

**Hazards  
Campaign**



[www.workstress.net](http://www.workstress.net)

The UK National Work-Stress Network

## **SPRING NEWS 2007**

# **Britain is 'one of the most highly stressed nations in Europe'**

February 2007

Money worries, long hours at work and family pressures are driving up stress levels across the country, a recently published report says. Half the population say they feel more stressed now than five years ago and more than 10 per cent say they have felt suicidal, twice the level in 2003.

The findings, from a survey commissioned by the Samaritans, confirm Britain as one of the most stressed nations in Europe. Research published last month showed one in five Britons felt their life was out of control, the highest proportion in the nine industrialised nations studied.

The Samaritans survey of 2,000 people, conducted over the internet last month, found pressure had increased most on the young, with 70% of 16 to 24-year-olds saying they felt more stressed than five years ago. Sixteen per cent had contemplated taking their own life, and almost a third said they had no one to turn to, the highest proportion for any age group. The survey, *Stressed Out*, was released to mark 'Stress Down Day' at the beginning of the month, organised by the charity to highlight stress in the workplace.

The director of Samaritans service support, Joe Ferns, said: "The results of the survey are worrying - not only because we're getting more stressed but because it seems we're getting worse at dealing with that stress." Mr Ferns said people sometimes reacted to stress in inappropriate ways, by drinking or going shopping, which added to the problem. "Feeling stressed can be a vicious circle. Sometimes, the more people feel stressed, the more they do things which put them under greater pressure."

The survey also found:

- half of Brits (50 per cent) say there are more stressed now than they were five years ago;
- almost one-in-five (17 per cent) say they are stressed out every single day;
- more than one-in-four (27 per cent) say stress causes them to argue with their partners while nearly a fifth (18 per cent) find their sex life suffers because of stress;
- the 25 to 34-year-old age group (41 per cent) drink more often than others to relieve stress;

### **Stress Network Conference**

**Saturday November 10<sup>th</sup> 2007, 10.00 a.m. till  
4.00 p.m.**

Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Birmingham

## **Enforcing the Stress Management Standards**

Early-bird Delegate fee: £50.00

[Full Delegate Fee: £65.00 after September 30<sup>th</sup> 2007]

Unwaged Fee £17.00

**Overnight accommodation available**

**Les Roberts, Conference Secretary: [lesvroberts@hotmail.com](mailto:lesvroberts@hotmail.com)**

**Booking form and details – see pages 6/7**

**Book early to avoid disappointment!**

- more men (35 per cent) than women (29 per cent) drink when stressed;
- 16 to 24-year-olds feel suicidal the most when they're stressed;
- The same age group also came top for being 'more stressed than they were five years ago' with 72 per cent saying they were more stressed today;

Those aged 16 to 24 watch TV or listen to music the most to relieve stress, but more than half of them (54 per cent) said that's how they try to cope although it can be a way of avoiding the cause of stress rather than looking for support or help. And 16 to 24-year-olds like to go shopping and spend some money to try and get over their stress, more than any other age group. When asked 'which feelings do you have when you experience stress and pressure?' 61 per cent said they felt depressed and down for some time while 41 per cent said they felt isolated and alone. One-in-four (25 per cent) said there was no-one they could turn to while nearly one-in-eight (12 per cent) said they felt suicidal. In Japan, the word karoshi is used to describe sudden death from overwork. At the moment there is no direct translation to English and let's hope that remains the case.

**Network Comment** – it is very concerning to note that despite the media coverage of specific cases, the optimism of the HSE that things are improving, and employers' lack of interest in the Stress Management Standards, many people are finding their lives and their health subject to damaging effects of unrelenting pressures. Some of these problems may be self-inflicted and indeed of a personal nature, but nevertheless they play a significant part in damaging the well-being of sufferers who really should read the signals and seek help and support.

### Convenor's Report

I was pleased to be able to attend the NW Region TUC Safety Representatives' Conference in Manchester at Old Trafford in early February. Over 200 delegates were signed up and there was a waiting list too! An excellent day as enjoyed by everyone I am sure. Only the threat of total white-out predicted by the Met Office and hyped up by the media created an atmosphere of uncertainty. I was able to publicise the work of the Network and to advertise our November Conference. I hope to see some of the delegates attending our event too!



**HSE Recognition of our work** – it was doubly pleasing to speak with David Ashton of the NW HSE offices. He was very complimentary of our handbook publication, and commended its content to the Conference delegates.

**Web Activity still growing** – after a relatively quiet summer period we achieved over 27,000 hits in October which has continued to be out weighed monthly and we have now recorded 44,500 hits in January 2007. Over 2,000 documents have been downloaded for further use in that month.

Our revised **Information Pack** was reprinted in the early summer following very generous support from AMICUS, NASUWT and UNISON and we are indebted to them for their generous assistance and support. It is now available in glossy printed booklet format as before.

Bulk copies of the booklet can be ordered by email from the Convenor – please contact [iandraper@workstress.net](mailto:iandraper@workstress.net) for details. A payment equivalent to at least £1.00 per copy is requested.

We are very pleased to provide more details of our **November 2007 Conference tackling the subject of "Enforcing the Stress Management Standards"**. Speakers from HSE, the world of research and trades unions will set the scene for workshops and discussion groups.

Details are available via Risks E-Zine, Hazards and through Trades Unions, also on our website <http://www.workstress.net/downloads.htm>

**Reserve the date – don't miss the opportunity of the year to hear about the HSE Stress Management Standards – Saturday November 10<sup>th</sup>, 10.30 a.m. till 4.00 p.m. Get your Union Branch to sponsor your attendance.**

*Ian Draper, February 2007*

### Diary Dates

**Stress Network Steering Group Meetings 2007**, Hillscourt Conference Centre, nr Birmingham:-  
Saturdays, 9th June & 8th September 10.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

**Hazards Conference July 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> 2007** Manchester University

## Stress Snippets

### **HSE warns Authorities to take action over health risks to staff**

January 2007

The Health and Safety Executive has warned Scottish councils to make sure they act to minimise safety risks to staff after Dundee City Council was rapped for not having an occupational health management structure. An improvement notice was issued following a routine appraisal, which highlighted inadequacies in the provisions to deal with occupational health risks.

HSE officials found the council did not have a co-ordinated structure for managing occupational health and left risk management to local team leaders.

The tribunal upheld the HSE's action, saying it was the inspector's duty to issue notices where safety regulations were breached. The HSE has said that while it is satisfied the council now has an appropriate action plan in place to deal with its concerns, the tribunal ruling should highlight to other local authorities the importance of identifying and addressing health and safety concerns in the workplace.

All employers are required by law to carry out risk assessments, make arrangements to manage risks and ensure staff have access to health and safety advice.

HSE inspector David Steven said: "Following the Dundee City Council decision, other local authorities in Scotland can be in no doubt about their duty to provide health monitoring and provision for their staff on an ongoing basis.

"The appropriate use of occupational health expertise and resources is necessary to comply with statutory duties but will also help employers meet non-statutory principles such as reducing work-related sickness absence."

HSE has pledged to work closely with local authorities in Scotland helping them to become more active in addressing health and safety issues. South Lanarkshire Council, which aims to cut sickness absences by providing staff with free access to a physiotherapist and occupational health team is shown as an example of good practice.

**Network Comment** – Any employer or manager who fails to apply his duty of care in this respect is asking for trouble! Irrespective of costs, employers have a duty to ensure the workforce's health.

### **Employers braced for National Sickie Day**

February 2007

Forget bird flu - an outbreak of the winter blues is forecast to strike Britain leading to hundreds of thousands of people taking "sickies" from work. Surveys have suggested that early February is the worst period of the year for absenteeism, leading to February 5<sup>th</sup> being labelled National Sickie Day.

The year began with what appeared to be a nationwide week off work, as many businesses failed to resume normal service until January 8. And around 310,000 workers were predicted to call in sick on the 5th. Post-Christmas blues, poor weather, credit card bills and a long wait for the next holiday have all been blamed for this lack of motivation. The Employment Law Advisory Services estimated that absence through sickness could cost British industry £27m today.

Spokesman, Peter Mooney, said: "Poor weather, long dark nights and a general dissatisfaction with official holidays all mean that early February is a very popular time for workers to give themselves an extra 'duvet day'."

TUC general secretary, Brendan Barber, said: "February is slap bang in the middle of the cold and flu season and to suggest that the thousands of employees who are genuinely off ill today are throwing a 'sickie' is hugely insulting. "Most employers are clearly going to prefer that their sick staff stay at home until they are better, rather than become 'mucus troopers' and struggle in, spreading their germs around the office."

**Network Comment** – it is not helpful to chastise alleged timewasters when little is really known about the causes of sickness absence. Whilst it is recognised that some workers are not always honest, the vast majority do their best, and feel rightly and unjustly wronged by such claims. It does little to foster good working relationships if employers feel they are being short-changed.

### **Drivers fined for not taking rest**

Four bus drivers in Gloucestershire have been fined £130 each for working too many hours and not having enough rest.

Gloucester Magistrates heard the Stagecoach drivers all worked shifts driving the Cheltenham to London Megabus route. They were found to

have acted illegally by not taking the required amount of rest after a six-day week. They pleaded guilty to a total of 12 charges of not taking the full 36-hours rest between shifts.

This lack of rest period went against EU regulations. It is a driver's responsibility to know the law. Tired drivers are unsafe drivers.

It was shown that they were all of limited means and had not known about the rules. They had asked for training on how the rostered hours worked. After considering sentence, chair of the bench, David Dawson told them: "In doing that job there is always a potential danger that you put the public at risk and that is of concern to all of us. "It is your responsibility to know the law. It is something you should have taken steps to deal with earlier."

**Network Comment** – Employers must always ensure that their employees are properly trained. If there is doubt then simple risk assessments should take place to ensure that every employee is properly updated. Working practices should be tightened up to ensure that such breaches of the law cannot happen.

### ***When is work-related stress 'reasonably foreseeable'?***

February 2007

AMICUS – the third largest trade union in the NHS – is investigating the level of excessive working nationally, following the case of a health visitor awarded £64,000 after suffering a breakdown because of overwork.

Tina Hiles was awarded £64,000 in compensation by the High Court after the workload imposed on her by her trust - South Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT) - caused a breakdown.

Judge Robert Moxon-Browne ruled that South Gloucestershire PCT had been in breach of its duty to Hiles, and that the stress she had suffered at work had been the cause of her breakdown. He commented that he believed "this particular injury was foreseen and could have been prevented by the exercise of reasonable care".

The fact that Hiles' injury was foreseeable meant the Trust was liable for her stress. Whether an injury is foreseeable rests on considerations such as:-

- what the employer knows (or ought reasonably to know) about the individual employees;
- the nature and extent of the work done; and

- signs from the employee of impending harm to health.

The Trust failed to act on some of these indications. For example, at one point Hiles burst into tears at a work review. The Court decided that this should have been viewed as not being the normal behaviour of an ordinary employee when discussing workload and as such should have been seen as a sign that the claimant was being affected by stress.

In a similar case last year, an employee was awarded £140,000 compensation after her excessive workload, resulting from the need to cover for absent colleagues, made her ill. The High Court heard that Melanie Garrod suffered two breakdowns when, she claimed, North Devon Primary Care Trust failed to bring in temporary staff to cover for colleagues on sickness or maternity leave. She was supposed to do a 30-hour week but often had to work many more hours unpaid to cope with the workload. Garrod claimed that depressive illness on two occasions was due to pressure of work. Following her second period of illness she returned to work with assurances from the Trust that she would not be required to take on any more extra caseload.

However, when another colleague went on maternity leave and was not replaced Garrod had to cope with two workloads again. She went off sick and did not return to work; her employment was terminated on grounds of ill health. The court ruled that psychiatric harm she suffered was reasonably foreseeable and that a reasonable employer should have foreseen that deciding which appointments to prioritise, which to cancel, attempts to find alternative staff, and the demands of Garrod's own duties created a significant risk of psychiatric harm. It also ruled that the Trust had failed to take steps to replace absent staff, something that it was reasonable to expect it to do.

**Network Comment** – many people believe that they have PI claims against their employer but fall short of the required legal criteria and fail to show that they have incontrovertible proof of their case. Although it may be a worry to do so, it is important to demonstrate at all stages that health is being affected by working demands. Employers must also recognise their responsibilities to ensure that any foreseeable health problems must be handled at source and as soon as practicably possible. Failure to do so is a breach of duty of care.

## **Teachers victims of cyber-bullies**

Increasing numbers of teachers are becoming victims of cyber-bullying from both pupils and parents, a teachers' organisation has said. Incidents range from abusive emails to the malicious use of websites and chat rooms, it said.

Silent phone calls and unwelcome text messages were also reported by some of those teachers surveyed. The Teacher Support Network and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers carried out the research. Its director Mark Langhammer said anti-bullying policies needed to be introduced.

"Certainly in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education have not issued a general guidance to schools," he said. "Some schools have very good policies, some have none at all. Teachers very often are working in a vacuum."

Fern Turner from the National Association of Head Teachers' said it was a hard problem to tackle. She said: "There are teachers whose whole professional reputation is being challenged on these sites. What we are told is that the network providers monitor the sites and take off material which they feel is inappropriate. While people can say anything and write anything, the victims can't actually address or challenge it."

**Network Comment** – regrettably teachers continue to be vulnerable to malicious behaviour on the part of their students. This type of behaviour will add additional unwanted burdens to classroom teachers. Those who have suffered in the ways described have their whole lives turned up side down. Akin to burglary it is as damaging as rape.

## **Flexible hours should be available to every worker**

February 2007

The Children's minister will call today for all workers, including non-parents, to be given the right to demand flexible working hours. Beverley Hughes hopes the move will help staff to tailor their working patterns to the demands of home life. Her call has won support from trade unions and groups representing women and children. Only about one in eight members of the workforce - 3.6 million parents with children under six or disabled children under 18 - have the right to ask for flexible working. Companies that refuse a request must explain the reason in writing and employees can appeal to a tribunal.

The right will be extended in April to another 2.8 million people who are responsible for caring for relatives or partners. But Ms Hughes calls for a dramatic widening of the entitlement to all 29 million employees in Britain, whatever their personal circumstances. She argues the step would particularly help parents to balance work around their children, rather than children around work, and make it easier for mothers and fathers to share their responsibilities.

"Many working people feel time-squeezed," she said. "With more women at work, an ageing population and many people aspiring to volunteer or to further develop their skills, government and employers need to recognise that balancing work and life is an issue that's not going away. We need a step change."

"The growing number of women at work has, in practice, often resulted in women having two jobs - a new professional one plus the old domestic one. We need to help families negotiate the balancing act between care work and paid work, avoiding negative trade offs between time and money."

Ms Hughes argues: "Everyone has a life outside work, not just parents. We must redefine the 'ideal worker' and accept it is a fantasy to expect people to have none other than work commitments. Many people make valuable contributions to their communities in their non-work time."

"It is unacceptable for family-friendly employment to be an option only for those parents - often women - who downshift in pay and status. Work-life balance is still unobtainable for many low-income families."

A move to universal flexi-hours is likely to be resisted by some employers, who could be hit by the cost of contesting tribunal appeals brought by their staff. But Anne Longfield, the chief executive of the charity 4Children, said "The need to balance work and family responsibilities doesn't stop when children start school, with most parents saying they would benefit by being able to continue to work more flexibly." Gaynor Anderson, research manager, 30: 'I didn't want to give up work, it's part of who I am'.

**Network Comment** – Much of the current provision for flexible working relates to family caring needs, for the young. However many workers also have other caring duties which should be recognised. IN addition, the opportunity to seek a more flexible approach to our work will enhance well-being, create an improved work-life balance and reduce stress levels.

**UK National Work-Stress Network  
7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

**Saturday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007 10.00 a.m. till 4.00 p.m.**

**“Enforcing the HSE Stress Management Standards”**

**How Employers should apply their Duty of Care**

*This conference is aimed at Trades Union Shop Stewards, Health & Safety Representatives, Health & Safety and Human Resources Specialists, Stress Management Consultants*

**Early-bird Booking Full Delegate Fee:- £50.00**

**(£65.00 after September 30<sup>th</sup>)**

**Unwaged Delegate Fee:- £17.00**

Special rate B&B available at £32.50 (Single Room) £50.00 (Double Room)

**Final closing date, October 13<sup>th</sup> 2007**

**Outline Programme**

**Speakers:-**

David Snowball, HSE Director of Operations Yorks & NE

Jane Ferrie, Senior Research Fellow, Dept of Epidemiology & Public health UCL – Whitehall II Research Project

Employer – the adoption of the standards at a workplace **TBA**

Ian Draper – UK National Work Stress Network, the case for enforcement

**Question & Answer session**

**2 Course Buffet Lunch**

**Workshops**

1. Whitehall II Research Project development
2. TBA
3. Enforcement of Stress Management Standards
4. TBA

**Closing Plenary Session**

**Details to be finalised**

**NASUWT Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rose Hill  
REDNAL, Birmingham B45 8RS**

Set in the Lickey Hills to the SW of Birmingham close to M5 (J4) and M42 (J1 and J2), this attractive parkland setting provides high quality conference facilities, good overnight accommodation and is acknowledged for its food. The Centre is some 45 mins by taxi from Birmingham New Street Station (c£15.00) and Birmingham Airport and Birmingham International Station (c£20.00).

**Disabled Access and induction loop facilities ensure that all events can be fully inclusive.**

## BOOKING FORM

<b>PLEASE RESERVE PLACES FOR ME AT THE UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS                  NETWORK CONFERENCE,                  HILLSCOURT CONFERENCE CENTRE, NR BIRMINGHAM                  SATURDAY NOVEMBER 10TH, 2007</b>		
<b>PLEASE PRINT DETAILS CLEARLY</b>		
<b>DELEGATE(S) NAME(S)</b>	<b>B&amp;B REQUIRED?</b>	<b>PLEASE INDICATE</b>
<b>1</b>		
<b>2</b>		
<b>3</b>		
<b>4</b>		
<b>CONTACT ADDRESS</b>	<b>TEL NO</b>	
	<b>POSTCODE</b>	
<b>EMAIL ADDRESS (BLOCK CAPS PLEASE)</b>		
<b>DISABLED ACCESS?</b>	<b>OTHER NEEDS? GIVE DETAILS</b>	<b>VEGETARIAN?</b>
<b>YES/NO</b>		<b>YES/NO</b>
<b>DELEGATE FEES:-</b>		<b>PLEASE ENTER SUM</b>
EARLY BIRD FULL DELEGATE FEE	£50.00	
UNWAGED DELEGATE FEE	£17.00	
LATE ENTRY FULL DELEGATE FEE	£65.00	
B&B SINGLE ROOM	£32.50	
B&B DOUBLE ROOM	£50.00	
DONATION TO STRESS NETWORK		
TOTAL FEE PAYMENT ENCLOSED		
<b>COMPLETED APPLICATION FORM TO BE SENT TOGETHER WITH CHEQUE(S) PAYABLE TO "UK                  NATIONAL STRESS NETWORK"</b>		
TO BE SENT TO:- LES ROBERTS, STRESS NETWORK CONFERENCE SECRETARY, 33 OLD STREET. UPTON UPON SEVERN, WR8 0HN WORCS		
EMAIL Address: <a href="mailto:LESVROBERTS@HOTMAIL.COM">LESVROBERTS@HOTMAIL.COM</a>		