

Stress on the rise, estimated 300m overtime hours worked in pandemic

BRIAN SHEEHAN

Two-in-five employees are experiencing “frequent stress” according a new survey, which also finds that 44% of employees are working longer hours at home compared to the workplace.

According to laya healthcare research, 65% of workers feel pressure to stay connected after normal work hours, while 43% are now experiencing frequent stress, up from 31% in July 2020. Other findings include:

- 69% of HR leaders say managing mental wellbeing is now their biggest challenge.
- 76% of organisations offer wellbeing supports.
- 79% of employees would get the Covid-19 vaccine if available.
- Over 70% believe employees should be vaccinated before returning to work.

The findings show Irish workers working from home have put in 300 million overtime hours since the start of the pandemic, “with growing concern over increasing workforce burnout”.

Two thirds (65%) of those working from home feel pressure to stay connected after normal hours, with an average of 22 hours put in of overtime per month by employees over the last year, worth €7 billion.

The research, which measures the wellbeing of over 1,000 Irish employees and 180 HR leaders during the pandemic, is the second barometer issued by laya healthcare during Covid-19 and will be unveiled at a free virtual event for HR leaders on 11 March 2021.

Sinéad Proos, Head of Health and Wellbeing at laya healthcare said: “We are seeing worrying signs of deteriorating morale among employees, due in part to less social interaction with colleagues, the struggle to self-motivate, and having to be ‘always-on’.”

She said that their latest barometer shows that employee motivation and maintaining organisational culture are becoming more notable issues compared to six months ago, “with a greater number of employees now citing the loss of workplace bonding as their top challenge of working from home.”

Ms Proos added that there is an “overwhelming feeling of being stuck in stasis”. Some say the hopeful start to 2021 “has failed to materialise while almost half of workers feel stuck in their current employment, wanting to change jobs but held back because of lack of opportunities”.

Employers also indicated that effective communication is a challenge, and this has a real knock-on effect — “if workers aren’t feeling communicated to, and supported, this can lend itself to the feeling of stagnation”.

MENTAL HEALTH

Key areas in the workplace identified by Ilaya for targeted communication and support include mental wellbeing management, the impact of Covid-19 vaccinations, and work arrangements in the future as we continue to work alongside the virus.

The findings “reveal a desire among Irish employers and employees to make mental health services within organisations more accessible”.

Seven in 10 (69%) organisations admit that the biggest challenge to working from home is managing the mental wellbeing of employees, up by almost 10% compared to six months ago.

Ms Proos said that great strides are being taken by organisations to address mental health supports, with three in four employers now offering health and wellbeing services to their workers. “We encourage employers to take an inward look at the effectiveness of their health and wellbeing strategies. When we did the research last year, 61% said their strategies were effective. It has now dropped to 53%.”

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

“Along with mental health management, organisations need to manage expectations around the vaccinations, sick leave and the future of work post pandemic,” she said.

“Over seven in 10 employees (74%) believe the workforce should be vaccinated before returning to work and an encouraging 79% said they would get it if available. It is critical employers support workers by communicating the facts around vaccinations, directing them to trusted sources of updated information,” Ms Proos added.