



Mental Health at Work Report 2016

Executive summary, call to action
and recommendations

Workplace mental health is a collective responsibility. 3 in 4 employees have experienced symptoms of poor mental health. A pervasive culture of silence. We all have mental health. Elevate mental health on a parity with physical health. **Duty of care to mental and physical health. A leadership disconnect.** Line managers see employee wellbeing as their responsibility. **A disconnect between good will and capability. Line managers need training. Reasonable adjustments.** Work can support recovery. **Talk, train and take action.**
It is time for a new partnership in mental health between employers and employees.

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Executive summary

In the UK today, thousands of people with poor mental health are suffering in silence, unable to share their condition or illness with colleagues or managers at work.

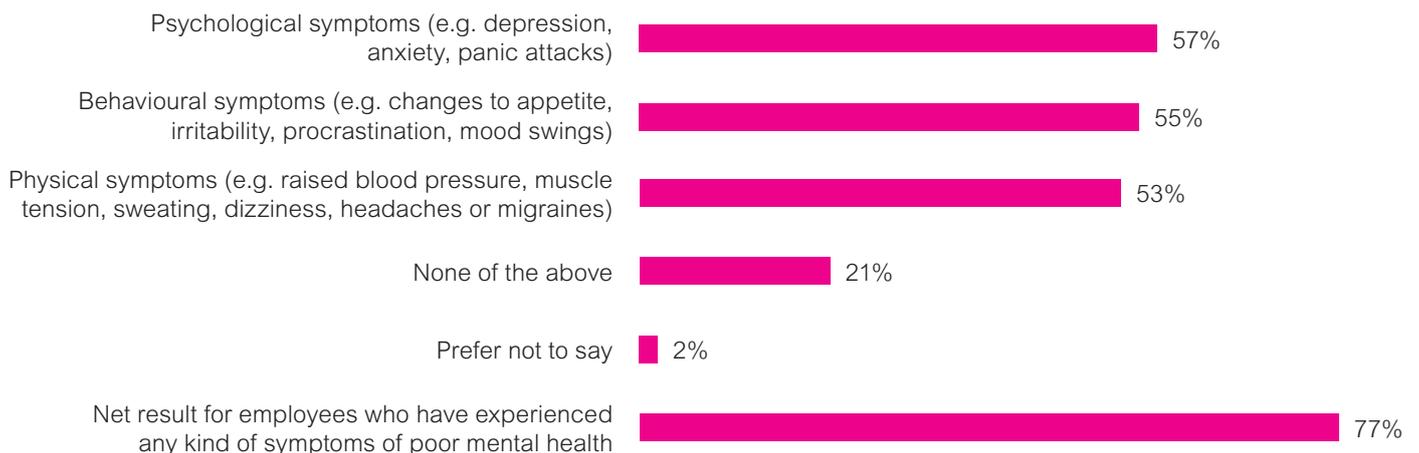
Although some progress has been made, the stigma of mental health remains deeply entrenched in UK business. There is greater awareness of the issue, but a devastating disconnect exists between employers' intentions and perceptions and what is actually happening in the workplace. This means that employees are not getting the help they need to maintain a fulfilling and productive working life, and managers are frustrated by the lack of support to do what they know is right.

77% of employees have experienced symptoms of poor mental health at some point in their lives

29% of employees have been diagnosed with a mental health condition

Business in the Community's National Employee Mental Wellbeing survey is a comprehensive assessment of workplace mental health in the UK. Participants took part via a YouGov panel survey (3,036 respondents) and a public open survey (16,246 respondents). In this report the experiences of thousands of men and women currently in employment are shared, from front line workers to directors and senior managers, specifically leading with the YouGov panel data that is representative of UK employees. Throughout the report reference is made to the open survey as a verification of the panel data – in some cases amplifying and reinforcing it.

Which of the following, if any, have you ever experienced?



Findings show that:

- **A majority of employees have been affected by symptoms of poor mental health.** 77% say they have experienced symptoms of poor mental health at some point in their lives and 29% have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. 62% of employees attributed their symptoms of poor mental health to work or said that work was a contributing factor. The results from the open survey are even starker, with 84% having experienced physical, psychological or behavioural symptoms of poor mental health where work was a contributing factor.
- **A pervasive culture of silence remains entrenched across workplaces.** Employees are least comfortable talking about mental health at work (out of nine equality and social issues asked about in the survey). More than a third (35%) of employees did not approach anyone for support on the most recent occasion they experienced poor mental health. Only 25% of employees approached someone at work for support (rising to 26% when including those who contacted an Employee Assistance Programme). Despite believing that colleagues care about each other's wellbeing (77% felt that their colleagues were very or fairly considerate), 86% would think twice before offering to help a colleague whose mental health they were concerned about. Only 14% feel that nothing would stop them from approaching someone if they were concerned.

62% of employees attributed their symptoms of poor mental health to work or said that work was a contributing factor

- **There is a concerning disconnect between employees' experience in the workplace and what those running the company believe is taking place.** 60% of board members and senior managers believe their organisation supports people with mental health issues. Despite this, only 11% discussed a recent mental health problem with their line manager, and half of employees say they would not discuss mental health with their line manager.

Only 11% of employees discussed a recent mental health problem with their line manager

- **Line managers are having to respond to something they know little about.** 76% of line managers believe employee wellbeing is their responsibility, yet only 22% of managers have received some form of training on mental health at work. 49% of line managers would find even basic training in common mental health conditions useful and 38% would find it useful to have training on how to talk to employees about wellbeing. The default responses to employees experiencing symptoms of poor mental health appear to be arranging time off or a job move, which do not align with what the employee wants or what good practice would dictate.

76% of line managers believe they are responsible for employee wellbeing, but only 22% have received training

35% of employees did not approach anyone for support the last time they experienced poor mental health

- **The threat of disciplinary action when experiencing mental ill health is very real.** Results showed that 9% of employees who experienced symptoms of poor mental health experienced disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. This could be a worrying indication of illegal employment practice.

9% of employees who experienced symptoms of poor mental health experienced disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal

- **There are big differences between women and men in relation to workplace mental health.** Women are more likely than men to talk about mental health with their line manager. Male managers are less confident than female managers in responding to poor mental health, yet are less enthusiastic about mental health training. In the case of a staff member with depression – 68% of female managers would feel confident responding, compared to 58% of male managers.

68% of female managers feel confident responding to poor mental health, compared to 58% of male managers

Executive summary

continued

- **The experience of mental health at work greatly differs between generations.** Younger workers (18-29 years old) are more likely to experience symptoms of poor mental health but feel less confident about discussing it with their manager. They are also less trusting in their employer's commitment to mental health and wellbeing. Older employees talk more freely about mental health and are more likely to feel that their employer is concerned with mental health and wellbeing.

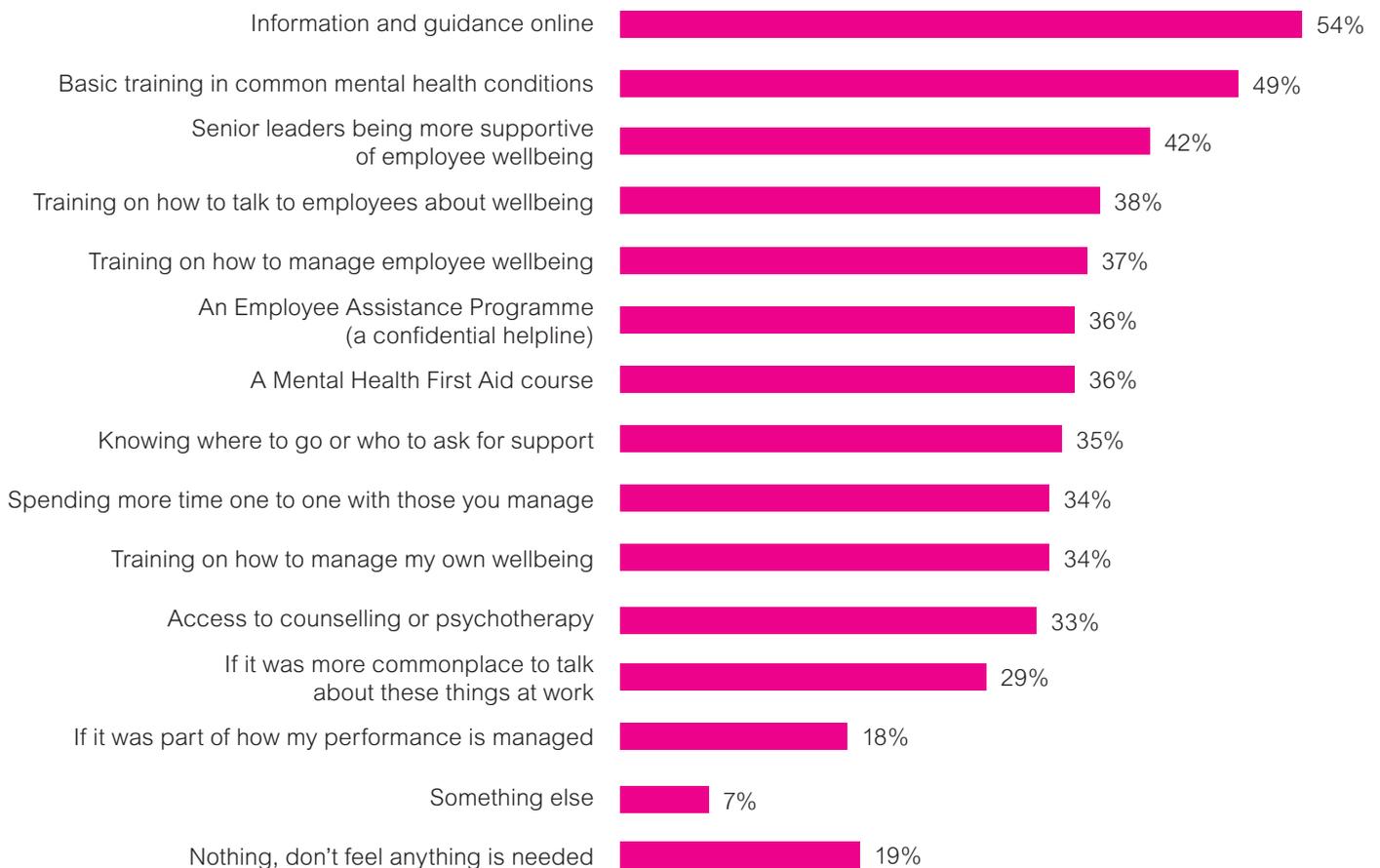
Employers need to recognise the scale of poor mental health in work, and take significant steps to reduce the risk of their workplace being a contributor to poor mental health. Employers have a duty of care to their employees to respond to mental ill health just as they would to a physical illness, such as cancer, diabetes or back pain. Organisations should equip their managers with the tools, support and organisational culture they

need to do their job well, which must include managing employees with mental health issues. It makes good business sense to foster a culture of openness that supports employees with a mental health issue to work and stay in work.

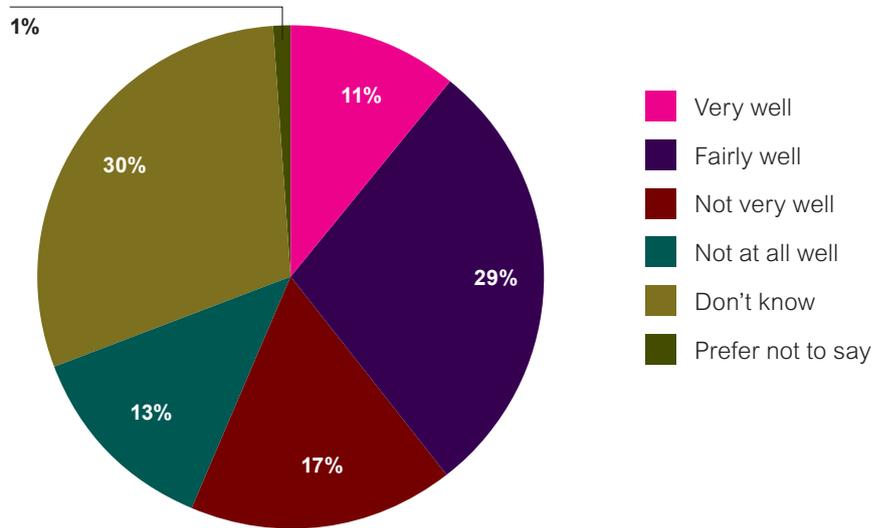
49% of line managers would appreciate basic training in common mental health conditions

We undertook this survey to understand the reality of how mental health is experienced at work. We have found that progress is being made with greater organisational awareness of the need to support better mental health at work, yet significant and potentially damaging disconnects exist that demand an urgent response from business.

Which, if any, of the following would be useful for you, as a line manager, to support the wellbeing of your employees?



In your opinion, how well does your organisation support employees who experience mental health problems?



We know it will take time to achieve parity of mental and physical health in the workplace. One of our first calls to action in campaigning for better mental health at work was to urge employers to tackle the culture of silence by signing up to the **Time to Change Employer's Pledge**¹. Next, we highlighted the need for improved line manager capability through Mental Health First Aid Training. Both of these actions remain pertinent for businesses today and form part of this report's call to action.

Our report gives employers crucial insight into what needs to change, with recommendations to inform transformative steps that will help to close these gaps.

It is time for a new partnership in mental health between employers and employees. It is time to end the disconnect.

30% of employees think their employer doesn't support people well who experience mental health problems, and 30% don't know either way

Calls to action and recommendations

We know that there is no one single solution to stop thousands of employees from suffering in silence. This report highlights a concerning disconnect between organisational and leadership awareness and action on mental health, and the line manager and employee experience.

An ongoing culture of silence around mental health, perpetuated by a lack of mental health literacy amongst management and employee populations, continues to be a major barrier to significant progress.

We are asking employers to implement three calls to action that will help to tackle these barriers.

Calls to action for employers

1 Talk

break the culture of silence that surrounds mental health by taking the **Time to Change Employer's Pledge**¹

2 Train

invest in basic mental health literacy for all employees and first aid training in mental health to support line manager capability

3 Take action

close the gap by asking all staff about their experiences in order to identify the disconnects that exist in the organisation between what you have committed to and what your employees are experiencing

Our first two calls to action have been previously advocated by Business in the Community, and our growing body of business case studies confirm these actions remain pertinent and effective.

Our third call to action is focused on addressing the gap between leadership perception and employee experience. It requires employers to look inwards and identify what their own gap is between awareness and action. What are the barriers, what are the challenges, what is working? Through an ongoing dialogue with employees, organisations can be certain their approach truly benefits individuals and the business as a whole.

Everyone has mental health and physical health, and we all move along a continuum between good and poor mental health throughout our lives. These calls to action alongside our recommendations will support employers to embed an ethos of parity of mental and physical health throughout their organisation.

Recommendations

1 Set the tone: we all have mental health

Tone from the top:

- Sign the **Time to Change Employer's Pledge**¹ to make a public commitment to tackle the culture of silence that surrounds mental health.
- Embed wellbeing into organisational culture by adopting Business in the Community's **Workwell Model**². This helps organisations to take a 'whole systems' approach that is aligned to securing strategic objectives.
- Use the Business in the Community and Public Health England **Mental Health Toolkit for Employers**³ that supports all employers to take simple, positive actions to build a culture that champions good mental health.
- Send a clear message of parity of esteem between mental and physical health to normalise conversations around mental health.

- Appoint a mental health champion on to your senior team, with a remit to drive better mental health and encourage all leaders to act as role models, actively challenging myths and stigma both proactively and reactively.
- Ensure skills based learning is made available to leadership and management teams to develop awareness, confidence and capability in managing mental health.

Tone from the bottom up:

- Invest in providing employees with basic mental health literacy so they can spot the signs when they or a colleague may need help.
- Ensure all employees know where to go for guidance and are equipped to start a conversation about mental health with colleagues they are concerned about.
- Share Business in the Community's **Listen Up: Let's Talk Mental Health**⁴ with all employees. This guide contains practical tips on how to start a conversation with someone you are concerned about and how to talk about your own mental health.

2 Address the disconnect

- Acknowledge that a gap may exist in your own business between leadership perception of support for employee mental health, and reality of employees' experience. Take action to identify the gaps and be clear that you are committed to resolving this.
- Gather employee feedback using a range of informal and formal mechanisms to understand where your gaps exist, including annual and pulse surveys, focus groups, and various employee forums. Provide employees with a timeframe for when you will report back with findings and next steps – to reinforce your commitment to change and encourage participation in feedback.
- Take part in the free annual **Britain's Healthiest Workplace**⁵, which provides both employer and employee feedback on health and wellbeing.
- Identify and remove any specific organisational barriers that restrict line managers from effectively managing and supporting individuals experiencing a mental health issue.
- Identify the issues in your workplace that may be impacting on employee mental wellbeing and use this knowledge to inform changes to approach, policy, and organisational design.

3 The role of line managers

- Ensure managers are supported to manage their own wellbeing, via their own managers and appropriate resources and training.
- Train as many line managers as possible in first aid training in mental health and invest in improving their mental health literacy.
- Regularly communicate to line managers the support they can draw on when supporting colleagues.
- Encourage line managers to seek support as needed, when managing a colleague with mental health concerns, e.g. from HR or other specialists, or their own line managers.
- Ensure line managers understand what steps they can, or need to, take in order to agree reasonable adjustments with someone who is experiencing mental health issues.
- Introduce the concept of 'everyday wellbeing' as a core part of all 1-2-1 and/or personal development conversations. This will help to normalise conversations around mental wellbeing between staff.
- Use Business in the Community's **Leading on Mental Wellbeing: transforming the role of line managers**⁶ report to embed wellbeing and deliver a functioning framework that gives line managers the support they need to respond to and manage employee mental wellbeing.

4 Tackle the culture of silence

- Instil an understanding in every employee that everyone has a state of mental health as they do physical health. Use awareness campaigns regularly to communicate this message, such as Time to Talk Day, Mental Health Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day.
- Normalise the conversation around mental health. Appoint volunteer wellbeing champions to be ambassadors, who can lead by example, raise awareness and share information to promote positive messaging about mental health.
- Work with change-makers, including key leaders, HR and other specialists, and wellbeing champions, to equip them with the confidence and knowledge to promote an open climate where discussion of mental health becomes normalised.

Calls to action and recommendations

continued

5 Respond to employees

- Take a preventative approach to creating a work environment that promotes mental wellbeing, by adopting Business in the Community's **Workwell model**², the **HSE Management Standards**⁷ and the **NICE Workplace Health Management Standards**⁸.
- Provide employees with a clear wellbeing offering, starting at induction, and reinforced on a regular basis, including resources to support employee resilience and mental wellbeing.
- Include employees in discussions to develop flexible, bespoke solutions to their mental health support needs, i.e. reasonable adjustments and Wellness Action Plans.
- Ensure every employee has access to (and knows where to find) appropriate support to stay well and to help manage mental ill health. Reinforce this information regularly.
- HR and any additional specialist support functions should clearly outline the role they can play in supporting all employees, so that employees feel they have a safe space to discuss mental health.
- Employers should follow best practice in handling any issues concerning performance, including taking account of any short or long-term mental health issues that may impact on performance.
- Make reasonable adjustments to enable people to remain in work when possible and take a phased approach to return to work after a period of ill-health.

The full report 'Mental Health at Work Report 2016' is available to read at: <http://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/surveyreport>

References

- 1 *Time to Change Employer's Pledge*: www.time-to-change.org.uk/get-involved/get-your-workplace-involved/employer-pledge
- 2 *Workwell Model*: <http://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/issues/workwell-model>
- 3 *Mental Health Toolkit for Employers*: <http://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/toolkits/mental-health-employers>
- 4 *Listen Up: Let's Talk Mental Health*: <http://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/toolkits/listen-lets-talk-mental-health>
- 5 *Britain's Healthiest Workplace*: www.healthiestworkplace.co.uk
- 6 *Leading on Mental Wellbeing: transforming the role of Line Managers*: <http://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/research-articles/transforming-role-line-managers>
- 7 *HSE Management Standards*: www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards
- 8 *NICE Workplace Health Management Standards*: www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng13

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