

WORKPLACE WELLBEING

The top 5 workplace stresses faced by employees in 2021

A 2021 poll showed that 54% of employees reported feeling “stressed” or “extremely stressed” at work¹. That’s just over half of the average UK workforce.

Should this be the norm? Clearly work-life can be a trigger of stress for employees across the country. But the scales are swayed. There are more people who feel stressed at work than people who don't. That's a statistic that needs shifting.

From feelings of overwhelm to trouble sleeping, a lack of self-confidence and using drugs or alcohol to cope—there's a myriad of ways stress can impact daily life. Long-term—or chronic—stress can lead to physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, also known as burnout². The phrase burning the candle at both ends springs to mind. But energy budgets eventually run out. And this can lead to serious health implications later down the line.

That's why we can't stress enough how important it is that the signs are recognised, acknowledged, and understood. By both employers, and employees. So we did a little digging. We've reviewed the data from the hundreds of thousands of calls that Health Assured has received over the past three months, to understand the top 5 workplace stresses faced by employees in 2021.

1. Job Role

The top workplace stressor relates to the job role. This kind of stress might cause employees to feel unsure about what's expected of them. Many employees in this calling category are seeking more clarity about their roles. Lack of objectives, no future direction and misunderstood expectations can lead to feelings of confusion, inadequacy and hopelessness. Over

time, this can take its toll.

2. Job demands

Next on the list is job demands. Typical issues in this remit include a feeling of overwhelm, not enough hours in the day and a struggle to cope. Perhaps it's an excessive workload, meaning employees are constantly 'up against it'. Or it could be an inability to cope with certain tasks required from the job role. Callers in this category often report symptoms of burnout and stress-related absences.

3. Work relationships

Relationships can be a cause of tension across all areas of life. In fact, both family and partner-related calls ranked within the top 10 call categories of the past three months. Work relationships came in as the third biggest cause of stress in the workplace. These kinds of calls can range from conflict with colleagues to bullying and victimisation across the organisation. Stress relating to relationships can subsequently impact many other areas at work too.

4. Support issues

The next biggest contributor to stress in the workplace was related to support issues. These kinds of calls cover problems relating to management and other methods of employee support. Issues in this category include receiving insufficient support in the role and a lack of guidance from management. Employees having difficulty in this category can often feel frustrated, anxious and neglected.

5. Changes at work

The final category in the top 5 is—changes at work. Changes at work can include big organisational shifts or smaller scale team changes. Whether it's redundancies, a flood of leavers or a shift in company



policy—there can be a range of reasons for work-life changes. Change can bring uncertainty and new ways of working. This can sometimes be a trigger of stress for employees, making it hard for them to stay engaged with workplace culture.

Countless potential workplace stresses reveal themselves from the call data. But behind each of these calls is an employee struggling. This stress can affect productivity, performance, and absence levels. It can also seep into other areas of life, affecting relationships, work-life balance, and mental health. This is why it's so important for both employers and employees, to grasp the impact of work-stresses and work towards a place of understanding, awareness and support.

Data taken from Health Assured's 24/7 EAP helpline between 01/06/2021-31/08/2021.

References

¹ Headspace.com. 2021. Rising work stress and burnout - Headspace. [online] Available at: <<https://www.headspace.com/work/2021-trends-report>> [Accessed 30 September 2021].

² nhs.uk. 2021. Stress - Every Mind Matters. [online] Available at: <<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/stress/>> [Accessed 30 September 2021].

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Breaking the taboo of menopause in the workplace

Most women will experience menopausal symptoms during their working life. And according to CIPD research, three out of five women experiencing these symptoms say it has a negative impact on their work.

At any one time, this means that it's statistically likely that someone in your organisation is experiencing these symptoms and the negative effects on their work. And while menopause is often hidden away, regarded as 'the ultimate taboo,' it's vital that you take steps to understand the menopause—and how good menopause in the workplace policy can help to reduce the stigma.

What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural part of ageing that all women experience, usually between 45 and 55 years of age, when their oestrogen levels decline¹. As a result, a woman will stop having periods, and will no longer be able to conceive without medical help. Signs and symptoms of the menopause include:

- Low mood
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Memory loss
- Problems concentrating
- Disturbed sleep patterns & night sweats
- Joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Hot flushes
- Headaches

From this list, it's evident how an employee's life at work can soon become difficult. What were once easy tasks now become a chore, causing employees to feel demotivated and disengaged. The stigma surrounding the menopause in the workplace often makes this situation even more frustrating

Employers have a duty of care to look after their staff. As advised by Acas, the Equality Act (2010) protects employees from discrimination at work due to the menopause. Further to this, the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) states that employers must ensure employee health, safety and welfare at work where possible.

Menopause policy in the workplace

One of the first steps you can take to protect and support employees going through the menopause is to create a menopause policy. Here are some examples of what such a policy should contain:

Open, honest communication: your staff should be able to speak about any issue, not just menopause—but menopause is very important. Don't make it the focus of a communication plan, but make sure people know that it's okay to approach a manager with issues.

Confidentiality: once someone brings up menopause, that conversation needs to be completely confidential. Your employees should know that they can trust your organisation with personal details and problems.

Understanding: training on the law around menopause at work, and how to sensitively handle conversations is a must.

Menopause support in the workplace

According to CIPD, only 32% of menopausal women get the support they need from their managers. Also, the Faculty of Occupational Health (FOM) has found that most working women are unwilling to disclose menopause-related health problems to line managers.

Clearly, not enough is being done to help make employees feel comfortable discussing health concerns. Yet, there are several benefits to the effective management of team members with menopausal symptoms.

Not only will it help you cultivate a working culture of acceptance, but it will help you to improve your team's morale, keep valuable talent, and reduce sickness absence.

To help you develop positive workplace wellbeing, we have listed several 'dos and don'ts' when helping employees through the menopause:

Do

Educate yourself: Gain a greater understanding of menopause by doing some research on the subject. By becoming more knowledgeable on the issue, you may find that you will become more approachable.

Build relationships: Asking your



team members how they are feeling and conducting regular 'check-ins' can provide them with an appropriate platform for them to voice their concerns.

Reasonable adjustments: Making reasonable adjustments for those suffering from menopausal symptoms can do wonders for employee morale. For example, altering their working hours.

Don't

Make assumptions: Every person in your team is different - so treat them as individuals.

Be embarrassed: Raising a health issue to a manager can be an anxiety-inducing experience - especially if the senior staff member is the opposite sex. Approach conversations with empathy, and try not to be embarrassed by the issue

Offer medical advice: Provide a compassionate ear if a health issue is raised, but avoid diagnosing the issue yourself.

Get support with employee wellbeing with Health Assured

Life is full of challenges, and the menopause is certainly one of them. By having a safe workplace where these issues can be discussed, employee wellbeing will thrive. This will allow you to support employees and retain your best staff members.

Create a healthy work environment and engage your team members by setting an example. One way you can do this is by having an Employee Assistance Programme, which improves wellbeing. Our EAP also comes with a wellbeing app, which employees can use whenever to access wellbeing resources.

References

¹ NHS. 2018. Menopause. [online] Available at: <<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>> [Accessed 23 September 2021].

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