

# Strategic approach to managing work-related stress

## CISM network Ireland

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# Work-related wellness in context

- Health and Safety remit - legislation
- Personal (Mental Health) injury – stress /distress
- Duty holders – standards to meet ('reasonable')
- Org Psychologist/inspector:
  - Assist – expertise re evidence available
  - Support – seminars/presentations/tools (Work PositiveCI)
  - Regulate – Advice/IN/DPP

# Wellbeing Vs Stress

- High wellbeing – low stress
- Stress not an illness or a disorder
- *Can* lead to an (Diagnostic Statistical Manual) illness - anxiety or depressive disorder
- A state of transient discomfort with varying degrees of dysfunction
- Being stressed interferes with reliability as a witness to the stress
- Highly subjective area –
  - Subjectively experienced
  - Subjectively described/labelled
  - Causes differently attributed

# Difficulties assessing wellbeing/stress

- National, sociological datasets scarce
- Coverage of psychosocial/'feeling' states/mental health issues scant
- Quality of data varies
  - Lack of understanding
  - Lack of agreement
  - Complexity of constructs
  - Associated variables random and minimal
  - Appropriateness of statistical models?

# Stress and wellbeing

- Experience of both can be short- or long-term
- We do not know which until its too late
- It changes us physiologically, psychologically , cognitively and behaviourally
- Leads to known decreased/increased information processing capabilities
- We are not capable or competent at self management when in distress to return to wellbeing
- Employers duties to employees – hazard control

# Strategic approach

- Look to research to find evidence
- Apply evidence to work systems – policies and procedures
- Use procedures consistently, fairly, transparently
- Leave room for manoeuvre
- Individual and group approach
- Review and record

# Stressors-> cause lower wellbeing

- Systems of work – i.e. shift work
- Technical aspects of work – i.e. machine usage
- Competency issues – i.e. training not effective or sufficient
- Fear of others/threat – i.e. bullying/conflict
- Consequences -> not coping, over time, -> lowered resilience, reduced performance, -> absence/illness

# Research – HSA/ESRI work

- Reliable international data sources
- ESRI competent expertise
- HSA – commitment to improve existing infrastructures to assist in the development of better systems nationally
- Goal ->reduce work related stress
- How? -> identify causal features within organisations
- Why?-> inform reduction actions/strategies
- ‘Evidence for Policy’



# Challenges of the report

- Stress
  - Not confined to 'work'
  - Not a discreet category
  - Over representation
- Data issues
  - Single source
  - Not enough variables
  - Limited scope for granularity
  - No qualitative features

# ESRI Report Results – 1 SAD

- Women have a higher risk of SAD illnesses
- 35 to 54 age group most likely to report SAD:
- Education sector, followed by health, public administration, transport and “other services”, which includes finance, information and communications.
- Long weekly hours and
- Shift workers report more SAD.
- New recruits have a higher risk of SAD per month worked

# ESRI Report 2 – Job Stress & working conditions

- Ireland compared to UK and EU
- EU dataset, 2 waves - European Working Conditions Survey - 2010 and 2015
- Job stress = reported experiencing stress at work “always” or “most of the time” *and*
- reported physiological stress reactions - general fatigue, anxiety *and* sleep disturbance.

# Results re stress from work:

- 1. Emotional demands:** (i.e., dealing with angry clients/customers or having to hide emotions while at work)
- 2. Time pressure** (e.g. never have enough time to get the job done, work to tight deadlines)
- 3. Bullying, harassment, violence, discrimination etc.**
- 4. Long working hours:**

# Stressful sectors and jobs in Ireland

- Health sector (18 per cent),
- Public Administration (16 per cent)
- Manufacturing sector (15 per cent) experience the highest levels of job stress.
- Occupational groups :
- Technical/associate professionals (20 per cent),
- Professionals (16 per cent)
- Managers (14 per cent).

# Trends and Insights

- People primarily emotional and need support, time, supervision around that (- Managers also!)
- Demanding people exist - takes more skill and time to manage
- Time crucial to reduce stress outcomes – less time reduces capacity to tolerate
- Relationships and interpersonal behaviour - Mediators and moderators exist
- Physical/behavioural consequences of distress – less sleep, reduced exercise, social removal, cognitive simplification, heuristics – add to longer term distress

# Solutions

- Person-job fit ?
- Upgrade probation period? – more inputs to test/learn/revert
- Formal feedback and constructive assessment of ‘perfit’.
- Resilience and stress management– self management /360 feedback/monthly coaching/ self insights
- People-facing roles need more supports – what type?
- Long working hours/shift work - alter late shift content for reduced capacity/tolerance/safety behaviour
- Engineered solutions – signs, colour,spaces,sounds

# Recommendations

- Identify health promoting (carriers) elements of work life AND those which are potential threats -> analyse data re illness absence
- Influence and extend capacities of data capturers ->get more usable, reliable, accessible data - fine tune it for usable insights
- Less reliance on averages and surveys in order to better capture subtleties behind the statistics – ID facilitators, barriers and mediators for increased performance, wellbeing and employment success
- Develop state structures to engage in unified approach across institutions
- Use all the expertise across industry -private and public, policy and applied
- Work PositiveCI ->



# WORK POSITIVE<sup>CI</sup>

- Ireland's national tool to manage and control work-related stressors
- Developed by HSA - 2000-2002
- Now owned by HSA/State Claims Agency - Critical incidents added (CI)
- Online, free, easy-to-use, evidence – based toolkit
- Easy, effective way to identify risks (stressors)
- Includes risks to employee wellbeing (WHO-5, PHQ)



Gníomhaireacht Bainistíochta an Chisteáin Náisiúnta  
National Treasury Management Agency

An Gníomhaireacht Stáit um Éilimh  
State Claims Agency



# Four Stage Process

1

## Prepare

Build a business case, secure commitment and establish your steering group

2

## Measure

Identify risk and opportunity within your workplace using our free survey tools

3

## Action Plan

Explore and prioritise the key actions, develop your action plan

4

## Review

Review progress and revitalise your Action Plan

# Finally

- Address individual issues in systematic humane way
- Have systems for the group as a whole
- Keep records carefully – GDPR
- Train competent people to deal with difficult cases
- Allow time to process complex emotional demands
- Review by asking – Work Positive CI

# Thank you