



wysa

Colleagues in Crisis

A Wysa Discovery Report

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Introduction

In workplaces across the UK, mental health has become a pressing issue. While there's been progress in how it's addressed, there's still some significant concern.

Statistics reveal that [1 in 4](#) people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England. 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 UK 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 highlight troubling trends: many people are struggling with serious mental health issues, including thoughts of self-harm and suicidal ideation but a significant number aren't getting enough support from their 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 an era where the dialogue around mental health is more open than ever, our workplaces must become havens of support and understanding. The findings presented in this report are both alarming and eye-opening, revealing a stark reality: mental health struggles are pervasive, yet the support systems in place often fall short.

The data shows that 1 in 4 UK employees have been troubled by thoughts of suicide or self-harm within the past two weeks. This statistic alone should prompt immediate action. Workplaces are more than just places of employment; they are communities where individuals spend a significant portion of their lives. Therefore, employers must not ignore their responsibility to address mental health.

Our research, involving over 2,000 UK employees across various industries, underscores the urgent need for a paradigm shift in how mental health is approached in the workplace. It is clear that many employees do not feel supported or equipped to handle mental health crises. This gap in support is not just a failure of policy but a societal issue that requires collective effort and commitment to change.

It's evident that mental health support cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. The needs of employees vary significantly across different age groups and industries. Younger employees often face unique pressures and may prefer digital tools and flexible support options, while older employees might lean towards traditional forms of professional help. Employers must recognize these differences and offer a range of supportive measures tailored to the diverse needs of their workforce.

Furthermore, the stigma surrounding mental health, especially in high-stress industries like engineering, IT, and hospitality, must be dismantled. This report highlights that a significant portion of employees in these sectors are at a high risk of mental health crises. Creating a culture of openness, where mental health can be discussed without fear of judgement or reprisal, is essential.

The findings also indicate that while some employers are making strides in providing mental health support, much more needs to be done. Training for managers, effective communication about mental health resources, and genuine, proactive support strategies are crucial. Policies must go beyond mere checkbox exercises and be embedded in the organizational culture, ensuring that mental health support is both meaningful and accessible.

At Wysa, we are committed to pioneering change in how mental health is perceived and managed in the workplace. This report serves as a call to action for all employers to invest in comprehensive mental health strategies that support the wellbeing of their teams. Only through sustained effort and commitment can we hope to create work environments where every employee feels valued, supported, and empowered to seek help when needed.



John Tench
Managing Director, Wysa



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

A staggering 25% of UK employees reported being bothered by thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves, in the 2 weeks prior to our survey. This means that approximately **8.24 million adults** in the UK are in crisis, as defined by the charity **Mind**.

Expand that timeframe to the past year, and the figure increases to one in three (36%) UK workers in crisis. This alarming pattern is not exclusive to the UK; similar trends are observed in the U.S. (32%) and Canada (36%), emphasising that this is a global issue requiring attention from employers and governments worldwide.



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

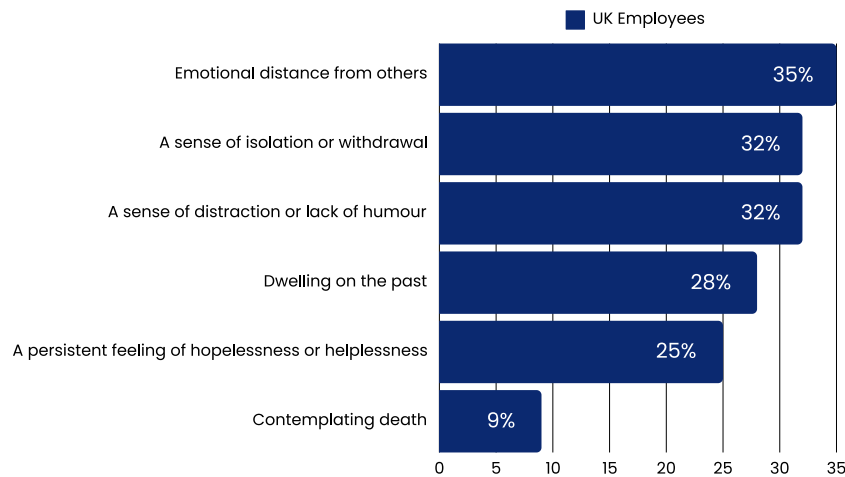
Mental health and suicide have often been overlooked in the workplace as health concerns, whereas this research indicates that it's also a societal issue in which workplaces and employers have a significant role and responsibility to support their teams.

The numbers are starkest for the younger generation in work - 41% of 18-24 year olds reported having these thoughts in the two weeks prior to the survey. Yet the Office of National Statistics **reports** that rates of suicide are highest in men aged 40 to 50 years, at around 20 per 100,000, and rising. This raises questions about which demographics are most vulnerable and who bears the responsibility for addressing this issue.

The impact of the workplace on mental health

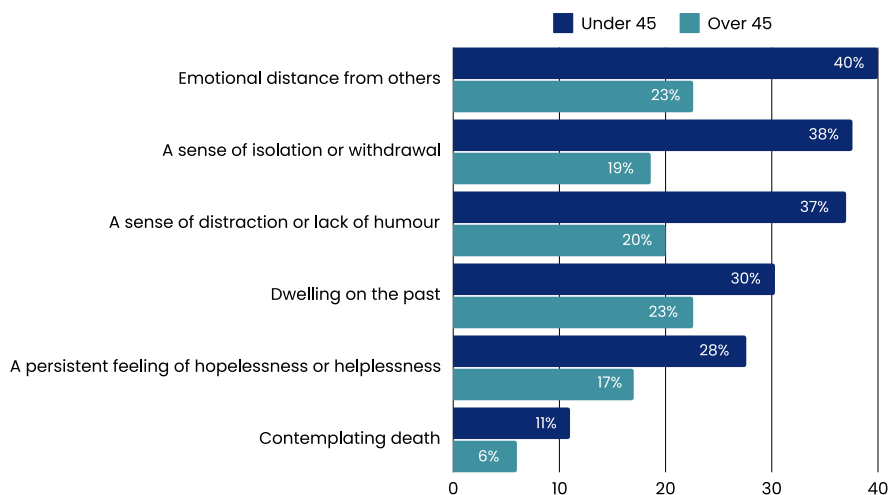
We see that almost 1 in 10 (9%) respondents report that they have contemplated death as a result of their work or within the workplace. Although some employees are already arriving at work experiencing psychological stress, for some the workplace environment or tasks are contributing to these feelings.

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



Over 1 in 3 (35%) say they have experienced emotional distance from others, and a third (32%) have felt isolated or withdrawn. We see that these feelings are much higher in those under 45 than over.

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





This may be due to a sense of stigma amongst older workers, or the growing pressures that younger generations are facing. The economic crisis is hitting those early in their career hardest. Entry into the workforce during the pandemic means many have not benefited from workplace interactions in a world where remote or hybrid working is the norm. And those slightly older in this cohort are likely to be experiencing financial and family worries.

Research shows that there are a number of work-related factors relating to mental health risk. [Waters & Palmer 'Work-related suicide: a qualitative analysis of recent cases with recommendations for reform'](#) (University of Leeds, 2021) cites eight key ones:

01.

Unmanageable workloads

02.

Isolation due to work hours/location

03.

Workplace bullying

04.

Exposure to trauma

05.

Work inspection pressures

06.

Returning to work after extended sick leave

07.

Lack of management mental health training

08.

Change in work status/ promotion pressure

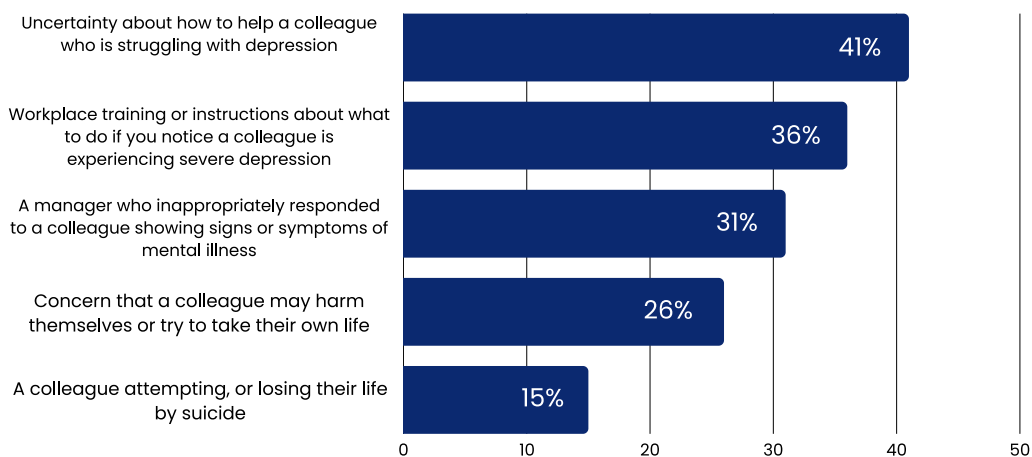
Rather than a place of safety, often the psychosocial impact of work can be harmful.



Workplace support required

Out of those surveyed, only 36% received training on assisting colleagues with severe depression. This leaves a concerning 64% without this vital knowledge. Four in 10 (41%) are uncertain about how to help a colleague and even those in positions of leadership appear to be ill-equipped - 3 in 10 (31%) say that they have experienced a manager who inappropriately responded to a colleague showing signs or symptoms of mental illness.

Those who answered yes: Over the past year, have you experienced the following at any time?



Individuals are not only impacted by their own mental health struggles, but also by those of their colleagues. A quarter (26%) have been recently concerned that a colleague may harm themselves or try to take their own life and a concerning 15% have experienced a colleague either attempting or losing their life by suicide. This highlights the need for full wraparound training on how to support others and yourself when facing such challenges. Rather than relying solely on policies that may appear superficial, there is a crucial need for meaningful and structured support and action to address mental health risks.

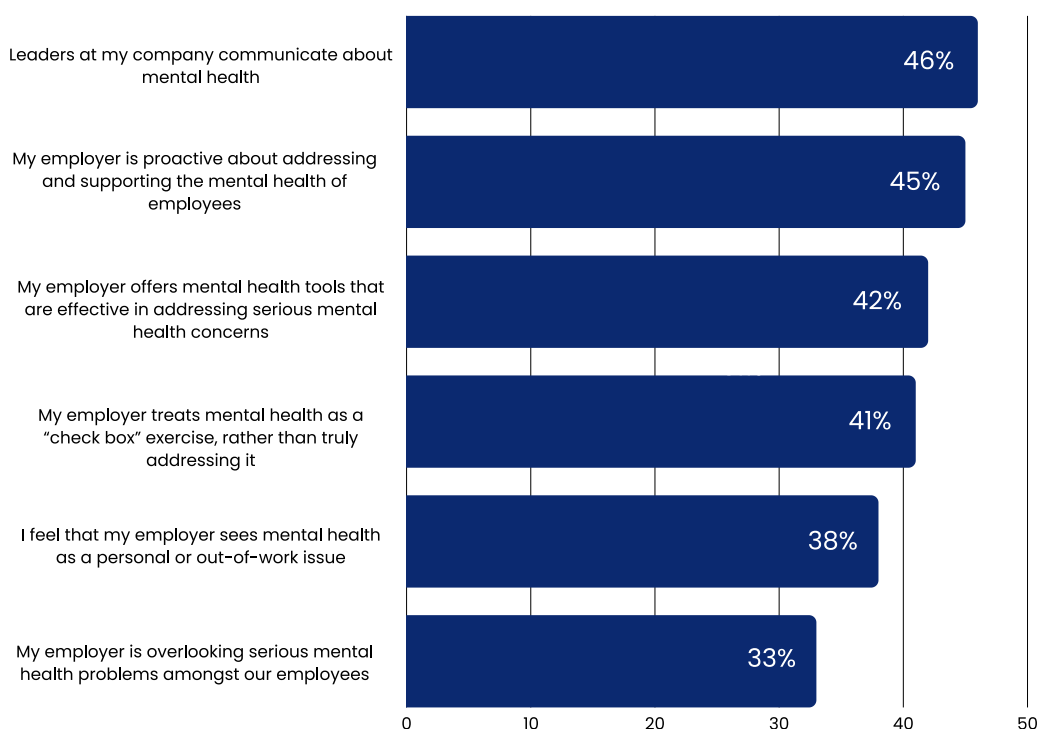
Improvements needed in workplace mental health offering

Employees have mixed feelings about their workplace's approach. Whilst 45% of respondents agree that their workplace is proactive in addressing and supporting the mental health of employees and offers effective tools to address serious mental health concerns (42%), this means over half of employees disagree with these statements and therefore do not have access to tools to support them when facing a mental health challenge.

Additionally, 33% feel their employer is overlooking serious mental health issues, indicating a significant gap in recognizing and addressing these concerns effectively.

Adding to the issue, four in 10 (41%) state that their employer's approach to mental health is more of a 'check box' exercise, rather than actively addressing the issue. 38% say that they feel their employer sees mental health as a personal or out-of-work issue, rising to 45% of 25-34 year olds. This mindset risks hindering efforts to create a supportive work environment and could discourage employees from seeking help when needed.

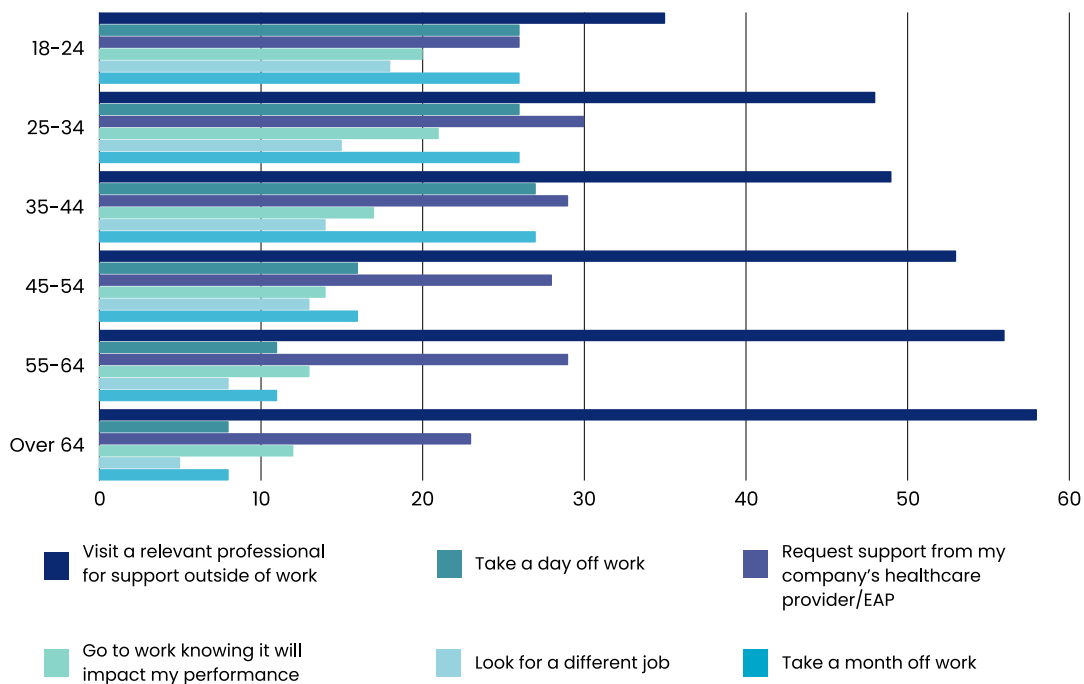
Those who answered agree to: To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your employer's approach



Age plays a significant part in seeking support

Reassuringly half (49%) of UK employees would see a professional for support outside of work if they were suffering from depression. Despite companies investing in Employee Assistance Programmes only 28% would request support in this way. We have seen from previous research ([Wysa Employee Mental Health Report, 2023](#)) that take up is much lower, around 3-7%. The reason for this? There are a few barriers to access, including complicated procedures to access the support, lack of 24/7 support, and the fact that people often do not recognise the severity of their own symptoms.

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



There is however a significant difference in how younger and older generations approach mental health.

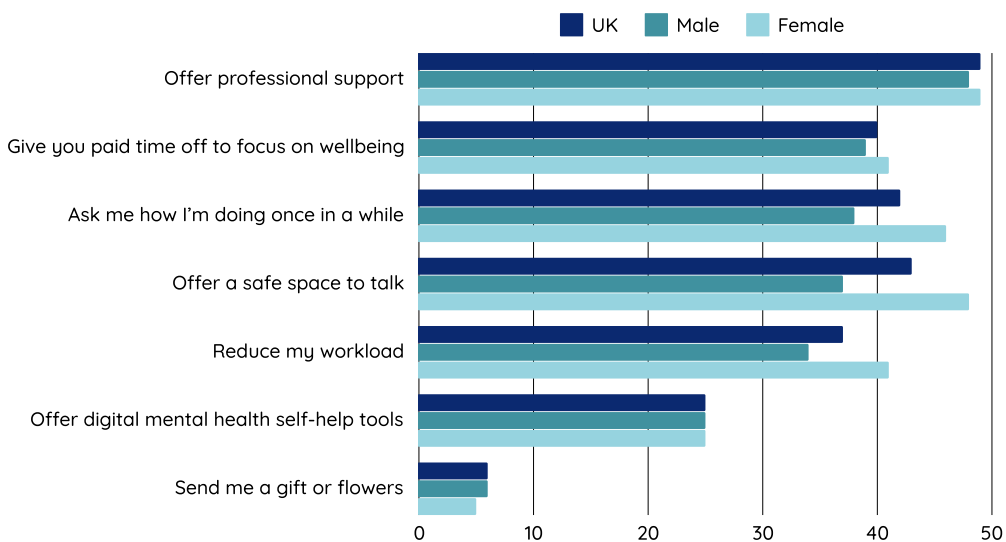
Those over 45 are more likely to seek mental health support from a professional out of work, perhaps viewing it as a personal issue (54% over 45 compared to 48% 18-44). Whereas those under 44 are much more likely to consider the workplace a source of stress with 35% saying they would take a day off work, 16% would take a month off and 17% would likely look for a different job. Those under 45 are also more likely to go to work knowing that it will impact their performance - simply not being at their best, and worse, possibly resulting in deterioration. Mental health affects more than just individuals outside of work - it impacts productivity, presenteeism and retention in the workplace too.

Understanding employee needs in mental health support

What do people want from their employers? Half (49%) would like to be offered professional support, while a quarter (25%) express interest in being offered digital mental health self help tools. These tools, when backed with clinical research, are effective, anonymous, and can be used in a crisis.

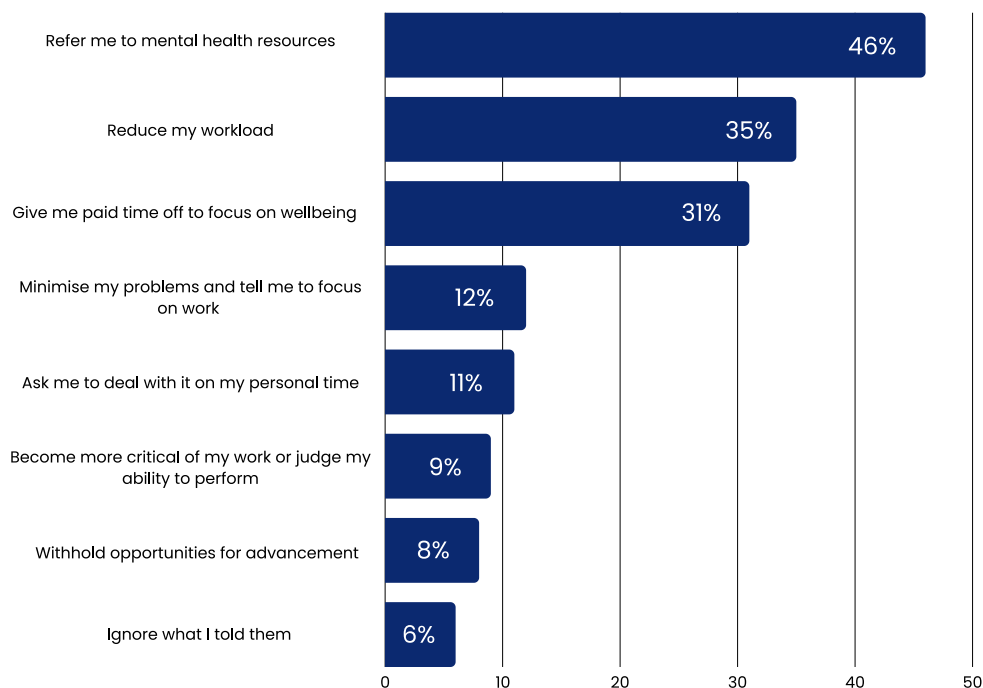
Interestingly, women are slightly more likely to seek more specific workplace actions, such as paid time off (41% of women versus 39% of men), and 41% would appreciate a reduction in workload to help minimise pressure, compared to 34% of men. Only a small fraction (6%) of UK employees would like token gifts such as flowers, but a significant number (42%) would appreciate wellbeing check-ins to see how they are doing once in a while. Alongside traditional methods such as cultural change to encourage employees to reach out if they need help, providing training for managers to identify individuals in crisis and offering access to qualified human support for those struggling, there is a clear need for workplaces to consider their attitudes to support and look at considerations such as workload and sick leave.

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



But unfortunately at the moment in a lot of cases that's not what's happening. Less than half (46%) expect that their manager would refer them to mental health resources if they were suffering from depression that was impacting their work, and just over a third (35%) would anticipate a reduction in workload. Around 1 in 10 expect to be told to deal with it in personal time, while some would expect their careers to be impacted by criticism of their work or judgement of their ability to perform (9%) or opportunities for advancement being withheld (8%).

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



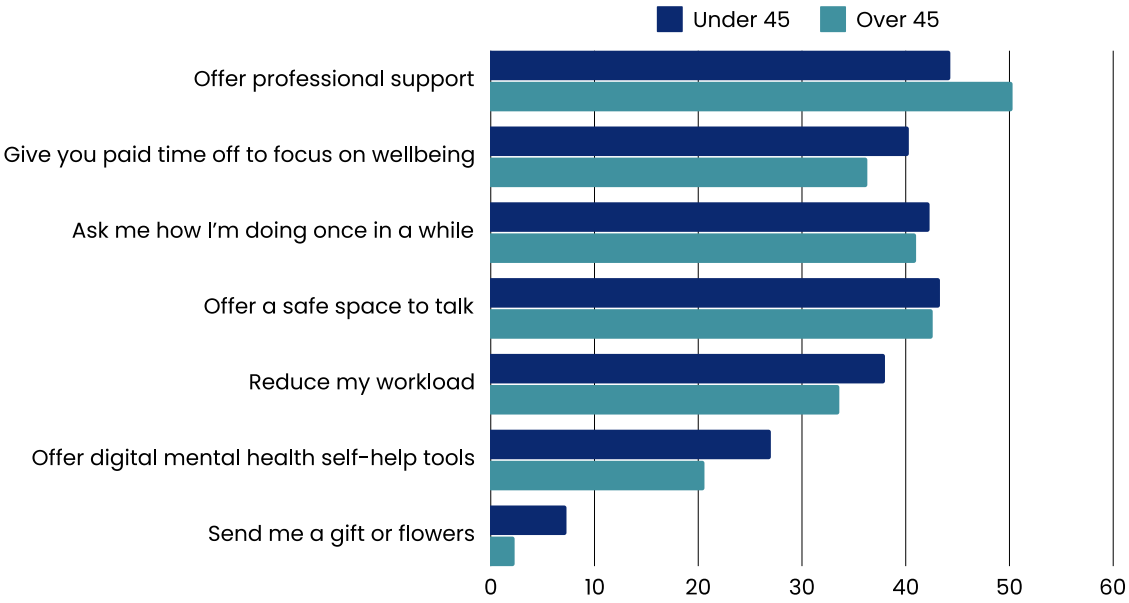
"I was very open with my new employer about my anorexia, depression and anxiety, and promised support. Yet after only a few months of working there with long hours, high pressure and a toxic culture I had a severe relapse. I was told that I was too embarrassing to be put in front of clients and was taken off numerous projects. I now freelance and working for myself has been the best mental health decision I've ever made."

F, 37, Marketing



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.



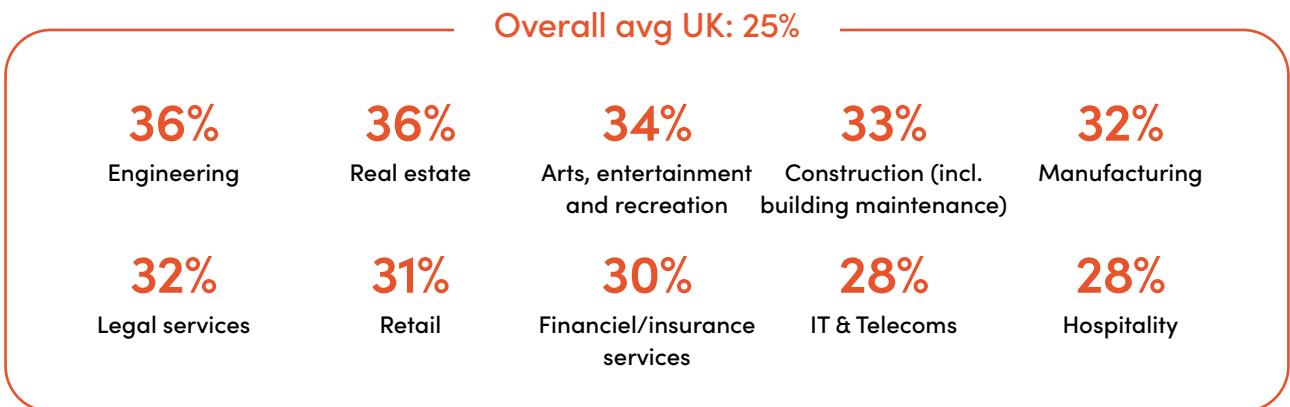
Previous [Wysa research](#) revealed that, even in times of crisis, individuals may not always feel ready to speak to a real person. Hence, it's essential to provide comprehensive support that caters to everyone's needs.



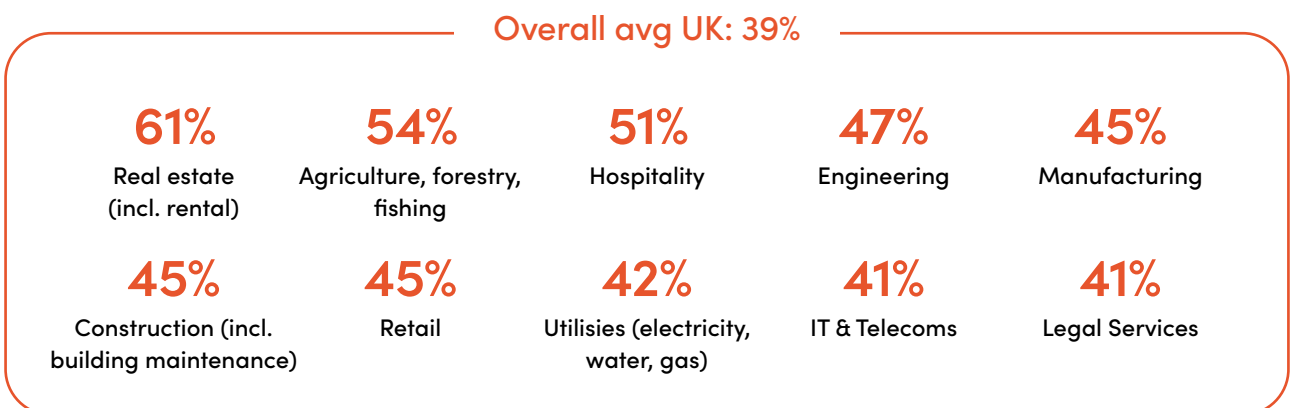
Industry focus

There are a number of industries where those currently facing mental health crises are higher than the 25% average, notably engineering (36%), arts and entertainment (34%) and construction (30%). These industries are characterised 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:



Hospitality

A third (37%) of employees in the hospitality industry have been concerned that a colleague may harm themselves or try to take their own life, and 23% say they have had direct experience of this over the past year. The [Institute of Hospitality](#) reports that 4 out of 5 (84%) hospitality professionals report having experienced at least one mental health issue during their career.

Over the past year

37%

of UK hospitality employees say they have had a concern that a colleague may harm themselves or try to take their own life

It's evident that numerous workplace stressors in hospitality, such as erratic work schedules, prolonged working hours, the pressure of customer service, and often lower pay compared to average, contribute to poor mental health. The hospitality industry also faces unique challenges, including the prevalence of temporary contracts, the pressure to provide outstanding customer service, and the impact of customer feedback on job security. These factors exacerbate the mental health issues faced by the workforce.

Over the past year



Nearly 1 in 4 hospitality employees have experienced a manager who has inappropriately responded to a colleague showing signs or symptoms of mental illness

Within the last year, nearly 4 in 10 (39%) say they have experienced a manager who has inappropriately responded to a colleague showing signs or symptoms of mental illness, and only 21% would request support from their company's healthcare provider or EAP - potentially as many are on zero hours contracts so simply don't have access to such benefits. Only 26% say that their employer offers mental health tools that are effective in addressing serious mental health concerns, and 47% say mental health is considered a personal issue. Despite the clear pressure the industry is under, only 25% expect their employer would offer paid time off if facing depression and one in 5 (16%) expect that they would be told to deal with it in their own time.

"If I hadn't have got out when I did, I would be one of them. I miss the kitchen every day, the buzz, the busy, the banter, but for the sake of my mental health and my marriage, leaving was the only option."

J, 33, former chef

IT & Telecoms

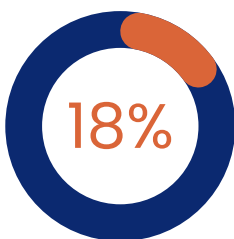
The IT and telecoms industry appears to be facing a crisis. A huge 28% of employees in the industry reported being bothered by thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves, in the 2 weeks prior to our survey, with a third (34%) expressing concern a colleague may self harm or try to take their own life, and 23% experiencing this reality in the last year. Data from the [BIMA Tech Inclusivity & Diversity Report 2019](#) indicates a troubling situation regarding mental health within the tech industry, with some experts describing it as nearing a crisis level. According to the report, over half of the individuals working in tech, approximately 52%, have experienced anxiety or depression.

In the 2 weeks prior to the survey

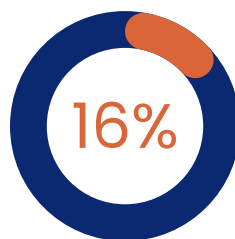
28%

of IT & telecoms employees had been bothered by thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves

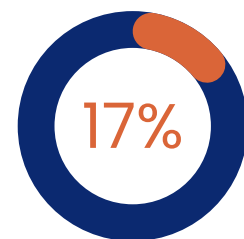
Although 4 in 10 (39%) would feel confident reaching out to their employer health provider or taking a day off, and more than half (53%) are happy with the tools provided by their workplace, a worrying 48% say mental health is just seen as a checkbox issue. This is proven by the fact that concerns about telling their employer are higher than in other industries.



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



of IT & telecoms employees expect to be told to deal with their mental health worries in personal time



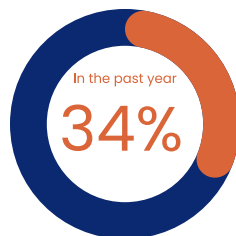
of IT & telecoms employees expect their boss to become more critical of their work or judge their ability to perform

If they had severe enough depression that it was affecting work and told their employer, 18% expect their problems to be minimised with an instruction to focus on work, 16% say they would be asked to deal with it in personal time (49%), and 17% anticipate that their boss would become more critical of their work or judge their ability to perform. Attitudes clearly need to change.



Engineering

34% of those working in the demanding sector of engineering have been concerned over the past year that a colleague would take their life or commit self harm, and a concerning 36% are considered to be currently at risk of suicide or self harm.



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

But reassuringly 40% expect that if they opened up to their boss that they were struggling, their manager would reduce their workload. Nearly 6 in 10 (57%) would seek support from a mental health professional, and 36% say that their employer is proactive about supporting workers with their mental health.

The stats suggest an industry that is struggling - but one where employers are open to change and taking action. Engineering is a typically male-dominated industry, with men often believed to be less willing to open up about their mental wellbeing than women.

"I've lost a few men on the track to suicide. It's tough, out here in the dark and all weathers on long shifts. We talk about mental health much more than we used to now, which helps, because it means you know you're not alone."

B, 69, Railway Engineer

Retail

The retail sector and hospitality sector are often fast paced and employees have to deal with high customer volumes, with targets to deliver a great customer experience at speed and do it well. [Trade union Unite in the UK](#) found that long hours are the norm with almost half (44%) working over 44 hours a week and a sixth of retail, hospitality and kitchen workers busy for over 60 hours a week. Many positions in retail and hospitality are lower-paying, part-time, or temporary jobs, which can contribute to financial stress and a sense of job insecurity. All of these factors make the sector a high stress environment.

Only 29% have received workplace mental health training, and 37% compared to an average of 42% say that their employer offers mental health tools and resources. A concern when 31% are considered at risk of suicide or self harm.

Only



of retail employees say that their employer offers mental health tools that are effective in addressing serious mental health concerns

If they were struggling with depression only a quarter (25%) would expect their employer to offer paid time off to focus on wellbeing, although 33% would want this. Yet only 29% would want a reduction in workload - it's an industry where most are paid by the hour, so time off is lost income. Only 35% (compared to 46%) across all industries say that leaders in their organisation communicate about mental health, demonstrating cultural change is key.



Conclusion

The survey results reveal a significant gap in mental health support within the workplace. Many employees are grappling with mental health challenges, some even reaching crisis point, yet adequate provisions for their needs are lacking.

Alarming, many individuals are at risk of self-harm or suicide, yet a concerning number of workplaces fail to provide the necessary support, not just for these individuals but for all employees.

The findings also show the need for tailored support for individuals at different life stages. While some prefer interpersonal communication, others find digital tools more accessible. By offering a diverse range of resources, everyone can access the support they need in a manner that suits them best.

It's evident that decisive action is needed to create a workplace culture that enables open conversations about mental health. Equipping both managers and employees with the necessary tools and skills to support themselves and others during times of crisis is crucial. Only then can we create work environments where mental health is prioritised and everyone feels empowered to seek and offer support when needed.

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

UK:

Samaritans (24/7): 116123

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

Canada:

Suicide Crisis Helpline: 9-8-8

USA:

National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988

Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990

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

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.