



Construction
Industry Federation



Mental Health in the Construction Sector

Our Partners



Construction Workers
Sick Pay Trust



proudly part of AIG



▶ OUR PARTNERS



The Trustee of the **Construction Workers' Sick Pay Trust** is pleased to support the launch of the CIF Mental Health Well-Being survey. The Construction Workers' Sick Pay Trust is committed to the promotion of better health, including mental health and wellbeing for all workers in the construction sector. During 2019, just over 7,000 sick pay benefit claims were paid to members covered by the Scheme and this is regardless of the type of illness, once certified.

The Construction Workers' Sick Pay Trust is committed to the well-being of every construction worker and assists members when they need it most. The construction industry, supported by its employers and workers, has had a strong track record of promoting health and safety in the work place, especially on sites, and we would urge all parties to now support an increased focus on the mental health and wellbeing of workers.

For information on how to claim, please visit www.cwspt.ie or email sickpay@cwspt.ie or call 01-4977663.



We know from the research that "Mental wellbeing, psychosocial risks and work-related stress are among the most challenging occupational safety and health concerns" for construction workers. Whilst we know that stress and other mental health related issues impact the staff at the construction industry we also know that these difficulties are under reported and therefore staff may not be accessing the much needed support at the times when they need it most. We are delighted to be there 24/7 to support staff in the construction industry when and where they need it by offering a completely free and confidential service which removes any potential barriers to staff seeking help and to work towards overcoming any stigma which may be preventing people from accessing the supports they need.

Dr.Emelina Ellis

Clinical Excellence lead at Spectrum.Life



The research from CIF is extremely insightful in terms of how we can best help to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in the construction sector. While it's very encouraging to see that most leaders in this sector acknowledge the importance of mental health and wellbeing as a health and safety consideration, it is concerning that over half of companies believe that staff under report mental health issues.

Our partnership with CIF, 'Build Health' is something that can support both employers and employees in the sector. The mental health and wellbeing support programme offers resources to leaders in the sector and the 24/7 Mental Health Support Programme offers invaluable and confidential help and advice to those who need it.

Alan Morris

Corporate Marketing Programme Manager

Mental Health and Wellbeing is now a critical part of the construction industry's safety culture. The industry began a transformative journey to improve its safety, reduce accidents and prevent fatalities in the 1980s. The next step in this journey is to ensure companies are equipped to help support and promote their employees' mental health and well-being. Due to the vast number of sole-traders, micro-enterprises and SMEs operating in the sector, this will involve coordinated action between industry leaders, the CIF and Government to ensure companies are supported in affecting mental health.

Construction companies, like those in other sectors, are increasingly wrestling with how to shape working environments to influence employee well-being. The construction industry has a strong track record in doing this in a physical safety context. This report shows that, like other industries, construction companies are concerned about employee mental health but in some cases lack support, expertise and resources and a regulatory backdrop to intervene confidently and effectively.

The CIF has been instrumental in shaping safety culture with its members and state agencies such as the Health and Safety Authority. In the coming decade, this collaboration could transform our industry into a positive platform shaping citizens' wellness.

In 2016, the CIF began a campaign to focus on improving equality, diversity and inclusion across the construction industry with extensive surveys and guidelines to members. The CIF views improved equality, diversity & inclusion as a sound basis for promoting employee wellbeing. This report represents a benchmark for measurement of our progress towards an industry culture that protects, supports and nurtures employee wellbeing.

Covid-19 has only increased the pressure on our employees' personal and professional lives. To protect our employees, and sustain productivity as the industry rebuilds Ireland 2020 and shapes Ireland 2040, we must build strong and resilient organisational cultures that support them. I'm confident that the dynamic, adaptable companies in construction and our industry can achieve as proud a record in mental wellness as we have achieved collectively in safety.

Dermot Carey

▶ **RECOMMENDATIONS**



Recommendations arising from this survey can be divided into industry-wide and company specific. They are intended as initial actions that both policy-makers and industry leaders can address in the short-term. The CIF will be developing a wider set of policy recommendations in the coming months to be launched in 2020.

Industry-related recommendations require collaboration amongst industry leaders, the CIF and in partnership with other agencies (i.e. HSE, Mental Health Ireland, Department of Health, etc.) Company specific recommendations refer to what individual companies can do to make their organisation more in the short-term.

COMPANIES RECOMMENDATIONS	INDUSTRY RECOMMENDATIONS	GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Prioritise the project management and supervision of each job to establish and maintain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Realistic deadlines ▶ Clear communication between management and staff ▶ Healthy work hours and work periods 	<p>Establish a CIF Working Group to objectively measure the impact of employee mental health on absenteeism, loss of productivity, safety etc in the construction sector in Ireland</p>	<p>Provide grants to companies to embed a culture within their organisations</p>
<p>Develop a collaborative company culture where teamwork and support are encouraged and rewarded. Senior management need to <i>“demonstrate and not just articulate that teamwork matters”</i></p>	<p>Facilitate free access for all construction workers to confidential Employment Assistance Programmes</p>	<p>Engage with construction companies as a vehicle to address mental health issues of young people, particularly men due to the proportion of the 147,000 employees that are male</p>
<p>Assign a senior person within the company with the responsibility for mental health. The assigned individual to be provided the support and resources to deliver the support structure</p>	<p>Establish baseline measurements of employee stress levels within the sector that are tracked annually</p>	<p>Engage with industry about including mental health under safety regulation and support companies accordingly</p>
<p>Engage staff in a frank discussion on mental health with the aim of developing appropriate policies and procedure</p>	<p>Develop best practice policies, guidelines and procedures for managing mental health that can be adapted for small and large companies alike</p>	<p>Launch a targeted campaign with industry to promote mental health and wellbeing on construction sites and allocate resources to an appropriate body to address this issue</p>
<p>Develop succinct and jargon free mental health policies and procedures and clearly communicate to all staff</p>	<p>Prioritise the importance of mental education as a lifelong learning initiative for companies with which they can engage, refresh and develop their knowledge level</p>	<p>Work with industry to develop tendering processes, procurement guidelines and contractual frameworks to ensure timelines are realistic and do not place undue pressure on construction company staff</p>
<p>Introduce an open & confidential process whereby employees can report a mental health issue</p>	<p>Promote a range of accredited mental health training courses that match the industry's needs for companies to select as appropriate</p>	
<p>Consider and invest in a range of educational initiatives (eg. talks, workshops, activities) to inform and promote good mental health in the workplace</p>	<p>Set appropriate work schedules and project management practices with cognisance to work-related stress</p>	
<p>Consider formal training for staff, selecting an accredited course that matches your company's needs</p>		

▶ 1. BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES



1.1 Background

Mental health covers a wide range of issues, including mild or moderate anxiety and stress, drug and alcohol abuse and disorders such as severe depression and schizophrenia. However, workers mental health and well being also relates to their general mental and emotional health and their ability to cope with the normal stresses of life.

According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), 18.5% of the Irish population has a mental health disorder. This places Ireland 3rd highest in Europe (after Finland and the Netherlands) in the estimated prevalence of a mental health issue.

The cost of mental health issues in the workforce is significant in terms of days lost at work, health and safety implications, social isolation and even the risk of self harm or suicide. This is borne out in the 2018-2019 UK Health & Safety Executive's reported figures for work related cases of stress, depression or anxiety (new or longstanding) totaling 600,000. Moreover, the total number of working days lost to a mental health related issue in the UK was 12.8 million equating to an average of 21.2 days lost per case.

The Construction Industry Federation is fully aware of the importance of mental well being as an issue for people working in the construction sector. The CIF recognises the need for a supportive infrastructure within the sector, given the large proportion of men in the workforce and the traditional beliefs amongst Irish men to avoid seeking psychological support for mental health issues.

In recognition of the importance of mental well being in the construction sector, the CIF engaged Accuracy to conduct research with employers to explore their experiences of managing staff and the key issues they face with regards to mental health.

The research sought to examine to what extent companies have access to the necessary support structures to effectively manage employees struggling with their mental health.

1.2 Objectives

More specifically, the research focused on a number of core areas, namely to measure:

- ▶ ***General awareness and consideration of employees' mental health***
- ▶ ***Attitudes towards the importance of mental health in the workplace***
- ▶ ***Challenges of managing staff's mental health particularly amongst the industry's SME cohort***
- ▶ ***Required policy supports for construction companies***
- ▶ ***Key factors that give rise to mental health difficulties at work***
- ▶ ***Impact of poor mental health in the workplace***
- ▶ ***Policies and procedures employed to manage workplace mental health issues***
- ▶ ***Resources and support structures employers currently provide to support employees mental health***
- ▶ ***Additional resources employers require to better address the issue of mental health in the workplace***

▶ **2. METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE**



2.1 Methodology

A two step methodology was employed for the project.

STEP 1:

Firstly a telephone survey was conducted with 301 construction companies. The sample was drawn from the 2020 Construction Industry Federation's database. The results were subsequently weighted to reflect the entire population of 1,226 companies.

This delivers a margin of error of approximately + or - 5% at the 95% confidence level.

STEP 2:

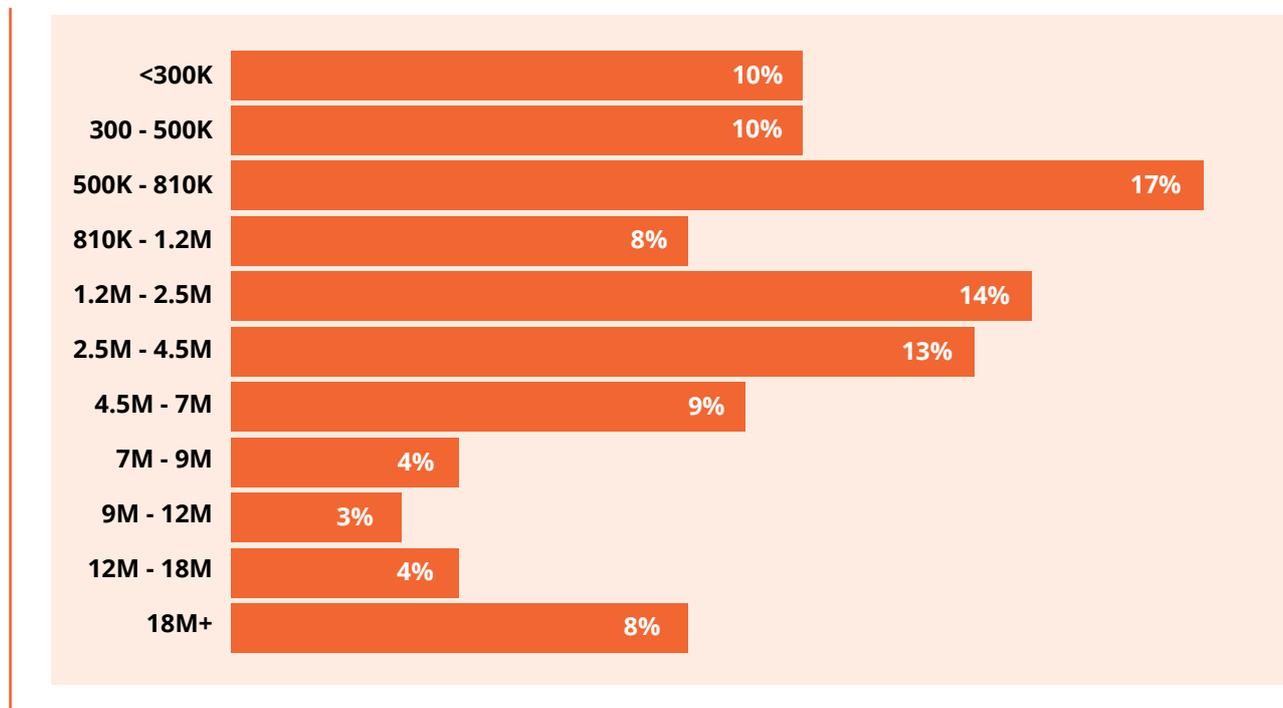
We also conducted 10 qualitative one to one interviews with employers from the Irish construction sector to explore in greater depth the day-to-days experiences of managing mental well being in the work place.

All interviews were conducted between 14th January-28th February 2020.

2.2 Sample

The sample of 301 CIF member interviews is reweighted so that the results can be generalised to the entire population (1,266).

▶ SAMPLE BREAKDOWN BY COMPANY CATEGORY



(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

▶ 3. KEY FINDINGS

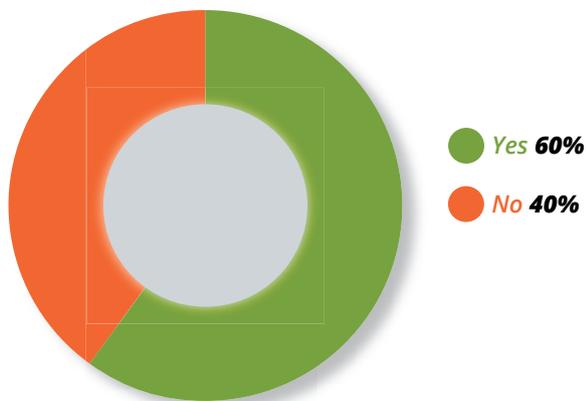


3.1 Mental health is on my mind

60% of companies reported that the mental health of employees is an issue that they have considered in the last 12 months.

▶ EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH

Is mental health of employees an issue that you / your company have considered / thought about in the last 12 months?



NO. OF EMPLOYEES	
1-4	33%
5-9	54%
10-20	63%
21-49	75%
50-100	85%
101-249	89%
250+	100%

(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

On a positive note, almost all companies recognise the importance of employee well being with 98% acknowledging that staff mental health has important safety implications. 94% also believe it to be critically important that the construction industry improves how it manages employees' mental health.

▶ **Almost all companies recognise the importance of employee well being with 98% acknowledging that staff mental health has important safety implications.**

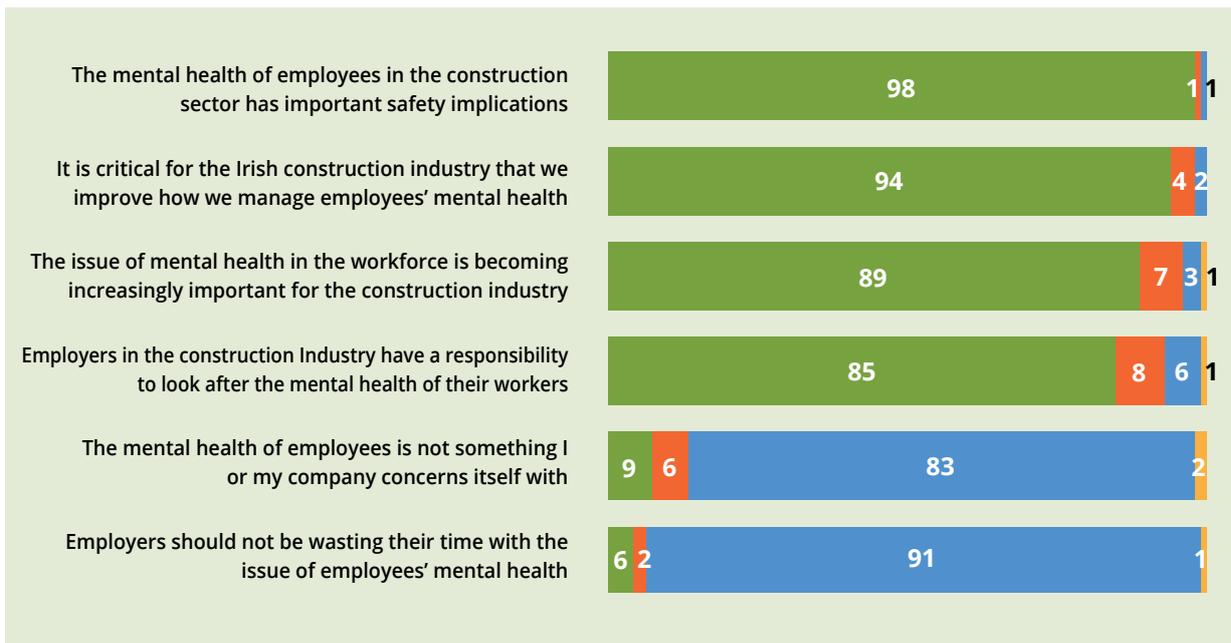
As construction companies increase in size (i.e. numbers of employees) they devote more time to thinking about the issue of employee mental health with 100% of larger companies (i.e. 250 + staff) having considered the issue in the last year. This is likely to be influenced in part by the greater resources available to larger companies to allocate to employee well being and also the fact that with a larger workforce we would expect a higher number of staff to present with a mental health issue.

Hence it appears that the issue of employees' mental health is not as "top of mind" for smaller construction (1-9 staff) companies possibly because they are more "time poor" and/or they believe they have a good appreciation of the well being of their staff. (see overleaf).



MENTAL HEALTH IN THE IRISH CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:



● Agree
 ● Neither
 ● Disagree
 ● DK / NR

(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

89% of companies also believe that the mental health of the workforce is becoming increasingly important for the construction industry. While 85% of employers hold the view that the construction industry has a responsibility to look after the mental well being of workers.

“Mental health is an issue that’s always been with us in the construction sector. There is a heightened awareness of it now. We as employers have just responded to the problem.”

(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)

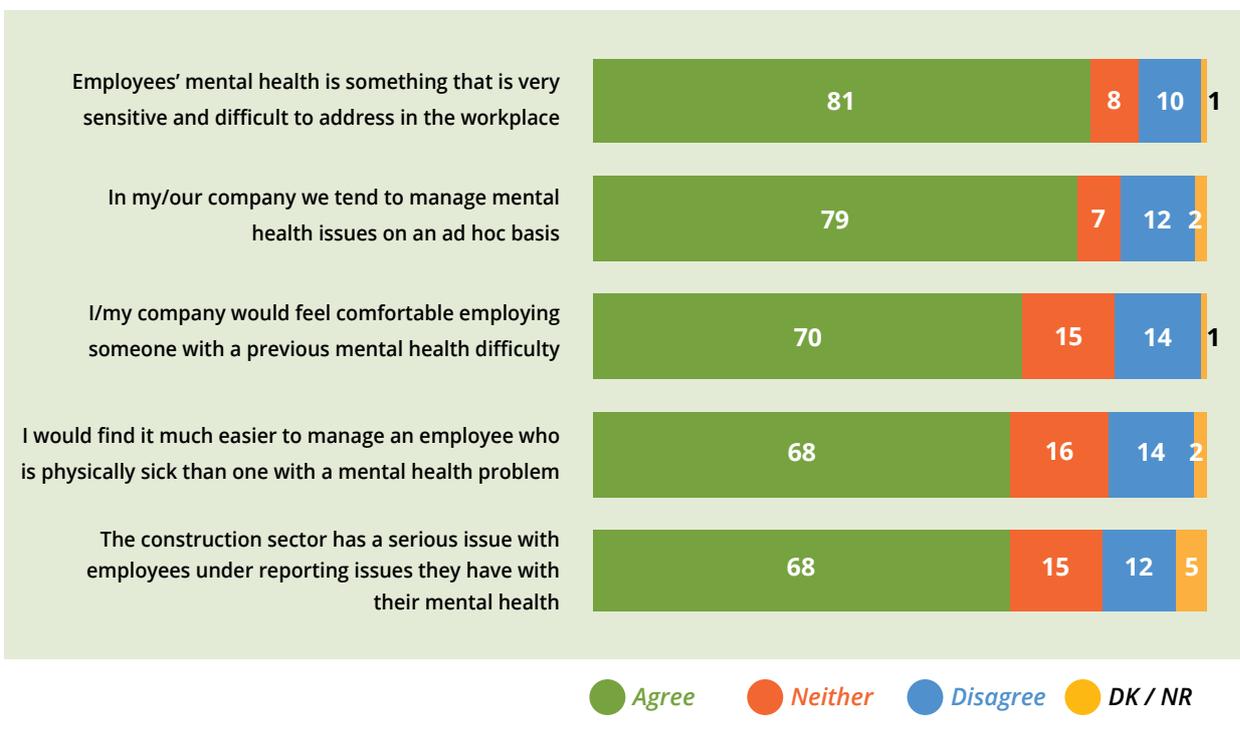
3.2 Managing mental health is a real challenge

Although Irish construction companies acknowledge the importance of staff well being, managing mental health in the workplace remains challenging. 81% of employers report that employees' mental health is a very sensitive issue and difficult to address.

68% also acknowledge that they would find it much easier to manage an employee who is physically sick than one with a mental health difficulty.

▶ ATTITUDES TO MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:



(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

The issue of managing staff mental health is no doubt made more difficult by some employees who may be unwilling or uncomfortable with reporting mental health difficulties. Interestingly, 68% of companies believe the construction sector has a serious issue with staff under reporting issues with their mental health in the workplace.

“What we find is that sometimes a person will not report a mental health issue directly but it will be flagged to me that a person’s attendance has not been good. I will contact the employee and check in with them. For example they might tell me that they’re drinking a lot and can’t get out of bed.”

(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)

The under reporting of mental health issues is a common theme to emerge from the interviews with employers, with absenteeism often the first warning sign. In companies that have assigned a resource to manage staff mental health, he/she will follow up the employee directly in a discrete and supportive manner.

3.3 Why employees experience mental health issues in the construction sector

This report recognises that the factors that determine good or poor mental health are complex and can involve a combination of biological and environmental factors. The focus here is on the environmental/ situational issues that employers view to be important in contributing to construction workers presenting with mental health problems.

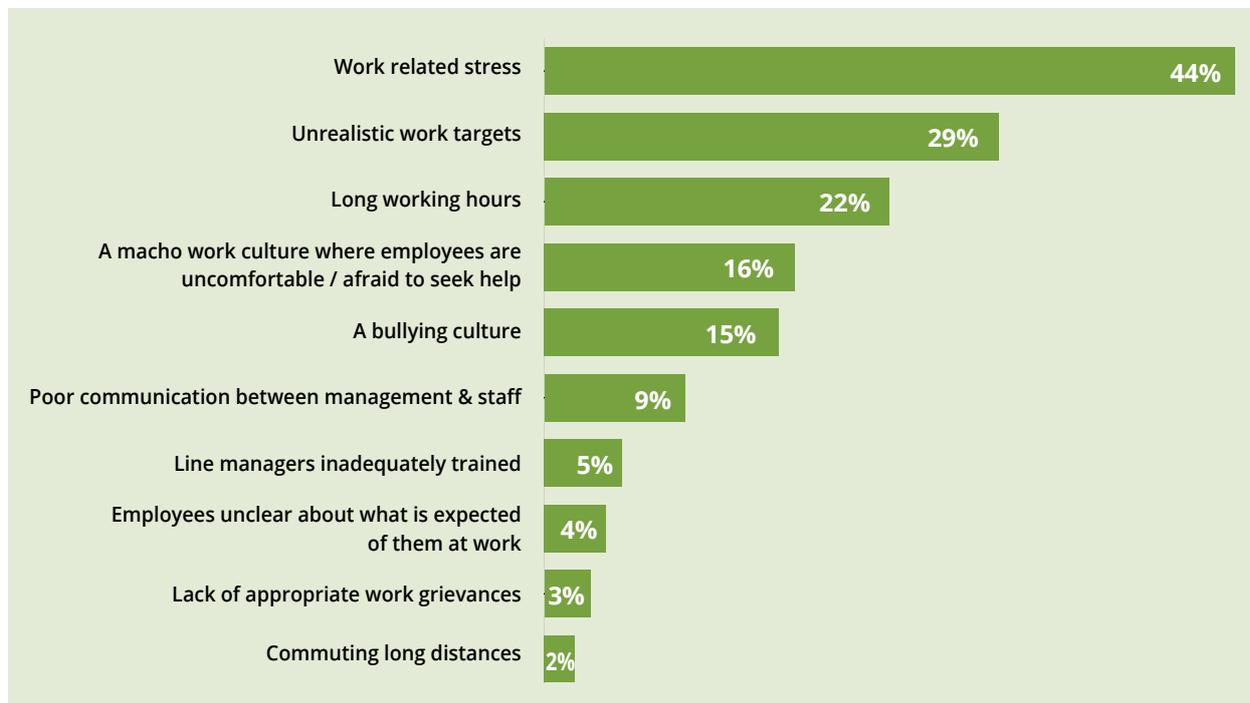
Examining the reasons provided by employers that give rise to staff mental health issues, they can be broadly categorised into **work related** and **non work related stressors**. 70% of employers attribute poor mental health in the construction sector in part to a work related issue.

The primary work related reasons contributing to poor mental health in the sector were general work related stress (44%), unrealistic work targets (29%), long working hours (22%), a macho work culture where employees are uncomfortable seeking help (16%), a bullying culture (15%) and poor communication between management and staff (9%).

Other factors also mentioned include inadequate training amongst line managers, employees unclear about what is expected of them at work, lack of appropriate grievance policies and a long distance commute.

WHY EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES - WORK RELATED

What, if any, are the reasons why employees experience mental health issues in the construction industry?



(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

The pressure of very challenging deadlines emerged as a key work stressor that can take a toll over time on the mental health of employees.

Many of the employers acknowledged that the working environment for construction workers was challenging particularly with long hours, physically demanding work in all weather conditions and terrain.

Another issue to emerge was the transient nature of the job with workers often moving from site to site every 6 months.

“The social context is always going to be different for a construction project. It sets you up for stress. You’re in a place for 6 months and then another place for 6 months. It’s the constant change, its destabilizing.”

(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)

The ongoing pressure of seeking to meet deadlines can negatively impact on employees’ well being.

“The pressure of projects is a thing. The deadlines, we have had people who said they can’t cope and need a break. Very heavy deadlines on things, driven by clients. Big multinationals giving out an image that they are a caring company but yet no understanding given. The pace is getting faster all the time.”

(Employer, Large-Sized Company)

Project management on individual sites can also contribute significantly to stress.

“A badly managed project can be very stressful. Young guys on sites may not always know who their boss is, it can be very corrosive. You can see people getting very stressed out. It is important that you have good management practices in place. Very often there can be an incident and the poor guy at the bottom is landed with the blame.”

Although it was recognised that construction workers can be well paid, the nature of the work can often be short term contracts with less long term certainty of employment. The lack of job security can be also be a source of stress as it can be difficult for workers to engage in long term financial planning.

“The other thing is the contract nature of the employment. That can be difficult for some. Poor provision for pensions. Hard to plan long-term.”

(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)



“A number of our people have left and gotten work with the local authority. These are some top class people. They found the workplace in the construction industry challenging, the time with their family isn’t what they’d like. They are looking for a job that gives them a daily routine, a pension at the end of the day.”

(Employer, Large-Sized Company)

Employers and clients need to be cognisant of how their company management practices and culture (driving workers to achieve unrealistic targets) can create a stressful environment for workers that must be managed.

“We’re not supposed to take on work under the construction regulations unless the programme for works has been agreed that the work can be safely done in that period of time. That regulation is being ignored by companies. We need to enforce the law that’s already there.”

(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)

The issue of unrealistic deadlines is something that can also be client driven. In essence a deadline gets passed from client to contractor, from contractor to subcontractor and from subcontractor to individual employee akin to a bucket of water being passed from one person to another down a hill. However the issue in this case is that at each point the timeline gets tighter and the stress mounts so that by the end it is the individual employee who is left carrying the greatest burden of stress (i.e. the heaviest bucket).

In the event of such work practices being employed, inevitably workers can and do become stressed and develop mental health problems. A company may respond by providing staff access to free counselling or an Employee Assistance Programme. This in effect alleviates the symptoms and does not tackle a key source of the problem.

“The one thing that I heard from everyone when I told them I was going into construction was this constant thing of time pressure and project deadlines. The client wants the project finished yesterday. In a lot of cases you agree to that in a tender even though you think it mightn’t be realistic. When this is constantly happening it leads to stress and anxiety. We can give people access to an EAP but in reality there isn’t enough being done at an organisational or sectoral level to look at the real causes of stress and how we as companies are contributing to it.”

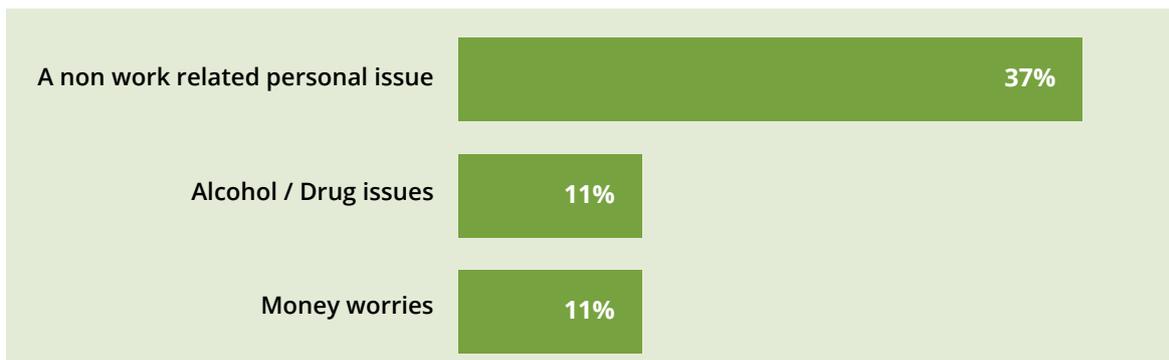
(Employer, Large-Sized Company)

In addition to work related stress, 48% of employers reported that a non work related issue contributes to the mental health difficulties of workers in the construction sector.

The key non work related issues that impact the mental health of construction workers were personal issues (37%), issues with alcohol/drugs (11%) and money worries (11%).

WHY EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES - NON WORK RELATED

What, if any, are the reasons why employees experience mental health issues in the construction industry?



(Base: All Companies: 1,266)



The personal issues that can impact an employee's mental health and affect their work performance are varied and can differ by age cohort and life stage. Family and relationship problems and issues regarding children and separation are common themes.

"The first thing would be around their children and separation. They're going to court to fight for access. That can lead to other problems like drinking a lot."

(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)

The notable impact that personal issues, if unresolved can have on the mental well being of employees needs to be taken on board by all employers. In many such cases the psychological burden of a personal problem without access to appropriate help can lead to a downward spiral of negative thought patterns and behavior.

The fact that the source of stress may be personal and not work related does not lessen its impact on the mental wellbeing of the employee and companies acknowledge the need to and want to provide appropriate support.

An employer through the provision of an empathetic ear can often create a safe space for an employee with a mental health issue to share his/her problem and find a workable solution. In many cases the observed behavior (poor attendance at work) may be symptomatic of a deeper employee concern that when aired in an appropriate forum can be resolved.

"We had one guy who was not showing up for work and when I contacted him he opened up about being very stressed about money, he was worried that he could not get a mortgage and a house to take care of his young family. This issue was causing him such distress and he was bottling it up inside as he did not know who to turn too. But actually, once we had a chance to talk it through we were able to connect him with a financial expert who helped him with the mortgage forms and everything."

(Employer, Large-Sized Company)

The problem of excess drinking and drug taking did emerge but was largely viewed by employers to be more prevalent amongst the younger demographic and also a broader societal issue that is not confined to the construction sector.

It is important that the issue of excess drinking and drug taking is not sensationalised but nor should the problem be viewed as trivial. Such practices can and no doubt do have safety implications and contravene health and safety regulations. The critical issue here is that the sector and individual companies are informed of such behavior and appropriately trained to identify potential signs and are equipped with the skills to address it accordingly.

3.4 What is the impact of mental health for the employer?

As we have seen the impact of unresolved mental health issues (either work related or non work related) on an employee's mental well being is considerable often resulting in severe psychological distress and possibly self destructive behaviour.

For employers, poor employee mental health can impact productivity, increase absenteeism, human error and accidents, leading to high staff turnover and poor company performance.

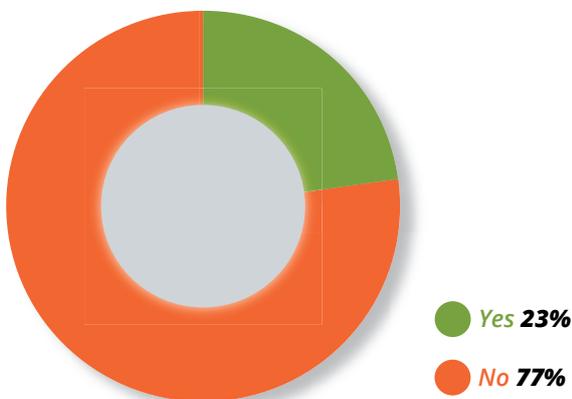
Almost 1 in 4 (23%) employers reported the absence of a company employee/subcontractor from work for 1 full day due to a mental health related issue in the last year. As construction companies increase in size, the link between mental health and staff absenteeism becomes more evident. 93% of larger companies (250 + staff) report the absence of a staff member/subcontractor in the last 12 months owing to a mental health issue compared with 47% for medium sized companies (50-100 staff).

▶ EMPLOYEE ABSENCE DUE TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

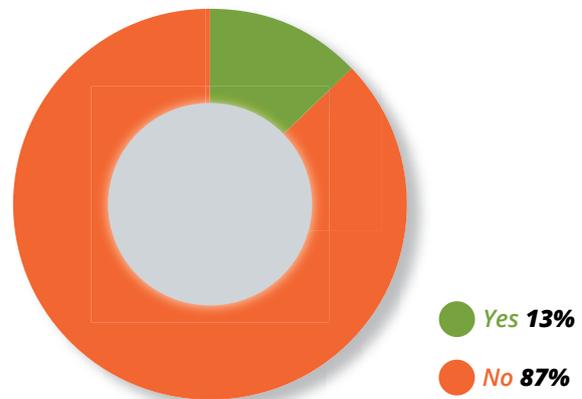
In the last 12 months, has a company employee/subcontractor been absent from work (i.e. for 1 full day's work) due to a mental health related issue?

In the last 12 months, has a company employee/subcontractor been present but unfit for work due to a mental health related issue?

Absent from work in the last 12 months



Present but unfit for work in the last 12 months



(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

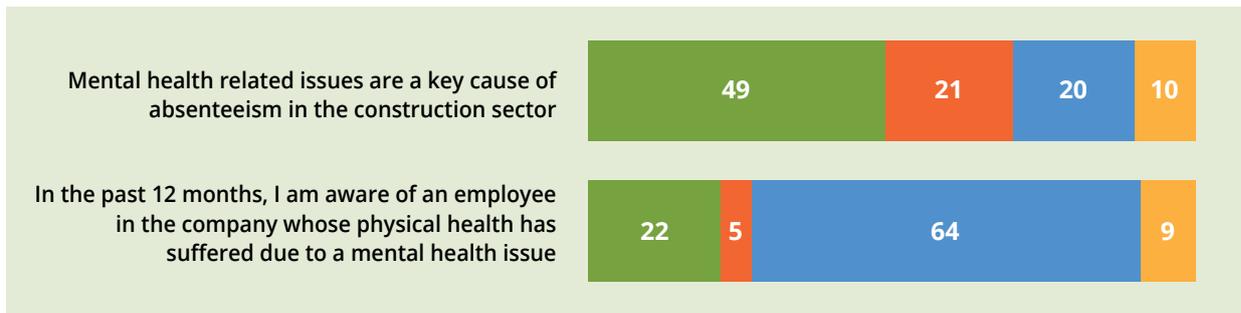
▶ For employers, poor employee mental health can impact productivity, increase absenteeism, human error and accidents.



Furthermore, 49% of companies also reported that mental health related issues are a key cause of absenteeism in the industry. This points to the strong link that employers in the construction sector see between poor mental health and staff attendance.

▶ ATTITUDES TO MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



(Base: All Companies: 1,226)

● Agree ● Neither ● Disagree ● DK / NR

In addition to absenteeism, poor mental health can lead to employees becoming physically sick with 22% of employers being aware of a company employee whose physical health in the last year has been adversely affected by their mental health.

Also of concern is the fact that 13% of employers reported that in the last year a company employee/subcontractor has been present but unfit for work due to a mental health issue. Although we do not know the specific roles of employees who presented unfit for work nor do we know the respective outcomes in each case (e.g. sent home etc), no doubt such cases can and do present a safety risk.

Poor mental health can also negatively impact staff productivity with 23% of companies reporting a loss of productivity from a staff member in the last year.

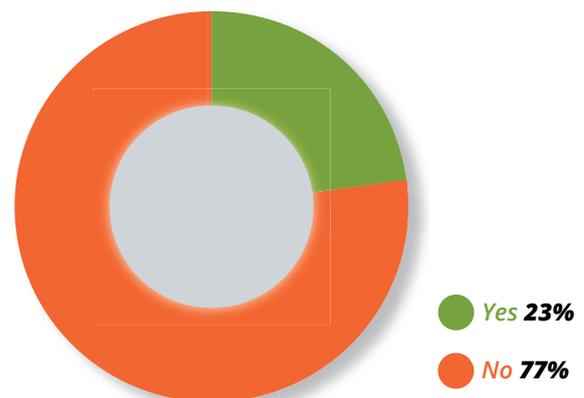
“We know that very often when an employee is struggling with their mental health one of the first things that can happen is their attendance at work drops off. Sometimes their attendance at work is fine but their behaviour at work may change, they may become more withdrawn or integrate less with their peers. They may start to eat lunch by themselves. You might also see that their productivity drops off, they may seem distracted, less switched on and almost in another world.”

(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)

▶ IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ON PRODUCTIVITY

In the last 12 months, has a company employee/subcontractor's productivity been negatively affected by their mental health?

Productivity negatively impacted in last year



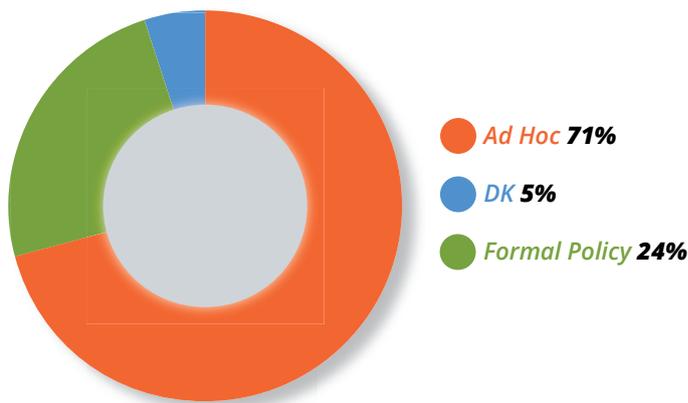
(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

3.6 How is mental health managed in the workplace?

Only 24% of employers report having a formal policy to manage the mental health of employees with 71% managing staff mental health issues on an ad hoc basis.

▶ EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH POLICY

Does your company have a FORMAL POLICY to manage the mental health of employees or is it done on an ad-hoc basis?



Have a FORMAL MENTAL HEALTH POLICY	
1-9 Employees	13%
10-49 Employees	30%
50-100 Employees	30%
101-249 Employees	45%
250+ Employees	74%

(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

As companies increase in size, they are more likely to have a formal mental health policy, yet only 45% of companies with 100-249 employees have a policy in place.

There appear to be a number of reasons as to why many construction companies lack a formal mental health policy. For smaller companies, the issue is likely to be influenced in part by limited resources. In mid-sized and larger companies the issue may be complicated by the fact that the responsibility of managing employee mental health is shared across multiple departments/roles (HR, Health & Safety, Occupational health, site managers, foremen, line managers etc).

The shared ownership of mental health within an organisation is positive as good company mental health is a collective responsibility.

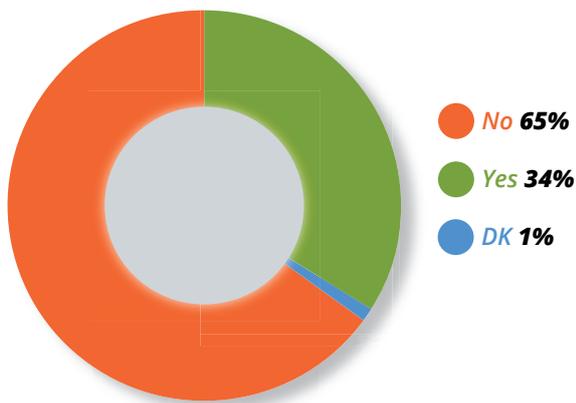
However, best practice indicates that assigning a senior person within the company with the responsibility to manage mental health is beneficial as he/she (with the support of senior management and adequate resources) can work to establishing robust mental health policies, guidelines and practices.

To date, 34% of construction companies have assigned a member of staff to manage any employee/subcontractor's mental health related issues.

▶ ASSIGNED A MANAGER FOR EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH

Has your company assigned someone to manage any employee/subcontractor related mental health issues?

Assigned a Manager



ASSIGNED A MANAGER FOR MENTAL HEALTH	
1-9 Employees	18%
10-49 Employees	38%
50-100 Employees	50%
101-249 Employees	93%
250+ Employees	100%

(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

Again, smaller companies (less than 50 staff) are less likely to have allocated a resource to manage employee mental health while in mid-sized/larger companies (i.e. 101-249 and 250+ employees) 93% and 100% respectively reported assigning someone to manage the issue.

The low number of smaller companies that have assigned someone to manage employee mental health suggests that they perceive they lack the resources to do so effectively. Yet, the consequence of not assigning someone to manage employee mental health is that it may be neglected altogether or inadvertently policies and procedures are not employed to protect staff.

This need not be the case, mental health policies and procedures can be streamlined to be concise and effective. This is an important challenge for the sector, to develop succinct mental health policies and procedures that are effective for both small and larger construction companies respectively.

Another factor that appears to inhibit some companies from employing mental health policies is the complexity of managing mental health (i.e. multiple stressors, consequences of getting it wrong etc). For some, there is a concern that a formal policy may be too rigid and fail to take account of the individuality of each employee situation and that each reported mental health issue needs to be managed on a case by case basis.

“We would not have a formal policy for mental health per se. Typically a foreman might let me know that an employee has been missing days at work, I would then follow up with them in a confidential manner and try to understand what’s going on? Depending on the issue, I might suggest they see their GP or remind them of the counseling service available through the EAP. It’s very discreet and subtle, we don’t have a formal manual that we follow.”

(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)

Although 77% of employers report having a procedure to manage bullying within the workplace, only 53% have a process to manage employee drug or alcohol addiction.

A significant deficit also exists in company procedures to tackle other work related stressors namely:

- ▶ Ongoing friction and anger between colleagues **(52%)**
- ▶ An employee experiencing significant stress at work **(42%)**
- ▶ A work related mental health difficulty **(41%)**
- ▶ Pressure within the company to work long hours **(32%)**
- ▶ A lack of support from colleagues when work gets difficult **(31%)**

Furthermore only 25% have a process to assist an employee with a mental health problem that is non work based but is impacting on their work.

PROCEDURES TO ASSIST EMPLOYEES

Does your company currently have a process / procedure in place to assist an employee / subcontractor experiencing an issue with any of the following?

STATEMENT	YES	NO	DK	NR
Bullying or harassment from another colleague	77%	21%	0%	2%
A drug or alcohol addiction	53%	43%	2%	2%
Ongoing friction or anger between colleagues	52%	45%	1%	2%
Significant stress at work	42%	54%	2%	2%
A mental health difficulty (i.e. stress, anxiety, depression) at work	41%	56%	2%	1%
Pressure within the company to work long hours	32%	56%	1%	11%
A lack of support from colleagues when work gets difficult	31%	66%	2%	1%
A mental health problem at home that is affecting their work	25%	70%	4%	1%

(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

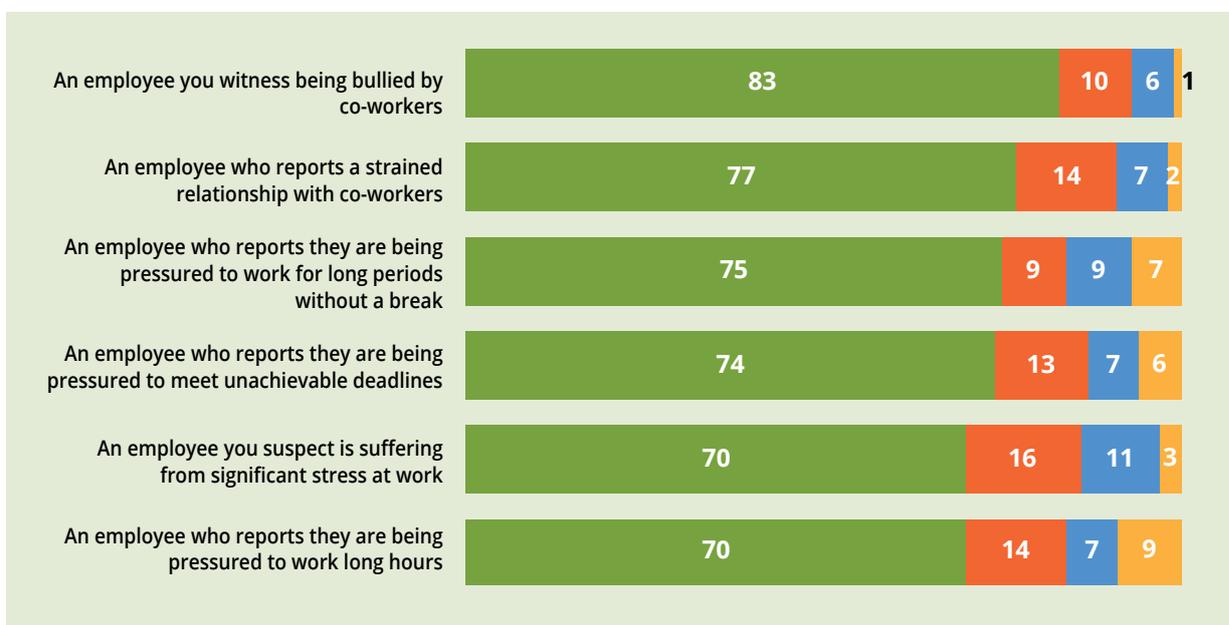
Many companies take the view that they can effectively address in an ad hoc manner a lot of the overt issues employees may present with namely:

- ▶ **77%** of employers are confident they can effectively manage an employee who reports a strained relationship with co-workers
- ▶ **75%** of companies are confident they can manage an employee who reports that he/she is being pressured to work long periods without a break
- ▶ **70%** are confident they can manage an employee they believe is suffering from significant work related stress



▶ EFFECTIVENESS OF PROCEDURES

How confident are you that you / your company has an effective process / procedure to help an employee / subcontractor in the following situations?



● *Confident*
● *Neither*
● *Not Confident*
● *DK / NR*

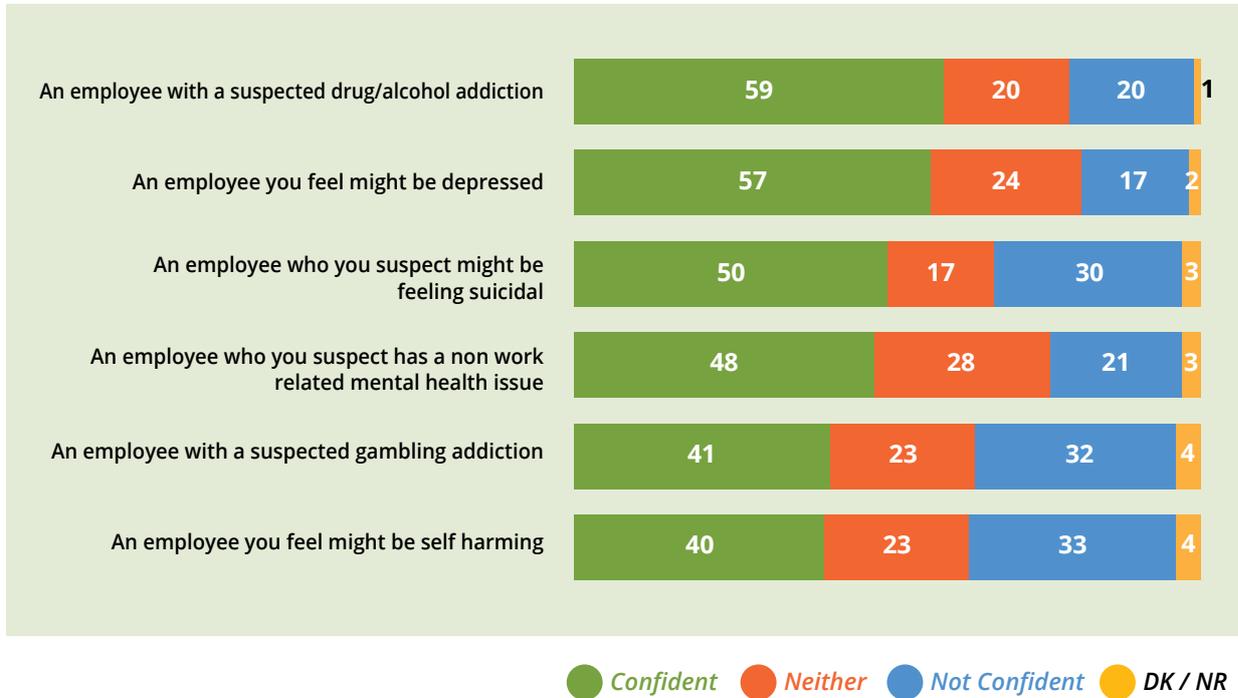
(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

However companies are notably less confident in managing the more covert and often less obvious mental health related issues such as suspected problems with drugs or alcohol, gambling, concerns regarding self harm or suicidal ideation and other non work related issues:

- ▶ Only **50%** believe they have an effective process to manage an employee they suspect is feeling suicidal
- ▶ **48%** believe they can effectively manage an employee with a non work related mental health issue (e.g. money problems, family etc)
- ▶ **41%** of employers are confident they have a process to address a staff member with a suspected gambling addiction
- ▶ Only **40%** of employers are confident they have an effective process to manage an employee they suspect may be self harming

▶ EFFECTIVENESS OF PROCEDURES

How confident are you that you / your company has an effective process / procedure to help an employee / subcontractor in the following situations?



(Base: All Companies: 1,266)

An interesting point to emerge from the research is that both smaller and larger construction companies alike appear less confident in their ability to manage an employee's mental health issue that is more covert and less clear cut. In such cases, employees/subcontractors may not openly seek help and the source of the mental health problem can often be non work related (i.e. money issues, relationships etc).

The issue is further complicated in cases where the suspected mental health problem is severe (suicidal ideation, depression, self harm etc) as employers are mindful not to exacerbate the problem.

Significant numbers of construction companies require support in developing an effective process to manage many mental health issues. In the absence of an effective intervention, the potential exists for an employee's mental health to deteriorate with negative consequences.

Establishing clear processes and procedures to address mental in the workplace is critical in providing a safeguard for all staff who may at any point experience difficulty coping with a mental/emotional issue.

It would appear to be the responsibility of each company to decide on the exact processes and procedures that fit with its management style, culture and size. Industry bodies and other stakeholders again can play a helpful role in outlining best practice and also in the design of concise but robust policies and procedures that can be adapted for small, mid-size and large companies respectively.

Senior management within individual companies in consultation with staff can adapt such general policies to fit the organisation.

The aim of such policies and processes should be to map a clear pathway within the company for employees who are experiencing a mental health difficulty.

3.7 How can we better manage employee mental health, where to start?

The issue of mental health in the construction industry is here to stay, yet a danger exists that employers fail to tackle it head on due to the fact that it is very challenging and difficult to manage. The other risk that we need to avoid is that we become too prescriptive in how companies should manage mental health in the workforce that fails to take account of a company's resources and culture.

It is not a case of **one size fits all** and what works well in managing mental health in one organisation will automatically transfer to another. Similarly over elaborate processes and procedures can become bureaucratic and hinder rather than help an employee struggling with their mental health.

Perhaps a good starting point is to examine how employers viewed a range of work practices (that impact employees' mental health) in terms of their importance. In addition, companies also acknowledged those practices they currently undertake which points to the opportunities for change in the sector.

All employers (100%) acknowledged the importance of **promoting a culture of teamwork and collaboration** and 76% of companies report that they currently do so.

Establishing and promoting a collaborative culture within an organisation appears an ideal starting point to tackle mental health as it fosters a supportive environment where employees are encouraged "to have each other's back".

The key issue, though, is that a company cannot pay lip service via a company mission or values to the ethos of teamwork and at the same time set unrealistic deadlines for employees that create undue pressure and stress. Hence the **onus is on the employer to "walk the walk"** by demonstrating the culture through specific work practices.

Another example of good company practice is encouraging staff to work healthy hours and take appropriate lunch breaks with 99% of employers recognising it to be important yet again with 72% currently promoting such a practice. Hence articulating a positive work practice but failing to implement it will have consequences for employees' mental health.



PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Which of the following work practices do you view to be important in promoting good mental health and well being at work in the construction industry?

Which of the following work practices are you currently undertaking?

	IMPORTANT	CURRENTLY UNDERTAKING
Promote a culture of teamwork & collaboration	100%	76%
Encourage staff to take appropriate lunch breaks and work healthy hours	99%	72%
Introduce robust policies for bullying, harassment and the reporting of mental health related issues	91%	70%
Senior people within the company to speak openly about mental health	82%	39%
Involve staff in dialogue about improving mental health in the workplace	81%	38%
Have clear guidelines for managers on managing mental health issues	79%	28%
Providing staff with a confidential support service where they can report a mental health issue	78%	28%
Providing staff with signposting to appropriate support services (such as counselling, medical services) in the event of a mental health issue	76%	29%
Put in place supervision procedures which ask staff about mental health	73%	22%
Offer all staff access to a free Employee Assistance Programme	73%	20%
Include mental health training at the induction stage for new employees	71%	23%
Conduct ongoing training on mental health & stress	71%	17%

The inclusion of **robust company mental health policies** is also recognised to be important (91%) but it is likely that such policies will only prove effective if they are built on the back of a collaborative work culture. In essence robust mental health policies alone are simply well laid out documents that need to be implemented appropriately by motivated staff.

Involving employees in **frank discussions about improving mental health in the workplace** and **encouraging senior people to speak openly about mental well being** are also recognised as very important practices yet the majority of companies are not adopting this approach. The employment of such practices serves to clearly demonstrate a company's culture to all employees. Many companies are now making mental health a subject for 'toolbox' talks for their workforces.

A number of respondents reported of how to engage staff on the issue of mental health and demonstrate a strong commitment to mental well being include:

- ▶ *The setting up of a **wellbeing committee** within the organisation focused on engaging with staff and running events around mental health (i.e. workshops, inviting speakers to talk about important issues: anxiety, depression, suicide, interactive events about healthy eating and lifestyle)*
- ▶ *Developing a **wellness magazine** and seeking contributions from employees (themes covered include: mental health first aid, personal accounts of employees struggle with addiction and their journey to wellness, financial wellness etc)*

79% of employers advocated **the importance of having clear guidelines for managers** on how best to deal with mental health issues as and when they arise. This again appears to be a critical matter as effective management where the dignity of the employee is protected together with the appropriate intervention avoids the issue escalating unnecessarily.

Coupled with the issue of maintaining an employee's dignity at work is **the desire (78%) for a confidential support service** where mental health issues can be reported. Confidentiality is a key theme that emerged in the discussion with employers as staff are often concerned of the stigma surrounding acknowledging a mental health difficulty in terms of its impact on job security, promotional opportunities and peer scrutiny.

Employee confidentiality can readily be maintained within companies through clear company policies, guidelines and also the availability of third party Employment Assistance Programmes delivering appropriate interventions.

"We would often talk to an employee and suggest they speak to their GP, if appropriate, or suggest the option of counselling from our confidential EAP. The counselling service is free and is available to family and friends."

(Employer, Large-Sized Company)

76% of employers acknowledged the need for **companies to direct staff to appropriate support services** (i.e. counselling, medical services) in the event of experiencing a mental health difficulty. In addition, 71% advocated **the benefit of mental health training** at the induction stage for new employees together with ongoing training for all staff in mental well being and stress management.

The issue of mental health training is interesting as the term is sometimes used loosely to incorporate everything from raising awareness of mental health to expanding employees knowledge via talks and discussions through to a formalised course and certification (ie Mental Health First Aid etc).

For the purposes of the construction sector it may be helpful to differentiate between mental health education which involves ongoing learning with the focus on improving employees' understanding and knowledge of mental wellbeing. Given the breadth of mental wellbeing it can include everything from maintaining a healthy lifestyle both in and out of work to a deeper understanding of mental health difficulties.

Education about mental health issues needs to start at the top of the organisation and permeate all levels of the company. Improved understanding of mental health will inform company policies and lead to the design of clear guidelines and effective practices to guide all staff how to appropriately assist a colleague they suspect is struggling with his/her mental health.

Mental health training is best thought of as accredited training that is delivered via a recognised organisation (i.e. Mental Health Ireland, HSE etc) and one that is supported via international research. Typically such courses are short, intensive programmes with a small number of employees from any one organisation attending.

"The company arranged for me and a couple of senior managers to be trained in mental health first aid. It was an intense course. The one we did was a 3 day course. They came to the head office, it covered all things like drink, drug issues, family issues, work issues, people with suicidal thoughts and depression. They do role playing."

"We are now rolling it out to middle managers and then to people on the ground who would like to do it, we are not forcing people."

(Employer, Large-Sized Company)

It is important to state that both general mental health education and formal training have a role to play in improving the management of mental health difficulties both overt and covert in the workplace. The responsibility lies with the company to select the approach that best serves the needs of their staff so that mental health issues are addressed quickly and in an appropriate manner.

▶ 4. CONCLUSIONS



▶ Employee mental health is recognised as a critical issue with employers acknowledging they have a responsibility to look after the mental well being of their staff

▶ The impact of poor mental health is significant for the employee in terms of ongoing psychological distress and potentially destructive behaviour

The consequences for employers is a considerable number of days lost, a loss of productivity and increased safety risks

▶ Yet managing mental health in the workforce remains challenging, given its sensitive nature and the fact there is a problem with underreporting

▶ The sources of stress that give rise to/exacerbate employee stress can be broadly categorised into work related and non work related stressors

- 70% of employers attribute poor mental health in the construction sector in part to a work related issue
 - While 48% view a non work related issue to contribute to the stress
-



Managing mental health in the workforce remains challenging, given its sensitive nature and the fact there is a problem with underreporting.



▶ Employers must also be aware of how non work related and personal issues can impact the mental health of staff and that they have a duty of care to provide appropriate support

▶ Employers should seek help in developing and informing all staff of the company policies, guidelines and procedures regarding managing mental health in the workforce

The policies and procedures should be succinct and jargon free and in line with best practice. The core aim should be to map a clear pathway to appropriate care for employees experiencing mental health difficulties

Evidence suggests that in the absence of clear mental well being policies and guidelines, companies will struggle to effectively manage many of the covert employee mental health problems that emerge

▶ Yet good mental health policies and guidelines will prove ineffective unless backed up by a collaborative company culture where teamwork and support are encouraged and rewarded

Senior management need to take responsibility here with the mantra being

“Let’s demonstrate and not just articulate that teamwork matters”

▶ There are many approaches to demonstrating a commitment to mental health in the workforce but a critical step appears to be the need to engage staff and seek their honest feedback on the matter. In this way employees have an opportunity to contribute and collaborate on how mental health is managed in their respective company

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- ▶ Employee confidentiality is a critical component of effective management of mental health as a social stigma still exists around reporting

The provision of a confidential service appears to be a must to encourage staff to come forward and express a need for help. Access to third party Employment Assistance Programmes is also important to create a safe space for employees to access the appropriate support

Education around mental health can be viewed as an ongoing initiative for employers where they should consider a range of approaches (expert talks, workshops, activities etc) to improve all staff's understanding of mental health and well being

Topics selected can include serious mental health conditions (depression, severe anxiety, suicide) and also issues regarding how to maintain good mental health (diet, lifestyle etc) can be addressed

A core aim of education should be to facilitate an open company culture where mental health issues including those at the more severe end of the spectrum are no longer stigmatised

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- ▶ Employers may also consider formal training for staff, selecting a course that matches their company's needs

Care should be given to evaluate both the specific course content and the agency/organisation delivering the programme in terms of their affiliation with a recognised body and formal accreditation etc



There are many approaches to demonstrating a commitment to mental health in the workforce but a critical step appears to be the need to engage staff and seek their honest feedback on the matter







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