

Stress in the workplace: guidance and advice for the radiography workforce

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Published: Thursday, September 5, 2013

Summary

The Society of Radiographers (SoR) issues this guidance and advice to provide information on the degree to which the radiography workforce is affected by stress and to provide support, guidance and advice on the topic.

Introduction

Members of the imaging and radiotherapy workforces are required to work competently within their scope of practice. The Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) publishes statements of professional conduct within the Code of Professional Ethics: ¹

- *You must work within current legal, ethical, professional and governance frameworks pertaining to your occupational role and the sector in which you work. (<https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/code-professional-conduct/...>)*
- *You must practise within the limits of your competence and, if necessary, refer patients to another qualified practitioner. (<https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/code-professional-conduct/...>)*
- *You must monitor the quality of your practice through reflective practice, using evidence from audit and research. (<https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/code-professional-conduct/...>)*
- *You must develop and maintain your competence to practise through continuing professional development (CPD). (<https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/code-professional-conduct/...>)*

The Code also continues with the required actions in the event of any impairment to safe radiographic practice:

- *You should limit your work if you believe that your physical, emotional and psychological health is such that your performance or judgement may be affected.*
- *You have a duty to look after yourself. If you believe that your health status is putting you or your patients at risk, you must take action. This also means*

sharing information with your manager and cooperating with them in any referral to occupational health services.

Members of the professional workforce who are registered with a regulatory body also have to comply with their standards. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) require radiographers to *act within the limits of your knowledge, skills and experience and limit your work or stop practising if your performance or judgement is affected by your health.*²

Stress is part of modern life and work based stress is to some extent inevitable. It is where there is the possibility of stress impacting on the ability of members of the radiography workforce to meet the requirements of employers, professional and regulatory bodies that there needs to be action taken to enable codes to be complied with and standards to be met.

The Society of Radiographers' Actions

The Society of Radiographers (SoR) issues this guidance and advice to provide information on the degree to which the radiography workforce is affected by stress and to provide support, guidance and advice on the topic.

The SoR frequently receives enquiries from accredited representatives and members regarding the contentious issue of stress. The SoR offers all Health and Safety representatives regional continuing professional development (CPD) accredited training on the subject. In September 2012, the SoR held a successful one day conference with speakers from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Howard Kennedy Solicitors and the Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) who addressed the issues and offered possible resolutions. A second conference is being held in September 2013, this time inviting SoR Health and Safety representatives to bring managers and to work together to achieve solutions.

Stress Survey

In the autumn of 2012, the SoR conducted a survey to ascertain whether or not imaging and radiotherapy departments had stress policies and whether employers understood their legal obligations of ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing (including mental health) of their employees. The SoR also wanted to discover whether stress was identified as a hazard in risk assessments and what the employer did to deal with the problem.

The survey was conducted online using "Survey monkey", 418 accredited Health and Safety representatives were invited to complete. Eighty- six responded. The questions asked and responses received are given in appendix A.

The SoR would like to thank the Health and Safety representatives who took the time to respond to the survey.

Awareness of stress policy

The vast majority of accredited SoR Health and Safety representatives (91.2%) reported that their employing authority had a stress policy in place and that nearly all line managers were aware that the policy existed. The manager has responsibility for

implementation and needs to be aware of the policies and procedures that are in place within the employing authority.

Health and Safety representatives are encouraged to identify and understand all policies and procedures which are in place within their work environment as these can and will be used to help the SoR members they represent. Under the Safety Representative and Safety Committee Regulations 1977³ accredited Health and Safety representatives can request information from their employer regarding risk assessments (including stress), sickness absence, accidents and injury statistics amongst other information. Representatives can gather further information by conducting a department/trust survey which will identify whether members are potentially suffering from stress. The information identified can be collated and raised at both departmental and trust/hospital safety committees.

When an employee commences work, the employer has a legal duty to ensure the employee receives copies of all policies and procedures which are in place (grievance, disciplinary, Health and Safety, stress, bullying etc.) The employer also has a legal duty to ensure that the employees fully understand the policies in place and, if required, receive relevant training. The survey revealed that 28.1% of employers are not fulfilling their legal duties. Health and Safety representatives could raise the awareness through monthly newsletters or speaking to new members of staff during workplace inductions, raising the profile of the SoR and the work we do.

Identifying stress in the department

Under the Safety Representative Safety Committee (SRSC) Regulations 1977, an SoR accredited Health and Safety representative can request information from the employer whether stress has been identified as the reason staff are absent from work.

The representative can also conduct a survey amongst all SoR members (or work with other AHP professionals within the trust/hospital) which can identify causes of sickness absence within the workplace amongst members. Keeping the survey confidential encourages staff to complete honestly and frankly; adding a further option box again encourages staff to input more detailed answers. Health and Safety representatives can also ensure that the subject of stress is included on the Health and Safety committee agendas (whether they are departmental or trust/hospital committee agendas).

One respondent to the survey commented on the recent survey that their trust had refused information regarding sickness absence stating that they had a “confidential sickness policy”. The representative did not require specific personal data (name etc); but rather wanted to identify the causes for the period of absence. This information can be requested under the representative’s rights from the SRSC Regulations.

Dealing with stress

The survey indicated that when stress was identified within the department and dealt with by the employer, adaptations or alterations made included:

- Buddy systems implemented for members of staff affected by stress;
- Adjustments made to the employees’ work practices (hours of work reduced, phased return to work after incidents), staffing levels of the department and work areas affected;

- Changes to the employees' workload (although consideration must be taken for the stress levels of the staff who may be affected by the changes within the department);
- Employee assistance programmes, which included offering counselling to employees affected by stress;
- Changes to rosters/overtime ban implemented for affected employees;
- Allowing the employee to be transferred to a less stressful department;
- Involvement of the occupational health advisor in developing solutions;
- Updating of the sickness policy to include stress.

Responsibilities of employer

The employer has a legal duty under both the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 ⁴ and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 ⁵ to conduct a risk assessment identifying any potential hazard and to act upon those findings. Furthermore, the employer has a legal duty to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing (including mental health) of their employees. The survey suggested that a third of employers are failing their legal duties and as such could be liable to prosecution from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

Risk assessment

SoR members work in a patient led environment, delivering a service with strict time constraints. Eighty-five percent of respondents identified work demands (including workloads, inadequate time slots for patients, work environment and lack of space) as contributory factors to stress. Simple effective measures, for example, including employees and SoR representatives in decision making and control of workloads can reduce stress and anxiety. The survey showed that half of respondents had "hot-spots" within their department where a particular issue had arisen. Nearly half identified knowledge gaps as an issue but one third of respondents acknowledged that improvements had taken place since the previous risk assessment.

Some (19.0%) managers were identified as ignoring the findings of the risk assessments (this could have been for a number of reasons ranging from the manager quite simply not knowing how to deal with the issue or not receiving training on dealing with issues). On a positive note most (61.9%) identified and prioritised the most serious risks and dealt with them. One third of managers acknowledged that representatives have an awareness of these issues and control measures and they engaged with them.

Action planning

All policies should be reviewed annually and especially where there has been a change to a workplace practice, introduction of new equipment or when an incident has occurred. Failure to do so is a clear breach of Health and Safety legislation which could be punished by an improvement notice from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The HSE now charge employers for their time and intervention to ensure compliance; costs which cannot be insured against and costs which drain already stretched budgets.

The vast majority (90%) of the respondents to this survey also identified that employers should provide further information in terms of training, supervision, instruction (for staff,

bank staff and management) to ensure compliance is achieved. Employers must be aware that their legal obligation extends to bank or agency staff.

Legislation clearly states that the employer is legally bound (under legislation) to conduct suitable and sufficient risk assessments identifying any hazard which may cause harm or injury. SoR Health and Safety representatives have commented at Regional and National meetings that management may take two to three months to act upon the findings during which a member could sustain a career threatening injury during this period.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents identified the lack of involvement of staff and the lack of information passed to staff as a problem. Simple changes involving newsletters, identifying changes, training, and issues raised would reduce this figure greatly; members work within the departments daily and hold a wealth of information and experience.

Support for employees

Most employing authorities offer employee assistance and support programmes which give support and advice on a number of issues. One problem which has been highlighted is the amount of time it takes for a referral. One representative from the London region recently commented that the occupational health department had a three months waiting list, which created problems when trying to get staff back to work.

The survey revealed that one-third of respondents identified that there was no clear signposting of the pathway which encouraged members to seek help from occupational health departments. Inclusion of the information in induction days or the provision of notices in the department would inform members of the appropriate pathway.

Encouraging employees to contact employee assistance and support programmes and occupational health are essential first steps to deal with the issue of stress. Offering accessible information on the employing authority website is vital as employees may feel embarrassed in asking for help and information, which will further add to any stress from which they may be suffering.

Future

The September 2013 conference on stress has been organised as a direct result of the findings of this survey. The SoR believes a joint approach to tackling stress is essential and will therefore encourage Health and Safety representatives to attend with a manager or person with responsibilities for dealing with the issues of stress. It is intended to offer solutions and encourage both sides to work together to address the issue.

Some positive work is being undertaken by *some* employers to address the problem of stress, however much work needs to be done towards this becoming *all* employers.

SoR Recommendations

The SoR proposes the following recommendations:

- Employers work together with SoR Health and Safety representatives to ensure

effective implementation of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress Management Standards;

- Effective communication channels are developed which ensure that all employees are kept informed of any proposed changes (for example, changes to work practices);
- When an issue has arisen, consultation with SoR Health and Safety representatives should be completed before any changes are made (representatives have specific rights under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977 [Regulation 4])
- Identify and work with other Allied Health Professionals to raise awareness and tackle issues surrounding stress within the employing authority;
- Joint working between the SoR Health and Safety representative and the employer to ensure reasonable adjustments and alterations are made to help recovery of the employee affected by stress;
- Involvement of employees and SoR representatives in decision making. Control of workloads can reduce stress and anxiety from the issues identified;
- Clear pathways of roles and responsibilities so that representatives and employees are aware and understand who has responsibility for risk assessments and ensuring that findings are acted upon;
- Support programmes (for example, occupational health, or employee assistance programmes) should be provided for staff struggling with stress, including those who self refer;
- Managers should be educated about their legal duties surrounding the health, safety and wellbeing (including mental health) of their employees;
- All risk assessments are reviewed and up to date;
- Suitable and sufficient risk assessment training should be provided (paying particular attention to issues surrounding stress);
- A stress policy is in place, and is reviewed frequently.

References

1. Society and College of Radiographers Code of Professional Conduct. London, SCoR 2013
<http://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/code-professional-conduct> (accessed 21.08.13)
2. Health and Care Professions Council Standards of conduct, performance and ethics London, HCPC 2012
<http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10003B6EStandardsOfconduct,performanceandethics.pdf> (accessed 21.08.13)
3. Safety Representative and Safety Committee Regulations, 1977
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1977/500/introduction/made> (accessed 21.08.13)
4. Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/37> (accessed 21.08.13)
5. Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3242/contents/made> (accessed 21.08.13)

Appendix A

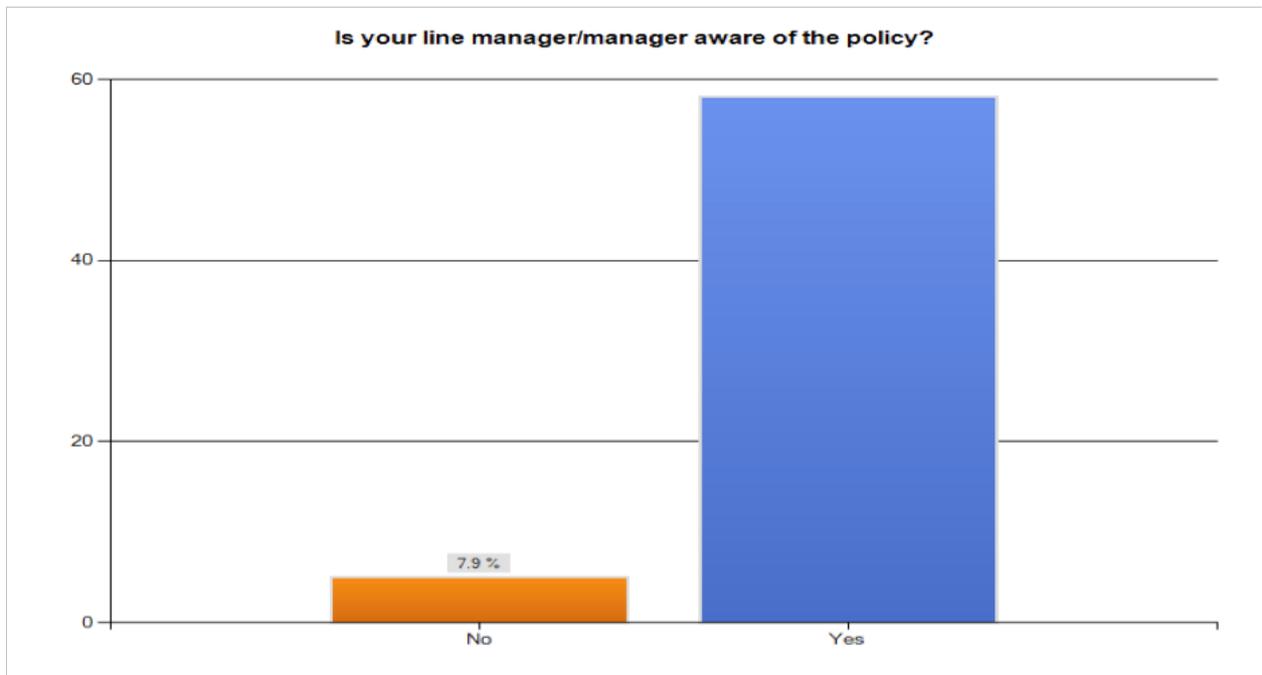
The Midlands region had the largest number of representatives completing the survey with 15.3%, while the North West had 12.9%; the South West had 11.8% and London, Yorkshire and North Trent had 10.6% Health and Safety representatives completing the survey. Regions with lower responses included Scotland with 9.4%, Northern Ireland 8.2%, Eastern and South Western 7.1%, Wales and Northern 3.5% of representatives completing the survey. Only 38.4% of respondents finished the survey.

The survey invited all respondents to identify their employing authority and which department modality they worked in. They included:

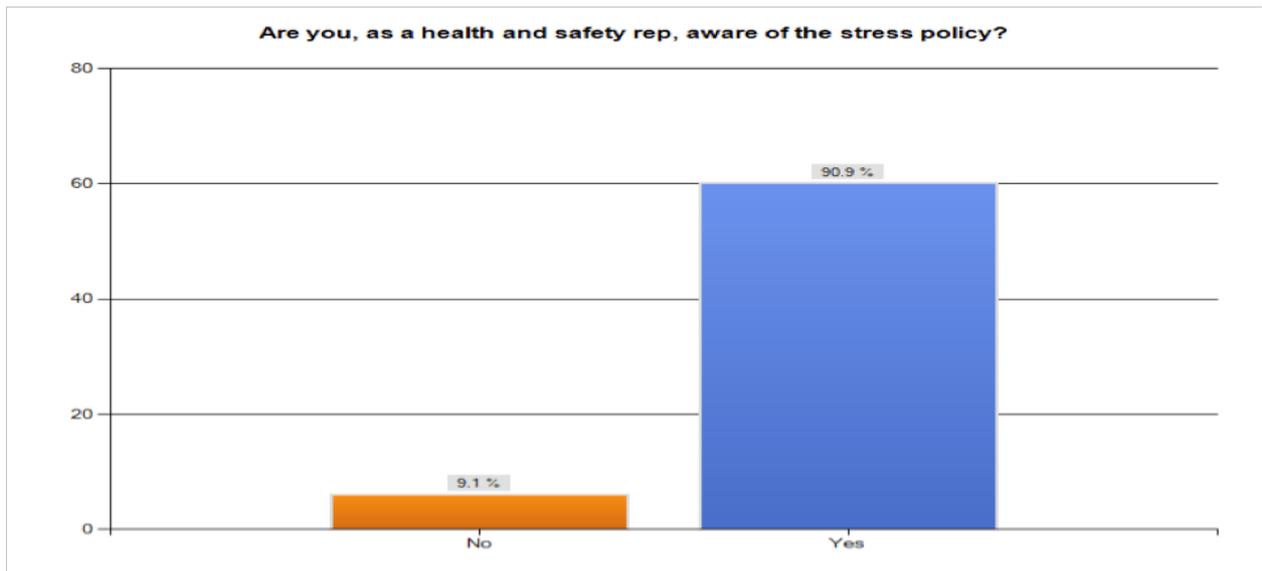
• Breast Screening/Mammography:	16 respondents
• CT	1 respondent,
• Diagnostic radiography	5 respondents,
• General X-ray	29 respondents,
• MRI	3 respondents,
• Nuclear Medicine	5 respondents,
• Neuro Imaging	2 respondents,
• PACS	1 respondent,
• Radiology	9 respondents,
• Radiotherapy	15 respondents



91.2% of accredited SoR Health and Safety representatives identified their trusts as having a stress policy in place.

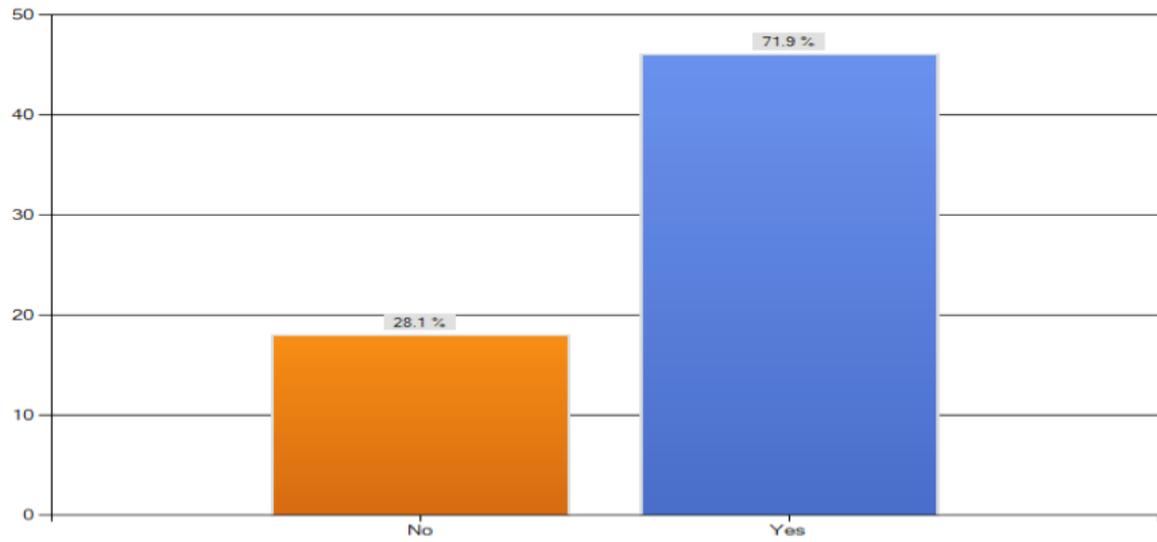


92.1% of line managers were aware that the policy existed, while 7.9% were not.

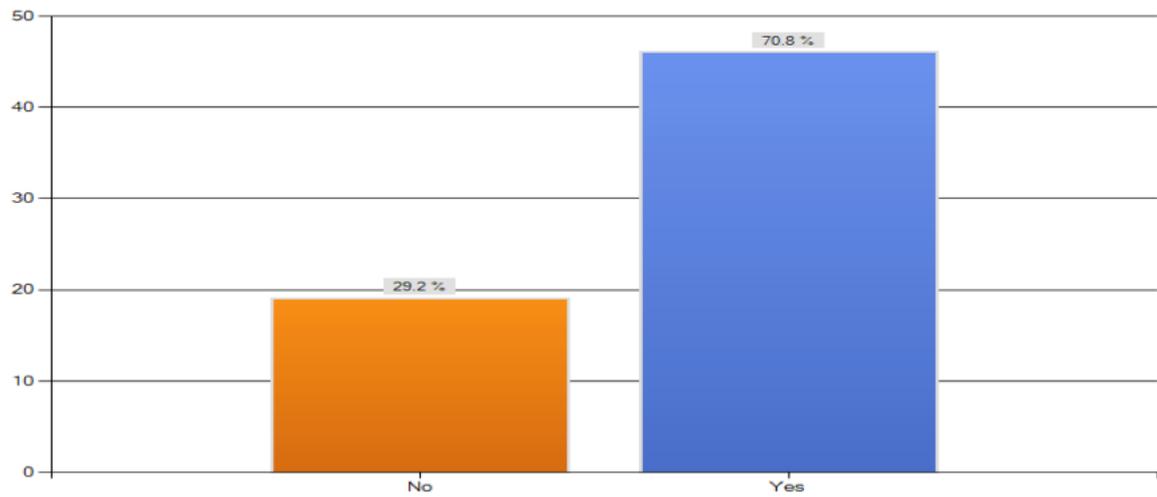


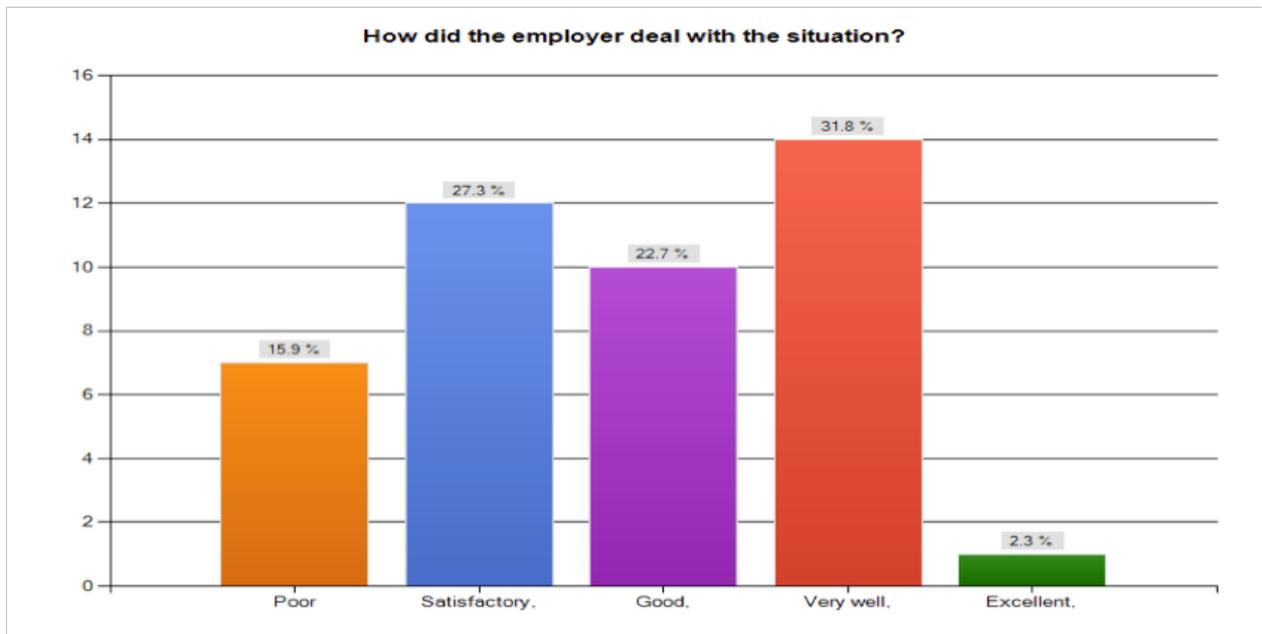
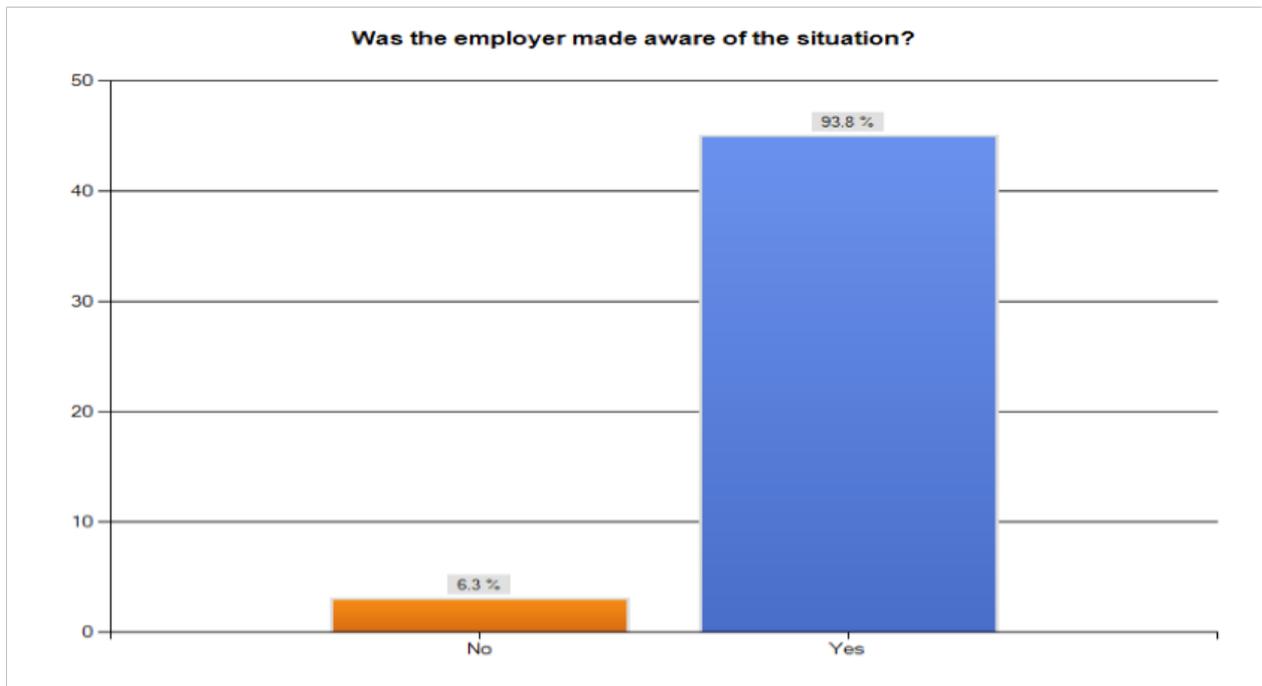
90.9% of SoR Health and Safety representatives were aware their trust/hospital had a stress policy, while 9.1% were not aware if a policy existed.

Are SoR members aware that a stress policy exists?

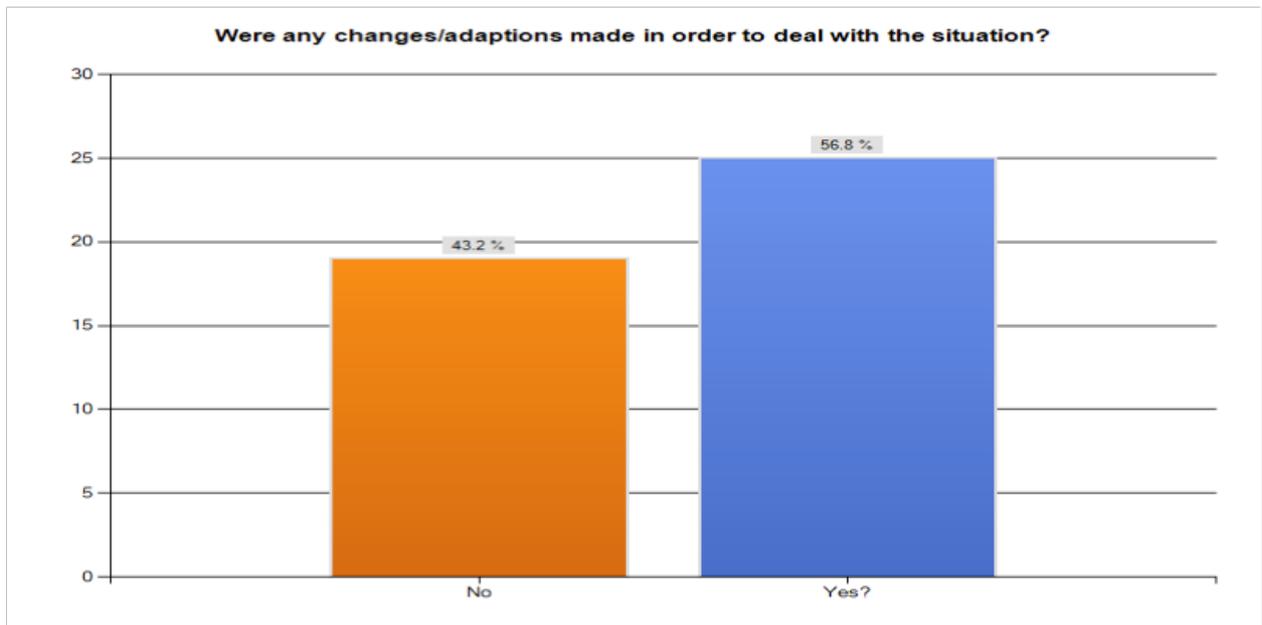


Are you aware of any member of staff, who has taken time off work due to stress related issues?

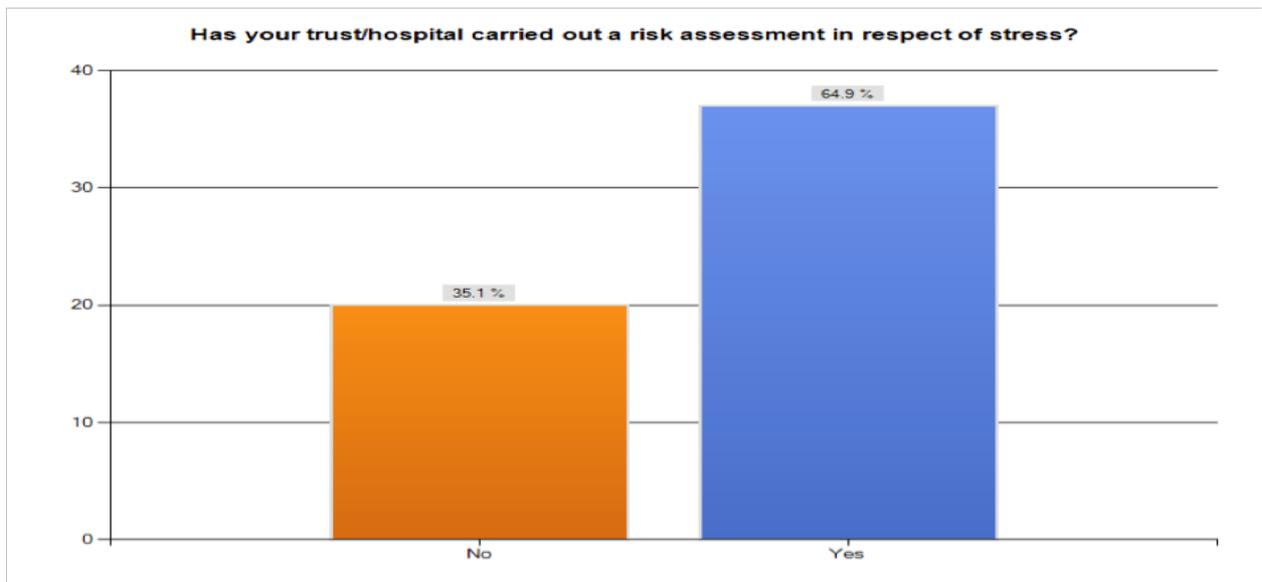




84.1% of reported incidents to employers were deemed to be dealt with satisfactorily, while 15.9% of respondents were unhappy with how the situation was dealt with.



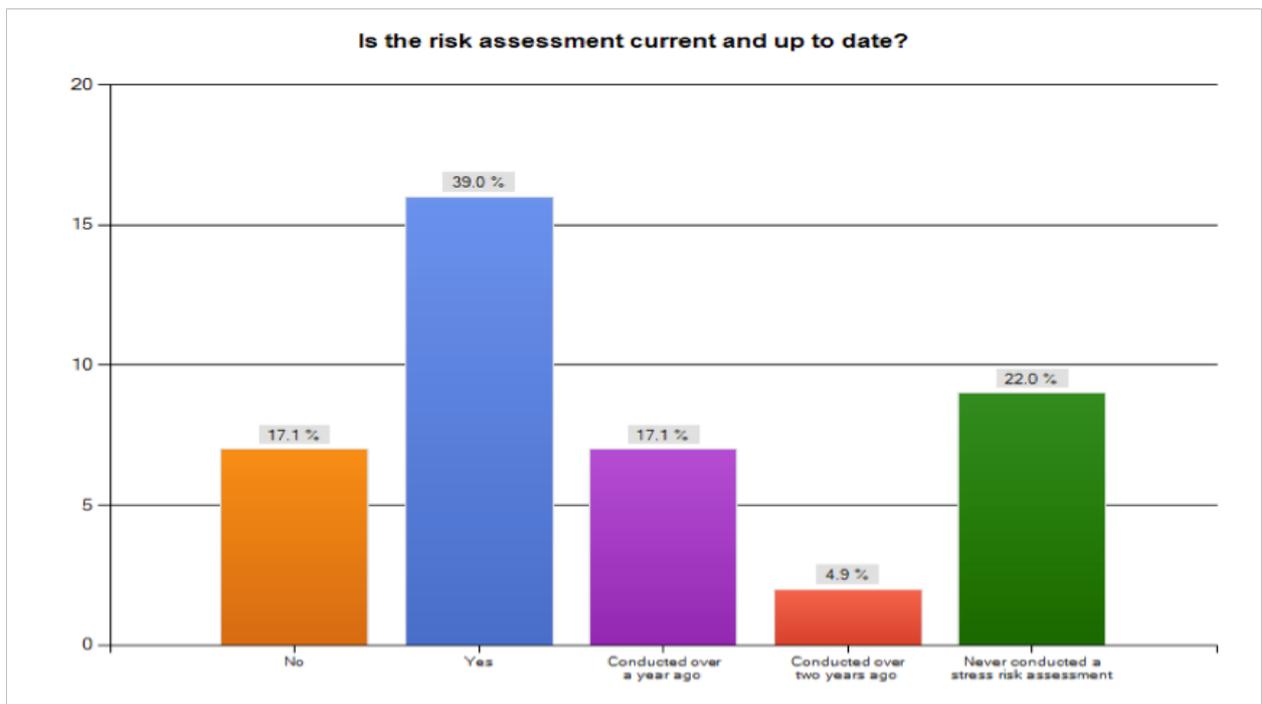
Employer's legal duties:

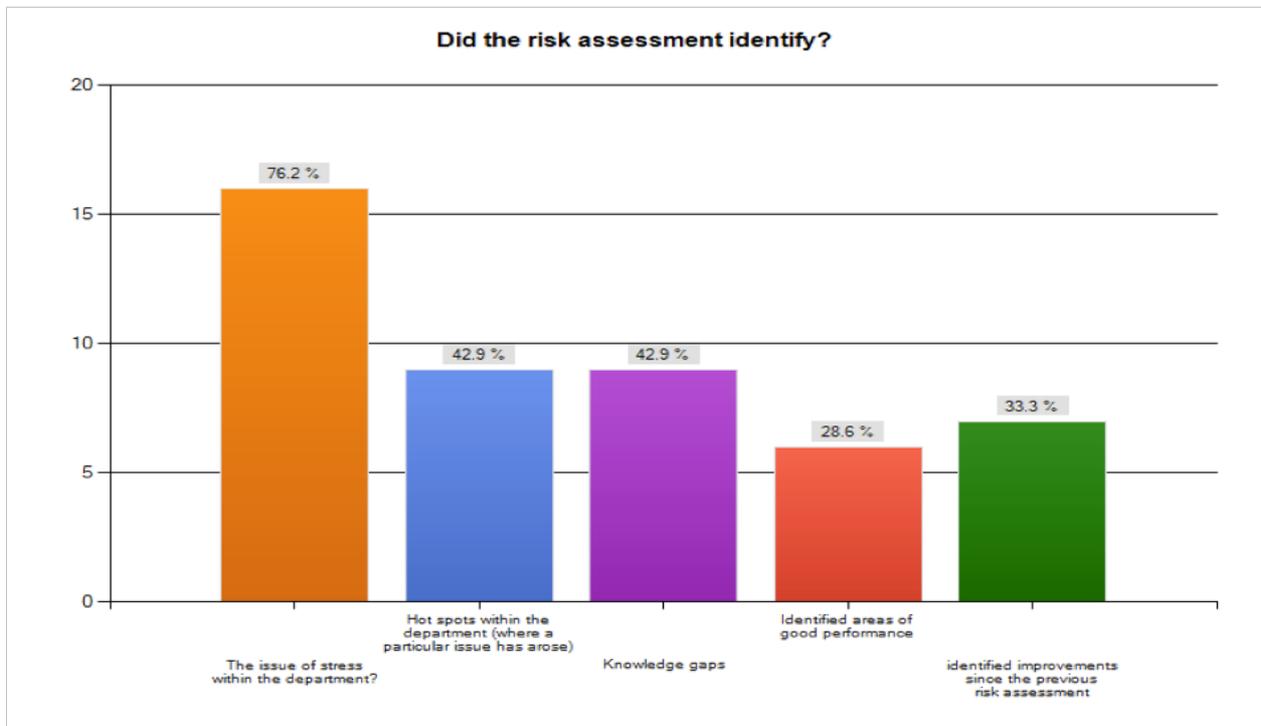
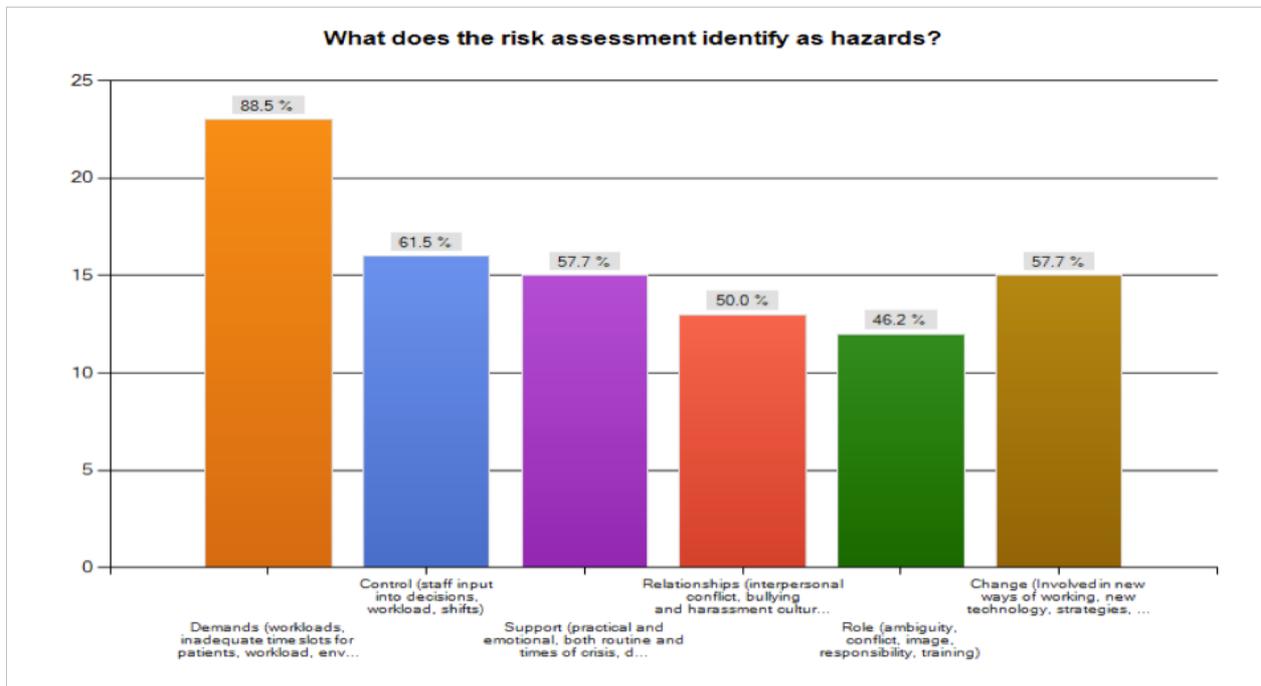




32% of employers were unaware of their legal duties to conduct a risk assessment; the remaining 68% are aware of their duties but have not complied with legislation.

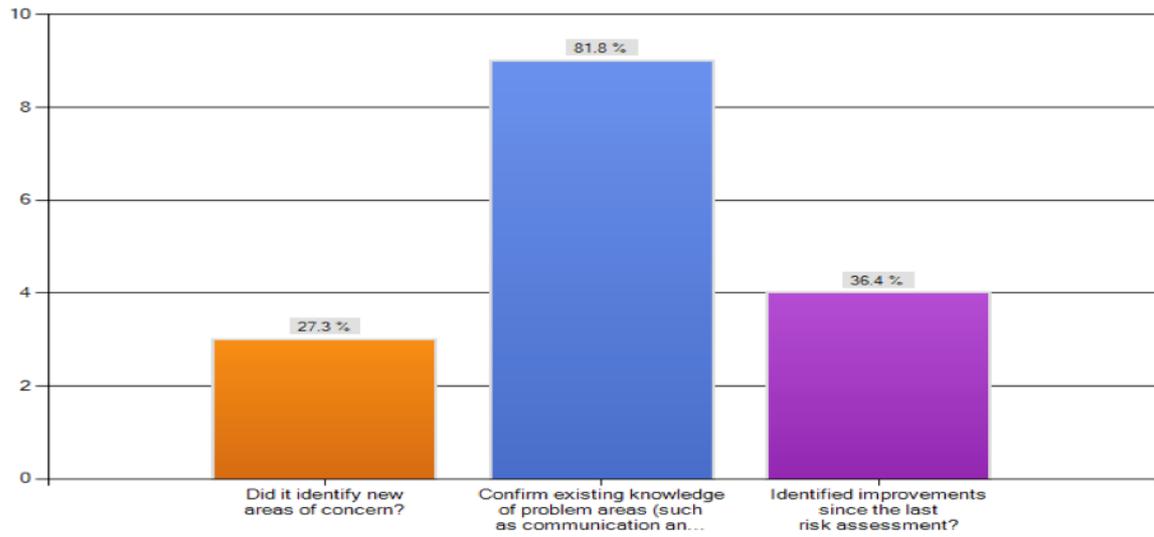
61 respondents did not answer this question.



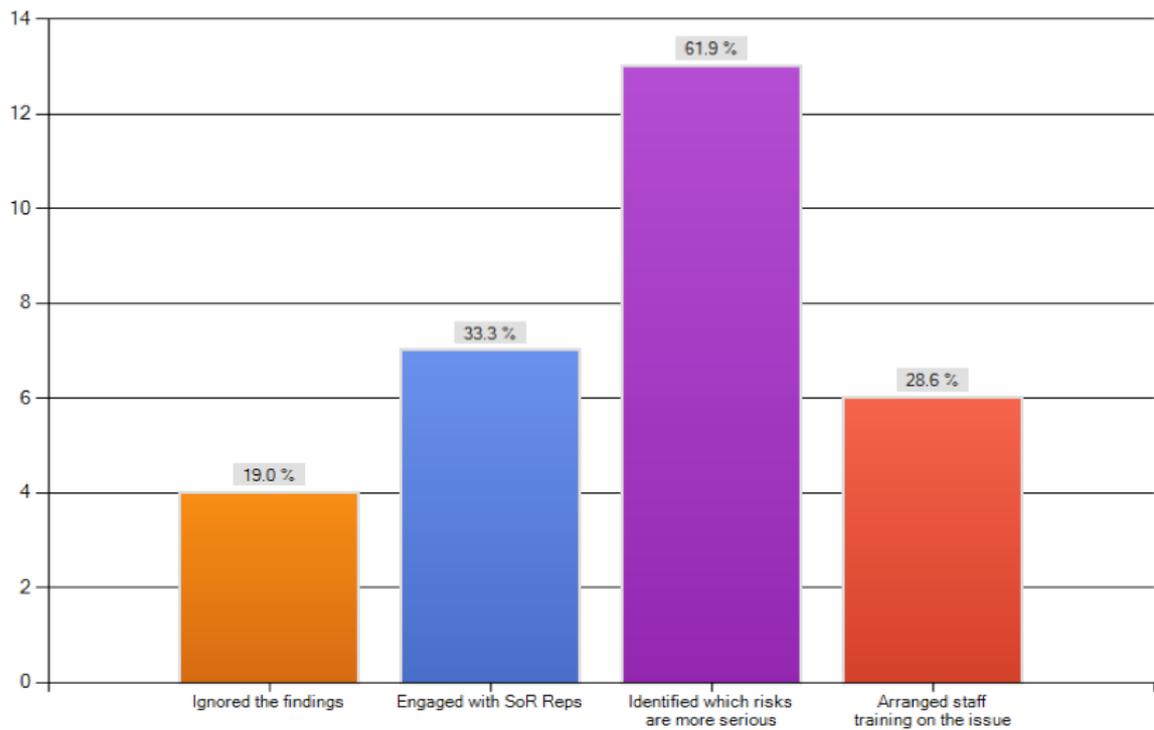


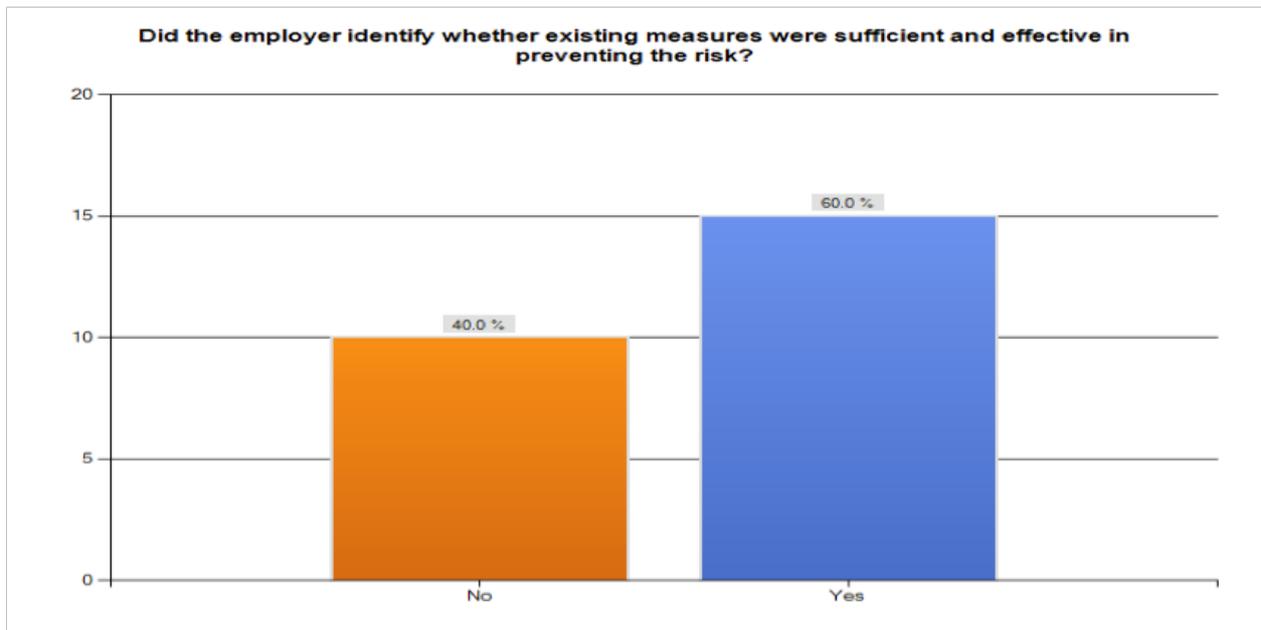
36.4% of respondents identified that improvements had taken place since the previous risk assessment had taken place. Control measures such as communication and consultation between SoR Representatives and employees reduced the issues by 81.8%. 27.3% identified new areas of concern, although these areas were not specified.

if your department had a previous risk assessment in place:



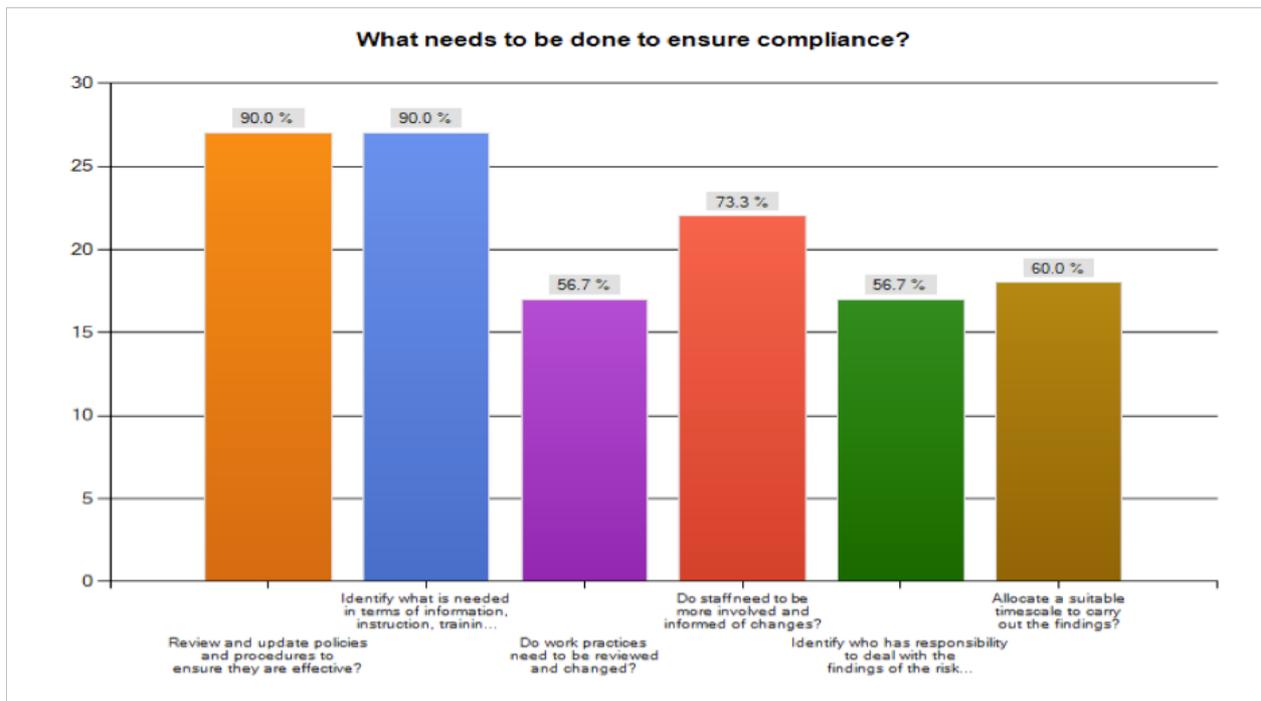
How did Management deal with the issues identified?



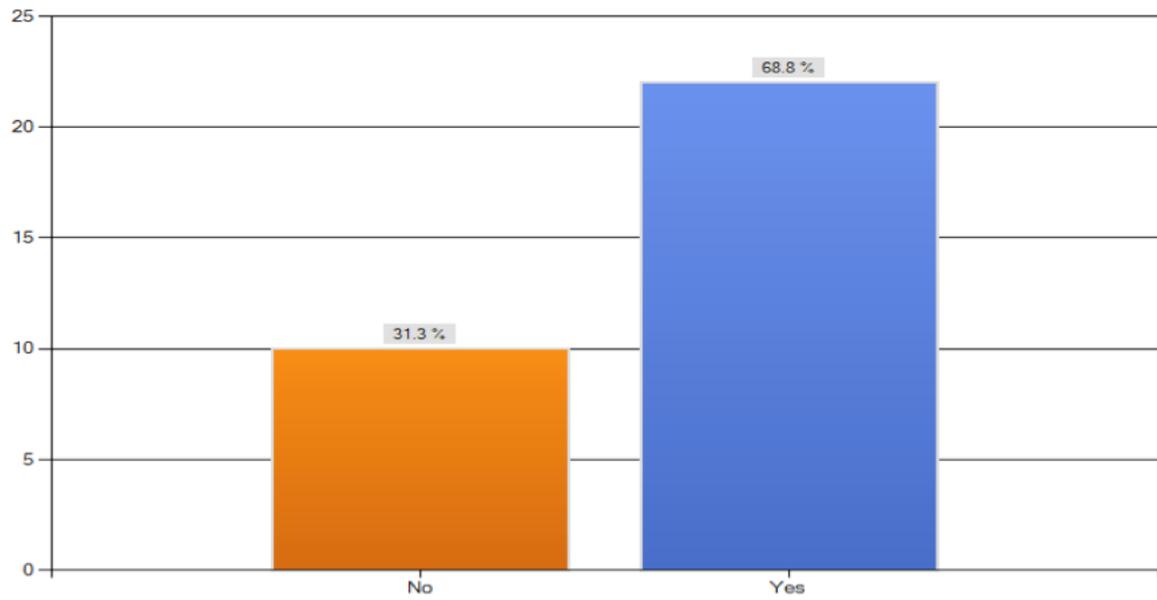


60.0% identified their existing measures as sufficient and effective, while 40.0% of respondents voiced concerns over the existing measures.

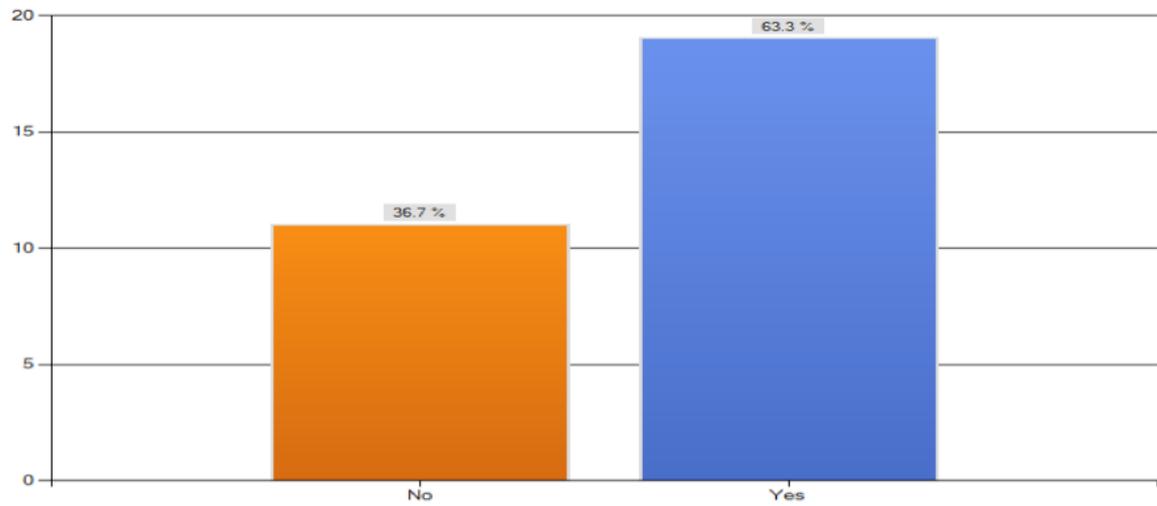
Action planning for the future:



Implementation: Do line managers, senior and management understand why this issue needs to be dealt with?

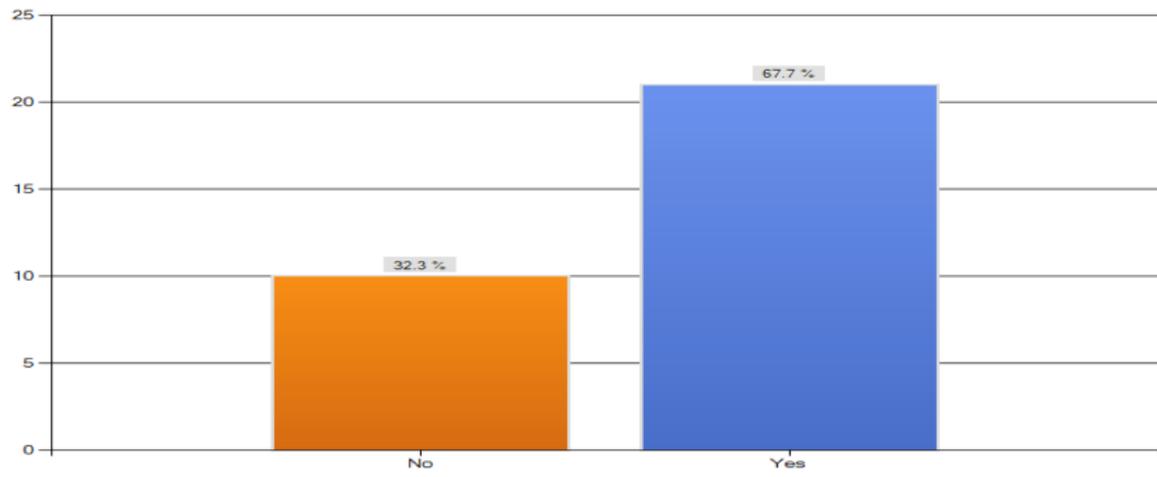


Is there a clear allocation of management responsibility for risk assessments and taking action upon findings?

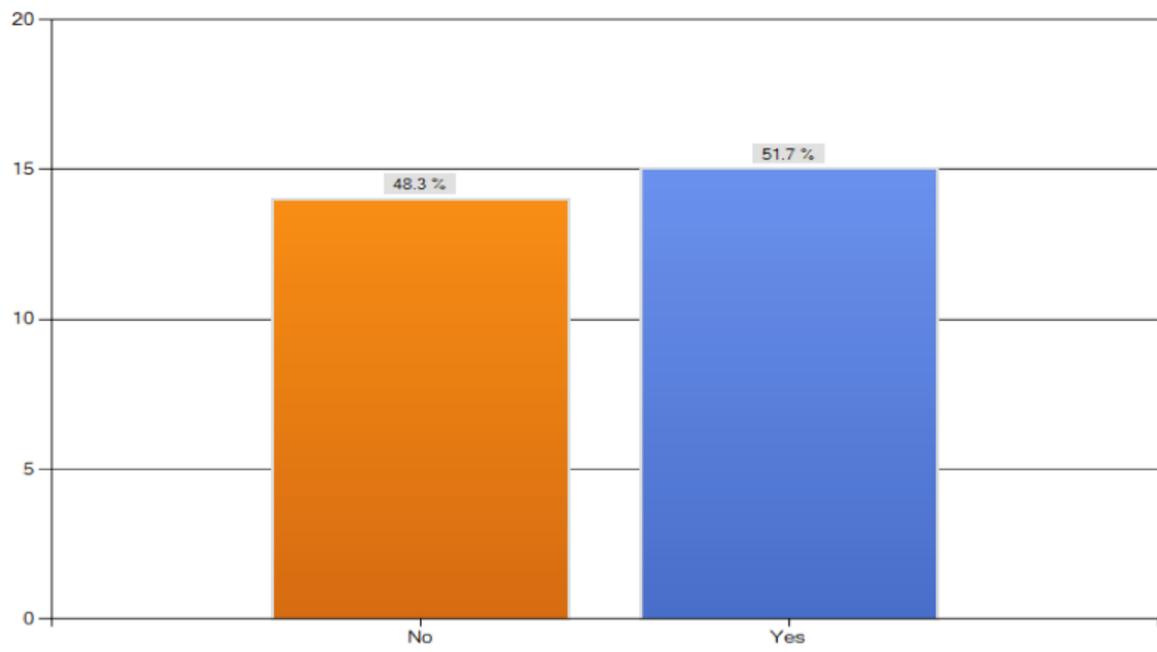


Managers:

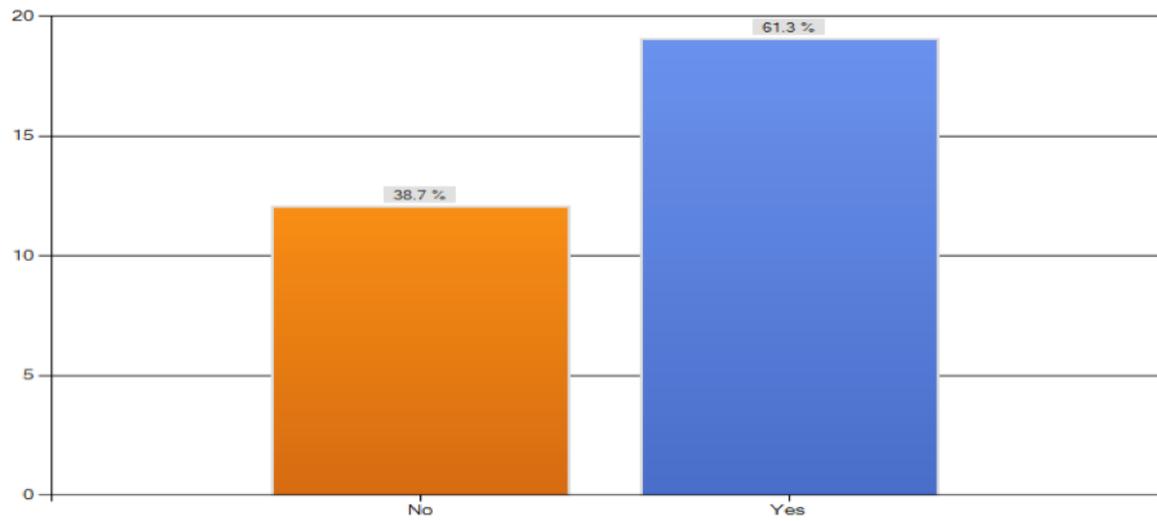
Have managers received training to undertake risk assessments and deal with issues?



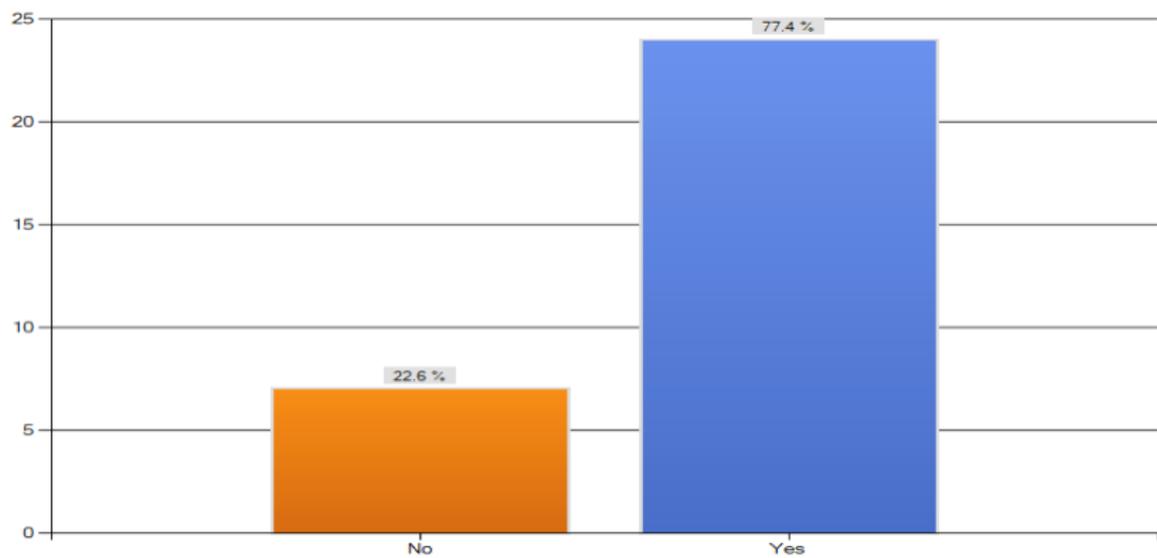
Do line managers/managers implement the stress policy effectively?



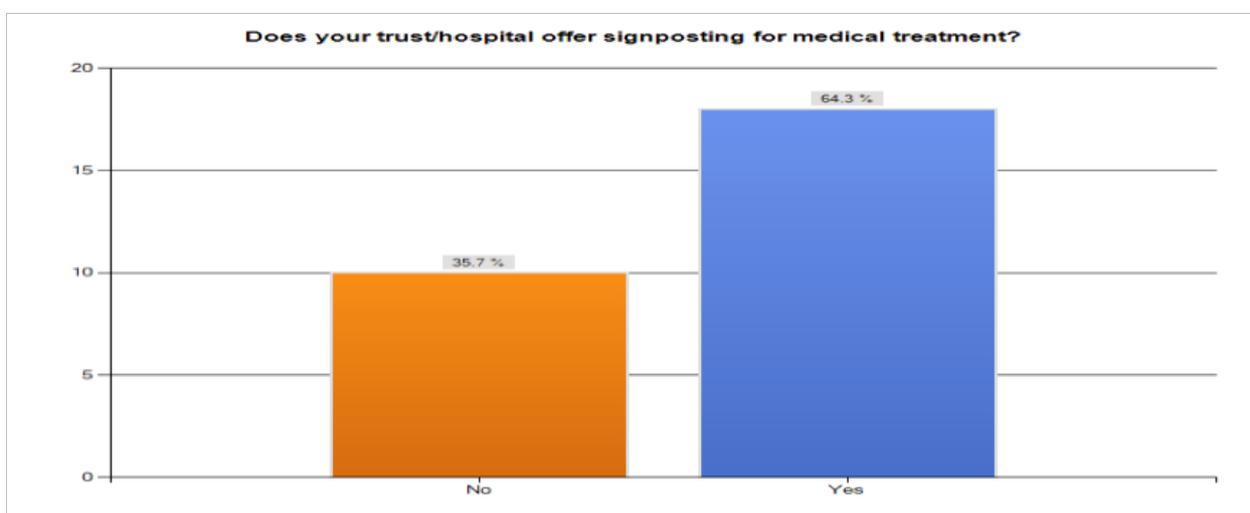
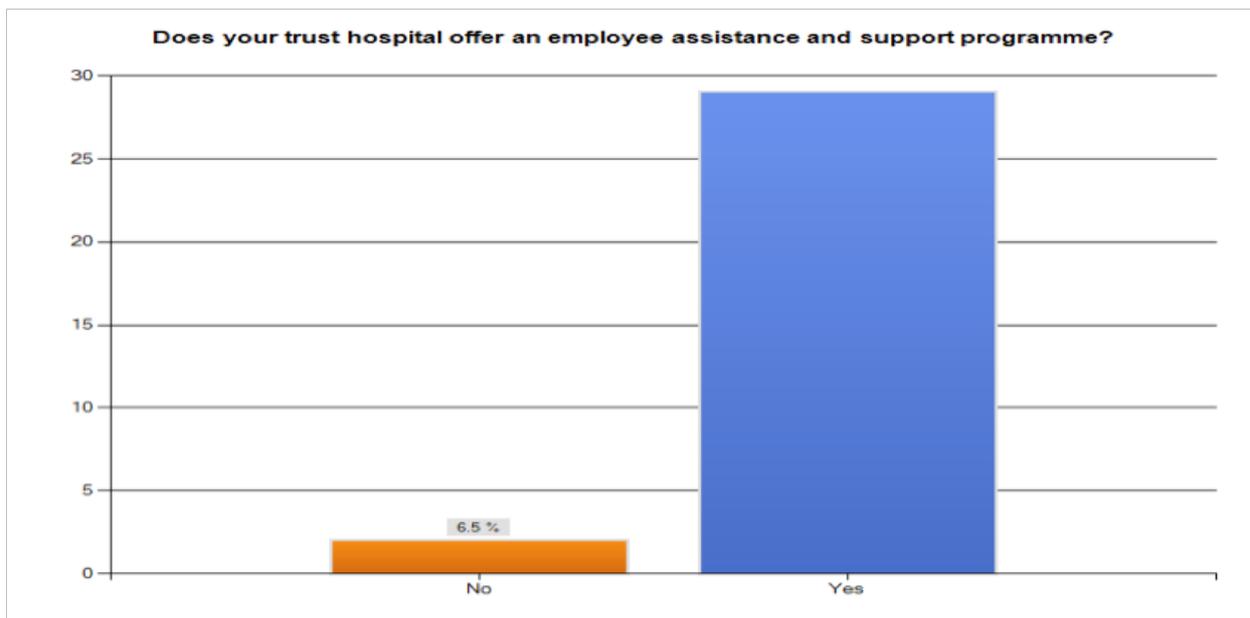
Do line managers/managers communicate issues affecting staff both up and down the management chain?



Do line managers/managers identify and manage those affected by stress?



Support available to employees:



Source URL: <https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/stress-workplace-guidance-and-advice->

radiography-workforce