

3 in 4 Workers Hid Work-Related Distress in the Past Year, Survey Finds

New research reveals that concealment is the default response to workplace stress, with nearly 40% of workers calling in sick and giving a fake reason.

HARRISBURG, PA, UNITED STATES, August 14, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Three out of four American workers did something to hide work-related distress in the past year, according to a new survey of 2,000 US-based working adults conducted by Founder Reports. Only 10.8% told a manager or HR representative what they were going through.

The [2026 Workplace Wellbeing Report](#) surveyed workers on how often their job affects their wellbeing, who they can actually be honest with, whether they've used their employer's mental health resources, and what they've done to conceal their struggles. By measuring all of these in the same group of respondents, the study connects support access, concealment behavior, and coping strategies at the individual level.

The study's most concrete finding is also its most costly. 38.8% of workers called in sick in the past year and gave a reason other than the real one. Among workers experiencing daily work-related stress, 52.3% have done this.

The rate rises steeply with strain, and regression analysis shows that full-time workers are roughly 33% more likely than part-time workers to report a fake sick day. Women are about 25% more likely than men.

Among workers affected by work stress daily, 88.3% concealed something and 26.9% did three or more concealment behaviors. Each step up the strain scale roughly doubles the odds of concealment in the study's regression model.

Meanwhile, 67.5% of the entire workforce concealed something in the past year and never told anyone at work. Among workers affected weekly or daily, that figure climbs to 78.7%.

The report identifies a segment of the workforce carrying significant stress with no support system in place. Among the 949 workers affected by stress weekly or daily, 76.7% have neither used an employer benefit nor have anyone inside their company they could be honest with. Roughly one in five workers across the full sample is dealing with weekly or daily distress while having no formal support, no internal confidant, and no AI-based outlet.

Within that group, 86.3% have done something to conceal their stress, and 45.8% have called in sick under a false reason.

[The study found](#) that 38.8% of workers say their employer offers no mental health support. Another 11.2% aren't sure whether anything exists. Among those who do have a benefit available, only 21.3% have ever used it.

Benefit utilization barely responds to need. Workers affected a few times a year use their employer's mental health support at 21.8%. Workers affected daily use it at 23.0%. Over the same range, the share of workers turning to an AI chatbot for work stress climbs from 38.3% to 52.9%.

Overall, 42.6% of workers have used an AI chatbot to talk through work stress or frustration, compared to 10.7% who have ever used their employer's mental health resources.

Concealment rates are statistically indistinguishable between managers and individual contributors, running at 76.7% and 76.0% respectively. Leaders aren't more willing to speak up. They are, however, more likely to turn to AI for work stress, with 50.2% of managers and above reporting AI use compared to 39.3% of individual contributors.

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