Measuring the levels of cortisol of 62 top managers, that closely followed SAM scale tests revealed the wide discrepancy between self-reported and independently measured levels of salivary cortisol.

Following semi-structured interviews uncovered that the reason is not that they would get used to the levels, but rather the fear of being discovered as weak and vulnerable in the full knowledge of the high level of stress they experience.

**Methodology**

Using Salivette test tubes measuring afternoon salivary cortisol and comparing the results to 5-point Self-Assessment-Manikin Scales to assess the validity of the responses that were administered before taking cortisol samples.

Semi-structured interviews to find out the reasons for managers not telling the truth in SAM scales.

**Sample:** 62 of Czech top managers of different age, sectors and number of employees.

**Results**

None of the managers in the sample revealed their perceived stress levels. The possibility of them not being aware of it was abrogated by semi-structured interviews. Among other arguments, the similarities were found around the concept of them being predators among other predators without a possibility of showing any weakness.

48 managers of the total sample (62) partially or fully confirmed that they are aware of the long-term increased burden and possible consequences of high stress.

16 managers insisted they felt no stress at the beginning of the interviews. All of these 16 managers belong to a group with very high cortisol levels.

12 managers in the interview admitted that they have long been in a very strong "pressure", "push", "not managing". All of them confirmed a significant increase in salivary cortisol (about 14nmol/l).

**Discussion**

Top managers in the sample knowingly take the risk of making a mistake against the risk of losing a contract or damaging their professional growth in a given company or industry.

The possibility of being discovered by the cortisol test (secret agent James Cortisol) made them to reveal the true nature of their perceived stress, leading to rationalization for this approach as a reseach beneficial side effect. However, this might lead to a wider issue and thus subsequent research should follow.

**Possible biases of the research:**

Small sample means there cannot be any attempt to generalize the results. Strong need for rationalization of their lies could mean that a social desirability bias is present.

**Possible hypotheses to be tested:**

Top managers do not reveal their perceived levels of stress intentionally. Top managers do not acknowledge the truth unless there is the independent known factor to prove the lie.

**References**

