

## WORKPLACE STRESS IN GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

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### Summary

Severe stress, exceeding the adaptation capabilities of the organism evolves into distress, which leads to many negative consequences. The study addresses factors that cause workplace stress in 58 general practitioners (GP), selected at random. Our results showed that stress in the workplace was often seen in the respondents. The stress was found to be closely related to the organization of work and its nature, and to a lesser extent, to interpersonal relationships. Many of the respondents reported having trouble coping with this stress, and its unfavourable effect on their private lives.

**Key words:** general practice, stress in the workplace

### Introduction

Stress in the life of modern man and especially stress in the workplace is very common and occurs in all forms. Stress makes people work longer and perform more tasks to be more competitive. Severe stress, however, exceeding the capabilities of the organism to adapt, evolves into distress, leading to very negative consequences. These may range from poor performance, discouragement and burn-out syndrome, to severe diseases of the cardiovascular, nervous, digestive and other systems in the affected individual [1, 2, 3]. In the workplace, stress can manifest itself mainly in three directions [4, 5, 6, 7]:

- Stress associated with the organization and nature of work. This includes unfavourable working conditions, too high levels of physical or psychological stress, as well as the opposite to those – activities too detached, dull and monotonous, frequent change of working conditions, vaguely formulated requirements with regard to employees, restrictions associated with time to perform tasks, etc.
- Stress associated with interpersonal relationships in the workplace - conflict situations, poorly defined tasks and responsibilities to be shared by employees, etc.

- Stress associated with personality features and individual susceptibility to stress. Some people are less affected by stressful agents in the environment, while others are more susceptible to the harmful effects of stress. This may affect both their ability to work and their private lives and health.

## Materials and Methods

The study was focused on factors generating workplace stress in GPs. The participants – 58 GPs, were selected at random from a list of general practices registered with the Regional Health Insurance Fund in the Pleven region. The main characteristics of GPs studied are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of participants

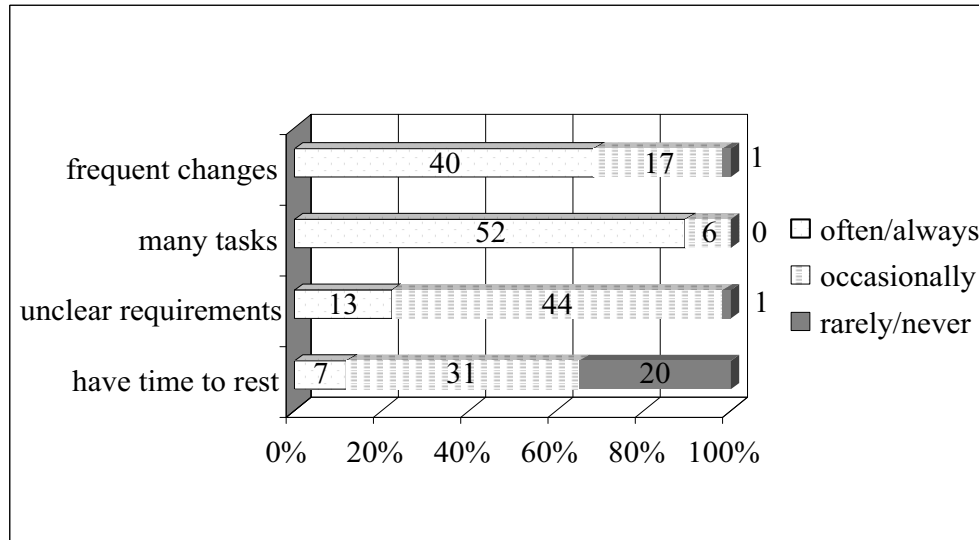
Characteristics	Number (n)	Ratio (%)
<b>Sex:</b> Male	23	40
Female	35	60
<b>Work experience:</b> to 5 years	0	0
6 to 15 years	16	28
over 15 years	42	72
<b>Specialty:</b> Without a specialty	29	50
Internal diseases	6	10
Pediatrics	17	28
Other (surgery, emergency medicine, obstetrics and gynecology )	6	11
<b>Number of patients served:</b> to 1,000	11	19
1,001 to 1,500	16	28
1,501 to 3,000	27	46
over 3,000	4	7
<b>Service location:</b> Village	18	31
City with a population below 100, 000	35	60
City with a population over 100, 000	5	9

## Results

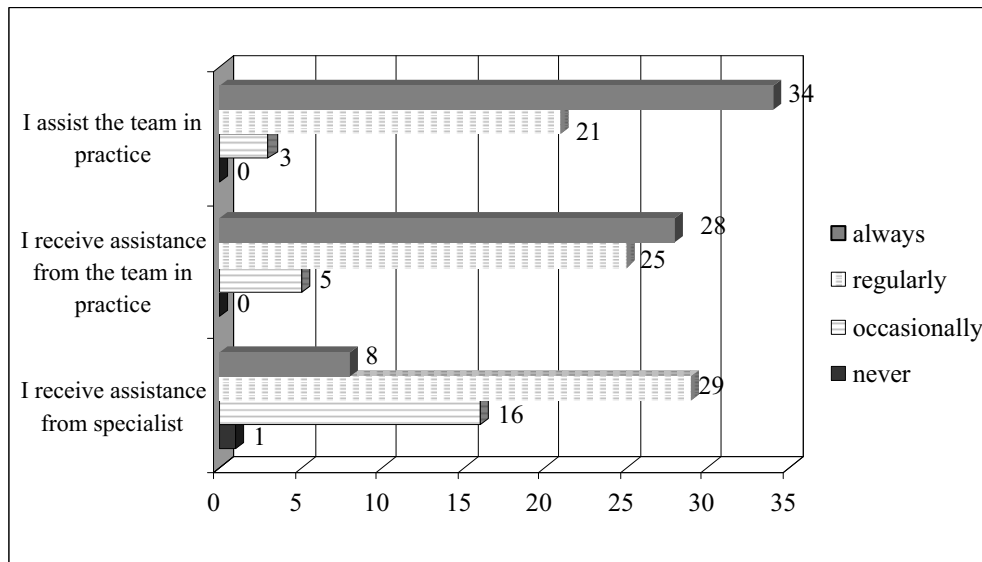
With regard to stress, associated with the organization and nature of work, the majority of respondents believed that their daily activities were uniform and monotonous, yet often associated with vaguely worded tasks. Moreover, according to 60% of the general practitioners, the requirements regarding their activities were changed much too often, and the time they had for rest was not sufficient (Figure 1).

Interpersonal relationships with other GP participants in health care were defined as relatively well-developed relations of mutual assistance within the individual practice in primary health care. The general practitioners studied answered that they almost always provided the necessary assistance to the people working as physicians, and in turn, also received assistance from others when they needed it.

Responsibility for actions, as a rule, was borne by the perpetrator, and no transfer of responsibilities and guilt within the practice was reported. Regarding the question as to whether GPs obtained appropriate support from specialists in outpatient care, the physicians studied responded that this happened in most of the cases (Figure 2), regardless of the nature of problem and remoteness of the locality, in which they worked ( $\chi^2=2.36$ ;  $p=0.5020$ ).



**Figure 1.** Characteristics associated with stress in daily activities in general practice



**Figure 2.** Characteristics of interpersonal relationships in general practice

## Discussion

Interpersonal conflicts that arise in a primary health care practice were described by the majority (57%) of respondents as rare or very rare. The frequency of conflicts did not depend on their length of service as doctors ( $\chi^2=1.63$ ;  $p=0.5420$ ), the size of the practice and the number of patients served ( $\chi^2=1.65$ ;  $p=0.8022$ ). To assess individual perception of stress, respondents were asked what effect it had on them. According to the majority of respondents, their daily work always (33%), or almost always (31%) had an adverse

affect on their personal lives. Some of them (31%) reported they considered changing their workplace within the following 12 months. This intention, however, correlated with the length of service ( $\chi^2=9.38$ ;  $p=0.0092$ ). Physicians with less work experience (up to 10 years) were much more likely (2.5 times) to change their job. Asked what emotions they associated with their work, 36% of physicians indicated stress and tension, 22% - irritation and reluctance, 39% - satisfaction and 3% - apathy.

## Conclusions

Stress in the workplace is often present in the work of GPs. This stress is related mostly to the organization and nature of work, while interpersonal relationships do not usually generate stress. Many of the respondents find it difficult to deal with this stress and it has a negative effect on their private lives.

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