Mental wellbeing in the construction sector

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Societal context influencing general attitudes

Mental health

Mental health problems are forcing thousands in UK out of work - report

Will Young

When Will Young pulled out of Strictly Come Dancing insiders say he has always been honest about battling his demons. The singer says part of his brain is telling me that you’re about to die, you’re going to die. The only thing I can do is go to bed.” He added: “There have been times when I’ve been suicidal and on the floor.”

From Sinead O'Connor's breakdown to Jay Z's new album: Mental health experts praise these celebrities for opening up about their struggles and inspiring others to seek treatment
How can employers understanding the impact of mental ill-health?

HSE (2017) reported for the period 2017/18 on cases related to stress, depression or anxiety being:

- **44%** of all work-related ill health cases (up from 40% the year prior); and
- **57%** of all working days lost due to ill health (an increase from 49% reported the previous year)

= **15.4 million** working days lost.

49% of workers would not be comfortable disclosing a mental health issue at work (Personnel Today, 2017)

Musculoskeletal conditions and mental health have a complex and reciprocal relationship, each exacerbating, or potentially causing, the other (Duffield et al. 2017)

- **1 in 4** UK employees reported having a physical health condition
- Of which **1 in 5** also reported having a mental health condition.

Employees with mental and physical health comorbidity were much more likely to see their health as affecting their work (29%)

- compared to those with a physical condition only (13%) or
- those with a mental health condition only (15%). (Public Health England, 2015)
Studies evidence that male-dominated industries at risk

Men, Work, and Mental Health: A Systematic Review of Depression in Male-dominated Industries and Occupations, Roche et al, 2016

Among male-dominated industry groups:

• an elevated prevalence of depression was found for workers in agriculture, construction, and mining.

Among male-dominated occupational groups:

• elevated levels of depression were found for farmers, machine operators, laborers, and unskilled manual workers.

Physical and psychosocial working conditions accounted for much of the variation in rates of depression.

Factors included:

• work hours
• level of physical activity
• Income
• time pressure
• Job demands,
• job security
• job discretion
• effort-reward imbalance,
• role conflict
• job value
• emotional demands
• exposure to violence/ threats
• social support
• job status.
Creating a context: Numbers do the talking

**Randstad survey (2017)**

- **73%** feel their employers do not recognise the early signs of mental health problems.
- **46%** of all women responding said they were dealing with poor mental health conditions at that point.
- **2/3** said that they do not feel there are sufficient outlets to discuss mental health conditions.
- **34%** of respondent construction workers experienced a mental health condition in the last 12 months.
- That **1/5** of respondents have increased their alcohol and tobacco intake as a stress reliever, increasing the potential for further health risks.

**ONS (2016) data on suicide rates for England and Wales**

Rate among low-skilled male construction workers was **3.7 times** above the national average between 2011 and 2015.

Rate among building finishing trades, including plasterers, painters and decorators, was **twice** the national average between 2011 and 2015.

**Additionally ...**

- **72%** of people who completed suicide were not known to a health professional.
- **Samaritans (2016)**
- **1 in 6** have a diagnosable mental health condition. **Public Health England (2015)**
Considering the implications of mental ill-health within construction

The construction industry is a major employer ~ 7% of the UK workforce

Just over 40% of the construction workforce are self-employed

- **2.4 million** working days lost due to ill health
- **14,000** work-related cases of stress, depression or anxiety (new or long-standing)
- **About one sixth** of all ill health in this Sector
... and what do we know of the costs to businesses?

- Mental-health related presenteeism costs - working whilst ill (poor mental health) and working at reduced productivity – employers up to 3x the cost of mental-health related absence (Deloitte, 2017)

- Centre for Mental Health report (2018) attributed the costs to employers of failing to address mental ill health to £34.9 billion – or £1,300 for every employee in the UK workforce
Not just about rolling out initiatives – important to take back to basics – the work environment

- There is clear research evidence that supports the link between job control and social support with workers’ health and wellbeing.
- Using these levers doesn’t need to cost the bank!
- Low job control means that workers are likely to have:
  - Less responsibility and discretion, which undermines feelings of competency and accomplishment
  - Negatively impacts on motivation and effort applied
  - Negatively impacts on people’s ability to learn on the job
  - Contributes to stress, anxiety and depression
- Employers have a duty of care to their employees, which means that they should take all steps which are reasonably possible to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing.
The case for having ‘good work’

Clear evidence base showing for the majority of people being in work is better for their health than being out of work.

... if we accept the premise that work is good for us, what can we understand ‘good’ work to be?

A safe work environment + a sense of security, autonomy, good line management & communication within an organisation = Good work

Over £100bn annually = combined costs of worklessness and sickness absence.
... but there are still barriers when it comes to promoting better mental wellbeing in work

- Industry machoism
- Sounds expensive
- Isn’t this what the NHS is for?
- Not MY job!
- Can’t we just say we are doing it?
- No one else does it
- Ignorance
- Can we just stick a poster up?
Mates in Mind – measuring impact

Case study: Working with GallifordTry

• Creating their own **Be Well** strategy with positive mental health programme at the heart
• Core this is in educating everyone across the business in mental health awareness
• Underpinned by relevant professional support and services

“A Site Manager experiencing stress at work had a period of adjusted duties and counselling. He posted his experience to LinkedIn. It’s received over 192K views, 44 shares and almost 2K supportive comments. He’s now a Mates in Mind facilitator, delivering STC on site.”

David White, Health, Safety & Sustainability Director

• Initial investment (3 month period)
  • 45 internal Mates in Mind facilitators
  • 15 MH First Aiders
  • 170 ‘Start the Conversations’
  • 130 attendees to mindfulness workshops
  • 38 Line Managers trained in MH awareness

• Wider wellbeing outcomes (1st year)
  • Rise in number of volunteering days
  • Increase in teleconferencing usage
  • Reduction in sick days recorded
  • Reduction in churn
  • High engagement by employees – across internal and external channels
Mates in Mind – measuring impact

Case study: Working with Barhale

• Ensuring the health and safety of its workforce has always been one of Barhale’s principal considerations.

• Pursuing the goal of a more mentally healthy workplace was one of the truest ways of showing that as a company it genuinely cared for and valued its people.

• Part of their Be Safe Be Healthy as well as learning and development strategies.

Some key steps in this journey?

• Making mental health a corporate issue

• Getting help where it’s needed

• Supporting others to offer support

• Keeping awareness high
Mates in Mind – measuring impact

Case study: Working with RSE

- RSE run a range of education programmes, including Emotional Intelligence and leadership coaching, as well as general awareness
- Provide access to various professional support services
- About creating supportive working environments = change the way they do business benefitting both staff and efficiency

Some key steps in this journey?
- Merging business performance and workforce care
- Getting help when and where it’s needed
- Using technology to relieve stress
- Making interventions where they are needed
Thriving at Work Report pointed out how employers are missing out and can better support employees remain in, and thrive at work

Six core standards:

1. Produce, implement and communicate a MH plan
2. Develop MH awareness
3. Encourage open conversations and promote the support available to staff
4. Provide employees with good working conditions
5. Promote effective people management
6. Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing.

Enhanced standards:

i. Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting
ii. Nominate a health and wellbeing lead at board or senior leadership level
iii. Improve the process for disclosing mental ill health during recruitment and throughout employment
iv. Provide tailored in-house mental health support and signpost to clinical help.
It’s about creating, communicating and delivering a complete approach across your strategy, systems, processes and people.
Making the change doesn’t need to be complex or expensive

• **Keeping staff engaged and productive in work:** Companies need to get the right support in place for both staff and their line managers in order to maximise their potential

• **Workplace adaptations cost an average of £75:** Clearly it can be more effective than to lose an employee

• **Creating a culture where talking about health conditions is a good place to start:**
  - One in three employees with a long term condition will have not discussed it with their employer
  - Only 52% have access to occupational health support through their work.

• **Skills pressures:** millennials by 2020 making up 50% of the workforce – how will you be compared to others?
Worth bearing in mind...

• A mental illness is a condition that affects a person's thinking, feeling or mood – it may affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day.

• Each person will have different experiences, even people with the same diagnosis

• A mental health condition isn’t the result of one event. Research suggests multiple, linking causes. Genetics, environment and lifestyle influence whether someone develops a mental health condition. A stressful job or home life makes some people more susceptible, as do traumatic life events like being the victim of a crime. Biochemical processes and circuits and basic brain structure may play a role, too.

• Half of mental health conditions begin by age 14

• 75% of mental health conditions develop by age 24

• Early engagement and support are crucial to improving outcomes and increasing the promise of recovery.
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