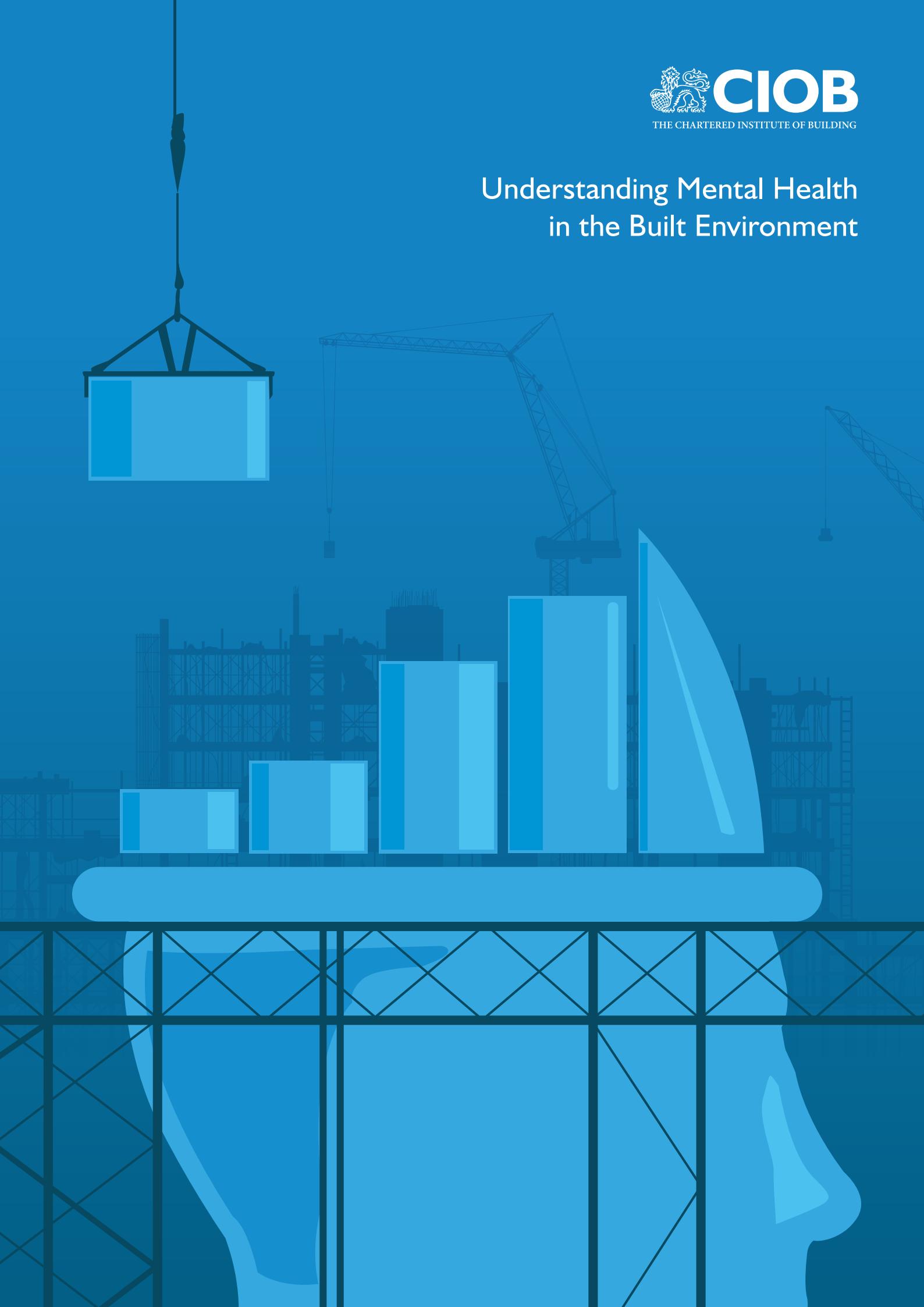


## Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment



by Daisie Rees-Evans, Policy Officer

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# Foreword

By Professor Charles Egbu  
President, The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)



Despite significant improvements in the safety of the construction workforce in recent years, mental health and wellbeing has become a silent crisis.

In many industries, the social stigma around discussing mental health is fading. Unfortunately, the construction industry still has some catching up to do.

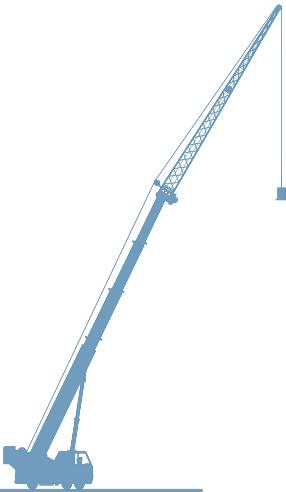
Despite significant improvements in the safety of the construction workforce in recent years, mental health and wellbeing has become a silent crisis. In Britain, statistics indicate that men working in construction are three times more likely to take their own lives than men on average. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also recorded 79,000 workers suffering from work related ill-health – a statistic that has remained flat in recent years.

However, poor mental health is not just a UK problem, but an international one. After all, construction is a high-risk industry, with numerous physical and structural issues. These run throughout the industry, ranging from long and demanding working hours through to tight and often difficult to reach deadlines. The construction industry's business model has also led to numerous payment issues and uncertainty over future workloads, both of which disproportionately affect small and medium sized businesses.

Construction is a truly rewarding and unique industry to work in – but at a time when mental ill-health is on the rise, we must make sure that the levels of investment and focus we offer are the same as that of the safety and security of our construction sites. As a professional institution, we are guardians of quality and an ethical way of working. We are the conscience of the industry. If we are to attract new people to the sector, from diverse backgrounds, we must make the sector an open and safe environment to work in.

At a mental health workshop and debate that I chaired at the CIOB Members' Forum event in Edinburgh in 2019, we heard of several experiences of mental health issues, both inside and outside the industry. I believe that all attendees left the event with a real understanding and appreciation for the need to not only care for our own mental health, but also that of our colleagues around us.

You might want to call it a duty of the organisations we work in and the colleagues we work with. It is why I believe that mental health is key to changing construction for better, and have subsequently made it the focus of my presidency at the CIOB.



This report is a contribution to that end. It details the results from our survey of over 2,000 construction professionals, taken in October 2019, to understand the scale and impact that mental ill-health is having on the construction workforce and the factors that are contributing to this.

Some of these survey findings might prove shocking or sobering reading for you, but you will also see the positive changes that are taking place across the sector. These challenges are likely to become even more acute, given the recent impacts that coronavirus (COVID-19) is set to have on the way that we live, work and play. Tackling mental ill-health is going to remain a significant challenge for the industry over the next few years, and we must work as a collective – involving industry, government, and professional bodies to make more fundamental changes and improvements to mental health provision.

I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to complete the survey and share their personal experiences of mental ill-health within the workplace. In particular, I would like to express my thanks to those mental health organisations who shared their expertise and insight for this report.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following organisations for their contributions to this report:

- Anxiety UK
- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
- Centre for Mental Health
- Mates in Mind
- Mental Health First Aid England
- Mind
- Komatsu Mining
- RSE Building Services
- Seddon
- Tideway

# Executive Summary

Mental ill-health is a silent crisis within the construction industry. The way the industry currently operates can be stressful and may contribute to poor mental health and wellbeing.

For construction, this issue runs through the industry, affecting decision-making from the boardroom through to site.

Research shows that a quarter of construction employees in the UK have considered taking their own lives, and between 2011 and 2015, more than 1,400 construction workers died by suicide. Workers often suffer in silence, and the 'macho' culture of simply dealing with it and not seeking help only makes the issues worse. Not only does this impact the individual who is dealing with poor mental health, but it affects their friends, families, colleagues, and the productivity of the business.

In recent years, mental health and wellbeing has garnered more attention in the media, leading to increased public and business awareness. However, this issue still pervades the construction industry, affecting decision-making from boardroom through to site.

This report seeks to explore three questions:

**How prevalent is poor mental health in the industry?**

**What factors are causing people stress, and at which job level does this most frequently occur?**

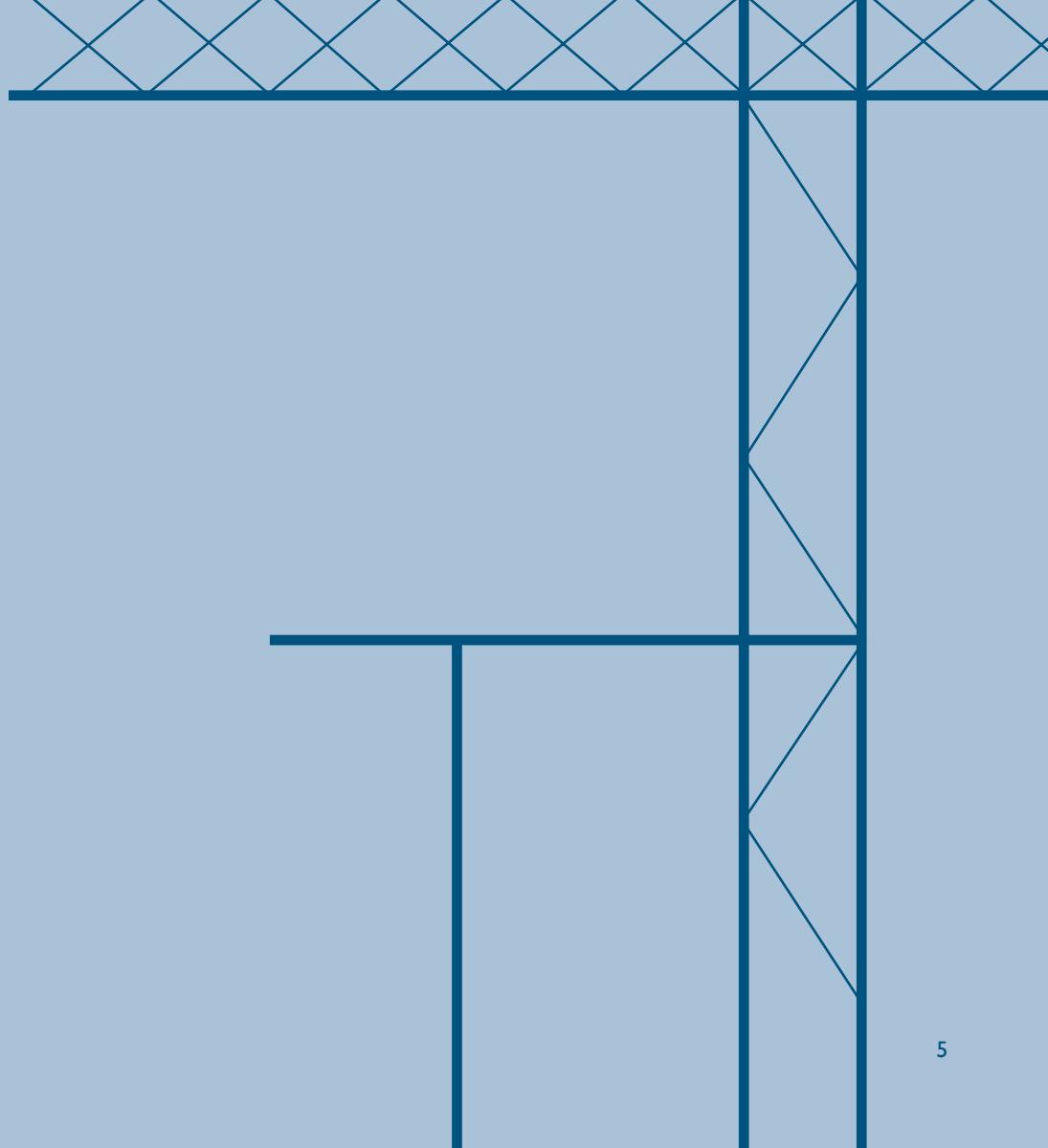
**What is the industry doing to promote good mental health and wellbeing within its workforce?**

This report hopes to shed light onto the current state of mental health within the industry. In our survey of over 2,000 construction industry professionals, we found stress (97%) to be the most common mental health issue felt over the past year. The number of respondents that had experienced some form of mental health issue over the past year was extremely high, and we identified several factors that contributed to respondents' poor mental health.

We recommend that the industry adopts a holistic approach in addressing mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Identifying the factors causing poor mental health, implementing support initiatives, and creating a change in workplace culture will all help reduce mental health issues within construction. The industry cannot act alone on such a complex, but important, issue. Government and professional bodies must work with the industry to support and help develop appropriate tools for managing and improving mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

Using evidence from the research, the report outlines recommendations which we believe may help policy makers and the industry address poor mental health and wellbeing within construction.

# **INTRODUCTION**



## INTRODUCTION

# Poor Mental Health – A Global Issue

Poor mental health affects 1 in 4 people each year, and ranges from common mental health problems such as depression or anxiety, to less common problems like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Just like physical health conditions, there is a whole range of mental health problems that an individual can face, which is why seeking professional help is often fundamental in receiving the right treatment and support.

In many ways, mental health is just like physical health – everybody has it and needs to take care of it. But what is it? When we talk about mental health, we are referring to an individual's emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. Just like physical health, mental health can change depending on a variety of factors – including biological influences, life experiences or family history. Ultimately, our mental health affects how we think, feel and behave. Having good mental health allows us to cope with the stresses of life, work productively and make meaningful contributions to our jobs. However, if our mental health is poor, it will negatively impact how we deal with life's ups and downs, our relationships and behaviours, and other aspects of our lives.

Mental health problems are a growing public health concern, with more than 4% of the world's population suffering from depression alone. Predictions made by the World Health Organization (WHO) show that, by 2030, mental health problems (particularly depression) will be the leading cause of mortality and morbidity globally.<sup>1</sup> People diagnosed with a mental health problem have been found to be at a higher risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours than the average person, and these figures are rising. In 2018, the UK saw a significant spike in the rate of deaths registered as suicide.<sup>2</sup>

In England, 1 in 6 people will experience a common mental health problem such as depression or anxiety in any given week.<sup>3</sup> The most common mental health condition diagnosed in Britain is mixed anxiety and depression, with 7.8% of the population meeting the criteria for diagnosis.<sup>4</sup>

In 2017, former UK Prime Minister Theresa May commissioned Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer to produce an independent review on how employers can better support the mental health of their workers, titled *Thriving at Work*.<sup>5</sup> The review examined the extent of poor mental health at work, and the effect this was having on the workforce and the wider economy. The findings indicated that the issues were much larger than once thought. Around 15% of people at work have symptoms of an existing mental health condition, and 300,000 of those experiencing long-term mental health problems lose their job each year. The review found that the cost of poor mental health to the UK economy stood between £74bn and £99bn, and lost employers between £33bn and £42bn annually, due to employees taking time off for their poor mental health at work.

Around the same time, the Centre for Mental Health produced a breakdown of the business costs of mental ill health, which was comprised of around £10.6bn in sickness absence, £21.2bn in reduced productivity and £3.1bn in replacing staff who quit due to mental health reasons. For every employee in the UK workforce, that equates to £1,300 per person.<sup>6</sup> This supports the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, which states that 12.4% of all sickness absence days were attributed to mental health conditions – equivalent to 4.4 days per employee.<sup>7</sup> This figure demonstrates how much poor mental health can cost businesses and the wider economy. The *Thriving at Work* report produced 40 recommendations for employers, the Government and other stakeholders, in response to their independent review findings.

In England, 1 in 6 people will experience a common mental health problem such as depression or anxiety in any given week. The most common mental health condition diagnosed in Britain is mixed anxiety and depression, with 7.8% of the population meeting the criteria for diagnosis.

Within the recommendations were six “core mental health standards”, which include implementing a mental health at work plan, encouraging conversations about mental health, improving working conditions, and monitoring employee mental health and wellbeing. All recommendations were accepted by the UK government in their Work, Health and Disability paper Improving Lives.<sup>8</sup>

Mental health is not just a UK issue, but rather an integral part of global health and wellbeing. According to the WHO, depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy \$1 trillion (US) each year in lost productivity.<sup>9</sup> Mental health, much like other aspects of health, can be affected by a range of socioeconomic factors, and therefore needs to be addressed at a national and governmental level in order to promote, prevent, treat, and aid in recovery. Mental health cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach, whether on an individual, governmental, or global level. The WHO, in their Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020<sup>10</sup>, reported that the global financial crisis has been a powerful macroeconomic factor leading to

worldwide cuts in funding for mental health, despite there being a higher need for support. For many societies, mental disorders related to overwork and stress are a growing concern.

Stepping away from the economic influence on mental health, it is important to note the impact of cultural views and values. The differences in cultures have a range of implications – from the way individuals view mental health and wellbeing, to how they seek help and support. This adds to the difficulty of measuring the prevalence of poor mental health globally, as each country will approach and measure the issue differently. This means that comparing different countries' mental health statistics could be misleading, with differing interpretations of what mental health is.

The report therefore primarily focusses on the UK, due to the number of responses coming from this country. However, we acknowledge that the themes being addressed here can also be applied on a global scale.



# Mental Health At Work

Employment provides an individual with a sense of achievement, a feeling of belonging and an opportunity to connect with others.

Research conducted by Philip Bush and others investigating mental health at work suggests that stable employment can be an important factor for maintaining good mental health, and those who have severe mental illnesses have reported improved wellbeing, independence, and social support from being employed by a business.<sup>11</sup> However, the Thriving at Work review suggests that work can also have a negative impact on an employee's mental health.<sup>12</sup> There are various factors that can have a negative impact on an individual's mental health including, but not limited to, financial concerns, family difficulties, poor physical health, lack of job security, and other work-related issues. Every business is affected by mental health problems within the workforce. The UK's National Health Service (NHS) outlines that there are various factors that can contribute to poor mental health. This includes, but is not limited to, unrealistic deadlines, inadequate managerial support, job insecurity, difficult relationships with colleagues, and bullying or harassment in the workplace.<sup>13</sup>

There are several ways in which poor mental health can present itself at work. This includes the number of days taken as "sickness", how often workers are showing up to work while sick (known as presenteeism), and employee turnover.

Employers also need to be aware of the impact on the wider workforce. If employees are not supported with their mental health, it can have a snowball effect on other members of the team and business. Common examples are when someone is not supported with the right adjustments to stay in work, meaning other team members are required to pick up their workload, which could add further pressure and stress to their jobs.

**Andy Bell, Deputy Chief Executive at Centre for Mental Health, said:**

"Work is – on the whole – good for our mental and physical health. However, mental health difficulties are both common and serious, and for a lot of people the places they work can have a big impact on their wellbeing. Companies, large and small, that take mental health seriously and create a mentally healthy environment to work in will benefit from being safer, happier and more productive."

Stress can come in many forms:

- Physical stress – e.g. late nights, lack of routine, binge drinking
- Environmental stress – e.g. social isolation, uncertainty of workload/employment, pressure from work
- Acute life events – e.g. bereavements, physical illness/accidents
- Chronic stress – e.g. debt, prolonged misuse of alcohol/drugs, accommodation problems

If the demands at work exceed how much an individual can cope with, they will experience work-related stress. On a global scale, depression and anxiety disorders cost the economy \$1 trillion (US) each year in lost productivity.<sup>14</sup> The UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that over 11 million working days are lost in the UK each year due to work-related stress, which can contribute to mental health conditions such as anxiety and/or depression.<sup>15</sup>

The ability to deal with stress varies from person to person. One person may thrive under a small amount of stress, whereas another may find it too much to deal with, causing them to develop poor mental health. In **Chart 1**, the stress response curve shows the level of stress against how well an individual can perform just through work pressure. It is important to note that the curve can be influenced by several factors – including peoples' lives outside of work, work relationships, and how they are treated while at work.

A moderate amount of stress can put people in the right mindset to tackle work. However, if the amount of stress increases too much, this can be detrimental to the individual's concentration, productivity and mental health. If someone experiences too much stress for a prolonged period, it can cause them to feel fatigued, irritable and affect their reasoning, judgement and decision-making skills. Ultimately, severe or prolonged stress can lead people to feel burnt-out and develop serious health problems. The level of pressure, and how long an employee spends out of their comfort zone, is often down to a variety of factors, including:

- Management style
- Unrealistic deadlines
- Excessive workload
- Bullying
- Lack of control
- Lack of clarity over job role
- Being over-skilled or under-skilled for a specific job

In recent years, the UK has seen some of the highest levels of employment since 1971, and with so many people now employed, it is vital that businesses consider how they contribute to work-related stress. It is important to note that Covid-19 may cause unemployment levels to rise, making it essential that businesses continue to look after their employees. The HSE reported that stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 54% of all working days lost due to ill health.<sup>16</sup> Employers are therefore encouraged to evaluate what factors could contribute to work-place stress within their business in order to minimise the impact. Many employers are already creating healthy workplaces by implementing and communicating a mental health at work plan, providing employees with good working conditions and monitoring employee mental health and wellbeing on a regular basis.

Addressing mental health and wellbeing in the construction industry will take greater consideration. This is partly due to the industry's heavy focus on subcontracting, and the diversity of SMEs within the supply chain – both of which make it harder to identify those that may be suffering from poor mental health. The culture of the industry and the working environment also plays a part in contributing to poor mental health, and may mask any issues.

**Chart I:** Illustrates how the level of stress can impact an individual's performance at work.

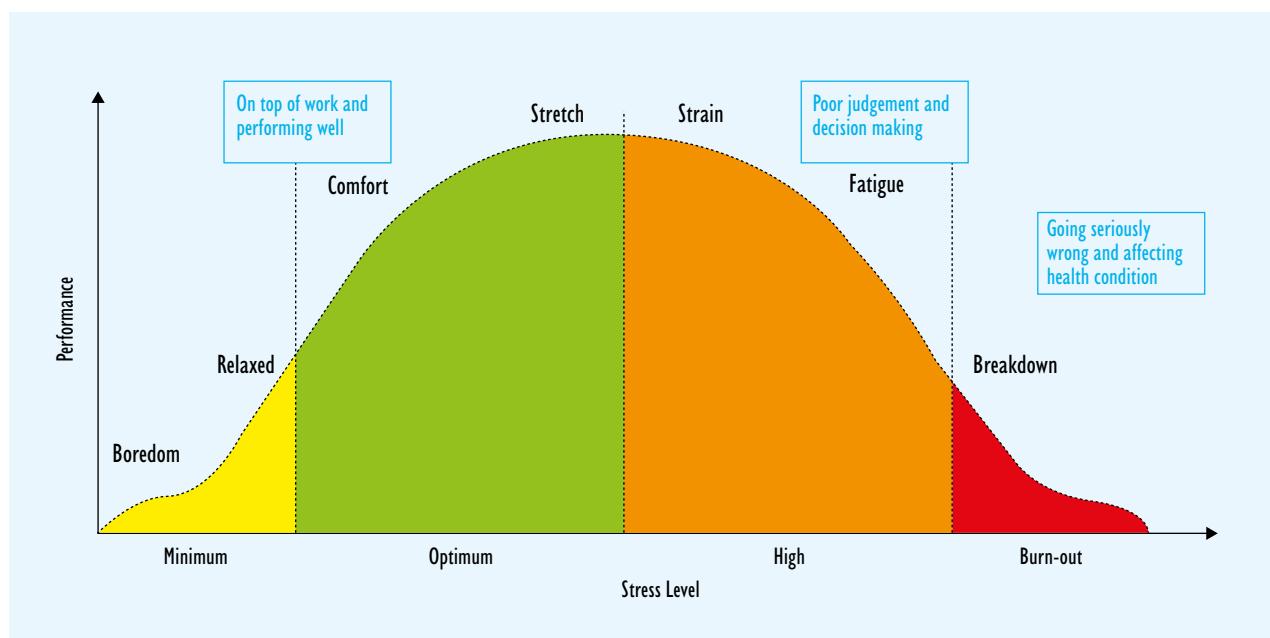


Chart produced by Mates in Mind

# Mental Health Within Construction

The number of firms operating in the construction industry has continued to rise, and unlike many other industries, the sector has a high proportion of people that are self-employed.<sup>16</sup> Many jobs in the sector are contracts to work on specific projects, and so often those who are self-employed are constantly trying to balance the books, looking for their next pay check in order to maintain cashflow or even survive. Unlike larger businesses, there are few small businesses that have a dedicated HR function or resources to develop and support their own mental health.<sup>17</sup>

The current definition of construction by the ONS only accounts for work conducted on-site, and does not account for the wider built environment. Due to the narrow definition, it can cause problems when discussing issues within construction, as data is only collated from on-site work. This is something that has been explored in our Real Face of Construction 2020 report.<sup>18</sup>

Using the ONS definition of construction, we see that on-site work is characterised by a labour workforce which consists of 82% males and 18% female.<sup>19</sup> The male-dominated nature of the sector is broadly in line with the responses from our survey that we conducted.

In England, women are more likely than men to have a common mental health problem, and are almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders. Although there are social and economic factors that can put women at a greater risk of poor mental health compared to men, it is believed that women are far more likely to talk about their mental health, and to seek support.<sup>20</sup>

When we look at the statistics for men, we see around 1 in 8 will experience a common mental health problem.<sup>21</sup> Those who are employed in male-dominated industries and occupations may be particularly vulnerable to developing poor mental health, which may go unrecognised and untreated.<sup>22</sup> While many of the same difficulties are experienced by all genders, some difficulties and influences on mental health may be more pertinent to men.

Societal expectations and the traditional idea of how men are expected to behave may play a role in how active men will be in talking about their mental health and seeking support. Typically, the view of hyper-masculinity prevents men from openly talking about their mental health. Within the British media, we continue to see the images of hyper-masculinity being presented, which has a lasting effect on society's expectations of males of all ages. To make matters worse, construction has been known to have an embedded 'macho' culture, and this continues to occur on-site.

Although there has been some progress in addressing the issue, the 'macho' culture continues to remain in the sector and other male-dominated industries. This culture encourages men to adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms, and prevents them from seeking help. Construction is a stressful industry, and the way it operates can contribute to poor mental health. If men feel like they cannot seek support, this could be why we see such high rates of suicide within the industry. The risk of suicide among low-skilled male labourers, for example, is three times higher than the male national average in the UK.<sup>23</sup> Poor mental health in construction is world-wide, and research from Australia indicates that the elevated risk of suicide among males working in construction includes high levels of alcohol consumption, relationship problems, and multiple stressful life events in the months before death.<sup>24</sup>

Industries with the highest rates of mental health issues are often seen to have high levels of stress. Construction News' Mind Matters 2019 survey<sup>25</sup> found that 3 out of 4

workers said long hours made the biggest difference to their wellbeing, followed by job uncertainty, tight deadlines, financial pressures, and working away from home.

Almost half (48.3%) had taken time off work because of unmanageable stress and mental health issues, which had increased by 18% from the previous year.

There are certain factors that are unique to the construction industry, which can cause the high numbers of poor mental health and wellness we see. These include:

- Limited-term contracts
- Long hours
- Lengthy commutes
- Time away from family
- Pressure to complete work on time and within budget
- The 'macho' culture that exists within the industry
- Late payments on work
- Uncertainty over pipeline of work

Unfortunately, these are seen to be cultural norms in the construction industry. Due to individual differences, some of these factors may be more impactful on a person's mental wellness compared to other factors. Their job role within the business will also affect which of the above factors will impact them.

Research conducted by the Electrical Contractors Association (ECA) and the Building Engineering Services Association (BESA) revealed issues into late payment practices on the mental health of workers within SME companies.<sup>26</sup> The study found that 92% of businesses faced payment issues, with 65% reporting that they

**On average, a person will spend 33% of their time at their place of work, and that means having a work environment that contributes to good mental health is important.**

frequently experienced late payments. As a result of these late payments, business owners often made sacrifices to their own salary, and 1 in 10 were forced to pay their direct staff late. It also reported that many had experienced mental health problems – 80% had experienced stress, 40% experienced anxiety and/or panic attacks, and 36% experienced depression.

It is not just late payment practices that contribute to poor mental health within the industry. On average, a person will spend 33% of their time at their place of work<sup>27</sup>, and that means having a work environment that contributes to good mental health is important. What differs for construction, compared to other industries, is that work is often temporary, with no fixed location.

This means workers are often subject to temporary office accommodation, sometimes poor or no catering facilities, inadequate toilet facilities and a lack of privacy while on-site. Issues around working conditions for construction workers have been well-documented. In 2018, Unite conducted an online survey of all female members in the construction sector. The survey revealed that employers are failing to make workplace adjustments for adequate welfare facilities, such as clean toilets, shower facilities, and supply of feminine hygiene bins. A survey by Randstad in 2017 revealed that nearly a quarter (23%) of construction workers said they were considering exiting the industry within a year. The survey also found that 73% of respondents felt their employers did not recognise the early signs of mental health problems, and many experienced high levels of stress and difficulties striking a healthy work/life balance.<sup>28</sup>

The culture of a business is extremely important to employees. Workplaces that have poor work/life balance, bullying, inadequate staffing, poor communication and planning, or a lack of management direction can often cause stress and other mental health concerns for the workforce. This also includes the individual's role within the business itself, where they may lack clarity about their responsibilities, or may experience conflicting demands, a lack of career progression, or uncertainty about future work prospects.

When we look at stress levels, we see 82% of those working in building and construction were stressed at least some of the time during a typical week.<sup>29</sup> How people respond to this stress is important, and on average, more men than women respond to stress by taking risks such as misusing alcohol and drugs, which can contribute to the likelihood of suicide.<sup>30</sup> Male construction workers are 3 times more likely to die by suicide than the national average. Figures now suggest that more than one worker a day will take their own life.

Suicide can have lasting effects on individuals and their social networks. There are many causes of suicide and suicide attempts, and it is important to consider the social, psychological, and cultural factors that can influence suicidal thoughts and behaviours. It is also worth noting that while men are more likely to die by suicide compared to women, there is less of a gap in suicide attempts and serious self-harm between the two genders.<sup>31</sup> In the construction industry, a great deal of focus is on ensuring health and safety is paramount, and similar protective factors for mental health should be included.

On an economic level, the construction industry is naturally volatile, responding to fluctuations in both consumer and business confidence. As a result, there is growing unease over how the industry operates, which has recently intensified with the collapse of Carillion, and with companies such as Interserve falling into administration. These join a list of corporate failures and near collapses of several of the UK's leading contractors, heightening concerns that the industry's business model is not fit for purpose. These external stressors are out of the person's control, and will contribute to poor mental health. Coupled with other demands from the job, this may cause an onset of mental health problems. Undoubtedly, external issues are something that managers and directors need to be aware of when looking after not only their contractors and workforce, but also themselves.

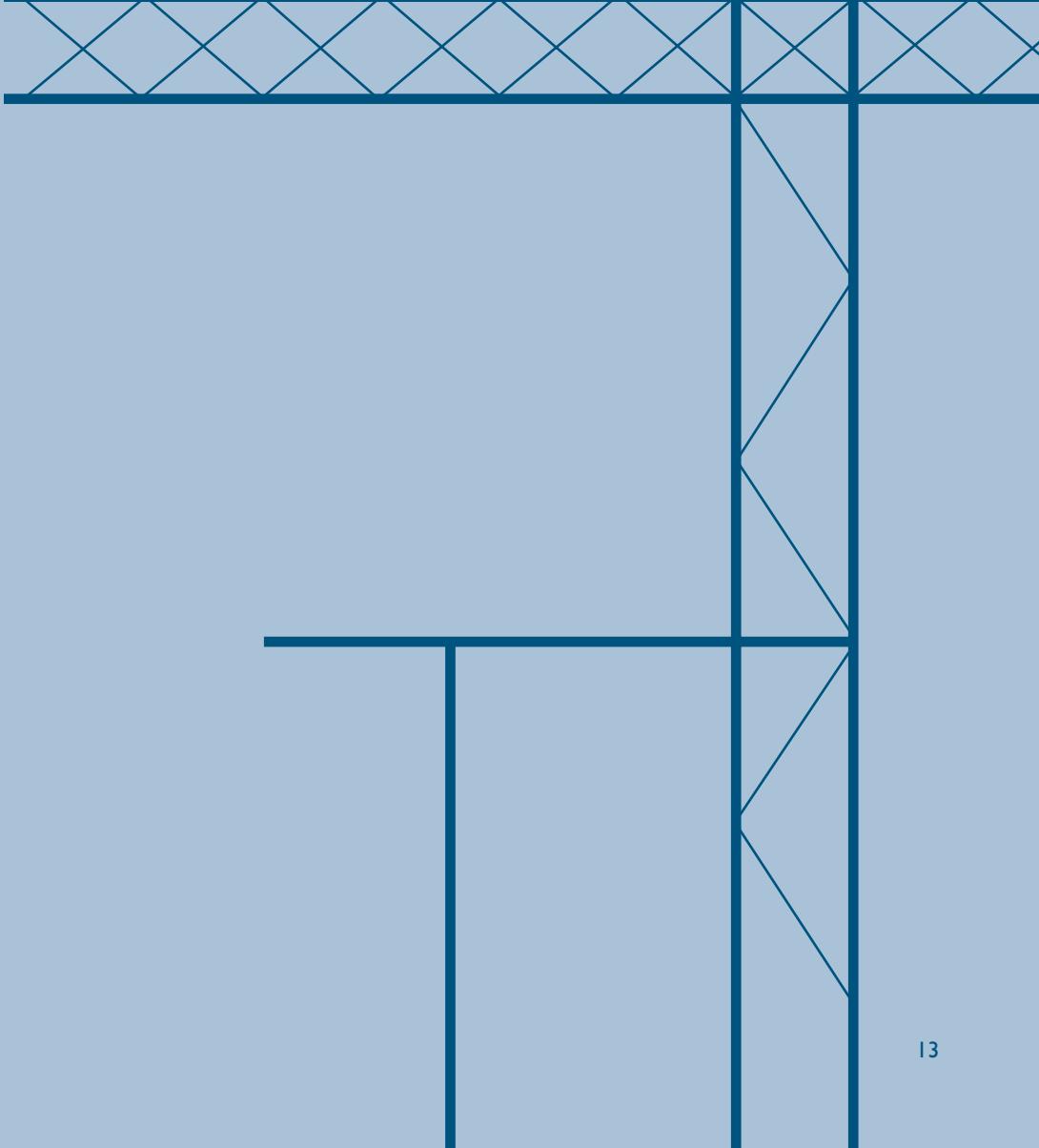
Currently, treating poor mental health in the workplace is inadequately covered under legislation. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, businesses have a legal duty to protect their employees from stress at work by undertaking a risk assessment and acting on it. One piece of legislation that could include mental health treatment is the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981, which requires that employers provide adequate and appropriate equipment, facilities, and personnel, and ensure their employees receive immediate attention if they become ill or are injured at work. When it comes to treating physical and mental health, the need to value them equally is something that is often spoken about, and yet we still see that mental health is not covered under this legislation, despite how common it is in the workplace.

Despite the lack of legislation around treating poor mental health at work, many construction businesses are now implementing strategies to help tackle the issue – including awareness talks, training, and support systems for the workplace. Some companies have become innovative in the way that they address poor mental health in the workplace, such as offering free yoga classes, discounted membership to the gym, and access to helplines for support and advice. However, with many project sites containing sub-contractors from different companies, the message for good mental health and the support systems in place could be lost. In addition to this, businesses are faced with having to change the 'macho' culture, which is easier said than done. However, mental health has started to become a subject people are familiar with, owing to the media and workplace initiatives – so although the industry has some way to go, there has already been some progress made.

In research conducted by the CIOB back in 2017, findings indicated that construction professionals were at high risk of experiencing poor mental wellbeing, which needed further investigation.<sup>32</sup> The social and economic climate has changed significantly since 2017, and notable events such as Grenfell, corporate failures in several high-profile construction businesses, and challenges relating to the global economy have all had a significant impact on the welfare of workers. This is why we are revisiting this important subject.

Given the poor mental health statistics for on-site work in the construction industry, this report looks at the wider built environment and the prevalence of poor mental health. We seek to explore what factors are causing people stress, and at what job level this occurs – including how the industry is promoting good mental health and wellbeing within its workforce.

# **FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY**



# Methodology

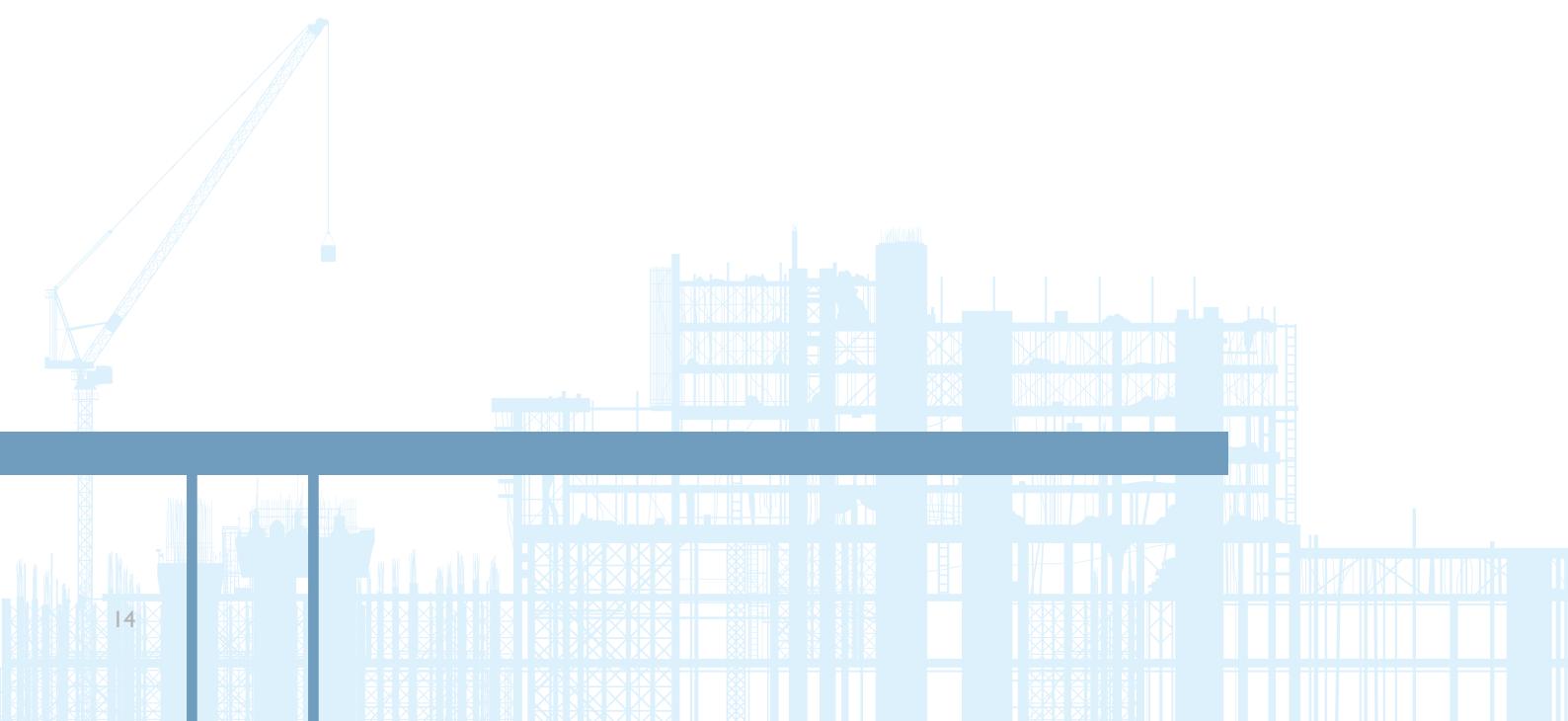
In October 2019, the CIOB conducted a survey to better understand the mental health of individuals in the construction industry. The survey ran for one month, and received 2,081 responses.

Respondents of the survey consisted of members of the CIOB worldwide, as well as other construction workers from the industry – from those who worked in manual labour positions, through to those at director and senior management level. To collect responses, the CIOB sent a weblink to members via a newsletter, and sought out participants using social media channels.

Of the 2,081 responses, 80% came from Great Britain, with other respondents coming from the Republic of Ireland, Hong Kong, United Arab Emirates, Australia, United States, and Qatar.

88% of respondents identified as male and 12% identified as female. 5% worked in manual labour, 50% stated their job role as middle management, and 34% responded they were at director/senior management level. The average age of respondents was between 45-55 years old.

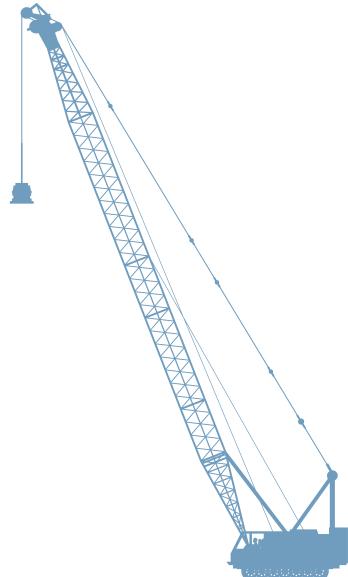
When asked what type of business they belonged to, 50% responded that they were a main contractor, 21% were part of a consulting business, 9% were sub-contractors, and 20% responded other. This aligned with the size of the companies, as 41% responded that their business employed over 500 people, 11% belonged to a business with 250-499 employees, 24% worked in a business with 50-249 employees, 14% had 10-49 employees and 9% worked for a micro business of 0-9 employees.



# Key Findings

## Over The Past Year:

- 87% experienced anxiety
- 70% experienced depression
- 97% experienced stress
- 96% experienced fatigue
- 95% experienced poor concentration
- 91% felt overwhelmed
- 86% experienced a lack of self-confidence
- 26% had suicidal thoughts



## The Working Environment:

- 71% of manual workers found the lack of adequate toilet facilities stressful
- 80% found noise levels stressful
- 79% found inadequate temperature control stressful
- 67% found the uncertainty of working location stressful
- 92% experienced stress due to unrealistic deadlines
- 94% experienced stress due to time pressures
- 93% experienced stress due to having too much work to do
- 86% of senior-level staff experienced stress due to cost pressures
- 84% found the lack of involvement in decisions caused them stress

## The Business Environment:

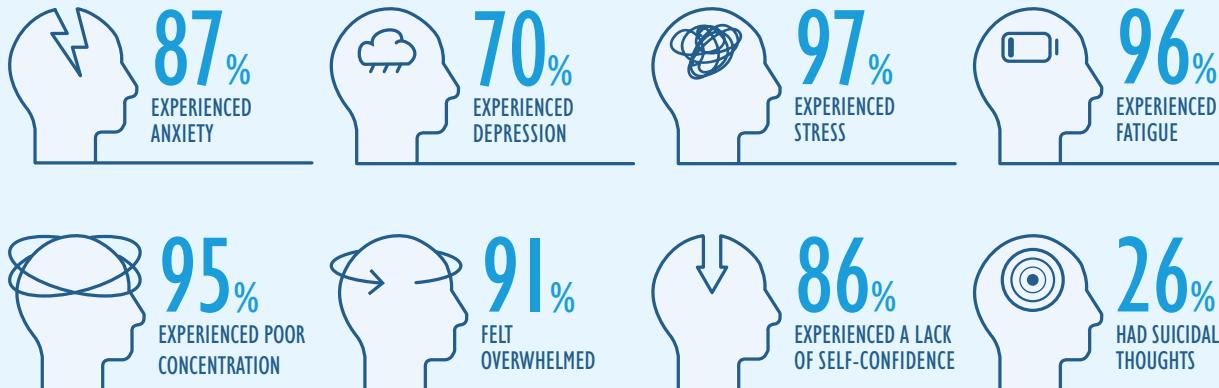
- 70% of workers experienced moderate to extreme levels of stress due to poor communication
- 65% of senior-level staff found inadequate staffing to cause moderate to extreme levels of stress
- 64% of manual workers experienced stress due to bullying

## What Is The Industry Currently Doing To Help?

- 38% said their business offered helplines
- 35% said their business offered Mental Health First Aiders
- 5% offered fatigue management plans
- 31% of people said their employer would treat a mental health issue extremely seriously
- 71% responded they had no formal training over the past three years for mental health
- 56% said their business had a policy in place for mental health



# Mental Health Over The Past Year



[Click to view data from survey](#)

## Anxiety

Anxiety is a persistent feeling of worry, fear, or nervousness. Many people feel anxious at times, especially when faced with stressful events. However, if these continuous feelings of anxiety impact your ability to carry out life as normal, you could have an anxiety disorder. According to Mental Health UK, over 1 in 10 people will live with an anxiety disorder at any one time.

When we asked how often someone in the construction industry had experienced anxiety over the past year, 87% stated they had experienced it at some point (either often, sometimes, or rarely). Of those, 23% had often experienced anxiety during the past year. This is significantly higher than the total prevalence of all types of anxiety disorder in England, which is estimated at 13.9% of the population at any given point in time. What is worrying is that so many workers within the industry have experienced anxiety at work at least once this year.<sup>33</sup>

**Nicky Lidbetter, CEO at Anxiety UK:**

"We welcome the commitment shown by the CIOB (in undertaking this initiative) to the mental wellbeing of those working in the construction industry. The results do not surprise us. The statistic that 70% of respondents cited they had experienced depression over the past year, and that 97% experienced stress and 87% anxiety, highlights the extent to which common mental health difficulties are prevalent – not only in the construction industry but in society in general. Fortunately, there are a range of support services and treatments available to assist those experiencing such difficulties, including those available through the CIOB-Anxiety UK partnership. Ultimately, the psychological safety of workers is just as important as the physical safety, and needs to be given equal consideration."

## Depression

Depression is a long-lasting low mood disorder that affects a person's ability to do everyday things, and inhibits interest and pleasure in activities. It is a common mental illness, with statistics suggesting that it affects 1 in 10 people at any given time, although this may be higher because not everyone with the disorder will go to their General Practitioner. Depression often co-occurs with other mental health issues, and 37% of people in England will be diagnosed with depression at some point in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

When we asked how often the respondent experienced depression during the past year, 11% reported that they often experienced it, and overall, 70% reported that they had experienced depression at some point in the past year. This is significantly higher than the national average, especially for males.

One criticism of our own study is that we did not provide individuals with the meaning of depression. Some individuals may therefore have confused the word "depressed" with feeling sad, pessimistic, or even just having a bad day. Regardless of the interpretation of "depression", sadness or pessimism occurring long-term could put respondents on the path to developing clinical depression.

## Stress

Currently, there is little research into the number of people within the UK population who may be experiencing stress. A 2018 study by insurance firm AXA found that during a typical week, 82% of people felt stressed at least some of the time, and 8% felt stressed all of the time.<sup>34</sup> According to Mind, 1 in 10 employees rated their current mental health as poor or very poor. 26% of respondents said this was due to problems at work, and 40% said they had taken time off as a result.<sup>35</sup>

In our study, when we asked respondents how often they felt stressed during the year, 39% reported they felt stress often, 45% reported they sometimes felt stressed, and 13% said they had felt stressed at some point in the year, but that it was quite rare. Overall, 97% of respondents had experienced stress at some point during the year.

Stress has a huge impact on health. According to AXA's Health Index, 42% felt anxious because of stress, 30% said it had caused restlessness and 27% said it had caused a lack of sleep.

In our study, we asked how often participants felt fatigued, irritable, overwhelmed, and how often they experienced poor concentration. 96% said that they had experienced fatigue over the past year, 95% reported they experienced poor concentration, 95% said they were irritable, and 91% said that they had felt overwhelmed over the past year. These numbers are significantly higher for the construction industry compared to AXA's Health Index, indicating that the factors and pressures many industry workers are having to deal with are contributing highly to their mental health and wellbeing. A quarter of respondents often felt overwhelmed, which could suggest that they need extra support and resources for managing those feelings. When asked if they had felt a lack of self-confidence over the past year, 86% said they had. If people lack self-confidence, it can often affect their ability to produce quality work and seek help. With over 97% of construction workers stating that they felt stressed this past year, it is clear that stress levels – and the factors contributing to it – must be addressed at an industry level.

## Suicidal thoughts

Males working in the lowest-skilled occupations have a 44% higher risk of suicide than the male national average. Figures for low-skilled male labourers, particularly those working in construction roles, are 3.7 times higher than the national average. Similarly, for males working in skilled trades, the highest risk of suicide is among building trades.<sup>36</sup>

It is difficult to know how common suicidal feelings and thoughts are, as many people will not talk about it or ask for support. However, research carried out by Time to Change found that 20% of the UK population will experience suicidal feelings in their lifetime, and 6.7% of people will act to end their lives.<sup>37</sup>

When we asked how often respondents had suicidal thoughts in the past year, a shocking 26% of people said that they had thought about taking their own life in 2018/19 alone. This figure is higher than the average number of people who will experience suicidal feelings in their lifetime as reported by Time to Change. Some of the risk factors associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviours includes feeling isolated, experiencing barriers to accessing mental health support and treatment, financial stress, physical illness, and unwillingness to seek help due to stigma.

When we break down the number of people reporting that they have had suicidal thoughts by the size of their business:

- 30% work for a micro business or as a sole trader
- 28% work for a small business
- 26% work for a medium size business
- 24% work for a larger size business
- 25% worked for a business that had over 450+ employees

We see that the smaller the businesses, the more likely a person will experience suicidal thoughts. This is due to factors often associated with smaller businesses, such as high-stress life, work uncertainty, long hours, and financial pressures. Alongside these pressures – which are more prominent in smaller businesses, but not exclusive to them – we see that the construction industry's working environment and organisational factors also contribute to poor mental health. The majority of the construction industry is made up of SME's and sole traders, making it even more important to ensure that these businesses are supported in every way possible, as they may not have the infrastructure or resources they need to support their own workers, or even themselves. This support could come from the industry, where each project has dedicated mental health support for all workers on-site, or from the Government, who could implement legislative mental health and wellbeing support for businesses of all sizes.

### Case Study: RSE Building Services (RSEBS)

As a result of his own adversity, which almost cost him his business, his family and his life, Russell Stilwell, Founder and Managing Director of RSEBS, has placed mental health and wellbeing on par with the safety culture that already existed within his business.



Russell has made investment into a series of initiatives that maintain a focus on mental wellbeing, both internally within his business, as well as externally as an Ambassador for Mates in Mind. Implementation within RSEBS includes:

- **Education and awareness programmes**
- **Regular informal consultations and discussions on new approaches/ tool kits for wellbeing and mental health**
- **Ongoing management of support – including setting up a 'confidence buddies' scheme for all teams, where trained, individual staff members are placed across the business to support open and honest conversations with struggling colleagues**
- **Biannual reviews of ongoing wellbeing and mental health procedures**
- **Internal communication of achievements/awards**
- **Undertaking the Mates in Mind Assessment to help inform their mental health action plan, and to embed improvements in management and process performance**

The positive impact of the programme on his business has been clear. Over the last three years, RSEBS has seen a reduction in stress-related absence, an increase in staff retention rates and for any staff that have taken time off, a significant proportion returning to work well and thriving.

# The Working Environment

Previous research suggests that there are aspects within the physical work environment that play a part in an individual's mental health.

A study by Unite the Union found that many of their members did not have access to adequate welfare facilities, or experienced difficulties in gaining access.<sup>38</sup> Lack of access at work is likely to impact their physical and mental health, and with closures of public toilets due to government cuts, this is only making the situation worse for many on-site workers.

We asked respondents to rate the level of stress they experience for different aspects of their work environment. 71% of manual workers in our survey reported that a lack of adequate toilet facilities as either moderately or extremely stressful for them. Workers, on average, will spend a third of their time at work, and having access to adequate toilet facilities is paramount to an individual's physical and mental health.

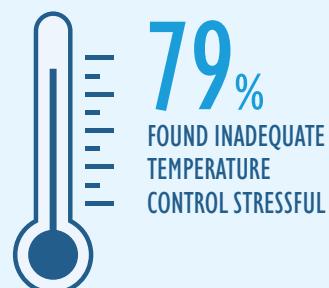
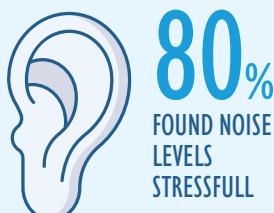
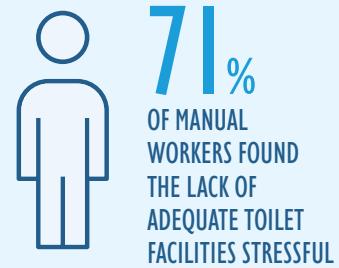
This issue is more relevant to women, and has been highlighted by Unite's research, which found that aside from issues with pay equality, the dominant concern was welfare facilities, the lack of clean toilets, supply of sanitary bins and shower facilities. Addressing this issue at a site-level could have a positive influence on the industry, and encourage more women into the workforce, particularly into site-based jobs, where the construction industry has long struggled to attract women.

On-site hygiene is likely to be of greater importance following the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The Construction Leadership Council (CLC), at the time of writing this report, produced Site Operating Procedures for the sector, which outlined how sites should increase their hygiene levels in order to prevent spread.<sup>39</sup>

Other physical factors that respondents said were stressful included noise levels (80%), inadequate temperature control (79%), and uncertainty of working location (67%).

Over half of respondents said that they found the uncertainty of working location stressful. Construction requires workers to travel to and from different project sites depending on where they are required and can sometimes be short notice. The stress caused by not

## Physical factors:



[Click to view data from survey](#)

knowing where they may be working next coupled with the uncertainty of who they will be working with on-site can be a problem within itself. The inability to cope with uncertainty may cause mental health problems, and although this is how the construction industry currently operates, this is something that may need to be reviewed by the industry.

A poor work/life balance can cause stress and burnout, which may lead to sickness absence or presenteeism at the workplace. When asked about the various job demand factors that construction workers found stressful over the past year, unrealistic deadlines (92%), time pressure (94%), and having too much work (93%) consistently scored the highest. With the advancement of digital technology, it is now easier for people to take work home with them, and with high workloads and unrealistic deadlines to complete projects in a short space of time, we often see a rise in poor work/life balance.

To combat this, some businesses have adopted a 'switch-off time', where workers are actively discouraged from working out of hours, and some have even adopted technology that will lock staff out of their computers during out-of-office hours. However, some respondents stated this can cause more stress for those needing or wanting to work more flexibly. It can also increase the time pressures for those who know they need to have something.

done by the switch-off time, but may need to work a few extra minutes to meet their deadline. This type of approach works for some, but only if it comes with the whole organisation's acceptance of appropriate workloads and deadlines. It therefore needs careful planning and consideration before implementing.

Many of these factors are typically seen as 'normal' on a construction site. However, despite these being considered normal working conditions, many employees still find them stressful. Ultimately, these factors could have an impact on retention rates, and create barriers to attracting new talent into the industry. Some companies are starting to innovate through technology, in an effort to improve the working environment for their staff. This includes providing quiet spaces to those who are feeling stressed from noise levels, and allowing more flexible working hours.

### Emma Mamo, Head of Workplace Wellbeing at Mind:

"Construction can be a rewarding and varied industry to work in. However, it is also one where pressures can be high, and people can be more likely than average to experience work-related stress and other mental health problems. For employees, it often has not felt easy to come forward, to mention that something is wrong or ask a colleague to talk. But things are changing. More and more construction businesses are starting to see their staff's mental health as a priority."

Over the past few years we have seen an increasing number of construction organisations start to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of their staff, whether this is encouraging open conversations about mental health, equipping line managers with the necessary skills and confidence to support staff, or routinely monitoring the mental health of staff. Although the construction industry has made great strides in tackling the stigma around mental health, the industry has yet to fully understand and tackle the causes of work-related mental health problems."

More and more companies are now adopting the use of digital technologies, and have had to adapt to many staff working from home due to the coronavirus (COVID-19). Although the use of such technologies can help improve mental health and reduce levels of stress, companies are discovering that this is not a solution for all employees. It is therefore important that – moving forward – companies operate in a framework that has a positive impact on all employees, and takes into account individual needs and preferences.

## Case Study: Tideway

Tideway recognises the value of having a dedicated internal mental health lead who is also within the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team. The programme includes a number of initiatives that ensure awareness is embedded across the organisation, including:



- **Ongoing delivery of Mates in Mind's 'Start the Conversation'** – a 45-minute awareness course on mental health, as part of the induction process
- Ensuring the executive team are Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) trained
- Ensuring workers are sign-posted to information hubs
- Promoting awareness of Mental Health Champions
- Using Mates in Mind cards, stickers and campaign materials to support promotion and maintain awareness across the workforce

The effect of the programme, as evidenced through the findings in the Britain's Healthiest Workplace Survey 2018, is that a significantly higher proportion of workers are not only aware of, but also participate in and benefit from, the programme – both physically and mentally.

Furthermore, Tideway's staff survey also showed that 84% of people responded positively to how Tideway is addressing mental health – seeing this as an aspect of health and safety management that is being done well. Additionally, the 2019 survey showed an increase of 12% of people who felt they could approach their boss with a mental health problem.

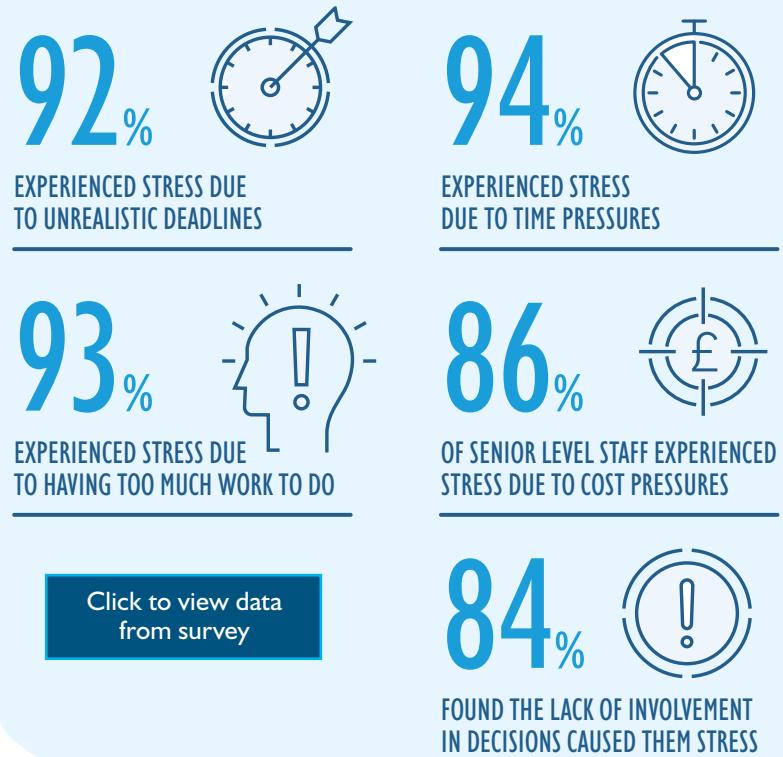
# Job Demand

Manual workers scored the highest on levels of stress for many of the job demand factors, including having too much or too little work to do on-site, pressure to attend regardless of circumstances or need, lack of participation in decision making, unrealistic deadlines, time pressures, and working in isolation.

84% of manual workers found working in isolation stressful ([click to view data](#)). Due to the nature of construction work, this can often be exacerbated if they are working away from their family and friends for weeks at a time.

Both senior and middle management rated cost pressures as stressful (86% and 88% respectively). Some of this is down to methods of procurement. At present, there is little standardisation when it comes to public sector procurement. Having a more consistent procurement process within the sector would help decrease overall cost, facilitate a more integrated supply chain, and result in a decrease in waste. Often, the focus in evaluating tenders has been on time and cost. However, this approach to evaluating tenders could ignore other vital indicators of success, such as the quality of build or the social value it offers citizens.

A report by Begbies Traynor revealed there are now over 63,153 UK construction companies that are under significant financial distress.<sup>40</sup> Some are relying on late payment practices or financial injections from their director in order to remain solvent. Due to this, we also see late payment practices and clients retaining monies, which has a huge impact on the supply chain and their own finances. 18% of senior-level staff and 20% of middle management – those who deal with these cost pressures – told us that they felt extremely stressed as a result of this. Financial matters are often out of their control, such as when waiting for payment from a client or a larger business higher up the supply chain. This can make many feel helpless, which adds to their poor mental health.



Although not construction specific, individuals still found not being involved in the decision-making process to be stressful. The UK construction industry is often described as fragmented and adversarial, with a tendency to adopt a single-discipline mentality. The one-off, project-based nature of construction demands that relationships within project teams need to happen quicker than what would usually be expected in another industry.

We see this reflected in our findings, with 84% of respondents saying that over the past year, they had experienced some level of stress due to lack of involvement. Establishing collaborative practices is particularly important,

not only to help reduce stress, but also for delivering high quality projects. Projects within construction can also involve large numbers of people, often from a variety of disciplines within the built environment. This makes the structure and management of the project team vital, and as we can see, poor project team management often induces stress when

relevant parties are not involved in the decision-making process. Training managers and the wider project team in mental health awareness, in addition to providing the tools for effective people management, will help ensure that project teams not only work well, but also support the entire supply chain during a project lifecycle.

## The Business Environment

The communication and leadership of a team can have a huge impact on the workforce. Respondents of the survey highlighted how stressful it can be if there is poor communication between key decision makers, with 70% saying they had experienced moderate to extreme levels of stress over the past year.



[Click to view data from survey](#)

When it comes to delivering a project, those managing the site must use a range of techniques, skills, and knowledge to understand what the client and stakeholders want, and be able to deliver without setting unrealistic deadlines for their workers. Those who oversee the management at site level need to consider other subcontracted workers when communicating plans, informing them of any changes and helping them to meet deadlines. Unfortunately, projects do not always go to plan, and it can lead to poor mental health in their workers if managed incorrectly. In our survey, we found that across all job levels, poor planning was contributing to the respondents' level of stress – with 91% of manual labour, 73% of supervisors, 72% of middle management and 64% of senior-level staff reporting they had experienced moderate or extreme stress over the past year<sup>†</sup>.

90% of those working in manual labour reported that they had experienced moderate to extreme levels of stress due to poor communication from their business, and 90% reported they had experienced the same levels of stress due to a lack of trust in management.

When middle management employees were asked what organisational factors contributed to causing stress, 73% cited poor communication and 73% cited inadequate staffing. Many of these employees manage the whole project, both on-site and off-site, which means that they work with people on all job levels. Therefore, communication is extremely important during a project's lifecycle. If poor communication

<sup>†</sup>Note: These statistics may not be generalisable to the construction population, due to the number of responses received. Only 5% of the responses came from manual labourers, 5% from supervisors, 51% from middle management and 33% from senior-level staff.

occurs, this may cause the person to experience stress, particularly if it is coupled with other work factors, such as inadequate staffing or budget and time constraints. Those working at supervisor level reported similar levels of stress, with poor planning, inadequate staffing and poor communication being the top three stressors (73%, 70% and 70% respectively).

Senior-level staff did not rate as highly on stress for the organisational factors. However, 65% reported that they experienced moderate to extreme stress due to inadequate staffing. Although it is unsurprising that this rated so highly for respondents working at this level, it is interesting that their levels of stress were, overall, low for the organisational factors, compared to other job roles. This may be down to senior-level staff having greater control over the organisational factors, and so they are less affected. Another reason could be that they are not fully aware of some of the challenges faced by those who are based primarily on-site or in the office.

In recent years, construction has come under the magnifying glass due to reports of 'banter' being taken too far, with many employees experiencing bullying by their colleagues. The term 'bullying' can be characterised as 'offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient'.<sup>41</sup> Bullying within construction has a history of not being taken seriously, mainly due to the 'boys will be boys' culture.

Our survey found that 64% of those employed as manual workers said that they had experienced stress over the past year due to bullying. However, as you move up the chain of command, bullying does not appear to be a stressor. 29% of senior-level staff said they found it stressful, 37% of middle management and 32% for supervisors. This may be due to the culture of the workplace where typically on-site staff have more banter with each other, and may not interact the same way as they do with those in managerial positions. Banter is not necessarily negative, and can help attract many people to the industry. However, it is important to remain professional while at work, and to understand when banter is taken so far that it could be seen as bullying.

Over the past few years, companies have been emphasising the need for a more professional atmosphere, and have discouraged inappropriate banter while at work. By doing so, this can help to reduce workplace bullying, although it still appears to be occurring for workers on-site. However, it is important to note that bullying can come in many forms, and that banter is only one of them. Our results show that bullying is still occurring within the industry, and is causing people distress. As bullying is a universal, yet unique, issue for each organisation, this needs to be addressed at an organisational level.

### **Joscelyne Shaw, Director of Strategy at Mates in Mind:**

"Mates in Mind was established by the Health in Construction Leadership Group (HCLG) with the support of the British Safety Council in September 2016. It was recognised that a holistic and systematic approach to addressing the risks associated with poor mental health needed to be collaborative, as much as it was about ensuring that a whole-person approach to health and safety also expanded to encompass mental wellbeing.

In this respect, the complexity of the industry is both its strength and weakness, as is evident from the work that we are undertaking – whether in partnership with associations and trade bodies, or supporting clients, contractors or individuals' businesses. The findings from CIOB's research demonstrate why our work to provide clear information to employers on available support and guidance – and more importantly how they can address this within their organisations – is needed.

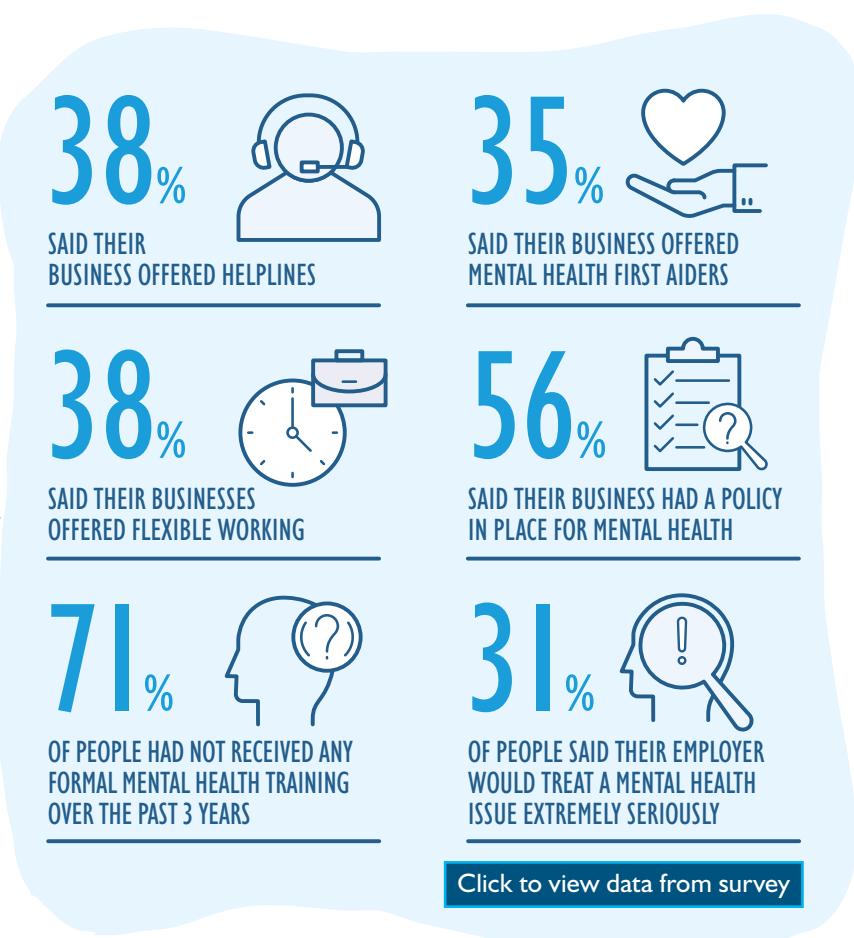
There is a balance to be struck between the development of skills and the confidence to manage mental health within an individual. It remains important for individuals to feel confident enough in identifying those who are struggling and enable them to reach out for support. By supporting professionals at work with their mental health this will help maintain an innovative and successful industry."

# What Is The Industry Doing To Help?

Unfortunately, high stress levels, if unmanaged, can become a serious mental health issue, and in a worst-case scenario can lead to suicide.

Many companies are waking up to the need for implementing mental wellness initiatives across their business, but as the survey identifies, they still have a long way to go in both educating staff and implementing processes to ensure good mental health.

We asked respondents what mental health resources their business offered employees. The most popular resource companies tended to offer was helplines (38%), flexible working (38%) and Mental Health First Aiders (35%). It was positive to see that employees had resources available for them, should they want to seek further support. Helplines are an easy resource for companies to implement, and allow employees to anonymously talk to someone when they need help. Another emerging resource for employees is Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs) – trained employees who have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues, and who can effectively guide a person towards the right support. This support can come in a range of options, such as self-help information, Employee Assistance Programmes or professional services.



[Click to view data from survey](#)

## Case Study: Komatsu Mining Corp. UK

Before the introduction of MHFA England training in early 2018, employees experiencing mental ill-health received reactive support from Komatsu's occupational health and wellbeing advisor, Georgina Wynne.

Working with an 85% male workforce, Georgina recognised that the social stigma attached to mental ill health was preventing employees from seeking help early on, due to feelings of weakness and shame. "I had been aware of mental health issues disguised as back pain" she explained.

This encouraged Georgina and Senior Environment, Health and Safety Manager, Kevin Toon, to map out an in-house mental health and wellbeing strategy, of which MHFA would be one part. "MHFA England

training has a focus on stigma, non-judgmental listening and proactive signposting to other sources of help," said Georgina.

Both Georgina and Kevin trained with MHFA England to become Instructor Members, enabling them to deliver Adult MHFA England courses in-house, across Komatsu's four UK sites.

Alongside MHFA England training, Komatsu has implemented a robust mental health policy, including an EAP service, which was rolled out in May 2018 through email communication, posters, and leaflets. As demand for MHFA England training continues to grow across the organisation, more courses will now be rolled out, including refresher courses for trained MHFAs.



### Simon Blake OBE, Chief Executive of Mental Health First Aid England:

"It is hugely encouraging that a third of employers across the construction industry are recognising the need to provide both physical and mental health first aid as part of their health and wellbeing strategies.

In organisations we work with, we know the positive impact our training has in raising mental health awareness, improving signposting and increasing uptake of support, as well as empowering people to access the help they need to recover and stay well.

At the same time, we know that evidence-based training like Mental Health First Aid is just one part of a whole organisation approach to supporting people's health and wellbeing.

Taking a holistic approach means focusing on creating the conditions for people to thrive, raising mental health literacy and ensuring pathways to further support are clear. From effective training for managers and leaders, to healthy job design, reasonable adjustments and flexible working, firms of all sizes must be supported to consider a range of measures in building a thriving and supportive working environment.

That is why we provide free guidance, developed in consultation with industry leaders, on implementing our training as part of a whole organisation approach, in line with Thriving at Work's core standards."

These resources are not just available for larger companies who may have extra resources or budget set aside for improving the mental health of their workers. The Construction Industry Helpline is available to everyone in the industry, to access for free, and MHFA courses are offered through charities or subsidised, particularly through the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)<sup>††</sup>. Alongside these resources, smaller businesses can also take a more flexible approach to working or even provide employees with plans to help manage their mental health at work. It was surprising to see that only 5% of respondents said that their workplaces offer fatigue management plans, despite 96% of respondents claiming that they had experienced work-related fatigue over the past year.

The construction industry needs to have a long-term vision for improving mental health and wellbeing. Metrics can play a critical role in this, as it will allow businesses to measure how successful the implementation of mental health resources are internally. Showing that their business has positively improved with metrics of mental health and wellbeing will help them understand which resources work for their staff, and encourage them to continuously improve. Currently there are no standardised metrics to design, implement, and evaluate mental health in the workplace programs.

Having resources in place is a good start, but it is also important that employees know who they can talk to at work if they are experiencing a mental health issue. Positively, almost half of the respondents (45%) said that they know who is responsible for providing mental health support in their workplace, which means that businesses are starting to create a culture of seeking help and speaking to someone for support.

Using an open text box, we asked respondents what they thought were the best things their employers had done to help promote mental wellbeing over the past three years. Many respondents noted that awareness raising schemes, more flexible working, and expert-led training on mental health were all good examples of wellbeing promotion.

<sup>††</sup>Note: For further details on the Construction Industry Helpline as well as other available helplines and resources visit page 34

## Case Study: Seddon

Back in 2017, we at Seddon were shocked to learn that Jordan Bibby, a talented painter and decorator, had sadly taken his own life. He never told anyone how he was feeling.

Mental health is still massively stigmatised, meaning that many people keep silent. We knew we had to do something to change this within the industry, so we spoke to our people and asked how we could help.

It turned out that simply asking someone if they are okay could have a massive impact. This encapsulates Jordan's Conversation, our mental health initiative we started in 2018 to spark conversations around how our staff are feeling.

Jordan's Conversation is an integral part of our Protect initiative, launched in 2017 during our company-wide safety conferences. Protect focussed on simplifying our approach to health and safety into three points:

- 1. Have you read and understood the Risk Assessments and Method Statements (RAMS)?** If not, do not start work and check with your team.
- 2. Housekeeping:** a clean, tidy workplace is a safe one.
- 3. Changing behaviours:** take five seconds before you start work. If it doesn't look or feel safe, it probably isn't.

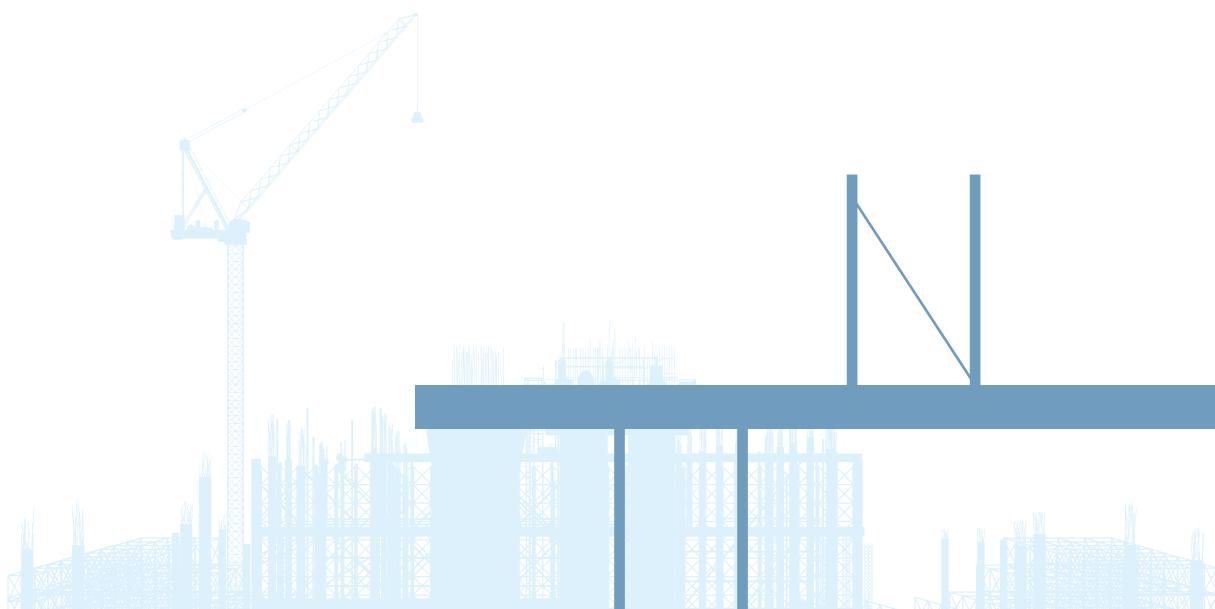


Through Protect, we aimed to introduce a new way of thinking about health and safety that considers the person as a whole. Vitally, that physical and mental wellbeing should be treated with parity. It's important that all our staff know that it's okay not to be okay, and that they feel empowered to speak up.

We've seen some encouraging results of our most holistic approach to date. In the first quarter of 2020, we have had 0 RIDDORs (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations), and our, and our non-reportable accidents reduced from 31 to 16 compared to the same quarter last year. During this period, more direct action was also taken when root causes were investigated – including one-to-ones with site managers, health and safety upskilling, improving welfare facilities on-site, and delivering Jordan's Conversation toolbox talk sessions to the 400+ people employed by Seddon, as well as those in our supply chain.

In May 2019, as part of Mental Health Awareness Week, we celebrated the first anniversary of Jordan's Conversation by asking all sites to 'Take 10 at 10' – one of four annual 'Stop For Safety' campaigns.

As both Seddon and the industry embrace mental health awareness alongside physical care, we hope to see a lasting shift towards a more rounded approach to health and safety.

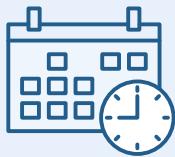


We explored how seriously respondents felt staff members would be treated if they were to disclose to their employer that they had a mental health issue ([click to view data](#)). Almost a third of respondents either said it would be treated somewhat seriously (32%), or extremely seriously (31%). It was positive to see that employees felt as though mental health in the workplace would be addressed appropriately. However, 21% did not know how seriously their business would treat it, and this is where more work is needed to ensure that employees understand what mental health policies and procedures are in place.

Ensuring employers and HR teams implement structures to manage mental health and wellbeing in the workplace – even if that is just a written policy linking off to external businesses that are better equipped to discuss mental health – would help employees recognise how seriously the company is taking the issue. Additionally, it is important that employees know what mental health support is on offer to them. In turn, this may help to encourage workers to reach out to their employers when they are having a mental health issue, as they know that it will be taken seriously, and that they will be offered help.

Staff training can be a useful tool for instilling the importance of good mental health and wellbeing, as well as showing the resources that are available to use. When asked what events/courses they had attended to better their awareness of mental health, 71% responded they had no formal training over the past three years. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is crucial to any industry, but even more so in construction, due to regular changes in legislation, health and safety concerns, and new practices. The Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) provides proof that individuals working on construction sites have the appropriate training and qualifications for the job they do on-site. By ensuring the workforce are appropriately qualified, the card scheme plays a part in improving health and safety standards on UK construction sites. Given how prominent poor mental health is within the industry, we feel that this could be considered a larger part of the CSCS application process, in order to raise standards of health and safety within the sector.

**TABLE:** Over the past three years, how many events or courses have you attended on mental health awareness?

	In-house	External	Formal training courses	Other
<b>0 (no event attended)</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>79%</b>
<b>1 event/course</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>2 – 3 events/courses</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>4 – 5 events/courses</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>More than 5 events/courses</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>3%</b>

It is also important that there is no misinformation provided to those attending mental health training, as this could fuel stigma and prevent people from seeking help. We therefore encourage employers to seek high-quality, professional resources, in order to provide useful training for employees. Time to Change, led by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, has received government funding to help change the way people think and act about mental health problems.<sup>42</sup> The Time to Change initiative helps to provide resources for both employers and schools, in order to help reduce the stigma. Thanks to this, we have seen hundreds of workplaces around the UK changing the conversation around mental health, and we encourage more businesses to take part. There is an array of training and support for mental health, although not exhaustive, and we have included a list of free resources and helplines at the end of this report ([see page 34](#)).

### Kris Ambler, Workforce Lead at the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP):

"It's great to see that so many companies in the construction industry are aware of mental health and wellbeing, and have started to embed mental health strategies in the workplace. When it comes to supporting employees' mental health, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and every individual will experience their own unique challenges that put pressure on their ability to cope. For those that require professional support through a counsellor or therapist, BACP would encourage employers to use qualified professionals who work to the highest standards of practice, and who possess the skills and competence needed to work in organisational settings. Our [accredited services](#) are a great starting point for businesses looking to invest in such support, or alternatively, our [directory](#) of registered BACP members."

Policies and procedures are an essential component of any business. They help to address pertinent issues, set expectations, keep management accountable, and ensure compliance with the law. Mental health policies outline provisions that are intended to prevent and address mental health issues among employees, and with such a high prevalence within construction, it would seem logical for businesses to start implementing policies.

Over half (56%) reported that their business had a policy in place for mental health, with the majority of these coming from larger businesses. The smaller the business, the less likely they were to have a mental health policy in place. We found that almost half of respondents from either a micro-business (fewer than 10 employees) or a small-sized business (10-49 employees) did not have a policy in place (49% and 40% respectively). This number significantly reduced when we looked at those employed by a medium-sized business (50-249 employees), and those employed by a large business with 250+ employees (21% and 10% respectively)<sup>†††</sup>.

It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Many people will manage mental health issues differently, and therefore offering several routes for addressing an issue is important. Examples of this could be offering stress reduction techniques to those feeling stressed at work (e.g. mindfulness), or a more targeted approach for individual workers experiencing mixed anxiety and depression (e.g. talking therapy treatment). A package approach of mental health resources such as training, flexible working, helplines, and counselling will provide employees with the help they need to improve their mental health and wellbeing. These packages therefore need to be created in consultation with employees, and ensure that the offering is of high quality, such as having training which is certified (e.g. by a professional body) or employing professional counsellors that are accredited.

<sup>†††</sup>Note: Those who responded that they either had no policy in place, or those who were unsure if they did, may be the result of unclear policies, or even a total lack of such policies, which is very common for SMEs. Therefore, these figures should be taken with caution.

# Discussion

Mental health and wellbeing is a serious issue for the construction industry, particularly for males, who are at the highest risk of dying by suicide.

Our survey of 2,081 members from the construction industry aims to shine a light on the current state of mental health. The majority of respondents were based in the UK, accompanied by some international perspectives, which highlights that this is a global issue. The findings suggest the most common mental health issues felt in the past year for the industry were stress (97%), followed closely by fatigue (96%), and poor concentration (95%). The number of people responding that they had experienced some form of mental health issue was extremely high, and it highlights the need for the industry, the Government, and professional bodies to step in and address poor mental health and wellbeing within construction.

The survey explored how the working environment plays its part in improving mental health and wellbeing, and found that there were environmental factors and job demand factors that contributed to stress at all levels of the workforce. It is therefore important that the industry identifies factors that could contribute to poor mental health and address these appropriately.

Construction is capable of change. We saw this in 2001 when John Prescott, the former Deputy Prime Minister, addressed the industry at a major Construction Safety Summit, calling for a reduction in serious injuries and fatalities. At that time, the construction industry saw reports of a high number of serious workplace injuries and fatalities. At the Summit, Prescott called for a 40% reduction in deaths and serious injuries by 2005, and a 60% reduction by 2010. These targets were not just set, but were reached by the entire UK industry, making great progress in managing site safety. In 2005, the UK Government introduced the Working at Height Regulations, and 10 years later, there has been a 40% decrease in incidents.

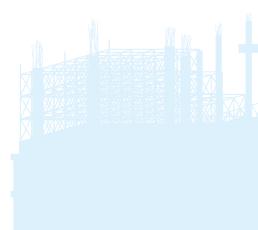
However, we now see workers more at risk of committing suicide than falling from height, and so while great strides have been made in physical safety, mental health risks have not received the same level of attention until more recently. We therefore encourage Government and industry to work together to address this important issue, by helping industry implement good practice for mental health and wellbeing.

The CSCS provides proof that individuals working on construction sites have the appropriate training and qualifications needed for the job they do on-site. By ensuring the workforce are appropriately qualified, the card plays its part in improving standards and safety on UK construction sites. With much of the focus of the CSCS card schemes dedicated to 'safety', there could be an opportunity to incorporate mental health training as a requirement for working on construction sites.

In addition to the organisational factors, some of the issues identified can be associated with poor management. Although this is not industry specific, it plays a big role in stress levels for businesses. Some businesses have already started to train managers in mental health awareness and how to improve wellbeing of staff, and it appears as though this could help minimise some of the issues reported in this study.

**However, we now see workers more at risk of committing suicide than falling from height, and so while great strides have been made in physical safety, mental health risks have not received the same level of attention until more recently.**

In addition to management, the construction industry's business model – with issues around cashflow and unfair procurement practices – can have significant impacts on stress levels. Research by the ECA and BESA revealed that late payment practices were causing mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, panic attacks, and even depression. It is therefore important to help minimise the effects of stress, and that businesses seek to actively change the culture and provide more support for workers. This can be done by offering access to quality mental health support/



training, offering stress reduction approaches to work, and encouraging a culture of openness around mental health and wellbeing.

It was positive to see that almost half of respondents (45%) reported that they knew who in their organisation was responsible for providing mental health support. It appears that many businesses in the industry have started to offer their employees such support – including helplines, Mental Health First Aiders, and the implementation of mental health policies in the workplace.

However, it was clear that more needed to be done in raising awareness, as 63% of respondents said that they had not received any mental health awareness or training within the past three years. We also found that 20% were unsure how seriously their business would treat a member of staff if they disclosed that they had a mental health issue.

We therefore recommend more businesses start to adopt a culture of openness regarding mental health issues, and have clear policies in place for employees who experience a mental health concern. This will ensure employees feel safe in disclosing their issue, and in accessing the correct support.

Throughout this report, we have included case studies of what other businesses have done to improve mental health. Additionally, we encourage those interested to read the free resources and helplines section at the end of this report, where they can learn more about mental health support, and how they can embed this into their own workplaces.

The industry must create a holistic approach to addressing mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. This includes identifying the factors that are causing poor mental health, addressing these with professional mental health resources, and creating a culture of change. The industry cannot act alone on such a complex, but important, issue. Government and professional bodies should work with the industry to support and develop appropriate tools for managing and improving mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

# Recommendations

Mental health in construction is seen as a silent crisis that does not discriminate between people. Here we outline recommendations to the construction industry, the UK Government, and to professional bodies who offer membership to workers in this sector. It is important that any interventions/recommendations consider the globalised nature of construction workers.

**These recommendations align with the other mental health organisations we worked with on this report.**

## Industry

- Identify risks that could contribute to poor mental health, and routinely monitor employees' mental health and wellbeing
- Develop mental health awareness among employees through training and events
- Encourage a culture of openness around mental health, and clarify the support available to all employees – in particular, by producing, communicating, and implementing a Mental Health at Work plan
- Train managers and supervisors in mental health awareness, and promote effective people management
- Ensure employees have access to high-quality mental health support and training
- Offer stress reduction approaches for employees, and take steps – where possible – to reduce stressful situations
- Develop stress mitigation solutions that employees can access, to help them cope with stressful situations. Proven approaches include mindfulness and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Larger businesses should look at how they can support both their supply chain and the smaller businesses with whom they work. This will help provide full coverage on worksites, and foster a more coherent system for mental health support.

## Government

- Review how mental health and wellbeing could be included in the application process for the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)
- Review the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981, so as to strengthen the protection and promotion of mental health and wellbeing, by ensuring workplaces make provisions for mental first aid
- Implement the recommendations from the Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers report
- Support businesses of all sizes (including sole traders) in implementing good mental health and wellbeing practices in the workplace
- Continue to fund the Time to Change campaign at its current level, to help end the stigma and discrimination often experienced by people with mental health problems
- Develop better metrics for measuring the effectiveness of mental health initiatives. This will make it easier for businesses to measure an initiative's success.

## Professional Bodies

- Develop mental health and wellbeing awareness among members, to increase understanding and reduce stigma e.g. through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)
- Develop globally-applicable mental health resources, that will increase understanding and reduce stigma within construction
- Provide guidance that will allow members to manage their own mental health within the workplace
- Highlight the importance of high-quality mental health support and training. These include Chartered mental health practitioners, and training from other recognised bodies.

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# Free Resources And Helplines

The following section contains details of organisations that have free resources for businesses to use, as well as free helplines that can be accessed for advice and support. Although it is not a definitive listing, it is intended to be a useful starting point for assistance and advice.

## **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)**

Web: [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

The BACP is the largest professional association for members of the counselling professions in the UK. Visit their [accredited services](#), which provide a starting point for businesses that are looking into investing in such support. They also have a [directory](#) of registered BACP members, for businesses that want to access a registered counsellor.

## **Mates in Mind**

Web: [www.matesinmind.org](http://www.matesinmind.org)

Tel: +44 (0)20 3510 5018

Mates in Mind is a registered UK charity that is dedicated to raising awareness, addressing the stigma of poor mental health, and promoting positive mental wellbeing across workplaces. The charity offers construction and transport organisations a number of tools and resources, to help them improve the mental health of their workforce – including awareness day resource packs, posters, infographics, factsheets and [more](#).

## **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England**

Web: [mhfaengland.org](http://mhfaengland.org)

MHFA England has produced an Implementing Mental Health First Aiders guide for employers. The free resource is designed to help organisations evaluate the current support they have in place, assist in recruiting and supporting Mental Health First Aiders, as well as help with internal promotion.

## **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)**

Web: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

The Health and Safety Executive is an independent regulator which aims to help prevent work related death, injury, and ill health. They provide free guidance and advice to businesses, including guidance on mental health. Visit their [website](#) for more information.

## **Samaritans**

Web: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Tel: 116 123

The Samaritans is a UK-registered charity that offers 24/7 listening and support to people and communities in times of need. They provide people with coping methods and the skills needed to assist others.

## **International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP)**

Web: [www.iasp.info](http://www.iasp.info)

The IASP was established in 1960, and is the largest international organization dedicated to suicide prevention and to the alleviation of the effects of suicide. On their website, you can find suicide prevention resources and country specific helplines.

## **Anxiety UK**

Web: [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)

Tel: +44 (0)3444 775 774

Anxiety UK is a national registered charity that provides support and information for anyone affected by anxiety, stress, and/or anxiety-based depression. You can get in touch with them through telephone, email, text, website (live chat facility) and via post.

## **The Lighthouse Club – Construction Industry Helpline**

Web: [www.lighthousedclub.org](http://www.lighthousedclub.org) / [www.constructionindustryhelpline.com](http://www.constructionindustryhelpline.com)

Tel: +44 (0)345 605 1956

The Lighthouse Club provides a confidential, 24/7 construction industry helpline which is available to the industry's workforce and their families in the UK and Ireland. The Construction Industry Helpline is supported and marketed by the Considerate Constructors Scheme. Whether you're an employer or an employee, the helpline provides the first point of contact for those who need to access a range of completely confidential support services, including:

- Emergency financial aid to construction families in crisis
- Advice on occupational health and mental wellbeing
- Support on legal, tax, and debt management matters

## **Mind Infoline**

Web: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Tel: 0300 123 3393 / Text Service: 86463

Mind can provide information on a range of topics, including types of mental health problems, where to get help, medication, and alternative treatments.

## **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)**

Web: [www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

Tel: 0800 58 58 58

CALM is leading a movement against suicide. CALM runs a free, confidential and anonymous helpline and webchat service, available from 5pm to midnight, 7 days a week, offering help, advice, and information to anyone who is struggling or in crisis based in the UK. For those outside the UK, they have compiled a [list of international services](#) that offer similar support.

## **Access to Work Mental Health Support Service**

Web: [www.remploy.co.uk/mentalhealth](http://www.remploy.co.uk/mentalhealth)

Tel: 0300 456 8114

Delivered by Remploy, the service is confidential and is available to any employee with depression, anxiety, stress, or other mental health issues that are affecting their work, at no cost. The service also helps those who are finding it difficult to remain in, or return to, their job. The helpline is open between the hours of 10am and 4pm each day.

## **Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) Benevolent Fund**

Web: [www.ciobbenefvolentfund.org.uk](http://www.ciobbenefvolentfund.org.uk)

Tel: +44 (0)1344 630 877

The CIOB Benevolent Fund is a service available to support all CIOB members (both past and present) and their dependent families. Eligibility details can be found [here](#), but in summary:

- Grants to help with general household costs
- Grants to help with essential travel (to and from work)
- Grants to help families in hardship to buy clothing or household items
- Grants to help members with children living at home and in hardship
- Short-term, skills-based training
- Specialised support in collaboration with [Anxiety UK](#)





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