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**HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE PRIVATE SECURITY SECTOR :
IDENTIFYING THE RISKS**

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Table of contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	5
A. Aim of the study	5
B. Methodology	5
C. Preliminary remarks	6
1. Health and safety in the workplace	8
2. The private security sector	9
2.1. General health and safety situation in the workplace across the sector	11
2.1.1. Health indicators in the workplace	11
2.1.2. A sector shaped and determined by the service relation/performance	13
A. Subcontracting and health in the workplace	14
2.1.3. A highly competitive sector	14
2.1.4. A flexible and atypical sector	16
3. Risks related to security work	18
3.1. Risks resulting from the general context	19
3.1.1. Risks related to the intervention of the security company in the user company	19
3.1.2. Risks related to a problematic occupational identity and the rather negative image of the sector	21
3.2. Risks peculiar to the activity and/or the organization of the sector	23
3.2.1. Risk of violence in the workplace	23
A. Risk of physical aggression	23
B. Risk of bullying	26
C. Risk of sexual harassment	28
3.2.2. Risks related to the handling of firearms	29
3.2.3. Risks resulting from the use of dogs	31
3.2.4. Risks related to the exposure to radiation	33
3.2.5. Risk factors related to the work organization	35
A. Double hierarchy – Double loyalties	35
B. Working time	35
C. Work schedules	37
D. Human resources management	37
E. Training	37
F. Lone working	38

3.2.6. Risks related to the physical workload	39
A. Working postures	39
a. seated positions	39
b. standing positions	40
B. Manual handling of loads	41
C. Moving around	42
D. Shift work and night work	43
3.2.7. Risks related to the psychosocial workload	44
A. Occupational stress	44
B. Job satisfaction and motivation	48
C. Mental workload	49
D. Emotional workload	51
3.2.8. Specific risks facing female security officers	54
3.3. Risks related to the workstation	55
3.3.1. Safety-related risks	55
A. Risk of slips, trips and falls	56
B. Risk of shocks, jamming	58
C. Risk of road accidents	59
D. Electrical hazards	60
E. Fire hazards	61
3.3.2. Risks related to the working environment	63
A. Physical risks	64
a. Noise	64
b. Temperatures, humidity and inadequate ventilation	65
c. Insufficient or inadequate lighting	66
B. Biological hazards	67
C. Chemical hazards	68
4. Prevention and prevention arrangements	70
4.1. Prevention arrangements	71
4.1.1. Assessing occupational risks	71
4.1.2. Coordination / cooperation between employers	72
4.1.3. Safety and prevention services	73
4.1.4. Consultation and participation of the workers	73
4.1.5. Information	74
4.1.6. Training	74
4.1.7. Medical supervision	75
CONCLUSION	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78

General introduction

A. Aim of the study

The project lies within the scope of the framework of European social dialogue in the private security sector and was motivated by the need to prevent health and safety risks in the workplace as much as possible. It is intended to:

- Contribute to the development of the social dialogue relating to health and safety in the workplace at the European, national and company levels;
- Contribute to risk prevention in the area of health and safety by determining the causes of these risks and providing the basis for a tool aimed at informing and raising the awareness of the various actors within the sector, especially the workers themselves;
- Promote greater professionalism in the sector by providing the means with which to increase and enhance the skills and aptitudes of private security staff in the field of health and safety;
- Help identify a series of necessary conditions in order to ensure worker welfare in the sector.

B. Methodology

The project was split into three phases :

1) First phase

A sector-level study to determine health and safety risks in situ. This study was carried out in Spain, Sweden and Belgium. In co-operation with the national social partners, two companies were chosen per country (a large-sized one and a medium-sized or small one). In each country in-depth interviews were conducted with two types of respondents :

At sector level :

- Members of national organizations representing employers and workers

At company level :

- The employers (or people appointed by them) of the two companies chosen in each country
- The employees appointed by the company to organize risk prevention and to monitor workers' health and safety (prevention consultants, members of the Committee for prevention and safety at work, or an equivalent body, etc.)
- The representatives/risk prevention representatives (two or three people) of the companies chosen for each country
- The workers from the companies chosen. The workers were interviewed in groups; one (8 workers) or two groups (of four to five workers each), depending on the practical circumstances.

The maintenance guide was composed on the basis of the literature relating to the private security sector and was validated during the interviews. The same guide was used for both the individual and group interviews.

A literature survey was conducted in conjunction with the sector-level study.

2) Second phase.

A workshop was organized in Brussels with a view to interpreting the results culled in the course of the first phase of the project. Experts (employer and worker representatives) from Italy, Ireland and Germany discussed the results based on their own experiences and national situations. The aim of this workshop was to ensure the results of the survey were representative and to guarantee their relevance on a European level.

3) Third phase.

The final phase in the project consisted of an analysis of the data obtained from the “sector-level study” and from the “workshop”, and of the drawing up of the final report, which was submitted for appraisal to the European social partners (CoESS and UNI-Europa) who oversaw the project.

C. Preliminary remarks

- This report is the result of a study in which several European countries were involved. In the course of the interviews, our attention was primarily directed towards common trends. This risks giving the reader the impression that the sector is homogeneous at a European level, which is far from the truth.
- The legal reference framework of the report is made up of European directives, particularly those relating to health and safety in the workplace. These directives essentially set forth the general prevention principles with which national regulations have to conform. For obvious reasons, it was impossible to take into account particular measures adopted in each state.
- The private security sector covers a diversified range of activities that may be grouped into three broad segments : 1) surveillance and protection of goods, buildings and individuals, 2) the transport of money and valuables, and, 3) the setting up and maintenance of security systems. Within the framework of this study, the focus was placed on the first segment, which contains a very wide range of activities : static surveillance of shopping centres, offices, supermarkets and stores, etc., the detection of shoplifting, access control; surveillance of events, exhibitions, etc. ; alarm-triggered interventions, surveillance with dogs ; patrols, protection of individuals, etc.
- Within the framework of the study, the term "security officer" will be used. However, it must be stated that this term does not cover the same job description and activities in the various Member States of the European Union. We have based ourselves on the definition of security officer given in the *Manuel européen de formation professionnelle initiale en*

gardiennage et surveillance ('European manual for initial professional training in security and surveillance')¹:

"Any individual paid to perform one or several of the following duties:

Prevention or detection of intrusion, entry or unauthorized activity, of acts of vandalism or trespassing on private property

Prevention or detection of theft, damage, misappropriation, embezzlement or the receiving of objects, money, securities, stocks, documents, etc..

Protection of individuals from bodily harm

Compliance with and application of legislation, regulations, measures and practices established for the fight against crime.

Description and apprehending of offenders.

Reporting on incidents and calls"

- In view of the particular nature of the cash-in-transit business, the social partners agreed not to include it in this study.
- This report will serve as a basis for the drawing up of a « European training manual for health and safety in the workplace for security and surveillance professionals ».
- This study identifies the risks, i.e. the aim was to draw up an inventory of the risks in the sector, but not to assess the risks in terms of their dangerousness, probability, etc. Hence, the risks are, in principle, given equal treatment, without any individual risk receiving more attention. Nonetheless, some will be more developed than others because of their complexity or higher profile as our field work revealed that these characteristics warrant more attention.

¹ Spaninks L., Quinn L., Byrne J., *Manuel européen de formation professionnelle initiale en gardiennage et surveillance*, CoESS - UNI-Europa.

1. Health and safety in the workplace

For a working definition of health in the workplace, we based ourselves on a dynamic approach which enables us to develop a critical analysis not only of the risk factors, but also of the dynamic social process within which workers' medical histories are situated. According to this approach,

“Health is a dynamic process by which an individual builds himself and grows, a process which is recorded in the body, through work experiences, living conditions, events, pain, pleasure and suffering, through everything which makes an individual history unique but also collective through the influence of the multiple dynamics into which it fits.”²

This approach to health in the workplace enables us to assess the strategies developed by worker of the sector in order to cope with the ever-present contradiction between health and productivity as well as with the ways this contradiction impacts on their health.

In the course of our interviews, the ambivalent nature of the work in terms of health emerged as one of the most prominent features; at once a powerful factor in the construction of health, and a powerful destroyer of health. When ingenuity and recognition gain the upper hand, work can be a source of wellbeing or of emancipation for the worker ; however, when restrictions and troubles (conflicts relating to social working relations, lack of recognition, etc.), prevail, work becomes an alienating and stressful activity.

Generally speaking, the impact of work on health is analysed mainly in relation to predetermined risks. For instance, security officers are faced with acts of physical aggression, night work, lone working, etc. Consequently, when conducting a risk assessment they appear serially and independently. However, in reality these risks are closely intertwined, and thus when designing prevention policies the multifaceted nature of the negative effects on health in the workplace should be taken into account.

Health problems in the workplace do not constitute a homogeneous group. P. Davezies³ identified three different types of health problems resulting from the individual's work:

- Direct effects on the body, especially by physiochemical factors : these problems are the result of exposure to physical risks such as falls, toxic products, but also noise, heat or excessive cold, etc.
- Overwork: these problems are due to an inappropriate or excessive use of the workforce. The typical example in this respect are muscular-tendinous pathologies ensuing from overwork or use of the working time: abnormal working hours (exceeding by far legal weekly working hours), atypical working hours (staggered

² Daubas-Letourneux V., Thébaud-Mony A., *L'organisation du travail et santé dans l'Union européenne*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Luxembourg : Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2002, p. 5.

³ Davezies Ph., “Evolutions des organisations du travail et atteintes à la santé”; Contribution au séminaire interdisciplinaire “Nouvelles organisations du travail”, CNAM, Paris, 1997. in *Travailler*, No. 3. and, "Recherche en Ergonomie et Santé". Proceedings of the conference on "Recherche et Ergonomie", Toulouse, February 1998, p. 173.

hours or shift work, night work, weekend work), irregular mealtimes and sleeping patterns.

- health disorders linked to acts diminishing a person's dignity and self-esteem : bullying in the workplace, denial of the suffering, rejection of the individual. Today, it is well established that all of these psychological impairments threaten the health of individuals.

While the traditional risks related to direct physical attacks on workers are still most often cited and remain significant, there has recently been an increase in risks related to excessive workloads or those affecting the dignity of workers. As a result, these risks should receive more attention from those responsible for prevention within companies and should be integrated into the policies they are supposed to implement.

2. The private security sector

The private security sector is witnessing a veritable boom. The reasons for this expansion are already well known : an increase in a feeling of insecurity in society and general, and thus in a demand for security on the part of companies, public institutions and private individuals; the transfer of tasks traditionally within the remit of public security services, and, especially, the outplacement of security activities which were previously performed by the companies themselves. This process of expansion has gone hand in hand with the development of new market segments and by significant changes in terms of the work organization.

These sector-level changes, which are perceived in slightly different ways depending on local contexts, have an impact on health and safety in the workplace. The sector has, not without its share of teething problems, become more professional, which has implied, among other things, preconditions in terms of qualifications, the setting up of initial or continuing training schemes, a recognition of the training by official bodies, etc. This process may have positive effects on workers' welfare. However, despite efforts at increasing professionalism in the sector, it is still associated with poor working conditions and generally suffers from a bad image. This is why working conditions and risk prevention are important items on the social partners' agenda. This concern is also borne out by the fact that these items are often mentioned in publications and joint declarations:

"In certain functions of the private security sector, there are important occupational hazards to be reckoned with. The minimum health and safety standards for private security officers must at least be applied at all the sector's companies in order to ensure the maximum possible prevention of professional risks.

These standards should be regularly revised in consultation with the social partners and the competent authorities, in order to increase the security officers' health and safety ".

Code of conduct and ethics for the private security sector

"The safety of employees

The prevention of occupational hazards is one of the most important aspects of the organisation of work in the private security sector. Training is essential in this area, as well as the development of techniques and procedures which guarantee, to the greatest extent possible, the safety of workers exposed to dangerous situations."

(...)

Minimizing the risks

All workers in the sector must be given appropriate training in the best practices in the field of health and safety; this reduces the risks to which they are exposed and allows them to carry out more efficiently their mission of protecting people and property"

The challenges and results of the social dialogue in the private security sector, pp. 11 and 12

Any improvements in the sector in the area of health and safety requires action at three different levels:

1. – At the (macrosocial) level, which is made up of all the employment regulations, which range from macroeconomic constraints that weigh on the labour market to institutions representing workers and employers at both the European and national levels.

At this level, it is important to take into account all of the elements that make up the social, economic, legal, etc. context within which the private security activity is developing. Among the regulations, one may cite, in no particular order, those that affect working time and working-time allocation, access to the profession within the sector, competition between companies, relations between user companies and private security companies, the weight of trade unions within companies, and at sector level, etc. These elements all have a direct or indirect influence on health and safety in the workplace.

2.- At the level of the company in the broad sense of the term, i.e. as a network incorporating workers with a different status and from different organizations.

At this level, it is a question of considering the company policy in the area of competition, the management of production costs, productivity, conflict management, communication policy, human resources management, risk prevention, etc.

3.- As a result of restrictions imposed by the organization in the workplace itself.

How is the team managed ? What is the working atmosphere like? How much autonomy do the workers enjoy? Does clients live up to their responsibility in terms of health and safety in the workplace ? etc.

The analysis of the sector will be based on this division, which will also play a role when it comes to identifying the risk factors as well as the preventive measures to be adopted.

2.1. General health and safety situation in the workplace across the sector

2.1.1. Health indicators in the workplace

The prevention policies are based on data and research revealing and delineating the harmfulness of risks and which, therefore, determine the appropriate preventive measures to be taken in order to eliminate them or to reduce them to acceptable levels. However, the security sector is beset by a glaring lack of data and a very small body of research. Indeed, there are very few studies that deal specifically with the sector. In order to tackle the health and safety risks that affect the sector, one needs to go to studies conducted in related professions such as the police force, the military, etc. or to more general studies that bear on several sectors of activity.

The data

The origin of the data varies widely : assessments by the workers themselves, statements made by the employer, data gleaned by prevention or labour inspection agencies, quantitative surveys, etc.

Generally speaking, the health indicators in the workplace are thus constructed on the basis of highly diverse data⁴ :

- Data concerning the working conditions in the broad sense of the term (sector, professions, etc.) and employment characteristics (type of contract, etc.).

As far as the data are concerned, most EU countries conduct national surveys on working conditions. Unfortunately, it is sometimes very difficult to have data broken down into individual sectors or professions (and even when this is possible the sample is too small and thus not very representative). Similarly, the statistics are frequently grouped for each branch of activity and it is difficult to obtain accurate information on the private security sector. The data concerning the employment characteristics are, generally speaking, more easily available, particularly those relating to the type of contract (limited period of time, unlimited period of time, full-time, part-time, etc.). This varies greatly from one country to the next. Normally, this information may be extracted from companies' social balance sheets, but more often than not these details are not treated or grouped at sector level.

- Data concerning exposure to risk factors

These data are available mainly at company level and result from their risk assessments. Unfortunately, these data are hardly ever systematized at sector level.

- Data relating to the state of health (occupational accidents, occupational diseases, other pathologies, absenteeism, etc.)

The data relating to health impairments in part rely on traditional indicators, i.e. occupational accidents and occupation disease.

⁴ Vogel L. (ed.), *La santé des femmes au travail en Europe: des inégalités non reconnues*, Brussels, BTS, 2003.

Data on occupational accidents are more readily available since there is a legal obligation to report them. These data are available at company level and, sometimes, for the entire sector. Within the framework of this study, we to a large extent relied on these data when identifying the main hazards in the sector.

As far as the occupational diseases are concerned, none of the six countries involved in the study recognizes an occupational disease for the private security sector. Hence, it is very difficult to get a picture of the incidence and prevalence of diseases, pathologies and injuries caused by working in the sector as the information is scarce or non-existent (in any case, we have not had access to these data). As a result, the diseases remain for the most part invisible.

- Data relating to turnover

The data relating to the staff turnover are sometimes used as a health indicator to the extent that it may provide an indication of the difficult working conditions. The data regarding the turnover across the sector are available, even if they are not always very reliable and accurate (this depends to a large extent on the way in which the calculations are effected). In any event, all actors in the sector agree that it is high. The reasons that are most often given to explain this are as follows:⁵

- Working conditions : nigh work, lone work, insecurity during certain interventions ;
 - Workers find it difficult to combine their professional and family lives;
 - Limited promotion opportunities (graded);
 - Unattractive salaries, particularly at entry-level;
 - Dismissal for absenteeism out of a concern over reliability vis-à-vis the client;
 - Bad management, planning problems.
- Data relating to the organization of prevention (access to medical supervision, coverage by prevention bodies, worker representation in the area of health and safety, specific training in health and safety, etc.)

Once again, these data exist at company level (the number of workers with access to medical supervision, the number of workers who have had training in prevention and health and safety), but these are rarely taken up at sector level. The data regarding the access to preventive measures and the way the latter function are quite disparate. Moreover, it is known that the coverage of companies by prevention bodies as well as the possibility of workers to be represented for matters of health in the workplace vary greatly between countries of the European Union and even within a single country because of factors such as the size of companies, union presence, job status, etc.

The absence of exhaustive indicators has a number of effects on prevention policies :

- Minimization and/or invisibility of certain risks, more particularly risks about which insufficient information is available;

⁵ Cortese V., Dryon Ph., Valkeneers A. *Sécurité Privée et Organisation du Travail. Approche thématique et transversale*, TEF-ULB, 2003, p. 19.

- Prevention focus on certain risks, usually the traditional risks which are precisely the ones with the highest profile, while others are ignored. This may be because (1) the risks in question are too complex due to the interplay of various factors as a result of which it is difficult to establish causal links since they either have long-term effects, or produce health impairments that are not very specific and make it difficult to prove a link to the job.

As a result, better prevention requires better know-how and a quantitative and qualitative improvement in the data available for the sector. It is a question of will, and of the coordination and collection of data.

2.1.2. A sector shaped and determined by the service relation/performance

The private security sector is characterized by subcontracting. Today, an increasing number of companies tend to subcontract security activities, which are not part of their core business. Hence, they increasingly call upon companies that are specialized in this field for the following oft-cited reasons:

- To cut costs;
- To refocus company activities on core business;

Others are mentioned less often:

- To pass on the risk associated with security activities;
- To pass on the constraints, and the technical and human risks related to the security activity to those who perform the service, i.e. security companies.

The service relation appears to be determining both in describing the sector and for analysing risk prevention.

According to the Framework Directive (89/391) which aims to promote the improvement of the safety and health of workers in the workplace the employer-principal (the client) and the employer subcontractor (security company) must:

- cooperate in implementing the safety, health and occupational hygiene provisions, taking into account the nature of the activities,
- coordinate their actions in matters of the protection and prevention of occupational risks, and
- inform each other of these risks
- inform their respective workers and/or workers' representatives of these risks.

Moreover, the employer-principal (the client) shall

- take appropriate measures so that employers of workers from any outside undertakings and/or establishments engaged in work in his undertaking and/or establishment receive, in accordance with national laws and/or practices, adequate information concerning :
 - the safety and health risks and protective and preventive measures and activities in respect of both the undertaking and/or establishment in general and each type of workstation or job;
- ensure that workers from outside undertakings and/or establishments engaged in work in his undertaking and/or establishment have in fact received appropriate instructions regarding health and safety risks during their activities in his undertaking and/or establishment.

In practice, this cooperation and coordination between employers is far from obvious, for a variety of reasons:

- the contradictory demands by clients to security companies , with the former on the one hand imposing excellence in the area of health and safety (specific certifications, etc.), while on the other forcing security companies to compromise on economic and organizational conditions which render any serious policy in the field of health in the workplace impossible;
- the client has recourse to security companies exactly in order to pass on the risks related to the security activity and the management of it, and is thus not inclined towards much cooperation with the security company;
- the commercial relationship that links employers, as a result of which the security company often finds itself in a delicate position and is unable to demand anything of the client, especially in view of the highly competitive market;
- the emergence of a third actor in the relationship between the clients and the security companies, i.e. the company hired by the client in order to manage the latter's relations with various subcontractors : cleaning, security, maintenance, etc. Security companies sometimes do not have any direct contacts with the client ; instead, they have to deal with another company, which situation greatly complicates any attempts at coordination or cooperation and makes the responsibility that incurs to each party a highly complex matter.
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A. Subcontracting and health in the workplace

The studies related to the effects of subcontracting on the health and safety of workers (as well as the implications of this in terms of changes in the social relationships in the workplace, the transfer of risks, etc.) have a very limited scope and usually consist of case studies.

This shortage of studies may be partly explained by the difficulty to access systematic data regarding occupational accidents and illnesses of subcontracting workers in general. Notwithstanding this, the few existing quantitative studies reveal a positive correlation

between excessive accident rates and outside workers. This observation has been corroborated by the case studies.⁶ There is a study⁷ in which the effects of subcontracting on the health of workers were analysed. The findings of this study may be summarized as follows:

1. Subcontracting workers are obliged to deliver results. The demands in this respect are all the more important because of the fierce competition between companies.

Before anything else, the party performing security and surveillance services is bound by an obligation of means, i.e. "to commit himself to using all appropriate means to perform the task at hand. In this case it is not unusual for appropriate diligence not to lead to the intended result. The result is uncertain and cannot, itself, be the object of the obligation"⁸ However, the principals increasingly stress their needs and demand results (to provide a predetermined and accurate result), whether this be the fixing of maximum response times after an alarm has gone off, or the demands imposed (need to produce results) to certain officers working in shopping centres in terms of detecting shoplifting, or the tasks (and demands linked to those tasks) to be performed by certain static security officers which are not inherent in security activities, etc. These examples amply illustrate the shift in emphasis from an obligation of providing means to one centred on providing results which has appeared in the sector. It entails implications in terms of insurance and results in the risk of legal abuses, while also having an effect on the officers in terms of stress and increases in workload, as well as in terms of occupational identity. It is the very concept and philosophy of security that is disturbed.

2. The subcontracting companies, the freelancers and small outfits seem to set less store by health in the workplace than the medium-sized and large companies. They are said to be less inclined to draw up prevention plans, conduct risk assessment or to train and inform their staff in this area. Moreover, there is little or no trade union representation. The minimum legal standards required by law in terms of health and safety in the workplace are only rarely observed.

Although the large companies have trade union representatives and are able to muster material and human resources in order to meet their obligations in terms of risk prevention, this is not always the case for small- and medium-sized companies, which is also linked to the matter of unfair competition.

3. Subcontracting is often conducive to a situation in which "the complexity and entanglement of levels of responsibility and security controls tend to blur the rules and restrictions in this field, i.e. form an obstacle to their implementation."⁹ There is, therefore, a real risk of disorganization in the workplace, which may, in turn, entail accidents because of inaccurate (i.e. ambiguous) task descriptions, and in the coordination of activities, etc.

⁶ Goudswaard A. (ed.), *New forms of contractual relationships and the implications for occupational safety and health*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2002, p. 7.

⁷ Mayhew Cl., Quinlan M., Bennett L., *The Effects of Subcontracting/Outsourcing on Occupational Health and Safety*, Sydney, UNSW studies in Australian Industrial Relations, No. 38. pp. 17-25.

⁸ Sortais M., "Savoir passer d'une obligation de moyens à une obligation de résultat", in *Arseg Info*, No. 49, 1996.

⁹ Thébaud-Mony A., *L'industrie nucléaire. Sous-traitance et servitude*, Paris, Inserm-E.D.K., 2000, p. 6.

4. The flexibility in working hours profoundly changes the living conditions of the subcontracting workers and their families.¹⁰
5. The already-mentioned high accident rates that affect temporary or subcontracting workers in comparison with the workers permanently employed by the client is due to, among other things, the exterior workers' lack of experience and training, or of information in issues of risks and risk prevention.

2.1.3. A highly competitive sector

Competition in the sector is generally recognized to be very fierce and it has often been posited that private security contracts are awarded to the least expensive (the lowest bid) and not to the "best" (the best bid), that is to say to the company that guarantees a quality service and good working conditions, as well as compliance with collective agreements, labour regulations and the obligations and responsibilities in terms of risk prevention and health in the workplace. Unfair competition which becomes apparent during the awarding of the contracts damages the image of the sector (amateurism, illegal practices, etc.) and has a negative impact on the health of workers in the sector. It is formally condemned by both employers and workers of the sector, who have published a manual¹¹ for the awarding of contracts.

The various actors in the sector are agreed on the fact that the image, working conditions and professionalism of the sector cannot be improved unless the rules of the game are not clearly established. So, it can be said that the first preventive measures in the area of health and safety is situated exactly at this level, i.e. at that of the sector.

2.1.4. A "flexible" and "atypical" sector

In a sector characterized by fierce competition and by the variability and relative unpredictability of client flows, private security companies often have to meet several challenges : to remain competitive, productive and have the ability to adapt themselves to their clients and to the variability in the latter's demands. In order to do so, they have opted for a type of organization which is characterized by flexibility.¹² It is what one might call a dual flexibility model in that it relies on an opposition between the "core workers" and those subject to more atypical employment types. This model was described very accurately by P. Simula.¹³

"We are faced with a dual system, which combines a primary market set up to last and a secondary market which is much more volatile. The turnover rule affects mainly tasks performed by less qualified staff and to a large extent saves on other staff. The quantitative flexibility is 'segmented or segregational". It reduces the constraints of

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹ Weber T., *Selecting best value - A manual for organisations awarding contracts for private guarding services*, CoESS - UNI-Europa 1999.

¹² This flexibility-based work is not peculiar to the private security business ; rather it is a characteristic that all service activities have in common.

¹³ Gadrey G., *Nouvelle économie, nouveau mythe?*, Paris, Flammarion, 2000, pp. 98-104.

*functional adaptability and facilitates the embedding of permanent staff in a stable working environment, which has its own reference points and signs of occupational identity. In spite of the massive use of the outside job market, the activities are structured around more or less stable staff which form its core. It is this staff which ensures the continuity of know-how and expertise on which the company activity relies."*¹⁴

To this quantitative flexibility, which meets the need to respond very quickly to fluctuations in demand (the use of limited contracts, temporary workers, etc.), one should add the flexibility in terms of working hours (additional hours, stand-by, atypical working hours, night work, weekend work). And then, there is the flexibility in terms of the tasks to be performed by the workers, who have to be able at all times to adapt to the needs of companies in order to comply with their varied and unpredictable demands. As a result, companies increasingly rely on their workers showing initiative. They rely on their being autonomous, their ability to adjust to the job whenever required. These constant demands require a considerable physical investment and the application of ever more cognitive and emotional resources on the part of the workers in order to complete their tasks.

As a result, whether it be because of the working hours, the type of contract or type of investment that is required of the workers, it is clear that the sector is a highly flexible one. This has a major impact on the social and family situation of the private security officers, and leads to considerable mental and emotional strain, even if these effects are often not recognized.

¹⁴ Simula P., "Précarité et relation aléatoire au travail : le cas des agents de sécurité privée", in CEREQ, No. 3, September 2000, p. 13.

3. Risks related to security work

We chose to divide the security-related risks into three broad categories :

- risks resulting from the general context
- risks inherent in the activity and/or organization of the sector
- risks related to the workstation

Initially, we intended to present the risks according to each activity/workstation (detection of shoplifting, patrols, etc.) ; however, given the specificities of each subsector and the limited scope of the report, we in the end adopted a more general presentation criterion and opted for a division into the three above-mentioned categories. For each of them, we will indicate whether it involves all of the security officers or certain specific categories. We also chose to stress the preventive measures. These are situated at three different levels (the sector, company and workstation).

Save for a few cases, the risks are always dealt with in the same way. First of all, there is a brief introduction of the nature of the risk. This is followed by an analysis of the intervening factors and a presentation of the preventive measures to be adopted, and, finally, an explanation of the effects of the risk on health.

The risks affecting the sector are arranged in the following categories:

- Risks resulting from the general context

- Risks related to the intervention by the security company in the user company
- Risks related to a problematic occupational identity and the rather negative image of the sector

- Risks inherent in the activity and/or organization of the sector

- Risks of violence in the workplace
- Risks related to the handling of firearms
- Risks posed by dogs
- Risks related to the exposure to radiation
- Risk factors related to the work organization
- Risks related to the physical workload
- Risks related to the psychosocial workload
- Specific risks facing female security officers

- Risks related to the workstation

- Security-related risks
- Risks related to the working environment

3.1. Risks resulting from the general context

The general context refers to the socioeconomic context in which the security activity is carried out. Hence, the reference sphere is the sector, its main actors and the relationships between them. As this has already been discussed in the preceding chapter, we shall limit ourselves here to dealing with the risks related to the intervention by the security company in the user company and with those ensuing from the image of the company and the occupation of security officer.

3.1.1. Risks related to the intervention by the security company in the user company

These are mainly interference risks, i.e. "an additional risk on top of the risks inherent in the activity of each company due to the presence of installations, equipment and activities of various companies in the same workplace."¹⁵

The interference risk is essentially a risk of accidents related to the intervention by the security company in a user company. However, it also constitutes a potential stress factor for the security officers to the extent that they find themselves in working situations/contexts in which they have no knowledge of the risks resulting from these situations, of the preventive measures to be adopted, or of the responsibilities of the respondents with whom they have to deal.

This interference risk ensues from a lack of knowledge at two levels : the lack of knowledge by one of the companies of the risks of the other company and the lack of knowledge of the risks related to the co-activity.

When workers from different companies are involved in the same working environment, the working relationships become more complex and may complicate the coordination of activities as a result of the entanglement of the various levels of responsibility and of security controls. This may result in disorganization, with everything this entails in terms of accidents, confusion as regards the tasks to be executed, etc. In these kinds of circumstances, efforts must therefore be made at company level in order to share information and to reach an agreement on the respective duties and responsibilities.

Cooperation from the client is a vital component within any prevention policy. Clients have the power to influence, both negatively and positively, the working conditions of the security officers and, to a large extent, determine the prevention policies implemented by the security companies.

The impression harboured by many of the respondents is that the obligations/responsibilities of the principal remain quite vague and that security companies are unable to force clients to cooperate if the latter are not inclined to do so. The prevailing sentiment is that these obligations are set out without really taking into account the nature of the service relation/performance, which makes the security company subordinate to the user company, or, at the very least, greatly limits the former's room for manoeuvre. The fierce competition across the sector weakens the position of security companies even more.

¹⁵ INRS, *Intervention d'entreprises extérieures. Aide mémoire pour la prévention des risques*, ED 757, Paris, 1998. p. 4.

Our respondents put forward several proposals to change the nature of this relationship. These are centred along two axes:

- to extend and more narrowly define the obligations/responsibilities of the principals with a view to forcing them actually to collaborate with the security company they are deal with. This proposal relies on legislation being enforced.
- to provide for exerting pressure on the client company. Companies should be able to submit the matter to the labour inspection (or other official bodies), whereas the measures resulting from such a procedure should have a sufficiently general nature so as to prevent a scenario in which the client simply turns to other security companies that pay less heed to health and safety prevention.

Naturally, such measures require, on the one hand, a prior dialogue between the sector's social partner, and, on the other, actions at institutional, political and legal levels. It should also be stated that these issues not only bedevil security companies, but are, in fact, a scourge afflicting all service companies.

3.1.2. Risks related to a problematic occupational identity and the rather negative image of the sector

This involves the issue of the rather poor image of the sector impacting on the wellbeing of the security officer. Although one might debate the relevance of viewing this issue as a guise, it seems important to direct our attention towards this question since the one element that clearly came out of the interviews conducted in the various countries was the fact that the on the whole negative image of the sector, and thus of security officers, weighs heavily on the occupational identity of the individual and his/her self-esteem. A negative occupational identity is a powerful factor in the destruction of the individual's health.

These problems seem to be rooted in, on the one hand, the profession itself, its characteristics and recent developments, and, on the other, in the bad perception of the sector on the part of the public at large.

The following comments may be made with regard to the responsibility of the profession:

- In spite of all efforts to improve the sector and make it more professional, it is still too often associated with bad employment and working conditions. The occupation of security officer remains quite unattractive and is consistently listed among the least prestigious professions.
- Some workstations are characterized by very high rotation rates, which impacts negatively on the quality of the services provided, and thus on the overall image of the profession.
- In some countries, companies find it difficult to recruit staff to meet the demand. In some cases the magnitude of this recruitment shortage is such that staff recruitment criteria have become very flexible indeed. This situation also has an impact on the quality of the product provided and thus on the confidence clients have in the services supplied by private security companies, as well as on the prestige of the profession as a whole.
- Client attitudes constitute another important element. In static security, clients increasingly demand from officers that they take on a number of tasks which, strictly speaking, have little to do with security. Companies and officers are often forced to take on these duties (whether or not they are included in the service agreement terms and conditions) if want to keep the contract. Security officers often find it difficult to cope with this uncertainty regarding their occupational identity.

As for the bad perception of the sector by the general public, the officers and principal actors in the sector often complain about the role played by the media, who are said to highlight only the things that go wrong or are bad in the profession, making a meal of the unprofessional behaviour or wrongdoings of certain officers. The media are also blamed for not sufficiently pointing out the ways in which the sector has contributed to a general feeling of security.

"Security officers do a very good job in providing security in public places such as the underground or shopping centres. In our present-day society they are an absolute necessity in order to prevent and fight day-to-day criminality. However, we do not feel that society appreciates us in the way that we deserve. Rather, we are depicted as being part of the problem instead of part of the solution. This is very stressful, mentally, for security officers. Everyone wants to know that they are doing something

useful, which is also appreciated. Unfortunately, this is not the case for security officers, who are subject to a continuous stream of negative propaganda in the media." Prevention representative

The officers also complain about their contact with the public, stating that they are often treated with contempt or disapproval when they are apprehending an offender and thus, in effect, contribute to enhancing security in those public places.

Faced with the reaction of the media and the disapproving looks of the public, officers feel very discouraged and have the feeling that their work is still not understood or valued.

The entire sector is tarred with the same brush. Whether it is at sector level, or at that of the social partners or the companies, there is a real need for initiatives to improve the image of the sector and the profession. It would seem that these initiatives should be directed towards several aims:

- to provide a better understanding of the role the sector plays in society;
- to increase the sector's transparency and visibility;
- to project a better image of the sector by reacting to spurious, erroneous or confusing information that appears in the media.

3.2. Risks peculiar to the activity and/or organization of the sector

Risks peculiar to the activity and/or organization of the sector refer to what are often called 'risks inherent in security activities as opposed to the risks related to the activity or facilities of the client. Given the diversity and organizational features of each security activity/service, some of the risks mentioned affect all officers, while others only affect a few highly specific workstations. In principle, the risks are dealt with on an equal footing, without attaching more importance to this or that risk, even if it involves risks that affect only a very limited number of officers, or which do not involve a great danger of accidents or only a slight health hazard.

Some hazards will be presented rather succinctly while others are more developed because of their complexity.

3.2.1. Risk of violence in the workplace

Violence in the workplace may come in many guises:

- Verbal violence or insults;
- threats;
- physical violence: bodily harm, assault;
- the display of firearms or giving the impression of being in the possession of firearms;
- discrimination on the grounds of race, skin colour, sex or religion;
- sexual harassment;
- bullying.

This report will concentrate on acts of physical aggression, sexual harassment and bullying.

Acts of physical aggression are a frequent occurrence in the sector, and to the extent that they constitute occupational accidents, they are often included in the statistics of companies and of the Fund for Occupational Accidents (or a similar body). According to the information we were able to collect, there are cases of sexual harassment and bullying just like in any other sector. However, it is difficult to establish the magnitude of these problems because of the dearth of data. Nevertheless, these risks might be substantial for a variety of reasons linked to the organizational features of the sector.

A. Risk of physical aggression

For obvious reasons, there is a high risk of physical aggression in the sector, even if it is difficult to assess this risk in terms of probability or dangerousness. Indeed, there is a wide range of situations in which acts of physical aggression are committed against officers. According to the statistics related to occupational accidents, the number of accidents resulting from physical aggression is quite high, and continues to soar. The magnitude of the problem is confirmed by several studies¹⁶ in which security personnel are listed as being among the occupational groups most likely to be exposed to acts of physical aggression.

¹⁶ Di Martino V., Hoel H., Cooper G-L., *Prévention du harcèlement et de la violence sur le lieu du travail*, Dublin, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2003, p. 37.

The acts of physical aggression constitute an occupational hazard and thus affect all security officers. However, some workstations are said to be more exposed to physical violence than others, for instance, those that involve contacts with the public : surveillance of shopping centres, communication hubs (underground stations, railway stations, etc.), detection of shoplifting, etc.

Intervening factors

- Some characteristics of the **workplace** : isolated, very busy (communication hubs, shopping centre), without a security system, etc.
- The **possibility to communicate** immediately or rapidly with other people (co-workers, police, one's company, etc.).
- Features of the **workstation**: lone work, night/day shifts, contact with the public, etc.
- The **assailant(s)** (delinquents, clients, users, etc.) : number, physical features, the fact that they may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, the level of aggressiveness and violence, whether or not they are armed, etc.
- The **officer**: training and experience in dealing with these kinds of situations, his/her reactions, excess/lack of confidence, etc.

Prevention measures¹⁷

- Heed physical safety measures: coded doors, locking of entrances.
- Avoid lone work, and if this proves impossible to do maintain/ensure rapid contact with the office.
- Train workers to deal with conflict situations : training for the early detection of potential assailants (identifying the patterns of behaviour and signs of a possible attacks), conflict and stress management training (learning how to deal with difficult situations involving clients and users, and learning how to cope with the stress inherent in such situations with a view to controlling any emotional reactions) ;
- Do not let an officer who has been a victim of or witness to a violent act alone in the hours following the incident ; provide psychological help to the officer, inform other officers of what has happened in order to nip the gossip or rumour machine in the bud, etc.
- The training of some workers to listen to and support officers who have been a victim of an act of physical aggression.
-

¹⁷ Agence européenne pour la sécurité et la santé au travail ('European Agency for Health and Safety in the Workplace'), *La violence au travail*, Facts No. 24.

Effects on the victims

The nature and seriousness of the injuries may vary considerably depending on the nature of the attack:

- light injuries: superficial lesions, blows and light traumas (bruises, scratches, etc.)
- serious injuries: serious traumas requiring surgery or resulting in the victim being in critical condition;
- death

In addition to these injuries, physical attacks may also wreak other negative effects on workers' health¹⁸ :

- increased stress and general deterioration in health;
- reduced psychological wellbeing and increased risk of psychological problems;
- cognitive effects, such as concentration problems;
- low self-esteem;
- lack of job satisfaction and motivation;
- reaction of fear;
- post-traumatic stress.

As far as post-traumatic stress is concerned, this manifests itself through the following symptoms: «the traumatic event is relived repeatedly or through frequent flashbacks, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, persistent irritation over a long period of time."¹⁹

In regard to the physical attacks, we should like to address three complementary aspects which are of some importance:

β *conflict management training*

Acts of physical aggression involve a large number of factors, within which the training of officers plays a very important part. Training (or better training) in conflict management is a recurrent demand within the sector since the worker can often only rely on his/her experience accumulated over the years, or on that of co-workers.

The training should focus on the following aspects:

- violence (definition) and its various guises and forms;
- reactions to violence (fear, panic, flight, attack, etc.);
- "what to do in case of violence?";
- how to cope with aggression;
- how to deal with a conflict psychologically;
- self-defence techniques;
-

¹⁸ Di Martino V., (*et alii*), *Op cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 62.

β *officers' behaviour and attitudes to violence*

Companies should provide for a regular follow-up of workers who are frequently exposed to physical violence with a view to ensuring not only psychological support to the individual but also social assistance.

β *How to deal with victims of aggression ?*

During our field work we were able to observe that some companies hired outside psychologists in order to provide victim support to those officers who had experienced traumatic events. This measure does not however appear to be widespread in the sector.

The possibility of offering immediate help from a psychologist or psychological support, if the situation requires it, is a preventive measure that we feel should be encouraged in order to avoid traumatic effects from acts of physical aggression and post-traumatic stress disorders. The debriefing conducted immediately after the assault takes place enables the victim to relive the experience in every detail and thus to review everything it has generated mentally (emotions, thoughts, various strong feelings). It is therefore imperative to provide for a procedure to accompany and support the victims in order to limit the psychological effects of acts of physical aggression. This kind of procedure could be organized at company level or across the sector.

In the event of an assault, it is also important that the officer in question is able to benefit from the support of the company, particularly when it comes to legal aid. Indeed, a violent encounter may in fact turn against the officers who sometimes find themselves in a situation in which they have to prove that they did not exceed their remit. These situations generate a great deal of uncertainty and stress among officers who fear that this situation may endanger their career prospects.

"I can still remember the last letter that came from the court. I immediately phoned my company and they told me that it was in fact a thirteen-year-old who had filed a complaint for "inflicting bodily harm on a minor". The result was that I was under severe stress for a week because I told myself that the judge was going to put me in prison because I had attacked a minor, while the reverse had actually happened: the kid had actually attacked me and he was so doped up it took three of us to immobilize him ". Security officer

B. Risk of bullying

Bullying in the workplace denotes *"abnormal and repeated behaviour directed against a worker or group of workers and resulting in a risk to health and safety. (...) which may manifest itself through verbal as well as physical aggression, but also through more subtle acts, such as ignoring an employee's work or isolating the individual socially."*²⁰

²⁰ Agence européenne pour la sécurité et la santé au travail ('European Agency for Health and Safety in the Workplace'), *Harcèlement moral sur le lieu de travail*, Facts 23.

As far as bullying in the workplace is concerned, there are two very frequently encountered excesses that must be avoided:

- Not every conflict in the workplace between co-workers, between an officer and his superior, between an officer and the client, etc. should be interpreted as bullying

There are numerous definitions of bullying but all of them contain three dimensions that serve to distinguish bullying from any other type of violence in the workplace : firstly, the repeated and persistent character of the act ; secondly, the negative, devastating and destructive effects the acts have on the target ; and finally, the wish by the bullies to harm the individual targeted by their acts.

To the extent that more and more EU Member States have started issuing specific laws on bullying in the workplace, it is important to make this distinction as the fact of being bullied or not has very different implications in terms of the law and how the situation is dealt with.

- The fact of analysing potential cases of bullying in individual terms, in terms of incompatibilities between people or groups of people

It is perfectly possible that a disagreement or misunderstanding between people is at the origin of the bullying, but more often than not its cause is rooted in other circumstances. Numerous studies²¹ have proven that there is a correlation between bullying and certain organizational features peculiar to the company:

- Flexible work organization.
- Bad working atmosphere, conflicts between co-workers without measures being taken.
- Confusion/conflicts in terms of hierarchic responsibilities.
- Authoritarian management style.
- Dehumanized management and social relations.
- Bad relationship between management and workers.
- Certain personnel management strategies (management by fear, destruction of occupational identity, etc.).
-

It should be remembered that whatever the cause of bullying, it is up to the company to find a solution. On no account should it refrain from acting.

Effects on health

Bullying may result in, among other things, stress, depression, loss of self-esteem, feelings of guilt, phobias, sleep and eating disorders, muscular disorders, etc. This outcome of this morbid process may range from depression to suicide, over drug addiction.

²¹ Di Martino V., (*et alii*), *op. cit.*, pp. 18-23; Garcia A., (*et alii*), *Violences au travail. Harcèlement moral et sexuel. Caractéristiques et conséquences sur les travailleurs féminins et masculins*, Federal Ministry of Employment , Provisional version, 2002

C. Risk of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment refers to *"unwanted behaviour with a sexual connotation, expressed physically, verbally or non-verbally, the aim or effect of which is to undermine the personal dignity of an individual and, more specifically to create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or insulting environment."*²²

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a phenomenon that companies increasingly have to face up to.

A common feature in surveys²³ on sexual harassment conducted in various European Union countries is that it is widespread in professions dominated by men that it is less so in those where there is a more balanced gender division. As the security sector is a typically male sector with only a minority of women there is a substantial risk of sexual harassment.

According to the same surveys, the victims of sexual harassment tend to have certain demographic, social and occupational characteristics. Young people (between the ages of 20 and 40), female, single or divorced with a low educational attainment are more likely to report acts of sexual harassment. As for the social and occupational factors, workers with seniority of less than five years, employed in organizations with a staff of more than 50 and with a contract for a limited period of time are more likely to be subjected to sexual harassment.

Effects on health

On a psychological level, sexual harassment may result in stress, anxiety, depression, a state of nervousness, feelings of despair, impotence, anger, etc. The physical effects of sexual harassment involve sleeping and eating disorders, headaches, nausea, hypertension, in fact, the symptoms commonly associated with stress.

Preventive measures

- Send a clear message to potential offenders and victims : violence, in whatever form, will not be accepted or tolerated
- Indicate unacceptable behaviour.
- Appoint one or several people of trust to provide 'primary care' for the victims.
- Introduce measures to deal with victims and to reintegrate them in the workplace.
- Specify the obligations of the hierarchy in the prevention of possible situations.
- Investigate the facts quickly and impartially.
- Make sure that complaints do not lead to reprisals.
- Preserve the confidentiality of victims and offenders alike.
- Inform and train workers regarding the risks and preventive measures to be adopted.

²² Directive 2002/ /CE of the European Parliament and the Council.

²³ Garcia A., (*et alii*), *op. cit.*, p. 16 et p. 19; Di Martino (*et alii*), *op. cit.*

3.2.2. Risks related to the handling of firearms

National regulations governing the carrying of firearms vary greatly from one country to the next.²⁴ In some countries (Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), security officers are prohibited from carrying firearms. In other countries it is allowed and there is a whole raft of provisions to be complied with regarding gun permits and training in the use of arm and their storage. In general, the use of firearms is limited to certain activities/workstations (principally for cash in transit, the surveillance of military installations or facilities of importance to national security, or to the protection of individuals, i.e. bodyguards).

Gun-related accidents may be the result of the firearm accidentally going off, a ricochet of bullets and exposure to bullet fragments, particularly during shooting exercises. Accidents are quite rare and often result from negligence or a lack of training. However, they may be lethal.

It involves a risk peculiar to the sector and mainly affects bodyguard activities, cash in transit and static surveillance of certain specific sites.

Intervening factors

- **weapon**: in poor condition (damaged, in poor working order), poor maintenance, etc.
- **ammunition** : in poor condition (past their usage date, damaged, etc.).
- **Inadequate shooting booths**.
- **environment** : inadequate climatic and environmental conditions, irregular floor, unstable surface, etc.
- **incorrect carrying of firearms**: inappropriate holster, unsecured weapon, etc.
- **incorrect storage** conditions: inappropriate temperature and humidity levels, storage of arms together with ammunition, lack of security, etc.
- the **officer**: bad/lack of training, unsafe behaviour, use of firearms while under the influence of alcohol, drugs or medication ; non-use or misuse of individual protection gear, etc.

²⁴ Weber T., *A comparative overview of legislation governing the private security industry in the European Union*, Birmingham, ECOTEC, 2002, pp. 35-37.

Preventive measures

- Use good-quality firearms and making sure that they are always kept in good condition.
- Regular firing tests and shooting practice.
- Ensure the maintenance of the firearms is carried out by specialized personnel.
- Store of the weapons in suitable locations.
- Train officers in the use of firearms.
- Use the required equipment (goggles and ear defenders).
- ...

Nature of the injuries

The nature and seriousness of the accidents may vary:

- light injuries: superficial lesions, grazing, burns, etc.
- serious injuries: vital organs, etc.
- death.

3.2.3. Risks caused by the use of dogs

The use of dogs in security activities is allowed in every EU Member State. However, there are differences when it comes to obtaining certificates to be a dog handler and the level of training required.²⁵

The risks resulting from the use of dogs are peculiar to the sector and mainly affect the dog handlers, as well as the officers that are part of teams that use dogs.

The use of dogs entails risks of accidents (bites, etc.) as well as biological risks linked to the exposure to biological agents, i.e. microorganisms, cell cultures that may cause infections, allergies or poisoning. These microorganisms may penetrate the human body through a wound or mucous membranes, or following an animal bite. They may also be inhaled or swallowed.

Intervening factors

- the **dog**: badly trained, too aggressive, sick, erratic behaviour.
- **Bad dog management**: several dog handlers for one and the same dog, different command patterns depending on the individual, poor living conditions, food and monitoring of the health of the animal (vaccinations, regular medical checkups).
- the **dog handler** : no or bad training as a dog handler, lack of compliance with to basic hygiene regulations, lack of care for the dog, aggressive or unsuitable behaviour towards the dog.

Preventive measures

- The dog handlers must have compulsory training and hold the necessary permits.
- The dogs must be properly trained.
- Dogs that are no longer suitable (either because they have become too aggressive or because their performance is below par) should no longer be used.
- Ensure the dogs are housed and fed properly (clean and well-kept kennels).
- Ensure that all the vaccination and hygiene requirements are met.
- In the event that dogs are used by several dog handlers, measures must be taken to ensure that only one set of commands is used.
- Compliance with regulations regarding the use of leads and muzzles
- Protection of wounds to avoid the penetration of microorganisms in the body.
- Ensuring basic hygiene conditions: no eating, drinking or smoking without previously washing one's hands.
- ...

²⁵ Weber T., *op. cit.*, p. 38.

Effects on health

Dogs may cause slight injuries such as lesions, light traumas (scratches, bruises) and serious injuries such as bites, etc. They may also cause diseases as a result of infections and allergies caused by bacteria, fungi, acarids and viruses.

3.2.4. Risks related to exposure to radiation

"Radioactivity is a natural phenomenon linked to the structure of the material. All bodies are made up of atoms. Some of these atoms are unstable and emit radiation. These unstable atoms (radio-elements) spontaneously transform themselves, lose energy, and in so doing progressively return to a stable state. At that point they emit particles whose flow constitutes radiation carrying energy specific to the radio-element that emits it. This radiation is said to be ionizing since as a result of their interaction with the material they may ionize, i.e. take away one or several electrons. The ionization power of radiation depends on its nature and the energy of each of the emissions (...). The transfer of energy of ionizing radiation is responsible for the biological effects of the radiation. This ionization affects the tissue of cells or organs exposed to it in such a way that the biological processes of the cells are disturbed."²⁶.

It involves a risk peculiar to certain workstations where X-ray machines are used: access control (airports, public buildings, etc.), or the screening of mail, packages, suitcases, etc. However, this also affects officers, who, during their rounds in hospitals, nuclear power plants, etc. may enter monitored or secured areas.

Intervening factors

- **scanners – X-ray devices** : faulty devices, inappropriate use.
- Certain highly specific **workstations**, e.g. in hospitals (radiology, nuclear medicine departments), nuclear power plants, etc.
- the **officer** : when an officer, who is not trained in the use of X-ray machines and/or is not familiar with the risks s/he is running nor of the preventive measures to be adopted, enters monitored/secured areas.

Preventive measures

- Train officers in the use of X-ray machines and inform them of the risks and preventive measures to be taken.
- These types of machines should only be operated by skilled personnel.
- Place the instruction manual as well as any documentation relating to the use of the machine in close proximity.
- Check sources (avoiding leaks).
- Use accredited machines (EU labelled).
- Ensure regular overhauls of the machines.
- Avoid placing one's hands into the radiation tunnel.
- When on duty in the radiological area officers must observe appropriate precautions and measures.
- Heed the signs situated in monitored/secured areas.
- Observe the indications received when moving about monitored/secured areas.
- ...

²⁶ INRS, *Prévention des risques liés à l'exposition professionnelle aux rayonnements ionisants*, Dossier, 2003.

Effects on health

Radiation may have a hereditary effect (i.e. may be passed on down the generations). As from a certain radiation threshold, there may be short-term effects relating to cell lesions: the tissue most vulnerable to radiation is reproductive tissue, tissue involved in the forming of blood cells (spleen, bone marrow, etc.), the crystalline lens and the skin. Random effects may also occur within a group of individuals with identical exposure without it being possible to identify a threshold; these involve cancers and certain genetic anomalies (mutations).²⁷

²⁷ INRS, *Prévention des risques liés à l'expositions professionnelle aux rayonnements ionisants*, op. cit.

3.2.5. Risk factors linked to the work organization

This involves health and safety hazards resulting from the way the work is organized, whether it be at sector level, company, or workstation. However, within the limited scope of this survey it is impossible to provide an exhaustive analysis of the impact of the organizational features of the sector on the officers' welfare. Hence, we shall restrict ourselves here to listing only the prominent features that emerged in the course of our interviews in the field.

A. Double hierarchy - double loyalties

The subcontracting relationship means that security officers find themselves in a special position. Because of the nature of their work, they are faced with a double hierarchy; on the one hand, they have to meet the professional demands imposed by their employer, while, on the other, they have to meet the demands set by the clients. In principle, the duties and obligations of each agent (the client, the employer, the security officer) are clearly delineated. However, in the field, the subcontracting relationship may result in each party's roles, duties and responsibilities becoming blurred. The workers frequently get the impression of 'being at the mercy' of this double hierarchy, these blurred responsibilities.

"Theoretically, it is up to the prevention consultant within your company to find a solution together with the client. And it is here that they just pass each other the buck. We hold the view that it is up to the client to find the appropriate measures, whereas the client says: 'no way, that's got nothing to do with me – it's your staff.' So, between the two of them there's this constant tug of war." Prevention representative

Another characteristic of the sector is the fact that it is not uncommon for a security officer to develop a sense of belonging to the client company. This situation may affect the officer's occupational and personal identity.

B. Working time

The working time varies considerably among the various Member States of the EU.²⁸ However, in spite of these national differences, the working hours are, on the whole, atypical, with night work and weekend work, shift work, long working days, the number of weekly and monthly hours and overtime which may be quite considerable in some countries.

Among the effects of working hours on workers' health, we should like to single out the following two areas:

- eating disorders, sleeping disorders and fatigue

A human being's biological functions follow a cycle of approximately twenty-four hours. This cycle is called the circadian cycle or the biorhythm. Shift work and night work are at the origin of a whole raft of nefarious effects as both imply a desynchronization of the cycle:

- deterioration in eating patterns: changes in mealtimes, often there is loss in the quality of the food: cold meals (sandwiches), fast eating, or not eating at regular times, etc.

²⁸ Cortese V. (*et alii*), *op. cit.*, pp. 27-29.

All of these result in a nutritional imbalance, digestive disorders and increased occurrence of obesity.

- Deterioration in sleeping patterns: disturbed sleeping patterns, loss in the quality of sleep (noise, lights), whereas the sleeping time is often reduced.
- A reduction in recuperation time, which results in the individual being more often tired.
- Difficulties in remaining awake at the workstation, which results in an increased risk of committing mistakes and thus to be the victim/cause of accidents.

- Difficulties in reconciling private life with professional life

Shift work or night work also have an effect on the security officers' family and social lives, which are out of synch with that of the other members of their families: the officers' mealtimes and leisure time do not coincide with that of their close relatives.

"If I take my own case, which is by no means unique, there was a period of about four years during which I worked here and there; in the course of that period I found myself being very lonely, because at the time, I was afraid to accept an invitation because I never knew whether I would have to work on that day or not (...) And in the end, people do not come to your house any more and you yourself do not get invited any more either." Security officer

The psychological and social consequences of this desynchronized lifestyle are legion: e.g. stress, gradual isolation, irritability, marital problems (high incidence of divorce) and family-related problems, difficulties in assuming one's family responsibilities, etc.

Besides, night work is often associated by our interviews with a risk of alcohol abuse and smoking as well as with mental health problems, notably depression.

Preventive measures

- Give workers their work schedules for the coming months/weeks sufficiently in advance so as to enable them to organize their leisure time (activities, social relations, etc.).
- Observe sleep cycles as much as possible when organizing duty rosters.
- Promote alternatives to rotating shifts.
- Promote contingency schemes in order to cope with unexpected duties so as to avoid having to call on workers on their days off or breaks.
- Make it easier for officers to have a balanced diet, hot meals and giving them enough time to eat.
- Ensure medical supervision in order to detect any problems workers may encounter during night work or shift work.
- Organize work so as to make it easier for workers to reconcile their family life with their and professional life.
- When organizing work schedules, the problems related to night work or shift work (increasing resting periods between working days or shift changes) must be taken into consideration.

C. Work schedules

In a sector like the security sector which is based on flexibility it is sometimes difficult (in certain workstations/activities) to provide working schedules several months or weeks in advance. This problem is exacerbated by the high turnover and absenteeism rates. However, one of the recurrent demands in the sector is the improvement in the organization of the working schedule so as to enable workers to better organize their private lives and/or to make arrangements for changes in the duty rosters.

D. Human resources management

Human resources management and the company culture may vary greatly from one country to the next, or from one company to the next (e.g. small- and medium-sized companies vs. multinational corporations). In spite of these discrepancies, our interviews revealed a convergence of views regarding management :

- An often authoritarian management and command style.
- A lack of (social, psychological) support by management of the workers, particularly in terms of follow-up, recommendations and complaints made by the workers. It would seem that this lack of support is to be linked to the insufficient number of inspectors or supervisors in relation to the number of officers and clients. The inspectors are often said to be drowning in work.
- A lack of know-how on the part of management as regards issues relating to health and safety: risk assessment, ergonomics, etc.
- Difficulties relating to the communication between security officers and their company. The contacts with the employer or the company administration are often irregular and indirect. They are often made through the inspectors. The lack of direct contact may have implications on the quality of the communication process and on the transfer of information or documents. This situation may increase the officer's feeling of isolation from the company.

E. Training

"It is imperative to increase the health and safety component in the basic training. It is also necessary to have training programmes that are especially adapted to the various tasks. If, for instance, I am supposed to do the rounds in a chemical plant, I have to know about the products I might be exposed to. If, on the other hand, I am a security officer in a shopping centre, I need to know how to communicate with people, and what to do in case someone has a heart attack or an accident. This means that private security officers need to receive training that takes into account the environment in which the officer will move. The training must be adapted to the various missions."
Prevention representative

The initial or continuing professional training given in the various countries of the European Union varies greatly.²⁹ As for specific training in safety and health issues, this also differs substantially from one country to another; however, all indications point towards the need for improvement in the situation by:

- upgrading the basic training and raising awareness of the workers to issues relating to safety and health in the workplace;
- ensuring that in addition to the 'classic risks' like those related to security, attention is also paid to the 'new risks': stress, bullying, etc. Not only the occupational hazards but also those that are the result of the specific workstation, i.e. those deriving from the client's activities and premises;
- improving the training in conflict management;
- increasing management know-how and skills in the field of health and safety.

According to the framework directive, each private security officer must receive sufficient and adequate training in health and safety, taking into account the workstation and job. This training must take place following their recruitment, subsequent to a change in position or in work equipment, or following the introduction of a new technology. According to the information that we were able to gather, this training does not seem to be provided in a systematic fashion.

F. Lone working

Although lone working is not prohibited under the European directives, it should in principle be subject to a prior risk assessment. If in the course of the risk assessment it transpires that the security officer's health and safety cannot be guaranteed, lone working should be avoided. If, conversely, the assessment reveals that it is possible, the security officers must be given all the necessary guarantees that s/he will be able to remain in constant contact with the company or that at least the company can be quickly contacted in the event of problems. Unfortunately, lone working is often the result of economic reasons since the fact of placing two officers instead of one at a given workstation has a major economic implication which the client is not always prepared to accept

²⁹ Cortese V. (*et alii*), *op. cit.*, pp. 15-17.

3.2.6. Risks related to physical workload

Every job requires the use of energy to a lesser or greater extent. The activation of the necessary strength to do the work requires the use of muscles. Depending on the way in which these are used the job is considered to be static or dynamic and will have a specific impact on the security officer's health.

These risks are general risks since they affect all security officers, irrespective of their workstation.

The risk factors related to the physical workload are primarily linked to :

- Forced or inadequate working postures
- Manual handling of loads
- Moving around
- Shift work, night work

A. Working postures

As far as working postures are concerned, the two most frequently encountered in the sector, or at least those that are likely to cause problems are: seated positions and standing up in the normal upright state. If possible, one should regularly change positions; however, in certain workstations the officer spends most of the day in the same position, either sitting or standing up.

a. seated positions

The seated positions are the most frequent ones in activities involving observing screens or monitors as is the case in security control centres, alarm control centres and certain access control workstations.

The working postures and the health hazards relating to them are chiefly determined by:

- the **size of the workstation**: too small, not enough space to put one's legs, etc.
- the basic **working equipment** (chair, table, footrest, hand-rests): inadequate.
- **Work schedule**, the tasks to be done, the time allotted for each of them, resting times, etc. are all elements which may determine the frequency and maintaining of certain working positions.
- the **worker**, his/her bad working habits (the fact of not adjusting the material to certain body features, etc.), bad habits in terms of position (slightly bent back, working with the hands on different surfaces, twisting the torso sideways, etc.).

Preventive measures

- Train staff to take an ergonomic posture.
- Reduce the risk of bad posture habits.
- Provide good-quality screens and video display units (VDUs).
- Adjustable keyboard, matt surface and sufficiently contrasted and legible keys.
- Stable chair guaranteeing the necessary mobility for the job at hand, with adjustable backrest and seat height.
- Ensure that the screen is perpendicular to the windows.
- Ensure there is enough space to allow changes in position and a certain freedom of movement.
- Make sure that the working surface is at the right height.
- Enhance comfort by reserving enough space for the legs.
- Arrange the items to be operated and/or used within an accessible work space.
- Ensure that the top of the screen is at eye level.
- Keep the screen clean.
- Take regular breaks with a change in activity/position if possible.
- Perform some physical exercises during breaks in order to increase circulation of the blood.
- ...

Effects on health

Prolonged periods of working while sitting down may cause muscular pain in the upper part of the back, the shoulders, arms, etc., linked to a bad position in front of the screens or monitors. It may also result in false movements, and blocking of nerves, etc. Within the framework of our study, the seated workstations were also linked with problems relating to sedentary work (lower back pains, disorders in the blood circulation in the legs) and to obesity.

b. Standing positions

Standing positions are very frequent in access control workstations or those involving static surveillance. As the standing position is a natural posture for human beings it should not, in principle, constitute any particular health hazard; however, the fact of systematically working in an upright position for considerable lengths of time may result in health problems for the workers in question.

The standing working postures and the related health hazards are mainly determined by :

- **work schedules** (break times, number of breaks, tasks to be performed, etc.).
- the **worker**: bad position habits, etc.
- the **floor covering** : e.g. metal or cement surfaces.

Preventive measures

- Train workers to adopt the right postures.
- Ensure that workers have adequate resting periods.
- Provide an adjustment period for workers who return to work after illness, holidays or sick leave so as to enable them gradually to get into the work rhythm.
- Cover the cement or metal ground surfaces with carpets.
- Frequently change positions and stay in the same position only for limited periods of time.
- Do not stay too long in a given position without moving.
- Ensure a good working posture by observing the natural shape of the spine:
 - Shoulders tilted slightly backwards
 - Head raised, with the neck straight
 - Abdomen slightly in, not tensed, with the abdominal muscles slightly contracted
- Exercise during breaks in order to enhance the blood circulation.
- Wear adequate footwear (shoes that do not modify the shape of the foot in any way, which keep the heel in place, allow the toes to move freely, and are comfortable, etc.).
- ...

Effects on health

The fact of regularly working standing up may result in painful feet, swelling of the legs, varicose veins, lower back pains, stiffness in the neck and shoulder muscles and joints, a general muscular fatigue as well as other health problems. It may even bring about a long-term degeneration of the tendons and ligaments.

B. Manual handling of loads

According to the European directive setting forth the minimum safety and health prescriptions regarding the manual handling of loads, "manual handling of loads means any transporting or supporting of a load, by one or more workers, including lifting, putting down, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving of a load, which, by reason of its characteristics or unfavourable ergonomic conditions, involves a risk particularly of back injury to workers."³⁰

The risks related to the manual handling of loads are general risks which affect all types of activity, but especially static surveillance and rounds.

Intervening factors

- the **characteristics of the load**: too heavy, too big, cumbersome, difficult to grasp, unstable, etc.
- the **physical effort required**: excessive effort, requiring a twisting of the torso, bringing about a sudden movement of the load, etc.

³⁰ Directive 90/269/CEE.

- the **surroundings**: not enough space to move around, uneven or unstable ground surface, etc.
- the **demands imposed by the task** : excessively high elevation, lowering or moving of the load, involving physical efforts that put a great strain on the spinal column, etc.
- the **worker**: a worker who is physically incapable of performing the task in question, inadequate clothing, shoes or other personal characteristics of the worker, etc.

Preventive measures

- keep your back straight, bend from the knees and use your legs to take the strain;
- stand with your legs slightly apart;
- hold the object solidly, in both hands;
- pick up the object with your arms stretched downwards, as close as possible to your body;
- avoid turning your body when lifting, carrying and placing objects on the floor. Move your feet to turn
- ...

Effects on health

The manual handling of loads may constitute a risk of injury and, in some circumstances, occupational illnesses resulting from physical strain, being crushed, shocks, bad positions. They are often at the origin of back problems or pains.

Manual handling and working postures often bring about physical fatigue and/or bodily harm: injuries and lesions (resulting from being stuck, crushed, or bumping into objects), fractures and especially injuries to muscles and bones, resulting in back pain, and pains and discomfort in the lower members (legs, feet). In passing it must be said that the muscular and bone problems are caused by physical (physical load) and psychosocial (stress) factors, as well as being linked to the individual (age, sex, lifestyle, etc.) and to the work organization (lack of training/information).

C. Moving around

Moving around, especially one foot as part of surveillance rounds may also constitute a significant physical strain, particularly in view of the distances to be covered, the features of the site to be inspected, and, finally, the time allotted for the rounds and breaks.

D. Shift work and night work

To the extent that shift work and night work have an impact on breaks, eating patterns and sleeping patterns, they also, directly or indirectly, determine the physical workload of the job (see pp. 35-36).

3.2.7. Risks related to the psychosocial workload

The psychosocial workload in the workplace is a general concept covering several dimensions.³¹ In the present study, the focus will mainly be on :

- occupational stress
- job motivation and satisfaction
- mental workload
- relational workload

A. Occupational stress

Occupational stress is an increasingly widespread problem in Europe. According to the third European survey of working conditions (2000),³² stress is said to be the second-most important occupational health problem in Europe, after back pains. More specifically, 28% of workers in Europe complain of stress and security officers are no exception.

Although there are numerous definitions of occupational stress, they all have one thing common, i.e. that stress is a state that is perceived as being negative and which is concomitant with physical, mental and/or social complaints or disorders. There is also a consensus regarding the causes of stress, i.e. an imbalance between the demands of the job and the resources; in other words, workers are not able to meet the demands put on them by their job.

As the causes of stress in the security sector warrant a specific study, we shall confine ourselves here to the causes that were most often cited in the course of our field work. Hence, the discussion below has no pretension of being exhaustive; instead, it is a very brief account of some of the causes of stress that were most often mentioned by people working in the sector:

- **Feeling of job insecurity**

The concept of job insecurity refers to a feeling of insecurity or vulnerability experienced by workers. Hence, job insecurity is defined³³ as the subjective feeling by security officers not only because of a fear that they might lose their job (dismissal, or the inability to reconcile their professional and private lives, etc.), but especially because of a fear of the loss or erosion of a series of working conditions by which the workers set great store: the possibility of moving up in the company, degree of autonomy to do the job, good working hours, good relations with the client, the fact of working in a good team, etc.

³¹ D'Hertefelt H., "La mesure de la charge psychosociale sur le lieu de travail en Belgique", in BTS-Newsletter, No. 19-20 September 2002, pp. 45-46.

³² Paoli P., Merllié D. *3rd European survey of working conditions*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2000.

³³ Burchell B., Ladipo D., Wilkinson F. *Job insecurity and work intensification*, London and New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 63.

- **Conflicts in the workplace** (with colleagues, superiors, clients or clients of the client).

The social relations in the workplace involve the human relations created by the work organization. Security officers perform their activities in a social working environment and they constantly have to liaise with other people. Depending on the quality of the relations with superiors, colleagues, clients, these relations may or may not become a cause of stress. In order to successfully coordinate the social interaction with the various parties it is necessary that there should be a climate of trust. However, trust is not something that is achieved overnight; it requires time, a certain degree of stability within the staff, and areas and moments of social interaction. As the sector is characterized by considerable staff turnover rates, there are many changes in the staff collective: workers leave the sector, while others do not really commit themselves (they know they are only going to be there for a short period of time), replacements stay for a short while or are inexperienced (young people, temps), who are often unaware of the risks, etc. If one adds to these elements the fact that many workers complain about their working and employment conditions and/or of not experiencing a great deal of solidarity among colleagues (very simply because often there is not enough time to forge any relationship of trust), etc. it is easy to see why the social relations between colleagues may become a major cause of stress.

- **Discrepancy between prescribed tasks and tasks performed.**

In the security sector, the nature and frequency of operations are included in detailed work instructions. In reality, however, the prescribed tasks are subject to constant change as a result of unforeseen events and additional demands imposed by certain clients. Not only are these tasks not included in the terms and conditions but they are often not even within the scope of activities performed by security officers. The way in which this discrepancy is dealt with, particularly in regard to additional demands, may become a source of tension for security officers.

- **Role ambiguity, conflicting roles and assuming responsibility**

"Very often it happens that you have to do things that are no longer within the remit of security officers, and this is due in part to client expectations. It is the same thing with the public at large; when they see someone in a uniform they expect this person to react and intervene" security officers

Role ambiguity³⁴ is defined as the absence of clarity regarding the individual's role in the workplace, the objectives to be reached and the extent of his/her responsibilities. Generally speaking and according to the law, the role of security officers is above all one of prevention and dissuasion, whereas they do not have any more rights than an ordinary citizen. However, in the exercise of their duties, they are often asked to exceed their role and responsibilities and to act in a way that is wholly illegitimate. This state of affairs creates tension and may cause considerable stress.

³⁴ Stora B., *Le stress*, Paris, PUF, collection Que sais-je?, 1999, p. 16.

- **Takeover of staff (subrogation)**

The uncertainty regarding changes in the market has also given rise to a great deal of insecurity. In the event that a contract is awarded to another company, the security officers do not know whether they will be kept on by the new company (and at which conditions, etc.), or whether they will stay with their current employer (and, subsequently, what their new workstation : will be, etc.). These tensions may be exacerbated if the uncertainty continues over a period of several months; this is a fertile breeding ground for the circulation of all manner of rumours which make workers feel even more insecure.

- **A feeling of fear** (especially as regards the risk of assaults)

"You get used to fear and you do not exaggerate it since it is something you face on a daily basis. You do not think about it any more because if you do, you end up not going in to work." Security officer

Workers can be fearful for a number of reasons: they are working alone; they are faced with work situations in which they are at risk of being assaulted; they have had some traumatic experiences which have not been entirely dealt with. It is difficult to estimate the number of officers that live with this feeling or have lived with it at some point or other in the course of their career. What is certain is that it is extremely widespread within the sector and that it requires special attention, especially since it is only rarely expressed by workers, who have often constructed defence mechanisms, are in denial or have simply blocked out the feeling since to express it would make it impossible for them to do their job. This feeling of fear constitutes a constant source of anxiety for those who are confronted with it. What is more, it may be associated to the problem of absenteeism and may, in part at least, explain the alcohol abuse, excessive smoking, which is often mentioned by the various actors within the sector.

- **Post-traumatic stress**

Reference has already been made to the stress resulting from a traumatic experience (most notably after violent occurrences in the workplace). The victims of post-traumatic stress (PTS) experience invasive symptoms (an intense psychological unease with reactivation) and avoidance symptoms (avoidance of the scene of the traumatic incident and of talking about it), irritability and loss of concentration. The security officers afflicted with these disorders are often on (more or less extended) sick leave and after returning to work their emotional state often remains very fragile for a long time. It is important for the victims of physical assaults to receive psychological assistance if they deem it necessary and if they feel they can benefit from some kind of emotional support upon resumption of work.

- **Contact with the public (clients, users, etc.)**

"I for one feel that one of the virtues of security officers is that one minute you have to deal with a physical assault or a very tense situation, whereas the next you respond politely to a trivial question by a member of the public. If you are able to go from one

situation to another, then you can handle just about anything. However, this comes at a price since it results in cumulative stress which needs an outlet" security officer

Work which involves contact with the public may be a cause of stress due to the potential risk of verbal or physical aggression but also as a result of the fact that the officer has to 'be liked' (by the client or his staff), and to remain at all times polite, courteous, etc. (see p. 52).

- **Stress related to interventions**

"If I have to intervene in the case of an alarm, I always wonder what I am going to have to deal with. Is it a cleaning lady who forgot to switch off the alarm, or what? Is there a thief? If I am in a store and my beeper goes off because the staff are looking for me I am also stressed out; is it because there is a shoplifter or do they need me to provide assistance to an elderly lady in a wheelchair?" security officer

Security officers have periods of relative tranquillity, of routine activities that are, often abruptly, interrupted by periods of great psychological tension. They are often called upon to intervene without having the slightest idea of the type of problem they will encounter. This tension remains until the officer arrives on the scene and assesses the situation and the nature of the problem.

Other causes of stress will be analysed in other parts of the survey:

- **Excess/insufficient workloads** (see pp. 49-50)
- **The lack of support from superiors** (see p. 37)
- **Working hours** (see pp. 35-37)
- **Difficulties in reconciling professional life with private life** (see p. 36)
- **Lone working** (see p. 38)
- **Double hierarchy, double loyalties** (see p. 35)
- ...

Stress is often viewed as a highly subjective, extremely complex issue, and thus very difficult to define. It must be said that this phenomenon is more complex to deal with than the so-called traditional occupational hazards (physical, chemical, electrical, etc.). Nevertheless, we believe that it is possible to prevent work-related stress, or to deal with it effectively. Besides, strategies and lines of actions have already been put in place in the field of health and safety in the workplace both at the European and national levels. The measures to be adopted are, on the whole, well known : "it is possible to neutralize work-related stress by re-examining the schedules (for instance, by avoiding excess workloads), by improving the social support structure, by adequately remunerating the efforts put in, and, of course, by adapting the physical and mental working conditions to workers' abilities, needs and expectations."³⁵

³⁵ Levi L., *Manuel d'orientation sur le stress lié au travail. Piment de la vie... ou coup fatal?*, Luxembourg, European Commission, 2000, p. vii.

B. Job satisfaction and motivation

Job satisfaction and motivation are related to the fulfilment of a number of psychosocial needs:

- Needs extraneous to the task at hand

Job security, favourable working conditions, equitable pay, etc. are all needs the fulfilment of which may engender a feeling of job satisfaction. Conversely, job insecurity, difficult working conditions, pay that is considered to be insufficient and which requires individuals to put in extra hours in order to have a decent income, the fact of having limited promotion possibilities, difficulties in reconciling work with family commitments, etc. are all elements that are conducive to a general feeling of gloom within a sector.

- Needs inherent in the job

In order for workers to be motivated in their jobs, the fulfilment of needs that are extraneous to the task is a necessary precondition, without however constituting a panacea. It is equally necessary for workers to be given the opportunity to learn, to improve their professional skills, to take initiative in the job, and to manage certain aspects of the job themselves. Although this is possible in certain workstations/activities within the sector, it is far from being the case for other areas of activities. Workers get the impression that they are performing a monotonous, routine job that is not very challenging or worthwhile. This invariably leads to a lack of motivation.

Job satisfaction and motivation have an impact on the workers' wellbeing and on their physical and mental health. For instance, it is well established that motivation and fatigue are inversely correlated,³⁶ i.e. the performance of a task/activity with little motivation goes hand in hand with the rapid emergence of fatigue-related symptoms. Conversely, if the motivation is high, fatigue is only felt when it has attained a high level (sometimes even bordering on exhaustion). Hence, the fatigue-sensation threshold is highly dependent on the motivation of workers and the energy they are prepared to muster. Job satisfaction and motivation can thus be powerful operators in building up health.

Preventive measures

- Ensure that worker's economic and social rights and collective agreements are observed.
- Improve the workers' prospects by drawing up career plans which combine qualifications and progress in the job.
- Promote continuing training, especially in line with developments in the security professions.
- Introduce changes in terms of the workstations so as to diversify tasks/activities and to ensure that they make sense to the workers.
- Promote workstation rotation.
- ...

³⁶ de Arguer M-I., *Carga mental de trabajo: fatiga*, INSHT, NTP 445.

C. Mental workload

Mental workload denotes all of the tensions experienced by the worker and inherent in the mental demands imposed by the job (perception and processing of information, cognitive processes involved in memorization, reasoning, problem-solving, etc.). It stands to reason that the skills and personal abilities (training, self-confidence, motivation, etc.) in order to cope with the mental workload are not the same for every officer. What is more, the mental workload may vary from one workstation to another because of:

- the demands of the job at hand;
- physical working conditions (noise, lighting, climatic conditions, etc.);
- social and organizational factors (control, supervision and communication structures at company level, working atmosphere, etc.);
- ...

As we have already dealt with the issues related to the work organization and as the issues related to the physical conditions will be dealt with elsewhere (see pp. 64-66), we shall restrict ourselves here to a discussion of the task-related demands.

The performance of tasks involving the processing of information demands the following from the security officer:

- attentiveness.

Consider the officers who in the course of doing their rounds have to be attentive to anything out of order or out of the ordinary. This activity requires the individual to direct and focus perception, to seek and sort information, etc.

- concentration.

Take, for instance, the officers who have to focus their attention for a great length of time on screens or monitors (security centres, alarm centres, etc.) over long periods.

- coordination.

Sometimes, the attention must be focused on several elements/people at the same time in order to be able to react quickly and unexpectedly, which implies translating information into reaction behaviour.

The mental workload of tasks to be performed also depends on other factors such as:

- the officer's responsibility vis-à-vis co-workers, client(s);
- duration of the activity (working hours, breaks);
- danger (possible assaults, etc.).

Within the sector there are activities/workstations which require highly different mental effort. For instance, in certain access control workstations, officers have to identify dozens of individuals an hour, answer the telephone, concentrate on the surveillance monitors, take decisions quickly (without having all the necessary information), take a firm approach to the public without being impolite, give a good impression of oneself, etc. All of these tasks demand the processing of a great deal of information and the triggering of cognitive processes such as reasoning, problem-solving, interpretation, etc. In the course of all this, the danger of mental saturation is never far away.

The contrary may also occur. For instance, there are certain night workstations where the officer is alone to guard the client premises; the workload is, in principle, far less demanding and, for the most part, not very challenging. This “insufficient mental workload” may have just as many negative effects on health as excess workload. When the activity or task requires little or no mental effort, the security officer has to make an effort to remain attentive, awake and concentrated. These situations/activities that do not have a lot of stimuli may result in drowsiness, a loss of vigilance and a reduction in the ability to react which is a natural side-effect of monotony.

It seems to us that the effects of both excess and insufficient mental workloads have often been minimized in the sector. The mental effort put in by the officer often remains hidden, i.e. insufficiently recognized or not at all. This lack of recognition is causes a problem since "recognition is not a marginal demand by those who work. Quite the contrary, it is a decisive factor in the process of subjective mobilization of intelligence and personality on the job. (...) The sense of suffering depends on recognition. If the quality of the individual's work is recognized, then their efforts, fears, doubts, disappointments, discouragement also have meaning. And so this pain was not in vain."³⁷ At the same time, a lack of recognition of these efforts and the pain related to it may result in a loss of commitment to the job and pose a problem in terms of welfare at work.

Preventive measures

- Train workers in the risks in terms of mental workload, as well as in the preventive measures to be adopted.
- Analyse the demands in terms of mental workload of each workstation/activity as well as the physical, social and organizational conditions in which the task is performed.
- Adapt the way in which the job is done to the security officers by taking into account the latter's experience and skills.
- Reshape the job content by making the activity/task more stimulating.

Effects on health

The situation in which the mental workload is inadequate, either because it is excessively high or excessively low, may have a negative impact on health: tension, stress, sense of monotony, mental fatigue, general fatigue, etc. Mental and nervous fatigue are generally associated with short-term absenteeism (fatigue, muscular pains, headaches, eating disorders). It may also have an effect on the worker's emotional state (irritability, sadness) and behaviour (alcohol abuse, smoking, aggressiveness, etc.).

³⁷ Dejours Ch., *Souffrance en France. La banalisation de l'injustice sociale*, Paris, Seuil, 1998, pp. 36-38.

D. Emotional workload

"Emotional workload relates to the emotional reactions experienced when working in circumstances and conditions which are less than ideal or perceived as inappropriate. It is also part of "interpersonal" work, where insight into others' emotions and control over one's own are essential to doing the job properly".³⁸

In the course of our fieldwork, we were able to glean diverse reactions from workers which might be placed under the heading of "emotional reactions". Here are some of them:

- The feeling of injustice regarding better working conditions that co-workers are thought to enjoy.
- The feeling of impotence and a certain helplessness regarding the employment and working conditions and the fact that they would not change in the foreseeable future.
- Fear of potential aggressive behaviour to which one may be subjected.
- The feeling 'that it is not normal' to have to perform tasks that are not within the remit of security officers or to work in conditions perceived as being less than ideal.
- The feeling of "leading an abnormal life", out of step with that of most other workers.
- The feeling of being isolated, of having only few and irregular contacts with the company, without any real support from the latter.
- The feeling that "one cannot keep up for very long" the present working hours, working conditions, and lifestyle.
- The feeling that the efforts one makes to do the job successfully are not recognized or valued.
- The feeling that the working conditions are not sufficiently good and that the risks one runs are too great in relation to the salary.
- The feeling of disapproval by the public at large who do not value their work, is not aware of the job done by security officers and their contribution to the creation of a climate of more security..
-

Besides these emotional reactions which may be qualified as "negative" or "protesting", we have also encountered 'positive' feelings: enjoying one's work, working in good conditions, feeling that one's work is recognized. This is entirely consistent with the ambiguous nature of the job, which is at once a source of joy and recognition, and a source of pain and constraints.

For certain duties, the job of security officers is above all of a relational nature and is often also associated with a considerable emotional workload. In their relationship with the general public, the security officer must at all times make sure to convey a good image. They have to be accessible, constantly use polished language, always project a professional image, have a pleasant and polite manner, be friendly without being too informal, efficient but not overzealous,³⁹etc.

³⁸ D'Hertefelt H., *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

³⁹ Spaninks L., Quinn L., Byrne J., *op. cit.*, p. 80

This constant need to give "a good self-image" has been defined in the literature as the *dramatic stress*: "i.e. the stress related to the presentation of one's image and to the various strategies employed to control the presentation of others." Although a certain measure of dramatic stress is inevitable in every professional activity, it is more accentuated in occupations that demand emotional involvement as well as increased manipulation of appearances"⁴⁰. The security officer must keep this/her clam (and often smile) when dealing with clients, users, and abusive, aggressive and impolite behaviour, which implies the sending of contradictory messages to their bodies: the first message is aimed at mobilizing it to respond to the hostility, the second to inhibit the instinctive response.

The job of security officer demands control over the emotions (emotional action), i.e. comprehension, assessment and management of one's own emotions as well as those of others. As a result, the job entails a significant emotional workload, which is often minimized but can have a major impact on the officer's emotional and affective equilibrium and thus on his/her wellbeing.

This emotional workload should also be viewed against other work dimensions, such as the physical workload and physical fatigue. After nine or ten hours of standing up at an access control point where the officer has seen hundreds of people walking past and replied to as many questions, etc. it is very difficult for the officer to remain courteous and polite.

"When you have been in front of a door for ten hours, looking at people walking past, and one of them says something which is slightly out of order of if he is not friendly to you... At 7 a.m. you do not say anything, you just let it slide, but at 5pm, when you have only got half an hour of your shift left, you say to yourself: I am not going to put with this! And that is when you react badly because your state of mind has changed. And sometimes you react badly to someone who has not done anything wrong, who was friendly to you... And that is why security officers have a bad image." Security officer

This emotional workload has a negative effect not only on the officer's emotional and affective state, but also on the quality of the service provided. The officers are perfectly aware of the fact that they are unable always to offer a quality service and their occupational identity suffers from it. This is exacerbated by the public perception of them, which is not good either.

A study⁴¹ has shown the extent to which the behaviour and attitude of security officers in contact with the general public change as a result of doing this kind of job. As regards certain emotional reactions, some security officers stated that their empathy diminished and that they become more irritable and oversensitive. The guard duty is thus said to have an effect on their attitude and general behaviour.

⁴⁰ Soares A., "Au cœur des services: les larmes au travail" dans *Pistes*, "Paroles de métier", Volume 2, No. 2, p.4.

⁴¹ Jarnefjord U., "Changes in attitudes and behaviour among wardens/security officers in public environments", UNI.

Preventive measures

- Train security officers in how to cope emotionally (awareness of the role of emotions in an individual's working life, understanding and controlling one's own emotional reactions on the job, adapting the way one communicates to the emotional climate peculiar to each situation, etc.).
- Inform workers of the risk related to the emotional side of the job, as well as to the preventive measures to be adopted.
- Analyse the demands in terms of emotional workload of each workstation/activity as well as the physical, social and organizational conditions in which the work is done.
- Adapt the way in which the work is done to the security officer by taking his experiences and skills into account.
- Provide social and psychological support and counselling to officers subjected to a great emotional workload.

3.2.8. Specific risks facing female security officers

In a traditionally male sector, the female security officers are in a minority. The proportion of women varies from one country to another,⁴² but rarely exceeds 20 %. We thought it politic to devote a separate section to them, for two main reasons:

- Because of a certain gender-based division at sector level

Whenever one finds women in the various activities within the sector (cash in transit, static surveillance, patrols, etc.), they tend to be concentrated in places like large stores, reception areas and workstations where superficial body searches are necessary, such as in airports. These workstations often also require constant contact with the general public. Hence, the female officers are more exposed to the risk of physical or verbal aggression, and to the risk of stress and of problems related to coping with their emotions. (see p. 54).

- They make up a minority in a traditionally male sector

A greater involvement by women in the sector implies changes within the sector itself, among other things in terms of its image. The traditional image of the security officer – male, overweight, intimidating, etc. – is called into question. According to the testimonies we have collected, this macho image which is so characteristic of the sector is today increasingly challenged. In this regard the sector might perhaps be more open to accepting women than certain clients, who still cling to a certain image of the security officer and of his role.

The workplace and prevention policies must also be adapted to the entry of women into the sector. This adaptation process particularly concerns:

- Changing areas and restrooms. There must be separate changing areas and restrooms (or at least separate use of the same facilities) for men and women.
- Working clothes. The company should provide working clothes adapted to pregnant women.
- Decoration of the premises. The display of pornographic photographs and images may offend the dignity and feelings of female security officers.
- Protection of the right to motherhood

The fact that women are in a minority in the sector also increases the risk of sexual harassment. Studies have shown that sexual harassment is more common in predominantly male occupations than in professional environments where the proportion of women and men is more balanced.⁴³

It is crucial that the specific risks to which female officers are exposed be taken into consideration during risk assessments and when outlining prevention policies.

⁴² Cortese V., *Sécurité privée - Organisation du travail (SPOT)*, TEF-ULB, UNI-Europa, CoESS, 2003.

⁴³ Alexanderson K., Östlin P., "Work and Ill-health among women and men in Sweden", in Marklund St (ed.), *Worklife and Health in Sweden 2000*, Swedish Work Environment Authority - Arbetslivsinstitutet, p. 123.

3.3. Risks related to the workstation

By risks related to the workstation we mean risks resulting from the physical environment in which the work is performed. Insofar as security officers often work at the client's premises, these risks are related to the activities and installations of the client. These risks mainly involve those related to the safety of the workstation and to the working environment.

Given that the risks included in this category are 'classic' risks for which the risk factors have already been well established in the literature, we shall content ourselves here with providing a succinct overview of them. At the same time, we should like to warn the reader about the importance of these risks. It is not because they are less known and less typical of the activity that they are less dangerous and require less attention. Quite the opposite is true; the accident statistics show that risks such as falls, slips, getting stuck, and road accidents are very frequent occurrences indeed.

3.3.1. Safety-related risks

There are numerous safety-related risk factors and it is vital that the security officer be well aware of them, for his own personal safety and physical wellbeing as well as those of others. Among the duties of officers there is precisely that of remedying (to the best of their abilities) and/or notifying any observed deficiencies in regard to hygiene and safety in the workplace in order to prevent any accidents, and to detect fires and floods.

As far as the safety-related risks are concerned, there is a series of general preventive measures which apply to all circumstances and which are the responsibility of the security officers:

- Inspecting the premises;
- Identifying the potential risks;
- Putting into place apt preventive measures;
- Point out/communicate any anomaly or accident to the relevant parties.

The safety-related hazards are as follows :

- ÿ Risk of falls, slips, trips
- ÿ Risk of shocks, bumps, jamming
- ÿ Risk of road accident
- ÿ Electrical hazards
- ÿ Fire hazards

A. Risk of slips, trips and falls

According to the statistics of the sector and those issued by certain companies, a significant number of occupational accidents are related to moving around the user company, either inside or outside the buildings. It mainly involves falls on the same level and those from a height.

It involves a general risk which mainly affects static surveillance, rounds and surveillance patrols.

Intervening factors

- **The state of the floors:** it may be conditioned by a number of inherent features and circumstances which may increase the risk of slips, trips and falls: slippery floors (as a result of cleaning products, climatic conditions), naturally slippery surfaces (tiled or marble floors), irregular or uneven surfaces (step, pavement, inclined surface), damaged surfaces (hole, loose flagstones, etc.).
- **Permanent or temporary obstacles:** cables, machines, various objects (boxes, tools, machines, furniture), etc.
- Insufficient **lighting** (especially in stairwells and passageways), so that slippery surfaces or objects blocking the way cannot be seen by the individual.
- **Stairs** : badly lit, without banister, too steep, with broken or slippery steps.
- **Bad or even nonexistent signposting of dangerous areas** (intersections, uneven areas, passages).
- Ill-adapted **shoes** (open shoes, smooth soles), shoes that are worn off, dirty.
- **Emergency situations:** when the officer has to run in the course of an operation, etc.
- The **security officer:** running without a reason, doing rounds without switching on the lights because of overconfidence or familiarity with the building, taking shortcuts or unauthorized passageways or those that are not fit for use.

Preventive measures

- Ensure a visual inspection of the work areas with a view to identifying the potential hazards of falls and slips
- Verify that the protection and anti-fall fittings are in good condition.
- Free up passages and surfaces.
- Use the appropriate access ways
- Ensure the passages are properly lit.
- Use torches.
- Wear adequate slip-proof shoes.
- Act in a level-headed fashion even in case of an emergency.
- Point out any anomaly or situation that does not comply with the relevant regulations.
- ...

Nature of the injuries

The injuries caused by falls, slips and trips may vary: fractures, pains, trauma, sprains, contusions, etc.

B. Risk of shocks, bumps, jamming

Shocks, bumps and jamming involves fixed objects (idle machinery, tools, furniture, etc.), or moving objects (machines placed in passageways, vehicles, etc.).

This is a general risk which especially affects static surveillance activities, rounds and surveillance patrols.

Intervening factors

- **Cramped working space** (too small, bad arrangement of furniture, etc.).
- **Passageways** that are too narrow, cluttered with left objects or permanent fixtures (furniture).
- Sliding, automatic **doors**.
- **Machines**, motorized vehicles (poor marking of circulation areas), vehicles without warning signs or indicators (sound, lights, etc.).
- The **manual handling of loads**.
- **Emergency situations**: when the security officer has to run during an intervention, etc.
- The **security officer**: running without a reason, doing rounds without switching on the lights because of overconfidence or familiarity with the building, taking shortcuts or unauthorized passageways or those that are not fit for use.

Preventive measures

- Ensure a visual inspection of the work areas with a view to identifying the potential hazards for shocks, bumps and jamming.
- Arrange the work space in the best possible way in order to ensure sufficient freedom of movement
- Free up passages and surfaces.
- Pointe out any anomaly or situation that does not comply with the relevant regulations.
- ...

Nature of the injuries

The injuries resulting from shocks, bumps and being jammed may be very diverse: fractures, pains, traumas, sprains, contusions, scratches, bruises, etc.

C. Risk of road accidents

Work-related road accidents include accidents while out on a mission, i.e. when on the road for the job, or accidents taking place between the home and the workplace. The statistics of road accidents at sector level reveal that this constitutes a serious hazard.

It involves a general risk which affects all officers going to work in a vehicle and a risk peculiar to certain surveillance activities: patrols, interventions following an alarm.

Intervening factors

- **vehicles** in poor condition.
- **the environment** : bad weather conditions, night-time driving, poor visibility, traffic (density, tailbacks and traffic jams, etc.).
- the **situation** : constraints imposed by delays, interventions.
- the **driver** : using the mobile phone, radio or other means of communication while driving; driving while suffering from fatigue or from the effects of alcohol, medication, etc.; non-compliance with highway code regulations, etc.

It must be remembered that, in general, barring perhaps exceptions in one or other country, security officers are subject to the exactly the same traffic regulations as any other citizen, even in the course of interventions.

Preventive measures

- Ensure the vehicle is in good working order.
- Regularly service the vehicles.
- Being in possession of the necessary accessories in case of a breakdown (warning triangle, tools to change the tyres, etc.).
- Organize travelling (times, travelling time, itineraries, climatic conditions and weather forecasts, etc.).
- Take the traffic conditions into account when drawing up work schedules.
- Retrain staff in driving behaviour and safety (observing the highway code), training staff in precautionary strategies.
- Periodic medical checkups of officers
- No driving under the influence of alcohol/illegal drugs/medication.
- No driving while using the telephone or any other means of communication (except if the car is fitted with a hands-free kit).
- Observe the highway code, speed limits, signs, etc.

Nature of the injuries

The nature and seriousness of the injuries may vary considerably depending on the nature of the accident.

- light injuries: lesions, light knocks and traumas
- serious injuries: serious traumas, etc.
- death.

D. Electrical hazards

The risk of an electrical accident is often determined by faulty machinery or equipment; faulty electrical wiring; or negligent use. Electrical accidents may also cause other accidents, fires and/or explosions.

It involves a general hazard which affects all security activities.

There are two types of hazards related to the use of an electrical current:

- Risk of direct contact: contact with a live element in an electrical circuit.
- Risk of indirect contact: contact with the earth of an electrical appliance that is accidentally switched on.

Intervening factors

- **A live conductor that is uncovered and accessible** : open fuse boxes, worn cables, leads and wires, etc.
- **Sockets and extension leads in poor condition or badly used.**
- **Unearthed sockets**
- **Badly isolated or protected machines or materials.**
- Handling and use of electrical appliances, live sockets that are **wet** or with **wet hands**.

Preventive measures

- Ensure the electrical appliance is in good working order prior to using it.
- Check the state of the cables, leads and sockets.
- Do not unplug appliances by pulling at the lead; instead grab hold of the plug and place the other hand on the socket and then pull briskly.
- Never touch a switch, live socket or electrical appliance with wet hands.
- Avoid any kind of 'DIY' work; never repair or replace a faulty cable yourself.
- Do not overload the circuits by connecting multiple plugs to the same socket.
- Only use sockets and plugs that are fully compatible.
-

Nature of the injuries

Electrical hazards can have dangerous consequences: e.g.:

- electrification: electrical shock throughout the body which results in a tetanization of the muscles, which may cause the victim to fall down.
- electrocution, electrification resulting in death as a result of cardiac arrest.
- skin burns: burns affecting the areas that have been in contact with the electrical current.

The seriousness of the injuries is linked to other factors such as the intensity of the electrical discharge, the length of contact, the individual's capacity to react, etc

E. Fire hazards

It is part of the security officer's job to prevent and detect fires. Security officers are therefore supposed to have received a basic knowledge about fires in the course of their training⁴⁴: its sources, common causes of fires, basic principles of fire and combustion, ways in which fire spreads, types of fire according to the surface as well as measures to be taken in order to fight fires.

Fire hazards are a general risk which affects all activities in the sector, but especially surveillance activities, rounds and patrols.

Intervening factors

- **Combustible** products and substances: accumulation of gas due to a lack of ventilation, improper storage of combustible products or materials, incandescent objects in close proximity to combustible products, etc.
- **Poor state of electrical installations and appliances.**
- Certain **work areas** where flammable materials, combustible substances or explosives are stored, etc.
- **Overheated machines or equipment.**
- **Lack of maintenance** of the working area and of the materials: full dustbins, oil or petrol slicks on the ground, etc.
- Lack or poor state of **fire-detection systems or alarms.**
- **Fire extinguishers**: missing, in poor state, badly placed, inadequate for the combustibles that are present in the work place, poor indication of the location of extinguishers, etc.
- Cluttered **staircases and exits.**
- Bad (or inexistent) indication of **emergency exits.**
- **Negligence**: presence of smokers, non-compliance with basic precautions when performing certain tasks (welding, drilling, etc.).
- The **officer** : poor knowledge of the premises, of the procedures to follow in case of a fire, poor training (lack of knowledge about the functioning of fire extinguishers), etc.

⁴⁴ Spaninks L., Quinn L., Byrne J., *op. cit.*, pp. 56-61.

Preventive measures

- Prevent the combination of the three basic elements of fire: combustibles, oxygen and heat.
- Immediately look for the origin of leaks of oil or any other flammable liquid.
- Switch off every machine that is not used or whose electrical supply should be cut and ensure the machine cools down.
- Remove working clothes or any other flammable object from heating devices and replace any missing fireguards.
- Remove any flammable objects that are placed in close proximity to a heat source and put them in a safe place.
- Check all fire-fighting equipment and fire alarms.
- Observe the no-smoking signs.
- ...

Effects on health

The first dangerous effects of fire are toxic smoke and fumes which may result in asphyxia or carbon-monoxide poisoning. When the fire is blazing there is a great risk of burns. There are three degrees of burns:

- the first degree corresponds to a slight damage to the skin, which is red, feels hot to the touch and is swollen;
- the second degree of burns is characterized by the appearance of blisters filled with liquid;
- the third degree of burns involves the complete burning of the skin, which becomes dark brown, with black stripes and which is no longer painful.

Burns are an injury like any other; it is therefore necessary to make sure that one is properly vaccinated against tetanus.

Fires may also result in death.

3.3.2. Risks related to the working environment

This category of hazards includes afflictions resulting from exposure to physical risks such as noise, cold; to chemical hazards such as gas and other hazardous products; and to biological hazards such as micro-organisms, cell cultures and human endoparasites. Most of these risks are not inherent in security activities; rather, they are connected with the client company or the nature and characteristics of the latter's installations.

Before discussing the various risks, we should like to list the minimum prescriptions regarding the workplace;⁴⁵ these are precautions that must be observed in order to guarantee a healthy and secure working environment for security officers:

- A sufficient quantity of healthy air.
- An adequate temperature; neither too high nor too low
- Sufficient natural light and/or measures ensuring adequate artificial lighting.
- Separate changing areas or separate use of the same space for men and women.
- Separate restrooms or a separate use of restrooms for men and women.
- The presence of signs relating to the safety and/or health in the workplace.
- Safe electrical wiring.
- Measures to fight fires and, if necessary, fire detectors and alarm systems.
- Doors that can be opened from the inside without special assistance being required.
- Mechanical doors and gates that can be operated without posing a risk of accidents.
- Sufficient artificial lighting in outdoor working areas when natural light is no longer enough.
- If workers are assigned to outdoor workstations, they should, as much as possible, be fitted out in such a way so as to ensure that they:
 - o Are protected against the elements and, if necessary, falling objects;
 - o Are not exposed to outside harmful influences (e.g. from gases, fumes, dust);
 - o Can quickly leave their workstation in case of danger and can be quickly rescued;
 - o Are not likely to slip or fall.

The fact that security officers are employees of a different company than the one they are working at does in no way diminish their basic rights to a working environment which takes into account the above elements.

⁴⁵ European Directive 89/654.

A. Physical hazards

Physical hazards such as noise, heat, cold, a lack of light, inadequate humidity, bad ventilation and possible exposure to radiation must also be taken into consideration in any risk assessment exercise since they are the cause of accidents, diseases and various discomforts.

a. Noise

Noise is a habitual factor in the workplace. Although most of the time there is no risk of loss of hearing, it may cause considerable hearing damage.

Noise is a general hazard which affects all activities of the sector.

Intervening factors

- The ambient noise in the **workplace** (noise of the building installations, noise of machinery, of office equipment, noise caused by human beings, crowds, etc.).
- The **worker's attitude** towards noise: if the worker is not happy in his work, he will be more sensitive to noise or in any case perceive it as a disturbing factor.
- The **job** : the noise will be all the more disturbing if it interferes with the job or if the latter is very complex.
- **Detonation** of ammunition during shooting practice.

Preventive measures

- Identify the source(s) of the noise.
- Limit or reduce noise at source.
- Promote working habits/behaviour that are not noisy.
- Wear earplugs.
- Wear a headset (during shooting practice).
- Correctly use the PPI.
- Point out any defect or discomfort of the PPI.
- Notify the people responsible of any unusual noise in the workplace.
-

Effects on health

The effects of noise on the human hearing depends on the level as well as on the duration of exposure. The effects of noise can be highly diverse, which is why it is difficult to predict the impact it may have on an individual or a group of people. The most common effects include physiological (headaches, loss of hearing or even deafness) or even psychological impairment (loss of concentration, nervousness).

b. Temperature, inadequate humidity and ventilation

Whether it is inside a building or in outside workstations, minimal conditions in terms of temperature, humidity and ventilation must be observed. These conditions must be fulfilled taking into account the specificities of the workstation, the level of physical activity required as well as the security officer's clothing.

The risks related to inadequate temperature, humidity or ventilation are general risks which affect all activities of the sector.

Intervening factors

- **Insufficient fresh air.**
- **Inadequate temperatures, humidity levels and air circulation.**
- **Working in bad weather conditions**, in great heat or severe cold.
- **The work organization** that does not provide for the necessary means to protect oneself against the cold or heat (shelter, heating, etc.) or in which officers are exposed to unsuitable temperatures for excessively long periods.
- The **officer** : inappropriate working clothing, etc.

Preventive measures

- Provide, if necessary, air conditioning, ventilation and dehumidification of the air.
- Ensure a sufficient supply of fresh air in enclosed working spaces.
- Protect workers who work in bad weather conditions (shelter, heating, availability of cold water, etc.)
- Organize the work schedule in such a way that heat stroke or hypothermia are avoided.
- Compensate the loss of salt in the body through a frequent intake of fluids.
- Wear appropriate working clothing: thick trousers, long-sleeved shirts and/or jacket and anorak (or the equivalent) in winter, and light trousers and short-sleeved shirt in summer.

Effects on health

The inadequate conditions we have just listed may cause discomfort, troubles and illness: drowsiness, feeling of ill-being, colds.

In an environment in which the temperature is very high, the security officer suffers the risk of dehydration, sunstroke, fainting as well as of experiencing skin or heart troubles..

In very low temperatures, the dangers facing the security officer include hypothermia, redness of the skin in the most sensitive areas of the body (fingers, toes, nose and earlobes).

c. Insufficient or inadequate lighting

Good visual perception relies on good lighting. Naturally, what is optimum lighting depends on the type of activities and the layout of the workstation.

This is a general risk which affects all security activities.

Intervening factors

- **Lack of lighting** (poor or no lighting of workstation, passageways, alleys or stairwells)
- **Glaring lights** (naked bulb in the field of vision, working in front of a computer screen, sun rays, etc.)

Preventive measures

- Ensure sufficient and adequate lighting at all workstations.
- Use natural light whenever possible.
- Make sure lights can be separately regulated (depending on the task to be executed, and the operator).
- Use torches.
- ...

Effects on health

The effects on health of bad lighting may include eye fatigue (either through the excessive use of the eyelash muscles, or the effect of excessive contrasts on the retina, general fatigue, headaches, and stress). What is more, insufficient and/or inadequate lighting can also cause accidents.

B. Biological hazards

These hazards are related to workers being exposed to biological agents, i.e. micro-organisms, cell cultures and human endoparasites which may bring about infections, allergies or poisoning. These micro-organisms can penetrate the human body through a wound, mucus, an animal bite or needle injuries. They may also be inhaled or swallowed.

This is a risk inherent in the profession which affects all officers who are in contact with the general public (access control, surveillance of demonstrations, etc.). As we have already discussed the risks posed by dogs, we shall limit ourselves here to the risks relating to human contacts.

Intervening factors

- The **attacker, user, client, is injured or sick**, etc. The situations in which officers may be exposed to biological agents are numerous: the fact of being injured as a result of a physical attack implies contact with the blood and other bodily fluids of the aggressor (biting, etc.). During long-term contact with sick people (hospital environments, etc.). During the unexpected contact with a sick person, for instance as a result of a rescue.
- **Quality of air** indoors.
- The **officer** : lack of knowledge of the proper way of reacting in case of conflicts, particularly the preventive measures to adopt in case of contact with blood and/or bodily fluids.

Preventive measures

- Train and inform workers of the biological hazards they may encounter.
- Vaccinate workers exposed to biological agents if there are effective vaccines available and if the risk assessment reveals that it is necessary.
- Thoroughly wash parts of the body that have come into contact with blood and/or bodily fluids immediately after contact has taken place.
- ...

Effects on health

There are several viral and bacteriological infections such as HIV, hepatitis or tuberculosis.

C. Chemical hazards

The risk of being exposed to hazardous products is not a risk that is inherent in the profession; yet, it may exist in some working environments as a result of the activities engaged in by the client company. This risk seems to affect surveillance activities and rounds more than it does other activities.

There is a whole series of chemical products (toxic, noxious, irritating and corrosive) that may constitute a health risk. Depending on their properties, the way in which they enter the body (through inhalation, ingestion, skin and eye contact, or contact with an open wound) and the quantity absorbed, they may adversely affect the health to a lesser or greater extent.

Intervening factors

- **Toxic, very toxic or harmful products** (depending on degree of toxicity)
- **Products causing irritation**
- **Corrosive products**
- **Poor storage condition of the products**
- **Badly aired spaces**
- The **officer** : an officer who is not informed of the risks, safety precautions and preventive measures to be taken.

Preventive measures

- Point out the risks relating to chemical products and the preventive measures to be implemented.
- When the worker comes into contact with these products: no smoking, ensure that the areas are well aired and make sure hygiene-related measures are adhered to: washing one's hands, no eating during the handling and/or contact with these products
- Point out any abnormalities to the people responsible.
- ...

Effects on health

The effects of chemical products on human health to a great extent depends on their properties:

- ‘toxic’, ‘very toxic’ or ‘noxious’ products may change the whole of the organism or only some organs: lungs, liver, heart, nerves, etc. They may also cause serious damage to the organism and even death. Some of these products are defined as being carcinogenic, others as

being mutagenic since they may bring about genetic mutations which may, in turn, cause tumours or fertility problems.

- “irritating” products may cause an inflammatory reaction after coming into contact with the skin, mucous, the eyes, etc. This results in itching, red blotches, conjunctivitis or inflammations of the respiratory tract.

- “corrosive” products may have a destructive effect on living tissues (skin, etc.). They burn the skin and mucus and result in sometimes very serious wounds that leave scars.

4. Prevention and how to organize it

The framework directive (89/391/EWC) constitutes the cornerstone of all demands in the area of risk prevention in the workplace. This directive, among other things, sets forth the obligations of employers and workers with a view to improving health and safety in the workplace.

As far as the employers are concerned, they are obliged to ensure the safety and health of the workers in all areas related to the job and nothing can relieve employers of this responsibility.

Employer obligations

The general obligations on the part of the employer include:

- **Avoiding risks;**
- **Evaluating the risks** which cannot be avoided;
- **Combating the risks** at source;
- **Adapting the work to the individual**
 - Making sure that the design of work places, the organization, the choice of equipment and products alleviate the monotony of the job to be performed with a view to reducing their ill effects on health.
- **Adapting to technical progress** (e.g. machinery, ergonomical tools and appliances);
- **Replacing the dangerous by the non-dangerous or the less dangerous;**
- **Developing a prevention policy** which takes into account the technology, organization of work, working conditions, social relationships and the influence of factors related to the working environment;
- **Giving collective protective measures priority** over individual protective measures;
- **Giving appropriate instructions** to the workers to guarantee their safety and health in the workplace.

As we have already stated, when workers of several companies are active in the same workplace, employers must cooperate in the implementation of measures relating to safety, hygiene and health (see pp. 13-14).

As for the workers, they, too, have a great responsibility in terms of the protection of their health and safety as well as that of their co-workers or other people involved through their actions and job assignments. So, they should take care of themselves and of others in accordance with their training and the instructions received from their employer.

Workers' obligations

- **Make correct use of** machinery, apparatus, tools, dangerous substances, transport equipment, etc.;
- **Make correct use of the personal protective equipment** supplied to them
- **Do not remove the safety devices** to be used for specific machinery and installations and use them correctly;
- **Immediately inform** the employer and/or workers with specific **responsibility of any work situation posing a serious and immediate danger** to safety and health and of any shortcomings in the protection arrangements;

- **Perform all tasks** set forth by national safety regulations and cooperate with the employer with a view to ensuring a working environment and conditions that do not pose any risks in terms of safety and health.

Moreover, the framework directive sets forth a series of prescriptions we should like to deal with very briefly:

- prevention arrangements
 - assessment of risks in the workplace
 - coordination / cooperation between employers
 - protection and prevention bodies
 - consultation and participation of workers
 - information
 - training
 - health supervision

4.1. Prevention arrangements

As part of their responsibilities, employers must take the necessary precautions to protect the safety and health of their workers, including action to prevent occupational hazards, informing and training the staff, establishing an organizational structure and providing the necessary means.

4.1.1. Risk assessment

Risk assessment involves the systematic examination of all aspects of the job that may cause bodily harm, the means to eliminate dangers and, failing that, preventive and protective measures taken or to be taken in order to contain these risks. It is the assessment of the occupational risks that will enable the employer to take the necessary measures with a view to ensuring the safety of workers and protecting their health. We do not propose to analyse the practical aspects of implementing the prescriptions regarding risk assessments set forth by the framework directive. We should simply like to list a number of critical remarks culled in the course of our field questionnaire with regard to risk assessments:

- The risk assessment should not be solely directed towards preventing occupation accidents but also towards preventing any damage to individuals' health.
- We do not believe that risk assessments patterned on a standard/universal model are in keeping with the spirit of the framework directive. These standardized assessments for each workstation/activity which are not complemented and/or contrasted with specific assessments conducted in the workplace often have a purely formal character. They often reflect a will to comply with the law, but have only limited value in terms of prevention.
- Risk assessments must attempt to go beyond focusing on traditional risks and minimal guidelines regarding the workplace: communication means, possibility of access to restrooms, etc. Instead, they should take into account the "new risks" (stress, risks related to the psychosocial workload, ergonomical hazards, etc.). All too often, these risks are not, or insufficiently, taken into account during assessment.

- Risk assessments should be systematically conducted in the workplace and lead to the setting out of prevention policies and coordination with clients. Afterwards, there should be a follow-up of the policies with a view to making amendments as soon as there are changes in the field which may affect the perception of risks and in order to check whether the measures taken are adequate.
- Risk assessments must take into account all sources of information available: data or information from workers' medical supervision, complaints and proposals by workers, statistical data on occupational accidents and diseases, statistical data regarding absenteeism, etc.
- In the course of the risk assessment, it is advisable to consult and/or involve all people present in the workplace to make sure that the dangers are identified. Questioning workers involved in the activity that is being assessed is a quick and often surer way of knowing the actual situation.
- The security officers and/or their representatives must be involved, consulted during the risk assessment and kept informed of the conclusions reached.
- ...

It is important to remember that risk assessments and prevention plans are not an end in themselves (the aim is not simply to comply with the law); rather they are a tool to promote the health of workers. It is essential that there should be a real will and tangible commitment on the part of employers towards carrying out these risk assessments and setting up prevention plans.

4.1.2. Coordination / cooperation between employers

We have already stated that the way in which the operations by security companies at a client company increases the risks inherent in the security activity as a result of interference with the client's activities. In order to minimize the risks in these situations, the framework directive provides for the coordination, cooperation and mutual exchange of information between employers. In spite of the lacunae and the slight vagueness of the guidelines, the framework directive lays down the following markers regarding the organization of prevention between different employers:

- risk assessment in which the client and the security company are involved. As a precondition, the client must already have effected an assessment of the risks of his activity; hence, as far as the security company is concerned it is a question of assessing the risks related to its activities within the client company, with both parties together examining the risks of interference with or related to their joint activity. These actions should result in the creation of a prevention plan.
- the training and information of security officers by employers regarding anything that may affect their health and safety. This involves information/training courses on the risks and preventive measures to be implemented, and on the instructions, procedures to be followed in case of an emergency, etc.
- the setting up of a communication structure between employers with a view to ensuring the follow-up of their collaboration: regular inspections and/or meetings; meetings each time there are changes or variations in the workstation/activity, etc.

- consultation of bodies/people responsible for health and safety at company level (Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work - CPPW, prevention representatives) with a view to involving them in the prevention and in the protection of the health of security officers;

National bodies charged with health and safety in the workplace developed practical forms or guides⁴⁶ to help the principal and subcontracting companies concert their efforts in the area of risk prevention.

4.1.3. Protection and prevention bodies

According to the framework directive, the employer should appoint one or several workers responsible for the protection against and prevention of occupational hazards. These people should be given the necessary time to perform their duties. When the company does not have the necessary skills to organize protection and prevention activities, the employer must call upon outside experts.

One of the recurrent criticisms in the sector is the fact that the people responsible for prevention at company level do not have the wherewithal, notably in terms of the time they are allocated, to perform their duties. In these conditions it is very difficult to implement prevention policies with any real chance of success. Across all activity sectors, the prevention bodies (in their various avatars) are often perceived as a burden, a kind of tax to be paid by companies in order to comply with the law.⁴⁷ Hence, these bodies are set up, but not really integrated within the companies; they often remain on the outside, without actually taking root in the operation of the companies. The companies in the private security sector are no strangers to this kind of phenomenon either.

What is more, it is known that the coverage by prevention bodies of security companies varies greatly from one EU Member State to the next, and even within one and the same country, as a result of factors such as the company size, union presence, etc.

4.1.4. Worker consultation and participation

Employers must consult security officers and/or their representatives and thus allow them to participate in all issues regarding health and safety in the workplace. According to the EU framework directive, the consultations should lead to, among other things, actions that can have substantial effects on safety and health, the exploitation and nature of the information

⁴⁶ In Spain, Nota Técnica de Prevención 564 : *Sistema de gestión preventiva: procedimiento de contratistas*, INHST, 2000; Prevención, Trabajo y Salud, Ficha Práctica No. 25: *Gestión Preventiva de Contratistas*, INHST, 2003. In France, *L'accueil des entreprises de surveillance*. Prevention Guide No. 7, CRAM du Nord-Est; *Intervention d'entreprises extérieures. Aide mémoire pour la prévention des risques*, INRS, ED 757. In Belgium, Fiche d'action 3, *Travailler avec des entreprises extérieures*, Prevent. In Ireland, *Health and Safety Guidelines for Employers, Employees and Clients in the Security Industry*, HSA, etc. In the United Kingdom, *Use of contractors. A joint responsibility*, HSE; *Working Together. Guidance on Health and Safety for Contractors and Suppliers*, HSE.

⁴⁷ Rodrigo F., "Presentation", dans *Hacer lo que hay que hacer y hacerlo bien*, III Foro ISTAS de Salud Laboral. La gestión de la salud y seguridad en el trabajo, Palma de Mallorca, 27/29 November, 2002.

relating to specific risk assessments, the design and organization of the training of all workers in matters relating to health and safety, etc.

Risk prevention is everyone's business and thus requires the participation and consultation of all those who are part of the company. The possibility of workers to be represented collectively as well as their consultation and participation in issues relating to health in the workplace also varies greatly across the EU. Once again, it is in the large companies within the sector that this participation and consultation process is best organized. It seems obvious that if prevention is something that affects everyone, it is necessary to involve the workers and their representatives. Independent studies reveal that companies that have equal-representation committees for questions of health and safety also have fewer accidents on average than companies where the management deals with safety and health without consulting the workers or without their participation.⁴⁸

4.1.5. Information

According to the framework directive, the employer is obliged to inform security officers directly (or through their representatives) of the occupational hazards, as well as of all measures taken in the company in order to deal with the risks in every type of workstation or job.

According to our fieldwork, this process of informing security officers about the occupational hazards is far from being a systematic occurrence.

4.1.6. Training

Still according to the framework directive, each security officer must receive sufficient and adequate training in matters relating to health and safety in the workplace, taking into account the individual's workstation and job. This training should take place following recruitment, transfer or change of job, changes in work equipment and the introduction of a new technology. Furthermore, the training must be adapted to the development of risks and the emergence of new risks and must be renewed at regular intervals, if necessary.

As throughout the report we have already pointed out the need for improving these types of training, we shall not dwell on these issues here. We should simply like to indicate that according to the information we were able to glean in the field, these training courses sometimes do not exist and when they do they are not organized in a systematic fashion. Once again, the situation varies greatly from one company to the next. We have had access to company-produced training and prevention documents that were of a very high quality indeed and which perfectly met the requirements in terms of training.

⁴⁸ Reilly B., Paci P., Holl P. "Unions, Safety Committees and Workplace Injuries", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 33: 2, June, 1995.

4.1.7. Health supervision

The framework directive sets out measures laid down in conformity with national legislation and/or practices to ensure appropriate supervision of the health of workers depending on the risks relating to their health and safety in the workplace. These measures must be such that each worker must be entitled, if s/he so wishes, to have a medical check-up at regular intervals. The framework directive thus remains quite vague as to health supervision.

Several directives quoted in this survey contain measures regarding the supervision of workers' health. These directives bear on radiation, working in front of a computer screen, noise, work-time organization (night workers). However, their field of application, at least as far as the private security sector is concerned, is somewhat uncertain. "The European community's orientation wavers between measures for obligatory medical supervision, those in which the individual workers has to set the process in motion and those which would be linked in one way or another to the assessment of risks by the employer."⁴⁹

We have already mentioned the dearth of statistics in the sector. This observation equally applies to health supervision. Yet, we have been able to extract some general information regarding this issue from our interviews.

It would seem that workers' health is not systematically supervised. Again, the situation varies greatly between companies.

The medical examination to which the security officers are submitted are often standard checkups. The value and extent of these examinations are limited as labour medicine only makes sense if it relies on the results of assessments of the occupational hazard to which the workers are exposed. Hence, it is important to organize specific health supervision in accordance with the results of the risk assessment.

At individual level, health supervision allows the early detection of health troubles and thus avoids more serious damage. However, it can also have a collective dimension: the use of data resulting from health supervision within risk assessments. Within the context of health supervision, it would seem that studies of an epidemiological (or other) nature should be carried out more systematically in order to identify the causes of health problems within the sector. These data and information should serve as basic indicators for the creation of prevention policies as well as for the evaluation of their effectiveness. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be a common practice within the sector.

⁴⁹ Vogel L., "La surveillance de santé dans les directives et recommandations communautaires" (unpublished mss.).

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, we should like to highlight the main points of this survey.

The private security sector is characterized by subcontracting. The service relationship seems to us to a determining factor both for defining the sector, and for analysing the risks encountered by workers. Companies call upon security companies in order to cut costs and focus on their main activities. At the same time, there are other, less bruted, reasons such as passing the risks, constraints, technical and human risks on to a security company. This explains the lack of collaboration between user companies in the area of risk prevention. It seems vital today that the respective responsibilities/obligations of the two employers – the principal and the security company - should be modified and/or specified within the law. It is difficult to imagine that a prevention policy stands a chance of being successful without the collaboration of the clients.

The fierce competition in the sector and the fact that the contracts are often awarded to the cheapest ('the lowest bid') rather than to the best (the best bid), i.e. the one guaranteeing good working conditions, as well as compliance with collective agreements, labour laws and responsibility in terms of risk prevention and health in the workplace, have a negative impact on security officers' health.

The organization of work relies on flexibility, whether it be in working hours, the type of contract or the type of investment required from the workers. This flexibility has a great impact on the social and family lives of the security officers as well as on the mental and emotional workload. In spite of this, this impact is often not recognized.

The fact that the occupation of security officer carries little social prestige, the fact that it is often associated with bad employment and working conditions and that it has a bad image makes it difficult to build a positive occupational image. This also has a negative impact on the security officers' wellbeing and on health in the workplace.

The risks related to direct physical harm have a greater visibility at sector level and receive more attention than the risks related to the psychosocial workload (stress, mental workload, emotional workload) and those relating to the organization of work. During the interviews, there was a clear call for these less visible risks to receive more attention from the people responsible for prevention within companies and to be fully integrated in the policies they are bound to implement.

The traditional risks like the risk of falls and slips, road accidents, physical hazards, etc. remain topical and very frequent.

It would seem that the selective and on the whole prescriptive measures created to deal with the traditional risks will have to give way to another view on prevention, one that is based on several factors and within which the genesis and complexity of health problems in the workplace are taken into account.

As for the prevention policies conducted by companies, these should, still in accordance with our research material, among other things:

- have a more general character; instead of being directed towards only occupational accidents, they should deal with all health problems;
- be integrated and/or fit into other policies set up within the company, such as (management) training, communication, staff policies and those governing working relations;
- have more and effective involvement by all the actors and competent authorities within the area of health in the workplace within the companies: employers, prevention consultants, worker representatives and workers, on the one hand, and internal and external prevention bodies, on the other;
- allocate more funds to the internal prevention bodies so as to enable them more systematically to conduct risk assessments in the workplace and to ensure a follow-up and development of prevention plans;
- increasingly develop training in the field of health and safety;
- notify more systematically the security officers of the occupational hazards they have to deal with;
- increasingly develop health supervision and integrate it into the risk assessments (so as to ensure that the medical examinations are more specific and geared to the occupational hazards faced by the individual workers).
- use the data derived from the health supervision in order to assess the prevention policies and to conduct more specific risk assessments.

The prevention policies are usually based on studies and data which show and quantify the harmfulness of risks and which allow the identification of appropriate preventive measures to eliminate them or to reduce them to acceptable levels. However, there is a glaring lack of data and very low research activity in the sector. The lack of even slightly reliable and valid indicators has a number of consequences on the prevention policies:

- a minimization and/or invisibility of certain risks, precisely those on which not enough information is available;
- a focus on the prevention of certain risks, i.e. the traditional risks, whereas other risks are not taken into account because they are too complex given the number of factors involved and the difficulty to establish a causal link, because they have long-term effects, or because the harmful effects are not very specific and it is difficult to prove their link with the work..

Better prevention therefore requires better knowledge and a quantitative and qualitative improvement in the data at sector level.

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