

Stressed Out

A study of public experience of stress at work

SAMARITANS

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1. Executive Summary

Bullying is the endemic in the UK and Republic of Ireland's workplaces

Almost everyone claims to have been bullied at some point in their careers (81% UK, 86% ROI). Alarmingly bullying is a weekly or daily cause of stress for one in four people (22% UK, 27% ROI). There appears to be little openness about the subject and challenge to employers to better identify and prevent bullying in the workplace is currently going unheeded.

Job related stress has a serious impact on the health of the nation and the economy

Job related stress not only affects workers' concentration and efficiency, but also results in a quarter of all UK workers (22%) and third in Ireland (34%) taking around 6 days off a year.

UK & Ireland's youngest workers are particularly vulnerable to stress

Having not long started their careers, 18-24 year olds have slightly less confidence than everyone else in dealing with the stresses of the workplace (6% less UK, 3% ROI). Particular focus needs to be given to this group as they also find it the hardest to approach their colleagues and managers.

Stress is not evenly spread throughout the UK and Ireland

- **The Republic of Ireland** overall appears to have a more negative experience of stress than the UK across all measures of experience, time off, bullying and coping.
- **Londoners** are among the most confident in dealing with stress and when taking time off for stress return to work the fastest
- **The South West** appear to be among the most emotionally equipped to deal with stress – they are the most likely to have someone to talk to about work and the best at helping people in tears over stress
- **Northern Ireland** finds it the hardest to cope with their own stress and helping others with theirs. There are also greater feelings of isolation.

Occupation has a major influence on stress

- **IT workers** are affected by stress more than any other occupation. Not only are they highly likely to feel work rules their life they do not feel

confident in dealing with stress and are unhappy with support from their employers.

- **Catering** also evokes strikingly high levels of stress among its employees, where bullying is rife and perceived support from employers poor.
- **Civil servants** while the least overwhelmed by stress are also the least compliance – they are fearful of their jobs becoming more stressful and less happy with the support of their employers.
- **Bankers and financiers** are least likely to be intimidated by bullying and are more likely to be able to enjoy a workplace in which they feel supported by their employers although are still among the most likely to feel stress rules their life.
- **Health & medical** workplaces are felt by staff to be very stressful, where bullying and harassment is commonplace and there is a strong sense that life is going to get even more stressful. They have a noticeable concern about the affect of stress on their health and among the most likely to take time off sick due to stress. Nevertheless this does not all appear to be blamed on the employer, support from whom is perceived to be higher than most.

Employees clearly want their employers to do more to tackle stress

While many employers are perceived to be providing adequate support, there is still more to be done – there is an equal proportion who are unhappy with the support they get and those who think their employers look out for them to prevent stress are still in the minority.

Domestic duties are a significant source of stress and sharing between men and women is still massively unequal

Although not formally employed, home makers experience job-related stress in the same way as everyone else, and even if working full time it is still women who bear the brunt of this stress in the majority of cases.

2. Introduction

Samaritans provides confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair. The organisation is working towards a society in which fewer people die by suicide, people are able to explore and understand their own feelings and are able to acknowledge and respect the feelings of others.

With this in mind, Samaritans conducts a wide range of research projects to contribute to its work and explore issues of importance and relevance. This research includes an interest in UK and Irish citizens' experience of stress and feelings about the impact stress is having on their lives.

Samaritans is generating a bank on knowledge on this subject and in late 2006, commissioned nfpSynergy, a research consultancy for the not-for-profit sector, to design and conduct a research study into the state of stress today in the UK. One of the key findings was the extent to which people's work contributed to their stress levels and impacted on their lives. This current report conducted by nfpSynergy builds on the 2006 wave of research to look more specifically at stress in UK and Irish workplaces and aims to contribute to the social dialogue surrounding related issues.

The key questions explored in this study include:

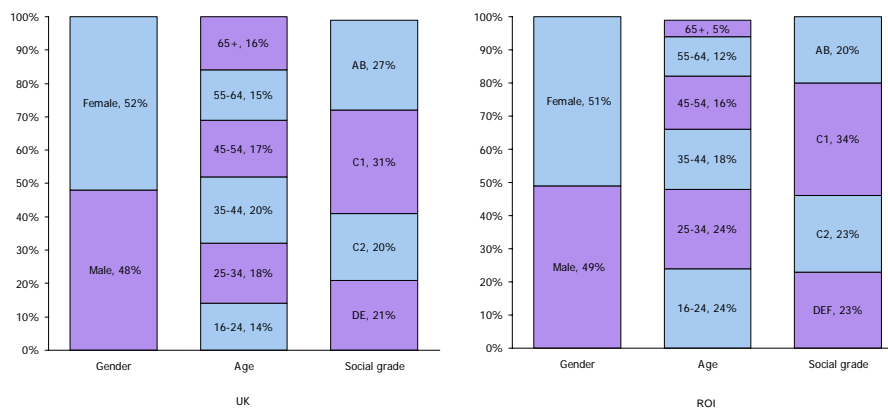
- How stressful is working life in the UK and Republic of Ireland today?
- What impact does stress have on productivity?
- How good are employers at supporting their staff?
- Do people feel confidently equipped to cope with stress at work?
- Do people have the emotional capacity to help deal with the stress of others?
- How does the stress of domestic work compare to formal employment?

This report details the findings of the research and includes a breakdown of questions by age, gender, social grade, occupation and region. Where relevant citations from the 2006 wave of research are made (note 2006 sample was UK only).

3. Methodology

An original quantitative survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,100 adults in the UK and 500 adults in the Republic of Ireland, was conducted between the 12th and 30th November, 2007 using online methodology. Respondents were accessed through a panel run by 'Research Now!'

Demographic profile of respondents



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

The socio-economic classification system we use consists of seven social grades which classify the household social status based on the occupation of the Chief Income Earner (so if a casual worker lives with a parent or spouse who is a doctor they'll be an A rather than an E);

- AB - higher (A) or intermediate (B) managerial, administrative or professional
- C1 - supervisory or clerical, and junior managerial, administrative or professional
- C2 - skilled manual workers
- DEF - semi-skilled and unskilled workers (D) & state pensioners, casual or lowest grade workers (E), or farmers (F – only applicable in the Republic of Ireland)

This report presents a parallel analysis of UK and Irish figures, although the occupational segmentations are only applicable to the UK. The UK occupations, were as follows;

| | |
|---|-----|
| Education | 229 |
| Retail / Wholesale trade | 215 |
| Healthcare / Medical / Pharmaceutical | 179 |
| Homemaker | 161 |
| Engineering / Construction | 157 |
| IT / Data processing / Internet / Web development | 118 |
| Transport / Travel | 112 |
| Banking / Financial services / Insurance | 111 |
| Manufacturing / Mining / Quarrying | 101 |
| Civil service | 91 |
| Student | 78 |
| Restaurant / Hotel / Catering | 60 |

4. Stress in the work place

This report begins by first examining how much stress the UK and Irish workforce feel they are under, looking at how this might be changing and the potential impact stress has on productivity.

Key findings:

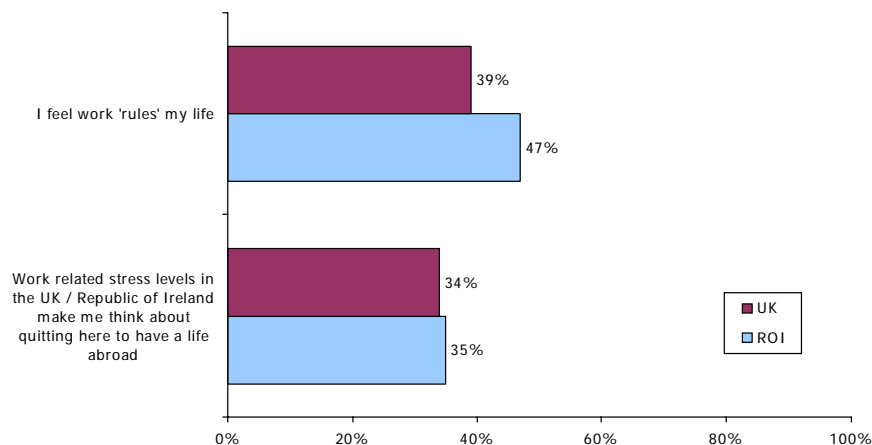
- Significant proportions of workers feel work rules their life (39% UK, 47% ROI)
- Over half of people feel their jobs are just going to get more stressful (52% UK, 55% ROI)
- A quarter of all UK workers (22%) and third in Ireland (34%) take sick leave due to stress

In 2006 it was found that job related stress is the second highest source of stress in the UK, behind money. The current research supports this finding as almost two in five people in the UK and Ireland admit that work rules their lives (39% UK 47% ROI).

In addition, a third of the UK and Irish public claim that work place stress is so bad they have thought about quitting for a life abroad (34% UK, 35% ROI). It is probably fair to assume that for many of this proportion such a move would prove unrealistic and is likely to be based on a fantasy of a holiday lifestyle. Nevertheless it is still a serious reflection of people resigned to the view that life in the UK and Ireland is more stressful than that enjoyed in, for example, Spain or the rest of Europe.

Workplace stress

"To what extent do you agree with the following statements?" Those answering "Agree strongly/slightly"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

Notably, different occupations vary in the likelihood of feeling this kind of stress;

- Those working in banking and finance, catering and IT are most likely to say work rules their life (47%, 48% and 48%, UK, respectively)
- Conversely, civil servants appear to be the least overwhelmed about stress in the workplace (30% UK).

This demonstrates that while stress levels appear to be high in the UK and Ireland, by no means every one is stressed to point of saying work 'rules' their life and wishing to escape abroad.

Overall, sizable proportions of workers disagree that work rules their life (42% UK, 41% ROI, with the remaining "not sure", 19% UK, 13% ROI). However, the next sub section of this report goes on to suggest this group of people shrinks when anticipate their jobs becoming more and more stressful.

Workplace stress is on the increase

Workplace stress looks to be a trend that is increasing – over half of the public feel their job is only going to get more stressful (52% UK, 55% ROI), chiming with findings from the 2006 wave of research, when it was revealed the majority of adults felt more stressed in 2006 than they did five years ago (50%).

This can only mean it is going to get harder and harder to ignore the problem of stress as it takes an even greater grip throughout UK and Irish workplaces.

- Civil servants – currently the group of workers least likely to feel work rules their life – are notably the most fearful that their jobs will become more stressful in the future (66%).
- Those working in healthcare/medicine (64%) and education (58%) also express concern that their jobs will become more stressful in the future.

Given the extent of these fears it is important to consider just what impact their realisation could have in the work place, and the next subsections of this report go on to explore the impact stress has on people's professional and personal lives.

Impact of stress at work

The negative impacts of stress should be of great concern to the UK and Irish employer; in 2006 wave of research significant proportions of adults claimed stress affects their concentration (33%), causes them to make mistakes they otherwise wouldn't (25%) and generally leads to less efficiency at work (21%).

Moreover, the current wave of research found almost a quarter of adults in the UK saying they have taken time off work because of stress, and an even greater proportion of the Irish public saying they have had to take time off (22% UK, 34% ROI). And in the past 12 months, when workers have had to take time off work because of stress the average number of days lost is 5-6 (5.9 UK, 5 ROI).

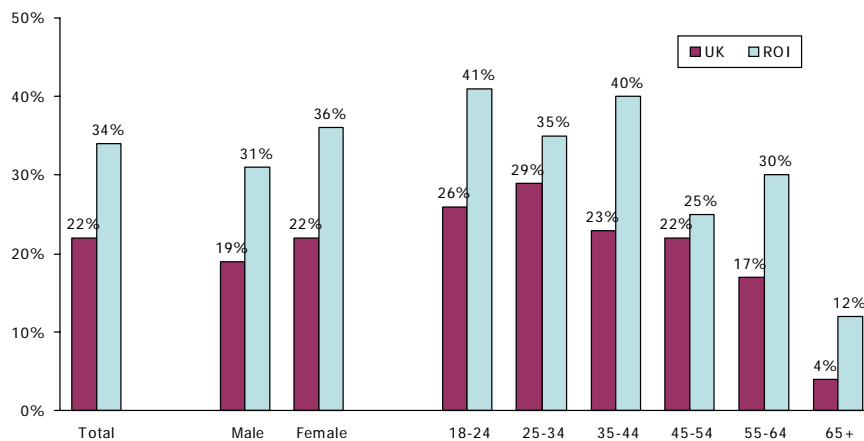
In some occupations this rises to almost a third – those working in the health/medicine (28%) and IT (27%). Occupation is not the only influence on this propensity however:

- Women are more likely to have had to take time off (though when they do it's for fewer days)
- The likelihood of taking time off work because of stress broadly has a relationship with age – those under 44 are more likely to have taken time off than those over 45, illustrated in the chart below. However, when

older respondents do need to take time off it is usually for a longer period – 7.1 days for 55-64 year olds compared to 4.1 for 18-24 (UK).

Taking time off stressed

*In the last 12 months, how many days, if any, have you taken off work as sick due to work related stress or bullying?
Those answering 1+



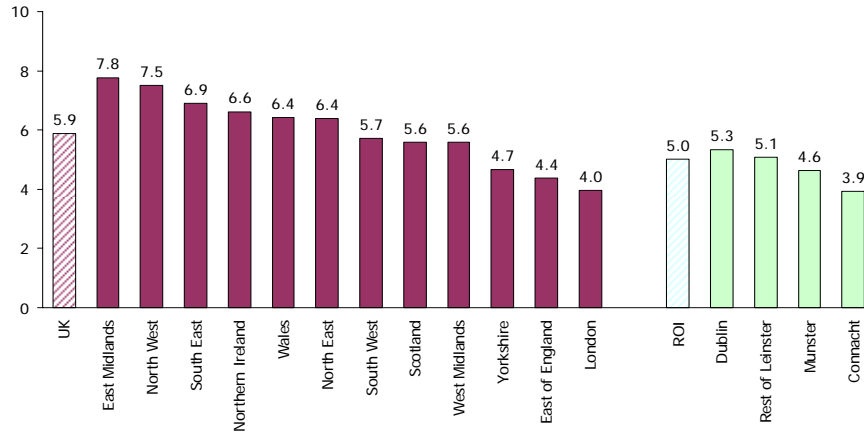
Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy

Base: All those taking time off stressed (436 UK, 169 ROI) among 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

There is also some interesting regional variation in the amount of time taken off work because of stress – in the past 12 months those taking time off stressed in the East Midlands were away for almost 8 days (7.8) – twice as many as the average Londoner, who appears to be in more of a hurry to return to work by taking an average of 4 days off.

Days off stressed

In the last 12 months, how many days, if any, have you taken off work as sick due to work related stress or bullying?



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: All those taking time off stressed (436 UK, 169 ROI) among 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

However, despite being so commonplace, people still seem unwilling to talk about the true reasons for taking time off stressed – instead the vast majority of people prefer to say the time off sick from stress was because of another problem/illness such as a bout of flu (83% UK, 86% ROI) – such an apparent reluctance to be open about stress will need to be addressed if employers are to even attempt to tackle the problems of stress and the negative impacts it has in their workplaces.

One key area of workplace stress that people seem particularly unable to be open about is that of bullying, the staggering scale of which is discussed in the next section.

5. Bullying at work

The core questions explored in this part of the report are the extent to which bullying occurs in the workplace and the impact this has on people's stress levels. There is no universally accepted or exhaustive definition of bullying and in research of this kind we rely on people's own subjective interpretation of behaviours which could be anything from being ignored or disrespected to being constantly shouted at or humiliated.

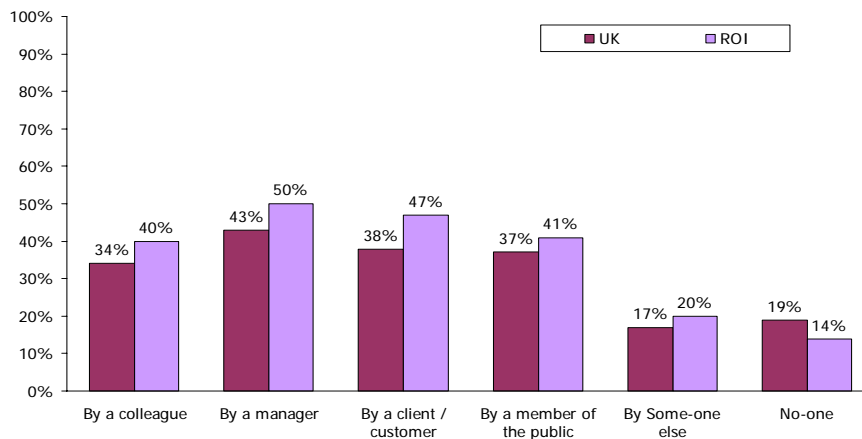
Key findings:

- Workplace bullying is rife in the UK and Republic of Ireland with more than four in five having experienced it (81% UK, 86% ROI).
- In extreme cases workers can take an average of 6 days off sick due to bullying

The source of bullying and harassment can also be varied and both internal and external to the place of work. By a slight margin people are most likely to have been bullied their manager (43% UK, 50% ROI) than other colleagues (34% UK, 40% ROI). Meaning there are equally high numbers who do not consider their managers or colleagues to be bullies (51% UK, 56% UK). However, in addition to bullying by internal personnel, bullying and harassment by clients/customers and members of the public is almost just as common (38% and 37% respectively UK, 47% and 41% respectively ROI).

Being bullied at work

"Do you agree you have ever been bullied or harassed at your work place?". Those answering "Agree strongly/ slightly"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

In total this means only a small minority of people will be lucky enough to escape this source of stress (19% UK, 14% ROI), which otherwise appears to be incredibly widespread – a massive four in five people claim to have been bullied

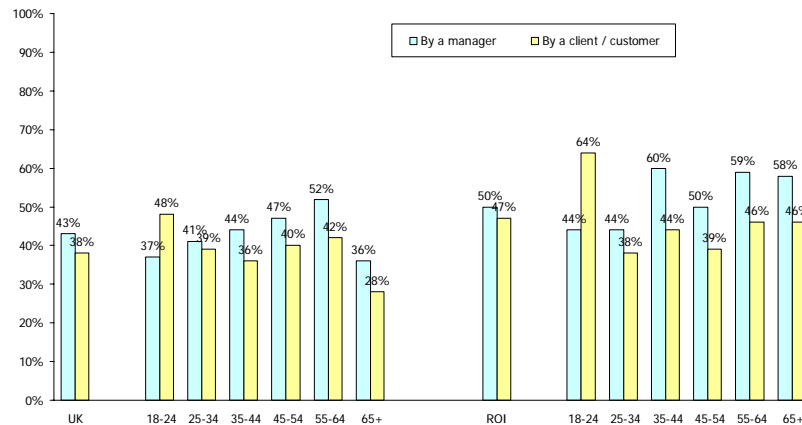
at work some point in their career (81% UK, 86% ROI) – presenting a very troubling universal norm in UK and Irish workplaces.

The source of bullying or harassment varies slightly by demographic:

- The youngest age groups are more likely to be bullied by clients/customers, especially in Ireland (48% UK, 64% ROI) – reports then broadly decrease with age.
- Conversely all other age groups are more likely to report being bullied by their manager, peaking at 55-64 (52% UK, 59% ROI).

Being bullied at work

"Do you agree you have ever been bullied or harassed at your work place?". Those answering "Agree strongly/ slightly"

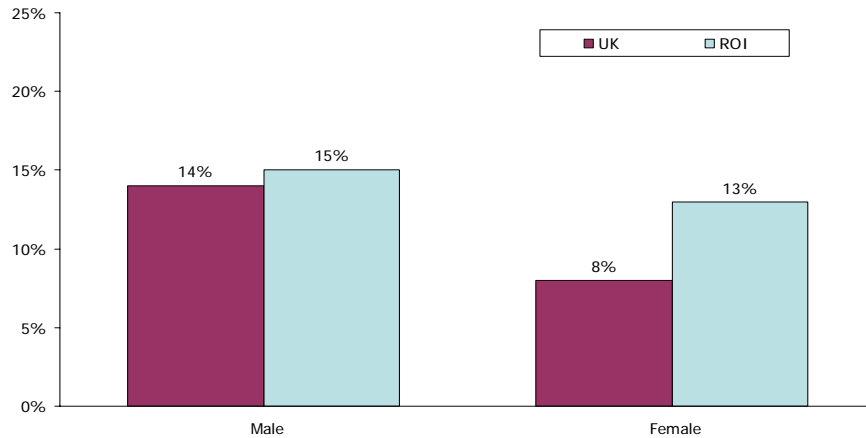


Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

Notably there are also variations within different industries that bullying occurs. Those working in banking/finance (76%) admit to being bullied the least, though still over three quarters of people working in this sector have been bullied at some point. Conversely, those working in catering are by far the most likely to feel they have been bullied by anyone (94%), ahead of the civil service (84%) and health service (84%).

Bullying others work

"Have you ever bullied anyone in the workplace?" Those answering "Yes"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

Given the prevalence of the bullying in UK and Irish workplaces it is important to consider the extent of the impact this is having on people's professional and personal lives, which the next subsection will explore.

The impact of bullying on emotional wellbeing

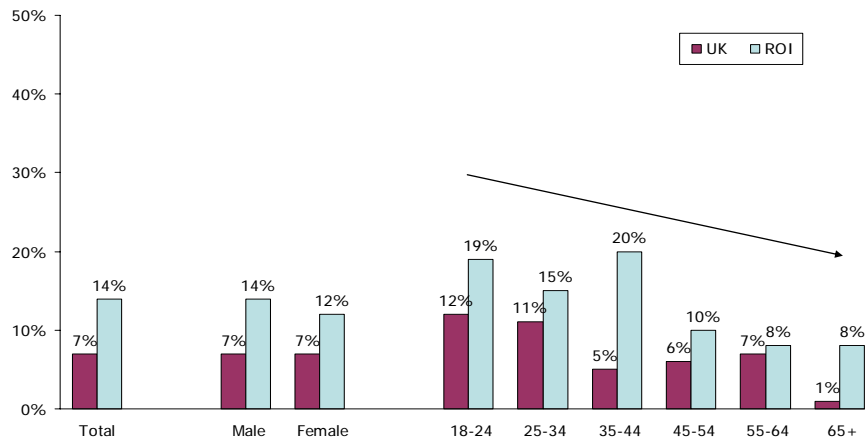
In terms of how often people feel affected by bullying at work, around a quarter of people experienced the stress of being bullied on a weekly or daily basis (22% UK, 27% ROI) and the vast majority have suffered stress from being bullied at least once (70% UK, 78% ROI).

In some instances bullying is so bad people have taken time off work – a small but noticeable 7% in the UK, and twice that in Ireland (14%). Notably the figure is higher among younger age groups (12% 18-24s UK, 19% 18-24s ROI) and seems to decrease with age, indicating employers need to pay particular attention to the welfare and treatment of their most junior and inexperienced members of staff.

Regionally there is little fluctuation from the average in terms of taking time off work, with the exception of the North East, where people are twice more likely to take time off because of being bullied than the UK average (15%), and at the other end of the scale is Yorkshire on just two percent.

Days off bullied

"In the last 12 months, how many days, if any, have you taken off work as sick due to work related stress or bullying?"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy

Base: All those taking time off stressed (436 UK, 169 ROI) among 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

On average, those who have had to take time off work due to bullying are away for about 6 days a year (6.0 UK, 5.5 ROI). While it is a relatively small proportion taking this amount of time off work because of bullying it demonstrates the potential seriousness of the problem.

Tackling the problem of workplace bullying presents a huge challenge to employers, not least because of the understandable reluctance employees have to admit to their employers they are suffering – the vast majority of those who needed to take time off work sick due to bullying preferred to tell their employers it was actually because of some other illness (90% UK, 79% ROI). Potentially one of the biggest barriers might have been that the person an employee has to report their sickness to may well be the person who is bullying them, i.e. their manager. This all highlights an important first step in identifying and tackling bullying is considering how to give employees confidence to talk.

And in addition to understanding those who are victims of bullying, it is also important to consider who is most likely to be doing the bullying and why. The next subsection of this report begins to look at these questions.

Will people admit to being bullies?

Just over one in ten people admitted bullying another person at work (11% UK, 14% ROI), and these will include people who say they have been bullied at work themselves. While the online methodology used in this research meant the

survey was completely confidential and could be completed by respondents in private, it may well be that bullying is still not something people will freely admit, and these figures we suspect represent the very minimum estimation. Nevertheless differences and patterns in the data can still be examined, for example there is a notable gender gap in the UK but not in Ireland: in the UK women are half as likely to admit being bullies than men (8% & 14%), whereas in Ireland women are just as likely to admitted being bullies (13% & 15%).

A key question employers need to consider is the relationship between workplace stress and bullying – is the stress of people’s jobs contributing to their behaviour? What can be done to curb it and thus decrease the stress of those who are being bullied and the associated impact this will have on their productivity?

However, it is not just employees who will suffer the impact of workplace stress and bullying. If stress spills from the workplace, an employee’s spouse, partner and family will of course also feel the effect. The next section of the report explores how often this can happen and the nature of the impact.

6. Wider impact of workplace stress

The next section of the report explores how likely it is that people feel their work affects them in their personal and home lives.

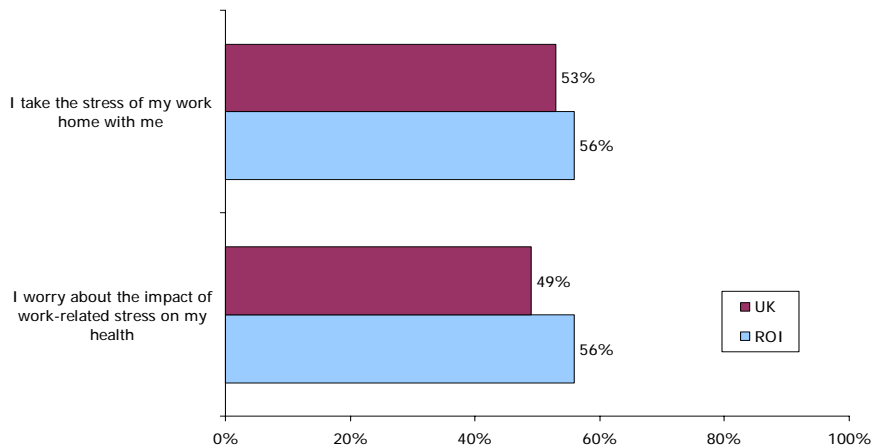
Key findings:

- Over half of workers take work related stress home with them (53% UK, 56% ROI)
- Large proportions of people are worried about the affect of stress on their home lives and health (49%, 56%)

Job related stress seems just as likely to impact work-life balance as it impacts workplace efficiency. Encouragingly about a third of people feel able to confine job-related stress to the workplace (34% UK, 31% ROI). However, over half of all adults do take stress (53% UK, 56% ROI), enhancing the findings of the 2006 wave of research which demonstrated extensively that stress affects all spheres of life including work, relationships, home life, health and emotional wellbeing.

Workplace stress

"To what extent do you agree with the following statements?" Those answering "Agree strongly/slightly"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

Workplace stress is clearly an issue many adults in the UK and Ireland today are conscious of and the public worrying about the affect stress is having on their health appears to be creeping up (from 44% UK in 2006 to 49% UK, 56% ROI in 2007 – no trend data available for ROI 2006).

Appropriately enough it is those working in health and medical fields who are most concerned about the effect on stress of their health (59% UK), followed by those working in manufacturing (57% UK) and IT (54% UK). This concern appears to be broadly reflected in reality above with health/medical and IT workers most likely to claim they have taken time off work because of stress.

Having explored the extent of work place stress and the impact it has on people's professional and personal lives, it is clear employers face a major responsibility to manage stress in the work place, but how effective do their employees currently rate their efforts? The next part of this report begins to discuss this.

7. UK and Irish employers approach to stress

Here this section looks at how well, in the eyes of their employees, employers are tackling the problem of stress, how well looked after they feel by their

employers and the attitude they perceive their employers to have about stress in the work place.

Key findings:

- Around half of employees feel well supported by their employer in dealing with stress (45% UK & ROI)
- Significant proportions, however, have very negative views about their employer's approach to stress – about a third feel their employers turn a blind eye to the problem (32% UK, 38% ROI)

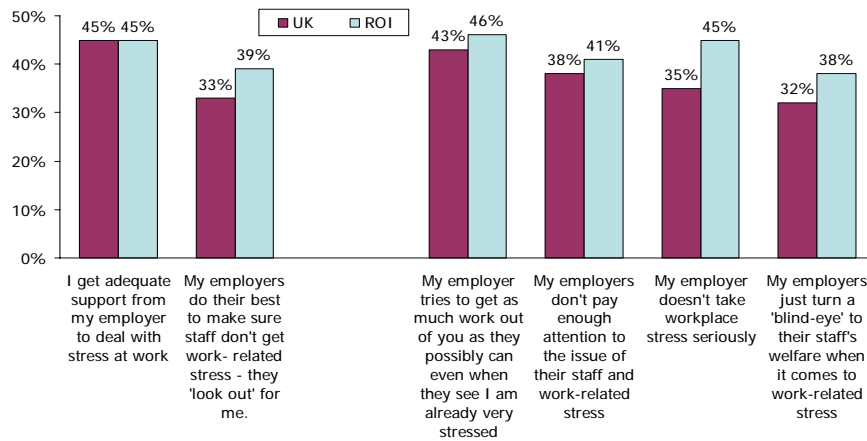
The UK and Irish public are fairly polarised in how well they perceive their employers to support them at work. A sizable proportion of employers are perceived to be doing a good job as just under half of employees feel they get adequate support to deal with stress (45% UK & ROI). A third even go so far as to say their employers look out for employees to actively attempt to prevent work related stress (33% UK, 39% ROI).

On the other hand, significant proportions of the public express specific doubts as to how concerned their employers are about stress in their work place:

- A third to a half of the public think their employers do not take stress seriously enough (35% UK, 45% ROI) nor do workers think employees pay enough attention to the issue (38% UK, 41% ROI)
- Many feel their employers are turning a 'blind eye' to staff welfare (32% UK, 38% ROI) and just try to get as much out of their employees regardless of how stressed they are (43% UK, 46% ROI).

Satisfaction with employers approach to stress

"When dealing with any kind of stress at in your work place, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?"
Those answering "Agree strongly/slightly"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

There is however a difference in the perceived performance of different industries: those working in health/medicine (56% UK), education (53% UK) and banking and finance (54% UK) have a slightly more positive perception of their employers with just over half agreeing they get adequate support to deal with stress at work.

Conversely, those working in IT, retail, the civil service, engineering, manufacturing and catering are the least happy with their employers approach to stress:

- IT workers, retailers and engineers feel least supported (all 41% UK)
- Those in IT, the civil service, and manufacturing are most likely to feel employers don't take workplace stress seriously (44%, 47%, 44% UK)
- IT, retail, manufacturing, catering and the civil service workers are the most likely to think their employers just try and get as much out of them even when stressed (48%, 50%, 50%, 48% UK)

One of the key factors in staff feeling supported is how approachable they feel their managers and other colleagues to be. It is important therefore to examine who open the lines of communication are in a workplace to assess how much employees feel supported, which is explored in the next subsection.

8. Communication at work

Key findings:

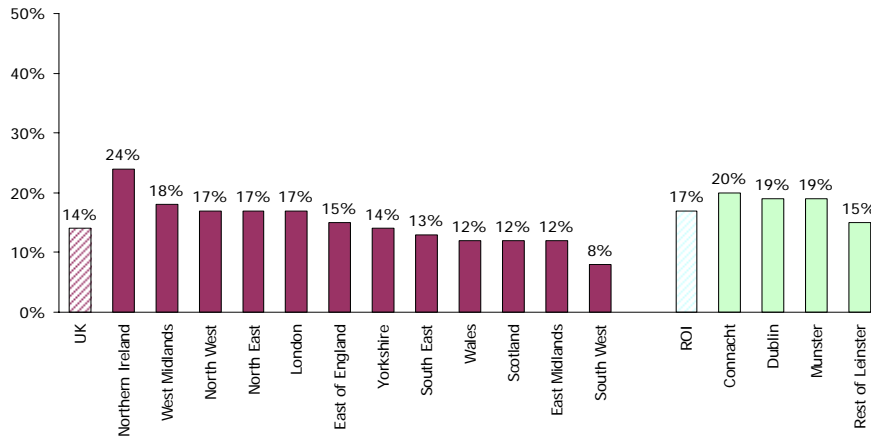
- Most people feel they have some-one to talk to about work related stress (86% UK, 83% ROI), though this can vary greatly depending on region and demographic
 - 24% Northern Ireland feel they have no-one to talk to
 - 18-24 year olds feel less able to talk openly with their colleagues and employers

Fortunately the majority of people appear to have someone to talk about their work related stress. Nevertheless it is important to note that just over one in ten feel they don't have anyone to turn to (14% UK, 17% ROI). While these figures do not differ much within industry, across age, social grade or even gender, the region in which people live does appear to have an impact on how alone people might feel:

- There appears to be a high degree of isolation in the North – almost a quarter of people (24%) feel they have no one to talk to about stress.
- This is three times as many as in the South West (8%), where people are most likely to say they have someone to turn to when they need to offload.
- In Ireland the variation is less pronounced but the likelihood of having someone on hand to talk to about work problems appears to be lower over all than the UK average.

No one to talk to

"When dealing with any kind of stress at in your work place, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?... There is no one I could talk to about work related stress" Those answering "Agree strongly/slightly"

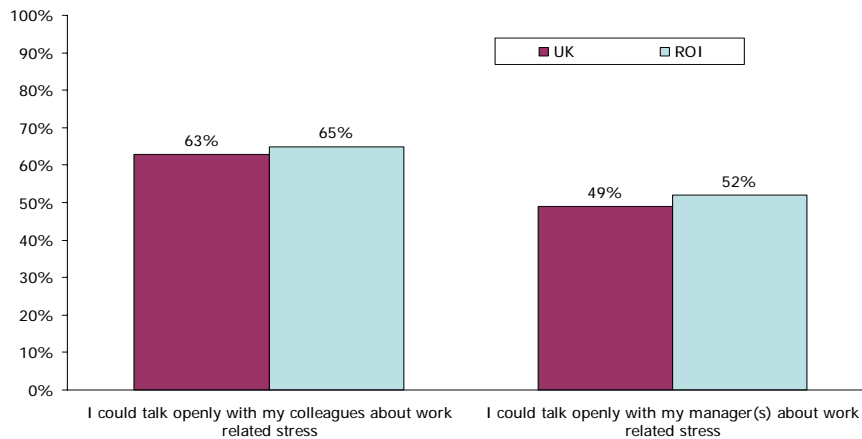


Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

When people are able to talk to others about their job related stress, they are most likely to turn to their co-workers: almost two thirds of people feel they can talk openly with their colleagues (63% UK, 65% ROI). The public are evenly split on how open their relationship is with senior colleagues however half feel they can talk to their managers about work related stress (49% UK, 52% ROI).

Communication at work

"When dealing with any kind of stress at in your work place, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?"
Those answering "Agree strongly/slightly"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

Again, 18 to 24 year olds appear to be a group in need of particular attention. Having earlier identified they feel the most vulnerable to bullying, they are also less likely than all other age groups to feel they can talk openly with their managers about stress (38% UK, 46% ROI%). This further highlights the importance for employers in the UK and Ireland to consider the support needed by those who are at the beginning of their career, not yet as acclimatised to the sometimes intimidating world of work.

This may be even more necessary in the UK as this age group also feels less able to talk to their colleagues (57%). Interestingly in Ireland 18-24s feel just as able to talk to their colleagues as other age groups.

In addition to the few but prominent regional and age differences in how approachable people perceive their colleagues and managers to be, there are some stark differences between industries. There also appears to be a broad correlation between sectors with better lines of communication and sectors in which people feel most supported by their employer:

- Those working in health and banking/finance were among the most likely to feel adequately supported and were the likeliest to feel they can talk openly to their managers (60% and 59% respectively, UK).
- Conversely engineers were among the least likely to feel adequately supported by their employers and were least likely to feel able to talk to their managers (39%).

Given the differences in how well people feel they are supported by their employers and peers, the next section of the report looks at how well people perceive themselves to be able to cope with the stresses that their work throws at them.

9. Coping with stress

Key findings:

- The public are fairly polarised in how confident they are in coping with stress – just over half feel confident enough to handle it (55% UK, 56% ROI)
- Slightly smaller proportions also feel able to cope with other people who maybe extremely stressed (34% UK, 38% ROI)

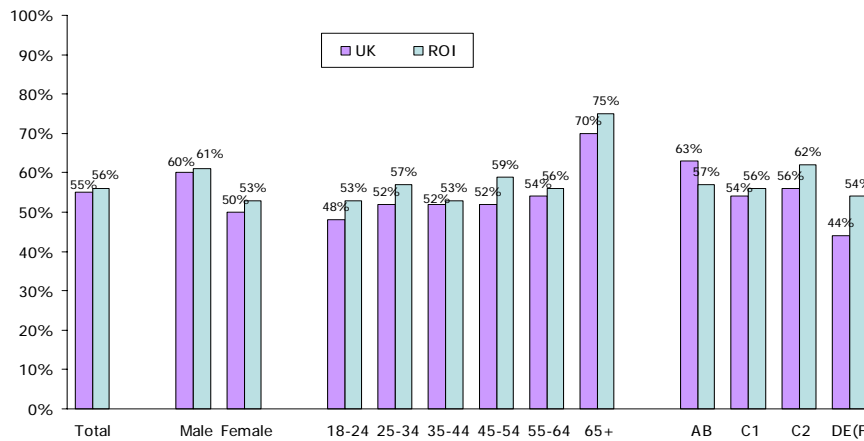
Overall, just over half of all adults feel confident enough to handle the stress work puts them under (55% & 56%), though confidence differs significantly with gender, age and social grade. This coincides with the 2006 wave of research, finding the same demographic groups (i.e. men, older age groups and higher social grades) to be more confident in coping with the stress they experience on a daily basis.

Specifically, men are slightly more likely to feel confident in dealing with stress (60% & 50% UK, 61% & 53% ROI), which may be a reflection of how most working women are still double burdened by taking the responsibility for domestic stresses, discussed in the next section of this report.

As well as the gender gap, confidence at work may well also increase with age. In the UK there appears to be a correlation between feeling able to deal with the stress of work and higher social grade (63% ABs & 44% DEs), possibly because those in AB households feel better resourced to cope with their stress and may not be burdened with additional financial problems. It may also be that AB employment positions entail more control (i.e. higher managerial) – a key factor identified in the 2006 research for coping with stress. However, this pattern does not appear to be apparent in Ireland.

Confidence in dealing with work related stress

*When dealing with any kind of stress at in your work place, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?...
I am entirely confident I can handle the stress work puts me under* Those answering "Agree strongly/slightly"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

There are also some slight regional variations in people's self confidence in coping with stress at work:

- In the UK, the North West and London the most confident (62% & 57%) as compared to the North East and Northern Ireland (both 49%), which stood out earlier as the regions least likely to feel they had someone to talk to about stress.
- In Ireland there are also some regional variations with Dublin the least confident (53%) in comparison to Connacht, the most confident (63%).

Finally there are also some differences within industry, although there is not much of a relationship between confidence and how supported different sectors felt by their employers and managers.

Of particular concern are those working in IT and manufacturing, who were among the least satisfied with their employers' approach to stress and are also among the least confident at dealing with stress (56% and 55% UK). Those working in catering, engineering and the civil service were also among the least satisfied with their employers and managers but are among the most confident in being able to deal with stress themselves (68% 63% and 59% respectively UK).

Having ascertained how well people feel they cope with their own stress another key measure of how well people are able to cope is the emotional capacity they feel they have to support others, explored in the following section.

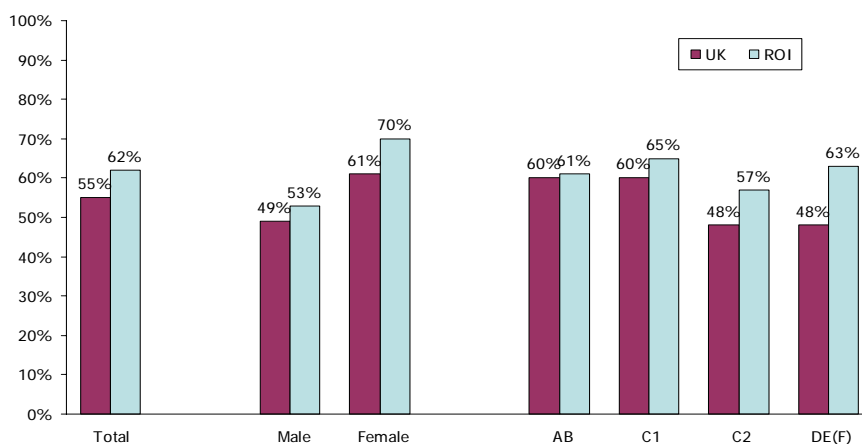
Coping with others

Given the importance of communicating about stress and the availability of someone to talk to about work related stress, it is important to consider how emotionally equipped people are when they are giving support rather than receiving it. This section now examines how people consider themselves able to help other people who are clearly stressed, to the point of being in tears.

Overall, seeing people cry through stress at work was experienced by over half of respondents (55% UK, 62% ROI), in itself a poignant statistic. Incidences were most common among women (61% & 49% UK, 70 & 53% ROI) and in the UK those from higher social grade households (ABs 60% & DEs 48%, no pattern in Ireland).

Crying at work

"Have you ever seen someone cry through stress at your work place?" Those answering "Yes"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

In addition to these demographic differences there are also some notable differences by occupation: those working in health/medicine (72% UK), education (69% UK) and retail (64% UK) were the most likely to have seen someone cry at work, though this may well have been patients, pupils/students or other members of the public (rather than colleagues).

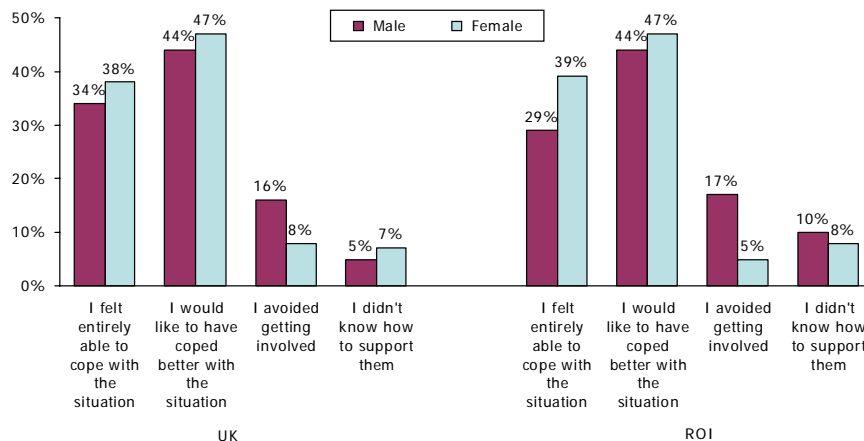
After these sectors, civil servants (63% UK), those in banking/finance (58% UK) were the most likely. In line with the gender difference already noted that men are less likely to witness people cry at work through stress, those working in typically more male orientated jobs were also the least likely to have done so.

Seeing people cry at work does appear to be a difficult experience for people. Just under half felt they would have liked to have dealt with the situation better (46% UK & ROI), one in ten tried to avoid getting involved (11% UK, 10 ROI) and just under one in ten admitted not knowing how to support them (6% UK, 9% ROI). This left just over a third entirely confident that they coped with the situation well (36% UK, 35% ROI).

As may have been predicted, women felt better able to cope than men, though interestingly the gap is not as pronounced in the UK (38% & 34%) as it is in Ireland (39% & 29%). Nevertheless, this finding reinforces the acceptance that women often feel generally better in coping with emotion. But despite that women were more likely than men to wish they had coped better (47% & 44%), most likely because they were more likely to have tried helping in the first place, while men were twice as likely to admit avoiding the situation in the UK and three times more likely in Ireland (16% & 8% UK, 17% & 5% ROI).

Coping with emotion at work

"How did you cope with the situation?"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy

Base: All those witnessing someone crying at work (1179 UK, 301 ROI) among 2,000 respondents UK, 500 respondents ROI, December 2007

Interestingly those in higher social grades are more likely to feel better equipped to cope with someone crying (42% ABs & 33% DEs UK, 44% ABs & 28 DEFs ROI). There are also some slight region variations

- In the UK, people from the South West were by far the most likely to feel they coped well with the situation (51%)
- Northern Ireland again sticks out as the least likely to feel they had the emotional capacity to cope with some-one crying through stress at work (27%).

Having reviewed the stresses of formal employment already highlighted the stresses of domestic duties as a possible reason for gender differences in stress, the next section of this report moves on to discuss this in more detail.

10. Stress of domestic duties

The final section of this report pays particular attention to the stresses of informal domestic work experienced by those working as full time homemakers and how this compares to formal employment.

Key findings:

- Stress is just as serious for home makers as it is for those in formal employment
- Women still bear most of the stress of domestic labour

In the 2006 wave of research, homemaking was identified as one of the most stressful occupations: seven in ten homemakers felt stressed on a weekly basis at least (71%) compared to just fewer than five in ten people on average (47%).

Many questions in this study focused on issues surrounding formal employment, asking specifically about employers, colleagues, managers and the workplace. Therefore not all questions were directly applicable to homemakers. This issue aside however, there are selected areas where homemakers appear to endure just as much stress as those in formal employment.

- 81% have been bullied (81% UK average) – be it either in a previous or part time job, or perhaps even by their partners, children or other people.
- 10% admit to having bullied someone else (11% UK average).
- 30% feel stress because of because being bullied on a weekly or daily basis (22% UK average)

- o 12% feel they have no one to talk to about work-related stress (14% UK average)

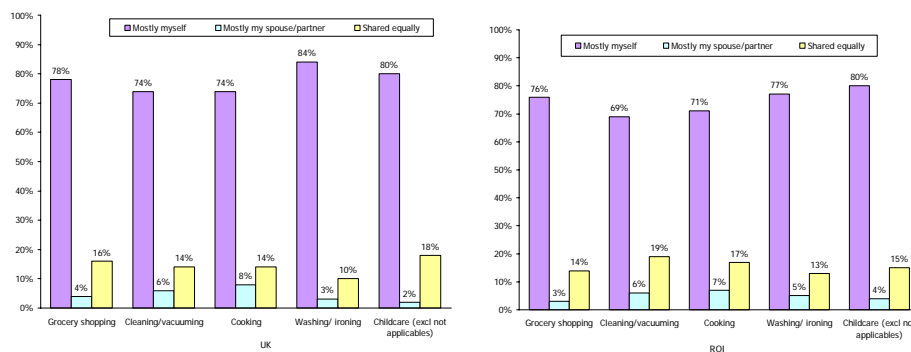
Inequality in 2007

In addition this study also reveals there is still a large gender imbalance when it comes to bearing the stress of domestic work; The chart below demonstrates at least three quarters of women in the UK and Ireland take sole responsibility for all domestic tasks asked about. At best one in five women in the Ireland share cleaning/vacuuming with their partner (19%).

Stress of domestic labour in the UK & Ireland

Females

"Could you please say who mostly bears the stress of the following tasks in your household?"



Source: The Samaritans/nfpSynergy
Base: 1,000 females among 2,000 adults 16+ UK, 262 females among 500 adults 16+ ROI, 2007

However there is a clear discrepancy in the perceptions on men and women. So while 19% of women (ROI) say they share cleaning equally with their partner, 32% of men say the same – 13% have different perceptions of what they share equally! And there are similar discrepancies for each domestic task in both countries.

11. Conclusions

This report highlights how stress is a significant and part of working life in the UK and Ireland, having a major impact on people's professional and personal lives.

Many people are confident in their ability to deal with stress and are happy with the support they have from their employers. Nevertheless, there are still a large number of workers who still perceive a clear need for their employers to take the issues around job related stress more seriously.

Employers should consider the different needs of particular sections of society. For example, young workers may need additional help in adapting to workplace stress. It may also be worth considering employees in different regions may need different levels of support – for example there is a higher likelihood of those in Northern Ireland feeling they have no one to talk to.

Moreover, employers within different industries face different challenges. For example, some appear to already be making inroads in combating workplace stress, such as the health service. Others have more work to do and may have specific problems such as the catering industry's high incidence of bullying.

Tackling workplace stress should be high on an employer's agenda - the potential cost of stress is high, not only affecting concentration and productivity but resulting in extended sick leave.