



WINTER 2006 EDITION INCLUDING CONFERENCE 2005 REPORT

Ensuring a Life-Work Balance



Hillscourt Conference Centre facilities at Rednal were kindly provided once again by NASUWT on 19th November last to facilitate what turned out to be a highly successful day for the 50 or so delegates who gathered together to explore various aspects of Life-Work balance. We are grateful to NASUWT for their support of our activities.

Chaired by **Hilda Palmer** of Greater Manchester Hazards Centre and the National Hazards Campaign, the morning session was devoted to presentations from four speakers

followed by a question and answer session.

The afternoon saw delegates participating in the three workshop sessions, which explored key aspects of the focus for the day.

The opening session commenced with a short cartoon on workplace stress produced by Leeds Animations, and was welcomed as a useful potential training tool. Following this ice-breaker, **Patrick Nash**, Chief Executive of Teacher Support Network outlined the work of his organisation in supporting teachers, schools and employing authorities.



Naomi Brent explained from her wide experiences the impact on a wide range of workers how working hours, expectations and demands on workers affected stress and health levels. She quoted a range of specific cases where groups of workers had need of proper consideration of their work-life balance by their employers.

The Working Time Directive was addressed by **Paul Sellars** of TUC, and he outlined the current position on the Directive as well as examining how it was expected that changes would be implemented.

To conclude the morning session, **Ian Draper** outlined the Network position on Work-Life Balance, spoke of the range of responsibilities that employers have under Safety Laws and highlighted how applications under the Flexible Working Directive can be made and how they can alleviate the needs that caring and other responsibilities place on some employees and conflict with their abilities to be a full-time worker.

Three afternoon workshop sessions proved to be very popular. Our thanks go to facilitators and participants for their success.

More detailed reports including presentations and workshop outcomes are published at <http://workstress.net/downloads.htm>.

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Network News – from the Convener’s desk

Happy New Year – I hope that 2006 brings you a less stressful time together with greater employer awareness of their duty of care and positive action to relieve the pressures that so many feel in their workplaces.



I am pleased to report in this edition and on the website on last year’s successful conference and to advise that plans for 2006 Conference on **Saturday November 18th** are well in hand. Please book it in your diary **NOW!**

As usual we will be involved with the National hazards Conference in Manchester in July and hope to see many of you there again.

We have now completed a major revision of our information pack, which is about to go live on the website and will be available in Adobe Acrobat .pdf format too. We also intend to publish a new edition of our very popular and successful booklet.

Tim Field

We have heard with sadness of the recent passing of Tim Field, a friend and colleague of the Stress Network. Tim suffered serious workplace Bullying and as a result was determined to eradicate this unacceptable practice. His work both in campaigning against workplace bullying, and supporting those in need of advice and guidance was unstinting.

Author of a number of publications, creator of the Bullying Helpline and website at www.successunlimited, Tim became well known on the conference platform circuits and indeed addressed an early Stress Network Conference.

We extend our sincerest condolences to his family and friends.

Ian Draper,

Network Convener, January 2006

Stress-proofing your life?

A copy of Elizabeth Wilson’s “**Stress proof your life** - 52 brilliant ideas for taking control” (Published by Infinite Ideas www.infideas.com ISBN 1-904902060-X) has been passed to me for review.

This practical volume includes a range of suggested strategies for coping with stress in our lives. Each chapter has a range of ‘brilliant ideas’ designed to give the reader opportunity to develop strategies for self-support.

Whilst not directly addressing the true causes of workplace and other stress and its related illnesses, this book is certainly well written, thought provoking and attractively presented as an inspiring opportunity to redirect all those negative vibes which leave us feeling down.

Dealing with topics such as ‘Zones of your Own’, [avoiding] ‘the Perfection Trap’, Exercising and eating the ‘Stress-free way’, ‘Crisis Management’ and many other coping strategies, each chapter has a lively and eye-catching presentation of useful ideas.

It is worthy of inclusion on any bookshelf, in conjunction with the real tools for dealing with and preventing the unwanted causes of stress in the workplace.

... stabbed in the arm with corn sticks by her colleagues. Workers also sprayed deodorant on her uniform, held a cigarette lighter against her ...

KFC worker 'died after bullying'

A teenage girl, Hannah Kirkham, suffered from severe depression and died of a drug overdose following a campaign of "severe bullying" by her colleagues at Kentucky Fried Chicken, an inquest has heard.

The hearing was told Hannah Kirkham, 18, from Baguley, Manchester, was attacked and humiliated. After she left her job she suffered hallucinations and could not even watch KFC adverts on television.

Her mother Marie found her collapsed on the bedroom floor on 17 December 2003. She died in hospital nine days later.

Rochdale coroner Simon Nelson, sitting at Oldham Magistrates' Court, was told Hannah was stabbed in the arm with corn sticks by her colleagues. Workers also

sprayed deodorant on her uniform, held a cigarette lighter against her and drew on her face and body with a marker pen.

Abusive names

During shifts at the Northenden branch of the fast food outlet, her fellow employees called her a "fat, spotty bitch" and one of the bullies said: "You dirty, ugly slag - who would want to rape you?"

After she left the job she began to self-harm. When she plucked up the courage to tell her employers about the abuse, after she had left, they told her to try to sort it out for herself and, if that failed, to put the grievances in writing.

Mrs Kirkham told the inquest: "She was a beautiful, talented and caring young lady, who shone in lots of areas, particularly arts and dance."

Insp Mark Wildigg, of Greater Manchester Police, said an investigation into the events leading up to Hannah's death had not found enough evidence to bring charges.

Fund studies

Hannah started a part-time job at KFC to help fund her way through college in Stockport. She left the job in March 2002, but returned to the branch later that year to fund her studies.

In a statement, KFC said Hannah's death was a "tragedy" and it had since set up a confidential employee hotline.

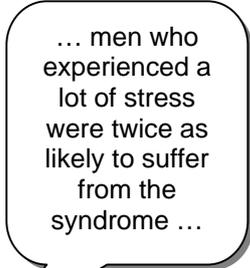
The employees who committed these heinous acts against Hannah have since left KFC.

Workplace stress link to higher heart risk

A STRESSFUL professional life heightens the chances of developing heart disease and diabetes, according to a long-term study of civil servants.

Research into work stress and the "metabolic syndrome" — which includes factors such as obesity, hypertension and high cholesterol — has found evidence of a direct link between stress exposure and ill-health.

The 14-year study of more than 10,000 civil servants, aged between 35 and 55 when



... men who experienced a lot of stress were twice as likely to suffer from the syndrome ...

the research began, showed that men who experienced a lot of stress were twice as likely to suffer from the syndrome as those not exposed to stress. A smaller study of female workers suggested that high stress carried five times the risk.

Scientists from University College London carried out tests on the participants on four occasions between 1985 and 1999, including an analysis of components of the metabolic syndrome. Social position and patterns of behaviour that might affect health, such as smoking, heavy alcohol consumption and lack of exercise, were also recorded.

The research, published in the "British Medical Journal" showed a "dose-response" relationship between job stress and the metabolic syndrome: the more stress that a person experienced, the higher his chances of suffering syndrome symptoms leading to heart disease and type 2 diabetes. The trend held even after adjusting for other risk factors.

Those from lower employment grades were more likely than those above them to have the syndrome, confirming the established trend that obesity, high blood pressure and other factors linked to heart disease and late-onset diabetes are linked to social status.

Overall, fewer women were found to experience chronic stress at work. The association between the metabolic syndrome and exposure to health-damaging behaviour was stronger among men than women.

A diet without fruit and vegetables, smoking, heavy alcohol consumption and physical inactivity were all associated with higher odds of the syndrome.

Known as the Whitehall study, the research was based on tests on civil servants from 20 London departments. The authors, led by Tarani Chandola, of UCL's Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, said that, though the study had some limitations, a clear link had been found.

"A dose-response association exists between exposure to work stress and the metabolic syndrome," they conclude. "Employees with chronic work stress have

more than double the odds of the syndrome than those without work stress, after other risk factors are taken into account.

"The study provides evidence for the biological plausibility of psychosocial stress mechanisms linking stressors from everyday life with heart disease."

One possible explanation is that prolonged exposure to work stress may affect the nervous system, they said. Alternatively, chronic stress may reduce biological resilience and thus disturb the body's physiological balance.

For more information check out:

<http://www.bmj.com>.

Claimants encouraged to 'try work'

A scheme allowing incapacity benefit claimants to try their hand at a job without putting payouts at risk will be hailed as an example of how the system can be reformed. Work and Pensions Secretary John Hutton is visiting Derby where supermarket giant Tesco has signed up to a programme aimed at encouraging people off state support and back to work.

Mr Hutton is preparing to unveil a controversial package of reforms to the incapacity benefit (IB) system and has warned claimants they cannot expect something for nothing.

Tony Blair in his third term agenda is desperate to get a million people who want to work back into jobs - helping slash the £12 billion annual bill for the benefit.

Claimants will now have the chance to get a week's taste of work at Tesco and then benefit from follow up training and support to help them return to the job market.

Some will get guaranteed interviews for permanent jobs with Tesco when they arise.

Through Jobcentre Plus claimants have been helped back to work through the Pathways programme. Pathways to Work is being piloted in 11 areas and by October will cover a third of all IB claimants.

Stress keeps more than 1,000 police officers a day off work

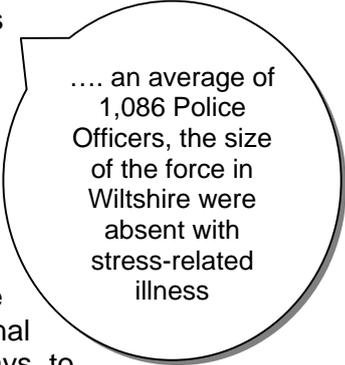
Enough officers to run a small police force were off work sick each day last year because of stress, according to government figures. On a typical day, an average of 1,086 officers, the size of the forces in Wiltshire or Warwickshire, were absent with stress-related illness, out of a total 160,000 officers.

About 250,000 days were lost across the UK police forces in 2004-05 due to stress, costing between £20m and £60m a year, the figures stated.

Chief constables are planning a national meeting to discuss ways to tackle the problem and cut costs from their stretched budgets.

Officers took an average of two days a year off because of stress, but one psychologist said that the real figure was likely to be higher because illnesses could also be linked to stress. The forces worst affected were Leicestershire, Northern Ireland, North Yorkshire, Dorset and Greater Manchester.

The Home Office said that police sickness absence had fallen from 12.2 days lost per officer in 2000-01 to 8.5 days in 2004-05.



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Your boss is to blame for work stress

DESPITE heavy workloads, unreasonable clients and high pressure environments, bad bosses and colleagues have been cited as the main cause of stress at work. According to a recent survey from Monster UK, almost 50 per cent of Brits blame their bosses for making their blood boil and causing the most anxiety at work.

The Monster Meter poll asked 2,330 British workers: "What makes you most stressed at work?" The survey revealed:

- ✓ 48 per cent said: colleagues, management - namely, the boss.

- ✓ 22 per cent (514 votes) said it was the workload.
- ✓ 12 per cent (287 votes) said: the environment.
- ✓ 11 per cent (263 votes) said: my commute to work.
- ✓ 7 per cent (179 votes) said: clients they deal with.

Bad bosses and difficult colleagues create stressful situations and can have a dramatic effect on workers' morale.

Nearly one in four bosses in the UK is bad or dreadful, according to a survey of employees by The Good Boss Company, which campaigns for better management.

This indicates that there is a direct link between how employees view bosses and how they feel about their jobs.

Fifty-eight per cent of respondents have looked for another job because of a boss.

Whether facing the wrath of Sir Alan Sugar or dealing with a Basil Fawly style of management, don't be afraid of the big bad boss and avoid suffering in silence.

The challenge is to be proactive and look at what steps you can take to build mutual respect.

Librarians suffer more stress than fire fighters

Recent research presented at the British Psychological Society's Division of Occupational Psychology Annual Conference on, January 2006, in Glasgow reveals that one in three workers across occupations suffer from poor psychological health, suggesting that all organisations need to take stress seriously.

The findings show that librarians, commonly seen as one of the least stressed roles in today's society, actually suffer from higher perceived levels of stress than so-called 'high stress' roles, including fire fighters and the police.

The study, which seeks to validate nine 'stressors' including:

- ✓ perceived control in their day-to-day role;
- ✓ perceived level of skill use;
- ✓ perceived workload;
- ✓ perceived variety in role;

- ✓ perceived clarity of goals and requirements;
- ✓ opportunity for interpersonal contact;
- ✓ availability of money;
- ✓ valued social position; and
- ✓ the physical environment in which they work.

The study further examined absenteeism, job satisfaction and work-family stress spill-over and their relationship to these stressors.

For librarians the key factors leading to stress were found to be their physical environment, their perceived poor utilisation of skills and perceived control in their role.

Researcher Mr Saddiq commented, "Although these findings appear strange they actually show how insidious stress can be, and how it can have an unhealthy impact in any organisation.

Fire fighters and police are trained to deal with the stresses that their jobs undoubtedly entail; librarians and schoolteachers are less likely to have these support systems in place.

In addition, stress impacts different personalities in different ways, and different personalities may be drawn to different roles - understanding the at-work behaviours of individuals in all roles, and ensuring that culture and environmental measures are not leading to undue stress is an important factor in reducing the enormous cost of stress in the workplace."

Further research is underway to identify the key stressors that have the biggest impact on general health with a view to helping HR professionals focus on the factors that will have the biggest positive impact on reducing stress in their organisations.

Over-65 staff numbers set to rise

The number of people working on beyond the age of 65 is predicted to rise by a third according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), estimating by 2020 the number of over-65s in the workforce would rise to 775,000 from 582,000 at present.

Age discrimination will be banned from October 2006. New anti-age discrimination

laws and pension scheme changes will lead to the shift in workers delaying retirement.

Last year, the government's Pensions Commission said that people should work longer to pay for their retirement. The Commission proposed that the age people could collect the state pension should rise to 68 reflecting increased life expectancy. "The UK economy is increasingly relying on older workers, so there will be many more over-65s expected to be in work in 2020," Adrian Thomas, Help the Aged, said, adding that no one should be "compelled" to work beyond age 65 because they could not afford to make ends meet.

IT stresses 'driving UK to drink'

The frustration of a crashing computer is a very modern cause of stress. The modern annoyances of automated call centres, mobile phones and crashing computers are driving people to alcohol and cigarettes, a survey suggests. The poll by UK charity Developing Patient Partnerships showed more than a third of men and a quarter of women have a drink to cope with stress. Of the 1,000 people polled, 27% of men and 23% of women said they would light up a cigarette in such situations. Almost one third said IT-related problems were a major source of stress. Developing Patient Partnerships (DPP) is issuing guidance to help people deal better with stress.

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DPP's TIPS FOR DEALING WITH STRESS

1. Live a healthy lifestyle
2. Don't take too much on
3. Decide what causes you stress and change it
4. Avoid unnecessary conflict
5. Manage your time better
6. Practice saying "no" without feeling guilty
7. Take time out to "recharge your batteries"

8. Talk about problems so they do not get out of proportion
9. Make time to see friends
10. Do not use alcohol, nicotine or caffeine to cope with stress

However, as always, the key to successful stress-management is to examine the causes, carry out full risk assessments and through collectively agreed implementation of the HSE Stress Management Standards, eradicate its causes.

And in Brief.....

Stress 'robs UK workers of sleep'

Workplace stress robs UK workers of sleep and could mean they perform worse in the office, a survey has revealed – see more? Visit:-

<http://news.viewlondon.co.uk/#>

Council staff bullying concerns - Corby

Some Corby council staff have concerns over bullying. Council workers have suffered from sexist abuse and bullying by councillors, a report has revealed.

The study says bullying at Corby Borough Council, in Northamptonshire, is having a negative impact on staff. Some workers, in interviews, claimed they had been shouted at and threatened by council members.

Diary Dates

- **Hazards Conference 2006**
Manchester UMIST, July 14th to 16th
(Check Website for booking forms early in 2006)
- **European Hazards Conference 2006**
September 29th to October 1st, Jurmula, LATVIA
- **Stress Network Conference 2006**
Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal
Saturday November 18th