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PRESS RELEASE

WORN OUT WORKERS COULD PUT LIVES AT RISK

Tired and worn out workers are making mistakes that cost money, compromise safety and even put lives at risk say the findings of a new survey launched on Thursday 23rd February 2006.

A catalogue of mistakes made by frazzled employees, ranging from car crashes to medical errors, is featured in the 24-7 survey report - an annual look at working life conducted by the Work Life Balance Centre, Leicestershire, Keele University, Staffordshire, and the University of Sheffield.

More than 1,600 people took part in this year's project, which covered a wide range of work related topics from health and family life to legislation and errors.

Julie Hurst, Director of the Work Life Balance Centre, said: "While the number of people admitting to making a mistake was small (11%) the consequences were chilling, including serious medical errors leading to patient deaths. We also had a number of road traffic accidents, incidents involving trains, and workers being contaminated with dangerous chemicals. One of the reasons we carry out the survey each year is to try to find some answers to the problems of poor work life balance and these results reinforce the importance of this work."

The survey highlights the complex role of work in people's lives as it contains many positives about work as well as negative impacts. Among the findings were:

- More than half of those responding enjoyed the challenges of their jobs and made sure work did not dominate their whole life.
- More than 8 in 10 workers felt they could not cope with the demands made of them at least some of the time, and most of these (58.3%) felt work to be the sole source of such feelings.
- More than half of respondents (58.9%) felt that they had suffered ill health as a result of stress at work. The most common symptoms were: fatigue/extreme tiredness (71.7%), sleeplessness (63.1%), irritability with colleagues/family/friends (61.2%), lack of concentration (54.1%), headaches/migraine (52%), depression (49.1%), and anxiety/panic attacks (39.8%).
- Men were more likely to report depression (53.7% men, 46.5% women), increased smoking/drinking (men 34.6%, women 26.0%), and suicidal thoughts (men 14.3%, women 10.4%). Women were more likely to report anxiety (women 41.0%, men 37.7%), uncontrolled crying (women 40.7%, men 11.1%), headaches/migraine (women 56.1%, men 44.6%), and persistent minor ailments (women 34.5%, men 26.0%).

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- More than half (56.4%) of the respondents felt more fulfilled when busy, and work was seen as an important part of life by 48.8%.
- Most people (56.8%) felt their workloads to be out of control occasionally and more than half felt that it had increased during the previous 12 months.
- Increasing the amount of control people have over their working life can drastically reduce illness levels, (from 86.8% of those who felt out of control most of the time to 33.1% of those who hardly ever or never felt out of control).
- Around a third of people enjoyed their home and work lives equally.
- Almost half of all respondents (46.7%) identified better communication between management and staff as the key factor that would improve work life balance, while only slightly fewer (43.4%) felt that better, more effective performance from others would be beneficial.

Steve French, Lecturer in Industrial Relations, Keele University explained: "Most workers in the UK find it difficult to manage their working lives with their family / private lives, many people are working more than their contracted hours; knowledge of legal rights is uncertain (although better in unionised organisations) and too many people still feel unable to cope with the pressure they are under. On the other hand the proportion of people made ill by work is falling, people enjoy the challenges and fulfilment of work and the availability of initiatives to improve the situation has improved."

The 24-7 report contains regional breakdowns of the major survey trends and individual case studies looking at some of the experiences in more depth. Copies are available, free of charge from the survey website at www.24-7survey.co.uk, or from the Work Life Balance Centre on 01530 273056. Last year more than 2,000 organisations around the world received copies of the findings to help with their work life balance initiatives.

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Further Information:

Julie Hurst is the director of the Work Life Balance Centre and author of a book on spending less time at work. She is a frequent speaker at work life balance conferences and has appeared as a work life balance coach on BBC1 television. Please contact the Work Life Balance Centre on (tel/fax) 01530 273056, email: hurstj@worklifebalancecentre.co.uk, (**out of hours:** 01530 270969, mobile 07074 333385)

Steve French is a lecturer in industrial relations at Keele University. His research within the Institute for Public Policy and Management, focuses upon the regulation of the employment relationship, notably the implementation or avoidance of employment legislation, employer's personnel policies, and employees' perceptions of their working lives. Steve can be contacted upon 01782 583609 or s.r.french@hrm.keele.ac.uk.