


Title	Stress and work	
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Source	focus	
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Brief Introduction	<p>Stress and work</p> <p>Stress is one of a group of so-called psychosocial risks which are an increasing occupational health concern. There are, however, different forms of stress, ranging from acute stress in possibly life-threatening situations, to more constant forms.</p> <p>Work-related stress as discussed here is the result of complex organisational decision-making and in some cases can become chronic. It is related to issues such as work demands, emotional demands, room for manoeuvre, social relations, value and ethical conflicts and employment insecurity. Taken in isolation and occurring only at times, these issues would in most cases be considered benign and could indeed constitute part of the everyday emotional demands at a workplace.</p> <p>Yet, when they become chronic and individuals feel they are no longer able to deal with them, they can lead to serious problems for workers themselves, the company that employs them, their family and society as a whole.</p> <p>Indeed, a series of epidemiological studies have clearly established a relationship between exposure to work-related stress as a whole as well as to various components of it and particular health risks (cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal</p>	 <p>drinking, etc.). They are likely to lead to various emotional, cognitive (difficulty in concentrating, remembering, making decisions, decreased creativity), and behavioural reactions (abuse of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco; destructive behaviour).</p> <p>Work demands that can lead to increased stress include both quantitative demands such as quantity of work, time constraints and qualitative ones, such as complexity of tasks and contradictory demands. This dimension also includes work-life conflicts.</p> <p>Effects of high work demands on health, especially in relation to cardiovascular diseases and mental health problems, have been demonstrated especially in work situations where workers have little autonomy or little social support from colleagues and managers.</p> <p>Recent data from the 5th European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) show that overall, work demands have been increasing since the survey started in 1991 and remain at a high level, indicating a higher risk for all of those at work. Yet other research has also shown that workers</p> <p>to some extent adapt to increased work demands, albeit in different ways. Long working hours, defined as working more than 48 hours per week, for example, have continued to decrease over the same period. Yet more than one in 10 still work long hours every week, the majority of these being self-employed. In 2010, 58% of workers report that their work includes complex tasks, showing little change over the last 15 years.</p> <p>While social support has been more or less constant at a high level over time, the room for manoeuvre which is essential for workers to compensate for and adapt to increased work demands has not improved. This has most likely contributed to the rise in work-related stress.</p> <p>The impact of emotional demands plays a growing role in forms of work mostly concentrated in the service industry. There, workers when delivering their service have to control their own emotions or are confronted with the emotions of those they are delivering a service to. With structural change taking place over time, these types of jobs have increased.</p> 