

## PRESS RELEASE

### Study Ranks Stress Factors Among Taiwan's Workers

The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), a unit of Taiwan's Council of Labor Affairs (CLA), carried out a study in 2010 of psychological stress among the island's workers. Participants performed a self-evaluation of the stress they felt in various areas; they graded stress on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 indicating the least stress and 10 the greatest stress. For both genders the top five stress factors were worry about their company closing down (with a score of 5.86), uncertain future of their company (5.83), being fired or forced to retire (5.67), unpaid leave, including retained position without pay (5.53), and responsibility for a company accident (5.00). Females felt greater work stress than males.

According to the results of the study, the top causes of stress in daily life were worries about reduction of income (6.35), serious injury or illness in the family (6.12), sudden loss of valuable property or need for a large amount of spending (5.91), difficulty of repaying loans (5.77), and death of spouse, children, parents, or siblings (5.77).

The study was conducted in accordance with the CLA's "Reference Index for the Determination of Psychological Disorders Caused by Work-related Psychological Stress," which listed occupational stress events that a worker might encounter in his or her life. A psychological stress index was compiled with 35 items of "work-related events in the workplace" and 23 "events in personal life outside the workplace." A total of 1,446 workers participated in the questionnaire survey, and the return ratio was 90%

The average scores given by females in 31 work-related items and 17 personal life-related items were higher, by a statistically significant margin, than those given by males. The items with the greatest differences were "sexual harassment" (with an overall ranking of 28<sup>th</sup>), "disputes with superiors" (15<sup>th</sup>), and "disputes with co-workers" (19<sup>th</sup>). Female workers also felt greater stress than male workers in cases of "death of spouse, children, or parents," "death of a friend," and "dishonorable incidents happening to relatives."

The overall grades for the number and severity of stressful events were significantly related to the workers' education level, working hours, and employment model. The higher the level of education and the longer the working hours, the greater was the work stress; in addition, short-term employees felt greater pressure than long-term employees.

IOSH acting chairperson Huang Chiu-kui pointed out that work stress has a direct impact on psychological health and working efficiency, and that the CLA has always worked to build a healthy workplace environment. The CLA announced the "Reference Index for the Determination of Psychological Disorders Caused by Work-related Psychological Stress" in November of 2009, and it is necessary to understand the types and weightings of work and life pressures faced by workers before it is possible to judge whether individual cases of psychological disorder were caused by occupational pressures. IOSH will continue collecting data for the evaluation of the severity of psychological stress among the workers of Taiwan. High-stress items will be added to the evaluation chart and given a higher weighting in determining scores so as to provide a reference for the CLA in revising the "Reference Index."

IOSH has always been concerned about the issue of psychological health in the workplace, and over the years has published an "Excessive Work Fatigue Scale," "Occupational Pressure Scale," and "Simplified Work Pressure Scale, Internet Version." These publications allow workers to test themselves online, increase their knowledge of work stress, and gain skills for relieving stress. It also helps companies to understand the stresses faced by their workers and implement work stress prevention management; in addition, a "Corporate Pressure Prevention Management Planning Guide" helps companies implement work pressure management service programs. IOSH has compiled the relevant scales into a "Workplace LOHAS Treasure Chest – Preventing Work Pressures, Excessive Fatigue, and Depression" and has produced 500 "Treasure Chest" disks, which may be obtained by calling IOSH at (02) 2660-7600, ext. 269, Ms. Hu Pei-yi.