

Clear evidence of Stress on the increase

Britain's workplaces are becoming increasingly stressful and few managers are accepting responsibility for the problem.

A report, commissioned by the UK's biggest private sector union, AMICUS, was released at the start of a TUC campaign to combat stress and bullying.

The survey of 2,000 union health and safety representatives from across the economy found half believed stress was a bigger problem than five years ago, and a similar number said it had got worse in the last 12 months.

Employers need to look closely at the hours their staff are working and how their work and home lives are balanced Roger Lyons, AMICUS said. Three out of four of the officials it surveyed had raised stress-related issues with their employers, but only one in three firms accepted responsibility of tackling the problem.

Most employers would rather deal with the symptoms than the causes, with few offering to reduce hours or introduce flexible working.

Joint general secretary of AMICUS, Roger Lyons said: "Stress needs to be dealt with by looking for the causes and not by simply patching up the injured soldiers of the workplace.

"Employers need to look closely at the hours their staff are working and how their work and home lives are balanced."

The union urged firms to start tackling stress by cutting down on long hours and bullying rather than looking at "quick fix" solutions such as stress management courses.

TUC General secretary John Monks said the condition was so serious that it could lead to mental and physical illnesses.

UNISON also launched a new guide giving advice to workers and managers on how to prevent stress, to European Health and Safety Week.

The union's head of health and safety Hugh Robertson, said it was in the interests of workers and employers to eliminate stress, which is now the biggest cause of workplace absence.



A time for Peace?

The festivities have drawn to a close. The stresses of extended holidays and family pressures are released by a return to work. Now we can think back over recent weeks and consider how our lives are touched by commercialism, excess and all that goes with the Christmas Holidays.

It is a well known fact that at such time as these, stress levels rise rapidly. Daily routines are changed, children's expectation are higher than usual and the once-easy road or rail journey isn't as it always was.

Airport queues are long and slow. Supermarkets are filled with grabbing hands, and thrusting trolleys. Parking slots are well-hidden. Shopping lists are endless. TV churns out the usual oldies, and new trivia. And drink ?

So we call it a restful holiday season – for those who are lucky enough to get a break.

For all and especially where work goes on, the STRESS NEVER ends!

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Boss fined after driver is killed in car crash

A DELIVERY firm owner has been fined £2500 after a 19-year-old driver who worked up to 16 hours a day was killed in a car crash. It is believed Gary Couser fell asleep at the wheel and died when his car hit a pile of stones in West Lothian.

Employer, Una Johnston, was fined after she admitted failing to ensure the health and safety of her employee. Linlithgow Sheriff Court heard that Mr Couser turned up early and worked late at his new job at Glenhire, Markinch, Fife.

Depute fiscal Fiona Macdonald told the court the teenager's family complained after he died about the hours he had been working, making deliveries all over Britain, and experts were sent in to examine his time sheets. During the six weeks before he died, he twice worked 16-and-a-half hours, three times 15 hours, and once 14-and-a-half hours.

Mr and Mrs Johnston were originally charged with failing to ensure the safety of Mr Couser by allowing him to work such long hours that he fell asleep behind the wheel from exhaustion and died in the crash in October 2000.

Mrs Johnston pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of allowing Mr Couser, to drive excessive hours without appropriate rest periods. Mr Couser was the only one of the firm's 12 drivers whose vehicle was not fitted with a tachograph to record driving hours.

Cupid's Arrows?

More British companies are drawing up formal codes of conduct for employees whose work interests spill over into a sexual relationship.

The proportion of firms who have written guidelines for office romances has more than doubled in the last two years.



Ten per cent of companies now expect enamoured co-workers to declare their relationship if their private and professional lives could lead to a "real or perceived" conflict of interest.

Long Hours culture

Britain's long work hours culture means an estimated 30 per cent of people will meet their life partner at work. The consequent growth in office romances has led human resource managers to formalise flirting, in a bid to minimise reprisals against employers if an relationship ends.

Some 28 per cent of employers are considering bringing in formal guidelines.

IRS Employment review, said: "If dealt with appropriately and conducted sensibly, workplace romances should not present any problem to employers. But get it wrong, and the consequences can be far reaching - potential claims for sexual harassment, charges of favouritism, decreased productivity and fear of reprisal or retaliation."

The result is increasing boardroom twitchiness about how to balance the privacy of workers and an employer's need to ensure a sexual

"love contracts?"

relationship does not lead to unfair pay rises or promotions. While most companies (40 per cent) still prefer to solve any potential difficulties by an "informal chat" with the people involved, 10 per cent said they would seek to generate a workplace culture which would make office romances unacceptable.

None had introduced so-called "love contracts", a device now commonplace in America under which an office couple undertake not to sue their employer for sexual harassment should the relationship end.

But at least one UK company made it clear that all office relationships were to be declared, saying: "Any employee who is working with a person with whom they have a personal relationship should inform personnel managers."

Other employers believed office romances can only be disruptive. Speaking anonymously, one said: "We have a large number of workplace relationships, and I believe they undermine core issues such as productivity, teamwork and motivation."

Experts said that far from causing disruption, relationships between people sharing the same work experiences could help to combat stress and provide support.

**Stress Conference 2003
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A spokesman for Liberty, the human rights group, said: "Companies have a right to protect themselves against extreme behaviour such as people getting pay rises for sexual favours. But it is wrong to impose reporting requirements on people just because they work for the same company. Any healthy, normal office will have a reasonable proportion of office romances."

Professor Cary Cooper, an occupational psychologist at UMIST in Manchester, said when a relationship developed between a boss and a subordinate it was fair for companies to move one of the couple to a different department. But he said employers had to be careful. "I think UK employers would be wise to draw a line beyond which they do not pry into their employees' private lives."

"Flexible" retirement age?

Compulsory retirement at 65 is to be scrapped because of the growing pensions crisis.

Andrew Smith, the Minister of Work and Pensions, said he wanted to see a more "flexible" retirement age.

About 50% of UK workers are simply not saving enough for the number of years they could now expect to be retired. "As we all want a decent standard of living in retirement then it follows that we either have to save more or work longer or some mixture of both."



Green Paper on pensions.

More and more people would like to move gradually into retirement. This could allow people to draw a pension but continue to work part-time for the same firm, for example. Mr Smith added "We've got to get away from the idea of retirement as a cliff-edge, where on Friday you're a valued member of the workforce, but on Monday you're shuffled off to retirement and that's it."

Not radical

Mr Smith is not expected to announce a radical reform to the state pension structure, such as

getting rid of the state second pension or raising the basic state retirement age. We either have to save more or work longer or some mixture of both.

He is also not expected to make it compulsory for either individuals or employers to contribute to a pension, describing private pensions as a "voluntary partnership" between the state, individuals and employers. This would come as a relief to the CBI which has warned that compulsory pension contributions could cost UK businesses £29 billion each year and lead to job cuts.

But it would disappoint trade unions who were in favour of such a scheme. The Green Paper is also expected to propose measures to reduce the red tape and regulation faced by companies offering occupational schemes.

High expectations

The formation of a new pensions watchdog with the aim of restoring trust in the pensions industry is also expected to be proposed. If the Green Paper gets high marks just for presentation and low marks for action, it will have failed.

The Green Paper is likely to disappoint various groups which had been hoping for a more radical response to the UK's pensions crisis. Mary Francis, director general of the Association of British Insurers, said: "The government has the chance to improve the pensions landscape and make a real difference. "But if the Green Paper gets just high marks for presentation and low marks for action, it will have failed. It is vital that the government gets this right."

Shop workers are very vulnerable

Nearly half of shop workers have taken time off because of violence, reveals USDAW – the Shopworkers union - claiming thousands of its members live in daily fear of physical attack and verbal abuse by customers. Verbal abuse is a daily event in more than a third of stores, most commonly when young people are refused alcohol. The threat of physical violence is just as strong.

'Shocking'

On average, at least one shop worker is attacked every hour of the working day. Mr Maxwell-Clarke was killed while working, and nearly half of staff surveyed had taken time off because of violence.

USDAW's John Hannett said the extent of violence against shop workers was "shocking". The union says managers play a crucial role in dealing with the problem, and should be trained to reduce risks at work, deal with dangerous situations and support staff after an attack. USDAW is campaigning for adequate staffing levels, extra security at opening and closing times, closed circuit television and well lit car parks.

Armed Raid

In December last year, Carlton Maxwell-Clarke, 36, died at JJB Sports in Beckton, East London, in an armed raid. And in September, a shop worker in Liverpool was shot in the leg. Figures released earlier this year by the British Retail Consortium (BRC), suggested there was a sharp increase in the number of violent attacks on shopworkers in Great Britain in 2001. Incidents included armed robberies, kidnap, CS gas attacks, pistol whipping, and the use of knives, iron bars and sledge hammers.

The figures claimed that on average seven out of every 1,000 staff were subject to physical violence. With around 2.7 million people employed in this sector, this means more than 19,250 shopworkers were attacked in 2001. The government has tried to address the issue with grants to fund security measures - in the summer, shops in Wales received £380,971.

Working Time Regulations

The DTI today launched a consultation on draft regulations to extend the provisions of the Working Time Regulations to around 770,000

workers in previously excluded sectors:

- non-mobile workers in road, sea, and inland waterways transport and sea fishing;
- junior doctors;
- workers in aviation not covered by the Aviation Directive and;
- workers in the rail and offshore sectors.

The Working Time Regulations provide for:

- an average 48-hour working week;
- four weeks' paid annual holiday;
- 1 day's rest in 7 (or 2 in a fortnight);
- 11 hours' rest between working days;
- a 20-minute rest break if the working day exceeds 6 hours;
- health assessments for night workers;
- an 8-hour limit on night working.

Employment Minister, Alan Johnson, said:

"We want to extend protection to more workers but also want to ensure their employers can cope with the changes. This consultation is not about whether we extend this protection but exactly how we do it."

The public consultation on the draft amending regulations will close by 31st January 2003.

No Dad's Army?

Out-of-date attitudes do not help modern fathers

Ignorance among senior executives of changing parental roles is having a major impact on family life in the UK. According to the Work Foundation, senior managers fail to understand the needs of parents and, in particular, men.

This is because when they had children themselves, they were supported by "stay-at-home" wives. The report, called "Dad's Army", says the attitudes of these "Dinosaur Dads" pervades workplace culture and is having a harmful effect on family life. Paternity leave is a great start but does not constitute a 'father-friendly' approach to work.

This is the "new and important divide" in the workplace. Men say they are concerned that they will be discriminated against if they highlight their childcare responsibilities. They will often cover up their responsibilities by parenting by "stealth" or covering up with excuses. They do not want to appear uncommitted or less masculine in front of their colleagues.

Changing roles

According to a recent survey, 59% of mothers with pre-school children are either married or cohabit, and also hold down a job. This has forced men to make changes at home, and take on board more domestic tasks to care for the

children. But, "these new responsibilities have not yet registered on the corporate radar".

Paternity leave

Only 65% of firms offer paternity leave and it is often not taken up by men due to the fear of discrimination for wanting time off for childcare reasons.

From 6 April 2003 employers will have a legal duty to consider requests for flexible working from employees who are parents of young children.

Fathers will also have the right to two weeks' paid paternity leave within eight weeks of the child's birth, paid at the same rate as standard maternity pay.

Happier at work

The Work Foundation said being father-friendly had corporate advantages. Research has shown that dads able to spend more time with their children were happier at work. Involved fathers were also more likely to have the 'emotional intelligence' considered essential for modern management. But it was not just the responsibility of senior managers to encourage fathers.

"Men's lack of participation to date in companies' work-family programmes perpetuates an environment where both men and women unwittingly allow childcare to become sidelined as a mothers-only issue, rather than a parenting one," said Richard Reeves, author of the report.

Bullying evidence

25% of all employees claim to have been bullied at work in the past year. One in twelve of 3,500 employees surveyed, said that they were victims of regular bullying in the work-place.

Many middle and senior managers said they felt victimised by more senior colleagues, the survey, by Mercer Human Resources Consulting, found. Workers in the public healthcare sector were the most at risk.

Physical abuse



"Paternity leave is a great start but does not in itself constitute a 'father-friendly' approach to work."

At-work bullying ranged from rude discourteous treatment, threats to physical abuse.

Employees had clear views as to what was acceptable behaviour by managers and colleagues and what constituted bullying.

Dr Patrick Gilbert, head of research at Mercer Personnel, said that if these findings were applied to the UK workforce then "over 1.5m workers could be the victims of repeated bullying at work".

Tough at the top?

24% of middle managers and 17% of senior managers reported bullying at least once in the past year. Mr Gilbert said: "The high rate of bullying amongst managers is a particular area of concern.

"If managers are the victims of bullying, they are more likely to bully the people they manage."

By sector, public healthcare proved a bullying breeding ground, with 28% of employees claiming they had been harassed at least once in the last year.

Store workers were happiest, with less than one in five falling victim to bullying.

Indiscipline and violence in schools?

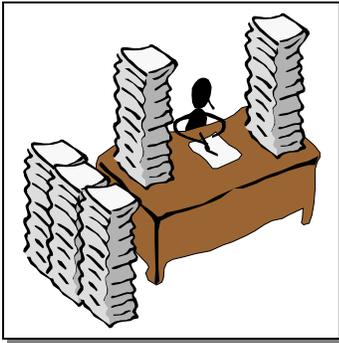
Among the worst incidents encountered by a news reporter recently in a London School were:

- Being threatened with rape. As a group of 16 year old boys blocked my path one said: "After school Miss, this afternoon, you get raped."
- Being thrown across a desk as I tried to stop a violent struggle in class.
- Being regularly sworn at by pupils.
- Being unfairly accused of racism.

Rapid changes in teaching staff mean that pupils become increasingly unruly and difficult to control. This makes life difficult for remaining staff who are worn down by these problems.

Chris Keates, Deputy GS of NASUWT teaching union, was appalled by the revelations. "Teachers tell us there are three things they find difficult about the job; pay, workload and pupil indiscipline. But it is pupil indiscipline they usually mention first and that is what does most to prevent graduates coming into the profession."

UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK 7TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE



Taking Stock – Moving Forward

Saturday April 12th, 2003

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Hillscourt Conference Centre,

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- PROGRAMME -

Keynote Speakers (details still to be finalised and agreed)

- HSC Commissioner –Abdul Chowdry invited
- Lawyer from a high profile Stress Case
- UKWSN Speaker – the Network Case
- Question and answer session

Workshop Sessions

- Low Pay, Debt and Stress – facilitated by Network and Low Pay Unit speaker
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Booking Form

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Please reserve place(s) for (Please Insert Names)

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

Name(s)	Address & postcode	Email/Tel No	Special Dietary needs?
1			
2			
B&B Requirements Friday 11 th & Sat 12 th April as required – Rooms for persons with disabilities available. <i>All bedrooms are non-smoking.</i>	Reservations needed:- Single Double Special needs?	Trades Union or Organisation:-	
		Cost £32.50 single; £50.00 Double/Twin How many nights?	

Payment enclosed:-

Delegate Fees @ £50.00 or @ £10.00 = £..... ADD **B&B** @ £32.50/£50.00

Total £..... Bank & Cheque Number

Booking Confirmation & Receipt will be provided.

Please complete and return this form with your payment (cheques payable to NASUWT please) to:-
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