Stress and Psychosocial Risks at Work

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I'm a little stressed right now...

(just turn around and leave quietly and no one gets hurt.)
Legal and HSE

- A duty exists for all employers to undertake an adequate risk assessment under the Management of Health and Safety Regulations (reg 3); that should include arrangements for managing risks due to work related stress.

- Employers have general duty of care required by Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.
HSE - New and long-standing cases of work-related ill health by type, 2016/17

- Other type of illness: 21%
- Stress, depression or anxiety: 40%
- Musculoskeletal disorders: 39%
- Total: 1.3 million workers
Statistics

- 526,000 workers suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety (new or long-standing) in 2016/17
- 12.5 million working days lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2016/17
Main difficulties in dealing with health and safety and with psychosocial risks

% establishments, EU-27

- Lack of resources such as time, staff or money
- Lack of awareness
- Lack of expertise
- Culture within the establishment
- Sensitivity of the issue
- Lack of technical support or guidance

Categories: Health and safety, Psychosocial risks
Psychosocial and Stress Risk factors

- **Psychosocial risk factors** are things that may affect workers' psychological response to their work and workplace conditions (including working relationships with supervisors and colleagues). Examples are: high workloads, tight deadlines, lack of control of the work and working methods (HSE)

- **Stress Risk factors** – demands, control, change, role, relationships, culture, support, training
STRESS CURVE

PERFORMANCE

laid back
inactive
too little stress (underload)
opimum stress
too much stress (overload)
burn-out

fatigue
exhaustion
anxiety/panic/anger
breakdown

STRESS LEVEL
Job Burnout

- Role-Related and Interpersonal Stressors
  - Emotional Exhaustion
  - Cynicism
  - Low confidence, low self-esteem

- Physiological, psychological, emotional and behavioural consequences
Impact of Stress and Psychosocial factors

- **Emotional**: Tearful, hypochondria increases, loneliness
- **Physiological**: Hypertension, headaches, asthma, chest pains, irritable bowel
- **Behavioural**: Poor work performance, accidents, absenteeism, aggression, indecisive
- **Psychological**: Negative, mood swings, anxious, angry, depressed
headaches
Stress can trigger and intensify tension headaches.

heartburn
Stress increases the production of stomach acid, which could lead to heartburn or make it worse.

rapid breathing
When you're stressed, the muscles that help you breathe tense up, which can leave you short of breath.

risk of heart attack
Over time, an increased heart rate and high blood pressure damage your arteries, which could lead to a heart attack.

pounding heart
Stress hormones make your heart pump faster so that blood can quickly reach your vital organs and limbs.

fertility problems
Stress interferes with the reproductive system in both men and women, and may make it harder to conceive.

erectile dysfunction
Your brain plays an important part in the process of getting an erection. Stress can interfere with this process.

missed periods
Fluctuating hormones can throw your menstrual cycle off, or in severe cases stop it altogether.

increased depression
Chronic stress can wear you down emotionally and lead to depression.

insomnia
Stress makes it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep, which can lead to insomnia.

weakened immune system
Long-term stress weakens your immune system's defenses, leaving you more vulnerable to infections.

high blood sugar
Stress causes your liver to release extra sugar (glucose) into your bloodstream, which over time puts you at risk for type 2 diabetes.

high blood pressure
Stress hormones tighten blood vessels, which can raise your blood pressure.

stomachache
Stress affects your body's digestive system, which can lead to stomachaches, nausea, and otherummy troubles.

low sex drive
Stress — and the fatigue that often comes with it — can take a toll on your libido.

tense muscles
Stress makes muscles tense up, and chronic stress can lead to tension-related headaches and backaches.
How Excessive Stress Can Lead to Accidents and Injuries

- Psychosocial hazards can lead to accidents and injuries by Direct or Indirect factors
  - **Direct** - employees lack sufficient influence over hazardous conditions in the workplace and lack control
  - **Indirect** – High pressure, low control stressors in the workplace could contribute to accidents and injuries by people worrying, anxious, sleeping badly, drinking excessively, angry, depressed, on medication.
Excessive Stress Can Lead to Accidents and Injuries

Indirect due to previous causes can become:

- Distracted for a moment - dangerously
- Poor and dangerous errors in judgment
- Body under stress, increasing the potential for strains and sprains
- High effort-low reward conditions can also cause injury causation
- Difficulty carrying out normal activities - hand-to-eye or foot-to-eye coordination
Poor Psychosocial Work Environment

- Lack of support
- Excessive and/or conflicting work demands
- Lack of control about job role
- Organisational change – poorly managed
- Job insecurity
- Harassment, bullying, intimidation
- Poor communication
Stress Risk: The Diligent Alternative

Knowledge of Stress Risk

Foreseeability of Harm

Stress Risk Management (Prevention)
- Stress Reduction
  - Health Promotion and Benefits
    - Increased productivity
    - Reduced Overheads

Stress Risk Management (Avoidance)
- Stress – same or increasing
  - Health Disorders, Accidents
    - Reduced Productivity
    - High Costs, potential litigation
Work Factors Impacting on Mental Health and Physical Safety

- Some common workplace stressors or psychosocial hazards include:
  - Intimidation, Bullying, Harassment
  - Work overload or underload
  - Low task control
  - No clearly defined job or role
  - Hot/cold environment
  - Insufficient lighting
  - Poor communication
  - Not meeting legal and HSE obligations
  - Conflict
Demand-Control Model (adapted from Karasek and Theorell)

- High Job Pressure
- Low Job Control
- Home Stress
- Social Support

Excessive Pressure → Increased Risk to Mental and Physical Health

- Infectious and Cardiovascular Diseases
- Anxiety, Depression, Hostility
- Alcohol, Tobacco, Drug Abuse
- Injuries
Johannes Siegrist’s High Effort Low Reward Model

- High effort
  - High work load
  - Time pressure
  - Responsibilities
  - Overtime
  - Interruptions and disturbances

- Low reward
  - Inadequate salary
  - Lack of esteem from colleagues/management
  - Low promotions aspects
  - Job insecurity
Figure 2 – Overview of the psychosocial risk management process

Management and organization of work processes

Production
Design, development and operation of work and production

Risk management process
Hazard identification and risk assessment
Organizational learning and development
Action planning
Risk reduction (interventions / controls)
Evaluation and review

Outcomes
Innovation
Productivity and quality
Quality of work
Workers' health
Societal outcomes
Figure 1. Key drivers of staff wellbeing

- Appraisal and recognition
- Teamwork
- Professional development
- Goal alignment
- Participative decision making
- Role clarity
- Supportive leadership
- Work demands

Causes

- 60% of Individual morale
- 80% of workgroup morale
- 80% of workgroup distress
- 30% of Individual distress

Explains
Figure 2. Four factor model of key cultural elements underpinning workteam climate
Managing Stress and Psychosocial Risks Benefits

- Reduced sickness absence and presenteeism
- Proactive, happier, healthier and productive workforce
- Improved performance and productivity
- Job satisfaction
- A healthy, motivated and productive workforce
- Reduced overheads and costs
- Meeting legal and HSE requirements
Key Takeaways

- Legal and HSE requirements
- Psychosocial and Stress Risk factors
- Excessive Stress Can Lead to Accidents and Injuries
- Work Factors Impacting on Mental Health and Physical Safety
- Impact on health and wellbeing benefits
- Managing Stress and Psychosocial Risks Benefits

Thank You

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