

PATRICK LÉGERON

Psychiatrist at Sainte-Anne Hospital and Founder of Stimulus (Paris)

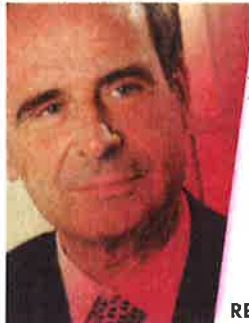
Companies must act to reduce work-related stress.

Spice of life or kiss of death. The title of the first major report on work-related stress published by the European Commission in 1999 presented the problem well. Stress has been studied scientifically for more than 80 years. It is the natural response triggered when we are faced with a challenging, frightening or threatening situation. This reaction is complex, combining changes in our hormone levels and our bodies, aggravating our emotions and our behaviour. The sole purpose of stress is to help us adjust to the situation, to face it effectively. But beyond a certain threshold, when this response becomes too intense or chronic, stress loses its primary function and endangers our health.

Between 20% and 25% of employees currently suffer from work-related stress. The condition affects all sectors and all categories of people: workers, office employees, managers and executives. "Hyperstress" is responsible for causing a number of disorders that can be either psychological (depression, burnout, suicide) or physical (cardiovascular diseases).

PROFILE

Psychiatrist at Sainte-Anne University Hospital in Paris, Patrick Légeron founded the consulting firm Stimulus which helps businesses develop well-being in the workplace. He has authored several books, including *La peur des autres*, *Le stress au travail* and *La gestion du stress*.



READ

"Le stress au travail: un enjeu de santé", Odile Jacob, 2015.

The sources of work-related stress have changed. These days, its root causes are in the new "psychosocial" demands of the work environment, including an excessive focus on performance and productivity, loss of independence and the meaning of tasks required, being constantly connected, faulty managerial practices and poor relations with others, to name just a few.

Companies must urgently act to reduce work-related stress. In addition to the human suffering, it is a huge economic waste due to the high costs it generates for companies and governments. The International Labour Office has defined three levels of stress management interventions: primary (reducing sources of stress), secondary (developing stress management skills) and tertiary (treating and rehabilitating workers suffering from stress).

Our professional lives are increasingly complex, uncertain and often challenging. Meanwhile, we have much higher aspirations of well-being but tolerate adversity significantly less. Is it a sign of weakness on the part of our contemporaries? That's a tough question to answer. Do these demands reflect the progress of our civilisation? Whatever the answers to these questions, the companies with the greatest chances of success will be those that help people deal with stress and organise the work environment in line with human aptitudes and aspirations. /