Mental Health in the Workplace
A workers’ and trade union perspective

Presentation at the OECD Expert Meeting on
Mental Health, Disability and Work

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Talking points:

TUAC and its role

Mental health - an issue for trade unions and workers

Work-related causes of mental illness

Union activities addressing mental health issues – the German case

Challenges ahead

www.oecd.org/els/disability
TUAC Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD

- An international trade union organisation with 56 affiliates from OECD member countries
- financed by its members
- operates as the interface of organised labour with the OECD based on consultative status
- operates through a small secretariat in Paris

Results: about 283,000 for "mental health at work"
Mental health and work: Impact, issues and good practices
Notions of mental health at work tend to focus on the individual rather than ...... Mental health at work – why is this field so under-researched? ...
www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/712.pdf

Results: about 15,800 for "La santé psychologique au travail"
Bien-être et efficacité au travail - 10 propositions pour améliorer la santé psychologique au travail -. LACHMANN Henri , LAROSE Christian , ...
www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/rapports.../index.shtml

Results: about 34,400 for „Psychische Gesundheit am Arbeitsplatz“
Psychische Gesundheit am Arbeitsplatz in Deutschland
Er beleuchtet das Thema „Psychische Gesundheit am Arbeitsplatz“ aus den ......
• There is no health without mental health
• Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders
• Mental health at work is not only determined by information
technology and increased communication requirements, as
assumed by the issues paper
• Mental health in the workplace is determined by socio-
economic and environmental factors
• Cost-effective interventions exist to promote mental health;
they include preventive interventions at work (e.g. stress
prevention programmes)

Mental health and the world of work

• The world of work is in a constant flux
• We must note that, as an US company executive
has put it recently,

"Workers no longer have jobs, they now have
projects or fields of work"
The Corrosion of Character: Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism

- The growing emphasis on flexible behaviour and working styles can produce successful results, but inevitably leads also to both confusion and harm;
- Expectations placed on workers today – to be flexible, adaptable, mobile and willing to take risks – directly contradict many features of strong character: loyalty, pursuit of long-term goals, commitment, trust and purpose.
- Rather than committing to a life career, workers are now expected to work fluidly in teams entering and exiting, moving from task to task.
- Loyalty becomes a liability rather than an asset
- When life becomes a series of discrete jobs rather than a coherent career, long-term goals are eroded, social bonds fail to develop and trust is fleeting.

Source: Martin Shain S.J.D.; Stress, Strain & Fairness at Work: Making the Connections (Health Canada Publication)
The German case – some facts

- Workplace absenteeism due to mental illness has increased
- 11% of working days lost due to sick leave were related to mental illness; their share has doubled over the past two decades
- Sick leave periods due to mental illness are usually much longer than the duration of sick leave on average
- Mental illness occurs more often in the service sector than in manufacturing
- Unemployment also causes mental illness; the unemployed tend to be 3 – 4 times more often affected by mental illness than the employed

Sick leave and mental ill-health – A study published by the Federal Chamber of Psychotherapists' (share of working days lost due to mental ill-health; data provided by statutory health insurances and company sickness funds)
WSI Works council survey

- Representative sample of works councils of about 1700 establishments surveyed during fall / winter 2008 – 2009; with a particular focus on innovation activities, working conditions and health
- Evolution of working conditions over the past 3 years in German establishments – a works council perspective (responses from works councils in percentage points)

**physical strain**  **mental strain**

![Graph showing increased, unchanged, and reduced percentages for physical and mental strain.](image-url)

Strain at work in German establishments

(the following causes of strain were perceived by works councils’ as severe or particularly severe by ... % of the respondents)

- Monotony at work
- Difficult social relations at work
- Lack of choice regarding working time
- Disturbing interruptions
- Problems with superiors
- Fear of job loss / unemployment
- High volume of work
- High responsibility
- Lack of cooperation
- Time pressure / short delivery cycles

![Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents who perceived each cause of strain as severe or particularly severe.](image-url)

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Strain at work related to new forms of work and management (responses by works council members)

Management by objectives – a key determinant of mental health

- According to works council members, stress and strain are related to time pressure, a high workload, working time limited, and options.

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Time pressure and performance requirements as key determinants of mental health

What about the assessment of work-related health risks? Is risk assessment on the agenda and being carried out?
Why has until now no comprehensive assessment of work-related health risks carried out?

Further steps to be taken by unions in order relief mental stress and strain:

- Education, enlightenment, sensitising;
- Dissemination of information regarding the legal framework, obligations of employers, tools and instruments available regarding risk assessment and mental health promotion, best practice examples;
- Urgeing governments in order to make work-related mental health issues a subject of public policy (re-design of work systems);
- Addressing mental health issues in negotiations with employers at company or industry level.

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Mental Health – an issue for trade unions in Germany

The Association of German business and company and doctors (VDBW) and the metal workers union issued a joint statement about the job crisis and its impact on mental health at work

Karlsruhe / Frankfurt am Main, 28.5.2009

Gemeinsames Positionspapier von IG Metall und VDBW

„Psychische Gesundheit in der Arbeit – eine gemeinsame Herausforderung der Arbeitswelt von morgen“
Some more examples regarding trade union activities in Germany focusing on the promotion of mental health

14. DGB-Workshop on „Promoting Health at Work“, to be held from June 23 – 26, 2010

Issues to be discussed at the workshop:
- Mental strain – a risk assessment
- Mental stress and strain and their impact
- The promotion of mental health – best practice examples
- Human resources management and mental strain – findings of recent research
- Health promotion through works council activities – the legal framework
- Mental health at the work place – the German network for the promotion of health at work

• Facilitating participative risk assessment and implementing agreed standards like ISO 10075, which establishes principles and requirements for the measurement and assessment of mental workload

  • ISO 10075-1 Ergonomic principles related to mental work-load - Part 1: General terms and definitions
  • ISO 10075-2 Ergonomic principles related to mental workload – Part 2: Design principles
  • ISO 10075-3 Ergonomic principles related to mental workload – Part 3: Principles and requirements concerning methods for measuring and assessing mental workload
**Participative risk assessment as a sequential process**  

![Diagram of participative risk assessment process]

- **START**
- Information and participation of employees (training)
- Identification of workplace risks
- Evaluation of the risks identified
- Repetition at regular intervals and in the event of changes
- Documentation of results
- Derivation and implementation of measures to improve occupational health and safety
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the steps taken

**Last but not least,**

- **we need not only to improve working conditions and to promote mental health, we need to change employers‘ hiring strategies as well**

- **That, however, is not only a task for trade unions..........**

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