

Survey: more than 40 per cent of rail workers suffer from a mental health condition

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The RSSB has published results from the first-ever mental health survey of the rail industry, with almost half of respondents found to have a mental health condition.

The RSSB, a rail safety body, is calling for “less yoga, fewer fruit bowls and better working conditions”. It says workers will be helped by better targeting of support.

The survey found nearly half (43%) of almost 4,000 respondents were found to have met criteria for a clinical mental health condition across screen measures for depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders.

The challenges of with performing a public-facing role during the pandemic were clear. Half the survey respondents were from the front-line, and the RSSB says additional pressures have clearly taken their toll.

The Covid-19 pandemic, it said, has likely contributed to poor mental health across the general population, with moderate to severe depression increasing from 5.6% to 31.6%, and moderate to severe anxiety

increasing from 6% to 18.8%, results which have been reflected in the latest RSSB survey.

Poor mental health, the RSSB said, also affects employers. It has a knock-on impact on costs, performance and brings potential safety issues.

Despite the prevalence of poor mental health, only half of survey participants sought help. Sickness absence was five times higher than the general population pre-Covid, and it was six times higher than the general population during the pandemic. One in eight respondents reported experiencing an incident at work where their poor mental health had been a factor.

Psychologists from the RSSB are warning that employers should steer away from lip-service, as well as token gimmicks like yoga and fruit bowls for all. Instead, they should use local data better to target more specific intervention where it's most needed, particularly focussing on workplace factors that employers can directly influence.

There should, they said, be more support for those who may be socially excluded such as new starters or those with a disability. There needs to be more reaching out to vulnerable employees with pre-existing mental or physical health conditions, ringfencing time for line managers, union representatives, and wellbeing champions to provide support.

RSSB's clinical psychologist, Dr Michelle O'Sullivan said: "For the first time we've been able to measure the impact of rail industry work on mental health. The industry has demanding public facing and safety critical roles, with many employees experiencing increased pressure since Covid-19. Responding to disturbing and challenging situations is often part of those roles. Employers have a responsibility to provide appropriate resources to protect staff from the impact of such events. This research identifies key modifiable work factors that can ensure the rail industry is a great place to work."

Read the report

<https://www.rssb.co.uk/what-we-do/key-industry-topics/health-and-wellbeing/mental-wellbeing/how-is-the-mental-health-of-rail-employees>