

A man with short dark hair and a beard, wearing a green button-down shirt and a blue lanyard with a clear ID badge, stands on a balcony. He is looking out over a cityscape. A thin orange arc is visible in the upper left quadrant of the image.

wysa

Colleagues in Crisis

A Wysa Discovery Report

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Introduction

While discussing mental health has become more normalized in households and workplaces across America in recent years, stigma remains, especially surrounding severe mental health concerns.

It is estimated that [1 in 5 U.S. adults live with a mental illness](#). Yet, it's essential to recognize that support must extend beyond those who openly disclose a mental illness. Just as everyone has physical health, everyone also has mental health. Therefore, comprehensive support systems must be in place for all individuals, irrespective of whether they disclose their mental health challenges.

But what does the current mental health support landscape look like in the workplace? Is the support being offered sufficient?

In February 2024, Wysa commissioned an independent survey involving over 2,000 American employees across a vast range of industry sectors. The aim? To delve deep into the prevailing landscape of mental health challenges and support structures in workplaces across the nation.

The overall takeaway? Many employees are at significant risk of mental health crisis, including thoughts of self-harm and suicidal ideation and lacking the support they need from employers.

The survey targeted full and part-time employees aged 18 and above, seeking insights into their experiences with mental health support in the workplace and their own experience of mental health struggles.

Key questions addressed include: How many employees are facing mental health crises? What are the current workplace experiences of employees? What would they do if they were facing mental health crises? How do they anticipate their employer responding to mental health struggles? And importantly, how do they wish their employers would respond?

Let's take a look at the findings.

Foreword

In today's world, where conversations around mental health are gaining momentum, it's crucial to pause and reflect on the state of mental well-being in our workplaces. Despite progress, stigma and barriers persist, especially concerning severe mental health issues.

This report is not just a collection of statistics; it represents the voices and experiences of thousands of American workers. Through rigorous methodology and comprehensive analysis, it provides invaluable insights into the prevailing mental health landscape.

The statistics are alarming: 1 in 5 American workers reported being bothered by thoughts of self-harm or suicide. These numbers demand our immediate attention and action. It's not just about numbers; it's about the individuals behind them, each facing their own struggles.

The burden of mental health concerns extends beyond individuals to their colleagues. Concerningly, many workers feel ill-equipped to support their struggling coworkers. This underscores the urgent need for enhanced training and resources to foster a supportive workplace environment.

Work shouldn't exacerbate mental health issues, yet for many, it does. The data highlights the profound impact of work on mental well-being, with significant percentages of workers experiencing emotional distance, isolation, and hopelessness. These findings compel us to reassess our approach to workplace mental health.

Age shouldn't determine access to support, yet disparities persist. Younger workers, in particular, face unique challenges in seeking professional help. As industry leaders, we must ensure that support systems are inclusive and accessible to all employees, regardless of age.

Our workplaces can and must do better in supporting employee mental health. The gap between what workers need and what they receive is evident, highlighting the need for a paradigm shift in how we approach mental health support.

Workers are not seeking superficial gestures; they want tangible solutions. From professional support to emotional assistance, it's clear that employees require a multifaceted approach to mental health support.

As leaders, we must recognize that one size does not fit all when it comes to mental health support. Tailored solutions, informed by age and industry-specific insights, are essential for effectively addressing mental health challenges in the workplace.

The construction industry, in particular, faces unique challenges in addressing mental health. From high rates of suicidal ideation to a lack of training and support, there's much work to be done to create a mentally healthy workplace environment.

This report serves as a wake-up call for the construction industry and beyond. It's time to prioritize mental health in our workplaces, fostering a culture of openness, support, and understanding. By taking proactive steps to address mental health challenges, we can create healthier, more resilient workplaces for all.

[Michael Bertolone](#)

Business Manager at International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 18



1 in 5 American Employees Bothered By Thoughts Of Suicide Or Self-harm

A staggering **20% of U.S. workers reported being bothered by thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves, in the 2 weeks prior to our survey.** Expand that timeframe to the past year, and the figure increases to nearly one in three (32%) U.S. workers in crisis, as defined by the UK charity Mind.



1 in 5 U.S. workers bothered by thoughts of suicide or self harm

Especially concerning is the impact on younger workers. A significant 35% of 18-24 year-olds report having these thoughts in the two weeks prior to the survey, surpassing rates among older age groups: 30% of 25-34 year-olds and 26% of 35-55 year-olds. This generational disparity emphasizes the urgency for tailored well-being support initiatives in the workplace.

When we consider that approximately [48,000 Americans die by suicide every year, with an average of 132 suicides per day](#), it's clear action is needed now. These numbers demand immediate efforts from employers to address the mental health crisis in the workforce.

Workplace Support Required

American workers aren't just in the midst of dealing with their own mental health crises, they're also struggling with concern for colleagues and uncertainty about how to help. Over one in five (22%) of American workers surveyed reported that over the past year, they've been concerned that a colleague may harm themselves or take their own life – a heavy burden to bear as they manage their own mental health. Younger workers were the most concerned, with 29% of 18-44 year-olds reporting this experience.

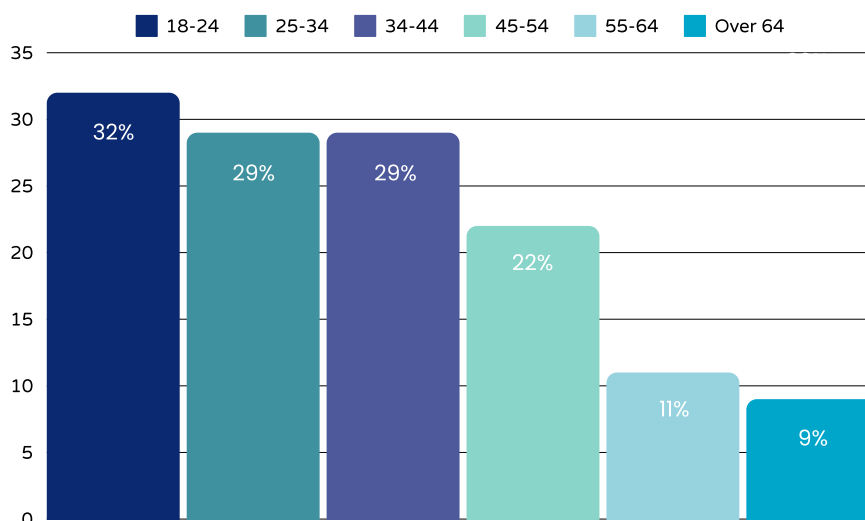
Tragically, the data shows they do have reason to be concerned for their colleagues: 12% of U.S. workers say they have experienced a colleague attempting, or losing their life by suicide over the past year.

12%

of employees have experienced a colleague attempting, or losing their life to suicide in the past year

For these workers observing severe mental health concerns in the workplace, 34% say they are uncertain about how to help a colleague who is struggling, and only 32% say they've received workplace training on the topic within the past year.

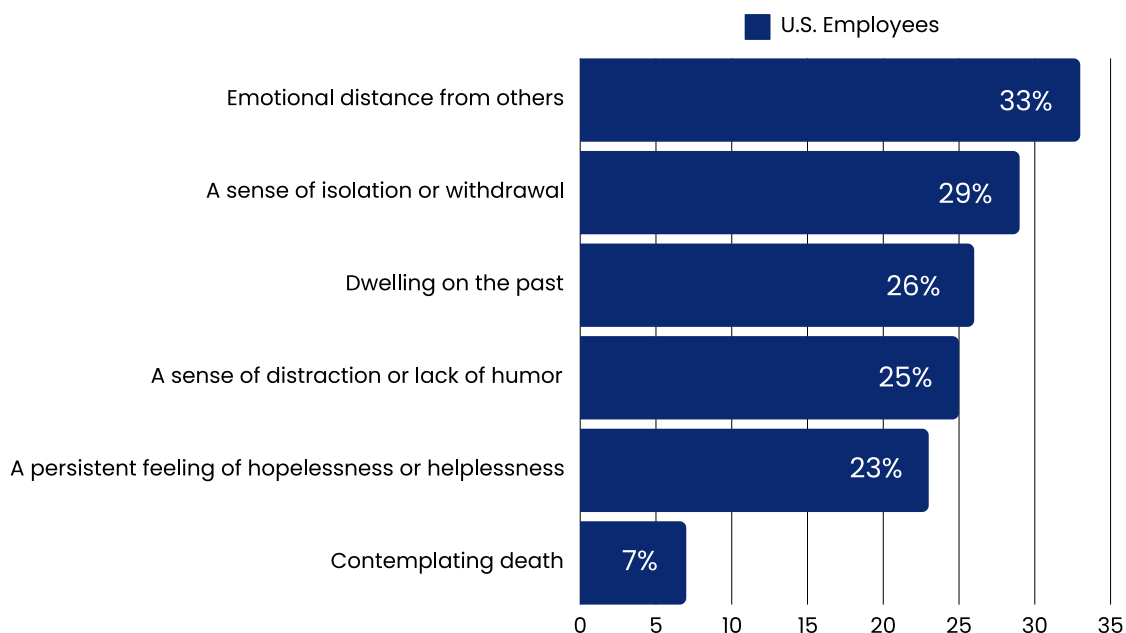
Even more concerning is the fact that over one in five (22%) workers have experienced a manager responding inappropriately to a colleague showing signs or symptoms of mental illness. This alarming statistic highlights a critical need for enhanced training and resources to support mental health in the workplace. Particularly troubling is the escalation of this issue among younger workers aged 18-44, with an average of 30% encountering such situations. This highlights a critical gap in support and emphasizes the imperative for immediate action to safeguard the mental well-being of employees, especially those in vulnerable age groups.



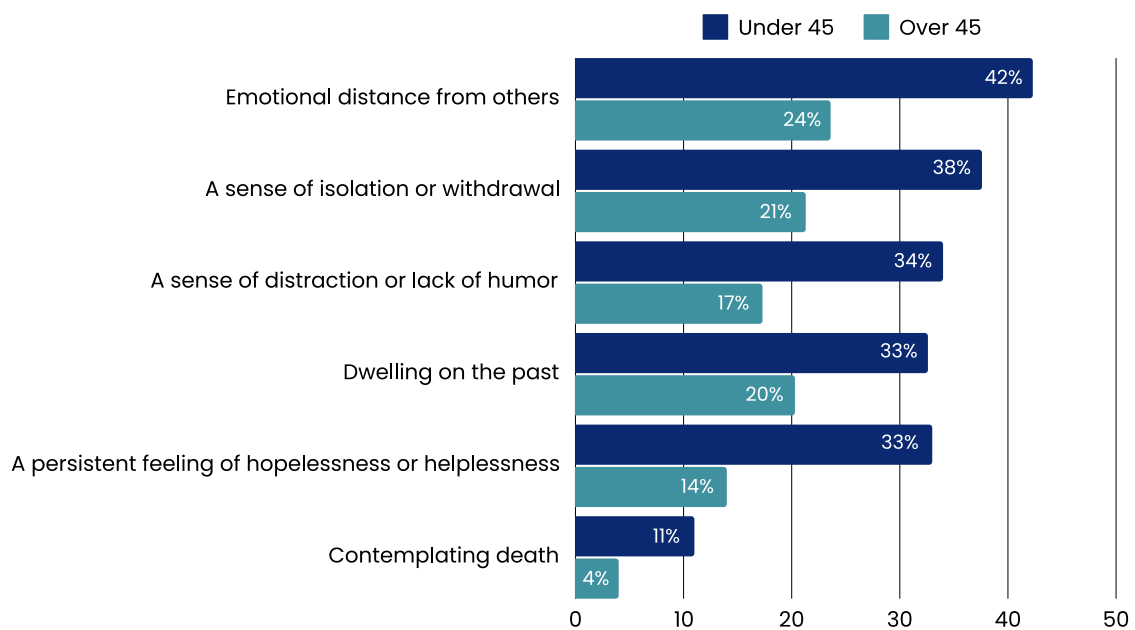


The Impact Of Work On Mental Health

Whilst 43% have not experienced any of the following feelings within the workplace or as a result of their work, that still leaves a substantial 57% that have: Emotional distance from others (33%), a sense of isolation or withdrawal (29%), dwelling on the past (26%), a sense of distraction or lack of humor (25%), a persistent feeling of hopelessness (23%) and contemplating death (7%).



Once again, we see these figures are much higher in the younger age groups, with nearly half of 18-24 year-olds experiencing emotional distance from others (45%), a sense of isolation or withdrawal (46%), and more than one in three 25-34 year-olds struggling with the same. While a sense of emotional distance can permeate solitude or crowded environments alike, this documented sense of isolation amongst younger workers does beg the question of whether the rise of remote work may worsen these effects.



In line with these findings, 30% of workers believe their employer is overlooking serious mental health problems amongst their employees. More than one in three (33%) do not feel that leaders at their company communicate about mental health and similarly 34% feel that their employer treats mental health as a “check box” exercise, rather than truly addressing it.

Workers also have mixed feelings about their workplace’s approach to mental health. Whilst 44% say that their workplace is proactive in addressing and supporting the mental health of employees and offers effective tools to address serious mental health concerns, this means over half of employees do not agree with these statements.

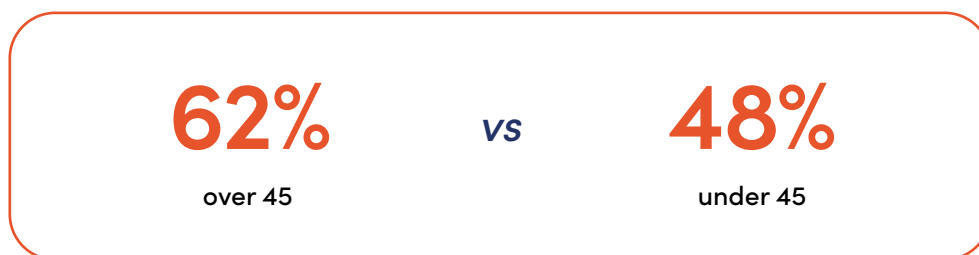
38% of U.S. workers also say they feel that their employer sees mental health as a personal or out-of-work issue, and highlights a concern for the stigma surrounding the role of employers in providing mental health support.



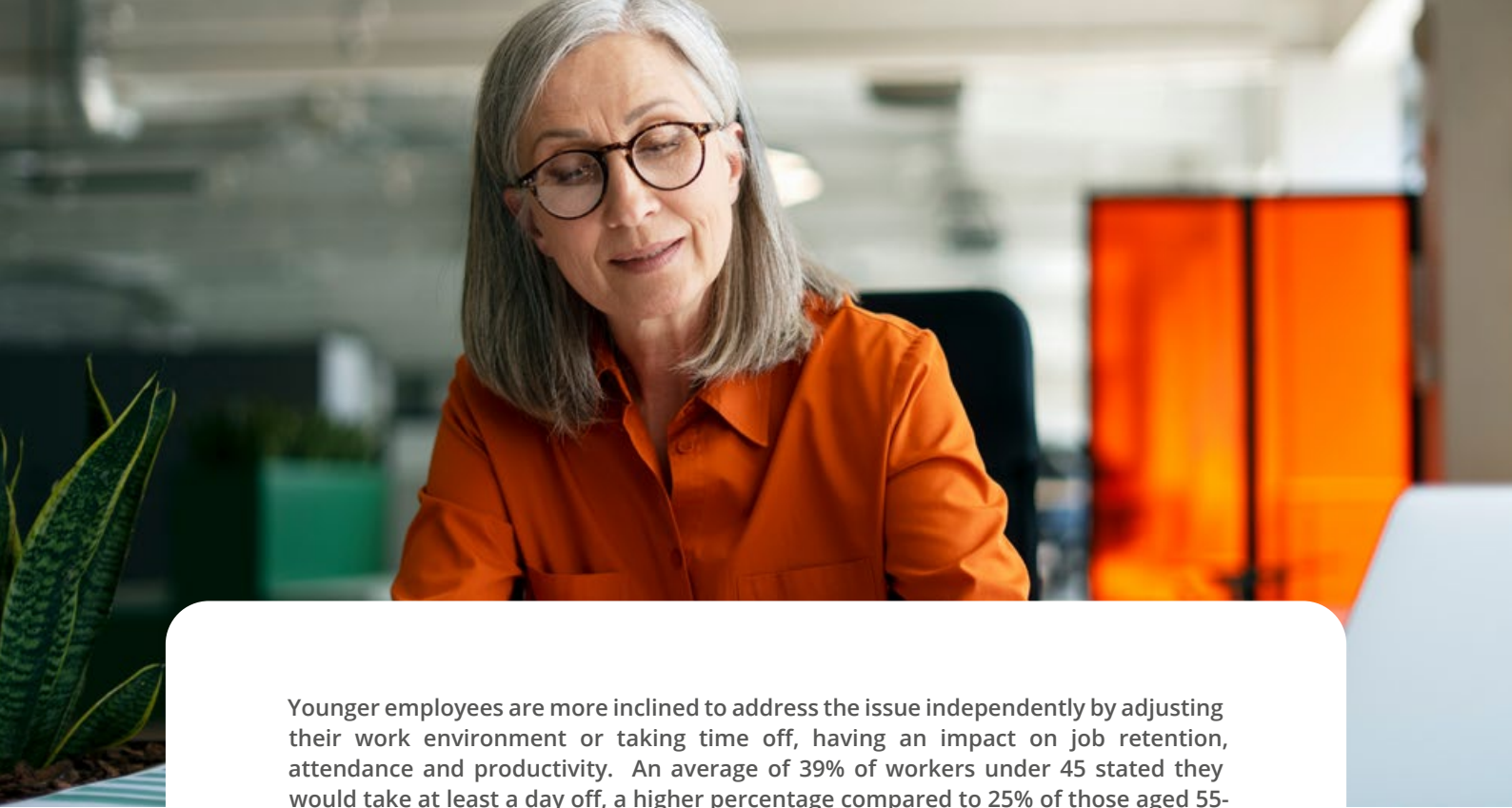
Age Plays A Significant Part In Seeking Support

If suffering from severe depression, those in the older age groups are more inclined to seek professional support. Specifically, 62% of those aged 45 and above expressed their willingness to seek professional support outside of work compared to 48% of workers aged 18-44.

% of U.S. employees that would visit a relevant professional for support outside of work



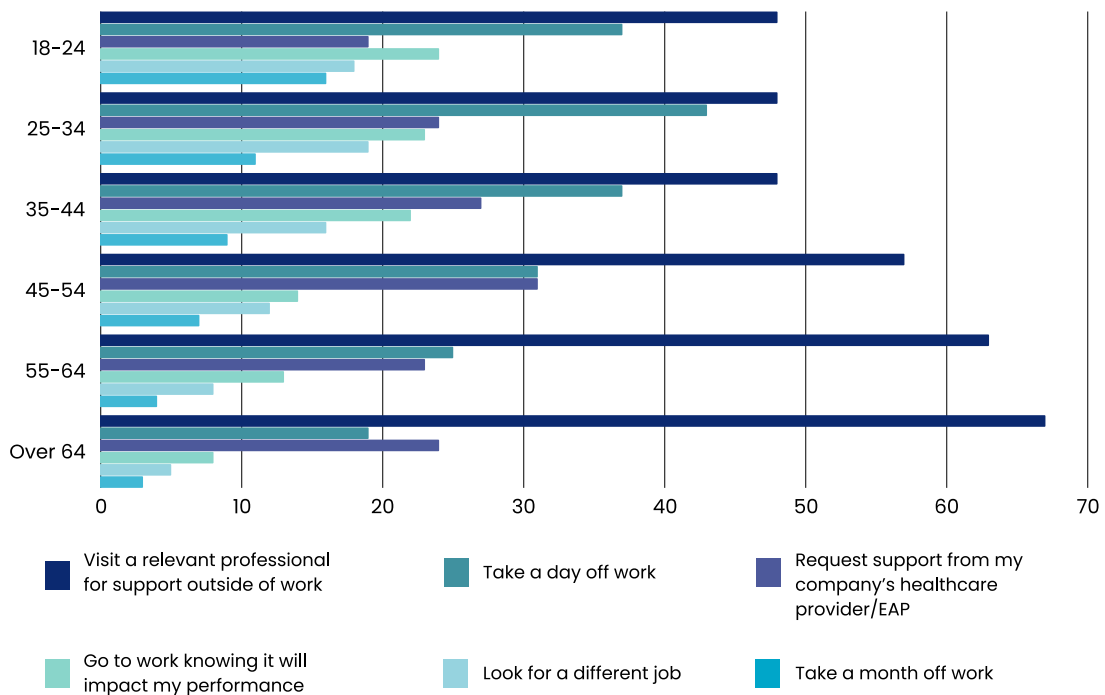
Younger workers are at least 19% less likely to seek professional support outside of work than their older colleagues. For workers aged 64+, this gap widens to as much as 40%.



Younger employees are more inclined to address the issue independently by adjusting their work environment or taking time off, having an impact on job retention, attendance and productivity. An average of 39% of workers under 45 stated they would take at least a day off, a higher percentage compared to 25% of those aged 55-64 and 19% of those over 64.

In terms of retention, employers should also be aware that younger workers are more likely to leave their role to try to improve their mental health. Nearly one in five (19%) of 25-34 year-olds said they'd look for a different job if they were suffering from severe depression, a sentiment that only 8% of 55-64 year-olds agreed with.

The same goes for presenteeism. More than one in five (22%+) younger workers (18-44) said they would go to work regardless of severe depression, against less than 14% of their colleagues aged 45+.



These numbers show the cost of unaddressed mental health crises within the workplace and in organizations aiming to lower attrition and boost employee engagement and productivity.

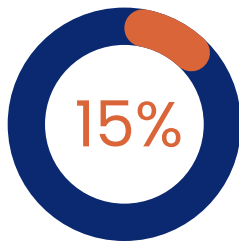
Improvements Needed In Workplace Mental Health Offering

In the workplace, there's a significant gap between what U.S. workers hope for and what they expect in terms of mental health support. Surprisingly, only about half of American workers would think their manager would refer them to mental health resources if they shared they were struggling with depression impacting their work.

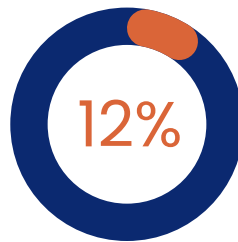
Only half

of employees would expect to be referred to mental health resources if they told their boss they were suffering from depression that was impacting their work

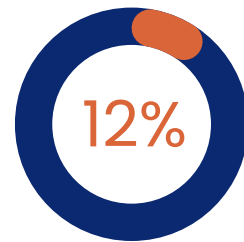
Even more concerning, 12% would expect their manager to become more critical of their work or question their abilities if they revealed their mental health struggles. Additionally, 7% worry their concerns would be ignored, while another 7% fear missed opportunities for career advancement.



of employees expect to be asked to deal with their mental health issues in their personal time



of employees expect their boss to become more critical of their work or judge their ability to perform



of employees expect their boss to minimise their problems and tell them to focus on work

Moreover, 12% anticipate their manager downplaying their issues and telling them to focus on work, while 15% expect to be told to deal with their mental health problems on their own time. These concerns are especially prevalent among younger workers. These findings highlight the urgent need for a shift in workplace culture and a more compassionate approach to mental health support.

Understanding Employee Needs In Mental Health Support

When it comes to navigating a mental health crisis, what exactly do workers want from their employers? Workers aren't seeking superficial gestures like flowers or gifts; they want tangible solutions. When asked how they would like their employers to respond if they were struggling with depression impacting their work, U.S. workers outlined three main types of solutions:

Professional support: Above all else, employees desire an offer of professional support (50%). Additionally, nearly one in four (24%) express interest in digital mental self-help tools as a solution.

50%

of U.S. employees would like to be offered professional support if they were suffering from depression that was impacting their work

Emotional support from employers: Many employees believe that small gestures can have a significant impact. 45% would appreciate being asked about their well-being occasionally, while 37% would value being provided with a safe space to talk.

Support with workload: A substantial portion (39%) would appreciate an offer of paid time off to focus on their wellbeing. Additionally, one in four (25%) would like a reduction in workload if they disclose suffering from severe depression

Interestingly, gender differences emerge in the types of support preferred. Women tend to favour paid time off to focus on their well-being (41% of women compared to 37% of men) and seek out safe spaces to discuss their mental health (42% of women versus 32% of men).

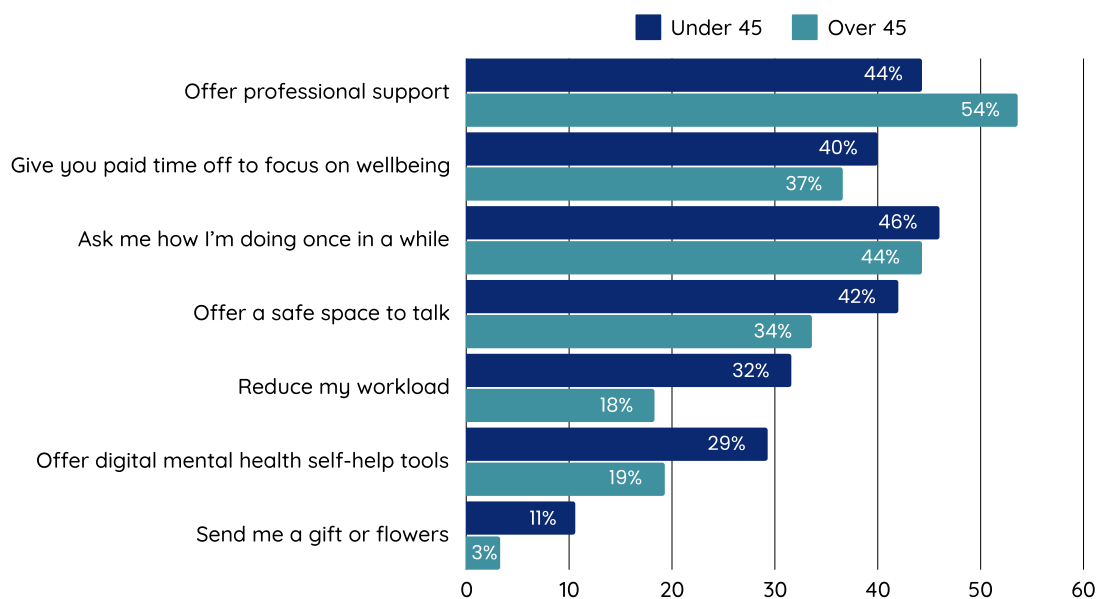
These findings highlight the urgent need for workplaces to create supportive environments where workers feel comfortable seeking help for mental health issues without fear of stigma. Managers need to be equipped with the skills and tools to respond empathetically and effectively to employees' mental health needs, setting a tone of understanding and support in the workplace.



Not A One Size Fits All Solution

Consistent with the patterns observed throughout this report, there remains a discernible divergence in preferred support methods among different age groups. While younger age groups tend to favor digital health tools, workload reduction, and the provision of a safe space for discussion, older age groups lean towards more traditional approaches such as seeking professional support and appreciating periodic check-ins. This highlights a crucial consideration for employers when rolling out well-being initiatives in the workplace.

Previous Wysa research revealed that, even in times of crisis, individuals may not always feel ready to speak to a real person. Hence, it's essential to provide comprehensive support that caters to everyone's needs.

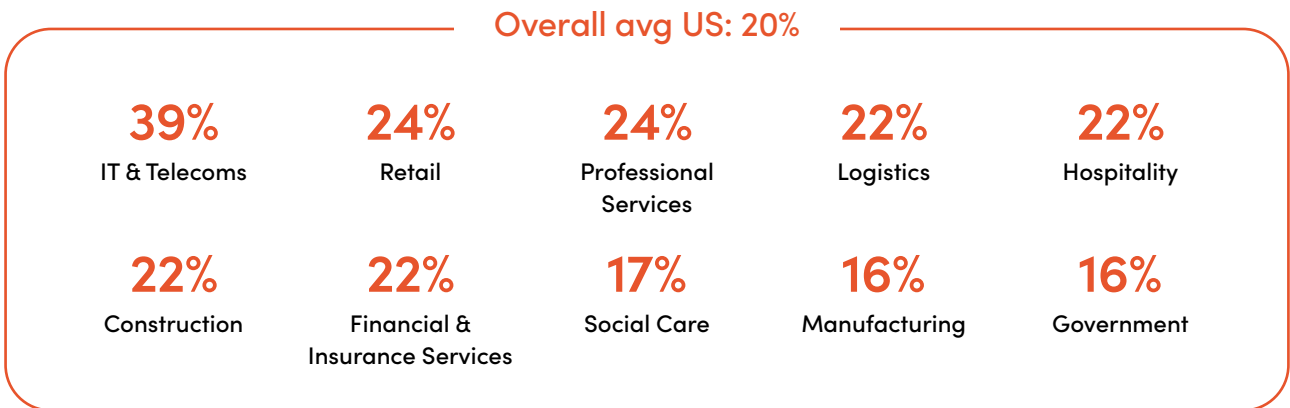




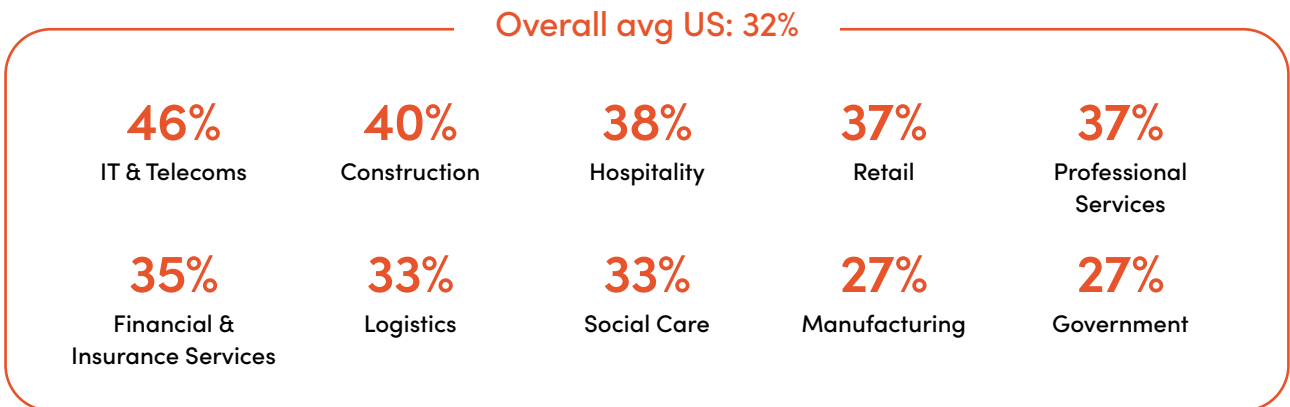
Industry Focus

There are a number of industries where those currently facing mental health crises are higher than the 20% average, notably construction (22%), retail (24%) and hospitality (22%). These industries are characterized by long hours and shift work.

Industries with the highest percentage of employees reporting suicidal ideation or thoughts about self-harm within the two weeks prior to the survey:



Industries with the highest percentage of employees reporting suicidal ideation or thoughts of self-harm within the past year, based on survey data:



Construction

The construction industry is well known to have some of the [highest levels of suicide](#) across industries; **1 in 10** respondents say they have experienced a coworker attempting, or losing their life by suicide over the past year.

Over the past year



1 in 10 construction workers say they have experienced a colleague attempting or losing their life by suicide

40% of construction workers have been bothered by suicidal ideation or thoughts about self-harm over the past year – that’s four in every ten employees on a jobsite.

40%

of construction workers have been at risk of suicide or self-harm over the past year



That’s **4 in every 10** employees on a jobsite



When examining contributing risk factors, the picture becomes clearer: 43% have experienced a sense of isolation (10% higher than the national average), 40% a sense of distraction, 35% emotional distance from others and 35% dwelling on the past, just to name a few symptoms.

Despite these figures, 66% of workers still say they have not received training on how to deal with a colleague facing depression and 38% remain uncertain of how to help a struggling coworker. Moreover, nearly a quarter (23%) say they've seen a manager respond inappropriately to a colleague showing signs of mental illness.

At 47%, workers in this industry were among the least likely of respondents polled to seek professional outside help, compared to other industries. And while 38% of construction workers feel that their employer is trying to be proactive about mental health, 42% still do not feel that leaders at the company communicate about mental health and a similar amount worry their employer is simply trying to "check a box" on mental health, rather than truly address it.

Construction workers are one of the least likely to seek professional help outside of work

Communication on the issue has hit a standstill, with workers worried about reporting their mental health struggles, for fear that their manager will become more critical of their work (19%), will ask them to deal with it on personal time (17%), will minimize their problems and tell them to focus on their work (16%), or even withhold opportunities for advancement (15%).

When it comes to solutions, nearly half are hoping to be offered professional support if they report struggles with depression, and one in five would like digital solutions to address this. Construction workers also say they're open to small steps, hoping for employers to ask them how they're doing (45%) and to be offered a safe space to talk (35%).

Retail

While retail may not conjure the same image of workplace stress as a construction site, the data shows professionals in this sector are struggling all the same.

37% of U.S. retail workers say they've been bothered by thoughts that they'd be better off dead, or of hurting themselves, over the past year. Many of these workers are reporting symptoms associated with severe mental health risk, and conversation and awareness of the issue in this industry is even further behind than in sectors like construction or industrials.

Over the past year

37%

of U.S. retail workers say they've been bothered by thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves

In the past year, retail workers have encountered various challenges either in the workplace or as a result of their work. Among them, 34% reported feeling emotionally distant from others, while 31% experienced a sense of isolation or withdrawal. Additionally, 30% struggled with dwelling on past events, and 29% felt persistently hopeless or helpless. 26% of retail workers experienced a sense of distraction or a lack of humor, and 10% even contemplated death.

With little awareness has come little action. 74% said they have not received training on what to do if they notice a colleague is struggling with severe depression and 37% felt that leaders at their company do not communicate about mental health. Further 38% felt their company sees mental health as a personal or out-of-work issue. Concerningly, 10% felt that if they reported that they were struggling with depression impacting their work, that their manager would ignore.

74%

of retail workers have not received any workplace training or instructions on what to do if they notice a colleague is experiencing severe depression

It's time that retailers recognize the risk lurking beneath the surface and take action. For support, these workers are looking to be asked how they're doing once in awhile (43%), to be offered of a safe space to talk (41%), or professional support (40%), paid time off to focus on wellbeing (34%) or digital mental self-help tools (27%).

Hospitality

Still making a comeback from the pandemic's impact to the sector, hospitality has long struggled with staff shortages and attrition. The issue of mental health, especially when it comes to support for more severe employee mental health concerns, has gone largely unrecognized in this space.

Yet, the report finds that 38% of hospitality workers have been bothered by suicidal ideation or thoughts about self-harm over the past year. While these workers have not only struggled with symptoms themselves like emotional distance from others (46%) and dwelling on the past (39%), one in four (25%) have also dealt with concern for a colleague who they felt may harm themselves and without training, have been unsure how to respond.

Over the past year



1 in 4 U.S. hospitality workers have had a concern that a colleague may harm themselves or try to take their own life

Of those polled, hospitality workers were also among the most likely to push through and go to work when they're experiencing symptoms of severe depression (22%), worsening the issue.

The first step for the industry is to begin having meaningful conversations about mental health visibly. Right now, a staggering 54% of hospitality employees do not feel that leaders in their company communicate about mental health. Nearly half of those polled (46%) pointed to having a safe space to talk as one of the key solutions they'd be looking for from employers, which should be the bare minimum action we begin to see in this sector as it addresses critical mental health issues for its workforce.

54%

of hospitality employees do not feel that leaders in their company communicate about mental health

These findings point to the extent in which employees are experiencing a crisis while at work. Issues in accessibility, anonymity and the gap in care allows some employees to thrive while others slip through the cracks. Clinically proven digital mental health solutions like Wysa have massive potential to provide support to individuals in all sectors who are currently struggling silently while the impacts of poor mental health on the workplace compound.



Conclusion

The data presented in this report clearly demonstrates the widespread occurrence of mental health crises across U.S. workplaces, indicating an urgent need for comprehensive training in risk assessment and crisis response across all industries. It is essential that both employees and managers are adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively identify and address mental health challenges as they arise.

Furthermore, the findings shed light on a troubling reality: many employees face significant mental health challenges without sufficient support from their employers. This glaring gap in mental health assistance not only leaves employees vulnerable but also contributes to a culture of silence, where individuals may hesitate to seek help for fear of negative repercussions.

To address this, it's crucial to prioritize open communication about mental health in the workplace. Implementing supportive policies and resources can help bridge the gap in mental health assistance. By building a culture that values and prioritizes employee well-being, organizations can create a safe and supportive environment where individuals feel able to seek help when needed, ultimately promoting a healthier and more resilient workforce.

While transforming workplace culture is challenging, it's essential for improving the current mental health landscape. Even small changes can have a significant impact, and these should be prioritized.

Methodology

In February 2024, Obsrvant carried out this survey on behalf of Wysa targeting employed online respondents in the US, UK and Canada. 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 6,413 respondents across the US, UK and Canada were surveyed with a target of 2,000 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.