

Study of mental health and well-being promotion in Irish workplaces

March 29 2023



Pictured are Dr Jane Bourke and Niamh Lenihan who led the survey mental health and well-being promotion in 1,500 business across Ireland. Credit: University College Cork

A landmark study of health and well-being promotion in Irish workplaces is published today (March 29), to reveal the first national mental health picture of the impact of the pandemic across Irish workplaces.

More than 1,500 businesses across Ireland were surveyed in the [University College Cork \(UCC\) report](#) , which among the findings are that 1 in 5 Irish firms have experienced [mental health](#) related issues in the past year, mental [health](#)-related absenteeism is on the rise and the majority of employers in Ireland are not investing in workplace mental health and well-being supports.

Led by University College Cork researcher Dr. Jane Bourke at Cork University Business School, Professor Stephen Roper and Niamh Lenihan, the study illustrates the challenges Irish employers face in relation to employee mental health post pandemic, explores workplace mental health and well-being promotion in Ireland, and investigates significant changes which have occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Mental health-related sickness absence is a growing challenge for Irish employers The [business](#) costs of poor employee mental health and well-being can be substantial However, employers are more likely to implement mental health and well-being initiatives that do not involve a financial outlay. In fact, only one in five firms have a dedicated budget for mental health," said Dr. Jane Bourke.

The study, which will be launched later today (Wednesday, 29 March at 4.30pm) at University College Cork, is part of a broader international study and compares the prevalence of mental ill health, absenteeism and presenteeism in Irish and English workplaces, as well as differences in how employers are responding to these challenges. 1,501 Irish employers took part in the survey between September and December 2022. Mental health issues are estimated to cost the Irish economy approximately €11 billion each year.

Key findings in the report—Healthy Workplace Ireland: A Survey of Mental Health and Well-being Promotion in Irish Firms—include:

- 80% of employers in Ireland are not investing in workplace mental health.
- 76% of employers see employee mental health and well-being as their responsibility.
- 32% of employers have an organizational response to mental health and well-being.
- 20% of employers have a dedicated budget for mental Health and well-being.
- Mental health-related sickness absence has increased post-pandemic. 64% of employers stating that absenteeism—physical and mental-health related—adversely impacts business performance.
- Mental health-related sickness absence is a growing challenge for Irish employers, as more than half of employers report that the proportion of absenteeism due to mental ill-health has increased in the last 12 months.
- Workplaces are changing as more employers allow staff to work from home (WFH). Most employers view remote/hybrid working positively.
- Prior to the pandemic, 7% of firms in Ireland had employees who worked from home. Now, 32 percent of firms have employees that work from home.
- Employers in Ireland are less likely to support workplace health promotion than in England. 23% of Irish companies have a plan to support employee mental health in comparison to 31% of companies in England.
- Presenteeism—working when ill—is higher in Irish businesses (27%) compared to businesses in England (21%), a pattern which is consistent across sectors and firm size bands. The most commonly cited reasons for presenteeism by Irish employers is the need to meet deadlines and client demand.
- Smaller firms are much less likely to be providing support for employee mental health and well-being. This could be due to

resource constraints, more informal practices within smaller businesses and perhaps the lack of a distinct HR function.

"The report is a first step to understanding workplace mental health and wellness promotion by Irish employers. Why are Irish employers, the majority of whom acknowledge their responsibilities, not investing in [workplace](#) mental health and well-being to a greater extent? It may be that the [business case](#) for investing in mental health and well-being is unclear to Irish businesses," stated Niamh Lenihan, Munster Technological University.

Provided by University College Cork

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