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Occupational Stress

Abstract

[Excerpt] “I’m stressed out.” The reality may be that the worker saying this is, in fact, experiencing an occupational illness. Many employees undergo stress as a normal part of their jobs, but some experience it more severely than others, to the point that they need time away from work. The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses classifies occupational stress as “neurotic reaction to stress.” There were 3,418 such illness cases in 1997. The median absence from work for these cases was 23 days, more than four times the level of all nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses. And more than two-fifths of the cases resulted in 31 or more lost workdays, compared to one-fifth for all injury and illness cases. (See chart.)

Keywords

occupational illness, stress, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, injury, absenteeism, occupation

Comments

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Occupational Stress

“I’m stressed out.” The reality may be that the worker saying this is, in fact, experiencing an occupational illness. Many employees undergo stress as a normal part of their jobs, but some experience it more severely than others, to the point that they need time away from work. The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses classifies occupational stress as “neurotic reaction to stress.” There were 3,418 such illness cases in 1997. The median absence from work for these cases was 23 days, more than four times the level of all nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses. And more than two-fifths of the cases resulted in 31 or more lost workdays, compared to one-fifth for all injury and illness cases. (See chart.)

Case counts

The 1997 estimate of 3,418 cases of occupational stress is the lowest since 1992, when BLS first began collecting these data. The decline is consistent with the trend for all nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses involving days away from work. Occupational stress cases declined by 15 percent over the 1992-97 period, whereas all injuries and illnesses declined by 21 percent.

Industry. Finance, insurance and real estate, with 12 percent of the cases, and services, with 35 percent, had higher proportions of occupational stress cases than they did of all occupational injury and illness cases involving days away from work, 2 and 23 percent, respectively. The proportion of occupational stress disorders was lower in all other industries than comparable proportions of all injuries and illnesses. Four industries accounted for the bulk of occupational stress cases: Services (35 percent), manufacturing (21 percent), retail trade (14 percent), and finance, insurance, and real estate (12 percent).

Occupation. White-collar occupations had a higher proportion of stress cases than both blue-collar and service occupations combined (see table). Managerial and professional occupations, with 16 percent of the cases, and tech-

nical, sales, and administrative support occupations with 48 percent, had higher proportions of occupational stress cases than they did of all occupational injury and illness cases involving days away from work, 5 and 15 percent, respectively. Three occupations accounted for almost 80 percent of all cases of occupational stress: The two white-collar occupations just mentioned and operators, fabricators, and laborers. Occupations most often leading to occupational stress disorders include bookkeepers, accounting, and auditing clerks—5 percent; supervisors and proprietors, sales occupations—4 percent; investigators and adjusters, excluding insurance—4 percent; cooks—4 percent; and production occupation supervisors—4 percent. (See table.)

Sex. For every case of occupational stress involving a male, 1.6 cases involved a female. The opposite was true for all occupational injuries and illnesses: For each case involving a female, two cases involved a male.

Incidence rates

Industry. The nonfatal occupational injury and illness incidence rate for occupational stress cases was less than 1 case per 10,000 full-time workers in each of the major industry divisions in 1997, the lowest since BLS began collect-

ing such data in 1992. The incidence rate for occupational stress in finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) in 1997, was the lowest in 6 years, and for the first time since 1992, did not significantly exceed the rates for all other industry divisions. In contrast, for all injuries and illnesses, the rate of 67.4 in FIRE was the lowest among the major industry divisions, and less than one-third of the total private industry rate.

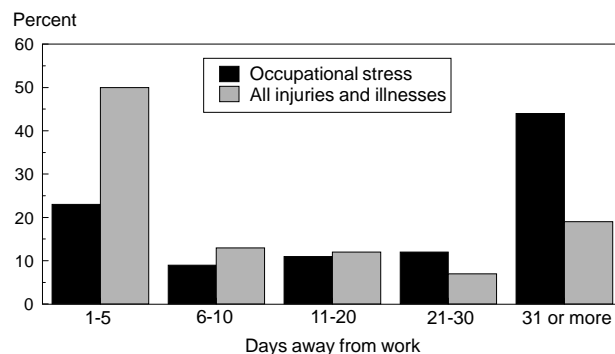
Relative risk by occupation. The risk of injury or illness faced by employees in individual occupational groups compared to the risk faced by all occupations combined is called relative risk. When constructing an index for such a risk faced by all occupations combined, the index is equal to 1. In 1997, the index for occupational stress ranged from 0.6 for managerial and professional occupations to 1.6 for technical, sales, and administrative support occupations.

The relative risk for occupational stress exceeded the relative risk for all injuries and illnesses for white-collar jobs. Among blue-collar and service jobs the reverse was true: relative risk for occupational stress was lower than the risk for all injuries and illnesses.

Additional information

For more information about the data presented here, contact Timothy Webster or Bruce

Percent of occupational stress and all nonfatal occupational injury and illness cases involving days away from work, 1997



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Occupational injury and illness data are also available at <http://stats.bls.gov/oshhome.htm>, the BLS Internet site. Material in this summary is in the public domain and may be reproduced with-

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Percent distribution of all nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses and neurotic reaction to stress cases involving days away from work, selected characteristics, 1997

Characteristic	All injuries and illnesses	Neurotic reaction to stress	Characteristic	All injuries and illnesses	Neurotic reaction to stress
Total cases ¹	1,833,400	3,418	Total cases ¹	1,833,400	3,418
Industry, total	100	100	Occupation, total—Continued	100	100
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing ¹	2	-	Sales representatives, mining manufacturing, wholesale	(³)	3
Mining ²	1	-	Insurance adjusters, examiners, and investigators	(³)	3
Construction	10	-	General office clerks	1	3
Manufacturing	24	21	Service	17	11
Transportation and public utilities ²	12	9	Cooks	2	4
Wholesale trade	8	7	Guards and police, except public	1	3
Retail trade	17	14	Blue collar	62	24
Finance, insurance, and real estate	2	12	Farming, forestry, and fishing	3	-
Services	23	35	Precision production, craft, and repair	17	9
Occupation, total	100	100	Operators, fabricators, and laborers	42	15
White collar	20	64	Supervisors, production occupations	1	4
Managerial and professional	5	16	Assemblers	2	3
Technical, sales, and administrative support	15	48	Sex, total	100	100
Bookkeepers, accounting, and auditing clerks	(³)	5	Men	66	39
Supervisors and proprietors, sales occupations	2	4	Women	33	61
Investigators and adjusters, excluding insurance	(³)	4			

¹ Excludes farms with fewer than 11 employees.

² Data conforming to Occupational Safety and Health Administration definitions for mining operators in coal, metal, and nonmetal mining and for employees in railroad transportation are provided to BLS by the Mine Safety and Health Administration; and the Federal Railroad Administration, U.S. Depart-

ment of Transportation. Independent mining contractors are excluded from the coal, metal, and mining industries.

³ Less than 1 percent.

NOTE: Dashes indicate data do not meet publication criteria.

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