

## **M0-EN.8 Assessment of Stress at Work**

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the employee and/or from the interaction of the employee and the conditions of work. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury. Sustained work-related stress is an important determinant of depressive disorders, the fourth biggest cause of the global disease burden. Stress can potentially affect any workplace and any employee, independently of the company's size, field of activity, or form of employment. Tackling stress can lead to greater efficiency and improved occupational health and safety, with consequent economic and social benefits for all stakeholders.

### **M0-EN.8.1 Legal Framework**

Although the Framework Directive (FWD) 89/391/EEC and its individual Directives do not mention explicitly the word “stress at work”, the content of several directives clearly reveals the intention of the EU legislator to cover all aspects of the health and safety of workers, such as their physical, mental and/or social well-being. More specifically:

The “VDU Directive” (Fifth individual Directive of the FWD), in Article 3(1) on the “analysis of workstations states that: *“Employers shall be obliged to perform an analysis of workstations in order to evaluate the safety and health conditions to which they give rise for their workers, particularly as regards possible risks to eyesight, physical problems and problems of mental stress”*.

The “Maternity Directive” (Tenth individual Directive of the FWD), in Article 3(2) the Commission should establish guidelines on the assessment of certain agents and processes considered hazardous for the safety or health of workers. These guidelines should *“also cover movements and postures, mental and physical fatigue and other types of physical and mental stress connected with the work done”*.

The “Working Time Directive” (93/104/EC) touches upon many aspects of the organization of working time which might trigger stress if not properly implemented and applied, however, an explicit reference to stress is to be found in the article 8 on “length of night work”, which states that: *“Member States shall take the measures necessary to ensure that ...night workers whose work involves special hazards of heavy physical or mental strain do not work more than 8 hours in any period of 24 hours during which they perform night work.”*

Furthermore, in recognition of the broad economic and social added value of tackling work-related stress, the European social partners (ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP) have signed a framework agreement (on 8/10/2004) aiming to the provision to employers and workers with an agreed framework to identify and prevent or manage problems of work-related stress.

### **M0-EN.8.2 Organization of the risk assessment**

Work related stress (WRS) is preventable and actions towards its reduction can be very cost-effective. Risk assessment for WRS involves the same basic principles, steps and process as for all other workplace hazards (see Chapter M0-EN.4). Participation of the workers and/or their representatives is crucial to the success of the

process. The assessor should identify the causes of stress, the groups of workers mostly affected, and to provide concrete suggestions for the elimination of the hazard.

Symptoms that should be considered as indicators that WRS might be a problem in an organization are the following, according to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (Fact Sheet No. 22):

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Individual</b>
<b>Participation:</b> Absenteeism, high staff turnover, poor time-keeping, disciplinary problems, bullying, aggressive communication, isolation	<b>Behavior:</b> Tobacco, alcohol or drug abuse, violence, bullying or harassment
<b>Performance:</b> Reduced output or quality of product or service, accidents, poor-decision making, errors	<b>Psychological:</b> Sleep problems, anxiety disorders, depression, inability to concentrate, irritability, family relationship problems, burnout
<b>Costs:</b> Increased costs from compensation or increased health care costs, referrals to health services	<b>Health:</b> Back problems, heart problems, peptic ulcers, hypertension, depressed immune system

Prior to the initiation of the risk assessment the assessor should take into account the above mentioned indicators and review the appropriate company's records. Additional information that needs to be gathered, include:

- Existing policies with respect to hierarchy, promotions, contracts, assignment of roles and responsibilities within the company
- Existing policies related to resolution of conflicts
- Work schedules
- How organizational changes are managed and communicated to employees
- Cases related to violence, harassment and bullying
- Recorded absences (causes and frequency)
- Training being provided to employees to acquire adequate skills and knowledge for the performance of their tasks
- Available means for the employees to report work related problems

Information should also be gathered from the employees through the distribution of appropriate questionnaires, in order to identify problems at an early stage keeping in mind the need for confidentiality.

### **M0-EN.8.3 Factors to be considered during assessment of the work-related stress**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Main issues to be considered</b>
<b>Work content and work</b>	• Clarity of employee's role and responsibilities

<b>organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of role conflict</li> <li>• Diversification and interest of work</li> <li>• Development of knowledge, skills, and capabilities</li> <li>• Degree of initiatives</li> <li>• Technical and intellectual abilities required</li> <li>• Opportunities provided for adaptation of working methods, rate and product's improvement</li> <li>• Distribution of work (pauses, rotations, vacations, absent workers, temporary workers)</li> <li>• Repetition of tasks and actions</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation system of the work and the worker</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of control and planning of individual work by the staff</li> <li>• Existence of a systematic self-evaluation system</li> <li>• Participation of the staff into the evaluation process</li> </ul>
<b>Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture and social climate (cooperation, understanding, mutual respect)</li> <li>• Management of conflicts - Support in solving problems (hierarchy, colleagues)</li> <li>• Level of communication with colleagues, management, peripheral departments</li> <li>• Quality of communication (freedom to communicate on any subject during work, available communication systems (telephone, e-mail, etc.))</li> <li>• Availability of social premises and facilities (e.g. cafeteria, lunch lodge)</li> </ul>
<b>Time Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overload and sub-activity</li> <li>• Schedules (extra time, holidays, rest)</li> <li>• Illness and absences (existing policy)</li> <li>• Night work</li> <li>• Atypical working hours</li> </ul>
<b>Professional incertitude</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development and perspectives for the future</li> <li>• Promotion opportunities</li> <li>• Contract and salary</li> </ul>

<b>Respect of personal integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harassment (sexual and moral)</li> <li>• Violence (physical and psychological)</li> <li>• Intolerance (racism, religious)</li> <li>• Mobbing, isolation, differentiated treatment</li> </ul>
<b>General working environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tools, equipment, working stations and working surfaces</li> <li>• Lighting and ventilation</li> <li>• Noise and vibrations</li> <li>• Manual handling of loads</li> <li>• Exposure to chemicals and biological hazards</li> <li>• High or low temperature and humidity</li> </ul>
<b>Relations between professional and private life</b>	
<b>Training and support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of training to new comers and sub contractors</li> <li>• Provision of training to staff whose jobs have changed</li> <li>• Provision of social support, feedback and encouragement</li> </ul>

**M0-EN.8.4 Key Elements for Avoiding or Reducing the Work-related Stress Risks**

<b>Measures</b>	<b>Means</b>
<b>Management and communication measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity of company's objectives</li> <li>• Clarity of individual roles and tasks</li> <li>• Clarity of staff related processes</li> <li>• Provision of adequate management support for individual and teams</li> <li>• Matching responsibility and control over work</li> <li>• Improvement of work organization, processes, working conditions and environment</li> <li>• Performance of risk assessment</li> </ul>
<b>Work organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptation of work to the individual</li> <li>• Avoidance of repetitive and monotonous work</li> <li>• Adoption working schedule to individual needs, when possible</li> </ul>

<b>Training and support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training of managers and workers to raise awareness and understanding of stress, its possible causes and how to deal with it</li><li>• Provision of valuable information and consultation to workers and their representatives in accordance with EU and national legislation, collective agreements and practices, in due time</li></ul>
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