

wyrsa

Winter 2022

All Worked Up

UK edition



UK Workforce Mental Health Report 2022

The Great British Burnout

Over the past few years, the UK has suffered population level stressors caused by Covid-19 and lockdowns, war in Ukraine and political instability. Thousands of key workers are striking. Is this entirely down to pay, or are people at break point?

We've seen a rising increase in the rates of mental ill health in the UK, with [official figures](#) indicating 1 in 6 people aged 16+ had experienced symptoms of a common mental health problem, such as depression or anxiety, in the previous week.

But what about those carrying the burden of generating an income? What does the cost of living crisis, a looming global recession and reading about mass redundancies in big tech do to working peoples' mental health?

In October 2022, Wysa commissioned an independent survey of over 1,000 UK employees to get an in-depth look at the current state of mental health in our workforce and the scale of severity we could be looking at.

The results reveal serious, debilitating mental health concerns that working people of all ages are struggling with, and in too many cases, without professional support. The people tasked with keeping our economy on a path to growth aren't getting the help they need.

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 significant levels of depression and anxiety whether or not 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 GP? And would they rather talk to a bot than their boss, or an app rather than a therapist?

Read on to find out.



Foreword

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The discoveries in our national employee survey are shocking. Severe stress, depression and anxiety are having a huge impact on the health of our society, the happiness of our people, and the productivity of our businesses. They go some way to explaining why the UK is experiencing more and more cases of mental ill health, many of which are treatable with the right support.

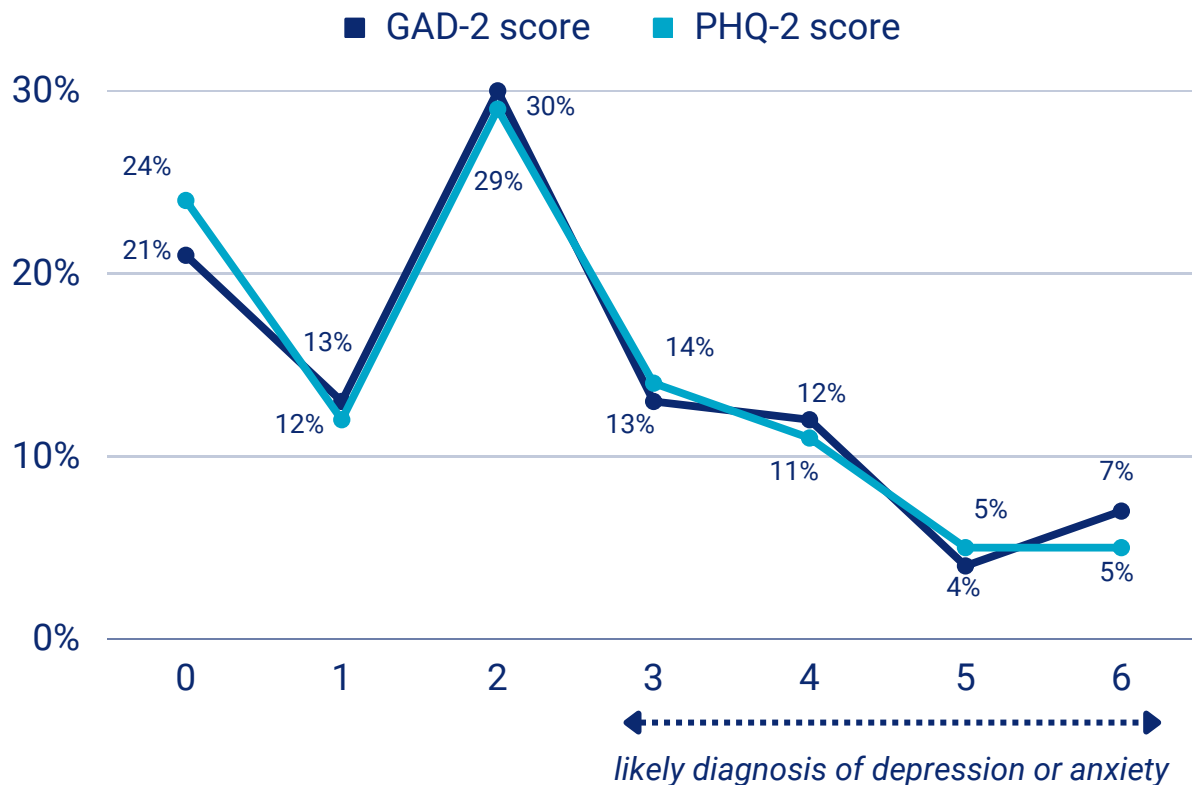
But not enough people access the help available. They are embarrassed to reveal their worries and stresses, concerned by what their employers would think, and battling through. The trouble is, we know that early intervention improves outcomes. The longer symptoms persist without being addressed, the more severe and entrenched their condition becomes. We need to act, and fast, with the resources we have available. If people are not comfortable speaking to their GP, a therapist, or their employer, we need to find novel support methods they feel comfortable with.

What we can say for sure is that mental health is a bigger issue than we realised, and more needs to be done to address the prevailing stigma. It's time to start talking and encouraging people to get help. Let's help them do so.

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Ross O'Brien, Managing Director UK, Wysa

1 in 3 UK employees screened positive for symptoms of depression or anxiety



Depression and anxiety screening scores in working people aged 16-65 in the UK

Over 1 in 3 (35%) met the threshold for a likely diagnosis of depression or generalised anxiety disorder – double that of the average UK adult population. This astonishing rate of prevalence indicates that the mental health crisis is bigger than we think amongst those responsible for generating income. Official figures point to 1 in 6 UK adults in the general population as struggling with their mental health, up from 1 in 10 prior to the coronavirus pandemic.

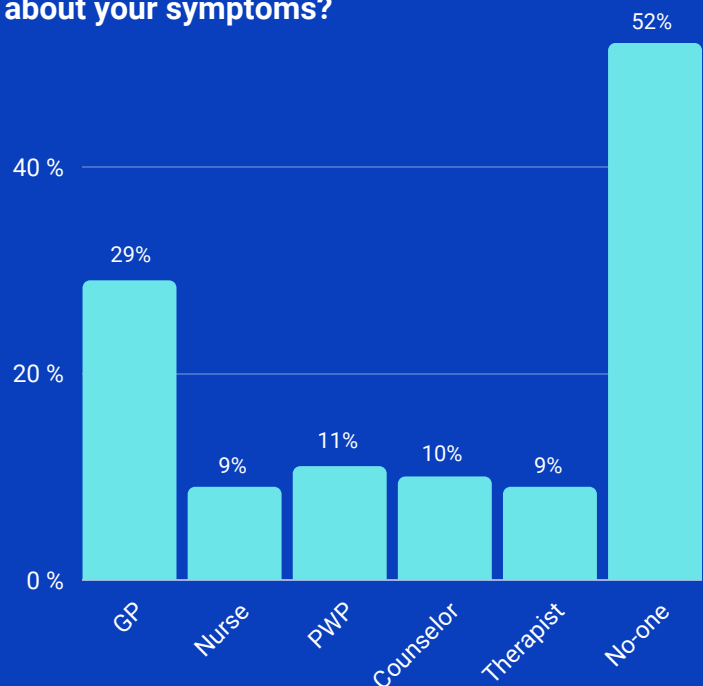
The Wysa employee mental health survey included the Generalised Anxiety Disorder questionnaire (GAD-2) screening for anxiety and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2) screen for depression. Anyone scoring 3 or more on the tests is considered likely to be suffering clinically significant symptoms,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

According to these numbers, 11.3 million adults require further assessment and some kind of therapy, medication or support.

Half of sufferers don't seek help

Which professionals have you spoken to about your symptoms?

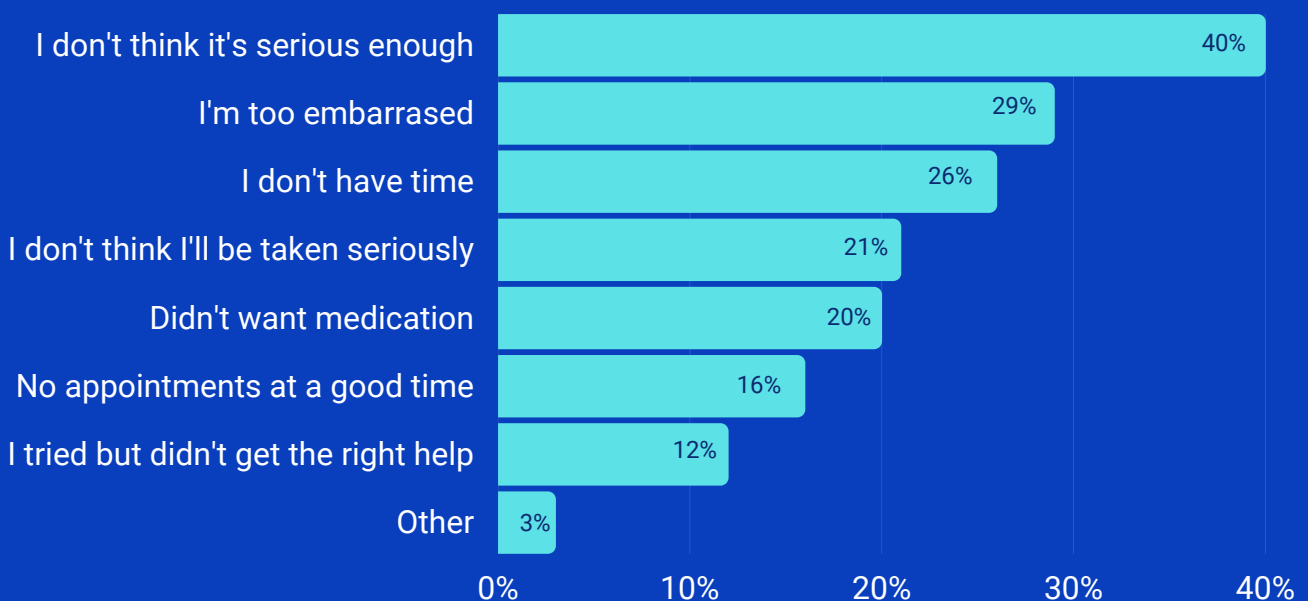
Alarming, 52% of employees who obtained a screening score of 3 or more, indicating further investigation and a likely diagnosis of depression or generalised anxiety, have not yet spoken to a doctor or relevant healthcare professional.



People doubt seriousness of their symptoms

When a third of workers are experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression require further investigation, scoring 3 or more on PHQ-2 and GAD-2, why are so few reaching out for help? People's belief that their symptoms aren't serious enough is the main barrier to accessing support for UK employees, followed by stigma and time constraints.

Reasons why those scoring 3+ on PHQ-2 or GAD-2 questionnaires don't ask for help:





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What's worrying is that many of the people who are not reaching out are suffering symptoms that suggest levels of anxiety and depression that require further investigation. If people don't think their symptoms are severe enough to warrant professional input, they are unlikely to take steps to get support. But this doesn't mean that they wouldn't benefit from some targeted help or intervention, if that was advertised and available to them easily, without the need to first approach a health professional. This is where digital solutions can make their mark

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Nicky Main, UK and Europe clinical lead, Wysa



Alarming, symptom rates are higher amongst younger people – nearly half (44%) under 24 screened positive for anxiety, compared to 27% of working people aged 55+.

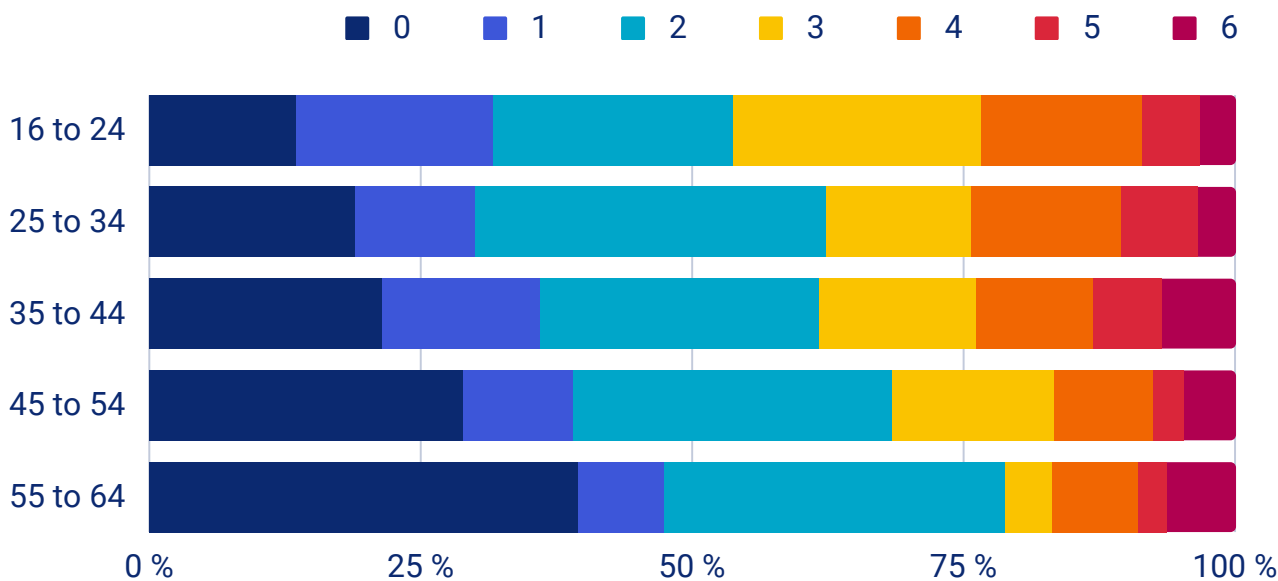
The same pattern is seen when it comes to depression. Twice as many under 24s screened positive for depression as those over 55 (46% vs 21%). Overwork, the challenges of the economy, and difficulties affording rent or houses appear to be taking a serious toll on the younger working generation.

Yet younger people are not speaking up - 57% of those who screened positive for depression and anxiety had not spoken to a relevant professional. 45% of these said this is because they don't think it's serious enough and 30% said it was due to a lack of time.

In our study, half of all employees under 24 claimed to be "suffering from symptoms of anxiety that they have not made their employer aware of". 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.

Young workers struggle the most with their mental health

These findings correlate with the [Institute of Fiscal Studies](#) report in Autumn 2022 that stated the number of working age new disability benefit claimants has doubled in the past year. Around 1/3 of new claims were for mental health. Among claimants under 25 that figure rose to 70%.



PHQ-2 depression screening scores by age

Moderate to severe depression in working people diminishes with age, with more than double 16-24 year-olds than 55-64 year olds scoring 3+ on the PHQ-2 questionnaire.

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We know that younger generations are faced with huge challenges. The job market is challenging, the housing market precarious, and financial pressures very real. Surprisingly though, 57% of 16-24 year olds surveyed with scores of 3 or more on the GAD-2 or PHQ-2 have not spoken to a professional. Despite this generation living in a society that is apparently more open with mental health challenges, a large number appear to be reluctant to reach out for professional help. If we don't want a population growing up with severe mental health issues, we owe it to them to find alternative ways for them to seek support.

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Nicky Main, UK and Europe clinical lead, Wysa



Women struggle without support

55% working women experiencing moderate to severe symptoms have not accessed professional support

Over half of women who screened positive for either depression or anxiety have not yet spoken to a relevant healthcare professional, compared to 48% of men. This is in contrast to 2018 figures we see from [IAPT](#) services when twice as many women as men accessed services.

Of those who scored 3+ on the GAD-2 or PHQ-2, almost half (48%) of the women said they haven't reached out because they don't think their symptoms are serious enough, versus men 1 in 3 (33%) who think the same.

Stigma continues to prevail in men in particular. 1 in 3 men (31%) who would be recommended for further investigation have not spoken to a relevant professional because they are too embarrassed, compared to a quarter of females (25%).

 38%

men screened positive for depression

 31%

women screened positive depression

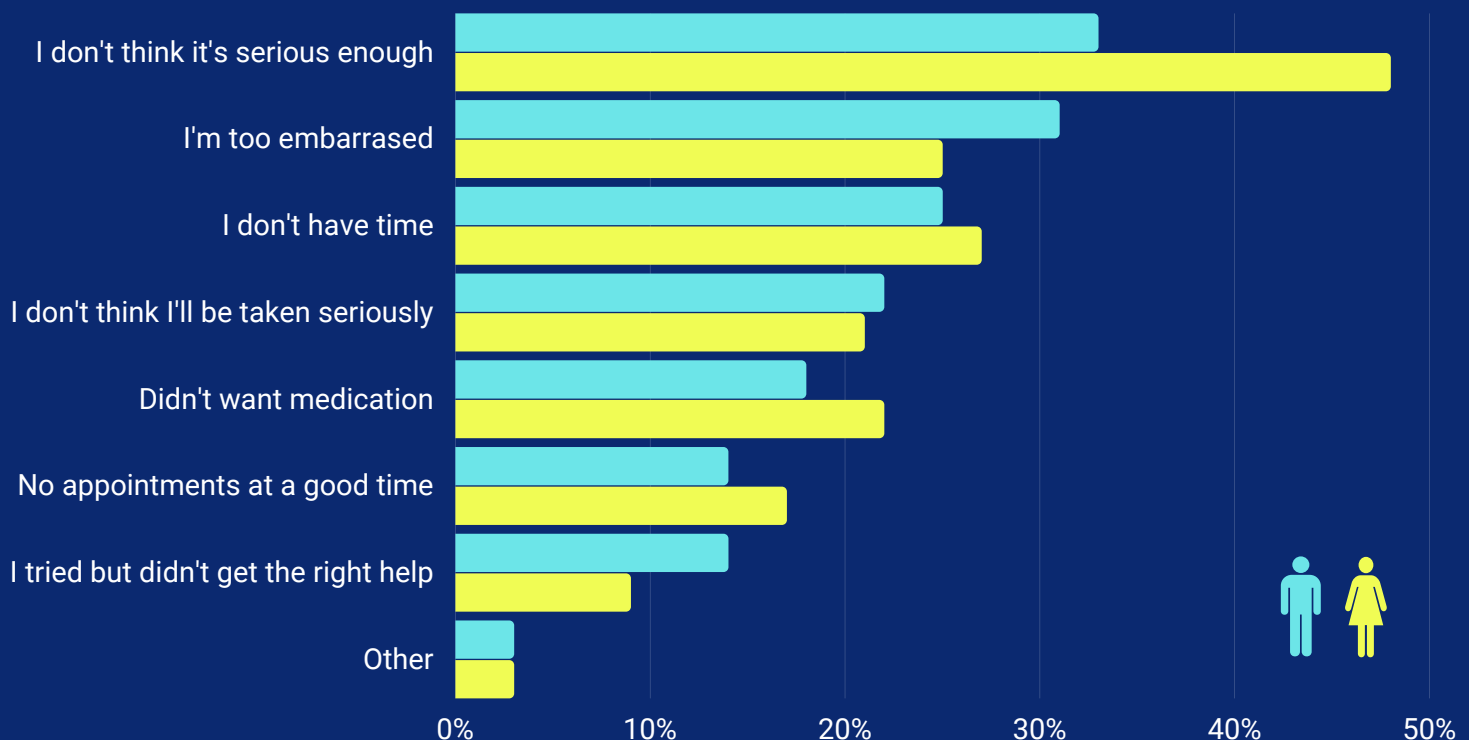
 35%

men screened positive for moderate to severe anxiety

 36%

women screened positive for moderate to severe anxiety

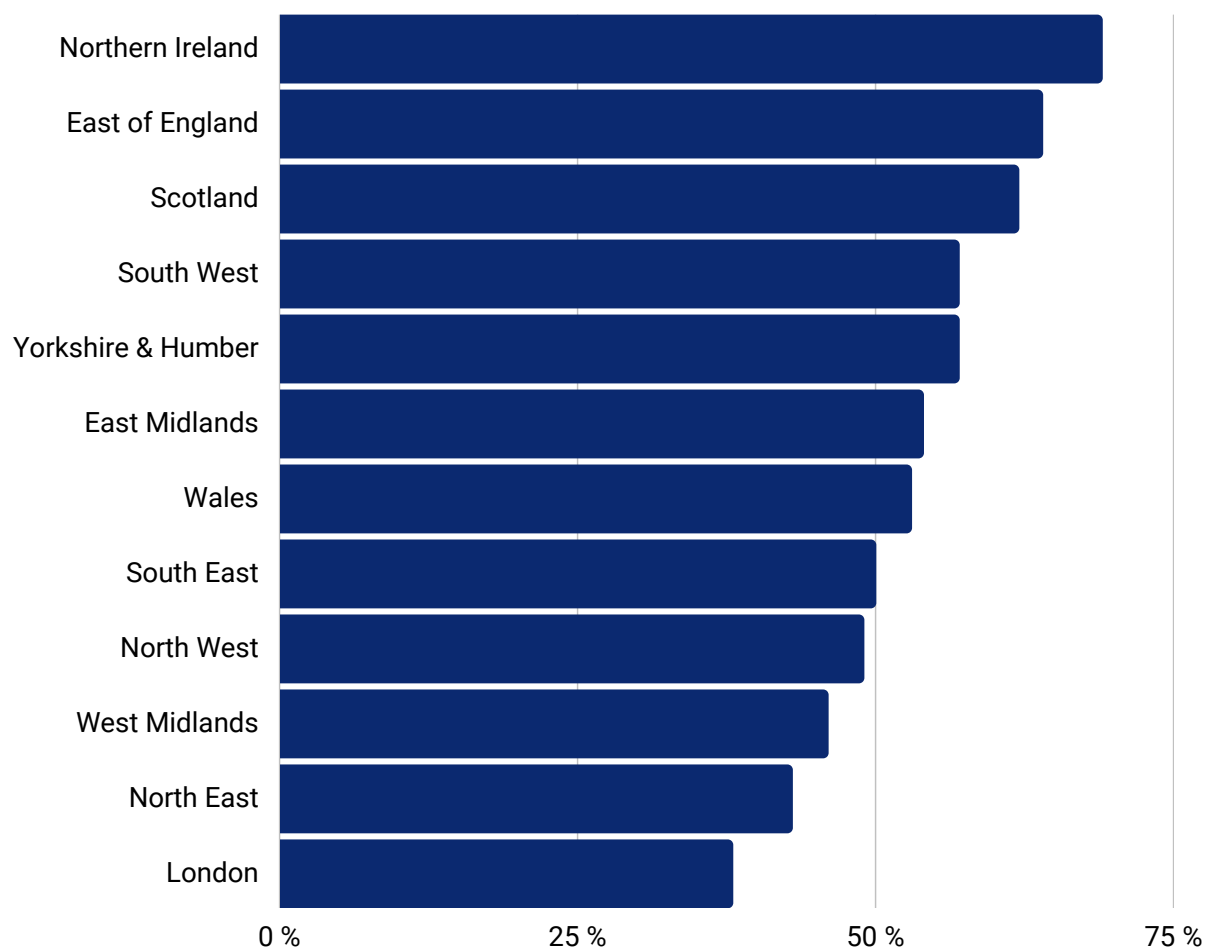
Reasons why those scoring 3+ on PHQ-2 or GAD-2 screening questionnaires don't ask for help



Mental health by region

	London	East Midlands	East of England	North East	North West	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humber
GAD-2 score 3+	34%	35%	29%	29%	45%	25%	41%	33%	31%	27%	41%	41%
PHQ-2 score 3+	35%	34%	29%	34%	41%	39%	42%	29%	25%	31%	40%	42%

Sufferers who have not yet spoken to a relevant healthcare professional



The top 3 regional populations with the best access to mental health support services are London, the North East and West Midlands. Two thirds (62%) of Londoners with significant depression and anxiety symptoms have spoken to a relevant healthcare professional, but only a third (31%) in Northern Ireland, leaving 69% of sufferers scoring 3+ on the PHQ-2 or GAD-2 having not accessed support. The East of England and Scotland also indicate relatively low numbers of people needing help successfully accessing support. But why is this? These regions have invested enormously in making the public aware that services are available. So what is preventing people coming forwards to accessing care?

Barriers to care in 2022

Playing down symptoms, lack of time and embarrassment prevent access

The number one reason in the majority of regions people gave for not accessing care was "I don't think it's serious enough" (all except the East Midlands and North East). These are people who scored 3 or more on the GAD or PHQ screening questionnaires, the cut off point at which further investigation is recommended.

A quarter (24%) of those in the East of England have tried to speak to someone, but didn't get the help they needed. Stigma is higher in the West Midlands (36%) and East Midlands (35%) whereas only a fifth (20%) of Londoners say they would be too embarrassed to speak up.

Half of working people the North East who are struggling with their mental health say they don't have time to seek help. A third of those in the West Midlands (28 %) and Yorkshire & Humber (30 %) say they can't get an appointment at a convenient time, compared to only 7% in the North East.

NHS talking therapy services have battled hard against stigma to encourage people to come forwards. But how can we encourage those who need help, but don't think they do, to reach out? The answer lies in a much more fluid approaches to access, with digital tools provided at a population level for both preventative self-care and to automatically triage people into higher levels of support when they need it.

	London	East Midlands	East of England	North East	North West	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humber
I don't think it's serious enough	32 %	30 %	48 %	33 %	38 %	56 %	43 %	48 %	50 %	40 %	36 %	37 %
I don't have time	12 %	20 %	24 %	50 %	24 %	44 %	22 %	19 %	25 %	40 %	40 %	30 %
I don't think I'll be taken seriously	16 %	15 %	19 %	17 %	34 %	33 %	26 %	16 %	31 %	20 %	12 %	22 %
I'm too embarrassed	20 %	35 %	24 %	33 %	28 %	22 %	30 %	26 %	31 %	30 %	36 %	33 %
Didn't want medication prescribed	24 %	30 %	24 %	33 %	17 %	11 %	22 %	29 %	13 %	20 %	16 %	7 %
Can't get appointment at a convenient time	12 %	20 %	19 %	0 %	7 %	11 %	9 %	10 %	13 %	20 %	28 %	30 %
I tried but didn't get the right help	20 %	15 %	24 %	0 %	3 %	0 %	13 %	16 %	6 %	10 %	12 %	7 %

Reasons why those scoring 3+ on PHQ-2 or GAD-2 screening questionnaires don't ask for help

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It's worrying that people aren't getting support, due to embarrassment, not feeling 'sick enough', shame, stigma and a lack of knowledge, or practical considerations such as getting an appointment. Not having help can result in increasing severity and longevity, and has significant implications for the individual, society, and our workforce. It's clear that articulating our deepest feelings to others, even professionals or HR teams, is still challenging for so many. But the technology is available now for a digital front door to getting support that people need, when they need it. It may be that we need more avenues to seek support, from an appointment with a GP to an app on your phone, catering for different needs and situations.

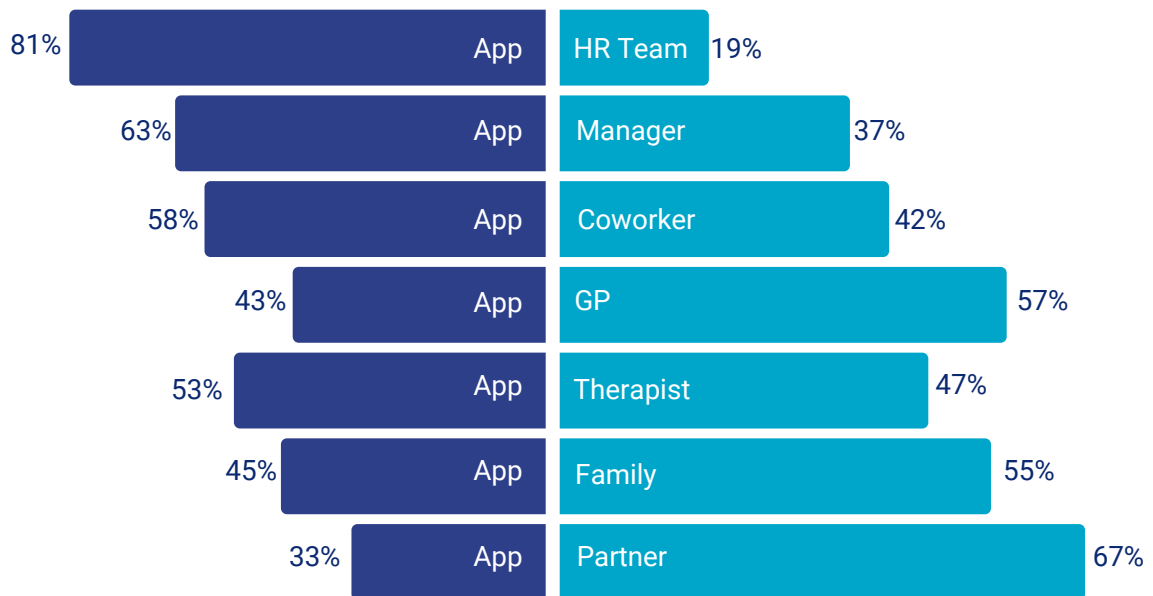
The NHS is committed to deliver the best health and wellbeing for the population, but mental health is an increasing burden. We can see that the way services are delivered in the UK means that location plays a role in accessing support. In a world where we all have access to technology we can reduce some of the social determinants to accessing mental health support and create a more equitable landscape.

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Ross O'Brien, Managing Director UK, Wysa

Digital therapeutics ready

When asked who they'd rather go to about their mental health, UK employees were more likely to select 'a mental health app with clinically proven self-help resources tailored to their needs' than a therapist or anyone in the workplace. Half of all young workers (16-24) would prefer to go to an app than their GP.



It's not just young 'tech savvy' employees who are more willing to share their mental problems with an app either. Two in three (59%) of over 55s would rather turn to the app than a therapist. When it comes to workplace support, it seems few employees are willing to share their problems with human resources departments, their boss or even colleagues.

29%

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

19%

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, over half 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.

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The fact that some people would rather speak to an app than a therapist demonstrates that it is important to have options available that suit not only personal preference, but the needs people have when it comes to convenience and accessibility. Particularly startling is that 43% of employees would choose to speak to a digital app over the doctor with regards to their mental health, and 81% a bot rather than their boss or HR. These are people who are in positions to help and support us, yet despite public awareness campaigns and corporate wellness programmes, many of us are just not comfortable opening up. Businesses need to find new solutions to support their biggest asset - their people.

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Nicky Main, UK and Europe clinical lead, Wysa

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Currently the burden falls on the NHS to solve the mental health crisis. But we can see that employees are struggling more than the average population. The current delivery model is unable to cope with the scale of demand, so we need other solutions. Given that these people are quite simply responsible for driving forward the health of the economy, we need to support them to be their very best, for their own wellbeing and society's. The research points to a collaborative approach, where employers signpost and support their staff to get the help they need. HR can be that front door to recovery.

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Ross O'Brien, Managing Director UK, Wysa



Management is in the dark

Despite corporate wellness programs and employee initiatives, people aren't always 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

Almost half (46%) said they suffer anxiety symptoms, yet their employer is unaware.



Secret yet serious depression

One in three (29%) said they suffer from symptoms of depression that their employers don't know about.



Sleeplessness impacting productivity

More than one in five workers (20%) said they suffer in silence at work from insomnia or lack of sleep



Social anxiety preventing collaboration

Unbeknown to their employer, one in five employees (19%) said that they suffer from social anxiety



Physical pain compounding mental health

It's not just mental health - one in ten workers said their employer is unaware that they suffer from chronic pain, a debilitating condition that can affect all areas of life.

The truth on time off work for stress

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

British workers revealed they are most likely to simply try to push through it and go to work, or blame physical illness as a reason for needing time off, fuelling the trend of burnout happening across industries.

1/4

ADMIT BLAMING
PHYSICAL HEALTH

22%

TAKE PAID
TIME OFF

13%

TELL THE
TRUTH

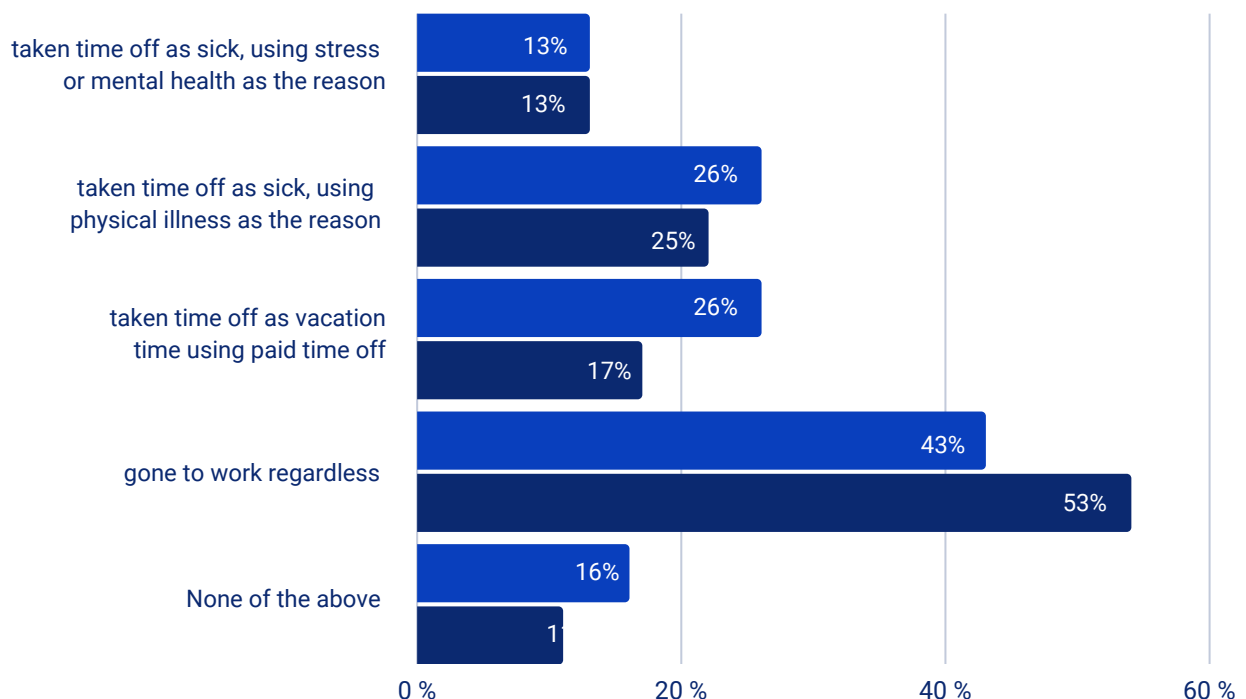
48%

PLOUGH ON
REGARDLESS

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

Male

Female



Nearly two thirds (61%) of those in the North East have gone to work regardless of their mental health and struggle on regardless, compared to 2 in 5 (40%) in London.

Whether employees take sick leave, paid time off, or power on through, these coping mechanisms come at a huge cost to organisations through absenteeism, staff turnover, and reduced job satisfaction.

Talking therapy services have already started in some areas, including Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust who are using Wysa for eTriage into their Steps 2 Wellbeing programme and waitlist support:

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Chatbots are very popular these days and offering that level of interactive digital support is appealing to us. We want to tap into people's personal preferences for communicating to make self-referrals easier. We hope that by making self-help more interactive that we can prevent patients from deteriorating while they wait, perhaps even improving their symptoms. Wysa will help patients learn the basic skills needed for effective therapy, so they can then build on that foundation in their therapy sessions. It's a better way of ensuring patients are continually engaging with their therapy and taking ownership of their recovery.

”

Joel Hooper, IAPT Business Manager, Dorset HealthCare
University NHS Foundation Trust

The future of mental healthcare is digital

The findings in this report suggest that the mental health crisis in the workplace is bigger than we think. There are worrying levels of prevalence of poor mental health in the British workforce and too many people are not getting the help they need. Despite society being apparently more open to discussion of mental health and 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 digitisation 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. People don't want to speak to their doctor, or their manager, showing a clear preference for access to a mental health app, with clinically proven self-help resources tailored to individual needs.

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.

Conclusion



Mental health problems cost the UK economy at least £117.9 billion annually, 5% of the annual GDP. Imagine if all of those people struggling started taking time off work to address their challenges. Imagine how productive we could be if we were firing on all cylinders. Imagine what a happier nation we could live in if people felt calm, buoyant, and well. A society where people had the tools to get the most out of their lives.

We owe it to our workforce to find a different solution to addressing mental health problems. Where the 11 million who need some kind of support for anxiety and depression have access to it, through a tool or system that works for them. A digital front door to support, services and therapy, to remove the barriers to mental health support, and that challenges the prevalence of stigma that still persists.

Ross O'Brien, Managing Director UK, Wysa



Methodology

In October 2022 Obsrvant 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. Obsrvant 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 Generalised 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)

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 anxiety.

A score of 3 or greater is considered a positive screening for anxiety.

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)

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.

A score of 3 or greater is a positive screening for symptoms of depression.

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.

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Marketing and Design: Madi Ballou, Poorva Patole

✉ press@wysa.io

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