



High levels of mental distress and a reluctance to seek professional help among UK construction workers is leading to increased alcohol consumption, non-prescription drug use and even self-harm according to a new major study.

Early findings from a major new study of the mental health of self-employed construction workers and those working in small firms show that intense workloads, financial problems, poor work-life balance and Covid-19 pressures on the supply of materials are combining to significantly raise stress and anxiety levels. This mainly male workforce has long been known to contain workers who are reluctant to talk about their mental health. Preliminary survey findings from over 300 respondents suggest that almost a third are now living with elevated levels of anxiety each day. Construction workers from a range of trades that are often too hard to reach, from bricklayers, to groundworkers to plasterers, told researchers from Mates in Mind and the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) that the continuing stigma of mental illness prevents them from discussing it beyond close friends or family members.

'We have a real concern that the data shows that sole traders and those working in smaller firms with more severe anxiety were least likely to seek help from most sources. This means that too many construction workers every day are going under the radar and are not seeking support from healthcare professionals or mental health charities' says Sarah Meek, Managing Director of Mates in Mind. *'This represents a real hidden crisis which threatens the viability of a major sector of the UK economy and many of those who work in it'.*

The study, funded by a research grant from B&CE Charitable Trust, is investigating both the extent of mental health problems in this important workforce and the extent to which new, more accessible, forms of support and guidance on mental wellbeing can be offered to individuals experiencing distress, depression, or anxiety. As reported by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the suicide rate among construction workers is already three times the national average for men, equating to more than two construction workers taking their own life every day.

Head of HR Research Development at IES: Stephen Bevan who has led the survey component of the research said today, *'we have been concerned to find that so many construction workers are finding it hard to disclose their mental health problems and that these are also causing them to lose sleep, develop severe joint pain and exhibit greater irritability with colleagues and even family members. We are hoping that our upcoming interviews with some of our participants will shed more light on the types of support which they feel comfortable and confident to use.'*

Mates in Mind, as a charity dedicated to improving mental health in construction and related industries, will be using the insights from this research to shape a series of interventions to educate, inform and support workers whose mental health is causing problems with sickness absence, an increased risk of accidents at work and, ultimately, the risk of an exodus from the sector.

Steve Hails, Director of Business Services & HSW at Tideway and Chair of the Board of Trustees of Mates in Mind said that *"this valuable research undertaken by IES, funded by B&CE, confirms what we suspected when Mates in Mind was formed as a charity by the Health in Construction Leadership Group (HCLG) with the vital support of the British Safety Council. Those working for the smaller organisations, sole traders or self-employed - the vast majority of workers in our sector - do not have*

access to the necessary mental health support to allow them to thrive within our industry. The next phase of the research is essential to help us understand what that support should look like and how Mates in Mind can assist with the required improvements."

Nicola Sinclair, head of the B&CE Charitable Trust, said: *"This research from Mates in Mind is incredibly important to the construction industry as it shines a bright light on a very real problem that is often overlooked. The information gathered will hopefully prove to be an important first step in ensuring that all construction workers have access to help when it comes to mental health and stress related issues.*

About Mates in Mind

Mates in Mind is a registered charity working in the UK that aims to provide clear information to employers on available support and guidance on mental health, mental illness, and mental wellbeing, and how they can address this within their organisations. Mates in Mind looks to make sense of what options and support are available to employers wishing to promote improved mental health within their workforce.

Mates in Mind is a collaboration of founding partners: Health in Construction Leadership Group and the British Safety Council. It is also supported by construction industry charities and bodies and has various Mates in Mind Business Champions, including Balfour Beatty; DE Group; Galliford Try, Tarmac; and Tideway. Quotes of support from these organisations

are available on request. This research project also received generous fundraising from Galliford Try, Balfour Beatty, Morgan Sindell, Kier, Skanska, Mace and Laing O'Rourke

Mates in Mind works alongside organisations from across the Transport and Logistics sector including Wincanton, Kinaxia Logistics and Palletways.

Mates in Mind was the result of a Health in Construction Leadership Group summit in early 2017 for construction industry CEOs and senior leaders who voted overwhelmingly to improve the mental wellbeing of its workforce. At an event in January 2017, Mates in Mind was launched, and the pilot phase was started. Mates in Mind was featured in the Thriving at Work report published in October 2017.

More details on Mates in Mind are available at www.matesinmind.org

Mates in Mind must only be referred to in acronym form as MinM.

Mates in Mind's networks

Website: www.matesinmind.org

Twitter: www.twitter.com/matesinmind

Facebook: www.facebook.com/matesinmind

LinkedIn group: www.linkedin.com/company/matesinmind

Instagram: [@matesinmind](https://www.instagram.com/matesinmind)

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About The Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and HR management. It works closely with employers in all sectors, government departments, agencies, professional bodies and associations. IES is a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and HR planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation. www.employment-studies.co.uk

About B&CE Charitable Trust

B&CE's Charitable Trust was set up in 1991 to give back to the construction industry by providing help for people working in construction in times of need, including grants towards education, financial support and retraining. It has given out millions of pounds in charitable donations over the past 30 years. B&CE Group was established in 1942 by unions and federations with the intention of providing financial products for the construction industry. Today B&CE is perhaps best known for The People's Pension, a leading workplace pension scheme with more than five million pension savers from over 95,000 employers and £16 billion assets under management. With no shareholders, it uses its profits to help people build financial foundations for life. To apply for the 2022 Occupational Health Research Award, visit: <https://bandce.co.uk/corporate-responsibility/the-charitable-trust/grants-for-health-and-safety/occupational-health-research-award/>