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Introduction to Health and Exercise Psychology

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Workplace stress is something that most people will experience at some point in their lives. For young adults, especially those aged between 18 and 34, stress at work can feel really overwhelming and can get the better of them. With the rising cost of living, growing job insecurity, and constant pressure to perform, many young people in the UK are finding it harder to stay mentally well while trying to build their careers. In 2024, stress isn't just about having a bad day at work. It's become a serious issue linked to poor mental health, anxiety and burnout (Law et al., 2020). This essay will explore how workplace stress is affecting young adults in the UK today, what damage mental health can cause, and what we can do to make things better.

Stress related to work has become one of the biggest health concerns for workers in the UK. According to recent figures, over 875,000 people in the UK reported suffering from stress, depression or anxiety because of work in 2023, and many of these were young adults (Mental Health Foundation, 2023). Some of the pressure young people face isn't just coming from their jobs, it's also linked to financial instability, job insecurity, and long-lasting impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. For many, trying to balance demanding workloads with low pay, limited control of their job, and fewer opportunities to progress can feel very difficult (Clarke, 2024). Adding in student loan repayments, rising rent prices, and a competitive job market, there's no surprise that stress levels are high. According to a 2023 report, mental health issues now account for a large part of long-term sickness in people under 35 (Mental Health Foundation, 2023). Some young adults tend to say that mental health problems have forced them to leave their jobs. Employers are beginning to recognise how widespread the problem is. Some employers are introducing mental health policies and employee support schemes (Spill, 2025). But despite these efforts, young people still don't talk about mental health at work. Many young people don't feel safe being open about how they're coping, which would only add to their stress.

Stress doesn't just make people feel tired or irritable, it can seriously affect mental health over time. For young adults in the workplace, stress is linked with mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and burnout. When someone constantly feels under pressure and unsupported, it can become difficult to concentrate, stay motivated, or even enjoy life outside of work. A review by Franke et al. (2024) found that high job demands, lack of control, and low recognition at work all play a key role in rising depression and anxiety rates. For most young workers, it's often their first time

experiencing and managing these pressures, and many haven't yet developed strong coping strategies. One study found that young workers experiencing heavy workloads and little support were significantly more likely to report emotional exhaustion and symptoms of depression (Law et al., 2020).

Another problem is that stress builds up over time. Even when it doesn't cause a full-blown mental health crisis, it can leave young adults feeling disengaged, unmotivated, and emotionally drained (Spill, 2025). Around 38% of young adult workers in the UK say they feel this way regularly. When looking at long-term, chronic stress can lead to burnout, a state of complete emotional and physical exhaustion. This not only harms the individual, but also affects businesses. According to Mind (2024), poor mental health costs UK employers over “56 billion pounds a year” through lost productivity, absence, and staff turnover. There is a clear personal and economic cost to ignoring workplace stress.

There are proven strategies that can make a big difference in tackling stress and supporting young workers. Below are three key approaches that can help reduce stress and support better mental health for young adults at work.

Changing the ways jobs are designed

One of the most effective ways to tackle stress is by looking at the environment of young people's work. This means changing how jobs are structured, and making sure that workers have more control over their tasks and schedules. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) recommends things like flexible hours, reasonable workload, and clear communication from management. When workers feel like they have a say in how they do their job, get to express their ideas, and that their wellbeing matters, they're less likely to become stressed. Franke et al. (2024) found that when workplaces made an effort to take steps to reduce job strain, like lowering workload or increasing employee independence, mental health outcomes improved. Flexible working models introduced during the pandemic have also shown lasting benefits, mainly for younger employees who value work-life balance (Jimoh et al., 2023). Making changes in the business might seem costly at first, but the return on such an investment can be significant. The Mental Health Foundation (2023) reports that for every £1 spent on workplace health initiatives, employers can expect £5 back in reduced absences and increased productivity.

Teaching techniques that reduce stress

While changing workplace environment is important, giving individuals the tools to manage stress can also make a real difference. Approaches like cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness, and resilience training can help people better understand their stress and deal with it more effectively. Cognitive behavioural therapy helps people reframe negative thoughts and develop healthier ways to respond to pressure. It's been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety and emotional exhaustion (Wikipedia, 2025). Mindfulness practices, like deep breathing and meditation, can help workers stay focused and calm, even in high-stress environments (BMJ Open, 2021). Apps or guided sessions in the workplace can introduce young workers to these techniques in a very easy and accessible way. Horton International (2023) found that companies offering mental wellness training saw clear improvements in how staff coped with stress. Similarly, Sutarto et al. (2021) reported positive outcomes using guided breathing exercise in workplaces.

Building stronger social support networks at work

One of the best ways to deal with stress is by having people to talk to. For young workers, creating new and developing current relationships in the workplace can boost resilience and reduce feelings of isolation. Support from coworkers, whether it's peer groups, mentorship, or just having someone there who listens, has shown to reduce stress levels and improve emotional well-being (Verywell Mind, 2024). Creating an environment where people check in with one another and where it's okay to ask for help can go a long way. Some workplaces have introduced peer support networks, where trained staff members act as go-to people for mental health concerns (Franke et al., 2024). This strategy is very effective in high-pressure environments like healthcare, but can be adapted for all different types of workplaces. Social connection also improves engagement. A workplace where people feel like they belong is one where they will most likely succeed (Wikipedia, 2025).

No single strategy will solve the problem of work-related stress for young adults, but a combined approach can lead to real change. Employers must offer individual tools like stress management training, but also commit to changing the work environment and helping people to grow supportive relationships. Most importantly, these changes need to be made permanent and long-term without this, it would just be a recurring thing. Continued research and regular feedback from young employees can help develop new strategies and ensure the current ones stay relevant and effective (Jimoh et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Work-related stress among young adults in the UK is a growing concern with serious mental health consequences. However, it's not an unsolvable problem. By making workplace environments more flexible and supportive, teaching skills that will help employees cope with these issues, and finding and encouraging strong peer support, we can create environments where young people can work, grow, and stay mentally well. It's very important to act on this now, and the evidence shows it's definitely worth the time and effort

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