

# Mental Wellbeing for All

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## Introduction

COVID-19 threw all our lives into turmoil and saw many people facing challenges that we could not prepare for. Perhaps one good thing to come out of the pandemic is the increased awareness of mental health. Awareness of mental wellbeing is higher than it has ever been, and with that has come the reduction in stigma of mental health issues.<sup>(35)</sup>

Mental health is declining on a global scale. **A recent report published by WHO stated that 1 billion people (12.5% of the population) worldwide live with a mental health disorder.** Mental illness is the leading cause of disability worldwide and most people living with a mental illness do not get the care they need.

It is important to note - mental health is a complex spectrum with experiences ranging from an 'optimal state of wellbeing' to 'debilitating states of great suffering and emotional pain'. Mental health 'is not defined by the presence or absence of a diagnosed mental disorder'.<sup>(1)</sup>

## 1 billion people worldwide

live with a mental health disorder



Worldwide, suicide accounts for 1 in every 100 deaths and is the leading cause of adolescent death, yet on average, governments spend just 2% of health budgets on mental health care.<sup>(1)</sup> Furthermore, around half of the global population live in an area where there is **1 psychiatrist per every 200,000 people.**<sup>(1)</sup> It is imperative that governments, institutions, and employers step up to support the mental health and wellbeing needs of our struggling population.



## UK & Mental Health

Mental wellbeing is declining across the board. In the UK, each year, 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health issue. **1 in 5 people in the UK have suicidal thoughts with 1 in 15 attempting suicide**<sup>(11)</sup>. The stigma around mental health needs to be broken to allow people to talk freely and have better access to care pathways.

It is impossible to determine factors that effect a population's wellbeing as everyone has different circumstances with triggers and tolerances. However, after Covid19, Brexit, and the Ukraine situation; there is an ongoing cost of living crisis in the UK.

77% of people over 16 report feeling 'very' or 'somewhat worried' about the rising cost of living, out of these, 50% stated they worry every day.<sup>(12)</sup> Worrying about finances can have a detrimental impact on mental wellbeing, for the whole family. Increased and growing social and economic inequalities, uncertain and extended conflicts, violence and public health emergencies 'threaten progress towards improved wellbeing'.<sup>(1)</sup>

As the factors determining mental health are multi-sectoral, interventions to promote and protect mental health and wellbeing should be provided with a multi-sectoral approach as people with mental health conditions often require services and support that extends beyond clinical treatment.<sup>(1)</sup>

There are several known factors that prohibit people from seeking help for mental health. Poor quality of services, low levels of health literacy (i.e., knowledge and beliefs around mental health disorders including recognition, management or prevention), stigma and discrimination. Even if resources are available, they are often inaccessible.<sup>(1)</sup> People will often choose to suffer through mental distress with no relief rather than risk 'discrimination and ostracization that comes with accessing mental health services.'<sup>(1)</sup> Understanding how to and where to access mental health and wellbeing supports without barrier entry is key.

## UK Employee's Wellbeing – The Pressure is On.

According to a study on work related stress in the UK, **anxiety and depression accounted for 50% of all work-related absences or ill health** between 2020-2021.<sup>(7)</sup>

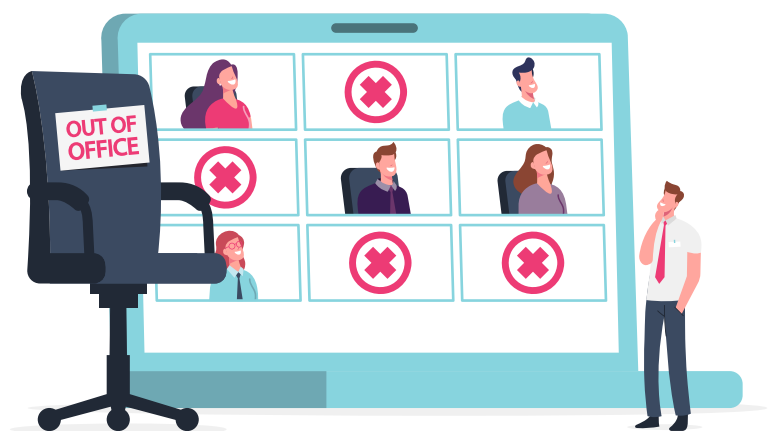
1/3 of UK employees are living pay day to pay day<sup>(13)</sup> 3.5m currently have to use credit cards to cover essential bills and this is set to increase<sup>(14)</sup> 4m people in

the UK have both serious debt problems and a mental illness, with a further 4-6million at risk because of their financial difficulties.<sup>(15)</sup> There is a rise in presenteeism- e.g, people attending work whilst they're sick either because they feel they cannot take the time off or they cannot afford it. In 2020, presenteeism cost the UK economy between £26-29 billion.<sup>(23)</sup>

A report from Business in the Community and Mercer Marsh Benefits revealed that **39% of workers in the UK experienced symptoms of poor mental health as 'a direct result' of their job.**<sup>(9)</sup> This figure highlights the need for better working environments and incremental changes to overall business cultures.

Mental health charity Mind conducted a similar study into UK employee wellbeing and found more than 1 in 5 employees have called in sick to avoid work when feeling stressed with **42% of stressed employees considering resigning.**<sup>(8)</sup>

In 2021, poor mental health/wellbeing accounted for almost a 1/5 of all work absences in the UK. (20) UK employees took more than 319 million days



off work in 2021, an estimated cost of £43b. The cost of lost workdays has increased by 31% in the last two years.<sup>(20)</sup> In fact, 54% of those that take 2 or more mental health related absences will proceed to leave their jobs in the future.<sup>(20)</sup>

Ensuring the right type of help and support is one piece of the puzzle. Managers and senior staff have a responsibility for their team's wellbeing, it is crucial that line managers have ongoing support and training to be able to recognise early warning signs and prevent further issues developing, or even how to open up mental health dialogue in a safe environment.

Just 51% of employees feel comfortable talking about mental health in the workplace with **only 13% of employees feel able to disclose a mental health issue to their manager**, signifying a clear stigma around mental health in the workplace and fear of opening communication.<sup>(23)</sup>

A 2022 study by IOSH involving UK employees and managers found that 60% of managers have not received training from their workplace on how to handle mental health and wellbeing issues.<sup>(22)</sup> Managers should not be expected to be experts or mental health professionals, but it is important to equip them with the right skills needed to protect their teams with a suitable goal. For example, **62% of managers have faced situations where they put the organisational interests above the wellbeing of their colleagues.**<sup>(23)</sup>

Organisations claim 'people' are their most critical assets, however, more must be done to ensure workers perform at their very best.

## Dynamic Lifestyle Shifts

Traditional lifestyle and working environments have shifted for most of the UK population. Many find themselves working in different set ups, integrating hybrid and remote working into their daily lives.

Data from the ONS showed that because of the pandemic, more than 8/10 workers in the UK planned to hybrid work. Between February - May 2022, the number of hybrid workers increased from 13% to 24%.<sup>(2)</sup>

**62% of managers** have had to put the organisational interests **above** the wellbeing of their colleagues



Strathclyde University conducted research in March 2021 on working from home and found that almost **a third of UK employees would prefer to work 100% remotely**. New research found that by the end of 2021, only 5% of UK workers would choose to work remotely, a significant decrease in 9 months.<sup>(3)</sup>

57% of UK workers would prefer to work in a hybrid setting in 2022, with 38% wanting to return to the office full time. Some workers may prefer to stay at home due to costly commutes (31%) or some may prefer to return to the office and save on energy bills so a degree of flexibility from the employer is required.<sup>(3)</sup>

### Why do people want to return to the office or prefer to work in hybrid settings?

Humans are fundamentally social creatures. We are used to spending a lot of time in work and around co-workers, you may have seen them more than family. Even though remote/hybrid working was introduced at the start of the pandemic, it is not getting any easier for employee wellbeing.

**37% of UK workers feel socialising with colleagues is the most motivating factor of coming into the office.**<sup>(3)</sup> Feeling lonely or lacking social interaction can be detrimental to overall wellbeing. Social isolation is associated with increased risk of mental health problems – including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, increased stress and difficulty sleeping.<sup>(28)</sup>

A report by Buffer on remote working in 2022 found that 24% of remote and hybrid workers are currently struggling from loneliness, a 4% increase than 2020.<sup>(26)</sup> A survey by workplace tech organisation Silicon Reef reported 73% of UK remote workers feel their employer should/could be doing more to tackle the issue of staff loneliness.<sup>(27)</sup>

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Forbes researched how being away from the workplace impacted mental health and found similar findings:<sup>(25)</sup>

- **70%** of those working from home felt more **isolated** than those working in office
- **63%** felt **less engaged** with their team
- **77%** agreed that **better communication** leads to better work culture
- **3/5** found **'something lacking'** in the quality of communication with their co workers



Furthermore, CIPD's 2022 Health and Wellbeing at Work survey found 81% of organisations reported presenteeism (working when ill) from those working from home, nearly 1/5 higher than those in the office.<sup>(24)</sup> not only does this impact on employee recovery and wellbeing, but it also effects the quality of employee output and performance.

## Skills Shortages

Currently, we are facing a huge talent shortage among all sectors. Talent shortages mean that there are job vacancies without enough properly skilled workers to fill them. ONS reports that official vacancies in the UK were at a record high of 1.2m, clearly illustrating the difficulty organisations are facing to fill roles. Furthermore, 80% of employers believe current graduates lack necessary skills to be 'work ready', leaving the expensive task of many businesses having to reskill and upskill employees.<sup>(4)</sup>

The Open University Business Barometer found overall skills shortages were estimated to cost £6.6billion each year in the UK due to recruitment fees, raised salaries, temp hires and training.<sup>(4)</sup> A report by the Learning and Work Institute found similar feedback in 2019 and stated the UK skills shortage will cost the UK £120 billion by 2030; equating to a shortfall of 2.5m highly skilled workers with a surplus of 8.1 million employees with traditionally low or intermediate skills.<sup>(5)</sup>

Skills shortages are affecting those already in work, **72% of staff are dealing with increased workload as a result of staff shortages**, an increase of 16% from September 2021.<sup>(29)</sup> Furthermore, Jobvite's 2021 Recruiter Nation Report found that 2 out of 3 recruiters/HR staff have reported higher stress levels due to high turnover rates and attracting new talent.<sup>(30)</sup>

### What Makes an Attractive Employer?

As an 'employee benefit', salaries only stretch so far. According to research by GlassDoor, **56% of workers rank a 'strong workplace culture' above salary** (increased to 65% for UK millennials), with more than 3 in 4 considering company culture before applying for a position.<sup>(2)</sup>

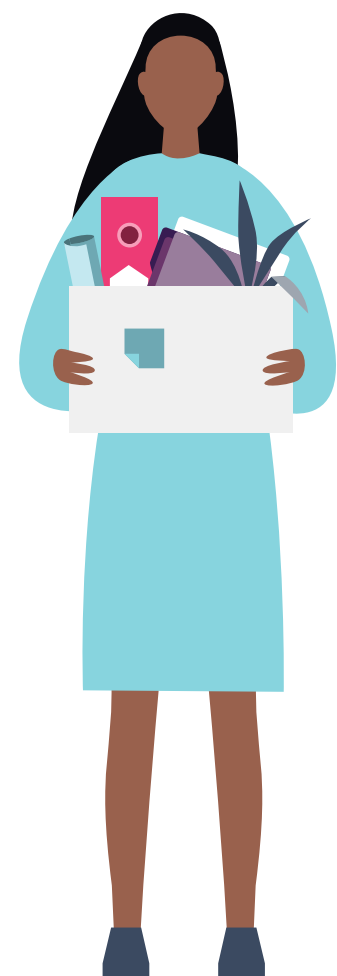
Skills shortages increase the competition for the potential employees that have the right education and skillsets. Increased competition means employers must position themselves as the most attractive option for candidates is on the job hunt. The power has shifted from the employer to the employee.

A European HR & Payroll provider, SD Worx recently conducted research in the area of skills shortages and found 59% of European businesses are facing difficulty attracting new talent, with 67.8% of businesses having a hard time positioning themselves as an 'attractive employer'.<sup>(6)</sup> This research indicates a European wide problem, with little to no opportunity for hiring internationally on a remote basis to fill the skills shortage gaps.

**60% of UK workers are planning to leave jobs within the next year, ¾ of which are between 18-24**, signaling the importance of looking after younger workers and supporting their working needs.<sup>(3)</sup> Furthermore, 38% of UK workers would look for another job if their employer did not facilitate flexible working policies or hybrid working.<sup>(3)</sup>

CIPD found similar findings in the Good Work Index research, with the number of those quitting in the next year rising by 4% since 2021. 35% are looking for better pay and benefits, 27% wish to increase job satisfaction and 24% are seeking a better work life balance.<sup>(31)</sup>

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Research from SD Worx found 35% of employers put working hours and flexible working arrangements as a major priority, given new levels of competition when attracting talent.<sup>(6)</sup>

**56% of employers said they want to improve staff wellbeing but don't feel they have enough guidance or training to do so**, demonstrating a clear need for education and higher management support to change overall business culture and improve individual wellbeing.<sup>(6)</sup>

Offering robust and holistic employee benefits are a great way to attract and retain talent, candidates are searching for extensive wellbeing offerings including digital resources and financial wellbeing supports. Flexible working policies and support in meeting the dynamic needs of the entire workforce is required to ensure the correct talent is attracted for positions, reducing the risk of high turnover in the future.



### **Business Culture & Environment in a virtual world**

The rise in hybrid/remote working settings puts more pressure onto employers to properly meet physical and wellbeing needs or risk losing talent.

According to the report by WHO, it is imperative that employers and institutions recognise the frailty of mental health systems for those with new or existing conditions. People have been struggling and have been made to come up with their own coping mechanisms and strategies to survive, some of which may be more damaging in the long run.

**Offering enhanced and robust coverage with increased financial protection or awareness will help reduce inequalities in mental health and help close the care gap for many in need of support.** Recognising everyone as individual and tailoring offerings to your specific organisation will enable higher adoption and utilisation success.

Businesses integrate wellbeing offerings to include both mental and physical care, improving accessibility, reducing fragmentation and duplication of resources and better meeting the modern-day employee's needs. Physical care can include digital gyms or nutritional advice, mental wellbeing offerings could offer structured therapy or coaching to further enhance accessibility and encourage those who have reservations to prioritise their mental health.

### **A spectrum of wellbeing services is required to support your employees for wherever they are on the wellness spectrum.**

**Our mental wellbeing is constantly being shaped by our environment.** It is important to create or enhance business culture to be open and encourage open communication to get a clear picture of everyone's wellbeing and avoid people feeling isolated. Furthermore, including training into offering may help focus on manager's or HR's specific wellbeing needs, for example, how to recognise early warning signs, how to regulate emotions in work in response to known stressors, how to open a safe dialogue about mental health.

**Greater flexibility in wellness offerings will help ease the pressure** for those wanting to work from home to save on the commute, or those wanting to work in the office to save on bills. Greater flexibility helps protect those in employment balancing work, care and child responsibilities. Letting employees choose their own working environment will help attract new talent and keep existing employees satisfied, reducing turnover rates all round.

### **How we can Help:**

**A fresh approach to workplace mental health:** At Spectrum.Life we've revolutionised how companies can look after their employees' mental health with Total Mental Health, a game-changing new mental health and wellbeing solution. Total Mental Health is a complete mental health and wellbeing programme for employers, employees and insurers.

We provide employees with **unlimited 24/7 access to unlimited mental health and wellbeing supports**, including a personal Mental Health Coach and open-ended therapy, at the touch of a button. We empower people to take control of their own mental health and give them the knowledge, training, tools and support they need to look after it on an ongoing basis.

## Get in Touch

Total Mental Health is suitable for employees from organisations of all sizes, from SMEs to Multinationals. If you would like to find out more about how Total Mental Health can help you look after your employees' mental health and wellbeing, give us a call and we will be happy to talk you through it.

[wellbeing@spectrum.life](mailto:wellbeing@spectrum.life)

**ROI:** 01 518 0356 | **UK:** 0330 818

You can also find us on **LinkedIn:** @Spectrum.Life



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[wellbeing@spectrum.life](mailto:wellbeing@spectrum.life)

ROI: 01 518 0356 | UK: 0330 818 0006