

Work-related stress remains a pressing health and safety concern across UK workplaces. According to recent figures, a staggering **776,000 workers reported work-related stress, depression, or anxiety in 2023/24**. This blog post will explore these figures, framing stress as a critical health and safety hazard, and outlining employers' duties under UK law, including the vital role of HSE stress risk assessments and the HSE Management Standards as a benchmark. We'll also touch on the Equality Act's definition of disability as it relates to stress and mental health conditions.

Work-Related Stress: A Serious Health and Safety Hazard

Stress at work isn't just a private mental health issue; it's recognised under UK law as a legitimate health and safety hazard. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them."

That reaction can slip into clinically significant **stress, depression, and anxiety**, affecting not only employee wellbeing but also organisational productivity, absence rates, and overall workplace culture.

What the *HSE 2023/24 Stats* Show

According to the latest HSE statistics for 2023/24:

- **776,000 workers were suffering from work-related stress, depression, or anxiety**, making it the leading cause of work-related ill health.
- These conditions resulted in around **19.9 million working days lost**—that's an average of 25.7 days lost per case.
- The sectors most affected include education, human health and social work, and public administration.

This means roughly 1 in 25 workers reported symptoms of work-related stress, depression, or anxiety in that year—a sobering figure that employers cannot afford to ignore.

Employer Duties Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Employers have a legal duty to safeguard employees' health and safety, which explicitly includes managing work-related stress risks. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments, including psychosocial hazards like work stress.

What Does This Mean in Practice?

- **Conduct regular stress risk assessments:** Don't wait for complaints or absence spikes; proactively identify stress triggers in your workplace.
- **Implement control measures:** Adjust workloads, improve communication, address bullying or harassment, and foster supportive management.
- **Monitor the effectiveness of these measures:** Use staff surveys, one-to-ones, and absence data to review and adapt.
- **Train line managers:** They often act as the first point of contact and should be equipped to spot early signs of stress and respond appropriately.

Failing to do so risks breaching the *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974*, which can lead to enforcement action by HSE or local authorities.

The HSE Management Standards as a Benchmark for Managing Stress

The HSE Management Standards for Work-Related Stress provide a practical framework for employers to identify and address key stressors. These standards cover six core areas:

1. Demands: workload, work patterns, and the work environment.
2. Control: how much say a worker has in the way they do their work.
3. Support: encouragement, sponsorship, and resources provided by the organisation, line management, and colleagues.
4. Relationships: promoting positive working, avoiding conflict, and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
5. Role: whether people understand their role within the organisation and if there is any conflicting role expectation.
6. Change: how organisational change is managed and communicated.

Using these standards, employers can assess workplace stress risks systematically, helping turn vague complaints into specific, actionable lists—my personal favourite way to manage these often nebulous issues.

Stress, Disability, and the Equality Act 2010

When work-related stress leads to a long-term mental health condition, it may meet the legal definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010, Section 6. This means the employer has additional obligations:

- Make reasonable adjustments to the working environment or arrangements.
- Ensure no discrimination occurs because of the disability.
- Engage with affected employees, considering their workload, flexibility, and support needs.

Examples of reasonable adjustments for work-related stress might include:

- Flexible working hours
- Reduced workload or modified duties
- Provision of a quiet working area
- Access to counselling or employee assistance programs (EAPs)

Ignoring these duties can result in costly employment tribunals and significant reputational damage.



What Can Micro-Employers and SMEs Learn from the 2023/24 Data?

In small companies—creative studios, cafes, micro-agencies—there's often no HR department. One manager wears many hats and faces the brunt of employment issues, including stress. The **776,000 workers experiencing stress** remind us that tackling workplace stress is not a big organisation problem only—it's everyone's problem.



Here are some quick, practical steps tailored for smaller employers:

1. **Start with a simple stress risk checklist**—spot the main stress triggers relevant to your team.
2. **Keep a list of “What to email your manager”** —encourage clear, specific reporting, avoiding vague complaints.
3. **Use free HSE tools** like their Management Standards Indicator Tool to gather anonymous feedback for better risk identification.
4. **Train all managers** (even if it’s an informal chat or short video) to recognise stress signs and signpost support.

5. **Create open channels** for informal conversations; often, just having someone to listen prevents stress from escalating.

Share and Stay Informed: Amplify Awareness on Work Stress

Spreading the word helps build healthier workplaces across sectors. Feel free to share this post with your network using the convenient social media links below—it's a simple step that helps normalise conversations about work-related stress as a health and safety issue:

- WhatsApp
- Facebook
- Instagram (share story & link)
- TikTok
- Twitter/X
- YouTube (create awareness video)
- Telegram
- Viber
- Pinterest

Summary Table: Key Facts from HSE 2023/24 Data on Work-Related Stress, Depression and Anxiety

Metric 2023/24 Figure Notes
Number of workers reporting work-related stress, depression, or anxiety 776,000
Leading cause of work-related ill health Working days lost due to these conditions 19.9 million
Average 25.7 days lost per case
Most affected sectors Education; Human health and social work; Public administration
Reflects high emotional and workload pressures
Legal framework Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974; Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
Requires stress risk assessments
Benchmark for managing stress HSE Management Standards
Six key workplace domains

Final Thoughts

Work-related stress is not a nuisance or personal failing. The 776,000 workers reporting stress in 2023/24 underline the urgency for every employer—big or small—to take this seriously. Under the *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974* and related regulations, employers [HSE guidance vs ISO 45001](#) must risk assess, manage, and mitigate stress, using practical tools like the HSE Management Standards. Remember, when stress falls into disability territory under the Equality Act 2010, additional duties kick in.

If you're managing a small team or even a one-person business, don't be daunted. Start simple, listen actively, and use these stats as a prompt to proactively support your workforce before stress causes absence or harm. Because ultimately, a healthy, supported employee is a productive and loyal one.