

Work pressure is major cause of accidents at work

Published on: 11 July 2004

The work-related accident rate in the Netherlands is 6.4%, with the highest rates found in the construction and agricultural sectors and in the police force. Workers subject to heavy work and work pressures are shown to have an accident rate up to five times greater than for workers who seldom or never experience these conditions. These are some of the most striking results from the 2003 Dutch National Working Conditions Survey.

About

Country: Netherlands

Author: Peter Smulders

The first National Working Conditions Survey, launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in the Netherlands, was carried out in November-December 2003 by TNO Work and Employment. The survey findings show that during the preceding 12 months, 6.4% of the Dutch workforce had experienced an accident at work, resulting in either physical or psychological harm - the rate is 4.5% when cases of physical injury only are taken into account. The data include accidents both resulting in and not resulting in absence from work.

Figure 1 indicates that almost 3% of the workforce (45% of all accidents) have to take time off work as a result of an accident, while 3.5% of the workforce (55% of all accidents) do not take time off.

Figure 1 Work accident rates, by gender



Source: National Working Conditions Survey NL, TNO 2003

Figure 1 also shows that male workers are more subject to accidents at work than female workers.

The National Working Conditions Survey was carried out among a representative sample of 10,000 Dutch employees (including temporary workers and temporary agency workers, but excluding self-employed workers) and it is planned to repeat the survey every two years. The survey deals with issues such as work pressure, work autonomy, emotional and physical strain, exposure to dangerous substances, dangerous work, accidents, repetitive strain injury (RSI), burnout, absenteeism, occupational health services, older workers, pregnancy and work. It also reviews measures taken at company level to improve working conditions.

The first results of the 2003 survey were presented in May 2004 to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and made available online. The results (in Dutch) may be downloaded from http://www.arbeid.tno.nl/perskamer/files/20040526_brochure_nea_2003.pdf.

The survey question relating to accidents was as follows: 'During the last 12 months at your work, were you involved in an accident or an incident from which you suffered physical or psychological damage?' Two follow-up questions differentiated between physical and psychological damage, and whether the accident or incident resulted in absenteeism.

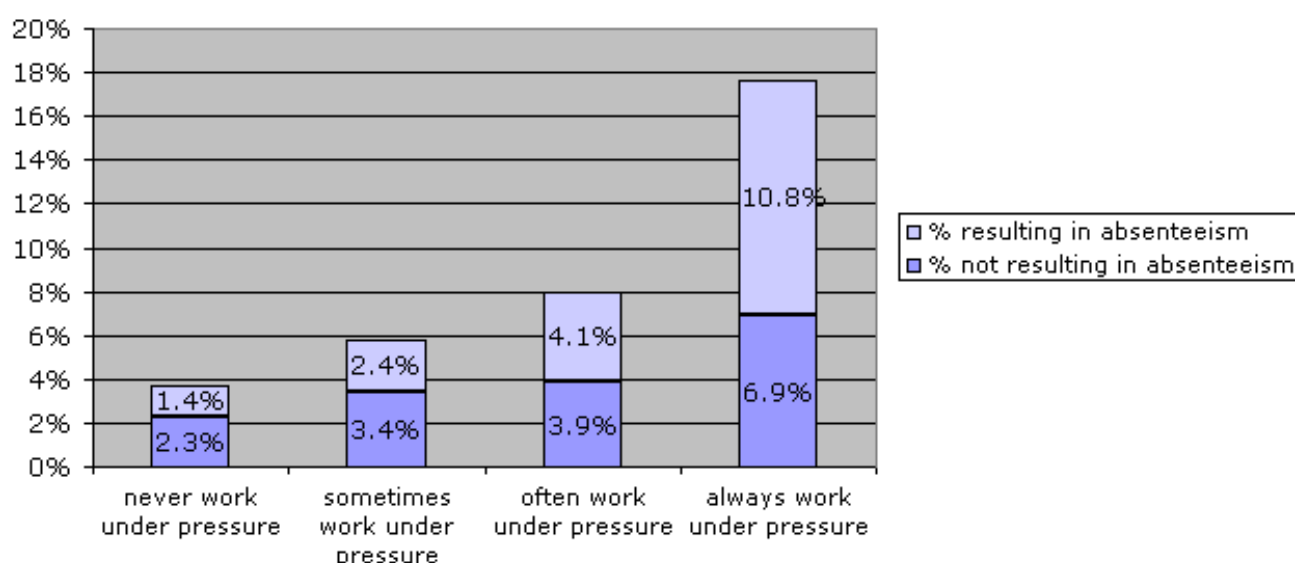
The highest accident rates were reported in the construction sector, agriculture, policing, the metal and machine industry, food processing and in the nursing home sector. The lowest rates were found in government departments, higher education, financing and banking, and in the service sector in general.

The National Working Conditions Survey corroborates the opinions of experts in the field of work accidents who have identified actions such as falling, stumbling, colliding, slipping, cutting, etc. as being the main causes of accidents.

The survey has also established a clear link between heavy work and work pressures and the number of work accidents. Figure 2 shows that employees who 'very often' carry out heavy work have an accident rate which is five times higher than that of employees who 'seldom or never' carry out heavy work.

The same is true for employees who experience intense work pressures continually. These persons have an accident rate which is also about five times higher than that of employees who are never subject to pressurised work (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Work accident rates in relation to work pressure



Source: National Working Conditions Survey NL, TNO 2003

The report confirms the general view that a combination of heavy work and work pressures make people tired and less cautious, and perhaps less attentive to dangerous circumstances, leaving them more susceptible to imprudent actions such as falling, slipping, cutting, etc.