

Stroke Risk Associated with Long Working Hours

Working long hours may lead to an increase in the risk of stroke, a study has found.

The findings were published in The Lancet, which showed the chances of having a stroke increased in those working beyond the usual 9-5 working day.

The research showed that there was a greater risk of stroke and coronary heart disease for people who work 55 hours or more per week, compared with working a standard 35 to 40 hour week.

The study also found that the more hours people worked, the more the risk of stroke increased. For example, compared with people who worked standard hours, those working between 41 and 48 hours had a 10 per cent higher risk of stroke, and those working 49 to 54 hours had a 27 per cent increased risk of stroke.

Dr Mike Knapton, associate medical director, British Heart Foundation, said: "This research shows an association between long working hours and an increased risk of having a stroke and heart disease.

It is plausible that there could be a causal relationship behind the link as sudden death following long working hours is often caused by stroke, due to long and repeated periods of stress, although that was not demonstrated in this study.

"More research is needed if we are to understand and treat the biological processes that can lead to increased risk of stroke and heart disease for people who work long hours.

"This study highlights to doctors that they need to pay particular attention to cardiovascular risk factors when they advise people who work long hours."

Transport Company Fined £150k for Work at Height Breaches Following Fatality

A Norfolk-based road transport company has been sentenced for safety failings after a driver suffered life-changing injuries which left him in a permanent vegetative state following an incident in Broxbourne, Herts.

Keith Brookes, 61, died two years later having never recovered from his injuries.

Mr Brookes, who was 59 at the time of the accident, from Milton Keynes, fell from an unsecured ladder during an operation to unload items from a lorry at the Hertfordshire Golf and Country Club on White Stubbs Lane on 23 November 2012.

Mr Brookes sustained extensive brain damage as well as a broken cheekbone, collarbone and ribs. He was in a coma for four months and in hospital for a further two months.

After his release from hospital he needed palliative care in a nursing home and was unable to move, swallow or communicate. He died two years later in December 2014.

The incident was investigated by HSE which prosecuted Mr Brookes' employer, David Watson Transport Ltd, after finding the company had failed to properly safeguard workers from falls.

At the sentencing it was heard how there were serious failures as far as the supervision of the employees.

The judge observed that "the total absence of supervision in this case in my view significantly contributed to the existence of a dangerous state of affairs and thus directly in the chain of causation to the incident itself and the death of Mr Brookes".

David Watson Transport Ltd of Mundford Road, Weeting, Norfolk, was fined a total of £150,000 at St Albans Crown Court and ordered to pay costs of £88,030.69 after being found guilty to three counts of the Work at Height Regulations 2005.

After the case, HSE inspector Sandra Dias, said: "This fall was entirely preventable and resulted in an employee being left in a permanent vegetative state owing to a traumatic brain injury. It was, of course, devastating for his family and friends. Sadly he died two years later.

"The risks of falling from height during unloading lorries is well known across the industry. There is absolutely no excuse for companies to neglect safety.

David Watson Transport Ltd's failure to adequately plan working at height and provide adequate supervision resulted in horrific injuries from which Mr Brookes never recovered."

Bullying in the Workplace is still “All Too Common”, Survey Reveals

A survey of 2,000 workers has revealed that bullying in the workplace affects 37 per cent of people, with a further 21 per cent admitting they have witnessed colleagues being subjected to abuse.

The research was commissioned by employment law specialists Slater and Gordon, who see hundreds of cases of employees being bullied every year.

The report shows that tight deadlines, personality clashes and office politics often caused tensions to run high, with shouting, shoving, intimidation and threatening behaviour all reported by respondents. But while most people had witnessed or believed they had faced bullying in the workplace, less than half (48 per cent) did anything about it.

Colleagues being deliberately humiliated by a bully was witnessed by more than a quarter of those questioned while one in ten had heard racist insults.

One in six saw a co-worker subjected to inappropriate sexual remarks. Childish pranks were seen by 24 per cent of those surveyed while one in 15 saw their colleague's work being sabotaged.

One in 20 said they had witnessed physical violence between workmates.

The bullying was disguised as 'workplace banter' in 56 per cent of cases while 68 per cent said the behaviour was 'subtle', such as leaving a colleague out of work drinks, lunches and meetings.

Four in ten workers who were bullied appeared stressed or upset by the behaviour while 21 per cent were reduced to tears.

Claire Dawson, employment lawyer at Slater and Gordon, said: "Bullying in the workplace is all too common and comes in many forms.

As our research shows, the majority of bullying comes in the form of verbal abuse or intimidation. This is often dismissed as 'banter' between colleagues but the workplace shouldn't be a place where people are insulted.

The idea that people can be subjected to physical violence while at work is quite alarming. This can have a devastating impact on the person who is being bullied and can result in depression and anxiety."

Over half (52 per cent) of respondents said they did nothing to stop the bullying with a third admitting they felt too awkward to say anything. A quarter thought bullying was just part of the culture of where they worked."

Twenty per cent said they feared becoming the target of the bully themselves if they spoke out and one in ten thought they could lose their job if they complained. A quarter said they didn't think it was their responsibility to do anything about it.

Commenting on the research, TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "Office bullies must be banished from the workplace. The stress and anxiety felt by victims can make them physically ill, lose all self-confidence and mean that they dread coming into work. No one should be put in this position.

"Employers who fail to tackle bullying will pay a price too. Staff who are bullied are more likely to take more time off because of the stress caused by their harassment and will be less productive at work.

"Every organisation needs to have an anti-bullying policy, and every manager should ensure that there is zero-tolerance of bullying either by line managers or workmates."

Building Contractor Sentenced Over Unsafe Working Practices

An international construction firm has been sentenced after admitting multiple safety issues at a Manchester site where it was carrying out a shop refurbishment.

Betcat International Limited is based in Seville, Spain, but has offices in locations around Europe, including London. The firm was hired by high street clothing chain Mango to carry out refurbishment and alteration works at its store on Market Street, Manchester.

The project involved the full refurbishment of the multi-storey retail unit, including structural alterations to facilitate the installation of two new staircases, the installation of a lift shaft, and the removal and infilling of an existing stairway.

The site manager was employed by Betcat, and all of the operatives on site were subcontractors.

On 29th July 2014, a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector visited the site to investigate safety concerns raised by a member of the public and to carry out an inspection of the construction works. A number of issues were identified during the visit, which are outlined below:

- Two operatives were seen using tower scaffolds which had not been properly erected with full edge protection. One of the tower scaffolds was also balanced at an angle on some steps so that the working platform was not level.

- Another operative was observed walking up the new steel staircase from the ground floor to the 1st floor. The staircase had no handrails or any form of edge protection to prevent falls from height.
- On the 2nd floor of the building, a man was observed standing on a structural steel beam which was spanning the large lift shaft opening in the concrete floor. There was nothing to stop this man from falling through to the floor below. The standard of guarding around the opening was poor on each floor and access was not prevented. There were also materials being stored in the area, indicating that operatives were approaching the opening frequently to retrieve materials.
- The site was heavily congested with materials, waste and other debris. There seemed to be no clear walkways and the lighting levels were very low.
- The toilet had been removed and there was no other toilet on site; nor were there any washing facilities. No other arrangements had been made regarding the provision of welfare facilities whilst the bathroom was being re-tiled and re-plumbed.
- An operative was seen using a small mitre saw which had no guard over the blade and he was pushing timber floor boards through the exposed blade by hand.
- A wood saw which was set up for cutting timber products had no dust extraction system fitted and there were piles of dust on all surfaces and large amounts of dust in the air.
- There were no fire alarms on site and the only fire extinguishers were out of date, having been left over from the previous shop.

The HSE inspectors served six Prohibition Notices and two Improvement Notices, along with a Notification of Contravention. Trafford Magistrates' Court heard all the issues were satisfactorily addressed by the company following HSE's intervention.

Betcat International Limited, 3 More London Riverside, London SE1 pleaded guilty at Trafford Magistrates Court to breaching Section 2(1) and 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and was fined £40,000 (£20,000 per offence) with £3761 costs.

HSE inspector Laura Moran said after the case: "Betcat International Limited completely failed in its duty to protect its workers, its subcontractors and visitors to its site from harm.

"Given the range of serious breaches identified, it is very fortunate that nobody was injured or even killed while working on this site. I'd therefore like to thank the member of the public who alerted us to the work, and may well have prevented a serious injury."

Understanding and Identifying Safe Performance

By Dr Claire Williams, consultant, Human Applications

Having done the 'groundwork' as described in the first article on Safety Behaviour Change (a constant round of workplace, equipment and system optimisation – so never really 'done') – identifying the behavioural issues on which to focus is paramount. It's easy to make a number of errors in this.

If only people just stuck to the rules...

The first error comes from taking too simplistic a view of safe performance; identifying 'sticking to the rules' as safe and the main goal, whilst not adhering to them as unsafe and contrary to the organisational goals. Having an understanding of the constant adjustments required to complete many work tasks is key.

Modern workplaces regularly require workers to make thoroughness vs efficiency trade-offs which can lead to better ways of working; of course sometimes these trade-offs can expose workers to more risk at levels we do not want to tolerate, but let's be clear, organisational goals are often driving this. It is worth reflecting that organisations can be crippled if their workforce decide simply to 'work to rule'.

In essence, we must not be guilty of too simplistic a view about the reasons the workforce might have for not following procedures; usually the simplistic view settles on lacking the right motivation (they 'can't be bothered'; 'have other priorities'; or worse, 'are being deliberately defiant'). As we'll see in the next article, the COM-B approach (2) is really helpful in dealing with this error – effectively a fundamental attribution error – that is falsely attributing the behaviour to some inherent deficiency in the worker.

Separating behaviours from outcomes...

Another potential mistake when it comes to promoting safe behaviours, is defining the outcome you're after, rather than the behaviour. So for example, Michie et al. Use the health issue of being overweight to explain the difference between outcomes and behaviours. In this instance weight loss is *not* actually a behavioural target but rather an outcome – telling someone to lose weight does not support them in outlining the behaviours that will lead to this.

On the other hand, eating fewer calories is a *broad* behavioural target – this has moved from outcome to an action or behaviour, all be it one that requires a large amount of background knowledge to achieve. Cutting out high fat food is a *specific* behavioural target...and can be even more specific if you move to cut out cake!

In a more safety based example, telling someone to having fewer manual handling injuries is *not* a behavioural target, it's an outcome. Handling well is a *broad* behavioural target but again depends on folk knowing what that means. Directing workers to use particular principals or techniques when handling particular objects, however, is a *specific* behavioural target and moves towards something you can see and supervise.

Safe performance

We need to understand that workers are only able to work safely if the underpinning systems are in place. However, we recognise that safety performance is not intuitive. The 1980's US TV Show 'Hill Street Blues' used to start each episode with the admonishment "Let's be careful out there".

General performance instructions like this will not drive behaviours. However, if we need to set expected behaviours for each and every situation we will rapidly move to the point where the worker is unable to remember or enact the 'right' behaviours.

We need to enable safety performance by creating a framework for the individual in which it is easier to do the 'right' thing than to do anything else. We see nudges in performance in the design of equipment – it fails to safe or uses guarding that is interlocked. Tools are designed to protect the worker – for example safety knives; low vibration hand tools.

All of these are important, but fundamentally we need the worker to make a good decision when doing any job. To do this, we need to understand that safety performance is driven by three factors. In the third article we will explore these behavioural drivers and consider how they can be used to support safer behaviours.

Dr Claire Williams is a senior consultant at Human Applications and a Visiting Fellow in Human Factors and Behaviour Change at the University of Derby.

Spotlight on Electricians' Health as Assessments Raise Concerns

Many electricians working in the construction sector are facing worrying lifestyle-related health risks, according to health assessments. ECIS, the employee benefits company for the construction sector, conducted health assessments of over 700 electricians during the course of 2014 as part of the Joint Industry Board (JIB) for the Electrical Contracting Industry, which promotes a health and wellbeing benefits scheme for its members and their employees, administered by ECIS.

The assessments found that although the psychological wellbeing of electricians is better than many of their counterparts in other trades, busy workers were evidently struggling to focus on exercise, diet and alcohol consumption with associated blood pressure and cardiac risks.

ECIS's assessments found that 24 per cent of electricians were at risk due to their regular alcohol consumption and 'high risk' drinking, which is higher than the rest of the construction sector at 6 per cent. Bearing in mind that many people underestimate their alcohol consumption the true picture may be worse. Current UK guidelines recommend that men don't drink more than three or four units of alcohol a day, and that women limit their intake to two or three units a day.

Inactivity was also a concern. Of those seen, both male and female electricians reported being less physically active than their counterparts in the rest of the construction sector, with more completely inactive. Only 20 per cent achieved a healthy weekly exercise rating.

In addition, electricians showed a higher body mass index than the sector average and their fasting blood glucose levels were also a concern, with worse than average results for the sector. A single high result does not mean a diagnosis of diabetes but the finding is in keeping with the overall picture. Finally, blood pressure readings in those seen were higher than expected. Lifestyle factors such as Body Mass Index, lack of exercise and alcohol will be contributors.

Vicki Leslie, Business Development Executive at ECIS said: "Although these findings are worrying it is hugely positive that so many electricians took up the opportunity to have a health assessment as part of their membership of the JIB, during 2014. We must also take heart from the fact that the mental well-being of electrician looks to be better than others working in the buildings sector.

"With the feedback received the electricians who had health assessments last year will now be in a position to make positive changes to their lifestyles to put them on the right track for a healthier and hopefully longer life. Also by detecting more serious health problems as early as possible, corrective action can be taken before they have a chance to develop further.

"There is also an onus on employers and contractors to promote healthier habits amongst their workers, perhaps focusing on alcohol awareness and incentives such as discounted gym membership."