



accidents don't have to happen

Slip Trip Fall research

RoSPA RSA falls prevention
programme preliminary report



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Introduction

RoSPA and RSA wanted to add to the existing pool of evidence relating to workplace slips, trips and falls (STF) by exploring new, emerging issues. We considered COVID related issues, the UK ageing workforce, any potential link between fatigue and falls and the impact of falls and looked to explore emerging themes that presented through the activity.

We aim to use the results of the programme to assist the following outputs:

- Headline statistics which will inform attitudes and behaviours to falls

- Falls-related event, showcasing a fresh approach and understanding, creating a platform for people to talk about their lived experience of falls and the ‘fall-out’ from a fall, such as caring responsibilities for older relatives
- Case studies of how organisations manage the impact of falls
- Brief summative report
- Further promotion of Fall Fighter scheme.

Methodology

The programme was conducted between March and late April 2022. The research was approached in the following steps:

- 1 A roundtable discussion event with specialists and experts (15)
- 2 Questionnaires designed and presented to two defined groups: general population and business decision makers (2080, 619)
- 3 Targeted Focus Group discussions with a variety of employees, some who have experienced STF personally and professionally (3 workshops)
- 4 Tailored snap survey of RoSPA members and interested parties (250).

The results were collated, evaluated and are summarised in this report.

This report is not exhaustive. Many conclusions can be collected and analysed from the results. Further study and evaluation is expected and encouraged to obtain maximum use of the data collected.

Paragraphs have been numbered and linked to the conclusions to aid the reader.

Results

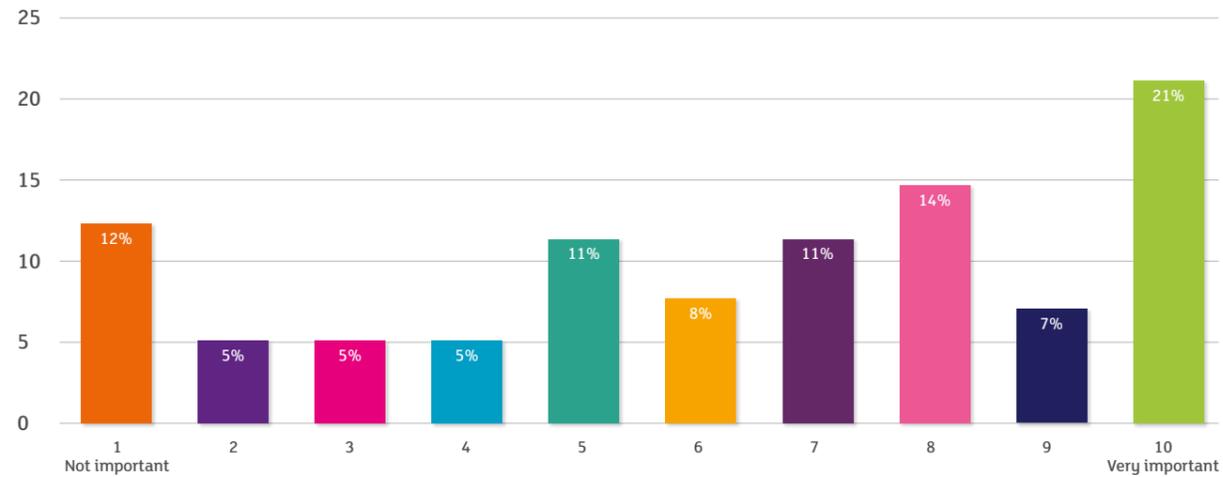
The results obtained from each of the activities have been collated into responses to themed questions.

Do the business decision makers think they have a STF problem?

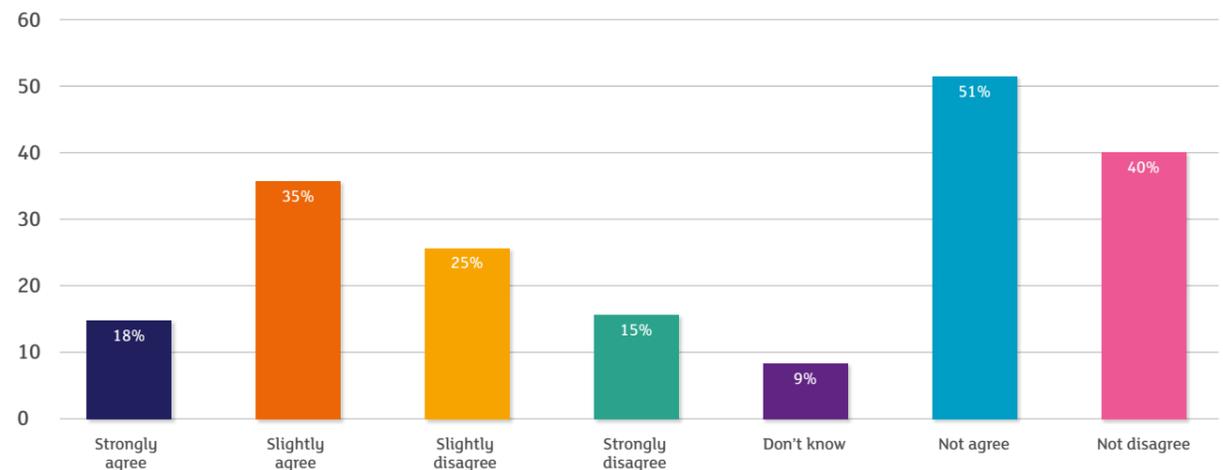
- 1 Business leaders demonstrated a risk management gap – 53 per cent of responders said that it was important to their business, however only 33 per cent reported having a dedicated falls prevention programme. 17 per cent said STF were not important at all. Overall, only 21 per cent said that STF were very important and these were predominantly the larger employers in the cohort.

Importance of STFs to organisations

As a reminder, by STF, we mean slips, trips and fall accidents that occur in the workplace. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'Not important' and 10 is 'Very important', how important would you say STF is to your organisation?

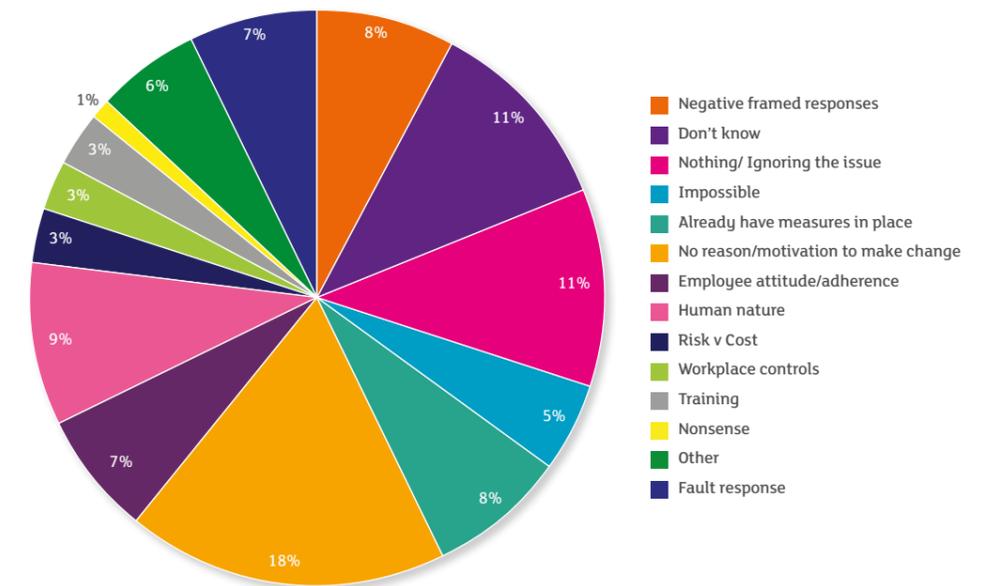


- 2 51 per cent of decision makers think that STF are inevitable in the workplace. There were a range of issues identified, which underlines the beliefs of business leaders relating to STF.



- 3 27 per cent of the decision makers we questioned said that STF are 'just not an issue in their industry'. This contradicted our expectations that were that virtually all organisations would recognise it as a problem, as most see STF as inevitable.
- 4 A significant proportion of business leaders were very dismissive of the barriers to eliminating STF in the workplace. Nearly 10 per cent of the sample gave significantly negative responses (eg. "stupid idea". "Nothing. I've never heard of STF before and the fact it's even a 'thing' shows someone has got too much time on their hands. There are real problems and challenges for employers and employees to deal with without making new ones up".)

What do you think stops your business being practically able to eliminate STF accidents in the workplace ?

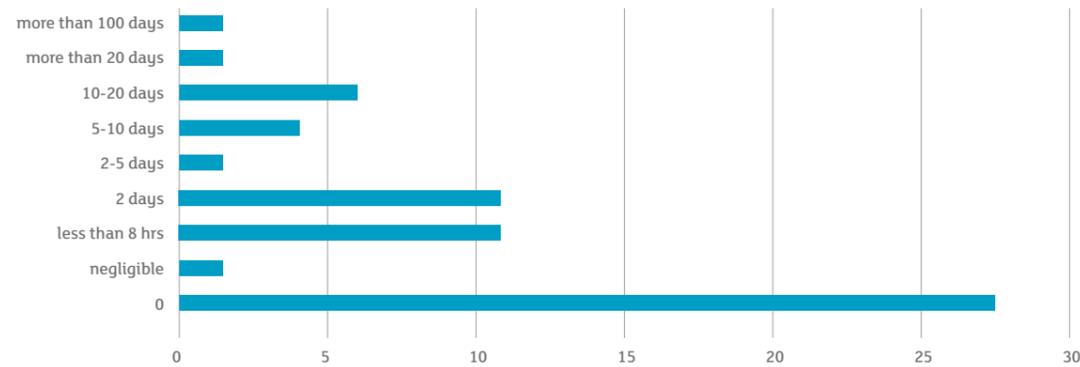


- 5 32 per cent of business decision makers believe that people who STF were not looking where they are going. This clearly indicates a lack of priority and an element of blame for people who STF. Our group indicated that this causation belief is more prevalent than floor condition or footwear as the most important factor in STF.
- 6 The consensus appears to confirm the view that STFs are not regarded as a priority for the majority of employers or employees. Clearly, the perception and attitude of many business leaders towards STF indicates that this is not something recognised as a common business issue or a negative event that can be 'managed out'. The decision makers expressed the belief that STF are a human failing condition and perhaps more could be done, but with no real sense of urgency or priority. This is confirmed by the response that nearly a third of employees believes that their employer accepts that STFs are inevitable in the workplace, an additional 30 per cent 'don't know'. Positively, 21 per cent strongly disagreed with this, indicating that there are some employers who are actively addressing the issue of STF.

How much working time do people think is lost to STF in the workplace?

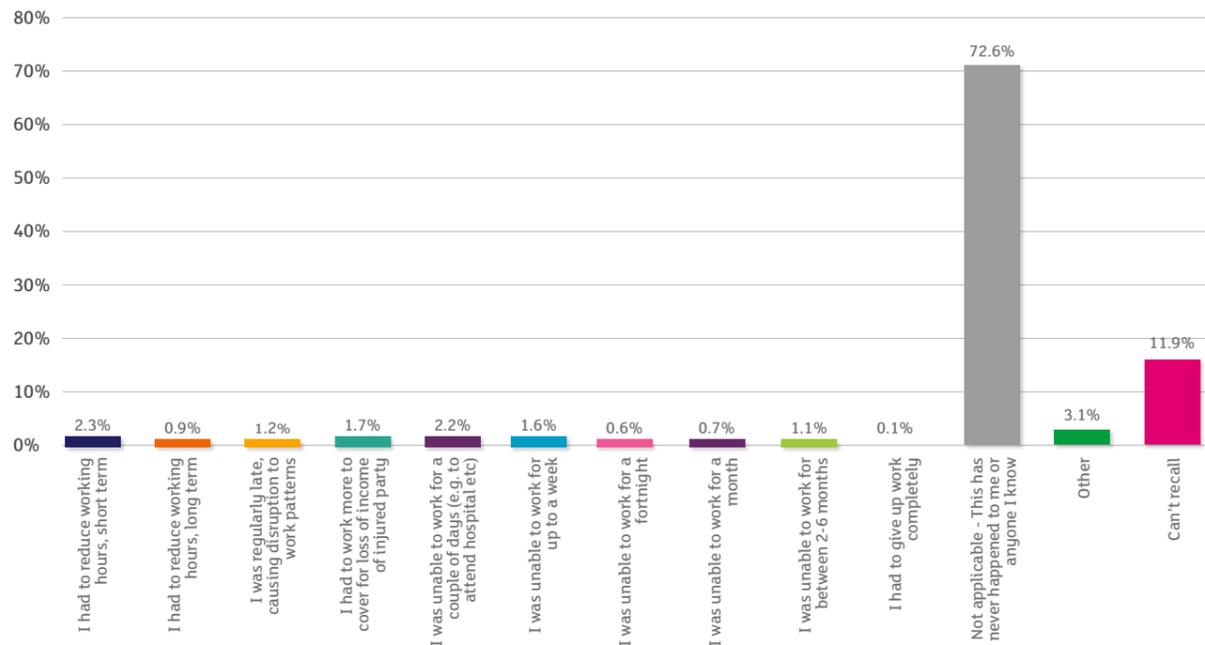
7 The vast majority of people we questioned did not know how many hours were lost in their own organisations. Of those that expressed that they knew, the majority of these were reported as zero. Organisations commonly reported losing between 1-20 working days per year to STF, however, the whole range of responses was enormous – including one organisation that reported in excess of 100,000 hours or more lost working time per year and another stating 6.9 million lost work hours. Clearly, the effect of even one incident can be significant. Small numbers of our general survey had experienced very significant effects on their working life from having to care for others who had suffered STF. While the vast majority had not experienced this, 13 per cent reported being affected and needing to care for others. The effects can clearly be significant and affect the whole working population.

How many work hours lost as a direct result of STF each year



Taking time off work to care for another person

Approximately when, if ever, was the last time that you took some time off work to care for another person who suffered from a STF at the workplace?



8 We noted that many organisations do not have a dedicated STF or return to work (RTW) plan. This will very likely have negative implications for their management of STF and their understanding of the extent of the impact on the organisation of the employees. We also noted that the effect of losing this staff time will disproportionately affect smaller organisations, compared to larger, more diverse organisations.

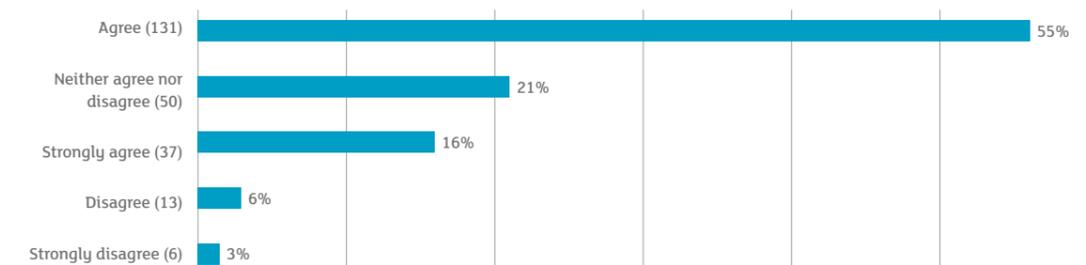
What are employers doing about STF?

9 The responses from HR and decision makers indicated that employers are actually doing very little about STF. 60 per cent of decision makers don't have a dedicated STF prevention programme and a significant proportion (16 per cent) of decision makers thought that eliminating STF was either impossible (5 per cent), or nothing could be done (11 per cent).

10 Worryingly, at least 17 per cent of decision makers thought that the biggest barrier to safety is their own staff: (either human nature 9 per cent or personal attitude/adherence 8 per cent). Clearly there is an activity to educate business decision makers on the incidence and effect of STF, in addition to the likely effective means of prevention.

11 The employees we surveyed identified that 71 per cent of their employers have multiple approaches to preventing STF at work. Therefore there is gap in actions between employers' actions and dedicated planning.

My organisation has a number of approaches to prevent slips, trips and falls at work



- 12 Worryingly, 18 per cent of people said their employer did not have a good system of assistance to support someone returning from a long period off work. This is a significant failing. 57 per cent said their employer did have a good system.
- 13 Similarly, the pictures for RTW arrangements is broadly the same for those who suffer a STF at home – 53 per cent of employers have a plan to support workers who have a STF at home.
- 14 9 per cent of the cohort stated they were fairly or very dissatisfied with the action taken by the employer relating to a STF event. This indicates that a fair proportion of employers don't take the issue or employees' needs seriously, and equates closely with the percentage of dismissive responses from some decision makers relating to STF.
- 15 Therefore, most employers will have arrangements to support employees' RTW irrespective of where the injury happened. There is a significant proportion of employers who are unprepared to support employees.

The comments from the workshops were summarised by the organiser as:

“ Employers need to increase general awareness of STFs in the workplace, especially when a STF has been reported. They need to demonstrate that the STF has been taken seriously and that measures have been put in place to reduce the risk in future. Importantly, a positive organisational culture needs to be displayed so that staff know that reporting a STF is not just acceptable but is encouraged. ”

- 19 54 per cent of people say that their employer does not provide younger employees with training on the cause and effect of falls on older family members. 19 per cent of people say that they do get some training, which is positive for this group but excludes a significant proportion of the present and future workforce.

The workshop consultees group members suggested some specific measures to help older employees avoid STFs, such as adjusting the nature of work that employees aged 65+ should do. Examples of this include reducing heavy, manual labour responsibilities. More general measures, such as reducing working hours and ensuring health assessments were carried out, were also raised by the 50+ focus group. It was acknowledged that these measures could help improve the safety of all employees and working practices must not be discriminatory.

Is the age of workers a significant consideration with STF?

How many people over 65 are in work in the UK?

According to the latest Office for National Statistics figures, for December 2017 to February 2018, just under 1.2 million people over the age of 65 were in work - or 10.2 per cent of the entire age group. That's out of a total UK workforce of 32.3 million.

The average age of the workforce is increasing and our expert panel identified this as a potential issue for employers and STF injuries.

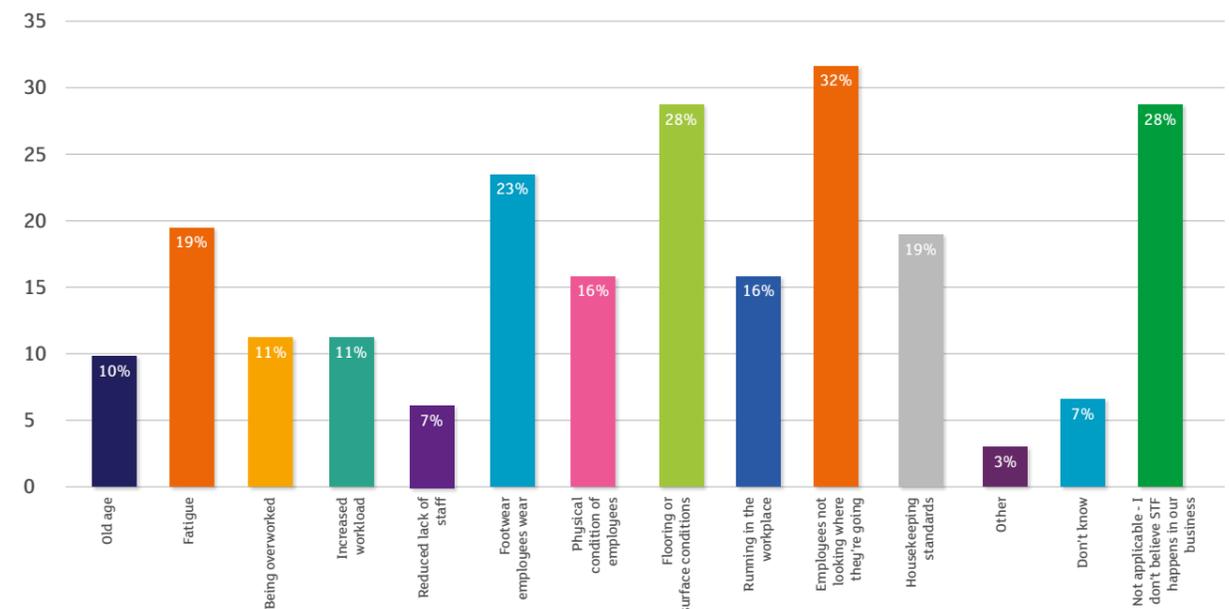
- 16 More than half of our cohort (53 per cent) thought that falls were inevitable as people get older. Only 13 per cent of our cohort strongly disagreed.
- 17 10 per cent of business leaders were of the belief that the age of employees is a primary cause of STF in their workplaces.
- 18 Less than 30 per cent of our cohort said that their employer takes any steps to address older people falling in the workplace. 28 per cent of employers said that their risk assessment process specifically requires consideration of older people for STF, whereas 40 per cent do not. The majority of people don't know (neither agree nor disagree) if their organisation takes steps to address the likelihood of older people falling at work. This is worrying. More people disagree (32 per cent) than agree (28 per cent) that their employer does take steps.

What are the expected causes of STF in the workplace?

- 20 Our decision makers survey groups identified that personal responsibility is seen as one of the main factors in relation to STFs and in various places the report talks about 'carelessness', 'rushing', 'not paying attention', – words that suggest victim-blaming and an emphasis on personal over corporate responsibility.
- 21 The decision makers identified a wide range of causes. The high level of responses indicating human factors and physical conditions as causes were more widely recognised than management failings. The most responses provided were 'employees not looking where they were going'.

Major causes of STF in organisations

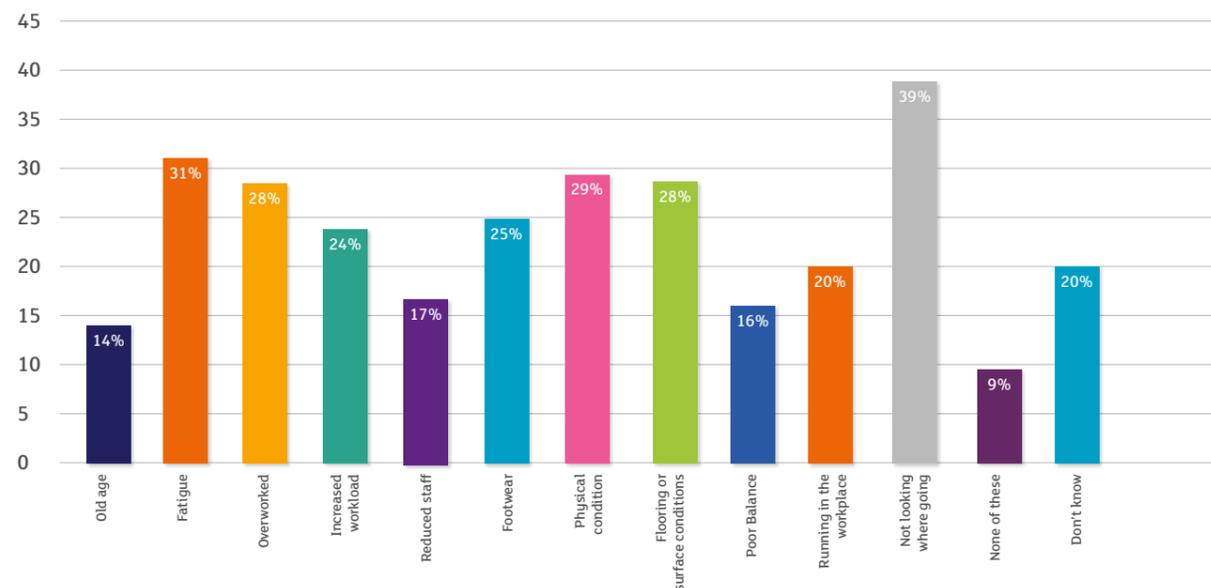
Which, if any, of the following, do you believe are major causes of STF in your business? Respondents were requested to chose more than one applicable response.



- 22 None of the HR decision makers survey group portrayed a particularly strong recognition of a link between fatigue and falls.
- 23 Participants verbally identified that they agreed that there was 'only so much' employers could do to prevent STF in employees' homes, and that responsibility for the prevention of STFs may be more in the employees' hands, with one participant joking that 'he would sue himself' if he fell at home.
- 24 STFs were not felt to be the main concern for those working from home. More, the impact of bad posture or working in a sub-optimal environment for the work undertaken (eg. poorly lit environment, desk at the wrong level, inadequate back/shoulder/arm/wrist support).
- 25 Our general cohort of the population indicated a broader, more balanced range of causation than decision makers. This is perhaps to be expected from a larger sample size, however, not looking where you are going scored the highest proportion of answers (39 per cent).
- 26 More of the public survey cohort indicated they perceive fatigue, overwork, increasing workload and reduced staff to be a more common cause of STF than the decision makers. Footwear and not looking where going received a similar level of responses.

Major causes of STF in organisations

Which, if any, of the following, do you believe are the most common causes of STF in your business? (Respondents were able to select more than one answer).



[In reference to a delivery driver]

“ Because we put things in place like social distancing and we were we weren't signing paperwork or given over electronic devices, a few of the reported incidents were as a result of the [delivery] driver walking away, facing backwards, from the premises. [This resulted in more STFs.] ”

“ I would [see people] working from home and sitting on the couch with the computer or laptop beside them. And you know, you should be sitting at your desk with your chair and everything else. I expect more muscular skeletal problems, definitely, than slips, trips or falls. ”

What do people do to help organisations prevent STF?

- 27 Reporting STFs and near misses is considered to be important but also considered unlikely to happen due to embarrassment, fear of blame, etc. Some felt that a 'good health and safety system' in the workplace should benefit all employees – including older workers. Effective OSH processes should be built into the fabric of a workplace, adapting to the needs of different workers and recognising that some adjustments need to be made to take age into account as a heightened risk factor.

Did STF increase over the pandemic?

- 28 Our decision makers cohort strongly indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic did not increase STF in their workplaces. Only per cent agreed that STF increased, 78 per cent disagreed. This was confirmed with the cohort where 63 per cent stated there is not an increased likelihood of STF due to the pandemic. (8 per cent said they believed an increase was likely or very likely).
- 29 The pandemic was not thought to increase the incidence of falls and was believed to have reduced it. There has been no mention or recognition of deconditioning from more static work practices.
- 30 The workshops indicated that there was no clear belief that the pandemic has increased falls and some thought falls would have reduced. There is possibly an underlying misconception or misunderstanding of working at home being a workplace or an employer's safety issue. 'Participants agreed that it was the employer's responsibility to make a decision about how far they would go to protect an employee's safety at home, and if they would provide certain equipment and measures to make their home working environment as safe as possible'.

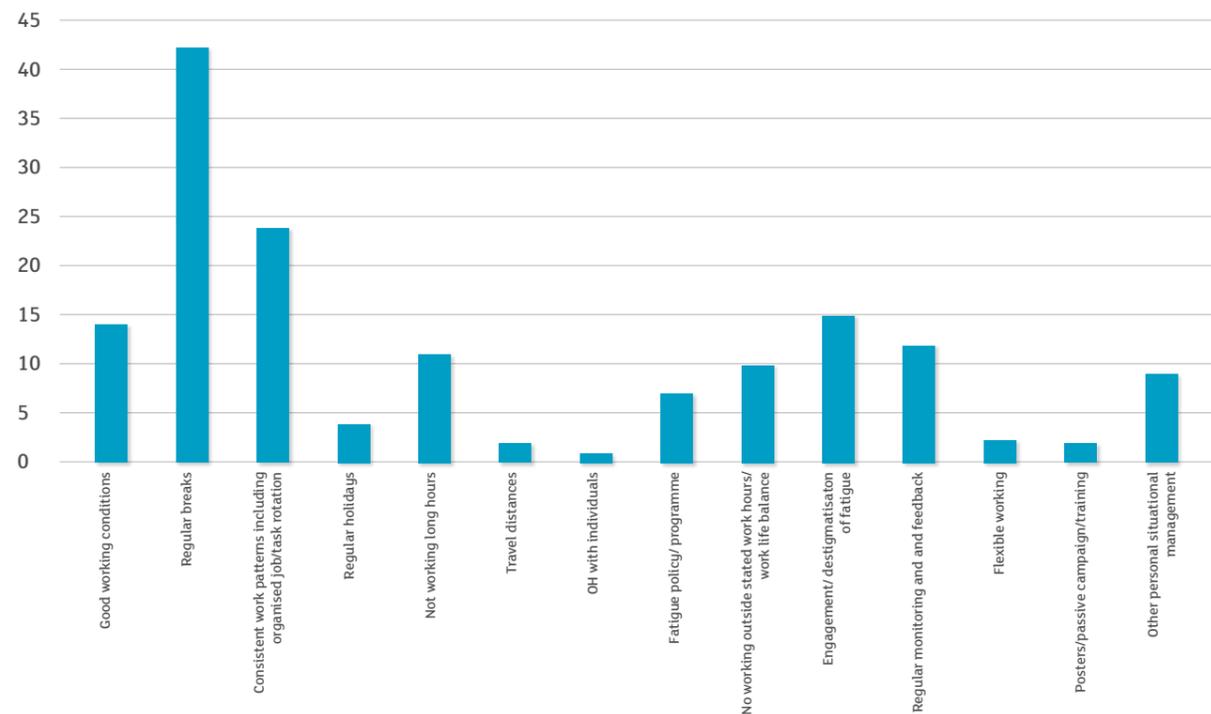
“ It's normally the older generation [who report a STF] as they are more likely to follow the process, expecting the incident to be looked at and investigated. However, the youngsters probably don't [they are] a little bit impacted by that macho culture. ”

“ I don't think there's been any change in trends or patterns, probably a slight reduction [in STFs due to the pandemic]. If anything, I think people are more aware of everything because of constantly changing code risk assessments. ”

Are falls caused by fatigue?

- 31 More than half of our cohort (56 per cent) reported that their employer has taken action to manage employee fatigue.
- 32 Decision makers suggested that they consider fatigue to be twice as important as old age in relation to STF. Fatigue was considered to be at the same level of importance as housekeeping. However, the survey cohort did not identify any of the actions that employers are taking to manage fatigue as one of the most effective methods for preventing STF.
- 33 Organisations should ensure staff take regular breaks and have consistent work patterns without excessive hours. Few identified training or specific OH interventions as effective in prevention. Thematically management engagement, monitoring and interventions were noted, with few making a link between workplace standards, ergonomics and fatigue.

What are the most effective ways of preventing fatigue that you are aware of?



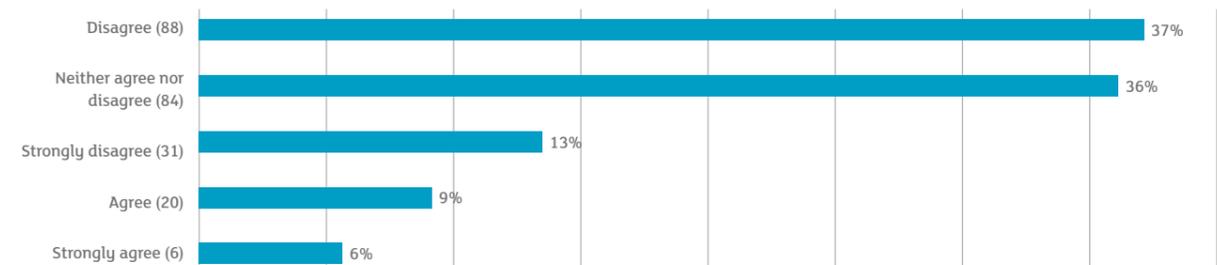
Do people think that home is safer than work for STF?

- 34 There is a fairly even split of opinion on highest risk. 38 per cent of people agree that the likelihood of STF is greater in the workplace than at home. 30 per cent think the home is greater risk than the workplace.
- 35 The majority of our general cohort disagreed that the risk of STF has increased through working from home. A significant 32 per cent stated they didn't know. Only 11 per cent strongly agreed or tended to agree.

Do organisations take STF at home seriously for employees and their families?

- 36 Only 15 per cent of decision makers indicated that their employer had any scheme to promote STF prevention at home. However, 82 per cent of respondents to our survey said that they use their personal knowledge of STF that was gained through work to protect their family and friends from STF at home.

My organisation has a specific plan or scheme to prevent slips, trips and falls for employees and their families at home



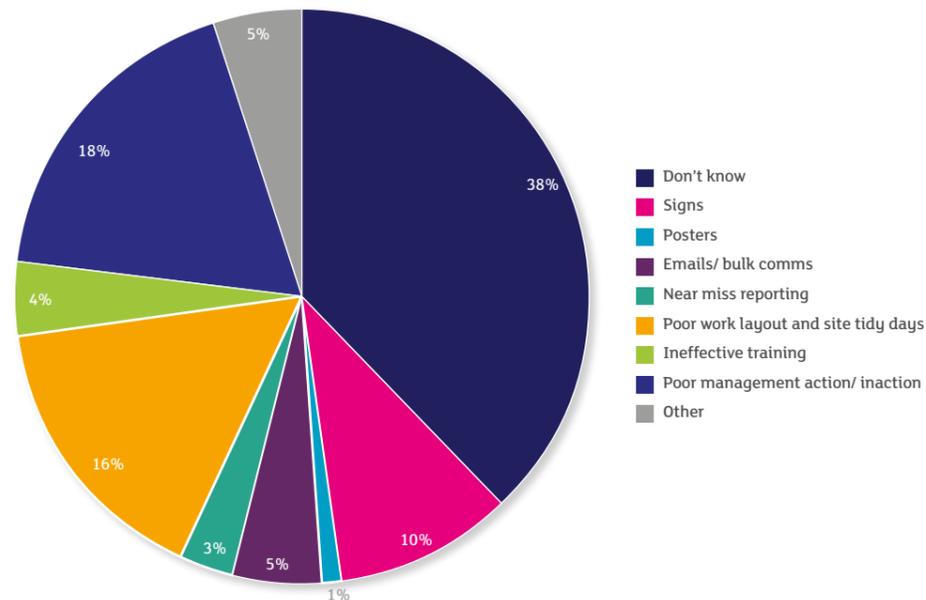
Is STF prevention all about people wearing the right shoes at work?

- 37 Whilst 63 per cent of employers report that they have an active footwear plan to manage STFs, 54 per cent of employers never check their staff footwear is suitable for their work. We noted that only 3 per cent of people suggested PPE or shoes as the most effective method of reducing STF that they were aware of and zero people identified it as a least effective method of reducing STF, therefore the importance footwear is not recognised as a clear issue for employers relating to STF.
- 38 A quarter of our cohort (25 per cent), indicated that they thought that footwear is a common cause of STF accidents.

What methods are considered effective and ineffective for preventing STF?

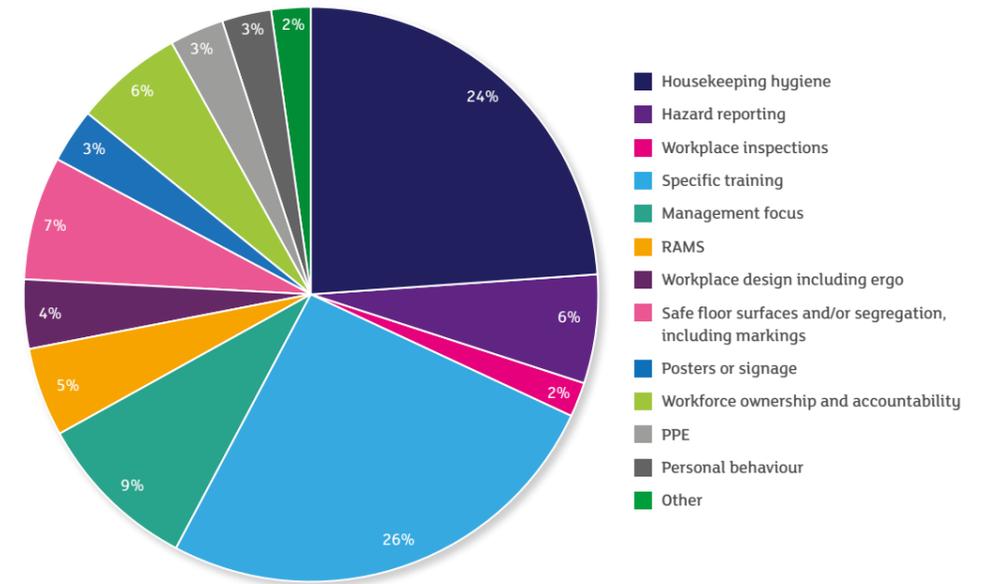
- 39 Basic housekeeping standards are recognised as fundamentally important in the workplace. Training was seen as very effective and this was generally linked with management involvement, workforce ownership and accountability.
- 40 Many of the respondents (38 per cent) did not have a suggestion of what doesn't work to prevent STF. This high proportion is surprising and indicates that a guide on what to do and what not to do would be useful and beneficial. The only correlation between STF specific controls and fatigue controls are management focus/ engagement and workplace design/ basic ergonomics. Otherwise the two controls appeared not to be linked in terms of a plan.

Least effective activity to prevent STF?



- 41 In their opinion, the least effective methods are the passive actions signs, posters, email campaigns with physical layout and poor management practices including ergonomics getting a small mention. The majority of these activities are inherently reactive, the comments and detail indicating unresponsive, passive management and leadership on the topic is the underlying issue.

What is the most effective method for preventing STF you have been made aware of for work?



- 42 Clearly housekeeping is recognised and fundamentally important. Training was seen as very important and this was generally linked with management engagement, workforce ownership and accountability. We note here that PPE (e.g. footwear) only gets a small mention and workplace design receives a lower recognition than 'Management focus' and 'Hazard reporting'. This is surprising, indicating that respondents focused on managing the issue rather than designing hazards out systematically.
- 43 The low recognition of personal behaviour, workforce ownership and accountability and posters and signage correlates with the least effective methods, therefore these are considered issues that organisations need to think about clearly and carefully to get right in their STF prevention programmes.
- 44 Organisations should have a dedicated plan, which includes the effective methods and how the least effective issues are addressed.

Conclusions

Large organisations – are they more or less exposed to STF?

- 45 The majority of large employers believed that STF are inevitable as people get older. Transport and distribution was the industry with the highest proportion of people who believed that STF were inevitable (72 per cent against 26 per cent disagree).
- 46 Following the perception of inevitability within large organisations, large organisations were significantly more likely than average to agree that STFs are very important to their organisation. 71 per cent against 56 per cent.
- 47 Large organisations are also significantly more likely to have a dedicated STF programme. (Average 33 per cent, large employers are at 47 per cent against 27 per cent of SMEs). Significantly more large organisations reported they believed STF had increased because of the pandemic (28 per cent over an average of 20 per cent and only 16 per cent of SMEs).
- 48 Only 11 per cent of large organisations expressed that ‘STF didn’t happen in our business’ against 36 per cent of SMEs. However, there is no data available on whether this 11 per cent do or do not actually have a problem.
- 49 Large organisations were significantly more likely (more than 10 per cent difference in responses between larger organisations and SMEs) to recognise being overworked, increased workload flowing and surface condition and running in the workplace as major causes of STF in their business. Only 11 per cent of large organisations stated ‘I don’t believe STF happens in our business’, as opposed to 36 per cent of SMEs.

- 50 More than half of decision makers think that workplace falls are inevitable⁵, and a third of decision makers don’t see STF as an issue for their business.⁶ Approximately 10 per cent of decision makers are actively hostile to the idea of STF being preventable in the workplace.⁷ This is significant and needs to be addressed.
- 51 There is some recognition that STF are important to businesses (mostly these are large businesses, but most employers don’t have a dedicated falls prevention plan – only 33 per cent do⁴). Lost time from STF varies significantly.
- 52 Most business decision makers are unaware of the severity of STF in terms of lost time to their staff from STF.¹⁰ Employers should be encouraged to specifically consider STF at home and at work for employees as part of safety and business continuation.
- 53 At least 17 per cent of decision makers thought that the biggest barrier to safety was the action of their own staff.¹³ Employees identified that some workplaces do have a varied approach to preventing STF and more than half of employers had a system of assistance for staff who returned from injury. About 20 per cent of employers do not have a good system^{15,16}. Nearly 10 per cent of employees say they were dissatisfied with the action taken following STF accident in their workplace.¹⁷ If considered in tandem with the results from decision makers⁷ this indicates there could well be a 10 per cent of the employer base which have very strong adverse attitudes and actions towards STF and perhaps safety, health and welfare in general.
- 54 Most people think that falls are inevitable as you get older and less than a third of employers take any steps to prevent STF in older people. The majority of organisations don’t provide anything for younger employees and there is clearly a risk management gap for many employees.
- 55 There was widespread agreement that the main causes of STF were human failings and that the most common cause of STF was people not watching where they were going.²⁴ Employers need more education of the importance of the issue and how STF can be prevented.
- 56 There was little recognition of home being a problem for STF risks from employees.²⁷ With a split of opinions on which is higher risk, although only 11 per cent agreed, or strongly agreed that STF risk had increased through working at home.³⁸ Employers and employees need more education on this issue.
- 57 People take the lessons they learn about STF home to protect their families, but only a small proportion of employers (15 per cent) have schemes to encourage this. This natural cascade of learning needs to be encouraged.
- 58 25 per cent of respondents thought footwear was a common cause of STF, only 3 per cent of responses indicated footwear standards as an effective control.⁴⁰ Further education of the importance of footwear to prevent STF would be useful to address this issue.
- 59 Statistically a higher proportion of decision makers in large organisations agree that STF are inevitable as people get older. (Larger proportion of agrees and smaller proportion of disagrees than average and to the SME sector).
- 60 Large organisations are generally more likely to understand the STF issue and have experienced the importance of STF⁴⁶, however, more than 60 per cent of large organisations do not have a dedicated STF plan, despite STF being considered very important and increasing.⁴⁷
- 61 A guide on what to do and what not to do would be useful for employers. Passive methods of signage and untargeted training were noted as being ineffective. Basic housekeeping was considered to be the most effective.



accidents don't have to happen

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