# Britain faces £45 billion annual hit as mental health drives record workplace absences



Britain is currently grappling with an alarming mental health crisis as a recent survey uncovers a dramatic surge in workplace absences attributed to stress, anxiety, and depression. The data indicates that nearly one in four Brits, or 23%, has taken multiple mental health days in the past year. Furthermore, over a third of respondents—35%—admitted that their overall productivity has deteriorated due to mental health challenges.

The implications of this crisis are significant. Research indicates that poor mental health costs employers around £45 billion each year, with approximately 12.8 million working days lost specifically to work-related stress, anxiety, or depression. This not only affects productivity but also places additional strain on the already overburdened healthcare system. According to the findings from Chrysalis, the UK's largest counsellor training provider, ministers are now urgently seeking solutions to address the substantial economic gap created by rising long-term sickness rates.

While this data paints a dire picture, conversations surrounding mental health in the workplace have prompted a broader debate about resilience. Some experts propose that society may be oversensitive, labelling normal emotional fluctuations—such as fatigue or occasional low moods—as mental health issues worthy of sick leave. An increasing number of voices within mental health advocacy circles argue that the term "mental health" has become a catch-all for diverse grievances, whether they relate to overwhelming workloads or the pressures stemming from the rising cost of living. Indeed, a report from the charity Mind adds that many stressors, notably household debt and insecure housing, are key drivers behind the escalating stress levels among employees.

Further evidence underscores the pervasive nature of this issue across various sectors. According to a report from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), employees in the UK averaged 7.8 days of absence over the past year, marking the highest level in over a decade. This rise is largely attributable to mental health-related issues, highlighting the crucial need for organisations to cultivate supportive workplace cultures where staff can comfortably express health concerns, receive appropriate backing, and access flexible working arrangements.

Particularly affected are critical sectors like social care, where a staggering 30% of sickness absences arise from mental health conditions and stress, equivalent to over 500,000 full-time equivalent days lost. This raises urgent calls from the British Psychological Society and the British Association of Social Workers for more focused mental health support tailored to the needs of these professionals, thereby safeguarding workforce availability in essential services.

The scale of the problem continues to escalate, as evidenced by a report from the Mental Health Foundation, which states that mental illness has emerged as the leading cause of work-limiting conditions among workers aged 44 and younger. They also note that 15% of the workforce is already living with a recognised mental health condition, further compounding the impact on workplace participation.

Additionally, the financial ramifications for businesses are substantial. A survey by Westfield Health revealed that employees took an average of 4.7 days off work for mental health issues alone, while physical health problems accounted for another 5.1 days. Collectively, these absences result in a staggering cost of approximately £19.5 billion annually to UK businesses, underscoring the urgent need for effective workplace wellbeing strategies.

As mental health continues to dominate discussions about workplace health, leading experts, including representatives from the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), are advocating for a proactive, people-focused work culture. They emphasise the importance of implementing psychosocial risk management strategies to address the crisis, which saw nearly two million workers in Great Britain suffering from work-related ill health in 2022/23, with around half of these cases stemming from stress, anxiety, or depression.

In summary, the confluence of economic hardship, societal pressures, and inadequate organisational support systems has contributed to a significant increase in mental health-related absences in the UK. Addressing this issue holistically is not just a matter of improving workplace productivity—it's crucial for the wellbeing of the population at large.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060370/Sick-Note-Culture-Mental-Health-Days-Surge-Amid-Burnout-Britain-Fears), [[3]](https://www.bps.org.uk/news/one-third-social-care-workforce-sickness-absence-due-mental-health-and-stress-troubling-new)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060370/Sick-Note-Culture-Mental-Health-Days-Surge-Amid-Burnout-Britain-Fears), [[2]](https://www.cipd.org/uk/about/press-releases/workplace-absences-highest-over-decade-new-report), [[6]](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-26/mental-ill-health-is-driving-britain-s-crisis-of-worker-sickness)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bps.org.uk/news/one-third-social-care-workforce-sickness-absence-due-mental-health-and-stress-troubling-new), [[4]](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/wales/node/3741)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.westfieldhealth.com/blog/the-impact-of-absence-businesses-lose-19-5bn-per-year-to-poor-health), [[6]](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-26/mental-ill-health-is-driving-britain-s-crisis-of-worker-sickness)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://iosh.com/news-and-opinion/iosh-calls-for-people-focused-work-culture-as-mental-health-crisis-revealed)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060370/Sick-Note-Culture-Mental-Health-Days-Surge-Amid-Burnout-Britain-Fears> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cipd.org/uk/about/press-releases/workplace-absences-highest-over-decade-new-report> - A report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and Simplyhealth reveals that UK employees were absent an average of 7.8 days over the past year, the highest level in over a decade. This increase is attributed to various factors, including stress-related issues. The report emphasizes the need for organisations to foster a supportive culture where employees can discuss health concerns and access necessary support, such as flexible working options and health services.
3. <https://www.bps.org.uk/news/one-third-social-care-workforce-sickness-absence-due-mental-health-and-stress-troubling-new> - Data obtained by the British Psychological Society indicates that nearly one-third (30%) of sickness absence in the social care workforce in England is due to mental health issues and stress. This amounts to over 500,000 full-time equivalent days lost. The British Psychological Society and the British Association of Social Workers highlight the urgent need for dedicated mental health support for health and social care staff, underscoring the impact of mental health on workforce availability.
4. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/wales/node/3741> - The Mental Health Foundation provides statistics on mental health in the workplace, noting that 15% of UK workers have an existing mental health condition. In 2022, mental health was the fifth most common reason for sickness absence, accounting for 7.9% of occurrences. The report also highlights that mental ill health is now the most common cause of work-limiting conditions among those aged 44 years and younger, indicating a significant impact on workforce participation.
5. <https://www.westfieldhealth.com/blog/the-impact-of-absence-businesses-lose-19-5bn-per-year-to-poor-health> - Westfield Health's Workplace Wellbeing Survey reveals that in 2023, employees took an average of 4.7 days off due to poor mental health and 5.1 days off due to physical health issues. These absences cost UK businesses approximately £19.5 billion over the year. The survey underscores the significant financial impact of mental and physical health-related absences on businesses and highlights the need for effective workplace wellbeing strategies.
6. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-26/mental-ill-health-is-driving-britain-s-crisis-of-worker-sickness> - Bloomberg reports that mental ill-health is now the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK, costing employers billions of pounds and hindering productivity. In the final quarter of 2022, over 85 million working days were lost to employee ill health, with mental-health issues accounting for almost a fifth of these absences. The article highlights the economic impact of mental health on the workforce and the need for effective interventions.
7. <https://iosh.com/news-and-opinion/iosh-calls-for-people-focused-work-culture-as-mental-health-crisis-revealed> - The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) calls for a people-focused work culture in response to the mental health crisis revealed by recent statistics. The Health and Safety Executive reported that nearly two million workers in Great Britain suffered ill-health due to work in 2022/23, with around half of these cases attributed to stress, depression, or anxiety. IOSH advocates for proactive psychosocial risk management strategies to address this issue.