



Deliverables

- Improvement of instruments for diagnosis, monitoring and evaluation of psychosocial risk factors, by including new risks, positive factors and elements which may "protect" employees' health and increase workers' well-being.
- Development of an integrated approach to the management of psychosocial risks in order to ensure a widespread adoption of the European legislation, the enforcement of which is also hindered by a lack of research on these kinds of integrated management methodologies.
- Increasing the effective evaluation of work-related stress, possibly by developing measurement proposals and analysis tailored to the business sector, companies and organisational branches.
- Development of effective work-related stress management processes, taking into account prototypical working conditions and the changing nature of the labour market (economic crisis, migration, atypical contracts).
- Development of measures, risk assessment, training and learning programmes related to the new ways of working.
- Raising awareness on the impact of stress on companies: in terms of health consequences, productivity, costs and impact on specific groups of workers.
- Raising awareness about violence and harassment in specific countries/sectors and dissemination of best practices among companies and employees.
- Updating of the current guidelines/policies or development of additional guidelines/policies for occupational health and safety.
- Development of a European platform to foster the transnational cooperation and the sharing of research findings among European OSH research institutions.

¹ EU-OSHA, Annual Report, 2007.

² EuroFound, The Fourth European Working Conditions survey, 2007.

³ EU-OSHA, European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks, 2010.

⁴ EU-OSHA, Annual Report, 2007.

⁵ To deepen the relation between organisational health and performance: EuroFound, Quality of work and employment in Europe Issues and challenges, Foundation Paper n. 1 February, 2002;

EuroFound, Links between quality of work and performance Survey, 2009; EuroFound, Management practices and sustainable organisational performance, 2009.

⁶ EuroFound - Links between quality of work and performance Survey 2009.

⁷ As outlined by EuroFound, an holistic approach to mental health promotion includes the promotion of wellbeing because «health cannot – and should not – be viewed as merely the absence of illness or disease; but rather as a 'state of positive physical, mental and social wellbeing, and enhancing functioning. EuroFound, Mental health promotion in the workplace – EuroFound, A good practice report, 2011.

⁸ In case there is no fixed pattern for the location, time, manner and amount of work that has to be carried out. This can impact on workers' psychosocial health.

Further information:

This research challenge is part of the PEROSH report "Sustainable workplaces of the future – European research challenges for Occupational Safety and Health". The full report, as well as each of the research challenges separately, can be downloaded in pdf-format from the PEROSH website: <http://www.perosh.eu/p/OSHresearch20>

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Psychosocial well-being in a sustainable working organisation

Summary

Psychosocial risks are considered an emerging risk across the European Union and a key challenge in modern occupational safety and health management. Findings reported that in Europe work-related stress is of concern for managers and workers due to its connection with risks for workers' health and safety and with its subsequent costs for organisations. The increasing changes in the nature of work and organisations, and the growing competitive nature of the global marketplace have increased workers' exposure to psychosocial hazards and the emergence of unknown hazards. Research in this area should contribute to a better understanding of the determining factors of physical, psychological and mental health and their impacts, and of the positive factors that may improve well-being including the development of integrated approaches to the management of psychological risks.



1. Description of the priority. What is at stake? Why is it a priority?

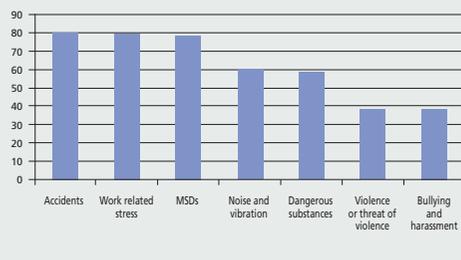
Across the European Union (EU) psychosocial risks, which are defined as «those aspects of work design and the organisation and management of work, and their social and environmental contexts, which have the potential for causing psychological, social or physical harm» have been identified as an emerging risk and as a key challenge in modern occupational safety and health management.¹

As reported by the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, one out of five workers from the EU15 and almost one in three from the 10 new member States believed their health was at risk due to work-related stress.² Furthermore, the ESENER survey reported that work-related stress is of major or some concern for 79% of interviewed European managers, while violence and harassment are of major or some concern for almost 40%.³

Regardless of the figures, this issue has become particularly challenging, since the nature of work and work organisation has broadly changed over the last decade and is likely to change further in the coming years, due to the financial and economical crisis.

The evolution of new working practices and the increase of restructuring processes (i.e. company reorganisation, closures, mergers and acquisitions, downsizing, outsourcing, relocation, etc.), to deal with the growing competitive nature of the global marketplace, have led to an increased exposure to recognised psychosocial hazards and the emergence of new hazards. Identification of these hazards is needed to reduce the associated health and safety risks.⁴

Figure 1: Health and safety concerns reported to of some and major concern (% managers, EU27)



Source: Esener Survey, EU OSHA (2008)

Dealing with psychosocial risks factors is not just relevant for policies on workers' health. Also, it can represent a key challenge for economical policies, since psychosocial risks can impact the organisational health of companies, thereby affecting their performance.⁵

Given the strong relationship between performance and occupational health, improving the quality of work and working conditions and achieving better performance should be considered as two sides of the same coin rather than conflicting goals. For instance, studies have suggested that between 50% and 60% of all lost working days have some link with work-related stress. This represents a huge cost in terms of impaired economic performance. Furthermore, as outlined by Eurofound⁶, companies with a high level of employee satisfaction, based on high rankings for trust and social capital, perform better over time.

In order to develop sustainable working conditions two main aspects require special attention: 1) the need of reducing the effects of psychosocial risk factors on physical, psychological and mental health. This should be done by further developing knowledge on their determinants and impacts and promoting the development of an integrated management approach to psychological risks to ensure a widespread adoption of the more advanced norms; 2) the need of exploring resources and positive factors (such as individual resources and attitude, organisational and work aspects) and to promote interventions and practices that may improve employees' well-being.⁷

2. Research needs at European level

2.1 Research needs on determinants

Research in the following areas is needed:

- investigate the effect of the individual resources (in terms of knowledge, skills, individual attitudes, personal characteristics and motivation etc.) on employees' psychological and mental health, and their impact on preventing mental disorders and promoting positive aspects (e.g. work and life satisfaction, motivation, well-being etc.).
- understand the influence of organisational and work related factors (e.g. working conditions, social context, physical context, management, etc.) on psychological and mental health and well-being.
- explore resources and positive factors that may influence and improve workers' well-being and examine which influences are modifiable in a workplace to achieve a global concept of well-being at work.
- highlight how group resources (such as social capital, team working and group support) may impact on individual psychological and mental health and groups' health and under which conditions; and what the consequences on individual and organisational productivity are.
- seek and analyse further under explored factors such as ethics, job insecurity, work-life balance, information overload, working hours etc. that can have an impact on work-related stress, mental disorders and on the development of organisational and individual well-being.
- highlight how new ways of working, innovations in the production system and the diffusion and use of information and communication technology (ICT) are connected to the quality of work, safety and health and well-being of workers.
- investigate the effects of restructuring (structural and functional changes such as company reorganisation, closures, mergers & acquisitions, downsizing, outsourcing, relocation, etc.) on employees' motivation, workplace and social behaviour and health and, in turn, how these effects might even thwart the success of the restructuring.
- understand the link between vulnerable groups (ageing workers, gender differences, precarious employment forms, boundaryless work⁸, etc.) and psychosocial risks (see also the research challenge on disability prevention).

2.2 Research needs relating to impact

Additional research on impacts is needed, especially to:

- connect major chronic diseases and disorders of great public health relevance (e.g. cardiovascular diseases and common mental disorders etc.) to the work context and psychosocial aspects, such as work related stress, violence and harassment.
- deepen the analysis of the multi faceted nature of the etiological development of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), considering both physical and psychosocial factors (understanding further their independent and interactive effect on the development of MSDs).
- highlight and improve policies, practices and interventions for reducing the impact of work-related stress tailored to organisations' needs and economical sustainability.
- analyse the under explored impacts of work-related stress and other related aspects, which have received less attention in the past (such as work engagement and workaholism) and their effects on employees' health and productivity. Since withdrawal behaviours (such as turnover, absenteeism and lateness) are affected by organisational climate dimensions through the mediating effects of specific occupational stressors.
- investigate the action priorities on work-related stress and well-being in different EU countries and the degree of development and implementation of effective workplace interventions, strategies, guidelines and policies on work-related stress in EU companies by focusing on their approach to the issue and the inclusion of all psychosocial risk factors (including new emerging risks).
- underline the benefits of new ways of working in terms of employees' engagement, job motivation, organisational flexibility, workplace relationships and perceived career prospects and their impact on aspects related to occupational health and safety.
- deepen the connection between work-related stress and violence and harassment in order to understand effective organisational interventions and actions aimed at reducing their occurrence.
- assess and highlight the socio-economic impact of work related stress and its consequences in terms of the costs, the effects on specific groups of workers and productivity.
- understand what work organisation and management practices can influence the impacts of restructuring on employees well-being and how.