



# Millennials & Gen Z Key Mental Wellbeing Trends: The Future of Workplace



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## Introduction

# Who are we and why our work matters

Millennial Mental Wellbeing (MMW) is a For Impact Organisation, uniting passionate professionals around the world with a vision to create a world where mental wellbeing is valued, promoted and encouraged. To do so effectively, our 1st mission is to provide access to relevant mental wellbeing tools and service to young professionals in the workplaces. MMW caters to the universe of mental health from a democratic stance. Our team comprises diverse individuals who bring their expertise to a single platform that is MMW through modalities like workshops, toolkits, surveys, and training modules as a holistic approach towards mental health. As an organisation, we thrive to contextualise well-being in and as a spectrum that is always changing. The arrival of the pandemic has brought about systemic changes both within and without the workplace and this report brings together findings from surveys and qualitative interviews that seek to address that change.



## About this report

We composed this report from quantitative data we gathered through surveys and qualitative data we gathered through interviews with employees worldwide. MMW seeks to always be informed on the arising needs of Millennials and Gen Zs regarding their mental wellbeing. As new cultural and social norms, trends and demands emerge around mental wellbeing in the workplace, our organisation continues investing in research to deliver relevant tools to Millennials, Gen Z and their workplaces to thrive in the new realities of employment.



The quantitative data is comprised by three surveys that two of them were launched in December 2020 and one in May 2021. The first two surveys were launched among our community and one pilot company. This survey of 488 respondents helped us to understand the necessity of mental wellbeing advocacy at the workplace and what it means for the Millennials and Gen Z. The third survey of 6561 respondents helped us to take a deeper look at the mental health, problems and priorities of the participants globally. Quantitative data was used to identify patterns and extrapolate those insights to larger populations. The aim of the qualitative interviews was to understand stress at a nuanced level taking into consideration the culture and personal factors of employees. About ten employees across the Scandinavian nations were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires on their experience of stress, the different ways the workplace aggravates, maintains and alleviates stress and the resources employed to tackle stress. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed to generate themes which are discussed throughout this report.

# Key findings



## Stress

Stress is indeed the main mental health challenge that Millennials and Gen Z might face. Our survey indicated that female respondents were more likely to deal with stress, while the least years of experience would illustrate a gloomier picture on stress levels.



## Mental wellbeing at workplaces

One in five employees consider that their mental wellbeing needs are not taken into consideration at the workplace. The lack of proactiveness about mental health leads to organisations stepping in only when they are dealing with a crisis.



## Life Balance

The fundamental priority in life for Millennials and Gen Z is mental and physical wellbeing. In MMW we advocate for a holistic approach of mental wellbeing, that does not view balance as in and out of the workplace, but as one.



## Our Solution

MMW proposes a three step model for mental wellbeing implementation at the workplace that includes:

1. Breaking down the stigma
2. Educate and train employers
3. Democratise and provide tools to employees for supporting their mental health.

## Chapter 1

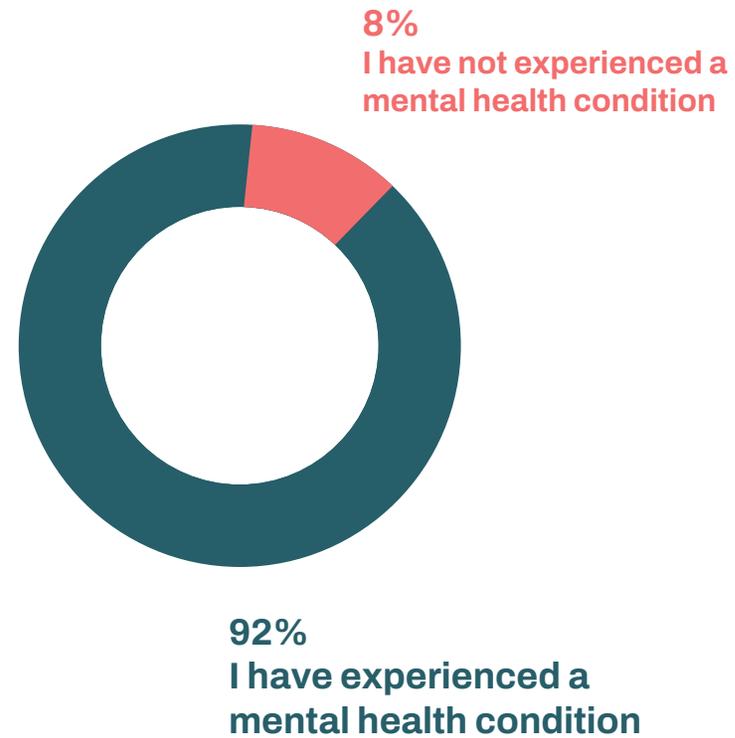
# Mental Health is a global problem

As we are moving towards a post-pandemic world, taking into consideration the casualties of the pandemic era, we see that more and more people are suffering from mental health related disorders. Worldwide almost one billion people are today experiencing a mental health or substance use disorder, collectively referred to as behavioural-health conditions (WHO, 2020; Statista, 2021).

In our study we discovered that 92% of the participants have in the past experienced or currently undergo a behavioural-health condition.



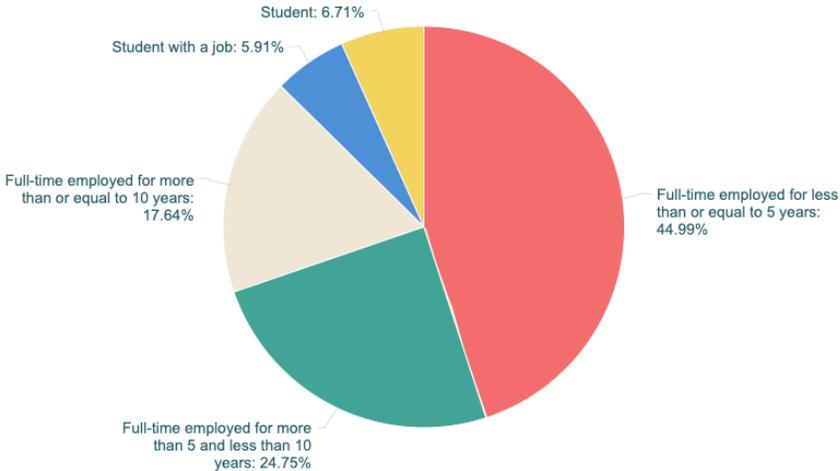
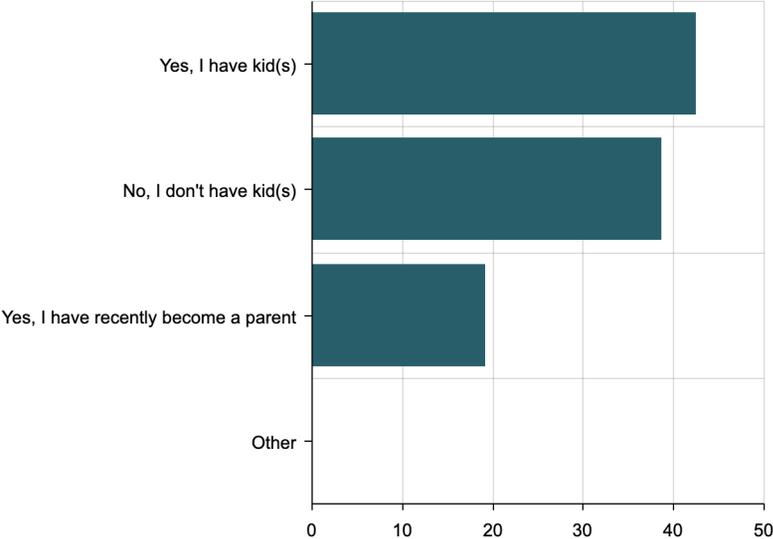
This could be explained by the timing that the survey took place, which was after a long period of lockdown conditions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the American Psychological association (2021) has shown, Gen z adults was the generation most likely to say that their mental health has worsened through the pandemic by 46% of the participants. Gen Z adults are facing unprecedented uncertainty, experiencing elevated levels of stress and reporting symptoms of depression (APA, 2021). Followed by millennials that were declaring a strain in their mental health through the pandemic by 33% (APA, 2021).



# Stress and family welfare

Another reason for the elevated levels of the mental health distress in the pool of our survey participants might have been demographic reasons as well. Reportedly, the participants of our survey had kids or recently became parents by 42% and 19% respectively.

The newly attained parental role can easily cause more stress and unbalance between new responsibilities and obligations. In Deloitte's survey on Millennials and Gen Z in 2021 it is reported that one of the main stressors through the pandemic by 46% of the Gen Z and 47% of the Millennial population was the welfare of the family.



## Millennials and the great resignation

We observed that the largest part of the population by almost 45% were people that were in their current full time position from 0 to 5 years.

A report by Gallup (2016) suggests that six out of 10 millennials are open to new job opportunities. The same research shows that 21% of millennials had changed job within the last year. Although, the Deloitte report suggests that during the covid 19 lockdown the loyalty to the company increased. We see that after lockdown the rate of people quitting their jobs is increasing rapidly. This wave known as “The Great Resignation” is the way millennials and Gen Z are daring to leave their current job in search of a better salary, better position, a more meaningful working environment and feeling more respected (Parker and Horowitz, 2022).

**Millennials are the generation that is most likely to switch jobs.**

## Stress: the number one driver to poor mental health amongst young professionals

Through our qualitative study, we found that almost all participants experience existential stress related to work. To cite a few examples, employees constantly think of “How am I making a change?” “Is this the right job for me?” “Is this my true calling?” This leads us to believe that finding meaning at the workplace is vital for work satisfaction. As evidenced by Rothausen & Henderson (2019), conceptualising job satisfaction outside the confinement of the workplace is key to strategize models that could improve employee well-being.

In our research we found that one of the most frequently mentioned and higher prioritised subjects across genders and age ranges was work related success. Work related success was mentioned to be the highest priority in life at the given moment especially for women 31 to 40 and men 35 to 40 years of age.

Acquiring a new position as well as the expectations of oncoming success can be overwhelming. A plethora of stressors, including newly acquired positions, family, covid-19 pandemic and more might have contributed in a large part to the participants declaring that they have experienced stress in their lives, while 39,8% of them declared that stress is their number one priority they would like to improve in their lives currently. From the qualitative interviews, we found that with respect to success and productivity, many employees experience “Imposterism”. Imposterism is a phenomenon wherein a person falsely feels like they’re not good at what they’re doing (Stone, 2022) and compensate for that by increasing their productivity which ultimately leads to burnout.. The experience is more pronounced when there is a lack of acknowledgement from the workplace.

As our study of 6561 respondents globally has shown, stress is indeed the main mental health challenge that Millennials and Gen Z might face

for 38.7% of the participants, followed by sleeping problems, depression, loneliness and anxiety. Our survey indicated that female respondents were more likely to deal with stress, than male or non binary respondents, while the least years of experience would illustrate a gloomier picture on stress levels according to the years of experience, from student workers suffering unproportionally high levels of stress to the senior workers stating less than 11%.

There is plethora of evidence from other research, such as the Deloitte’s (2021) research on Gen Z and Millennials that has shown that stress has returned to pre-pandemic levels, with more than 41% of millennials and 46% of Gen Zs saying they feel stressed all or most of the time. The main driver for this elevated stress levels for two thirds of the participants was the uncertainty around their financial future. Additionally, the leading cause of stress for Millennials was their family’s welfare, while for Gen Z was the uncertainty around their job/career prospect.

As backed by our qualitative study, with the arrival of a global pandemic, the workplace dynamic has been significantly misplaced and a lot of employees work from home with schedules that are not certain. A lack of schedule puts the employee in a place that takes away their locus of control and that seems to add to the ongoing stress. When the locus of control becomes external, an individual is driven by external factors as a drive to work as opposed to an internal locus of control where the drive comes from within (Spector, 1982).

Another major source of stress for employees is socialising with colleagues, clients and a horde of people within the work system, which brings with it, varied cultures. The requirement of working with a diverse population is being well-versed with their standards of behaviour and communication. Just like how extraversion and introversion are a part of a sliding scale (Sabina et al., 2021), there is a varying threshold for social burnout amongst employees and not everyone is equipped with the social energy that meets the demands of the workplace.

## Millenials & Gen Z are suffering from diverse mental health challenges with stress being the leading cause of mental unwellness.

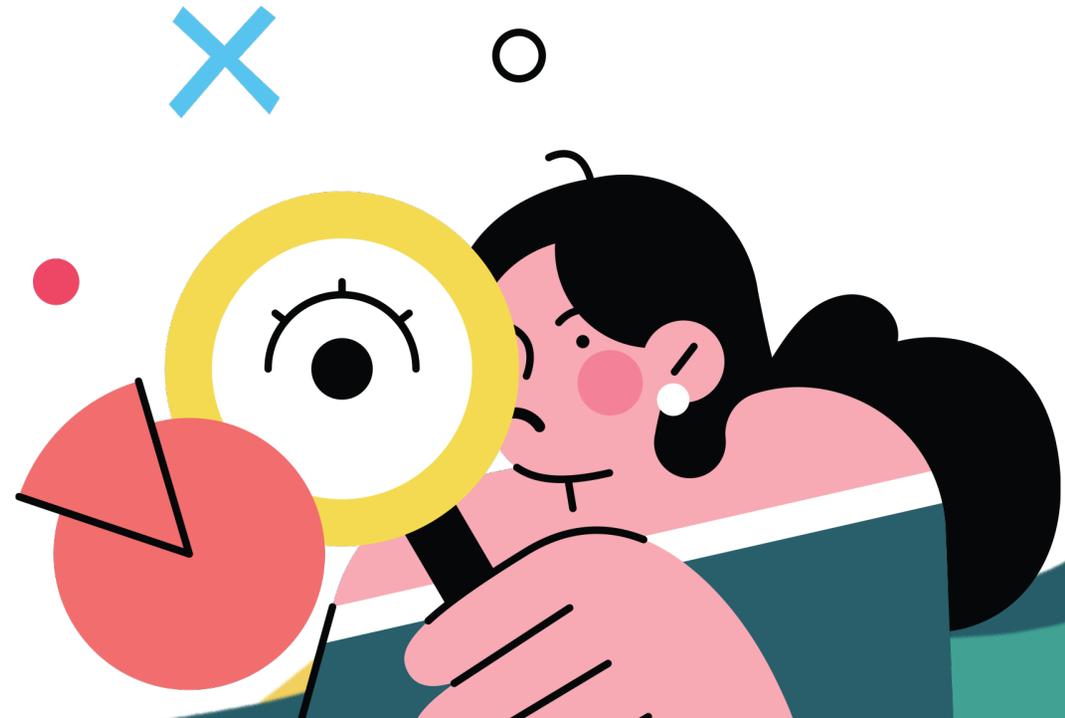


## Chapter 2

# Mental Health at Workplace: Stress and the impact of Workplace

More than one in four millennials and Gen Z (28.9%) consider their work as a main reason impacting negatively their mental wellbeing. According to Business wire (2021) the majority of millennials in the US (57%) say they are happy and feel fulfilled at work, but still exhibit signs of restlessness. A large majority of each generational group said they are generally happy at work, but as the survey questions became more specific, a series of common complaints emerged. A majority of each group express a desire for a better work-life balance, while the three youngest groups share a dissatisfaction with their bosses and a desire for more work-from-home opportunities.

To illustrate the importance of a good employee-employer relationship, a theme from the interviews would be helpful to consider. Employees find it stressful to work in an environment where the workplace does not actively participate in making a personal connection with their employees. When the employees are seen as people



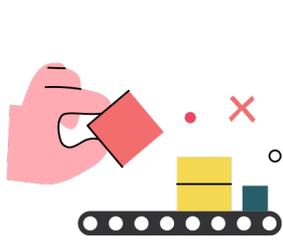
who are more than the roles they play, the connection seems to become more meaningful, alleviating the stress of feeling alienated at work.

Amongst almost all of the interviewees, not feeling belonged at the workplace seems to be the most important contributor to stress. An inclusive workplace strengthens the identity of the employee thereby enhancing their professional role and is also linked with better job performance (Chen & Tang, 2018).

Heavy workload is a major source of stress for many employees but what makes it more stressful is the lack of clarity with respect to task priorities. Not knowing what is of the immediate need brings forth an increasing sense of having to complete all of the tasks which is time-consuming and hence the problem of time management.



A summary of the themes from the interviews:



**Social Energy**



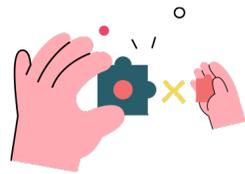
**Uncertainty**



**Non-Inclusivity**



**Vulnerability**



**Lack of Connection**



**Imposterism**



**Digital Connection**



**Existential Stress**



**Lack of Tools**



**Prioritisation**



**Comparison**



Deep diving into the reasons why the workplace might be the main cause of mental unwellness for almost 30% of our respondents, we can see that more than one in three of the participants in our research believes that their considerations about mental wellbeing at their workplace are not taken into consideration to a certain extent. Specifically, 36,2% of the participants feel that their mental wellbeing needs and concerns are not taken into consideration at the workplace from an extend to not at all to somehow they are not taken into consideration.

All of the interview participants echo the need for training to equip themselves to tackle stress. Many of them recognize stress only after they experience burnout and part of the solution seems to be putting a formal training program in place that helps employees effectively manage stress as it waxes and wanes.

Out of this 36,2% of the participants that consider that their mental wellbeing needs are not taken into consideration the vast majority of them, around 60%, support that their company does not cultivate a kind of culture that offers mental wellbeing benefits, and does not encourage them to voice their concerns. As gathered from the interviews, even with intervention protocols in place, some employees find it stressful to be vulnerable at the workplace, the primary reason being the lack of proactiveness about mental health. To illustrate with an example consider “The organisation making an ongoing effort to keep mental health in check versus “The organisation stepping in for a crisis”.

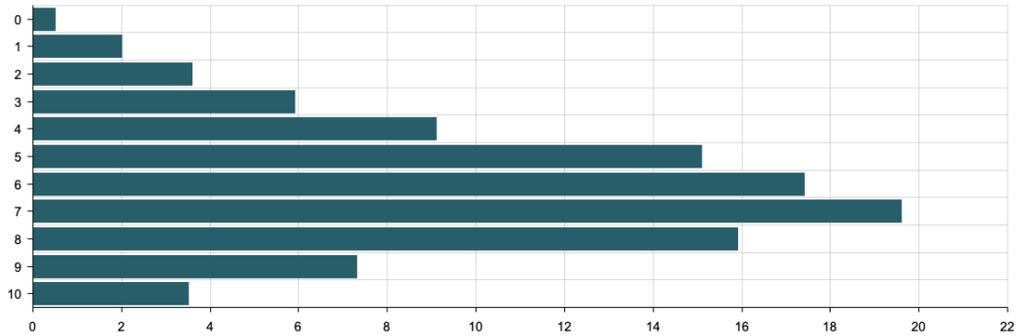
The second cohort of almost 36% of the participants are internalising the problem of mental wellbeing care, saying that they

personally hesitate to voice their concerns. In the last cohort, one in four of the participants that declared that their mental wellbeing needs are not taken into consideration at their workplace said that they do not feel comfortable with their supervisors to express these needs.

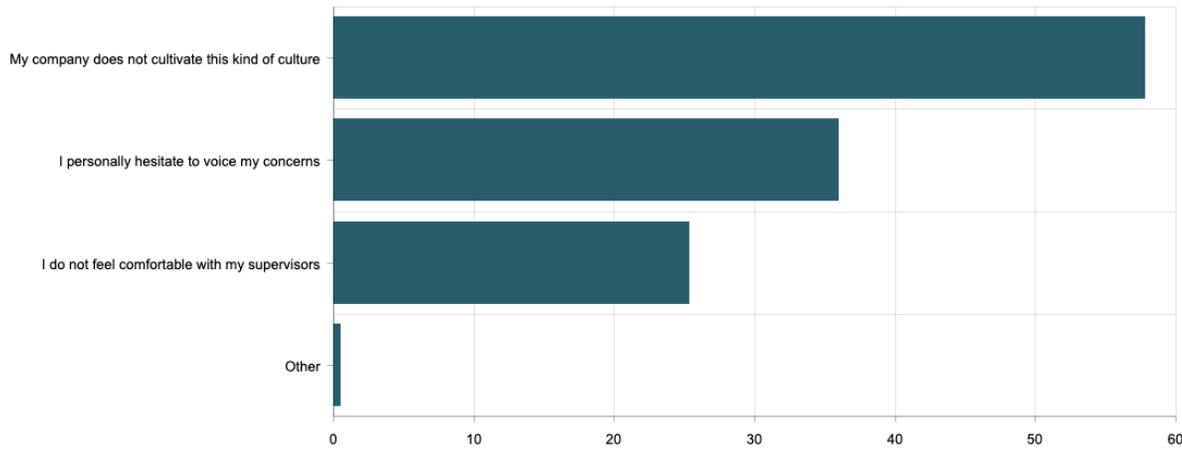
Our findings might showcase a different view than the intergenerational study done by Goodhire (2021) in the US identified the boss or supervisor as the major source of gripe at the workplace across generations.

Potentially, this showcases how much the immediate supervisor is influencing the formation of the culture around mental wellbeing in each team, and how important it is for middle managers to be trained in mental wellbeing issues and how to help their employees' concerns being heard.

## To what extent do you feel that your mental wellbeing needs and concerns are taken into consideration at your workplace?



## Why do you think your mental wellbeing concerns are not taken into consideration at your workplace?



# The consequences of a connected world

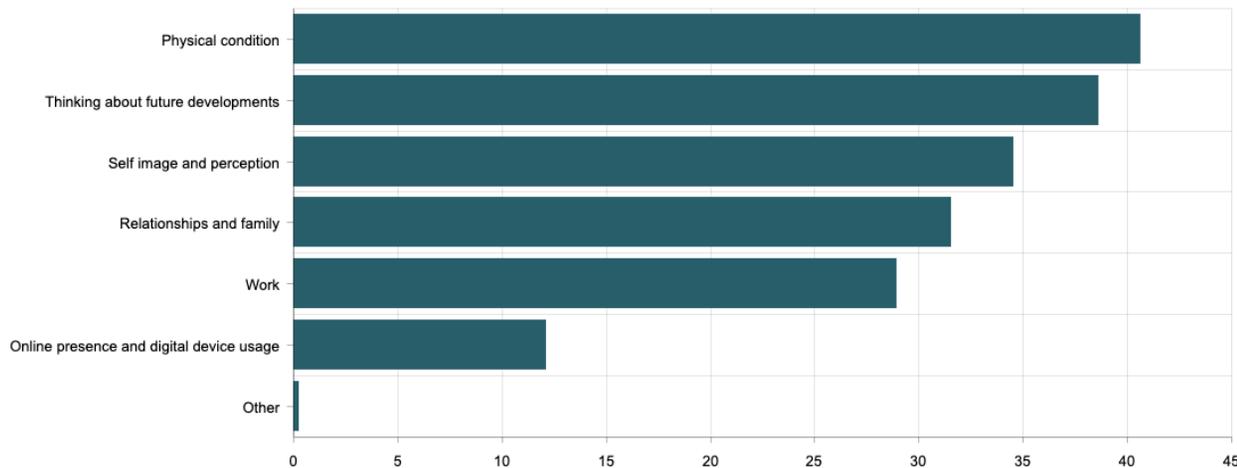
Millennials and Gen Z are living a new reality of the connected world, as we refer to this term in MMW. They are living in an increasingly connected world, where they are online 24/7, they make excessive use of social media and are dealing with always-on workplace consciousness. Our respondents reported a medium to high digital consumption, with more than half of them declaring that they would like to change the amount of screen time they are currently having. 12,1% of our survey participants reported that the online presence and digital consumption is the primary reason for their mental distress.

In a pandemic ridden world, digital connection has increased manifold and seems to put undue pressure on the employees to stay connected virtually all the time. While some employees can draw up work-life boundaries, many find it stressful to do so owing to personal factors. The paradigm of a 'digital workplace' poses many negative consequences on health like anxiety, depression, burnout in addition to deepening workplace deficiencies (Marsh et al., 2022).

# Life Balance is the way forward

Overall, despite the fact that 60% of Millennials found great meaning and purpose in their jobs, they still support big changes in the workplace that will determine the future landscape of the workplace. Changes such as the four-day-week and the hybrid and remote work options give professional employees the space to be their own boss, taking more control over managing their day away from managers and bringing a desire to find an improved work-life balance as supported by GoodHire's Chief Operating Officer Max Wesman.

One could argue that a dichotomy between life at work and personal life is an obsolete concept that bisects the need for mental wellbeing in different fields. At MMW, we learned through our multiple surveys and interviews, that work and life are inevitably intertwined. As conditions at the workplace and personal life can influence one another, we argue in favour of a holistic approach regarding mental wellbeing. Mental wellbeing is singular in and out of workplace. Therefore, in MMW we advocate for Life Balance instead of work/life balance.



A major part of the participants, little less than 30% single handedly chose the number one priority in life currently to be mental and physical wellbeing.

In the study done by Deloitte (2021) it seems that stigma around mental wellbeing challenges at the workplace still remains for millennials and Gen Z. Allegedly, about a third of all respondents (31% of millennials and 35% of Gen Z) said they've taken time off work due to stress and anxiety since the start of the pandemic. Among the two-thirds who didn't take time off, four in 10 deemed themselves to be stressed all of the time but chose to work through it. And approximately 40% of millennials and Gen Zs feel their employers have done a poor job of supporting their mental wellbeing during this period.

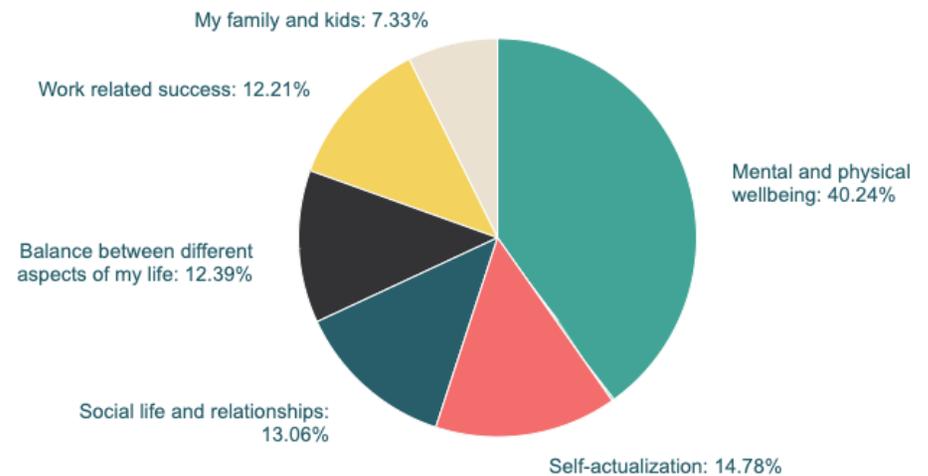
These results indicate that the mental wellbeing stigma endures in the workplace. Employers should not only prioritise raising awareness to tackle this problem, but also at the same time

## Mental wellbeing advocacy at the workplace

democratise the means of taking care of the mental wellbeing of their employees.

It is evident in one of the first MMW surveys (2020) that there is an appetite for mental wellbeing advocacy at the workplace as the 92,9% of the participants felt very positively or positively about it. The majority of the respondents in this survey that took place within a specific company feel that there is a necessity for mental wellbeing advocacy in every employer's agenda.

### Which of the following has the highest priority in your life currently?



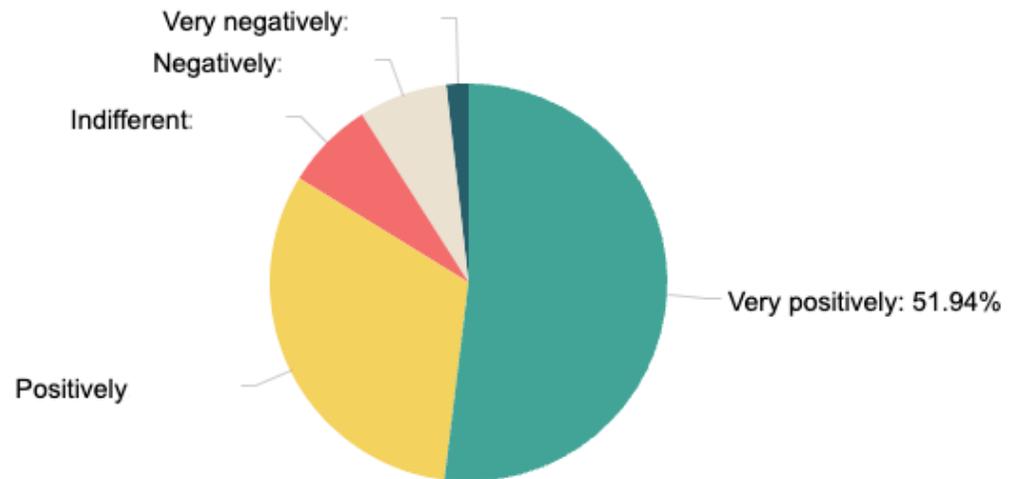
Similarly, as the survey of Forrester (2021) shows 64% of their employees would demand mental wellbeing benefits after the pandemic. Moreover, the same survey showed that the majority of the employees in managerial and non-managerial positions would stay or leave to look for another workplace based on the mental wellbeing support that company provides to them.

In the survey that MMW has launched (2020) it was indicated that employees would generally think about the mental wellbeing aids that the workplace may offer as outsourced services, such as health insurance that covers the cost of counselling. Closely followed by workplace activities like workshops and programs. As a third option participants chose workplace counselling with a mental wellbeing professional.

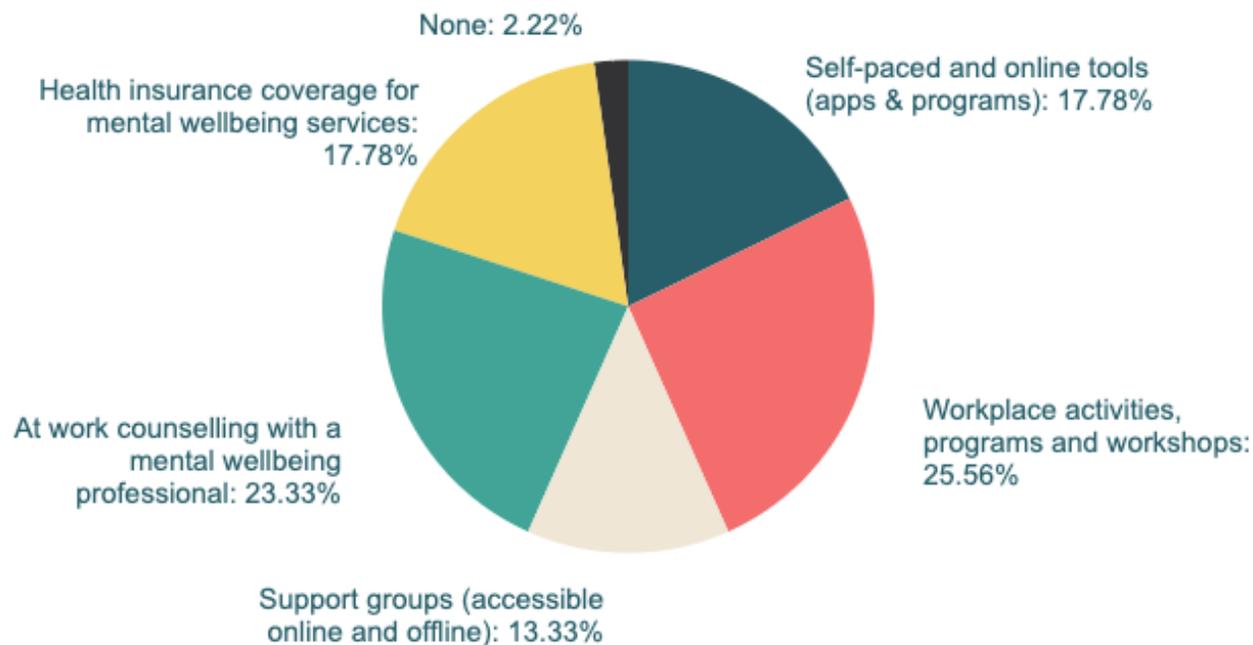
The choice of outsourcing mental wellbeing might be one more indication of the stigma around mental health at workplaces. Although, around 23% of the participants chose in-house activities that raise awareness on mental health, such as workshops and programs,

Nevertheless, a big amount of participants would also be open to using self-paced online tools to monitor their mental health. Our global survey (2021) showed that 14.2% of millennials and Gen Z already use mental wellbeing tools and apps as the first or second coping technique about their mental health.

### How do you feel about mental wellbeing advocacy at workplace?



The insights from the surveys and the interviews should be used to structure and implement training modules to better equip the workplace and the employees to tackle stress. Moreover, designing anti-stress interventions for the perusal of employers helps shift the onus of wellbeing from personal to communal giving the employers an opportunity to build better connections at work and thus make better organisations.



# The Way forward: Future of Workplace & Mental Health

The MMW thought leadership on effective implementation of mental well-being at the workplace is a proposed three step model:

1. Breaking down the stigma associated with mental health opens the avenue for more open dialogue, creating a safer space for communities to be vulnerable. A more proactive workplace means shifting the focus from 'crisis-intervention' to 'crisis-prevention'. A dynamic framework that acknowledges the omnipresence of mental health are key to championing organisational well-being. To illustrate with a few examples:

- A constant dialogue about mental health at the workplace which takes into account feedback and uses it to create action outcomes.
- A workplace that explicitly talks about psychological safety, for instance the existence of a bulletin that expresses concerns that exist within a particular period and the different steps to be taken.
- A clear and accessible system of helplines/ resources that all the employees are well-

versed with.

- The employment of narratives from employees to share their struggles so as to normalise a crisis.
- Tapping on well-being from a place of empowerment to place mental health on a continuum that celebrates both strengths and weaknesses.

2. Educate and train employers on the systemic nature of mental health and enable the stakeholders to directly engage as gatekeepers with their employees. The repercussions of such an engagement not only work to benefit employee well-being but also contribute to organisational welfare at multiple levels:

- Personal level - Equip the employee with skills that help in building resilience, identify mental health red flags, and coping.
- Interpersonal level - When the people managers and HR step in to bear the well-being torch for their employees, it is an excellent example of making mental health a communal force and strengthens interpersonal connection.

- Organisational level - With employee well-being in place, there is a ripple effect with respect to positive outcomes at the workplace and thus an organisational flourish.

To state with an example, MMW is in the process of constructing a platform that equips both employees and employers to stay connected with mental well-being at the workplace. The platform informs the user about various mental health concerns and the many ways to tackle them. If a manager is facing a situation where an employee is experiencing undue stress, they can refer to the platform to move forward. Under the platform, “stress” as a mental health concern could look something like this:

1. The framework: Defining stress
2. Quantifying it: How stressed are you?
3. The many stressors and the role of workplace
4. The effects of stress on well-being
5. Why is it important?
6. The steps to tackle it
7. Do's and don't's
8. Follow-up
9. Recommendations

3. Democratise and provide relevant tools to employees to navigate safely across the mental health landscape. As mentioned earlier, this would mean keeping feedback from users at the heart of creating tools for mental health. This is vital because the context of mental health drastically keeps changing with the advent of digitalisation, globalisation and urbanisation. To cite an example, with the workplace becoming digital the concept of ‘boundaries’

changes too and thus a tool that acknowledges that change is of utmost importance. It is not enough to promote mental health, it needs to be accessible and relevant.

While this integrative report aims to shed light on the many ways the workplace is affected by the system in which it is situated and its effect on employees, the insights are speculative in nature and are not meant to be generalisations.

From a positive psychology framework, there are many antidotes to stress and burnout that tap on resources that are personal to the individual and also those that can be generated at the workplace. A strategic model that utilises these factors to inform and educate employers and employees could be the key to unfolding a holistic approach towards mental health. Reach out to us to know more.

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