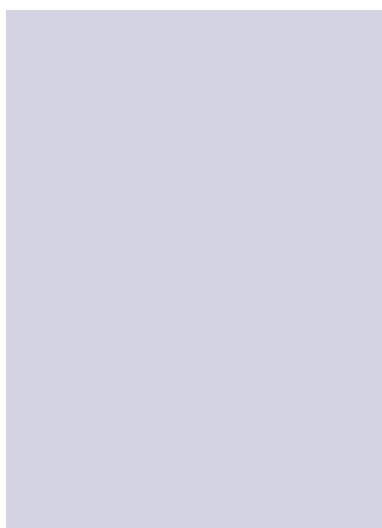




How to Tackle Psychosocial Issues and Reduce Work-related Stress Summary of an Agency Report

Introduction

More than one in four workers are affected by work-related stress (WRS) in the European Union. WRS and psychosocial issues are the focus for the European Week for Safety and Health at Work 2002. To support this initiative, a report has been produced covering a number of cases of programmes, practices and experiences from across the Member States that seek to tackle psychosocial issues and prevent WRS. This fact sheet summarises the report and is aimed at those with an interest in developing strategies to tackle WRS at a national, regional or local level. At the end of the fact sheet, there is information on how to obtain the report and other WRS products.



Aims of the report

- To raise awareness of information on work-related psychosocial issues;
- To promote a preventive culture against psychosocial hazards, including stress, violence, and bullying;
- To contribute to a reduction in the number of workers being exposed to them;
- To facilitate development and dissemination of good practice; and
- To stimulate activities at the European and Member State level.

Legislation and national regulation

The EU Framework Directive (89/391/EEC), on the improvement of worker safety and health in the workplace, is the reference legislation for EU Member States. It refers implicitly and explicitly to psychosocial issues. In a few countries, the legal provisions go further than the Framework Directive by specifying action employers should take on psychosocial risks. Examples of recent initiatives are described in the report such as *a new health and safety law in Finland* that includes references to psychosocial work demands, violence and bullying. Some alternatives to implementing laws are studied such as a project on sector agreements from the Netherlands: *Covenants on Health and Safety at Work*. The response from social partners and public authorities, including labour inspectorates, is summarised. Some examples are described of how psychosocial issues are addressed during inspection.

Improvements of the psychosocial work environment

Case studies

- Work Positive – a stress management approach for SME's (Ireland and Scotland)
- Tackling Work-related Stress: the risk management approach (UK)
- Health Circles: a participative approach to improve health related working conditions (Germany)
- Naoussa Spinning Mills S.A.: workplace health protection programme (Greece)
- Intervention Project on Absence and Well-being (IPAW) (Denmark)

The report gives examples of tools aimed at improving in the psychosocial work environment. Among these tools is *Work Positive*, a five-step process for managing workplace stress. The tool helps SMEs to identify the risks of work stress and to take appropriate action. *The Risk Assessment - Risk Reduction* framework is another tool that has been successfully tested in many organisations. The aim is to assess the risk and take action to reduce stress among workers. *Health Circles* are employee discussion groups, formed at the workplace in order to identify major health related problems at work and to find solutions. They have been used and evaluated as a method to develop improvements in the work environment since the 1980s.

Naoussa Spinning Mills S.A. provides an example of the use of a workplace health protection programme. The enterprise has been a pioneer in this area since 1986. The *Intervention Project on Absence and Well-being* is a five-year psychosocial work environment intervention study. Improvements in these psychosocial factors have been followed by significant reductions in absence rates.

Reduction of stress

Case studies

- Guidance provided by HSE: part 1 - work-related stress (UK)
- StRes.Moderator: a stress management method (Austria)
- Stress prevention and control clinical programme (Portugal)
- Stress management policy in the Belgian federal police force
- Road access and bus driver's working environment (Sweden)
- Take Care: a team-based burnout intervention programme for oncology care providers (The Netherlands)

Tools and guidelines more specifically aimed at the reduction of stress are presented in the report by *Guidance on work-related stress* and the *StRes Moderator tool*, both providing support to employers and employees in identifying, analysing and tackling psychosocial risk in the enterprise. The *stress prevention and control clinical programme* is tailored to individuals; the main objectives are to restore participants' well-being and to teach coping skills.

Police officers, drivers and health care workers are all groups that exhibit a high risk of exposure to psychosocial factors that might generate stress. To aid police officers, the Belgian Federal Police

introduced a **stress management policy** and established a “stress team” in charge of its implementation. This multidisciplinary team’s areas of action are post-traumatic stress management, prevention of stress, information and training. **Road access and bus driver’s working environment** describes an intervention programme that was carried out on a bus line in central Stockholm. It was targeted at the organisational level, and evaluation studies showed reduction in symptoms of stress among the drivers. Finally, the **Take Care** project seeks to prevent burnout (a form of chronic job stress) among oncology care workers through a team-based stress management approach, including establishment of staff support groups.

Prevention of violence

Case studies

- Guidance provided by HSE: Part 2 – violence at work (UK)
- La Poste: management of stress related to situations of aggressiveness (France)
- Prevention of physical workplace violence in retail trade sector – KAURIS method (Finland)

Guidance on violence at work is part of a strategic approach to tackle workplace violence. Case studies are included which show how some businesses have used a variety of cost-effective ways to reduce the risk to staff. **Prevention of physical workplace violence, KAURIS**, is a method to help businesses in the assessment and management of workplace violence. It is aimed at the retail trade industry where the risk of violent incident is high. **LaPoste** is a national project aimed at management of stress related to situations of aggressiveness in Post Offices. The aim is to train individual employees to practise specific behavioural and psychological skills for managing stress.

Prevention of bullying

Case studies

- Dignity at Work – the Challenge of Workplace Bullying (Ireland)
- Turin public transport system: an agreement to prevent sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination (Italy)

A task force on the prevention of workplace bullying was established in Ireland to investigate the problem of bullying and to develop recommendations on how to tackle it. The report, **Dignity at Work – the Challenge of Workplace Bullying**, gives a series of directions as to how the challenges can be met by a co-ordinated response from State Agencies. In the second case study, **the Turin public transport system** in Italy has been faced with an increase in the number of women in the workforce and of non-Italian workers. Because this can give rise to harassment and discrimination, an agreement was signed among trade unions to prevent sexual

harassment, bullying and discrimination. A special commission was set up to deal with any problems.

Success factors of good practice in stress prevention:

Seven factors are presented in the report as important focus points for successful stress prevention interventions at the workplace:

1. Adequate risk analysis

A baseline should be established through risk assessment. Surveys can be part of this process, but surveys should not be undertaken unless there is a clear intention of taking timely action on the results.

2. Thorough planning and a stepwise approach

Clear aims should be set and target groups identified, as well as identifying tasks, responsibilities and allocating resources.

3. Combination of work-directed and worker-directed measures

Priority must be given to collective and organisational interventions to tackle risks at source. Worker-directed measures can complement other actions.

4. Context-specific solutions

Employees’ on-the-job experience is a vital resource in identifying problems and solutions. Outside expertise may sometimes be necessary too.

5. Experienced practitioners and evidence based interventions

Only competent outside expertise should be used.

6. Social dialogue, partnership and workers’ involvement

Involvement and commitment from employees, middle and senior management is crucial for every stage of an intervention.

7. Sustained prevention and top management support

Sustainable improvement is not possible unless management is ready to make changes. Risk management should become a principal of the way business is done.

How to get the report

The full report is available in English at:

http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/reports/index_en.htm where it can be downloaded free of charge. The printed report “How to tackle psychosocial issues and reduce work-related stress”, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2002, ISBN x can be ordered from the EC’s Publications Office EUR-OP in Luxembourg (<http://eur-op.eu.int/>), or from its sale agents. The price is x Euro in Luxembourg (excluding VAT).

More information on work-related stress is available at <http://osha.eu.int/ew2002/>.