

Anxiety 'hitting British workers'

British workers are experiencing panic attacks and insomnia because of stress associated with the economic downturn, a survey has suggested.

Norwich Union Healthcare polled 200 GPs, 200 business leaders and 1,000 employees for its Health of the Workplace survey.

Half the workers admitted to being stressed, while one in five is suffering depression. A leading GP said people now had better access to talking therapies. The annual Norwich Union healthcare study found workers are putting increasing amounts of time and effort into their jobs.

About half are going into work when they are ill and working longer hours, while just over a third are not taking lunch breaks. And 33% of the employees questioned said they were offering to take on more responsibility.

When the workers were asked about their illness, half said they were suffering from insomnia while a third said they were having migraines and 21% had anxiety attacks and palpitations.

Almost a third said they were drinking more and a fifth were smoking more. A third said they were comfort eating, and 11% said they were self-medicating with over-the-counter medicines.

Of the GPs questioned, almost half said they have seen their patients' use of alcohol and drug increase, and 89% expect levels of depression and requests for anti-depressants to dramatically increase this year.

And more than nine out of 10 of the GPs and 80% of employers polled predicted that stress-related illness will be the most critical occupational health issue of 2009.

'Far-reaching effects'

But even though 97% of business leaders agree the health status of staff impacts upon productivity, only 1% said they planned to introduce new health measures in 2009.

Dr Douglas Wright, head of clinical governance at Norwich Union Healthcare, said: "On top of the adverse mental effects of stress itself, an unhealthy diet, limited exercise and increased levels of smoking and drinking could have far-reaching and long-term effects on both the nation's health and the UK economy."

Professor Steve Field, president of the Royal College of GPs, said: "We are seeing an increase in anxiety and stress due to the economic situation.

"But we are very pleased that the Department of Health has invested in increasing access to talking psychological therapies because that means we'll be able to help patients more than ever before."

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/health/8073806.stm>

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