

Impact of COVID-19 on mental wellbeing

What your employees and their families are dealing with
and how you can help

May 2020

Introduction

A few months ago, most of us had never heard of the coronavirus (COVID-19). And now it's the single biggest factor shaping the way we go about our daily lives – and especially our working lives.

In light of this, we wanted to understand the impact COVID-19 is having on the mental wellbeing of people in the UK. We spoke to 2,455 UK residents (including 1,002 parents)¹ who told us about the specific challenges they're facing as they try to carry out regular life during the pandemic, including their jobs.

Our hope is that this report will give you more understanding of how the virus is affecting your workforce and the kind of support they need from you at this time. As their employer, there are a few key steps you can take to help support the mental wellbeing of your workers – and consequently, their morale, performance and output.

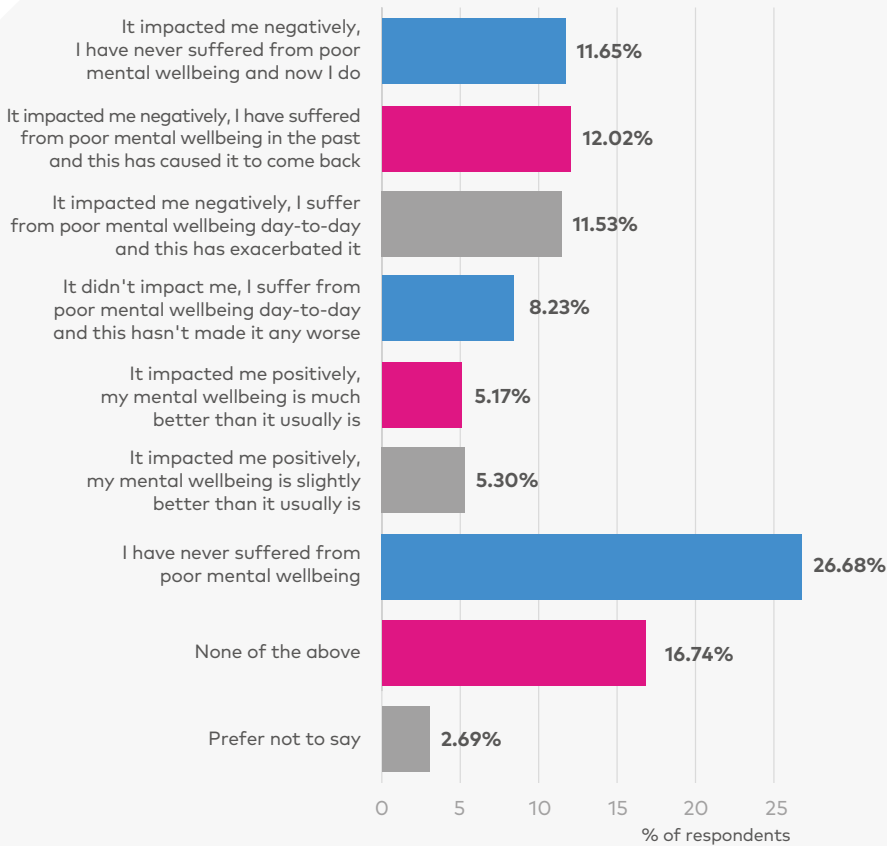


Research results

1. The impact on mental wellbeing

Over a third of respondents feel the pandemic has been damaging to their mental wellbeing

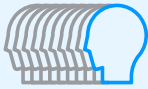
Which of the following best describes how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted your mental wellbeing, if at all? Please select best match



¹ The survey was carried out between 15 and 20 April 2020.

35.19% of people feel their mental wellbeing has been impacted negatively due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Comparatively, only 10.47% of people feel it has had a positive impact on their mental wellbeing.

The younger generations seem to be most heavily impacted with 46.74% of 16-24 year olds and 48.66% of 25-34 year olds saying their mental wellbeing has been negatively affected versus 18.18% of those over the age of 55.



Over 1 in 10 people with no prior mental wellbeing issues are being affected

Most worryingly, 11.65% of all respondents told us *'they have never previously suffered from poor mental wellbeing and now do'*.

To put this in perspective, **the pandemic is causing over 1 in 10 people to suffer from compromised mental wellbeing for the very first time.**

These people may be particularly vulnerable as they may not know how to get help if their stress or anxiety is prolonged, and without the right support could lead to long term health issues. Read on to find out how you could help to support your employees.

There are regional variations to these results too. Those living in Greater London seem to be suffering the most with over 1 in 5 respondents (21.47%) reporting poor mental wellbeing for the first time compared to just over 5% in Brighton, Sheffield and Newcastle.

The figure is also higher at 14.37% for those with children.

2. Work is a major source of stress for 1 in 5

Nearly 20% of respondents said that work is causing them 'the most' stress during these times, with:



11.12%

Worried about losing their job



8.31%

Stressed by their workload

Although not directly linked to work, 29.08% are worried about their finances too.

People living in Greater London are the most affected by work related stress with 14.42% worried about losing their job and 15.71% stressed by their workload.

More men are reporting work-related stress than women: 23.98% compared to 15.58%.

3. The impact of balancing work and childcare

More than half (58.31%) of parents, whose mental wellbeing has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, say balancing working from home and childcare was having an impact on their mental wellbeing.

Interestingly, two thirds of men reported this (66.67%) compared to around half of women (52.99%).



Of the parents who said their mental wellbeing had been impacted by balancing working from home with childcare, **a third (33.59%) are worried that they're not performing to their best professional capacity** whilst trying to home school.

And conversely, **33.98% are worried they're not able to be a good parent because of work** while a further 30.86% feel they cannot dedicate the time to home schooling whilst also working from home.



Worryingly, one in ten (10.55%) parents who felt their mental wellbeing has been impacted by balancing working from home and childcare, said their **employer isn't being understanding of the requirements of working with children at home.**

And men feel less supported by their employers than women. Almost double the amount of men responded with yes to the question: 'My employer isn't being understanding of the requirements of working with children at home' (14.04% vs. 7.75%).

4. Over a third of individuals want more employer support

37.80% of respondents said more support from their employer would help, in the form of:



22.04%

Knowing their job is safe



8.19%

Providing mental health or wellbeing support



7.58%

Being more understanding about the pressures of juggling childcare with working

How can you help?

Here are our recommendations for supporting the mental wellbeing of your employees.

Our research gives you an indication of the scope and scale of the problems your employees may be facing as a result of COVID-19. So how can you help them?



Here are some key steps you can take to support the mental wellbeing of your employees during and after this unprecedented time:

Offer assurances (where possible)

We know it's not an easy time for many businesses but if you're able to offer employees assurances about the security of their job, be sure to let them know. And, if you're unable to do this, regular communication and feedback on the value of their contribution will be particularly well received at this time.

Open communication

Whilst working remotely employees can easily begin to feel isolated, two-way communication is more important than ever. Creating a [culture of openness](#) can encourage employees to come forward with any concerns.

Ask line managers to commit to regular check-ins with individuals so they can acknowledge and address stresses and triggers before they become overwhelming. Managers will also better engage and motivate their teams by talking with them, rather than simply broadcasting to them. At Benenden Health, we achieve this balance via twice-weekly senior leadership team meetings, fortnightly two-way business updates with the senior team and team huddles, all conducted via Teams. As well as daily emails from our CEO and prompt engagement with any team members who are facing challenges whilst working remotely.

Heighten manager awareness of compromised mental wellbeing

When we work regularly with our colleagues, we often notice the subtle signs that stress, for example, can show like changes of behaviour, dress and workflow.

Yet unfortunately when we're all working from home, these subtle signs aren't often picked up, making some compromised mental

wellbeing symptoms invisible to other colleagues. Share this report with managers and ask them to regularly check-in with employees and really listen to their teams when they discuss how they're feeling. If employees are talking about feeling tired or struggling to concentrate – this could be a sign of stress or anxiety. Many of your employees may also be experiencing new thoughts and feelings which are causing them stress, as a result of the significant impact COVID-19 is having on their normal daily routine.

Provide access to mental wellbeing support

Offering a safe and confidential way for employees to speak to a professional can help prevent the immediate negative impacts on mental wellbeing turning into more serious long-term issues. [Benenden Healthcare for Business](#) includes access to 24/7 GP and Mental Health helplines. At Benenden Health, our employees can also utilise these services and they are able to speak to qualified counsellors 24/7 who can support with a variety of concerns. All employees also have access to mental health first aid, provided by fellow trained colleagues.

Check out our [mental wellbeing report](#) for an in-depth look into mental wellbeing in the workplace and for more ways employers can support their employees.

Clear signposting

Make sure your team are aware of who they can turn to and the employee wellbeing services available to them. Whether you've got a mental wellbeing first aider or specific employee wellbeing services, now is a great time to remind people, and to keep reminding people, so the services they can access remain front of mind should they need them.

Be mindful of different employee's needs

This research indicates parents, younger groups and those based in Greater London maybe the most vulnerable at this time. Being mindful of each team member's different needs will be vital to ensure

that the workforce's overall morale, motivation and productivity remains high. Ensure managers are skilled up and supported to enable them to effectively lead teams working in different circumstances.

For example, find out which employees are parents, especially those who are single parents or have a partner who also works as well as those who have elderly caring responsibilities, and ask managers to reach out to them and find out how they're coping and if there's any additional flexibility that would help them deal with their combined roles.

Offer flexibility where possible

It can be a huge benefit to employees to have some flexibility to work their hours around parental commitments. It can reduce the likelihood of additional stresses taking hold, without necessarily inconveniencing business operations. Ultimately, your team will appreciate your efforts to respond to their needs and reflect this back with loyalty and productivity.

Work-life balance

[Finding a good work-life balance](#) is vitally important and is needed to support all areas of our life. When working remotely, it's all too easy for these lines to become blurred, with employees often unable to switch off mentally and physically.

In the current climate, employees may feel more pressure to work harder than ever before. To prioritise working remotely at the expense of your quality of life is very harmful for both employees and businesses. Overworked employees may become withdrawn, tired and are at a greater risk of experiencing burnout. By encouraging your team to "switch off" at the end of the day, you can alleviate stress by removing any perceived expectation from everyone's shoulders. Maintaining a constant, open dialogue about current workloads will allow for a greater distinction between home and work life. In doing so, you'll provide your team with the space to look after their physical and mental wellbeing.

Looking to the future

How to build a healthy workforce
through the pandemic and beyond



The reality is that the pandemic has further heightened awareness on the importance of mental wellbeing and the key role of employers to support the wellbeing of their employees.

The 11.65% of respondents who selected: 'I have never suffered from poor mental wellbeing (prior to the pandemic) and now I do' suggests that when we come out of this, more people may suffer with compromised mental wellbeing than they did before. And this may only be compounded by the struggles of business and economic recovery.

So we urge you not only think about how you support your employees right now, but consider an ongoing plan to support employee mental and physical wellbeing. It'll result in happier employees and inspire great loyalty, productivity and motivation.

It's important to take the learnings from the wellbeing of the workforce during this time to identify how effective your health and wellbeing strategy is, if you have one or are looking to create one, and help adapt and shape the direction and focus of your offering moving forward.

It's vital, at this uncertain time, that employees know their business is responding rapidly to their changing health and wellbeing needs, offering them support, advice and guidance in what is an unknown work environment for many people, with increasing demands and pressures on stress levels, mental wellbeing, finances and relationships.

As a business, we immediately assessed our existing health and wellbeing plan to establish what was of value and what wasn't. Through communication with our employees it was clear that health anxiety was an increasing concern for our people. We have adapted our strategy to consider the impact on working relationships, and physical health, as the whole workforce began working from home.

We have since established a range of activities to support staff, including guidance on sleep hygiene, home working hacks, top tips on balancing home schooling and working, desk stretching and virtual bootcamps. But one size doesn't fit all, and businesses should ensure their wellbeing policy considers the different situations of their employees, to ensure culture and morale stays high at what is a difficult time for everyone.

If you need guidance in providing the right framework read our [health and wellbeing strategy guide](#) for a step-by-step process for developing your own strategy.

Good luck, we wish you all the best in keeping your employees healthy and happy whilst your business survives and thrives beyond the pandemic.

Take a look at our [COVID-19 hub](#) which includes a wealth of information to support you as an employer, as well as providing tips on how your employees can stay healthy during the pandemic. There's also information on how to support employees who have recently returned to work having suffered from COVID-19, or have recently suffered a bereavement.

Who is Benenden Health?

Benenden Health is a mutual, not-for-profit healthcare provider run for the benefit of over 800,000 members.

We've been focused on helping to keep employees healthy since 1905, when we were founded to provide treatment for postal workers suffering from tuberculosis. Since then we've been at the forefront of keeping employees fit and healthy at an affordable rate.

Benenden Health can help to support employees and keep them healthy with a range of products including private healthcare, health cash plans and health assessments. All our business products are designed with simplicity in mind so they're easy to take out and straightforward to manage. We believe healthcare for employees is part of a culture of wellbeing, not just a tick in the box, which is why all companies we work with are provided with a dedicated account manager to provide on-going support to make sure you and your employees are getting the most from our services.

These are just some of the reasons why our members voted us Winner of Moneywise

Most Trusted Health Insurance Provider

via Your Employer Award.



**MOST
TRUSTED**
HEALTH INSURANCE
PROVIDER
VIA EMPLOYER
**Benenden
Health**

Speak to our friendly team today to find out more about how we could help you to support your employees health and wellbeing.



0808 291 4556*



salessupport@benenden.co.uk



www.benenden.co.uk/cv19report

* Lines are open 9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday (except bank holidays). Please note that your call may be recorded for our mutual security and also for training and quality purposes.

Benenden Health is a trading name of The Benenden Healthcare Society Limited. Healthcare for Business is offered by The Benenden Healthcare Society Limited, which is an incorporated Friendly Society, registered under the Friendly Societies Act 1992, registered number 480F. The Society's contractual business (the provision of tuberculosis benefit) is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority, (Financial Services Register number 205351). Verify our registration at register.fca.org.uk. The remainder of the Society's business is undertaken on a discretionary basis. Registered Office: Holgate Park Drive, York, YO26 4GG.

At Benenden Health, we look after your details carefully and we adhere to the requirements of the UK Data Protection Act 2018. We are keen to keep you informed about how we use your information and have a 'Privacy Notice' which makes clear, in one place, what these uses are. The Privacy Notice also provides you with information about your rights. Our Privacy Notice is available at www.benenden.co.uk/privacy-policy or can be requested by calling us. Changes to the Privacy Notice are made occasionally, so please revisit our website and read it through again from time to time.