

Introduction

There is increasing evidence that work-related stress is on the rise. This has been identified through various studies and surveys. For example:

- In 2020, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that over two fifths of public sector organisations reported that stress-related absence (most commonly caused by heavy workloads) had increased over the last 12 months. With 70 per cent, stating it is the most common cause of long-term absence.
- The 2020 Labour Force Survey found rates of work-related ill-health due to stress in the health sector is statistically significantly higher than that for workers across all industries (HSE 2020).
- The annual NHS Staff Survey (2020) reported that 44 per cent of staff reported feeling unwell as a result of work-related stress in the last 12 months, a steady increase from 36.8 per cent in 2016. Increases were sharpest in acute/acute and community trusts and acute specialist trusts.
- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) publication *Work-related Stress, Anxiety or Depression Statistics in Great Britain, 2020* identified that figures for stress, depression or anxiety in 2019/20 was statistically significantly higher than the previous period.

There are moral, financial, legal, and quality reasons for managing stress in the workplace. This guidance uses various sources including good practice information drawn from a useful 2013 study titled *Health and Wellbeing in Healthcare Settings*, commissioned by the NHS Staff Council.

More recently a study by the Royal College of Nurses Foundation and the Society of Occupational Medicine (2020) *The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Nurses and Midwives in the United Kingdom* report calls on urgent action to properly address the organisational causes of poor mental health and wellbeing in nurses and midwives (e.g., high work demands, poor leadership, lack of resourcing and workplace bullying).

The authors found that many staff were reluctant to disclose mental health difficulties and avoid asking their managers for support. They

recommended that to avert a mental health crisis among staff, more healthy working environments were needed for nurses and midwives, with the stigma of disclosing mental health problems to be reduced, and

managers and leaders being training to identify and alleviate stress in staff.

The HSE (2020) statistics, identified professional groups, and associate professional and technical groups as having the highest prevalence rate of work-related stress, depression or anxiety, with the predominant causes being workload, particularly tight deadlines, too much work or too much pressure or responsibility, with lack of managerial support, organisational changes and violence and role uncertainty.

The aim of this guidance is to enable employers within health organisations to work in partnership with trade union bodies and employee representatives to identify the signs of stress and put in place measures to prevent and reduce the causes and risks associated with workplace stress.

The key aspects of this guidance are:

- identify signs of stress
- identifying how management behaviours impact on the health of staff
- demonstrating how, by working in partnership on stress risk assessments, the impact on health and wellbeing can be positively improved
- providing resources for future use.