

Three quarters of care workers' mental health has worsened during pandemic



Urgent action needed to battle 'mental health crisis' in social care

Urgent action needed to battle 'mental health crisis' as major survey of 1,200 social care workers finds 75% report pandemic work has caused worsened mental health and sharp increase in anxiety

GMB, the care workers' union, has warned of a looming care workers' crisis as new research found that three quarters of care workers have experienced worsened mental health as a result of their work during



the pandemic.

The Government and employers must step up and address the mental health crisis in social care, the union said.

GMB's major survey of more than 1,200 care workers conducted between December and January found that:

- 75% of care workers say that their work during the Covid-19 pandemic has had a serious negative impact on their mental health
- Care workers report anxiety levels are almost half as high (44% per cent higher) than all employees in the wider economy
- Care workers' mental health declined throughout the second wave: care workers reported poorer mental health in December/January than at the start of the second wave in September/October
- Some groups of care workers were more likely to report poor mental health: women, disabled, residential, and care workers who were only entitled to statutory sick pay all reported lower mental health scores

The new findings – reported today by the BBC – should be a wake-up call for the social care sector, GMB said.

The union said that poor mental health in social care was a longstanding concern.

Research carried out before the pandemic found that care workers are at a significantly higher risk of dying by suicide.

Worryingly, the new survey found that care workers' mental health had declined since the summer. Survey respondents' scores for happiness had fallen by 12% and self-reported anxiety levels had risen by 6%.

GMB said that low pay, insecure working, and inadequate sick pay were all contributing factors to poor mental health in the sector.

The average care worker in England is paid £8.80 an hour and a third of care workers are employed on a zero hours contract, according to **figures reported by employers**.



The findings are being released to mark the one year anniversary of the peak in care home residents' deaths, after **1,300 residents died** on Easter Sunday 2020 (of which 495 residents were known to have had Covid-19).

GMB is campaigning for higher wages, full sick pay so care workers can afford to self-isolate, better support from employers including separate recording of mental health absences, and national funding for new mental health services for care workers including talking therapy and specialised PTSD support.

 image of carer in field

Rachel Harrison, GMB National Officer for care, said:

“Care workers have been asked to make incredible sacrifices during the pandemic, and these sobering figures demonstrate the urgent need for better support.

“Members describe having to nurse much loved residents as they died from this terrible disease, while all the while worrying about their own safety and how they were going to pay the bills.

“Our care members are dedicated, compassionate professionals but everyone has their breaking point. For too many, the combined effect of poor employment conditions and the pandemic has been too much to bear.

“If any good is to come out of this pandemic then it must include urgent reform of the sector. Ministers and employers need to explain how they are going to care for the people who have cared for us.

“As a minimum, this must include dedicated national mental health services, a substantial increase in pay, and full sick pay cover so that care workers can afford to self-isolate when they are ill – no-one should be asked to live on £96.35 a week.”

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