Stress at work is increasingly recognised as a serious health hazard, and the costs of occupational stress are substantial. Despite the fact that female participation in the workforce has grown in recent years and women account for nearly 50% of the labour force in Western societies, studies on stress have largely been restricted to male populations. The studies that have included women show that they experience a greater amount of work-related stress than men and that jobs dominated by women have lower status and are less well paid. Women are confronted with additional stressors such as conflicts between work and family responsibilities, sex role attitudes and sexual harassment. Women also experience more psychological and physical symptoms.

Studies of gender differences in workplace stress have often been performed in organisations where women are employed in different roles than men, which makes comparisons difficult. In studies where gender differences are found, the results may be due to the fact that the women and men were working in different types of jobs and at different levels in the organisations. However, few studies have compared men and women working in the same type of job or organisational settings.

The present study attempts to shed light on the context of stress for men and women in the same type of job. Interviews using the Critical Incidence Technique were conducted with 40 sales employees, both at the managerial and the non-managerial level in a Swedish telecom company. The study showed both similarities and differences in stressors reported across levels and gender.