with manual handling, changing work organisation and the risk category of young workers.[1]

During a seminar held last year, work-related stress was identified several times as one of the new risk areas which would need to be addressed in the forthcoming Community strategy for safety and health at work. The 'Quality of Work' seminar, held in Bilbao in April 2001, was organised by the Commission, the Swedish Presidency and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.

Work-related stress has been also continually identified in a number of reports and resolutions of both the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee as one of the key themes for attention.

What exactly is work-related stress? It can be defined as a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological reactions to adverse and harmful aspects of work content, work organisation and the working environment. It is a state characterised by high levels of agitation and distress and often feelings of not coping.

The Commission has been fully aware of the European Union (EU) trends, national priorities and the opinions of EU institutions on this matter for some time. This is why the Commission has been working on this issue in several ways.

The European Social Agenda, approved at the Nice European Council in December 2000 committed the European Commission to developing a Community strategy on health and safety at work based on a Communication which has recently been published. One of the key objectives is to respond to new risks, including those of a psychosocial nature, such as work-related stress, by initiatives on standards and exchanges of good practice. The Commission's

intention is not only to prevent accidents at work and occupational diseases, but also to promote wellbeing at work. It is clear that work-related stress is one of most important threats to workers' wellbeing.

The Commission has already carried out significant work in the area of work-related stress, publishing its comprehensive document *Guidance on Work-related Stress* in 2000. The guidance provides general information on the causes, manifestations and consequences of work-related stress, both for workers and work organisations. It also offers general advice on how work-related stress problems and their causes can be identified. It proposes a practical and flexible framework for action that social partners, both at national level and in individual companies, can adapt to suit their own situation. The focus is on primary prevention of work-related stress rather than on treatment[2].

This guidance, together with the findings of the Agency's report *Research on Work-related Stress*[3], give the EU the necessary background information with which to act.

In addition, the Commission has already begun to incorporate the 'stress theme' into other new developments and initiatives. As part of its EU strategy for long-term investment in high-quality jobs and living standards which was adopted in June 2001, the Commission has included 'stress levels' as one of the key indicators in the 'Health and Safety at Work' section of the ten key quality dimensions. These will now be developed further, along with the other list of indicators.

During 2002, the European Commission has given the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work the task of organising the European Week which this year is on work-related stress. This is an EU-wide campaign in which I will be personally involved.

The European Commission is convinced that work-related stress can and must be prevented. This is an important task in which the stakeholders of the world of work should be fully engaged. The new Community strategy on Health and Safety at Work establishes the main lines of action to fulfil these objectives.

> *Work-related stress is one of most important threats to workers' wellbeing.*

Anna Diamantopoulou, European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs.

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1 See the Agency's report on the State of Occupational Safety and Health in the European Union – available on-line at
http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/reports/stateofosh

2 Guidance on Work-related Stress – spice of life or kiss of death is available online at
http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/h&s/publicat/pubintro_en.htm or in print from EU publications offices – ISBN 92-828-9806-7.

3 Research on Work-related Stress is available on-line at
http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/reports/stress/

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Work-related stress: the European picture

Work-related stress is a strong negative emotional reaction to work

Work-related stress is non-trivial and can significantly alter the behaviour of the person involved, impair the quality of their life and damage their health.

In the European Union (EU), over the last decade, work-related stress has been consistently identified as one of the major workplace concerns - a challenge not only to the health of working people but also to the healthiness of their organisations.

> *Studies suggest that between 50% and 60% of all lost working days are related to stress.*

In the European Foundation's 1996 and 2000 surveys of working conditions, 28% of the workers reported stress-related problems, a figure exceeded only by musculoskeletal complaints (30% and 33% respectively). Furthermore, studies in the EU and beyond (Cox *et al.*, 2000) suggest that between 50% and 60% of all lost working days are related to stress.

This represents a huge cost in terms of both human distress and impaired economic performance. Besides the serious effects on workers' mental and physical health, the impact of work stress is obvious in 'organisational symptoms' such as high levels of absenteeism and labour turnover, poor safety performance, low employee morale, a lack of innovation and poor productivity.

Consequently, the challenge of work-related stress has received growing media and public attention across the developed world. Legislators at EU and national level have tried to put in place measures to protect workers' health and thus the efficiency of their organisations.

Council Directive 89/391/EEC, and the legislation it needs at Member State level, place work-related stress firmly within the legal domain of occupational safety and health. They set the strong expectation that it is approached in the same logical and systematic way as other health and safety issues by applying the risk management model, with special emphasis on preventive action.

Work-related stress clearly represents a major problem, but the wrong impression is sometimes given that such 'stress' is a subjective phenomenon that is both difficult to define and manage. This, in turn, can leave both employers and workers feeling helpless and unsure as to what they can do to address the problem. In fact, although different researchers have approached the problem from slightly different perspectives, most share the same basic conceptual framework for defining and managing stress.

People experience stress when they feel an imbalance between the demands placed on them and the personal and environmental resources that they have to cope with those demands. This relationship between demands and resources can be strongly moderated by factors such as social support – both at work and outside work – and control over work.

Although the process of evaluating both demands and resources ('appraisal') is psychological, the effects of stress are not merely psychological in nature. They can also affect physical and social health, innovation and productivity (e.g., Kawakami & Haratani, 1999; Kristensen, 1996; Stansfeld *et al.*, 1999; Devereux *et al.*, 1999).

Stress may also compromise other aspects of work behaviour, such as safety, as discussed by Dr Jason Devereux in issue 3 of this magazine (*Preventing Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders*). It is also related to the experience and report of work-related musculoskeletal disorders. We think that understanding the causes of work-related stress is important not only in itself, but also as a way of unlocking the management of musculoskeletal problems and that of accidents at work[1].

The causes of stress: physical and psychosocial hazards

Most researchers agree on exactly which factors of the work environment can cause employees work-related stress. We can broadly divide these factors into *physical hazards* (which include biological, biomechanical, chemical and radiological ones) and *psychosocial hazards*.

Exposure to the physical hazards of work can be associated with anxiety that, in turn, drives the experience of work-related stress. Psychosocial hazards may be defined as those aspects of the design, organisation and management of work, and its social and environmental context, which can cause psychological, social or physical harm. Many of their effects can be directly attributed to stress. Figure 1 shows the known stress-related work factors grouped into ten categories. These different categories relate to either 'work *content*' or 'work *context*'.

Figure 1: Factors associated with work-related stress (adapted from Cox et al., 2000)

Category	Hazards
	Work context
Organisational culture and function	Poor communication, low levels of support for problem-solving and personal development, lack of definition of organisational objectives.
Role in organisation	Role ambiguity and role conflict, responsibility for people.
Career development	Career stagnation and uncertainty, under- or over-promotion, poor pay, job insecurity, low social value to work.
Decision 'latitude' / control	Low participation in decision-making, lack of control over work (control, particularly in the form of participation, is also a context and wider organisational issue).
Interpersonal relationships at work	Social or physical isolation, poor relationships with superiors, interpersonal conflict, lack of social support.
Home-work interface	Conflicting demands of work and home, low support at home, dual career problems.
	Work content
Work environment and work equipment	Problems regarding the reliability, availability, suitability and maintenance or repair of both equipment and facilities.
Task design	Lack of variety or short work cycles, fragmented or meaningless work, under-use of skills, high level of uncertainty.
Workload/workpace	Work overload or underload, lack of control over pacing, high levels of time pressure.
Work schedule	Shift working, inflexible work schedules, unpredictable hours, long or unsocial hours.

The world of work is undergoing considerable and continuous change. Figure 2 summarises some of the characteristics of the emerging new ways of working. As the 16th-century physician Paracelsus noted, the development of new work practices makes it likely that new risks to safety and health[2] will appear (or that some existing hazards will become more significant). Superimposed on these new ways is the effect of the changing demography of work, with fewer younger workers and an increasing proportion of older workers in the European workforce.

Figure 2: Changing work patterns

- Teleworking and the increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the workplace.

- Self-regulated work and teamwork.

- Changes in employment patterns: downsizing, outsourcing, subcontracting and globalisation.

- Demands for workers' flexibility in terms of number and function of skills, shiftwork and unsocial hours.

- Increasing proportion of the population working in the service sector.

The constantly evolving patterns and demography of work underline the need to put the management of work-related stress in the wider context of other inter-related problems (e.g. social inequality, discrimination, workplace violence and harassment) and against the background of an increasingly diverse working population in terms of age, disability, ethnic origin and gender. Only if we look at these issues together, in an integrated way, can we ever achieve a comprehensive and successful strategy for the management of work-related stress. This is one of the challenges for researchers, managers and workers, and policy-makers in the EU.

The future: encouraging good practice

> *Enough is now known to support action to translate knowledge into effective practice.*

As our report for the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work points out, the last 30 years have seen a rapid growth in stress research, and a great deal is already known about the causes and consequences of work-related stress (Cox *et al.*, 2000). We think that enough is now known to support action to translate knowledge into effective practice. This view agrees with that expressed in the European Commission Guidance on Work-related Stress (European Commission, 2000),

"One of the cardinal sins in the area of occupational health is to conduct elaborate studies, describing in considerable detail the work-related stress of the employees, its causes and consequences – and then leave it at that. To diagnose, but not to treat and even less to prevent. If this is done it adds insult to injury". (p.71)

The priority now is to develop and test ways of applying the wealth of knowledge that exists to 'real world' situations, and to work environments and work organisations of all sizes and structures and in all economic sectors. European health and safety legislation suggests the framework to do this: the risk management model and several research institutes across the EU have produced versions of this model adapted to deal with the psychosocial hazards that are known to cause or exacerbate stress at work. Notable among these institutions are the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, TNO Work and Health (Netherlands), and the Institute of Work, Health and Organisations (UK). As required by European health and safety legislation, the risk management model places the emphasis on organisational-level interventions supporting primary prevention. Risk management has the added advantage of being a framework that is already familiar to most organisations across the EU.

The design and scientific evaluation of strategies for preventing and managing work-related stress is *the* challenge in this area for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers in the EU. To be truly successful, the full support of the social partners is needed, not only to develop effective stress management strategies based on risk management, but also to implement and use in workplaces and organisations. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work is taking a lead in sharing the information that everyone needs for making progress in this important area.

The European Agency's initiatives, under the banner of the European Week, are most opportune. They highlight the convergence of public and professional concern, and scientific developments and legislative action to tackle work-related stress.

This issue of the European Agency magazine presents a series of brief case studies and commentaries from across the EU that show how work-related stress can be successfully managed within the health and safety framework. We hope that these case studies and supporting information will encourage everyone to take action to benefit both workers' health and the 'healthiness' of their organisations.

NOTES

1 These three issues (musculoskeletal disorders, accidents and work-related stress) have been highlighted during the European Weeks of 2000, 2001and 2002 respectively.

2 Phillipus Paracelsus (1567) *On the Miners' Sickness and other Miners' Diseases*. In: HE Sigerist (ed) Four Treatises of Paracelsus. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press (1941).

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Turning knowledge into action

Accessing Agency information on work-related stress

Providing information on work-related stress has been a key topic for the European Agency since it started operations in 1996. Since then, the Agency has made available a wealth of information on both research and good practice on stress at work as well as some of the main causes of stress such as violence and bullying at work, and poor work organisation and design. This work has been mirrored in the Member States and by our partners around the world with the result that the Agency website now offers a global portal to quality information in different languages to help prevent work-related stress.

However, making information available is only part of the equation. *Using* the information in practice to help prevent work-related stress is the way to reduce the appalling toll of ill health caused by stress at work. European Week 2002, with the theme 'Working on stress', looks to promote *action* in this area throughout the year and into the future.

So what is available on the Agency site, who is it for, and how should it be used?

What information is available?

European Week 2002 - Working on stress

A special web feature at http://osha.eu.int/ew2002/ is packed with information to promote action and will be updated and added to throughout the campaign. On-line resources include:

- fact sheets aimed at helping those at the workplace level improve their management of work-related stress and how to find further information on the Agency's web site. There will be fact sheets on

risks causing work-related stress such as violence and bullying/mobbing;

- reports on research findings and practices and programmes used to combat work-related stress in the European Union;
- links to dedicated web pages in Member States and good practice information on preventing work-related stress;
- promotional material such as posters and European Week leaflets in 11 languages;
- contacts for finding out how to get involved;
- latest news and press releases;
- a round-up of planned activities across Europe.

As part of the Week, the Agency is also running a Good Practice Award scheme to recognise companies and organisations, which have been successful in implementing workplace solutions which have helped reduce work-related stress. Winning entries will be publicised on the Agency website and the awards will be presented in November, in Bilbao, at the Week's closing event.

What we know about stress

Visitors to the Agency's site can also find research information, bringing together the results of studies on this topic. One of the key Agency products in this area is a May 2000 research report *Research on Work-related Stress* produced by the Institute of Work, Health and Organisations, University of Nottingham, UK. This report collects, evaluates and reviews research data on work-related stress and its causes, and on intervention studies. It covers effects both on the individual worker and the organisation, providing a 'business case' for stress management. The report found available scientific evidence to support the following:

- work-related stress can be dealt with in the same way as other health and safety issues, by adapting the control cycle already well

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established for the assessment and management of physical risks to the management of stress at work;

- practical examples of this approach applied to stress at work exist in several European Union countries;

- future research should concentrate on stress management interventions at the organisational level.

A fact sheet (no. 8) is available summarising the results of the report.

The Agency's pilot study on *the State of Occupational Safety and Health in the European Union* shed light on the extent of Europe's work-related stress problem. Some examples of indicators for work-related stress follow:

Exposure indicator: High speed work

Potential health effects	High speed work can lead to stress related illnesses and ultimately burnout of the individual. It can also induce a high margin for human error leading to workplace accidents.
European picture[1]	56% of all workers interviewed report working at very high speed for at least 25% of their time.
Sector categories most at risk from the national reports	Hotels and restaurants; Post and telecommunications; Land transport; transport via pipelines; Construction; Some manufacturing and publishing and printing.
Occupation categories most at risk from the national reports	Corporate managers; Customer services clerks; Drivers and mobile plant operators; Metal, machinery and related trades workers.

Exposure indicator: Work pace dictated by external demand

Potential health effects	Work pace dictated by external demand can lead to stress-related illnesses.
European picture[1]	69% of all workers interviewed report being exposed to work pace dictated by external demand.
Sector categories most at risk from the national reports	Hotels and restaurants; Health and social work; Retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles; repair of personal and household goods.
Occupation categories most at risk from the national reports	Customer services clerks; Personal and protective services workers; Life science and health associate professionals; Life science and health professionals.
Preventive action	There are a number of measures that can be adopted and further developed to reduce the risk from work pace dictated by external demands, these measures include: • improved work planning and organisation; • implementation of improved work organisation including job/task rotation, regular scheduled breaks; and • provision of information & training.

Exposure indicator: Machine dictated work pace

Potential health effects	This can lead to stress-related illnesses and injuries associated with lack of concentration.
European picture[1]	20% of all workers interviewed report being exposed to machine dictated work pace or movement of a product.
Sector categories most at risk from the national reports	Manufacturing.
Occupation categories most at risk from the national reports	Machine operators and assemblers; Labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport; Drivers and mobile plant operators.
Preventive action	There are many work-related tasks that are characterised by repetitive and monotonous activities, which are governed by the relationship between the machine/production requirements and the worker. Such relationships are typically amongst unskilled labour such as metal workers, assemblers/packers and workers in the food industry. There are a number of measures that can be implemented to reduce the risk from exposure to machine dictated work pace; these measures include: • improvement in technical and organisational measures; • regular workplace inspections; • implementation of regular breaks; • outine job/task rotation; and • provision of information and training.

Exposure indicator: Sexual harassment

Possible health effects	Sexual harassment can be another factor leading to stress-related illnesses.
European picture[1]	2% of all workers interviewed report being exposed to sexual harassment.
Sector categories most at risk from the national reports	Hotels and restaurants; Health and social work; Retail trade, except motor vehicles and motorcycles; repair of personal and household goods; Education; Wholesale trade and commission trade, except motor vehicles and motorcycles.
Occupation categories most at risk from the national reports	Personal and protective services workers; Models, sales persons and demonstrators; Customer services clerks; Office clerks;
Preventive action	There are a number of measures that can be adopted to reduce the risk from sexual harassment in the workplace. • There is a need for training and information of workers; • There is a need to improve the social defence and to encourage • Inspection activities should involve assessing an organisation's policy to control and (if applicable) reduce sexual harassment.

Exposure indicator: Monotonous work

Potential health effects	Monotonous work can be a major contributor to stress-related illnesses. It can also lead to attention lapses resulting in accidents. It can also result in individuals taking risks in order to relieve the boredom.
European picture[1]	40% of all workers interviewed report having to perform monotonous tasks.
Sector categories most at risk from the national reports	Tanning and dressing of leather; manufacture of luggage, handbags, saddlery, harness and footwear; Manufacture of textiles; Manufacture of food products and beverages;
Occupation categories most at risk from the national reports	Machine operators and assemblers; Sales and services elementary ; occupations Customer services clerks.
Preventive action	There are a number of measures that can be adopted and further developed to reduce the risk from monotonous in the workplace, these include: • need for task enrichment and job rotation within the workplace; • introduction of new ways of work organisation which include participation of workers; and • provision of training and information for the workforce.

OSH outcome: Stress

Potential health effects	Work-related stress can cause fatigue, anxiety, sweating panic attacks and tremors. It can lead to difficulty in relaxation, loss of concentration, impaired appetite and disrupted sleep patterns. Some people become depressed or aggressive and stress increases susceptibility to ulcers, mental ill health, heart disease and some skin disorders.
European picture[1]	28% of all workers interviewed report being affected by work-related stress.
Sector categories most at risk from the national reports	Health and social work; Education; Land transport; transport via pipelines; Public administration and defence; compulsory social security; Agriculture, hunting and related service activities.
Occupation categories most at risk from the national reports	Life science and health professionals; Teaching professionals;
Preventive action	Stress at work is often considered to be a white-collar phenomenon. However, work-related stress can be found in other environments brought on by the environmental conditions such as noise, toxic substances, heat or difficult working postures. It has long been known that shift workers are particularly vulnerable to stress. Job insecurity can also add to stress problems. There are a number of measures that can be adopted and further developed to reduce the risk from stress at work; these measures include: • implement work organisation procedures; • promote worker participation; • introduce job rotation work regular breaks; and • provision of training and information to workers about relaxation techniques to reduce stress.

Exposure indicator: Physical violence

Potential health effects	Physical violence can lead to a wide range of physical injuries from minor to life threatening. Anxiety resulting from either a threat of violence or as a direct result of actual violence can lead to stress-related illnesses.
European picture[1]	4% of all employees report being exposed to physical violence at work from people outside the workplace
Sector categories most at risk from the national reports	Health and social work; Public administration and defence; compulsory social security; Land transport; transport via pipelines; Hotels and restaurants;
Occupation categories most at risk from the national reports	Personal and protective services workers; Life science and health associate professionals; Sales and services elementary occupations;

Exposure indicator: Bullying and victimisation

Potential health effects	Bullying and victimisation often lead to stress-related illnesses.
European picture[1]	9% of all workers report being subject to intimidation in the workplace
Sector categories most at risk from the national reports	Health and social work; Hotels and restaurants; Education;
Occupation categories most at risk from the national reports	Sales and services elementary occupations; Personal and protective services workers; Customer services clerks;
Preventive action	There are a number of measures that can be adopted and further developed to reduce the risk from bullying and victimisation in the workplace; some of these measures include: • provision of training and preparation of methods for dealing with the consequences; • the need to educate occupational health professionals, labour inspectors, social partners and also personnel at the workplaces on identifying workplace bullying and its victims; • the need for developing knowledge concerning the connection between work environment factors and the searching for scapegoats; • planning and designing social relationships in the workplace; • increase the authorities protection and surveillance actions; and • provision of information and training for the workforce.

Further data is available on work-related stress from Eurostat[2]. Eurostat found that stress, depression and anxiety represent 18% of work-related health problems, and 26% of those involving two or more weeks' absence from work (this rate doubles in education and health and social work). This makes stress, depression and anxiety the second highest cause of work-related health problems, after musculoskeletal disorders.

Good practice

The Agency's website also provides access to good practice information on the key areas of preventing stress at work – for example what legislation applies, risk assessment and prevention, as well as case studies from organisations which have successfully reduced stress at work.

We're also developing sector information on key risks including stress at work – so far there is information on preventing stress at work in the healthcare sector, and further sector information will be developed in the future.

While the Agency's Good Practice Online Forum gives practitioners the possibility of sharing experiences and good practice on stress and other topics.

You can access this information in a number of ways, for example, through the search engine on the Agency website or by going directly to a Member State or Global Partner page to see if there is specific information on stress there, or from the 'Topics', 'Good Practice' or 'Research' pages.

*W*ho is the information for?

The information is for anyone who wants to know more about work-related stress. This may include, for example, managers in enterprises who should tackle stress in their workplace, employees who need help in finding out more about work-related stress or prevention professionals who want to find out more about how other countries tackle stress at work or what the latest research reveals.

*H*ow should the information be used?

The information should be used to help develop actions for tackling stress at work. For example, good practice case studies from one workplace could give ideas and methods for dealing with stress in other workplaces and information on risk assessment should help give guidance to those who have a duty to carry out assessments. There is information available especially targeted to the needs of SMEs to help owners take action.

*W*hat next?

The challenge during 2002 (and beyond) is to use this resource to take action to reduce work-related stress and to tackle its causes. The European Week theme 'Working on stress' provides an excellent opportunity to get to grips with this topic, and to help reduce the unacceptable toll on workers' health in Europe.

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Further information: http://osha.eu.int/ew2002/

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Spice of life or kiss of death?
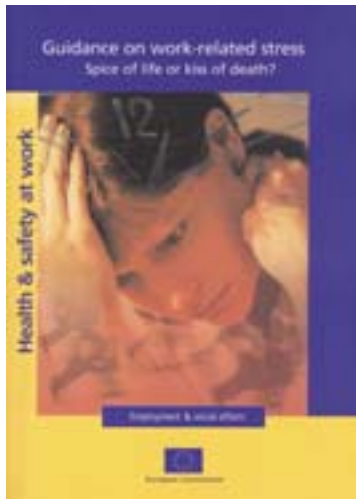
The EU Guidance on work-related stress

In its invitation to a conference on *Stress and Depression* held in Brussels on 25-27 October 2001, the Belgian Presidency called attention to the "growing evidence that stress, anxiety and depression are amongst the most important contributors to the burden of disease and disability in Europe. Their direct and indirect socio-economic impact is highly important on individuals, on families and on society as a whole. General awareness-building has to take place in all sectors of society".

What is stress?

Stress consists of a pattern of 'stone-age' reactions preparing the human organism for fight or flight, i.e., for physical activity. Stress was adequate when stone-age man was facing a wolf pack, but not so when today's worker is struggling to adjust to rotating shifts, highly monotonous and fragmented tasks or threatening or over-demanding customers. It is often maladaptive and disease-provoking.

Health and wellbeing can be influenced by work, both positively (spice of life) and negatively (kiss of death). Work can provide a goal and meaning in life. It can give structure and content to our day, our week, our year, and our life. It can offer us identity, self-respect, social support, and material rewards. This is more likely to happen when work demands are optimal (and not maximal), when workers are allowed to exercise a reasonable degree of autonomy, and when the 'climate' of the work organisation is friendly and supportive. If this is so, work can be one of the most important health-promoting factors in life.

If, however, work conditions are characterised by the *opposite* attributes, they are – at least in the long run – likely to cause ill health, accelerate its course or trigger its symptoms.

Pathogenic mechanisms include:

- *emotional* reactions (anxiety, depression, hypochondria, and alienation);
- *cognitive* reactions (difficulty in concentrating, remembering, learning new things, being creative, making decisions);
- *behavioural* reactions (abuse of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco; destructive and self-destructive behaviour, and inhibitions about seeking and accepting the offer of therapy and rehabilitation); and
- *physiological reactions* (neuroendocrine and immunological dysfunction).

The present situation

Work-related stress, its causes and consequences are all very common in the 15 European Union Member States. More than half of the 160 million workers report working very quickly (56%), and to tight deadlines (60 %). More than one third have no influence on task order; 40% report having monotonous tasks.

Such work-related 'stressors' are likely to have contributed to the present spectrum of ill health: 15% of the workforce complain of headache, 23% of neck and shoulder pains, 23% of fatigue, 28% of 'stress', and 33% of backache. They also contribute to many other diseases, even to life-threatening ones (European Foundation, 2001).

Sustained work-related stress is an important determinant of *depressive disorders*. Such disorders are the fourth leading cause of the global disease burden. They are expected to rank second by 2020, behind ischaemic heart disease, but ahead of all other diseases (World Health Organization, 2001).

In the 15 EU Member States, the cost of these and related mental health problems is estimated to be on average 3-4% of GNP (ILO, 2000)[3], thus amounting to approximately €265 billion annually (1998).

It is further likely that sustained work-related stress is an important determinant of the *metabolic syndrome* (Folkow, 2001; Björntorp, 2001). This syndrome contributes to *ischaemic heart disease* and *diabetes type 2* morbidity.

Thus, virtually every aspect of work-related health and disease can be influenced. This can also be mediated through emotional, and/or cognitive *misinterpretation* of conditions of work as threatening, even when they are not, and/or the occurrence of trivial bodily signs and symptoms as manifestations of serious disease.

All this can lead to a wide variety of disorders, diseases, loss of wellbeing, and loss of productivity. Examples discussed in some detail in the EU Guidance include ischaemic heart disease, stroke, cancer, musculoskeletal and gastrointestinal diseases, anxiety and depressive disorders, accidents, and suicides.

*W*ho is at risk?

> *Every person has his or her breaking point.*

In fact, every one of us is at risk. Every person has his or her breaking point. In addition, the nature and conditions of work are changing at whirlwind speed. This adds to the risk we run, or may run, but to a varying degree. Some groups are more at risk than others.

Some determinants of this increased risk are 'type A' (hostile) behaviour; an inadequate coping repertoire; living and working under underprivileged socio-economic conditions, and lacking social support.

Other determinants are age (adolescent and elderly workers), gender combined with overload (e.g. single mothers), and being disabled. Often, those who are particularly at risk are also more exposed to harmful living and working conditions. High levels of both vulnerability and exposure thus tend to coincide.

*C*an work-related stress be prevented?

Work-related stress can be approached on four levels - those of:

- the individual worker;
- the work organisation;
- the nation; and
- the European Union.

Whatever the target(s), conditions are man-made and open to interventions by all relevant stakeholders.

At all levels, there is a need to identify work-related stressors, stress reactions, and stress-related ill health. There are several reasons for doing this:

- stress is a problem both for the worker and his or her work organisation, and for society;
- work stress problems are on the increase;
- it is a legal obligation under the EU Framework Directive on Health and Safety (see below); and
- many of the stressors and consequences are avoidable and can be adjusted by all three parties on the labour market if they act together in their own and mutual interests.

According to the EU Framework Directive, employers have a "duty to ensure the safety and health of workers in every aspect related to the work". The Directive's principles of prevention include 'avoiding risks', 'combating the risks at source', and 'adapting the work to the individual'. In addition, the Directive indicates the employers' duty to develop 'a coherent overall prevention policy'. This is why the European Commission published its Guidance (Levi, 2000) to provide a basis for such endeavours.

Based on surveillance at individual workplaces and monitoring at national and regional levels, work-related stress should be prevented or counteracted by job-redesign (e.g., by empowering the employees, and avoiding both over- and underload), by improving social support, and by providing reasonable reward for the effort invested by workers, as integral parts of the overall management system. Also, of course, by adjusting occupational physical, chemical and psychosocial settings to the workers' abilities, needs and reasonable expectations - all in line with the requirements of the EU Framework Directive and Article 152

of the Treaty of Amsterdam, according to which "a high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Community policies and activities".

Supporting actions include not only research, but also adjustments of curricula in business schools, schools of technology, medicine and behavioural and social sciences, and in the training and retraining of labour inspectors, occupational health officers, managers and supervisors, in line with such goals.

According to the Swedish EU Presidency Conclusions (Stockholm European Council, 2001) regaining full employment (in the EU) not only involves focusing on more jobs, but also on better jobs.

Increased efforts should be made to promote a good working environment for all including equal opportunities for the disabled, gender equality, good and flexible work organisation permitting better reconciliation of working and personal life, lifelong learning, health and safety at work, employee involvement and diversity in working life.

*T*ools to prevent stress

To identify work-related stress, its causes and consequences, we need to monitor our *job content, working conditions, terms of employment, social relations at work, health, wellbeing* and *productivity*. The EU Guidance provides many references to simple checklists and questionnaires to enable all stakeholders to do this.

Once the parties in the labour market know 'where the shoe pinches', action can be taken to 'adjust the shoe' to fit the 'foot', i.e. to improve stress-inducing conditions in the workplaces. Much of this can be accomplished through rather simple organisational changes by:

- allowing adequate time for the worker to perform his or her work satisfactorily;
- providing the worker with a clear job description;
- rewarding the worker for good job performance;
- providing ways for the worker to voice complaints and have them considered seriously and swiftly;
- harmonising the worker's responsibility and authority;
- clarifying the work organisation's goals and values and adapting them to the worker's own goals and values, whenever possible;
- promoting the worker's control, and pride, over the end product of his or her work;
- promoting tolerance, security and justice at the workplace;
- eliminating harmful physical exposures;
- identifying failures, successes, and their causes and consequences in previous and future health action at workplace;
- learning how to avoid the failures and how to promote the successes, for a step-by-step improvement of occupational environment and health (see section on internal control below).

On a company or national level, all three parties in the labour market may wish to consider organisational improvements to prevent work-related stress and ill health, with regard to:

- *work schedules*. Design work schedules to avoid conflict with demands and responsibilities unrelated to the job. Schedules for rotating shifts should be stable and predictable, with rotation in a forward (morning-afternoon-night) direction;
- *participation / control*. Allow workers to take part in decisions or actions affecting their jobs;

- *workload*. Ensure assignments are compatible with the capabilities and resources of the worker, and allow for recovery from especially demanding physical or mental tasks;

- *content*. Design tasks to provide meaning, stimulation, a sense of completeness, and an opportunity to use skills;

- *roles*. Define work roles and responsibilities clearly;

- *social environment*. Provide opportunities for social interaction, including emotional and social support and help between fellow workers;

- *future*. Avoid ambiguity in matters of job security and career development; promote life-long learning and employability.

Internal control

One of the most common-sense, down-to-earth and low-cost approaches is known as Internal control.

Actions to reduce harmful work-related stress need not be complicated, time consuming, or prohibitively expensive. One of the most common-sense, down-to-earth and low-cost approaches is known as *Internal control*.

This is a self-regulatory process, carried out in close collaboration between stakeholders. It can be co-ordinated by, for example, an in-house occupational health service or a labour inspector, or by an occupational or public health nurse, a social worker, a physiotherapist, or a personnel administrator.

The first step is to *identify* the incidence, prevalence, severity and trends of work-related stressor exposures and their causes and health consequences, for example by making use of some of the many survey instruments listed in the EU Guidance.

In a second step, the characteristics of such exposures as reflected in the content, organisation and conditions of work are analysed in relation to the outcomes found. Are they likely to be *necessary*, or *sufficient*, or *contributory* in causing work-stress, and ill health related to it? Are they accessible to change? Are such changes acceptable to relevant stakeholders?

In a third step, the stakeholders design an integrated *package of interventions*, and implement it in order to prevent work-related stress and to promote both wellbeing and productivity, preferably by combining top-down and bottom-up approaches.

The short- and long-term *outcomes* of such interventions need then to be *evaluated*, in terms of :

- stressor exposures;

- stress reactions;

- incidence and prevalence of ill health;

- indicators of wellbeing;

- productivity with regard to the quality and quantity of goods or services; and

- the costs and benefits in economic terms.

If the interventions show no effects, or negative ones, in one or more respects, stakeholders may wish to reconsider what should be done, how, when, by whom and for whom. If, on the other hand, outcomes are generally positive, they may wish to continue or expand their endeavours along similar lines. It simply means systematic *learning from experience*. If they do so over a longer perspective, the workplace becomes an example of *organisational learning*.

Experiences with such interventions are generally very positive, not only for the employees and in terms of stress, health and wellbeing, but also for the function and success of work organisations, and for the community. If conducted as proposed, it is likely to create a *win-win-win* situation for all concerned.

It is likely to create a win-win-win situation for all concerned.

Start now

Does all this sound complicated or even utopian? It is not. It has been done in many enterprises, and with considerable success. The principles mentioned above are incorporated in the EU Framework Directive and in the Work Environment Acts of a number of European countries. True, it may take time and effort, but it can be done. And it is likely to be highly cost-effective.

Your first step? Read the EU Guidance, and take concrete steps to apply what you have read in your own country, or at your own workplace. The 'right time' is now. It can mean improving both working conditions and health, as well as your own, your company's and your country's output and productivity.

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JUAN CARLOS APARICIO

Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Spain

Workplace stress – a growing problem

Juan Carlos Aparicio, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Spain

Change and innovation can result in workers feeling stressed

Companies are currently facing huge changes. Competition has increased both within the European free market and beyond. The need to improve productivity and quality, innovations in technology and in the organisation of work, environmental demands and shifts in the structure of the working population (ageing, a multicultural society, women in the workforce) all require flexibility and adaptability.

So what we need is a workforce which is willing to change and innovate – one which is client-oriented and very motivated. As a result, many workers feel threatened: knowledge very quickly becomes outdated and there is an increasing need to update their skills.

Occasionally, other factors come into play, such as intensive work patterns, longer working days and harassment. All of these factors have resulted in stress becoming an increasingly common phenomenon with significant repercussions, since a person's physical and psychological wellbeing is affected and the running of the organisation is damaged. Stress, therefore, harms health and efficiency, both individually and socially and workplace stress has become an important aspect of job security and health.

Job security and health

Work-related stress, its causes and its consequences are very common in the Member States of the European Union (EU). Data published by the European Commission in the *Guía sobre el estrés relacionado con el trabajo* (Guide to work-related stress (1999)) reveal that more than half of the 147 million European workers admitted to working under considerable pressure.

More than a third do not have the freedom to organise their tasks, and more than a quarter do not have a say when it comes to deciding on

their patterns of work. Furthermore, 45% claim they carry out monotonous tasks, and 50%, short repetitive tasks.

It is thought that these work-related causes of stress have contributed to current illnesses: 13% of workers complain of headaches, 17% of muscular pains, 30% of back pains, 20% of fatigue and 28% of stress.

In Spain, the 4th *Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Trabajo* (4th National Survey on working conditions) carried out by the *Instituto Nacional de Seguridad e Higiene en el Trabajo* (National Institute for Health and Safety at Work), reveals that of the total number of medical consultations requested by workers over the last year, 20% were due to work-related injuries and, of this percentage, 4.6% were related to stress.

An analysis of the part of the survey referring to the presence of certain symptoms of a psychosomatic nature shows that 5% of those questioned showed symptoms of stress. Statistics show that this percentage varies when each area of activity is analysed separately: 7.6% in the administrative and banking sector and 7.1% in the social services sector.

The EU estimates that costs arising from work-related stress come to around €20 billion annually within the EU. The ILO states that the cost of work-related mental health problems, including stress, represents 3% of the EU's GDP.

High-risk groups

Within the working population, certain groups of people are particularly susceptible to stress. This higher susceptibility normally goes along with a greater exposure to stressful environments, whether professional or not. Young workers, older workers, women, immigrants, disabled people and temporary workers all come into this category.

Preventive policies

Since stress is currently one of the main risks to health and workers' safety, we need an integrated health promotion strategy which meets both the workers' needs and those of the organisation concerned.

We need an integrated health promotion strategy

This should be an EU-wide campaign and it should implement actions specifically aimed at:

• developing a coherent and general prevention policy which deals with technology, work organisation, working conditions, social

relations, and the influence of factors related to the working environment;

- adapting work to the workers, especially regarding workplace design, the choice of the working team and the choice of working and production methods, specifically aimed at reducing monotonous work and piecework, and reducing their effects on workers' health;

- giving workers the opportunity to participate in the organisation of change and innovation which affect their jobs – informing, training and educating them on issues of health and safety risks.

National level proposals would implement measures aimed at:

- developing the legislative framework to cover the psychosocial aspects of working;

- including stress at work as one of the causes of work-related accidents, occupational illness or work-related illness;

- improving and broadening the statistical data referring to temporary or permanent disabilities, either caused at work or elsewhere, introducing specific indicators of stress in the monitoring of health at work. This would allow stress and its main characteristics to be monitored;

- periodically carrying out in-depth studies which would yield reliable estimates of the economic costs caused by work-related damage to health.

CLAUS HJORT FREDERIKSEN

Minister for Employment, Denmark

S tress – a common disease?

Claus Hjort Frederiksen, Minister for Employment, Denmark

Putting stress on the European agenda

Work-related stress is becoming as common a disease in the working population as, for instance, backache. The EU estimates that more than 41 million Europeans are hit by work-related stress resulting in millions of days off sick each year and lost earnings.

Serious problems with work-related stress are generally caused by a lack of knowledge within companies about how to organise work in an efficient and stress-free way - because stress is quite the opposite of efficiency. Long-term stress will reduce an employee's sense of perspective and their ability to solve problems. This will lead to a greater risk of illness and absence due to sickness.

With the adoption of the social agenda, the European Council in Nice has identified stress in the workplace as one of the new working environment problems which has to be counteracted through measures such as initiatives on standards and the exchange of experience and best practice.

Workplace stress will be a central element of the European strategy to improve safety and health at work. This is why the EU has chosen work-related stress as the theme for the European Week for Safety and Health at Work in 2002.

Consequences of stress

In the modern labour market, where things are moving very quickly so that companies can cope with keen international competition, it is difficult to completely avoid stress. But short-term stress - for instance when meeting a deadline - isn't a problem. On the contrary, it can encourage people to do their best. The most important risk to safety and health is that posed by protracted periods of stress or chronic stress. This can lead to a specific physical and mental health breakdown. Researchers are talking about a higher risk of a range of health problems such as sleeping disorders, depression and cardiovascular diseases. Stress may also be the cause of fatal accidents. Recent research seems to indicate that one issue that can influence the degree and seriousness of stress may be individual and mental ways of coping with challenges at the workplace.

> *A number of sectors are over-represented when it comes to stress problems.*

In Denmark, notification of occupational mental illness and regular national studies of the working environment and health status of Danish employees shows that a number of sectors are over-represented when it comes to stress problems. This applies for instance to such sectors as home care services, office work and the iron and metal industry. This means that problems caused by employees suffering from stress affect many different types of enterprises in very different sectors.

New Danish studies show that the need for alertness and concentration at work has increased significantly. At the same time, studies also show that a comparatively large proportion of Danish employees report their own health as being poor and in these cases we know that there is a greater risk of illness and exclusion from the labour market. The need to cope with the issue of stress and its causes is thus becoming increasingly important.

Danish initiatives

Since 1975, Danish legislation in the field of safety and health at work has covered the mental health working environment, and work-related stress. Work-related stress has thus been the focus of attention in Denmark for more than 25 years. This means that we have a lot of useful and good experience in this field.

In 1996, the Folketing (the Danish Parliament) launched the action programme 'A clean working environment 2005'. The programme's aim is to strengthen safety and health initiatives in line with seven visions concerning a clean working environment, one of them being mental health at work. The programme's goal here is to either reduce as much as possible, - or completely eliminate - illness due to psychosocial factors in the workplace by 2005. To achieve this target, it is essential that everyone involved in the working environment field takes an active part in preventive measures.

European focus

However, there is also a need at European level for overall initiatives to reduce stress problems.

The European strategy comprises three elements:

- collection and analysis of knowledge about work-related stress and its consequences;

- exchange of experience and good practice so that individual countries may learn from each other's experience; and

- development of new instruments and methods to handle and counteract work-related stress.

Stress problems can only be solved through social dialogue and through a constructive and innovative work process between employees and management in individual companies. In order to help European Union firms to set up such processes we need targeted information and a European debate involving all enterprises in all Member States.

Development of the European labour market means that it will become increasingly important to be able to retain existing labour and to open up the market to new groups of employees. So companies are facing big demands if they are to retain and recruit employees in the coming decades. If we want to mobilise the entire labour force, the pace and volume of work shouldn't be so intensive and inflexible that many people – for instance parents with small children, older workers or people with reduced working capacity (for whatever reason) – are not able to meet them. This is why it is so important to ensure that the issue of work-related stress will now be placed on the European agenda.

During the Danish Presidency in the second half of 2002, the focus will be on how to recruit and retain labour, for instance by measures to prevent problems of safety and health at work, including social dialogue and information initiatives in this field. The European Week for Safety and Health at Work stands out as a good example of how this can be done.
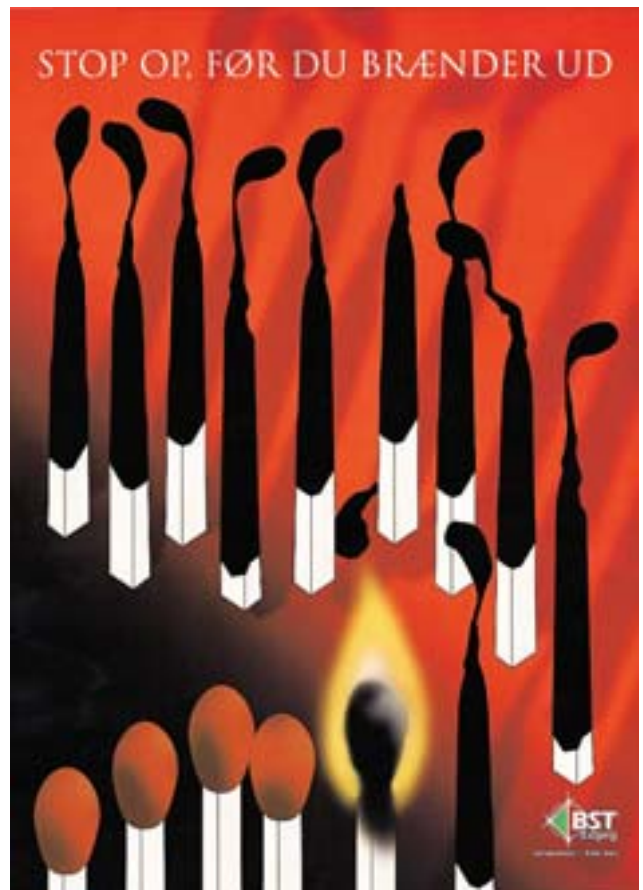
'Stop before you burn out'   Courtesy of Denmark BST Esbjerg.

EUROPEAN WEEK OCTOBER **2002**

WORKING ON STRESS

EUROPEAN WEEK FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK

Tackling work-related stress

Seven case studies from across Europe show how stress at work can be successfully tackled.

KARI LINDSTRÖM

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*L*earning 'within the envelope'

When a long-established, family-run envelope manufacturer was acquired by another business, new work practices had to be introduced to improve its profitability. The main problems that needed to be resolved were inadequate collaboration between the business units, including poor information flows, and low employee participation in the company's decision-making processes.

With the aid of external consultants and a group of company and employee representatives, the new owners of the business set out to create a 'learning organisation' that would enable staff to adopt new practices easily, while respecting the traditions of the 125-year-old company.

The first phase of the two-year process was to survey all staff, measuring recent job and organisational practices and job stressors, as well as learning and training needs. Next, all employees attended a one-day seminar to discuss and jointly create an action plan for staff development and organisational change, based on the survey's findings.

The plan that was finally agreed included upgrading traditional organisational practices, increasing awareness of company goals and client needs, improving internal collaboration, and increasing employee participation. Four small project groups - representing production, sales, administration and warehouse personnel - were formed to implement the plan, with clear goals, responsibilities and deadlines.

One year later, another 'all staff' seminar was held where the four groups provided an update on the progress made, including successes and difficulties, and employees were invited to give their feedback and suggestions.

In the second and final year of the process, another staff survey was conducted to evaluate the success of the initiative, to learn from it and improve on it. Again the results were shared with all the employees and plans were made to continue to support the joint learning process. The biggest improvements came from greater communication between the work groups, management and employees and various occupational groups. There was also a marked improvement in productivity and morale. Seventy percent of staff surveyed expressed a strong interest in continuing this 'learning' process and only 30% were slightly motivated to do this.

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*T*argeting 'quality of work'

Combating work-related stress is one of the key elements in a new national initiative in Germany called 'New quality of work'.

Launched at the 27th International Congress of Occupational Safety and Health in Düsseldorf, the scheme is designed to support the EU's new Community Strategy on Safety and Health. It covers 'classical' OSH topics, such as accident prevention, as well as emerging issues associated with a rapidly changing work environment, including dealing with an ageing workforce and stress.

According to a national survey carried out between 1998 and 1999, nearly half (46%) of German employees complained of increasing stress at work. However, although there is mounting evidence of this problem, practical solutions for tackling it remain relatively undeveloped and are applied in a piecemeal manner.

To address this issue, the German Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs is working with the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (FIOSH) to create a common framework for preventing occupational stress, based on best practice at different organisations.

The Ministry will act as the 'network manager' while FIOSH will provide a comprehensive overview of the methods for evaluating and preventing mental workload. This information will be partly gathered via the Internet, using data-mining techniques and interactive features that will enable FIOSH to obtain feedback and consult with the different players in this field.

The ultimate aim is to establish a common set of optimal guidelines for assessing and reducing work-related stress which can be used by companies, social partners, federal states and insurance companies.

To fill any gaps in its knowledge of how to deal with stress, FIOSH will carry out additional research. In conjunction with Germany's Union of Media Workers,[1] for example, it recently ran a pilot study of stress amongst freelancers, a rapidly expanding group not covered by OSH regulations.

This revealed that freelancers worked 47 hours a week on average, with 25 % putting in over 60 hours a week. Key stress factors included fluctuating work demands and times, low pay, unfair treatment by customers and agents, and social isolation. Significantly, 36 % of freelancers claimed they were 'unable to relax', an important risk factor in coronary disease.

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KATH JONES

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*L*ibrary of solutions

Libraries might appear to be oases of calm to visitors but even in this environment, staff can experience significant stress, as a study of a UK central library found.

The study was initially carried out in London in 1997. Based on confidential questionnaires completed by all staff, it revealed that the employees at the library had a substantially higher 'worn out' score than the UK average. Two main apparent causes of stress were identified: management communication and support; and staffing cover and career development. Both of these issues were positively correlated with reports of tension, work-related musculoskeletal discomfort, low job satisfaction and plans to leave.

Several potential hazards that could lead to further stress were also highlighted in the study, including the library's relatively high temperature and humidity, and the regular interruptions that staff had to contend with.

Together with their staff, the management team worked through these issues, separating out those they could influence and those they couldn't. Some of the problems had very practical solutions. To rectify the temperature and humidity issue, for instance, engineers were called in to alter the air conditioning system. This had an almost immediate effect on the quality of the work environment.

Other concerns, notably management communication and support, were less tangible but equally important. To address these and other issues, the library introduced a performance management system, enhanced workplace security, and implemented new, uniform procedures for job rotation, conditions of service and how the management team operated and communicated with staff.

In 2000 the risk assessment was repeated and there was a marked reduction in stress levels and associated problems. This was substantiated by lower levels of absence and plans to leave, amongst other quantitative and qualitative indicators.

IRENE HOUTMAN

TNO Arbeid, The Netherlands

*I*mproving care under pressure

Giving nurses at one of Holland's largest and most 'pressured' residential homes for the elderly more clearly defined roles and greater control of their jobs, not only led to an increase in job satisfaction but also an improvement in the quality of care.

The solution came from TNO Arbeid. In 1996, the home's occupational psychologist asked TNO to help find a way to deal with the mounting pressure faced by nursing staff. This stemmed from an increasing number of patients needing intensive care, coupled with financial cut-backs.

To help nursing staff cope with this additional pressure, TNO conducted a five-stage analysis of the work carried out by the nurses, involving them in every stage of the study, a key factor in the project's success. The five steps included:

- making an inventory of the work that the nurses did;
- identifying the formal and informal standards expected from the nurses, for example in terms of the quality of care expected and delivery times;
- pinpointing the obstacles that prevented staff from achieving these standards;
- developing solutions for these problems; and
- measuring the success of these solutions.

This led to several key operational changes. One of the most notable was that 'primary' nurses were given direct responsibility for 10 patients each, including developing a suitable nursing plan and keeping in contact with the patient's family. Previously, this was the role of the head of department. In addition, middle managers were withdrawn from the care process and now focus on training staff.

Although the nurses' workloads and associated pressures did not really alter, the nursing home's occupational psychologist claims that staff now feel in control of the pressures. This is reflected in anecdotal, but statistically unquantified, reports of higher job satisfaction and evidence that staff are pro-actively analysing and solving work problems themselves.

Generally there is a commitment to transform the home from a task-oriented to a patient-oriented organisation. This has been supported by the introduction of systematically monitored compliance standards for both the level of work pressure and the quality of patient care provided.

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MINAS ANALITIS

Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (ELINYAE), Greece

*C*otton company wins stress award

Greece's Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (ELINYAE) has launched a new award scheme to encourage best practice in dealing with stress, enabling the Institute to collect data on this problem along the way.

Under the scheme, organisations complete a questionnaire that asks them to detail the stress-related problems they have encountered, the causes of the stress and the solutions employed to reduce it. A steering group from ELINYAE then visits the business to evaluate the effectiveness of its stress prevention measures. Depending on the success of their solutions, the businesses can receive either an award or an honorary commendation.

In the first round of the awards nine businesses, employing over 4 000 staff, were visited by the ELINYAE team. Two of these received awards, including one of the country's most important cotton and blended yarn producers, employing nearly 700 staff.

This company had found, via a study conducted by the general pathology clinic of the University of Thessaloniki, that stress levels amongst its staff were relatively high. This was measured by the correlation between employee artery pressure and a number of variables, such as job satisfaction, educational background, position in the production line, dietary habits, number of years in the particular company, smoking and results of hearing assessments. High noise levels and monotonous work were identified as two possible causes of this problem. Another possible factor was rising job insecurity amongst younger staff, stemming from rising unemployment in Greece.

To tackle these issues, the company's occupational health unit carried out a number of initiatives. First, they examined working conditions,

focusing on factors such as noise, dust, humidity and temperature levels. Wherever a shortcoming was identified, the work environment was modified to meet optimal standards. In addition, new technology was introduced to reduce the monotony and personal safety equipment issued to all employees. A new shift system was also developed so staff could balance work and family life more effectively. Finally, the company implemented a collective insurance scheme and a productivity bonus.

An evaluation of these measures found that the ergonomic improvements had the greatest impact on employees' job satisfaction and stress levels.

In the long run, ELINYAE plans to use the award scheme to collect enough data and insights into best practice to create a self-assessment methodology that firms can use themselves to recognise and tackle stress-related problems.

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The power of positive thinking

A study of a group of teachers in Spain has found that proactive strategies for coping with stress, including positive thinking, can play an important role in alleviating these mental pressures while the root causes of stress are tackled.

The researchers analysed the levels of adrenalin and noradrenalin in the urine of a group of 165 teachers in Barcelona. The survey was carried out over two key periods: during the end of the summer term, when tension tends to be highest due to examinations and other factors; and in the post-holiday period of September, when stress levels are normally lower.

They found that the primary sources of stress stemmed from situations where the teachers lacked control, often due to the absence of information or support. Common complaints included: "having to do things that I disagree with"; "lack of information about how to implement changes"; "receiving conflicting or contradictory instructions"; "lack of support from parents regarding discipline problems"; "having to teach large numbers of students"; "poor communication within teaching teams".

Teachers who simply accepted these problems, without attempting to find solutions – 'avoidance coping' - reported higher stress levels and experienced increased symptoms of stress, measured by heightened adrenalin and noradrenalin levels. Conversely, teachers who used

proactive coping strategies, such as positive thinking and cognitive re-organisation, recorded lower stress levels.

Although it is important to address the root causes of stress, these results indicate that training in how to adopt more proactive coping strategies could help staff in the short term. This type of training, often done through workshops, can also remove the stigma attached to stress, reinforce social support networks and facilitate the exchange of good practice across organisations.

HANS JEPPE JEPPESEN

Institute of Psychology, University of Aarhus, Denmark

Shifting the burden of work

Shift work can disrupt biorhythms, not to mention employees' social lives, leading to stress and impaired health, and increasing the risk of sickness and accidents.

Although putting a stop to this type of work is clearly impractical given its importance in so many industries, a recent initiative in Denmark has shown that it is possible to minimise its impact on occupational safety and health.

The key to success, as a study at a regional hospital in Aalborg, Denmark found, is to re-design the shift schedule in conjunction with both the employers and the staff. This joint approach ensures that employers retain the necessary flexibility while staff are able to accommodate their individual time preferences, based on their ages, family structures, financial needs and other factors.

At the hospital, which has over 4 000 employees, this approach was piloted at seven intensive care wards. The number of people working shifts in each ward had to stay the same, to safeguard care levels, but staff were given the authority to design new schedules and decide when they would be introduced and how they would be evaluated. One main aim was to keep the number of consecutive night shifts to a minimum.

To oversee the development and implementation of the new schedules, working groups were established for each ward, including representatives from the management team, employees and the researchers. These groups discussed ergonomic recommendations, collected data through questionnaires and evaluated the results, debating and drawing up proposals to improve the schedules.

On four wards the schedules were changed. The researchers found - via questionnaires and blood samples - increased satisfaction amongst shift workers and improved cardiovascular biomarker levels.

GARY BOOTON

Health and Safety Manager, Engineering Employers' Federation, United Kingdom

Answering the call

How one British employers' organisation responded to the need for more guidance on work-related stress

Stress, we're all talking about it. Ask most people if their work is stressful and they will tell you that it is. To say otherwise has become regarded as a confession that you aren't committed to the job. Occupational stress is being seen as the next big thing in high-cost civil liabilities – or the back-pain of the 21st century.

The world of work has changed significantly in the past 20 years. Downsizing, the growth in information systems, de-manning, a 'just-in-time' approach and the increased use of contractors, to name just a few factors, have changed what we do and how we do it. Job security, some would say, is a thing of the past. All these are new pressures - but do they harm us?

> *Pressure only becomes stress when the individual feels unable to cope.*

To start to understand stress is to first appreciate how people respond to different pressures, and, more importantly, to recognise that it is only when a person feels unable to cope that pressure becomes stress. The right amount of pressure can stimulate us to succeed, and success brings satisfaction. Pressure only becomes stress when the individual feels unable to cope with the demands placed on them. This perception varies considerably between people and, for each of us, the pressure/stress boundary is constantly shifting.

The popular wisdom is that work-related stress is the beginning, middle and end of the problem. But this approach doesn't take account of the pressures experienced outside work. If managers believe that the problem is caused by work and therefore can only be cured at work, they are destined to fail.

The reality, as with many health-related issues, is far more complex. People come to work not as a blank emotional sheet but with all sorts of pressures upon them (pressures at home, whether financial or relationship ones for example, or indeed from wider expectations in society). They then face a different set of pressures in the workplace.

The focus and concentration which some of these work pressures bring may, if well managed, benefit the person experiencing them and help to alleviate the effect of other pressures by taking the individual's 'mind off them.' However, other work pressures may have the opposite effect.

The big question

Managers at the sharp end know that they have to do something but the big question is - what? In Britain the Health and Safety Executive

Courtesy of Engineering Employers' Federation

(HSE) has said that business *'would benefit from having more guidance about work-related stress'[1]*. This is a call that the Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF) has answered. It has published straightforward guidance - *Managing Stress at Work* - to help managers understand and do something practical with the workforce, about managing stress at work.

Managing Stress at Work is based on risk assessment. This, after all, is what is required by health and safety law. It was developed using the experience of a

> *Managing Stress at Work is based on risk assessment.*

number of large companies who have already appropriate strategies. The guidance is not some untried theory, but is based on practical experience. The HSE research identified this as being just the sort of information small firms would find most valuable. The guide provides a self-checklist which can be given to the workforce so that they can recognise their own signs of not coping. Completing this will raise awareness of the issue. This makes the task of risk assessment more productive.

Risk assessment used for stress is beneficial in terms of helping to manage the issue but, perhaps more importantly, it provides the means through which the workforce can become involved. That in itself can bring improvements for the psychosocial health of the business.

At an EEF Conference on employee rehabilitation held in May 2001, Dr. Sayeed Khan, an occupational physician from the aero-engine maker Rolls-Royce plc, highlighted the value of this risk assessment approach. In his presentation he said that the company had found that initially

there was some scepticism about whether the risk assessment approach was going to work. Some managers seemed to be more interested in teaching employees more coping strategies to deal with stress. To investigate this, the occupational health team analysed sickness absence data and looked at one site with about 5 000 employees.

The site has two operating units, each with about half the workforce. About 25% of people managers at one business unit had attended the stress awareness workshop providing risk assessment training, whilst about 75% of people managers in the other unit had attended. When sickness absence for stress-related problems, anxiety and depression (S/A/D) was compared between the two business units for 1999 and 2000, there was no change in the business unit with fewer trained managers but the other, where most were trained, showed a 21% decrease in absence for S/A/D.

So there is clear evidence that the approach which is described in the EEF guide works. This booklet explains how to recognise stress and the pressures both at work and in the world outside, which can lead to it. Managers can then actively manage stress through risk assessment.

Stress will never be completely solved within the workplace but as with other health matters there is a great deal which *can* be done. This booklet is not the complete solution but it is an important step in the right direction.

Good practice

In order to continue raising awareness and promoting good practice, the EEF hosted a major conference on stress on 23 April 2002 as part of its campaign on rehabilitation. The conference was organised with the UK's National Occupational Health Forum and the UK Work Organisation Network. Its objectives were:

- to engage those experts and key stakeholders (e.g. managers, union representatives and researchers) who are taking practical action to reduce stress and to evaluate that action;
- to focus on the delivery of clear, practical advice (solutions) for managers and employees;
- to distil the significant practical outcomes of research and current good practice (to deliver case studies demonstrating what works and what doesn't work);
- to inform the process of risk assessment and the selection of appropriate interventions and controls;
- to suggest practical next steps for the UK and the EU; and
- to better understand and help minimise stress in the workplace.

This initiative fits in well with the work being done by the EEF to demonstrate the business case for effective health risk management and sound occupational health policies.

REFERENCE

1 Baseline measurement for the evaluation of the work-related stress campaign, by the Institution of Occupational Medicine. HSE Contract Research Report 322/2001.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Managing Stress at Work, ISBN 1 903461 07 3, price £17.50, available from the Engineering Employers' Federation, Broadway House, Tothill Street, London. SW1H 9NQ. A free to download on-line version is available on the Federation's website at http://www.eef.org.uk/fed/fedpub/fedpub.htm.

More information is available from Gary Booton, Health and Safety Manager, EEF, e-mail: gbooton@eef-fed.org.uk.

RAILI PERIMÄKI-DIETRICH

Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions

United against stress

An interview with Ms Perimäki-Dietrich for a social partner's viewpoint on stress

What's your view on the importance of stress as an occupational health and safety issue?

Stress has become one of the most serious risks in the world of work. The World Health Organisation is concerned at the increase in stress-related problems. Studies in this field show similar results in all Member States (MS). In many of these, stress-related disease is the cause of a lot of early retirement from work. For a long time now, psychosocial factors at work haven't been regarded as important enough to deal with and problems have been seen only in relation to individuals.

What do you see as the employer's role in managing stress at work?

Stress - and the factors causing stress - are covered, along with traditional occupational safety and health (OSH) risks , in the EU Framework Directive. So when an employer carries out a risk assessment, they have to look at all the potential risks for causing stress. Stress can induce physical and mental problems. Its most serious impact on health is heart disease, including cardiovascular problems.

What do you see as the role of employees and their representatives in tackling stress at work?

> *Workers' representatives have played a crucial role in initiating changes.*

Workers' representatives have played a crucial role in initiating changes in this area. So they need to be trained to identify those risks and to make them plain. A company's OSH management has to act together with preventive OH services to support employees at work in managing stress. There's great concern about the situation within SMEs, which do not have workers' representatives. There's a variety of possibilities for creating healthy workplaces – they're quite often related to how to motivate employers to implement interventions at company level.

What are your views on the role of employers' and employees' representatives in Europe in tackling stress at work?

Employers have a legal obligation to reduce and prevent workplace risks. One of the main problems is the different points of view regarding causes of stress. The employer should be clear that good management leads to healthy workplaces and is also good business. It is important to know which factors cause stress. Therefore you have to communicate properly with workers. It's not crucial which methods you use, but it is important that good practical solutions are available. You need information and motivation to improve working conditions.

It's vital that employers' representatives and employees' representatives work together, along with government departments. One example of this in Finland is the Wellbeing at work programme. This is a government-sponsored project being implemented by the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry for Education, in cooperation with trade unions and employers' associations. Other organisations, such as the Church and those connected with agriculture and sport, are also involved.

The programme aims to promote people's wellbeing and their quality of life. It sees wellbeing in very broad terms. Work-related stress is particularly targeted. Know-how and competence have become quite significant in a continuously changing work environment. If an employee's skills don't meet the changing demands, their motivation will quickly disappear. Often, pressure can be lifted and stress reduced simply by reorganising the work.

The 'Wellbeing' at work programme operates at four levels:

- giving information and promoting good practice;
- using research findings and commisssioning new research;
- giving support and funding for development projects; and
- developing and monitoring legislation.

(You can find more information about this proramme at: http://www.mol.fi/jaksamisohjelma/svenska_english/eng_index.htm)

What are your views on what has already been achieved, what is planned for the future and the remaining challenges?

Knowledge about stress factors at work is available. But scientists and practitioners don't meet each other at workplace level. The communication problems between these two groups present a big challenge to be overcome in the future. Many good practical solutions available now can't be transferred directly to other workplaces and they need to be adapted. There are still some knowledge gaps to be filled in regarding stress. So activities are needed at all levels – including political decision-making.

KARL KUHN

Federal Institute for Occupational Health and Safety, Germany

Managing stress by promoting health

Workplace health promotion offers a way to reduce work-related stress

What exactly is 'health promotion'?

According to a WHO definition, health promotion includes all measures that enable individuals, groups or organisations to have increased control over the determinants of health. The aim of these measures is the improvement of the health of individuals, groups, organisations and communities.

Health promotion can therefore be described as a process which enables people to reach a higher level of self-determination about their health and to strengthen it. In this sense, health represents a resource for daily life which allows a person or a group to fulfil expectations and desires for action, and at the same time to deal with, as well as change, the world.

Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work.

This can achieved through a combination of:

- improving work organisation and the working environment;
- promoting active participation in the process of WHP;
- encouraging personal development.

(Luxembourg Declaration on WHP in the European Union)

ℙrescription for success

> *Improvements in workplace health can be key ingredients of business efficiency and competitiveness.*

A healthy, motivated and well-qualified workforce is fundamental to the future social and economic well-being of the European Union. There is a growing body of evidence that improvements in workplace health can be key ingredients of business efficiency and competitiveness. In innovative enterprises, the quality of work and the quality of products or services are elements of the same strategy.

Research results based on a large number of *Models of Good Practice* in enterprises from different European regions show the common success factors for workplace health promotion. These include:

- workplace health action should be based on an analysis of the health requirements and needs of an enterprise;
- health actions should involve all stakeholders in enterprises, especially the workers, and representatives of intermediary organisations (a participative approach);
- WHP actions should seek to improve the quality of working life and conditions as well as focusing on the behaviour of the individual worker; and
- workplace health action should become an integral part of management practices and daily working life at all levels of an enterprise.

These general characteristics of successful workplace health practice are independent of enterprise size and economic sector.

> *Health circles offer employees the chance to participate in the process of reducing stress.*

WHP offers a way to reduce work-related stress. Its aim is to influence those factors which promote employees' health. It succeeds by improving the working conditions, by promoting employees' participation and by strengthening personal competence. Major components of company health promotion are the methodological approaches and procedures used. In order to analyse the initial position, both work loads as well as the subjective effects on wellbeing are identified using different methodological tools such as questionnaires, tools for health risk appraisal and 'health circles'. Like the 'quality circles' on which they are based, health circles offer employees the chance to participate and become involved in the process of reducing stress, as experts in their own affairs.

ℰnabling employees

In order to preserve employees' capabilities in the long run, those responsible must face the problem of stress at the workplace. New legislation concerning occupational health and safety forms an important basis. In view of future challenges due to changes in working conditions, the efforts of occupational health and safety will focus much less on improving working conditions by applying rules and pushing them through. Stress prevention, which primarily identifies the causes of stress, has to set off processes and at the same time integrate changes in regard to ergonomic working conditions, work organisation and individual behaviour. The major prerequisite in order to reach this aim is that employees will be enabled to improve their own working conditions.

By actively engaging with their own work situation, employees can recognise sources of stress in their work, reconsider their personal methods of dealing with stress and tap into new resources (for example, changing their work situation). The way the individual experiences situations and their behaviour can also change in this way (for example in the sense of greater calm and composure). The long-term aim of active stress management for employees is to enable individuals to create and maintain a balance between the demands of work and their own capabilities, skills and needs.

An important precondition for this is to reduce the experience of stress by strengthening individual skills in dealing with strains. Fortunately, theoretically sound and well-developed concepts, which have also been tried in practice, are now available.

𝒜 step-by-step approach

In a process where each step is built up on the previous one, it is particularly important in the group to:

- actively perceive stress;
- recognise methods of dealing with stress which may not be helpful;
- mobilise one's own resources;
- recognise the possibilities and limits of individual stress management;
- deal with anger; and
- improve self-assertion in discussions with superiors.

Depending on the situation, additional measures for workplace health promotion, and optimal stress management, can include:

- improvement of knowledge and skills in order to be able to cope better with the situation;
- planning and organisation of work by the individual responsible for carrying it out;
- setting-up of a personal communication and cooperation network;
- re-evaluation of existing demands, change of attitude, change of behaviour; and
- physical activity and healthy way of life.

WHP aims at identifying and improving organisational conditions for better health. This includes addressing working conditions which are conducive to health (physical and psychosocial) and in particular all relevant issues around work organisation.

There is strong evidence that the quality of job and workplace design has an enormous impact on health and wellbeing of workers. In particular, job and task design constitute an important potential for strengthening workers' resources conducive to health.

Other factors which have to be considered include leadership style, recruitment and appraisal procedures as well as recognition schemes.

At the centre of this level, WHP aims at influencing corporate policies which impact either directly or indirectly on health and wellbeing. The main objective is to support a development which leads to a health-promoting organisational culture. Relevant policy areas include human resource management, quality management, occupational health and safety and environmental health.

STÅLE EINARSEN

University of Bergen, Norway

$\mathcal{B}$ullying at work

Bullying at work is a health and safety as well as a management issue

A host of recent studies suggest that exposure to bullying at work is a serious problem for many workers around Europe. As many as 8-10% of European employees may suffer from exposure to bullying and harassment at work. It prevails in both private and public organisations and finds its victims among men and women alike. Studies also show that exposure to bullying at work is a severe source of stress at work and may be a crippling and devastating problem for those exposed.

To be a victim of bullying at work seems to produce severe emotional reactions such as fear, anxiety, helplessness, depression and shock. It seems to alter the victims' perceptions of their work-environment to one of threat, danger, insecurity, and self-questioning, which may result in pervasive emotional, psychosomatic and psychiatric problems.

However, bullying may also have tremendous negative effects on the organisation. In one of our studies conducted within seven Norwegian labour unions, as many as 27% of all participants claimed that bullying lowered the productivity in their work group. Other negative consequences are related to absenteeism, turnover and to lowered motivation and job satisfaction among the colleagues of the victim.

$\mathcal{W}$hat is bullying at work?

Bullying refers to all situations where one or more people feel subjected to negative behaviour from others at work over a period of time and in a situation where, for different reasons, they are unable to defend themselves against these actions. Typically, a victim is constantly teased, badgered and insulted and perceives that he or she has little recourse to retaliate in kind.

We may distinguish between work-related bullying such as being exposed to unreasonable deadlines, unmanageable workloads or other kinds of behaviour that make the work situation difficult for the victim, and bullying that is primarily person-related, such as insulting remarks, excessive teasing, gossip and rumours, social isolation and exclusion. This kind of behaviour may be common and experienced by most people at work from time to time. As a single episode in a positive social climate, such actions may even be harmless. However, when behaviour that is perceived as unwanted by the recipient, is systematically and continually aimed at a particular person, and especially in a situation were the victim feels defenceless against the actions or the people performing them, it becomes an act of bullying.

$\mathcal{C}$auses of bullying at work

A rather popular view is that this kind of behaviour is deeply rooted within the personality structure of the office or shop-floor bully.

Although we did find in one study that a group of self-reported bullies described themselves as being aggressive in many situations, not much empirical evidence exists for this notion.

Many researchers have concluded that bullying only occurs within an organisational culture that permits or even rewards such kinds of behaviour. Moreover, bullying will only take place if the offender feels he or she has the blessing, support, or at least the implicit permission of their superiors to behave in this manner.

In some organisations, bullying may even be institutionalised as a part of the leadership and managerial practice. Authoritarian leadership styles are still highly valued in many companies. Blaming it all on the 'psychopaths at work' or even a 'neurotic' victim is therefore in most cases far too simplistic a solution to the problem of why bullying takes place.

> *In some organisations, bullying may even be institutionalised.*

In addition to the values and norms prevailing in the organisational culture, the quality of the psychosocial work environment seems to be an important cause of bullying. A work situation characterised by role conflict and a lack of interesting and challenging work tasks, combined with a negative interpersonal climate in the work group, seems to be a high risk situation for bullying.

A high degree of ambiguity or incompatible demands and expectations around roles, tasks and responsibilities may create a high degree of frustration and conflicts within the work group, especially in connection with rights, obligations, privileges and positions. This situation may then act as a precursor of conflict, poor inter-worker relationships and a need for a suitable scapegoat, especially if the social climate is characterised by low trust and interpersonal tension.

A typical characteristic of workplaces where bullying prevails is also a low satisfaction among many employees, with the leadership style of their mangers and supervisors, either it is too aggressive or too *laisser-faire*. In fact, as many as 50% of the victims of bullying claim to be bullied by a superior, again linking bullying closely to leadership.

The prevention and management of bullying at work

You are not on a crusade against all evil, you are there to stop unwanted behaviour.

Some general guidelines should be followed when dealing with bullying at work as a third party, be it in the role of, for example, a manger, a supervisor, or a personnel officer. First of all we must accept the basic but simple principle that the bullying, or whatever the victim perceives as unwanted behaviour, must stop. Communicate this message clearly throughout the organisation in general, as well as to the parties involved in a particular case.

When first addressing a case, preserve a basic non-punitive attitude towards the alleged tormentors. You are not on a crusade against all evil, you are there to stop unwanted behaviour and to restore a fair working climate. Interviews and discussions with alleged offenders must have the basic approach of an impartial investigation.

Most people, even bullies, have a general attitude against bullying. A non-punitive atmosphere will more easily reach these anti-bullying attitudes in the bullies. On the other hand, we must be prepared to teach the bullies basic social norms if necessary. Some may even need coaching, guidance or special training programmes.

Victims of bullying are by definition in a difficult situation and a weak position. Be prepared to protect the victim from further stigmatisation and retaliation and be aware that measures may have to be taken to prevent the situation from getting even worse. You must also be prepared for the possibility that the victim will display disturbed behaviour. People who are highly depressed and distressed often annoy others. So victims may be very demanding, in need of your full attention and support, and highly sensitive to any sign of mistrust or disbelief. Some victims will be in need of professional support and help, of a psychological and sometimes medical nature. There may even be a need for a rehabilitation programme to secure the reintegration of the victim into the work group and into productive work.

Although tempting, we must not use individual cases to raise awareness about bullying in the organisation in general. Prevention programmes must be implemented independently of any specific case of bullying. Such programmes must include general efforts to improve leadership, organisational climate and working conditions, the development and communication of an organisational policy against bullying, as well as training programmes for managers, supervisors and human resource management.

Prevention programmes must be implemented independently of any specific case of bullying.

What is important is that the organisation has an informal system for support and guidance for victims as well as an independent system for the management of formal complaints. As bullying is so closely related to leadership, training managers in conflict management seems to be highly important as is a critical look at what kind of leadership styles are nurtured within the particular organisational culture.

At the end of the day the existence, prevention and constructive management of bullying at work resides with the managers and supervisors of the organisation and the organisational culture they create or permit.

Noticeboard

WORKING POSITIVELY

IRELAND / SCOTLAND

An innovative tool to help SMEs identify the causes of work-related stress has been jointly developed by the Health and Safety Authority in Ireland (HSA) and the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS). Using a simple questionnaire and information pack, the 'Work Positive' pack enables SMEs to pinpoint the source of stress and make appropriate interventions at a systems level to alleviate the problem. Work Positive was successfully piloted at 26 SMEs throughout Ireland and Scotland during 2001.

For more information, contact Patricia Murray at HSA in Ireland (tel: +353-1 614 7055, e-mail: Patricia_Murray@hsa.ie) or Miriam O'Connor at HEBS in Scotland (tel: +44 131 536 5522, e-mail: miriam.oconnor@hebs. scot.nhs.uk). To order from HSA, tel: +353 1 614 7000 (or visit: http://www.hsa.ie) and from HEBS, tel: +44 131 5500 (or visit http://www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk)

NEW METHOD TO MEASURE WORK PRESSURE

NETHERLANDS

Unacceptably high work pressure is "when at least half of employees claim they have too much work and need time off to rest", according to a new definition devised by Dutch scientists. To test this measure, a 'covenant' will be established between a group of social partners and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. A covenant is an agreement between these two parties to improve working conditions, based on quantitative risk reduction targets. By 2001, the Dutch Ministry and its social partners had already drafted 16 covenants covering stress-related risks and a further 17 are in the pipeline.

For more information, visit www.arbo.nl/systems/strategies/covenants

PUBLICATIONS FOR DEALING WITH STRESS

UNITED KINGDOM
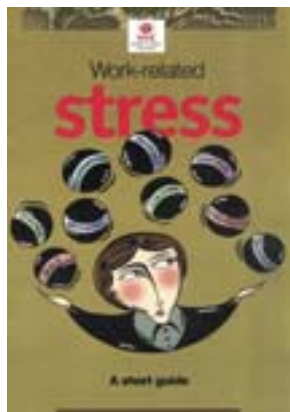
The UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (http://www.hse.gov.uk/) has produced several publications over the last year on how to prevent stress at work.

Its leaflet *Work-related Stress: a short guide* explains how managers in firms with fewer than 50 employees can reduce stress, plus answers basic questions and provides a list of common stressors. For businesses with more than 50 staff, the HSE has published a book entitled *Tackling Work-related Stress: a managers' guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well-being*, including the 'five steps to risk assessment model'.

Other recent publications include: *Effective Teamworking: reducing the psychosocial risks - case studies in practitioner format*; and *Change in Manufacturing: how to manage stress-related risks*. This last book, which is based on case studies, deals with four major developments in manufacturing that can increase work-related stress: advanced manufacturing technology (AMT), downsizing, team working, and lean production.

In addition, the UK trade union UNISON has produced a 20-page booklet on how to negotiate a stress-reduction policy and a training package for safety representatives on how to tackle work-related stress (http://www.unison.org.uk).

NEW STRESS PREVENTION INSTITUTE

PORTUGAL

Portugal has established a dedicated research centre focusing on occupational stress. IPSSO (Instituto de Prevencão do Stress e Saúde Ocupacional) collects data on stress and provides facilities for diagnosing stress and its consequences in individuals, groups of people and within organisations as a whole. It also runs psychological intervention programmes to help people develop the skills needed to cope productively with stress.

For more information, contact: ipsso@mail.telepac.pt

DRIVING FORWARD

AUSTRIA

More than 3,000 of Vienna's public transport drivers have attended 'stress management' seminars. Developed by ZKD (Centre of Communication and Dynamics) and the Vienna Public Transport, the two-day seminars are believed to be the first of their kind. They are designed to improve the driver's psychological and physical well-being by helping them deal more effectively with main causes of stress for this group, including time pressures, traffic and their personal circumstances. Preliminary results from a study of the seminars indicate that this approach helped alleviate stress.

For more information, contact: Peter Andel, Institut für Betriebswissenschaften, Arbeitswissenschaft und Betriebswirtschaftslehre der TU-Wien, http://ebweb.tuwien.ac.at/aw.

ONLINE STRESS TESTS

DENMARK

Denmark's Centre for Stress and Work Psychology has developed three online tests to measure how stressed employees are, each based around simple questionnaires (http://www.ing.dk/arkiv/011029/stress.html).

One analyses whether you have a problem with stress; another probes the personal and social roots of this stress at work; while the final test assesses your emotional intelligence and, in particular, your ability to cope with stress, indicating appropriate interventions. The Society of Danish Engineers has created a similar tool specifically for engineers (http://www.ida.dk/psykisk/psykisk/default.htm).

Major research programme

The Department of Psychology at the University of Aarhus is working on a range of studies into the psychology of work-related stress (http://www.psy.au.dk/research/ao2000uk.htm). Areas covered include:

· Psychosocial work environment. Can the relationship between the work place, the individual, and illness by theoretically modelled and empirically validated?

· The importance and meaning of work. What elements of work are most important from a psychosocial perspective? How are these affected by technological developments?

· Burn-out. How can this problem be measured? Which environmental factors cause it?

· Bullying. What is the relationship between bullying and environmental and social factors?

· Violence. What role does the working environment play in the incidence of workplace violence?

· Working time, psychosocial work environment, health, and prevention. How do different work schedules and environments affect well-being, attitudes and mobility?

· Participation, regulation and prevention in the psychosocial work environment. What impact do different forms of employee involvement in decision-making processes have on occupational stress?

STRESS COSTS 1.4% OF GNP

SWITZERLAND

A study by Switzerland's State Secretariat for Economic Affairs has found that stress-related problems cost the country an estimated 1.4% of its annual gross national product. Roughly half of these costs are due to lost production and the other half due to health and social security costs. Most of the stress-related disorders are not covered by employee insurance schemes.

(For further details of the study visit: http://www.osha-focalpoint.ch/topics/e/index.htm).

To help reduce these costs, the Swiss National Accident Insurance Fund (Suva) has launched a stress-prevention campaign, including a video/DVD, booklets and a promotional monster called 'Stressy'. The materials are available in German, French and Italian (http://www.suva.ch; enter 'stress' in the search box).

Stressy

MEDIATION TECHNIQUE

SWEDEN

Inspectors in Sweden have been mediating between workers and employers in a new stress-reduction programme. Funded by the Council for Work Life Research and carried out by the Örebro Work Environment Inspectorate, trained labour inspectors ask employees to complete a questionnaire and invite a small group of them to discuss the survey's findings, with two inspectors acting as objective moderators in the debate.

The inspectors then present the results of these discussions and their recommendations to the employees' management team. Recommendations typically cover issues such OSH training for management and their staff, clearer lines of responsibility and the need for social support and feedback mechanisms at work.

SIGMA – A STRESS SCREENING TOOL

GERMANY

Germany has devised a tool to screen stress levels within an organisation.

Called SIGMA (Screening - Instrument zur Bewertung und Gestaltung Menschengerechter Arbeitstätigkeiten), the modular tool uses a simple 'yes-no' questionnaire to analyse the degrees of stress created by an organisation's activities, management structure and work environment, including its lighting and noise. The data is benchmarked against national standards, legal requirements and results from scientific studies to establish whether stress levels in different facets of an organisation are problematic, enabling managers to identify areas where interventions are required.

The system, which demands considerable time and managerial commitment, has been successfully used in a number of sectors, including health care and call centres.

For more information, visit: http://www.arbeitsschutz.nrw.de/

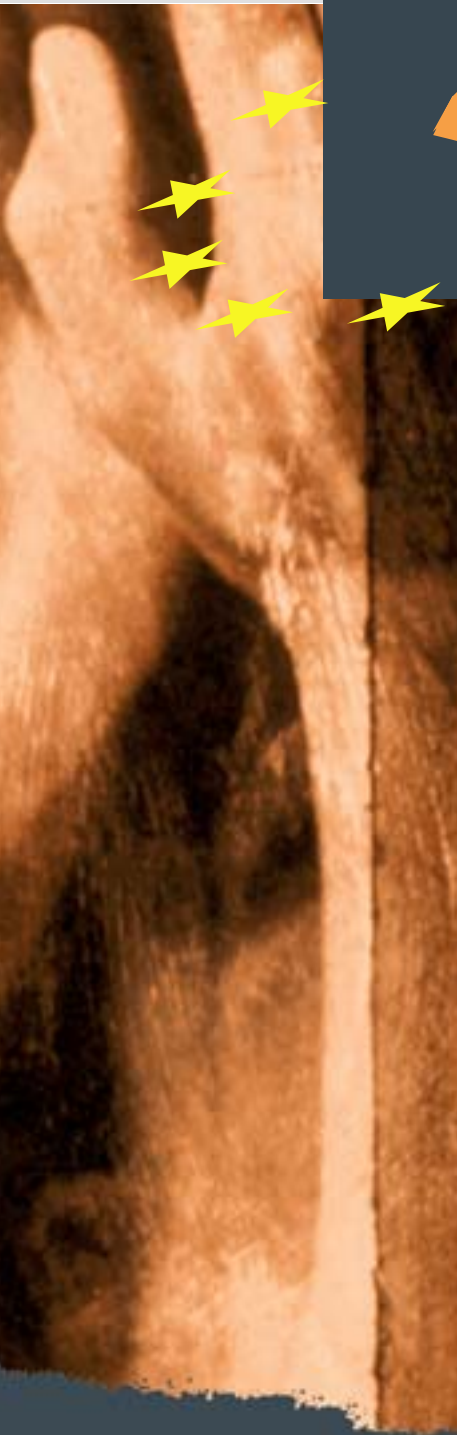# Venta • Salg • Verkauf • Πωλήσεις • Sales • Vente • Vendita • Verkoop • Venda • Myynti • Försäljning
http://eur-op.eu.int/general/en/s-ad.htm

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