

Home Alone, India Inc's Pros Have Stress for Company

Data from counselling firms show a 35-40% increase in the number of cases of stress and panic attack in April over previous months

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Mumbai: Social isolation and work from home seem to have started eating into the minds of working professionals.

There has been a 35-40% increase in the number of cases of stress and panic attack in April over previous months, according to data from counselling firms. A large number of the callers seek cure for mental stress arising out of social isolation and the work-from-home milieu—leading to anxiety, depression, loneliness, newly formed OCDs (obsessive-compulsive disorder), and even fear of death in certain cases. Many large companies are wa-

king up to this problem and some are already hiring mental health professionals to deal with the situation. Companies such as Lupin, Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra and TVS & Sons are seeking professional help to enable their employees deal with stress.

"Social isolation has become a challenge across industries," Lupin's global human resources president Yashwant Mahadik said. The pharma company is currently in the process of signing up with a provider of employee assistance programme (EAP) for mental wellness of employees. "After a week or so (of working from home) people have started to miss the office routine," Mahadik said.



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Times have never been better for counselling firms, which have seen a massive surge in number of clients.

Take, for instance, Itohelp.net, which has signed up 40 new companies in April alone—corporate

clients usually take months to enter a counselling contract.

Optum, another health and wellness company has seen a threefold increase in calls over the past one month. Amber Alam, Optum's director

for EAP and wellness services (Asia Pacific), cited the example of a professional who reached out to the company seeking counselling assistance. The person has decided to divorce his wife and quit job too as he found working and helping in the house too strenuous. "Things have changed and have become tense ever since he has started working from home," said Alam.

"Employers are recognising the need for mental health support during these challenging times," said Itohelp.net director Archana Bisht. The stress from social isolation as a result of work from home increased further due to issues related to dealing with children, helping elders and also psychological

issues like claustrophobia, panic attacks, depression, hypochondriasis, apart from the uncertainties around the pandemic as well as fear of death, said experts. Economic insecurity is further adding to the worries in addition to the fear of losing jobs and fear of the future.

"This kind of sale (of counselling services) is highly unusual for us as our sales cycle is pretty long; decision-making around hiring mental health counsellors in companies can take many months," said Bisht.

The sudden spike in demand for counselling services is predominantly on account of the absence of EAP programmes in many companies.