



Huawei and Red Consultancy

The restrictions put in place to tackle COVID-19 have had a significant impact to our daily lives. The way we live, work, communicate and interact have changed dramatically and this has been challenging and difficult for many as we come to terms with limited physical interactions, restrictions on gatherings and new working practices.

As lockdown restrictions are ongoing and likely to continue for some time, the true long-term impacts are as yet unknown. In these abnormal times, with no historical precedence, it's hard to predict how this affecting the British public. As a result, Huawei have collaborated with The Stress Management Society to gain an understanding of the state of the nations' wellbeing.

Research completed on 2000 participants, identified that 65% people in the UK have felt more stressed since the COVID-19 restrictions began in March 2020. The three key causes for concern are feelings of disconnection, uncertainty, and a worrying loss of control.

(Missing friends and family 57%, Uncertainty of when things will get back to normal 46%, Being confined to the home 41%, The changing rules around lockdown 34%, Fearing for the future post-Covid 34%, Money worries 30%)

The results show that Females (72%) report as more stressed than males (58%). Those in full-time employment (73%), and in particular front-line workers behind a counter (85%), in hospitals (80%) and education (76%), along with Students (78%) and people between the ages of 18-24 (79%) have all felt an increase in their stress levels.

Scotland (66%), Wales (66%) and Northern Ireland (55) have reported feeling more stressed since March 2020. However, England has the most stressed regions of the UK; the North West (71%), North East (70%) and London (70%) all agree/strongly agree to feeling more stressed since the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Due to the restrictions of movement, many people have turned to technology as a form of escapism, entertainment, or for socialising with friends or family. They have also benefitted by using apps to de-stress or motivate themselves; people between 25-34 used more technology for this purpose during the pandemic than the other age groups.

A high percentage of respondents indicated that they are feeling more anxious (53%) and more depressed (44%) than usual. A way to tackle these feeling of isolation and loneliness is to keep connected with your support network, whether this be friends, family, neighbours or colleagues. It is encouraging to see that the majority (52%) of the survey sample reported that they keep a support network.

Providing empathetic support by listening, being informed about mental ill-health, asking questions and encouraging discussion is a great way to aid people to comfortably express their feeling and emotions. This is important as the survey showed that whilst 52% reported being able to express their feelings and emotions, 19% disagreed/strongly disagreed with this statement.

Technology is a double-edged sword; if we over-engage, are 'always on' or 'too available', it can be a source of stress. As the evidence indicates, it also presents us with a massive opportunity to positively affect our wellbeing if applied strategically.

The survey results show that many of the stressors are examples of 'What if...?' thinking; things that are worst case scenarios, are out of our control or have not happened yet. 36% (all of



the time/most of the time) found it difficult to concentrate, have been easily distracted, and 39% (all of the time/most of the time) have been feeling unmotivated.

Practicing a form of meditation or mindfulness can help people to be less distracted with the 'What if' and more aware of the 'here and now'. Mindfulness can give us more insight into thoughts, feelings and body sensations to improve our connection with the present.

The data suggests that the Covid-19 restrictions have left many people feeling disempowered. The definition of the word power is 'the ability to do or act'. At The Stress Management Society, we are passionate about wellbeing; our message is one of support and empowering people – we will always ask 'What could you do instead?'. One of the easiest ways to get daily support is signing up to one of the apps like Headspace who offer short and easy to follow mindfulness exercises.

Neil Shah, Chief De-Stressing Officer at The Stress Management Society says.

'It's inevitable that every single one of us has been impacted in one way or another by the events of the last 12 months – and as we find ourselves living in a strange dystopian reality, it is imperative that we find strategies to increase our resilience to cope with the unfamiliar, uncertain and challenging times we find ourselves living through.'

Mindfulness has proven to be a powerful and practical technique to bring yourself to the present moment – given much of our stress and anxiety stems from things that haven't happened yet, and we are often worried and upset by past events, our ability to bring ourselves back to the present moment is a wonderful way to 'reset' ourselves'.

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