



wysa

Fall/Winter 2022

All Worked Up

A report on the state of American
employees' mental health

The hard truths on the impact of a post-pandemic, pre-recession, transitional work environment

Over the past few years, organizations have had to make rapid and life-impacting decisions around the very nature of work; trying to balance performance and flexibility in a challenging, transitional environment. Some companies are now making huge layoffs due to ongoing shifts in market dynamics, the invisible threat of which adds enormously to work-related stress, leading to loss of control and a sense of helplessness for millions of employees.

As the geopolitical impact of the war in Ukraine and Covid 19 policies continue to scar the economy, what does the state of mental health of the American workforce look like now? How are employees grappling with day to day pressures while staring down the barrel of a gun loaded with global recession?

In October 2022, Wysa commissioned an independent survey of over 1,000 American employees to get an in-depth look at the current state of mental health post-COVID.

The results are staggering.

There are serious, debilitating mental health concerns that our workforces are silently struggling with. Everyone deserves mental health care, and lack of mental health care access can impact an individual's self-confidence and self-perception about their abilities and identity at work, which could lead to perceived low self-efficacy, leading to poor performance and low productivity at work.

Our survey took respondents through two standard mental health assessment tools used by clinicians as an initial screening for depression and anxiety symptoms. We then asked those whose scores indicated clinically significant levels of depression and anxiety if they had sought professional support, and if not, why not? We asked what people are telling their employers about their mental health, if anything. Are they comfortable talking to their HR departments? Or would they rather talk to a bot than their boss?

Read on to find out.



Foreword



The discoveries in our national employee survey are shocking. Severe stress, depression and anxiety are the underlying problems behind burnout, stifled productivity, and excessive absenteeism in the workplace. They go some way to explaining why the U.S. is experiencing some of the highest suicide rates since World War II, all heartbreaking losses, many of which are preventable with the right support.

While our parents' generation would probably laugh if we asked what kind of mental healthcare support they received from their employers, today, expectations could not be more different. People are actively seeking employment with companies who acknowledge them not just as workers, but as full human beings. Despite this clearly identified need from workers, employers often struggle to know how best to support their employees' mental health while respecting their privacy in such personal matters.

What we can say for sure is that more needs to be done to address the prevailing stigma around stress in the workplace. As it stands, too many people feel compelled to lie about taking time off when their mental health is affecting their ability to work. Even those suffering symptoms of moderate anxiety or depression don't feel comfortable letting their managers know. We can't let this continue to be the elephant in the room, it's time to start talking about it.

Ramakant Vempati, Co-Founder and President



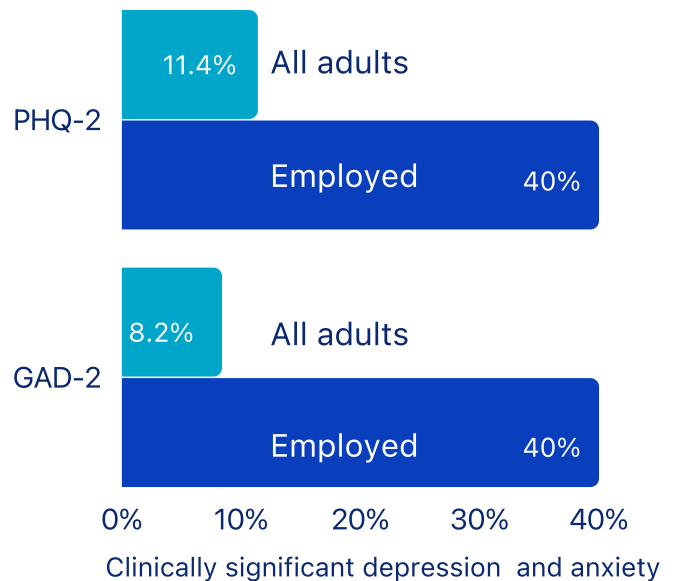
Employees are at risk

Workplace depression and anxiety much higher than general population figures suggest

The sampling reveals a grim reality. The scale of anxiety and depression sweeping America's workforce is substantially higher than the general population's national averages. While stressors related to health and social relationships affected everyone due to COVID, employed people additionally face unique financial and workplace challenges. These are exacerbated by a workplace culture that is increasingly transactional, isolated, and stigmatized.

Why do these numbers differ from the national population estimates? There is [evidence](#) on how work stress, the work environment, nature of work, and relationships at work can lead to increases in incidence for mood disorders in the working population.

These studies paint a very different picture to the environment for non-working people, including partners of employed people, those wealthy enough to not have to work for an income, and retirees who are enjoying a more relaxed pace of life. Without further research we can only assume that, on average, these groups benefit from lower incidences of severe depression and anxiety.

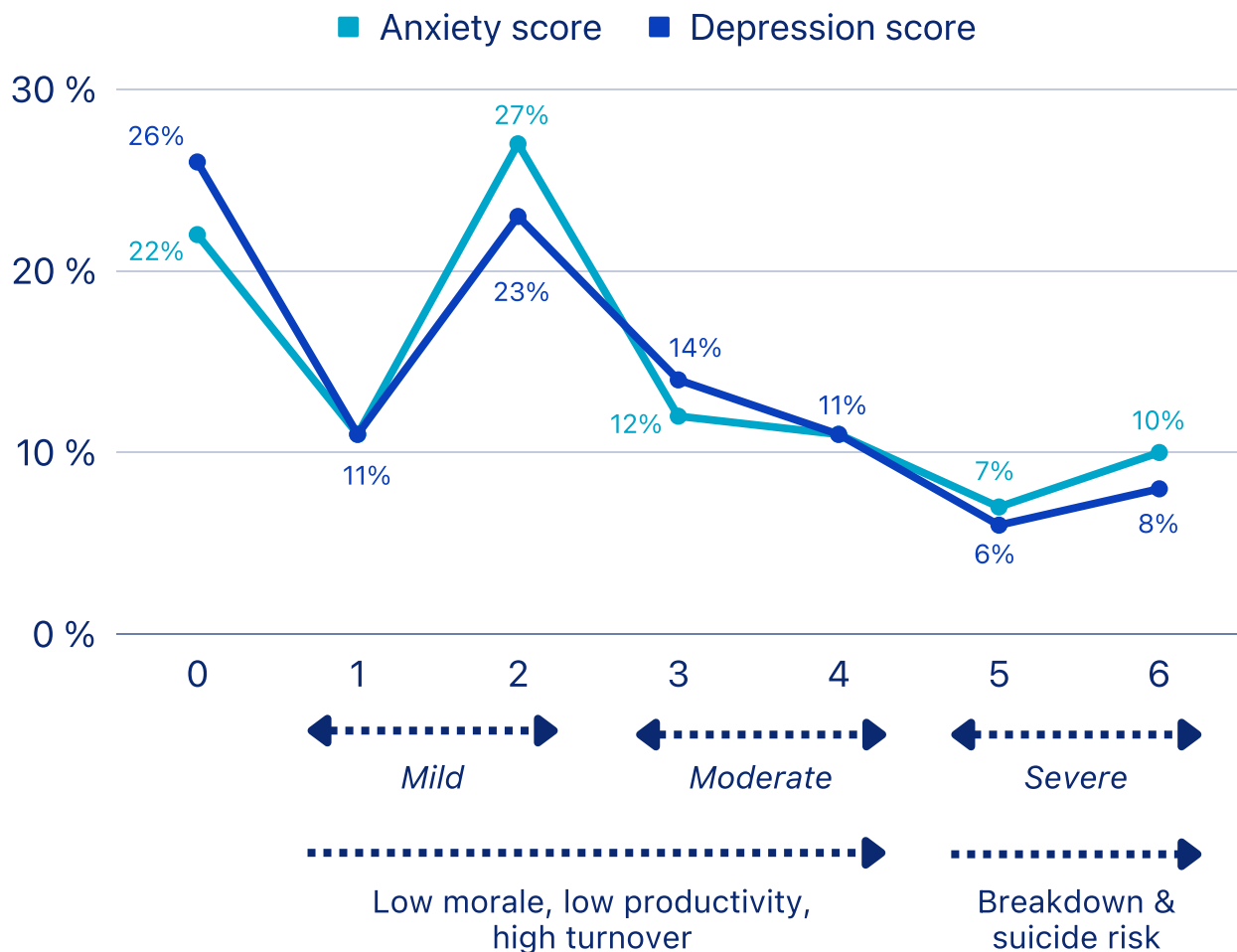


40%

of working Americans
suffer from moderate to
severe depression
and/or anxiety

4 in 10 employees suffer moderate to severe mental health symptoms

Our survey found that the scale of clinically significant levels of depression and anxiety sweeping America's workforce is substantially higher than general population averages.



The Wysa employee mental health survey included the Generalized Anxiety Disorder questionnaire (GAD-2) screening for anxiety and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2) screen for depression. Anyone scoring 3 or more on the tests is considered likely to be suffering clinically significant symptoms, at moderate to severe levels.

The 40% moderate to severe anxiety prevalence amongst employees is a stark variation from the 11.4% national population figure reported in a December 2020 survey in the [Journal of Affective Disorders](#), indicating that workers are at heightened risk of psychological stress. Major depression in the general population is 8.4%, according to the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) a notable difference for working adults where scores of 5 and 6 on the PHQ-2 screening reached a total of 14%.



“

These numbers are a red flag and need immediate attention. This is not just a responsibility of the struggling individual, but also of their employer's, as these people spend a significant amount of time at their workplace and their symptoms could be a direct result of their work.

”

Smriti Joshi, Chief Psychologist



Young workers need more support

Younger employees are the biggest worriers, with twice as many working 25-34 year-olds than 45-54 year-olds suffering from moderate to severe anxiety symptoms, with a score of over 3 on the GAD-2.

Similar levels prevail in Gen Z, with almost half (47%) of 16-24 year-olds suffering symptoms of clinically significant anxiety. Especially alarming is that 15% of this age group indicated the highest levels of anxiety, stating they feel nervous, anxious or on edge nearly every day and are unable to stop worrying.

Moderate to severe depression in working people diminishes with age, with 1 in 2 16-34 year-olds suffering moderate to severe depression, declining to 1 in 3 in those closer to retirement age.

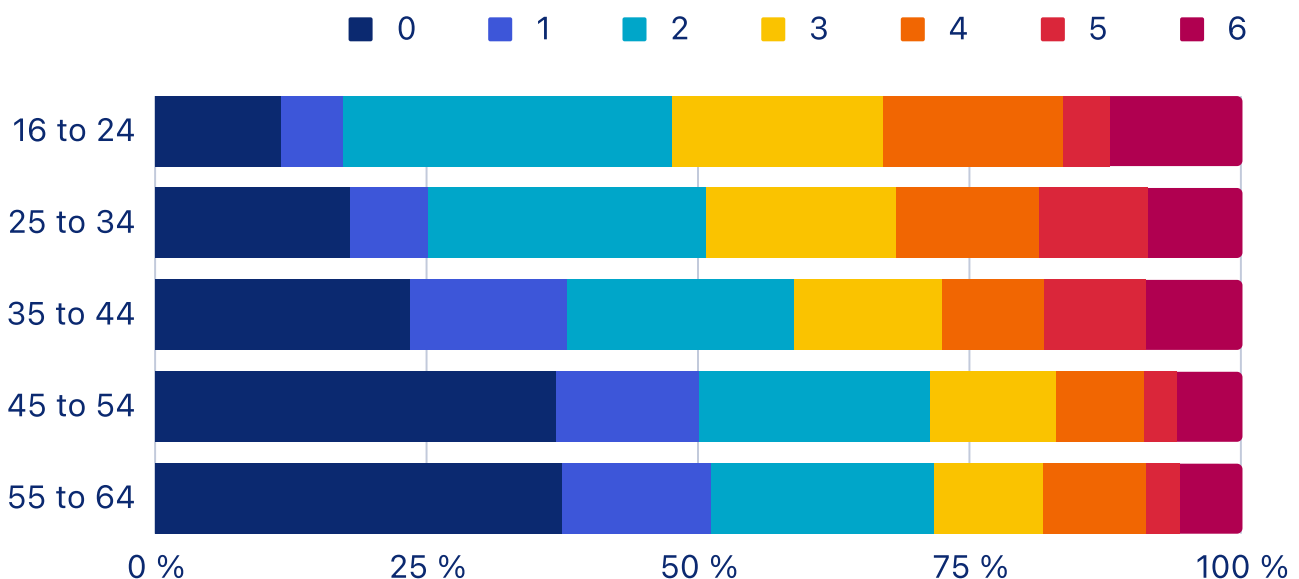
This could be because younger generations are more informed about mental health, and able to recognize the signs and symptoms more readily. We've seen a growth in the media about mental health, many of which targets Gen Z and Millennials. Or that older people are more settled at work and in life, and experienced in dealing with life challenges head-on.

Respondents under the age of 44 were much more likely to admit they experienced work-related stress, than those 45 and above. Of those who said they "don't get stressed about work":

- 41% were 55 to 64
- 31% were 45 to 54
- 16% were 35 to 44
- 18% were 25 to 34

It's clear that the younger workforce is suffering greater symptoms of stress and as such are in need of more attention and support from employers.

Depression scores by age



Employees become less depressed as they mature

“

Existing literature supports these findings. Studies on the workplace and mental health of young employees reflect that young individuals experience perceived low control, higher demands from work place, low security, many forms of discrimination at work and having a temporary work status were found to increase vulnerability for developing anxiety and depression symptoms.

These discoveries have serious implications for a workplace looking to nurture and retain young talent, and have contributions to overall productivity. Not only is the need for support more acute among young people, traditional ways of helping them may not cut it, with Gen Z needing employers to meet their personal needs, at times that suit them and through appealing methods of support.

Smriti Joshi

”

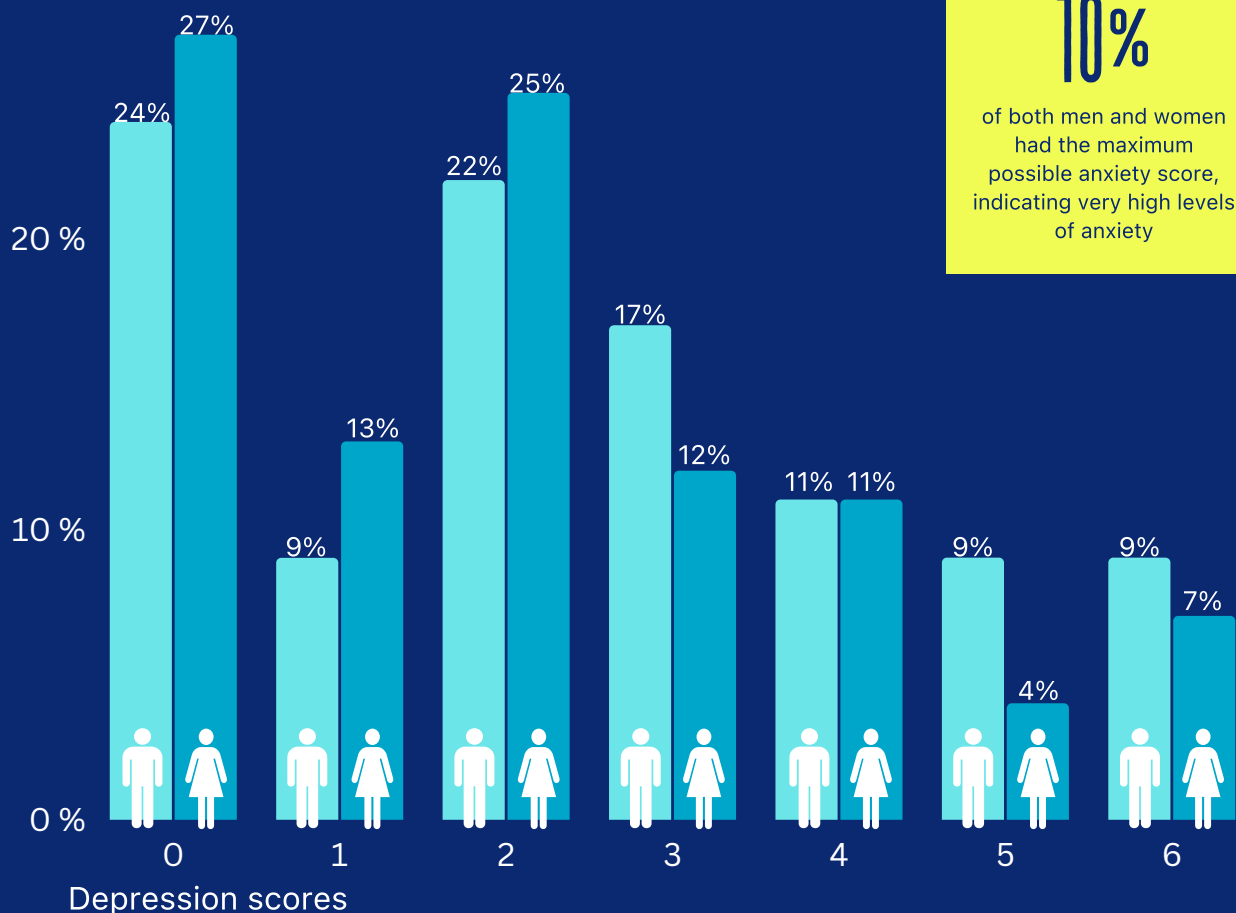


Men suffer more severe symptoms than women

32% more working men than women experience symptoms of clinically significant depression

Almost half of all working men suffering moderate to severe depression versus one-third of women (34%) suffering the same (scoring 3+ on the PHQ-2 test).

Similarly, 43% of men versus 37% women screened as suffering moderate to severe anxiety. 30% more women suffer anxiety at mild levels, with over 3 in 10 women (31%) scoring a 2 on the GAD-2 test. Traditional gender stereotypes explain some of this difference, with men tending to internalize problems more than women, who are more comfortable finding safe and judgment-free audiences for emoting and building social bonds. While mental health issues are gender-neutral, employers will need to reimagine what gender inclusive support looks like.



46%

men screened positive for moderate to severe depression

1 IN 3

women suffer moderate to severe depression

10%

of both men and women had the maximum possible anxiety score, indicating very high levels of anxiety

Mental health by region

Northeast



Northeast	Anxiety	Depression
None	19%	20%
Low	35%	37%
Moderate	26%	25%
Severe	20%	18%

The most anxious employees live in Northeastern states, with a prevalence of moderate to severe anxiety symptoms reaching almost half of working adults (46%), around one third higher than in the Midwest. The Northeast working population also suffers higher levels of depression, with 18% showing severe symptoms and only one in five people having no depression symptoms at all.

West



West	Anxiety	Depression
None	27%	26%
Low	33%	32%
Moderate	24%	28%
Severe	16%	14%

The region with most relaxed employees is the West, where 27% of employees suffer no anxiety symptoms. Despite this, almost one in 4 employees living here experience symptoms of moderate anxiety which needs to be addressed. Levels of depression also need to be improved, with more than 4 in 10 people suffering at moderate to severe levels.

Midwest



Midwest	Anxiety	Depression
None	22%	25%
Low	43%	37%
Moderate	20%	27%
Severe	15%	11%

Fewer workers living in the Mid-West suffer moderate to severe anxiety that any other region, with 65% having levels where people can usually manage themselves. Depression levels are average versus employees in other regions. Nevertheless, these number of employees suffering moderate to severe mental health symptoms are still more than triple that of the general population, so easier access to mental health support here is vital.

South



South	Anxiety	Depression
None	21%	29%
Low	41%	33%
Moderate	21%	23%
Severe	17%	15%

The working population in the South is the least depressed, with 1 in 3 people suffering no symptoms at all. However this is the second most troubled region when it comes to anxiety, with 38% of workers having clinically significant symptom levels.

Too busy to get help

Alarming, 1 in 3 employees who screened as suffering mental health symptoms at moderate to severe levels have not yet spoken to a relevant healthcare professional about it, such as a doctor, nurse, wellbeing practitioner, coach, counselor, therapist or psychologist.

1 IN 3

GET NO HELP

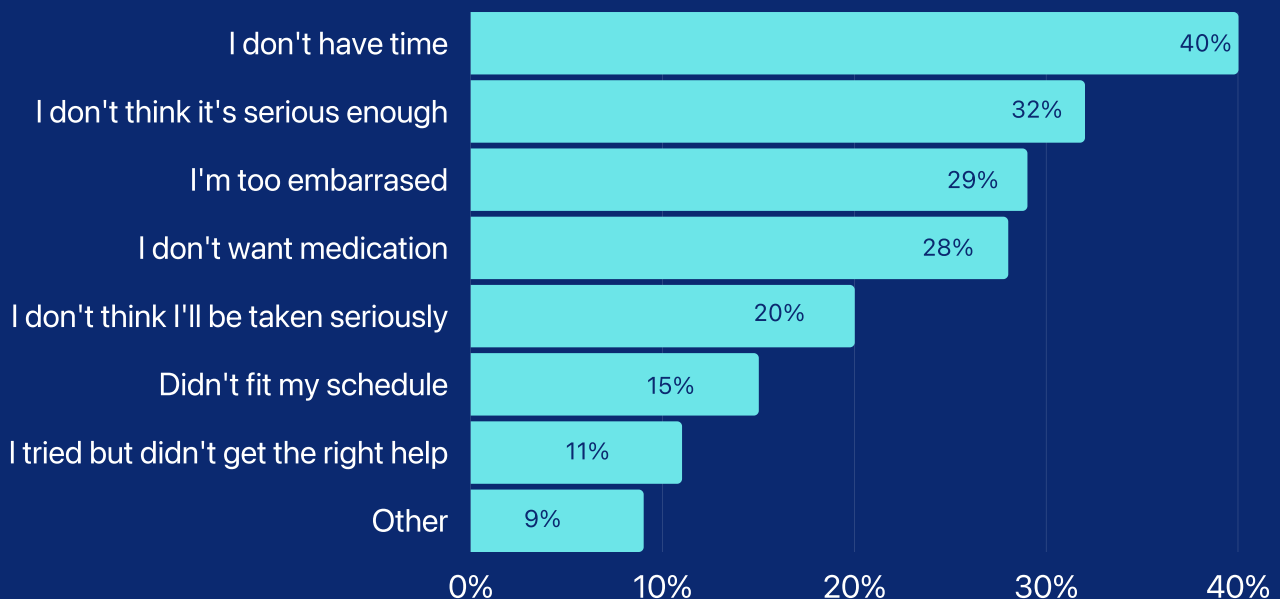
1 IN 2

WOMEN SUFFERING
DON'T REACH OUT

4 IN 5

MEN WITH MODERATE
TO SEVERE SYMPTOMS
HAVE ACCESSED HELP

Moderate/severe sufferers give their reasons for not accessing help



Women are particularly reluctant to seek help; almost half (49%) of women who are suffering from moderate to severe symptoms have not spoken to a relevant professional, more than double that of men, where just 19% have not sought support.

These findings point to the problems with accessibility, anonymity and the gap in care that exists in the current mental health system. Clinically proven digital mental health solutions like Wysa have massive potential to provide support in all of these areas where individuals are currently going untreated, and the impacts on worker and workplace health are significant.

“

Not receiving a diagnosis or access to support, along with continued exposure to a large variety of stressors, can quickly escalate into more serious, long term mental health concerns. Ultimately, it can cause people to lose hope and experience suicidal ideation. This has significant implications for the organization through increased turnover, reduced productivity and an unhealthy work culture

”

Smriti Joshi

Management is in the Dark

Despite corporate wellness programs and employee initiatives, people aren't prepared to speak to their employers about their mental health. When asked about mental health conditions they face there is a startling prevalence of symptoms that employers are unaware of.

Problems to encourage into the open



Hidden anxiety hits hard

More than 4 in 10 workers (42%) said they suffer anxiety, yet their employer is unaware.



Secret yet serious depression

38% said they suffer from depression that their bosses don't know about.



Sleeplessness impacting productivity

More than 1 in 4 workers (26%) said they suffer in silence at work from insomnia or lack of sleep



Social anxiety preventing collaboration

Unbeknown to their employer, more than 1 in 5 workers (23%) said that they suffer from social anxiety



Physical pain compounding mental health

It's not just mental health - nearly 1 in 5 workers (18%) said their employer is unaware that they suffer from chronic pain, a debilitating condition that can affect all areas of life.



6 out of 10 employees who stated their employers weren't aware of their anxiety screened positive for moderate to severe anxiety.



More than 5 out of 10 workers who stated their employers weren't aware of their depression screened positive for moderate to severe depression.

Figures were substantially elevated for most of these conditions for Gen Z workers (aged 16 to 24), illustrating a special need for attention and support to this new workforce by managers.

They were:

- 91% higher than average on social anxiety
- 57% higher than average on anxiety
- 57% higher on relationship strain/breakup stress
- 55% higher than average on depression
- 35% higher than average on insomnia

In this younger age group, only 15% were not suffering from symptoms that their employer was unaware of, compared to 37% of those aged 45-54. Perhaps this younger age group is happier to share their problems at work, as we know they are suffering from the results of their PHQ-2 and GAD-2. As this group continues to flow into the US workforce, it's essential for leaders to embrace the value that Gen Z places on their mental health as an integral part of their well-being and continue to encourage openness around these challenges.

“

We spend the majority of our waking life at work, which we now know is affected by the way we feel. If we are anxious or depressed, work performance and productivity slip, which is extremely problematic for employers. Insights from the American Psychological Association (APA) 2022 Work and Well-being Survey revealed that 81% of workers in the United States are seeking employment opportunities at companies that actively support employee mental health. So it's not only good for business and ultimately improving the bottom line, it's good for reputation and forging a compelling employee value proposition.

Ramakant Vempati

”

The truth on sick days for mental health

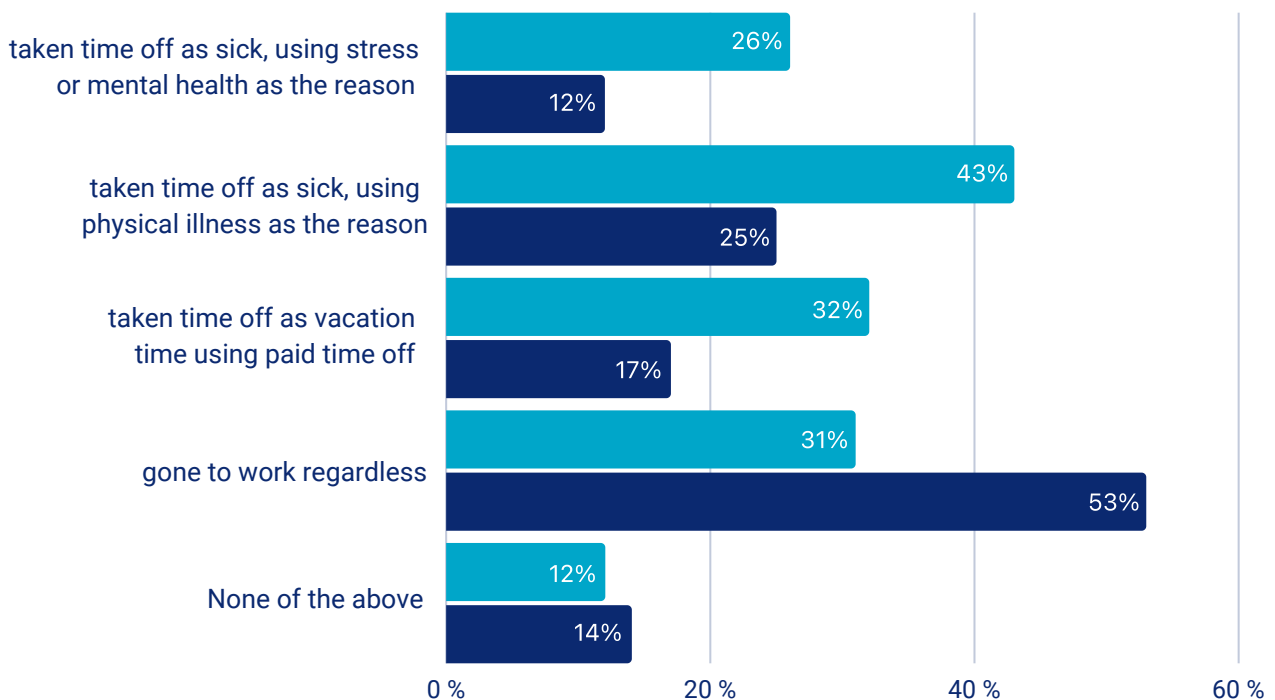
Despite growing conversations around mental health in the workplace in recent years, the report revealed a significant portion of employees are still not comfortable disclosing their mental health challenges as a reason for needing time off.

American workers revealed they are more likely to either lie about taking off sick to get mental health relief, or simply try to push through it and go to work, fuelling the trend of burnout happening across industries.



In the past, when my mental state or stress levels were impacting my ability to work, I have...

Male Female



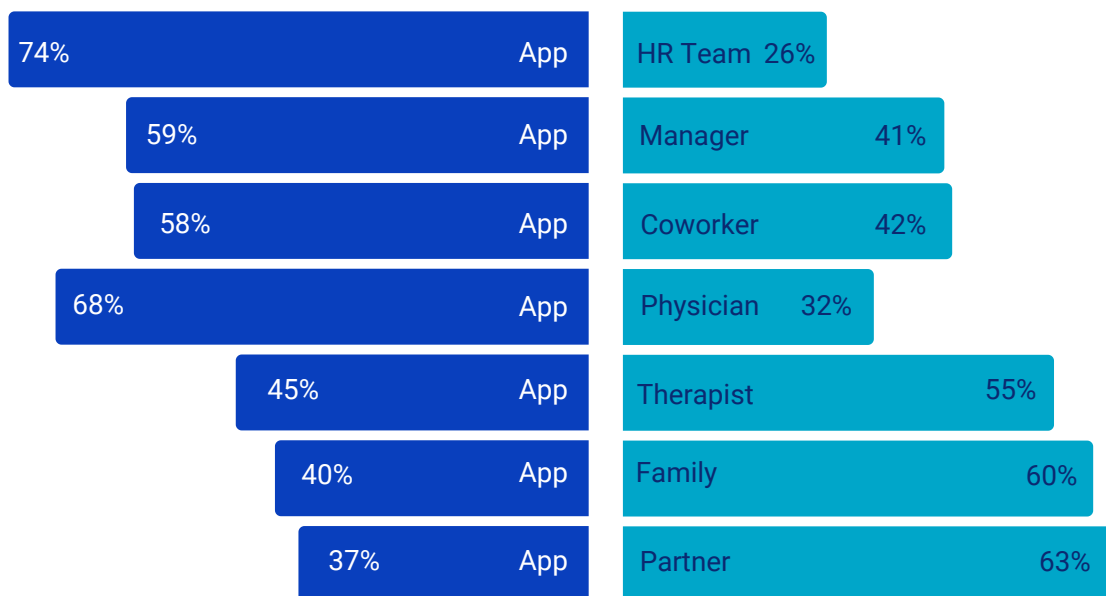
This fear of owning up to dealing with mental health stress to employers is symbolic of the huge progress still to be made in corporate culture when it comes to transparency and support for employees' mental wellness on par with physical health. Despite corporate propositions and brand mantras, more is still to be done.

Whether employees take sick leave, paid time off, or power on through, these coping mechanisms come at a huge cost to organizations through absenteeism, staff turnover, and downstream medical claims.

Boss or bot?

When asked who they'd rather go to about their mental health, American employees were more likely to select 'a mental health app with clinically proven self-help resources tailored to their needs' than anyone in the workplace, and even their general physician.

- Nearly 3 in 4 would rather go to the app than approach HR
- Almost 3 in 5 people would rather talk to an app than their manager or colleague
- More than 2 in 3 would rather talk to an app than their general physician



It's not just younger 'tech savvy' employees who are more willing to share their mental problems with an app rather than people at work either. 82% of 55 to 64 year olds would prefer to turn to the bot than their HR team, and 72% would prefer the tech solution to talking to their boss, the highest proportion of all age groups. 73% of this older age group would rather turn to the app than their general physician, and a shocking 56% of them would prefer to talk to the app than a therapist. Being the hardest to reach group, with 57% of 55-64 year olds with moderate to severe mental health symptoms not seeking help from any relevant professional.

21% said 'the night before I start my work week is when I'm most stressed'

18% are most stressed about work 'first thing in the morning'

It's no wonder that most employees turn to their family or partner about their mental health. When asked when they're most stressed about work, 45% of respondents selected periods outside of working hours.

Work stress bleeds into our home life, and this finding indicates that in-office mental health resources, or tools that are only available during work hours, do not help those who are feeling the impacts of work-related stress when they need it most.

The future of mental healthcare is digital

The findings in this report suggest that the mental health crisis in the workplace is bigger than perceived.

There are worrying levels of prevalence of mental illness in the American workforce and too many people are not getting the help they need. Despite employers offering corporate wellness schemes and communicating an open culture when it comes to mental health, employees just aren't comfortable speaking up or disclosing their condition.

But there is a solution. The increasing adoption of technology and digitization in our everyday lives is extending into healthcare. There is an appetite for digital tools that allows for people to offload, share concerns, and learn strategies for self care. Digital mental health initiatives can meet people where they are, providing access to both self-care and human delivered mental health support.

The idea is to not replace existing treatment focused on in-person mental health services, but to offer digital access and guided support to people at a time and place when they really need it.

It's clear that mental health support must be delivered through an already open door, one that requires no human intervention at all, giving people the choice of who, or what, they speak with.



Conclusion

“

Even at mild levels of depression and anxiety, digital self-help tools like Wysa are hugely beneficial to help prevent people's mental health from deteriorating. Most people suffer at this level. It's here that almost everyone can benefit from building mental resilience and learning how to cope when daily life becomes overwhelming.

We know from our work with global employers, that HR leaders recognise their people as the most valuable asset they have - and are putting in huge efforts to support wellbeing. Meeting people where they are - online, on their phones, and open to technology - could be the best opportunity we have to address this crisis.

Jo Agwarral, Co-Founder and CEO, Wysa

”



Methodology

In October 2022 Observant carried out this survey on behalf of Wysa targeting employed online respondents in the UK and the USA. The services included survey programming, data collection and reporting. Respondents were incentivised and each provided opt-in consent in line with GDPR guidelines. Observant is an accredited MRS company partner.

This survey was conducted online. A total of 2,024 respondents across the US and UK were surveyed with a target of 1,000 completed surveys in each market.

The sample was representative on gender and region alongside national representative distribution of employed age groups. The different recruitment methods used alongside the supplier blend removes any potential single source bias. Measures were taken to ensure that no duplication or link manipulation occurred on either a supplier and respondent level.

Resources

GAD-2 Questionnaire

The GAD-2 is a brief initial screening tool for Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). In primary care patients, the GAD-2 has been shown to have high sensitivity and specificity. Any positive screening should always be followed up with further assessment.

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	+1	+2	+3
Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	+1	+2	+3

GAD-2 score obtained by adding score for each question (total points)

A GAD-2 score of 3 is the optimal cut-off point when using the GAD-2 to screen for depression.

If the score is 3 or greater, major generalized anxiety disorder is likely.

Patients who screen positive should be further evaluated with the PHQ-9, other diagnostic instruments, or direct interview to determine whether they meet criteria for a depressive disorder.

Resources

PHQ-2 Questionnaire

The Patient Health Questionnaires (PHQ-2) was developed by Drs. Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B.W. Williams, Kurt Kroenke and colleagues. This questionnaire is a standard measure to screen for depressive concerns. A total score greater than three warrants further diagnostic investigation, such as follow-up with the PHQ-9.

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	+1	+2	+3
Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	0	+1	+2	+3

PHQ-2 score obtained by adding score for each question (total points)

A PHQ-2 score of 3 is the optimal cut-off point when using the PHQ-2 to screen for depression.

If the score is 3 or greater, major depressive disorder is likely.

Patients who screen positive should be further evaluated with the PHQ-9, other diagnostic instruments, or direct interview to determine whether they meet criteria for a depressive disorder.

Breaking barriers to access in mental health support

About Wysa

Wysa is a global leader in AI-driven mental health support, available to individuals directly, through healthcare providers and employer benefits programs. Wysa supports users with the help of an 'emotionally intelligent' conversational agent. The bot uses evidence-based cognitive behavioral techniques (CBT), meditation, breathing and mindfulness exercises, as well as micro-actions to help users build mental resilience skills. For employers, Wysa offers a workplace solution that caters to the full spectrum of mental health needs. Wysa has facilitated over 550 million conversations in 65 countries across the globe. Wysa's corporate partners include Bosch, Swiss Re, Allianz, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, the UK's NHS, and the Ministry of Health in Singapore.

 press@wysa.io

 www.wysa.io

 [wysa-ai](https://www.linkedin.com/company/wysa-ai)

 [@wysabuddy](https://twitter.com/wysabuddy)