



# WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL STRESS?

"The physical and psychological responses of workers who perceive that their work demands exceed their resources and/or abilities to cope with the work" (Leka, Griffiths & Cox, 2003).

## COMMON WORKPLACE STRESSORS INCLUDE

- Communication difficulties
- Bullying, harassment or intimidation
- Excessive/unreasonable work demands
- Job insecurity
- Significant changes in the workplace.
- Understaffing and inadequate resources
- Unresolved health and safety concerns
- Insufficient training
- Lack of control over how work is done
- Difficulties with clients or the public.

## SYMPTOMS OF STRESS



### COGNITIVE

- Inability to complete work within a reasonable timeframe
- Loss of initiative and creativity
- Poor concentration and memory
- Difficulty learning new things
- Difficulty in making decisions and problem solving
- Uncharacteristic errors and disorganisation.



### PHYSICAL

- Constant lack of energy
- Frequent complaints of headaches
- Frequent illness
- Reduced attention to physical appearance.



### EMOTIONAL

- Increased anxiety, excessive worry and lack of calm
- Loss of confidence or self-esteem
- Increased displays of emotion
- Reduced enjoyment and engagement in work
- Reduced motivation and low morale
- Indifference or dissatisfaction with work and/or work colleagues
- Frequent mood changes.



### BEHAVIOURAL

- Increased impatience and workplace conflict with others
- Deteriorating work relationships
- Withdrawal from work/social activities
- Regular lateness/poor punctuality
- Avoidance of work
- Consistently working long hours
- Frequent, unplanned absences from work and use of leave
- Increased consumption of alcohol and drugs
- Destructive behaviour.

# IMPACTS OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Not all stress is bad. A certain amount of stress can improve performance and motivation. Prolonged exposure to stressors, on the other hand, can have detrimental effects to health and wellbeing.

## Psychosocial Hazards

## Occupational Stress

### Psychological Injury/Illness

Depression, anxiety, burnout, emotional distress, suicide.

### Physical Illness

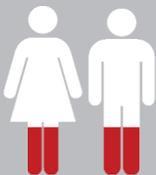
Cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, immune deficiency, gastrointestinal disorders.

### Social Impact

Relationship breakdown, social withdrawal, interpersonal conflict, loss of social support.

### Organisational Impact

Reduced productivity, job satisfaction, morale, cohesion, client satisfaction and increased absenteeism, staff turnover, accidents, injuries, conflict and workers' compensation claims.



APPROXIMATELY

**20%**

“ A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF AUSTRALIA'S WORKING POPULATION ARE LIKELY TO BE EXPERIENCING A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION AT ANY ONE TIME ”



“ MENTAL DISORDERS ARE THE **THIRD LEADING CAUSE** OF THE NON-FATAL BURDEN OF DISEASE AND INJURY ”



SCHOLARS PREDICT THAT BY **2020**

“ STRESS-RELATED ILLNESSES SUCH AS **DEPRESSION AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE WILL BE THE LEADING CAUSES** OF THE GLOBAL DISEASE BURDEN ”



AVERAGE COST OF A MENTAL STRESS-RELATED CLAIM  
**\$16,500 vs \$6,900**  
FOR ALL SERIOUS CLAIMS

## FACTS ABOUT STRESS



AVERAGE LOST TIME FOR A MENTAL STRESS-RELATED CLAIM  
**11 WEEKS vs 4 WEEKS**  
FOR ALL SERIOUS CLAIMS



SOCIETAL COSTS OF DEPRESSION DUE TO JOB STRAIN COSTS  
**\$730 MILLION/YEAR AND \$13.8 BILLION OVER A LIFETIME**

# PREVENTING AND MANAGING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

UNDER WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY LAW, THERE IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE A SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKPLACE. THIS RESPONSIBILITY EXTENDS TO THE REQUIREMENT TO IDENTIFY AND MANAGE OCCUPATIONAL STRESS.

It is important that organisations establish the nature of any stressors that may be present and determine how to best combat these issues using a risk management approach. By identifying and assessing the workplace stressors, suitable interventions can be put in place, not only to mitigate risks, but to also enhance employee health and wellbeing and organisational performance.



## STRATEGIES



### MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES:

- Put stress on the agenda
- Encourage open discussion
- Foster a problem solving attitude
- Assess risks and put in place action plans to manage the identified risks
- Communicate clearly
- Give clear and consistent messages
- Provide professional development opportunities for employees
- Be flexible and understanding
- Set realistic timeframes.

- Encourage a fun and engaging team environment
- Promote exercise, team lunches, healthy eating and positive thinking
- Encourage staff to seek support

### EMPLOYEE STRATEGIES:

- Stress management starts with a healthy body – maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly and get good quality sleep
- Learn to recognise when you're having unhelpful or negative thoughts
- Find time to do activities that you enjoy
- Talk to someone you trust e.g. family member, friend, colleague, psychologist
- Have a health check with your General Practitioner.

## BENEFITS OF MANAGING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

It makes sense from a business perspective to ensure employees are working within an environment that allows them to be productive, efficient and work to their full potential.



Employees and their families are more likely to have better mental health when surrounded by a positive and supportive work environment.



Organisations who promote and support mental health in the workplace can reduce direct and indirect costs, and satisfy their ethical and legal obligations by enhancing employee health, safety and wellbeing.



Societal benefits include a sense of inclusion, increased productivity, reduced turnover and lower use of health services.