

Stress and mental health issues in the workplace

Paul Farmer – Chief Executive



For better mental health

- **Mind is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales**
- **We have been campaigning for better mental health for all, for over 60 years**
- **We have a network of 168 independent local Mind associations providing local services**
- **Our vision is of a society that promotes and protects good mental health for all, and that treats people with experience of mental distress fairly, positively, and with respect**



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- **People who experience mental distress are at the heart of what we do**
 - ✓ **Our network of 2000+ people with mental distress informs our work**
 - ✓ **Fifty per cent of trustees have experience of mental distress**
 - ✓ **Mind actively employs people with mental health problems**



Key points

- **Mental health and employment**
- **Stress and mental health problems at work**
- **The elephant in the room**
- **Prevention and support**
- **Disclosure**
- **Mind's 'Taking care of business' campaign**



Mental health and employment

We all have mental health, like we all have physical health

The workplace can have a significant impact on mental health – it can promote wellbeing or trigger distress

- Poor working environment
- Long hours and no breaks
- Unrealistic expectations or deadlines
- Unmanageable workloads
- Lack of job security
- Negative relationships or poor communication
- Workplace culture



Stress and mental health problems at work

- Conditions like anxiety, depression and unmanageable stress affect **1 in 6 British workers** each year
- **Up to five million workers** feel 'very' or 'extremely' stressed by their work, with **half a million** believing it is making them ill
- **Yet eight in ten employers** have no mental health policy to help staff sustain good mental health
- **Mental ill health costs UK employers over £26bn** every year as a result of absence, reduced productivity and staff turnover - **£1,035 per employee**



Mind's research (2010)

Due to the impact of recession on workplaces:

- **28 per cent of people are working longer hours**
- **One in ten had visited their GP for support due to recession-related pressure on their jobs**
- **One in seven had started taking anti-depressants**
- **One in five workers had called in sick due to unmanageable stress, but 93 per cent did not tell their boss the real reason**

Workplace stress and mental health issues are a growing problem – but remain the elephant in the room



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The elephant in the room



Right now, 1 in 6 workers is experiencing depression, anxiety or stress.

That's the elephant in the room.

Let's talk about mental health at work
visit mind.org.uk/work

If you want mental health advice and support,
find your local Mind at mind.org.uk

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Mind's research (May 2011)

- 54 per cent said stress and mental distress is a taboo subject in the workplace
- One in five people fear mentioning stress to their manager would put them first in line for redundancy
- One in four said they would be perceived as less capable than other colleagues if they admitted to stress
- One in three said time off for stress was seen as an 'excuse' for something else
- Of those who had disclosed a mental health problem, one in five had either been sacked or forced out of their jobs



Culture of silence

- **Employees feel unable to speak up about issues, for fear of discrimination**
- **Employers fear broaching the subject, for fear of exacerbating distress or any legal consequences**
- **If support is not put in place, problems can spiral into a health crisis – with increased costs for individuals and employers**



Employers need to take the first step in confronting the elephant in the room

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Prevention and support



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Best practice for employers

A comprehensive mental wellbeing strategy **will** create an open and supportive working environment through a more detailed and de-stigmatised understanding of mental health

Three-pronged approach

1. Promote wellbeing
2. Tackle work-related mental health problems
3. Support employees with mental health problems (undisclosed and disclosed)



Senior leadership across the organisation is crucial

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Promote wellbeing



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Promote wellbeing

- Promote work/life balance
- Flexible hours where possible
- Employee engagement and consultation
- Promote positive working relationships
- Good communication
- Exercise provision and social activities
- Peer support/buddy systems
- Raise awareness of wellbeing and promote open discussion



Tackle work-related mental health problems



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Tackle work-related mental health problems

- Training for line managers
- Regular supervision
- Managing workloads among staff
- Stress risk assessment
- Physical environment
- Stress coaching and on-the-job support
- Publicise internal and external support pathways
- HSE Management Standards for Stress
- Communication with dispersed workers



Support employees



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Support employees

- Flexible hours
- Change of workspace
- Return-to-work policies (phased return)
- Changes to role
- Increased supervision or support
- Provision of quiet rooms
- Support groups
- Relaxing absence rules and limits

Often about a change in attitude rather than a cost



Three-pronged approach: case study

BT operates support at three levels

- **Level one: promoting wellbeing and preventing mental distress - advice on intranet and training on soft skills**
- **Level two: identifying distress and intervening early to prevent escalation - online stress risk assessment for employees and training for managers**
- **Level three: range of support and treatments for people experiencing mental health problems – employee and manager produces an ‘advance directive’, identifying early warning signs and a plan of action and support**

Outcome: mental health sickness absence has reduced by 30%



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Disclosure



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Responding to disclosure

- Review policy – new restrictions on pre-employment health questionnaires
- Avoid making assumptions – ignore stereotypes about mental health and do not guess symptoms and impact
- Embed confidentiality – sensitive personal information
- Encourage people to talk – honest and open dialogue
- Respond flexibly – agree on tailored system of support
- Seek advice if you need to – Mind, local Minds, health professionals, EAP, occupational health...



Mind advises: it is the person's choice whether or not to disclose, but being open can help them get the right support

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Conversations about mental health

- Focus on the person not the problem
- Ask some simple questions
 - How are they feeling?
 - What would they like to happen? How?
- Work on the basis that they want to return to work - the interaction will be more positive
- Wellness recovery action plans (WRAPs) are a useful tool

“Employers have understood that having a mental health condition is something that can and does get better...the best employers can see beyond a label or diagnosis to get the best from people.”



Encouraging openness: case study

“Deloitte now has seven partners trained as Mental Health Champions so people can talk to them in confidence about their mental health, outside of formal line management structures. This sends a signal that employees can be open about their mental health and access support at an early stage. Some 40 people across the firm have sought help and we have also boosted our Well Now programme to focus on managing pressure, building resilience and offering early help to colleagues.”

John Binns, Partner



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Mind's campaign for mental wellbeing at work



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'Taking care of business' campaign

- Launched in May 2010
- Aims to ensure that people with experience of mental distress are able to gain and retain fulfilling employment
- Start of a three to five year campaign to transform attitudes to mental wellbeing at work
- Raising awareness, building relationships and providing tools to support employers and employees
- Over 40 organisations have signed up as official supporters and over 5,000 employers have received our free guide





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2011 activities

- **Aim: create open workplace environments, where employees feel able to speak up and employers can respond to provide support**
- **Between 14-21 May, high profile awareness campaign about the 'elephant in the room' – excellent reception through national and local media and online**
- **Activities:**
 - **High-level business summit, supported by AXA**
 - **Local Minds working with local businesses**
 - **Organisations promoting our postcards and posters**
 - **Coming soon... disclosure tools with the CIPD**



More information

Mind's resources

- Advice and toolkits for individuals and employers
- Mental health awareness training
- Workplace assessments

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