

taking down  
the walls



around mental  
health in  
construction.

# the hidden voice

## of the workforce.

It's the concern loitering in the minds of construction workers across the UK, and it's the one we don't like to talk about.

The NHS defines Mental health as a person's emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act in all situations. It affects us all. No matter a person's gender, race, wealth, age, sexuality, culture, religion or education, everyone can be affected in their own way.

The UK construction industry has made some positive steps to tackling the stigma of talking about this on-site, but we have just scratched the surface of understanding and tackling mental health concerns in our workforce.

Randstad Construction, Property and Engineering has conducted a survey to 3,400 construction workers to discover the hidden voice of our workforce and understand the factors that are affecting the industry.

**A fifth of respondents** have increased their alcohol and tobacco intake as a stress reliever, increasing the potential for further health risks.

we discovered

### 34%

More than a third of construction workers have experienced a mental health condition in the last 12 months.

### 73%

Almost three quarters feel that their employers within the construction industry do not recognise early signs of mental health deterioration.

### 46%

Almost half of all women responding said that they were dealing with poor mental health conditions right now

### 23%

Just under a quarter of construction workers are considering leaving the industry in the next 12 months.



# mental health

## impacts organisations.

It is difficult to define mental health in one term or stemming from one cause as it affects every individual differently.

From childhood to adulthood, the causes could differ from biological factors to life experiences such as trauma or abuse.

### Some of the conditions under the mental health umbrella

- anxiety
- bipolar disorder
- borderline personality disorder
- depression
- eating problems such as anorexia or bulimia
- paranoia
- PTSD
- insomnia
- schizophrenia
- ...to name a few.

### Some of the side effects of mental health conditions

- eating or sleeping too much or too little
- pulling away from people and usual activities
- having low or no energy
- feeling numb or like nothing matters
- having unexplained aches and pains
- feeling helpless or hopeless
- smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual

\*Source: NHS

Due to differing elements of mental health, employers must be vigilant to identify suffering employees. As the UK gains a better understanding of the causes and effects of mental health, employers will be better equipped to spot the signs and act on them.



At a time of unprecedented skills shortages it is more important than ever that the construction industry cultivates a strong and sustainable talent base. Without this, productivity targets will become increasingly hard to hit which could place even more stress upon the workforce of the construction sector. Owen Goodhead, Managing Director, Randstad CPE.



One third affected

# 36%

Just over a third of workers say they have average to poor mental health at the moment.

This is too high for a thriving industry considering the UK average is only 26%. If employers are not able to provide the right level of support, the future does not bode well for future generations, with 43% of 18-25 year olds having experienced mental health conditions in the last 12 months.

Sleep is suffering

# 29%

Just under a third suffered loss of sleep due to stress at work and almost one in five people would miss a family or social event.

It is well documented that work/life balance is a key factor in job satisfaction and sustaining a balanced workforce. However, with nearly a quarter (20%) of workers increasing their consumption of tobacco and alcohol, the overall health and well-being of our workforce will deteriorate at a much faster pace if the industry does not recognise and action a change?

There has been an 8% increase in absences, due to mental health conditions which could be having a negative impact on productivity and efficiency. A further one in six have expressed reduced productivity due to stress. Such a slump in productivity and efficiency has resulted in an estimated 1.7 million days being lost every year. This is equivalent to 7000 full-time workers being absent for an entire year in the construction industry. The total estimated cost of these absences in construction were £400 million.

### Tackling talking

A more concerning discovery is that 46% of workers who took time off for mental illness did not reveal the true reasons to their employer.

This further emphasises the stigma surrounding mental health in construction.

It is clear that employers are not doing enough to identify early indications of deteriorating mental health in their workers, or they are not offering extensive support to address the issue. 56%, of the 3,200 workers asked, felt they didn't have enough support structures in place in their working environments.

$\frac{2}{3}$  said that they do not feel there are sufficient outlets to discuss mental health conditions.

# gender differences.

Women make up 20% of the workforce in construction and that number will reach 25% by 2020.

Our research has found that 45% of women in construction had an average to poor mental health state at the moment, compared to 32% of men.

Almost half of the women surveyed reported to have had a mental health condition in the last 12 months and 27% had taken time off as a result; compared to 17% of men.

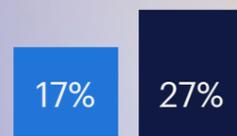
The effects that mental health cause appear to affect both men and women differently as well.

Our research suggests that women are more acutely affected by mental illness than men, which is compounded with the lower numbers of women in the industry. This could be seen as a significant factor in why it is difficult to attract more women into the industry. Only 16% of senior roles in construction are filled by women - these particular roles are also perceived as the most demanding and stressful which are both factors that can cause stress, and eventually lead to mental health conditions.

Employers will need to be mindful that in order to continue to close the gender gap in construction, more must be done to identify and support those suffering with mental health conditions.



loss of sleep



increased absence



reduced productivity



...almost half of the women surveyed reported to have had a mental health condition in the last 12 months.

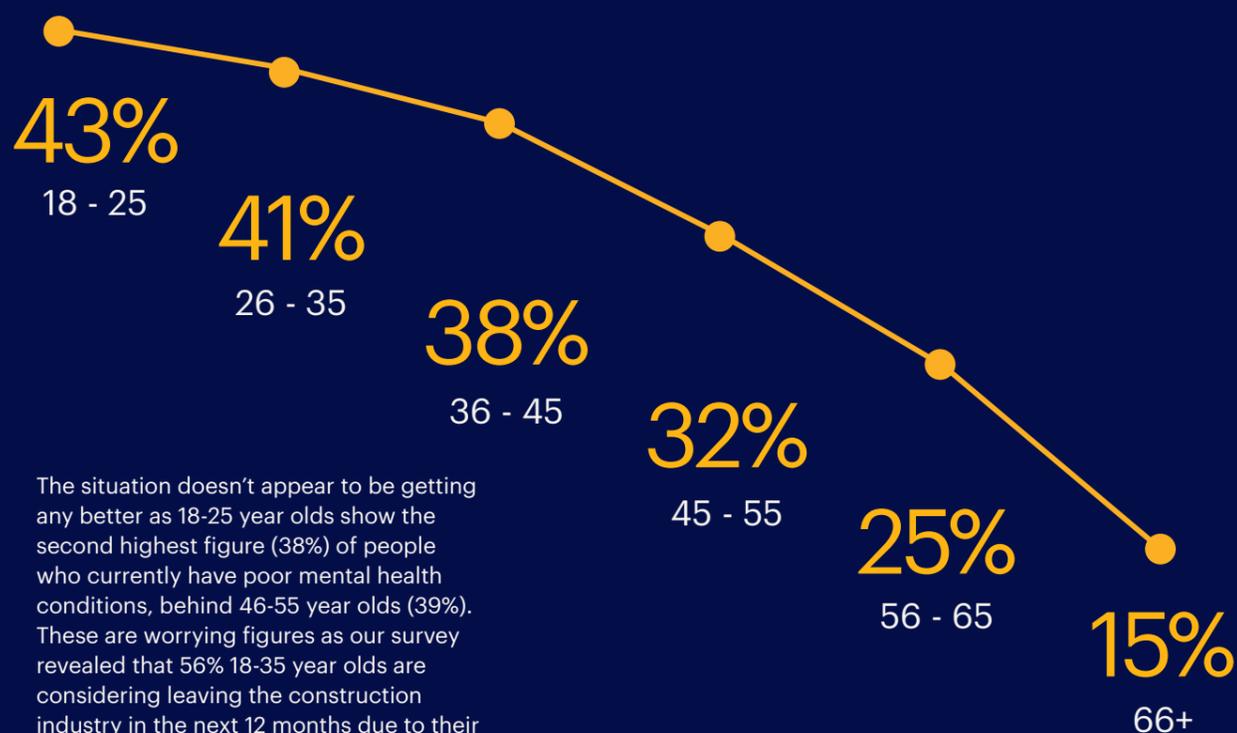


# age

# matters.

As the workforce's age increases, the level of mental health conditions experienced decreases.

% of workers that have experienced a mental health condition in last 12 months



The situation doesn't appear to be getting any better as 18-25 year olds show the second highest figure (38%) of people who currently have poor mental health conditions, behind 46-55 year olds (39%). These are worrying figures as our survey revealed that 56% 18-35 year olds are considering leaving the construction industry in the next 12 months due to their mental health conditions and lack of support for it. This is the crucial age demographic, as middle management look to push into senior leadership positions. More must be done to support this segment of the workforce.



Randstad CPE's Age of Housebuilding report highlighted the skills shortage across the industry and the need for employers to do more to bring in new, skilled workers in order to keep up with the increasing demand for construction projects in the UK.

It is therefore vital for employers to retain their workforce by offering more support structures and removing any barriers that may exist.

The situation appears to become better as you go up the age groups but that could be down to older workers not wanting to express or act on mental health conditions due to the stigma surrounding it. This is prevalent in our research as only 33% of those 35 and over were happy to speak to their employer about taking time off for mental health compared to 66% of 18-25 year olds. Even though more 18-25 year olds have taken time off work, due to mental illness, than any other age group, the fact they are much more willing to discuss their problems is a huge step forward. However, the structures are not in place to support them when needed.

**38%** of 18-25 year olds have poor mental health conditions.

only **33%** of those 35 and over were happy to speak to their employer about taking time off for mental health.

## on-site support

64% of 18-35 year olds suggested that having a named person on site to offer support would be an ideal solution. By catering to this need, the level of workers affected by mental health conditions could start to reduce, paving the way for the younger generations to enjoy long and successful careers in the industry.

Almost half of 46-55 year olds would be open to discussing mental health conditions through an anonymous telephone help-line. Organisations need to look at what support structures are out there and available. Randstad works closely with the Lighthouse Club, supporting construction workers with mental health conditions, providing an outlet to discuss what is going on. By making it OK to talk, and raising awareness, perhaps a higher proportion of the workforce would know where to turn.

Analysing the results further, younger generations are evidently more affected by loss of sleep due to mental health conditions. 54% are increasing their alcohol or tobacco use as a way to deal with stress, compared to 26% of older workers. Self medicating in this way, could lead to further health concerns as a short to medium impact.

The UK has been investing in huge construction projects such as the expansion of Heathrow, HS2, Hinkley point to name a few and all these have increasingly demanding targets to meet. Therefore it is imperative we keep hold of the workforce and continue to bring in more workers. The concerns surrounding mental health are real and the implications to both the mental state of the workforce and the economy are real. Employers need to dispose of the stigma to mental health as a priority and open up the right levels of support for the workforce.



# creating

# solutions.



Employers should look at what type of assistance and support programmes they provide their workforce. According to our research, the top three mechanisms are:

## Help-line

43% of the workforce named the ideal solution to be setting up an anonymous help-line. By having access to an anonymous outlet to discuss topics such as stress at work, anxiety or other mental health related conditions; workers may feel more comfortable in addressing certain topics. This will help to maintain a healthier. More engaged and productive workforce.

## A friendly face

27% would also like to see a named person on site, someone they could go to and talk to on a daily basis if conditions appear or reappear during the working day. Or, if an employee is suffering at home due to work related stress and is wanting to find other means of relieving their situation.

## Access to training

24% said they would like in person training. It is important that businesses equip their management teams with the correct resources to manage conditions such as mental health. Understanding their responsibility for the wellbeing of their staff is the initial steps, coupling this with in-house training will enhance the solution.



At Randstad CPE we are very proud to support the Lighthouse Club Charity. We actively promote their services with our worker community and encourage its use. We ourselves actively provide not only a standard Employee Assistance Programme for our corporate employees but also a financial, mental and physical wellbeing hub, with free risk assessments for our staff.

Suzanne Jacks, Senior HR Business Partner, Randstad CPE.

It is clear that tailored solutions are needed across the industry.

Something that should be regulated as part of their site safety and support structures, taking into account age and gender of the workforce. Without the right level of support and awareness for mental health and wellbeing, the sustainability of the workforce and attraction for the next wave of new skills could prove difficult.

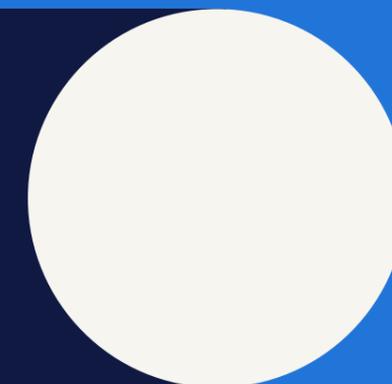
Construction is a well paid industry, with growth constantly on the incline. We must band together and do all we can to make the industry and all its sectors a viable career choice.

## Three step strategy

- 1 Develop a culture.** Address your vision and values; looking after your people is a business priority! You need visible leadership, policies and procedures in place that enable people to feel supported and part of an organisation that cares.
- 2 Training, education and support.** Organisations could look at resilience training, mindfulness, mental health first aid, access to counselling and employee assistance programmes.
- 3 Added value activities.** These are tools that reinforce your training and culture, not used instead of. For example, yoga, health checks, free fruit and subsidised gym membership.

"Managers are often found without the training required to help them identify signs of mental health or how to deal with it when they do discover the condition. It is crucial that we, as employers in the construction industry, ensure that managers have the right training and skills to not only identify mental health conditions but to also aid in the solution. It is prevalent that we spend time getting to know our teams and provide them with the time and space to talk through any concerns or challenges they may be having."

Jennie Armstrong, Head of Occupational Health and Wellbeing, Tideway





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human forward.