

UK leader cracks down on 'sick note culture'

22nd April 2024



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has announced plans to crack down on what he has labelled Britain's "sick note culture". The leader believes there are too many people in the UK claiming welfare benefits because of mental health issues. He said welfare

payments were a drain on the economy, and the number of people not working was creating labour shortages. The number of sick notes issued by doctors has risen sharply since the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. The most common diagnoses being given by doctors are related to mental health and behavioural disorders. Sunak said: "We need to change the sick note culture, so the default becomes what work you can do not what you can't."

Mr Sunak has emphasised the need to get people back into employment. He said: "We need to be more ambitious about helping people back to work, and more honest about the risk of over-medicalising the everyday challenges and worries of life." He added: "Half of people becoming inactive over the last year cited depression and anxiety." Opponents of Sunak's plans say his government caused the current crisis. The mental health charity Mind said: "The truth is that...services are at breaking point following years of underinvestment." The opposition Labour party called Sunak's plans, "another front for their culture wars". It said the government was "tone deaf, shameless and irresponsible".

Sources: [ft.com](https://www.ft.com) / [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com) / [time.com](https://www.time.com)

Writing

Governments need to spend much more money on mental health. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

plans / crack down / sick note / culture / drain / coronavirus / pandemic / disorders / employment / ambitious / honest / challenges / anxiety / breaking point / culture wars

True / False

- 1) The UK leader said welfare payments were a boost to the economy. T / F
- 2) The number of sick notes issued in the UK rose after coronavirus. T / F
- 3) Rishi Sunak said sick notes needed a change of format. T / F
- 4) The default in the UK will be based on what people cannot do. T / F
- 5) Rishi Sunak said people needed to be more ambitious. T / F
- 6) Rishi Sunak said people were "over-medicalising" everyday worries. T / F
- 7) Opponents of Sunak's plans blame his government for the crisis. T / F
- 8) A charity said Sunak's plans were part of his culture wars. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| 1. crack down on | a. conditions |
| 2. drain | b. opinions |
| 3. diagnoses | c. reckless |
| 4. disorders | d. standard |
| 5. default | e. aspiring |
| 6. emphasised | f. put an end to |
| 7. ambitious | g. worry |
| 8. anxiety | h. battlefield |
| 9. front | i. burden |
| 10. irresponsible | j. highlighted |

Discussion – Student A

- a) How much of a 'sick note culture' is there in your country?
- b) What do you think of claiming welfare benefits?
- c) How supportive is your government of mental health?
- d) How should governments help people with mental health issues?
- e) How often are you sick?
- f) Would you always try to go to work even if you were sick?
- g) How did coronavirus affect you?
- h) What advice do you have for people with mental health issues?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. people in the UK claiming | a. wars |
| 2. welfare payments were a drain | b. breaking point |
| 3. The most common diagnoses | c. work you can do |
| 4. related to mental health and | d. back into employment |
| 5. the default becomes what | e. welfare benefits |
| 6. emphasised the need to get people | f. being given by doctors |
| 7. depression and | g. deaf |
| 8. services are at | h. behavioural disorders |
| 9. another front for their culture | i. anxiety |
| 10. It said the government was tone | j. on the economy |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think about what you read?
- What do you know about Rishi Sunak?
- How can governments get people back to work?
- What challenges do you have in your life?
- Have you ever been at breaking point?
- What happens during culture wars?
- How shameless do you think the UK government is?
- What questions would you like to ask Rishi Sunak?

Spelling

- what he has lbeealld
- erfaelw benefits
- labour erosghtsa
- The most common oesidsгна
- lvairebohau disorders
- the edflaut becomes what work you can do
- imhassededp the need to get people back
- We need to be more asuiboitm
- depression and nxyaeit
- following years of msunnirtetndvee
- The ippsoiootn Labour party
- tone deaf, shamlse and irresponsible

Answers – Synonym Match

1. f	2. i	3. b	4. a	5. d
6. j	7. e	8. g	9. h	10. c

Role Play

Role A – Stress

You think stress is the best reason to take a day off work. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their reasons aren't good enough for a day off. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these reasons (and why): contagious illness, back injury or no sleep.

Role B – Contagious Illness

You think a contagious illness is the best reason to take a day off work. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their reasons aren't good enough for a day off. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these reasons (and why): stress, back injury or no sleep.

Role C – Back Injury

You think a back injury is the best reason to take a day off work. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their reasons aren't good enough for a day off. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these reasons (and why): contagious illness, stress or no sleep.

Role D – No Sleep

You think no sleep is the best reason to take a day off work. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their reasons aren't good enough for a day off. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these reasons (and why): contagious illness, back injury or stress.

Speaking – Off Work

Rank these with your partner. Put the best reasons to take a day off work at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|------------------------|------------|
| • Too stressed | • Headache |
| • Contagious illness | • Vomiting |
| • Back injury | • Fever |
| • Hospital appointment | • No sleep |

Answers – True False

1	F	2	T	3	F	4	F	5	F	6	T	7	T	8	F
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.