

Opening the Conversation: Mental Wellbeing in Market Research New Zealand



Forewords

With the second Covid-19 lockdown being a reality, it is pertinent timing to have received this survey report from Opinium on Mental Wellbeing in the NZ Market Research and Insights community. Clearly Covid-19 has had an impact on most of us in terms of both where and how we work. Whilst working from home has provided positive impacts for many, it has also brought additional stress and seen some new mental health issues emerging.

The results of the survey certainly “opens the conversation” and perhaps not surprisingly shows that the vast majority of us have struggled to some degree with aspects of mental health over the last year. We operate in an environment where tight deadlines (and tight budgets) are usually the norm, both agency side and client side. Workplace culture is vitally important, and organisations need to be aware of the benefits of listening to employees and providing an environment where their people can be open about any struggles they are facing.

It's clear that Covid-19 has added another layer of anxiety for RANZ members even though most appear to have coped fairly well with WFH and the vast majority (90%) would like to continue this in some capacity.

I see this as an opportunity for leaders to learn from the lockdown experiences and design workplace practices and environments that reflect the need for some new and different approaches. One size definitely does not fit all!

I would like to thank Opinium for enabling us to participate in this survey and now that we have opened the conversation, I hope we will repeat the exercise in future to build on this work and establish a measure towards positive change.

Susanna Baggaley – General Manager, RANZ

There has never been a more crucial time to talk about mental health at work.

The extra stress and strain that Covid-19 has placed on the mental health of the world is something that none of us could have predicted. It has turned our worlds upside down in terms of working practises and day-to-day living, and this has undeniably impacted mental wellbeing.

After developing the first workplace mental wellbeing audit with Warwick University Medical School in 2019, we were so delighted when the Research Association New Zealand agreed to partner with us and help us take the audit further afield in its second year.

Our research has found that the majority of market researchers in New Zealand have struggled with their mental health to varying degrees in the last 12 months. Though despite this impacting so many of us, the culture around talking about mental health problems in the workplace still needs considerable work. Employers have a vital role to play in supporting the mental health of their teams and fostering a culture of openness and acceptance.

We are extremely proud to be able to share this report with you, which we hope will accelerate change in market research teams across New Zealand. As you'll see throughout the report, we've uncovered some of the key issues companies need to address, and various initiatives that may help them in doing so, as well as the impact of Covid-19 on mental wellbeing. Addressing mental wellbeing at work may seem like a mammoth task, but it's a journey; taking that first step in the right direction will kick start wider organisational change, benefitting everyone involved.

Sophie Holland – Senior Researcher, Opinium

Summary of Findings



9 in 10 have struggled with their mental health to some degree in the previous 12 months



The impact of coronavirus on the company is the top cause of stress for researchers



68% say their current workplace takes the mental health of their employees seriously



Two thirds feel they would be supported in the workplace if they were struggling with their mental health



43% would feel embarrassed if their colleagues discover they were struggling with their mental health



57% would like to see their workplaces introduce 'duvet/ mental health days'



38% are worried about commuting when going back to work



9 in 10 would like to continue working from home practices in some capacity once lockdown is over

Introduction

We designed our Workplace Mental Wellbeing Audit to help organisations understand the mental health of their employees and in turn take steps to help them. For this study, we partnered with Research Association New Zealand (RANZ) and surveyed 65 researchers between July and August to look specifically at the mental wellbeing of those working in the market research industry in New Zealand and how they are coping in the context of a pandemic.

The report will cover a brief overview of our findings including the top stresses market researchers in New Zealand face, and how employees feel when discussing mental wellbeing in the workplace. Suggestions for employers to help employees improve the wellbeing of their staff will also be scattered throughout the report.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

A key element of our audit is the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale*; a rigorous and scientific method designed by the University of Warwick with funding from NHS Health Scotland. Looking at the scores of the scale, the mental wellbeing of an individual can be determined in terms of whether it falls above or below the national average. The scale enables us to quantify mental wellbeing, thus promoting wider understanding of mental wellbeing. A further use of the scale is to encourage effective improvement of mental wellbeing for the individual, by tracking scores over time, and to equip organisations and wider society to support the enhancement of mental wellbeing.

Mental wellbeing in the workplace

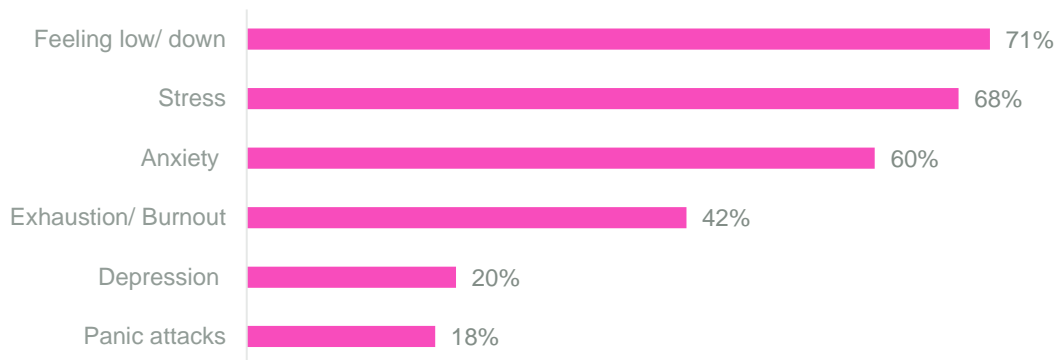
Almost 9 in 10 of those surveyed struggled with their mental health in the last 12 months

Almost 9 in 10 (86%) have struggled with their mental health to some degree in the previous 12 months, this is compared to 80% who experienced a physical health problem and 6% who have experienced neither. The top mental health problems include feeling low/ down (71%), stress (68%), anxiety (60%) and exhaustion/ burnout (42%). Three in ten (29%) of those who experienced a mental health problem said it caused a significant negative impact on their work.

Unsurprisingly, of those who struggled with their mental health, only 29% took time off work to rest or recover compared to almost double (62%) who took time off for physical problems, highlighting a need for employers to cultivate a safe space where employees feel able to take time off for their mental health.

*Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) © University of Warwick, NHS Health Scotland, and University of Edinburgh, 2007, all rights reserved. If you would like to use the scale, please visit the University of Warwick website for more details: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

Mental health problems experienced in the last 12 months



The impact of coronavirus and impending deadlines are the top causes of stress faced by those in Market Research

One in five (18%) market researchers find their job highly stressful (giving it a rating of 8-10, with 10 being extremely stressful). The top stresses for researchers are the impact of coronavirus on the company (46%), impending deadlines/ targets (43%), and heavy workload / having too much to do (38%).

Workload seems to be a key issue amongst researchers as half (52%) say they have impending deadlines/ targets often or all the time, 45% experience tight deadlines regularly, and 42% heavy workload. Work-life balance is also an issue, with a quarter (26%) saying they are working long hours on a regular basis. Tackling these key areas surrounding workload and deadlines would reduce the stress faced by employees and improve mental wellbeing in the long run.

Two thirds say they would feel supported at work if they were struggling with their mental health

More positively, employees feel they would be supported in the workplace if they were struggling with their mental health (66%). Three quarters (75%) say their colleagues in particular would be supportive if they were struggling with their mental health and 47% say they can talk openly to their manager about their mental wellbeing.

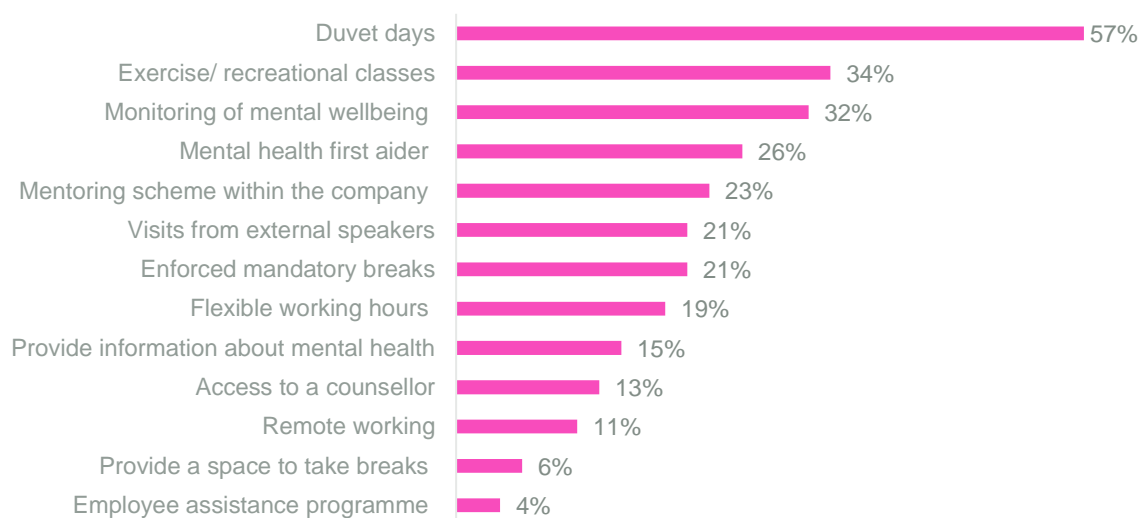
Along with this, 68% say their current workplace takes the mental health of their employees seriously. This is further demonstrated through the initiatives offered by workplaces to promote better mental wellbeing for their employees – 98% of employees say their workplace offers initiatives to support mental wellbeing. Over 8 in 10 (83%) are offered remote working/ working from home, 72% are offered flexible working hours, 72% have a space to take breaks, and 53% have access to an employee assistance programme.

Workplaces need to work on cultural change around mental wellbeing

The picture isn't clear cut though as 43% say they would feel embarrassed if their colleagues discover they were struggling with their mental health, 30% say they don't know who they would turn to at work if they were struggling and a third (34%) feel as though their workplace is not doing enough to help employees with their mental health/ wellbeing.

A key way to combat this would be to listen to employees and offer initiatives employees actually want and would find helpful. The majority (57%) say they would like to see their workplaces introduce 'duvet/ mental health days' (only 6% of workplaces currently offer this), 34% would like exercise/ recreational classes offered during lunch or after work (offered by 15% of workplaces) and 32% would like mental wellbeing to be monitored such as via a staff survey (only 11% of workplaces currently offer this).

Initiatives employees would like to see their workplace introduce



Impact of Covid-19 on wellbeing

This year, coronavirus became a new threat to both mental as well as physical wellbeing of employees. As highlighted earlier, the impact of coronavirus on the company was the top stress amongst those surveyed (47%) and its effects were felt worldwide. Positively, 86% say their organisations have handled the pandemic well, compared to only 3% who say their organisations handled it poorly, and almost all (94%) say their organisations have been supportive during this period of uncertainty.

Two thirds say they feel more relaxed working from home, but a quarter feel it has decreased their mental wellbeing

Another benefit from coronavirus has been the ability to work from home. The majority (94%) of those surveyed have been working from home since the pandemic and consequent lockdown, and most (90%) would like to continue this in some capacity once things are back to normal. This is unsurprising as the benefits of working from home are clear. Over 2 in 3 (69%) say they feel more relaxed working from home and 61% have a better work life balance now that they're working from home. Not having to commute is also shown a benefit as 76% agree the lack of commute has improved their mental health.

However, there are downsides with working from home for a prolonged period. Whilst 49% feel that working from home has improved their mental wellbeing, a quarter (27%) feel working from home has decreased it. This is likely due to the added pressures of balancing home and work life. Almost half (45%) say they are working longer hours now that they're working from home and 37% struggle to draw the boundaries between work and rest. Feelings of isolation are also prominent as 29% struggle to stay in contact with their colleagues and 24% say they feel isolated due to working from home. We asked researchers why they felt working from home had decreased their mental wellbeing, and these demonstrate the challenges people face with social isolation as well as switching off from work:

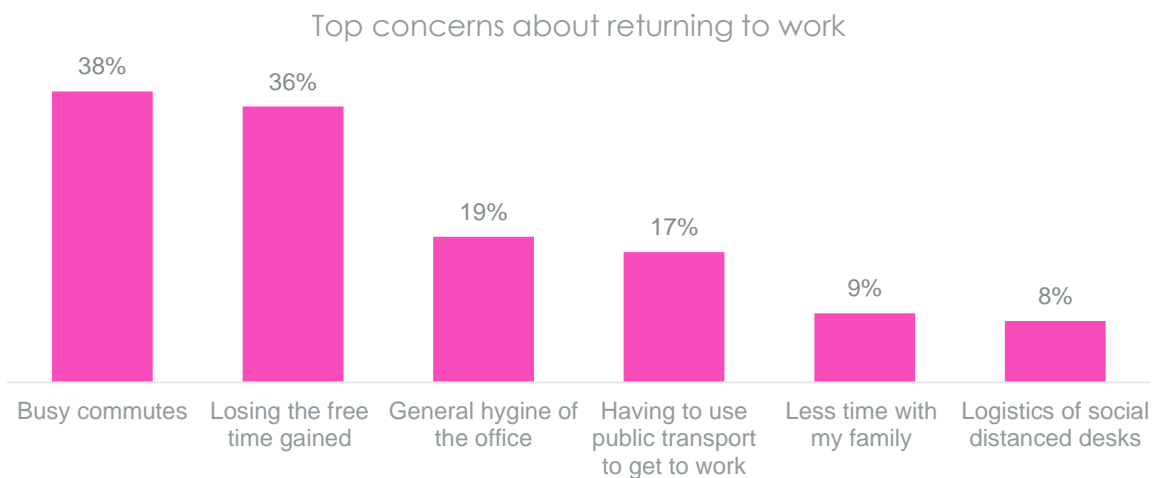
'My personal situation is such that I'm essentially alone at home, so I use work to be social. It is not normal to be this isolated and my friends/ family are not near me, so it's difficult to see them and socialise that way.'

'The main impact is being in front of the computer all day, as it's very easy to spend all day sitting there and not taking breaks. It can feel exhausting staring at the screen all day. Otherwise there have been a lot of positive impacts.'

As lockdown measures ease, it's critical for employers to continue the good work in enhancing mental wellbeing of their employees. The lasting impact of Covid-19 and working from home is still yet to be felt, 33% are worried about the consequence prolonged working from home will have on their mental health. By adopting a hands-on and individual approach during this transitional period, employers could help employees maintain good levels of mental wellbeing.

Busy commutes are the biggest concern when it comes to returning to office life

When it comes to concerns that people have about returning, the greatest concerns are around the commutes and loss of free time as the chart below shows. Employees will need to ensure that as we start to return to work, they provide a way for their staff to take alternative travel options and that flexible working hours are in place.



Generally, employees are happy to return to the office. When asked about the prospect of going back to the office, employees reported feeling optimistic (47%), relaxed (40%), and excited (38%). However, a quarter (26%) feel anxious and apprehensive (25%) about it. This highlights a strong need for employers to take the concerns of their employees seriously and work towards minimising them. As some still feel nervous about going back to the office, employers need to adopt an individual approach when it comes to returning, to ensure all employees feel safe and at ease when transitioning back to office life.

Authors



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Sophie is passionate about mental health and holds a BA Hons in Experimental Psychology from the University of Oxford. She developed Opinium's workplace mental wellbeing audit and heads up Opinium's mental health research team. Sophie is also Head of Wellbeing internally at Opinium, introducing workplace initiatives to support employee mental wellbeing. Sophie works on a variety of different projects from design to delivery, ranging from large-scale quantitative research and international studies, to in-depth qualitative pop-up communities. She is heavily involved in the brand and comms space, charity sector and social research.

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Raven works on a variety of projects utilising both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to help clients better understand consumer attitudes and behaviours. Raven is heavily involved in the brand and comms and thought leadership spaces and more recently, she has been involved in financial research, helping clients track monthly trends.

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