Occupational Health / Safety in the World

The Development of the European Framework for Psychosocial Risk Management: PRIMA-EF

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Abstract: The Development of the European Framework for Psychosocial Risk Management: PRIMA-EF: Stavroula Leka, *et al*. Institute of Work, Health and Organisations, University of Nottingham, UK—**Aim:** This paper presents the development process of the European framework for psychosocial risk management (PRIMA-EF). It also summarises and discusses key findings of research conducted through this policy-orientated research programme. **Objectives:** This paper presents an overview of the development process of PRIMA-EF. The background, methods and outcomes are described and discussed. The paper summarises the key findings of PRIMA-EF and concludes by a discussion of the merit of PRIMA-EF in the area of psychosocial risk management and its intended use. PRIMA-EF has been built on a review, critical assessment, reconciliation and harmonisation of existing European approaches for the management of psychosocial risks and the promotion of mental health at the workplace. The framework has been built from a theoretical analysis of the risk management process, identifying its key elements in logic and philosophy, strategy and procedures, areas and types of measurement, and from a subsequent analysis of European risk management approaches. It is meant to accommodate all existing psychosocial risk management approaches across Europe. It also provides a model and key indicators that relate to the psychosocial risk management process both at the enterprise and macro levels. **Method:** Experts, researchers, social partners, key European and international organisations and networks were involved throughout the development of PRIMA-EF. A number of methods were applied including literature, case study and policy reviews, interviews, surveys, focus groups and workshops. The scientific findings have been used to develop user-friendly tools for use at the enterprise and policy levels such as guidelines, indicators, guidance sheets, inventories and web-based tools. **Conclusions:** PRIMA-EF is intended as a framework for harmonizing practice and current methods in the area of psychosocial risk management. It can also be used as a guidance tool for the development of further methods both in Europe and internationally as it can provide a benchmark for validation of new methods. A number of priorities have been identified on the basis of PRIMA-EF for the future of psychosocial risk management and the promotion of mental health at workplace in Europe.
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Psychosocial risks have been recognised as emerging risks in Europe[1]. They are linked to issues such as work-related stress, violence, harassment and bullying that represent concerns internationally[2, 3]. Nearly one in three of Europe's workers, more than 40 million people, report that they are affected by stress at work[4]. In the 15 Member States of the pre-2004 EU, the cost of stress at work and the related mental health problems was estimated to be on average between 3 and 4% of gross national product, amounting to €265 billion annually[5]. Particular challenges in relation to psychosocial risks and their management exist both at the enterprise level and at the macro policy level. At the enterprise level there is a need for systematic and effective policies to prevent and control the various psychosocial risks at work, clearly linked to companies' management practices. On the national and the European level, the main challenge is to translate existing policies into effective practice through the provision of tools that will stimulate and support organisations to undertake that challenge, thereby

preventing and controlling psychosocial risks in our workplaces and societies alike. At both levels, these challenges require a comprehensive framework to address psychosocial risks. This paper presents the development of the European framework for psychosocial risk management (PRIMA-EF) that relates to the enterprise and the macro levels. Within this framework, key concepts and the philosophy of psychosocial risk management that underlie policy and best practice are highlighted, key findings are described and discussed.

The idea of the development of a framework for the management of work-related psychosocial risks was born in May 2004 at the World Health Organization Headquarters in Geneva. With an international perspective, WHO challenged members of the now PRIMA-EF consortium to come up with a best practice framework that could, in the long run, be promoted at the international level. This framework should be used to harmonize practice and methods in the area of psychosocial risk management. It should also represent a guidance tool for the development of further methods both in Europe and internationally and provide a benchmark for validation of existing and new methods. The PRIMA-EF consortium was subsequently set up at a WHO EURO Network meeting as an alliance of WHO Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health and initial funding to start developing the framework idea was received by SALTSA (confederation of Swedish Trade Unions and the then National Institute for Working Life). It was decided that since substantial knowledge and best practice was already available in the European Union (EU) in relation to the management of psychosocial risks, on the basis of European health and safety legislation built on the risk management paradigm, it would make sense to start building the framework at the EU level and then work to develop it further for use at the international arena[6]. In the meantime, a fruitful context had developed in the EU with the signing of the work-related stress framework agreement by European Social partners in 2004. A call for policy-orientated research was then announced by the European Commission (EC) Directorate General for Research through the 6th Framework Programme that specifically focussed on psychosocial risks, work-related stress and workplace violence, harassment and bullying. The development of PRIMA-EF was funded through this call. This paper presents the development process of PRIMA-EF, summarizing and discussing the key findings of research conducted through this policy-orientated research programme as well as follow-up activities.

Method

The development of PRIMA-EF was a stepwise process. PRIMA-EF was built from a theoretical analysis of the risk management process, specifically by identifying its key elements in logic and philosophy, strategy and procedures, areas and types of measurement. On the basis of this analysis, an inventory of best practice was developed, incorporating these key elements, that allowed a comprehensive comparative review and analysis of psychosocial risk management models across Europe[7]. It should be noted that the review aimed to identify best practice models that mapped onto the complete risk management cycle, from risk assessment to the design of risk reduction interventions and evaluation (examples of these include, among others, the Management Standards on Work-related Stress in the UK, SME Vital in Switzerland, Health Circles in Germany and Work Positive in Ireland). PRIMA-EF was built on this review, critical assessment, reconciliation and harmonisation of methods that have proved valid in the EU for the management of psychosocial risks and the promotion of mental health and well-being at the workplace. PRIMA-EF identifies equivalence of these methods in terms of principles, process, stages, measurement and outcomes. It is meant to accommodate all existing psychosocial risk management approaches across the EU[7] and be used as a comprehensive, overarching framework for the harmonization of practice and methods in the area of psychosocial risk management. It is also meant to be used as a guidance tool for the development of further methods both in Europe and internationally and provide a benchmark for validation of existing and new methods.

Following the development of the framework, a number of methods were employed to: a. validate it, b. elaborate on its key elements, and c. translate it into user-friendly guidance tools for policy makers, social partners, experts and practitioners. In fact, all these key stakeholder groups (experts, researchers, social partners, key European and international organisations and networks) were involved throughout the research and development work conducted. This work included several parallel research activities (called work packages) that focussed on specific issues of relevance to the framework. Table 1 presents the different work packages and the research methods employed for each. These included literature, case study and policy reviews, interviews, surveys, focus groups and workshops. The table also presents the outputs of each work package.

The scientific findings of the different work packages were used to validate PRIMA-EF, elaborate the framework and its key elements further, and develop user-friendly tools for use at the enterprise and policy levels such as guidelines, indicators, guidance sheets, inventories and web-based tools (all available online at: www.prima-ef. org).

Results

Given the broad scope of the PRIMA-EF project, it is impossible to detail all results in relation to each specific aspect of the framework in this paper. More information

Table 1. PRIMA-EF work packages and methods

| Work package	Methods	Outcomes
Framework development	Literature review; policy review; review and analysis of European approaches to psychosocial risk management; expert validation through survey; stakeholder workshop; indicator piloting with policy networks (EU-OSHA Focal Point Network and WHO EURO Focal Point Network)	PRIMA-EF enterprise model PRIMA-EF policy model PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 1: Key aspects of psychosocial risk management PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 2: Enterprise level PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 3: Macro policy level PRIMA-EF WHO guide (relevant sections) PRIMA-EF Book: chapters 1, 9
Monitoring and indicators	Literature review; monitoring instrument review; indicator model review; Delphi survey; indicator piloting with experts, government representatives, trade unions and employer associations	PRIMA-EF monitoring and indicator model PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 8: Monitoring psychosocial risks PRIMA-EF WHO guide (relevant sections) PRIMA-EF Book: chapter 2
Stakeholder involvement and social dialogue	Literature review; policy review; stakeholder survey supported by EU-OSHA; stakeholder workshop; focus groups	PRIMA-EF Social dialogue indicator model PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 4: Making social dialogue successful for psychosocial risk management PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 5: The perception of psychosocial risks among European stakeholders PRIMA-EF WHO guide (relevant sections) PRIMA-EF Book: chapters 4, 5
Policy and standards	Literature review; policy review; standards review; stakeholder interviews; stakeholder workshop; focus groups; indicator piloting with enterprise networks (CSR Europe and Enterprise-for-Health)	Corporate social responsibility indicator model PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 6: Corporate social responsibility and psychosocial risk management PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 7: European and international standards related to psychosocial risks at work PRIMA-EF WHO Guide (relevant sections) PRIMA-EF Book: chapters 3, 6
Interventions	Literature review; inventory development; inventory piloting with experts; intervention review and analysis using inventory; expert and practitioner interviews; Best practice in psychosocial risk management interventions workshop; focus groups	Online interventions inventory and tool: work-related stress, workplace violence, harassment and bullying PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 9: Best practice in work-related stress management interventions PRIMA-EF guidance sheet 10: Best practice in workplace violence and bullying interventions PRIMA-EF WHO guide (relevant sections) PRIMA-EF Book: chapter 8
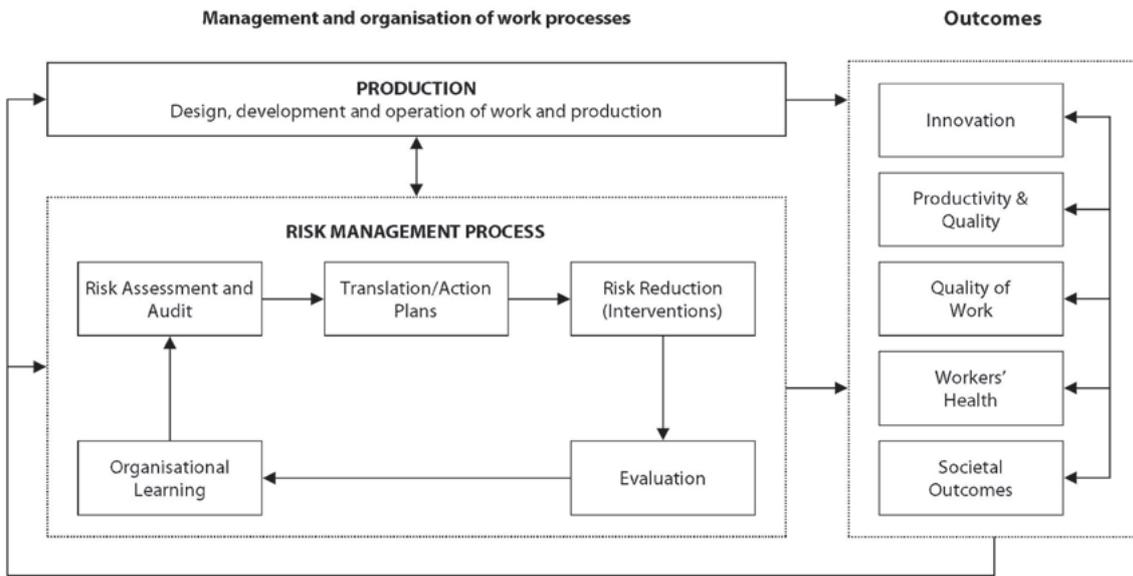
Fig. 1. The PRIMA-EF model for the management of psychosocial risks-enterprise level.
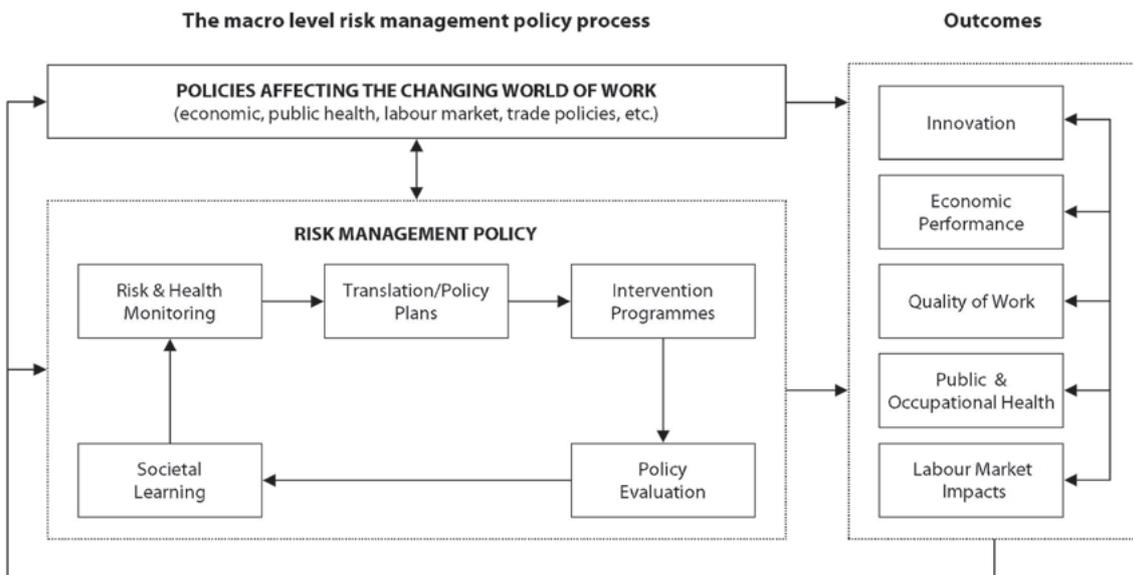

Fig. 2. The PRIMA-EF model for policies regarding the management of psychosocial risks.

can be found in the outputs outlined in Table 1 and in further scientific publications, see[8–12]. As such this section will present the developed PRIMA-EF models for the enterprise and the policy levels and will summarise some overall findings of the project.

The PRIMA-EF model developed is relevant to both the enterprise level (see Fig. 1) and the wider macro policy level (see Fig. 2) as particular challenges in relation to psychosocial risks and their management exist at both these levels.

The developed framework has been used to examine key issues of relevance to the management of psychosocial risks at the workplace, such as policies, stakeholder perceptions, social dialogue, corporate social responsibility, monitoring and indicators, standards and best practice interventions at different levels[13]. In doing so, the current state of the art in these areas was reviewed, associated guidance was developed, and priorities and avenues for

Table 2. Key PRIMA-EF findings

Work package	Priorities for action
Framework development	• Awareness raising on psychosocial risks across the enlarged EU and across stakeholders: psychosocial risk management should represent a higher priority in national and international agendas
	• Development of appropriate infrastructure (including occupational health services) for the assessment and management of psychosocial risks in all EU member states and especially where it is lacking
	• Development and promotion of specific training programmes on psychosocial risk management for stakeholders, for occupational health and safety professionals and for health and safety inspectors
Monitoring and indicators	• Actions are needed to improve monitoring of psychosocial risk management at different measurement levels (and especially at employer level)
	• Psychosocial risk management and preventive action have been a neglected aspect of monitoring and have been missing in the indicators defined so far. It is considered important that indicators of that type should be further developed
Stakeholder involvement and social dialogue	• Addressing stakeholder perceptions and promoting social dialogue: Social dialogue plays a critical role in the development and implementation of initiatives for psychosocial risk management at the macro as well as the organisational level and hence should be promoted, especially in the new member states where existing social dialogue structures are weak
Policy and standards	• Focus on policy-level interventions: The evaluation of the policy process should allow the strengths and weaknesses of both the policy plan and the implementation process to be assessed and provide the basis for societal learning. Also, better transference of best practice between ministries within countries, between countries as well as between international organisations will lead to the development of effective tools that could be implemented and evaluated effectively
	• Developing a European standard for psychosocial risk management: Such a standard should be based on existing guidance from the EC, WHO, ILO and national best practice examples and represent a reference point for organisations. It is not essential that the end point is certification but rather clear pan-European guidance
	• Promoting a CSR-inspired approach to psychosocial risk management: A CSR approach to psychosocial risk management (that sees legal requirements as the floor and not as the ceiling) is based on the recognition that a company cannot be responsible externally without being responsible internally towards its own workforce
Interventions	• Capacity and competency building within organisations and management, and extending this to the macro level to include policy makers
	• Comprehensive stress management techniques: Developing a comprehensive approach to the management and evaluation of interventions for work-related stress, and workplace violence and bullying by incorporating the use of a multi-modal intervention approach (i.e. focus on both the individual and the organisation)
	• Further integration of process issues into the evaluation of interventions: How to effectively translate intervention 'action plans' into a 'successful' intervention
	• Development of the business case: Linking the business case more strongly to responsible business practices, including a focus on the social well-being and health of employees

improvement were suggested[14]. The key findings and priorities for action identified through PRIMA-EF are summarised in Table 2.

Discussion

The development process of PRIMA-EF was lengthy, intensive and complicated given the different activities

that took place. However, to achieve effective translation of knowledge into practice, it is important that different methods are employed and different stakeholders are involved. This is particularly important for policy-orientated research as in the case of this project. These are key positive elements of PRIMA-EF that are expected to make its uptake easier by policy makers, social partners, experts and practitioners. However, the outputs would not have been possible had there not been a strong consortium with a high level of knowledge, sufficient manpower and resources and support from key stakeholders (such as the European Commission and WHO).

A number of key findings and priorities for action were identified through the PRIMA-EF project as presented in the previous section; some of these are discussed here. These relate, for example, to the existence of appropriate infrastructure for the management of psychosocial risks across EU member states and stakeholder dialogue, sensitisation and engagement[9]. Social dialogue is a useful form of communication among social partners that plays a critical role in the development and implementation of initiatives for psychosocial risk management at the macro as well as the organisational level and, hence, should be promoted, especially in the new member states, where existing social dialogue structures are weak[8].

In addition, awareness raising and training in psychosocial risk management through the use of tools and guidelines (such as the ones developed through this project) should be promoted to ensure both an increase of national capabilities and the minimisation of the existing gap between policy and practice in this area. It is important that specific training programmes on psychosocial risk management are developed and promoted, for stakeholders, for occupational health and safety professionals and for health and safety inspectors.

The importance and impact of policy interventions for the management of psychosocial risks has been largely ignored in the mainstream academic literature[12, 15]. There are a few complementary European policy approaches to addressing psychosocial risks in the workplace in the form of legislation, social partner agreements or European standards. Some of these have been outlined in European documents such as the European Commission's Guidance on Work-Related Stress[16], the European Standard (EN ISO 10075- 1&2) on Ergonomic Principles Related to Mental Work Load[17], the European Commission's Green Paper on Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility[18]. These approaches are based on different but related paradigms, which might lead to confusion and misinterpretation. Standards for addressing psychosocial risk management in the workplace, therefore, need to be developed based on a framework unifying these approaches.

A number of priorities have been identified on the basis of PRIMA-EF for the future of psychosocial risk

management and the promotion of mental health in the workplace in Europe. Since its development, PRIMA-EF has been used in three ways through follow-up initiatives: first, to develop training in the area that will be promoted to different stakeholders and will be incorporated in national training systems in different EU member states; second, to develop a guidance standard on psychosocial risk management in the workplace that will be promoted to enterprises; and third, to develop similar frameworks in countries outside Europe through the WHO Network of Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health. This work is ongoing and will be evaluated. It is hoped that through this ongoing work, at least some of the priorities identified through the project will be addressed.

In particular, the training that is currently being developed will be targeted to different stakeholders to raise awareness and promote social dialogue while building capacity at national level. The training will be available to enterprises and stakeholders through an online platform and there are plans to disseminate it at national level through key professional and social partner associations. In addition, it is hoped that the guidance standard that is currently being finalized in collaboration with the British Standards Institution and with the input of other key organisations (such as WHO, the European Agency for Safety & Health at Work, the European Trade Union Congress and EEF-the manufacturers' organisation), will promote best practice at the enterprise level, also by making the link with existing occupational health and safety management systems as well as with company policies and practices. The uptake and outcomes of the use of this standard will be evaluated across Europe.

Since the development of the framework, interest from other countries has been building up. The PRIMA-EF WHO guide has already been translated in other European languages as well as in traditional Chinese. It is currently being translated in Japanese and in Portuguese by Japanese and Brazilian WHO Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health. PRIMA-EF is also being promoted by WHO as best practice within its Global Framework for Healthy Workplaces[19]. There are plans to promote and evaluate the use of the framework in an international context.

The development of PRIMA-EF was a lengthy process and involved a number of parallel activities as outlined in this paper. PRIMA-EF is intended as a framework for harmonizing practice and current methods in the area of psychosocial risk management. It can also be used as a guidance tool for the development of further methods both in Europe and internationally as it can provide a benchmark for validation of new methods. A number of priorities have been identified on the basis of PRIMA-EF for the future of psychosocial risk management and the promotion of mental health in the workplace in Europe. Ongoing PRIMA-EF work is now focussing on two of the identified priorities: the development of training for different

stakeholders and the development of a guidance standard on psychosocial risk management in the workplace. It is important that the unifying best practice European approach that is promoted through PRIMA-EF is disseminated at the EU level to promote the translation of knowledge and policy into effective practice at the enterprise and macro levels. Through WHO, PRIMA-EF is also disseminated at the international level.

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