

Introduction to Psychosocial Hazards and Work-related Stress

With globalisation, changing lifestyles and technological advances over the years, the way of doing work has changed considerably. There are various forms of technologies being used nowadays, new work organisation and methods and diverse types of employment have emerged (temporary, part time- or home-based work). Other changes includes fluctuating work demands, job insecurity and demographics have triggered the genesis of psychosocial hazards. According to the ILO definition from 1986, "psychosocial factors at work refer to interactions between and among work environment, job content, work organisation and workers' capacities, needs, culture, personal extra-job considerations that may, through perceptions and experience, influence health, work performance and job satisfaction". The interaction of these factors have a significant effect on the health of workers. Psychosocial hazards and risks can be categorised into the namely factors such as job content; workload and work pace; working hours; participation and control; career development, status and pay; role in the organization; interpersonal relations; organizational culture and home-work interface. Psychosocial hazards lead to work-related stress affecting the mental health of workers. Work-related stress is the harmful physical and emotional response caused by an imbalance between the perceived demands and the perceived resources and abilities of a person to cope with those demands. Workplace stress arises when the demands of the job exceed or do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. It also arises due to the knowledge and abilities of the individual or group of individuals not aligning with the strategy, vision and culture of the organisation. As psychosocial risks are determined by work organization and labour relations, most of the causes of work-related stress are associated with how work content is designed and how work is organized.

Following the emerging work settings, work-related stress can be triggered by workplace reorganisation following a lack of control over work, insecurity over the job and a change in the work shifts and timings due to the intensification of work or workers being required to be more flexible and to learn faster in order to perform new tasks. Organisational changes cause turmoil at all levels of the organisation and society contributing to an upsurge of psychosocial risks at the place of work which further lead to work-related stress, anxiety issues, depression and fatigue. The fatigue

experienced can affect productivity, work interrelationships and lead to occupational accidents and diseases. Additionally, workers must constantly live with the fear that they might lose their jobs, scope for promotions and massive layoffs. Such factors are likely to be more significant as employment becomes more precarious for some, and workloads and working hours often increase for those remaining in employment causing stress and other health disorders.

On another note, work-related stress and burnout have taken a sharp rise and individual coping behaviours such as consumption of alcohol, cigarette smoking substance and drug abuse and workplace violence such as bullying or any other types of workplace violence have also increased. The studies conducted have demonstrated that occupational stress and decision making process also pave the way for depressive and alcohol and drug-related disorders. Furthermore, the place of work is a contributing factor of psychosocial risks and poor work-life balance. In such connection, it is imperative to address those issues at the workplace itself. Employers should be informed of the side effects and impacts of psychosocial hazards which may affect employees due to over work-exertion or lack of control over tasks which will ultimately result in workplace stress and negative coping behaviours. The workplace can offer support and allow workers to become more productive without enduring the effects of negative stress. Making employers and workers aware, informed and competent to take care of these new risks, creates a safe and healthy environment, builds a positive and constructive preventive culture in the organization, boosts engagement and effectiveness, protects the health and well-being of workers and increases productivity.

For this reason, enterprises should not only focus on an individual response to the problem. A comprehensive approach that breaks away from traditional efforts and moves towards new effective responses is necessary. It is essential to find innovative ways in dealing with the consequences of psychosocial risks and work-related stress in the workplace both with collective and individual measures.

You can refer to further reading on https://scielo.isciii.es/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0465-546X2013000300001