

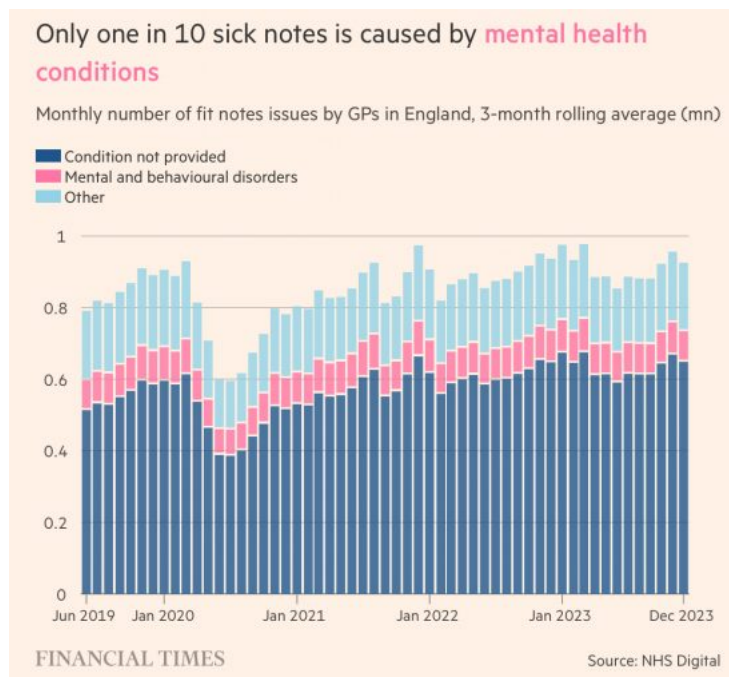
# Do we have a sickness culture or a sick benefits system...

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The [FT has offered](#) an analysis in so-called sick note culture today. Its conclusion is that there is no such thing.

The data on sick notes shows that. The situation now is no worse than in 2019. Short term sickness rates have not changed.



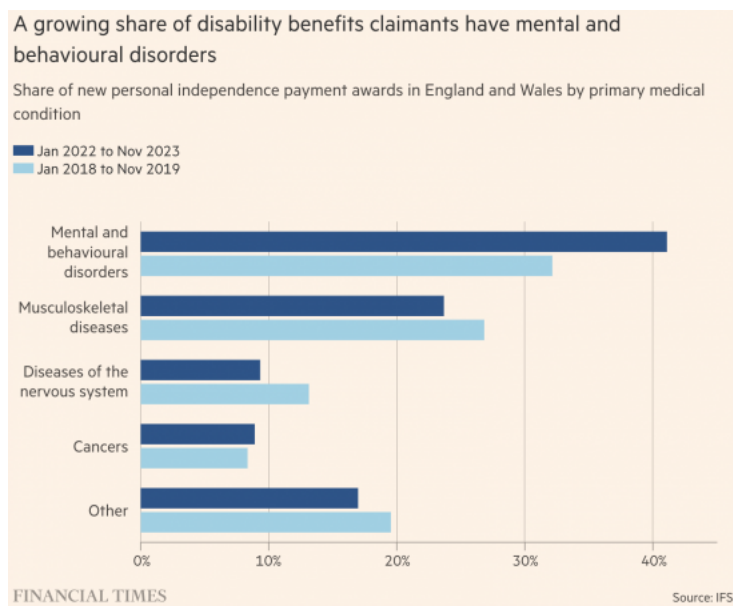
However, as the FT notes, this is due to the reason why sick notes are requested. They are only needed to claim statutory sick pay and that is miserably low in the UK, meaning that we have very low numbers of days off work on average in this country as a result. So, if there is a sickness problem in the UK it is not due to people off work in the short term.

The problem, if there is one, is people off work in the longer term. The caveat in that sentence is there for good reason. As the Office for National Statistics admits, its data

on many labour statistics is now very unreliable. The information it uses is based on survey data, and since Covid, the responses it gets to requests for information are so low that the information it produces might be inherently unreliable. That is caveat one.

The second caveat is that since it has become increasingly hard to get benefits for being unemployed, the number of people claiming benefits for incapacity has grown. It is not rocket science to see how the two might be related. If you are forced to live without income, you suffer stress. Stress then becomes the cause of incapacity. Benefits are then paid on that basis instead.

The data does, maybe, support this claim. This is also from the FT:



Stress-related disorders have grown in scale, and the number of claims is rising.

But that does not prove there is more stress, per se. It might prove that we have a system that is so mean that it results in hardship, and that creates stress. But that is not the same as stress rising otherwise.

So have we got a sick note culture? No one really knows. The data is weak, and the causes are uncertain.

On the other hand, we can say with certainty that we do have a benefits system that encourages people to claim sickness-related benefits resulting from the meanness of those benefits paid to those out of work through no fault of their own.

So where is the problem? Wouldn't it be wise to end the meanness within the benefits system, reduce the resulting stress, and so encourage people back to work? Wouldn't that make the most sense? And if not, why not - because the evidence of people actually wanting to live on benefits is very low indeed.

*I offer a prior warning to benefit system trolls: I will be heavy-handed with the delete button when dealing with comments in this post.*