More than two-thirds of employees are stressed by work

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Work is the third biggest cause of stress for UK employees, after lack of sleep and money worries, according to new research by HR software provider Ciphr.

Over two-thirds (70%) of the 1,238 employed adults surveyed, identified at least one aspect of work that contributes to their stress levels.

Work in general is the biggest cause of stress for around one in three (37%) employees, with workload pressures (35%) coming a close second.

Nearly one in four (23%) struggle with long, or inflexible, working hours. While one in five blame their bosses (21%), workplace culture (20%) or work colleagues (19%) for their increased stress.

Despite the rise in remote and hybrid working since the pandemic, commuting is still a significant source of stress for a fifth (19%) of workers.

And, worryingly, nearly one in six have anxiety about their job security (17%).

The stress of sending and responding to emails (as well as instant messages and group chats) was also cited by a sizeable share of respondents (16%).

Other major stress triggers, which undoubtedly can impact an individual's focus and performance at work, are feeling tired (40% of employees), financial strain (38%), and family or relationship issues (32%). Over a quarter are also coping with stress caused by health problems (27%) and having a 'too' busy schedule (27%).

Share of UK employees who find the following things stressful:

- Work in general (39% of women vs 35% of men)
- Their workload (38% vs 31%)
- Their working hours (22% vs 25%)
- Their boss (23% vs 20%)
- Their organisation's workplace culture (21% vs 20%)
- Commuting (18% vs 21%)
- Their colleagues (22% vs 16%)
- Job security / unemployment (18% vs 17%)

Based on Ciphr's data, the people most likely to feel stressed out by their jobs are Gen Xers, aged 45-54 years old. 80% of women and 75% of men in this cohort reportedly find one or more aspects of their work lives stressful.https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/o9imh/1/

Women appear to be most frequently affected by stress – in and outside of work. They are the least likely to say they never feel stressed in a typical month (7% of female workers vs 12% of male workers) and the most likely to say they feel stressed every single day (13% vs 8%).

Indeed, most of the common stressors identified by Ciphr's study impact noticeably more women than men. For example, although feeling tired or lack of sleep is the biggest stress trigger for all UK workers, it was cited by a far greater share of surveyed women – half (48%) compared to less than a third of surveyed men (31%).

Women are also significantly more likely to be stressed about their finances (44% of female workers vs 32% of male workers), their workload (38% vs 31%), what's going on in the world (29% vs 18%), cooking and meal planning (22% vs 9%), and their caring responsibilities (21% vs 16%), among many other things.

There are a few exceptions though – marginally more men than women cite their working hours as a cause of stress (25% vs 22%). Male workers are also more likely to say the same about their commute (21% vs 18% of female workers).

Most stressful industries to work in

'Some' transitory feelings of stress or pressure can be helpful at times as a positive motivator to achieve specific goals or meet a deadline. Prolonged or negative stress, however, can have a debilitating impact on people's physical and emotional wellbeing.

Ciphr's findings suggest that many employees are more affected by on-the-job stress than their colleagues, managers, or direct reports perhaps realise, with the average worker feeling stressed for about 11 days a month.

Two in five (42%) of all employees below senior management level find work in general stressful. In comparison, just one in four (25%) senior managers and leaders say the same.

Some types of work can also be more stressful than others. People employed in hospitality and events suffer from stress most often, on average, at 15.6 days a month. This works out to 187 days – over half a year – dealing with some form of stress.

Those working in social care, and teaching and education, experience stress most regularly. Nearly one in six (18%) employees in these service sectors feel stressed every day (although the average is 13.1 and 12.3 days of stress a month, respectively).

The least stressed occupations (in comparison) are those found in engineering and manufacturing, with this group of workers typically feeling stressed for 7.3 days a month.https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/gYSKT/1/

The types of things that cause people the most stress at work also vary by industry.

Workload is the biggest stressor for people doing charity and voluntary work, as well as those employed in teaching and education, and healthcare (42%, 41%, and 40% respectively, compared to the survey average of 35% for all employees).

Social care workers are the most likely to cite working hours as a significant cause of stress (30%, compared to the survey average of 23%). Over one in four (26%) people working in accountancy, banking and finance also find their hours stressful.

Those employed in property and construction, and the law, are the most likely to say their bosses cause them stress (42% and 40% respectively, compared to the survey average of 21%).

Many solicitors, lawyers, and others in the legal sector, also find their organisation's workplace culture a stressor, as do a quarter of transport and logistics workers (30% and 27% respectively, compared to the survey average of 20%).

What can employers do?

Claire Williams, chief people and operations officer at Ciphr, says: "Ciphr's latest research provides some interesting, yet worrying, insights into the high levels of work-related stress that exist across all job roles.

"One finding that stands out for me is how one in nine employees – that's millions of people in the UK – feel stressed every single day. Work is not necessarily always the cause, granted, but it can be a significant contributor. If 11% of your workforce – likely more – is stressed daily, then it is going to have a big impact on their home lives and their work lives. So, employers need to be mindful of the role they can play in helping to relieve an individual's stress and anxiety.

"Unrealistic workloads and time pressures, overbearing bosses, unsupportive colleagues, and toxic workplace cultures, can all trigger stress. This can interfere with people's focus and productivity, and negatively affect our happiness and job satisfaction. It can also lead to higher staff turnover and absenteeism.

"Some stressors are always going to be around, and there are many things outside of an employer's control that can still take a toll. But there are many things that organisations can, and must, do to actively support their employees' mental health and wellbeing with empathy and understanding.

"If people are raising concerns about their workloads or working hours don't ignore it – make changes where possible. The key lies in cultivating a workplace culture that prioritises employee wellbeing. One where discussing stress, and its causes and effects, is normalised and encouraged to help identify

potential issues before they escalate. This includes training managers to recognise signs of mental distress and ensuring employees know what support is available to them via health insurance plans and employee assistance programmes."

Ciphr commissioned a survey (via OnePoll) of 2,000 representative UK adults in August 2024. Nearly two-thirds (62% or 1,238) of these respondents are currently in full- or part-time employment.

Ciphr's 2024 stress study, examining the incidence and causes of stress (in and outside of work), is available to view at https://www.ciphr.com/infographics/workplace-stress-statistics.

Ciphr is the go-to HR software and solutions partner for medium and large organisations in the UK. Its integrated HR, payroll, learning and recruitment software, services and content provide invaluable insights to HR teams to inform their people strategy and grow and develop their organisations. Based in Reading, Ciphr is on a mission to amplify the voice and value of HR through intelligent people data solutions that help HR be heard – in the boardroom and across the business.

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