

# The stress of work becomes social issue

November 1 2010

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The sharp rise in work stress in Britain is becoming a major social problem in the current economic crisis, a new British Academy report has found.

Report author Professor Tarani Chandola from The University of Manchester, found that even employees who have escaped loss of employment during the [economic downturn](#) are suffering under the pressure of company downsizing and restructuring.

The study, *Stress at Work* reveals an increase of 4-6% in work ‘stressors’ such as workload, conflict, job security and organisational change from spring 2009 to spring 2010, a marked rise in the previous 0.5-1.0% yearly increase since 1992.

Work stressors can fuel depression, anxiety, suicide, and workplace injuries. Notable recent research has shown they can lead to a 50% increase in the risk of heart disease.

The public sector in particular has felt the strain, with over a quarter of employees reporting an increase in their hours, a rise of 7% since the recession, compared to a 2% rise in the private sector.

Job insecurity has also increased considerably in the public sector with almost a fifth of workers thinking they are ‘likely’ to lose their jobs, a rise of 11 % since spring 2009.

It also reveals a rise in interpersonal conflict in the workplace, with 7%

more public sector workers reporting bullying by managers in the past year, compared to 4% in the private sector.

According to the report, employers are placing tighter controls on sick leave, forcing employees to attend work in poor health. Such activity, it suggests, can lead to more frequent long-term health problems for the workforce and end up costing more to society.

With no legislation in the UK specifically on this issue, the report questions the effectiveness of the current voluntary code of practice that is meant to guide employers in matters of work stress.

Medical Sociologist and author of the report, Professor Tarani Chandola from The University of Manchester, said:

“With attention focussed on people losing their jobs following Government cuts, it’s easy to forget the added pressure put on those still in employment who are often taking on extra duties and working longer hours.

“Work stress has increased since 1992, especially for women. In the past year these levels have risen at an alarming rate and there are no effective measures in place to prevent the situation worsening.

“Government and employers must take responsibility and measure, mitigate, monitor and act effectively before problems get out of control, with damage to the health of the workforce and the economy.”

Professor Duncan Gallie FBA, Chair of the British Academy Working Group which produced the report, said:

“The Scandinavian societies have taken a lead in developing forms of [work](#) organisation that are protective of employees’ psychological health.

The time has come, perhaps, to give serious policy consideration to how similar institutional developments could be encouraged in the UK.”

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: The stress of work becomes social issue (2010, November 1) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-stress-social-issue.html>

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