



The UK National Work-stress Network • [workstress.net](http://workstress.net)



## Newsletter and Conference Booking

Spring 2009

### *Taking action on Negative Behaviours at work*

In 2005 research into negative behaviours between staff was conducted in two Primary Care Trusts in the NHS ([Burnes & Pope 2007](#)). Most of the behaviour experienced and/or witnessed was described as incivility with a few people experiencing aggression. Unexpectedly, behaviour that was classed as incivility, but not bullying had very similar levels of effect to incivility also perceived as bullying. Also, low 'Now & Then' frequency behaviour had similar levels of effect as higher frequency behaviour. Aggression clearly had higher levels of effect.

These findings clearly have implications for how we view negative behaviour in the workplace and indicate that we should consider all negative behaviour to be unacceptable. We need to make every effort to prevent and manage problems more effectively than we are currently doing. All negative behaviour, however defined, is costly and damaging to both the individual and the organisation.

Following this research the observation was that organisations can know there is a problem with negative behaviour. We also know that it is damaging to an individual and the organisation with a huge financial cost, but still not take effective action to address the problems of negative behaviour between staff.

In preparation for further research work, delegates at the 2008 National UK Work Stress Network conference were asked two questions.

Q - From your observations and experience in work situations:

Why **do** organisations take action to address the problem of negative behaviours between staff?

Why **don't** organisations take action?

There were 31 responses.

Based on frequency of mention of key words and phrases which were grouped under headings the results were as follows:

The top 4 reasons given (in decreasing order of mention) for taking action were:

- effect on performance/productivity (25)
- influence/pressure on organisation (17)
- concern regarding legal/formal procedures (13)
- appearances/reputation (13)

The top 4 reasons for not taking action were:

- negative leadership/culture/management behaviour (26)

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- 6/7** **CONFERENCE NOVEMBER 2009**

- avoidance/denial (25)
- lack of resources (13)
- lack of will/casualness (11)

Thank you to all those who took the time to respond.

If more people would like to contribute to answering these questions please contact Rachael Pope at: [Rachael.pope@nhs.net](mailto:Rachael.pope@nhs.net)

[Burnes, B. Pope, R (2007) 'Negative Behaviours in the Workplace: A Study of two Primary Care Trusts in the NHS', *The International Journal Of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 285-303]

## Network Comment

Many of you who attended our successful conference in November 2008, will remember that Rachael Pope facilitated a successful workshop on her research. We received many positive comments about her work and input and are grateful for her involvement.

Details of the [Conference Report](#) can be found on the website. Subsequent to that Conference, we have been pleased that Rachael Pope has agreed to help us in our work. We wish her success in her developing doctorate studies.

## Prolonged Night Shift work and Health effects?

News in mid March has shown that the Danish Government has responded to the impact of research showing a connection between prolonged Night Shift work for women and higher risks of Breast Cancer.

It follows a ruling by a United Nations agency that night shifts probably increase the risk of developing cancer.

BBC Radio Scotland's The Investigation has been hearing from experts and union leaders in Scotland who said the UK government should be doing more to tackle the dangers.

For years there has been growing evidence that night shifts are bad for you.

Among the symptoms: disturbed sleep, fatigue, digestive problems and a greater risk of accidents at work.

But these are the first government payments to women who have developed breast cancer after long spells on the night shift.

Ulla Mahnkopf, one of those who has been compensated, spent 30 years as a flight attendant for the big Scandinavian airline SAS. Long hours and disturbed working patterns came with the territory.

Then she developed breast cancer. " I had bilateral cancer so affecting both breasts."

At first she did not make the connection between her cancer and night working.

"But when you think back now I can see that when I stopped flying it was like coming out of a shell, I had been living in there because of jet lag and I can see now I had a totally different life."

Here in the UK unions estimate about 20% of the national workforce is involved in night shifts.

Margaret Hancock from Edinburgh was like many parents who take on the night shift – she needed the extra money and had a young family to care for.

When she started work at the former Leith Hospital in the 1980s, her shift pattern allowed her to take her three children to nursery when she got home, sleeping just a few hours before picking them up again.

At the time, she said, tiredness and disrupted meals seemed a reasonable price to pay: "I felt like I battled time continually.

"There's only so much you can get done in a day. "And because I did split nights, I often wasn't sleeping until the following day.

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## Convenor's Report

**Ian Draper (Network Convenor)**

News of our **2009 Conference** has been some time coming, but we are now pleased to advertise the details with this newsletter.

Please do what you can to ensure that it is advertised as much as possible – free copying of the booking information pages is available.

**The complete application form and details are available on our website at <http://www.workstress.net/downloads/NetWorkConference2009.pdf>**

**Brian Robinson**, co-founder of the Stress Network has stepped back from his regular involvement with the work of the Steering Group, also from his regular commitment to Hazards Campaign. Since we were first established, Brian has been a leading contributor to our work, and his input has always been highly valued. Serving for a time as Network Convenor, he took us through changes that lead to our direct involvement with TUC, when we co-organised the European Week of Safety on Stress.



Brian has however not retired totally and we look forward to continued advice and guidance from him, albeit from a distance in the darkest depths of Norfolk! We hope will continue to contribute to Hazards and our own Conferences, and we look forward to seeing him again later in the year.

We look forward to an eventful and effective 2009, and welcome all support for our efforts.

### Diary Dates

#### Network Steering Group Meetings

Saturdays May 9th, September 5<sup>th</sup> 09,  
1000 a.m. start, Hillscourt Centre

#### Hazards Conference 2009

Manchester University, July 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>

#### Stress Network Conference

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> & Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November  
2009

#### Advance Notice European Hazards Conference

Leeds University, September 9th to 12<sup>th</sup>  
2010

We have welcomed new members to our Steering Group following the Bullying Conference in November 2008, and are pleased that FBU, Police Federation and other organisations, through their representatives are adding their weight to our work.

The Network currently faces certain funding difficulties. We are entirely dependent on donation and sponsorship and the very generous support of various Trade Unions, both nationally and regionally and at local level.

In order to streamline and make our working more effective, we are looking at how we might make progress through 'virtual meetings' on-line and to set up task groups, charged with different functions.

We will be reviewing our services and establishing a more effective programme that we can offer.

As Easter approaches, we find ourselves once more invited to exhibit at Union Conferences.

Look out for us at:-

- ▶ **ATL** Annual Conference in Liverpool, April 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>,
- ▶ **NASUWT** Annual Conference, Bournemouth, April 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>
- ▶ **UNISON** Health Sector Conference, Harrogate April 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>

We hope also to attend **UNISON's** National Delegate Conference in June, and this year's Conference for **UNITE**.

We thank **UNISON** Branch at the University of Sussex, Brighton for their invitation for me to make a presentation on Stress and its relationship to Organisational Change at their AGM on March 12<sup>th</sup>, and for their generous donation to our funds.

Some 30 members were present, and copies of our [Information Pack](#) booklet were distributed to members.

If your branch would like us to come and talk about stress, bullying and specific issues that are affecting your workplace, then please make direct contact with [Ian Draper](#), Network Convenor to arrange a date.

*Ian Draper*, Network Convenor  
March 2009.

## **Cancer and Night Shifts** [from pg 2]

Professor Andrew Watterson, an occupational health specialist at Stirling University, said we are far behind Scandinavia in recognising the dangers.

"I think we can say there is a big public health problem here," he said.

"The evidence has been good over a long period of time about cardiovascular disease and night work, gastro-intestinal problems and nights.

"Work indicates there may be risks in terms of low birth-weight babies and longer pregnancies for women.

"We don't tend to identify the damage being done where shift working is prevalent and I think that's an error. The damage is there but we don't see it and we don't count it."

At the Health and Safety Executive, chief medical officer Dr John Osmond said they were aware of the debate and have commissioned their own research.

"The HSE has been very on the ball in this area and has commissioned a very eminent epidemiologist to examine the risk of working at night and whether there is any link to breast cancer. This report will be completed in 2011."

Assistant general secretary of the Scottish TUC, Ian Tasker, thinks the UK is lagging behind.

He fears workers may be missing out on health checks to which they are entitled under the existing law. "I don't think we have enough evidence to say they're not," he said.

"But we have a feeling that perhaps employers are taking the opportunity to ensure these health checks are not carried out or, if they are, it's very much a tick-box approach to it."

In the meantime unions are calling for a greater awareness of the dangers of night shifts.

But as Ulla Mahnkopf said, it is already too late.

She said "I wouldn't have been flying for that many years, definitely not. Because it's cancer you can die from. So I would like to stay alive."

## **Network Comment**

It has been well recognised that high stress levels can cause cancers and ultimately lead to premature death. Those who constantly work unsocial hours including shift work know only too well how their health and well-being have been affected through disruption to the normal body-clock regimes.

In this case clear evidence from research shows that women night workers are especially vulnerable to cancer.

It is clearly time that the HSE and the UK Government accepted their responsibilities to protect workers from all kinds of harm, including psychological damage and those factors that have serious effect on the physical health and well-being of workers.

Some BBC Radio 2 discussion of the news that broke on 16<sup>th</sup> March, revealed the usual crop of people who had a great deal of back up evidence, or spoke of 30 years of night shifts and never had any complaints!

## **How can your Office make you sick?**

Vertebrae-skewing chairs, Mr Angry for a boss, an air-conditioning unit that's a ticking time-bomb – many factors can destroy the calm of our working environment. Most of us, however hope to survive each day at the office so that we are alive and well to battle our way through the next.

Research is claiming that such hopes might be misplaced. According to a report published by the American Journal of Epidemiology, middle-aged workers working for more than 55 hours a week have poorer mental skills, short-term memory and word recall than those working less than 41 hours over the same period.

What's more, some reports link dawn-to-dusk working times to the onset of cognitive afflictions such as dementia. The extent of the damage to one's mental faculties is thought to equate to what might be experienced from extensive smoking.

The study – by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health – has won partial support from the British scientific community. Dr John Challenor, a consultant occupational physician says:

"The research seems to suggest a link between middle-aged people working long hours and cognitive function. From their research, it seems there are grounds to think this is true. However, the link to cognitive diseases, such as Alzheimer's, is tenuous."

However there are a number of salient connections between other factors affecting the quality of our working environment and stress levels, as well as the spread of disease.

"A certain amount of anxiety is healthy because it is natural to feel that adrenalin-mediated sensation of fight, flight or frolic. **However, if anxiety is unremitting it can have adverse health effects, put hearts under strain, deteriorate our moods and interrupt our sleep.**"

### Some thoughts about working environments

**Open plan?** Then wash your hands

- ▶ While open-plan offices can aid inter-departmental communication, they also allow viruses such as common colds to spread more easily.
- ▶ Poor design of offices can make day-to-day life vulnerable to intrusion, and thus stressful.

### Don't burn the midnight oil

- ▶ "If you consistently work long hours, you will get ill", Prof Cary Cooper says. "It will damage your health. It is generally the case that where you have no control over your work rate and if you are being overloaded by a manager, then that will make you sick."
- ▶ These effects will be minimised if you are in charge of your own workload, in which case you are less likely to burden yourself with unmanageable tasks.
- ▶ If you increase the amount of time you spend working, your ability increases and you get job satisfaction. But it does get to a point where there are adverse health effects. Enormous amounts of time doing the same task invariably causes what some used to call 'brain ache'.
- ▶ If your boss is expecting you to work more than your contracted hours, that

needs to be addressed, although short spells of working long hours are relatively harmless.

- ▶ If you are working for long periods week after week, then you should request time off in lieu. Any ill effects can be mitigated with good diet, regular breaks and exercise three times a week.

### Sit up straight and pay attention to your back

- ▶ According to the charity BackCare, sitting badly, or sitting on a badly designed chair, can put too much pressure on the muscles of the lower back, potentially causing serious back pain that can become a chronic problem.
- ▶ Organisations should assess all employees' workstations and be able to advise whether they are set up correctly. If they are not, it can cause visual, muscular or skeletal strain.

### Your boss could be killing you

- ▶ Working for someone who's difficult isn't only bad for your mental health. A bad boss can actually be bad for your heart, increasing the risk of heart attack and [premature] death in people of all ages.
- ▶ Higher rates of heart disease were found among those who considered their boss to be incompetent. Some people thrive under the pressure of meeting persistent deadlines, but in others this can cause severe anxiety.
- ▶ What helps most workers is having a manager who works with, rather than against them. When management and the physical environment are under par, it can seem like everything is conspiring against you."
- ▶ "Obviously, a bullying boss will damage your health," Cooper says. "The less control you perceive yourself to have over your work, the more vulnerable you will be to being ill."

### Network Comment

We have known for many years that various aspects of the working environment including relationships can cause high levels of anxiety and lead in many cases to stress-related illnesses.



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## Annual Conference

# Stress – the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Epidemic?

Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Nr Birmingham

Courtesy of NASUWT

Saturday, November 21<sup>st</sup> 9.45 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. and  
9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

*This conference is aimed at Trades Union Shop Stewards, Health & Safety Representatives, Health & Safety and Human Resources Specialists, Stress Management Consultants*

### Stress remains rampant and growing ... ..

A 2008 survey conducted by the Samaritans confirmed that 38% of Britons cited work as one of their biggest stressors with over 68% reporting high levels of irritability and 56% losing sleep over their work-related worries. CBI figures report over 13.5million working days lost to work-related stress and associated illnesses, costing UK plc a staggering £3.7bn during 2006-07. 40% of respondents to the 2008 TUC Safety Rep Survey quoted Bullying Management Style as a major cause of stress.

New research looking at the improvement of management skills is nearing completion and will be the subject of discussion alongside information on how the EU is seeking to deal with increasing levels of stress throughout the wider community.

We hope also to hear from those who have been directly involved in stress-related situations at work and in pursuing their cases.

*The Conference will provide an opportunity to hear from and discuss issues with speakers, attend a range of workshops on aspects of, and the handling of stress at work.*

### PROGRAMME OUTLINE

#### SATURDAY MORNING – panel of speakers with Q&A session to follow

- Ian Draper – Stress Related Illness – the causes, effects, symptoms, costs and actions
- Emma Donaldson-Feilder, HSE/CIPD Management Competencies research project
- Isabelle Schoemann, ETUC Researcher – the EU Framework on work-related health issues
- HSE Speaker Or TUC Speaker *details to be confirmed*
- Stress victim speaker OR a Safety Rep who has taken the issue up with Management - *details tbc*

#### SATURDAY AFTERNOON & SUNDAY MORNING

Workshops aimed at guiding Representatives in supporting members, gathering evidence of Stress, dealing with casework, and the pursuit of good management practices and commitment through workable in-house Stress Policy - full details to be confirmed in due course

- \*\* Supporting colleagues with stress-related illness
  - \*\* Workplace Auditing
  - Improving Management Style
  - Gender and Stress
  - Pursuing workplace action and policy against stress
  - HSE Management Standards implementation
  - Securing a Work-life Balance
  - The effects of long-term absence on workers
- \*\* These two workshops will be repeated on Sunday morning to expand delegates' choices.

With an overnight stay in pleasant, comfortable rural surroundings to the SW of Birmingham, it is hoped that this weekend event will provide a wide range of networking opportunities for delegates.

**Don't delay – Book NOW to avoid disappointment and get the benefit of discounted delegate fees. CLOSING DATE 31<sup>ST</sup> October '09**

Please complete a *separate form for each delegate* and staple together if necessary.  
Photocopies are acceptable. **Please type or write clearly**

<b>NAME (BLOCK CAPITALS)</b>	
<b>CONTACT ADDRESS (BLOCK CAPITALS)</b>	
	<b>Postcode</b>
<b>TELEPHONE No.</b>	
<b>EMAIL (Block Caps)</b>	
<b>ORGANISATION</b>	
<b>SPECIAL NEEDS</b> (Please specify)	

	<b>Totals</b>
<b>1 DAY DELEGATE (SATURDAY 21<sup>st</sup> November only)</b> Full Rate <b>£100.00</b> Unwaged Rate <b>£40</b>	£
<b>RESIDENTIAL DELEGATE (SATURDAY 21<sup>st</sup> November and SUNDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> November)</b> <b>Includes accommodation on Saturday night</b> Full Rate <b>£160</b> Unwaged Rate <b>£78</b> <b>DEDUCT £6.00 IF SHARING A ROOM</b>	£
<b>Non Residential Day Delegate Fee</b> 2 days <b>£110</b>	
<b>Optional extra B&amp;B (FRIDAY 20<sup>th</sup> November if required)</b> Single room <b>£40</b> Shared room <b>£36, per person.</b> <b>NO Separate Unwaged Accommodation Fee</b>	£
<b>SUB TOTAL</b>	£
<b>Less Early Bird discount of 10% (If booking and payment received before 20<sup>th</sup> September 2009 )</b>	<b>- £</b>
<b>FULL TOTAL</b>	<b>£</b>

**Complete this section if you have opted to share a room**

Name of person with whom you are sharing.		
Type of room	<b>TWIN</b>	<b>DOUBLE</b>
Is this person a delegate?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>

**CANCELLATIONS POLICY:** UP TO AND INCLUDING THE EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT CLOSING DATE, FULL REFUNDS [LESS AN ADMINISTRATIVE FEE OF £10] WILL BE MADE. AFTER THAT DATE 75% REFUND ONLY WILL BE MADE UNLESS A CANCELLED PLACE IS FULLY FILLED BY ANOTHER NEW APPLICATION. NO REFUNDS WILL BE MADE ONCE NUMBERS HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED WITH THE CONFERENCE CENTRE BY 31<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2009.

COMPLETED APPLICATION FORMS SHOULD BE SENT TOGETHER WITH CHEQUE(S)  
PAYABLE TO **UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK** TO:-  
LES ROBERTS, CONFERENCE SECRETARY, 33 OLD STREET, UPTON UPON SEVERN, WORCS WR8 0HN  
**EMAIL ADDRESS:** [UKWORKSTRESS@LIVE.CO.UK](mailto:UKWORKSTRESS@LIVE.CO.UK)