

Mental Health: Still The Last Workplace Taboo?



Independent research into
what British business thinks
now, compared to 2006

December 2010



Contents

Key Findings	1
Foreword	2
Background	4
Summary of Key Findings	6
Full Research Findings	12
1.0 WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE 2006?: DEFINITIONS AND AWARENESS	13
1.1 More people can define mental ill health, and perhaps more accurately too	13
1.2 An improved understanding of the scale of mental health problems	15
1.3 Businesses saying they have employees with mental ill health almost double	17
1.4 Summary	18
2.0 WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE 2006?: WORKPLACE POLICIES	19
2.1 Little improvement in the development and understanding of policies to deal with mental health in the workplace . . .	19
2.2 . . . and perceptions of policy effectiveness go into reverse	20
2.3 But there is less cynicism about company policy motivations	22
2.4 Summary	23
3.0 WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE 2006?: PREJUDICE AND DISCLOSURE	24
3.1 Prejudice against those with mental ill health declines, but there is still great scope for improvement	24
3.2 There remains a willingness to discuss, but also an expectation of disclosure	25
3.3 Summary	26
4.0 WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE 2006?: SUPPORT AND ACCOMMODATION	28
4.1 Progress is being made in providing support for those with mental ill health and their managers	28
4.2 More organisations providing support for those suffering from mental ill health	30
4.3 Summary	33
5.0 WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE 2006?: THE ROAD AHEAD	34
5.1 Greater acceptance of the losses to industry from mental ill health and greater support for better understanding of the issues	34
5.2 Summary	37
6.0 CONCLUSIONS	38

Key Findings

Mental health remains the last workplace taboo whilst **40% of employers view workers with mental health conditions as a 'significant risk'**.

Generally understanding is broader and big improvements have been made in some areas. Only 11% of employers agree that none of their staff will be affected by mental ill health, down from 41% in 2006. However given 1 in 6 workers will experience mental ill health at some point in their working life* **42% of employers are still underestimating the prevalence of mental health in their workplace.**

The vast majority (90%) of managers say they would be happy discussing mental health issues with an employee and 73% with an applicant, however, when employers are so affected by negative perceptions of mental ill health **many applicants may feel it is in their best interest not to disclose information.**

Despite increased awareness **72% of workplaces still have no formal mental health policy.**

Finding a workplace adequate mental health policy and level of understanding is a lottery but the presence of an HR department can be beneficial. **However, major barriers remain in the way of people with mental health conditions seeking employment.**

*The Centre for Mental Health, Mental Health at Work: Developing the Business Case, 2007

Foreword



As a national charity supporting almost 80,000 people in disadvantaged circumstances across the UK every year to overcome obstacles to employment, inclusion and independence, we know that employers' understanding and attitudes towards mental health can either be one of the biggest obstacles or one of the best aids of all.

One in four people are likely to experience a mental health problem every year*, that's a significant number of any workforce.

Mental ill health doesn't discriminate, it can happen to any one of us, at any time, whether we are a receptionist, an accountant, a mechanic or a chief executive, and the consequences can be devastating.

Having a job means inclusion in society, financial security, independence and stability. However, exclusion from the labour force, and society due to stigma and misunderstanding means that people with mental ill health struggle daily to have a sense of identity, dignity and independence, contributing to a downward cycle of poverty, and exacerbated mental ill health.

Working for a supportive employer that allows you to manage your job as well as your mental health condition can make all the difference.

But as one Chief Executive to another, it's not just about social justice and a duty of care to your employees, it also makes real business sense to manage mental health in your workplace and embrace a diverse workforce.

Staff absence and lost productivity due to poor mental health management have an overall annual cost to employers of over £25 billion**.

Mental ill health is a fact in society today, so avoiding recruiting or supporting employees with mental health conditions isn't an option. Embracing diversity and supporting your workforce is, and will pay dividends in terms of increasing productivity, improving performance and retention, garnering talent and shaping future leaders, helping you to retain a competitive edge.

In this age of austerity and focus on the bottom line can organisations really afford to ignore mental health in the workplace?

Since we first conducted this research in 2006 we are pleased to see there has been some improvement in understanding and awareness of different conditions and the scope and prevalence of mental ill health. However, negative views around the capability and reliability of people with mental health conditions are still alarmingly high; for example, 40% of employers viewed workers with mental health issues as a significant risk. With employers seemingly so affected by negative perceptions it is no wonder that individuals feel anxious about disclosing their conditions.

So as business leaders, I hope that you will join with us and lead the way in saying that in the 21st century it really is time to break this last workplace taboo once and for all.

I urge you to read this research and make managing mental health in your organisation a priority for the benefit of your employees, society and your organisation's bottom line. The power really is in your hands.



Sally Burton
Chief Executive, Shaw Trust

*MIND

**The Centre for Mental Health,
Mental Health at Work: Developing
the Business Case, 2007

Background

In June 2006, Shaw Trust published '*Mental Health: The Last Workplace Taboo*', an independent research report that investigated attitudes towards mental health in the workplace. The report found that 'understanding of mental health in the workplace is still at a relatively low level'. It revealed that 80% of businesses did not have any formal mental health policy in place, a third were unsure of how to define mental ill health and over 40% of employers believed that none of their employees will be affected by mental health problems during their life.

This report is a follow up to the 2006 report and is based on the results of the latest survey of business leaders' attitudes to mental health in the workplace. Its aim is to see what changes in both attitudes and practice, if any, have taken place in the four years since the publication of the first report.

Methodology

The 2006 survey consisted of telephone interviews using a 14 question survey focusing on employment of individuals with mental health conditions and policies in place to assist these employees. These questions were derived after a literature review and qualitative research with a broad range of representatives from employer relations organisations, governmental and non-governmental organisations, researchers, business representatives and people with experience of mental health conditions and employment.

The original survey recruited a random sample of 500 Chief Executive Officers (CEO), Managing Directors (MD) or Finance Directors (FD), with an additional sample of 50 Human Resources

(HR) Directors. The survey was incorporated into the Business Omnibus Telephone Research Survey, conducted by Continental Research. Employers were randomly selected using a weighted sampling design to ensure representation of both small (£50,000 - £1million turnover (300 interviews)) and medium/large employers (>£1million turnover (200 interviews)).

The repeat survey, conducted in June 2009, was based on the 2006 survey methods. However, we wished to increase the proportion of HR Directors, especially for medium/large businesses in which the owner/MD may have little or nothing to do with personnel responsibilities and thus be unable to answer questions about mental ill health in the workforce. Therefore the sampling frame for this round of the survey differed slightly from 2006: approximately 300 small companies (1-50 employees) and 200 medium/large companies (>50 employees) were to be included in the 2009 sample. Within each of these groups, approximately 100 HR Directors were to be interviewed; the interviewees were screened to ensure that they met the criteria of decision makers in relation to HR matters. In both surveys only companies with one or more employee (excluding the interviewee) were recruited into the survey.

The 2009 survey was conducted as a stand alone survey via Computer Aided Telephone Interviews (CATI) conducted by Teamsearch Market Research Services. Employers were again sampled from all registered British Businesses.

“Ultimately, work is a very positive thing in my life as it gives me something to get up for in the morning.” Shaw Trust Client

Summary of Key Findings



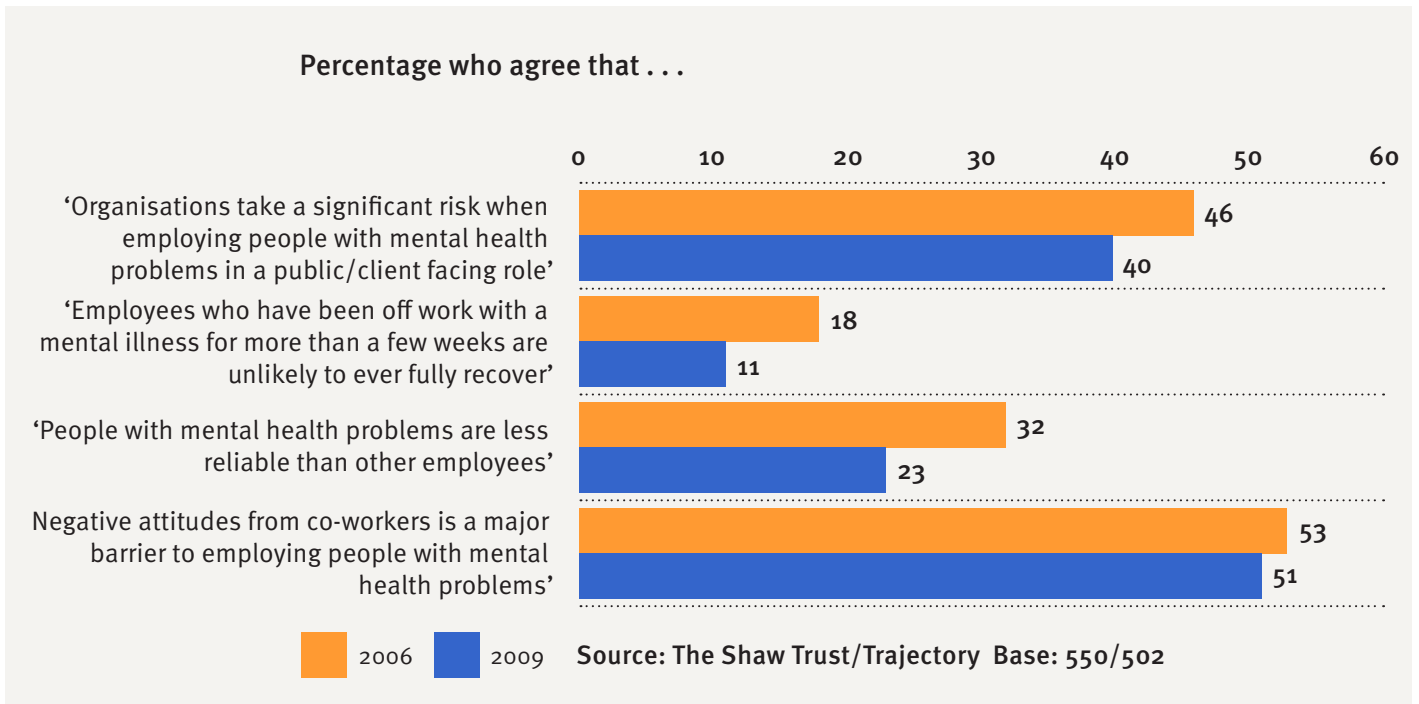
“We know through research and anecdotal evidence that stigma and discrimination in the workplace stop many employees disclosing their mental health problems, which can mean they don’t get the support they need and can leave them unprotected by legislation.

Many organisations are beginning to address the mental wellbeing of their workforce which not only has benefits for their staff but also benefits their bottom-line, improving productivity and staff retention. However, there are still many employers who struggle to know what to do to meet their obligations and employees who simply don’t know their rights.

Conditions like anxiety, depression and unmanageable stress affect 1 in 6 British workers each year. Since the launch of Time to Change, we have seen society begin to change its attitudes towards mental health - and employers can and should play their part at the forefront of this change.” **Sue Baker, Director, Time to Change**

40% of employers view workers with mental health issues as a 'significant risk'

Negative views have decreased since 2006, but in some cases, only very slightly. Employers reported 'negative attitudes from co-workers' to be a serious obstacle, and a significant minority believed that a mental health condition would have a permanent effect on an employee. Nearly a quarter suggested that people with mental health conditions are likely to be 'less reliable' than other workers. Overall, the number agreeing with the statements below decreased, but negative views remain worryingly prevalent.



79% of managers also agreed that potential employees should disclose any mental health conditions prior to recruitment. When employers are so affected by negative perceptions of mental ill health, however, many applicants may feel it is in their best interests not to disclose this information.

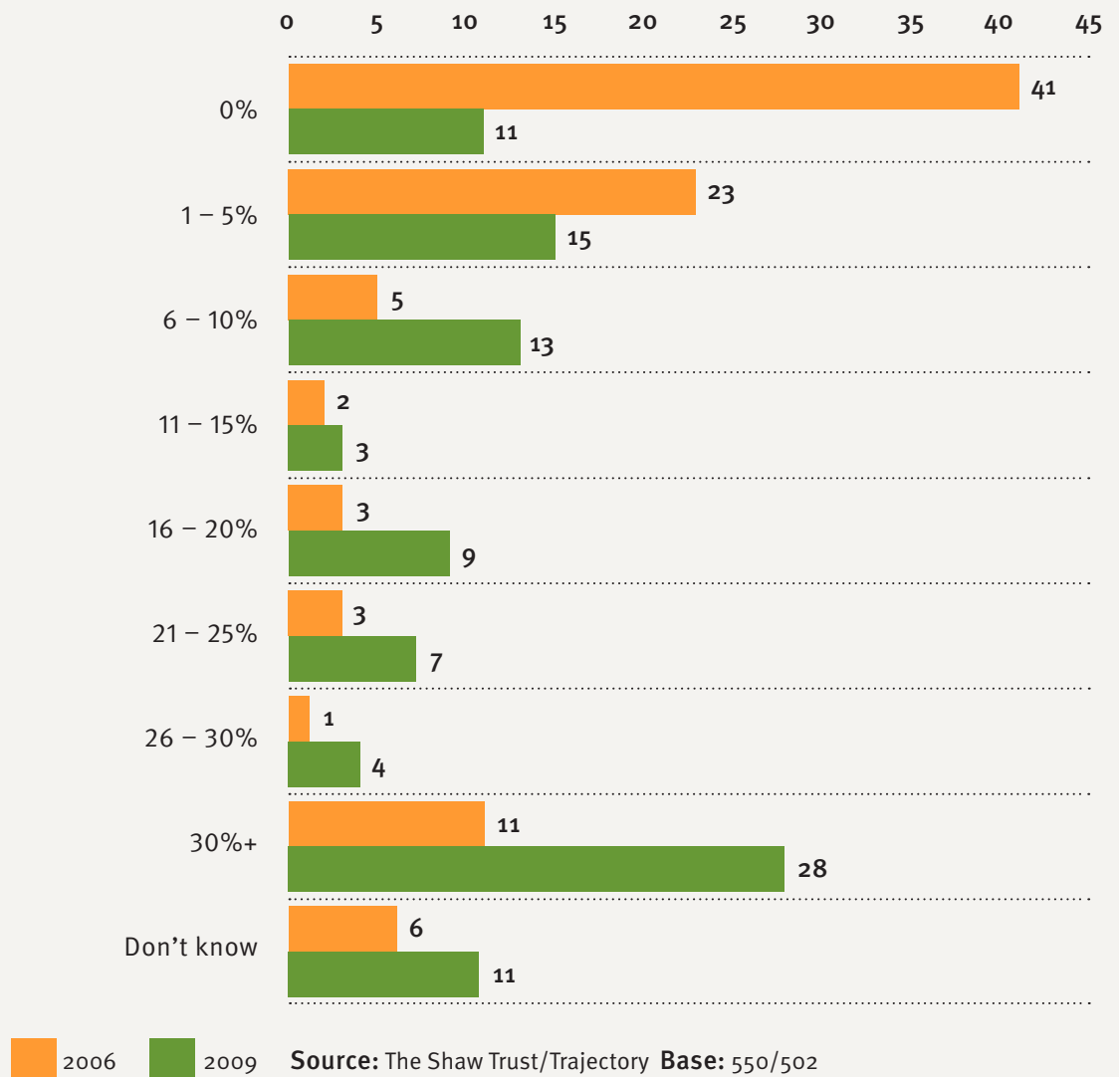
“I hid my depression at work because I felt it would have been seen as a weakness.” Shaw Trust Client

Understanding is broader and big improvements have been made in some areas

There have been some significant positive developments since 2006. Employers are more likely to be able give a broader list of mental health conditions, and an association with 'stress' is declining as managers recognise that other conditions impact on workers. 23% of managers were unable to name any conditions, a high figure, but down from 33% in 2006.

Perhaps most notably, employers have a vastly improved understanding of the scope of mental health issues, including a more accurate impression of how many people are likely to suffer from one. In 2006, 64% thought that only one in twenty (less than 5%) of people would experience mental ill health in their lifetime. By 2009, that figure had dropped to 26%, and the proportion believing that more than one in four people were likely to be affected rose from 12% to 32%.

'What percentage of your employees do you think will have a mental health problem at some point during their working life?'

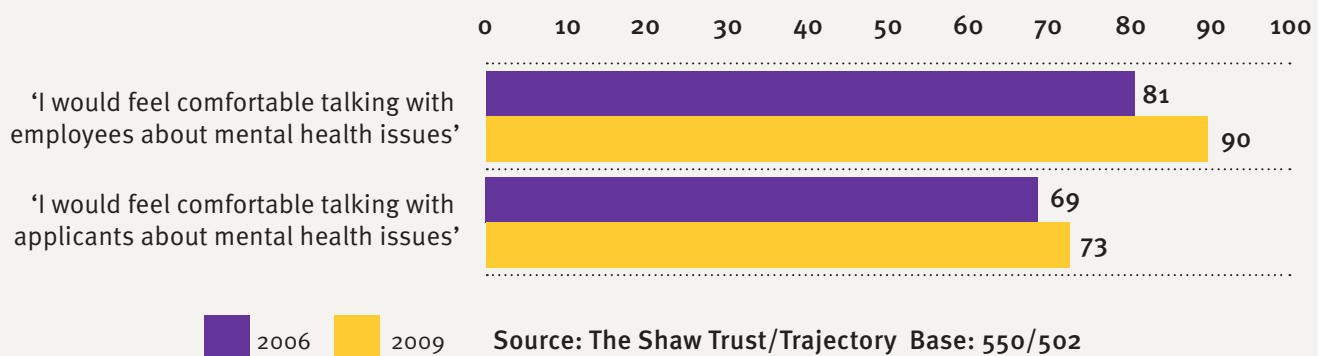


The vast majority (90%) of managers say they would be happy discussing mental health with an employee

Employers are more confident in both the ability of their company, and their own personal ability to deal with mental ill health issues in the workplace. In 2009, more respondents agreed that they would be flexible in accommodating staff with mental health, that the organisation provides a good level of support, and that managers themselves have a good understanding of mental health issues. This rise in confidence seems derived from a rise in understanding.

The rise in understanding has also led to an increased willingness to engage in dialogue about the issue. 90% of managers say they would feel comfortable talking with employees about mental health issues (an increase of 9%) and 73% said they would be happy to talk to a job applicant about the issue (up 4%).

Percentage who agree that . . .



“Being unable to compete for a job on an equal footing is one of the biggest barriers that people with mental health problems face. Many people with mental health problems want to work, but engrained attitudes about what having a mental health problem is all about can lead some employers to shut the door in their faces. Opening our workplaces to employees who have experience of a mental health problem is a vital step to putting the record straight on mental health, and will ensure that skill and talent is not overlooked just because a candidate or employee has had mental distress.” Paul Farmer, Chief Executive, Mind

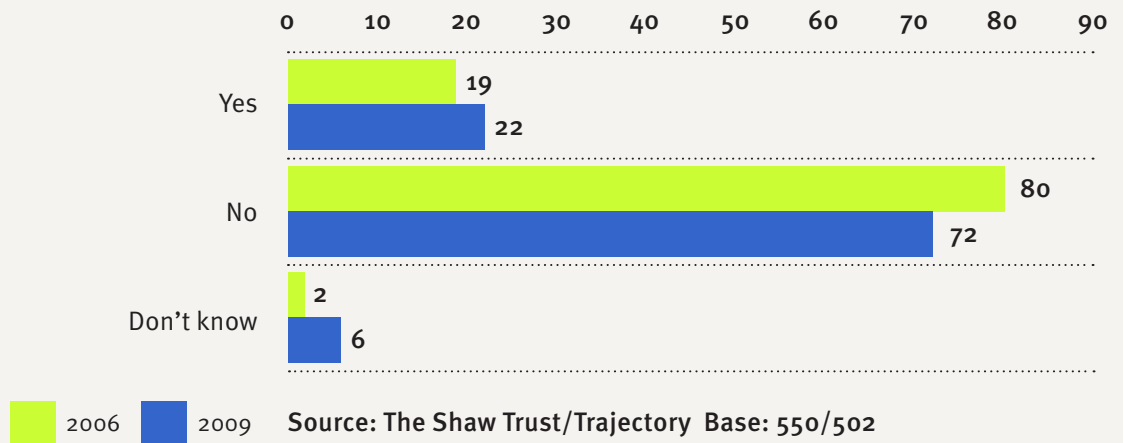
78% of workplaces still have no formal mental health policy

Increased awareness since 2006 has sharpened the focus on deficiencies in organisations' mental health policies. There was a marked rise in employers agreeing that British industry loses out from not knowing enough about mental health, and an increase in those agreeing that British industry needs more support on the issue.

In 2006, 61% of managers responded that they used 'none' of the resources suggested in conjunction with employee mental health. In 2009 that figure dropped to 25%. Correspondingly, more companies started managing mental health internally, the use of internal HR rose from 26% to 65%.

However, some challenges remain. Although understanding has risen and, in some cases, companies have responded to the issue, the amount of companies reporting that they have a formal mental health policy has risen only negligibly, from 19% to 22%.

'Does your company have a formal policy on stress and mental health in the workplace?'



“Coming to work makes such a difference to how I feel on a daily basis. It’s really good for me being around other people, it acts as a distraction when I’m feeling particularly low. It’s made such a difference being able to talk openly and honestly about my condition to people at work.”

Shaw Trust Client

Finding a workplace adequate mental health policy and level of understanding is a lottery

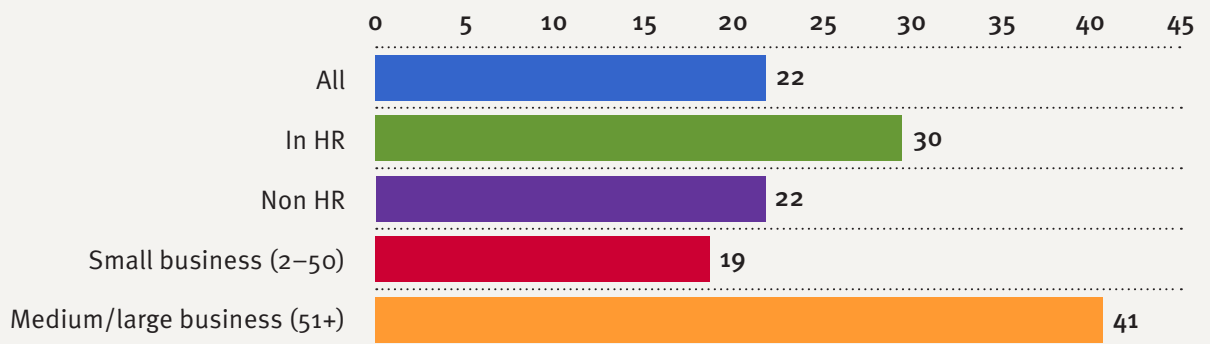
The 2009 survey demonstrates that the presence of an HR department can significantly improve the mental health credentials of a workplace. HR managers were consistently more likely to be aware of their company's mental health policy, know of any mental health issues affecting staff, be aware of provisions and support services, and concede that their business would benefit from external support.

Largely, the same was true of bigger businesses. While, on average, 22% of managers said they had a mental health policy, this rose to 30% among HR managers, and 41% among medium/large businesses.

While it is positive news that mental health provision is more adequate in bigger businesses, and that HR managers can improve working conditions for those with mental ill health, it also reveals a disparity in mental health attitudes and policies in the workplace in the UK today.

The jobs market is very much a mixed bag for an applicant with a mental health condition.

'Does your company have a formal policy on stress and mental health in the workplace?' Percentage answering 'yes' by job title and business size, 2009.



Source: The Shaw Trust/Trajectory Base: 502

Full Research Report



“For too long people with mental health problems have been treated as second class citizens. Indeed many people with mental health problems say that stigma and discrimination are worse than the condition itself. In many countries worldwide such social exclusion is most damaging in relation to the workplace, where employers often show very little understanding about mental health problems, or how to support people with such difficulties to enter and stay in the workforce. This latest Shaw Trust survey shows that at long last these problems are beginning to change for the better, and offer evidence to encourage all of us to redouble our efforts to eliminate mental health related stigma and discrimination.” **Graham Thornicroft, Professor of Community Psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College London**

1. What has changed since 2006?: Definitions and awareness

1.1 More people can define mental ill health, and perhaps more accurately too

Chart 1: Definitions of Mental Health: “What specific disorders do you think of when you hear the term ‘mental ill health in the workplace?’”

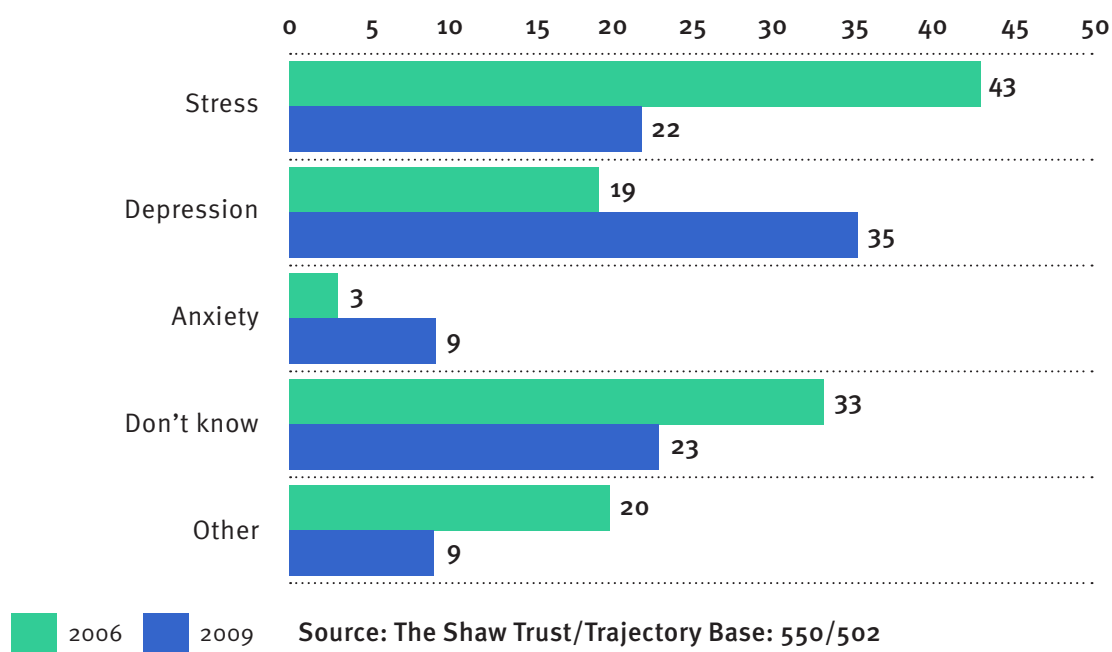
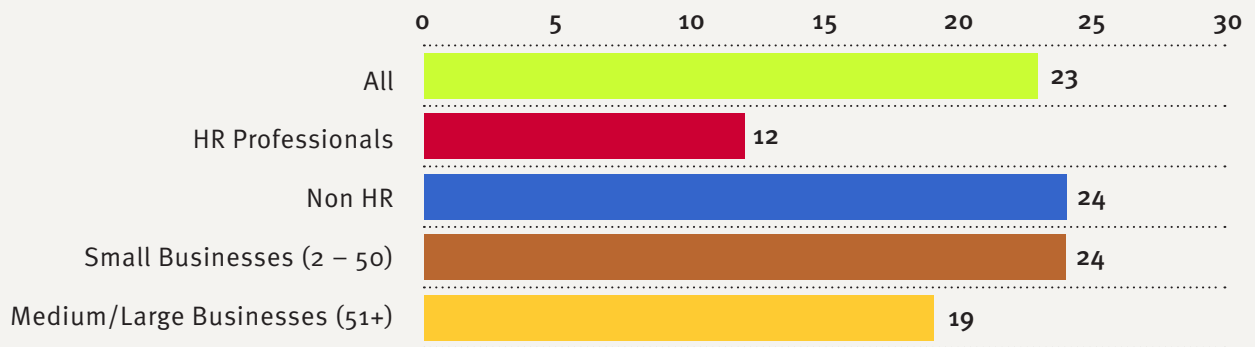


Chart 1 suggests that there have been positive developments in mental health understanding in the workplace since 2006, with fewer people unable to give a definition of mental ill health and a broader spread of responses. However, while indicating an improvement, the proportion answering ‘don’t know’ remains relatively high, at nearly a quarter of respondents.

The 2009 survey indicates a significant change in the way we now define ‘mental ill health’. There has been a sharp drop in respondents naming ‘stress’ and a corresponding rise in those naming ‘depression’ compared to the results from 2006. The pair remain the most prominent conditions named by some degree, but it is possible the transference is indicative of greater understanding of the shape of mental ill health.

Chart 2: “What specific disorders do you think of when you hear the term ‘mental ill health in the workplace?’” Percentage answering ‘Don’t Know’ by job title and business size, 2009



Source: The Shaw Trust/Trajectory; Base: 502

Many employees may state that they find their jobs ‘stressful’, but this would not always be considered a mental illness, and a rise in ‘depression’ and a trebling in ‘anxiety’ (albeit to just 9%), may indicate a broader understanding of what constitutes mental ill health. This is corroborated by a large fall in ‘don’t knows’, which accounted for a third of the sample in 2006.

Responses varied by business size and were affected by whether or not the respondent had HR responsibilities.

Smaller businesses and employers with no HR responsibilities were notably more likely to answer ‘don’t know’ when asked which disorders they thought of when thinking about mental health in the workplace. Even though only 12% of HR professionals answered ‘don’t know’, this actually represents a rise on the 2006 survey, where the figure was 8%.



“Since the last Shaw Trust report into mental health in the workplace was published, the world of work has become a very different place. Businesses are facing tough times, many employees are working with the looming threat of redundancies, and the economic outlook for everyone is uncertain. With such factors putting people at increased risk of mental health problems, we welcome the Shaw Trust’s research into this crucial issue, and encourage employers to build on the progress indicated in this report by ensuring that all necessary provisions are made for the sustained mental wellbeing of their staff. Between issues like rising absenteeism and impaired productivity amongst those who remain at work, mental health problems now cost UK employers over £26bn a year. We therefore literally cannot afford to neglect this problem any longer”. **Dr Andrew McCulloch, Chief Executive, the Mental Health Foundation**

1.2 An improved understanding of the scale of mental health problems

Mental health is a big issue for British business. 2010 CBI data suggests that over 50% of long term absences are caused by mental health problems, and in 2009, NICE estimated mental health absences cost employers £28bn a year. Indeed in our latest survey, 78% of respondents agreed that British industry lost out because it doesn't know how best to deal with mental health in the workplace. So, better understanding of mental health issues in the workplace may improve the fortunes of British businesses.

In some areas, the 2009 results suggest a better understanding of the scale of the issue compared to 2006. ONS/Mind figures suggest that one in four people will have a mental health problem in a given year, but the 2006 survey showed that only 15% of employers are aware of this, and that 64% believed the figure to be less than 5%, or one in twenty. The 2009 survey demonstrated a notable swing towards the more accurate figures. 39% of people in 2009 responded that more than one in five people would be affected by mental health issues, and only 26% believed the figure to be one in twenty or fewer.

There has been a strong swing away from the perception that very few workers are likely to be affected by mental health issues over the course of their career. In 2006, nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents believed that less than 5% of their workforce would have a mental health condition. In 2009, that had fallen to just over a quarter (26%). Correspondingly, the number believing that more than 20% of their workforce will suffer a mental health problem has sharply risen: 39%, up from just 15% in 2006.

Perhaps the most important indicator of increased awareness of mental health in the workplace comes from responses to a question about whether respondents currently employ people with mental health problems. In our latest survey 21% of respondents stated that they currently employed someone with a mental health condition –nearly twice the response in 2006.

Chart 3: 'What percentage of your employees do you think will have a mental health problem at some point during their working life?'

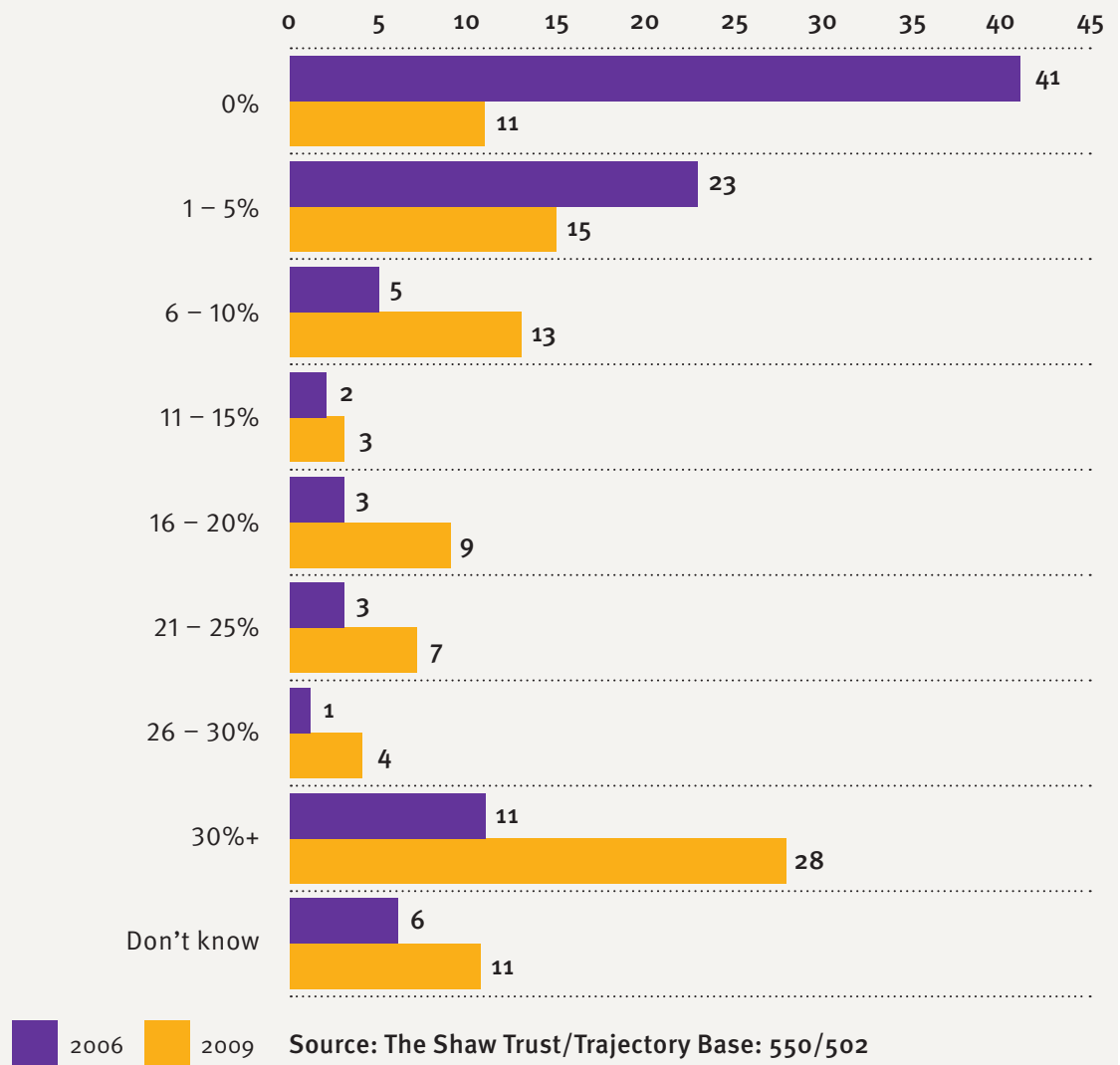


Chart 3 demonstrates a significant improvement of employers' knowledge of mental health statistics and its potential effect on the workforce. Combined with a rise in awareness of specific disorders (and a drop in 'don't knows' – Chart 1), this would appear to indicate a broad improvement in how mental health issues are understood by businesses in the UK. Some caveats remain attached to these positives, however:

- The number answering 'don't know' increased from 6% to 11%, contrasting to the drop seen in the question about defining mental health.
- The expectation that HR managers would more likely give a truer response than the overall figures was not fulfilled, fewer (6%) thought that no employees would suffer mental health disorders, but notably more thought that 1-5% would (23%). The number of HR workers who thought more than 20% would be affected was the same as the non-HR figure.
- Bigger companies were more likely to answer 'don't know'. The figure for companies with fifty or fewer employees was 10%, and 15% for larger ones.

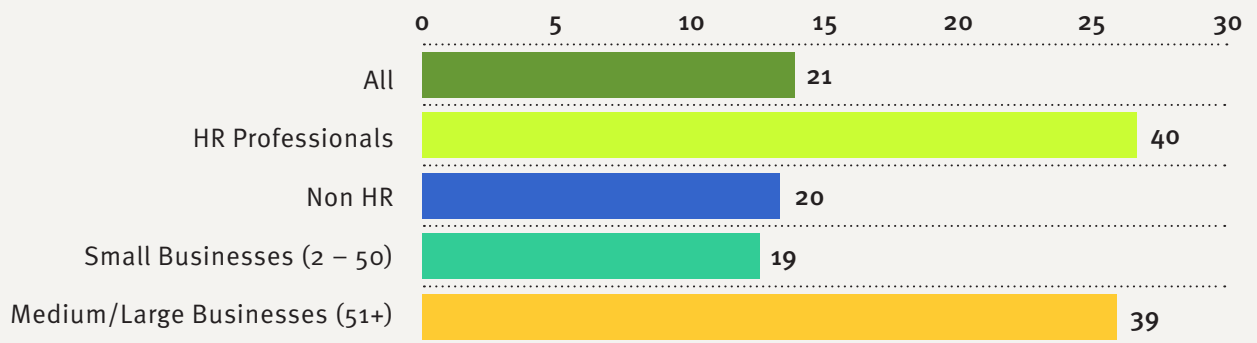
1.3 Businesses saying they have employees with mental ill health almost double

Perhaps more important than businesses perception of the scale of mental health problems generally, is the extent to which they are aware of individuals within their own organisations who suffer from mental ill health. Here our surveys show a significant increase in awareness.

In 2009, 21% reported that their company currently employed someone with a disorder, up from 11% in 2006.

Of course, despite increased awareness of mental health issues in the workplace, nearly four-fifths of managers believe that they do not work with someone with a mental health disorder.

Chart 4: “Does your organisation currently have any employees that you know to have a mental health problem?” (Sorted by business size and job title, 2009)



Source: The Shaw Trust/Trajectory Base: 502

The overall figure of around one in five represents a strong increase but is still relatively low given that as many as 25% of employees could suffer from a mental ill health in any given year. The figure doubles, however, to 40% and 39% among HR professionals and large businesses.

“Everyone could potentially have a mental illness, things can happen to you which might tip the scales.” Shaw Trust Client

Summary

Defining Mental Health

More employers name anxiety and depression as examples of mental health disorders, and fewer are unable to give an example. This may indicate a broadening of employers' understanding of mental health conditions, and is encouraging. In some areas, however, the improvements were modest, implying that there is still much work to do.

Understanding its scope

The 2009 survey shows a significant drop in the number of employers who believe that only a handful of their staff will be affected by a mental ill health problem, and a large swing towards the truer figures.

The proportion of businesses saying they employ someone with mental ill health has almost doubled from 11% in 2006 to 21% in 2009.

In 2006, two thirds of employers thought that less than one in twenty of their employees would suffer a mental health problem during their working life; in 2009 this had dropped to a quarter.

The improvements are significant and a positive step towards a better understanding of mental health. However, 25% of employers still believe less than 5% of their workforce will suffer a mental health problem during their working life, combined with one in ten that are unable to give an answer.

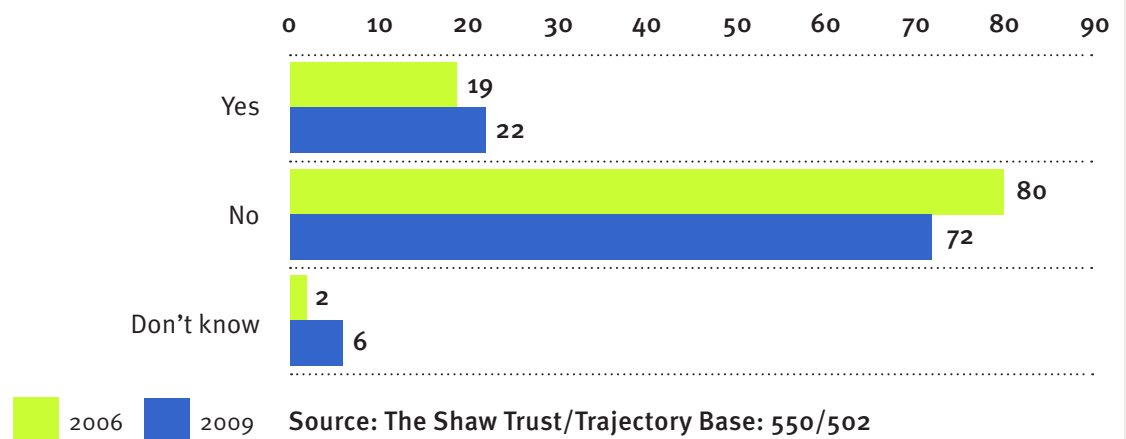
2. What has changed since 2006?: Workplace Policies

2.1 Little improvement in the development and understanding of policies to deal with mental health in the workplace...

The improvements in understanding and defining mental health and its potential effect on the workplace are not matched by a development in formalised company policies designed to deal with mental health. The follow up survey examined employers' knowledge of their mental health policies, and found that despite improvements, there was still relatively low awareness of company policies and procedures.

The 2009 survey also examined attitudes towards mental health from those with HR responsibilities, and generally these respondents were more likely to be aware of mental health policies within their organisation or business, twice as many HR managers were aware of employees with mental health problems, and more were aware of their business's mental health policy.

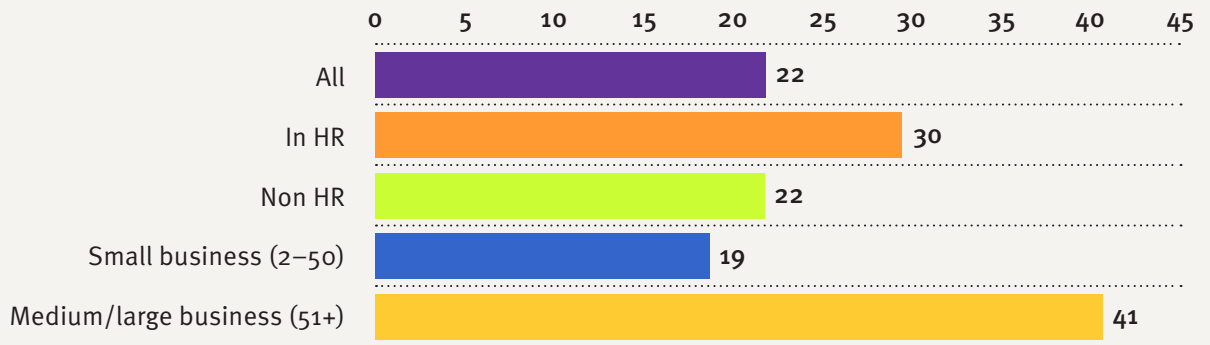
Chart 5: 'Does your company have a formal policy on stress and mental health in the workplace?'



The chart above shows that there has been only a negligible increase in employers with formalised mental health policies. Only 22% of employers answered that they had a stress and mental health policy in place, against 72% who didn't. In comparison, there is almost no development from 2006.

Positively, larger companies were twice as likely to have a formalised policy. Those working in HR were more likely to answer ‘yes’, implying that some employers without HR duties may be unaware of whether or not their company has a policy on mental health. Perhaps worryingly, HR managers were (slightly) more likely to answer ‘don’t know’ than the average (8%).

Chart 6: ‘Does your company have a formal policy on stress and mental health in the workplace’, Percentage answering ‘yes’ by job title and business size, 2009.



Source: The Shaw Trust/Trajectory Base: 502

The results are most positive with larger businesses, two-fifths of which have a formalised policy in place. Less encouraging are the figures for small businesses, which stand at 19% (lower than the average), and the HR figure, which shows only an 8% improvement on the non HR figure.

2.2 ...and perceptions of policy effectiveness go into reverse

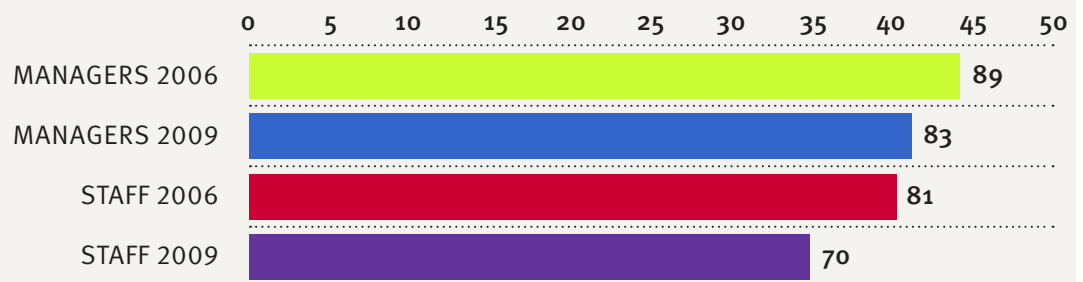
Another cause for concern is the success of the mental health policies where they do exist. Businesses who replied that they had a mental health policy in place were asked to evaluate it in both the 2006 and 2009 surveys. The results suggest a step back in terms of confidence in mental health policies in the workplace:

- Fewer respondents agreed that the policy was ‘well understood’ by bosses (83%, against 89% in 2006).
- Even fewer thought their policy was well understood by staff (81% in 2006, and 70% in 2009).
- In 2006, 83% of respondents believed their policy to be ‘effective’ in helping staff with mental health disorders stay in work. In 2009 this fell to 76%.

The overall proportion remains high, but the decline, though slight, between 2006 and 2009 is a possible cause for concern. The proportion of workplaces with formalised mental health policies remains low (around one in five) and the quality of the policies appears to be deteriorating.

The results did not improve in the responses from those with HR responsibilities in 2009. 80% of HR workers thought that their policy was well understood by managers (83% overall), and 71% thought it was well understood by staff (70% overall). The only notable variation was in perceptions of effectiveness, where 84% of HR workers believed their policy helped employees stay in work, 10% higher than the overall figure.

Chart 7: Do you agree that...‘The policy is well understood by the managers/staff who work within our organisation?’ Those agreeing...



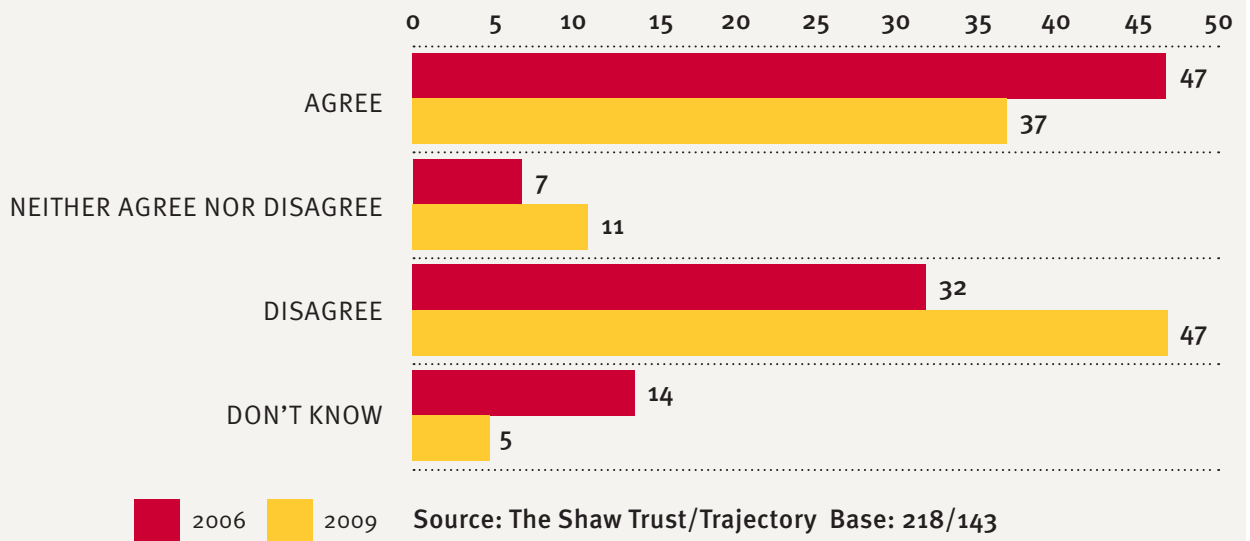
Source: The Shaw Trust/Trajectory Base: 218/143

“I didn’t feel I got the support I required to successfully return to work as my employer appeared to ignore the recommendations of both the Occupational Health doctor and my own GP.” Shaw Trust Client

2.3 But there is less cynicism about company policy motivations

There is better news when it comes to perceptions of company motives for introducing policies on mental ill health. Here, cynicism has dropped, and more people disagree that their company's mental health policy is 'primarily designed to avoid litigation'. This implies that awareness has risen, and companies are less likely to view mental health policies as just box-ticking exercises.

Chart 8: 'The policy is primarily designed to avoid litigation'



The number of managers admitting they do not know enough about the law regarding mental health in the workplace has also risen slightly. In 2006, 69% of respondents suggested they needed more education on the subject, and by 2009 this figure had increased to 75%.

Summary

Policies

21% of respondents stated that their company currently employed someone with a mental health problem, a rise from 11% in 2006. Despite this, companies that have a formalised mental health policy in place rose only 3% in 2009 standing at 22%.

Of these, most are considered effective in both 'helping our staff with mental health problems improve their mental health (75%) and 'helping staff stay in work' (76%). The figures have not improved since 2006, however, and the number agreeing that their policy helps staff stay in work has actually decreased.

Understanding

The perception that both managers and employees understand the policy, where it exists remains high, but as with effectiveness, is subject to a recent decline.

Policies are less likely to be seen simply as a means of trying to avoid litigation.

In 2009, 83% agreed that the policy was well understood by managers, compared to 89% in 2006. 70% of employees were perceived to understand the policy in 2009, down from 81% in 2006.

The decrease is slight but consistent, hinting that confidence in, and the potential effectiveness of mental health policies are waning in the few places in which they exist.

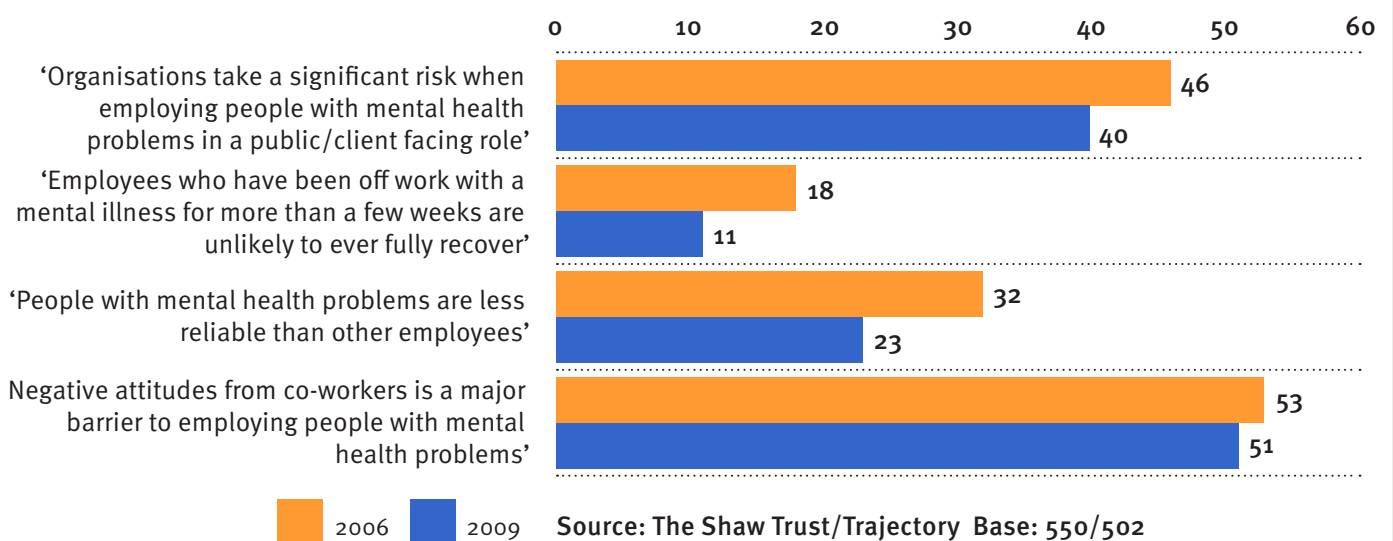
It seems plausible that the decline of confidence in mental health policies may be caused by an increased awareness of the issue: in realising the potential impact of mental health in the workplace (as charts 1 and 3 imply) some businesses may have been given cause to doubt the actual effectiveness of their policies.

3. What has changed since 2006?: Prejudice and disclosure

3.1 Prejudice against those with mental ill health declines, but there is still great scope for improvement

Although there have been some positive developments in employers' understanding of mental health issues, significant barriers remain in the way of full acceptance of mental ill health in everyday life that cement its status as 'the last workplace taboo'.

Chart 9: Percentage who agree that...



In each case above, negative views of people with mental ill health fell between 2006 and 2009, but in some cases very marginally. Those agreeing that 'negative attitudes from co-workers is a major barrier' fell by a negligible 2%, and those agreeing that organisations take a big risk when employing sufferers in a public/client facing role fell just 6%. Both remain high figures, at 51% and 40% respectively, indicating that as much as half of employers would have some reason to be wary about employing anyone affected by a mental ill health.

The more overtly prejudiced views – that people with mental ill health are unlikely to ever recover and that they are less reliable than others – saw a greater decline. Positively, those disagreeing with the statements rose significantly (and by more than ‘agreeing’ dropped).

However, there remains a significant number of who agree with these statements, causing real concern that anachronistic prejudices are having a major impact on the employment prospects of people with mental health disorders. Equally worryingly, the results did not vary significantly in 2009 when looking at responses of HR professionals – quashing expectations that this group may be less affected by negative views.

Earlier findings have indicated that awareness is rising and a minor drop in the proportion of employers who hold or whose decisions are affected by a negative image of mental health correlates with this trend. The proportion of employees and potential employees who stand to be affected by negative views is still significant (two-fifths labelling such employees a ‘significant risk’) and demonstrates that there is clear potential to educate further.

3.2 There remains a willingness to discuss, but also an expectation of disclosure

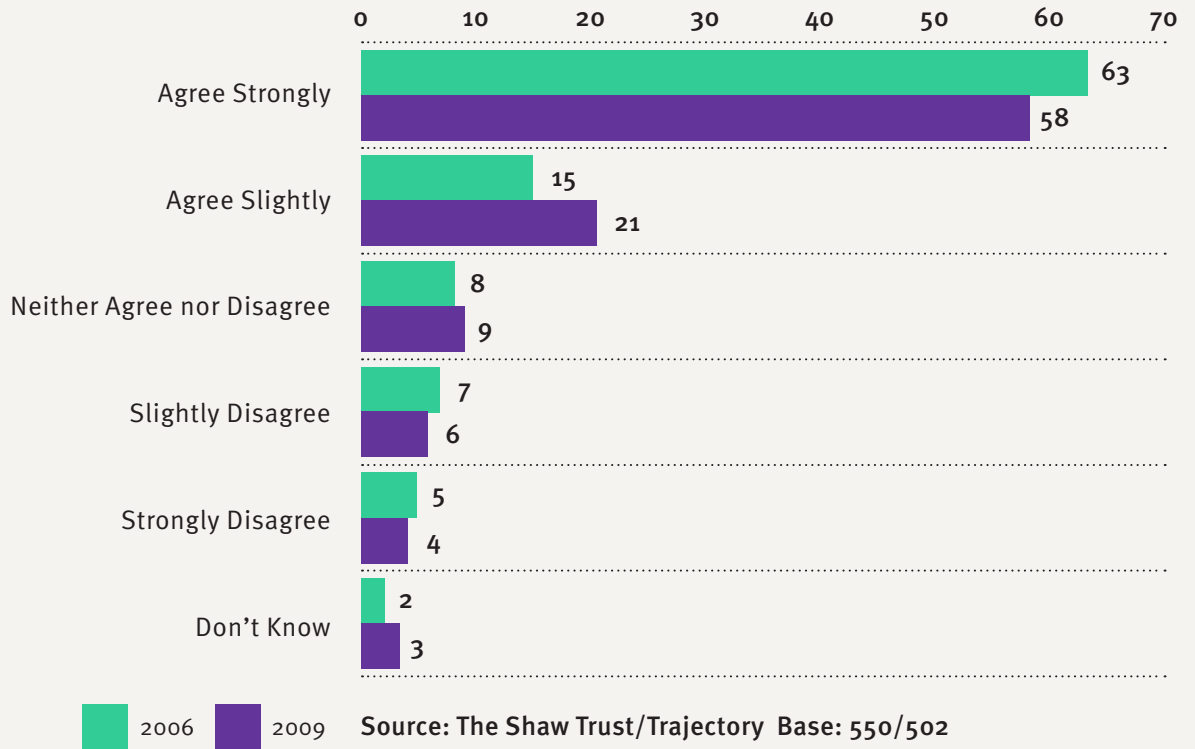
The 2009 survey indicated a welcome continuation of the readiness of employers to discuss mental health issues with employees.

- 90% agreed (the majority ‘strongly’) that they would feel comfortable talking to employees about mental health – up from 81% in 2006
- 73% stated that they would feel comfortable talking to job applicants about the issue. In 2006 the proportion was 69%
- The figures did not vary widely with HR managers or by business size, but both were slightly more likely to discuss the issue with employees and slightly less likely to discuss it with applicants

However, despite this confidence, there is evidence that this may be a hypothetical willingness, as only 21% of managers agree that they actually work with anyone with a mental health disorder. The potential discussion may also lack clarity, as 75% of managers agree that they don’t know enough about the law regarding mental health in the workplace.

“I feel like an employer would find a way to not employ me, I feel like I will always be on the outside, always have a label.” Shaw Trust Client

Chart 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that ‘potential employees should disclose mental health problems prior to recruitment?’



The proportion believing that employees should disclose any mental health problems prior to employment remained high, with only minor variation.

Managers appear strongly in favour of full disclosure of any mental health issues a potential employee may have. But with such a high proportion of bosses affected by negative perceptions of mental ill health, it would be easy to understand why many applicants may feel it is in their best interests not to do so.

Summary

Negative views of mental health in the workplace have not increased – and in some cases have decreased slightly – but remain high and present a real barrier for sufferers.

The number of employers who believe that potential employees should disclose mental health problems prior to employment has remained high, at around 80%. Employers call for disclosure before employment but are affected by negative attitudes that may harm sufferers' job prospects.

Positively, willingness to engage in discussion about mental health issues remains very high. 90% of managers are happy to talk to employees about mental health issues.



“It is disappointing that so many employers still hold stigmatising attitudes towards people with mental health problems. With one in four people affected, a vast swathe of any workforce will have a mental illness, whether their employer realises it or not. We know that fear of prejudice puts people off applying for jobs, but we hope that the new Equality Act will help to remedy this. No longer will employers be allowed to ask job applicants about their health before they have offered them a job – a legislative change that Rethink campaigned long and hard to achieve.

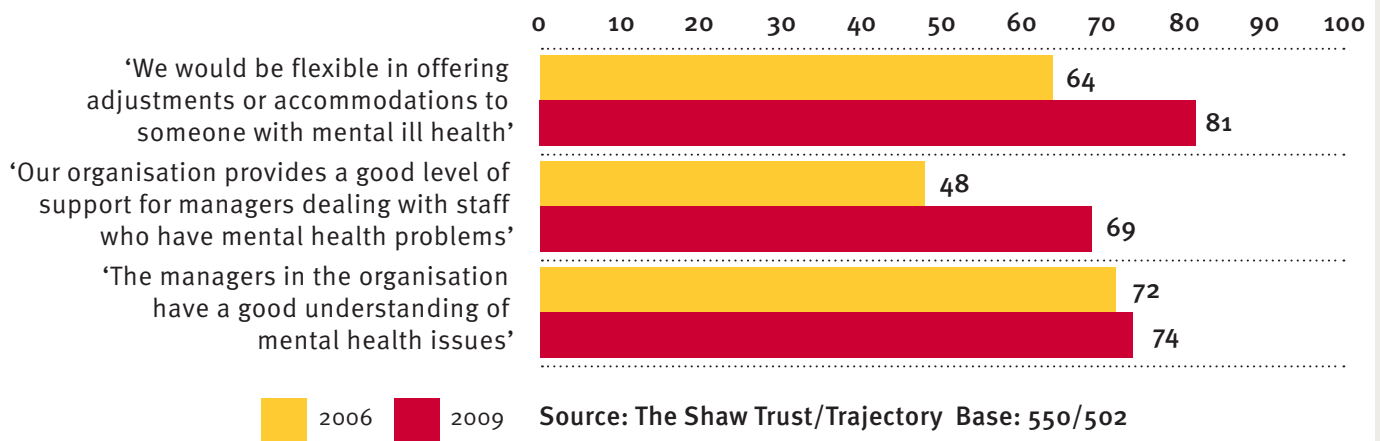
On the plus side, it is encouraging that mental health awareness is improving and that more employers feel comfortable discussing mental health with their staff. We now need organisations to formalise this and make sure a workable mental health policy is in place so that all employees and managers understand their rights and responsibilities.” **Paul Jenkins, Chief Executive, Rethink**

4. What has changed since 2006?: Support and accommodation

4.1 Progress is being made in providing support for those with mental ill health and their managers

Despite the sluggishness of the development of formalised policies, and a clamour for more clarity on the law regarding mental health, employers are increasingly confident of their own ability, and that of their organisation, to provide an adequate level of support.

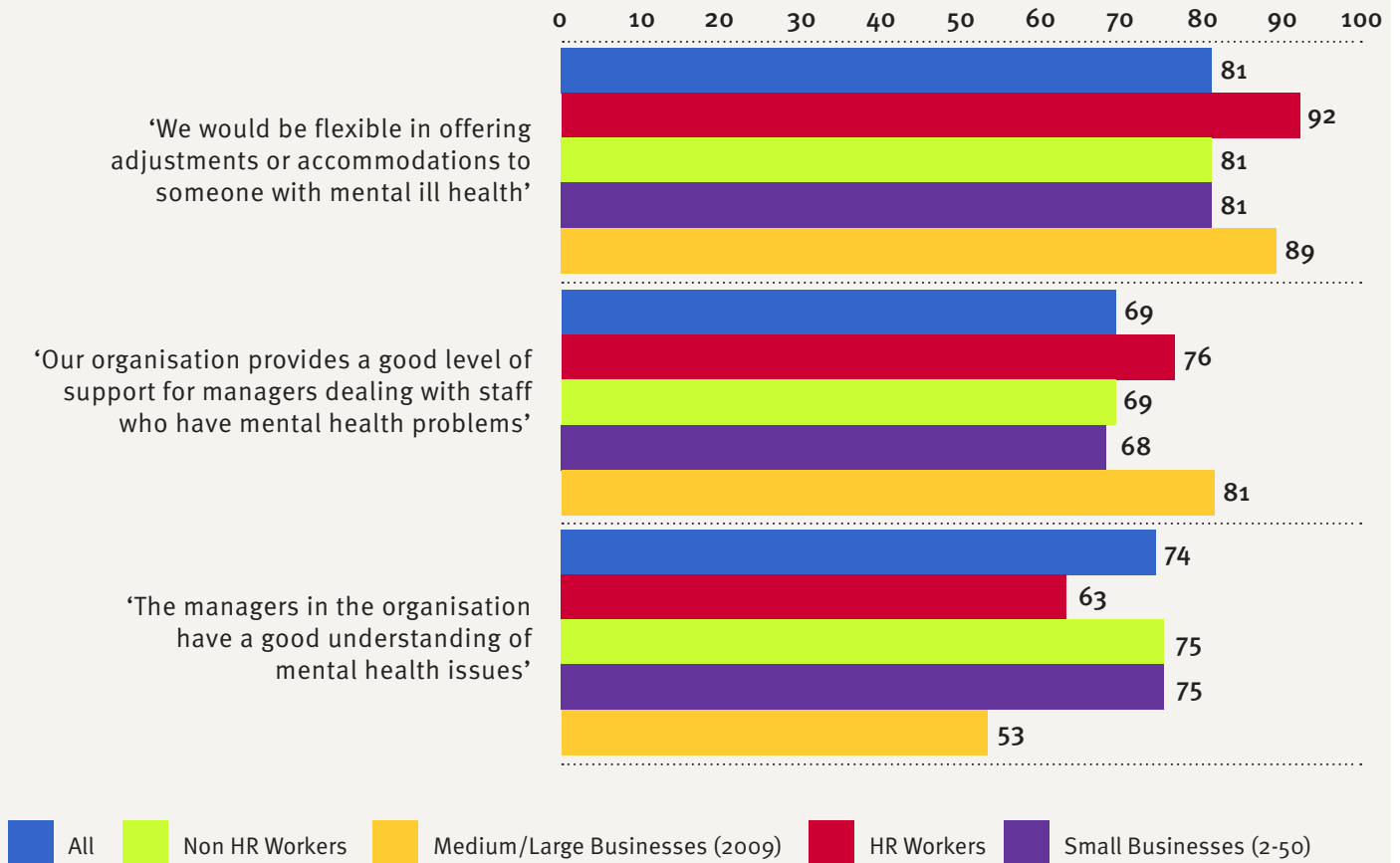
Chart 11: 'To what extent do you agree that...'



The 2009 survey revealed a strong rise in employers believing that their organisation provides a good level of support for managers (which rose from 64% to 81%). Those feeling their organisation is flexible in dealing with staff with mental ill health rose 21% to 69%. Managerial understanding of mental health issues was also rated highly, at 74%, but had increased only very slightly.

“Staff at Shaw Trust have been extremely supportive during this very difficult time. Their advice and guidance have been invaluable and without it I would still be very depressed and finding it difficult to cope with what has happened. Knowing that someone else understands what you are going through means you feel less isolated. I do not believe that my employer accepted my condition as a genuine illness and the issues I faced at work contributed to it worsening.” Shaw Trust Client

Chart 12: 'Do you agree with the following statements?' Percentage agreeing, by job title and business size, 2009



Source: The Shaw Trust/Trajectory Base: 502

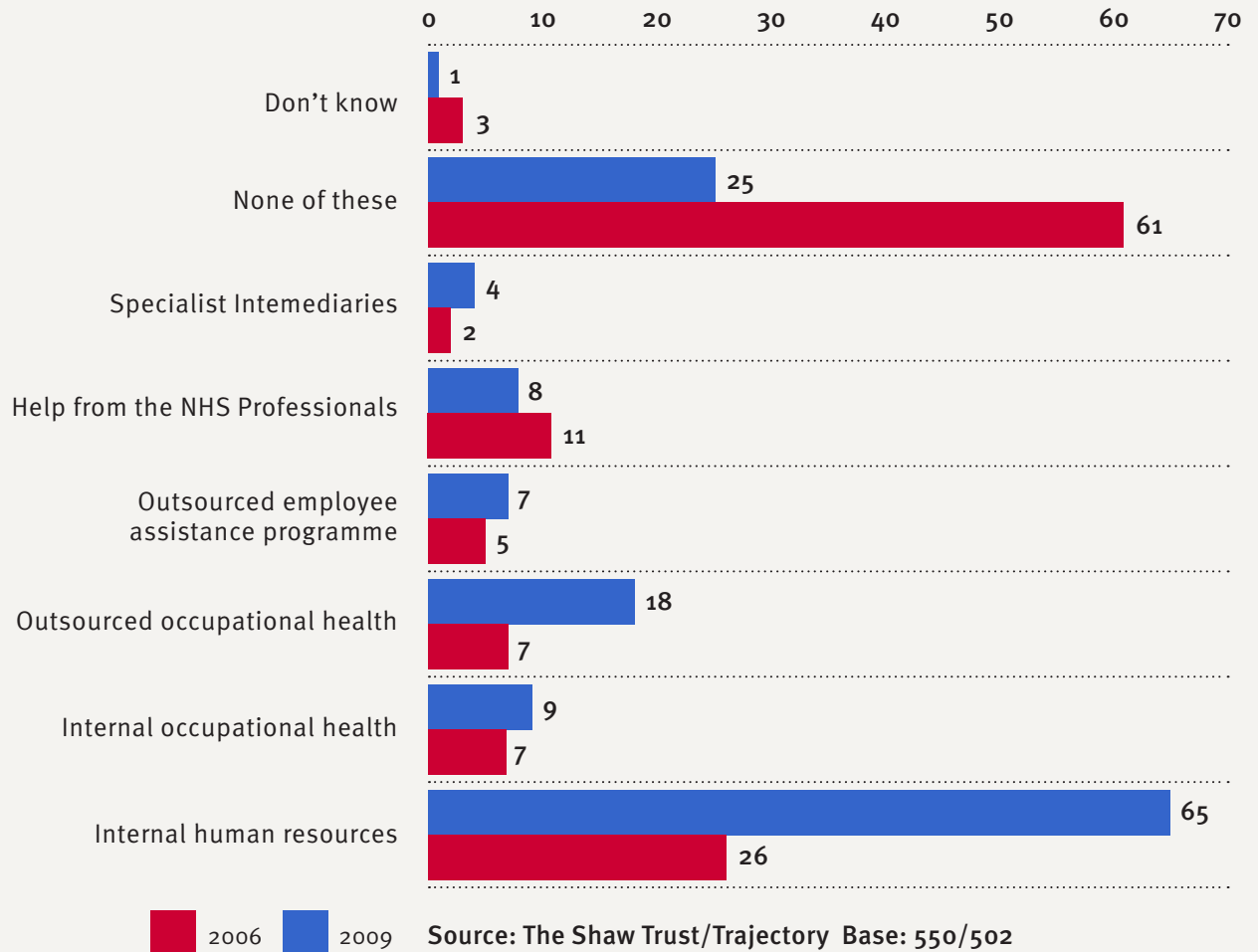
When asked to what extent they agreed that their organisation is either flexible in accommodating mental ill health sufferers, or provides a good level of support for managers dealing with staff with such complaints, larger businesses and HR managers demonstrated higher levels of support than the average.

The opposite is true of their confidence in individual managers' understanding of mental health issues. The average figure is 74%, but among HR workers this drops to 63%, and in small businesses to just 53%, indicating that confidence in managerial understanding of mental health issues is inconsistent and potentially overstated.

4.2 More organisations providing support for those suffering from mental ill health

The 2009 survey revealed a strong positive swing towards a wider use of provisions dealing with employee mental health.

Chart 13: 'Which of the following does your organisation currently use in relation to employee mental health?'



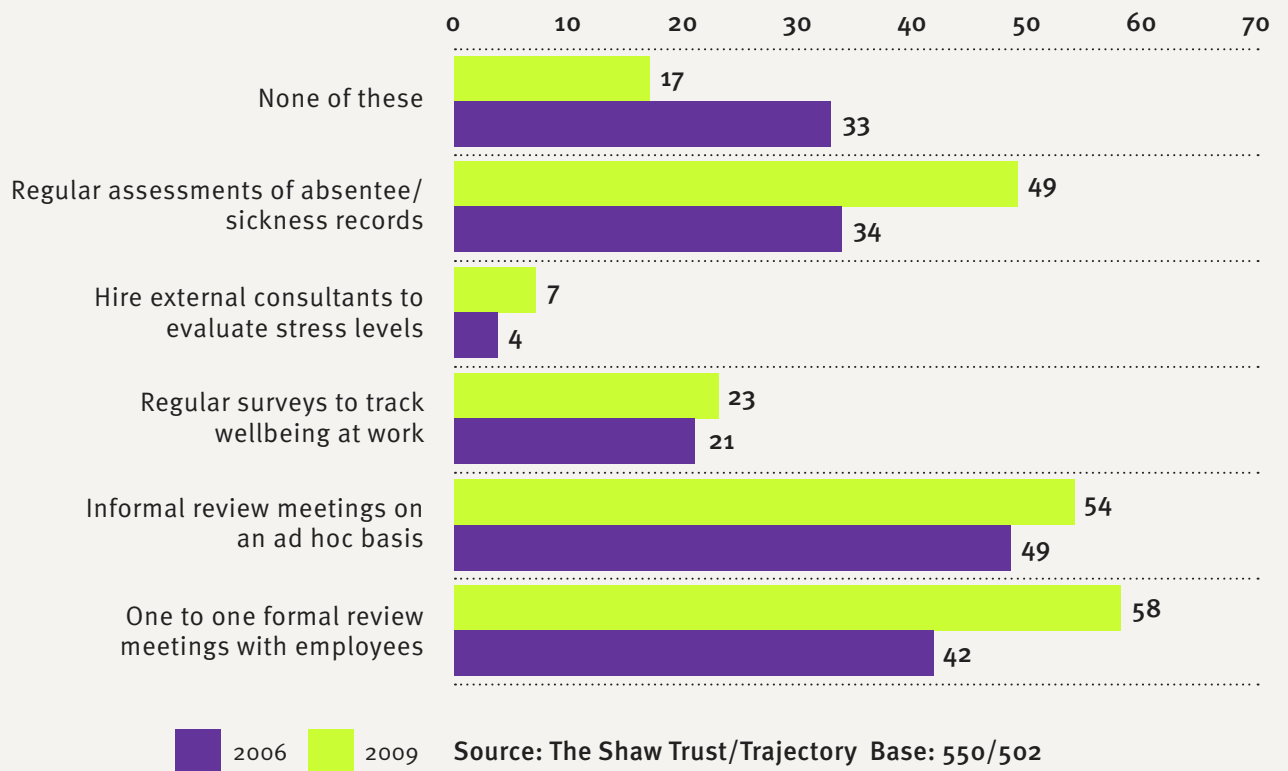
The drop in companies reporting 'none of these' corresponds to a large rise in the use of internal human resources, which increased from 26% to 65%. There was a very minor drop in the use of NHS professionals, and a rise in most all other types of provision, most notably outsourced occupational health, which rose from 7% to 18%.

HR managers were consistently more likely to reply that the company used any given type of provision (indicating, for example, that 80% use internal human resources and 32% use outsourced occupational health). Larger companies were also much more likely to use the any one of the given provisions.

The huge drop in those answering ‘none of these’ indicates an overwhelmingly positive step forward, corroborated by rises in the majority of mental health provisions. Nearly three quarters of employers now offer some form of support for members of staff suffering from mental health problems, compared to almost two-thirds in 2006 that offered none at all.

Preventative measures – aimed at combating stress in the workplace – have also been increasing.

Chart 14: ‘Which of the following measures, if any, does your organisation use to measure the stress levels of employees on an ongoing basis?’



Each method used to measure stress has increased to some extent between 2006 and 2009. The proportion answering 'none of these' has halved from a third to 17%. Some of the increases represent only minor developments, but the prevalence of one to one formal reviews has grown by 16%, and regular assessments of absentee/sickness records by 15%, indicating a strong, sustained rise in workplace initiatives to combat stress.

The figures when HR managers were asked were significantly more positive. Only 5% answered 'none of these' indicating that the vast majority of companies do measure stress levels, but that some managers are unaware of this. Every potential measure received a higher rate of response when HR responses were isolated, and the most popular, one to one formal reviews, saw 75% of HR workers agreeing that their organisation use these to measure stress. Companies with more than 50 employees responded similarly to HR workers: only 6% answered 'none of these' and were consistently more likely to agree that they used any one of the measures suggested to gauge stress levels.

While the higher scores for HR managers and larger companies are encouraging, the wide variation in figures nevertheless implies that smaller companies and those employers with no HR responsibilities are far less aware of mental health issues. Despite improvements, they remain less likely to offer preventative measures or to make accommodation for mental ill health. Awareness is often at a lower level generally. This is supported by data showing (chart 12, above) that HR managers have significantly less confidence in the ability of their non-HR colleagues to deal effectively with mental health issues in the workplace.

The danger here is the potential for inconsistencies in mental health provision at work. Some companies may offer a comprehensive support package complete with a formalised policy and high levels of staff awareness due to the presence of a robust HR department. Smaller companies, less likely to have a full-time HR manager, will find it more difficult to reach the same standard.

Summary

Generally, support systems are more widespread and inspire greater confidence than they did in 2006, but this is not the full picture. Despite improvements, HR managers continue to rate less highly the ability of their non-HR colleagues in dealing with mental health issues.

Between 2006 and 2009 there was a dramatic rise in organisations' use of various provisions designed to deal with mental health issues in the workplace – as many as three in four now offer some support. Those answering 'none' fell from 61% to 25%.

There was also a rise in organisations' use of measures aimed at preventing or assessing stress levels in the workplace. However, the wide variation in figures between larger companies or HR managers and the average implies that small businesses or those with no HR responsibility do not offer the same level of support.



“It is encouraging that attitudes towards mental health at work are improving. In particular, we welcome the finding that 90% of managers would be happy to discuss mental health with a colleague. Having the confidence to talk about mental health at work is also a sign of good communication. That’s vital for all employees, whether or not they have a mental health condition, and makes good business sense.

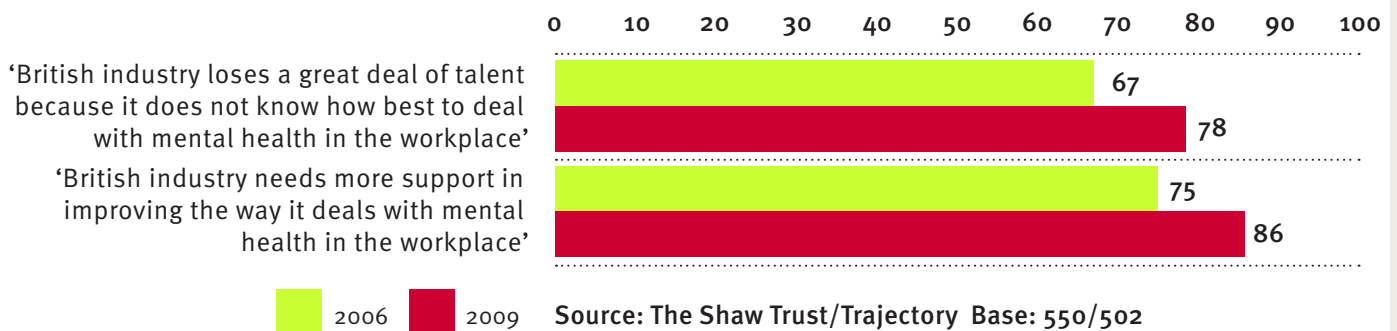
There is a clear business case for getting it right on mental health: one in four people experience mental ill health in their lifetime. No employer can afford to miss out on the talents of a quarter of the population.” **Susan Scott-Parker, Chief Executive of Employers' Forum on Disability**

5. What has changed since 2006?: The road ahead

5.1 Greater acceptance of the losses to industry from mental ill health and greater support for better understanding of the issues

Employers have been increasingly positive about their organisation's ability to deal with mental ill health, but remain aware of the impact deficiencies in mental health policies can have on British industry overall.

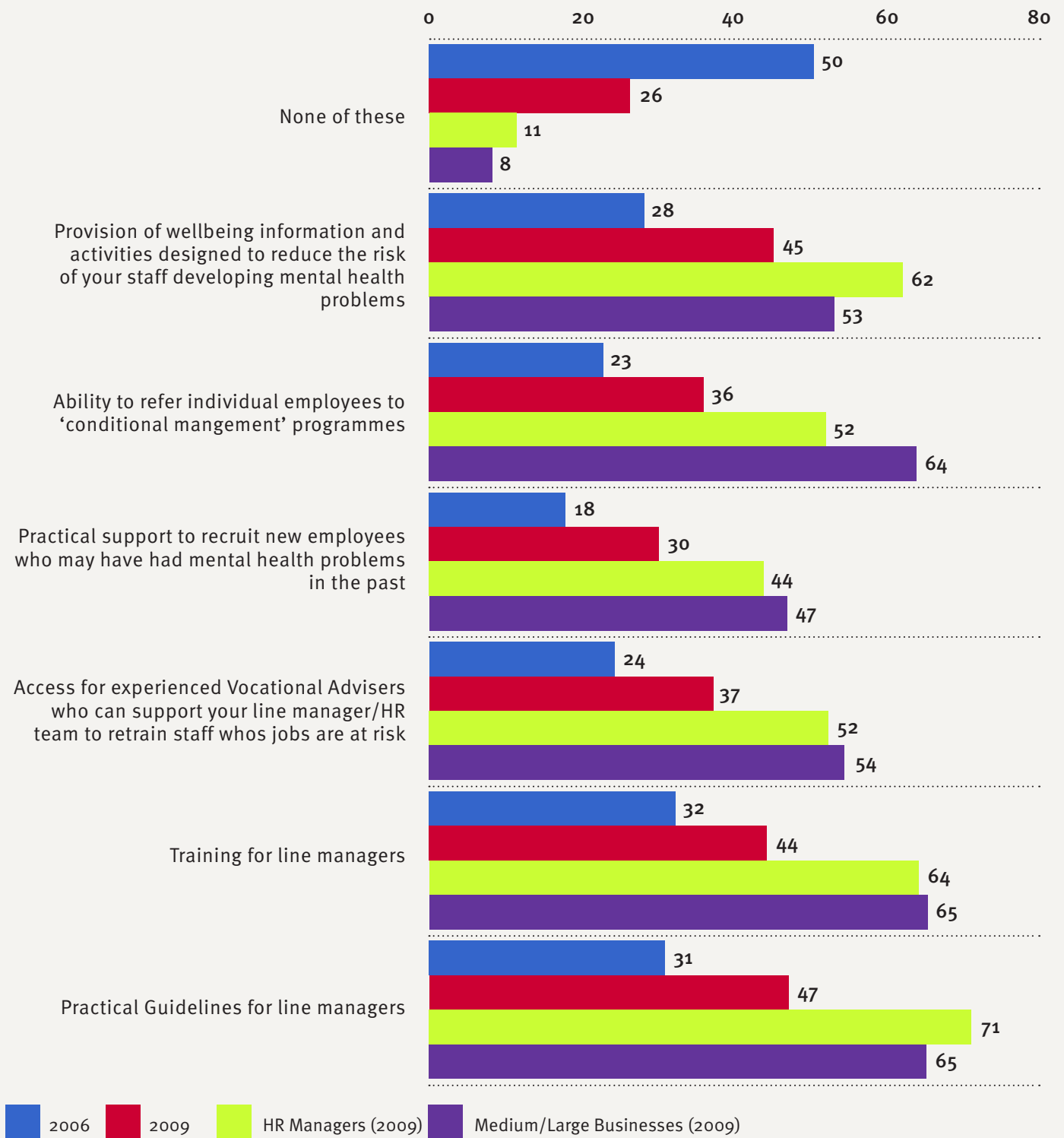
Chart 15: 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements?'
Percentage who agree, 2006/2009.



Both statements have seen significant rises in the proportion of employers agreeing with them. There was little variation in business size or job title. Roughly 8 in 10 people agree that British industry either needs more support or does not make the most of its resources as a result of its approach to mental health.

The total cost to employers of mental health problems among their staff is estimated at nearly £26 billion each year. The Centre for Mental Health, *Mental Health at Work: Developing the Business Case, 2007*

Chart 16: 'Which of the following services would your organisation benefit from?'



Source: The Shaw Trust/Trajectory Base: 550/502

The perception is not that British industry's approach to mental ill health is worsening, but that awareness of both the scope and effect of mental health disorders is growing. This represents a positive development, as more employers understand the effect of mental health on the workplace.

This also fits with the emerging trend that as awareness rises, deficiencies in some company's approach to the issue have been highlighted. Organisations appear happy to ask for help, however. The chart below demonstrates a consistent increase in support systems employers believe their company would benefit from.

There was a notable rise in support for every potential service, and a halving in the proportion of employers saying 'none of these'. Preventative measures, such as 'provision of wellbeing information' and 'guidelines for managers' grew by the most (17% and 16% respectively), but the increase was consistent across all services.

Support for better training and guidelines for line managers was notably high (44% and 47% respectively).

HR managers were consistently more likely to agree that their organisation would benefit from any given service, as were larger businesses. As much as 71% of HR managers thought that their non HR colleagues would benefit from being given practical guidelines to work from. The figures were also much higher for larger businesses, reinforcing the trend that larger businesses (perhaps more likely to have an HR department) are better equipped to deal with mental ill health and better able to assess the potential effect of mental ill health on their workplace.

Across all segments, training and guidelines for line managers were considered to be the most necessary mental health policy related services that would benefit companies.

The average employee takes seven days off sick each year of which 40 per cent are for mental health problems. This adds up to 70 million lost working days a year. The Centre for Mental Health, *Mental Health at Work: Developing the Business*

Case, 2007

Summary

Most employers agree that British industry could do more to get the best out of its workforce through changing their approach to mental ill health. 78% agree that British Industry ‘loses out’, and 86% that it ‘needs more support’.

There is also an increased willingness to agree that businesses could benefit from one or more mental health support services.

Less positively, the figures are much higher for bigger businesses and HR managers. This implies that mental health provision in smaller organisations or those without HR departments is of a lower standard.



“Mental distress is a fact of life. It can happen to any of us at any time and affects every workplace in Britain. The cost of mental ill health at work is some £1,000 a year for every person you employ. Most of that cost is hidden by the stigma that surrounds mental illness and stops people talking honestly and openly about it. Yet simple, inexpensive steps can make any workplace better able to cope with life’s stresses and support colleagues whose mental health is under strain.”

Employers have nothing to fear from employing people with a mental health problem. The vast majority of working age people with mental health problems are in work and manage their mental health successfully as well as doing their jobs. A well-managed workplace is good for business anyway and is what makes the biggest difference.”

While most people with mental health problems are in work, there remains a large group of people who have a range of mental health problems who are not in paid work in the UK. The vast majority want to work and can do so successfully. Employers who see beyond a person’s illness or disability have much to gain from giving someone a chance to prove themselves and use the skills they have to everyone’s benefit.”

Professor Bob Grove, Joint Chief Executive, Centre for Mental Health

6. Conclusions

Broader Understanding

Awareness of mental ill health in the workplace has risen since 2006. Employers were less likely to be unable to name a mental health disorder, and reporting of conditions other than 'stress' rose significantly.

The most dramatic indication of this came with the huge drop in the number of employers believing that less than one in twenty of their staff would be affected by a mental health problem at some point during their career, and a corresponding rise in those agreeing with the truer, higher, figures.

However, despite these positive developments, only 22% of employers reported that they had a formalised mental health policy, and only 21% believed that anyone they worked with had a mental health condition (though the latter figure was almost double that in 2006). This implies that in some areas, ignorance of the scope and appropriate response to mental health in the workplace is still apparent.

Deficiencies Highlighted

There was a notable rise in the acknowledgment of poor mental health understanding's cost to British Industry, with 86% admitting that they needed more support, and 78% that they 'lost out' as a result of an inadequate approach.

This was compounded by the rise in those agreeing that their business would benefit from any one of a number of additional supports, and a significant drop (from 50% to 26%) in those stating that none would be of value.

The survey responses consistently implied that awareness of mental health issues had risen since 2006. A corollary of this was the understanding that many organisations' mental health policies (or lack of) needed to change. In short, raising awareness and understanding had highlighted how little many managers knew about the implications of mental health disorders.

Increased Confidence

Managers are more aware of the challenges posed by getting to grips with mental health, but generally confident in their ability to meet them. There has been a slight fall in the number of manager's reporting that they have a good understanding of their company's mental health policy, but it remains very high, at 83%.

74% of all managers agree that they have a 'good understanding' of mental health issues (a rise from 62%) and 69% that managers receive a good level of support from their company in dealing with mental health issues (up from 48%). Furthermore, managers are increasingly happy to discuss mental health (90% with employees, and 73% with applicants).

There are some contrasting figures, however, which suggest that this willingness to engage may not be backed up by an informed understanding. 75% of managers say that they do not know enough about the law regarding mental health in the workplace, and many agree that their workforce would benefit from improved training and guidelines for managers.

Negative Views Remain

The prevalence of negative views on mental health has dropped, but not dramatically. 51% of employers agreed that 'Negative attitudes from co-workers is a major barrier to employing people with mental health conditions', compared to 53% in 2006 (a drop of just 2%). Other areas have dropped by larger amounts but remain significantly high. 40% agreed that managers took a 'significant risk' when employing someone with a mental health condition, 11% that people who have suffered in the past are 'unlikely to ever fully recover' and 23% that they are 'less reliable than other employees'.

The upshot is that it remains likely that people with mental health disorders are unlikely to avoid prejudices in the workplace. Despite the continued prominence of negative opinions, 79% of employers still expected applicants to disclose any mental health problems prior to recruitment.

“Mental health is still such a taboo in many work environments. I think because people can't see something physically wrong with you then they can't understand what you're going through. I have spent years trying to hide my condition – putting a brave face on and pretending I'm ok – yet underneath I feel like I'm in a black hole.” Shaw Trust Client

The effect of HR

In 2009, HR managers were more likely to:

- be aware of their organisation's mental health policy.
- know someone in their company with a mental health condition (twice as likely).
- be aware of mental health provisions/accommodations.
- be aware of methods used to measure stress levels.
- agree that their company would benefit from support services.

Additionally, they were less likely to be unable to name a mental health condition and less likely to have confidence in their non-HR colleagues' ability to deal with mental health issues in the workplace. There was a similar difference between smaller and larger businesses, with bigger companies consistently better equipped to deal with the problem.

The problem is that despite improvements, developments in smaller businesses, or those without HR departments remain well below bigger companies. Even in an organisation with an HR manager, other senior bosses may have a much more limited knowledge of mental health issues.

The result is that a job with an employer with an adequate mental health policy and level of understanding and awareness is no guarantee for an applicant with a mental health problem.



“The Shaw Trust is to be commended for this report as part of its ongoing commitment to tackling the last workplace taboo. On the one hand it shows a remarkable increase in mental health literacy amongst business leaders and a greater willingness to recognise and talk about mental health over just four years, on the other hand shamefully 40 per cent regard hiring a person with experience of mental distress in a customer facing role as a “significant risk” just a 6 per cent change. The stubborn stigma that we are broken, tarnished or downright dangerous remains.”

Jonathan Naess, Director, Stand To Reason

For further support . . .

Shaw Trust has developed a free online resource for line managers to help them feel more confident and comfortable to recognise the early warning signs of mental ill health and support and manage employees in a positive way. www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk

Business in the Community provides a free online resource to support line managers to develop their emotional resilience and that of their teams. www.managingemployeewellbeing.com/bitc/

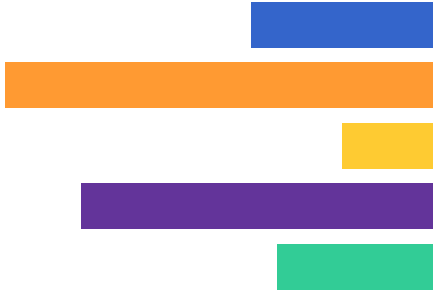
Centre for Mental Health offers workplaces basic training in recognising the signs of depression and knowing how to respond well when a colleague becomes unwell. www.impactondepression.co.uk

Employers Forum on Disability has a line managers guide to non visible disabilities. www.efd.org.uk/publications/non-visible-disabilities-line-manager-guide

Mind Workplace provides consultancy and training for organisations that want to develop and improve the mental wellbeing of their staff. www.mind.org.uk/workplace

Rethink provide a line managers guide for local authorities www.mentalhealthshop.org/products/rethink_publications/we_can_work_it_out.html and a guide for employees with a mental health condition www.mentalhealthshop.org/products/rethink_publications/working_it_out.html

Time to Change offer some resources to support employers and employees at www.time-to-change.org.uk



About Shaw Trust

Shaw Trust is a national charity supporting almost 80,000 people in disadvantaged circumstances across the UK every year to overcome obstacles to employment, inclusion and independence.

If you would like to work with us, find out how we can support you or make a donation visit www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Commissioned by:



Funded by:



Written by:

