

WORKING TOWARDS STRESS-FREE EMPLOYMENT

In 2017, we have seen impressive progress made

WHY FOCUS ON WORK-RELATED STRESS?

in challenging the stigma surrounding mental health. The Royal Family have been promoting the Heads Together Campaign – an initiative which strives to change the conversation on mental health. We have also seen the subject become a popular theme in discussions both in politics and the mass media.

Despite the fact that mental health appears to be slowly moving up the national agenda, the issue of everyday stress, including its prevalence and impact, is still largely being overlooked.

Stress in itself has been shown to have a negative impact, both on individual life expectancy and on quality of life. However, it has also been shown to be one of the main catalysts in developing serious mental health conditions and contributes towards their severity (Ingram and Luxton, 2005). Therefore, if we stand any chance of preventing mental health difficulties in the future, it is paramount that more attention is given to the topic of stress and how it can be prevented.

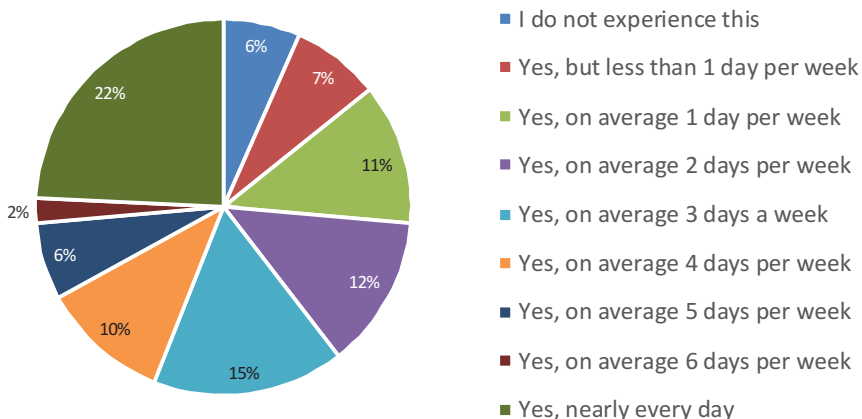
94% OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCE WORK-RELATED STRESS

The average person in the UK spends around 12 years of their life at work. As

well as taking up a significant part of our lives, the experience of work can become a major source of stress for many people. The International Stress Management Association (ISMA UK) has commissioned research to look into the prevalence and impact of work-related stress and mental health issues in the UK. This report presents the findings, and makes suggestions about how we can reduce stress in the workplace and help prevent the development of mental health issues.

More than 350 people participated in this survey-based study. These individuals were from a range of age groups and professions, including the public, private, and third sectors. The results suggest that around 94% of people in the UK experience work-related stress, with work-related issues contributing more to people's stress levels than difficulties regarding relationships, health and finances combined.

Do you experience work-related stress?



EFFECTS OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

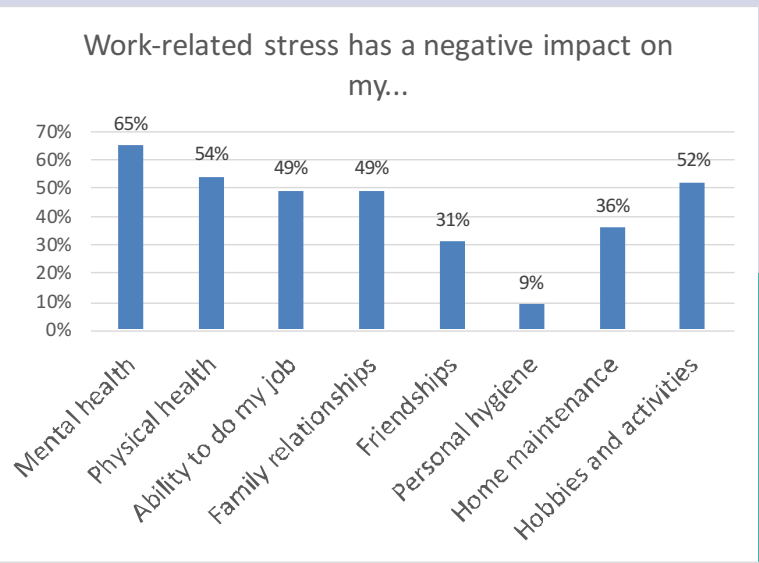
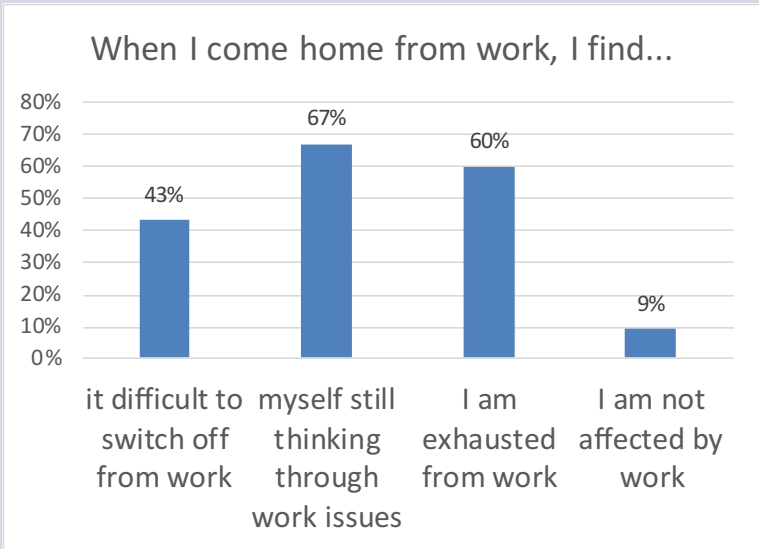
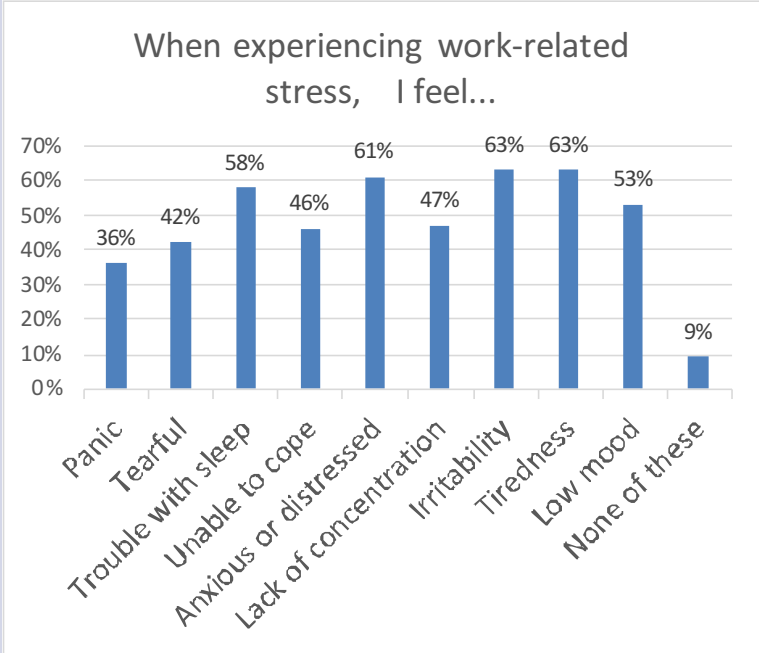
The research explored the negative effects that work-related stress has on people's lives — with 91% of individuals experiencing symptoms such as feeling panicked, depressed, anxious, irritable or unable to cope. Other effects included difficulties with sleeping and lack of concentration.

Almost half of individuals reported that work-related stress had a negative affect on their ability to do their jobs, with 57% of individuals saying that this culminated in them having to take periods of time off work.

The results show that work-related stress also impacts outside working hours, with 67% of individuals saying that they were still thinking through work-related issues when at home, and 60% of individuals reporting that work caused them to be either tired or exhausted after work.

Work-related stress also has an impact on people's general wellbeing and how they function in their daily lives. More than half of people reported that it had a negative impact on their mental health, physical health and their ability to undertake activities that they enjoy in life. People also reported that it had a negative impact on their relationships with friends and family, as well as their ability to maintain their home and standards of personal hygiene.

Individuals were asked about how much money they spent counteracting the effects of work-related stress. The average amount spent was £120 per month, but for some individuals this figure was as high as £300 per week.



91% OF PEOPLE REPORTED THAT WORK-RELATED STRESS WAS HAVING A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THEIR LIVES

“It is clear that work-related stress is having a crippling effect on many people’s ability to function, both in and outside of work, making this not only an economic problem but an ethical one. It is vital that we change expectations of wellbeing at work, so that the question changes from whether someone is coping at work to whether they are thriving there.”

Carole Spiers, Chair, ISMA UK

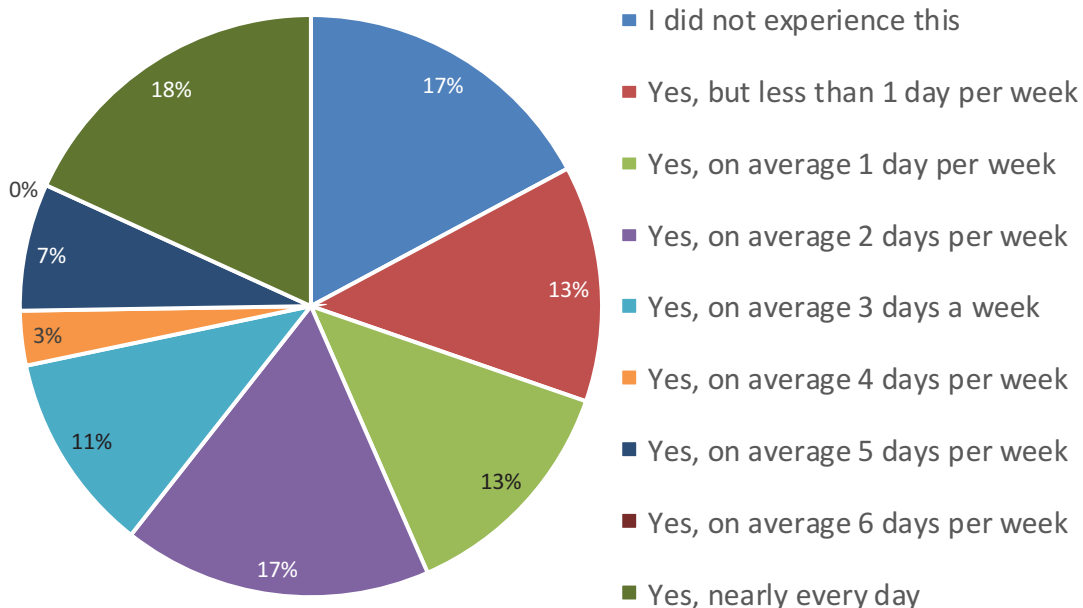
“Our survey shows that levels of work-related stress have increased significantly in the last five years alone - with 91% of individuals saying that stress causes them to experience symptoms such as feeling panicked, depressed, anxious, irritable and being unable to cope. Almost half of respondents said work-related stress has a negative effect on their ability to do their job.”

Holly-Anna Petersen, Lead Researcher

COMPARING CURRENT STRESS LEVELS TO PREVIOUS YEARS

When comparing current levels of work-related stress (see page 1) to those of previous years, the ISMA survey results show that its prevalence is significantly greater in the UK now than it was in 2012. If these findings are reflective of a wider trend, demonstrating that stress levels are increasing over time, it is clear that action needs to be taken quickly in order to prevent levels escalating further.

Did you experience work-related stress in 2012?



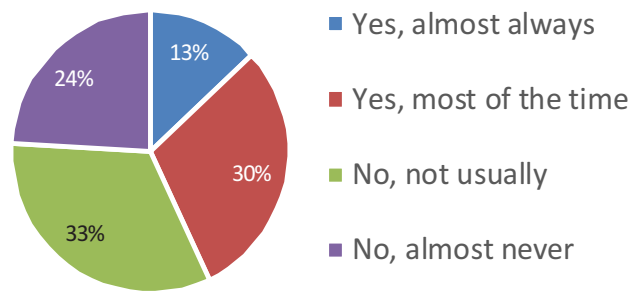
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STRESS

Evidence has shown that working too long, without breaks, can have negative effects including work fatigue and reduced performance. It has also been shown to decrease creativity, while increasing the number of mistakes made by individuals (De Bloom, Kinnunen & Korpela, 2014; Tucker, 2003).

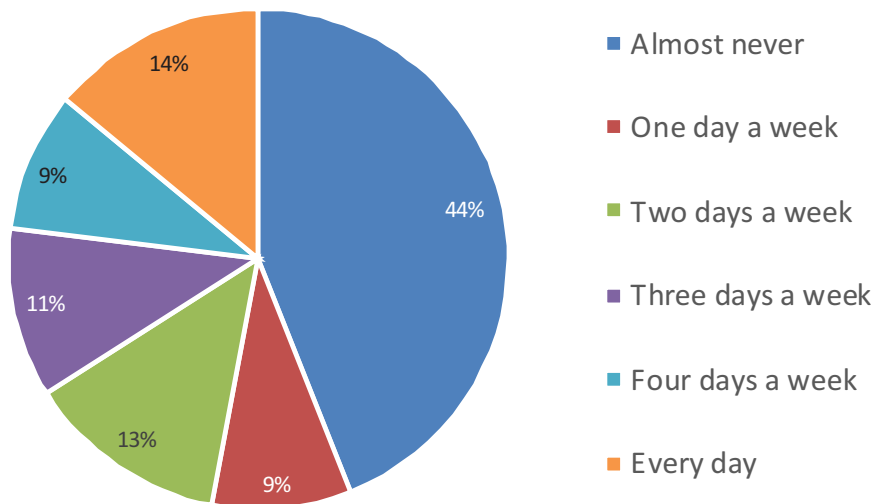
The ISMA findings suggest that, currently, around 57% of individuals in the UK are unable to fit their workload into official working hours, causing them to take work home or stay longer hours in the office than contracted. On top of this, 44% of individuals stated that their workload was so high that they were 'almost never' able to take a work-free lunch hour in the day, with 34% of individuals not taking a break at any time.

57% OF PEOPLE REPORTED THAT THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO FIT THEIR WORK INTO THE CONTRACTED HOURS

Can you fit your work into your allotted working hours?



Do you usually take a work-free lunch hour?



44% OF PEOPLE REPORTED THAT THEY WERE ALMOST NEVER ABLE TO TAKE A WORK-FREE LUNCH HOUR

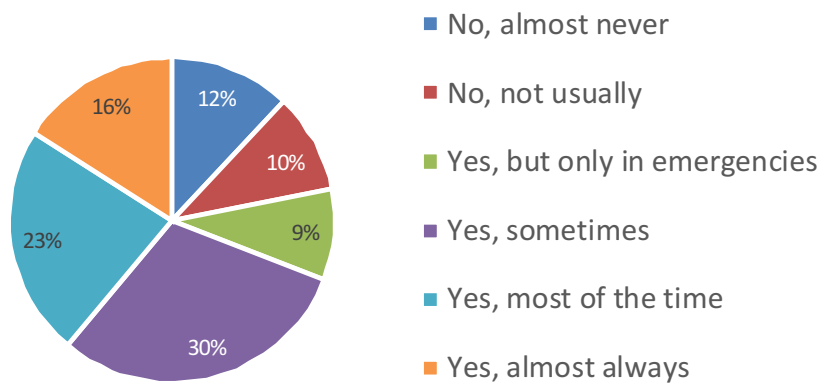
A staggering 78% of individuals said that they answered work-related email and phone calls outside working hours. The remaining 22% of individuals who did not act like this consisted of people who did not feel the need to communicate about work outside of working hours, and those who were unable to do so, due to the nature of their employment.

78% OF PEOPLE REPORTED THAT THEY ANSWERED EMAIL AND PHONE OUTSIDE WORKING HOURS

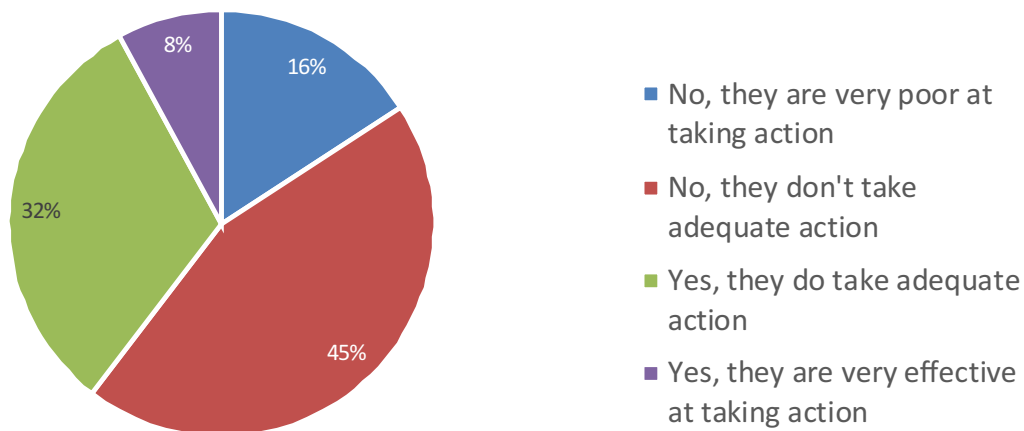
In the light of this evidence, it is not surprising that 61% of individuals reported that they did not think their employer was taking enough action to prevent their stress levels getting too high.

61% OF PEOPLE REPORTED THAT THEY DID NOT THINK THEIR EMPLOYER DID ENOUGH TO PREVENT THEIR STRESS LEVELS GETTING TOO HIGH

Do you answer work-related emails or phone calls in out-of-work hours?



Do you think that your current employer takes enough action to prevent your stress levels getting too high?



De Bloom, J., Kinnunen, U., & Korpela, K. (2014). Exposure to nature versus relaxation during lunch breaks and recovery from work: development and design of an intervention study to improve workers' health, well-being, work performance and creativity. *BMC public health, 14*(1), 488.

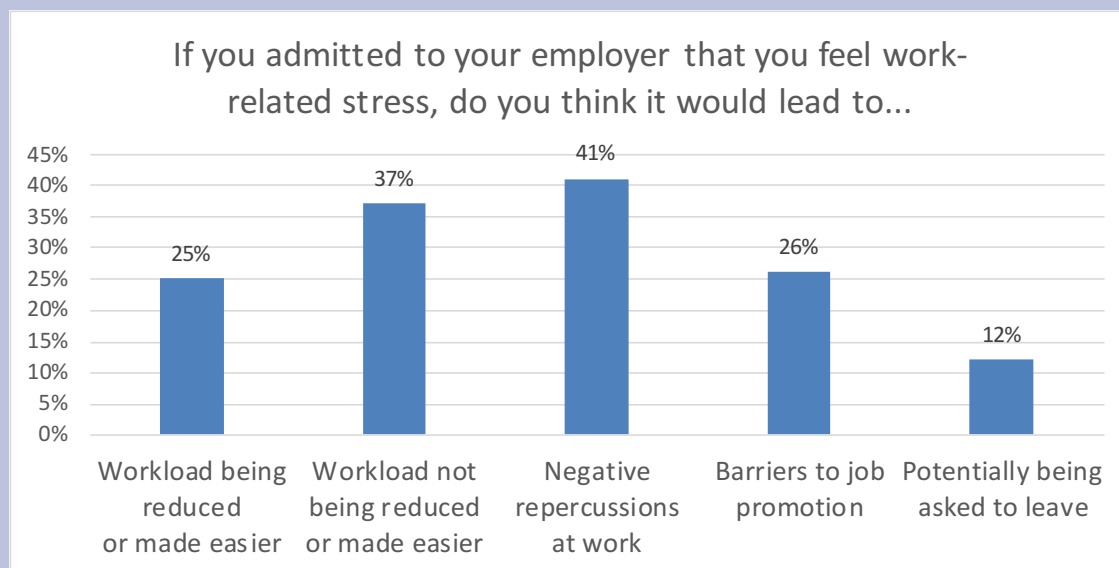
Ingram, R. E. & Luxton, D. D. (2005). "Vulnerability-Stress Models." In B.L. Hankin & J. R. Z. Abela (Eds.), *Development of Psychopathology: A vulnerability stress perspective* (pp. 32-46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Tucker, P. (2003). The impact of rest breaks upon accident risk, fatigue and performance: A review, *Work & Stress, 17*(2)

Despite the prevalence of work-related stress highlighted in this report, when it comes to seeking support and solutions to the problem, only 32% of individuals felt that they would be able to speak to their line manager or HR department about the issue, and only 29% of individuals said that they would be comfortable asking for time off work due to stress, if needed.

One possible reason for this is that only 25% of individuals thought that admitting to work-related stress would have beneficial effects, such as their

workload being reduced or their role being made easier. In contrast to this, the remaining 75% of individuals thought admissions about stress would have negative repercussions, such as getting in the way of job promotion or being asked to leave the organisation.



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75% OF PEOPLE REPORTED THAT THEY WOULD NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE ADMITTING TO WORK-RELATED STRESS TO THEIR LINE MANAGER OR HR DEPARTMENT

WORKING TOWARDS A SOLUTION



“This report highlights the prevalence of work-related stress and the negative impact it is having on people’s lives—affecting their ability to maintain relationships at work and at home, and having a negative impact on both their physical and mental wellbeing. It also highlights a reluctance by employees to admit to difficulties they are experiencing, through a fear of potentially negative repercussions. While this is the case, individuals will continue to suffer the effects of work-related stress in silence and will be unable to receive the support which could be available to them. It is up to each of us, employees and employers alike, to raise the profile of work-related stress and create an environment in which people are able to speak freely about their difficulties. Only when the stigma of work-related stress has been removed will we be able to have honest conversations about solutions and move towards a more holistic perspective of wellbeing at work.”

Carole Spiers, FISMA, MIHPE, Chair, ISMA UK

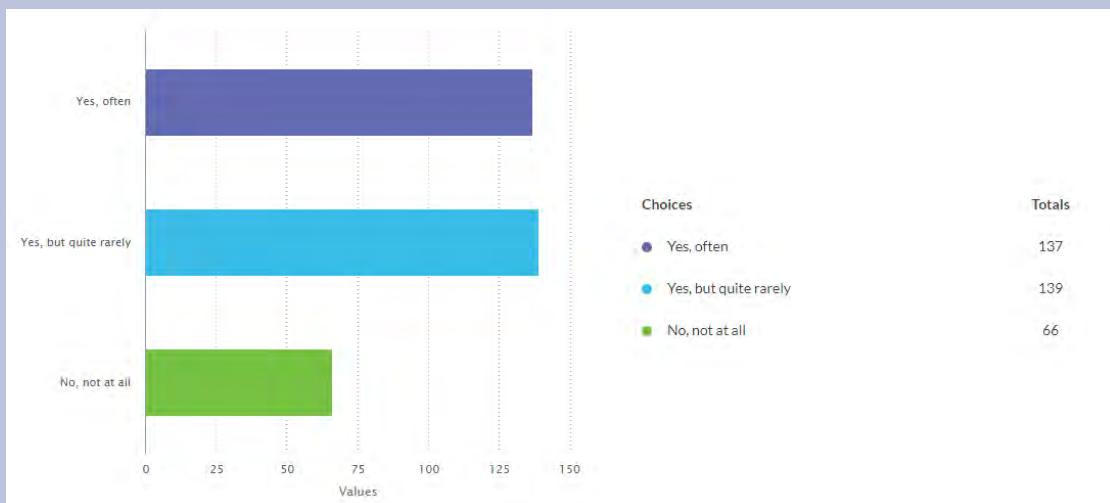
WHY FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH?

The same ISMA survey also addressed mental health, in order to gain an insight into key issues and support for people at work.

This provided a useful snapshot, confirming the high numbers of people in employment who are experiencing or have experienced mental health issues.

A large majority (81%) said they had experienced mental health issues at some time and, of these, nearly half said they had experienced them frequently. Only 19% had not experienced any at all.

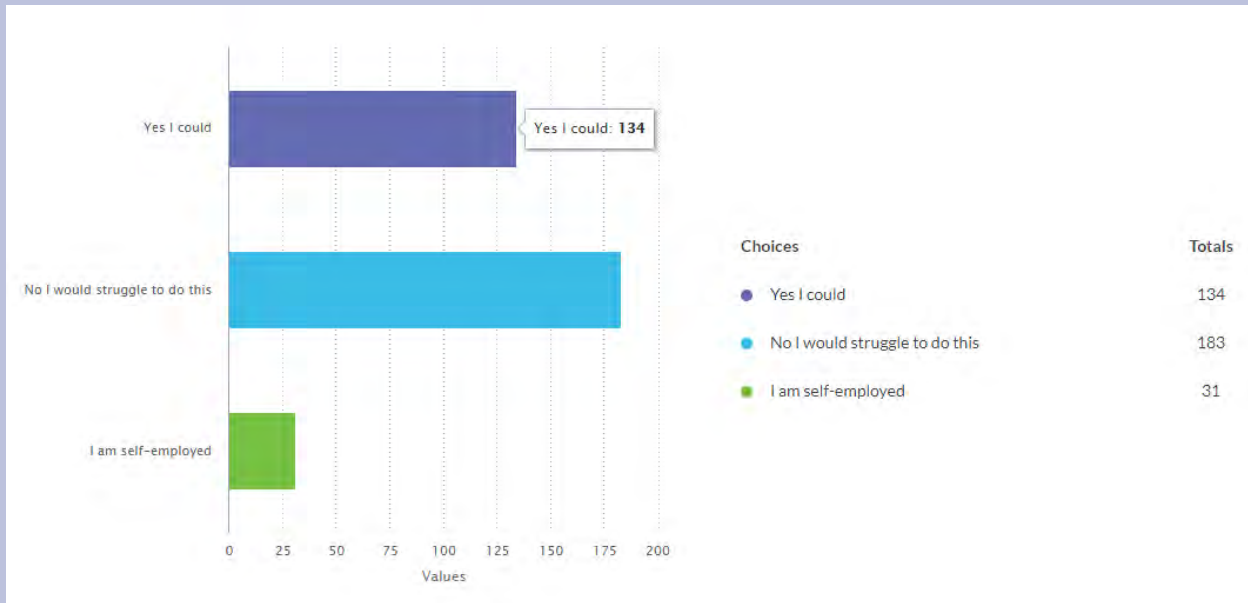
81% OF PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES



As shown in the findings on stress, a majority felt they would struggle to share concerns about their own mental health at work, suggesting that perceptions of stigma and fears of repercussion are still prevalent. However, a substantial minority (39%) of respondents felt they could talk to their employer about mental health issues, whereas 53% felt unable to do so. Others were self-employed and had no-one to turn to.

These findings may reflect differing cultures within work-places in this sample or indicate that recent campaigning by public figures is encouraging greater openness. Nevertheless, they also demonstrate that, in most cases, people suffer in silence and the issue stays unmanaged.

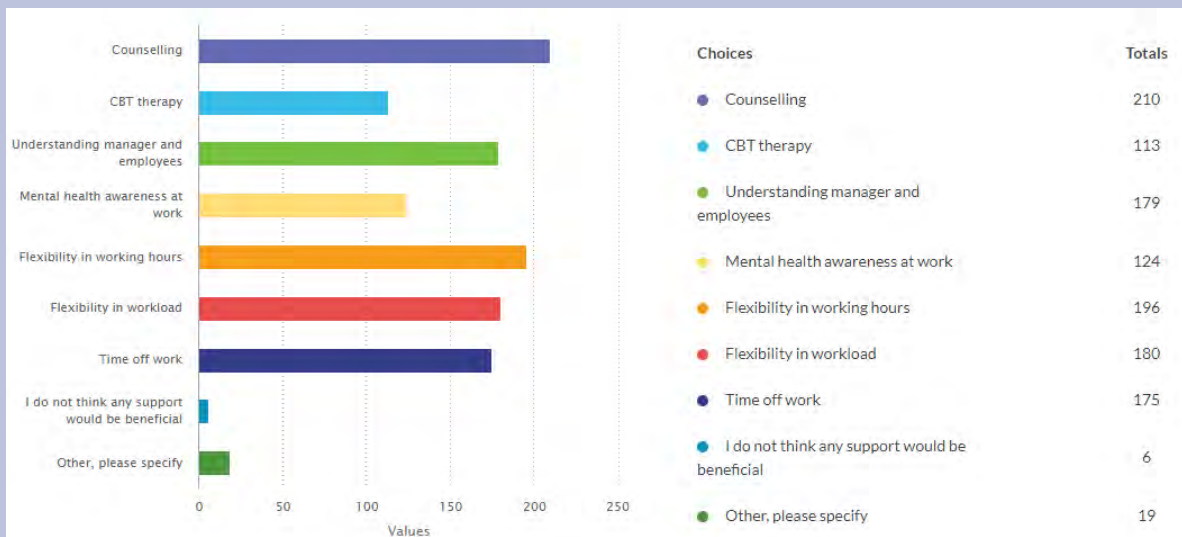
DO YOU FEEL YOU COULD TALK TO YOUR EMPLOYER?



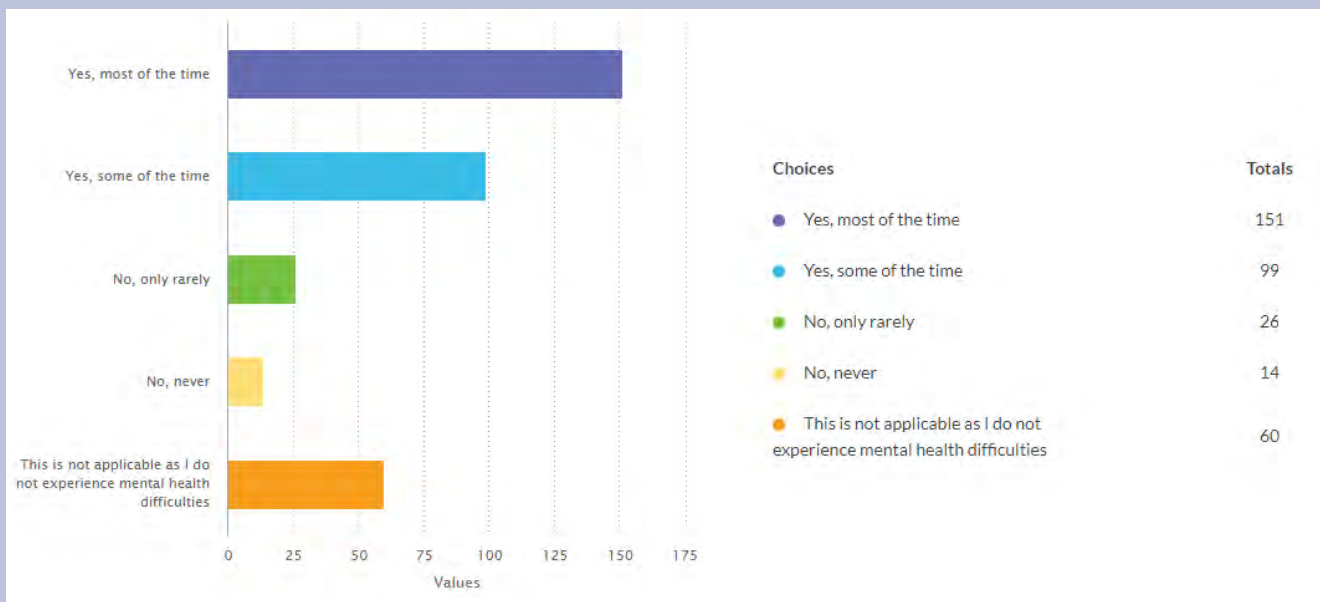
When asked whether their employer provided support for mental health problems, there was a fairly even split, with almost half considering that their employer provided adequate support, while 44% disagreed. This may reflect a disparity of provision amongst employers, some of whom provide exemplary support whereas others make little provision. In this respect, there may be something of a mental wellbeing lottery, depending on which organisation employees work for.

Respondents were also asked which interventions they would find beneficial, if they experienced mental health issues. Of the top three answers, counselling and flexible hours were seen as most helpful, while ranked at no. 3 was the importance of good relationships between managers, employees and colleagues. Very often, stress and mental health issues can be triggered by social experiences at work. If this can be got right, powerful benefits would accrue to both employer and employee.

GOOD RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK CAN HELP



FAMILIES AS A SOURCE OF SUPPORT



Asked about families as a source of support, the vast majority of respondents (96%) who had experience of mental health issues felt that they were a source of support most or some of the time. However 1 in 25 said their families were not supportive. This places those with no support at work or at home in a highly vulnerable position.

“Any plan developed to tackle mental health needs will be empty and meaningless if it doesn’t factor in the escalating problem of work-related stress. We urge employees and employers alike to end the stigma of work-related stress by ‘speaking up and speaking out about stress’ and raising its profile in the workplace. ISMA believes that, by transitioning our workplaces into safe spaces where employees’ emotional wellbeing is also valued, we can start to find collaborative and creative solutions to stress and mental health problems. This will have a positive effect not only on productivity, but also on the general mental wellbeing of the nation.”

CAROLE SPIERS FISMA, MIHPE, CHAIR, ISMA UK

About ISMA



ISMA, a registered charity, is the UK professional body for stress management and has been campaigning on stress-related issues for over 30 years.

ISMA members are focused on encouraging employers and employees to help each other by providing guidance on establishing programmes to reduce stress and the development of mental health issues within their businesses. ISMA also seeks to help individuals by encouraging them to focus on their health and wellbeing on a day-to-day basis.

<http://isma.org.uk/>

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