

Mental Health Awareness Week: Research reveals anxiety is gripping the UK

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The [Mental Health Foundation has published research](#) showing that 60 per cent of UK adults experienced anxiety that interfered with their daily lives in the previous two weeks.

On the first day of Mental Health Awareness Week (15 to 21 May 2023), the Mental Health Foundation is raising the alarm about the impact of anxiety across the UK as it publishes its new report, *Uncertain Times: Anxiety in the UK and how to tackle it*.

The paper outlines the prevalence of anxiety across the population, the key drivers in the wake of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis and recommendations for governments to reduce anxiety levels and support good mental health. Among the recommendations is a call for the development and delivery of mental health strategies in each UK nation that include a focus on prevention and responsibilities across all government departments.

Polling of 6,000 UK adults (conducted on our behalf by Opinium) found that nearly three-quarters of the population (73 per cent) had felt anxious at least sometimes in the previous two weeks, while more than a quarter (26 per cent) of those with feelings of anxiety felt anxious to the extent that it stopped them from

doing what they'd like or need to do. One in five people (20 per cent) felt anxious most or all of the time.

Despite anxiety being so common, stigma and shame play a part in how people deal with anxiety, with almost half (45 per cent) of UK adults with feelings of anxiety keep it a secret. This suggests that although there has been progress in discussing mental health more openly in recent years, significant numbers of people are still not comfortable talking about their own experiences.

The extent of the problem is compounded by one in three people (30 per cent) with feelings of anxiety saying they are not coping well with those feelings. This is worrying because chronic (or long-term) anxiety is associated with a higher risk of physical or mental health problems.

The results of the polling make it clear that financial stress is giving rise to anxiety across the UK as existing support for people who are struggling does not go far enough. The most commonly reported cause of anxiety in the past two weeks was being able to afford to pay bills, reported by 32 per cent of respondents, while 40 per cent of respondents said that financial security would help prevent anxiety.

Mark Rowland, Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation, said: "Across the UK millions of people are experiencing levels of anxiety that is stopping them from living their lives, with many not speaking out and struggling to cope. More can and must be done to protect our mental health.

"A big focus of our Mental Health Awareness Week is to encourage people to share their experiences on anxiety and increase understanding of the steps we can take. However, the scale of the problems requires change that goes beyond individual action.

"We need governments across the UK to recognise and be honest about their roles in the causes of and solutions to high levels of anxiety.

"We can't treat our way out of a mental health crisis; we need action which tackles the root causes of poor mental health including poverty, financial strain, bullying and discrimination. We need our governments to develop and deliver long-term mental health plans with a focus on prevention of poor mental health, including anxiety.

"They must ensure that all government departments from work and pensions to justice, transport to education, have a responsibility to ensure their policy decisions support good public mental health."

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