



EHSToday®

2021 **Mental Health** in the Workplace Report

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Executive Summary



THE FAST-PACED, real-time world that we live in has its benefits, but it also means more demands from customers and bosses, including longer work hours, heavier workloads and less leisure time. The pressure to perform was already intense prior to the emergence of Covid-19. The pandemic has added a new level of stress for workers. Many companies are dealing with understaffed workforces who have faced isolation, illness and uncertainty during this unprecedented time.

Pandemic-related stress can manifest itself in lower productivity, poor workplace morale and high attrition rates. More importantly, the toll it takes on a personal level can be devastating. Alcoholism, drug abuse, fractured family relationships and suicide are all potential risks when mental health goes unchecked.

EHS Today conducted a survey in June 2021 of leaders from a wide range of industries to examine how their organizations are managing mental health in the workplace.

The findings demonstrate the urgency for more mental health resources within organizations. While companies have made strides with innovative approaches to mental health awareness, education and intervention, the need for additional support is evident based on survey responses.

Write-in responses were revealing, even troubling, in many cases, with leaders themselves expressing concern about their own mental health. When asked about their “biggest fear or challenge regarding mental health” in their workplace, individual responses included:

- ✓ “Dealing with unfamiliar colleagues and reporting to my boss can make me anxious and nervous.”
- ✓ “Employees are depressed and issues are never addressed in time. There are no clear communication lines between management and staff.”
- ✓ “That an employee will have a manic episode, and no one will know what to do [or] how to properly respond.”
- ✓ “That it is not taken seriously or given the resources it truly needs — especially since the resources and seriousness of physical health aren’t where they should be.”
- ✓ “The stigma inhibiting ... discussions about mental health.”

EHS Today presents the following survey findings to help organizations benchmark their current mental health programs, gain a better understanding of where they’re lacking and the impact that mental health has on their performance and workplace environment.

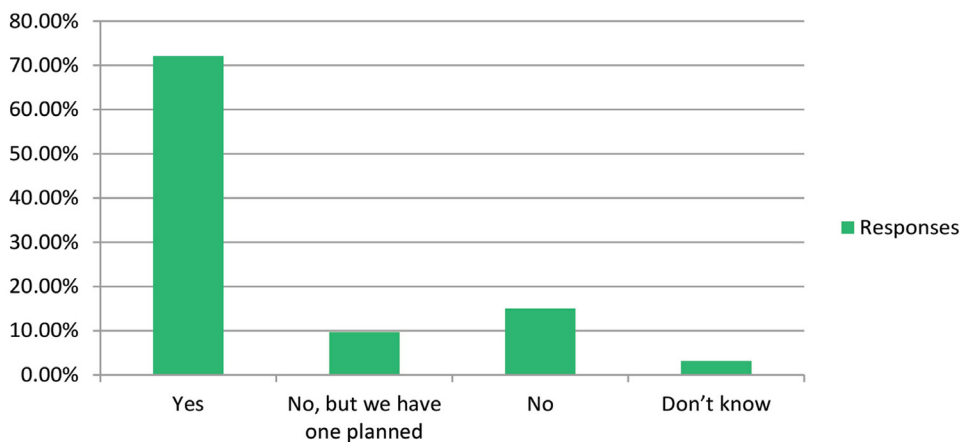


Mental Health Awareness in the Workplace

MOST EMPLOYERS recognize the importance of employee health, with 72.1% of respondents indicating they have some type of workplace wellness program and another 9.7% planning to implement one. Only 15% said they don't have a wellness program in place (Figure 1).

Figure 1

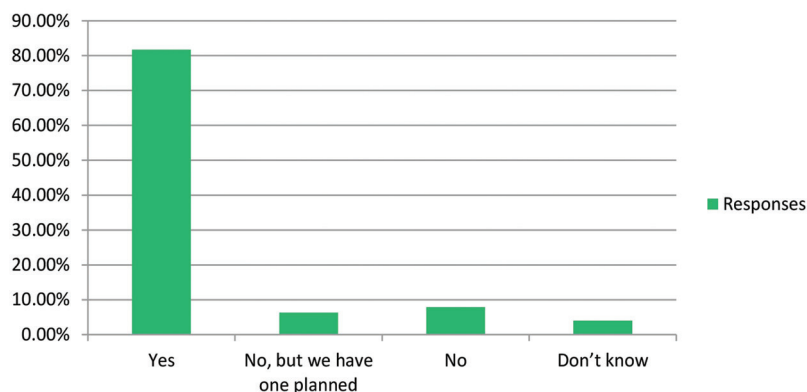
Does your company have a workplace wellness program?



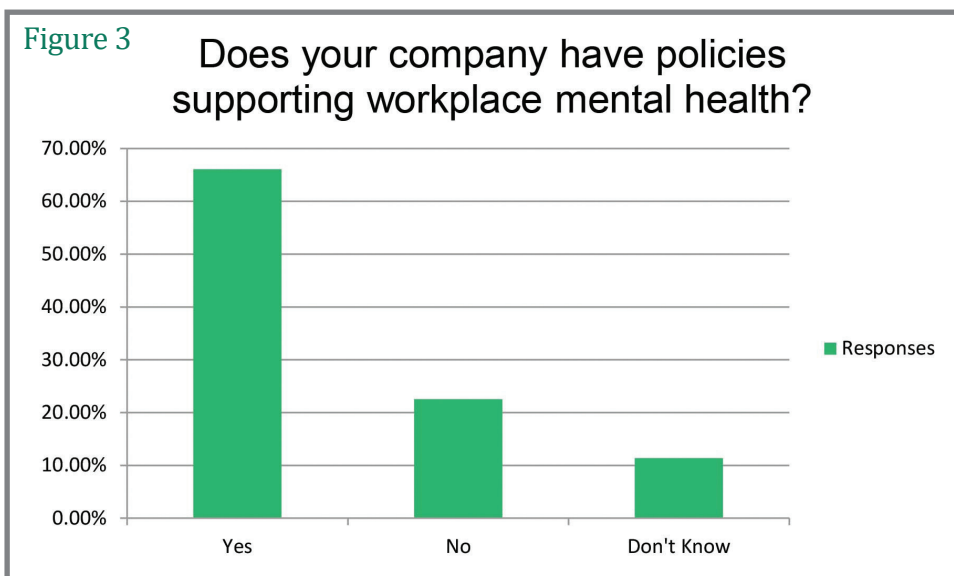
A SIGNIFICANT number of employers are prioritizing mental health as part of their wellness programs, with 81.8% saying they have a program in place that focuses on mental health and 6.3% saying they have one planned (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Does your workplace wellness program include a focus on mental health?



WHILE MENTAL HEALTH is clearly becoming an important part of corporate wellness programs, structured policies are lacking at many organizations. In fact, 33.9% of respondents said they either don't have a mental health policy in place or "don't know" if they have one (Figure 3).



Mental Health Program Challenges

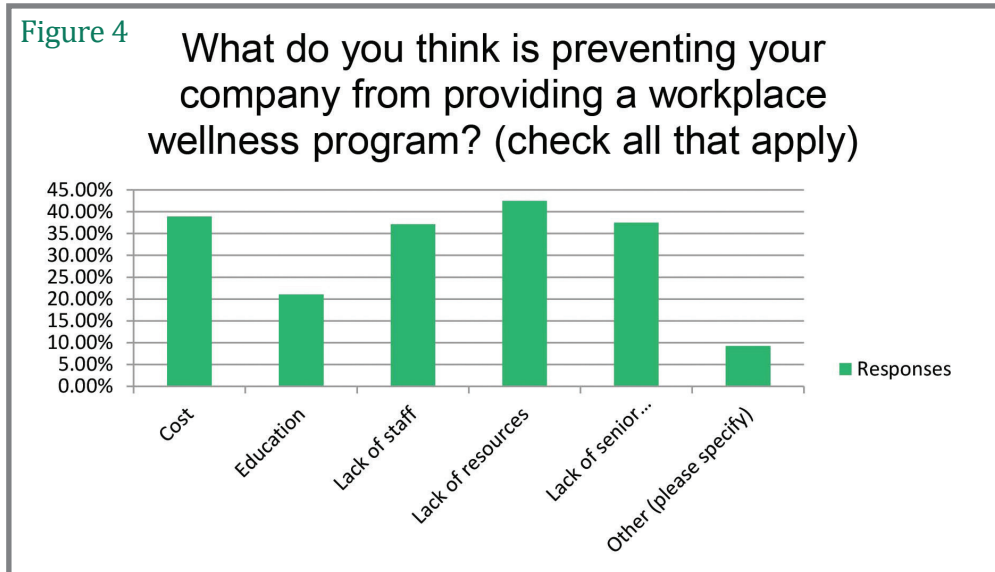
When asked about barriers to adoption, survey participants were given an opportunity to provide write-in responses. Some additional responses to this question included:

- ✓ "We discuss wellness topics at monthly safety meetings, but there is not a formal program."
- ✓ "We have an informal program in place."
- ✓ "[Lack of] participation

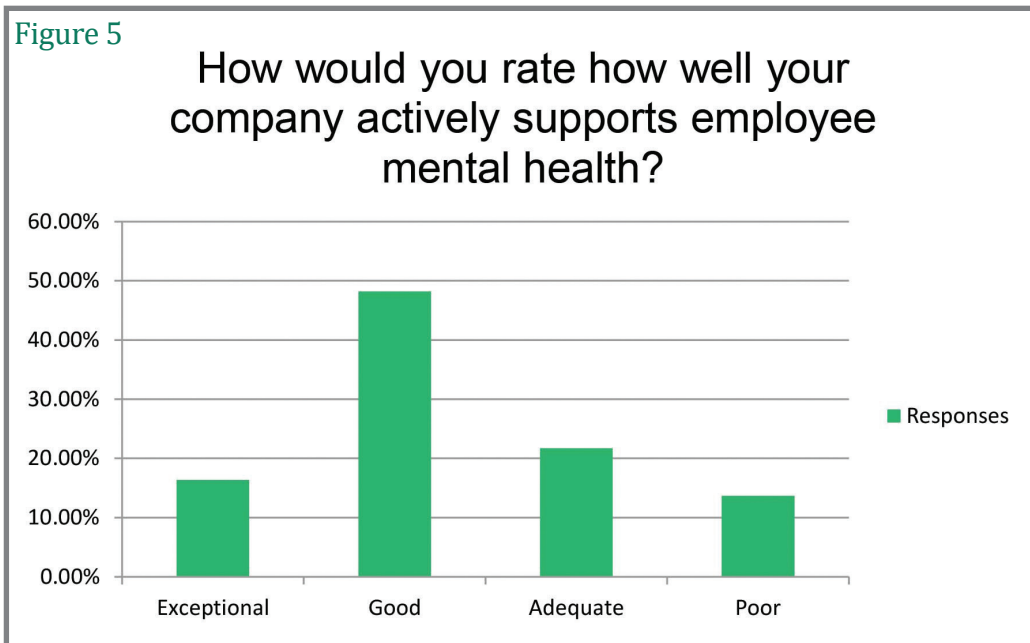
from staff"

- ✓ "Lack of engagement in prior programs"
- ✓ "Lack of interest"
- ✓ "Too busy managing the pandemic"
- ✓ "There is no need for this"
- ✓ "Don't know, probably waiting for something to happen first"

FOR COMPANIES that don't provide a wellness program, cost, lack of resources, staff and senior management support were all cited as significant hurdles to adoption (Figure 4).



ORGANIZATIONS that struggle to adopt wellness programs may account for a significant percentage of respondents who rate their organization's mental health support as only adequate (21.7%) or 13.7% who rate it as poor (Figure 5).



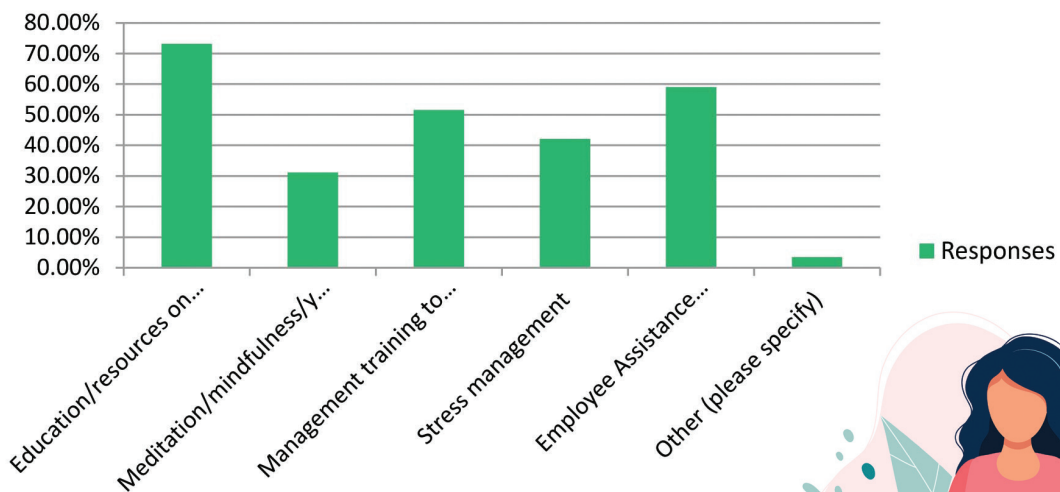


Evolving Wellness Strategies

MANY COMPANIES are becoming more receptive to nontraditional approaches to workplace health, with nearly one-third saying they offer meditation, mindfulness or yoga programs. Nearly three-fourths of employers offer some type of mental health assistance via education or other resources. Another 59.1% provide an employee assistance program for limited therapy sessions (Figure 6).

Figure 6

What types of programs do you offer?
(check all that apply)



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Participants also had an opportunity to provide write-in responses. Some of the other approaches respondents cite include online counseling/help lines, third-party evaluations and counseling, internal alert systems, “hands-on HR” people who are available to talk, wellness classes, QPR (question, persuade and refer) training for suicide prevention, a peer support program and a mental health audit system. A few respondents also indicate that they rely on their on-site contractors to provide mental health support. As noted in previous *EHS Today* articles, companies should take an active role in at least verifying subcontractors are adhering to health and safety protocols to avoid potential liability issues.



Impact of Covid-19 on Employee Well-Being

THERE'S NO question that pandemic-related stress has taken its toll on the workforce. Consider that prior to the pandemic 97.3% of employers perceived the mental health of their employees as at least average, with 49.1 rating it “good” (Figure 7). Fast forward to today, and 85.6% of employers rated their employees’ mental health as average or above, with only 30.3% rating it as “good” (Figure 8). The overall mood of employees fell as well, with 35.5% rating it as “good.”

Figure 7 Rate the following items below based on your perception -- BEFORE COVID

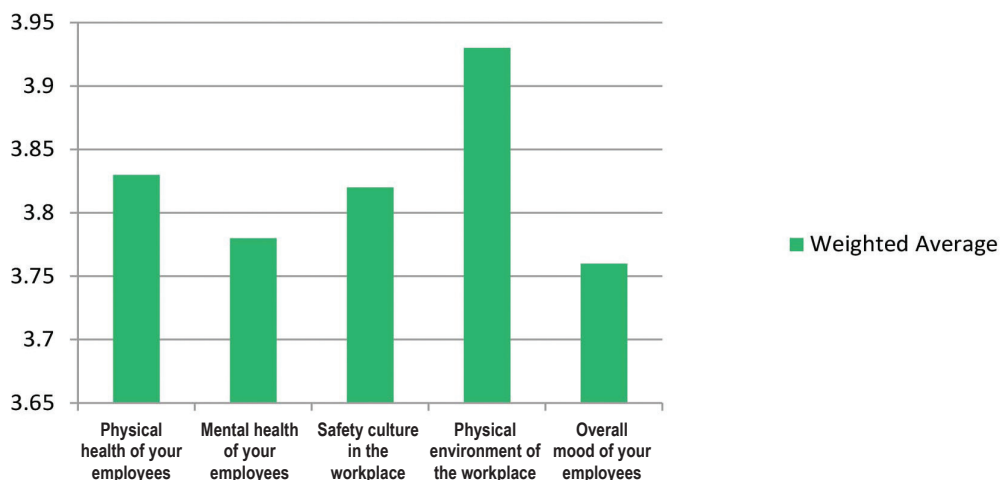
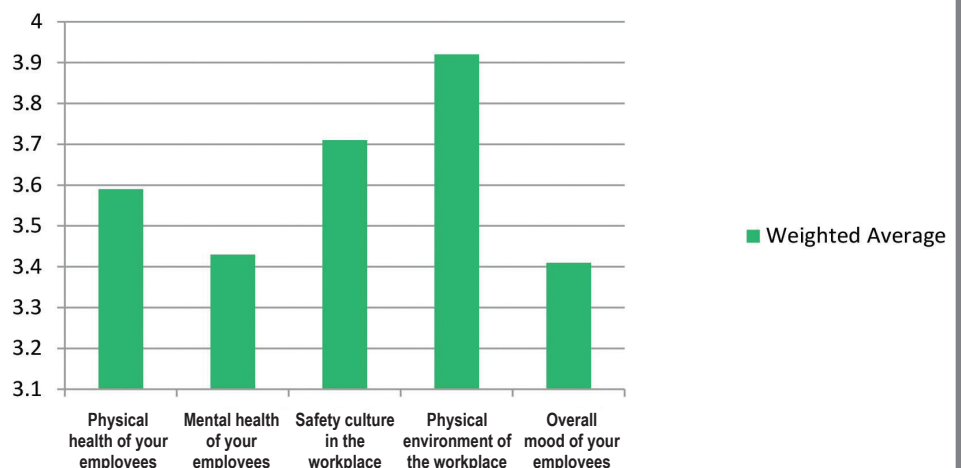
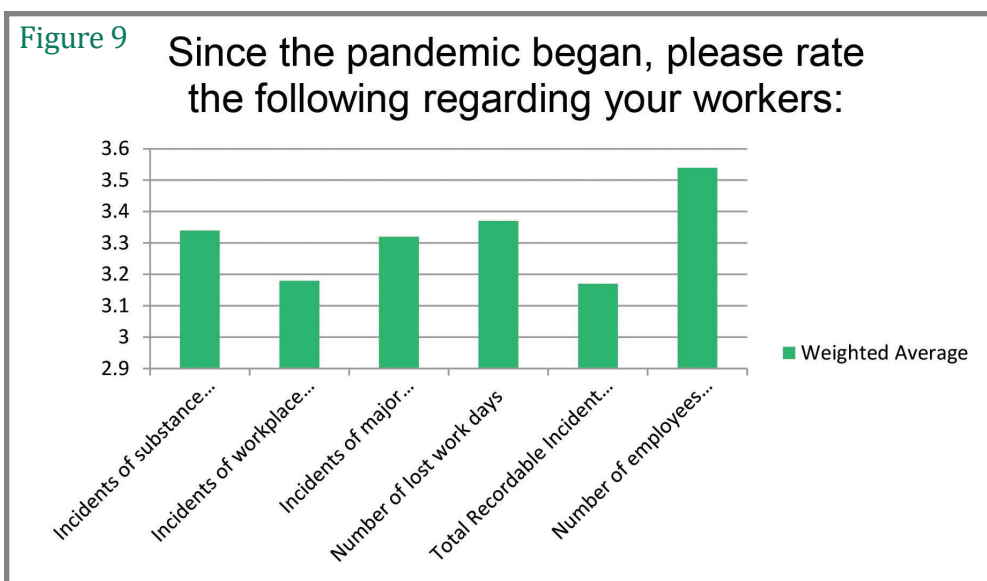


Figure 8 Rate the following items below based on your perception -- TODAY

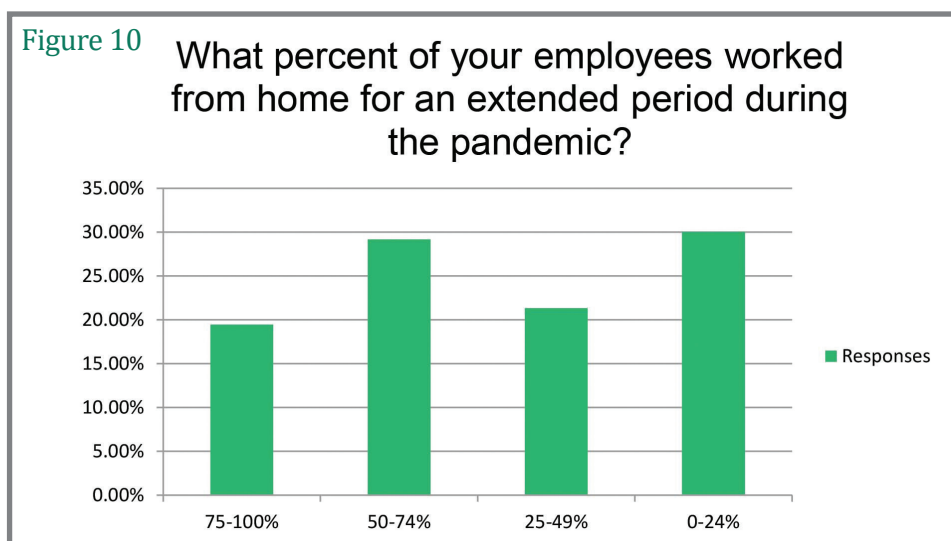


SINCE THE pandemic began, many employers are reporting slight increases in issues related to substance abuse, workplace violence and major depressive episodes (Figure 9). Slightly more than 10% of all respondents also report significant increases in the number of employees who have voluntarily quit or retired, and lost work days. Nearly 40% have also reported at least slight increases in the number of employees who have voluntarily quit or retired.

Interestingly, 10.6% of respondents indicated that their total recordable incident rate “slightly decreased,” while 7.7% agreed that it “greatly decreased.” This could be due to greater awareness of health and safety protocols during the pandemic.



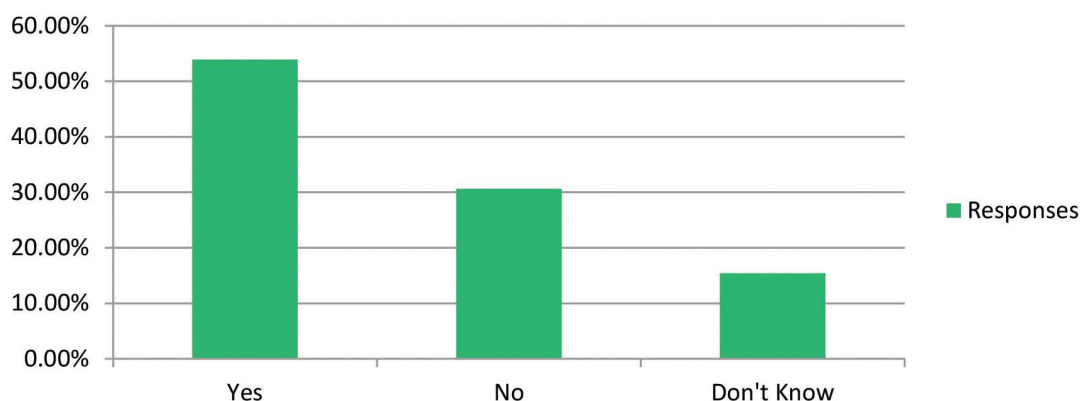
DURING THE pandemic, remote work was quite common, with nearly half of respondents stating that at least 50% of their employees worked from home (Figure 10). Of those respondents, 36% said the number of employees working from home “greatly increased” during the pandemic, while another 31.3% said that figure “slightly increased.”



MORE THAN half of employers recognize the need to address the psychological impact of the pandemic, with 53.9% indicating they have an action plan to address mental health as part of their overall post-Covid return-to-work plan (Figure 11). Still, 30.7% have no plan and another 15.4% “don’t know” if their company has a plan. Most employers that have post-Covid-19 plans in place feel confident they’re sufficiently meeting their employees’ mental-health needs. However, 16.1% selected either “no” or “don’t know” when asked about the effectiveness of their post-pandemic support.

Figure 11

Does your company have an action plan to address workplace mental health as part of its overall post-COVID return-to-work plan?



iStock/Getty/Maria Stavreva



Conclusion: Mental Health Support Benefits Everyone

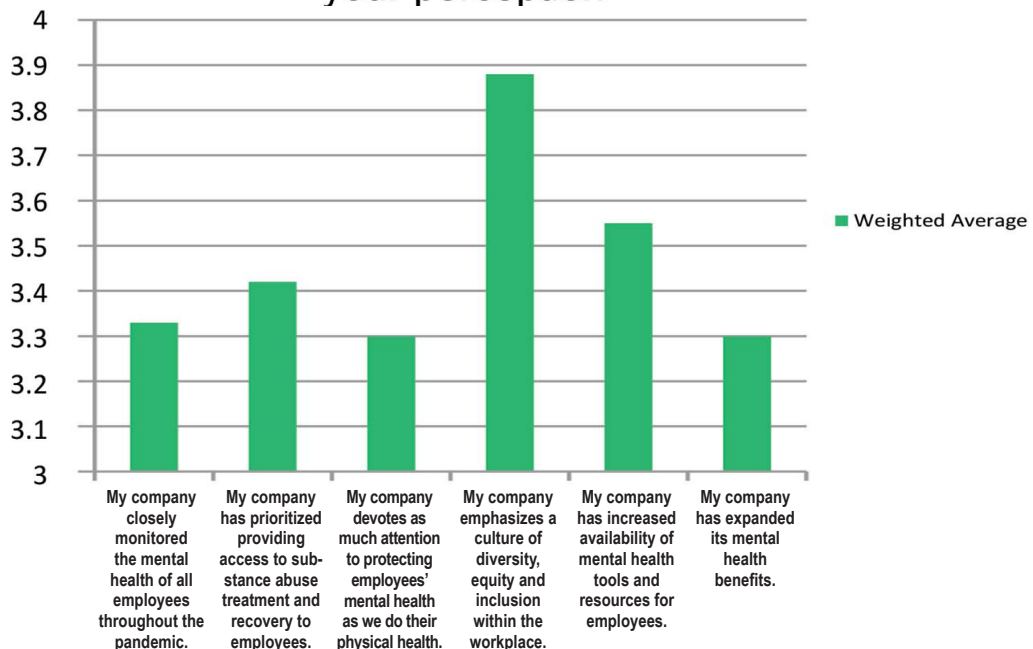


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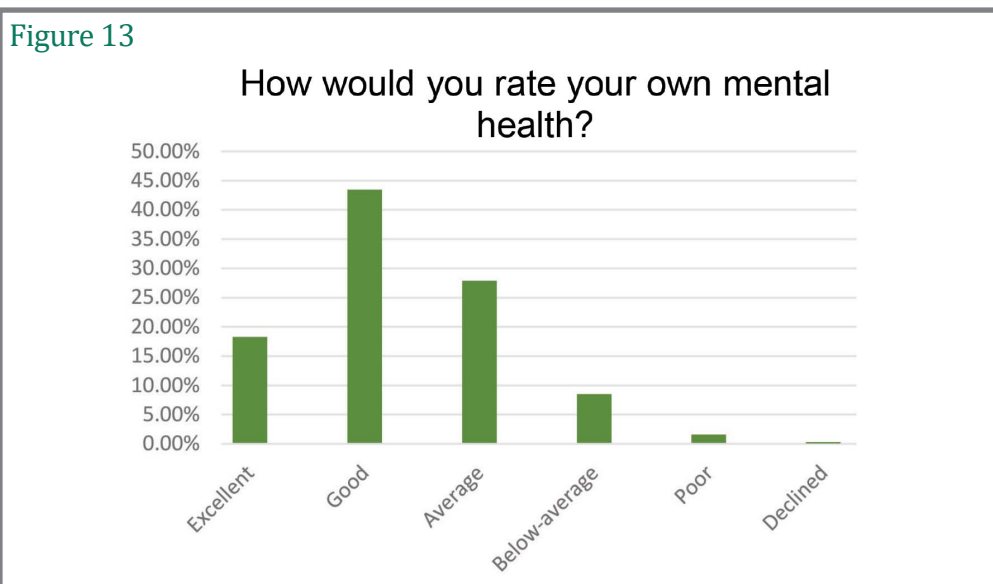
IT'S CLEAR that most organizational leaders understand the value of mental health support in the workplace. Still, companies must do a better job of allocating resources to this urgent need and prioritize mental health awareness, support and treatment. It's encouraging to note that slightly more than half of respondents at least slightly agreed their company “closely monitored the mental health of all employees throughout the pandemic” (Figure 12). But nearly one-fourth of respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed with the same statement. Just as concerning is the percentage (nearly 30%) of respondents who disagreed that their company devotes as much attention to protecting employees’ mental health as their physical health.

Figure 12

Rate the following statements based on
your perception



Also, many respondents indicate a need for mental health support. While the majority of respondents rate their mental health as “good” or even “excellent, another 27.9% rate their mental health as average, and 10.1% say it’s either below-average or poor (Figure 13). That’s a large percentage of workers who are at risk for mental-health related illnesses.



The cost of doing nothing is substantial. On average, employees exhibited impaired work performance between 13% to 29% of time in a two-week period, depending on types of work tasks performed, according to a study by the Tufts Medical Center. Using a depression cost calculator, the Tufts study concludes that “a hypothetical employer with 10,000 employees, 55% of whom are female, and with average salary and benefits per employee of \$70,000 (total payroll of \$700 million) and total profit of \$70 million” will incur costs related to major depression of \$17.2 million, or 24.6% of total profit.

The data reinforces the need to continue destigmatizing mental illness in the workplace. Mental health awareness begins with education and training and must be backed with ongoing investment into resources and programs that provide support to workers who need it. **EHS**





About the Survey

EHS Today accepted completed surveys from 1,145 participants between June 11 and June 29, 2021. Of those responding, 53.7% have an EHS role within their organization (Figure 14). In terms of company size, 70% of respondents had at least 100 employees, with 100-499 accounting for 35.3% of overall respondents (Figure 15). About one-quarter of respondents work in organizations with more than 1,000 employees, and nearly 30% have less than 100. Industries varied, with manufacturing accounting for almost 20% of respondents (Figure 16). Some of the other industries represented include construction, education and consulting.

Figure 14

What is your title?

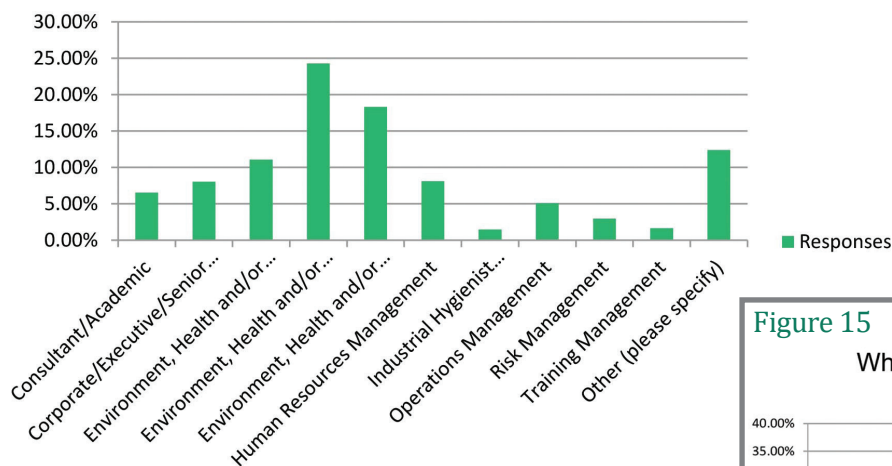


Figure 15

What is the size of your company (number of employees)?

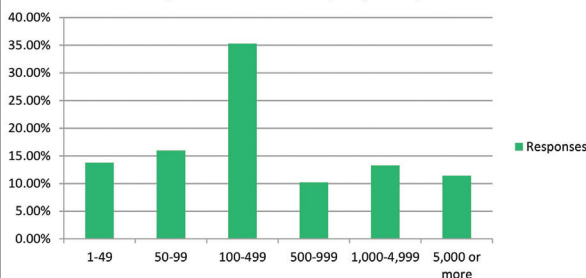


Figure 16

What best describes your company's primary industry? (Select only one)

