

Network News

2004 has seen the Stress Network reaching something of a crisis point. Steering Group membership has fallen off as a result of increasing workload for some members, and of illness for others. Nevertheless we continue to work on our main focus – the campaign against all forms of stress-related illness in the workplace.

Brian Robinson, who has been Convener for a number of years now has handed on this responsibility. I want to place on record my very sincere thanks, and those of many colleagues with whom he has tirelessly worked over the past years.

Brian's contribution has been considerable, patiently and empathetically delivered, robust when necessary, in helping to publicise our cause, and in securing recognition that workplace stress is a debilitating cause of illness, with physical and psychological effects upon the health of a good many workers at all levels.

Brian has not entirely retired from work within the Hazards Campaign nor within the Stress Network, but he is now able to take a well-earned retirement from the front line of activity.

Many grateful thanks, Brian – your efforts have been much appreciated by so many.

Financial Crisis

The Network has survived for many years on donations, sponsorship and general support from Hazards Campaign, Trades Union branches and individual contributions. These are much appreciated, enabling us to continue our work.

Ongoing expenses include the maintenance of the website, holding Steering Group meetings, involvement in Hazards Campaign, and the running of our Annual Conference.

We recently circulated to all Network members details of the 2004 Conference together with a letter outlining the difficulties we currently face through lack of regular income. We have written to major Trades Unions at national level seeking support.

UK Hazards Campaign has provided very generous support for which we are extremely grateful. Trades Union Branches have sponsored Newsletters, made donations, and regularly assist with activity expenses.

Until we are able to regain a firm financial foundation, the Network is very vulnerable – we therefore need your help.

If you or your organisation can make a contribution, sponsor a page on the website (£50) or a Newsletter edition (£50), then we would be very pleased to hear from you. All sponsors will be acknowledged.

Donations of any amount will be most welcome by our new Network Treasurer:-

Philippa Weightman
1 Stanningwell Cottages
Stanningwell Road
HORSTEAD, NORWICH NR6 7JA

I would like also to place on record our thanks to Dianne Jones who has served as our Treasurer since the Network was first founded.

New Convener

I commit myself to further raising the profile of the Network, through media and the wide range of activities with which we are involved.

My background is with NASUWT teaching union. I have been active in the Hazards Campaign for 12 years. I continue to work for the eradication of stress in my daily work for NASUWT in its South East Regional Centre, in Kent, and will be further involved in the UK and European Hazards Campaigns.

Ian Draper, Convener

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UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE

WHEN? Saturday, 20th November 2004 commencing 10 a.m.

WHERE?: Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Birmingham

WHAT?: Stress and the brutal work environment

WHY?: Because work-related stress destroys lives

WHO? YOU!

PUT IT IN YOUR DIARY NOW!

APPLY NOW!

Speakers will include: Tom Mellish, Health and Safety Officer TUC

Steve Lee, HSE Stress Priority Programme

Thompson's Solicitors

Convenor of the UK National Work Stress Network

Delegate fee: £45 (unwaged £10)

Inclusive of lunch and refreshments

Bed & Breakfast accommodation available at the Centre, price £30 per person (payable on departure)

Application form

Name		
Address with postcode:		
Tel. No.		
Organisation/ trade union		Email
Bed and breakfast required?	YES/ NO (delete as required)	Special Requirements
Please send form and cheque payable to NASUWT to: Les Roberts, 33 Old Street, Upton-upon-Severn, Worcester WR8 0HN Tel: 01684591156 email: <les@roberts.farmcom.net>		

Government Bullying Project

No – its not Government bullying, we are talking about the new DTI project launched in late March by Patricia Hewitt of funding to assist a project to help workforces and managements to eradicate bullying management styles.

Any attempt to educate both managers and workers about how to counter and prevent aggressive, harassing actions and behaviours by anyone in the workplace has to be welcomed. Workplace dignity is essential to the safety and psychological well-being of employees.

Workplace bullying study gets £1m

The government has put £1m towards what is thought to be the biggest study of workplace bullying in the world. Under the project, with a total cost of £1.8m, trade union AMICUS will help firms to deal with the problem. Staff will be offered advice and training to act as counsellors and investigators to identify bullying.

AMICUS will also work with some of Britain's biggest employers to draw up guidance to help them.

Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt launched the project at a London conference organised by gay equality campaign group Stonewall. Bullying is a terrible issue with terrible consequences. Patricia Hewitt, Trade and Industry Secretary said, "We must tackle discrimination from the cradle to the grave."

"People's lives should not be made a misery by bigots fuelled by hate and ignorance.

"Bullying is a terrible issue with terrible consequences, whether it's because of people's sexuality, race, size or anything else.

"This represents a change in gear from government, business and the union movement on the issue."

AMICUS spokesman Chris Ball said he expected reported cases of bullying to increase during the project as more people are encouraged to come forward, but then numbers would decrease. It is a devastating and hugely humiliating thing for individuals when they are experiencing it. "But people don't necessarily report it and indeed it is fair to say that the bully's greatest friend is the individual's silence," he told BBC Radio.

Mr Ball said, "Every single survey that has been done, either from academic sources or trade unions, showed that bullying is a problem. There is probably no organisation that has not got something of a problem of bullying.

"It is a devastating and hugely humiliating thing for individuals when they are experiencing it."

He said organisations needed to have "a culture that is ingrained... that says that bullying doesn't take place, we don't have it here, we're in favour of people being treated with dignity as human beings and we're going to move on from there."

Ian Draper, Stress Network Convener welcomed this initiative and was invited to discuss it on BBC Radio in March.

He said that Cary Cooper's research into causes of work-place showed that stress was largely down to aggressive management style and bullying. Cooper's research showed some 35% of stress was directly caused by bullying tactics by managers and work colleagues.

All forms of harassment, victimisation and bullying in the workplace are a crime against humanity. Workers deserve the respect of managers and colleagues, and are entitled to dignity in the workplace.

The Network welcomes the introduction of any projects such as this one where a partnership between employers and Trades Unions can show the way forward to an acceptable climate of trust and openness between employer and employee.

Diary Dates

15th Hazards Conference, UMIST, Manchester

July .16*th to 18th – Book your place via
<http://www.gmhazards.org.uk/>

Stress Network Steering Group Meeting

10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. Saturday May 22nd,
NASUWT Hillscourt Conference Centre,
Rednal, Birmingham B45 8RS

Hazards Campaign Meeting, Manchester

June 8th 2004, 12.00 to 4.00pm

Workers' Memorial Day

April 28th 2004

Stress Snippets

Teacher suicide caused by overwork

A Cornwall teacher set herself alight, having complained about pressure of work, an inquest has been told. North Devon Coroner Elizabeth Earland recorded a verdict that Jane Dibb, who taught English and drama at Penair School in Truro, killed herself while the balance of her mind was disturbed.

The inquest heard that Liverpool-born Ms Dibb, 28, had been complaining to her father about overwork. Her body was found last April on Dartmoor after she set herself alight. The inquest was told that a depressive illness in the teacher had re-emerged in February last year.

Penair pupils filled a 30-page book in tribute to their teacher. Head teacher Barbara Vann said: "Jane was loved by all who knew her."

Stress as a prescribed disease and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, the independent body which advises the Secretary of State for Social Security on the Industrial

Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) scheme, (today) announced the publication of its Position paper on 'Stress as a Prescribed Disease and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder'.

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) has undertaken an investigation to review whether, and under what conditions, it might be possible to extend the schedule of prescription under the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 to include adverse health outcomes ascribed to stressful exposures at work as a Prescribed Disease.

The review focussed on Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in relation to the Accident Provisions: of particular importance was clarification of the nature of stressful events capable of causing PTSD.

To avoid confusion, a clear distinction is drawn in this position paper between stressful exposures or circumstances (stressors) and stress-related outcomes and illnesses.

Conclusions

IIAC is not yet able to identify circumstances in which it recommends extending the schedule of prescription to include adverse health outcomes

ascribed to stress at work. However, it recognises fully the importance of mental health problems as a source of morbidity nationally, and will continue to keep the topic under review.

PTSD

For PTSD to be diagnosed as the pathological change arising from an accident, it is the view of IIAC, based on evidence received, that the relevant incident should be a traumatic, single event that is, or could be reasonably perceived to be, severely life-threatening or with the potential to cause serious injury to the individual or others present at the time. It should be an event outside the realms of normal human experience. PTSD should only be diagnosed for the purposes of IIDB when it results from an incident of this nature.

The full text of the Council's Report can be accessed on the web site www.iiac.org.uk

Long-hours culture

The only suitable response to the CBI's conversion to strict enforcement of European Union working time rules is *"too little, too late"*.

This has to be a calculated assessment of the least the CBI needs to do to head off the growing pressure to end the individual opt-out that uniquely in the UK allows every employee, however vulnerable, to sign away their right to work no more than an average 48-hour week.

Our long-hours culture is a symptom of bad work organisation, poor productivity and poverty pay. French employees are 32% more productive, German employees 16% and US workers 19% for every hour they are at work compared with UK employees.

Long hours are bad for health, bad for family life, bad for equal opportunities (why are so few top managers women?) and bad for community cohesion. One in four who have signed an opt-out say they were given no choice. Nearly two out of three who regularly work more than 48 hours have never been asked to sign. Ending the opt-out is the only effective way to start to tackle our long-hours culture, and will significantly boost our productivity. It's about time it went.

Brendan Barber, General Secretary, TUC

Stress and the city hits Londoners

The fast-paced environment of living and working in London is taking its toll on Londoners with more than three quarters saying they are stressed at least once a week, a survey by *This is London* reveals.

More than 2,000 people were polled for the *London Thinks* questionnaire which showed 77 percent are stressed every week and 30 percent every day. Only six percent said they are relaxed and never get stressed. A further 20 percent of Londoners who admitted pulling a 'sickie' within the last year, also put their excuse down to work stress.

The survey reflects recent findings by the International Stress Management Association (UK), which this year reported a 51 percent increase in the number of people phoning for help.

Rosemary Anderson, chair of the ISMA (UK), said: 'We all have pressures in our lives but it's when there's a build up without doing anything about it that causes stress levels. Nowadays people face stress from mobile phones, emails, company cutbacks and problems associated with commuting.

'Commuters are especially vulnerable to stress because they can be away from their extended families and probably very rarely see their partners.'

One of the best way to combat stress, says Rosemary is to engage in physical exercise. 'If you've had a bad day then unwind with physical exercise it's the best way to de-stress. And switch off your mobile phone,' she said.

[Far better also to examine the causes of the stress, and tackle them head on? Editor]

Teachers report staffroom strife

Thousands of teachers are contacting a support service to report conflict at work - with their colleagues. This, and bullying by managers, accounted for more than twice as many contacts to the Teacher Support Network as pupil misbehaviour.

The network's support service has helped 76,000 teachers in England and Wales over the past four years. Four-fifths of all the enquiries came from women, with workload another pressing issue. The network says numbers are rising. Last year 30,000 teachers - one in every 15 - sought help either by phone or online.

The largest single group of callers were newly-qualified teachers, who accounted for a fifth of all enquiries, with many student teachers also getting in touch.

Reasons for Contact

- Conflict - 10.2%
- Workload/hours - 4.8%
- Pupil behaviour - 4.3%
- Long-term sick leave - 4.2%

Stress anxiety and depression accounted for the highest number of calls, the network said. "Many teachers calling the service have expressed reluctance to discuss stress with their GP, because they worry about being seen as weak if this is put on a sick note.

"They are also anxious about informing colleagues and managers when they feel that they are not coping."

Conflict and bullying

Just over 10% of all contacts were triggered by conflict - in two thirds of cases, conflict with managers, and in a quarter with other colleagues.

"It is not unusual for the caller to feel helpless and lose sight of how to 'get themselves out of a situation' that is having a continuous, debilitating effect," the network reported.

"In extreme circumstances, conflict - especially conflict with a manager - can lead to a teacher going on sick leave.

"Some teachers in this situation have called the service to say they are 'too frightened to pick up the phone at home for fear that it will be the school calling'."

More than 2,200 calls were from teachers on sick leave, who often said they felt they had failed and felt guilty for letting down so many people.

Law Lords Reverse Appeal Court Judgment - stressed teacher wins £72,547

Law Lords have handed down judgment in **Barber v Somerset County Council**, one of the four co-joined cases heard before the Court of Appeal as **Sutherland v Hatton** - but was the only one of the four to appeal to the House of Lords.

A former maths teacher who lost his job through a stress-related illness has been awarded £72,547 in damages.

Leon Barber was originally awarded £101,000 against Somerset County Council, which was overturned by the Court of Appeal in 2002.

The House of Lords has now ruled he was entitled to some damages, adding that his treatment was unsympathetic.

A spokesperson for Somerset County Council said the outcome of the case was disappointing.

The majority of the House of Lords, in a 4-1 judgment, allowed the appeal and overturned the Court of Appeal's decision.

Despite that sounding enormously exciting for lawyers all five judges made it very clear that they believed the Court of Appeal's interpretation of the law relating to stress at work claims to be correct.

Lord Scott stated that the Court of Appeal had "*succinctly and accurately express[ed] the principles that ought to be applied.*" Lord Walker described, as "*a point of great importance*", the distinction between an individual *believing* they suffered from stress at work, and *telling their employer* that they suffered from stress at work.

The decision was overturned, though, on the facts. The majority (Lords Walker, Bingham, Rodger and Steyn) thought that even though the legal principles enunciated by Lord Justice Hale in the Court of Appeal were correct, the County Court judge was "*entitled to form the view*" that the Defendant employer was in breach of its duty of care. The minority (Lord Scott) thought that - again, although the Court of Appeal's exposition of the law was correct - the trial judge *might* have reached a different conclusion if he had the benefit of LJ Hale's judgment, and as a matter of policy, the Court of Appeal had been correct in interfering.

Thus, by a 4-1 majority, the County Court judge's finding that Mr Barber could recover damages for stress at work was reinstated.

Four out of five GPs are stressed

Most GPs report high levels of stress, and believe their problems will get worse rather than better. An NOP poll for the BBC's *Now You're Talking!* programme and Pulse magazine also found that 5% of GPs say they are clinically depressed. The findings come as another survey suggests public trust in doctors is at its highest level for 20 years. The MORI poll found 92% of patients trust doctors to tell the truth.

Highest rating It is the highest rating for doctors since this annual survey was commissioned by the British Medical Association in 1983. Doctors traditionally top the poll and this year is no different. They are followed by teachers on 89% and professors on 80%.

Who do you trust?

Doctors 92%
Teachers 89%
Professors 80%
Government Ministers 23%
Politicians 22%
Journalists 20%

The BBC poll suggests that many doctors are struggling to cope with the demands of their job. Six out of 10 say they are more stressed now than they were 12 months ago.

Most blame excessive workload, pressure from patients, too many guidelines or increased scrutiny from local managers. Most of the 569 GPs questioned said their new NHS contract, which came into effect this month, will not do anything to help. Seven out of 10 said they expected their stress levels to increase when the contract is introduced. The poll was commissioned as part of the BBC's NHS Day - a special day of themed programmes on the NHS on Wednesday 24 March.

Phil Johnson, editor of Pulse, said GP shortages were helping to increase stress levels. "The fundamental problem is that we simply do not have enough GPs and nothing will change that fact between now and the beginning of April," he said. However, Dr John Chisholm of the BMA said GPs would see improvements as a result of the new contract. Some turbulence and stress are inevitable with any major change," he said. "However, once the contract is in place, practices have reorganised the way they work, particularly in relation to how they manage patients with chronic diseases, and GPs are able to opt out of out-of-hours responsibility if they wish, we should start to see an enormous transformation in general practice, to the benefit of GPs and their patients."

Could you help the Network?

Join the Steering Group? Donations or Subscriptions? Any help will be very welcome. Contact us via ian.draper@workstress.net if you wish to be involved in some way.