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## **Stress and professional burnout as factors affecting functioning of prison officers operations**

**Natalia Jędrzejak**

Faculty of Management, Czestochowa University of Technology, Czestochowa, Poland

E-mail address: [natalia.jedrzejak@o2.pl](mailto:natalia.jedrzejak@o2.pl)

### **ABSTRACT**

Solutions of this study are focused on the analysis of studies conducted in detention centers. We meet the concept of stress and burnout syndrome every day, it reaches each profession. However, not every job is as stressful as service in the uniformed formations. Often skills to overcome stress and competence are not enough when performing tasks that threaten life or health.

**Keywords:** stress, risk factor, organization, burnout syndrome, prison officers operations

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Increasing competition on the labor market, an extremely fast lifestyle, higher and higher requirements for employees or the lack of jobs are the factors that create every day the state of mental tension commonly called stress. Human feels discomfort caused by too much responsibility, a short time for their implementation, or the erroneous adjustment skills, aptitudes or knowledge available for the duties to be performed at the workplace. Recent studies show unequivocally that about 70% of workers in the European Union experience stress in their work. Indicator remains at a high level, thereby creating additional expenses for costs associated with sick leave.

## **2. STRSS IN THE WORKPLACE**

Every day we deal with the concept of stress. Busy lives, too many duties, constant time pressure accompanying the expectations of superiors - are the most common causes of stress. Stress at work is associated exclusively as undesirable and unnecessary element that accompanies the work. However, not many people know that stress is a neutral phenomenon. It has two faces: the positive side (motivating) and negative (demotivating), both calculated are possible to experience depending on the job specification. Indispensably important principle, which is a crucial importance in this subject, and thus accompanied by employees in the workplace is vulnerability to stressors. While supervisors put tasks tailored to the employees in terms of their emotional, intellectual and physical abilities, the employee has the opportunity to do them properly, and the accumulated energy to transform into action that will bring relief induced by stress. The situation is different when the rulers impose obligations beyond the emotional, intellectual and physical abilities. The employee is not able to cope with the tasks imposed on him and he feels physical and mental exhaustion, persistent and often long. There is a feeling of resentment, helplessness and sadness, a well-known lack of response from the head of the employee brings a sense of chronic fatigue. Which in the long term can lead to feelings of burnout and become a risk factor.

## **3. POLISH LEGAL REGULATIONS – THE EMPLOYER'S OBLIGATIONS**

Polish legal regulations does not impose on the employer direct obligation to minimize stress at work by creating free from the phenomenon of the working environment. Despite this, the employer is obliged to fulfill the obligation contained in Article. 15 of the Labour Code, which provided that: The employer shall provide employees with safe and healthy working conditions, as well as art. 207. The employer is responsible for the condition of health and safety in the workplace.

Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 26 September 1997, indicate the nature of occupational risks in the general health and safety legislation contained in this Ordinance, as the likelihood of adverse events associated with the work performed (...). Proper assessment of occupational hazards focused on psychosocial factors should be a priority for employers, by reading the occupational risks he would be able to apply through appropriate preventive measures. The intention of the study is developed to show the complexity of psychosocial risks as one of the organizational problems, which could pose a negative consequences in the activities of the organization.

## **4. THE AREA OF SURVEY CARRIED OUT TOGETHER WITH AN ANALYSIS**

The aim of the study was to find the answer to the question whether stress and burnout syndrome can be a factor determining the operation of prison officers? A separate research group became employees of Polish penitentiary system, officers of detention centers - 39 people. Screened respondents answered the questions voluntarily and anonymously, and the extracted data concerned only sex, age and length of service in criminal detention. The

criterion for selection of the target group in the research project became the specifics of the work, namely large exposures prison staff to stress.

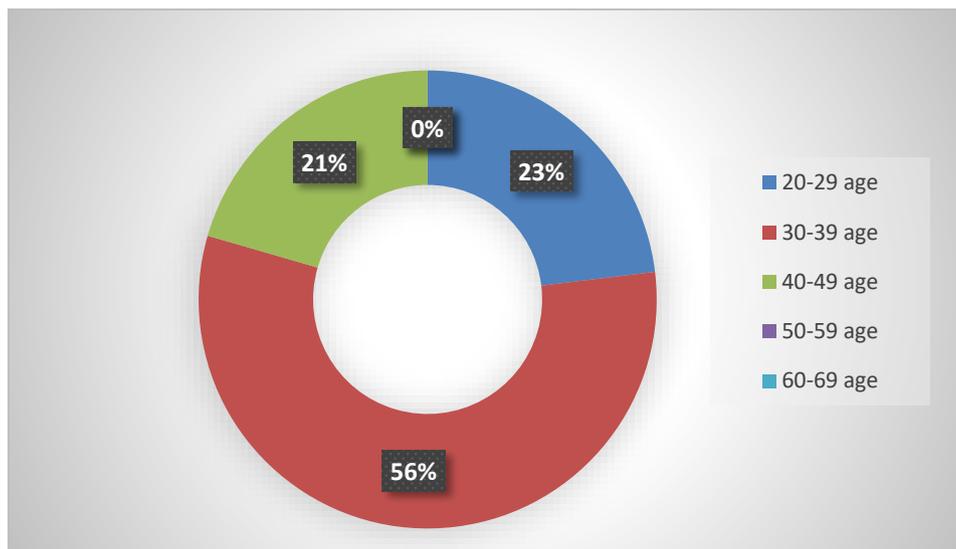
What exactly is: "*The Prison Service (SW) it is the uniformed and armed formation apolitical subordinated to the Ministry of Justice, which has its own organizational structure. Prison Service performs on the rules specified in the code of criminal executive tasks in the field of enforcement of custodial sentences and of preliminary detention.*" [7]

Requirements for candidates for the Prison Service to different regulations and apply only to positions in which employees can only be officers:

- Act of 9 April 2010. Prison Service (Dz. U. No. 79, item. 523, as amended. D.)
- Regulation of the Minister of Justice of 20 September 2010 on detailed rules and enrollment procedures for the Prison Service (Dz. U. No 186, item. 1247)
- Regulation of the Minister of Justice on 24 January 2011. On the requirements for physical and mental capabilities to the Prison Service. (Dz. U. No. 20 item. 108).

The largest group among the tested officers of detention centers are people in the age between 30-39 years, they represent 56% of respondents. Another large group of officers are in the age range 25-29 years they represent 24% of respondents. The third, and also and the last age group who took part in the study are people aged 40-49, you can find among them people with years of experience and a great resistance to stress, but frequently subjected to trials.

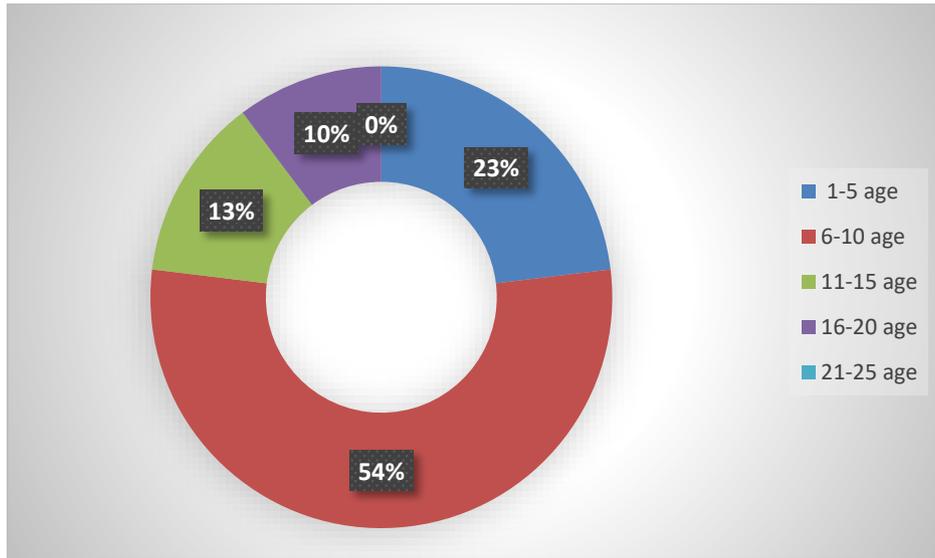
**Figure 1.** Age of people involved in the survey



Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

People participating in the study can not boast of work experience over 25 years. The rules for entitlement to retirement after 15 years of service in the prison favor this situation. It is rarely spoken that the pension is only 40% of the last salary and nearly half of prison officers - 46% have higher education, which is almost the highest percent among the uniformed services.

**Figure 2.** Seniority in the prison service



Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

The officers received 12 questions on the basis of own formulated questionnaire, which included the following aspects:

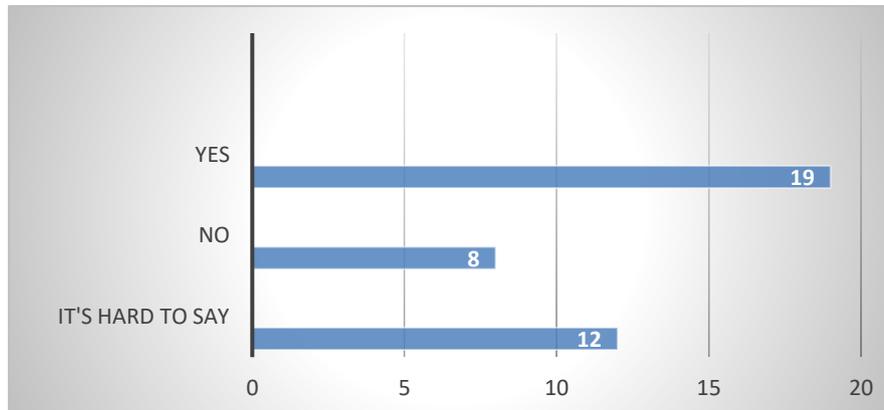
- level of satisfaction with the performed tasks on the position of the prison service,
- level of commitment to work in the duty,
- sense of responsibility for the tasks performed,
- factors affecting stress,
- stress as a limiting element functioning of the organization.
- proposals to fight against stress,
- self-assessment work in the prison service.

The first key question concerned, satisfaction with service in the detention center. 19 people indicated a positive response, 8 negative while 12 people did not reply to questions by selecting the answer - it's hard to say. Result 49% of satisfied officers in this professional group is not good. Probably the effect of this are tasks that the prison service must deal with by the regulations of the Act of 9 April 2010. Belong to them:

- penitentiary and rehabilitation impacts on people sentenced to imprisonment,
- conducting of preliminary detention by properly executed criminal proceedings,
- providing the rights through humane living conditions, dignity, and health care and religious to persons sentenced to imprisonment or detention, as well as to people who are performed imprisonment and coercive measures resulting in the deprivation of liberty,
- provide the safety of the public against the perpetrators of crimes or fiscal crimes detained in prisons and detention centers,
- provide order and security in prisons and detention centers,

- carrying on Polish territory of temporary arrests and imprisonment sentences and coercive measures that result in deprivation of liberty, and their execution has to be carried out in prisons and detention centers under the ruling issued by the competent authority,
- cooperation with formations in other countries and with international organizations on the basis of international agreements.

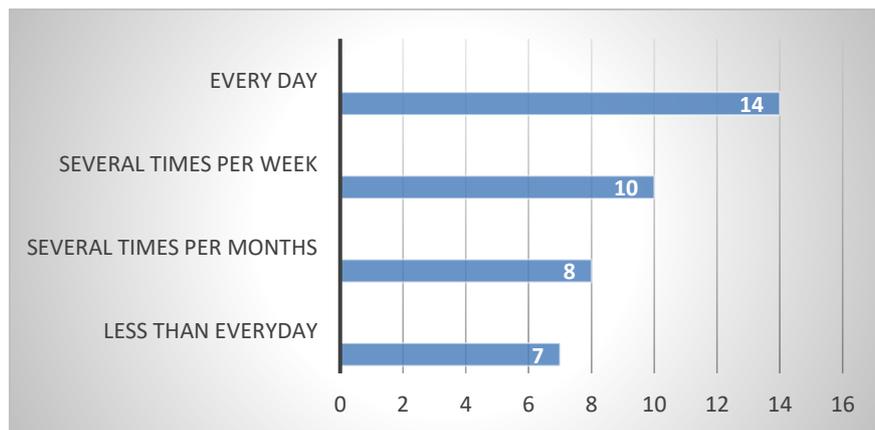
**Figure 3.** Satisfaction of duty in the prison service  
Do you like at work?



Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

The second question was related to frequency of stress at work, the responses take into account four stage scale. In this question the answer prevailed exposure to daily stress in the workplace indicated by 14 people (they are guards performing the service mode 8 hours five days a week). The answer -several times a week indicated by 10 people, the third answer-means stress at work a few times a month feels 8 people and the fourth answer, rare exposure to stress indicated only 7 prison officers.

**Figure 4.** Frequency of stress at work. How often do you feel stress at work?



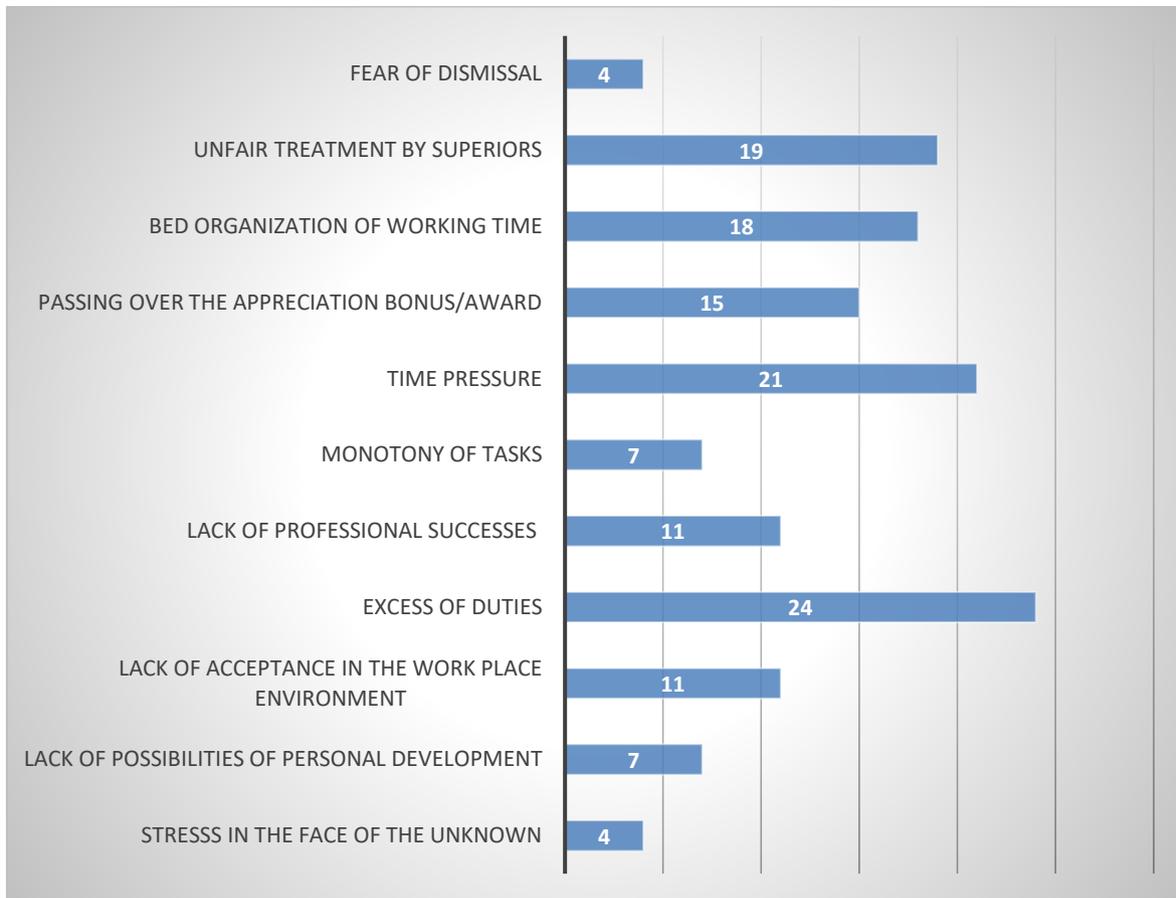
Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

Which factors are stressful for prison service workers?

Officers responding to this question, could indicate several answers, but three of them prevailed:

- 17% - excess of duties,
- 15% - time pressure,
- 14% - unfair treatment by superiors.

**Figure 5.** Factors causing stress  
Which factors caused stress in your work?



Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

Another question was integrated directly with the previous question and feelings in a stressful situation. So how the employees of the prison service deal with stressful situations and feelings that accompany them? Among the 9-choice questions, the most common of these were:

- 26% - focusing on the ensuing problem and look for the best solutions by officers,
- 24% - the emergence of feelings of tension,
- 15% - drawing conclusions / learning from mistakes.

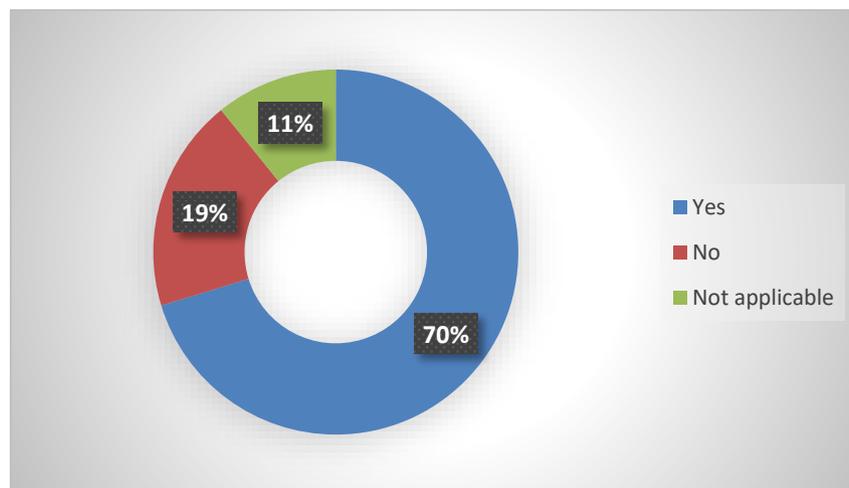
**Figure 6.** Feelings in stressful situation  
Which feelings do you experience in the stressful situation?



Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

Graph No. 7 illustrate the answer to the question: whether stress in the work of prison officers has an impact on their family life. 67% - believe officers that work in uniform formation has affected their family life. 18% - believe that there is no impact, while only 15% of officers this question does not apply, probably by their young age.

**Figure 7.** The influence of stress on personal life  
Does stress have influence on your personal life?



Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

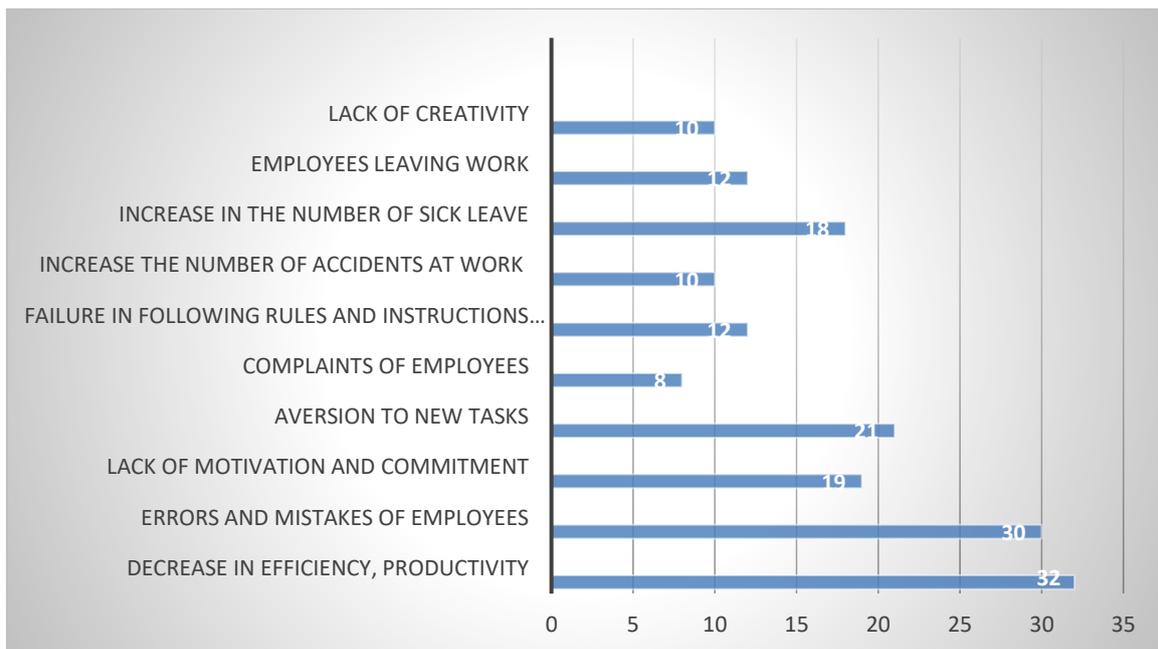
Another analyzed issue is stress in the organization. What, then is an organization? R.W. Griffin defines it as: "a group of people who work together in an orderly and coordinated manner to achieve a set of goals." Does this mean that the stress of prison officers may have negative consequences for the organization? If so, what are they? This question is also answered by a group of officers.

Officers of detention centers pointed to three key elements that are affected by stress at work and has negative consequences for the organization:

- 18% - a decrease in efficiency, productivity,
- 17% - errors and mistakes of employees,
- 12% - aversion to new tasks.

Summing up the results of the responses, we can conclude that stress in workplace can have a negative impact on organizations, inter alia, through these elements.

**Figure 8.** Stress as component having a negative impact on the organizations  
Which negative effects stress does consequences for the organization?



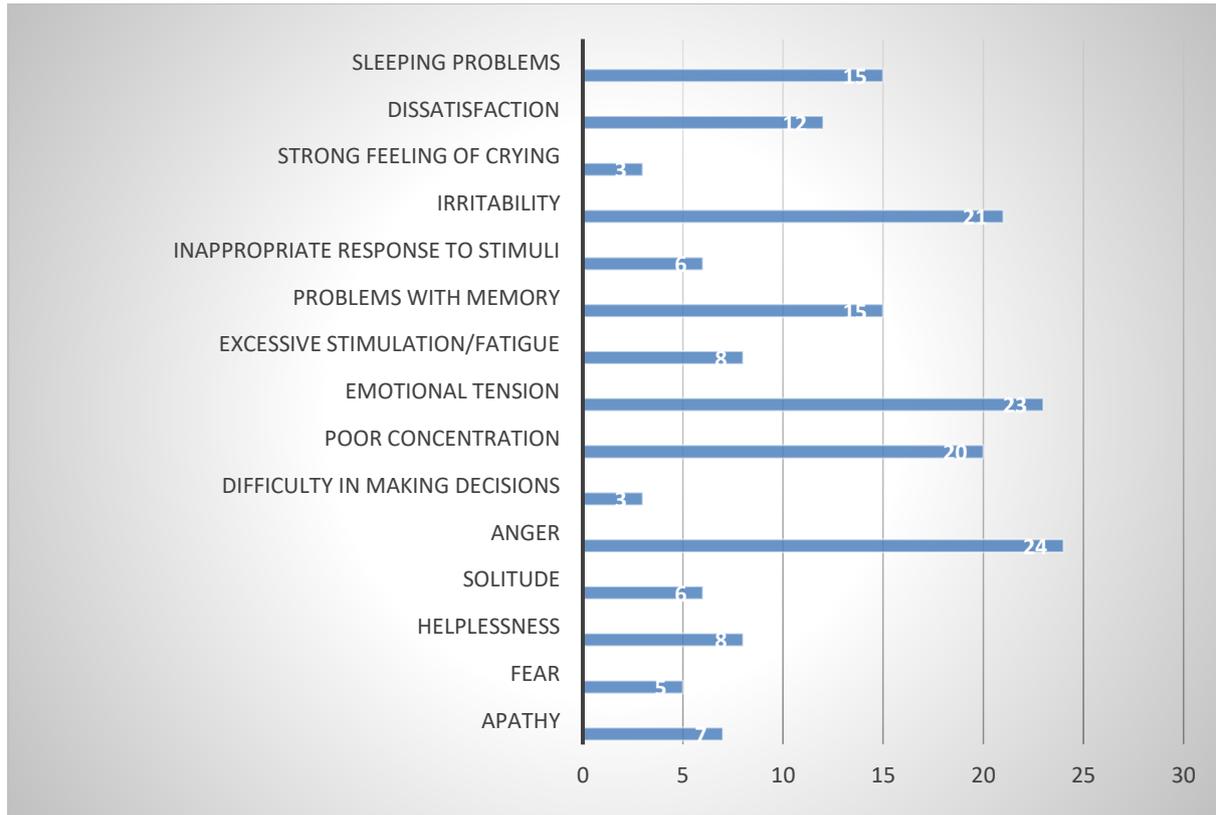
Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

A human in a stressful situation feels the changes that affect the entire body. The problem of stress and the process of dealing with it is a well-known phenomenon not only among the officers uniformed services. However, every day they experience major exposure to risk factors, which is stress and burnout syndrome. Received symptoms are negative stimuli affecting professional work and private life. Employees of detention centers indicated the 5 most felt symptoms in the last year:

- 14% - anger,
- 13% - emotional tension,

- 12% - irritability,
- 9% - problems with memory,
- 9% - sleeping problems.

**Figure 9.** Symptoms experienced by officers last year  
Which of the following symptoms did you experience in the past years?

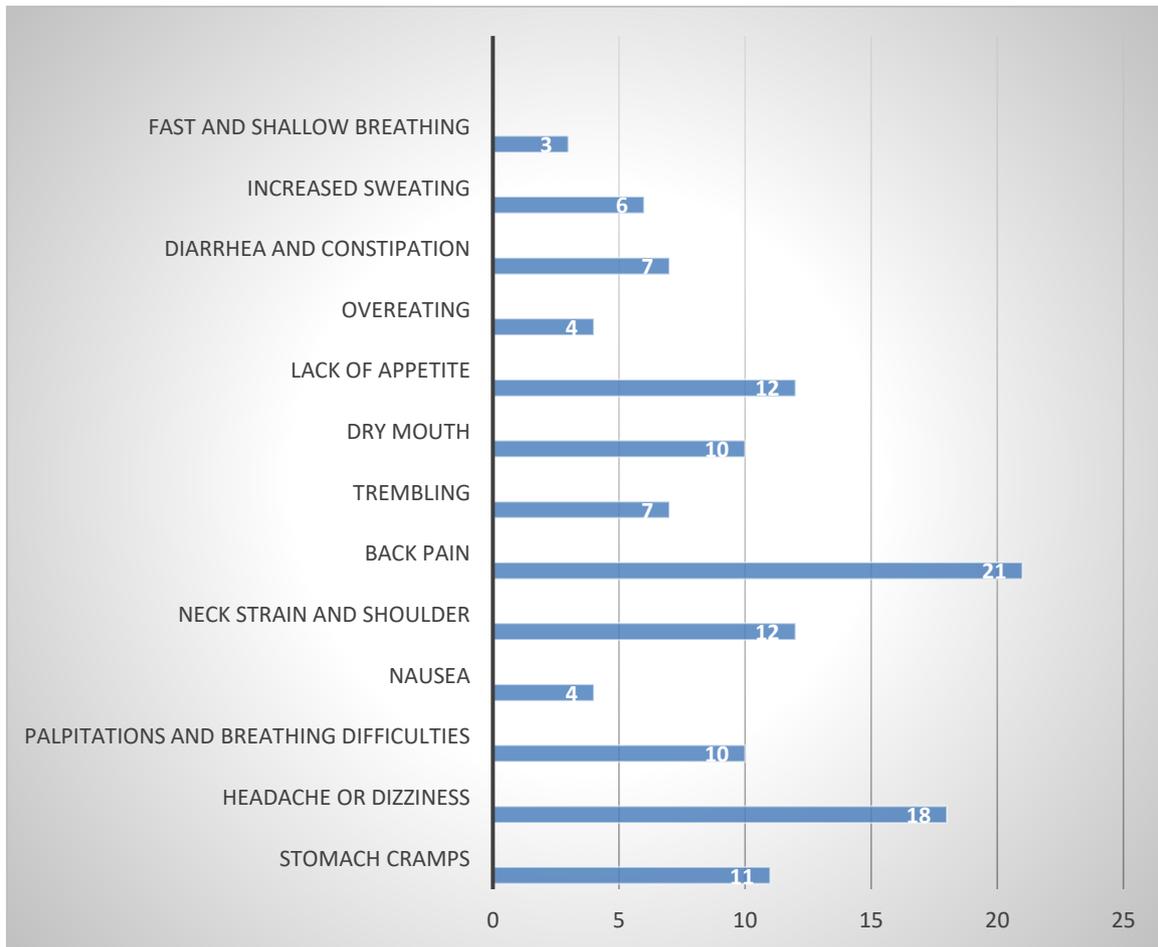


Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

The natural reaction to difficult situations, which often mobilizes is strong nervous tension. Unfortunately, the extension of such status carries with it negative consequences for the organism, but which are not immediately visible. Chronic stress, constant tension and lack of rest can often lead to physical and mental exhaustion of every human being. Feeling some health problems can cause serious changes in human health. In the study group of officers the most common symptoms are:

- 17% - back pain,
- 14% - headache or dizziness,
- 10% - lack of appetite,
- 10% - neck strain and shoulder.

**Figure 10.** Influence of stress reaction on analysed group  
Did you experience in the past year?

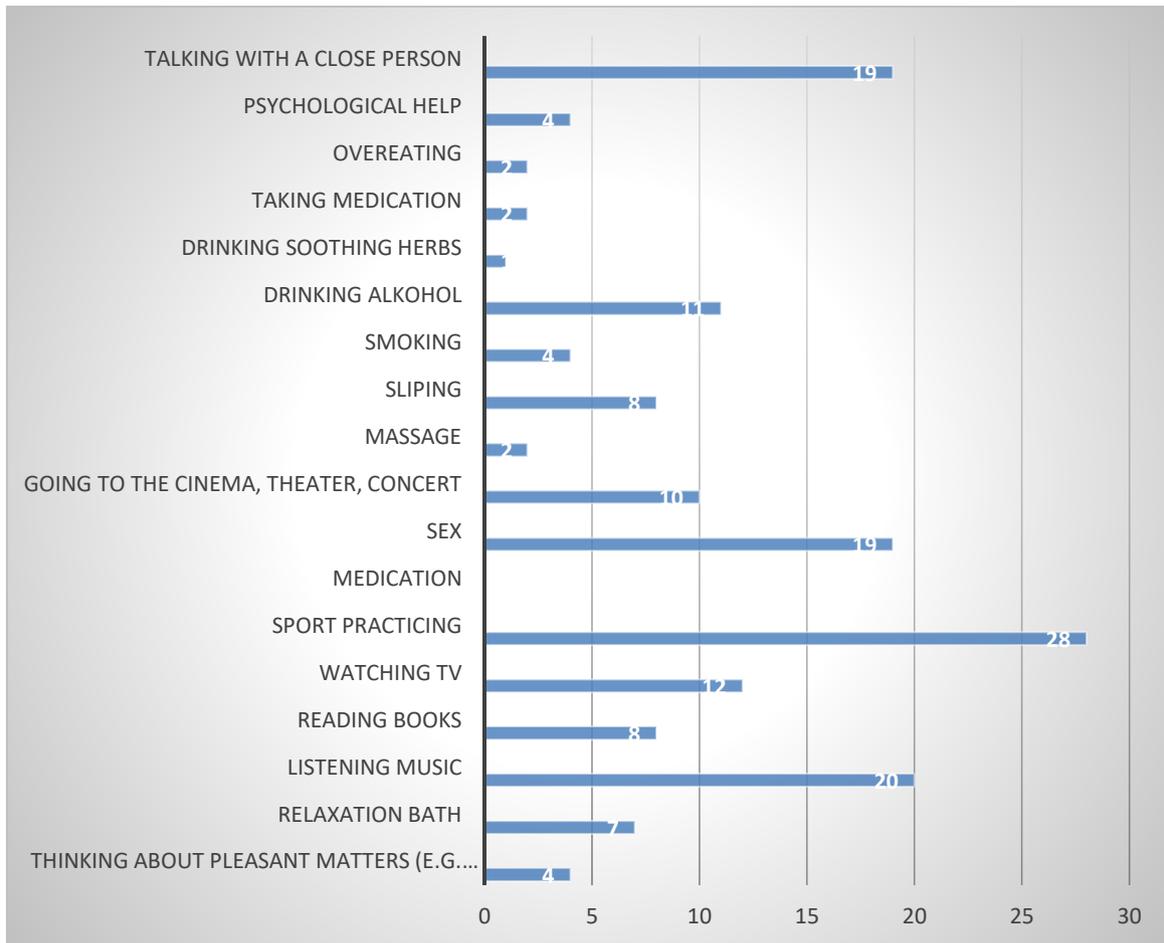


Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

Stress is our own reaction to the stimulus coming from the external world, which requires action. Stress reaction depends on us, so we can control it. What then should be done to be able to deal with it? The base is to know the cause to be able reflect on its liquidation or partial restriction. In the case of the study group, stress factor is the nature of work. So how prison officers deal with it?

- 17% - sport practicing,
- 12% - talking with a close person,
- 12% - cohabitation.

**Figure 11.** Ways of fighting with stress  
Which methods of fighting stress do you use?

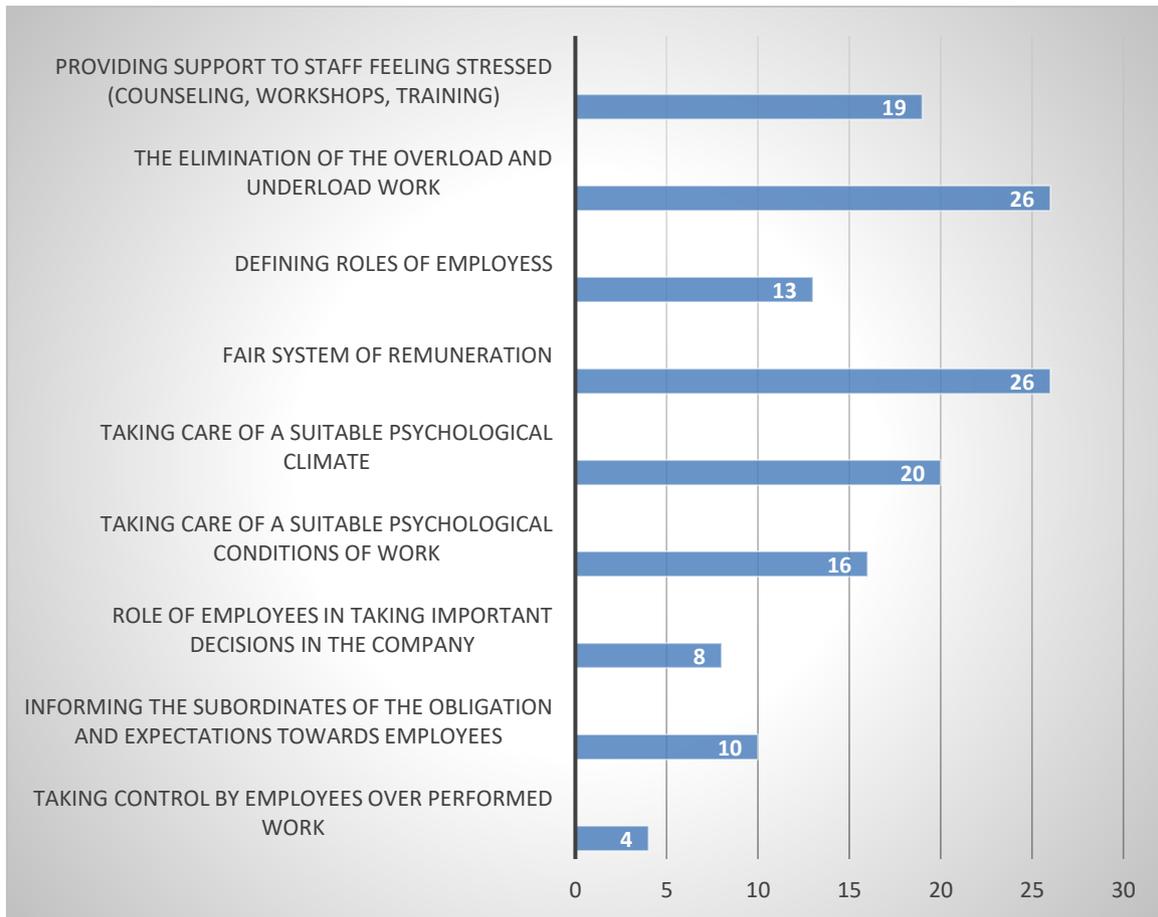


Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

Stress management in the company by employers is a very important element. One of the most popular approaches is the concept of preventive stress management. This is the "philosophy of the organization and a set of principles that shape the specific methods dedicated to promoting the health of individuals and organizations in order to protect individuals and organizations from the negative effects of stress." Proactive stress management should therefore be based on five basic principles based on mutual functioning of individuals and organizations:

1. The individual and the organization are mutually dependent on each other.
2. Manager is responsible for the health of individuals and organizations.
3. Individual and organizational stress are inevitable.
4. Each individual and organization reacts to stress in their own way.
5. Organizations are constantly changing, are dynamic.

**Figure 12.** Proposal of anti-stress activities  
Which actions against stress should come into use?



Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

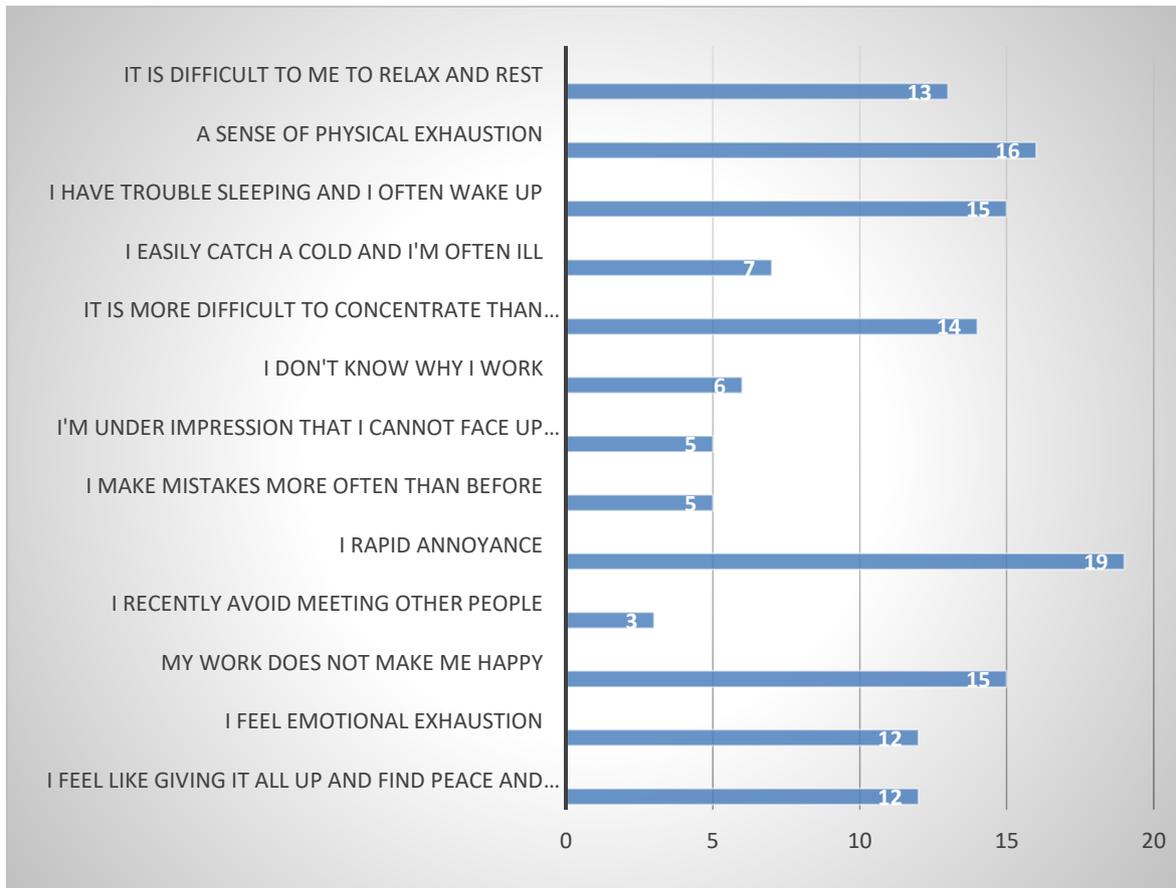
Employees of the Prison Service on the basis of preventive stress management assumptions pointed to actions that should be implemented in their workplaces:

- 18% - the elimination of the overload and underload work,
- 18% - fair system of remuneration,
- 14% - taking care of a suitable psychological climate.

Another thing which should be remembered is to distinguish three phases of the stress response: mobilization phase, activity and exhaustion. Each stage of stress can have a devastating impact on the functioning and human health in the studied group of officers manifested they are:

- 15% - dislike of going to work,
- 11% - rapid annoyance,
- 10% - a sense of physical exhaustion.

**Figure 13.** Assessment of physical work in the prison service  
Have you recently happened to think about:

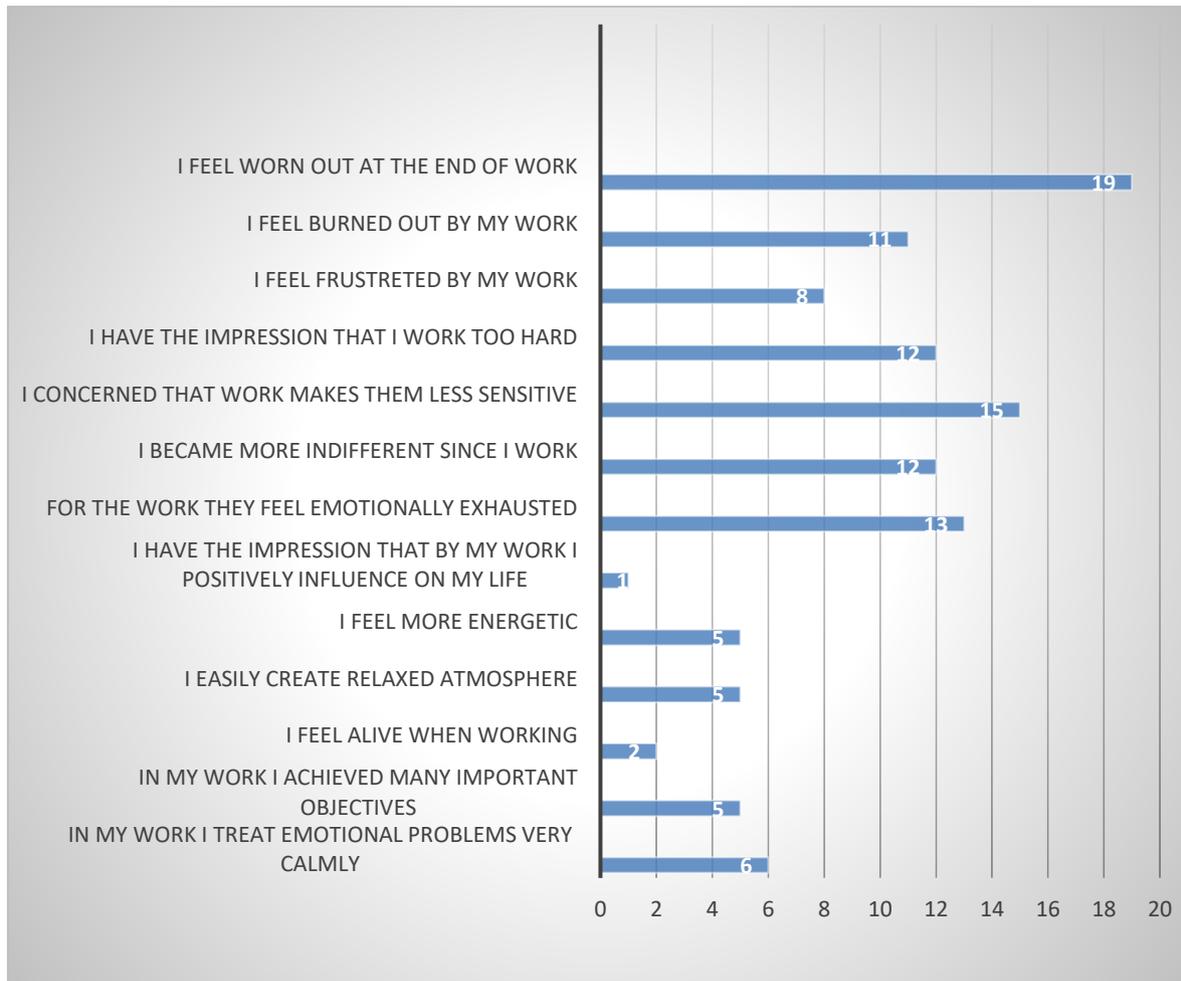


Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

Chart 14 is a subjective assessment of the psychological work made by employees of Polish penitentiary systems. It reflects the impact of stress on service and satisfaction associated with the work in the studied uniform formation. Prolonged stress can be the burnout syndrome and could pose a negative consequences. Employees of the Prison Service are first exposed to them because:

- they can sustain injury, permanent disability or loss of life that could be followed up by people living in prisons and detention centers or accidents during the use of firearms or exercise,
- participation in the extraordinary events: escorting, supervision of prisoners, leading the chase in an arbitrary dismissal of a prisoner,
- participation in traumatic situations
- serving on outdoors, often in adverse weather conditions,
- exposure to dangerous biological agents which are e.g. HIV, HCV, HBV, TB.

**Figure 14.** Assessment of psychological work in the prison service  
Please tick the statement which refers to you:



Source: own analysis based on the conducted research

The study group of officers in the first place pointed statements that relate directly to them:

- 17% - at the end of the work they feel "wear and tear"
- 13% - are concerned that work makes them less sensitive,
- 11% - for the work they feel emotionally exhausted.

Analyzing the responses it can be concluded that the Prison Service officers are exposed to a determining factor limiting their activity in the uniform formation.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Stress is one of the biggest problems that accompany humanity in the modern world. In Europe, it occupies second place, just behind musculoskeletal disorders, which cause the greatest sickness absenteeism among employees. The latest research firm Extended DISC

Poles are the most stressed employees worldwide. National Stress Indicator - NSI calculates the level of stress at work and the environment in which every day we live and which we perceive as less stable, peaceful and safe. In Poland, the rate remained at the level - 2.22 for every further classification are behind us, countries such as South Korea. - 1.98 or Denmark - 1.81. Risk factor may be cells raising significant levels of stress workers, which could include: malicious and hostile work environment, the excess duties or their under load, lack of control over their work, the lack of support from superiors and the impossibility of personal development. These elements inevitably accompanied by the study group of professional, which are inseparable elements of which builds up the feeling of stress. Not threatening syndromes can transform a depression, which will become inflamed leading to burnout syndrome of officers. In the present case, State organizations should pay attention to the subject of work stress that accompanies their subordinates. It is a threat that still partnered formation uniformed employees of the Prison Service and may lead to a decrease in the efficiency and productivity of employees through tangible financial losses for the state.

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