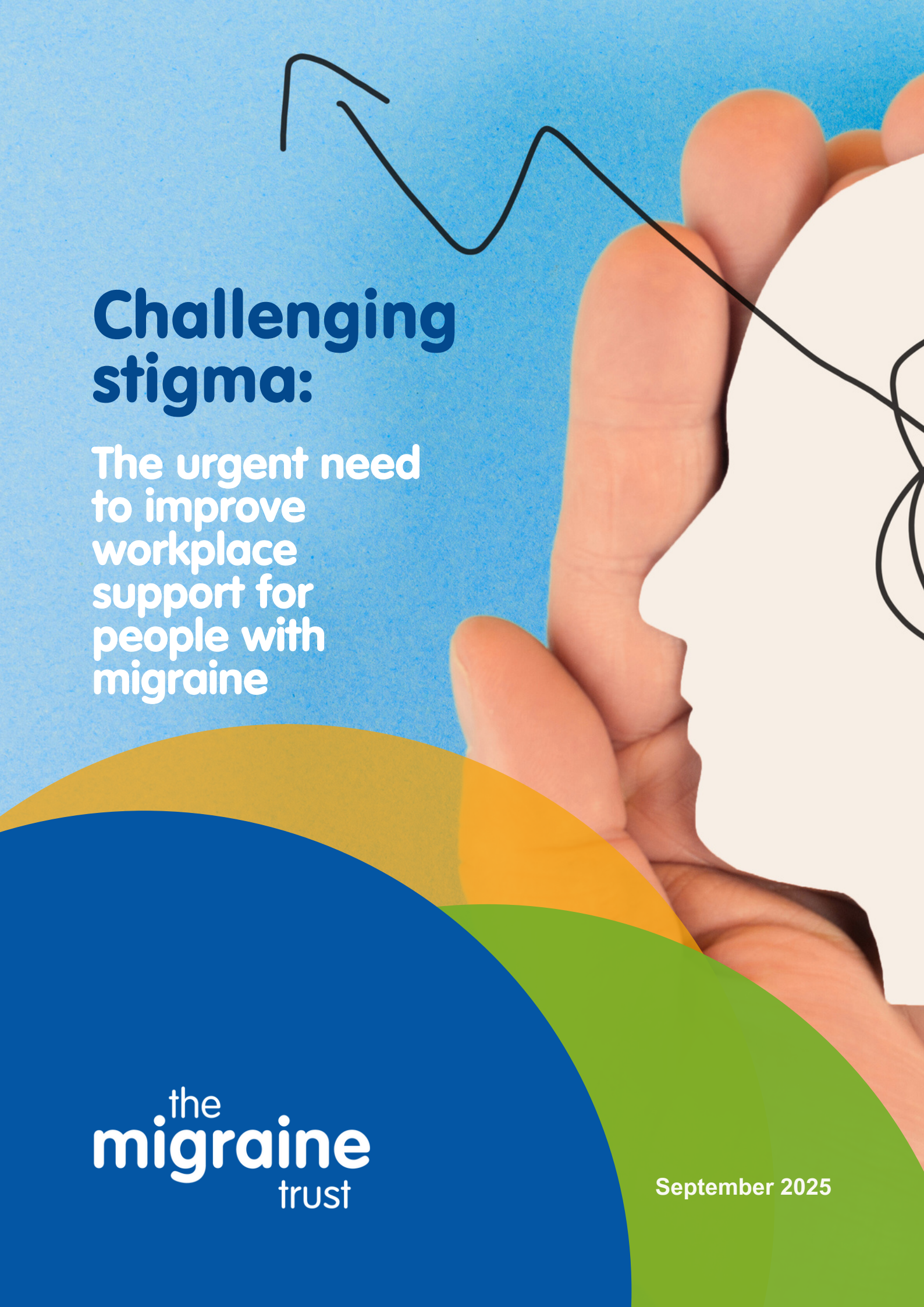




Challenging stigma:

The urgent need
to improve
workplace
support for
people with
migraine

the
migraine
trust

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The case for change

One in seven people in the UK live with migraine - around 10 million adults - meaning that many employers are likely to have a team member, or members, who are affected. Migraine is a long-term neurological condition which has severe and often debilitating symptoms.

Yet migraine remains an often misunderstood and stigmatised condition and is often dismissed as 'just a headache'. As a result, those with the condition often do not receive the support they need, including in the workplace.

Previous research by The Migraine Trust in 2024 found 27% of people with migraine have faced significant financial difficulties as a consequence.¹

In addition to the personal impact, including on finances and mental wellbeing, the Work Foundation estimates that migraine leads to 86 million lost workdays each year, costing the UK economy more than £8.8 billion in lost productivity through absenteeism and presenteeism.²

However, with small adjustments, many workplaces can become migraine friendly, enabling more of their team members with migraine to continue working or re-enter work. This is good for individuals' wellbeing and financial security, for employers' retention and productivity and for the wider economy.

 **“Chronic migraine impacts my whole life. I've lost my job, my whole career. There's just no support in the workplace.”¹**

Our research

To understand the impact of migraine in the workplace we conducted two UK-wide surveys in 2025, one of 2,141 people with migraine and one of 2,000 people of working age (16-64) who do not experience migraine.

Among those with migraine, 85% were female and 65% were aged between 35 and 64. 49% said they have chronic migraine, experiencing 15 or more headache days a month with at least 8 of those having migraine symptoms; 41% experience migraine with aura; 14% experience vestibular migraine and 10% experience hemiplegic migraine. 76% have lived with migraine for over 6 years.

12% were not working due to migraine, with 33% in full time work, 16% in part-time work and 7% self employed. Others were looking for work, retired or not in work for reasons such as having caring responsibilities.

Understanding migraine

One of the most striking findings was how widespread misconceptions about migraine are. 68% of those without migraine were unaware of what the condition really is, with many thinking it is just a headache, a mood swing or a psychological issue.³

Those with migraine reported feeling they are not believed (65%) and regularly having their migraine dismissed as an exaggeration or an excuse (66%).⁴ Three quarters (77%) feel that people do not take migraine seriously and joke about the condition.

In reality, for many people migraine symptoms can be so debilitating that they have a serious impact on their mental health. Previous research has found that 34% of people with migraine have had suicidal thoughts and that 7% have these thoughts frequently.⁵ High numbers report migraine impacting their relationships, ability to socialise, work and mental health.

“Colleagues see it as an excuse and headache so now I have lost their respect and support.”

Impact in the workplace

A significant 91% of those with migraine said they have worked while experiencing migraine symptoms, with many using annual or unpaid leave to avoid taking sick days. In contrast, those without migraine were more likely to use migraine as an ‘excuse’ to avoid work and associated it with being lazy. Less than 20% were likely to believe someone who called in sick because of migraine.

The implications of misconceptions and stigma are sobering: 15% of people with migraine have previously been forced to move from full-time to part-time work and 19% have had to leave a job entirely.

Fear of the consequences of disclosing migraine has meant that two thirds have previously not taken sick leave when experiencing a migraine attack because they worried about being disciplined or losing their job, or because they had previously been treated badly for doing so. 59% would not be comfortable talking to their line manager about their migraine and fewer than 20% would be comfortable talking to their organisation’s HR. 58% of people had avoided telling an employer about their migraine at all, worrying that they may not be hired, promoted or taken seriously.

“Work is not at all aware or sympathetic, other staff have time off and understanding for viruses or family commitments...or time to exercise, but I don't.”

This reluctance to speak out about migraine is concerning, yet understandable when considered with the views of those who do not have migraine. 24% of business owners, 34% of senior managers and 41% of C-level executives say they would be 'very concerned' about hiring a qualified candidate with migraine. This highlights a serious inequity, as well as potential discrimination against people with migraine.

Encouragingly, almost half (46%) of respondents without migraine said that they would like to learn more about migraine and how it can affect people in the workplace, demonstrating a desire to remedy these misconceptions.

We need to see a shift in workplace culture so that migraine is understood, adjustments are made, and people feel supported rather than stigmatised. This will benefit employees, employers and the wider economy.

Practical support

Common work-related triggers for migraine can include lighting, noise and smells in the workplace, stress, screen use, working long hours with lack of regular breaks and changes in routine when shift working.

Many employers are not aware that the adjustments required to transform a person's ability to work are often straightforward and low-cost. With a supportive employer and some adjustments where necessary, the majority of people with migraine are better able to manage their migraine in the workplace.

Whilst the requirements of people with migraine will vary, things such as flexible work times, glare-reducing screen covers and allowing regular breaks may be helpful for people with migraine. However, our research shows that 37% of people with migraine did not request adjustments because they did not realise they were able to or because they did not feel comfortable doing so.

Migraine, disability and legal rights

Whether or not a person's migraine is considered a disability will depend on the frequency and severity of their migraine attacks and how much they impact on normal day-to-day activities. When someone's migraine is considered a disability, employers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to support them in the workplace.

It may not be feasible for an organisation or employer to make every change. However, it is against the law to discriminate against someone due to their disability. This can include treating them less favourably, making them redundant or disciplining them.

You can find more information about [migraine, disability and legal rights here](#).



I have a small private office where I can work in the dark, I have anti glare screens and can take a break when needed...and if needed am allowed to work from home. They listen and adapt which has meant I have felt supported and actually think my quality of work has improved.

Take action

Despite affecting so many people, migraine is regularly misunderstood or dismissed. Improving awareness of what migraine really means, and addressing its impact in the workplace, could improve not only employee wellbeing but also productivity.

Join The Migraine Trust in advocating for the best possible support for the 1 in 7 people who live with migraine and increased recognition for migraine in policy-making.

Your support could involve:

- Helping to change the perception of what migraine means so that the condition is better understood and taken seriously so that people living with migraine get the support they deserve. This can be done across your organisation or throughout your sector by advocating for the inclusion of migraine in relevant health and work policies.
- Promoting our [Toolkits](#) for employees and employers across your networks, to your organisation's leadership and to colleagues. They provide details on reasonable adjustments, how to communicate constructively with employers about migraine and what support and protections are available.
- If you are an employer, signing up to our [Workplace Pledge](#)⁶ and taking part in our tailored workplace training to learn how to support your team.
 - The Workplace Pledge allows employers to demonstrate that they understand the impact of migraine and want to create a culture in which staff living with the condition feel supported.
 - Our tailored [workplace training](#) for staff, as well as for HR and leadership teams, focuses on how to effectively support employees with migraine to stay in work.



More information

For updates and more information, please email campaigns@migrainetrust.org

References

- 1 The Migraine Trust survey of 2,028 people with migraine, conducted between 29 May and 30 June 2024.
- 2 Respondent to The Migraine Trust's survey of more than 2,100 people with migraine, conducted through SurveyMonkey between June and July of 2025.
- 3 The Work Foundation (2018), Society's Headache: the Socioeconomic Impact of Migraine. <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/media/lancaster-university/contentassets/documents/lums/work-foundation/SocietysHeadacheTheSocioeconomicimpactofmigraine.pdf>
- 4 The Migraine Trust survey of 2,000 people of working age (16 - 64) in the UK (16-64) who do not suffer from migraine. Conducted in June 2025 by Censuswide, which is a member of the British Polling Council.
- 5 The Migraine Trust survey of more than 2,100 people with migraine, conducted through SurveyMonkey between June and July of 2025.
- 6 The Migraine Trust survey of 2,028 people with migraine, conducted in 2024.
- 7 This can also be found at <https://migrainetrust.org/get-involved/the-migraine-trusts-workplace-pledge/>



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