

CONTENTS

Preface

The Editors

The PRIMA-EF Consortium

Chapter 1

The European Framework for Psychosocial Risk Management (PRIMA-EF) 1
Stavroula Leka, Tom Cox & Gerard Zwetsloot

Chapter 2

Monitoring Psychosocial Risks at Work 17
Maartje Bakhuys Roozeboom, Irene Houtman & Seth van den Bossche

Chapter 3

Standards Related to Psychosocial Risks at Work 37
Maria Widerszal-Bazyl, Dorota Żołnierczyk-Zreda & Aditya Jain

Chapter 4

Social Policies, Infrastructure and Social Dialogue in relation to Psychosocial Risk Management 60
Michael Ertel, Ulrike Stilijanow, Jadranka Cvitkovic & Uwe Lenhardt

Chapter 5

Exploring Stakeholders' Perceptions on Social Policies, Infrastructures and Social Dialogue in relation to Psychosocial Risks 79
Elena Natali, Patrizia Deitinger, Bruna Rondinone & Sergio Iavicoli

Chapter 6

Corporate Social Responsibility & Psychosocial Risk Management 96
Gerard Zwetsloot, Stavroula Leka & Aditya Jain

Chapter 7

Psychosocial Risk Management: The Importance and Impact of Policy Level Interventions 115
Stavroula Leka, Aditya Jain, Gerard Zwetsloot, Maarit Vartia & Krista Pahkin

Chapter 8

Best Practice in Interventions for the Prevention and Management of Work-Related Stress and Workplace Violence and Bullying 136
Stavroula Leka, Maarit Vartia, Juliet Hassard, Krista Pahkin, Sanna Sutela, Tom Cox & Kari Lindstrom

Chapter 9

The future of psychosocial risk management and the promotion of well-being at work in the EU: A PRIMA time for action 174
Stavroula Leka & Tom Cox

PREFACE

This book forms part of the outputs of the PRIMA-EF project, a Specific Targeted Research Project funded under the European Union (EU) Sixth Framework Programme and orientated towards the promotion of EU policy and practice. It presents research carried out as part of the PRIMA-EF project that contributed to the development of a European framework for the management of psychosocial risks at work.

Psychosocial risks, work-related stress, violence, harassment and bullying (or mobbing) are now widely recognised major challenges to occupational health and safety (European Agency for Safety & Health at Work, 2007). Reports indicate that work-related stress alone affects more than 40 million individuals across the EU, costing an estimated €20bn a year in lost time and health bills; it is among the most commonly reported causes of occupational illness by workers (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living & Working Conditions, 2007). According to the Fourth European Working Conditions survey (2007), 6% of the workforce had been exposed to threats of physical violence, 4% to violence by other people and 5% to bullying and/or harassment at work over the past 12 months. In a wider perspective, psychosocial risks are a major public health concern as well and are associated with economic and social security challenges.

Throughout Europe, researchers, practitioners, government bodies, social partners and organisations differ in awareness and understanding of these new types of challenges in working life. Although in some member states there appears to be widespread awareness of the nature and impact of these issues as well as agreement among stakeholders on their prioritization for the promotion of health, productivity and quality of working life, this situation is not reflected across the enlarged EU. However, even though in some EU member states systems and methods have been developed to deal with these challenges at different levels, a unifying framework that recognises their commonalities and principles of best practice that can be used across the EU has been lacking. PRIMA-EF has been built on a review, critical assessment, reconciliation and harmonisation of what exists and has proved valid in the management of psychosocial risks and the promotion of (mental) health, and safety at the workplace and beyond it.

Particular challenges in relation to psychosocial risks and their management exist both at the enterprise level and at the macro level. On the enterprise level there is a need for systematic and effective policies to prevent and control the various psychosocial risks at work, clearly linked to companies' management practices. On the national and the EU levels, the main challenge is to translate existing policies into effective practice through the provision of tools that will stimulate and support organisations to undertake that challenge, thereby preventing and controlling psychosocial risks in our workplaces and societies alike. At both levels, these challenges require a comprehensive framework to address psychosocial risks.

PRIMA-EF is meant to accommodate all existing (major) psychosocial risk management approaches across the EU. The framework is built from a theoretical analysis of the risk management process, identifying its key elements in logic and philosophy, strategy and procedures, areas and types of measurement, and from a subsequent analysis of typical risk management approaches as used within the EU. PRIMA-EF, when agreed and disseminated, should inform decisions on the development of new and existing approaches concerning policies and practical applications of the psychosocial risk management process.

The model developed is relevant to both the enterprise level and the wider macro policy level. The developed framework was used to examine key issues of relevance to the management of psychosocial risks at work, such as policies, stakeholder perceptions, social dialogue, corporate social responsibility, monitoring and indicators, standards and best practice interventions at different levels. In doing so, the project aimed at identifying the current state of the art in these areas and to suggest priorities and avenues for improvement on the basis of the key aspects of the framework. To achieve its aim and objectives experts, researchers, social partners and a number of key European and international organisations were involved throughout the project activities. A number of methods were used to explore the above issues, including literature and policy reviews, interviews, surveys, focus groups and workshops. The findings are discussed in relevant chapters.

Chapter 1 sets the context by describing and discussing PRIMA-EF and its relevance and

application at the enterprise and macro policy levels. It discusses key concepts and also the philosophy behind psychosocial risk management that underlie policy and highlights best practice at both levels. In addition, at each of the two levels, the logic of psychosocial risk management is presented in a conceptual model. Chapter 2 then identifies the main indicators on psychosocial risks at work and psychosocial risk management and discusses the process of monitoring these issues across the EU. An indicator model for psychosocial risk management developed on the basis of PRIMA-EF is presented.

The following chapter (Chapter 3) presents a review, analysis and discussion of available standards in relation to psychosocial risks and their management. These include EU and member state legislation, guidance, social partner agreements, ILO conventions and ISOs. The standards presented are analysed on the basis of the PRIMA-EF indicator model. Chapter 4 then moves on to discuss social policies and infrastructures in relation to psychosocial risk management and focuses on the issue of social dialogue and its importance for the effective management of psychosocial risks both at the enterprise and policy levels. Key indicators for successful social dialogue in this area are identified. This chapter is closely linked to Chapter 5 that explores the perceptions of EU stakeholders on psychosocial risks and their management. The chapter presents and discusses the findings of a stakeholder survey that was conducted as part of the project.

Chapter 6 again touches on policy issues but from another angle, that of corporate social responsibility (CSR). It explores the link of CSR and psychosocial risk management and discusses the business case underpinning this area. It also identifies both a CSR indicator model for use at the enterprise level and a CSR inspired approach to psychosocial risk management. The following chapter (Chapter 7) explores in more detail the macro policy level and its impact on the management of psychosocial risks by focusing on the often neglected key concept of policy-level interventions. A model of macro policy level indicators for psychosocial risk management is presented and discussed. Chapter 8 then focuses on enterprise-level interventions for psychosocial risk management and in particular discusses best practice in relation to interventions for the prevention and management of work-related stress and workplace violence, harassment and bullying. The final chapter of the book (Chapter 9) brings together the key findings of the PRIMA-EF project and identifies key priorities in policy, research and practice that need to be addressed in the EU (and beyond) to promote the effective management of psychosocial risks at the enterprise and macro levels.

The scientific findings of the PRIMA-EF project have also been used to develop user friendly tools for use at the enterprise and policy levels such as indicators, guidance sheets, inventories and web-based tools. All outputs are available through www.prima-ef.org.

Finally, the PRIMA-EF consortium would like to thank the EC for supporting the development of the framework. Special reference must also be made to the World Health Organization and its strong support and involvement in the development of PRIMA-EF since the idea was born at WHO Headquarters in Geneva in 2004. In addition, the PRIMA-EF consortium pays special tribute to the former Swedish National Institute for Working Life that (with SALTSA) supported the initial development of the framework idea and would have been the seventh scientific partner in this project.

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