



UK National Work-stress Network News

Volume 01, Issue 1

January 2001

TUC Safety Representatives' Survey puts Stress top of the pile once more

TUC Survey results

November 2000

Stress at work tops safety poll

Stress is the major workplace hazard according to a new TUC survey of 9,000 safety reps. And despite the introduction of the Working Time Directive in October 1998, long working hours are a greater problem than two years ago.

The TUC report, shows stress is the number one concern for two out of three safety reps (66%). It is the main concern across almost all industrial sectors. Heavy workloads are cited as the main cause of stress (74%) followed by cuts in staff (53%). Safety reps say long hours are a more significant cause of stress than two years ago (up to 39% from 28% in 1998). Bullying remains a significant cause of stress at work - mentioned by 30% of the reps who reported stress as a problem. Bullying is more prevalent in the voluntary sector (45%), banking and finance (43%), local (41%) and central government (41%).

The biennial survey asked safety reps to list their top five concerns at work. After stress, back strain is the second concern, reported by 44% of reps. Repetitive Strain Injuries is placed third (41%).

The survey also shows:

- although violence and working alone were a greater problem in small workplaces, health and safety was less

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UK National Work Stress Network newsletter featured on TUC Website

Check out the What's New page

The Autumn 2000 edition of our newsletter was featured on the What's New page of the TUC H&S Website. We hope this will further develop our profile and bring our activities to a wider circle of people.

Remember the dead - Fight for the living

Organising grass-roots events on Workers' Memorial Day, April 28th

Workers Memorial Day takes place every April 28th, an international day of remembrance of workers killed, disabled, injured or made unwell by their work. It highlights the preventable nature of the majority of workplace accidents and ill health and promotes campaigns and union organisation in the fight for improvements in workplace safety. The slogan for the day is Remember the dead - Fight for the living.

Workers Memorial Day originated in Canada in 1985 when the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) arranged events to commemorate those killed, injured or made unwell by their work. CUPE's symbol for the day is a caged canary as used to detect poisonous gas in mines, with the slogan Remember the canary. CUPE says, "Today, CUPE members act as front line protection for their fellow citizens...they have become the canaries." The Canadian government gave official status to the day when it passed the "Act respecting a day of mourning for persons killed or injured in the workplace" on February 1st 1991.

Trade unions in USA, UK, Asia and elsewhere have organised events on this day since 1989. The Scottish TUC adopted Workers Memorial Day in 1993. The TUC formally adopted it in 1999 and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 2000. This is all progress but what is needed most is action to involve all workers in this important event.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions

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UK NATIONAL WORK STRESS NETWORK

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of a concern in small workplaces than large ones.

- It appeared that only 90% of workplaces actually have safety arrangements;
- less than half of employers (47%) have adequate risk assessments. Where risk assessments have been done, less than three out of ten safety reps (26%) are happy with their involvement in drawing them up.
- nearly one in four employers (23%) provide access to rehabilitation for injured workers - but more (30%) use their occupational health service in disciplinary assessments.
- TUC is calling on the Health and Safety Executive to draw up standards for tackling excessive workloads, low staffing levels and long hours, against which management performance can be judged;
- TUC is calling on Health and Safety Commission to give top priority to developing action plans to cut RSI and back strain
- TUC is calling on the Government to legally oblige employers to establish a rehabilitation policy setting out how they will deal with employees injured or made ill at work.
- The TUC is also calling for a new right for victims whose employer has not conducted a sufficient risk assessment at work. The new right would make it easier for victims to win compensation where their employer had not assessed the risks which led to their injury or illness.

TUC General Secretary John Monks said: "Stress at work is a serious problem. But a modern, twenty-four hour economy doesn't have to mean long hours - we should be working better, not longer. Partnership between employers and unions, and respect for people at work, are the keys to creating a healthy workplace.

"The government, which has a major stress problem among its own employees, needs to take the lead in creating a better working environment for its own staff, and creating a better business environment for British workers generally."

Main hazards at work cited by safety reps in 2000:-

- stress or overwork 66%
- back strains 44%
- RSI 41%
- display screen equipment 36%
- working alone 32%

Main causes of workplace stress cited by safety reps in 2000:-

- workloads 74%
- cuts in staff 53%
- change at work 44%
- long hours 39%
- shift work 30%
- bullying 30%



The report also cites regional differences in hazards and causes of workplace stress.

NASUWT Claims Record Stress Compensation For Teacher

NASUWT in December 2000 announced a record payment of £254,362 secured for a woman teacher in compensation for the stress which led directly to her enforced early ill-health retirement.

Nigel de Gruchy, General Secretary of NASUWT (the teachers' union with 186,503 in-service members) said:

"Government and employers had better wake up quickly to the soaring costs of work-related stress. The case of our member, Mrs Janice Howell and the Newport County Borough Council (formerly Gwent C.C.), contains all the classic causes of stress against which the NASUWT has been warning. These include:

- intense pressure from successive governments for schools to retain disruptive and violent youngsters as well as coping with other special needs pupils in mainstream schools;
- lack of suitable alternative educational provision for emotionally disturbed youngsters;
- totally inadequate resources;
- incompetent and uncaring management.

"If work-related stress is not taken more seriously by Government and employers it could become the cancer and chief killer of the 21st Century.

"The case illustrates how intolerable it was to expect Jan Howell to cope with 11 special needs pupils in her mainstream school class with next to no support, having to deal with a seriously disturbed youngster who had previously been expelled from two other schools, with no cover provided for staff off sick and with her persistent calls for help ignored.

"I want to pay tribute to the great personal courage being shown by Jan Howell in facing the world publicly today to highlight the problem and hopefully play a part in preventing other teachers from suffering a similar fate.

HEALTHY TEACHERS FOR HEALTHY SCHOOLS - MORRIS December 2000

Schools Standards Minister, Estelle Morris reinforced her commitment to healthy schools by launching new guidance on health in the workplace for teachers. She said the guide would help to create a more supportive working environment for teachers and reduce the incidence of stress related illness.

The DfEE guidance was commissioned from the Faculty of Occupational Medicine. It will promote a higher standard of occupational health, tailored to the particular needs of

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

UK NATIONAL WORK STRESS NETWORK STEERING GROUP

PLACE NASUWT HILLSCOURT CONFERENCE CENTRE, REDNAL

TIME SATURDAY, 17TH FEBRUARY - 10.00 AM TO 1.00PM

Steering group meets regularly to plan network campaigning work. If you would like to help, please contact us.

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY SAFETY DAY

PLACE VARIOUS

TIME FEBRUARY 27TH 2001

Meeting to support workers in the Construction Industry

REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY (RSI) DAY

PLACE VARIOUS

TIME 28TH FEBRUARY 2001

Contact your local Union branch for information about plans.

ASBESTOS CONFERENCE

PLACE TUC CONGRESS HOUSE

TIME APRIL 23RD 2001 10 A.M.

FREE conference to raise awareness of continuing problems related to asbestos in the workplace.

WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY

PLACE VARIOUS

TIME APRIL 28TH 2001

An opportunity to remember the dead, who have given their lives through illness and accidents in the workplace.

UK HAZARDS CONFERENCE 2001

PLACE UMIST, MANCHESTER

DATE 22ND TO 24TH JUNE 2001

Annual Conference of the Hazards Campaign

EUROPEAN HAZARDS CONFERENCE

PLACE VIENNA

DATE 21ST /23RD SEPTEMBER 2001

The Biennial event, where the Hazards Campaign combines forces with friends from Europe and beyond

EUROPEAN HEALTH & SAFETY WEEK

PLACE VARIOUS

DATE OCTOBER 2001

An opportunity for organisations to focus on safety issues in and out of the workplace.

UK NATIONAL WORK STRESS NETWORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE

PLACE HILLSCOURT CONFERENCE CENTRE, REDNAL

DATE SATURDAY DECEMBER 1ST 2001

The fifth annual conference at which this network publicises its campaign work.

Workers Memorial Day

(ICFTU) estimates that 500 workers are killed at work every day (approx. 200,000 annually) and an estimated 65-165 million contract occupational diseases.

Studies by the HSE have shown that 90% of workplace accidents are preventable and that 70% of these are the result of employers failing to act appropriately to prevent them. Apart from the appalling cost to the families and friends of those damaged by work the HSE estimates the cost of this to the nation as up to £16 billion annually. In reality this financial cost amounts to a subsidy to employers.

What You Can Do

Many activities can be organised locally. Promotional posters are available from the Hazards Campaign and some unions. Purple "Forget me knots" for people to wear are available from Greater Manchester Hazards Centre and UNISON.

Your union may run its own WMD campaign so check with your health and safety department to see if they have promotional materials. Use this factsheet to inform people of the ideas behind WMD

Keep in mind the other part of the slogan, fight for the living, and look at ways of promoting change to prevent repeat occurrences. Remember that WMD is about work and organising for improvements; it is not a religious event.

Some groups have organised a formal minute's silence as a mark of remembrance when all workers stop work, including bus drivers (Canada/USA). Others have organised meetings at lunch time or after work with invited speakers.

Healthy Teachers ... continued from page 2

teachers. The guide, part of the Healthy Schools Programme, in conjunction with the Department of Health and the Health Development Agency.

Ms Morris said: "I am committed to helping schools become healthy working environments. I want to promote good health amongst teachers. We are already using the Healthy Schools Programme and a range of other policies on wider aspects of school management to make a positive impact. More serious problems can often be avoided if appropriate advice is sought at an early stage. This guide will boost existing activities helping to make schools a healthier and happier place to be.

"I expect schools and Education Authorities to take active steps to manage sickness absence. New guidance will help reduce days lost through illness, prevent experienced teachers being lost through ill-health retirement. Occupational health services for teachers are important: professional advice can clarify the difference between illness and issues of competence and capability.

"Previously there has been a huge difference in the extent to which colleges and schools have obtained professional occupational health advice and in the quality of the advice that they have received. Today's guidance will encourage Education Authorities and colleges to access occupational health services providing consistent high quality advice aimed at helping teachers perform to their full potential."

From the Convener's Desk

In January two pieces of reporting, one in The Guardian, the other in The Observer, demonstrated the problem facing all workers in the field trying to reduce workplace stress. The piece in The Guardian was based on the ideas put forward by Dr Rob Briner, Jo Rich and others that *"stress is used to describe any negative emotion felt at work"* and that *"stress is normal and not necessarily wrong."* Both views permit managers to trivialise and ignore this very serious and growing workplace issue. It seems to me that they are trying to create an academic definition of stress which is neat and which satisfies those keen to set up sophisticated research projects.

Those of us starting from the workplace and not the study know all too well the number of workers who are ill and unable to work. Trades Union based research starts from this point by asking not "What is it?" but "Why is it?"

Reports from the workplace indicate common causes seen as creating stress in workers. This pragmatic, or 'rough and ready' approach may offend some academic niceties but it does seem to offer ways of tackling the problem. It allows the issue to be seen from all strata of the workplace for even high level managers are known to suffer stress. The drawback is that it does require an acceptance of shared interest and responsibility of the health, safety and welfare of all, and a rejection of the "if you cannot take the heat, step out of the kitchen" style of management.

The Observer piece does indicate that this pragmatic approach and attitude does work in reducing absence, improving health and raising morale. Quoted in the article was a statement from Chevron Europe, a petroleum company, that for every dollar invested in the field of stress reduction they got a return of between \$6 and \$10. I would hope evidence of this level of benefit would encourage employers for financial motives, even if they could not recognise the caring humanitarian benefits. Perhaps I am too convinced a socialist and it clouds my judgement and I confuse the duty of being a good employer with the duty of shareholders.

Our Conference last October produced evidence of a range of agencies available to help management find constructive solutions to problems. The establishment of a free-standing self-referring occupational health service has demonstrated its effectiveness. There are also many good examples of anti-harassment or Dignity at Work policies in use up and down the nation. Several employers set up confidential counseling services and are showing good returns on their commitment. We have seen a growing number of health and well-being policies helping to encourage healthy attitudes to the workplace.

All of these are to be applauded but until every workplace is prepared to look into its own working practices and attitudes using the techniques of risk assessment to establish causes and severity of problems, accepts the findings and then moves to take action to eliminate the stressors then the workplace problem will not go away. This is why we call upon workers and employers to adopt this open-minded and pragmatic approach to improve the lot of the workforce. This done, then will be the time to argue over the proper definition of stress and give a name to the monster we have just eradicated.

Brian Robinson

February 2001

How can you help the Network?

We continue to work with a very small Steering Group which meets perhaps three or four times in the year, and usually at **NASUWT** Hillscourt Centre, Rednal near Birmingham. (Junction 1 M42)

We are looking for help from anyone who can spare the time to join us.

If you are interested, then do please let us know. We will be more than happy to welcome you to join the work we do in campaigning, organising workshops and planning and running our national Conference.

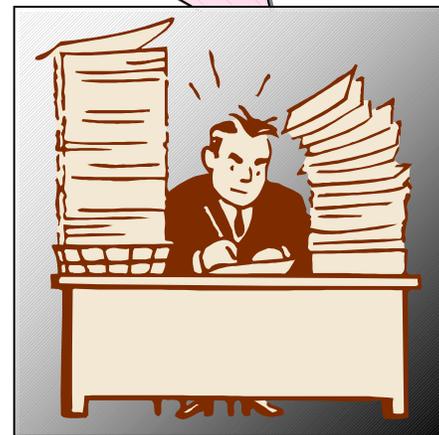
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SAFETY INFORMATION CENTRES HELP WITH PRACTICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY SOLUTIONS FOR SMALL FIRMS

The Health and Safety Executive has published research confirming that small businesses and their employees have benefited from the assistance provided by the voluntary-based Safety Information Centres (SICs).

The HSE- funded research project examined the operation of two SICs in North West England to determine whether this type of intervention was useful in improving small businesses health and safety management systems.

SICs give voluntary assistance to small firms on how to efficiently manage health and safety in the workplace. The Centres are run by groups affiliated with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and use a number of methods to assist local businesses including holding local forums, networking, and coordinating partnerships between employers, educational establishments, local authorities, health and safety inspectorates and trade unions.

The findings show evidence that small firms were often motivated to make proper health and safety arrangements, but they needed practical help with preparing a policy statement and carrying out risk assessments.

STRESS OF WORKING FROM HOME MAY BE BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH

*British Psychological Society Conference
December 2000*

Working from home exposes employees to higher levels of stress and emotional difficulty than their colleagues in the office, a study has found.

Research among journalists has revealed that far from offering a panacea of extra free time to be spent with family and friends, so-called "teleworking" often results in isolation and increased working hours.

The conference was told that reliance on technology such as computers, faxes and the internet increased working pressures, along with a lack of understanding from their bosses at company headquarters.

Even when they fall ill, home workers feel obliged to work on because their office-based colleagues see them as shirking responsibilities, according to the report by university researchers in Lancaster and Manchester.

The findings will come as a blow to ministers after the Government published a report last month urging employers to encourage staff to undertake flexible working, including working from home.

In the last two years, teleworking has boomed in Britain with 250,000 people opting to work from home in the last 12 months alone.

Dr Sandi Mann, of the University of Central Lancashire, who carried out the study with colleagues at University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, said: "Many who embrace teleworking do so in the belief that the reduction in commuting time, more flexible lifestyle and freedom from office interruptions will produce a healthier working environment. Our work shows this might not be the case. People who work from home feel isolated. They miss out on the emotional support and camaraderie you get at the office. They also experience a lot of guilt."

The report, based on the responses of 74 journalists on a broadsheet and tabloid newspaper split evenly between office-based and home-working, found a series of ill affecting teleworkers.

They were more likely to experience negative emotions of loneliness, irritability, resentment and frustration, as well as mental problems e.g. loss of concentration, insomnia and anxiety.

SKIPPED MEALS HEALTH RISK

Many people skip meals because the frantic pace of modern life means they are too busy to eat, a survey has found.

Experts warn that this could put people's health at risk. The research, by the supermarket chain Sainsbury, found that nearly 70% of people regularly miss at least one meal a day. For more than a third of these people the missing meal is breakfast. Six out of ten people surveyed said they were simply too busy to stop to eat. Young people were most likely to miss out - 87% of 16 to 24-year-olds said they skipped at least one meal a day.

Growing concern

Gill Fine, a nutritionist for Sainsbury, said: "The nation's habit of skipping meals, within the younger generation, is becoming a growing concern. By skipping a meal, we may be more open to temptation because we are hungry. Self-control can go out of the window so those high fat or sugary snacks become even more appealing.

"Establishing a healthy eating and fitness regime at a young age offers long term health benefits." Colette Kelly, a nutrition scientist for the British Nutrition Foundation, said eating breakfast was particularly important.

"The body needs glucose first thing in the morning after fasting through the night, particularly the brain which needs it to concentrate. There are studies which show that a child that has eaten breakfast performs better throughout the day at school than a child that has not." Ms Kelly said it was best to eat little and often, and to have a varied diet.

The survey, which covered 1,000 people of both sexes across the UK, also found that only a quarter ate the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Middle-aged and older people ate more fruit and vegetables than the younger generations. Only 13% of those questioned took exercise three times a week, as recommended by health experts, while 18% took no exercise at all.

Binmen cleaned out by stress of the job

December 2000

City boardrooms are often quoted when it comes to stress, but it is the council binman who has it tough, as a study in Bradford, West Yorkshire, has shown. The city launched an £85,000 stress action plan two years ago after research by Sheffield University found that 40 per cent of its workers were stressed.

Each member of the cleansing team was forced to take an average of 13.4 days' sick leave in the last financial year, the highest of any department, according to a report compiled for the council's environment scrutiny committee.

The figure compares to an average of 10.5 days' absence for the whole council and 11.6 days for all manual workers.

Cleaners complained that they were expected to make decisions on their own and told of inequalities in sex, race and status that affected opportunities, training and morale.

Terry Patten, branch secretary of the TGWU, said: "There is a lot of stress, a lot of it caused by job insecurity. There is pressure from city hall and people wanting new working practices."

Managers insist they are trying to counter the problem and say absentee levels have fallen. Frequent absentees can now get advice or counselling.

But the cleaners are not convinced.

One said: "I felt tired all the time and wasn't sleeping at night because I was worrying. The management was always changing the system and promising the public things we couldn't do. We were being blamed on all sides."

IPMS wins big settlement for stress victim

Nine years after medical retirement from UK Atomic Energy Authority at Dounreay an IPMS member has been awarded a six-figure sum in compensation for the stress suffered at work.

The settlement was agreed on the steps of the Court of Session in Edinburgh on the day when a hearing into his case was due to start. The member, was employed during a time of great change in the industry when large numbers of voluntary redundancies left fewer staff to continue with essential work.

Assisted by IPMS, the member made a claim for injury benefit under the UKAEA pension scheme and claimed damages for personal injury. The case involved difficult medical and legal issues but the legal action was eventually settled following prolonged negotiations. As a condition of the settlement the member discontinued his injury benefit claim.

IPMS negotiator John Billard said: "I would like to pay tribute to all the hard work put in by our solicitors in Scotland. In the end it was the good teamwork between our lawyers and negotiators that gave us victory in a long drawn out campaign.

"At last our member can start to put the past behind him and enjoy his retirement."

Identifying the accident prone

Is dangerous driving linked to personality? Your personality could determine how likely you are to be involved in an accident, say researchers. Certain personality features may make one person more accident-prone than another.

And they may be the crucial factor behind up to a quarter of all mishaps. The researchers say this could make it possible to screen people applying for potentially risky jobs such as train drivers and air traffic controllers.

A team from the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology identified three key personality traits:

- Dependability - the tendency to be conscientious and socially responsible
- Agreeableness - the tendency not to be aggressive or self-centred
- Openness - the tendency to learn from experience and to be open to suggestion from others

People whose personality featured low levels of the first two traits are more likely to be involved in accidents. However, high levels of openness are also associated with an increased risk.

Professor Ivan Robertson said people with low levels of agreeableness tended to be highly competitive and less likely to comply with instructions. People with high levels of openness tended to be somewhat dreamy, and to let their imagination get the better of them.

He said: "The results we have got certainly would be helpful if they were used in a selection setting. While somebody should not be excluded on the results of these tests alone, I would be happy to defend their use as part of the overall selection process.

"It could be very foolish and dangerous to appoint somebody with all the wrong personality characteristics to a job in a potentially dangerous environment."

Linking personality to accidents has proved to be difficult to evaluate in the past, because of the many different methods used by researchers to collate their data.

However, the Manchester team got round this by using a technique that standardised their findings. A spokeswoman for ROSPA said: "We do not accept that certain people are accident prone, although we do believe that certain factors at different times of life will make a person more likely to have an accident.

People need to be educated to help create an accident free environment.

"If you start to label certain personality types as accident-prone then there is a danger that some people will start to blame their personalities, rather than accepting responsibility for their actions."



February 2001

STUDY PROVIDES BASIS FOR WORK-RELATED STRESS CAMPAIGN SAYS HSE

A research report which should help assess the true impact of its three year publicity drive on work-related stress has been published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The report, Baseline measurements for the evaluation of the work-related stress campaign, is based on research carried out at the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) by a team led by Dr Adele Pilkington.

The key findings of the research were:

- 79% of respondents said that stress should be controlled in the same way as other workplace health and safety issues;
- 40% of respondents said that their organisation had taken steps to reduce work-related stress;
- Based on the follow up interviews about 35% of respondents said that their organisation used some sort of primary level intervention to tackle work-related stress;
- 42% of respondents said that their organisation was unaware of any resources to help them tackle work-related stress.

The results were based on a telephone survey across a random selection of small, medium and large organisations, using a specially constructed computer based questionnaire, devised by the IOM team. Follow up telephone interviews were undertaken with a sample of those organisations who had implemented or evaluated specific initiatives to tackle work related stress.

HSE expects to see significant improvements in these indicators, which will be revisited at the end of the campaign. The drive started on National Stress Awareness Day (1 November 2000) and is part of the Health and Safety Commission's wider strategy on this issue. The next phase of the drive will be the publication of a comprehensive set of guides to help organisations tackle what is now recognised as one of the largest causes of occupational ill health. These guides will provide practical advice to organisations on how they can go about tackling the problem.

Elizabeth Gyngell, senior policy manager in HSE's Health Directorate, said: "This study is very useful. It tells us that organisations need help to tackle work-related stress. We intend to provide that help, but we recognise that publicity alone will not reduce the number of people being made ill. What's needed is firm commitment from senior managers to do something about it."

Copies of Baseline measurements for the evaluation of the work-related stress campaign, ref. CRR322, ISBN 0 7176 1941 9, price £15.00, can be ordered online at <http://www.hsebooks.co.uk>

risks

the TUC health and safety e-zine

A new service from the TUC - an electronic magazine with direct links to events, news, conferences, specialist topics such as Stress, available FREE by email.

If you would like to receive the e-zine, please contact iandraper@nasuwt.net and I will forward your email address to the relevant department

For General Health & Safety information from TUC log on to:- www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index

NEW REPORT CRITICISES WORKPLACES FOR CAUSING MENTAL ILLNESS

From Online Recruitment

Trends in job design intended to improve productivity and efficiency could cause widespread mental health problems among UK employees, says a new report on work-related stress from UK NGO **The Industrial Society**.

"**New work, new stress**", to be launched in the UK shortly, says that badly designed jobs which are repetitive and demanding, with low job control - e.g. in many call centres - are bad for employees' mental health. Pat McGuinness, author of the report, argues that current thinking on tackling workplace stress puts employers in a no-win situation. "Guidance on job design is key, but policy makers also need to rethink definitions and approaches to stress to take into account the wide range of risks at play in today's workplaces.

"Conventional ways of identifying and approaching stress are based on those for physical risk, but the differences between physical and psychosocial hazard, harm and risk are so great that they make a parallel approach unworkable. Employer initiatives that tackle stress in the same way as other occupational health issues will inevitably fail. This puts employers in a very difficult position when it comes to devising preventative strategies," says McGuinness.

The report is critical of popular employer initiatives such as counselling or employee assistance programmes, lifestyle campaigns and stress management programmes. What these responses, rare as they still are, have in common is their emphasis on individual responsibility for controlling stress-related illness. Stress audits, which are increasingly common in the UK, are often too subjective to be of any real use. Companies should consider the impact of organisational change, train managers to spot signs of serious job strain and deteriorating mental health before they become a problem, and encourage workplace cultures which don't see stress as a sign of weakness. Post your work stress comments on iClinic's <http://www.wozainternet.co.za/chat/iclinic/mental.htm>

Source: Online Recruitment, UK

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