

Local Mental Health Associations

All members of local MHAs work on a voluntary basis in their communities to support people with a mental illness and to promote positive mental health.

While local MHAs are autonomous and determine their own work programmes and priorities, their activities may include:

- **Befriending** – Local MHAs play an important role in providing social supports to, and promoting social integration of people experiencing mental illness. Activities include individual befriending, social clubs and holidays.
- **Social Housing** – Many local MHAs (sometimes in partnership with Health Boards) are involved in the provision of housing at varying support levels.
- **Mental Health Promotion** – Activities at local level may include facilitating information days, school based projects, courses and seminars on issues relating to mental health.
- **Advocacy** – Local MHAs may seek to address issues of concern relating to mental health with appropriate authorities in their region and may also advocate on behalf of individuals.

If you would like further information on the work of Mental Health Ireland or would like to volunteer with your local Association, please contact:

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Mental Health Ireland

Mental Health Ireland

A National Voluntary Organisation

**campaigning
information
housing
volunteers**

mental health promotion

Mental Health in the Workplace

Health at work covers a wide range of issues from a basic concern with health and safety through to lifestyle management. The World Health Organisation has identified four elements of organisational health:

- Environmental Factors
- Physical Health
- Mental (Psychological) Health
- Social Health

It is the mental health aspect of health that is the focus here and how stress at work can impact on a person's mental health.

Safeguarding health and safety from the effects of stress is based on the same approach as that for safeguarding against toxic chemicals or dangerous machinery:

- Identification of potential problems
- Assessment of risks
- Implementation of safeguards
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the safeguards

Controlling workplace stress is no more optional than the control of any other hazards. The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 1989 obliges employers to identify and safeguard against all risks to health and safety.

What are the effects of stress in the workplace?

An increasing number of people are taking time off work with stress related illnesses. This can cost industries hundreds of millions of pounds per year in lost productivity.

Prolonged stress can lead to mental health problems, which in turn can affect the efficiency of the workforce. It is important for stress to be dealt with because of its cost implications.

The basic effects of stress on the organisation include:

- Increased absenteeism

- Low motivation
- Reduced productivity
- Reduced efficiency
- Faulty decision making
- Poor industrial relations.

Factors which may influence stress in the workplace

The workplace may be an important influence on mental health problems. It may be due to the working environment or to the employee's reactions to it.

What Causes Stress in the Workplace?

Some stress in any job is inevitable – it is a fact of working life. The main influences on stress at work can be categorised as follows:

Organisational Factors:

- Lack of participation in decision-making
- Lack of autonomy (e.g. petty rules)
- Restructuring due to budget cuts and freezes on recruitment
- Rapid changes within the organisation
- Organisational culture (e.g. competitiveness)
- Introduction of new technology
- Ineffective or poor management.

Role Ambiguity and Conflict:

- Conflicting expectations of roles
- Conflicting demands on workers by the organisation and other people
- Role overload – legitimate demands which cannot all be met.

Poor Working Relationships:

- Poor interpersonal skills
- Bullying in the workplace
- Sexual harassment and discrimination.

Job Security:

- Threat of redundancy
- Threat of early retirement
- Demotion
- Short term contracts
- Performance related pay and contracts
- Changing roles
- Lack of promotional opportunities.

Working Conditions:

- Poor physical working conditions
- Shift work, repetitive work, unsociable hours, "on call"
- Being overloaded
- Long periods with nothing to do
- Time pressure and deadlines
- Poor safety standards.

As an employer what can I do to reduce stress in the workplace?

While each workplace will have unique requirements, the following tips may help employers to improve worker satisfaction and efficiency. The mentally healthy workplace is safe, productive, comfortable and retains its high quality staff.

Where possible:

- Give priority to staff welfare and safety with clear policies on harassment and bullying
- Develop a clear set of organisational values which all staff share
- Develop clear, achievable and consistent goals for the organisation
- Clearly define each staff member's role and responsibilities
- Give a high priority to training, supervision and support of staff
- Minimise red-tape, paper work and petty roles