

Research finds that nearly all heavy industry workers have struggled with mental health

12 months ago



As part of [Pirtek's Under the Hard Hat](#) campaign, they conducted a survey to help gain a better understanding about the scale of mental health challenges faced by workers across the heavy industries.

In partnership with Marine Professional, Transport Engineer and The Engineer, the survey was conducted amongst 343 individuals who work in engineering, marine & port, manufacturing, waste management, and mining & quarrying.

The research found the following:

- 94% of respondents have felt stressed, anxious, depressed and lonely
- Stress is a struggle for three quarters of hard hat professionals
- For every hundred workers, fourteen have experienced feelings of self-harm or suicide
- Four out of ten respondents have taken time off work for mental health reasons
- Absence in the hard hat industries is three times higher than the national average
- Over half of respondents find talking about their mental health uncomfortable or awkward
- 41% of hard hat workplaces don't have sufficient mental health support in place
- Professional services have been used by 35% of respondents to support their mental health

Commenting on the research results, Pirtek Group QHSE Manager, Martyn Smart, said: "It's incredibly worrying that so many of our survey respondents have reported challenges with their mental health. Professionals who work in these sectors face many hazards in their day-to-day duties, but it's important to

remember that mental health risks in the workplace must also be assessed to correctly measure the level of risk to workers.”

What does the research tell us?

Exploring the results in-depth, Pirtek identified five key findings that emphasise some of the major challenges surrounding mental health in the hard hat industries.

1. Mental health has been a challenge for the majority of hard hat workers.

According to the research, nearly all workers in the hard hat industries have struggled with their mental health. It found that 75% of survey respondents have felt stressed, whilst 62% have suffered with anxiety. 43% have experienced depression and 41% have felt lonely. Worryingly, 7% have experienced feelings of self-harm and an additional 7% have experienced feelings of suicide.

To put this into context, the [Office of National Statistics](#) reported 34 suicides per 100,000 in employment in the construction industry. If the research was scaled to this number, the magnitude of those who have experienced suicidal thoughts equates to 7,000 workers out of every 100,000. It's clear that more focus needs to be put on supporting mental health and wellbeing in these industries.

2. Absence due to mental health is higher in the hard hat industries than the national average

Four out of ten professionals in the hard hat industries have taken time off work because of their mental health. According to the [Health and Safety Executive](#), average working days lost between 2022 - 2023 for stress, depression or anxiety equates to 19.6 days. That's three times as high as those taking time off for workplace injuries. Additionally, the [national average](#) for time taken off work for mental health reasons is 12.4% whereas our survey data reveals this to be 39.5% for the hard hat industries.

Interestingly, in 2023, the Office for National Statistics [highlighted](#) that women are 42% more likely than men to take sick leave. There are many contributing reasons for this, but one assumption to be made is that, for men, there is a stigma associated with opening up about struggles with mental health. According to our charity partner, [Andy's Man Club](#), the bulk of suicides in the UK are male and [Mind](#) states that men are three times more likely to commit suicide than women.

Hard hat industries are commonly male dominated. It's vital that more education around mental health is needed in order to help workers, regardless of their chosen gender, understand mental health and access the right support as and when they need it.

3. Over half of hard hat workers feel uncomfortable or awkward discussing their mental health

Pirtek found that around one quarter (24.3%) of respondents would never discuss their mental health with colleagues, and if they did, they would feel uncomfortable in doing so. Three out of ten (28.9%) have spoken about mental health with their peers but felt awkward in doing so, whilst 26% feel completely comfortable having these conversations. Additionally, the research found that 20% of respondents have never had to talk about their mental health. However, as [research](#) suggests, one in every two people will develop a mental health disorder in their lifetime, so even if they haven't had to speak about these issues so far, support should be in place if they choose to do so in the future.

4. Workplaces in hard hat industries need to do more to support mental health as part of health and safety requirements

Just 59% of respondents said that their workplace had mental health support in place, with four out of ten reporting that there was no support in place or they weren't aware of it if it was. With nearly all hard hat workers reporting to have experienced feelings such as stress, anxiety, depression and even suicidal thoughts, it's vital that businesses operating in these areas have support available for their employees – or do more to drive internal awareness around the support systems that employees have access to.

According to [UK Law](#), employers have a duty of care which means they should do all they reasonably can to support their employees' health, safety and wellbeing. And the [Health and Safety Executive](#) states that 'like any other safety hazard at work, work-related mental health issues must be assessed to measure the level of risk to staff' and employers should put in place a framework of actions called 'Core Standards'. Steps should be taken by businesses to ensure compliance with duty of care.

5. Mental health is on the rise, yet NHS professional support services face huge backlogs. Hard hat workplaces should offer employees alternatives to get support

Pirtek's research found that 35% of respondents have received professional support for their mental health. This further supports the point that workplaces should have options in place to support their employees if they should ever need it, especially as the rate of adults experiencing a [mental health condition is rising](#) and the wait list for professional services on the NHS is increasing with [an estimated 1.2 million](#) people waiting for support. This essentially means, it will take longer for workers to access mental health services on the NHS and they will be living with their struggles without professional help for long periods of time.

Smart adds, "Despite the growth in awareness towards mental health in recent years, our research has found that there is still much more work to be done. It's vital that we continue to drive awareness and ensure the correct support is in place for every individual to access, should they need to."

In it together to support mental health

As part of the Under the Hard Hat Campaign, Pirtek is proud to be partnered with mental health and suicide prevention charity, [Andy's Man Club](#) and [Ollie Ollerton](#), former UK special forces soldier and directing staff (DS) from Channel 4's SAS: Who Dares Wins.

Lucas Whitehead, Head of Marketing and Partnerships at Andy's Man Club, said: "The results from Pirtek's research highlights the scale of the mental health problem in heavy industries. Mental health does not just impact the individual in question, it can have a profound impact on an individual's friends, family, coworkers and colleagues. Mental health challenges are indiscriminate, targeting everyone regardless of their chosen gender, race or belief."

He continues: "If we are to cultivate a culture where open discussions about mental health can be had, free from any judgement or stigma, it's vital that we all work together. We need to ensure that those struggling are not alone and there is support available should they need it. We have an opportunity to make real and lasting change for the many people working in the hard hat industries, it's important that we are all in it together."



To find out more about Andy's Man Club and the services it offers, please visit [here](#).