

Work-related stress within EU28:
empirical evidence from the European Working Conditions Survey

Stefania Capecchi, Francesca Di Iorio, Nunzia Nappo

(stefania.capecchi@unina.it, francesca.diiorio@unina.it, nunzia.nappo@unina.it)

Department of Political Sciences,
University of Naples Federico II
Via L. Rodinò 22, Naples, Italy

Abstract

The study investigates the relationships between several self-assessed, individual and economic covariates and work-related stress perception in a large sample survey.

Working conditions measures are a prominent issue in economic and social sciences and work-related stress represents a key research topic because of its connections with other psychosocial risks for individuals, such as very high work intensity and pace (briefly defined as job strain, Karasek, 1979). Moreover, work-related stress is considered likely to exert several impacts on enterprises' and national economies. In order to build intrinsic job quality indices and provide measures of working life sustainability, the subject has been variously investigated (among many others, see: Eurofound, 2013). As an instance, the experience of work-related stress is likely to increase sick leaves and to cause at least half of the total absenteeism at work (EU-OSHA, 2014). Thus, to address effective policies at a national and supranational level, the need arises to understand which work situations and/or which characteristics of workers and occupations may lead to specific difficulties. Given its very nature as a latent construct, the experienced stress is typically measured through subjective assessments often collected by means of ordinal scales. Therefore, statistical tools suitable for ordinal data should be implemented.

Our paper presents results on perceived stress in a cross-country perspective, by means of data collected in the 6th European Working Conditions Survey, carried out by Eurofound in 2015. Workers are asked to say whether they face stress in their work (Question Q61M), using a 5 points scale: "Always", "Most of the time", "Sometimes", "Rarely", "Never". We are dealing with a sensible item since it may of course interact with other working conditions, and impacts on individual satisfaction, commitment/engagement, absence at work, desire to change and/or quit the job, etc.

An ordered probit model is implemented to detect the effects of subjective, environmental and economic variables on the response patterns of a large sample (about 25.000 respondents). After a preliminary screening for missing values of the available explanatory variables, results show significant effects of several respondents' characteristics and self-assessments (such as age, gender, education, self-perceived health), job's typology (full-time, private/public sector, firm's size), and some structural indicators. For interpretation purposes, the scale of response variable has been reversed, so as to better explain the results.

Further analyses will follow to disentangle the differences related to institutional and labour market factors within the countries of interest.