

A Path Through the Storm

Headspace for Work:
2020 Mental Health
Trends Report



Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Mental health support: what employees think they have 5

Mental health support: what employees say they need 7

“Work stress” is just stress 9

Understanding the “whole self” 12


Helping your team heal..... 15

COVID-19 revealed that people really do bring their whole selves to work — and employers aren't prepared

The health crisis suddenly and swiftly wrought unimaginable changes to the world of work. Not the least of which is a record number of unemployed — **36+ million Americans out of work**. But despite the huge blow of furloughs and layoffs, about 80% of the workforce remains employed. That's cold comfort, we know.

But those people need help, too. Fractured guidelines for returning to the workplace, along with the desks around us that might stay empty, create a lot of anxiety. After all, only 77% of furloughed workers believe they'll get their jobs back, according to a recent *Washington Post-Ipsos* survey.

The emotional toll the pandemic has taken on workers who were fortunate enough to keep their jobs — while watching their colleagues be furloughed or let go — is creating global worry about long-term mental health concerns.

So, too, is the ongoing racial injustice witnessed in current events shaking the U.S. and other countries. **The pandemic and social upheaval have cast a strong light on how employees believe the workplace should support mental health needs for workers and their families.** 

“Bringing your whole self to work” has taken on a new meaning. Our whole selves come with the stress, anxiety, and uncertainty that shapes our daily life.

Companies are starting to learn what it means for an employee to bring their whole person to work — for better *and* for worse.

As the *Headspace for Work 2020 Mental Health Trends Report* shows, many more people in the workforce need extra resources to support a wide range of mental health concerns – on the job and at home. Based on this survey of over 2,500 employed adults working in several industries across the United States and the United Kingdom, this report makes it abundantly clear that in the age of COVID-19:

- There's a gap between employee expectations for mental health support and what companies actually offer.
- People are just starting to recognize the importance of well-rounded mental health support – compared with check-the-box EPA programs and other types of old-school benefits.
- The line between work stress and life stress has been dissolved. Stress in any area of someone's life contributes to, or is exacerbated by, stress at work.

And when you break these findings down by generation or gender, you'll find differences in the degree of mental health symptoms and diagnoses, use of mental health tools, and feelings about access to workplace mental health resources.

The survey was completed between April 5 and May 5, 2020, by 2,500 employed adults in the United States and the United Kingdom. They represent more than 20 industries, and were just about evenly split between men and women, and 2% who were non-binary.

44%

of workers don't feel employee mental health is a priority at their organization.

89%

of workers think their company should offer mental health benefits to employees and dependents.

40%

of younger workers suspect they suffer from anxiety and depression but haven't been diagnosed or seen a professional.

53%

of workers feel mental health benefits are essential post-COVID-19.

Mental health support: what employees think they have

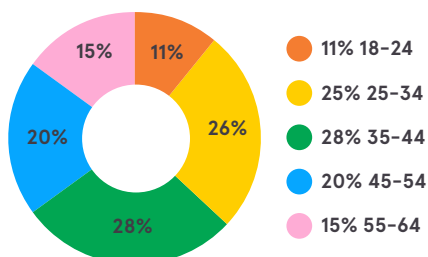
Most companies do check in with their teams about their understanding and feelings toward their workplace benefits. But these surveys are usually only offered annually – during enrollment season – and they usually center on high-level categories of benefits information and choices. Their aim is to help HR make its benefit-planning decisions.

In our experience, these efforts:

- Rarely “get personal” to understand how people *really* feel about their benefits
- Don’t look deeply into employee understanding of the mental health tools and resources available to them

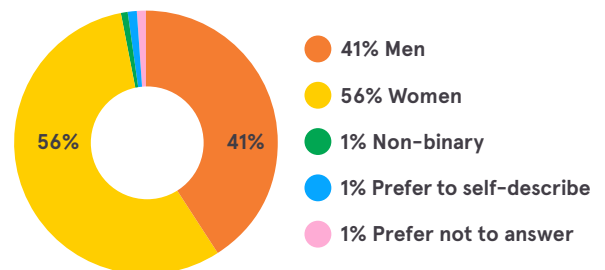
It’s no wonder our survey found that less than half of the workforce considers mental health to be a priority at their organization. And that’s where our story begins.

By age group: employees who feel their mental health and emotional well-being is not priority in their organization



In addition to significant differences among age groups on this point, the feeling also varies across gender:

By gender: employees who feel their mental health and emotional well-being is not a priority in their organization



It’s not hard to see why 44% of the workforce doesn’t think their organization prioritizes mental health. We found this startling fact: **nearly 4 in 10 employees don’t even think their company offers mental health benefits.** [🐦](#)

38%

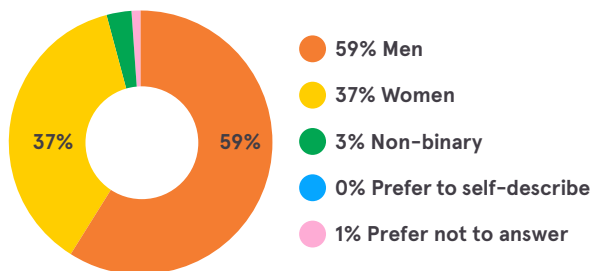
of workers do not believe their company offers any mental health benefits.

55%

of workers say their company offers an EAP.

But even among companies with an EAP (Employee Assistance Program), only 1 in 5 people (20%) use the resource. It's also interesting that among those employees, the majority are men.

Employees who use their company's EAP



HOW HEADSPACE FOR WORK SEES IT

Everyone has mental health needs, even if they haven't been diagnosed with a disorder.

Diagnosed issues are on the rise, but the needs of the "working well" are increasing, too. Because they're high-functioning, this group is less aware of their needs, and less likely to seek support from their employer. As a result, employers can expect a rise in presenteeism — or the "working undiagnosed."

Businesses have made "slow but steady" progress in providing increased support for mental health, according to a [SHRM suite of annual surveys](#).¹ The 2019 report found growing recognition among employers that "long-term stress and anxiety can negatively impact employees in many ways, including deteriorating health and productivity."

¹ Get a summary of the surveys in this [Forbes article](#).

The not-so-great news? Beyond traditional programs, employees don't feel they're getting much help easing stress and anxiety.

12%

of workers think their employer has a holistic mental health program.

A holistic mental health program goes farther and deeper than an employee assistance program (EAP). Instead of *treating* mental health once it becomes an issue, these programs provide *preventative* support with digital mental health platforms, mindfulness and meditation programs, stress management, in-person mindfulness programs, crisis training, and onsite yoga.

Research shows that a holistic approach to workplace mental health is crucial to supporting the whole self.

42%

Identified work/life balance as the greatest source of stress in their lives

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The greatest sources of stress in my life are:

"Balancing homeschooling and work responsibilities"

"My family's health"

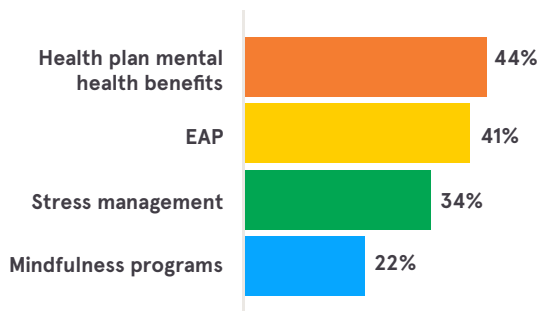
"Not being able to give time to my relatives"

Mental health support: what employees say they need

We asked employees what they need from their organizations to live a happier, healthier, and more productive life at home and on the job. The short answer? More than they're getting.

Employees want programs beyond an EAP or the mental health benefits provided by their health plan.

How workers ranked the most helpful mental health benefits



Employees don't just want more types of mental health programs, they also want to know that they work.

77%

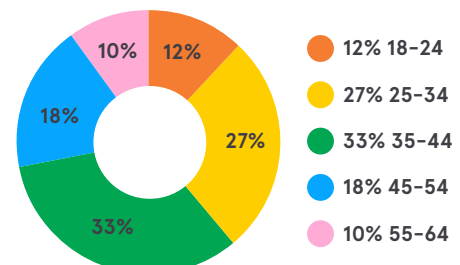
of workers say it's "very" or "extremely" important that the mental health benefits offered by their companies are backed by science.

Perhaps even more important is this statistic from our survey: **83% of workers believe their company should offer mental health benefits to employees and their dependents.** Over 1 in 5 (21%) workers in our survey didn't even know if benefits were available to their dependents and spouses.

83%

of workers believe their company should offer mental health benefits to employees *and* their dependents. Before the pandemic, this would have meant nearly 141 million working adults in the U.S. wanted mental health coverage for themselves and their family.

By age group: employees who believe companies should offer mental health benefits to employees and dependents



Offering benefits to dependents and spouses is a major opportunity for employers to provide more holistic, far-reaching support. When every family member can better care for their own mental health, they contribute individually to a healthier, happier home.

Regardless of who takes advantage of these benefits, supporting the entire household mitigates stress from sources managers weren't even aware of.

HOW HEADSPACE FOR WORK SEES IT

Well-being and mindfulness are contagious.

Science shows that teaching mindfulness to one partner in a relationship enhances the well-being of both partners – even when the other one isn't practicing mindfulness. (May, Ostafin and Snippe, 2019; Khaddouma, Gordon and Strand, 2017; Fowler and Christakis, 2008).²

²To learn more about mindful contagion, check out the work of Ostafin and Snippe, Khaddouma, Gordon and Strand, and Fowler and Christakis.

“Work stress” is just stress

The concept of employees bringing their “whole self” to work isn’t new. And it’s typically seen as a positive thing — no one should feel like they have to hide parts of themselves to be accepted in their workplace. It just so happens to be good for business, too. For example, this quote from [HR Connect](#) in November 2019:

“Helping your employees bring their whole self to work is not only beneficial for the performance of the business, but also valuable for the business’ reputation. When your employees are happy, they are less likely to leave and more likely to refer [job candidates and customers to] you.”

Showing up as our whole selves means our identity, our personality, and our goals. But it also means our worries, our stress, and our anxiety. 🐦 We can’t choose which parts of ourselves to leave at home.

And the impact of our collective stress, anxiety, and depression in the workforce is evident — if you look for it.

39%

of workers have taken a day off in the past year due to stress, anxiety, or depression. Among genders, the rate was highest (57%) among respondents who identified as non-binary.

42%

of workers have been diagnosed with depression or anxiety. The 35–44 age group had the highest share to have been diagnosed (49%).

30%

of workers suspect they suffer from depression or anxiety. The number is highest and equal among women and non-binary respondents (33%), and lowest among men (27%).

40%

are younger workers who suspect they suffer from anxiety and depression, but haven’t been diagnosed by a professional; by far the largest share by age group.

Obviously, finances are the main reason most of us work. So it's no shock that our survey found money to be the top driver of worker stress in the U.S. and the U.K., regardless of age.

52%

of survey respondents identified money/finances as the greatest source of stress in their lives.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

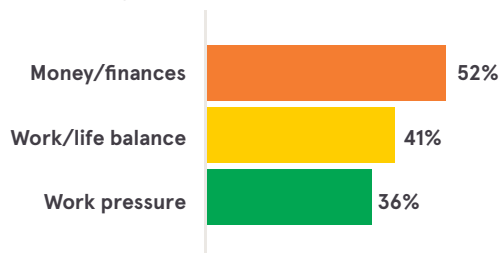
The greatest sources of stress in my life are:

"Financial insecurity and low work stability"

"I live check-to-check and some months I don't have enough for my bills or food"

"Worrying about possible layoffs"

What is the greatest source of stress in your life?



We also found that women are more likely to be stressed by money and finances, while men are more likely to be stressed over their health. Non-binary respondents seemed to stress more about their health and money than either group.

Sources of stress in personal life can easily become key reasons for employee burnout, reflected in numbers related to disengagement, low performance, and turnover. The number is highest among workers who are 35–44 years old and lowest among those 55–64 years old.

42%

of today's workforce, on average, feels "burned out" or "extremely burned out."

The number feeling "burned out" or "extremely burned out" is highest among employees aged 35–44 (48%). As shown in the next section, this age group is also feeling more stressed than any other.

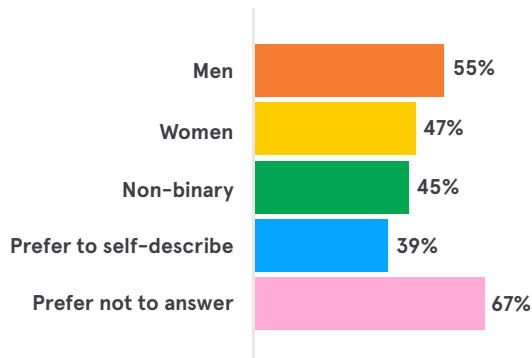
The dominoes fall in both directions: While our personal lives affect our work, a majority of workers say work-related stress directly affects their personal relationships.

51%

of workers say work-related stress has affected their personal relationships.

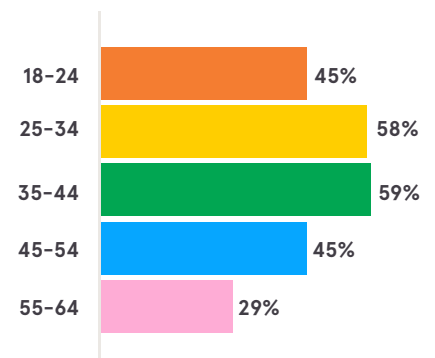
Among genders, the number is significantly higher among men.

By gender: employees who feel job stress affects their personal relationships “somewhat” to “a great deal”



Among age groups, the number is highest among those aged 35–44 – the same group with the highest rate of burnout.

By age: employees who feel job stress affects their personal relationships “somewhat” to “a great deal”



HOW HEADSPACE FOR WORK SEES IT

Stress doesn’t end with our shift.

Although there’s more awareness of how mental health impacts work, there’s still a disconnect between employers and what’s actually happening in employees’ lives. [Sometimes, this is seen in a difficulty to understand and treat well-being in a holistic way. Financial wellness, for example, should be something employers address because of its links to new mental illness diagnosis, sleep quality, engagement, retention, productivity, and personal relationships.](#)

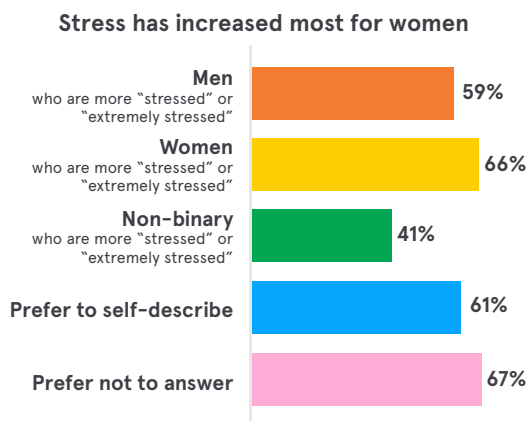
In 2020, we learned what it *really* means to bring your whole self to work

Employees' concerns about their finances, health, and personal relationships — you know, the things that comprise a whole person — have always existed. But COVID-19 and recent conversations on police violence and systemic racism have not only heightened these stressors, but given business leaders an opportunity to see the lives of their employees as they never could, or maybe never wanted to, before.

We're struggling with the shift to remote work and homeschooling. We're struggling with anxiety about our health, and that of our family members. We're struggling with feelings of financial insecurity and day after day of uncertainty. *And* we don't leave those feelings at home.

For better and for worse, the whole person has truly shown up for work in the spring of 2020. 🐦

In April and May, employee stress increased significantly.



Split by age group, workers over 35 are currently more stressed than their younger colleagues. Employees age 35–44 felt more stressed than any other age group in April and May.

68%

of workers age 35–44 who are "stressed" or "extremely stressed."

What does that mean for business? **In the two weeks before participating in our 2020 *Mental Health Trends* survey, 45% of participants said stress has caused them to lose up to two hours of work time a day. 🐦**

21%

of workers lost up to two hours of work time a day because of stress.

24%

of workers lost up to an hour of work time a day because of stress.

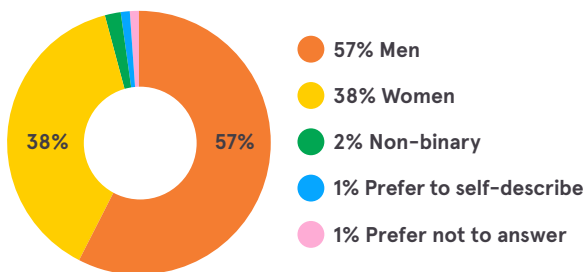
Split by gender, non-binary participants were most likely to say their work performance is most affected by stress — 23% lose up to two hours of daily work time due to stress.

Meanwhile, how do people feel their companies have responded to the mental health ramifications of COVID-19? **Fewer than half of all workers feel their companies increased access to mental health tools in response to COVID-19 – and women are far less likely than men to have seen an increase in that support.** 🐦

47%

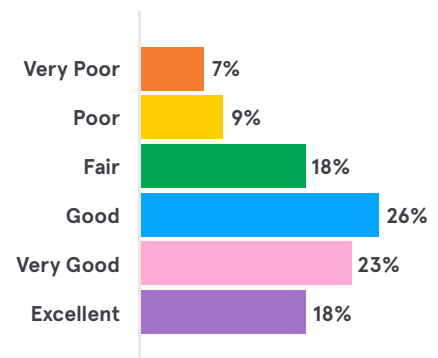
of workers said their organization increased access to mental health tools in response to COVID-19.

By gender, employees who said their organization increased access to mental health tools in response to COVID-19:



Although most companies may not have added more mental health *resources* in response to COVID-19, the majority of workers feel their employer’s overall *response* to the crisis was good – 18% said it was excellent.

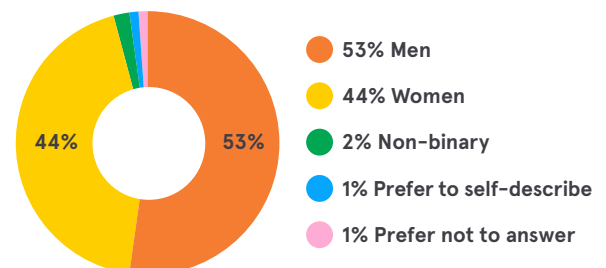
Workers rate their organization’s response to COVID-19



Companies should be aware, however, that gender gaps exist in these responses.

Non-binary workers are by far the least likely to say their company’s response to COVID-19 was very good or excellent. 🐦

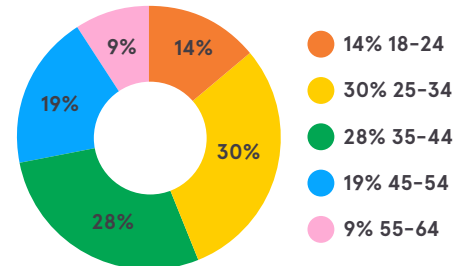
By gender: workers who rated their organization’s response to COVID-19 as “very good” or “excellent”



Younger workers are the most disappointed with their company’s response to COVID-19. [🐦](#)

That would align with what we showed in an earlier section, that Gen Z reported the highest rate of depression and anxiety. They’re also the most likely to speak about and seek help for their mental health concerns. (More than 6 in 10 workers in this age group said they’ve used their organization’s mental health benefits, compared with 16% of workers overall.)

By age: employees who feel their company’s response to COVID-19 was “very poor” or “poor”



HOW HEADSPACE FOR WORK SEES IT

Employees want more mental health support. Now.

COVID-19 and protests over police violence and systemic racism have put pressure on companies to help their employees reduce stress, take a proactive approach to mental health, and guide them to healthier routines. And when individuals feel supported, company-wide performance improves.

Helping your team heal

COVID-19 and social upheaval in response to police brutality and law enforcement policies throughout America reveal a lot about what employees need and expect from their employers.

From our research, it's clear that companies and their leaders need to develop a better understanding of these four points:

1

The perception employees have of available resources to help them deal with the stress and demands of today's fast-changing world.

2

What employees feel they need from their employers to stay (or get) mentally healthy – from mindfulness programs to mental health coverage for dependents.

3

Fully embracing the whole person – when it comes to stress, what happens at home doesn't stay at home.

4

More than ever, evidence-based mental health tools and resources should be part of the way every company supports its employees and their families

53%

of workers feel mental health benefits in the wake of COVID-19 are essential.

No one who experiences a major crisis or a layoff – including those who aren't let go – is ever the same. Some faith is gone, some confidence is lost. Those still employed are struggling with the uncertainty of whether they'll be next. They may be feeling the heavy stress of workplace survivor's guilt. And meanwhile, HR leaders struggle with whether they made the right decisions each step along the way.

Stress, and workplace stress in particular, is a multifaceted phenomenon. Individuals bring their entire selves to work, and bring their work into their lives.

51%

of workers say stress generated by their jobs affects their personal relationships.

Both sides of this coin have been magnified with the reality of remote work during the pandemic.

Knowing how to support your team through an unprecedented pandemic is ... hard. And it might not be the business you're in. Even for HR and benefits leaders, adequate mental health support is new territory, and it's not what most well-being programs can provide.

Headspace for Work is the authentic, science-based, employee mental health solution with proven mindfulness programs that lead to change from the inside out. Just a few minutes a day adds up toward a healthier, happier mind — from good mornings to more restful nights.

Our enterprise-ready, proven solution is designed in partnership with you — for your people, for your organization's culture, with full support from true professionals start to finish. We're all affected by life's challenges — start providing support that works for everyone.



Headspace for Work — mindful people, healthier business.

[Get a Demo](#)