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»Mental stress during the COVID 19 pandemic«

Petra Zander Head of Department Psyche at VDSI

A year of ups and downs, of massive restrictions and limitations with temporary but unfortunately not short business closures, occupational bans, home offices and so on are behind us and there is no end in sight.

Studies show that psychological stress of various population groups is increasing. Occupational health and safety has been and continues to be massively challenged. In the meantime, there is a steadily growing amount of assistance available, mostly in the form of tips on how to counteract stress factors. For example, there are weekly plans as templates for working parents in the "home office" with children in "homeschooling," special guides for managers as well as employees, and so on. One positive effect is that the cohesion and solidarity in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has grown significantly with the pandemic, as a study shows. However, the negative effects outweigh the positive. A study by the University of Duisburg-Essen shows that especially women and younger people are mentally maladjusted. Women, according to the Bertelsmann Foundation, because in our oh so modern world we probably still live stereotypes and still many families indulge in the traditional division of tasks and women manage the household alone in addition to home office and Co. For young people, the quality of life has generally deteriorated strikingly, and they suffer especially in families in which they experience little support and appreciation.

It is easy to see here that occupational health and safety reaches its limits in such circumstances. In addition, it also depends to a large extent on the people themselves how threatening a situation is perceived. Depending on their personality, people react differently to mental stressors. Those who have a high level of emotional stability, are more extraverted and focused, react more calmly, communicate openly about their experience and create new routines/ structures for themselves. Here, everyone is asked to reflect on his or her reactions and organizations can contribute by offering coaching, mindfulness and resilience courses for their employees. Because one thing is clear, the mental stress of employees will continue to increase if prevention is not emphasized.

The department is continuously monitoring this topic and informed interested members in an online seminar held by the VDSI in March.



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The Big Five of personality: emotionally stable and extroverted people are more stress resistant than insecure ones. Source: WfMO GmbH

Left score behavior	Factor / Score	Right score behavior
Stronger emotional reaction under stress and conflict	Emotional Stability 10	Resistant to stress and negative emotions
Quiet, reserved, reflective, introvert	Extroversion 5	Outgoing, assertive, strongly engaged with the social world
Follows own rhythm, norms and preferences	Agreeableness 6	Follows the rhythm, norms and preferences of others
Spontaneous, flexible, laid-back, instinctive	Focus 1	Organized, thorough, planful, has a strong sense of duty
Practical, prefers the familiar, has narrower interests	Openness 4	Curious, imaginative, insightful, has wider interests