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Focus on mental health

Mental health issues were a common cause of illness even before the pandemic. The current crisis has exacerbated them even more and created additional stress. As such, it is important to deal openly with mental stress in society, including the world of work. The German social accident insurance institutions help companies and educational institutions to identify when their employees are mentally stressed at an early stage and to respond appropriately.

There is often just a fine line between a demanding situation becoming an overwhelming one. The resulting strain varies greatly and the way it is perceived varies from person to person. Taking a look at the last 12 months we can see that certain factors have played a greater role such as changed forms of work and communication at short notice, emotional strain in certain sectors such as healthcare, fear on losing one's job or livelihood, and the risk of infection. In addition, there are worries about relatives or the additional demand of balancing work and family life. All of these, whether individually or in combination, can lead to excess workloads that can result in physical and psychological disorders. Companies also bear responsibility for the health of their employees. 'Employers have a duty of care, which means that they must ensure that employees remain healthy – even in times of crisis. The design of working conditions has a considerable influence on how well employees can cope with new challenges',



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Managers should recognise and address mental stress in their employees as early as possible.

explained Dr Stefan Hussy, Director General of the DGUV. The social accident insurance institutions provide assistance with designing healthy working conditions. An example is a risk assessment which also takes mental stressors into account.

Managers in particular have an important role to play with regard to psychological illnesses. They can use what is known as a wellbeing conversation to discuss changes in work behaviour with an employee one-on-one and find solutions together. Managers should not and cannot take on the role of a doctor. Their only responsibility is to recognise negative mental stress at an early stage and to do something against it. They

should show that they are approachable and have an understanding for each individual's own crisis situation or problems.

The end of the pandemic does not necessarily mean the end of mental health issues. Companies and educational institutions should remain on the ball and continue to develop their own systematic approach to dealing with mental stress.

Currently there are no reliable findings on mental stress as a result of the corona pandemic. Therefore, the Institute for Prevention and Occupational Medicine of the German Social Accident Insurance (IPA), together with the German social accident insurance institutions, is conducting a survey. Among other things, the negative effects of the pandemic on the mental health of employees in various sectors are being investigated. The study will run until the middle of 2021. The results can help to develop strategies to reduce mental stress in such extreme situations.

Interview

on the mental stress caused by the corona pandemic with Esin Taşkan-Karamürsel, Team Leader of the DGUV Subcommittee for Psychology and Health in the Workplace

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➔ www.ipa-dguv.de > Webcode: d1182901 (German only)



Dear Reader,

Every week we read about new record numbers of vaccinations. More and more people we know are getting their first job. Politicians are discussing the easing of restrictions. The end of the fatigue that has taken hold of us seems to be in sight. Warm summer days, more freedom of movement and the ability to plan are returning to our everyday lives. The long-awaited key to recovery and freedom – immunisation – is already within reach for some, and hopefully only weeks away for others. True, at the moment there are more people willing to be vaccinated than there are vaccine doses, but this will soon balance out and go the other way. We're on the home stretch.

Looking back, we realise that our mental health was exposed to considerable stress and strain during the pandemic. All the more reason why this topic deserves the attention it is currently getting. Employers and managers have a particular responsibility to fulfil their duty of care. They should increase and improve existing services and be more aware of mental stress and strain. After all, designing healthy workplaces includes taking mental health into account.

The same applies to healthy learning environments because the pandemic also affects children and young people. Forms of communication and learning are changing, relationships are more difficult to maintain. So, let's make the most of the 50th anniversary of the pupil accident insurance – let's not only reflect on the achievements of the last 50 years but also at the challenges of the future. Let's develop prevention concepts further and get them into classrooms.

Dr Stefan Hussy
Director General of the DGUV

Talking with Gabriele Pappai, Managing Director of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Public Sector in North Rhine-Westphalia

“Develop safety and health competences from an early age”

Around 18 million children and young people are insured by the pupil accident insurance as they learn and play. In daycare centres, schools and universities, they are made aware of health and safety issues. As future employees, they pass on what they have learned to their companies. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the pupil accident insurance, DGUV Kompakt spoke with Gabriele Pappai, Managing Director of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Public Sector in North Rhine-Westphalia, about current prevention measures and future challenges.

Ms Pappai, an accident during a sports lesson lead to the introduction of the pupil accident insurance in 1971. What are the typical accident hotspots today?

Accidents happen when children are active and on the move. That was the case 50 years ago and will probably always be the case. That's why physical education continues to be a focus of our prevention work. Ball sports are particularly likely to result in injuries. Unfortunately, we also have many serious accidents on the way to and from school – especially on bicycles.

How can the social accident insurance institution help in the event of an accident?

This is where the strength of the social accident insurance system can be seen. We support and guide our insured persons back into their everyday lives step by step. It's important that treatment and care is customised to the injured children and is provided from a single source. We also have special requirements for our partners in the healthcare system. This is because the healing process for children is different to that for adults and their social or school context must also be taken into account.

That sounds like a long process.

Yes, in some cases we stay with our insured persons even after their medical rehabilitation – until they can actively participate in everyday school life and social life again. In the case of children, this can sometimes mean years of working together, in more serious cases even lifelong cooperation.

Learning and playing in a healthy and safe way requires effective prevention concepts. How have these changed in recent years?

In the early years of the pupil accident insurance, the focus was initially on physical hazards, be it preventing falls or making sure that emergency doors are correctly installed. Of course, these are still important. But today we help educational authorities right from planning phase, before construction begins. This means that in addition to educational concepts, health and safety are factored into the building from the very beginning – for both children and staff.

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Healthy learning environments lead to good learning outcomes.

In schools in particular, it is also worth taking a holistic view of the school system in order to create good learning and working conditions and, as a result, good learning outcomes. We encourage educational institutions to include occupational safety and health protection as a prerequisite and resource for successful learning. If we can do that, it is incredibly valuable.

Why?

Today's children and young people will shape the working world of tomorrow. Our work reaches them at a formative stage in their lives, which enables us to lay the foundation for a safe and healthy world of work. Our goal is for them to develop safety and health competences from an early age.



Talking with Gabriele Pappai: "I'm convinced that prevention will succeed if we take future challenges into account."

Because if we can instil healthy and safe behaviour in the minds of young people at an early stage, they will automatically take this with them into their future world of work.

Where is the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Public Sector in North Rhine-Westphalia currently focusing its prevention work?

We follow the concept of the 'Good Healthy School' and this has proven to be successful for more than ten years. It promotes better interplay between education and health promotion in schools. In addition, we are focusing on mobile education and promoting physical activity.

What does that actually mean?

As a provider of social accident insurance, we are committed to expanding safe infrastructures in cities. We also want to improve the cycling skills of young cyclists. This is of personal significance to me. I very much welcome the idea of children independently travelling to and from school with their own muscle power and not by parent taxi. I see this as a good way to tackle the growing lack of exercise among children and young people.

The social accident insurance institutions for the public sector are also responsible for safety and health in educational institutions. What support have they been providing during the pandemic?

In coordination with the North Rhine-Westphalian Ministry for Schools and Education, we provide teachers with recommen-

dations and guidance – whether in the classroom or home schooling. We have also made every effort to ensure we can continue to fulfil our training mandate as quickly as possible. Starting in August 2020, we were back helping teachers with revised hygiene and protection concepts. We advise them on topics such as proper ventilation, hygiene plans, wearing masks and other pandemic-related topics such as insurance coverage during physical education classes conducted remotely.

What are the topics that the pupil accident insurance must take more into account in the future?

We have to continue taking a holistic view of the school system. This means encouraging and empowering school leaders to integrate safety and health into everyday school life. After all, healthy learning environments lead to good learning outcomes. We will also align our prevention concepts more closely with research findings. For example, this means a more refined breakdown of accident statistics, identifying new topics and developing appropriate measures.

I'm convinced that prevention will succeed if we take future challenges into account. We must not shy away from sensitive or difficult topics. We will focus more on psychological stress. But we must also focus more on children with different language skills and cultural backgrounds learning together.

→ www.schuelerunfallversicherung.de
(German only)

More participation for people with disabilities

Equal participation in social life – this is not a given for around 87 million people with disabilities in the European Union (EU). That is why the European Commission wants to create more equal opportunities for them. In March, it presented the new EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030. Safe and healthy workplaces and vocational rehabilitation are aspects of this strategy.

The aim of the new EU strategy is to enable people with disabilities to live independently and participate equally in all areas of life. The EU wants to support them in exercising their rights and foster access to quality and sustainable jobs and equal opportunities. Gaps in social protection and healthcare are to be closed.

An independent life also includes a safe and healthy workplace. This is why the Commission is presenting a package to improve labour market opportunities for people with disabilities in 2022. Its aim is to support Member States with implementing the relevant Employment Guidelines as part of the European Semester and to promote mutual learning. Topics of the exchange will also include safe and healthy workplaces and vocational rehabilitation programmes following an accident. In the event of a work-related accident in Germany, the German social accident insurance system steps in. It does everything it can to preserve the ability to work following an accident at work or an occupational disease. In addition to medical care and personalised rehabilitation management, the job placement service DGUV job and benefits for participation in working life and social participation also contribute to this. The aim is to assist insured persons return to a self-determined and independent life – in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the new EU strategy. The latter also serves as an additional framework for the social accident insurance system to further develop its services.

→ www.dsv-europa.de > News 2021

Federal Order of Merit for Dr Mehrhoff

Dr Friedrich Mehrhoff, who was employed at the DGUV from 1991 to 2018, has been awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. He was honoured for his outstanding commitment to people with disabilities and health impairments.

He was especially committed to accessible participation of people with disabilities in working life. Among other things, he was responsible for developing the action plan of the social accident insurance for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The DGUV's has taken on a pioneering role with its commitment to implementing this internally within the social accident insurance system.

Dr Mehrhoff was a board member of several federal institutions and also campaigned internationally for inclusion. For many years, he has been an honorary board member of Rehabilitation International where he chairs the Work and Employment Commission. This global organisation strives to improve the participation in different countries around the world.



Photo: © DGUV

Dr Friedrich Mehrhoff has been awarded the Federal Order of Merit.

Number of the Month

100 years

... of testing and certification with DGUV Test – the testing and certification system of the German Social Accident Insurance.

www.dguv.de >
Webcode: dp1318507
(German only)

German Paralympic Media Award postponed to 2022

Many sporting events had to be cancelled last year due to COVID-19. As a result, there has been very little coverage of disability sports. This was also reflected in a low number of entries for the 2021 GPMA. Therefore, the DGUV will postpone the award until next year.

Entries that have already been submitted will automatically be included in the next round. The award ceremony is expected to take place in the first half of 2022, if possible as a face-to-face event. All media

professionals are called upon to submit their sport stories, whether big or small. Contributions can be made from the categories photography, audio, film/video, print and online/social media published between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021.

➔ www.dguv.de/gpma
(German only)

Collaboration with Socieux+ extended

At the end of 2020, the DGUV and Socieux+ extended their collaboration agreement for a further four years. Socieux+ is a European initiative that promotes the exchange of knowledge and experience on social security topics between European institutions in partner countries.

With the support of Socieux+, occupational safety and health training has already been provided by the DGUV in Malawi,

Tanzania and Nigeria. For example, an online seminar on Vision Zero was offered to the Lagos State Safety Commission (LSSC) in Nigeria at the end of last year. In addition, online training on road safety together with the German Road Safety Council was given in February 2021. Staff from the Workers Compensation Fund of Tanzania received an overview of procedures related to vocational reintegration through various

SOCIEUX+

EU expertise on social protection,
labour and employment

webinars and want to revise their national rehabilitation strategy based on this.

➔ <http://socieux.eu>

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