

Workplace Stress

A Brief Overview



What is Stress

- (A) Demand on physical or mental energy
- (B) The distress caused by this (ie suffering from stress).

The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.



Work

- Work is one of the main causes of stress
- It can compound stress from personal factors
- Poor working situations can result in stress becoming self perpetuating



Work Related Stress – The risks

- Pressure is part of all work, helping to keep us;
 - Motivated and productive
- Excessive pressure can lead to stress, which;
 - Undermines performance
 - Costs employer
 - Makes people ill



How big is the problem?

- About 1 in 7 find work either very or extremely stressful
- 2005/6 half a million people reported levels of stress, that they believed made them ill.
- Depression and anxiety are the most common complaints, affecting 20% of the working population.
- Average sick leave 30.1 days
- A total of nearly 13.5 million working days lost
- Cost to society about £3.7 billion each year



The Results

Stress Related illness includes

- Coronary disease
- Muscle spasm/chest pains
- Peptic ulcer
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Nervous breakdown
- Paranoia
- Reduced immune system



Adverse effects for organisations

- Employee commitment to work
- Performance and productivity
- Staff turnover
- Attendance levels
- Recruitment and retention
- Customer satisfaction
- Image and reputation
- Potential litigation



Work Related Stress – action

- HASAWA
 - Employers have a 'duty of care' to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees while at work.
- Management Regulations
 - Employers have to assess the risks arising from hazards at work



HSE Management Standards

Organisations are expected to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments for stress.

The management standards are a guidance intended to help and encourage this and manage any problems more effectively.



HSE Management Standards

6 key areas of work; the stressors

- Demands
- Control
- Support
- Relationships
- Role
- Change

if properly managed, can help to reduce work-related stress



Demands

Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment

- The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work
- People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.



Control

How much say the person has in the way they do their work

- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills;
- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.



Support

Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues

- The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.



Relationship

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour

- The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- Employees share information relevant to their work;
- The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.



Role

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and; whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.

- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
- The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and
- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.



Change

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

- The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
- Employees are aware of timetables for changes;
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.



Risk Assessment

- An effective risk assessment approach should include 5 simple steps
 - Step 1 – Identify the hazard
 - Step 2 – Decide on who might be harmed and how
 - Step 3 – Evaluate the risk and take action
 - Step 4 – Record the findings
 - Step 5 – Monitor and review



Risk Assessment

Which involve;

- Measuring the current situation
- Open discussions between, management, reps and employees
- Working in partnership to identify and implement practical improvements
- Agree and share the action plan
- Regularly review the situation to ensure it continues to improve



A generic approach may be helpful

- Risk assessment is completed on the role not the individual, however often an individual cannot be totally separated from the role.
- Role specification should be included in the assessment, taking into account the skills and abilities of the individual and identifying any training needs.



A generic approach may be helpful

- A range of measures may be appropriate to control risks to employees.
- Identify underlying causes with the potential to cause stress, these will help focus resources.
- Consultation is essential as control measures are more likely to work where employees have helped to develop and implement them.



A generic approach may be helpful

- Develop an 'Action plan' for implementation listing measures and a date for implementation and the person responsible for ensuring implementation.
- Once all of the additional controls are in place, carry out a further evaluation of the risk.



A generic approach may be helpful

- The control measures must be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure they remain effective.
- The entire process must be recorded in writing, and be openly and transparently available for all employees who are affected.



Step 1- Identifying the problem

Your organisation may already collect information

- Sickness Absence
- Low productivity – talk to employees
- High employee turnover – exit interviews
- Performance appraisals – one to one discussions
- Team meetings and focus groups
- Safety reps inspections



Step 2 – Decide who might be harmed and how

- Acknowledge that stress has the potential to affect all employees
- Consider the data available to you to indicate the potential problem areas
- Measure your performance against the Management Standards
- Identify any stress “hot-spots” in your organisations



Step 3 – Evaluate the risk and take action

Linking problems to solutions using focus groups

- 6 to 10 employees
- a selection of employees from specific work groups to explore finding of risk assessments in more detail and any local challenges



Step 3 – Evaluate the risk and take action

What solutions are going to work for us?

- Developing solutions is often difficult
- Workplaces and employees are different so there is no one set of solutions
- Good examples of what other organisations have done to successfully deal with problematic working conditions can be helpful.
 - Good Practice ,Real Solutions, Real People
 - Work related stress case studies, etc.
- Aim of the focus group is to draw up recommendations and form an action plan



Step 3 – Evaluate the risk and take action

Focus groups need to communicate the results

- Provide feedback
 - Communication between management, safety rep's and employees.
 - Surveys and focus groups may identify that individuals are experiencing problems. Solutions may not address all individuals needs
- Develop ways for employees to raise their concerns
 - Formal and informal chats with managers; Speak to Safety Reps; Occupational health advisor; GP.



Step 4 – Record the findings

- Develop an action plan that will:
 - Help organisation set goals to work towards;
 - Help you to prioritise;
 - Demonstrate that management are serious about addressing employee's concerns
 - Provide a bench mark to evaluate and review against



Step 4 – Record the findings

- An action plan is a key part to your risk assessment and should include:
 - What the problem is
 - How the problem was identified
 - What is going to be done in response
 - How you arrived at this solution
 - Some key milestones and dates for them to be reached
 - A commitment to provide feedback to employees on progress
 - A date for reviewing against the plan



Step 5 – Monitor and Review

Measure and share success

- It is essential to review any action taken to tackle stress

How to review your work

- There are 2 elements
 - Monitor against your action plan to ensure the agreed actions are taking place
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions you implement



Step 5 – Monitor and Review

Follow-up surveys

- One way to measure progress is to use the surveys again after a period of time
- Consider an annual survey
- This is in addition to any other arrangements established

Remember

- Standards are about making continuous improvements in the way you manage stress
- Working with employees to identify and address the problems in your workplace that could lead to stress related ill health



Workplace Stress Policy

A stress policy can be a useful mechanism to reduce and prevent occupational stress. It is essential that such policies are developed and monitored jointly by management and union safety reps.



An effective policy must;

- recognise stress as an occupational health and safety issue
- Set out responsibilities for preventative measures
- Identify who to contact in the event of a problem arising
- Set out work patterns and acceptable hours
- Commitment from senior levels of management
- Include commitment for the provision of suitable training for managers and workforce
- Identify systems and procedures
- Contain arrangements for supportive and confidential health monitoring
- Be relevant and effective
- Monitored reviewed and if necessary revised – the mechanism for doing this should involve all parties and be contained in the policy itself.



Useful websites

www.unitetheunion.com
www.hse.gov.uk/tacklestress
www.workstress.net
www.tuc.org.uk

