

STRESS IMPACT AT THE WORKING PLACE – COMPARATIVE STUDY FOR BULGARIA, MACEDONIA AND GERMANY

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Abstract

The modern society is highly material and financially oriented. Due to this reason, the processes have to be cost-effective with optimizing the expenses. Despite the tendencies of modernization, technological progress and automating proceedings, the role of a person as an “actor” in these processes is irreplaceable. Unfortunately, especially in the countries with highly developed economy, the expenses for staff are really high. The worker’s protection from occupational accidents and professional illnesses, as well as the employees’ efficiency in a long-term plan are connected with consumption resources which for the factories are often quite high. In short-term aspect, the resource-saving in a way of good working conditions is not a decision.

During the last years, more and more attention is given to a factor that remains at the background of a workplace – the stress. There are many studies about its negative effect on the workers, as that reflects on the whole effectiveness of the companies and the factories. The stress-management and the prevention of the Burnout syndrome are important prerequisites for sustainable economic growth because the performance, creativity, productivity, and competitiveness of every factory depend on the qualified, healthy, motivated and organized employees who work there. The aim of the study is a comparative analysis of the working conditions in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Germany for several branches for which personal indicators as environment, habits, motivation, etc. are observed. Based on assessment of the workplace stress, conclusions should be drawn for its impact as a factor, threatening the workers’ health.

Key words: WORKING STRESS, SAFETY, WORKPLACE FACTORS, BURNOUT

INTRODUCTION

The safety neglect on the working place is quite higher in the countries with developing economy compared to the developed countries.

The technical progress and automation of the working processes are high and the result of that is the fewer number of working must have higher performance. More and more people feel the consequences of the modern society through psychological bundle as time pressure, social isolation, alienation, concentration problems. At this time the psychological stress on the working place increases due to noise, heat, night shifts, heavy physical work. Each of these factors can be a reason for violation of a person’s emotional balance. It can be noted that when a person is under stress, the people around him are affected as well. Every person has their own idea of perfection and experiences situations in which they can react chaotically or nervously. In these cases the body sends a signal for attention and people resort mostly to “sources for calming the emotions” and unfortunately they are unhealthy eating, alcohol, drugs or medicaments.

The chronic stress leads to chronic illnesses: asthma and breathing difficulties, back pains, other

muscle pains and high blood pressure, cardiovascular risk as heart attack, heart diseases, etc; difficulties with metabolism, gnashing of teeth, alcoholism, depressions.

Assessing the importance of this factor and the World’s work safety and health day – 28 April, the International work organization organizes a campaign in 2016 under the slogan: “Stress on the working place”.

According to healthcare in Germany for treatment of chronic diseases around 200 billion euro are granted annually. It is considered that 50 to 60% of the sick days are connected with stress. (*BGI-609: Stress am Arbeitsplatz, Metall-Berufsgenossenschaft, 2003*). The World health organization (WHO) defines stress as one of the biggest reasons for illnesses of 21 century.

Eight out of ten Germans feel their life as stressed; every third person is feeling under pressure almost always. This shows and the actual Forsa – a research on behalf of the Technical Health Insurance Fund (Germany). “Especially worrying is the fact that the number of Burnout-diseases increased to 17% in the last five years...”, says Helen Heinemann from Hamburger Institut für Burnout-Prävention

(IBP) <http://www.g-o.de/wissen-aktuell-9928-2009-05-18.html>
(06.10.2011).

Stress management and the prevention of the Burnout-syndrome are significant factors for stable economical success. The productivity, creativity and competitiveness of each factory depend on the qualified, healthy, motivated and organized employees and workers.

Aim of the research

Through comparing the working conditions in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Germany of the chosen branches the aim is to be given an assessment of how the stress occurs on the working place and eventually turns into health endangering factor. For the assessment are considered the personal characteristics of the respondents as dwelling, habits, motivation, etc.

Each country offers different work conditions. What actually matter are the mentality, living standard, the developing level of the economy. For same type of job is given different payment. Not only the workplace and the related benefits are the reasons why many qualified people are looking for fulfillment in Western Europe.

It is a fact that in Bulgaria and Macedonia are observed processes, connected with searching for new workplaces outside the territories of the countries. The reason is often the low payment, as well as the lack of perspectives of development for young and qualified people. There are also cases of job positions which are inconsistent with the level of qualifications of the candidates.

When we speak for work conditions on the workplace most commonly are understood the methods and means of protection of the workers from occupational diseases (hearing loss, skin problems, or of the musculoskeletal system) and environmental factors connected with their safety.

The psychological states connected with emotional depletion as the so called Burnout-syndrome, other psychological misbalances or psychiatric diseases were not in the group of occupational diseases to that moment.

Table 1: summary of the more important stress factors

Type of stress factor	Description
<i>Psychological stressors</i>	Time pressure; traffic jams; large crowds of people; competition; monotony; illness/death of a colleague; separation of partners; unemployment; change of the workplace; new setting
<i>Physical stressors</i>	Heat, wintriness, noise, light, air pollution
<i>Psychic stressors</i>	Starvation, pain injury
<i>Load at work</i>	Overload , underload , ambition , examinations
<i>Social stressors</i>	Mobbing, conflicts with colleagues, injustice , isolation
<i>Resources as stress factors (look Hobfoll p.71)</i>	Non-material: marriage, citizenship
	Material: food, clothing, cars
	Personal: intelligence, optimism, talents
	Convertible actives: money, knowledge, time
<i>Chemical stressors</i>	Drugs, chemical substances, alcohol, cigarettes

Questionnaires

All participants in the polls answered or gave an assessment of the following formulations:

1. I go to work with pleasure.
2. I feel **motivated** by my workplace.
3. I **trust** my colleagues.
4. **Teamwork** it is not a problem at my workplace.
5. My attitude towards the **management staff** is good.
6. What does make me happy?
7. I live a **healthy life** – nutrition and free time.
8. During work I feel...
9. **Problems** connected with stress.
10. Do you feel under stress and what do you do about it?

Explanation notes to the polls:

Questions are selected so as to allow swift and spontaneous answers, thus believing that they can be on a subconscious level and to be objective. This matters for the fact that the stress is a really subconscious experience and in case of any matter having to think long, there is a chance the answer is not likely to correspond to the real situation.

In order to be able to place representative and time distributed analysis of individual perceptions of

respondents, it is necessary surveys to be carried out for a specific period during which each employee and managing staff answer to all questions. In that way, the dependencies between work conditions and personal experiences of each individual could be defined.

The survey should be done in big enough time interval in order to observe all the changes in the assessment of people about the stress situations.

Why was this poll held?

Summarizing the answers of the polls does not have the significance of the psychological survey. On that topic enough number of surveys and studies of large groups of people have been done. For the exact case the analysis is done on purpose and through observations of daily situations as well as personal conversations stands the point of view of people towards the problem which can be analyzed by medical aspect as well.

Participants in the survey

The poll includes 60 people (20 people from each country) and has no power as a representative sample. The number of the asked people is not big in order to cover as big a topic as "Stress on the workplace" but the results of each country are interesting.

In fact, the aim of this survey is not to make representative conclusions but rather to show the methodology of that kind of survey. An important thing to mark is that with really simple resources it is possible to make an adequate assessment of the state of the personal in each company or factory, the situation can be described as well as the efficiency of the implemented measures can be tracked.

For the current survey were interviewed in identical way people from three countries – Bulgaria, Macedonia and Germany. This allows evaluation and comparison of the stress level, taking into account the specifics of each country in terms of mentality, values, working conditions, etc.

Why was the poll done in three countries – Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Germany?

It does not matter in which part of the world a person lives or where we are; all people have similar needs, complemented by the country-specific. A person's psychic health is important in order to feel satisfied and to live a healthy life. At the heart of it lies the balance between stress and relaxation. Although these countries are located in Europe, each one of them has its own cultural specifics. The manners and customs are different. Despite numerous information

sources such as press, radio, and television, as well as the internet, one can get acquainted with real life in a country only when they begin to reside there. A serious role for understanding a culture has the fluency in the native language, knowledge about the literature and history of the country. The mobility of human resources within the EU is relatively easier and cultural transition is much smoother in comparison with Japan, for example, where there is completely other public orderliness.

This is the position from which the three countries are analyzed in the present survey, as it is appropriate to be noted that the comments made are based on the personal appraisal of the author referring to conversations with the people and general information about the countries as a whole. It is important to write down some of the typical details of each country before analyzing the results from the polls.

Macedonia is a country in process development and at the moment is currently in a transitional period. Generally the labor market does not offer enough work places. Due to this limitation the occupation of a position is connected either with excellent qualities of the candidate, or with a certain social status having privileges. Regarding to the influence on the public sector, the country and the institutions have strong influence. In long-term aspect, given work positions prefer candidates who can guarantee loyalty to the institutions. Because of this reason a lot of well-educated and qualified people emigrate to the USA looking for better work opportunities and better life. Compared to Germany, the individualism is not so highly developed among the Macedonians. People generally are open-minded, friendly, kind and ready to respond and help in case of need. The feeling for one big family applies for a group, team or a collective as well. Exactly the opposite situation is in Germany where the individualism is really important.

Bulgaria is quite a new country-participant in EU and also is at a process of development and changes. After it becomes full member, a lot of Bulgarians begin working out of the country. Generally, the mentality in Bulgaria and Macedonia is alike. Bulgarians are friendly and open-minded as well, but there are essential differences. Compared to Macedonia, individualism in Bulgaria is more expressed but it has not reached the level of Germany. The tendency these years is that a lot of men and women live on their own. The number of divorces is much higher than in Macedonia.

Germany is preferred as a place of living and working among Bulgarians and Macedonians. There are

significant differences in the mentality of the Germans living in the former eastern and western provinces.

Germans are quite alienated from one another. For all spheres of life there are standards and rules. There is an emotional distance no matter how long the people know each other (or work together). This is somewhat a form of defense since people in general and Germans in higher degree show a form of opportunism. Individualism is striving for maximizing success (professional, financial, and social layer) increase steadily in Germany.

As these factors harm the common good, where the state has regulatory mechanisms – intervenes. This in turn leads to discouragement and passive resistance of the people who have chosen this lifestyle.

In Bulgaria, there are a lot of foreigners, among which Germans as well, who say that here they feel better and live more relaxed than in Germany. This positive attitude is connected to their resistance on stress, which leads to better results during work.

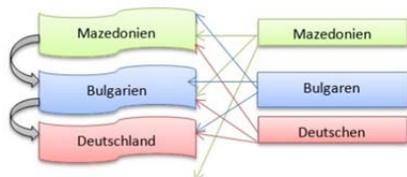


Fig. 1.

Change in the mentality

The figure shows schematically the change in the mentality of the population in a given country in aspect of its economic situation. Regardless this, people settle and seek realization there, where they feel satisfied.

Scope of respondents – three separate branches (**universities, IT and call-centers**).

The three chosen branches in which the survey was done are quite different in nature and accordingly people work in an environment with a different kind of mental load. In the branches “**universities**” and “**IT**”, the workers are personally motivated and the polls show that the stress level is less than in the Call-centers. The work in a Call-center is characterized by a routine but is also about mental load and this is why the stress level has been the highest.

Results

Only some of the answers of several questions from the survey are going to be commented because of the large data amount.

Results, received as an answer of the statement: “I go to work with pleasure” (fig. 2, fig.3, and fig. 4):

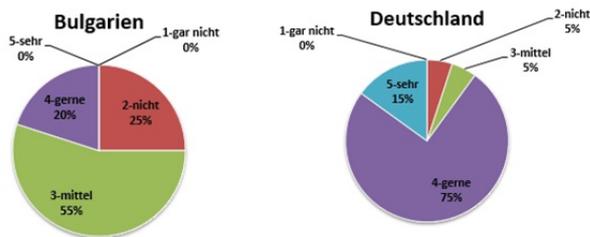


Fig. 2. For Bulgaria

Fig. 3. For Germany

Bulgaria:
 20% - with pleasure,
 25% - without pleasure
 55% - middle score

Germany:
 75% - with pleasure,
 5% - without pleasure
 3% - middle score

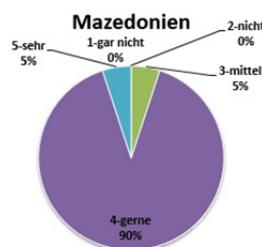


Fig. 4. For Macedonia

Macedonia:
 90% - with pleasure,
 2% - without pleasure
 3% - middle score

On the question: “Do you feel you are under stress?”, the answers are shown graphically on figure 5 as follows:

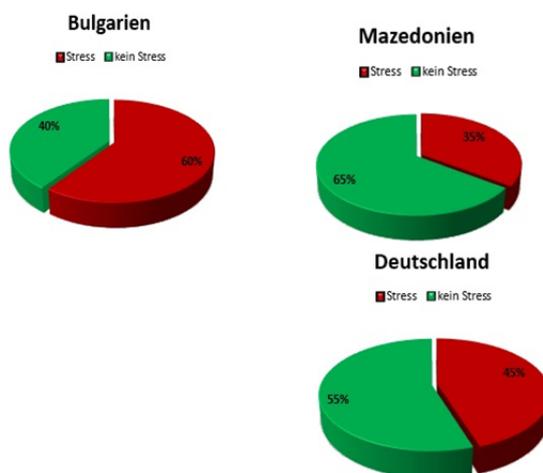


Fig. 5

Bulgaria:	Macedonia:	Germany:
60% - Yes	35% - Yes	45% - Yes
40% - No	65% - No	55% - No

Conclusions

Almost half of all the respondents answer they feel under stress. It is considered that the consequences on the contemporary society reflect on the workplace in the form of increased mental load. The high percentage of the affected people is worrying because the stress has become of the serious workplace factors. According to the legal regulations about the risks of an activity, which are dangerous for the health, an evaluation must be done, the risk should be reduced and minimized until it has reached acceptable levels. The effects of new work habits and rates are expressed in reduced communication between people and lack of maintenance of interpersonal relationships. This is a counterbalance of our human nature and the expression of feelings often is seen as a weakness. Due to this a lot of people hide their emotions which sometimes can be connected with health problems. Not many are the people who have friends on their workplace with whom they can share personal themes. The orientation of the work world to high aims increases the daily dynamics. These requirements are often not in balance with our psychical and physical resources.

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