Psychosocial risks and health and well-being at work
– Eurofound findings and policy pointers

Dr Erika Mezger
Deputy Director, Eurofound
The European Working Condition’s Survey

- Working conditions
- Workers’ (self-reported) health
- Workers’ emotional and psychological well being
In this presentation

- The policy context
- Quality of work in the EWCS
- Physical and psycho-social risks
- Psychosocial work environment and health outcomes
- Conclusion and policy pointers
The policy context

- Improving safety and health of workers enshrined in European Treaties
- Health and well-being key elements of Europe 2020: healthy economy depends on healthy people
- Range of actions for safety and health at work: Community strategy for the period 2007 – 2012 (but: no new strategy agreed)
- Depression and work related stress increasingly important cause of incapacity for work
QUALITY OF WORK IN THE EWCS
Topics in the 5th EWCS

- Wide range of aspects of the conditions of work and conditions of employment:
  - Demographics
  - Working time
  - Physical and psychosocial work factors
  - Nature and organisation of work
  - Job content and training
  - Work-life balance
  - Information and consultation
  - Outcomes: health, job satisfaction
  - Earnings

- Gender mainstreaming central in reflection on questionnaire
Job quality: four indices

- Earnings
- Prospects
- Intrinsic Job Quality
- Working Time Quality

Intrinsic Job Quality

- Skill use and discretion
- Social environment
- Physical environment
- Work intensity
PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS
Change in exposure to physical risks (index) between 2000 and 2010, by country

Eurofound, Fifth European Working Conditions Survey
1. Work intensity and job autonomy
   - workload
   - work pace
   - control

2. Characteristics of the job content:
   - type of tasks
   - exposure to people through work
   - changes in process and use of skills

3. Working time arrangements and work-life balance
4. Interpersonal relations at work and support
5. Job insecurity and career development
High demands and work intensity

- Work intensity can be measured using several EWCS questions
  - the number of determinants of the pace of work
  - frequency of having to work at high speed
  - frequency of having to work to tight deadlines
  - sufficient time to get the job done
- Work intensity increased over the last two decades but the increase slowed down since 2005
- 62% of workers report to be working to tight deadlines and 59% of workers report to be working at high speed (almost) all of the time.

Eurofound, Fifth European Working Conditions Survey
• Ability to change or choose
  ‣ order of tasks
  ‣ speed or rate of work
  ‣ method of work.
• 53% of workers control all these aspects
• Autonomy increases with age
• On aggregate, men and women do not differ
Work intensity and autonomy by occupation and sector (Karasek model)
Work intensity and autonomy by country
Workers reporting monotonous tasks (%)
Reported levels of jobs involving repetitive, monotonous or complex tasks – by occupation (%)
Emotional demands: Hiding ones feelings, always or most of the time, by sector and gender, EU27

[Bar chart showing the percentage of men and women hiding their feelings by sector.]
Workers reporting selected job content characteristics (%)
Working time influence on work-life balance and health reported

- Higher irregularity of time schedules increases the probability
  - of reporting difficulties with work-life balance
  - of reporting that work has a negative impact on health (to lesser extent)

- Autonomy in organising time eases these negative effects
Irregularity index; Influence working time index

(EU28=100)
PSYCHOSOCIAL WORK ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH OUTCOMES
Health and well-being, work-ability outcomes and job satisfaction, by gender (%)

- Not (not at all) satisfied with working conditions
- Sleeping problems
- Poor mental wellbeing
- Work affects health negatively
- Experience stress in work always or most of the time
- Unable (or unwilling) to do job at 60
- Absenteeism due to health problems
- Musculoskeletal disorders

Men and Women
Number of aspects of health and wellbeing for which a pronounced effect was found (out of 5)

- Adverse social behaviour
- Work life balance
- Being well paid for the job
- Irregular working hours
- Discrimination
- Work intensity
- Monotonous work
- Job insecurity
- Complex work
- Working long hours (48 hours or more)
- Career prospects
- Feeling of work well done
- Social support
- Applying own ideas in work
- Repetitive work
- Job autonomy
- High autonomy and high intensity

Eurofound, Fifth European Working Conditions Survey
Outcomes perspective (1)

- Stress
  - Work intensity and Adverse social behaviour show strong association
  - Job autonomy (as isolated variable) does not show strong association (second part Karasek)
  - Also related: long hours, complex tasks, discrimination, and job insecurity.
• Sleeping disorders
  ▸ Adverse social behaviour highly associated
  ▸ Also: discrimination, learning new things, working long hours, working in irregular time arrangements, job insecurity

• Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)
  ▸ consequence of both physical and psychosocial risks
  ▸ highest association with composite ergonomic risk indicator
  ▸ adverse social behaviour, discrimination, irregular hours, job insecurity all increase the odds of reporting MSDs.

• Lowering odds
  ▸ Work life balance
  ▸ Social support for sleeping disorders
  ▸ Career prospects for MSDs
• Poor mental-well-being (WHO5)
  ▸ a number of variables are relevant; no prominence of one or two variables
  ▸ increase in odds: job insecurity, irregular working hours, monotonous job, adverse social behaviour and discrimination
  ▸ decrease in odds: work life balance, being well paid, career prospects and social support.
Lack of information about health and safety risks, by occupation and type of employment, EU27

Eurofound, Fifth European Working Conditions Survey
Conclusions

- Physical risks: exposure has not diminished greatly since 1991 (1st EWCS)
- Prevalence of psychosocial risks
  - considerable proportion of workers report monotonous or complex tasks
  - intensity of work (high speed or tight deadlines)
  - aspects of organisation of working time (irregularity or long working hours)
- Strongest negative association with health and well-being
  - adverse social behaviour and work intensity
- Strongest positive relationship:
  - Good work life balance and social support
• Have we missed the transformation of the nature of work?
• Psychosocial risks are linked to work-ability and sustainability of work → High labour market participation requires attention to psychosocial environment at work
• Policy solutions must be multidimensional, addressing working time and work–life balance, work organisation practices.
• The extent of differences between men and women reinforces the need to develop gendered analyses and policies in relation to working lives.
Policy pointers (2)

- Win–win arrangements should be promoted: working conditions associated with higher health and well-being of workers are often also associated with high motivation, commitment, and sustainable work.
- Previous research has found associations between worker well-being and the performance of companies and workplace innovation.
- Consultation and employee representation is key to the effectiveness of policies to improve working conditions.
- Good work may well be one of the keys for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth.
Perspectives for the future

- Increase our understanding of the conditions that promote win-win solutions: company practices and job designs that improve both company performance, job quality and employee health and wellbeing
  - Third European Company Survey 2013
- Further investigate and reflect upon the relationship between health and wellbeing at work
  - Having a job, being fit for the job, having relevant, marketable skills, combining work demands with private demands (care etc.), being motivated to work etc.
For more information:

www.eurofound.europa.eu