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Global Employee Mental Health Report

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Foreword

An estimated 3.3 billion people spend 65% of their waking hours at work. At such a scale, the workplace connects human experience across the globe, and offers the largest mechanism to promote wellness.

As of 2022, mental health concerns contribute to the highest disease burden in the general population¹ and the linkage between psychosocial risk factors at work and stress-related disorders² is clear. In Wysa's '<u>All Worked Up</u>' report published earlier this year, we heard employees describe barriers like stigma and lack of awareness, and why they find it hard to ask or reach out for help. Employers still have a lot of work to do in order to expand access to mental health at work.

Recommendations for increasing access to interventive support have been difficult to fully implement. This is due to two reasons. First, it is very hard to increase access effectively across geographies and at scale: the solutions on offer are local and expensive, and a sole focus on severe illness leads to delayed support. Second, any data on need or efficacy is costly and timeconsuming to generate, and even if it is available, it is fragmented and hard to access. This makes it harder for decision-makers to identify issues quickly, prove what works, and offer affordable support to a global workforce.

This report hopes to address this gap. As a global leader in mental health, Wysa has been providing mental health support to 11 million people across 95 countries. It is used directly by consumers and by public health bodies, and also offered by employers and insurers across the world. This kind of scale gives us a unique opportunity to look at what employees say about mental health at work, and study how it impacts their employer.

The sections that follow are drawn from one of the largest observational studies of its kind globally, and presented here for the first time. These insights are drawn from the analysis of 150,000 conversations that 11,300 employees from 11 organizations and 60 countries had with Wysa's AI chat platform, over thirteen months (July 2021-July 2022).

In this report, we will see how these workers speak about their distress, across geographies and through time, and how it demonstrates itself through mood and productivity. We will also calculate, using a case study, the financial cost of poor mental health that is borne by an employer.

We present data that shows how Wysa is effective at improving the mental health of employees in over 60 countries, covering Africa, South America, Australia and Pacific Regions, Asia, Europe, and North America. The economic benefit to large corporations is also clear, where we estimate that this saves an employer 30 million USD per year, at a scale of 50,000 employees.

This report examines the effectiveness of an AI-led stepped care model, with anonymous and clinically safe AI chat as the first step; which allows for early and effective intervention, where AI chat makes users stay anonymous yet feel heard and not judged, even at 4 am. We will show why an employer will find that it works, how it is affordable and can save larger costs in the future, and possible to deploy instantly across the world without any restrictions on availability or amount of use.

Like the people featured here, millions of workers across cultures and countries can use Wysa for help when they are in distress, in a way that has never been done before.

This is their - and our - story.

"

Methodology

Wysa is an Al-led conversational agent app that has the capacity to offer services to reduce stress and alleviate the symptoms of depression and anxiety through interventions rooted in CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) principles. In this report, we closely examine the employees served by Wysa in the last calendar year (July 2021–July 2022) to understand the impact of mental health concerns across workplaces, and the relevance of digital health support in that context.

This report is one of the largest observational studies of its kind, and these insights were derived from Wysa data analytics applied to over **150,000 conversations** undertaken by **11,300 users** of the Wysa app from **11 organizations** and **60 countries** from all over the globe.

We measured varied metrics pertaining to employees' mental health parameters and app usage, from depression (PHQ-9³) & anxiety (GAD-7⁴) assessments to energy score ratings⁵ & sessions undertaken on the app. We studied the emotions expressed by employees during conversations with the bot and the qualitative feedback they shared on the app. We also measured SOS triggers via chat, and the support that employees in crisis accessed, either through helplines, crisis text messaging, or online information.

We also studied differences and similarities on these parameters across employees based in the following regions: North America, Africa, South America, Australia and Pacific Regions, Asia, and Europe.

The final section of the report studies the impact on employer cost savings, for which the methodology for each component is mentioned within. The calculations for absenteeism and presenteeism utilize the Health and Work Performance Questionnaire and Work Productivity and Activity Impairment (WPAI) questionnaire and the World Health Organization Health and Performance Questionnaire (HPQ).



Global insights

1

Globally, employees are reporting feelings of sadness and depression...

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, 42 percent⁶ of employees globally have reported a decline in mental health.

What kinds of emotions and feelings are employees expressing throughout the day?

While talking to Wysa, **32%** employees expressed feeling low, bad, numb, depressed, and sad throughout the day. All of the regional sub-divisions globally had comparable levels of such emotional expressions, ranging from **26%** in **Europe** and **35%** in **Asia** and **Australia & Pacific Regions**.



Percentage of emotion words expressed about feelings of sadness and depression

Region-wise estimates of the **PHQ-9 depression scores** reported on the Wysa app reveal that employees in Europe and North America reported the highest average depression scores globally — **7.44** and **6.93** (between mild to moderate depressive symptoms). 65% employees from Europe and 56% from North America reported symptoms of mild or more depression.

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...feelings of stress and anxiety...

23% employees expressed feeling anxious, confused, stressed, tired, and afraid. Comparable levels of such emotional expressions were found globally, with 25% of anxiety mentions from **North America** and 30% from **Europe** and **Australia & Pacific Regions**. Mentions of anxiety from Asia, Africa, and South America also featured in the same bracket, ranging from 27% to 29%.



Percentage of emotion words expressed about feelings of *stress* and *anxiety*

Region-wise estimates of the **GAD-7 anxiety scores** reported on the Wysa app reveal that employees in **North America** and **Europe** reported the highest average anxiety scores globally — 5.87 and 5.66 respectively (between mild to moderate anxiety symptoms). 48% employees from North America and 45% from Europe reported symptoms of mild or more anxiety.

All in all, 38% and 37% of all employees globally reported symptoms of depression and anxiety, respectively.

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2 Employees are expressing "neutral" levels of motivation and energy.

When asked, "how is your day going so far?", 52% of all employees had an ambivalent response, while 25% reported high energy scores on the Wysa app; and 22% reported feeling low.

When examining the differences between countries, we found that employees in **Africa** reported feeling the most active, motivated, and energetic, with **47%** of employees reporting "high" energy scores. In contrast, only **20%** employees in **Australia & Pacific Regions** reported "high" energy scores; and **38%** employees from **Asia** reported feelings of low motivation and energy.

Average energy scores reported were lowest during the workday, slightly higher at the end of the workday, and highest in the mornings at the beginning of the workday.

Over **33%** of employees globally reported feeling 'not okay' at the start of the workday– and this number kept going up throughout the workday, reaching its peak at **40%** towards the end of the workday. All in all, **75%** employees reported low to moderate energy on average throughout the day.



3

During the workday, a high percentage of employees are expressing feelings of stress (36%) and sadness (38%).

How were people feeling as they began work across the world?

At the start of the work day, a high number of employees (**31%**) reported feeling stressed and anxious. These feelings spiked during the work day (**36%**) and fell at the end of the work day (**19%**). Feelings of sadness were high before (**32%**) and during (**38%**) the work day; and they remained high at the end of the day too (**31%**), with a significant minority reporting feelings of loneliness (**7%**) at this time.

Feelings of tiredness were similar (8%) before and during the work day, and they started to spike towards the end of the day (17%). Employees reported feeling angry (13%) at the beginning of the work day, as compared to during the work day (3%).

At the same time, around **10%** of all employees reported feeling calm, confident, good and happy throughout the day.



Emotions expressed by employees throughout the day, from 7 am to 8 pm

4

Most people asked for crisis support during the work day, and notably, late in the night.

After mentioning an instance of crisis within the app, a user gets immediately signposted and redirected to helplines and local resources within the app.

From those who were signposted, **87%** of Wysa users successfully took the next step to reach out to a resource in their geography.

The maximum occurrences of SOS instances were observed during the work day (10 am to 6 pm; **41%**) and in the night (8 pm to 7 am; **38%**). **15%** took place right after the end of the workday, between 6 and 8 pm. The majority of the night-time instances were between 8 pm and 2 am.

Digital interventions serve as a useful crisis management tool in the mental health space. Wysa, in particular, plays a vital role in providing employees with just-in-time support, by giving them access to an arsenal of tools, which prove to be helpful, comforting, and, if it comes to it, life-saving. This is especially significant when, as we have seen in the data, nearly 1 out of 3 SOS instances occur late at night when support services are not available, and if at all, very few are accessible.

The SOS feature of Wysa offers at-risk individuals access to international crisis helplines, child helplines, and links to online resources when they are amidst abuse, trauma, or crisis; helps vulnerable people create a safety plan; and provides employees the option to reach out to their EAP counselor if the need arises.

Wysa's accessibility also ensures that employees have a support system at their fingertips in moments when they feel overwhelmed and find it difficult to function.



Wysa's stepped care model– enhancing usage, improving access

75%⁷ of employees require mental wellness support. 77%⁸ employers offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which provides employees with support for personal issues and psychosocial distress.

EAPs typically provide employees with a limited number of paid sessions with a mental healthcare professional (since offering unlimited immediate therapy sessions is difficult and cost-prohibitive for payors) and referrals to therapists⁹. This process contains various barriers to access: from the complicated procedures employees need to undertake to access the support they need, to the delays in access due to the lack of 24*7 availability of therapists.

Thus, less than 7% of employees actually access EAP services¹⁰. There are other reasons for this underutilization too, from concerns over the confidentiality of employees' mental health data to the stigma around seeking mental health support¹¹. This underutilization leads to the worsening of mental health concerns, thus increasing the costs incurred by employers on mental health support services¹².

Early and preventative interventions that promote mental wellbeing and enhance and simplify access to mental health support resources are massively cost-effective & cost-saving¹³. Digital interventions not only incur lower costs but also provide greater net monetary benefits as compared to individual therapy¹⁴. Added to this is the disinhibition effect we see in Al conversations: more than 80% of individuals prefer to share their mental health concerns with an Al conversational agent rather than a human¹⁵.

Employees have varied mental health needs and require different levels of care. Wysa's stepped care model customized the support services employees received, and monitored outcomes consistently. This approach moves from lower to higher levels of care based on user outcomes and is known to enhance the impact and effectiveness of mental health interventions¹⁶. This model also optimizes the use of limited resources, increases access, and reduces treatment costs: compared to usual care, stepped care treatments are associated with more than 40% cost savings for payors¹⁷.



The employee experience

Wysa is *the* state-of-the-art, research-backed mental wellbeing platform that can be seamlessly implemented as part of your organization's EAP, and here are a few testimonials from our current users to answer the question, "Why Wysa?"

Over **91%** employees rated Wysa 3+ out of 5 stars.

79% of the user ratings were above 4 stars, with4.2 being the average rating.

Out of the individuals who rated the app positively, **58%** expressed **appreciation** for the app, and **48%** expressed how **useful** the app was to them and the **positivity** they experienced after using it.

Globally, employees expressed **feelings of gratitude and appreciation** for having a mental health support system like Wysa.

The primary reason why employees sought this support is because of Wysa's high **degree of usefulness**. Wysa enabled employees to think more deeply about their problems, deal with their negative thoughts and find their root causes, and identify their emotions better.

"I've been lonely and depressed lately. I can't talk about it with the people I'm with right now, and Wysa really helps in getting this load off my shoulders."

Wysa operated as a **judgment-free space** where employees felt that they could be completely honest with their innermost thoughts. They could freely talk about their worries and concerns and get a much-needed **catharsis** or emotional release. This enabled them to feel **calm, relaxed, positive, focused, and motivated.** Users also reported that Wysa helped them gain **confidence** and a **better perspective** on their issues.

"I am feeling calm and grateful and a little more confident to face the future."

Wysa is in the position to offer this kind of efficacy because it's designed in a way that its users are able to develop a **therapeutic bond with the AI-led conversational agent**. Employees saw Wysa as a friend or a mentor– someone who was aiding them in their journey towards better well-being and self-discovery.

"Wysa just feels like a friend more than a bot. I feel better while talking to Wysa since I get so many insights."

When engaging with the app, users found it particularly helpful when **the bot checked in with them** to ask about their emotional state, and offered them advice & recommended tools based on their responses. Users also reported that app features that enabled **progress-tracking** and **goal-setting**, and therapeutic tool packs that contained **guided meditations** and **sleep stories**, helped them feel in greater control of their lives and emotions, improved their sleeping habits, and enhanced their overall experience with the digital intervention.

"What I like is that the AI is tuned to ask meta-questions that help in self-discovery... and it balances out the self-discovery questions with actionable recommendations, such as "planning your day will help you feel unstuck, let me help you do that". Pretty awesome for an AI tool."

AI as a safe space, an empathetic listener

More than three-quarters (76%) of employees reached out to Wysa when they were feeling low and "not great" and needed psychosocial support - this is a highly significant number, especially compared to the take-up and utilization of alternative support mechanisms like EAP. Employees turned to Wysa during moments of crisis when they needed instant mental health aid and distress alleviation.

The feature of the app that has received consistent appreciation is its ability to offer a lending ear. Employees felt that they were able to vent and rant about their fears, doubts, worries, mistakes, and challenges in a candid and uninhibited way, and this led to the reduction of distress. Wysa's anonymity, and the accessibility of the service encouraged people to depend on it in the thick of emotional upheaval.

The app made it possible for one to express & vent their emotions, and also facilitated a therapeutic conversation. When users first joined, **83% of the most expressed emotion words** on Wysa were related to anxiety, depression, and stress. But upon continued use of the app, **52% of users** demonstrate a trend of expressing more positive emotions while interacting with the app. These users went from communicating predominantly negative emotions like "frustrated" and "depressed" to expressing more positive emotions like "happy", "calm", and "confident".



Clinical improvements with AI alone

Wysa can help improve the mental wellbeing of employees by alleviating symptoms of depression and anxiety.

To demonstrate the clinical efficacy of using Wysa as part of EAPs, we studied the mental health parameters of over **11,000 EAP users** of the Wysa app from all over the globe, alongside metrics pertaining to their app usage.

Here are our key findings.



When employees first onboarded onto the app, **47%** reported symptoms of depression: **21%** reported mild symptoms, **15%** reported moderate symptoms, and **11%** were severe.

After using Wysa, **59%** of those with symptoms of depression reported a reduction in PHQ-9 scores, with **24%** reporting **no depressive symptoms at all**.

Those with moderate or greater depressive symptoms exhibited a statistically significant **3.4 point** reduction (α = 0.05) in their PHQ-9 scores on average after using Wysa.



Reductions in PHQ-9 scores amongst employees who had moderate or more depressive symptoms at onboarding



(as measured by scores on the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7)



When employees first onboarded onto the app, **43%** reported symptoms of anxiety: **16%** reported mild symptoms, **16%** reported moderate symptoms, and 11% reported severe symptoms. After using Wysa, **68%** of those with symptoms of anxiety reported a reduction in their GAD-7 scores, with **33%** reporting **no symptoms at all.**

Those with moderate or greater anxiety symptoms exhibited a statistically significant **3.2 point** reduction ($\alpha = 0.05$) in their GAD-7 scores on average after using Wysa.



Reductions in GAD-7 scores amongst employees who had moderate or more anxiety symptoms at onboarding



Economic Case for AI–enabled stepped care

Depressive symptoms amongst employees cost employers in the USA between 17 billion USD to 44 billion USD¹⁸.

- Highly engaged Wysa users see a 31% reduction¹⁹ in their depressive symptoms.
- 80%²⁰ of our users saw their self-resilience improve after talking to Wysa.
- 93%²¹ of young adults found that Wysa helped when stressed, down or anxious.

48 percent of employees talk about their struggles, go through screening, and connect with the right level of resources.

Early support for employee mental wellbeing has strong economic benefits through enhanced productivity, reduced presenteeism, absenteeism, and turnover.

We analyzed these benefits for a leading employer in the United States with 50,000 employees.

This was done by considering employee metrics (industry benchmarks on salaries, and the prevalence of depressive symptoms amongst the employee population) and the expanded access to preventative, unlimited, anonymous mental health support made possible by Wysa.

By taking into account all the different realities and logistics in a workplace population and considering Wysa's proven efficacy and average app uptake rates in most large workforces, we have also added greater nuance to our cost savings estimates, and we've presented these and their corresponding calculations below.

Here are our key findings.

TOTAL IMPACT

By implementing Wysa, our client saved an estimated **29 million USD** per year due to lower absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover across 50,000 employees.

This is an annual cost saving of **580 USD** per employee.

Presented below is the breakdown of our cost savings analysis for reduced absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover due to reductions in depressive symptoms and improved mental well-being.

Absenteeism

Α

(Workdays that an employee is absent from the workplace due to depressive symptoms)

IMPACT

Wysa can reduce absenteeism costs by an estimated 7 million USD per year.

Employees with symptoms of depression are absent for an average of 6.45%²² of their working days in a year, over and above the absenteeism levels for employees not exhibiting depressive symptoms. As depression symptom severity goes up, so does absenteeism²³: **1.8%** for those with mild symptoms, **3.7%** for those with moderate symptoms, **6.3%** for those with moderately severe symptoms, and **14%** for those with severe symptoms. Assuming 240 working days in a year, employees with depressive symptoms are absent for an average of **15 days**, and this can go up to 34 days in case of severe symptoms.

Given the fact that **47%** employees on average report symptoms of depression at onboarding, and that Wysa users show reduced depression scores²⁴ post-usage; we estimated the number of people with depressive symptoms who would onboard on the app, and whom Wysa could support. Considering data for salary ranges in this organization and taking into account the entire workforce; we estimated per employee cost saving benefits of providing the workforce access to Wysa.

For an employer with 50,000 employees, Wysa can save **7 million USD** per year due to reduced absenteeism; with **139 USD** saved per employee per year.

Presenteeism

В

(Lost productivity that occurs when employees attend to work under mental stress)

IMPACT

Wysa can reduce presenteeism costs by an estimated **19 million USD per year**.

Employees with symptoms of depression exhibit presenteeism²⁵ during **17.5%**²⁶ of the working day on average, over and above the presenteeism levels for the employees not exhibiting depressive symptoms. As depression symptom severity goes up, so does the percent presenteeism: **9%** for those with mild symptoms, **15%** for those with moderate symptoms, **19%** for those with moderately severe symptoms, and **27%** for those with severe symptoms.

Given the fact that **47%** employees on average report symptoms of depression at onboarding, and that Wysa users show reduced depression scores²⁷ post-usage; we estimated the number of people with depressive symptoms who would onboard on the app, and whom Wysa could support. Considering data for salary ranges in this organization and taking into account the entire workforce; we estimated per employee cost saving benefits of providing the workforce access to Wysa.

For an employer with 50,000 employees, Wysa can save **19 million USD** per year due to reduced presenteeism; with **388 USD** saved per-employee per year.

Turnover

С

(Employees voluntarily leaving the organization due to stress, depressive symptoms, and other mental health concerns)

IMPACT

Wysa can reduce voluntary turnover costs by 3 million USD a year on average.

The estimated annual voluntary turnover in the USA in 2022 is 24%²⁸; mental health concerns such as stress and depressive symptoms account for five percent²⁹ of total voluntary turnover; and replacing a single employee cost approximately 21%³⁰ of that employee's salary.

Given the fact that **47%** employees on average report symptoms of depression at onboarding, and that Wysa users show reduced depression scores³¹ post-usage; we estimated the number of people with depressive symptoms who would onboard on the app, and whom Wysa could support.

Keeping the above data points in mind, and considering the average salaries in the organization in question, we estimated that Wysa can save **3 million USD** a year on average, by reducing stress-and depressive symptom-induced voluntary turnover. For an employer with 50,000 employees, Wysa can save **59 USD** per employee per year.

All in all, by implementing Wysa, our client saved an estimated 29 million USD per year due to lower absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover across 50,000 employees. This is an annual cost saving of 580 USD per employee.



Triangulation of our cost savings model

We validated our cost savings analysis above by using a second analytical model to see if the cost savings were in the same range. For this model, we used cost savings estimates of *reduced productivity losses* due to reductions in depressive symptoms.

Productivity

(Work time that is missed or affected because of concerns like depression)

IMPACT

Wysa can save 34 million USD per year due to reduced productivity losses.

Employees with depressive symptoms exhibit productivity³² losses during **29%**³³ of the work week on average, over and above the productivity losses exhibited by the population not exhibiting symptoms of depression. As depression symptom severity goes up, so does the percent productivity loss: There's a **15%** productivity loss for those with mild symptoms, **27.4%** for those with moderate symptoms, **32.5%** for those with moderately severe symptoms, and **43.4%** for those with severe symptoms.

Given the fact that **47%** employees on average report symptoms of depression at onboarding, and that Wysa users show reduced depression scores³⁴ post-usage; we estimated the number of people with depressive symptoms who would onboard on the app, and whom Wysa could support. Considering data for salary ranges in this organization and taking into account the entire workforce; we estimated per-employee cost-saving benefits of providing the workforce access to Wysa.

For an employer with 50,000 employees, Wysa can save **34 million USD** per year due to reduced productivity losses; with **685 USD** saved per-employee per year.



Validation of our cost savings model

The productivity model above used different causal factor benchmarks for the cost impact of mental health, by examining the effect of mental health on losses in *productivity as a whole* (Model 2) rather than for absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover separately and combining them subsequently (Model 1).

MODEL 1

Absenteeism, Presenteeism, and Turnover Total cost savings = 29 million USD per year, for an employer with 50,000 employees.

MODEL 2

Productivity Total cost savings = 34 million USD per year, for an employer with 50,000 employees

We find that results from Model 2 are **17% higher**, but *in the same range as* in Model 1. Thus, as a conservative estimate, we have used the lower cost savings estimate between the two, i.e., annual cost savings of **29 million USD**.

Conclusion

The World Health Organization has called for worldwide transformation towards mental health for all, with stronger strategies for prevention, evidence, and research. This needs to start with a transformation in how employers support the mental health of employees and their families.

In the surging post-COVID mental health landscape, most employers still offer limited mental health resources geared towards moderate to severe issues, which causes delays in seeking support. The significant cost of lost productivity, absenteeism, and turnover can only be solved by creating early access to scalable and unlimited support.

The first step of a stepped-care model becomes scalable with an AI conversational agent, with a unique capacity to build a clinically safe bond, and take on a significant portion of the therapeutic effort, freeing up clinicians to provide interventive support to severe concerns. Resources like Wysa have been proven at scale with users, research, and from a cost point of view. These now need to become mainstream in the procurement processes of employers, brokers, and insurers.

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