

BUSINESS NEWS

HR PROFESSIONALS BLAME INCREASED STRESS FOR RISING EMPLOYEE ABSENTEE LEVELS

A poll of over 100 HR professionals revealed that stress is the top cause of rising employee absenteeism in the UK, with 76% of respondents noting an increase in the number of employees taking time off due to stress-related illnesses in the past five years.

The research also found that:

- 50% believe that unmanageable workloads are the main cause of employee stress
- 15% believe that it is owing to their employee's personal circumstances;
- 12% feel that it is down to organisational change
- 9% believe that pressure from managers is compounding the stress levels.

Other factors linked to rising stress levels were a long hours working culture, the inability of employees to prioritise workloads and a poorer work/life balance.

The good news however, is that a surprisingly high number of organisations seem well-equipped to deal with employees who suffer from stress. Over half (54%) of respondents claimed that their workplace has a policy in place to re-introduce employees into the workplace who have been signed off work with a stress-related illness.

In addition, if money were no object then HR executives would solve the problems by:

- employing more staff (15%)
- offering counselling (15%)
- gym membership (12%)
- more flexible working (8%)
- spa days (8%).

They would also look to introduce better child care facilities into the workplace to support parents; offer onsite yoga, as well as stress management training.

Despite these good intentions, there are still a large number of companies in the UK who have no mechanisms in place to cope with employee stress. A third of companies admit they do not have any facilities in place to monitor stress levels and fail to offer any counselling or support. Whilst 62% said they might consider alternative therapies for staff if they thought it would prevent or reduce workforce stress, one in five said they would not.

It also seems that employees feel that companies could do more to support their mental wellbeing. A separate survey amongst 2,500 jobseekers registered on <http://www.reed.co.uk/> last December revealed that 73% of employees felt their

companies should be doing more to look after their wellbeing by offering gym membership discounts, free fruit, stop smoking schemes or even lunchtime yoga sessions to help reduce stress levels.

Jason Willis, operations manager, Reed Human Resources, said: "The link between employee absenteeism and rising stress levels is a worrying trend and seems to be affecting the majority of UK workplaces. It is reassuring that many companies are taking steps to monitor their employees well being and introducing solutions to combat and deal with stress."