

# Occupational Psychosocial Risks Identification and Assessment at Labour Offices in the Czech Republic

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## ABSTRACT

Psychosocial risks at Labour Offices in the Czech Republic are expected to be on a very high level. Very frequent communications with very demanding clients in need of different financial aids, not optimal organisation of work, time pressure, high demand of work and resilience of employees were between the main topics we tried to address in our research. Data collection was provided through an online questionnaire survey in December 2021 in 5 selected Labour Offices in the Czech Republic. A special questionnaire was prepared and tailored to the needs of workers exposed to demanding communication with clients. This questionnaire survey was done after the pilot study to ensure the adequacy of the questions, comprehensiveness of the contents, and clearness of instructions. A total number of 1168 questionnaires were included for further analysis. The study group consisted of 93% women and 7% men. The biggest age group of respondents was between 50 to 64 years (33%). The results showed the highest satisfaction of employees in the area of communication at the workplace, whereas employees were most dissatisfied with work changes. For 58% of respondents, communication with the work team and superior impacted their job satisfaction. If there was a conflict or escalation of communication when dealing with a client at the counter at the Labour Office, only 1.7% of respondents stated that they had equipment at the workplace place to signalize and monitor the potentially dangerous clients. Our results demonstrated several very problematic areas of psychosocial risks at the workplaces of Labour Offices.

**Keywords:** Psychosocial risks, Labour offices, Resilience, Demanding client, Questionnaire survey

## INTRODUCTION

Psychosocial risks at work can be defined as a set of risks resulting from the employee's interaction with the work environment, the nature and organization of work and interpersonal relationships both inside and outside the workplace. The unsatisfactory work-life balance also has a major impact on an employee's well-being and performance (WHO 2008). Psychosocial risks at Labour Offices in the Czech Republic are expected to be on a very high

level. Very frequent communications with very demanding clients in need of different financial aids, not optimal organisation of work, time pressure, high demand of work and resilience of employees were between the main topics we tried to address in our research.

ESENER's Europe-wide surveys, which are conducted by EU-OSHA every 5 years, focus on new occupational risks, including psychosocial risks at work. The most significant psychosocial risks at work in organizations were identified already in the ESENER 2009 and ESENER 2014 surveys, namely work-related stress, time pressure, contact with problematic customers, patients, students, etc. According to the latest ESENER 2019 survey, European workplaces are most at risk of musculoskeletal disorders and subsequently psychosocial risks (Esener 2019). Psychosocial risks at work are a problem for many professions, these risks and work-related stress have been repeatedly presented in various professions, nurses, physicians or teachers, for example (Berlanda 2019; Bernal 2015; Dutheil 2019; Vévoda 2018).

In the Czech Republic, 49% of employees perceive work stress, almost 7% have symptoms of severe depression and up to 30% of the work population have mild symptoms of depressive disorders (Raboch 2015). Workplace stress is a critical issue with potentially negative impact on the mental and physical health of workers and organisational and societal costs (Gray 2019; Havermans 2018, Sara 2018; Yang 2019). In the banking sector most studies showed that mental health problems had increased and that they were stress-related. Examples began with anxiety and depression, carried on through maladaptive behaviors, and ended in job burnout. (Giorgi 2017; Mutkins 2011). Psychosocial risks are among the areas to be addressed, as highlighted by the EU Strategic Framework on Occupational Safety and Health for the period 2021-2027, developed by the European Commission, which defines key priorities and measures to improve the health and safety of workers.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

The standard tools for assessing psychosocial risks at work in promoting occupational safety and health and assessing occupational risks are questionnaires. The questionnaire results help to identify psychological hazards and select specific groups of workers that should be given particular attention for further action (Dettmers 2021).

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The questionnaire contained different types of questions. For the questions concerning satisfaction with various aspects of the work (6 in total), the respondents had the opportunity to choose the answer on a scale of 1 to 10. In addition, the questionnaire contained dichotomous questions, where the respondents had the choice of answering yes / no. Further closed questions with the possibility of either one or more answers. These types of questions prevailed in the questionnaire. In addition, the questionnaire contained several open questions, in which respondents had an empty text box in which they could write an answer. However, these questions were not mandatory.

### **Participants**

The total number of 1448 questionnaires was received. Of this number, 1168 were completed and included for further analysis. The remaining questionnaires were discarded due to incompleteness. For most of these questionnaires, the respondents did not fill in the basic socio-demographic data, and therefore these questionnaires could not be considered relevant in the further analysis. The average time needed to complete the questionnaire was 24 minutes. The study group included 93% women and 7% men. The biggest age group were respondents between 50 to 64 years (33%). The largest group of respondents had secondary education with a high school diploma (56%), 33% of respondents had university degree.

### **Data Analysis**

PS QUAESTIO PRO software was used for questionnaire creation, data collection and subsequent data processing. It is a comprehensive software for data collection, analysis and reporting. Due to the centralized platform, all collected data is immediately ready for further analysis. The questionnaire was created using a scripting tool.

Subsequent data analysis was performed using the PS IMAGO program, based on the analytical tool IBM SPSS Statistics. Its functionality has been extended by a number of procedures and graphs and by the tools for automation and output sharing. Pearson's chi-square test and Pearson's linear correlation coefficient were used for analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Each area of the questionnaire started with the question on satisfaction. The result and average level of satisfaction calculated shows in Table 1. Only the area specified for Communication with clients was mandatory for all respondents which shows on the number of completed questionnaires (N in Table 1). The highest satisfaction is shown in the area of communication at the workplace, whereas employees are most dissatisfied with work changes. For 58% of respondents, communication with the work team and superior has the greatest impact on their job satisfaction.

The highest values (above 0.7) of the correlation coefficient are for these three areas of satisfaction - job characteristics, organization of work and job evaluation. The value of the coefficient is positive, which means that the respondent also evaluates the remaining areas positively. See Table 2.

**Table 1.** Average level of satisfaction calculated from all completed questionnaires (possibility to answer on a scale of 1–10).

Satisfaction - area	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Workplace communication	7,84	2,13	677
Job characteristics	7,15	2,06	524
Organization of work	6,91	1,90	446
Communication with clients	6,22	1,96	1168
Job evaluation	5,68	2,30	400
Work changes	4,99	1,95	199

**Table 2.** Pearson correlations of areas of satisfaction (\*Sig. (2-tailed) <0,001).

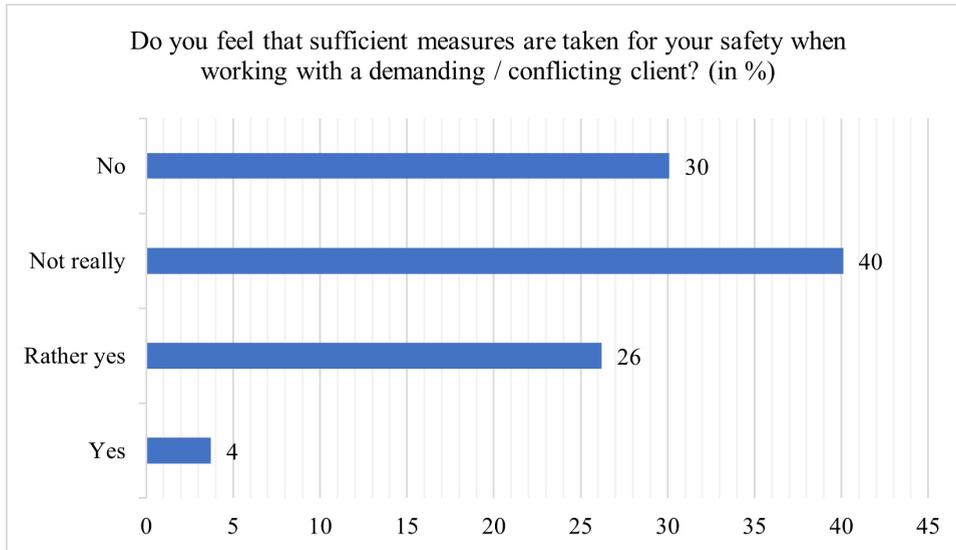
Satisfaction - area	Workplace communication	Job characteristics	Organization of work	Communication with clients	Job evaluation	Work changes
Workplace communication	-					
Job characteristics	0.302*	--				
Organization of work	0.624*	0.621*	--			
Communication with clients	0.470*	0.621*	0.738*	--		
Job evaluation	0.429*	0.595*	0.704*	0.704*	--	
Work changes	0.482*	0.449*	0.645*	0.705*	0.492*	--

If there is a conflict or escalation of communication when dealing with a client at the counter at the employment office, only 1.7% of respondents state that they have a system in place to indicate and monitor the potential of dangerous clients. Overall, 70% of workers do not feel that sufficient measures are undertaken for their safety when working with demanding clients – see Figure 1.

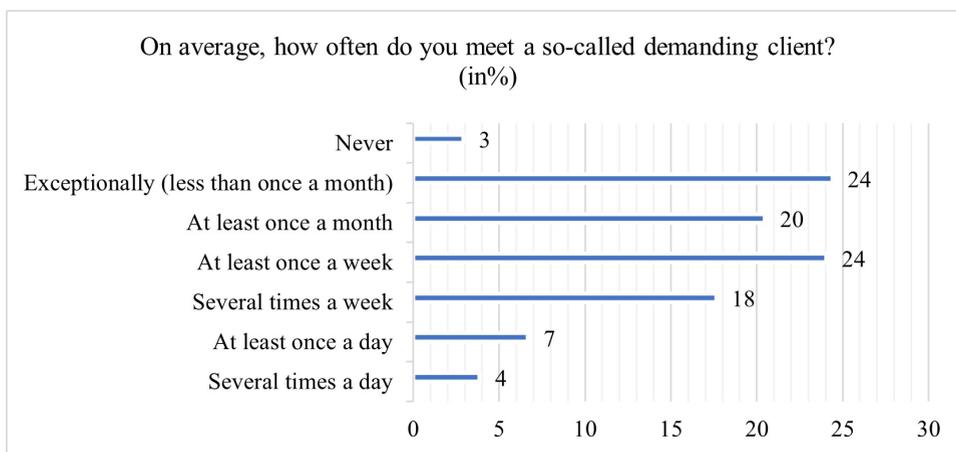
How safe employees feel about these meetings with demanding and even dangerous clients depends also on the type of agenda they are working with. Here were found statistically significant differences in the answers to the question whether sufficient measures are taken for the safety of employees when working with conflicting clients. Workers dealing with the “Agenda of material need” (the system of assistance in material need is a form of assistance to persons with insufficient income to help them with living allowance or supplement for housing or emergency immediate financial assistance) more often chose the answer “no”, in 80%, compared to workers with the “Agenda of the labour market”, where the answer “yes” prevailed (in 55%).

The frequency of dealing with demanding clients differs but more than half of the employees state that they meet and have to deal with demanding or conflicting clients more than once a week – see Figure 2, Table 3, Table 4.

Only one third of the employees recovers quickly after a meeting with a demanding or conflicting client – immediately or within tens of minutes. Another one third of the employees recovers within days or weeks and 7% of employees state that they do not recover at all. See Figure 3, Table 5, Table 6.



**Figure 1:** How employees feel about the measures undertaken for their safety when working with demanding or conflicting clients.



**Figure 2:** Frequency of dealing with demanding client.

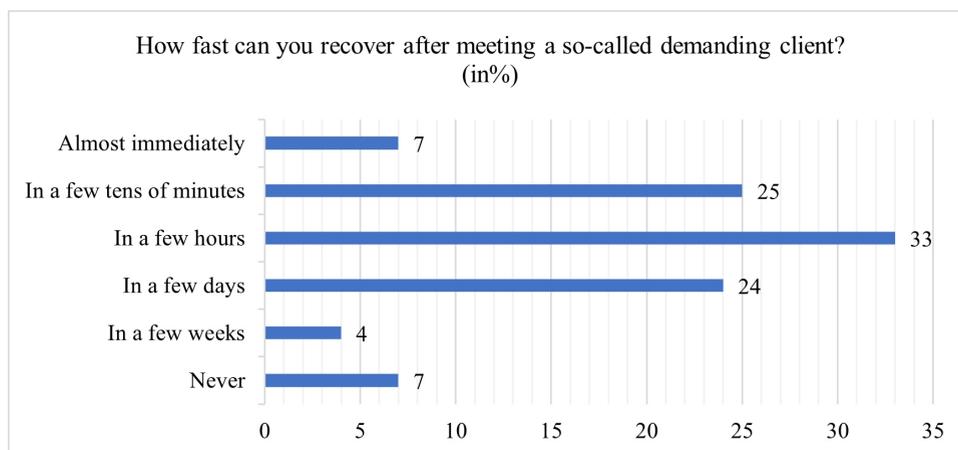
**Table 3.** Frequency of dealing with demanding client.

Satisfaction - area	Observed N	Expected N	Sign Schema
Several times a day	47	166,9	---
At least once a day	78	166,9	---
Several times a week	205	166,9	++
At least once a week	280	166,9	+++
At least once a month	238	166,9	+++
Exceptionally (less than once a month)	286	166,9	+++
Never	34	166,9	---
Total	1168		

**Table 4.** Test statistics, frequency of dealing with demanding client.

On average, how often do you meet a so-called demanding client?	
Chi-Square	440,046*
Df	6
Asymp. Sig.	<,001

\*0 cells (0,0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 166,9.

**Figure 3:** Recovery after meeting a demanding client.**Table 5.** Recovery after meeting a demanding client.

Satisfaction - area	Observed N	Expected N	Sign Schema
Never	84	194,7	---
In a few weeks	50	194,7	---
In a few days	273	194,7	+++
In a few hours	380	194,7	+++
In a few tens of minutes	296	194,7	+++
Almost immediately	85	194,7	---
Total	1168		

**Table 6.** Test statistics, recovery after meeting a demanding client.

How fast can you recover after meeting a so-called demanding client?	
Chi-Square	492,921*
Df	5
Asymp. Sig.	<,001

\*0 cells (0,0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 194,7.

## CONCLUSION

Our results showed some very problematic areas in the field of psychosocial risks at the workplaces of Employment Offices. Employees were most dissatisfied with work changes and when dealing with a potentially dangerous client only 1.7 % of respondents stated to have tools to signalize and monitor that

client. For more than one third of clerks at Labour Offices it takes at least few days or weeks to recover from this meeting. We also found some promising results in high satisfaction of employees in the area of communication at the workplace, with the work team and managers. To prevent the negative consequences of psychosocial risks on employee's health and improve the working conditions tailored intervention techniques shall be applied.

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