



International Commission on Occupational Health

Founded in 1906 as Permanent Commission

World Day for Safety and Health at Work: 28 April 2016

The International Commission of Occupational Health, ICOH, calls for action to manage stress and psychosocial risks factors at work. While individual workers around the world are affected we should concentrate on measures at the level of workplace or organisation.

We are proud to celebrate the *World Day for Safety and Health at Work* with the International Labour Organisation (ILO). We believe that the theme of this year “Workplace Stress – A Collective Challenge” is relevant all over the world.

Stress is not just everyday pressures and deadlines. We are talking about those serious consequences of stress that cause changes in our body functions resulting in physical and mental disorders. The negative outcomes – often combining stress and other contributing factors at work – include cardiovascular diseases, other health disorders, injuries and suicides.

The Global Burden of Disease and Injury, GBD metrics indicate that mental disorders cause the biggest single contribution of Years Lived with Disability, YLD, 21% of all YLD years globally, followed by musculoskeletal disorders at 19%. The ILO has not been able to estimate the exact number of deaths but it is known that stress and strain linked to shift work, night work and long working hours are associated with death, diseases and disability – including poor workability – and premature withdrawal from working life. Connections also to harassment, violence and suicides have been identified. The number of disorders and deaths that would not be there without long-term stress – the attributable fraction - has been estimated to be between 5-15% of cardiovascular deaths, more with long working hours. In some countries suicides are compensated as occupational diseases, such as *karoshi* in Japan. In Finland the biggest share of the causes of today’s disability pensions is mental health, 42%. For every new disability 15 working years in average are lost when the expected retirement would be at 67 years.

The ICOH would like to congratulate ILO for an excellent and comprehensive report on Workplace Stress, <http://www.ilo.org/safework/events/safeday/lang--en/index.htm>
I encourage everyone to study the ILO Report.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has just concluded the two year European campaign on Psychosocial Risks and Stress at Work. “Around half of European workers consider stress to be common in their workplace, and it contributes to around half of all lost working days”. The EU-OSHA further says: “however, when viewed as an organisational issue rather than an individual fault, psychosocial risks and stress can be just

as manageable as any other workplace safety and health risk”.

This is important. We should not talk about mental health of an individual worker, we should talk about the *mental health of an organisation* that employs those workers. I would prefer not to talk about mental health of a worker because of the still existing stigma, rather we should tackle psychosocial factors present in the work organisation. One cannot eliminate a disorder as a whole but the factors behind such disorders can be eliminated or reduced.

A company, educational institute, public service organisation, health sector employer and others may not consider that they should have a role and responsibility in managing psychosocial factors at work. It is also true that the consequences are often caused by many factors that act together. But there is a huge difference between work settings, between the “best place to work” and the “worst place to work” even in the same sectors and operations. How can we learn from the best practices and multiply them in other settings, exactly as we manage injury prevention and eliminate exposures of carcinogens.

I was personally involved from the very start in recognising the World Day in the ILO as of 2003. The Workers' Group proposed that ILO should launch a World Day based on the Workers Memorial Day on April 28. We started it in a very modest but tripartite way. Today I am impressed to see the April 28 success globally.

April 28 is a Safe Day for Healthy Work Life!



Jukka Takala, President of ICOH