Teladoc
HEALTH

Tackling a Global Mental Health Crisis in the Workplace

How Employees View Mental Health at Work and What Employers Can Do to Help

Insights from the 2019 Mental Health Workplace Study by Teladoc Health

Executive summary

The world's population is experiencing a mental health crisis that has ballooned out of control. According to the World Health Organization, one in four people in the world will be affected by mental health challenges at some point in their lives and around 450 million people currently suffer from such conditions, placing mental health issues among the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide. Unfortunately, individuals experiencing mental health issues frequently go undiagnosed – coping with problems that interfere with and limit both work and life.

Without question, it is imperative to improve access the mental healthcare and reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions, so that people get the care they need. The findings of this study are focused on how respondents (employees) view mental health in their places of work. The following pages provide analysis of responses to a variety of questions including:

- **How prevalent are mental health issues in the workplace?**
  Answer: More than one in four — 27% of respondents — reported that they have been diagnosed with a mental health condition.

- **Do employees seek professional help when they need it?**
  Answer: More than 25% of respondents experiencing multiple mental health episodes **do not** seek help.

- **Does productivity suffer when employees have mental health problems?**
  Answer: 66% of 18-25 year-olds say mental health episodes have affected their job performance.

- **How comfortable are employees speaking about their mental health needs in the workplace?**
  Answer: 82% of those with a diagnosed mental health issue did not confide in management.

- **How do employees find help for their mental healthcare needs?**
  Answer: 43% of respondents welcome remote forms of information and care.

The global mental health epidemic is real and stigma, coupled with the lack of access to mental health resources and support, is contributing to the crisis.

While our global society has become more comfortable in recent years openly talking about mental healthcare problems and solutions, in the workplace, employees typically suffer in silence. Stigma is the biggest obstacle in obtaining help for mental health problems. In fact, one in 10 employees feel confiding in someone at work about a mental health episode could result in job loss. Now, more than ever, employers understand the need to take action and provide mental health benefits designed to help their employees when they need it.

Scope and methodology

On behalf of Teladoc Health, Ipsos MORI interviewed 3,894 participants online. The study was carried out across four countries with 1,000 people interviewed in United States, 1,000 participants in United Kingdom, 964 participants in Canada, and 930 participants in Australia. All participants were adults who are 18-65 years in age and in full- or part-time employment. Quotas based on census data available were set for age, gender and region in order to ensure a nationally representative sample of the working population in each country was achieved. "Freelancer" and "self-employed" adults were excluded to focus on workplace employees. The quota limits for region in United States and United Kingdom were eventually removed in the final week of fieldwork so the overall target of n=1,000 in these countries was met. Fieldwork took place between August 12 to September 13, 2019.

Key Insight: Mental health challenges are common, hitting younger workers harder.

While many people do not receive a diagnosis, 27% of all respondents in this study indicated they were diagnosed with a mental health problem. Diagnosis is more common in younger workers with 38% saying they have had a mental health diagnosis. Interestingly, United Kingdom and Australian respondents in this study both reported a higher level of diagnosis – 31% and 30% respectively in those countries.

Diagnosed by a healthcare professional as having a mental health condition

27% of respondents have been diagnosed with a mental health problem

38% of those aged 18-25 have been diagnosed with a mental health problem

Millennials born between 1981 and 1996 represent the largest generation in today's workforce. Younger workers are changing the traditional way in which they work – seeking flexible work days and an environment that is more suitable to their style of work. However it's concerning that a large percentage of 18-25 year-olds say they feel burned out, deal with stress and anxiety frequently, and even miss work because of their mental and emotional health.

Responses show that more than two thirds (67%) of younger workers (those age 18-25) worry about their mental health, compared to just less than half (48%) of all ages. In addition, 61% of younger workers report that mental health symptoms have affected their job performance, while just 38% of all combined age groups reported that their job performance was affected by mental health symptoms.

A large percentage of 18-25 year-olds say they feel burned out, deal with stress and anxiety frequently, and even miss work because of their mental and emotional health.

Employees, both with and without a healthcare professional's diagnosis, are experiencing mental health challenges at work. Younger workers report suffering the most. During this study's two-week sample period, participants reported the following:

Statement	18-25 year olds	All ages (18-65 year olds)
I often or always feel stressed or anxious at work	41%	30%
I rarely or never feel mentally and emotionally healthy	28%	16%
Mental health symptoms have affected my job performance	61%	38%
I have missed work because of my mental and emotional health	66%	44%

Many turn to forms of teletherapy to get the assistance they need. A recent CNBC report[1] indicates that digital natives like Millennial workers, don't hesitate to seek the help they need online.

"I treat my patients 100% online," said Goali Saedi Bocci, Ph.D., a mental health therapist based in Portland, Oregon. She adds that teletherapy is emerging as the "new frontier in mental health counseling. It's amazing how it's caught on: It's private. It's convenient. It's comfortable for both the therapist and client. And it eliminates the stress of traffic and time."
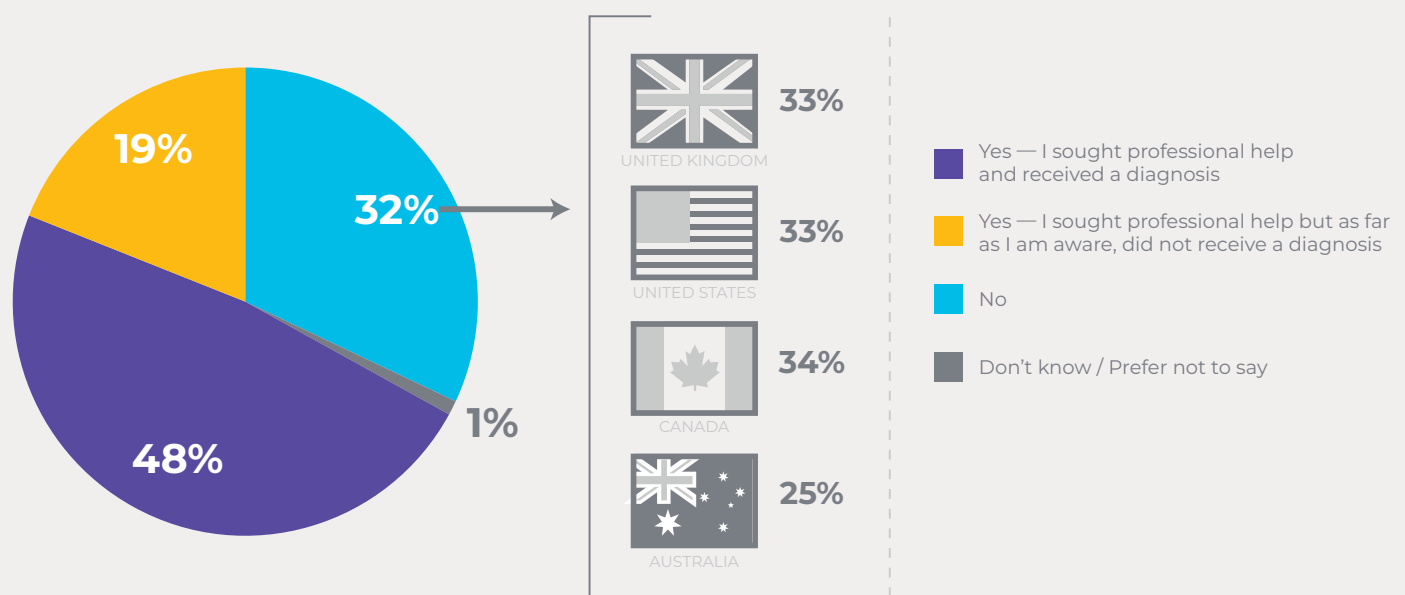
Key Insight: One in three respondents who experienced a mental health challenge did not seek help.

While two-thirds of those in the study did seek mental health assistance when they suffered a mental health issue, **32% did not.** Equally concerning, 26% of those who have experienced *multiple* mental health problems say they did not seek help.

The reason many individuals don't seek mental health assistance rests with their perspectives on how it may impact their work. On average, respondents don't believe their employers have a responsibility to deal with mental health. The study shows that 82% of respondents experiencing a mental health issue did not confide in HR or a manager at work. In addition, 28% of respondents feel their employers don't take mental health seriously.

These statistics are troubling. First, what is the cause for the increased demand for mental health services in the workplace? In addition, what keeps nearly one-third of the workforce population from getting the help they need when they are faced with a mental health problem? And why should anyone with a mental health problem feel they should "go it alone" and not seek help either from a workplace resource or privately?

Respondents who have had one episode of poor mental health

19%

32%

48%

1%

33%
UNITED KINGDOM

33%
UNITED STATES

34%
CANADA

25%
AUSTRALIA

■ Yes — I sought professional help and received a diagnosis

■ Yes — I sought professional help but as far as I am aware, did not receive a diagnosis

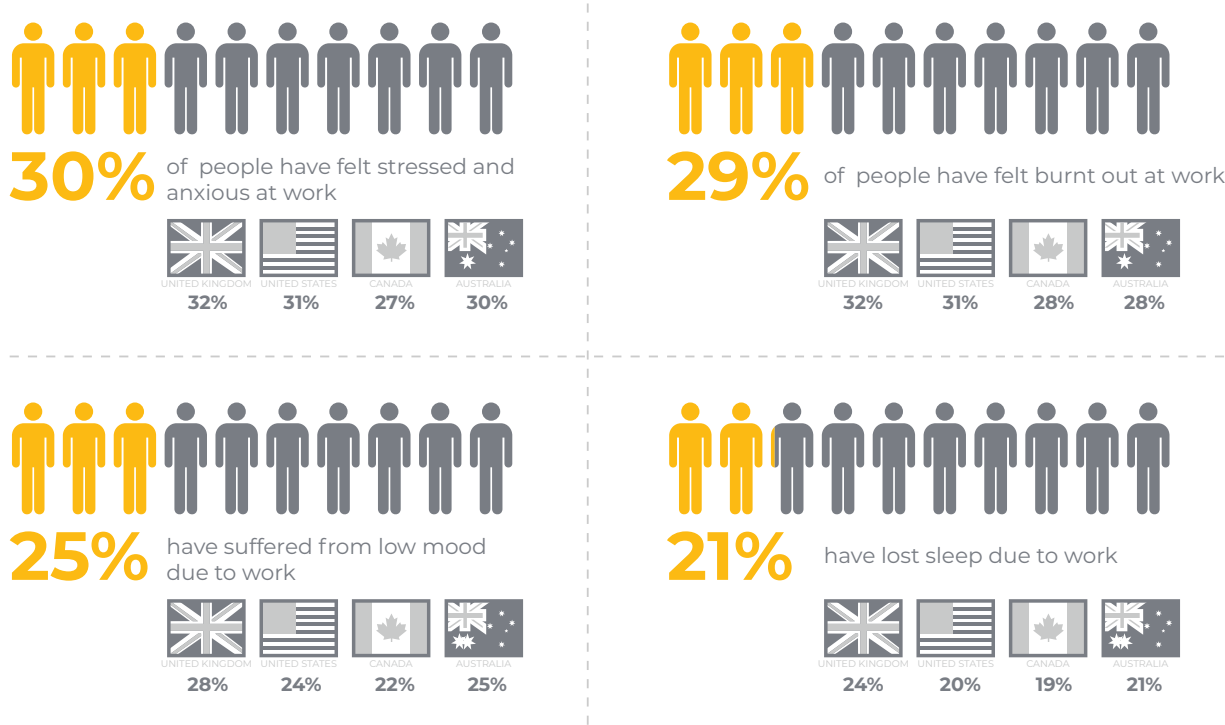■ No

■ Don't know / Prefer not to say

The key to resolving these questions may lie within the workplace itself.

The study points to a variety of reasons for an increased need in mental healthcare, from stress and burnout to relationship issues, grief and addiction. Individuals are facing a variety of complex work-life issues that, ultimately, demand some form of mental healthcare if they expect to remain productive at work and in life.

The Connection Between Work and Mental Health

30% of people have felt stressed and anxious at work

UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	CANADA	AUSTRALIA
32%	31%	27%	30%

29% of people have felt burnt out at work

UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	CANADA	AUSTRALIA
32%	31%	28%	28%

25% have suffered from low mood due to work

UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	CANADA	AUSTRALIA
28%	24%	22%	25%

21% have lost sleep due to work

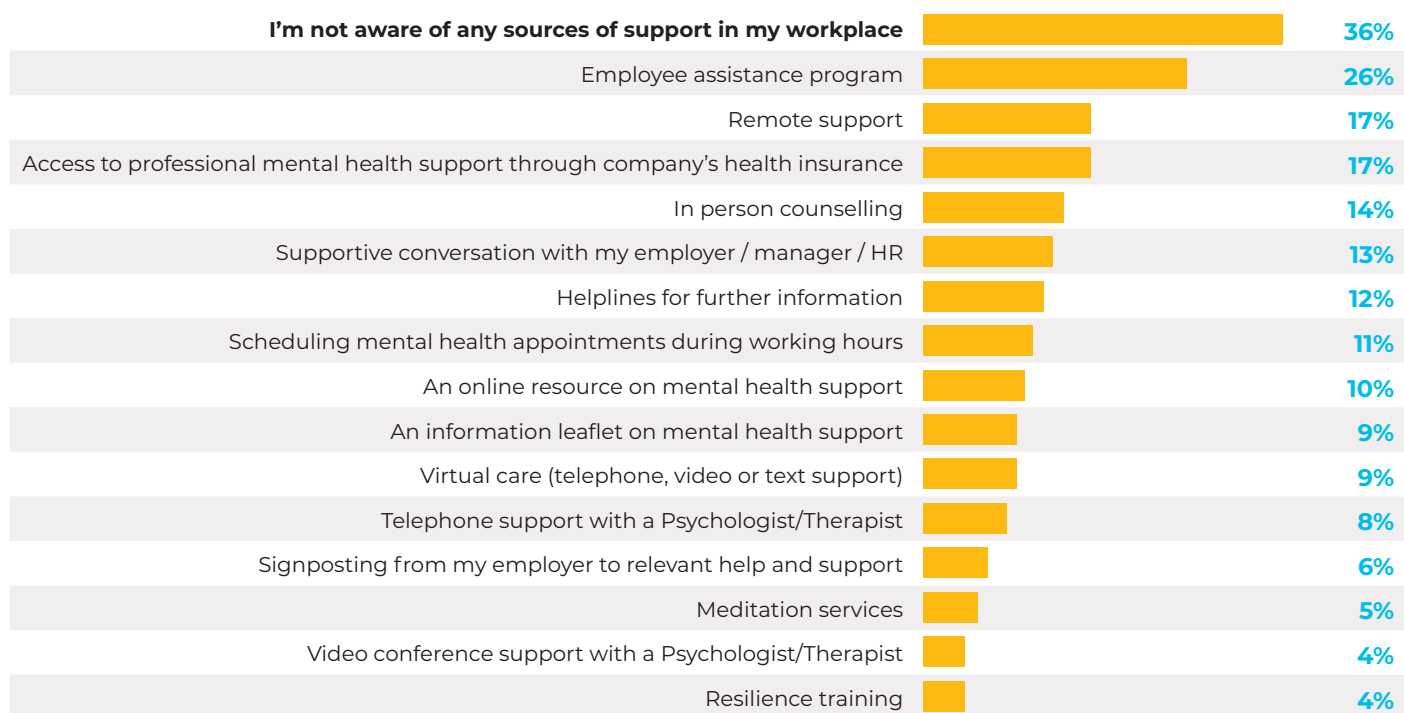| UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	CANADA	AUSTRALIA
24%	20%	19%	21%

More worrisome, however, is the lack of awareness employees have when it comes to resources that might be available to them in the workplace. This study revealed that in the United States 36% of respondents were unaware of the resources available to assist them when they have a mental health problem. While 26% said they were aware of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) that many organizations have adopted, fewer reported awareness of programs like remote support (17%), access to mental health professionals (17%) and in person counseling (14%), among other forms of assistance.

In the U.S., employees report low awareness of mental health support in the workplace

I'm not aware of any sources of support in my workplace	**36%**
Employee assistance program	**26%**
Remote support	**17%**
Access to professional mental health support through company's health insurance	**17%**
In person counselling	**14%**
Supportive conversation with my employer / manager / HR	**13%**
Helplines for further information	**12%**
Scheduling mental health appointments during working hours	**11%**
An online resource on mental health support	**10%**
An information leaflet on mental health support	**9%**
Virtual care (telephone, video or text support)	**9%**
Telephone support with a Psychologist/Therapist	**8%**
Signposting from my employer to relevant help and support	**6%**
Meditation services	**5%**
Video conference support with a Psychologist/Therapist	**4%**
Resilience training	**4%**

Employers need to be creative in how they communicate with employees about mental health to ensure everyone is familiar with available programs and resources. Proactive, open communication will help employees begin to feel confident that their employers take mental health – as well as physical health and wellbeing – seriously.

Key Insight: Stigma is preventing employees from seeking help at work.
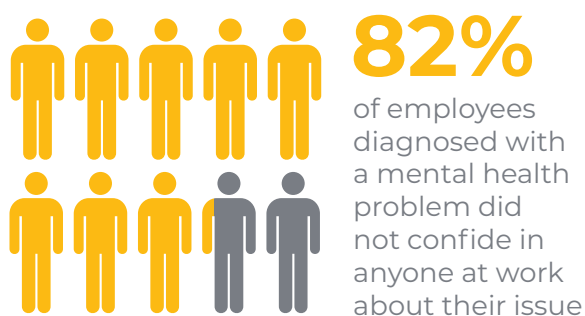
In this study, respondents from around the world all indicate that stigma plays a significant role in what they *don't* say about their mental health needs in the workplace.

The research shows that 82% of employees diagnosed with a mental health problem did not confide in anyone at work about their issue. And while some individuals may elect to confide in a co-worker, more than 27% of respondents said it's inappropriate to even talk about mental health issues in the workplace.

Respondents said they were embarrassed (21%) and worried that others' professional opinion of them would be tarnished (22%) if they shared their mental health problems in the workplace. In addition, 18% of respondents believed their capability at work would be questioned if they were forthcoming about their mental health struggles.

Perhaps most concerningly of all, however, is 55% of respondents said the most common reason for not telling someone at work about their mental health problem is fear of the information having a negative impact on their job. One in 10 respondents (10%) believe confiding in someone at work about their mental health challenge could result in losing their job.

82%
of employees diagnosed with a mental health problem did not confide in anyone at work about their issue

It's clear that the stigma of mental health clearly impacts how comfortable individuals are about discussing their mental health problems with colleagues and managers.

Reasons for not confiding in people at work

38%
were concerned about the impact it could have on their career

10%
believed that confiding in someone at work about their poor mental health could lead to them losing their job

Almost half of all employees (40%) said they believe stigma about poor mental health still exists in their workplace and 43% said they would be unlikely to confide in anyone at their workplace in the future if they were experiencing an episode of poor mental health.

The challenge for organizations (leaders as well as HR teams) is to create a work environment in which no stigma about health-related concerns exist, so employees are free to ask for and get the care they need when they need it.

When employers and leaders speak up about mental health challenges, they send a powerful message to employees that it's okay to get help. Research shows that authentic, open leadership helps to create better performance, engagement, employee retention, and overall well-being.

"Mental health is a boardroom issue for employers around the globe. Our research confirms, what we already suspected, that mental health stigma is firmly established in the workplace. Virtual care can be the great equaliser in mental health, providing that confidential access to the care employees need."

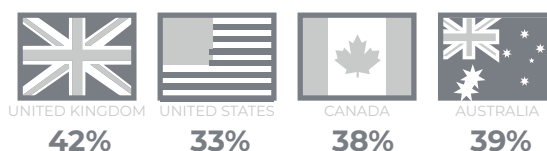**Jason Gorevic, Chief Executive Officer, Teladoc Health**

Key Insight: Employees call for leaders to take action and provide meaningful support.

When it comes to mental health in the workplace, nearly one-third of respondents in this study said they feel there is an epidemic that needs to be addressed. In recent years, many employers have adopted new resources and implemented new programs to help employees who need mental health support and yet employees welcome more.

As the following illustration shows, nearly one in four respondents feel their productivity would increase if they had access to mental health resources and felt an increased level of support from the organization where they work.

Employers know many factors impact productivity and absenteeism with healthcare and disability topping the list. In the U.S., it is estimated that $17-$44 billion is lost to depression each year[2], whereas $4 is returned to the economy for every $1 spent caring for people with mental health issues.[3] In the United Kingdom alone, 15 million working days are lost each year due to poor mental health[4] (with an annual estimated cost of £94 billion to the U.K. economy). In Canada, 57% of respondents said their employer has a responsibility to directly support employees with any mental health issue.

Mental health and productivity at work

38% of respondents believe they would be more productive at work if there was better mental health support

UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	CANADA	AUSTRALIA
42%	33%	38%	39%

Employees acknowledge that more mental health education in the workplace, alongside access to the right support to help them recover, would be a major step forward. Nearly half (43%) of all respondents say not enough is being done to raise awareness about mental health in their workplace. And more than half (57%) think more should be done in their workplace to improve mental health.

In the study, employees said they want more openness about mental health in their workplace, with almost half (45%) saying they would be more likely to seek mental health support when they need it if there were to be more open conversation in their workplaces on this topic.

Lastly, but equally important, the study shows that employees will become more comfortable when they see and hear their executives and leaders talking about mental health in the workplace itself. As this illustration shows, half of respondents believe leaders who openly discuss mental health in the workplace make them more comfortable with their own mental health.

The effectiveness of executive involvement to eliminate mental health stigma in the workplace has been proven in many companies.

Talking openly about mental health in the workplace

50% of respondents feel that executives and leaders in the workplace talking openly about their mental health encourages them to feel more comfortable about their own mental health

Key Insight: Access to the right information and personalized support is necessary to improve workplace mental health.

It comes as no surprise that when an employee faces a mental health problem, taking a break from work can often be the most effective solution. The study indicates that, on average, 33% of all respondents who had an episode of poor mental health were offered time off work when they confided with someone in the workplace about the circumstance.

Of those respondents who have experienced a poor mental health episode in the past, and received support, the most useful solutions were:

- Adequate time off work (80%)
- Adjustments to work hours and setting (79%)
- A temporary reduction in workload (77%)
- Being offered specific information about their own difficulties and needs (70%)

Employers should take note that employees say they find resources like meetings to discuss how things could be improved (64%) and other more general information – handouts and collateral materials (48%) – less helpful to them.

One service that employees did find helpful was the ability to access mental health assistance using some form of remote solution. As the illustration below indicates, nearly half of those who perceived mental health stigma in the workplace selected a remote form of access to information and support as a way to break through that stigma. This simply means that when employers provide a variety of resources and support, they will identify the tools that work for their needs. Having access to a remote form of support is an important tool to include in the toolbox in order to reduce the negative impact mental health problems have on the workplace itself.

Reducing mental health stigma in the workplace

46% of those perceiving mental health stigma in the workplace selected a remote form of access to information and support as a way of reducing stigma

UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	CANADA	AUSTRALIA
52%	**43%**	**46%**	**44%**

What can employers do to advance mental health resources and support?
Four recommendations.

The global mental health epidemic is real and stigma, coupled with the lack of access to mental health resources and support, is contributing to the crisis. What's more, this study highlights that younger people (18-25 year-olds) around the globe report greater mental health challenges than previous generations and they also expect more support from their employers.

Organizations that want to truly be on the leading edge – providing employees with mental healthcare resources and support – should adopt a vision that includes both creativity and ingenuity to meet this growing need. Executives and leaders can lead the way, promoting mental wellbeing in the workplace and taking steps to end stigma that clearly exists.

Here are four proactive steps employers can begin taking today:

1 Create thoughtful, company-wide health and wellbeing programs that include support for mental health. Develop and share a list of preferred providers and therapists who are familiar with the organization and the related issues that employees may face. Offer convenient, confidential access to mental healthcare services through local and virtual care providers. Make certain all employees are familiar with the mental health resources and support available to them in the workplace.

2 Teach leaders how to talk about mental health in the workplace. The first step to eradicating stigma is normalizing the mental health conversation. Foster a workplace that values open communication and reassures confidentiality. Thoughtful conversations and openness create a more empathetic environment for everyone. Successful mental health conversations leave employees feeling heard, understood, and hopeful that if they need it, there is help.

3 Educate employees about strategies for good mental wellness and how to address mental health issues that they may face. Frequent workplace education sessions held throughout the year, as well as regular communications, should address topics such as stress, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, grief and loss, and more. Ask your senior leaders to have a voice on the topic in town hall meetings and publish information on intranets, blogs, social platforms and company emails.

4 Empower all managers to have meaningful discussions about mental health challenges. When employees are ready to talk, managers need to be prepared to listen, respond in a supportive manner, and direct employees to the care they need. Teladoc Health has created a resource to help managers have these vital dialogues effectively.

Conclusion

While society Is raising the conversation about mental health, the data from this international study shows that when employees suffer from mental health problems – stress, workplace burnout, addiction, relationship issues, and more – they aren't talking about it (at least with colleagues and managers in the workplace). Stigma is the largest hurdle when attempting to get help for a mental health problem in the workplace. The belief is pervasive and persistent that revealing a mental health problem at work will backfire and employees are unwilling to risk being labelled as unreliable, incapable or passed up for career opportunities.

"In the workplace, the motto should be 'no health without mental health,'" said Dr. John Oldham, distinguished emeritus professor of psychiatry in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor College of Medicine, and chief of staff at the Menninger Clinic. "The importance of solid information about mental health should be stressed from the top, visibly endorsed by the CEO and all managers. What this study shows us is that employees are rightly recognizing the major influence that the workplace has on their mental health and are asking employers to do all they can to take action with more at-work resources and support."

References

[1] "Teletherapy is on the rise as employees try to cope with the 24/7 workday," by Sheryl Kraft, CNBC, Sept. 10, 2019, https://www.cnbc.com/2019/09/10/teletherapy-on-the-rise-as-employees-try-to-cope-with-247-workday.html

[2] Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/health-strategies/depression/evaluation-measures/index.html

[3] World Health Organization, https://www.who.int/mental_health/in_the_workplace/en/

[4] "Work-related stress and mental illness now accounts for over half of work absences," The Telegraph, Nov. 1, 2018, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/11/01/work-related-stress-mental-illness-now-accounts-half-work-absences

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