



Workplace Mental Health

A survey-based report by
White Swan Foundation for Mental Health

Bengaluru, India 2019



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About White Swan Foundation

White Swan Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that is committed to delivering knowledge services on mental health and wellbeing. We provide well-researched content on these topics to the general public.

We believe that we can achieve transformational social change in the area of mental health only by empowering people with the right information. Doing so will enable people to make the right decisions. With awareness we can get rid of misconceptions, play an assertive role in eliminating stigma, and create a supportive environment for those who live with mental health issues.

We have developed India's largest knowledge repository on mental health content. We also engage with various communities through our outreach program. These communities include school and college teachers, youth, health workers, employees at workplaces and community leaders. We also work with the general public in our engagement programs through our wide range of mass communication initiatives.

Our workplace mental health program is based on a three-pronged approach:

- Impart education to create greater awareness about mental health in the workplace
- Empower and equip each person in the workplace to take appropriate action for themselves and to support those around them
- Enable systemic change to create an environment that promotes emotional wellbeing and helps those with mental health issues lead a good quality of work life

To know more about our workplace mental health program, write to us:
connect@whiteswanfoundation.org

To know more about White Swan Foundation, please visit
<http://www.whiteswanfoundation.org>

Mental health at the workplace

A report by the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that depression and anxiety disorders cost the world economy USD1 trillion annually in lost productivity. This figure addresses only a part of the economic loss caused due to mental health issues.

Employees who are in distress are known to perform better when they receive support at their workplace. A study by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), USA, showed that people who received support for their depression were more likely to stay in their jobs as compared to those who didn't. They also showed an increase in their productivity that led to their organization benefiting by more than four times the investment made in their mental healthcare.

The costs of mental health issues among employees are significant, and the benefits of addressing them even more so.

Workplaces should take into consideration factors that can affect an employee's wellbeing at work, such as work environment, bullying, harassment, discrimination, workload, and work stress. When these are not addressed, workplaces face consequences that manifest as absenteeism, low productivity, employees working extra hours out of job insecurity or working while unwell, conflict, discord, substance abuse, physical health problems, and high attrition rates.

Ensuring preventive measures, encouraging open and nonjudgmental communication, and creating inclusive policies can go a long way in caring for employees' mental wellbeing.

This survey reveals in-depth facts that make a strong case for addressing employees' mental health at the workplace.

About the survey

This survey includes various perspectives on mental health at the workplace from participants across different age groups and industry sectors. Questions were circulated online and offline.

The survey results reflect experiences of an urban and educated population. These results cannot be mapped to all work sectors in India.

Methodology

An online survey was created using Google Forms with questions focused on the respondents' individual experience of mental health at the workplace. It was then circulated on White Swan Foundation's newsletter, social media, and other online fora. The survey received 552 online submissions.

Five volunteers were asked to help with reaching out to offline participants. Participants filled out the online survey on the volunteers' devices (phones and tablets). On-ground survey participants were located at different sites in the city, such as bus stops, railway and metro stations and housing complexes. It received 277 offline submissions.

Limitations of the survey

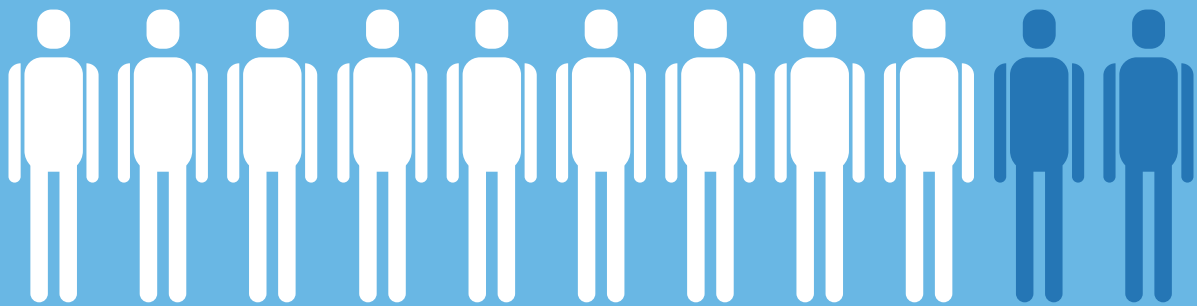
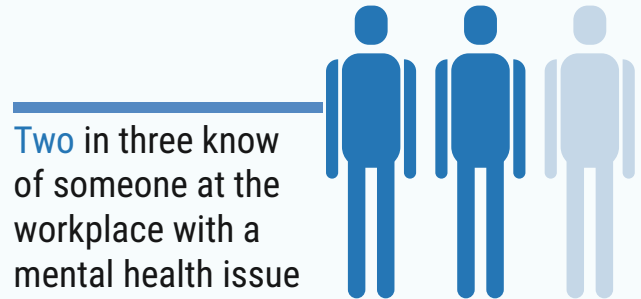
The objective of the survey was to get a broad understanding of existing trends in place when it comes to how workplaces view mental health. Keeping this in mind, the survey sample size was restricted to a small number of around 800 people.

Given this number, not all data points may accurately reflect facts on the ground. They point towards broad trends that serve as powerful and relevant insights. Usage of limited media to share the survey also led to data that is not representative of a large and diverse pool of employees at workplaces in the organized sector.

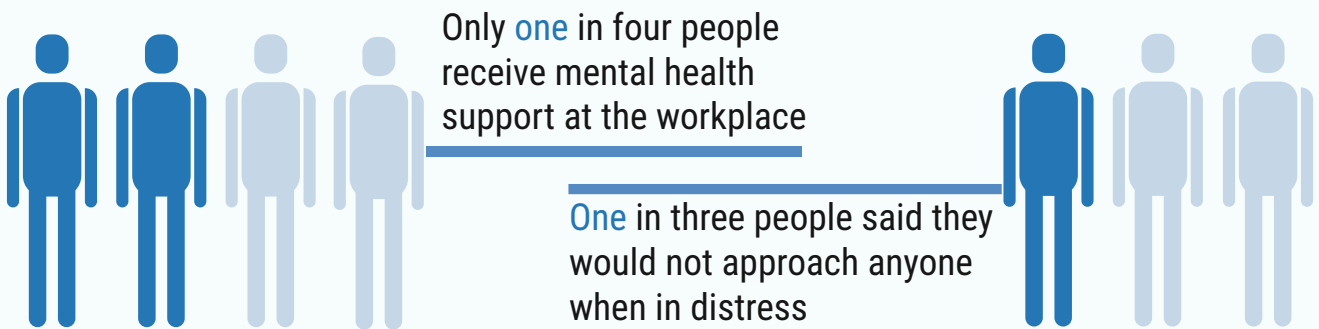
Despite these limitations, this survey is a relevant first-step that builds a strong case for why an in-depth survey must be conducted – one that captures inputs from a larger section of the target demographic.

Workplaces in India today face various different challenges when it comes to its employees' mental health. To be able to tackle these hurdles it is important that we have a more studied view of what these challenges are.

Key findings



More than **eight** out of ten people said they had few or no discussions on mental health at the workplace

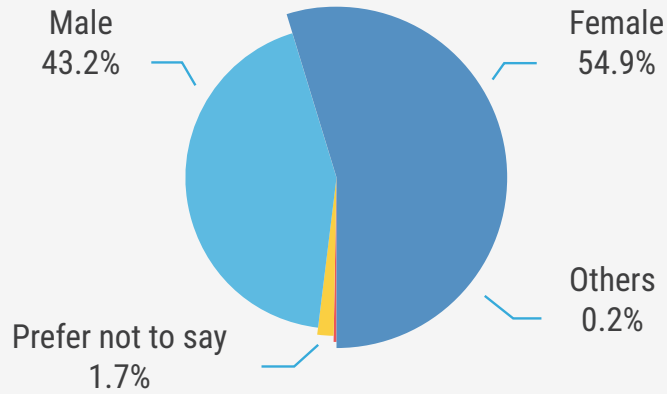


Only **one** in ten people have access to EAP (Employee Assistance Program) services; six out of ten people are not aware of what an EAP is

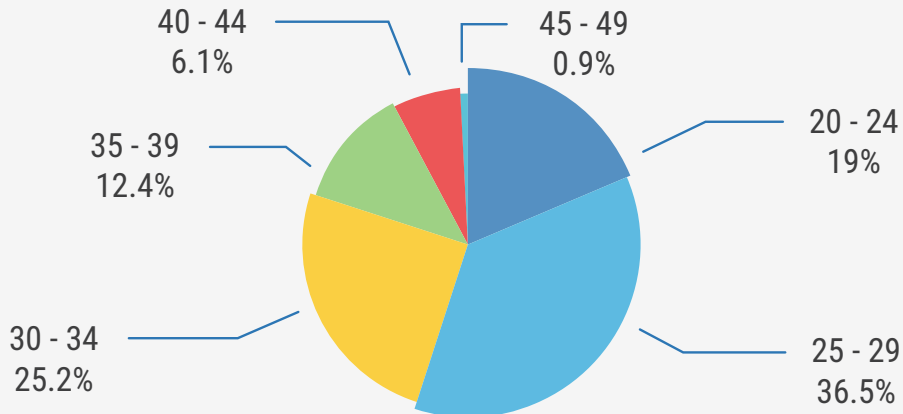
Survey demographics

829 people took the survey.

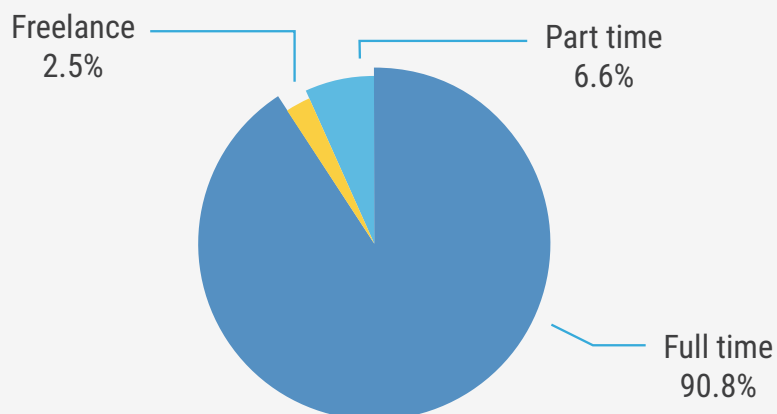
Gender



Age (in years)

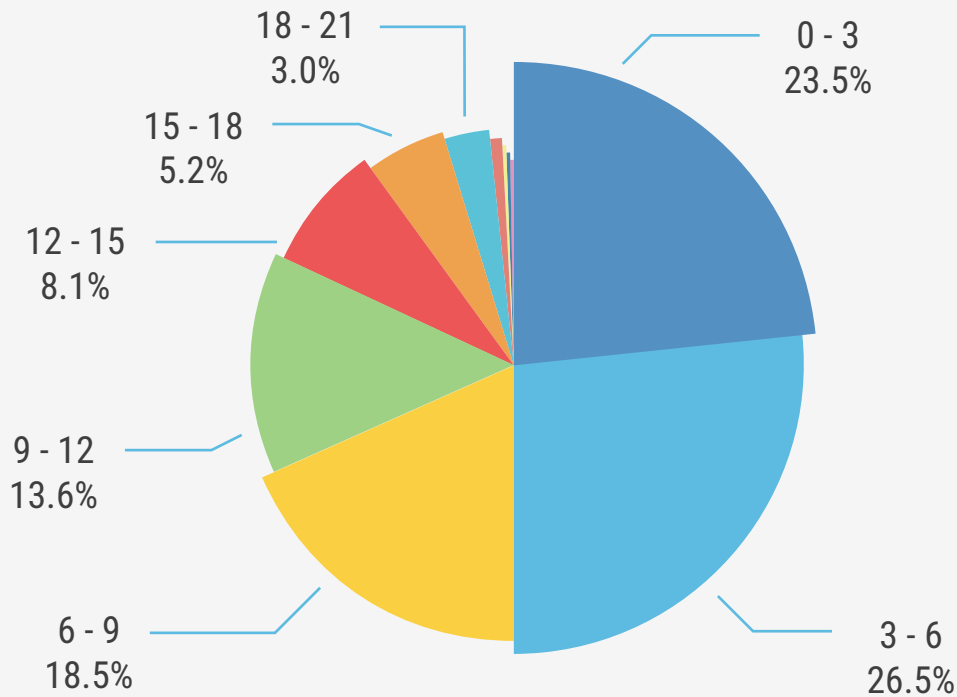


Nature of Employment



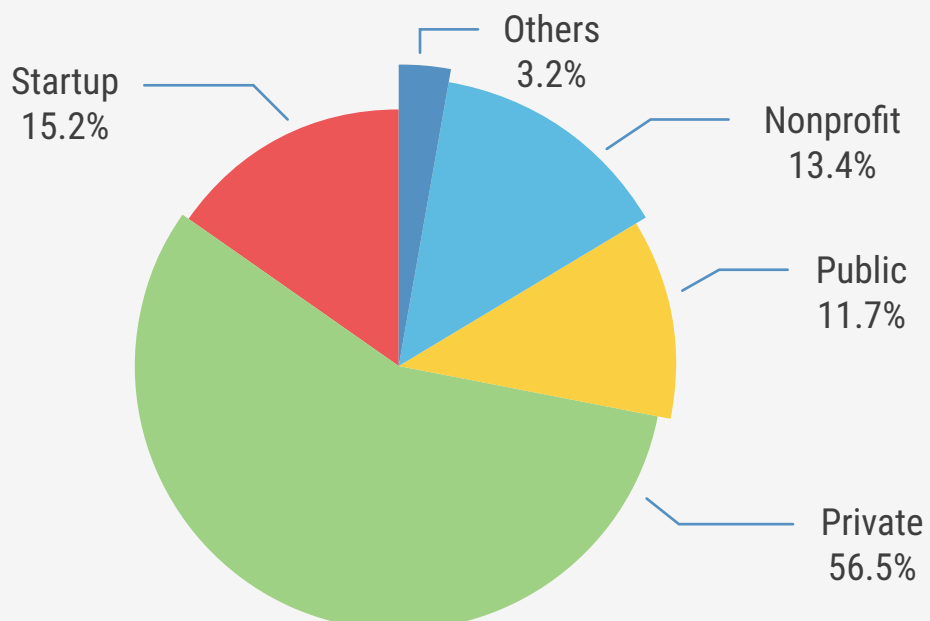
79% of survey respondents are aged between 21 to 34 years. Their average age is 30 years (the median is 29 years). 90.8% of them work full time. More than half of them identify as female.

Work Experience (in years)

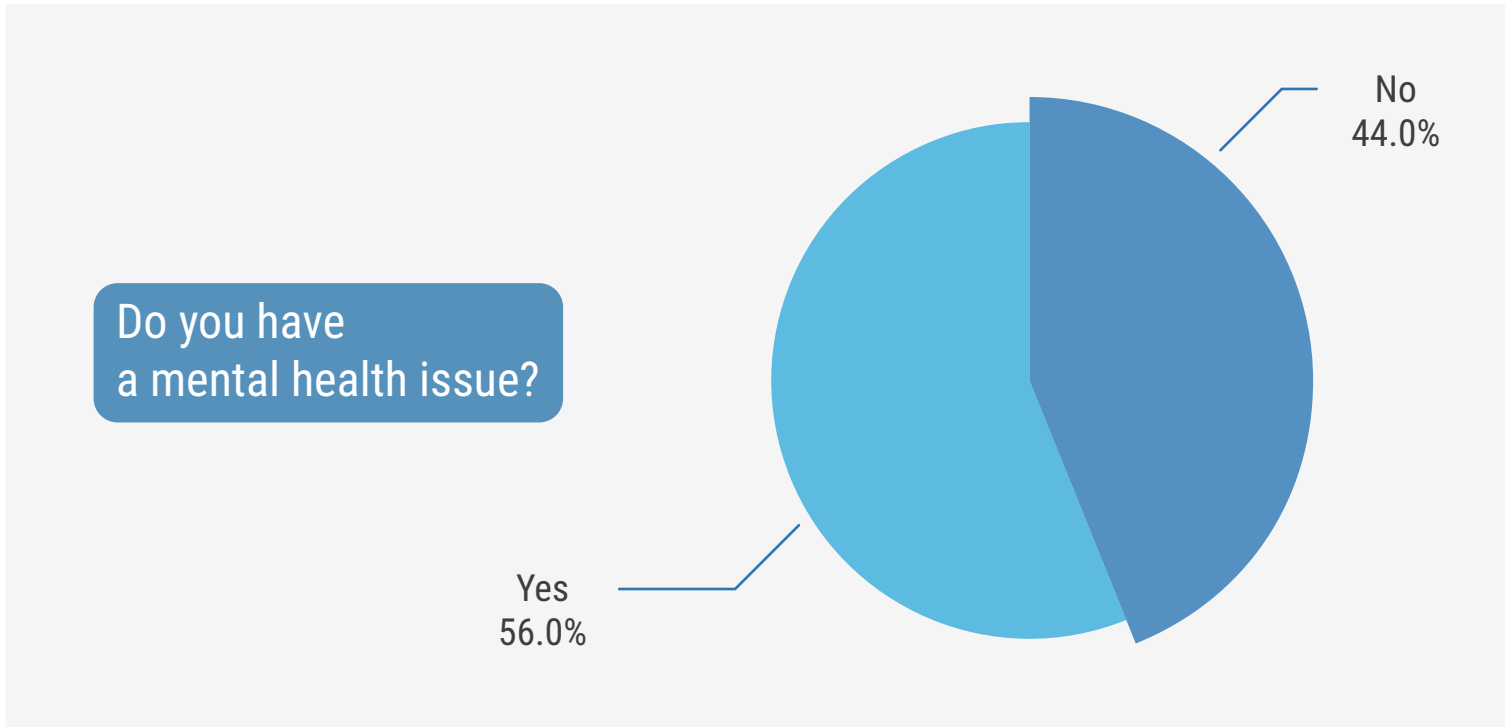


50% of the respondents have less than six years of work experience and the average age of this section is 30 years.

Industry

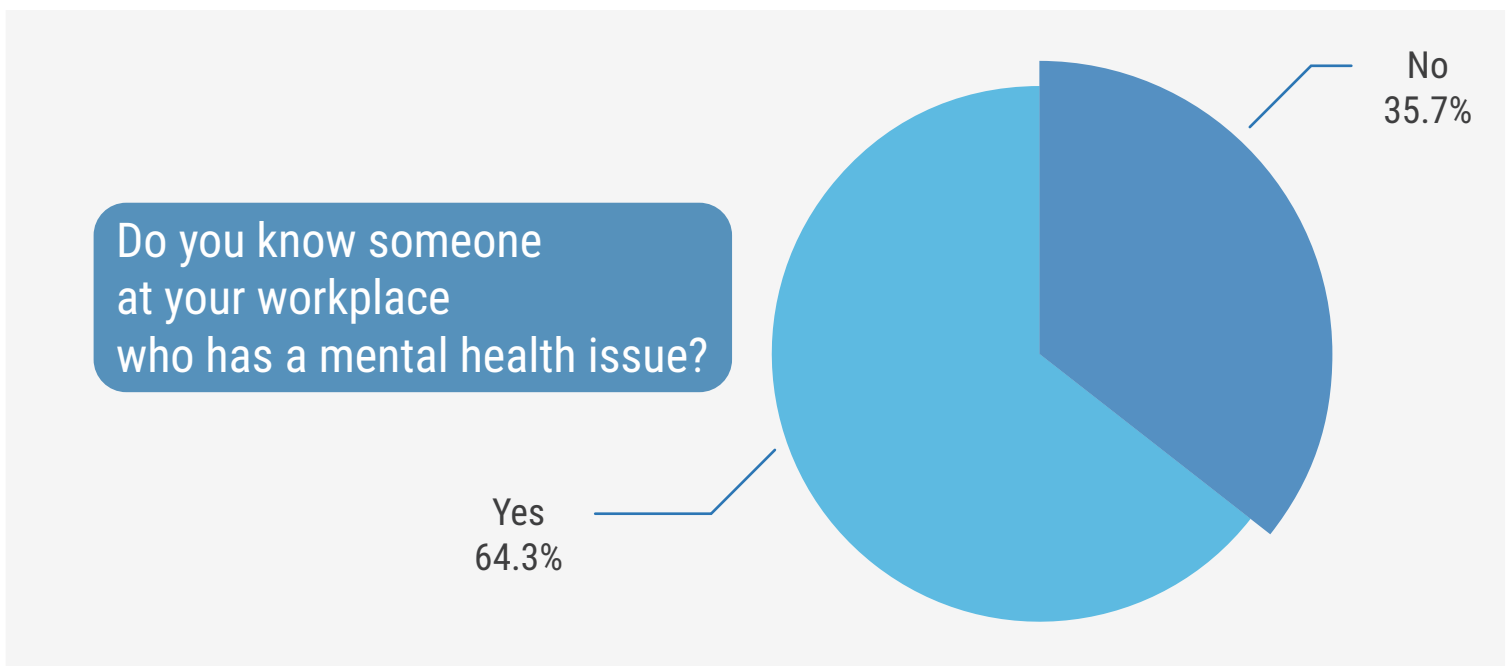


Survey findings



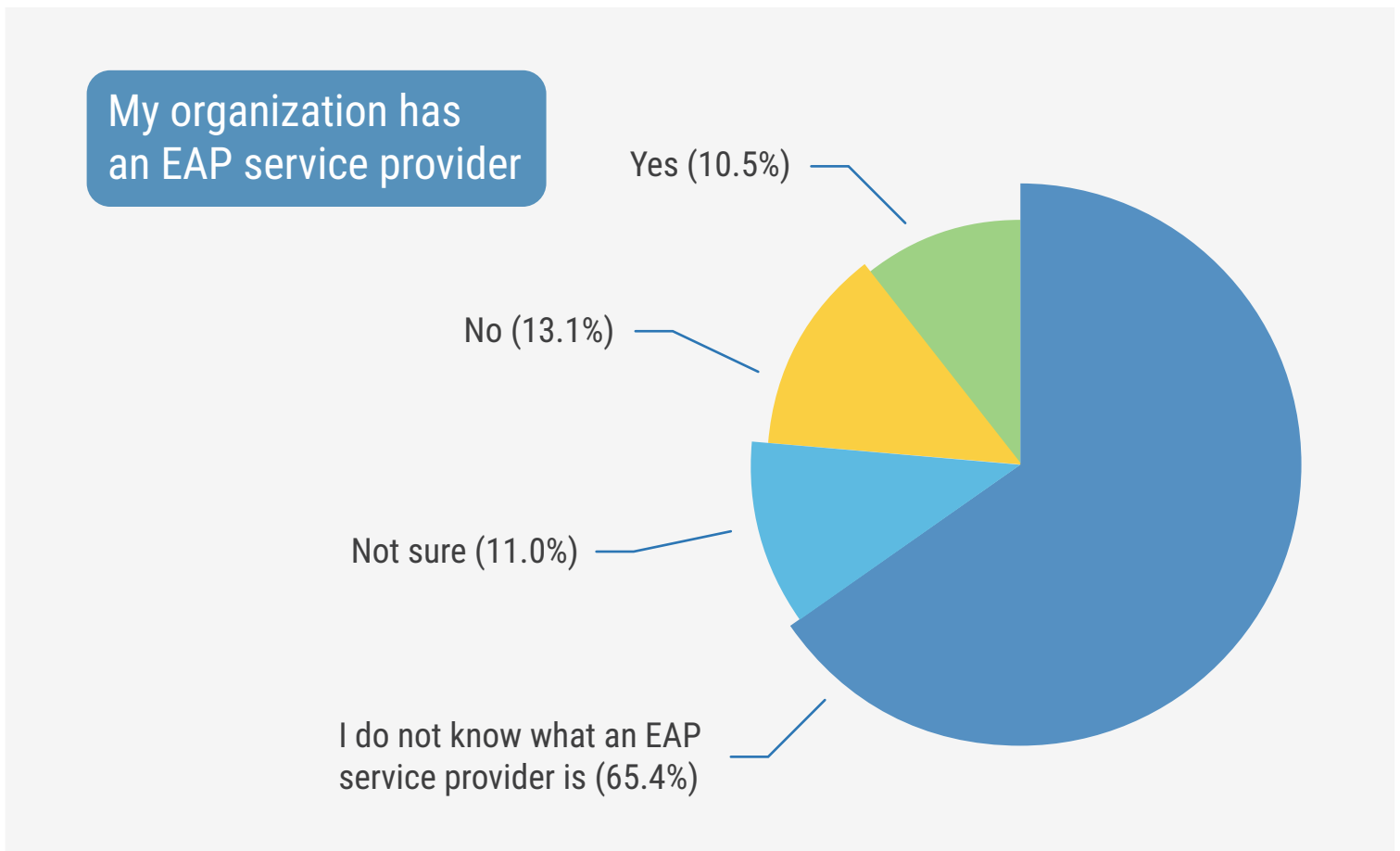
1 in 2 people who took the survey reported that they experience a mental health issue. For the purposes of this survey, the term “mental health issue” refers to diagnosed illnesses such as depression and anxiety, as well as other forms of emotional distress (like worry or stress).

National Mental Health Survey of India 2015-'16 estimates that 13.7% of the Indian population Indians will develop a mental health issue at some point in their lifetime.



64.3% of respondents know someone at their workplace with a mental health issue. This number is significant because it indicates the widespread nature of the problem. Often people don't know how to interact with or support a colleague who is experiencing distress. When workplaces are equipped with the right knowledge it will be possible for more people to reach out, empathize and provide care.

Access to services



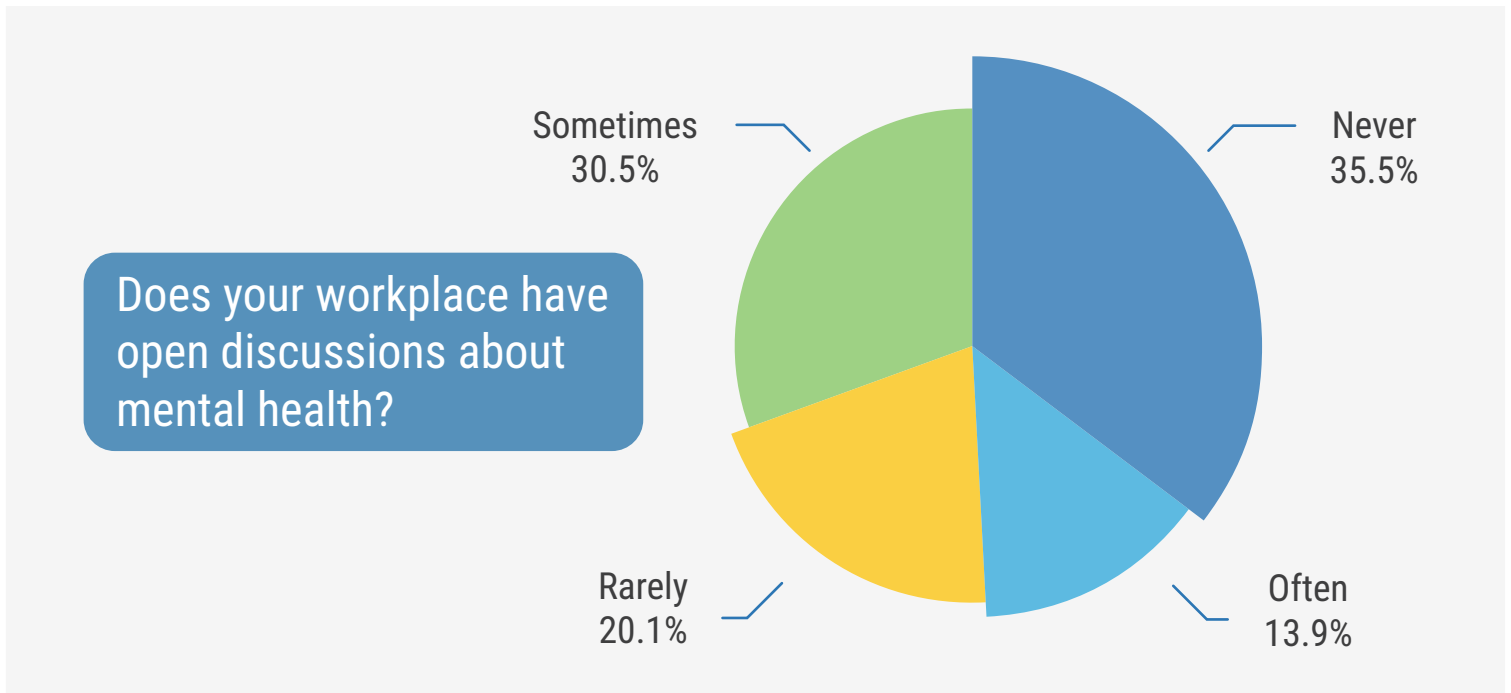
More than 65% of the respondents didn't know what an EAP (Employee Assistance Program) service is, 13.1% didn't have access to any EAP service at work.

Only 10 people had access to an EAP services at the workplace.

Despite the high need for services (56% of respondents said that they had a mental health issue) access to EAP service is low. This indicates that organizations need to foster a climate where seeking help for mental health issues is normalized and even encouraged.*

* Globally, the average usage of EAP services in organizations is 6%.

Workplace culture



More than one in three respondents reported that they have never had conversations on mental health at the workplace.

“ *No discussions. I was ashamed to bring up my mental disorder. I thought I would be risking my job.* ”

Among those who reported having had conversations about mental health, the nature of these conversations varied:

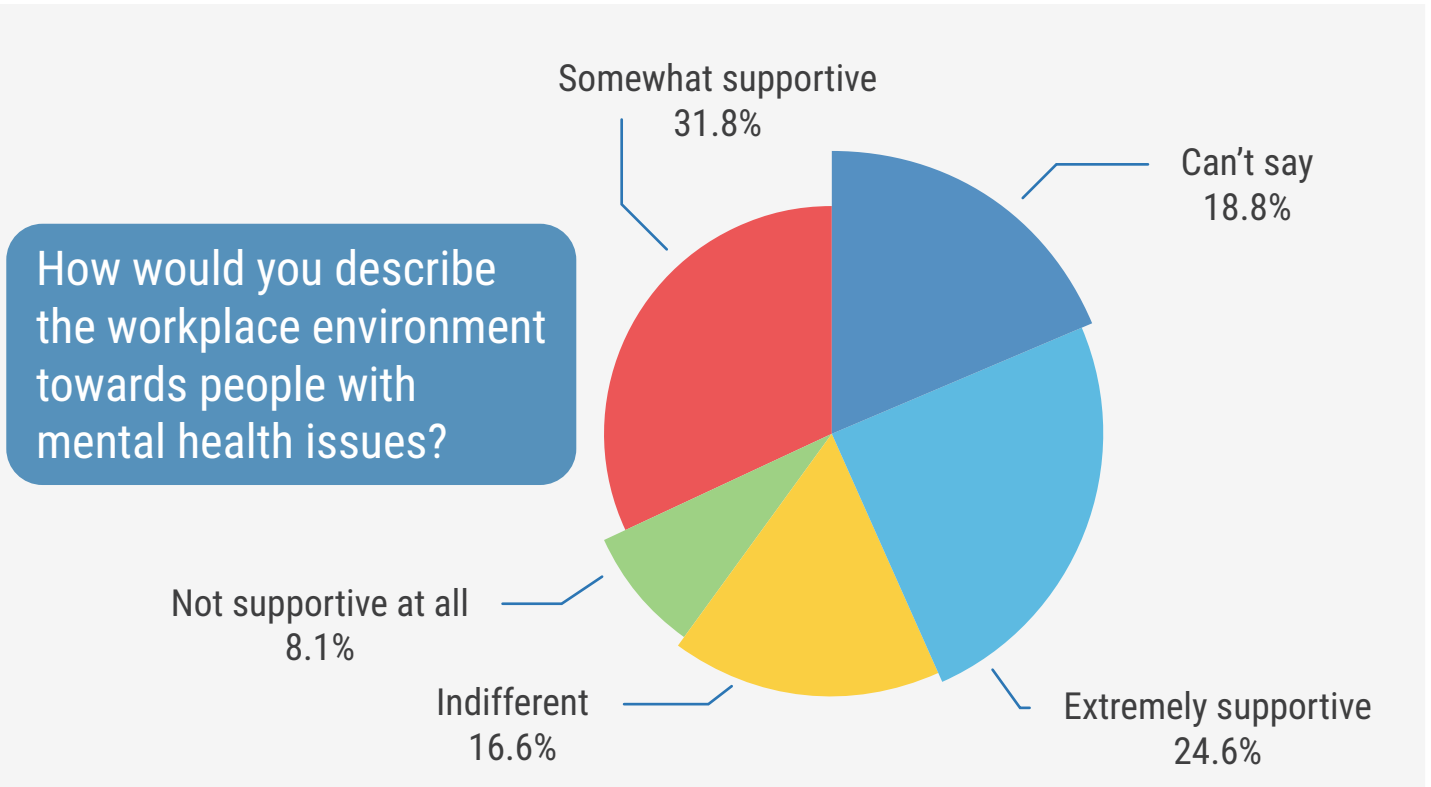
“ *My boss frequently talks about her own struggles with mental illness and invisible disabilities.* ”

“ *We have an occasional seminar or talk by a psychologist or counselor, mostly during what is called ‘Health and Wellness week,’ once a year.* ”

Some respondents pointed out that even though there was general awareness about the issue, there were no concrete steps taken to ensure a mental health positive work environment.

“ *There is awareness of mental health and people often recognize it as a pressing issue in society. However, the environment is still not comfortable enough for people to admit that they have any mental health problems where they need help.* ”

Inclusion



Even though 56% of people who responded to this survey have a mental health issue, only 24.6% of the respondents saw their workplace as supportive. This points to the need to educate the leadership to drive a culture shift, and to middle management to create a more empathetic environment within their teams.

A respondent who talked about why they didn't feel supported at the workplace said,

“ My boss said that she doesn't know much about 'all this' (read: mental illnesses) because she hasn't experienced it. ”

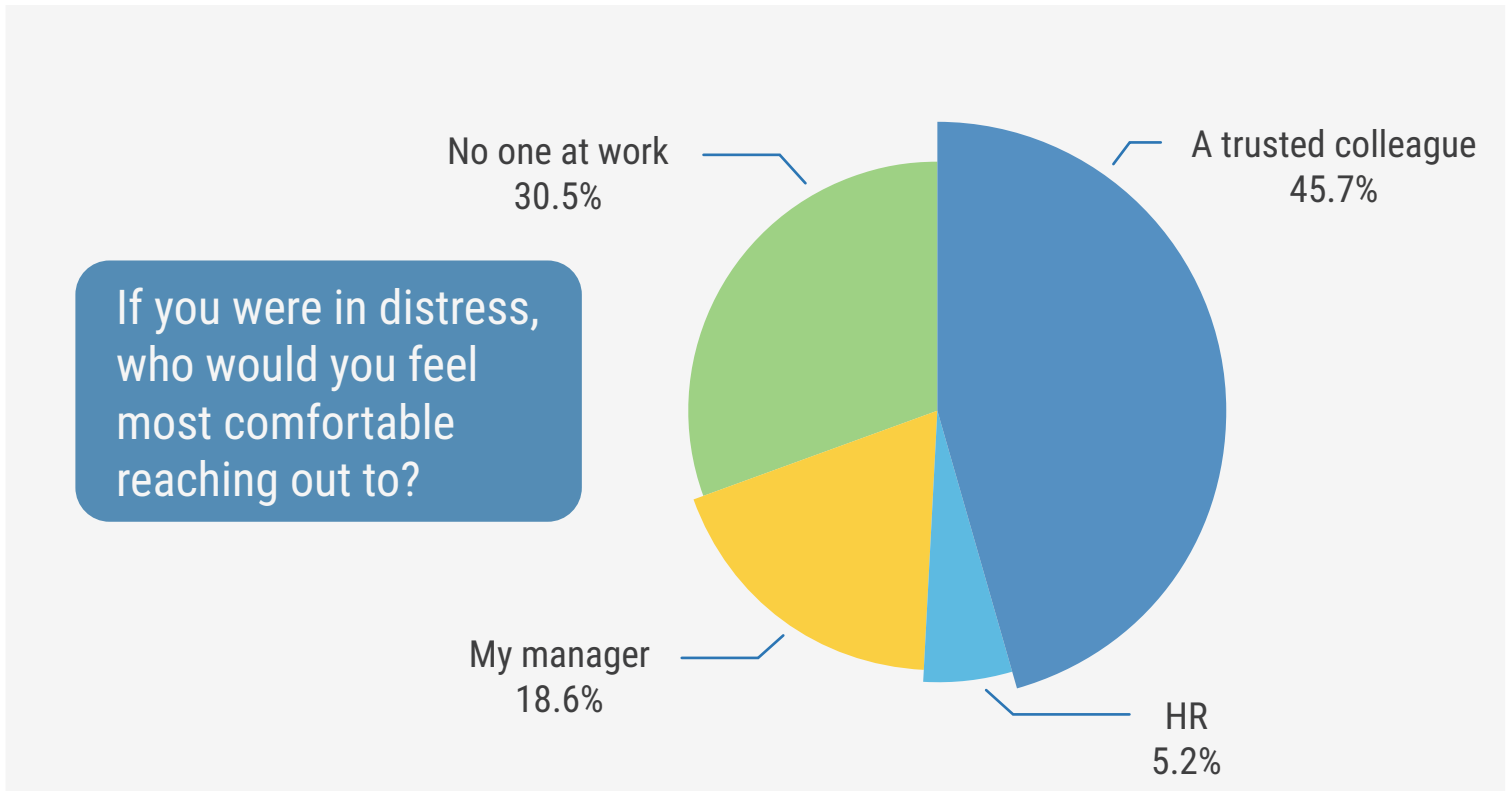
They were not alone in having had such an experience, another person shared,

“ The CEO once equated clinical depression with boredom. ”

Mental health issues pose a workplace challenge not just for those who're living with the issue but also for their caregivers. A respondent reported,

“ I have resigned from this job because of my partner's issues with his mental health. I would take leave to be with him. Rather than being supportive, my boss and the head of the office lectured me for taking leaves, asking why I didn't prioritize work over personal life. ”

Workplace community



When asked about who at work they would feel comfortable reaching out to when they're feeling distressed, more than 45% of respondents said that they would reach out to a trusted colleague. Close to a third of respondents said that they would not feel comfortable reaching out to anyone at work.

This finding – that nearly one in two people see their colleagues as a potential source of support – reaffirms our belief that everyone is a caregiver. Conversations and policies on mental health and wellbeing shouldn't be confined to a few people but should extend to the whole organization.

Only 18.6% of respondents said that they would reach out to their manager, and only 5.2% said they would reach out to their HR. Breaking down barriers and building trust is essential to bring about change and encourage conversations on mental health.

People reach out to those they feel comfortable with and not necessarily HR or the EAP service.

Recommendations

Speaking up about a mental health issue at the workplace can be extremely difficult, but it shouldn't be. A good start is to create open workplaces, where talking about mental health or mental health issues doesn't lead to losing your job or dignity.

Workplaces must be cognizant of the impact that the work environment has among employees. It is important to acknowledge that making service providers accessible does not necessarily address the issues faced by employees with mental health issues. Since a lot of the challenges faced by them are related to their social environment, leadership must ensure that the workplace is inclusive and supportive of them. People at the workplace must be self-aware of their role as a potential mental health allies.

A healthy workplace can:

1. Prevent mental health issues by reducing factors in the workplace that can cause stress or trigger mental illnesses
2. Support the recovery of people with mental health issues by equipping co-workers and managers to be aware of, and respond to their needs and challenges

The key to achieving these goals is to begin driving a social shift in the organization. One that will result in employees and leadership empowered with the right knowledge of the subject. This will create an inclusive and empathic environment for those with mental health issues.

The role of leaders

1. They have a larger role to play in championing the cause of supporting those with mental health issues and making the work environment a healthy place for the overall well-being of employees.
2. They need to encourage their employees to acknowledge the biases and preconceived notions that the latter have about mental health; and help them acquire the right knowledge about it.
3. There is a need to create a work environment where employees can discuss and communicate on the subject of mental health without fear of being stigmatized, questioned and excluded.
4. They must make appropriate changes; adopt best practices and processes in the organization; and empower those in key roles so that these suggestions could be achieved.



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