

Multi-national survey reveals 75% of asthma sufferers are unable to work to their full potential

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A new multi-national survey has revealed that asthma sufferers are missing nearly one-tenth of work hours due to their symptoms, which

also results in a loss of productivity and affects their emotional wellbeing.

The World Health Organisation estimates that 235 million people around the world suffer from [asthma](#). But little is known about the impact of asthma on symptomatic people's ability to work.

This new research, published in the *Journal of Asthma and Allergy*, surveyed over 1,500 symptomatic asthma patients across six countries and found that, on average three out of four workers could not work to their full potential.

Further, the survey indicated that asthma impacted the respondent's emotional well-being, including mental strain and embarrassment.

A research team, led by Dr. Kevin Gruffydd-Jones from Box Surgery, Wiltshire, UK, invited a random selection of participants from Brazil, Canada, Germany, Japan, Spain and the UK to participate in an online "Work Productivity and Activity Impairment—Specific Health Problem" survey developed by Research Now (London, UK).

The survey quantified the impact of asthma on [work time](#) missed, loss of productivity while working and total work productivity loss for the seven days prior to the survey.

In addition, the questionnaire asked the open-ended question, "How does your asthma at work make you feel?" to judge the impact of a patient's asthma symptoms on their emotional well-being at work.

Respondents were selected to participate in the survey if they were over 18 years old, diagnosed with asthma by a healthcare professional, currently employed full- or part-time and a long-term user of a controller inhaler or preventative medication.

A total of 1,598 symptomatic patients completed the 5-minute [survey](#) between April and September 2015.

The study results found that, on average, up to one-tenth (9.3%) of work hours were missed in a single week because of workers' asthma symptoms.

This averaged out to 5.4 work hours missed for both part- and full-time employees. Further, roughly three out of four (74%) workers reported being unable to work to their full potential because of their asthma, with 42% of workers experiencing a 'prominent' reduction in productivity. Workers commonly reported feeling challenged by respiratory symptoms, as well as tiredness/weakness, mental strain and physical impairments.

Overall, total [work productivity](#) dropped by one third (36%) due to asthma.

"But, what struck us most was the emotional response to asthma in the workplace," explains Dr. Gruffydd-Jones. "A significant number of patients felt guilt, shame and embarrassment when using inhalers at work."

Respondents also reported feeling inferior and disadvantaged compared to their non-symptomatic colleagues, and over two-thirds of respondents felt that asthma negatively impacted their work activities.

Despite capturing a one-week snapshot from a working year only, without comparison with asymptomatic patients or personnel with no asthma, this study highlights the global issue of asthma in the workplace, its impact on [productivity](#) and the personal challenges it causes workers.

The solution, Dr. Gruffydd-Jones explains, requires a coordinated

approach by clinicians, employers and occupational health teams.

"Clinicians must ask patients about the impact of asthma on their work and employers must encourage their workers to seek medical help and provide an 'asthma friendly' environment.

"This requires not only providing appropriate environmental controls but also a working environment that minimizes embarrassment, such as allowing to staff to move out of the immediate work environment to use their inhalers."

More information: Kevin Gruffydd-Jones et al.

Asthma impacts on workplace productivity in employed patients who are symptomatic despite background therapy: a multinational survey

, *Journal of Asthma and Allergy* (2019). [DOI: 10.2147/JAA.S204278](https://doi.org/10.2147/JAA.S204278)

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