

# Excess workplace stress results when needs not being met

By Norma James  
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We have heard a great deal about workplace stress in recent years. We talk about downsizing, right-sizing, harassment, bullying etc. as reasons for stress.

But have you stopped to think about what is really happening within your organization to cause us to feel stress?

Excess stress is produced when work is organized in such a way that our basic needs, both mental and physical are not met.

This column will not deal with the basic physical need for food, shelter and security

However, there are basic mental health needs that apply to the workplace.

We need respect and appreciation. We must feel that our ideas are at least heard and listened to. We must have the freedom to speak up about issues.

Our workplaces should foster a sense of confidence and self-worth.

The workplace must allow us freedom from chronic feelings of hostility and anger.

Workers must feel part of their workgroup and the relationship with co-workers must be meaningful and supportive.

We should not have to feel continually distressed, anxious or depressed about our jobs.

Lastly, there should be periods when there is calm when one feels some peace of mind.

Threats to our mental health can come from work overload and time pressure. If we feel we lack influence over our day-to-day work, we lack training or proper preparation for the work or if there is ambiguity in our job responsibilities we will feel stressed.

If we feel we are not being rewarded for our performance or if there is perceived discrimination or harassment, our mental health will be threatened.

Poor communication and neglect of legal or safety obligations will also be stressful in the workplace.



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Research has shown the most disturbing organizational influences occur when workers have feelings of unfairness when there are high demands with low control or high effort and low reward conditions in work assignments.

In these situations workers feel angry, demoralized, anxious and sometimes even depressed.

Emotional upset can lead to dangerous distractions that constitute a real safety hazard on the job.

It is important to note home stress can have an additive effect on our total level of stress and can not be ignored.

When we feel stressed we sleep badly, we may over-medicate ourselves and we may drink alcohol or take mind-altering drugs.

In these emotional states, besides being distracted we may make errors in judgment, fail to have our normal eye-hand or eye-foot coordination.

A body under stress has increased potential for strains and sprains.

The end result is a cost to our health; increasing the risk for the development of acute and chronic disease, accidents and conflict resulting in more frequent absences from work.

We spend a good part of our waking hours at work. Each of us should understand what causes stress in ourselves and our co-workers.

Working together to develop a workplace that minimizes stress should be the goal towards which we all strive ...each of us can make a difference.

My next article will review some suggestions to manage stress in the workplace.

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