

## Monitoring Psychosocial Risks at Work

Keywords: psychosocial risk management, monitoring, indicators

### Introduction

PRIMA-EF aims to define and promote a strong European agenda to address psychosocial risks at work. Work-related psychosocial risks concern aspects of the design and management of work and its social and organisational contexts that have the potential for causing psychological or physical harm. They have been identified as one of the major contemporary challenges for occupational health and safety and are linked to such workplace problems as work-related stress, violence, bullying and harassment at work. Work-related stress is experienced when the demands of the work environment exceed the employees' ability to cope with (or control) them. Work-related violence occurs when one or more workers or managers are assaulted or abused by clients, patients or pupils. Bullying or harassment occurs when one or more workers or managers are abused, humiliated or assaulted by colleagues or superiors. In PRIMA-EF, psychosocial hazards also include violence, bullying and harassment at work. However, bullying at work should also be regarded and discussed as a consequence of a poor psychosocial work environment.

Monitoring psychosocial risks in order to identify groups and occupations at risk and to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes, policies and interventions to prevent them is in this sense very important. Identifying the main indicators on psychosocial risks at work and psychosocial risk management as well as listing appropriate methodologies to develop them are among the first steps in the process of adequately monitoring change and progress on these issues across the European Union.

### Aim

This guidance sheet aims at providing guidelines and recommendations for monitoring psychosocial risks at work and psychosocial risk management. It can be used as a reference point by enterprises, social partners and policy makers.

As part of PRIMA-EF, the following steps were taken to develop these guidelines:

- 1) development of an European indicator model for monitoring psychosocial risks at work and evaluating psychosocial risk management
- 2) analysis of methodologies for monitoring psychosocial risk management and psychosocial risks at work
- 3) inventory and prioritization of main indicators on psychosocial risk management
- 4) identification of gaps between indicators that are available and that are considered to be necessary to monitor psychosocial risks at work and the process of psychosocial risk management.

### Indicator Model

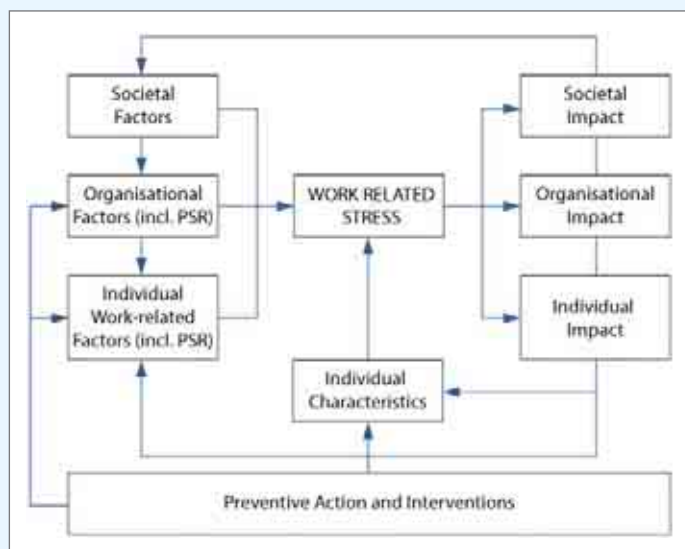
In developing an integrated model for monitoring psychosocial risks, several criteria have to be taken into account. The indicator model should:

- identify indicators on exposure (e.g. psychosocial risk factors), outcomes and preventive action or interventions



- illustrate the cyclical process of psychosocial risk management
- address three levels of impact: the individual level, the organisational level and the society/sector or national level.

The PRIMA-EF indicator model, presented in Figure 1, meets all three criteria.



**Figure 1.** Indicator model on psychosocial risks at work linked up with preventive action and interventions (PSR = Psychosocial risks)

Psychosocial risks are constituted by organisational factors, such as lack of supportive relationships at work, job insecurity or company culture. However, even societal or sectoral factors, like a high competitive climate or an economic recession can have an aggravating effect on psychosocial risks at the workplace. Exposure to psychosocial risk factors at work may result in a state of work-related stress, in which one often feels tense, concerned, less vigilant and less efficient in performing tasks.

Work-related stress depends on individual perceptions of their work environment. Dependent on resources available in the workplace and in the organisation, e.g. the support of co-workers and supervisors, it can have negative consequences like negative health outcomes, increased risk for accidents, and impaired performance eventually leading to drop out from work. These consequences indicate impact at the individual as well as at the organisational level, but will also result in impact at the sectoral and national level.

Conversely, work tasks with a high degree of personal control and skill variety, together with an organisational environment which includes resources such as supportive social relationships, can contribute positively to workers' well-being, health and productivity as well as to organisational productivity and growth.

To prevent and manage psychosocial risks at the workplace and their negative impact, preventive action or interventions should be implemented that are primarily directed at sources of risk at the workplace and the organisational level but are supplemented by actions directed at the individual workers, their skills, abilities and capacities. Preventive action can also include structural measures like the implementation of policies or the integration of issues related to psychosocial risk management into the systems and structures of business operations.

## Availability of Methodologies

Several methodologies are available for measuring indicators in this area. The indicators can be translated into questions or checklist items to be transmitted verbally or in written form, either by regular questionnaire, by a web- or internet based survey or in a checklist. Postal surveys, using printed questionnaires, telephone interviews as well as checklists are the most widely used methodologies. Because of technological developments, web- or internet based surveys are used more and more. These surveys attract different types of respondents, which may be a problem when representativeness is important and this methodology is solely used. Using registers may be another relevant way to collect information on some indicators. Based on the inventory of available methodologies for monitoring in general and psychosocial risks in particular, it can be concluded that the appropriate

methodology of monitoring is heavily dependent on the aim, context and specific topic of the survey. Large organisations may benefit from questionnaires and web-based surveys, whereas checklists may be more suitable for SMEs.

## Availability of Indicators

In reviewing indicators available in existing monitoring instruments on quality of work and more specifically on psychosocial risks at work, a gap was identified. Indicators on exposure and risks as well as indicators on outcomes appear to be already available in many monitoring instruments, but indicators on preventive action and intervention are lacking. In the following tables, a summary review of indicators that can be used in relation to exposure, outcomes and preventive action is presented.

Exposure (including psychosocial risks)	
<b>Organisational factors</b>	
<i>Policies/facilities</i>	Facilities for optimizing work-home balance Human resource management Occupational Safety & Health policies Corporate social responsibility as related to psychosocial risk management Business strategy
<i>Organisational culture</i>	Open/trust-based relationship between management and workers Information from management / feedback Communication (bottom up/ top down) Organisational justice
<i>Industrial relations</i>	Existence of works council/employee representatives Trade union membership Collective agreements
<b>Work-related factors</b>	
<i>Employment conditions</i>	Contract Pay History of work
<i>Organisational design</i>	Job rotation / cross-training Team work Multi-skilling
<i>Quality of work</i>	Job demands Autonomy / decision latitude Job security Social support and conflicts Violence, harassment, bullying Discrimination Working time Work from home, telework

Outcomes	
<i>Health-related outcomes</i>	Accidents at work Health complaints Physical health Mental health
<i>Outcomes related to job satisfaction</i>	Job satisfaction Turnover
<i>Absence, presenteeism</i>	Sick leave Cause of absence Working while being sick / presenteeism
<i>Economic costs</i>	Economic costs of accidents and absence Performance / productivity
<i>Work ability</i>	Evaluation of one's health and capacity for work
<b>Preventive action / Interventions</b>	
<i>Assessments</i>	Risk assessment Recording/registration of attendance, accidents and illness Investigation into causes of accidents etc.
<i>Measures</i>	Directed at <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reducing psychosocial risks</li> <li>• improving autonomy, control and organisational resources</li> <li>• improving coping capacity, providing information &amp; training</li> <li>• return to work</li> <li>• drivers/barriers for taking measures</li> </ul>
<i>Evaluation</i>	Use of policies/facilities Effectiveness of measures Process evaluation of implementing measures
<i>Participation of employees</i>	Risk assessment Development & implementation of a plan of action

## More Information

www.prima-ef.org  
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