

wysa

Colleagues in Crisis

A Wysa Discovery Report

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Methodology

In February 2024, Observant 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. Observant 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.



Introduction

In recent years, there has been a noticeable change in how mental health is perceived and addressed in the workplace. But is this change enough?

Statistics reveal that [1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental illness in any given year](#). 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 Canadian 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 findings uncover alarming trends: a significant number of individuals are grappling with severe mental health crises, including thoughts of self-harm and suicidal ideation, yet many are not receiving adequate support from their employers.

The survey targeted 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.

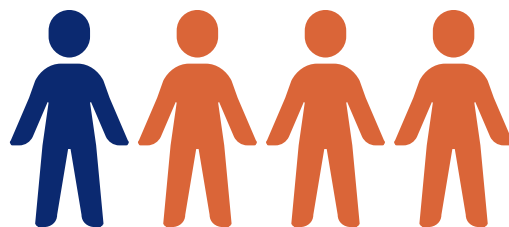
Key questions addressed include: How many employees are facing mental health crises? What are the current workplace experiences of employees? What would they do if they were facing mental health crises? How do they anticipate their employer responding to mental health struggles? And importantly, how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

Let's take a look at the findings.



1 in 4 Canadian employees bothered by thoughts of suicide or self harm

Nearly a quarter of Canada's working population (23%) have been bothered by thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves, in the 2 weeks prior to our survey. This equates to a substantial [4.63 million adults nationwide](#) currently navigating a mental health crisis, as defined by the UK charity [Mind](#).



1 in 4 Canadian employees bothered by thoughts of suicide or self-harm

Of particular concern is the vulnerability among young adults aged 18-24, with an alarming 39% currently identified as experiencing these thoughts. It is imperative that interventions are swiftly implemented to address the mental health needs of these individuals.

Examining these statistics from the past year reveals a troubling trend: more than 1 in 3 individuals (36%) have been bothered with thoughts that they would be better off dead or of hurting themselves. Notably, this trend is even more pronounced among younger age groups, with staggering rates of 56% among 18-24-year-olds and 45% among those aged 25-34. This alarming pattern is not unique to Canada; similar trends are seen in the U.S. (18-24: 53%, 25-34: 41%) and the UK (18-24: 58%, 25-34: 45%), highlighting that this is a global issue that needs to be addressed by employers and governments worldwide.

We know that every year, approximately 4,500 people in Canada die by suicide, which is equivalent to 12 people dying by suicide every day. (Source: [Statistics Canada](#)) The harsh reality is that a concerning number of employees across the country are currently at risk, highlighting the urgent need for businesses to recognize and prioritize this pressing issue.

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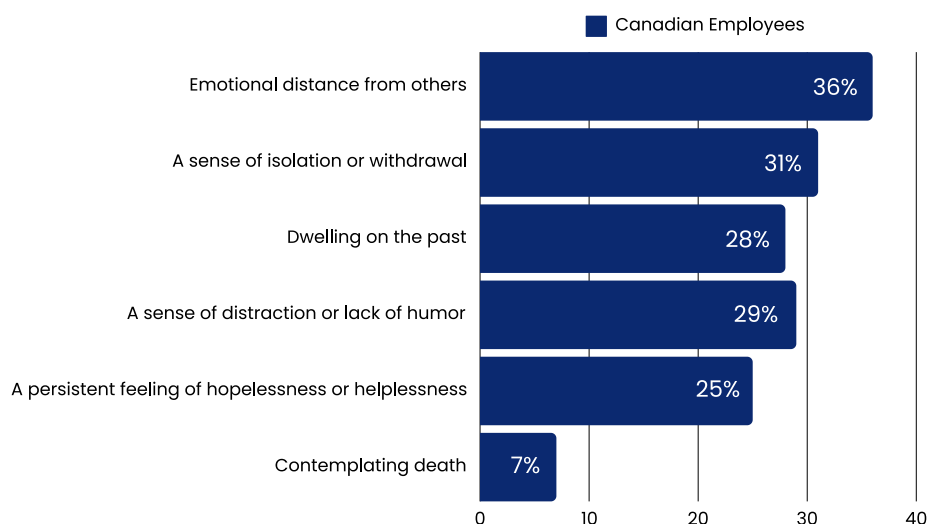


The impact of the workplace on mental health

Whilst 37% have not experienced any of the following issues within the workplace or as result of their work, that still leaves a substantial 63% that have.

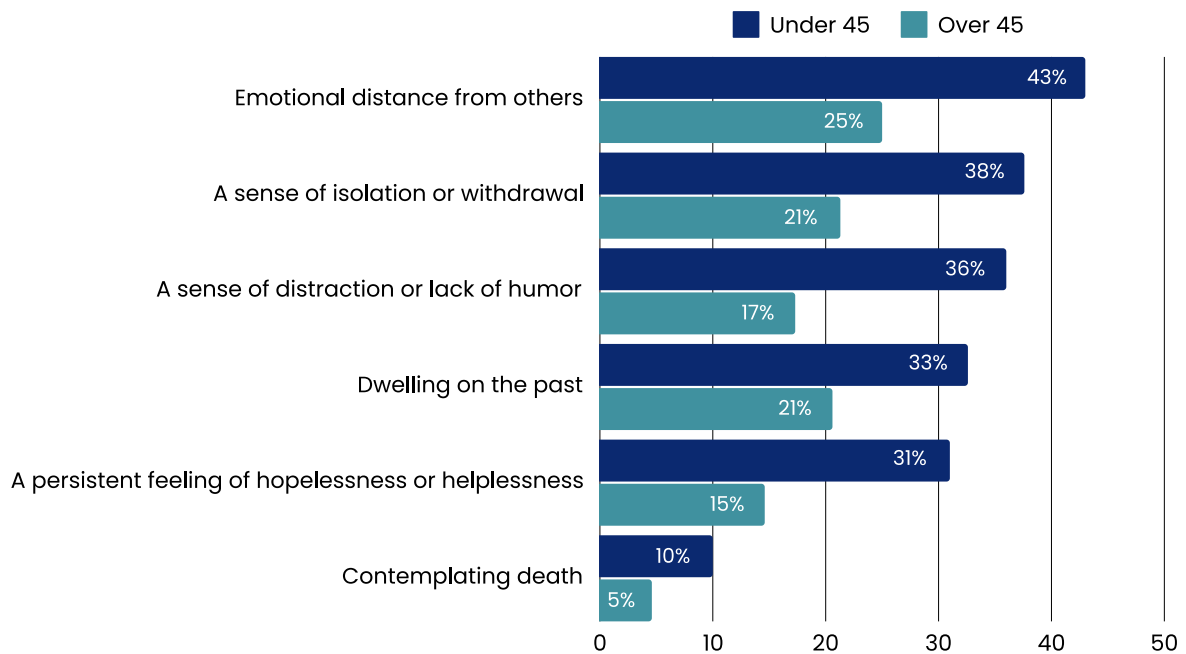
In the past year, 7% of individuals surveyed reported having contemplated death as a result of their job or workplace environment. This alarming statistic emphasizes the reality that employees are experiencing mental health issues as a direct impact of their work or workplace.

Over the past year, have you experienced any of the following within the workplace or as a result of your work?



1 in 3 employees (36%) surveyed reported experiencing emotional distance from others, while 31% have experienced a sense of isolation or withdrawal within the workplace. **Notably, the data reveals a disparity between age groups, with individuals aged 45 and above reporting lower instances of these feelings compared to the under 45 age group.** This suggests that factors such as generational differences or varying career stages may influence the prevalence of emotional disconnection and isolation experienced in the workplace.

Over the past year, have you experienced any of the following within the workplace or as a result of your work?



Post-pandemic, there has been a change in work environments with more organizations opting for a fully remote or hybrid working structure which can lead to feelings of isolation if employees are not supported properly. Early career stressors such as job insecurity and financial pressures may exacerbate these feelings. Additionally, younger employees may rely more heavily on digital communication, which can blur boundaries between work and personal life and contribute to emotional disconnection.



Workplace support required

Not only are individuals impacted by their own mental health struggles, but also by the well-being of their colleagues in the workplace. **Shockingly, in the past year alone, 1 in 5 employees have had concerns that a colleague may harm themselves or take their own life**, with an astounding 12% experiencing a colleague attempting or losing their lives to suicide - these figures state the urgent need for workplace intervention, not only to support those experiencing mental health crises, but also to aid those around them.

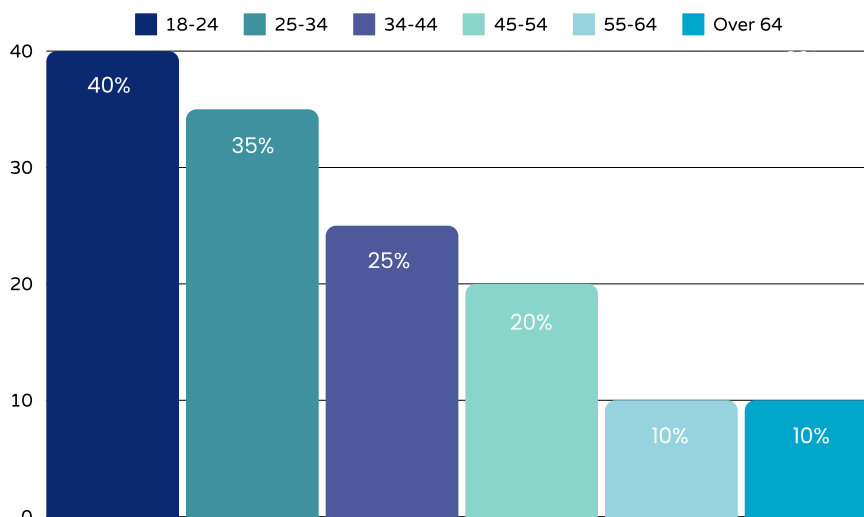
12%

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

Across all industry sectors there appears to be a lack of training or information on what to do if a colleague is experiencing severe depression. A substantial 68% of employees have not received such training within the past year.

Additionally, a quarter of employees (25%) have encountered managers who have inappropriately responded to a colleague showing signs of symptoms of mental illness. This concern is amplified among the younger age groups with inappropriate responses rising to 35% among 25-34 year olds and 40% among 18-24 year olds.

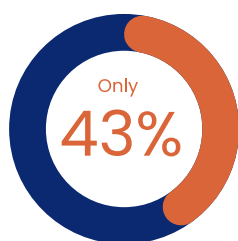
Over the past year, have you experienced at any time a manager who inappropriately responded to a colleague showing signs or symptoms of mental illness?



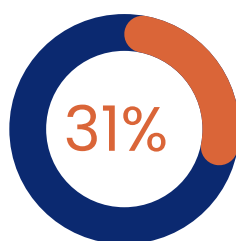


Improvements needed in workplace mental health offering

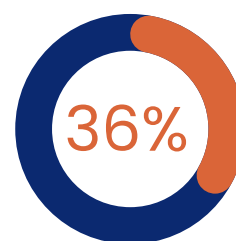
The data paints a concerning picture: only 43% of employees agree that their employer takes proactive steps to address employee mental health. Additionally, 31% feel their employer is overlooking serious mental health issues, indicating a significant gap in recognizing and addressing these concerns effectively.



of employees agree that their employer takes proactive steps to address employee mental health



agree that their employer is overlooking serious mental health issues



agree that their employer sees mental health as a personal or out-of-work matter

Adding to the issue, 36% agree that their employer sees mental health as a personal or out-of-work matter. This mindset risks hindering efforts to create a supportive work environment and could discourage employees from seeking help when needed.

However, it is positive to see that 44% of respondents agree that their employer offers mental health tools that are effective in addressing serious mental health concerns, but this still means that over half of employees do not have access to tools to support them when facing a mental health challenge.

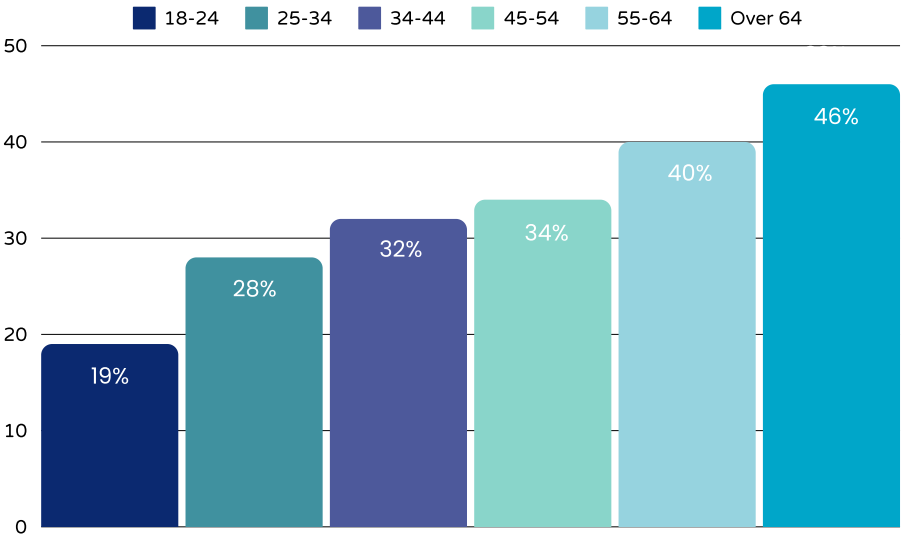


Age plays a significant part in seeking support

While it is reassuring to see that over half (53%) of employees would visit a professional for support outside of work if suffering from severe depression, only a third (32%) would request support from their company's healthcare or Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). This raises questions about how employers can better support their employees or encourage more effective utilization of resources like an EAP. A study conducted by [Mental Health Research Canada](#) reveals significant barriers to EAP utilization, highlighting concerns regarding effectiveness and privacy breaches.

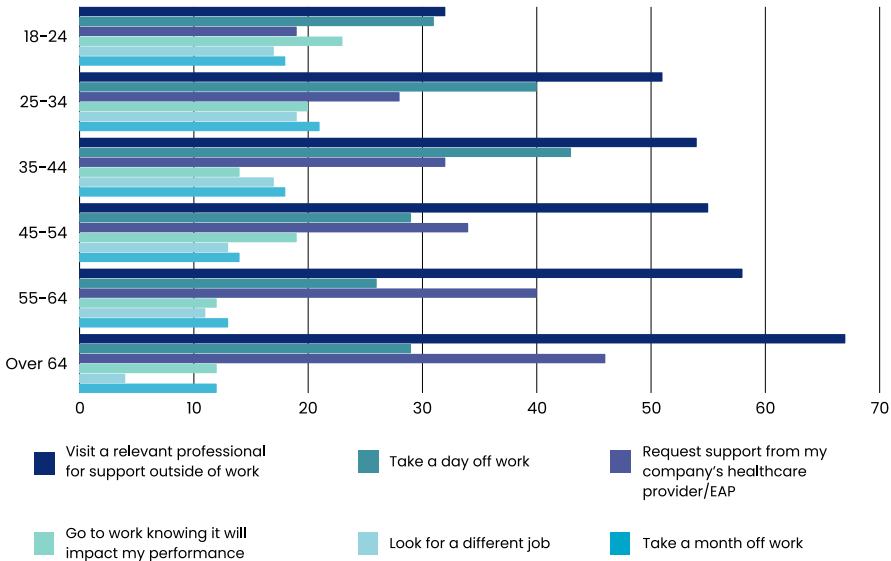
Age appears to be a significant factor when it comes to seeking help for mental health support. Those aged over 25 are more inclined to seek support from a professional outside of work, with only around a third (32%) of those aged 18-24 who would do the same. Similarly, there's a noticeable trend in Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) usage, with a growing willingness to request support among those over 35, and even more so among those over 55. Only 26% of under 35's would request support from their company's healthcare provider or EAP compared with 40% of over 35's. This trend is worrisome, especially considering the higher risk among younger age groups who urgently need this support.

Those who answered yes to the question: If I was suffering from severe depression, I would request support from my company's healthcare provider/EAP



Absenteeism patterns vary with age, with those under 45 being more likely to take a mental health day (average of 38%), compared to 28% among those over 45. This suggests that individuals under the age of 45 may be less inclined to seek assistance for mental health crises and more likely to either take the day off work or continue working despite experiencing mental health challenges.

Please finish the following sentence: If I was suffering from severe depression, I would. . .



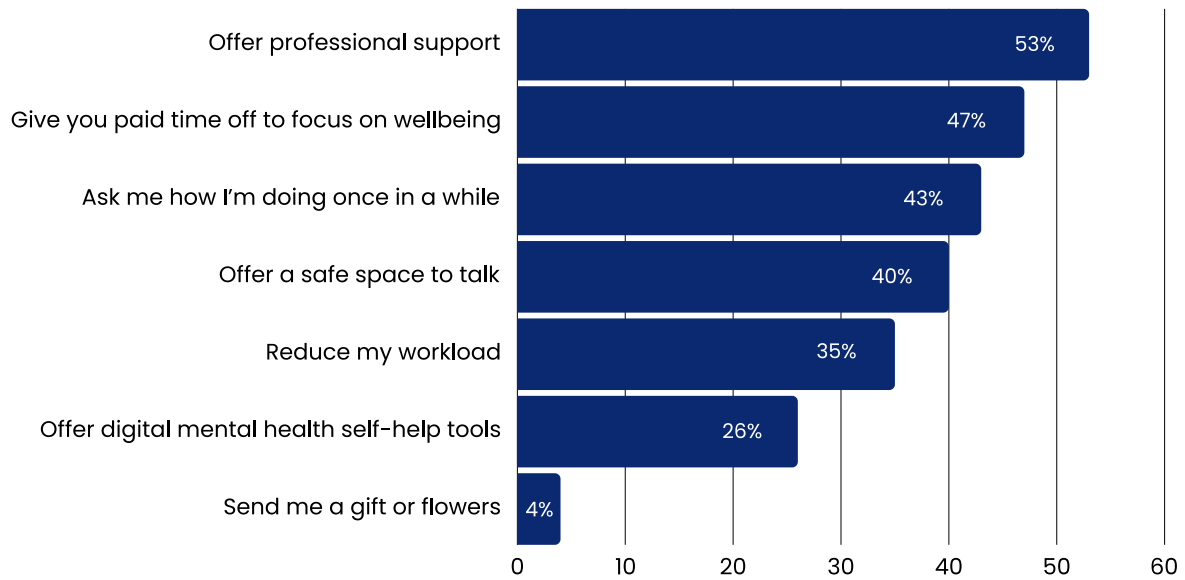


Understanding employee needs in mental health support

When it comes to navigating a mental health crisis, what exactly do employees want from their employers? The data reveals some clear preferences. Around half of employees (53%) are keen on being offered access to professional support, emphasizing the significance of robust mental health services in the workplace. Additionally, a quarter of employees would be interested in being offered access to digital mental health self-help tools.

Interestingly, gender differences emerge in the types of support preferred. Women tend to favour paid time off to focus on their well-being (50% of women compared to 43% of men) and seek out safe spaces to discuss their mental health (45% of women versus 35% of men). Additionally, 43% of employees would appreciate periodic well-being check-ins from their employers.

If you told your employer you were suffering from depression that was impacting your work, how would you like them to respond?



Looking at employees' expectations of their managers' responses to mental health issues affecting their work uncovers concerning insights. Only half (53%) anticipate their manager would refer them to mental health resources, while just 31% would expect a reduction in workload. Alarming, 13% anticipate being told to address the issue in their personal time, with some fearing potential repercussions such as missed opportunities for advancement (9%) or increased criticism of their work (10%).

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

These findings highlight the urgent need for workplaces to create supportive environments where employees 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.

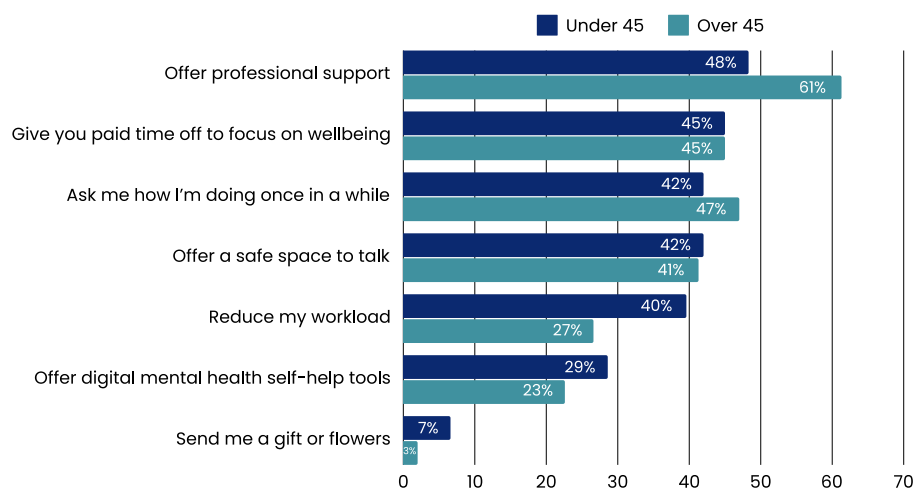


Not a one size fits all solution

Throughout the study, one key finding emerges: a notable contrast in preferences between different age groups. Those aged over 45 tend to lean towards traditional support tools, while those under 45, show a preference for alternative solutions. This highlights a crucial consideration for employers when rolling out well-being initiatives in the workplace.

Previous Wya [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.

If you told your employer you were suffering from depression that was impacting your work, how would you like them to respond?



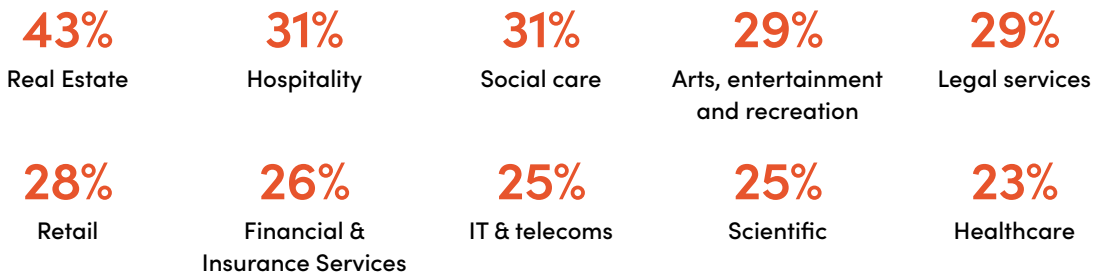


Industry focus

There are a number of industries where those currently facing mental health crises are higher than the 23% average, notably real estate (43%), hospitality (31%) and retail (28%).

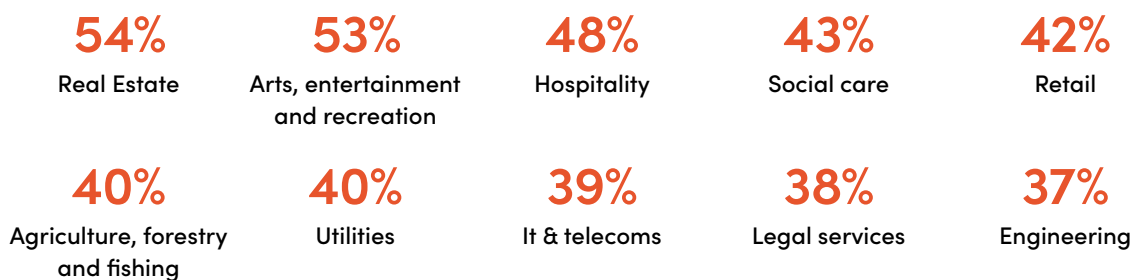
Industries with the highest percentage of employees reporting suicidal ideation or thoughts about self-harm within the two weeks prior to the survey:

Overall avg: 43%



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

Overall avg: 36%



Real estate

Over the past year over half (54%) of individuals in the Canadian real estate industry have been bothered at least once by suicidal ideation or thoughts about self-harm. This alarming statistics surpasses rates seen in any other sector, prompting serious concern.

Over half

of real estate employees have been bothered at least once by thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves over the past year

Adding to the concern, only 14% of real estate professionals agree that their employer offers mental health tools that are effective in addressing serious mental health concerns.

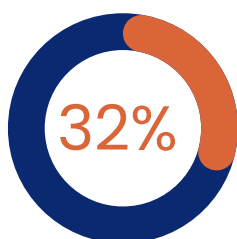
When asked how they'd like their employer to respond if they were suffering from depression that was impacting their work, 46% would like professional support, 39% seek time off to focus on their well-being, and another 39% desire a safe space to talk.

From fluctuating market conditions to intense competition, individuals working in real estate often navigate high levels of uncertainty and pressure. It's imperative for employers to step up and provide comprehensive support systems, investing in mental health resources not only safeguards the welfare of employees but also enhances productivity and creates a healthier work environment.

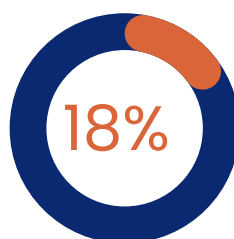
Hospitality

In the past year, 32% of hospitality workers have been concerned that a colleague may harm themselves or try to take their own life, with 18% experiencing a colleague attempting, or losing their life to suicide. When combined with the fact that 31% have been bothered by suicidal ideation or thoughts about self-harm within the two weeks prior to our survey, action must be taken as a matter of urgency.

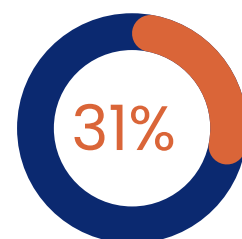
In the past year . . .



of hospitality workers have had a concern that a colleague may harm themselves or try to take their own life



of hospitality workers have experienced a colleague attempting, or losing their life by suicide



of hospitality workers had been bothered by thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves



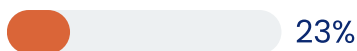
Working in the hospitality sector exposes employees to various stressors. These include demanding schedules with long and irregular hours, the high-pressure atmosphere leading to burnout and mental exhaustion, low wages for the demanding work, and emotional strain from dealing with challenging customers or guests.

The hospitality sector seems to be falling short when it comes to mental health support with only 29% of workers saying that their employers offer effective tools for addressing serious mental health issues.

Even more concerning, 42% feel their employers are overlooking serious mental health problems, while 43% feel their employer sees mental health as a “check box” exercise, rather than a real concern.

A worrying 23% admit they would go to work knowing their mental state will affect their performance, potentially leading to more serious issues down the line. This points to a deeper cultural problem within the industry.

If they were suffering from severe depression



of hospitality workers would go to work knowing it will affect their performance

Sadly, 21% believe they'd be told to deal with severe depression on their own time if they confided in their employer, and 14% fear they'd be ignored altogether.

It's time to take action and for open conversations about mental health to become the norm. The data reflects this need, with 44% wanting a safe space to talk, while 43% simply want to be asked how they're doing once in a while. It's a simple to implement, yet crucial step towards a healthier, more supportive work environment.

Retail

In the past year a significant 42% of retail workers have been bothered at least once by suicidal ideation or thoughts about self-harm.

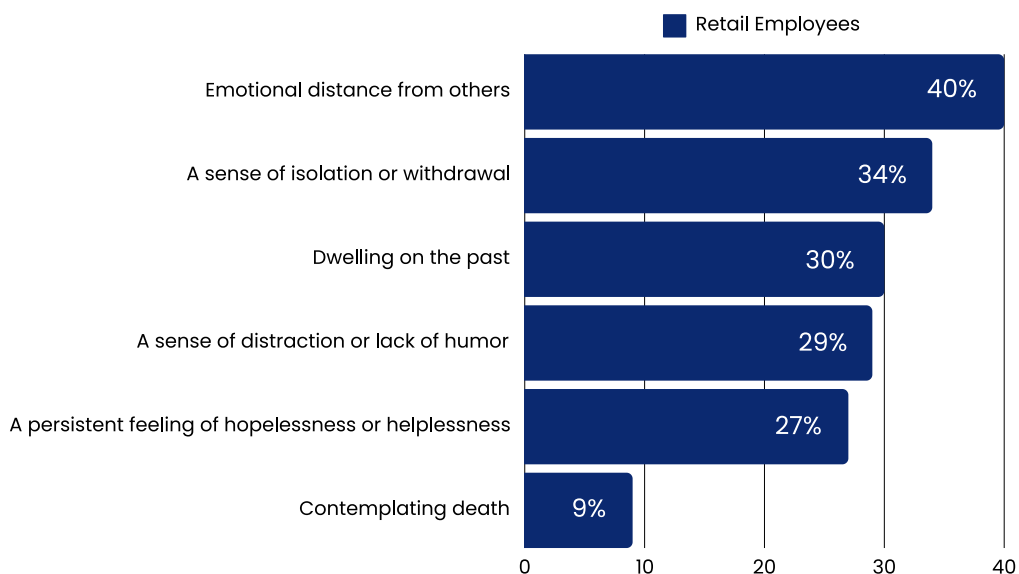
42%

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

Retail employees often endure extended and irregular work hours, which can have an impact on their work-life balance. Coupled with the demands of customer-facing roles and the high turnover seen in the industry, this can lead to heightened stress levels and a sense of instability.

This can be seen within the data, 40% of retail workers say they have experienced emotional distance from others, 34% a sense of isolation or withdrawal and 27% a persistent feeling of hopelessness or helplessness within the last year.

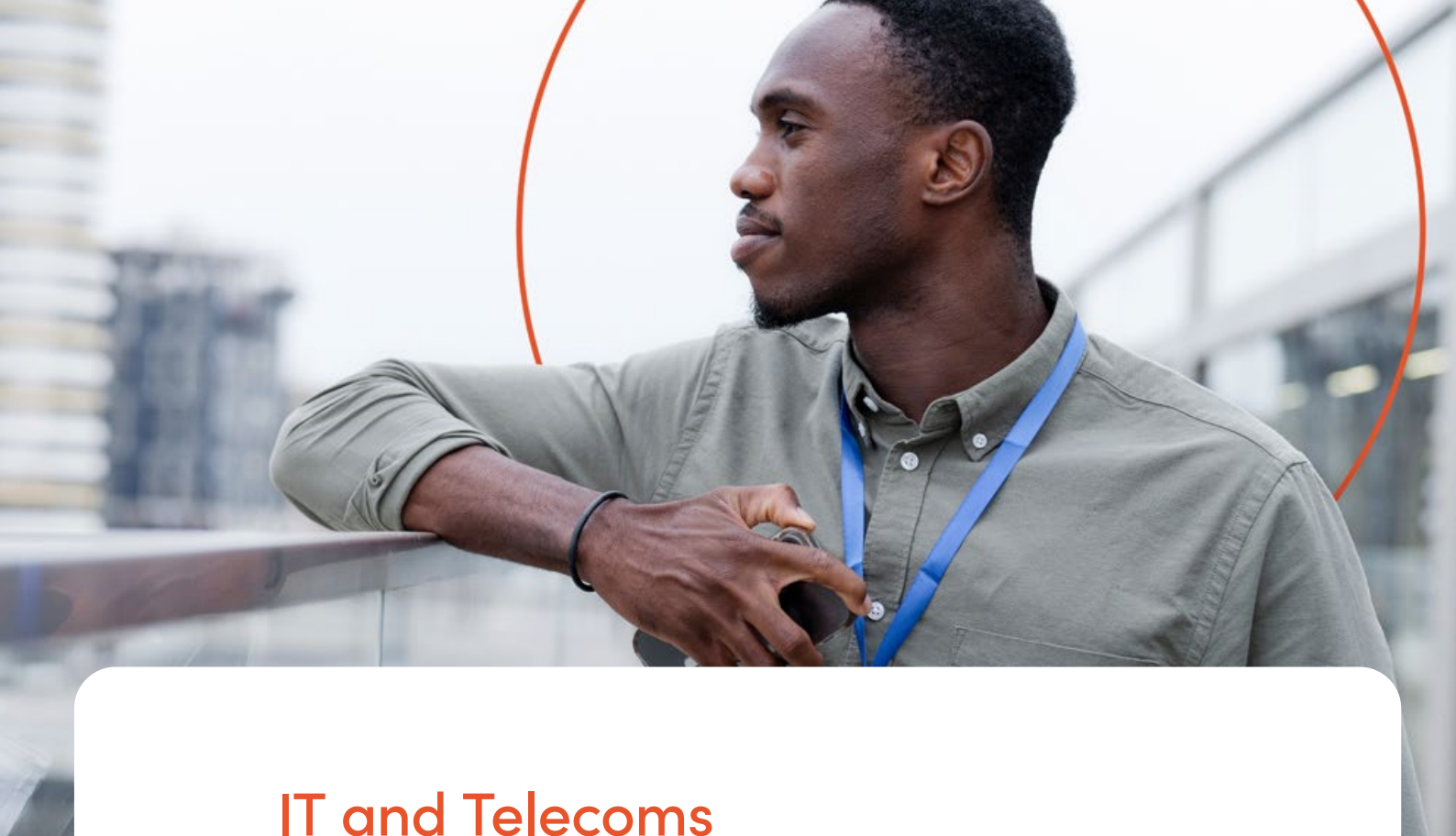
Over the past year, have you experienced any of the following within the workplace or as a result of your work?



Action needs to be taken to ensure that support is in place for those experiencing a mental health crisis, as well as support for those around them as 73% have not received training or support over the last year on what to do if they notice a colleague is experiencing severe depression.

As well as being offered professional support, 46% would like to be given paid time off to focus on their wellbeing and 42% would appreciate the occasional check-in.

Addressing the mental health challenges faced by retail workers is imperative, it's crucial to recognize the impact of their work environment on their well-being and to provide both professional support and practical measures to ensure their mental health is prioritized.



IT and Telecoms

Over the past year



1 in 4 IT and Telecoms employees have had a concern that a colleague may harm themselves or try to take their own life

In the fast-paced world of IT and Telecoms, it appears that the wellbeing of employees is often being overlooked. Over the past year 1 in 4 IT and Telecoms employees have had concern that a colleague may harm themselves or try to take their own life with 15% sadly having a colleague that has attempted or lost their life to suicide. Additionally, 36% have been bothered by thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves, highlighting the pressing need for supportive measures.

Despite growing awareness, there remains a stigma surrounding mental health disclosure, with 18% of employees expecting their boss to become more critical of their work or judge their ability to perform if they told them they were suffering from depression that was impacting their work, while 12% would expect opportunities for advancement to be withheld.

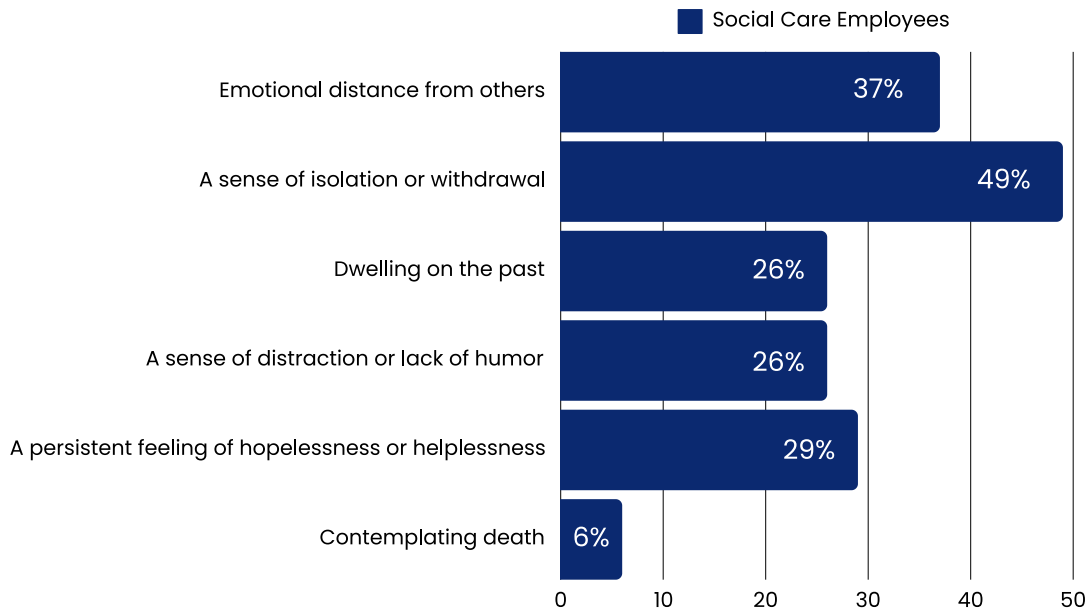
38% of employees have been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless several days over the past 2 weeks with 42% experiencing little interest or pleasure in doing things. These figures represent the silent struggles being endured by employees in the sector and changes need to be made to ensure that everyone feels valued and able to seek help when it is needed.

Social care

Over the past year 43% of social care employees have been bothered by suicidal ideation or thoughts about self-harm. And even in the two weeks prior to the survey, 31% were having these thoughts. Many also worry about their colleagues, with 23% concerned that a colleague may try to take their own life or harm themselves over the past year.

The report also reveals that 35% of employees have experienced a manager who has inappropriately responded to a colleague showing signs or symptoms of mental illness. This lack of support from managers can worsen the situation and deter employees from seeking help.

Over the past year, have you experienced any of the following within the workplace or as a result of your work?



Emotional struggles are prevalent with 42% feeling emotionally distant from their colleagues, and 41% experiencing feelings of isolation or withdrawal, the highest among all the sectors surveyed. Despite these struggles, only 45% of social care employees feel that their employer is proactive about addressing and supporting the mental health of employees.

Some employees expect to be told to deal with mental health problems in their own time, and others worry that their boss will be critical if they ask for help. Despite these concerns, many social care employees want more support. Half of them would like their employer to check in on them and provide a safe space to talk. And nearly a third are interested in using digital tools to help with their mental health.

These findings emphasize the need for comprehensive mental health support strategies in the social care sector, addressing both individual needs and systemic challenges within workplaces.



Conclusion

The findings in this report suggest that mental health crises are a significant issue in the workplace. Many individuals are at risk of self-harm or suicide, yet a worrying number of workplaces are failing to provide adequate support not only to those individuals but to all employees.

It's evident that many employees feel their workplaces are falling short in addressing mental health concerns, and they often hesitate to discuss their struggles with their employers due to fears of potential repercussions.

Addressing this issue is imperative to create an environment where employees feel safe to speak up about challenges that are affecting them and their work. Equally crucial is ensuring that leaders and managers possess the necessary skills and resources to support their team members during difficult times and to recognize when to seek additional help for a colleague in need.

The report findings also suggest that individuals at different stages of life seek different types of support from their managers and the workplace. It's important to provide tools that suit everyone's needs. Some prefer talking to a person, while others find it easier to use digital tools. Offering a variety of resources ensures everyone can get the support they need in a way that works for them.

Taking action to prioritize everyone's well-being and create a workplace that supports mental health is vital. Changing workplace culture isn't easy, but even small changes can make a big difference.

If you feel distressed or in need of immediate support please reach out to the following crisis helplines:

Canada:

Suicide Crisis Helpline: 9-8-8

USA:

National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988

Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990

UK:

Samaritans (24/7): 116123

SANeline (daily, 16:30 to 22:30): 0300 304 7000

For other regional helplines download Wysa for free through the app stores and click on the SOS button.