

## Problems of Health and Safety Management in the Bulgarian Public Administration

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### Abstract

*The article regards the occupational health and safety management in the Bulgarian public administration. Here the occupational accidents, including fatal accidents and heavy occupational diseases, are not registered with the same frequency as the ones in industrial production and construction sectors which could have hard working conditions and thus deteriorated parameters of the work environment.*

*Alongside with the other aspects and issues of public administration management, the problem of the stress relief and decreasing is strongly neglected. The reasons for such an omission can be found in the public pressure for a decrease in the number of the civil servants, for closing down and dismantling of administrative structures, as well as in the situation of economic crisis and low public revenues.*

*The paper analyses statistical data and studies connected with health and safety conditions of work in the Bulgarian public administration. Some of the most often problems in the occupational health and safety management practice in the public administration have been analysed. On the results of an author's questionnaire survey carried for the working conditions in the public administration, suitable measures for improvement have been proposed. Some good practices in regard to health and safety from the Bulgarian public administrations have also been presented.*

**Keywords:** working conditions, health and safety, public administration

**JEL Codes:** J81, H77, M54

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### 1. Introduction

In present times, researchers' interest in stress is being increased due to the diminishing impact of the physical risks on employees' health and safety. The

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stress reduction is a field of research in many reports, projects and programmers implemented by the European Union, and it is also a matter of legislation in this regard. Here, an initial and major role is played by the Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work, as well as by the Community strategy 2007–2012 on health and safety at work.

Besides just following the EU directives, strategies and recommendations, Bulgaria has also to comply with its own national legislation regulating this matter, i.e. its Labour Code, Occupational Health and Safety Act and the numerous regulations, rules and instructions existing as regulatory documents in this regard.

The present paper examines the management problems in concern with the occupational health and safety in the central and local public administration in Bulgaria. The Law for the Administration divides the Bulgarian public administration structures in central administration (the Council of Ministers, the Ministries, the secondary budget funded government agencies attached to them (such as executive agencies, state commissions)) and local administration (the regional administrations, the municipalities and mayor's offices).

The results of a pan-European opinion poll on occupational safety and health, conducted in June 2009, showed out as a whole an underestimation of these issues in Bulgaria. Occupational health and safety were pointed as merely the third in importance factor in searching and choosing of a particular employment with a frequency of occurrence in the responses of 21 %. It was preceded, on the first place, by the level of remuneration with a frequency of occurrence in the responses of 85 %, and the security of employment, on the second place, with a frequency of occurrence in the responses of 46 percent. Of all the 27 EU member countries, which had replied to this question, Bulgaria came to 24th place.

The country also occupied the last place among all the member countries in answering the following two questions from the opinion poll survey:

- Do you think that over the last 5 years the health and safety at work in Bulgaria has got: “much”, “better”, “better”, “worse” and “much worse” with a frequency in occurrence in the responses of “worse” and “much worse” of 56%, and

- “Regarding safety and health risks at the workplace, do you consider yourself informed”, where some 59 % pointed out that they were “not very well informed” and “not at all informed”.

As a whole, the level of stress in the Bulgarian public administration has remained high throughout the period 2002 – 2011, and the general work conditions still need to be improved. This calls for an increased attention not only to the general management issues of occupational health and safety in the Bulgarian public administration, but also for searching of ways for prevention, informing of the employees, improvement of the process of occupational health and safety and decreasing the consequences of occupational stress on employees.

## **2. The Bulgarian Public Administration – Characteristics and Policy on Occupational Health and Safety**

The Bulgarian public administration complies much more strictly with the legislation requirements and regulations in the field of occupational health and safety than the private sector of the Bulgarian economy. The later and particularly the small and medium-sized enterprises as a whole have a weaker knowledge of the regulations in this regard. The owners and managers of these enterprises are also unwilling to comply with the legislation due to their financial constraints, lack of material interest and entrepreneurship culture. The risks and the fatal accidents and severe injuries are much greater in number in the private sector and particularly in the manufacturing and construction sub-sectors. For 2008, a total number of 1961 occupational accidents have been recorded in the manufacturing and construction sub-sectors, and in the sectors of the public administration, national defense and the compulsory social security the occupational accidents have reached a total number of only 195. (National Social Security Institute, 2009).

Having in mind this fact, it is not strange that the Bulgarian General Labour Inspectorate is checking much more intensively mainly the organizations which do not provide safe and healthy work conditions. In the meantime there is a necessity for development of a proactive occupational health and safety policy in the structures of the public administration. This policy designed for the needs of the public administration agencies should stand as an example for the private sector of the economy and thus to support the development of the overall public governance.

By the end of 2009, the permanently employed personnel working in the public administration have amounted to 80 255 job positions (See “Annual report for the state of the administration – 2009”). Some 69.1 % of the people employed in the public administration in 2009 had a completed higher education. The number of civil servants with a higher education degree working in the central public administration (77.1%) prevails by 20 % the ones working in the territorial administration (57.9%) (Bulgaria’s central public administration includes the Council of Ministers (the Government), the Ministries, the public administration agencies and commissions at a central level, and the territorial administration comprises the regional administrations, the municipalities, the mayors’ offices and the territorial sub-divisions of the central public administrations).

Two third of the civil servants in the public administration in 2009 were women. In 2006 their share amounted to 59.8% and in 2009 it increased to 66.2%. Incrementally and annually, the share of the civil servants of 40 years of age increases as well. In 2009 over 63 % of the civil servants in the public administration are at the age of 41 and above. Simultaneously, there is a constant decrease in the youngest age group of the civil servants (Ministry of State Administration and the Administrative Reform, 2010:56).

### **3. The Management of the Occupational Health and Safety in the Bulgarian Public Administration**

In scientific literature the occupational health and safety is usually entitled as a function to the human resources management departments within the organizations. Due to the high requirements set to these departments and the numerous regulatory documents, which defined and regulated in addition their activities, the occupational health and safety function was not in the center of their attention.

The human resources management departments of the public administrations lack specialists with a training in occupational health and safety. Therefore, the activities of analysis of the occupational accidents are being assigned to specialists either from the property management departments or from the technical and utility maintenance departments. In this regard for example, in the Ministry of education, youth and science, the function of occupational health and safety has been included in the scope of responsibilities of the “Economic and Accounting activities” Directorate, and in the Ministry of

Energy, Economy and Tourism it comes as a function No.20 of the “Industrial relations and management of the state participation” Directorate. In some of the internal regulations of the public administrations, the human resources management departments have as an obligation to perform “surveys among the civil servants in order to increase the organizational culture and in order to improve the work conditions”. This function may also be included to the activities in concern with the occupational health and safety.

In order to ensure healthy and safe work conditions, Bulgaria’s public administrations sign annual contracts with privately owned agencies for labour medicine services. An agency for labour medicine services which has signed such a contract is entitled: to perform the medical examinations envisaged in the Bulgarian legislation; to analyse the results of these medical examinations; and to provide recommendations for improvement of the occupational health and safety within the public administration. It is no secret that the medical examinations are being performed only formally by the agencies for labour medicine and that the results of these examinations are not at a sufficient level. Not all the employees are obliged to pass annually through these examinations (As per Regulation No.3 of 28.02.1987 r. for the obligatory preliminary and periodical medical examinations for the workers, issued by the Minister of Health, the examinations of the persons at the age of 18 to 40 are to be performed once at every five years and for those at the age of over 40 – once at every 3 years) and they show a very weak interest in them. And because of the limited time envisaged for carrying out of these examinations, they do not assist for an early discovery of important diseases. The employees unwillingly share information on their health (despite the assurances for confidentiality) especially when they become older or are concerned to lose their work places. All these circumstances reflect on the quality of the annual analyses performed by the agencies for labour medicine.

From one side, the implementation of the above described activities of the private agencies for labour medicine is a positive in nature, as it avoids subjectivism and a professional expertise is being ensured. From the other side, however, the engagement of the agencies ends with the performance of the medical examinations and the analyses, as well as with the expiring of their temporary contracts. The short term of the contracts provides neither the existence of a long-term involvement of the contracting parties, nor a long term vision for cooperation.

The recommendations, which are usually given in regard to the occupational health and safety, if not particularly connected with avoiding of a serious danger standing in front of the civil servants' safety, remain in most cases not implemented. The public administrations have a serious "justification" in the lack of sufficient financial resources for implementing of the recommendations, such as procuring and providing to the employees of free-of-charge membership cards for fitness centers and sport complexes for ensuring conditions for practicing of sports.

#### **4. Methodology**

In general, the surveys conducted in the EU member countries on occupational health and safety could be classified in two separate groups with reference to their way and repeatability (or lack of repeatability) in conducting: cohort and one-off surveys (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010:8-10). The prevailing surveys on stress issues in Bulgaria come into the second group of the one-off surveys.

As an EU member country Bulgaria participates with statistical data in the EU annual reviews of working conditions (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011). These reviews however contain only general information on occupational health and safety for each separate country in regard.

On a national level, and especially in regard to the public administration, there are also quite a few surveys in Bulgaria which examine problems of occupational health and safety and especially those related to the stress on the work place. Nevertheless, the existing surveys, actually only two in number and of the "one-off" type, have been taken into account both in regard to their methodology and the statistical data provided. These two surveys on civil servants' occupational stress and work conditions have been used for data comparison with the data of the new questionnaire survey, which is further explained in the text of the paper.

The lack of fresh follow-up data due to the small in number surveys on civil servants' occupational health and safety and especially ones related to the stress on the work place, provoked a need for new study, which is to be focussed particularly in this domain. Within the period of January to March 2011, the New Bulgarian University (NBU) in Sofia, Bulgaria conducted a study on the working conditions in the Bulgarian public administration. The survey was

aimed at studying the level and the causes of stress on the workplace. It was based on filling in of a questionnaire card, which followed a model of a similar questionnaire card named “Stress at work” and published in the Handbook of Safety and Health at Work in the enterprise (Donev, D., Petkova, K., Kokalov, I., 2009:285-291).

The NBU survey had also as objectives to cover certain aspects of the working conditions such as: the requirements of the workplace; the presence of control; the organization of working time; the changes in working environment, the support received from the colleagues; the interaction with the supervisor (the direct manager); and the satisfaction from the work realization. There were completed 49 questionnaires – 15 from civil servants working in institutions of the central public administration and 34 from civil servants working in a municipal administration.

The initial questionnaire “Stress at work”, which was used as a model, comprised 35 questions in the following areas: contents of the work tasks; clearness in understanding of the work requirements and comprehension of the work results; bullying on the workplace; relations and support from the colleagues and the line manager; intensity of work; matching of personal life and work; opportunities for autonomous task performance of the assigned tasks; respect and recognition; participation in the changes on the workplace.

In order to save time for answering the NBU questionnaire, the number of the questions was reduced to 16 in comparison to the initial model of the questionnaire card. An additional, 17th question was also included to clarify the civil servants’ personal opinion on the opportunities for improvement of the work conditions. For the closed questions, a 5-degree answering scale was applied comprising the answer options: “never”, “rarely”, “sometimes”, “often” and “always”. The questionnaire also included questions for the type of administration in which the responder works, for her/his age, sex and position. The anonymous way of answering was preserved as well in order to obtain more correct information from the responders.

Purposefully, in the title of the study (of the survey) “Questionnaire survey on working conditions”, it was not included the concept of stress. Questionnaires cards were to be filled anonymously and there were deliberately omitted the questions on physical and psychological bullying and harassment on the workplace. The purpose of this was to get sincere answers, as there were concerns that such questions would not be most probably answered correctly.

The main goal of the survey was to prove the thesis that the level of stress in the work of the civil servants continued to keep high and did not diminished in the period from 2002 to 2011.

The main limitations which appeared in front of the NBU survey could be summarized in the following manner:

- In contrast to the preceding surveys, which were conducted respectfully in 2002 (with 995 responders of whom some 31.3% were in the central and the local administrations) and in 2008 (with 500 effective structured interviews with civil servants from the public administration), the current questionnaire survey was based on a much smaller sample of 49 filled-in questionnaire cards though also covering both the central and the local administrations as it was already mentioned.
- The period of conducting and analyzing of the received filled-in questionnaire cards was a comparatively short: from January to March 2011, as the survey was conducted with limited financial resources.
- In the course of receiving of the filled-in questionnaires, it was found that some of the respondents have fear to disclose information in regard to their working conditions. The reasons which were pointed out were the current policy of dismissals in the public administration and the misunderstood "loyalty" to the employer (usually the head of a division within a certain public agency), who had helped the particular employee to get her/his current job position in the public administration. As a proof of that finding serves the fact that the sample contains 6 completed questionnaires, in which the respondents intentionally have not filled in the information regarding their age, sex, administration and job position.
- The questionnaire in use for the NBU survey lacked purposefully questions on "presenteeism" and bullying on the workplace, as for these issues separate surveys will be needed to provide more detailed data and analysis.
- An important limitation also comes from the choice and the structure of the questions used in the questionnaire. From a methodological point of view, the use of closed questions in a

questionnaire ensures a higher degree of researcher's control, but provides a smaller opportunity for examining and checking the responders' way of thinking (Cooper, Schindler, 2003).

- The number of the responders by the type of administration showed out a prevailing number of questionnaire cards filled-in by employees from the local (municipal) administration. This fact to some extent added for a more favorable representation of the work conditions in the public administration, as well as for a lower level of stress regarded as an average value for all the responders.
- According to the data included the European Working Conditions Survey for 2005, Bulgaria was pointed to have the lowest level of bullying and harassment on the workplace of only 2% (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007:36). In order to clarify this problem, however, another separate study will be needed to reveal the causes on bullying and harassment in the workplace and to explain this low statistical results, something which goes beyond the scope of the NBU survey and the present paper.

Based on the above presented methodological remarks and limitations of the survey conducted by the NBU, some suggestions for further research could also be pointed out. The next researches in this field could be aimed at revealing of the correlational dependencies between certain conditions of the work environment and the civil servants' level of stress. They could also cover greater in number administrations and the information received could also be complemented with focus group interviews. Researches could also be made on the bullying on the work place and especially in connection with the absenteeism and presenteeism phenomena.

##### **5. Discussion (Results from the two preceding studies on the level of stress and civil servants turnover in the Bulgarian public administration)**

The most serious problem in concern with the occupational health and safety in the Bulgarian public administration is the work-related stress. For the past 10 years the public interest in this problem has increased. In 2009, the Bulgarian General Labour Inspectorate undertook a special campaign for posing of questions for the workers' stress during their inspections in the private sector companies.

In two separate studies, conducted within the period 2002 - 2008, the specific working conditions and the level of stress in the Bulgarian state administration were regarded and reviewed. In 2002, the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria conducted a representative survey named "Work stress in the context of transition". According to the results of the survey, the level of stress in both the central public administration (the so-called "state administration" according to the Bulgarian terminology) and the municipal administration was of a high degree. Within the framework of the methodology used in the survey, the level of stress was calculated to be at the degree of 6.0 (the range in the stress level between of 5 to 6 means an intermediate level of stress and the range from 7 to 8 degrees stands for very high stress) and in comparison to the public health sector (6.3 degrees) and the education sector (6.2) it appeared to be slightly lower. There are three leading stressors, which were identified in the health, education and public administration sectors and which are caused by the organization of work:

1. The necessity to work faster, which has a negative effect on the quality of work and satisfaction from it (according to 92.5 % of all respondents);
2. The presence of many administrative formalities and paperwork (according to 91.4% of all the respondents);
3. The setting of tasks with controversial demands (according to 89.1 % of all respondents).

Respondents from state and municipal administration pointed out as the most stressful factors in their work the very intensive mental activity (8.5 degree); the low remuneration for the work done (8.4 degree); and the need to take independent and responsible decisions (8.3 degree).

In the study, there were also commented two more important factors which determine the high level of the stress in the public administration. The first one is the failure, despite the adoption by the Bulgarian parliament of the Law for Civil Servants, to create a politically neutral administration which is to ensure a stable civil service. The public administration is characterized by "the sustaining of a permanent insecurity and fear for job loss". The "constant changes in regulations and their inconsistency" were pointed out as the second factor, which affects the stress of civil servants, as they are entitled to apply these very same regulations (ILO & Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria, 2002:12).

Yet another characteristic feature of the work-related stress was discussed in the study, i.e. the stress-resistance and its different levels between men and women. Some 65.3% of female respondents believe that they are resistant to stress as compared with men of whom only 53.6% share this opinion. Apparently, the high concentration of working women in public administration contributes also for an even greater diffusion of stress, and especially the one connected with combining of both the family and the professional life.

In 2008, the former Ministry of State Administration and Administrative Reform conducted a study on the working conditions and employees' motivation in the public administration. An extremely great share of the employees indicated that they had endured either a high workload (59.6%), or a very high workload (36.6%).

**Table 1: Reasons for occurrence of workload at the workplace, according to the civil servants**

<i>Nº</i>	<i>Reason</i>	<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>
1.	Insufficient remuneration	66.7%
2.	Too many work duties	51.3%
3.	Insufficient time for completion of the assigned tasks	48.1%
4.	Inadequate performance assessment on the work carried out	27.4%
5.	Too many responsibilities in low autonomy for decision taking	22.8%
6.	Ambiguity in the assigned tasks	17.3%

**Source:** Turnover, working conditions and motivation of employees in state administration, The results of a study project on OPAC, 2008, [www.saveti.government.bg/c/document\\_library](http://www.saveti.government.bg/c/document_library)

A part of the objectives of the study is pointed to reveal the level of stress at the workplaces of the public administration. Some 22.5% of the respondents describe the stress level at their workplaces as very high and some 50.7% as high. These results confirm once again, 6 years after the first study in this area that the level of stress in the administration remains worryingly high, and that the condition of stress is widespread among civil servants.

Some of the employees react to the existing stress by looking for job opportunities outside of the public administration. In the survey, the first three factors for leaving work in the administration, which had been pointed out by the employees, are the insufficient amount of wages paid, the high levels of stress at the workplace and the workload. In 2009, the mean percentage of the

workforce turnover in the public administration was in total 10.9% of which 13.2% come from the central administration and 7.8% from the local administration. It becomes apparent that the overall level of the workforce turnover is relatively low, and therefore, it can be ignored as an indicator of the level of stress. The low level of the workforce turnover is caused by the economic crisis in the country and is linked to the profile of employees working in the public administration. These very same employees are people of a higher age, and often in the period of their lifetime preceding retirement, and for that reason they strive for a greater stability and security of the workplace and they do not wish to compensate their low satisfaction of the working conditions by moving to another job.

#### **6. Explaining the Results of the New Questionnaire Survey on the Working Conditions in the Public Administration**

The main results and findings from the new questionnaire survey conducted by the NBU are presented hereby with specific accent on the details of the research issues in regard.

Some 78 per cent of the respondents were women and in the questionnaires the prevailing responses came from persons occupying the positions of either experts, or specialists. Such a type of distribution of the responses creates condition for evaluation of the work-related stress for the positions, which are exposed to the highest levels of stress, those of the lower hierarchical levels of the public administration.

The responses to the first question in the questionnaire "I understand what is expected of me at work" show that employees are well aware of the job they perform. Some 72 % have pointed out that they always know what is expected from them, while some other 16 % have indicated that they are often aware of what is expected from them. Those answers can be interpreted as a result from the legal obligation of the public administration agencies to develop and update the job descriptions for the public servants, as well as they could be also explained by the experience of the staff occupying certain job positions.

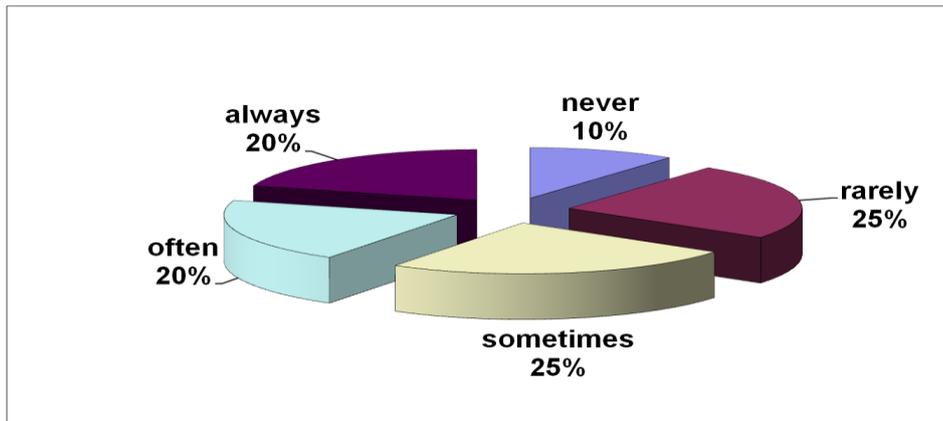
#### **Workload and strategies for dealing with the assigned tasks**

The questions concerning the employees' workload and the presence of sufficient time for performing of the work tasks are respectively numbered no.4,

6 and 7. A total of 22 % of respondents declared in question 4 that they had always or often unachievable deadlines in their work.

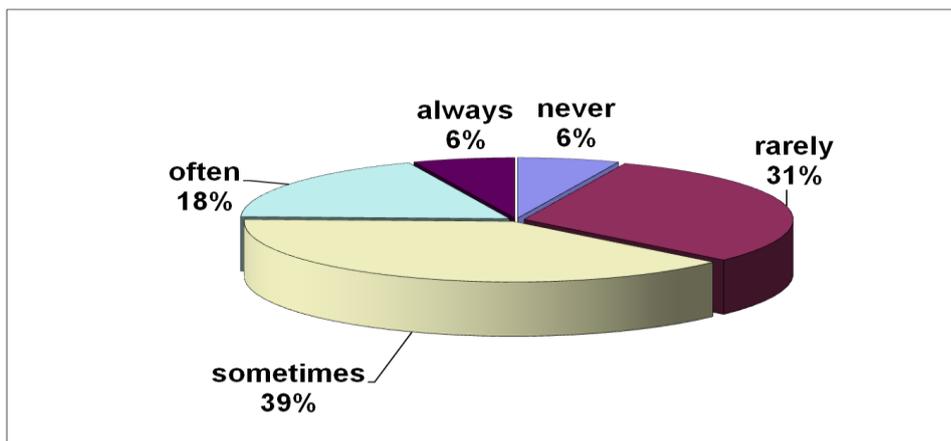
**Chart 1:** Answers to Question no. 5

“When changes in the work are implemented I know how they will work in practice”:



**Chart 2:** Answers to Question No.6

“I have to ignore some of my work tasks because I am overwhelmed with work”:



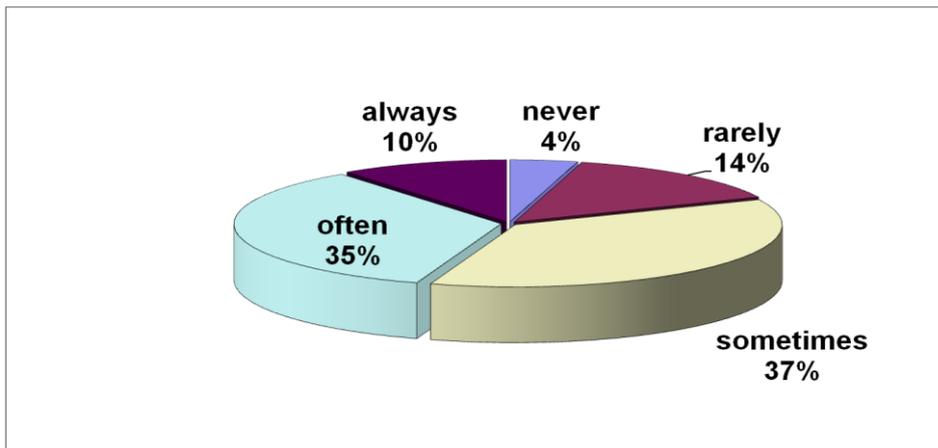
In question no. 6 some 24 % of respondents indicated that they often or always had to ignore some of their tasks as they were overwhelmed with work.

The biggest group of respondents (39 %) indicated that they were overwhelmed with work from time to time. The answers to these employees, who are nearly 40% of respondents, can be explained in the context of cyclical growth of workload in the administration during certain periods of time such as at the end of the calendar year, when there are deadlines for preparing analysis and reports or when some important deadlines envisaged in the regulations are approaching.

As an answer to question no.13, a comparatively low percentage of respondents pointed out that they could achieve better results if they were given more time (28 per cent among respondents with answers “often” and “always”). It is extremely high the share of the respondents giving “sometimes” as an answer, some 58 %, which also signals on the lack of time in particular work situations.

**Chart 3:** Answers to Question No. 13

“I stay after the end of the daily working time in order to complete my work tasks”:



According to respondents, the working conditions can be improved if "there is a proper coordination between the different departments within their agency and if not everything is done on the very last moment!" and if "the organization of the work processes and the tasks are to be improved". These comments refer to a lack of coordination and synergy between the different departments. They also show out that Bulgaria's public administration has reserves for a more effective organization of the entire workflow. These factors also lead to an

unnecessary and disproportionate workload of civil servants while the individual employee cannot exert influence on them.

A different strategy for the completion of assigned tasks within the pre-set deadlines is to work after the end of the daily working time. Some 35 % of respondents indicate that they do it often, and those employees who remain at their workplaces after the end of the working hours always amounted to 10% of all the respondents. Remaining at the workplace after the end of the working hours was pointed to occur "sometimes" by another 37 % of the respondents. These responses are indicative of the workload of staff and volume of work that they actually do.

Some 47 % of respondents often or always receive help from colleagues if their work becomes difficult. For the rest of the respondents the situation is quite a different. The reasons should not be sought only in the presence of poor working relationships and working microclimate, as the question no.12 "Do you have difficult situations and conflict with colleagues was answered by 16 % as "never", another 46 % gave the answer "rarely". Some 22 % pointed "sometimes" as an answer. And this is something which happens in the practice when colleagues who communicate on a daily basis.

The answers to the above question indicate that at the central and municipal administration prevail good working relationships. This fact is confirmed by the survey of the Ministry of State Administration and Administrative Reform, in which, the poor relationships with colleagues were pointed only as the sixth in order factor causing workload in the workplace (Turnover, working conditions and motivation of employees in state administration, 2008:8-9). The good working relationships were commented by two of the respondents in response to the 16<sup>th</sup> question. The first employee proposed improving working conditions to be achieved through improved teamwork, and the second one expressed a specific desire for a better microclimate.

The lack of support from colleagues at work is connected with the design of the job positions in the Bulgarian public administration. The job positions are divided on a functional basis, which means that they are independent and in most cases include duties with different content. In the public administration teamwork is not widespread, although it facilitates the even distribution of workload among employees. Thus the organization of the work tasks in the units becomes an objective obstacle for helping a colleague with difficulties at the workplace. The workload of colleagues who could lend their support is also

of importance. If they are too overwhelmed with work it would be hard for them to spend time and give some assistance.

The 14<sup>th</sup> question in the questionnaire "At work I am required to perform tasks that are difficult to combine" was answered by 28 % of employees replied that it happened to them "always" or "often". About 42 % of the employees replied that it happens to them "sometimes". The assigning of very different tasks to civil servants is typical for smaller administrations where employees perform more than one job position. A concrete example in this regard is the employee who has the functions of both a secretary and a specialist in human resources. The assigning of tasks, which are difficult to combine within a certain job position, is usually being done in the absence of a part of the employees or in case of a lack of a sufficient time for performing of the tasks within the unit. The comments from respondents indicate the presence of inadequate organization and coordination of the performed tasks. One of the respondents pointed out that the working conditions could be improved if "the duties of employees are clearly defined and strictly performed". Another respondent gave a proposal for a "better organization from the side of managers in assigning of the specific tasks".

In the latest report on the state of the public administration, a conclusion has been drawn that the administration has inflexible, hard management and work processes, poor coordination, decreased efficiency and effectiveness. The reason is its highly hierarchical structure. On average, 1 out of every 5 employees has managerial functions. Therefore, measures are needed for organizing of the work of the employees in a more flexible manner and for reducing artificial hierarchical levels.

Informing for changes which reflect on employees' performance and on the features of the leadership style in the public administration

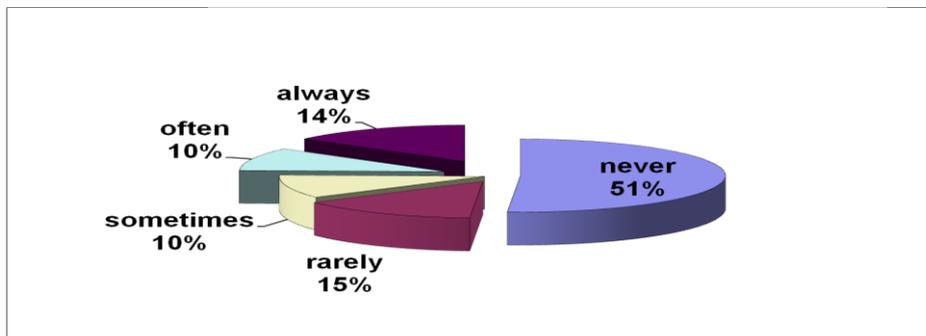
The achievement of objectives set to the units of the public administration depends on the results and the commitment of many employees working in these units or outside of them. This circumstance hinders the individual achievements and makes it harder to distinguish the visible link between the individual efforts, the individual achievements and the outcomes of the work. In this regard, the incentives provided by the supervisor, as well as the feedback and the assessment of the job become even more important as a factor for motivating of the employees and for achieving satisfaction at the workplace.

The received from the supervisor incentives are not sufficient for the staff. The answer to question no.15 "My line manager encourages me" shows out, that supervisors encouraged 43 % of the staff often or always. Another 27 % of employees receive incentive sometimes. The issue is extremely important with reference to the low salaries in the public administration and the search for approaches for intangible reward and motivation. The respondents' comments in the study are an indication in this regard. A respondent expressed the view that the working conditions in the administration would improve "if the performance appraisal is to be carried out fairly and properly; if the employees' potential and qualifications are respected; if the striving to appoint politically correct people to the management positions is overcome; and if the employees are to be evaluated according to their actual competence". A second comment referred to the improvement of the working conditions: "if managers are competent and if no low-qualified people are being appointed in the public administration". In the third comment, it was stated "whatever incentives (of miscellaneous character) are welcome that in turn will reflect more on the quality and the incentive for the work".

On question no.8 "I can count on my line manager for assistance in solving problems in work" some 63 % of respondents answer affirmatively, stating that they can rely "always" or "often" on their direct manager. This result could be interpreted as a good and indicative of the relationship between the regular, subordinate civil servants and their direct managers. It can be interpreted also as a result of the greater in number positive responses received from the civil servants working in a municipality administration, in which, obviously, there are good working relationships between subordinates with managers.

**Chart 4:** Answers to Question No.8

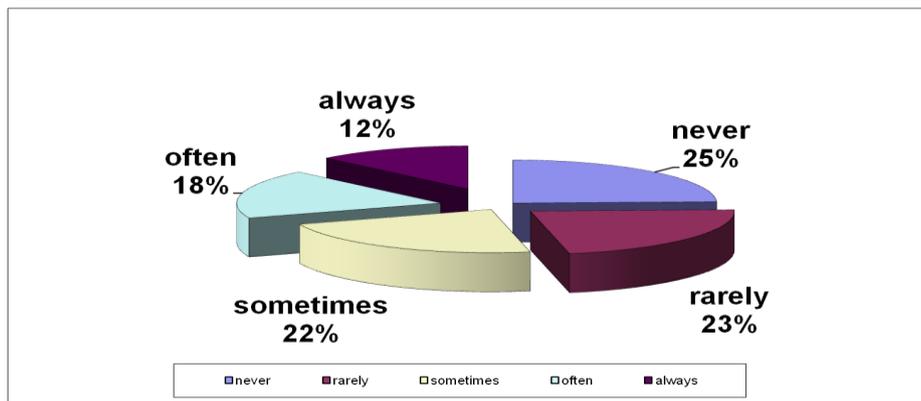
"I can choose when to start or finish my work day":



Questions no.9 and no.11 of the study highlight the technology for introducing innovations in the administrative units. On the question no.9 "Managers always consult employees about changes in the work" the answers received for the categories "always" and "often" are respectively 18 and 12 %. These very low percentages indicate that the management does not coordinate in a sufficient degree the decisions taken with the employees, who will be affected by these very same decisions. This leads to a failure of the management to ensure ownership and commitment on the employees who will have to work in the new conditions.

**Chart 5:** Answers to Question No.9

"Managers always consult employees about changes in the work":



The lack of involvement by employees, when changes are being made and when these changes concern them, creates conditions for significant stress at the workplace. In the distribution of responses received for question no.11 only a half of the respondents have answered with confidence that they know how the changes will work in practice. The responses of the remaining half of the respondents testify for the employees' low level of awareness and for the lack democratic enough style for decision taking in the public administration. In the ever more dynamic external environment and in the presence of an increasing pressure for reforming of the public administration, the change management becomes an inevitable necessity, and informing employees for forthcoming changes is more than a must.

Questions no.5 and no.8 consider the possibility of civil servants to regulate their pace of work and to enjoy the possibilities of flexible working hours. A total of 40 % of respondents answered question no.5 in the way that they “always” or “usually” have the right to adjust their speed of work, and some 35 % gave the answers “never” or “rarely”. The latter answer is indicative of the lack of autonomy at work for a great number of the employees working in state and municipal administration. Two of the respondents explicitly expressed a desire for a greater freedom and autonomy in the workplace.

Responses to question no.10 "I can choose when to start or finish my work day" are highly polarized. Some 51 % of respondents indicated that they could not choose when to start or finish their working day. Another 15% of the respondents pointed out that they had rarely this opportunity. The answers of more than 70% of the respondents indicate that they do not have the opportunity to decide when to use a break. This fact is probably due to the specifics of their obligations connected to providing of administrative services to the citizens or with the adopted internal rules that regulate the time for using of a brake or lunch.

The low autonomy of the work has a negative impact on the civil servants' motivation and contributes to the formation on higher levels of stress.

## **7. Conclusions and Recommendations for Improvement of the Occupational Health and Safety Conditions in the Bulgarian Public Administration**

On the basis of the NBU questionnaire survey, the following several conclusions can be drawn out. First, it appears that the work in the public administration is intensive, although this is not seemed so by the general public. About 25% of respondents stay systematically after work or have to ignore a part of their duties in order to cope with the workload. The high intensity of the workload is related to a low use of computers and software, and the inadequate organization of the work processes.

Second, it can be concluded that civil servants work under conditions of high stress, which is being generated by factors such as: low autonomy; low involvement in the changes affecting the work of employees; presence of impossible deadlines; and lack of team collaboration. The answers of respondents show out that there are considerable reserves for improving working conditions through the introduction of team work, reduction of

hierarchical levels of the administration and creation of conditions for a more flexible working day.

As a whole the work organization and the characteristic features of the public sector management limit the possibilities for improvement of the working conditions. A part of the measures that are to be taken in order to reduce the level of stress is linked with providing of a greater awareness of the effects of stress in the workplace. For that purpose brochures can be developed and training sessions for managers can be organized in order to create awareness and reduce the symptoms of stress experienced by their subordinates.

The political influence exercised on the professional public administration should also be reduced as it does not only contribute for the achievement of better results at work, but also has a destructive effect on relationships at the workplace and creates a sense of injustice and inequality. It should be ensured that managers provide fair incentives for a work well done. These measures are especially needed in the present situation of the low wages in the public administration and not only as recognition of the employees' efforts, but also as a precondition for increasing the motivation and retention of qualified public civil servants.

In general, despite the small sample, the research succeeded to point differences in stress levels depending on the job position and the type of administration. The levels of stress and workload are higher for the central government employees than for respondents in the municipal administration. The questioned in the study managers are being supported in their work in a greater extent from their subordinates and have more information on the implementation of changes in administration. Therefore, the target groups, who are to be influenced and for whom the stress levels should be reduced are primarily employees at lower positions in the hierarchy and the ones working in the central administration.

The unfavorable age structure of the employees in public administration has no chance to change soon in a positive direction. Due to the aging of the workforce in the state administration it should be strengthened the use of measures such as more ergonomic office equipment and furniture, enhanced lighting and heating. Currently, furniture and equipment especially in large part of the municipalities is not only old but it is also insufficient. It is not an unnecessary luxury in case of workforce with higher age to sign contracts with policlinics

and hospitals in order to provide the employees with the opportunity to be promptly examined and tested throughout the year and under preferential terms.

A particular attention should be paid to the measures by which to adapt the work and working environment to the individual needs. A special attention should also be paid to the ensuring of a more flexible matching of work and family life for the women working in the administration. For example, every summer the young mothers in the Bulgarian public administration are under stress due to the closure of kindergartens for one month and their inability to balance work with the personal commitment to their children. The levels of stress for these employees could be reduced significantly, if opportunities for flexible start and end of the workday are provided alongside with an opportunity to use paid leave within the month when the kindergarten are closed in summer.

Conditions should be created for conducting annually risk assessment and evaluation of the stress within the public administration agencies and the management of these very same agencies should be engaged with the implementation of programmers for its considerable reduction. It is necessary that the Human resources management departments become more active in ensuring healthy and safe workplaces in the public administration. They should assist the management in the task of creating better working conditions, and for this task the management in a certain government agency will need at least one employee with adequate training and skills in this area. The data in the field of the occupational health and safety should be analyzed precisely by experts in HR departments. Information, which is collected from the HR units, but is not used actively to carry out internal analysis, is the information of the sick leaves and paid leaves used by the civil servants. The HR personnel should assess and evaluate also the phenomenon of "presenteeism", which is typical for employees who fear for their jobs and appear at work despite being sick.

In the annual reports on the state of the administration, discussion and analyses should start to appear in regard to the occupational health and safety in the public administration. The reports could define and provide centralized management decisions and recommendations for improvements of the working environment, the atmosphere, the work organization and the reduction of the stress in the public administration. At present, in these reports, the information on the occupational health and safety is entirely missing.

The public administrations have many practical opportunities which are not expensive and at the same time are good for the employees' health and performance. Such initiatives include providing conditions for parking of bicycles for the employees either in the building of the public administration agency in concern, or beside it. Improving occupational health and safety is associated with creating of a more favorable work environment and with the provision of opportunities for practicing of sports by the civil servants, for example through organizing discounts for employees which are interested in sports and contracts with sports facilities/complexes.

Examples in this regard can be found in the measures taken by the mayors of some of the larger and financially secured Bulgarian municipalities such as of Stara Zagora, Sofia, Plovdiv and others. In regard to the analyses and recommendations in the field for occupational health and safety, the mayors of these municipalities have organized yoga courses; seminars for studying the practices for reducing stress at the workplace; mountain tracking; courses in traditional Bulgarian dances and other initiatives for the benefit of their employees. All these good practices should be encouraged at both central and local public administration level, as they are neither too expensive, nor require too much efforts from the management of the public administration itself.

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