# Hospitality and real estate sectors found to have highest rates of common mental health problems

February 14 2023



Credit: Marta Dzedyshko (Pexels)

Mental health problems such as depression are most common in the hospitality and real estate sectors, but—at least prior to the COVID-19 pandemic—were on the increase across the board, according to new research.

Researchers from the University of Cambridge and University College

London found significant gender disparities of common mental health problems against females in over half of the twenty industries studied, with the smallest gap being in the transport and storage industry and the highest gap being in the arts, entertainment and recreation industry.

In the U.K., about one in seven people in the workplace experiences mental health problems, and women are nearly twice as likely to have mental health problems as men. More than half of all sickness absence days can be attributed to mental health conditions. It is estimated that [economic losses](#) caused by mental health problems account for about 4.1% of U.K. GDP, and that better mental health support in the workplace can save U.K. businesses up to £8 billion per year.

The researchers analyzed data from almost 20,000 people aged between 16 and 65 across 20 industries. This data was collected as part of the Health Survey for England, a representative repeated cross-sectional survey of people in England, looking at changes in the health and lifestyles of people all over the country. The results are published in *Frontiers in Public Health*.

The team found an overall increase in the proportion of people reporting mental health problems, up from 16.0% in 2012–14 to 18.8% in 2016–2018. None of the industries studied experienced significant decreases in prevalence, but three industries—wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; construction; and other service activities—saw significant increases.

Common mental health problems were most prevalent among those who were not working, with around one in three (33.7%) people reporting problems. In the hospitality sector (accommodation and food services) and [real estate](#), just under one in four people (23.8% and 23.6, respectively) reported mental health problems.

The lowest prevalence was seen among professional, scientific and technical activities (15.0%), agriculture, forestry and fishing (9.6%) and mining and quarrying (6.2%).

Dr. Shanquan Chen from the Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, said, "Jobs that involve working face to face with the public, particularly where the employee has a degree of responsibility, and those that involve working irregular and long hours can all be emotionally demanding or even expose employees to violence and verbal aggression. This in turn could contribute to higher rates of mental health problems."

"Nevertheless, we would still strongly encourage industry leaders—particularly in those sectors that fare worst, such as the hospitality and real estate sectors—to take an urgent look and try to identify and address the underlying issues."

In the majority of industries (11 out of 20), mental health problems were more common among females than they were among males. This was highest in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector, where more than one in four women (26.0%) reported problems compared to around one in 20 (5.6%) of men. Not working also appeared to have a much bigger impact on females (45.0%) compared to males (21.7%).

From 2012–2014 to 2016–2018, gender disparities had widened in all but two sectors—human health and social work activities, and transport storage.

Previous studies have identified some risk factors that have gender-specific impacts on mental health. For example, working full-time decreases the risk of mental problems among males, but not among females; fixed-term contract only increases the risk of mental problems among females; males are more affected by changes in tasks at work, while lack of training, low motivation and weak social support are

drivers of mental problems among females. However, the researchers say that the existing evidence cannot explain why there were disparities in some industries but not others.

**More information:** Shanquan Chen et al, Industry-specific prevalence and gender disparity of common mental health problems in the UK: A national repetitive cross-sectional study, *Frontiers in Public Health* (2023). DOI: 10.3389/fpubh.2023.1054964

Provided by University of Cambridge

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