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A SIGNALMAN'S STRESS AT WORK

Milan Bezjak¹, Nevenka Podgornik²

Abstract

The concern of signalman for safe, regular and settled railway traffic is a mission, which hides many traps that prevent the realization of such tasks; therefore, strict adherence to instructions, regulations, acts and protocols is essential in order for them to carry out the work process, which provides the users with a quality service. The signalman faces daily many situations that are unpredictable and have often negative consequences.

In this paper we identify the presence of stress in the workplace of railroad signalman, the consequences arising there from factual knowledge of the aid program by the signalmen, and the opinion of experts.

Key words: stress at work, railway traffic, consequences, signalman

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Introduction

According to the available data regarding stress perception in a workplace, Slovenian employees are at the very top of the European Union scale. In Slovenia, 45,6% of workers believe that their health is compromised because of their work. 37,7% believe that stress is the most frequent cause for it, this percentage is the second highest, right behind Greece. Most of the blame for this situation can be attributed to the economic crisis and globalization, which bring great daily changes in the form of pressures and excessive demands at work, employment insecurity, weak control and support at work (Lužar Šajt, 2011).

The European Union defines stress at work as an emotional, behavioral, cognitive and physical reaction to damaging work sources, work environment and work organization. It is a state with a characteristically

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elevated proportion of excitement and discomfort, frequently followed by feelings of inability to face a burdensome situation (Gyllensten and Palmer, 2005).

Stress at work is composed by a mixture of pressures, originating in the work environment, and the responses that an individual experiences (Mesner Andolšek, 2002). An elevated quantity of stress is very damaging and it creates physical and psychic disorders among the employees, as well as it influences the lowering of the social income (Bushara and Parvaiz, 2011). The range of unwanted consequences includes also higher expenses for organizations and their work productivity, which consequently falls to a lower level. The quality of the job performed worsens just as well, there is a lot of absence from work, the company's public image is downgraded and there is a great discontent among the employees (Heller and Hindle, 2001). One of the most frequent consequences of changes in the organization is the company's need for restructuring. This brings stressful events that manifest themselves as a short-term and long-term worsening of the employees' health status, as for them their work represents a financial security and social integration, a feeling of utility and control over an important part of their life. Creating a balance between the demands and work monitoring, an individual's efforts and rewarding him is extremely important, since otherwise a severe imbalance arises, the workplace becomes more stressful, which has a sure negative influence on the employees' physical and psychic health state. We can talk about a proven correlation between the work position and health, where people on lower positions have worse health conditions than people on higher positions (Marmot and Wilkinson, 2006).

American experts estimate that stress-related consequences cost approximately 40 million working hours worldwide (Kavšek and Klemenčič, 2009). The researches of trade union organizations reveal that, in most cases, the high level of stress at work is caused by bad work conditions, not enough autonomy for the employees and employment insecurity. Consequently, the responsibility of all that shifted the focus on the employer as well and it is not a burden of the employee only (Mesner Andolšek, 2002). The research Eurofound observes that by improving the employees' health, security and wellbeing, the productivity in some companies increased for 20%. The company reaches the higher level of success, especially with the decrease of work absences and a greater satisfaction of the employees (Podjed, 2012).

An extended exposure to stress can lead to a burnout, linked to feelings that people experience during a long-term exposure to emotionally

burdensome situations. It is composed of emotional burnout, losing one's own personality and a reduced feeling of personal fulfillment (Maslach and Leiter, 2002).

Around 3-4 percent of the EU gross domestic product is spent for dealing with the consequences of work-related burnouts (Kralj and others). The researchers explain that a burnout is a process of self-exhaustion as a consequence of an employee's unsuccessful attempt to attain the results he needs to improve his self-evaluation and keep a positive self-image. Consequently, it is linked to a person's efforts for being successful at work.

The medical absence represents a study object, as its causes and consequences stretch to numerous fields. It represents a social, an organizational and a legal problem with great economic consequences for all that are affected, including employers and employees, as well as the economy and the field of compulsory health insurance. The phenomenon also connects the population's health with economic, labour, socio-demographic and cultural factors. It is influenced by numerous factors of a work and a social environment, and in a lesser measure, by the employees' health condition (Vučković, 2010).

In stress and burnout at a workplace it is necessary to look for the occurrence of presentism – a person's reduced efficiency at work. This term is also used to describe the behaviour of employees, who come to work despite not feeling well, with an illness or other factors from their personal life and, consequently, they do not perform their job with the efficiency that they could (Levin Epstein, 2005; Sitter, 2005).

Some studies show that the number of people, who are absent from work because of illness, is lower than the number of employees, who come to work despite their illness. Presentism does not represent a direct danger for the company, since the consequences manifest themselves over a long-term period and they slowly affect the employees' health, but gradually it leads to a decrease in productivity (Smith, 2005).

Another unwanted phenomenon is fluctuation – the employees' movement, with their departure from the organization and leaving the position open to substitutes, it also represents the ratio between the departures and the arrivals at the beginning or end of a period (Pučko, 2001), it reflects the employees' condition and an inconvenient organization climate.

It is evaluated that the average level of fluctuation in Slovenia is between 6 and 0%, which is well above the desired one (1,65%). The replacement of a good worker, who left, is an additional and unnecessary expense that an employer should take into account. If the level of fluctuation in a company is high, the company faces a significant increase of expenses that result in the interruption of the work process.

The stressful condition is definitely aggravated by trying to coordinate the family and work life. In Slovenia, we have legal possibilities to coordinate the two separate lives, but in practice their application has different levels of success, since a successful coordination depends on the interaction of the national legislation, the employers' politics and the employees' strategies (Kralj and others, 2011).

The company Slovenske železnice d. o. o. – Slovenian railroads

The company Slovenske železnice works as a contractual group of the Slovenian railway companies, it is composed by the parent company SŽ, d.o.o. and the subsidiaries (Slovenske železnice 4/2009).

The company SŽ – Infrastruktura d.o.o., (hereinafter: SŽ – Infrastruktura) strives for an increase of the quality of services regarding the railway infrastructure maintenance and traffic management. They strive towards the personnel's flexibility and a systematic planning of the necessary number of employees with new technologies, the optimization of business maintenance processes and the introduction of new organizational structures. In doing so, they take into consideration the organization and geographic allocation of the staff resources as well. They ensure additional education and training, they coordinate the country's investments in the infrastructure, regarding the needs of the drivers and the existing infrastructure.

The traffic management (hereinafter: TM) represents one of the organization units within the company SŽ – Infrastruktura d.o.o. Its basic activity is railway traffic management on public railway infrastructure (PRI). It also carries out all specialized activities in accordance with the Railway Traffic Law as a compulsory economic public service (hereinafter: CEPS). Its responsibilities include train traffic management, the preparation and execution of timetables, technologic work processes on traffic sites, monitoring the drivers' work, notifying the security authority, the Traffic inspectorate on violations, the driver on violations of provisions which regulate security in railway traffic, creating and publishing the network program and collecting fees. It executes its work uninterruptedly, to the extent, defined by the network schedule, the technologic work processes and the opening hours of traffic sites. It is

obliged to observe all principles of a relevant, economical and rational business (Slovenske železnice 8/2009).

A signalman – track signalman's³ stress at work

The authors of the analyses of the publications regarding the field of stress at a workplace, published in Slovenia between 2004 and 2010, the psychologists Nataša Sedlar and Tatjana Novak, observe that in Slovenia there is an increased interest in stress and its negative effects. The analysis included 1415 Slovenian professional and research publications gathered through the COBISS system in the last 7 years, regarding the topic of the employees' psychosocial and medical workload. It is possible to notice the lack of interest of social studies in the traffic field. Traffic, as an entire branch, belongs among the poorly researched fields, regarding the work-related stress, it is also possible to notice a deficit of qualitative researches regarding this comprehensive phenomenon (Sedlar and Novak, 2012).

Zdravko Lavrič's quantitative research from 2013 entitled "For a better health and the diminution of stress related to the job of signalmen", states the greatest source of stress for a signalman and how the employees experience this stress at their workplace. Its purpose was for the employer to prepare, based on the received data, an adequate educational program, which would raise the employees' awareness, contribute to the employees' better health and lower the consequences linked to stress.

In the previously mentioned research, where 565 men and 62 women participated, from a total of 663 signalmen, it was stated that the biggest cause of stress in 313, or less than half, of the cases are exceptional occurrences. The following case was the fear of exceptional occurrences with a number of 152 cases, and a constant attention to traffic with 137 cases. The signalmen classed the malfunction of signal-safety equipment in fourth place (Lavrič, 2014a).

Since the case of exceptional occurrences stands out, we examined them in detail and established that, at SŽ since 2014, they are separated in:

- Serious accidents that include train collisions and derailment, and cause the death of one or more persons, all serious injuries of five or more persons, a great material damage on the

³ A signalman is an operator employee, who directly conducts the traffic on a locally controlled station and/or maximum two remotely controlled stations.

A track signalman is an operator employee, who directly conducts the traffic on a track or a track section from the centre of traffic control.

infrastructure, means of transport or the environment and similar accidents, which influence the management and security of the railroad.

- Accidents with damaging consequences, including collisions, derailments, accidents on railway crossings, serious damages of 1 and up to 4 people, material damage ranging from 5.000 to 2.000.000 EUR, the interruption of the railway traffic for more than 2 hours and previously mentioned accidents, where none of the previous mentioned consequences occurred and bad injuries that contractors and executive railway workers suffered during their job in the area of PRI.
- Accidents, linked to train traffic security, including repetitive disturbances, train passage past signals that forbid driving, derailments during movements, rear-ended collisions or impact during movements, except on train, train departure when not all the conditions for departure are met, collisions, rear-ended collisions or derailments of motor vehicles, passage of carriages over the level crossing without consequences, tearing up of the train, preventing a rear-ended collisions or a collision of a train, the malfunction of air brakes in a train, a severing of the switches, passengers' injuries on PRI, damages on train signal-safety (SS), telecommunication (TC), electrical (E) equipment and motor vehicles, putting objects on the railway, objects falling on the railway, broken tracks or deformation of the rails, disasters, fires near the train, the railway line, exceeding the prescribed train speed, uninsured or improperly insured railroad, suicide, attempted suicide, running over third persons and other accidents that influence the security of rail traffic.
- Other occurrences that do not belong to the category of serious accidents, accidents and incidents such as found bodies, injuries of unauthorised persons and third persons, running over domestic and wild animals.
- Disturbances are events that do not reach the criterion for a serious accident, an accident or incident and do not influence the security of railway traffic. We include in this category the malfunctions or disturbances in the functioning of SS, TC, E trail and other equipment (Slovenske železnice, 12/2014).

Within the research, the signalman evaluated as well their experiencing of stress at work with a scale from 1 – the least stressful, to 10 – the most stressful, where the majority of 125 participants (19,4%) chose the answer 5.

The research showed that the experiencing of stress is equally distributed along curve in both ways. Similarly, the signalman answered also the question of how much stress they experience in facing exceptional occurrences at work.

The participants chose the number 5 for their answer 125 times (19,4%). The curve slightly leans over the number 5, since stress caused by exceptional occurrences is more burdensome. In the data presented, 392 signalmen answered that they cope with stress by exercising, followed by other activities in their leisure time with 248 answers. 337 respondents said that they have enough information about recognizing, controlling and decreasing the sources of stress.

The execution of a qualitative research

By carrying out our own research we wanted to analyse the present data and find out how stressful the job of a rail signalman is. We observed the main sources of stress, the signalmen's dealing with this social phenomenon and consequently, we were interested in the prevention within this area and especially, in the signalmen's familiarity with the help program, offered by the company Slovenske železnice in dealing with emotional distress, their reaction to the mentioned program and the profession's opinion, which carries this program out within the company Slovenske železnice.

Based on the critical review of the literature, we developed a main research question and other questions that are directly linked to it, as also a proper research approach. We posed the main research question, which is: "What are the impacts and effects of the working environment on the life of signalmen? And the following research questions that helped us conduct and orient the research:

Q1: What are the factors of stress in a signalman's job?

Q2: What are the effects of stress that the signalmen face?

Q3: Is a signalman exposed to a constant stress?

Q4: How well do the signalmen know the help program?

Q5: What is the signalmen's reaction to the help program, offered by their employer?

Q6: What is the reaction of the professional, who assures psychosocial help in the program?

The method of sampling and the description of a sample

We invited six signalmen, two from each PVP, over 40 years-of-age and with a minimum of 20-years of experience of working as a signalman, and the expert Zdravko Lavrič, a specialist for family therapy, employed by the SŽ within the Help program, offered by the employer, where he faces on daily bases the mentioned subject.

Research instrument

We prepared two questionnaires. One was made for the signalmen and we divided it in four sets (a signalman's work environment, his duties and consequences, the sources and types of negative consequences, prevention), the other one was given to the expert and it contained questions about the signalmen's reactivity to the help program and the professional interpretation of the data. Based on the questionnaire, we carried out a structured interview with the participants in the research.

The process of the data analysis

In analyzing all the collected contents and arranging the data in the form of transcripts, we used open coding. We broke the answers down to concepts by using the comments and the most repetitive or similar answers. We arranged them in meaningful categories and processed all the questions – units of the transcript, which related to the questions. We compared the answers – concepts with each other and combine them into categories.

The interpretation of the results

The average age of the signalmen who participated in the research is 47 years and they have an average of 27,5 years of experience in their field of work. With that, we met the parameters we imposed on our research, which are an age of 40 years and a minimum of 20 years of working as a signalman. All participants are experienced workers, who worked on smaller stations before taking their current jobs. The coverage of PVP is also realized, since there are two signalmen from each PVP taking part in the research. We got close to the data from dr. Lavrič's research regarding the signalmen's average age (47,5 years) and the years of service (26–30), which forms the most numerous category of his research.

The signalmen describe their workplace as adequate, satisfying and neat. They also emphasize that the work conditions really improved over the years, but there are still problems that the job brings. They frequently find themselves in the middle of noisy situations (people, telephones), which disturbs the peace that the signalmen need in order to carry out their job.

The spaces are climatized (but they still have problems with cooling the spaces because of a great number of monitors and computer equipment, which heat the space up even more and therefore, the places need to be cooled even during winter – Centre for railway traffic management), most of the time the conversations are recorded, the spaces are mostly surrounded by sunlight.

Their working time and staff differ from station to station. Therefore, they can work a shift alone, there could be two of them covering a shift or even three signalmen, often is a turn of 12/24, 12/48 hours. They can work 8 hours per day, in the morning, in the afternoon, every second day for 12 hours, they can end their shift at night, or the workplace has two signalmen until a determined hour and afterwards the job is done by only one signalman, who assumes the work and tasks of the worker that just finished. Their main task is to direct and organize traffic safely on the sections that they are responsible for. In addition, they collaborate with other services (freight transport, passenger transport, border authorities, etc.), with nearby rail administrations, they inform passengers through public address installations, they monitor, organize the work, handle the safety-signaling equipment (SSE) of different systems (mechanic, electro-mechanic or a combination of the two, electro-relay safety-signaling equipment, computer of the type TALIS, ILTIS), in their job they use various computer systems (Roman – timetables, data entry, composition of reports, statements, monitoring of movements), they monitor video surveillance (Centre for railway traffic management), in key moments they take responsibility and make the necessary decisions for ensuring the traffic security in every moment. At work, they switch every 4 or 6 hours depending on the working group, especially to minimize the burdens of working with the SSE. They can have the role of an installer, external or internal signalman-administrator, which differs from station to station. In their job, they warn us about a bad work organization as a whole, which was drastically changed by the reorganization of society.

Before the reorganization, a signalman was the key person in organizing the work — now that has been assigned to workers, who are not qualified. So, the signalmen find themselves caught in a dilemma, they see the mistakes and they know how to fix them, they also warn about them, but this is understood as their own arbitrariness. Consequently, it leads to conflicts, a lack of trust, replication of information and work, which create chaos, bad services, anxiety and problems, that are being operatively solved. The signalmen's job is demanding, responsible, it demands a respectful attitude towards the workplace, total

concentration, organization capacities, working in shifts, on days-off, at night, it demands a great psychic effort, determination, experience, adaptation, especially the application of a hierarchy, but sadly not in the same extent as in the past. Consequently, there are disturbances in the work process, which create a general dissatisfaction, worse relationships, individuals' aggressiveness, nervousness, anger, overload, exhaustion, irritability and the increase of stressful events that have a negative influence on all people involved in rail traffic. It is also necessary to mention that all signalmen have different limits to which they can control a situation, since some people could have a relatively higher threshold than others.

The signalmen have different viewpoints of problems they face every day, but they all agree that stress at work damages their internal balance, which in a long term causes negative consequences (the accumulation of problems, errors, unease, over-thinking about work, self-doubt, exhaustion, absence from work, involvement in exceptional occurrences, a feeling of inability to solve problems, medical conditions, problems in personal life, anxiety and extreme stages of stress) that can lead to post-traumatic stress disorders and other psychosomatic problems. Despite all that, the signalmen say that they know how to live with stress, they just need to face it and to know how to overcome it. In their field, they say that the greatest source of stress is their work, despite the fact that they like it, but it is difficult to exclude its negative influence. They say that stress is constantly present, it usually oscillates and it increases during rush hours, but they also maintain the possibility that some people do not even recognize it. There is also the company's personnel politics, which with the reorganization caused the worsening of relationships among new societies to the extent that the mere collaboration among them causes stress. As for the exceptional occurrences (accidents, rear-ended collisions, derailments, accidents on crossings, in guarding work groups, passengers), the signalmen say that they represent a shock, especially when they include human lives and a massive material damage. They are highly placed on the stress scale. In these cases, the signalmen are a part of it, since they need to organize the work.

They also add that facing exceptional occurrences in small stations is more stressful, because they have to do all by themselves, meaning that their decisions carry a greater weight of responsibility than decisions made in larger stations, where the number of signalmen per shift is larger and they agree on the following measures with coordination. This brings more work for the signalmen, a greater burden, more responsibilities and with that a greater amount of stress at work. With the

reorganizations and the global economic crisis, there is a tendency for decreasing the number of signalmen in the company, the absent workers are not being replaced, which leads to a different work systematization, to a decreasing number of signalmen, because there are more of them working the same shift, and additional working obligations in merging jobs. There are an increasing number of interruptions of work at the stations, especially during the night, cancellations and a diminution of workers in shifts.

The modernization of stations and an early retirement of workers, who represent a great expense for the employer, contribute to these interruptions. Luckily, it is controlled to a certain extent, so the security of rail traffic is not jeopardized, but this kind of management could lead to that too in time. Because of that, the signalmen are facing intensified shifts during unexpected sick leaves and the annual leaves, which bring to less rest between shifts, uncontrolled shifts and a greater psychic effort. They emphasize filling in for workers at other stations in similar situations, which brings additional stress to the signalmen, especially because of the specificity of each station and short-term replacements, in which the signalmen do not have the time to completely adapt and familiarize, and consequently a light adoption of a new role, which differs from station to station. The only thing they have in common is the traffic work, which also differs from station to station, especially regarding the form of traffic security. They say that the employer should take more care of this subject, so there would not be these many replacements, because they directly jeopardize traffic security, and in the case these replacements were urgent, they should last longer. They say that relationships at work are average, mostly satisfying. They defend constructiveness, honesty and correctness in relationships with their co-workers, and also their superiors.

The signalmen had a lot to say about the influence of the human factor in their work. They estimate that the human factor depends mostly on the type of the SSE. They say that the older the type, the more it covers the inclusion of the human factor. It is especially present when a malfunctioning occurs, where the signalman is the one who takes on entirely the task of conducting the traffic and with that the SSE. They defend the fact that the bigger the station, the easier is to act and carry out further traffic. In these cases, they have to trust blindly their co-worker on the field, while at smaller stations there is only one signalman to solve the problem and with that he takes on all the responsibility for carrying out the work during that time, until solving the present malfunction or error. In both cases, they explain that following protocols and instructions is necessary, but it can happen that there is no

mandatory action for a particular situation. The signalmen say that the presence of the human factor at work puts them under great pressure, which burdens them mentally, especially because the decision has to be made in short time. This means being extremely stressed and making important decisions under great pressure.

Since the SSE should protect the signalmen, it frequently happens the opposite, namely the increasing presence of the human influence in managing it. In their work, stress is also caused by their working hours (shifts, night work, workdays), inconsistency, unclearness of an individual's roles, overload, extraordinariness, working groups' security, unexpected complications, changes at work, interference with traffic, coming to work and taking over the tasks, constant monitoring of traffic (constant stress), fear of malfunctions of the SSE and exceptional occurrences, experiencing stress effects, the economic and political situation, anxiety and factors in a person's personal life (family issues, lack of money, illnesses and a series of medical problems). These problems are the reason that there is a help program for the workers, offered by the employer and which includes psychosocial help to workers with problems at work and in their private lives (alcohol dependence, money problems, behavioural problems, the development of an illness, mobbing). Its primarily objective is to give psychosocial help to workers with emotional problems, warn them about the sources of stress in their work environments, relief of the affected, raise awareness about the negative consequences of stress, helping recognize and overcome stress, control it, health management, informing and educating the employees and motivating them to start to live in a healthier way in all the areas of their lives. A worker can enroll in the help program alone, if he has problems at work or in his private life. But it could also be the employer who sends him to the sessions, in case he took part in an exceptional occurrence and he does not realize that he has problems. The workers take this step very difficultly and for different reasons. In the first place, there is the fear of being labeled, "I have a file", and there is also a very important factor, which is the felling of admitting powerlessness, weakness, burdening oneself with other people (in particular regarding what would the co-workers, friends and the family say), and the fear of losing the job, although there is no reason for it. Lavrič explains that a person enrolls in the help program when the desire to effectively solve the problems has matured within the person. He underlines that the employees do not have any problems with the employer regarding this. When they realize that they have a problem, they can call a publicly disclosed number any time or they can arrange by e-mail, the program is anonymous and available in their free time or during a sick leave. He also says that he does not report to

anyone about the help program, he does not even keep any records, in case of possible misuse of the mentioned evidence and information. Further on, he explains that he tried to offer a similar type of help for workers 10 years ago, but the employer rejected the proposal. He permitted it just in 2011, when the health and safety at work law was adopted. He then responded and the help program started taking today's form. In the same year, there was a notice on the internet pages regarding psychosocial help for workers and where to find all the necessary information that the workers need.

The signalman says that they know very little about the help program. They received the information regarding the program two years ago, during their work formation, before that they did not know almost anything about it. They also emphasize that the content is mostly unknown to them, what they do know is just an effect of their self-initiative (psychosocial help to workers in distress and active relief). One of the signalmen says that he knows only that the program takes place in Ljubljana with a psychiatrist. The signalman say that the employer helps just a little, they especially mentioned the free participation at the active relief, which now they have to pay themselves, making it less accessible. They express a desire and a need to go back to the old organization. The signalman also stress that in case of problems they firstly rely on themselves, the program represents an alternative only in case they fail, but they do not have any need for it at the moment.

Regarding the success of his programme, Lavrič thinks that the reactions are positive, because despite the problems the workers are facing, they succeed in finding solutions, determine the causes, solve the distress and reach a mutual satisfaction, the workers regain their self-confidence and motivation to face problems. The signalmen know that stress is a problem and that they live with it, but they also realize that it is unpleasant and, on a long-term period, it influences their health. They also say that over the years the level of stress decreased, especially because of the experience they gained during their work and in life. They also know that an individual can accumulate feelings, that could explode in a moment, and that is why they place great emphasis on relaxation and the quality of life. In their free time, they exercise, hang out with friends, take excursions, have hobbies, have an interest in music, healthy food, they give up smoking, alcohol, and they try alternative forms of relaxation (yoga, meditation).

A percentage of workers deals with stress by abusing alcohol and illegal psycho-active substances (approximately 5% of men), but there are also individuals who try to overcome the problem by increasing their sexual

activity. Regarding the solving of conflict situations and sources of stress, the signalmen defend conversations. They demand peace and order in their jobs, they focus all their attention primarily on traffic safety, they remain collect and calm in their work, in order to keep the situation under control. They assure with clear and simple instructions that all the participants understand their roles and so, they cooperate in solving unpleasant situations. In case the arguments and conversation do not help enough with regulating the relationships, they invite the superiors and the syndicate to solve the problem, but this never happens in principle. Talking about their psychophysical preparation, the signalmen say that they are not prepared enough, which confirms the fact that stress do not influence everybody in the same way and that the consequences of stress are not the same for all. A lot depends on the individual, how he understands stress, how he reacts to it and what is his limit or his threshold of tolerance, where the stress in not yes burdensome.

Conclusion

The qualitative research showed that the impacts and effects of the work environment are negative for the signalmen, which, to a larger extent, depends on each individual, to what extent is he willing to accept the negative influences present in the work environment and how he faces the consequences, brought into his life by the influence of the work environment.

The main factors of stress at work for the signalmen are exceptional occurrences and the fact of facing them, SSE and the fear of its malfunctions, the influence of the human factor at work, their work as a whole, the lack of signalmen, their replacement at other stations, relationships at work and the constant focus on the rail traffic flow.

At work, the signalmen are constantly facing dissatisfaction, nervousness, crumbling of internal balance, aggressiveness, anger, overload, anxiety, disturbed sleep rhythm, exhaustion, irritation, self-doubt, discomfort, health problems (sight problems, hearth diseases, psychic problems – posttraumatic stress disorder), absence from work, feelings of incapability in solving problems and their accumulation, thoughts about work and constantly feeling under pressure.

The research showed that the signalmen are exposed to constant stress at work and despite that, they are not familiar enough with the help program, offered by the employer to workers with emotional problems.

The expert, who offers psychosocial help for the program, has a positive opinion, because the workers can successfully find effective solutions, despite the problems that they are facing.

Since the consequences of stress impact also the work organization, it is necessary, during the next years, to focus all the attention on removing the causes, which would mean less stress for the signalmen and informing them that stress is a part of life that they could also alleviate by themselves. He suggests a healthy life style, as much activity as possible, which he describes as relievers, or as a part of the relief from stress, and finally the help program, which could help a lot of people to alleviate the consequences of stress.

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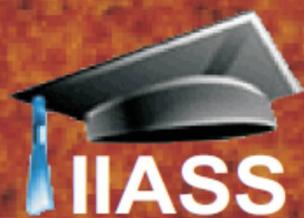
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