

Widespread stress among vets

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Veterinarians frequently suffer psychosocial stress and demoralization associated with heavy workloads. Research published in BioMed Central's open access *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology* analyses the extent of the problem and reveals a complex relationship with binge drinking, tobacco consumption and drug use.

A team of researchers co-ordinated by Melanie Harling, from the Institution for Statutory Accident Insurance and Prevention in Hamburg, Germany, evaluated 1060 practicing vets in north Germany via a carefully-designed, self-administered questionnaire. The researchers found that the likelihood of psychosocial stress increased with the number of working hours and was a consequence of time pressure due to a heavy workload, difficulties in balancing professional life with private life, insufficient free time and dealing with difficult customers. The authors found that many of the vets reported symptoms of demoralization - they were frequently dissatisfied with themselves, rarely optimistic or confident and almost never felt proud.

By close examination of their tobacco, alcohol and medical drug habits, Melanie and her colleagues described a series of complex inter-relationships. According to M. Harling "these results indicate that psychosocial stress at work is associated with a poor psychological state, high-risk alcohol consumption and regular drug use while demoralization is associated with tobacco consumption, problem drinking and regular drug intake. Furthermore psychosocial stress leads to demoralization which in turn leads to an increased consumption of psychotropic substances. One way of coping with psychosocial stress in the veterinary

profession might be the consumption of psychotropic substances".

The authors believe that further research will clarify the causes of their findings and help develop strategies to reduce stress in the veterinary profession.

More information: Psychosocial stress, demoralization and the consumption of tobacco, alcohol and medical drugs by veterinarians, Melanie Harling, Petra Strehmel, Anja Schablon and Albert Nienhaus, *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology* (in press), www.occup-med.com/

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