



Managing psychosocial strain at workplaces

- Inspection practices and policy measures in Finland



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Psychosocial strain – definition and frequency



PSYCHOSOCIAL WORKLOAD FACTORS

(OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION IN FINLAND)

Workload factors related to organisation of work

Examples:

- Too much work or too little work
- Too much time pressure at work
- Harmful factors related to working hours, such as shift work or night work

Workload factors related to work content

Examples:

- Monotonous work
- Excessive amount of information
- Constant interruptions
- Too much responsibility

Factors related to organisation of work

Factors related to work content

Factors related to social interaction at work

Workload factors related to social interaction at work

Examples:

- Working alone (social or physical isolation)
- Lack of support from supervisor or colleagues
- Bullying and harassment



COMMON PSYCHOSOCIAL WORKLOAD FACTORS AT FINNISH WORKPLACES

Heavy work load
and time
pressure
51 %

Experience of
work as
psychologically
demanding
48 %

Experience of
job insecurity
32 %



WHAT IS BULLYING AND HARASSMENT?

(OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION IN FINLAND)

- Harassment or bullying: systematic and persistent negative behavior.
- Harassment is, for example,
 - repeated threats
 - intimidation
 - vicious messages
 - continuous unjustified criticism and hindrance of work
 - questioning one's reputation or status
 - isolation from the work community
 - sexual harassment.
- Harassment may also involve misuse of the management right. This may include, for example, unjustified changes in the quality or number of work tasks.



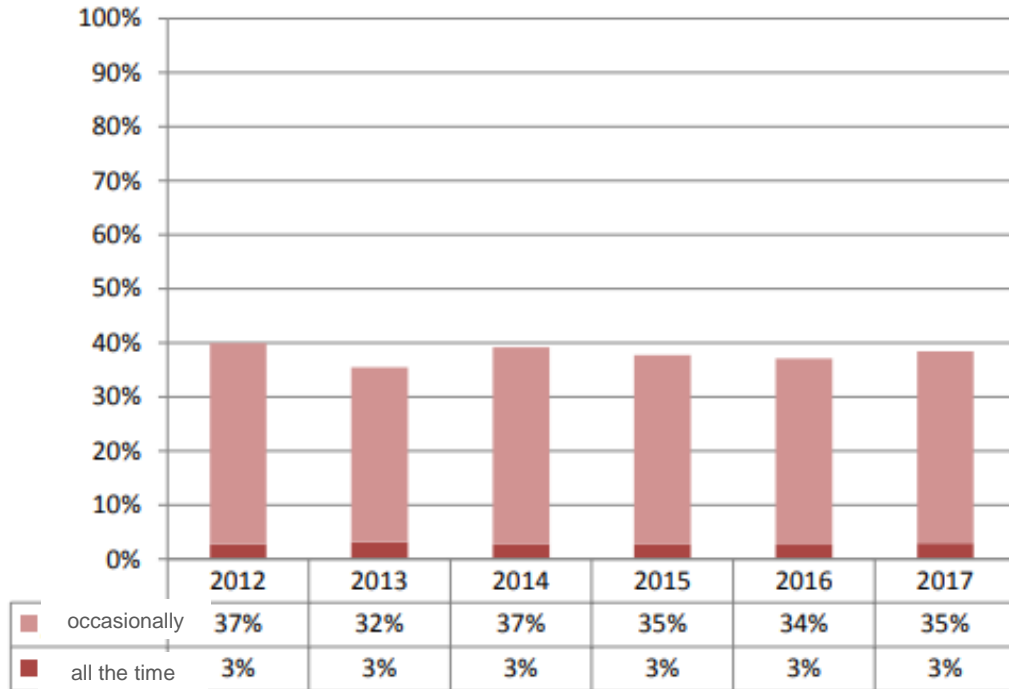
FREQUENCY OF BULLYING AND HARRASMENT

- Share of employees who felt themselves subjected to bullying and harassment: **5%** of Finnish employees
- More common in workplaces in the public sector and among female employees
- However, the impacts are much wider; bystanders also suffer from bullying, as it affects the whole working community's atmosphere.



”DOES BULLYING OCCUR AT YOUR WORKPLACE FROM COLLEAGUES?”

(WORKING CONDITIONS BAROMETER SURVEY, 2017)





Tackling psychosocial risks in Finland



LEGISLATION

- **The Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2002**
- OSH Act Chapter 5 includes specific provisions on work and working conditions.
- **Avoiding and reducing workloads 25 §**
If it is noticed that an employee is exposed to workloads in a manner which endangers his or her health, the employer, after becoming aware of the matter, shall by available means take measures to analyse the workload factors and to avoid or reduce the risk.
- **Threat of violence 27 §**
The work and working conditions in jobs entailing an evident threat of violence shall be so arranged that the threat of violence and incidents of violence are prevented as far as possible. Accordingly, appropriate safety arrangements and equipment needed for preventing or restricting violence and an opportunity to summon help shall be provided at the workplace.
- **Harassment 28 §**
If harassment or other inappropriate treatment of an employee occurs at work and causes hazards or risks to an employee's health, the employer, after becoming aware of the matter, must by available means take measures to remedy the situation



EMPLOYER'S OBLIGATIONS

- Employers must take appropriate measures to ensure the safety and health of their employees in the workplace.
- It is not sufficient to mitigate negative consequences.
- → Prioritise preventive measures.
- Employers are expected to
 - 1) Be aware of the PS-workload factors of their workplace
 - 2) To take measures proactively themselves if the workload is harmful or health endangering.
- The main tools for managing PS-workload factors:
analysis and assessment of the risks at work.
- Where employers lack the expertise → use external experts such as **occupational healthcare services**.
Organisation of occupational health care is an employer's statutory obligation.





SUPERVISING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

- The Regional State Administrative Agencies oversee compliance with workplace OSH within their OSH Divisions.
- OSH enforcement is mainly carried out by means of workplace inspections.
- In 2018: over 26,000 inspections.
- OSH inspectors in Finland: about 300 inspectors.
- All inspectors check psychosocial strain (basic issues) and approximately 30 inspectors specialise in this task.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the four-year framework agreements concerning these areas of responsibility define the aims of OSH supervision.
- In 2016 –2019, the inspections carried out by the OSH authority covered psychosocial stress factors in all sectors of employment.



INSPECTION GUIDELINES

- Inspection guidelines are implemented in all OSH Divisions in order to standardize and to improve the quality of OSH supervision and to use resources more effectively.
- Inspection guidelines for psychosocial strain (2018)
- Inspection guidelines for harassment and bullying (2016)
- Inspection guidelines for violence at work (2015)





CONDUCTING THE INSPECTION

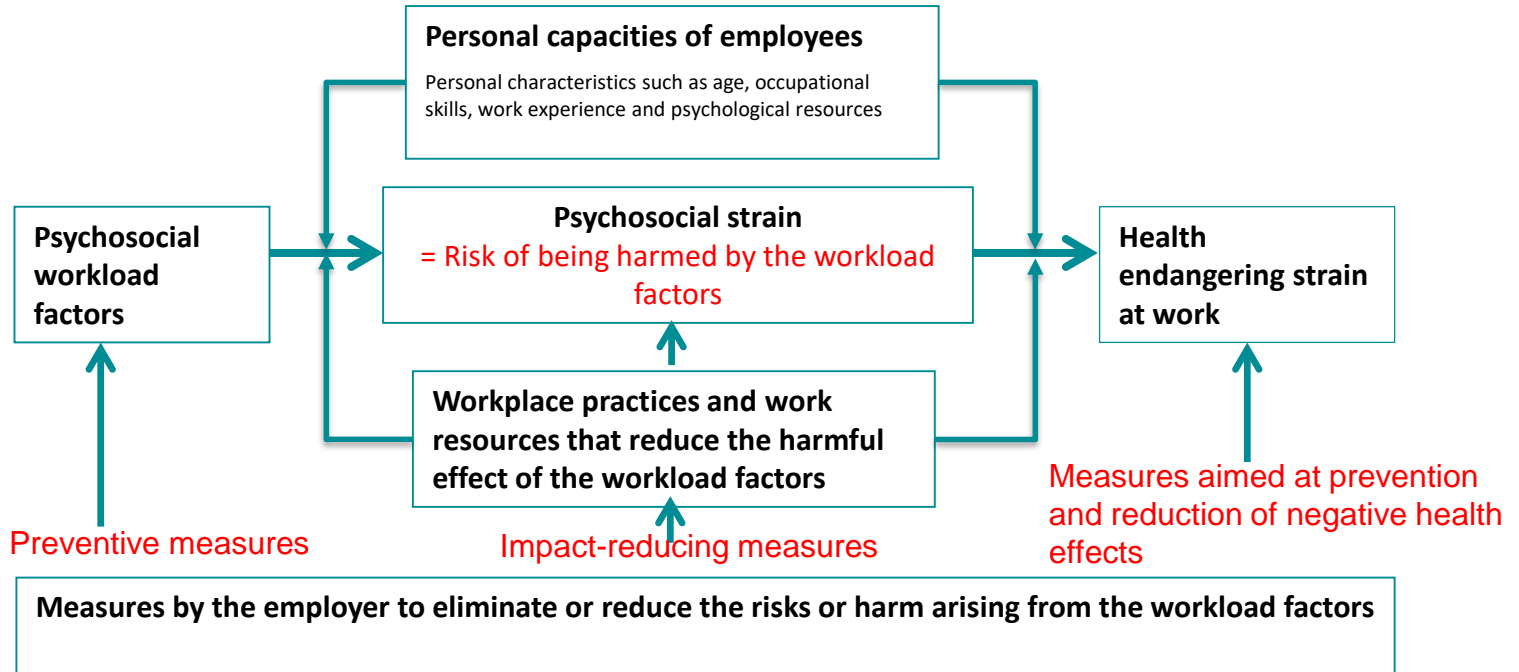
- The inspector monitors that workplaces have well-functioning practices to avoid and manage psychosocial risks by:
 - a) Evaluating the existence of management procedures (systems) and
 - b) Investigating how the management procedures function in practice by observing if the working conditions are adequately safe and healthy.

- The inspector does **not**:
 - Identify on behalf of the employer the existence of risk factors, nor assess the risk
 - Evaluate the health or the work ability of the employees.
 - Assist employees in the handling of harassment or stress issues at the workplace or mediate conflicts.



ASSESSING IF ADEQUATE MEASURES HAVE BEEN TAKEN

- Has the employer taken adequate measures to avoid or reduce the risks?
- The OSH Act does not include requirements about acceptable exposure/level.
- Employers choose the necessary measures.
- Employers must first and foremost use preventive measures.





Results from OSH inspections



TARGETED INSPECTIONS AIMED AT SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE SECTORS

- Yksote-project (2017-2018)
- OSH enforcement and communication project aimed at private employers in the social and health sectors in order to prevent health hazards caused by harmful workloads.
- Targeted inspections to e.g. medical centres, housing services for older people, child day care services.
- All together 1855 inspections.
- Psychosocial workload:
- Proportion of workplaces with poor management of psychosocial risks: **16 %**
- Threat of violence:
- Proportion of workplaces with poor management of threat of violence: **26 %**



CUSTOMER-INITIATED CONTACTS CONCERNING BULLYING AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WORKLOAD

- In 2018: ~2 300 customer-initiated contacts with the OSH authorities related to harassment and psychosocial workload. ~25% from social and health sector.
- Most common reasons for contacts:
 - Ask for instructions and advice on how to handle the matter at the workplace
 - The employee requests supervision measures in his/her own matter
 - The contact person gives an inspection tip concerning the entire workplace
- The contacted employees often experience harassment from the superior.
- Harassment manifests itself in very different ways.
 - Repeated threats, intimidation, constant unjustified criticism of work, questioning one's reputation or status.
- Harassment in the social media and harassment cases involving joint workplaces have emerged as a new phenomenon.



Psychosocial workload factors survey



PSYCHOSOCIAL WORKLOAD FACTORS SURVEY

- Designed to examine workers' views on psychosocial workload factors.
- Provides an overview of:
 - Psychosocial strain that workers are experiencing
 - Harmful psychosocial workload factors present in the workplace.
- The survey is designed to facilitate occupational and safety enforcement, but employers can also use it. Based on the survey responses, enforcement measures can be focused on issues that are most often causing strain for the employees.
- Workers answer the questionnaire anonymous before an OSH inspection. Individual workers' answers are not shared with the employer.
- The questionnaire consists of 23 statements relating to:
 - The way in which work is organised (7 items)
 - The content of the work (9 items)
 - Social interactions within the work community (6 items)
 - One item: health-endangering work-related strain in general.



CONTENTS OF THE SURVEY

- 1. Workload factors relating to the way in which work is organised
 - Duties, targets and workload (3 items)
 - Working hours (2 items)
 - Equipment, work environment and distractions (2 items)

4.2.1 Duties, targets and workload

How often have the following issues caused you harmful strain at work during the past six months?						Does not apply to my work
	Not at all	Rarely	Occasionally	Fairly often	Very often	
1. Unclear job descriptions or responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5	6



CONTENTS OF THE SURVEY

- 2. Workload factors relating to the content of the work
 - Monotony (1 item)
 - Unclear instructions and information overload (2 items)
 - Multitasking and interruptions (2 items)
 - Challenging or high-pressure work and the risk of workplace violence (4 items)

4.3.2 Unclear instructions and information overload

How often have the following issues caused you harmful strain at work during the past six months?						Does not apply to my work
9. Working with unclear instructions or expectations	Not at all	Rarely	Occasionally	Fairly often	Very often	6
	1	2	3	4	5	



CONTENTS OF THE SURVEY

- 3. Workload factors relating to the social functionality in the work community
 - Interaction and cooperation among workers (2 items)
 - Interaction and relationships with managers (2 items)
 - Harassment and discrimination in the workplace (2 items)

4.4.1 Interaction and cooperation among workers

How often have the following issues caused you harmful strain at work during the past six months?						Does not apply to my work
	Not at all	Rarely	Occasionally	Fairly often	Very often	
17. Problems related to mutual cooperation and interaction between colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6



CONTENTS OF THE SURVEY

- 4. Health-endangering work-related strain (1 item)

4.5. Health-endangering work-related strain

	Not at all	Rarely	Occasionally	Fairly often	Very often
23. Does your work cause such workloads, which weaken your physical or mental health?	1	2	3	4	5



Further measures to tackle psychosocial strain at work



HARMONIOUS WORK COMMUNITY -PROJECT

- Harmonious Work Community is an anti-bullying project implemented by the Finnish Institute for Occupational Health (2014-2016)
- The objective of the project is to promote zero tolerance of bullying at all levels of the organisation.
- Research: Examines the links between the working culture of the workplace and the prevalence of bullying.
- Intervention: Supports the development of a culture of non-acceptance of bullying and the establishment of zero tolerance of bullying
- Tools for workplaces:
 - Steps towards a harmonious working community - Workbook
 - Zero tolerance for bullying at workplaces – online coaching for supervisors



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MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE -PROJECT

Conducted by Finnish Institute for Occupational health and Mental Health Finland (2018-2020)

- Online toolkit for line managers
 - Helps to understand how and why mental resources and work ability vary during life-course and how individuals can be supported during different phases
 - 1) Management practices supporting mental wellbeing at workplace
 - 2) Strengthening the resources of work and employees
 - 3) Identifying and managing risk factors for mental wellbeing
 - 4) Supporting workers experiencing stress or mental problems
- Award for Mentally Healthy Workplaces
 - Workplaces can apply for an award "Mentally Healthy Workplace"
 - Workplaces must meet certain criteria in order to receive an award
 - The aim is to
 - Support the long-term processes of workplaces in improving employees' mental wellbeing
 - Emphasise the importance of the management of PS-risks and enhancing mental wellbeing as a strategic success factor for companies.



STRATEGY LEVEL

- National Mental Health Strategy 2020-2030
 - The MSAH is preparing mental health strategy in collaboration with several stakeholders.
 - The objective of the strategy is to ensure that mental health work will continue in a goal-oriented manner.
 - Strategy will include a Programme for Mental Health in Work Life.
 - Strategy will be adopted in December 2019
- Policy for the work environment and wellbeing at work until 2030
 - Guides the activities of the ministry and its administrative branch to ensure healthy and safe work at all workplaces.
 - The policy has three focus areas:
 - Future challenges concerning OSH and wellbeing at work
 - Safe and healthy working conditions
 - Promoting functional capacity, workability, and employability
- Goals (e.g.): Reducing harmful work-related strain, promoting mental workability, reducing emotional abuse and workplace bullying



Conclusions



CONCLUSIONS

- The changing world of work:
reducing significance of physical strain, increasing significance of mental strain.
- More brain work, use of digital tools and robotics
→ Importance of cognitive ergonomics.
- The management of psychosocial risks will become an increasingly important part of OSH.
- Psychosocial risks can be managed as well as physical risks.
- The management of psychosocial workload factors is worthwhile:
In a safe workplace the workers are healthy and wellbeing as well.
- → Impact on customer satisfaction, quality of service and productivity.



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