



Hazards Conference 2017

Keele Work-Stress Network

Workshop 16, *Excessive Workloads*

The UK National Workstress Network (WORKstress) was represented by Ian Draper and Vaughan Skirrey, (Network Convenor and Deputy Convenor respectively), both of whom have had long associations with Hazards Campaign and its Conferences. We have run this workshop on several previous occasions. We were pleased to welcome over 50 delegates to our two sessions and hope that we covered what was looked for.

The sessions were 90 minutes long and moved at a pace to enable a good opportunity to allow delegates time to talk with each other as well as in plenary session and through group work.

Introduction

Ian and Vaughan gave brief introductions to the work and background of the Network, it having been established originally from within NASUWT back in the very early 1990s. The Network has been a free-standing entirely voluntarily run campaigning organisation encompassing many workplaces and work backgrounds since 1993. We very much value the on-going support provided by major national unions especially UNISON, UNITE and NASUWT. We also welcome the support provided to our work by the many delegates who attend our November Conferences. [Download the Booking Form.](#)

Workshop Session 1 – delegates in their groups were invited to list home-based and personal stresses that affect their personal and family lives. They were also asked to itemise those factors at work which created work-stresses. Short discussions followed in the groups and then the common outcomes were listed on flipcharts:-

WORKSHOP SESSION 1 (09.00 TO 10.30)		WORKSHOP SESSION 2 (11.00 TO 12.30)	
HOME STRESSES	WORK STRESSES	HOME STRESSES	WORK STRESSES
Care responsibilities	Short staffing	Rising Living costs	Presenteeism and conflicting priorities
Effects of exhaustion and tiredness	Excessive meetings	Stagnant wage levels	Staff leaving and not replaced
Lack of adequate family time	General workload issues	Demands of supporting children and negotiating with authorities	Social media demands – unrealistic expectations
Effects on Social Life	Long Hours on site	Dependent elderly relatives	Technology demands and targets
Finances, bills vs. income	Negative management behaviours	Bringing the job home	Monitoring
Chores – sharing work at home	Constant lack of certainty - restructuring	Logistical and psychological factors	Work Life Balance and deadlines pressures
Bringing Work Home	Bullying and harassment	Social Media pressures	Target driven approaches
	Psychological effects of customers	Absence from home – travel time and commuting	Appraisals/ reviews an stress levels – need to be seen to ‘achieve’

	Wage cuts		Balancing demands of conflicting roles
	Monitoring		Sickness Absence
	Lack of training (managers)		Unpredictable work allocation, patterns and priorities
	Violence		Casual work

Workplace Audits – the session went on to examine issues around workloads and to develop a simple Workplace or Branch Audit approach to finding out what the problems are in the workplace.

This exercise involved three phases – completion in column 1 of the table below individually and then collating into column 2 the table group outcomes. Finally in Column 3 the overall workshop totals were collated and the highest scoring 5 factors were then discussed. A table similar to this one can be downloaded from the Workstress Website Downloads page.

Overall outcome scores were:-

WORKPLACE AUDIT TABLE				
For each factor score how high between 0 and 3 the stress levels are – this exercise can be done anonymously as a workplace or a branch project and the results tabulated to take specific issues to management at H&S Committee or at JCC or JNC discussions.				
WORKLOAD FACTORS	WORKSHOP SESSION 1 OUTCOMES		WORKSHOP SESSION 2 OUTCOMES	
Work Demand	56		48	
Targets and Deadlines	44		42	
Shift Patterns	14		13	
Work-rate control	25		27	
Time keeping	15		24	
Colleague Absence	36		28	
Job definition and expectations	39		35	
Information and support	38		35	
Technology	31		28	
Workplace Consultation	37		34	
Hours, breaks and holidays	32		27	
Toilet breaks	4		7	
Workload Monitoring	32		31	
Team Working	30		26	
External factors (environment etc.)	20		23	
Pay & benefits	41		33	
Harassment and Bullying	34		29	
Management attitude	41		39	
Work life balance	50		40	
Violence aggression and abuse	30		20	
Staff cuts but same workload	52		43	
Restructuring	36		38	
Government imposition	26		21	
Working environment	28		30	
Managerial roles and functions	35		33	

The general outcomes from each group were discussed and common threads identified. For this session we have colour coded the reactions along the same way as is produced by HSE Stress Management Standards outcomes from

their online assessment tool. This is a very much simplified approach but it does give an accurate picture of what the problems might be in a typical workplace, and allows Stewards and Safety Reps to take forward the issues as reported by member to management.

Using the same exercise at different workplaces and on different occasions has provided different outcomes. However it is not uncommon to see Work Demand, Targets and Deadlines, (poor) Management Attitude, Work Life Balance and Staffing Cuts but no reduction in workload featuring high on the list. In this instance both workshop groups were of the same size but came from different work sectors with different experiences.

In each session we moved on to allocate the top few factors for further discussion and analysis. Ideally a work plan could be developed in each example so that Stewards and Safety Reps had an approach in mind. The objective is to apply the HSE Management Standards Assessment Tool and then get a much more accurate picture form across the entire workforce.

So what did we find?

Workshop Session one –

- **WORK DEMAND** - a group examined the issue around demands on workers in any workplace, and considered how those demands are made whether there is any seasonal variation or other factors that vary the demands made. It was explained in report back that the objective would be to bring any concerns raised by members to the Health & Safety Committee and indeed the JCC or JNC for consideration with managers. It was recognised that 'hard data' helps to provide a better case and that without it managers are quite likely to dismiss any anecdotal claims. It was recognised that Branch recognition and input were essential and that some investigations into the specifics of particular areas of work and the demands being developed would help to identify what the problem is and whether it is seasonal or production levels driven.
- **STAFFING CUTS AND SAME WORKLOAD** – a very current thread running through many workplaces now with austerity-based cuts slashing the workforce but not cutting workloads. Some examination of staffing levels and reductions would help to identify if there were specific areas more prone to reductions and then lead to see how workload could be better distributed. Turnover rates, exit interview materials and outcomes, and some effective work measurement to identify task levels and just what people were paid for might help to ensure a better distribution of tasks.
- **WORK LIFE BALANCE** – this is an issue that comes up frequently, the extent to which people have control over workload and can manage to fit their own personal and family needs in alongside the demands of work, especially now that there is a greater spill over into family life brought about by technological developments and associated assumptions that where there is a capacity to email and search the net, then people will be open to taking on more work within their home lives. Some discussion around the Working Time Directive (whilst it may or may not remain in place post-Brexit), and the impact of flexible working would enable a picture to be created that might improve the balance between working and family lives. There were comments too about how the face fitted and the inevitable pressures to do more as a means of ensuring increased and more stable income levels.
- **TARGETS** – this has become a much more focussed aspect of work, and is built into appraisals and performance management as a result of which more intensive work patterns are imposed and demanded. The issue requires identification of work hot spots and discussion around how the works calendar, systems and routine can be better managed. There would need to be some joint discussion with bargaining and negotiation to settle any differences of view.

- **MANAGEMENT ATTITUDE** – this subject remains amongst the higher priorities as it largely emerges from lack of true understanding on the part of managers about personnel management issues and the impact of stress and the role that managers play in both causing and creating stresses alongside their duty of care not to make workers ill. A constantly re-emerging theme here is lack of adequate personnel management training and understanding of managers of the effects on their workforce.

Workshop Session two – time pressures did not enable a full discussion on the 4 main topics so a more general discussion around Staffing Cuts and same workload brought the following factors forward.

Some examples were quoted including running a stress survey following the cuts and imposition of extra workload. This was followed by a withdrawal of goodwill upon the failure of management to respond effectively. The issue of TOIL was discussed and whether it could be withdrawn, short of industrial action. It was felt also that showing the intention of or serving notice to work strictly to contract would have an effect on work outcomes. Whatever the situation it was felt necessary to stop any automatic assumptions that work would just continue unchanged with a reduce staffing complement.

Examples of failure to address workload issues adequately showed considerable impact on the workforce in time. Revisiting job descriptions and apportionment of workloads was felt an important step to take.

The sessions ended with thanks to participants and to the facilitators for developing a chance to discuss workload issues. Delegates went away with ideas on how to address some of the problems identified.

Thanks to all who attended.

ID/VS, August 2017

