

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a beige turtleneck, is smiling and looking towards the left. In the background, a man with short dark hair and a beard, wearing a grey button-down shirt, is looking in the same direction. To the left, the back of a person with curly brown hair wearing a green shirt is visible. They are in a bright room with large arched windows.

Mental Well-being in Insights 2022



FOREWORDS

We are delighted to be partnering with the Insights Association for the third year in a row to track mental well-being in the US insights industry.

As an industry, we have made important progress in prioritizing the mental well-being of our teams. This year's data show that over two-thirds of insights professionals feel they would be supported at work if struggling with their mental health or well-being (67%, up 10 percentage points vs. last year). Encouragingly, we've also seen similar increases in those who feel they can openly talk with their managers about their mental health and who report their workplaces have introduced policies and processes to look after employee well-being.

That's fantastic news and shows that, as an industry, we are putting in the effort to shift our work cultures. I believe it's important to pause and celebrate the hard work we've invested in this important cause thus far.

That said, this year's data also continues to show that there is much more work to be done.

Over half of insights professionals (55%) reported feeling exhausted or burnt out this year, well above US employees at large, and we've seen upticks in levels of reported stress and feeling low/down year-over-year.

So, what's next? In addition to the well-being policies and perks many of us already have in place, as leaders we need to model what taking care of ourselves means to signal to those on our teams that they can safely do the same. We can all play a part in reducing mental health stigma by sharing our own personal challenges and regularly checking in with our teams to ask how they are doing, and monitoring for extended periods of heavy workload to help address any staffing issues. Personally, I have succeeded in some of these areas more than others, but they remain key resolutions as I lead our team into 2023.

With all the challenges of the past couple of years, addressing mental well-being at work may, at times, feel like an insurmountable task. But it's a journey. As researchers, we believe that tracking the problem is the first step to tackling it. We invite you to join us in using this research to kick start the conversation in your workplace.

We are proud to be able to share this report with you, which we hope will inspire insights teams across the US to continue taking small steps towards improving mental well-being in their organizations.

Giulia Prati, VP, US Research, Opinium

The return to more “normal” activities has uncovered some lingering effects that COVID had on mental health and well-being in our communities. There has been a rise in mental health concerns among young people and schools nationwide are taking extra steps to provide support for students in need. Therapists are in high demand, and long waiting lists for in-person appointments are exacerbating the problem. And yes, stress levels in the market research industry remain high and continue to be driven by many of the same factors seen in past years.

Exhaustion and burnout in our industry remain the most common concerns, fueled by long hours, pressures, client demands, and tight timelines.

These issues have long plagued the consumer insights profession and the impact continues to take a toll on our most precious resource – our people. High numbers of employees feel they cannot take the time off needed to rest and recover because they have too much work to do. Feeling down/low has increased this year, while anxiety and stress continue to be experienced by the majority of employees in our profession. In addition, many employees feel guilty when they take time off and often do not share that they are taking time off for their mental health and well-being; they prefer to say they have a physical illness instead.

Despite these persistent issues, our industry did show some improvements in addressing mental health and well-being and we should celebrate the progress that’s been made. There has been an increase in workplace policies to help employees with their mental health and well-being (53%, up 9% versus a year ago). More employees report being able to openly talk to their managers about their mental health (58%, up 12% versus last year), with nearly 70% of workers saying they would feel supported if struggling with their mental health at work (up 10% versus last year). And among those who do take time off, most report the quality of their work improves once they return to their jobs, even though they may not necessarily feel better.

The question now becomes, what’s next?

How do we build upon the foundations corporations and managers have built over the past several years and address persistent industry issues of burnout, long hours, and exhaustion among our employees? Sure, solutions to these issues are complex, but let’s remember one thing: we solve complex issues every day for our clients and stakeholders. Why not exert that same energy and creativity internally to address these critical issues on behalf of our employees and profession? We hope these findings focus you on areas in need of improvement and inspire you and your organization to take the additional needed steps. We’ve made great strides, but this is a race we **cannot** lose.

Melanie Courtright, CEO, Insights Association

INTRODUCTION

We have made important progress addressing mental health and well-being in the last several years. More individuals feel comfortable sharing their mental health experiences openly, and governments and businesses have taken greater ownership for helping improve collective well-being.

The following are positive signs of progress toward well-being in the industry this year, drawing from our latest research:


- 67%** feel they would be supported at work if struggling with their mental health or well-being (up 10% this year)
- 58%** feel they can openly talk with their manager about their mental health (up 12% this year)
- 53%** say their workplace has introduced policies and processes to look after employee mental well-being (up 9% this year)

However, more work needs to be done, as workloads remain high, and some insights professionals still feel unsupported and unsure how to discuss their mental health and well-being:

- 51%** experience heavy workloads and pressure often or all the time
- 30%** feel their workplace isn't doing enough to support well-being
- 41%** would feel embarrassed if their colleagues discovered they were struggling with their mental health
- 37%** wouldn't know how to approach the topic of mental health if they were struggling at work

We designed our Workplace Mental Well-being Audit to help organizations understand employee mental health over time and take steps to address key barriers to well-being in the industry. We have, for the third year running, partnered with the Insights Association to survey 409 insights professionals through their network. We also draw on our US benchmark survey of 845 full- and part-time employees to compare how industry well-being measures against US workers more broadly.

While we will focus on what employers can do, we want to acknowledge that – like people – the factors influencing well-being are complex. Societal issues, personal experiences, lifestyle choices and biology also affect mental health at work. Leaders must assume responsibility for their important role while respecting that governments, institutions, and individuals themselves also must play their part in supporting greater mental health and well-being for all.



Societal issues, personal experiences, lifestyle choices and biology also affect mental health at work.

KEY FINDINGS



3 in 10 do not think their workplace is doing enough to support well-being (30%)



51%

1 in 2 experience heavy workload and pressure *often* or *all the time*



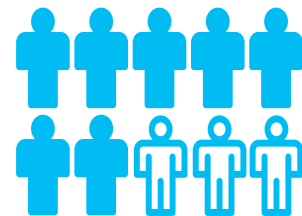
36%

1 in 3 work long hours *often* or *all the time*



55%

felt exhausted or burnt out this year



2 in 3 feel they would be supported at work if struggling with their mental health (67%)



7 in 10 (**72%**) who experienced exhaustion or burnout this year did not take time off to recover, with the top reason being too much work to do



58%

3 in 5 feel they can talk with their manager openly about their mental health and well-being

But **61%** who took time off for their mental health told their employer they were doing so for reasons other than the truth



28%



3 in 10 would not know who they would turn to if they needed support with their mental health

37%



And nearly 4 in 10 would not know how to approach the topic of mental health if they were struggling

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Renew efforts to tackle workloads and burnout

Having “too much work” and no time to recover can lead insights professionals toward exhaustion and burnout. Employees who take time off return to work healthier and more productive. But most still feel uncomfortable or unable to take time off for their mental health. Proactive communication, deadline management, and better staffing may help buffer against chronic stress and burnout.

2 Improve well-being by example

The examples set by managers and senior leaders are critical to driving positive changes in workplace well-being. Leaders who take time off and work reasonable hours show their teams they can safely do the same. Leaders can reduce mental health stigma by sharing their own personal challenges as well as regularly checking in with their teams to ask how they are doing.

3 Use pulse surveys to understand employee well-being needs

Many insights professionals do not feel comfortable discussing mental health with their managers or coworkers. Pulse surveys allow all employees to voice their experiences and provide honest feedback about existing and proposed initiatives. Short, well-designed surveys can also help identify undersupported groups and diagnose company-specific barriers to well-being.



RENEW EFFORTS TO TACKLE OVERWORK AND BURNOUT

Insights professionals continue to experience high levels of stress, burnout, and exhaustion

Compared to our US benchmark survey of full- and part-time employees, insights professionals were 25% *more* likely to have experienced stress (82% vs 56%) and 24% more likely to have experienced exhaustion or burnout compared to our benchmark this year (55% vs 31%).

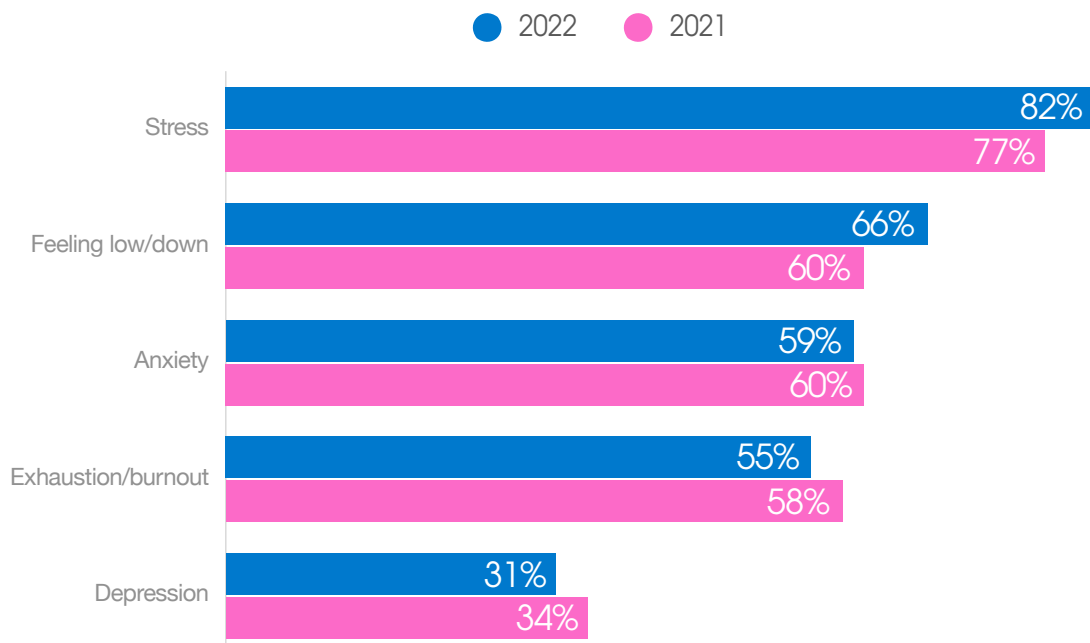
Insights professionals are also more likely to say their jobs are highly stressful. This year, 28% of insights professionals rated their workplace stress levels as 8+ out of 10, which is up slightly from 25% last year and higher than the 18% of US workers who reported the same in our benchmark survey. Median stress levels were 5 out of 10 from our US benchmark and 7 out of 10 among insights professionals, further highlighting elevated stress levels in the industry.

What is burnout?

According to the World Health Organization, burnout results from chronic workplace stress that is not successfully managed. People who are burned out frequently lack energy or feel exhausted, are less productive or efficient, and experience negative feelings toward their work. Burnout negatively impacts mental health but can also cause physical health issues over time.

More than half of insights professionals experienced exhaustion or burnout this year

Thinking about the past twelve months, have you experienced any of the following?
Physical health issues not shown.

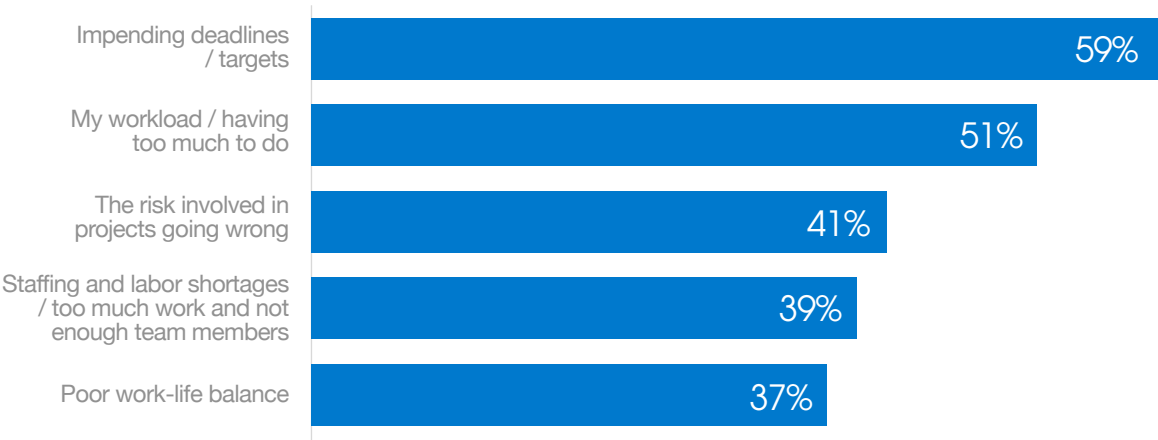


Stress and exhaustion exacerbated by heavy workloads and tight deadlines

Heavy workloads are, once again, a key source of stress for insights professionals. Half (51%) reported their workload and having too much to do caused them stress at work this year, matching last year (52%).

Impending deadlines and having too much to do are the most common stressors for insights professionals

Which, if any of the following cause you to feel stressed at work? Top 5 stressors.

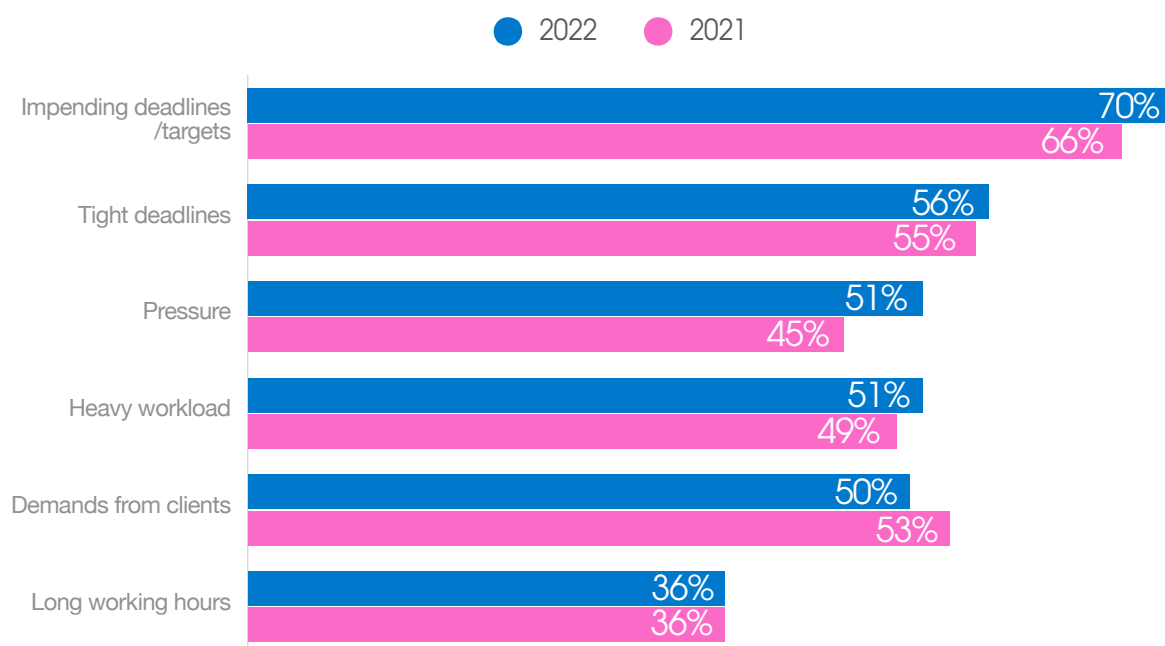


In 2022, as in 2021, half of professionals say they experience tight deadlines, pressure, and heavy workloads *often or all the time* (56%, 51%, 51%, respectively). More than 1 in 3 professionals (36%) say they deal with long working hours *often or all the time*.



More than half of insights professionals experience heavy workload, pressure, and tight deadlines *often or all the time*

How often do you experience the following in your job? NET: often or all the time



Insights professionals can be simultaneously overwhelmed, exhausted and unable to take time off to recover. More than half (56%) of insights professionals said the reason they didn't take time off for the exhaustion/burnout they experienced this year was because they had *too much work to do*.

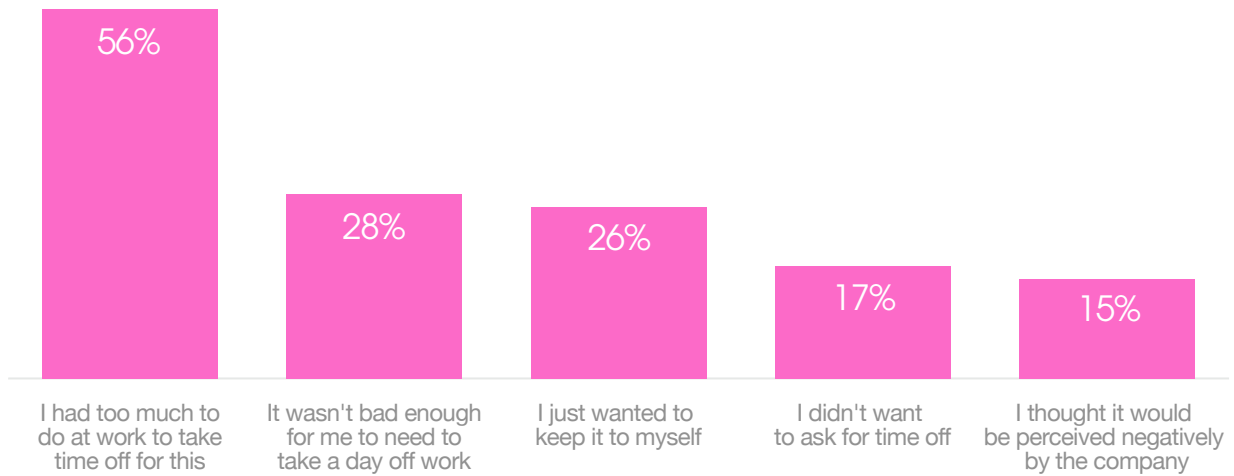
Despite benefits, majority do not take time off when feeling exhausted or burnt out

Insights professionals are still unlikely to take time off when they feel exhausted or burnt out. 7 in 10 (72%) who experienced exhaustion/burnout this year didn't take any time off, compared to 69% in 2021. Over 3 in 4 insights professionals (77%) said that the burnout/exhaustion they experienced this year negatively impacted their work.

Our research shows that those who do take time off for their well-being return to work feeling healthier and more productive. This year, more than 7 in 10 insights professionals (73%) who reported taking time off for a mental health issue said that the quality of their work improved as a result, and 6 in 10 said they returned to work feeling much better.

Most unable to take time off for burnout/exhaustion because they have “too much to do”

Why didn't you take time off work for burnout/exhaustion?



Strategies to support healthier workloads

1 Proactively monitor and communicate about workload

Managers should regularly check in with their teams about their workloads. Check-ins allow employees to voice concerns about workload in the moment when they otherwise may be too overwhelmed to seek support. Managers can ask questions to understand why employees are overworking, what tasks are taking longer than expected, and what may be slowing them down. Managers can improve the well-being of their team members by taking stock of hours worked and monitoring for signs of burnout to connect employees with support resources.

2 Plan upfront to minimize deadline stress

Over half of insights professionals regularly experience tight deadlines, and deadlines are the most common cause of workplace stress. Thoughtful planning before a project begins can help to avoid stressful staffing issues. Project managers should also add sufficient buffer time to account for things taking longer than expected. If necessary, try discussing with clients whether timelines can be pushed back.

3 Prioritize and redistribute tasks

When deadlines cannot be moved, managers can help their direct reports to better prioritize projects and rally support from other team members. Managers should communicate priorities and guide team members on what to focus on when they are overwhelmed. Not all work is equally important. Internal initiatives and administrative tasks may need to be de-prioritized while team members focus their attention toward client-facing or sensitive projects.

4 Ensure adequate staffing

Staffing shortages – having too much work and too few team members – caused 2 in 5 (39%) insights professionals to feel stressed this year. Leaders should pay close attention to feedback from managers about unmanageable workloads and unmet project resourcing needs. Chronically understaffed teams are at high risk of burnout and exhaustion. Better staffing helps distribute large workloads and can relieve strained employees.

Train managers to identify and respond to mental health and well-being needs

Insights professionals are more likely to feel comfortable discussing their well-being with managers than their co-workers. Nearly 3 in 5 professionals (58%) this year say they feel comfortable openly speaking with their manager about mental health and well-being, up 12% from 2021, compared to 43% of insights professionals who say they can talk about mental health with their colleagues.

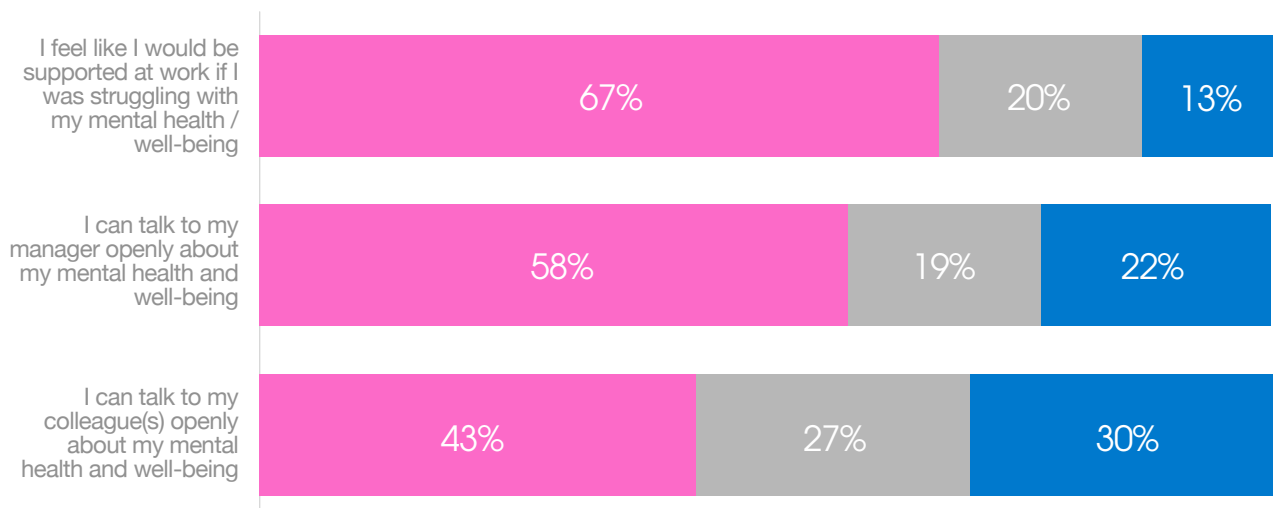
Managers may and should often be the first point of contact for struggling employees. Companies should equip their managers with the tools and resources to navigate these conversations. Managers should receive training on how to ask about well-being, identify mental health problems, and proactively connect employees with support resources.



Employees more likely to feel comfortable opening up about mental health to their manager than their colleagues

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree



Many still feel uncomfortable or guilty for taking time off for mental health reasons

All employees, regardless of seniority, can experience mental health issues. Over half (54%) of senior employees (managers and above) experienced anxiety and 1 in 4 (25%) experienced depression in the last 12 months. Nearly 1 in 5 senior employees (17%) have been formally diagnosed with a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression.

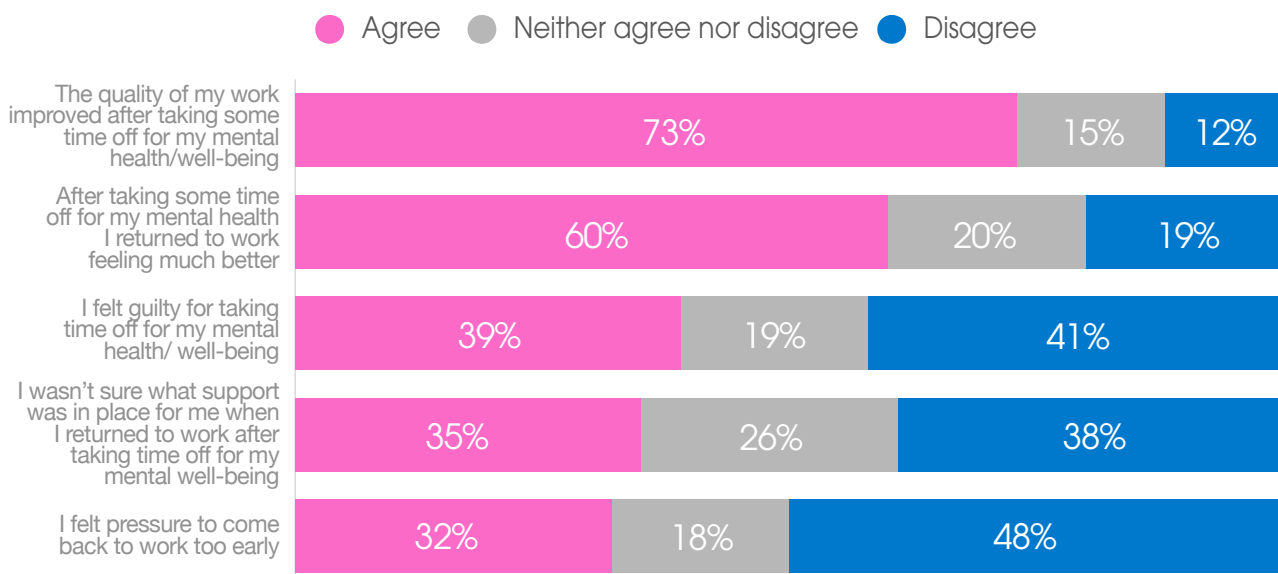
But stigma and other factors still cause many to avoid sharing mental health issues with their employers: 3 in 5 (61%) insights professionals who took time off for mental health reasons this year told their employer they were taking time off for their physical health or a different reason other than the truth.

Moreover, those who do take time off for their well-being often feel guilty for doing so. Among insights professionals who took time off for any mental health issue, 2 in 5 (39%) said they felt guilty for taking the time off – unchanged from 2021. A further 1 in 3 (32%) who took time off for their mental health felt pressure to come back to work too early.

To reduce stigma and encourage honesty about mental health, leaders must set the example. One way to model open discussion is for leaders to share stories of their own personal struggles. Stepping forward takes courage and vulnerability but can help tremendously to reduce stigma, encourage use of well-being programs, and offer hope to others struggling with their mental health across the organization.

Quality of work improves for researchers who take time off for mental health but many feel guilty or pressure to come back to work too soon

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



What leaders can do to model well-being

1 Take breaks and time off

1 in 4 researchers (25%) said that not having time to take a proper lunch break caused them stress this year. When managers work excessive hours, skip lunch breaks and never take time off, they signal to those below them that it is necessary to advance in the company, whether they intend to or not. In contrast, managers who practice well-being behaviors such as leaving at reasonable hours and going for walks teach their teams that they can do the same.

2 Establish and respect boundaries

Managers must first set and respect their own boundaries to support their own well-being at work. Then when their direct reports feel overwhelmed or unable to take on additional requests, managers should teach the importance of communicating about one's workload and respectfully explaining why they don't have time to help.

3 Encourage time for focused work

Silencing notifications and using "Do Not Disturb" can provide all employees relief from the stress of constant interruptions and allow them to complete challenging tasks. Focus time for deeper work allows employees to make meaningful progress on their high-priority to-dos, helping to reduce overall levels of stress and overwhelm. Managers should communicate what counts as urgent enough to interrupt a focus session.



3

USE PULSE SURVEYS TO UNDERSTAND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING NEEDS

Pulse surveys allow teams to track well-being over time and identify unmet employee needs

Anonymous pulse surveys, distributed by HR and well-being teams, can be a safe way for employees to share their personal mental health and well-being experiences. They are especially important for reaching employees who are not comfortable discussing mental health with their managers or colleagues; 1 in 5 insights professionals (22%) this year say they cannot talk openly about mental health with their managers, and 3 in 10 say they are not comfortable discussing the topic with their coworkers.

Pulse surveys also offer a support channel for the 2 in 5 (37%) insights professionals who say they would not know how to approach the topic of their mental health if they were struggling at work. Questions can help prompt employees to put labels and numbers to feelings they may not otherwise feel comfortable expressing. With sufficient and representative responses, these surveys can effectively quantify the state of well-being within an organization.

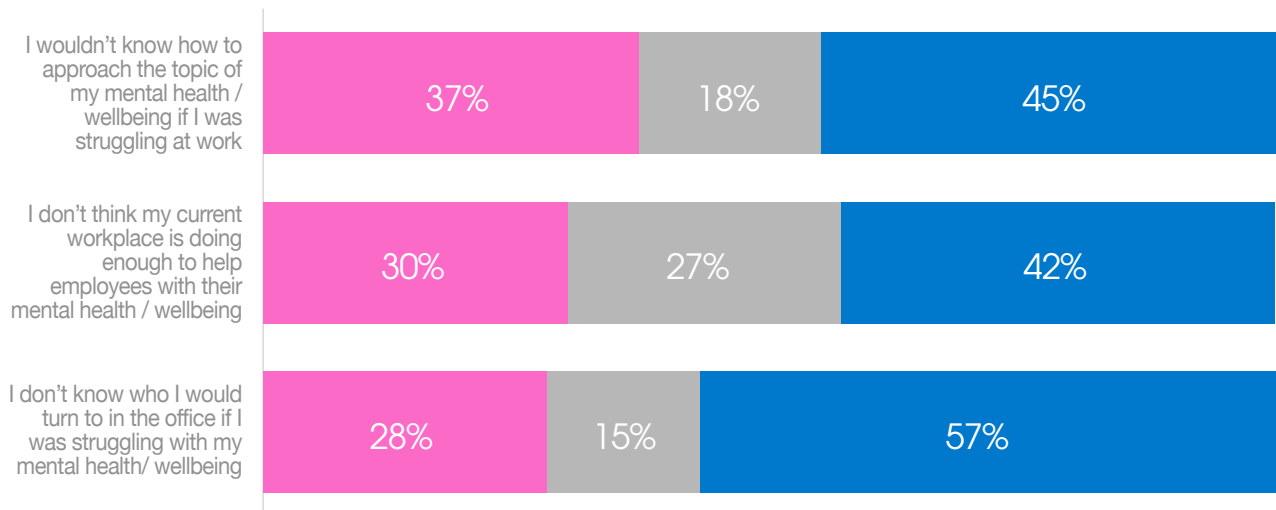
Because workplace well-being needs can differ by factors such as age, gender, seniority, and race, surveys can be used identify under-supported groups. Certain demographics may experience additional difficulty getting mental health support at work: 1 in 2 (48%) professionals who identify as Black, Asian, Hispanic, Multiracial or another minoritized racial group say they wouldn't know who to turn to if they were struggling with their mental health at work, which is significantly more than the 1 in 4 professionals who identify as White alone that say the same (23%).



3 in 10 don't feel their workplace is doing enough to support well-being and would not know who to turn to if struggling

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree



Collect feedback on existing and proposed wellness initiatives

Employee surveys can reveal whether employees truly feel supported by existing well-being efforts. From our research, 3 in 10 insights professionals say their workplace isn't doing enough to help employees with their mental health, and only half (53%) agree that their current workplace has introduced programs to look after employee well-being.

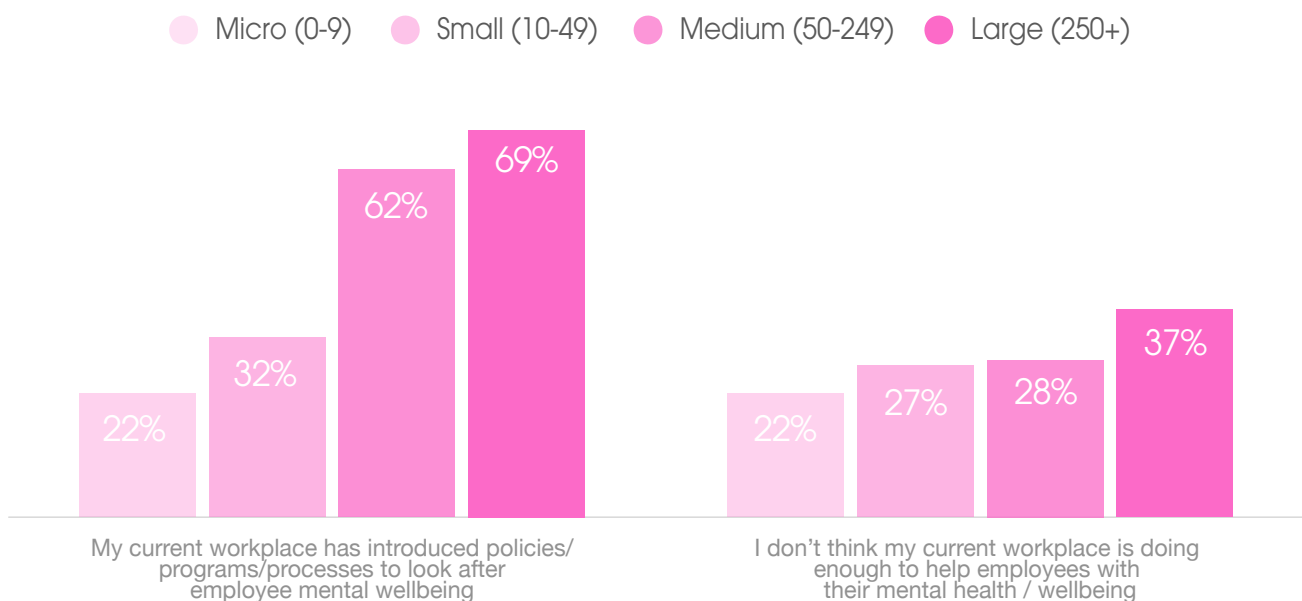
Targeted questions can provide actionable information about which initiatives are and are not helping employees improve their health and well-being. Well-being teams can receive critical feedback from employees about existing and proposed initiatives. They can even ask employees to share their own ideas about what well-being teams should focus on.



Companies who already offer well-being benefits should be especially diligent about collecting feedback from employees on existing offerings. More employees at large companies (over 250 employees) say their employer has introduced well-being benefits and programs, but these employees are also *more* likely to say their employer isn't doing enough to help employees with their mental health and well-being; nearly 7 in 10 insights professionals (69%) at large companies say their workplaces have introduced well-being programs but 2 in 5 (37%) still say their employer isn't doing enough to support employee well-being. In some instances, employers can mask root causes of negative mental health such as overwork by offering meditation app subscriptions and discounted gym memberships.

Large employers more likely to have introduced well-being initiatives
but their employees still don't feel they are doing enough

Agreement with statements by company size



As more and more companies offer well-being programs and services, leaders should use surveys and other data sources to gauge whether employees are aware of available support programs and follow up to ensure they are easy to access. Those struggling with their mental health will often lack the energy to pursue help and programs that take significant effort to register for may discourage usage by those that need them most.

Tips for running successful pulse surveys

1 Measure multiple dimensions of well-being

Consider asking one or two questions across core dimensions influencing workplace well-being such as: individual well-being, perceptions of organizational support, perceptions of managerial support, presence of healthy workplace relationships, and effectiveness of well-being programs. Ask one or two open-ended questions to capture qualitative feedback about what issues concern employees most and what ideas they have for building a culture of well-being.

2 Keep pulse surveys short and focused

Wellness surveys should be kept under 5 minutes, and ideally as short as possible. Eliminate non-essential questions. Long surveys may lead to higher survey abandonment and lower participation rates. Consider conducting one lengthier engagement survey per year, then several pulse surveys throughout the year. Offer small gift cards or prizes to encourage participation if necessary.

3 Share results and take action

Following up on employee feedback is critical. Employees may stop providing feedback if they do not feel their opinions and experiences are heard and acknowledged. Well-being teams can use survey results to raise the most pressing concerns with stakeholders. C-suite-led communications, which signal leadership buy-in, are particularly effective for raising awareness of employee well-being issues and sharing the steps employers plan to take to address them.



CONCLUSION

We can appreciate the important progress we've made to advancing mental health causes while acknowledging that high levels of stress, overwork, and exhaustion remain challenges for our industry, among other problems. As an industry, we must prioritize the most significant obstacles to mental health and tackle them one step at a time.

We must recognize that well-being and heavy workloads cannot co-exist without adequate support. If leaders are not serious about reducing workloads, offering support, and making real change, then they are not serious about improving well-being.

Leaders must model the change they want to see. Healthy work cultures are built from the decisions made each day by all team members, with leaders wielding the greatest influence. The choices that individuals and leaders make each day cast votes for (or against) a culture of authentic well-being that respects and inspires people's lives at and outside of work.

METHODOLOGY NOTES

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

A key element of our audit is the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale; a rigorous and scientific method designed by the University of Warwick with funding from NHS Scotland. The scale gives our research a robust method for measuring mental well-being and distinguishes our approach from other mental health surveys by giving us a benchmark underpinned by academic research.

The scale provides a score for each individual which can be contextualized by whether it falls above or below the national average. The scale enables us to quantify mental well-being, thus promoting wider understanding of mental well-being more holistically. Furthermore, scores can be tracked over time, allowing organizations and society at large to understand factors that impact mental well-being.

AUTHORS



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About Opinium

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About The Insights Association

The Insights Association is the leading voice, resource and network of the marketing research and data analytics community. IA focuses on Four Pillars in its efforts to help members: Protect, Connect, Inform & Promote. IA invests in providing enforceable and respected quality standards, legal and business advocacy, education, certification and direct support to enable its members to thrive in an evolving industry.

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