

2021

# EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AT THE WORKPLACE

**miSCO**



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# INTRODUCTION



Mental health has been an important subject for quite a while, but awareness of mental health issues has increased in the past year, due to the impact of the coronavirus. Employers are attaching more importance to the matter but often ask what is truly meant by “good mental health” or by “good mental well-being” at the workplace?

As explained by the World Health Organisation, “Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”

Studies have consistently shown that employee well-being predicts job attitudes and performance, and it also has its implications on productivity and work relationships. Employees who have a positive perception of the status of their well-being, are more likely to trust their superiors and follow company rules. Such behaviour will lead to high-performing organisations which are productive and innovative.

In 2020, MISCO studied the subject of employee well-being at work before the onset of the coronavirus, and in 2021, we conducted the second wave of this survey to allow for comparisons. Through this report, we seek to provide employers with an understanding of the employees’ perspective in relation to their well-being at work, thereby enabling them to take the appropriate initiatives to strengthen their engagement at work.

## METHODOLOGY



This survey was conducted by MISCO Consulting Limited among employed people. Fieldwork was conducted in the first quarter of this year amongst 353 respondents.

Data was weighted according to age and gender.

Weighting is used to bring results more in line with what is known about a population. The weighting was done according to the Demographic Review of 2018.

**The age groups used were:**

**16 – 24 years**

**25 – 34 years**

**35 – 44 years**

**45 – 54 years**

**55 years and over**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE SALIENT RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The aspects covered in the survey are:

- Mental well-being at work
- Supporting mental well-being at work

01

63% experienced mental health issues such as stress and anxiety related to work.

02

When respondents were asked how they rate their mental wellness on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 meant very poor and 4 meant very good, 69% rated it positively and 31% rated it negatively. The result was similar to that obtained in 2020.

03

53% of all respondents stated that they work more than 40 hours a week.

04

Stress levels remained very much at the same level as last year, with 45% describing it as poor or very poor.

05

39% stated that they experienced excessive fear, worry or anxiety.

06

47% of respondents answered that their job is often stressful.

07

The research showed that pressure (44%), heavy workload (34%) and tight deadlines (34%) are often experienced at work.

## THE SALIENT RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

08

42% of respondents believe that experiencing trouble in concentrating is one of the effects, poor mental wellness has on someone's performance at work.

09

Whilst in 2020, 50% agreed that their employer takes the mental health and well-being of their employees seriously, this increased slightly to 53% in 2021.

10

Whilst in 2020 51% of respondents stated that they do not know who they would turn to in the office if they were suffering with mental health issues, this increased to 53% in 2021.

11

33% of respondents would like their employer to introduce healthy lifestyle initiatives.

12

A third of businesses still do not invest in mental well-being initiatives.

13

68% of respondents have never disclosed unmanageable stress or mental health problems to current employer or manager.

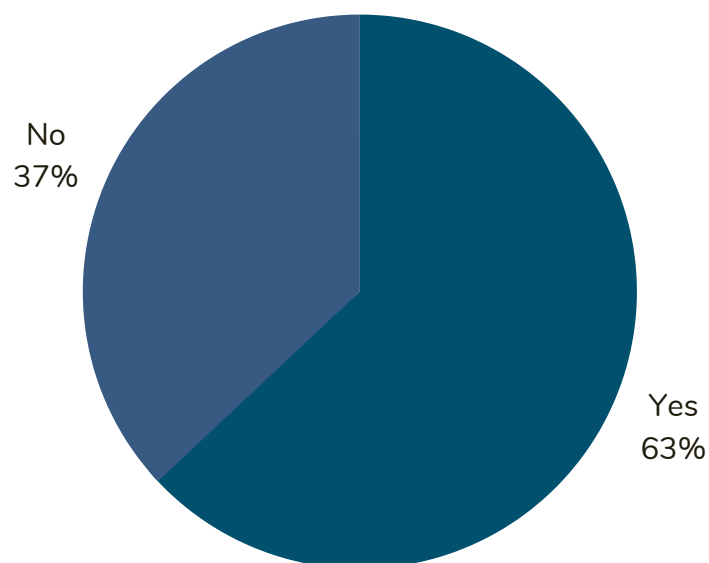
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85% of respondents would attend a workshop on the subject of achieving a positive work-life balance.

## MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

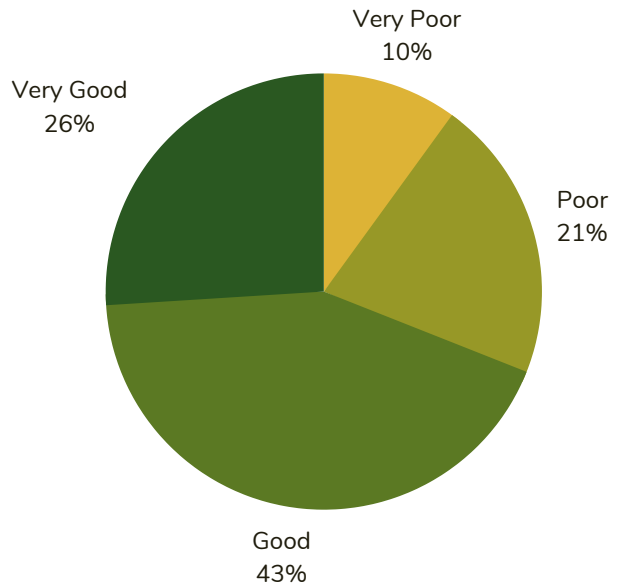
The research study shows that 63% of respondents have experienced mental health issues such as stress and anxiety related to work, opposed to 67% in 2020. Those respondents who have experienced mental health issues in the past, were also asked if they have experienced mental health issues at work in the last 12 months, and 62% confirmed that they did, as opposed to 70% in 2020. A reduction in the incidence of mental health issues has therefore been noted since last year. This could be a result of employers demonstrating a greater awareness of such issues to their employees or the result of specific initiatives taken by employers such as remote working.

Have you ever experienced mental health problems related to work? (feeling anxious and stressed)



# MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

When respondents were asked how they rate their mental wellness on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 meant very poor and 4 meant very good, 69% rated it positively and 31% rated it negatively. The result was very similar to that of 2020.



How would you describe your current mental wellness?

The research is also indicating that even though employees experience stress and anxiety, over 50% of respondents do not dedicate time to unwind from work, again similar to the result obtained last year. This is likely to be due to the fact that respondents do not see the need for it, maybe hoping that the issue would resolve itself on its own. Only 5% of respondents said that they had asked for vacation leave and such leave was refused.

This might also be reflected in the working hours which respondents stated that they work. 53% of all respondents stated that they work more than 40 hours a week. This shows a 3% increase from 2020. This could also have been brought about with the changes that needed to be implemented due to the pandemic.



## MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

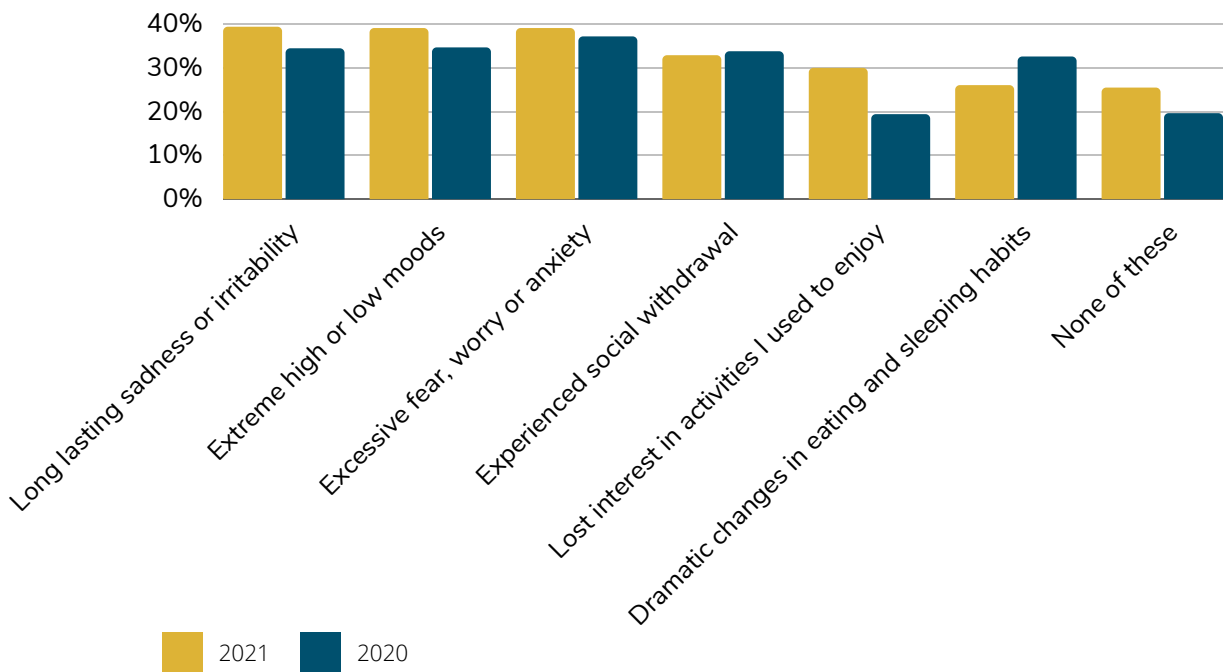
When respondents were asked about how they feel at work, 81% claimed that their energy levels are good to very good, whilst 19% said that they are poor to very poor. Another positive factor is that 80% of the employees shared that their decisiveness level is good to very good and 79% said that their mental concentration is good to very good. Stress levels remained very much at the levels of 2020. In 2020, 46% claimed that their stress level is poor to very poor, whilst in 2021, this resulted in 45%. In addition to this, 34% stated that their sense of optimism level is poor to very poor which is at the same level as the percentage featured last year.

	2021		2020	
	Very Poor - Poor	Good - Very Good	Very Poor - Poor	Good - Very Good
Energy Levels	19%	81%	22%	78%
Mood	24%	76%	28%	72%
Concentration	21%	79%	23%	77%
Stress Levels	45%	55%	46%	54%
Decisiveness	21%	79%	23%	74%
Confidence	16%	84%	21%	79%
Purposefulness	30%	70%	31%	69%
Sense of belonging	36%	64%	34%	66%
Optimism	34%	66%	37%	63%

How would you describe the following when you are at work?

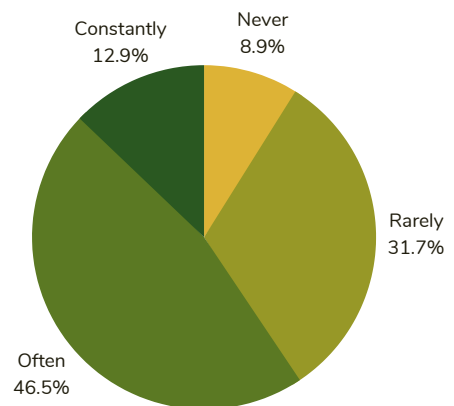
# MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

An interesting finding was that when we asked respondents how they felt in the last 12 months, 39% said that they experienced excessive fear, worry or anxiety, 39% experienced extreme high or low moods, 39% lost interest in activities they used to enjoy and 33% experienced long lasting sadness or irritability. The graph below shows a comparison with 2020 with regard to such feelings. The chart clearly shows the increase in feeling sad, which reflected in dramatic changes in eating and sleeping habits.



Thinking about the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following?

Respondents were asked how often they find their job stressful and 13% replied that their job is constantly stressful whilst 47% of respondents answered that their job is often stressful. 32% stated that they rarely find their job stressful and 9% stated that they never find it stressful.



How often do you find your job stressful?

# MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

Respondents were also asked what causes them to feel stressed, and 17% said that a heavy workload was the main reason for this, followed by lack of support (13%), tight deadlines (11%), and job insecurity (9%).

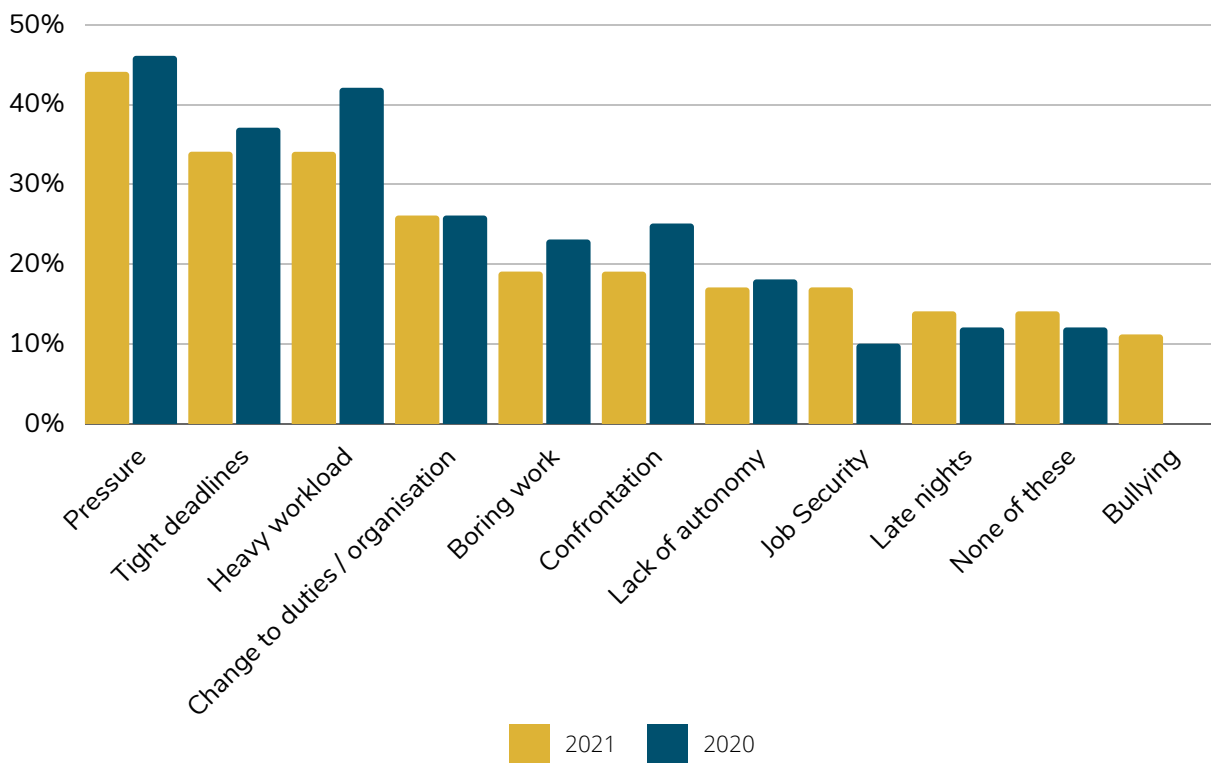
The results indicate that the increase in remote working, has not had much of an impact on those claiming to work long hours, but has contributed to less conflict among work colleagues. The sense of isolation as a result of remote working may be seen by the fact that 13% mentioned lack of support as a main cause of stress, compared to 10% in 2020. Bullying came up as an issue this year. This does not mean that bullying did not exist in 2020. It means rather that respondents did not attach a great deal of importance to it.

	2021	2020
Heavy workload	17%	20%
Lack of support	13%	10%
Tight deadlines	11%	10%
Job insecurity	9%	4%
Long hours	8%	7%
Low morale within the workplace	7%	9%
Regulations and procedures	7%	4%
Workplace environment	5%	8%
Customer/ Client satisfaction levels	5%	5%
Type of work	5%	7%
Issues with colleagues	3%	8%
Bullying	2%	-
Other	9%	8%

What causes you to feel stressed at work most?

# MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

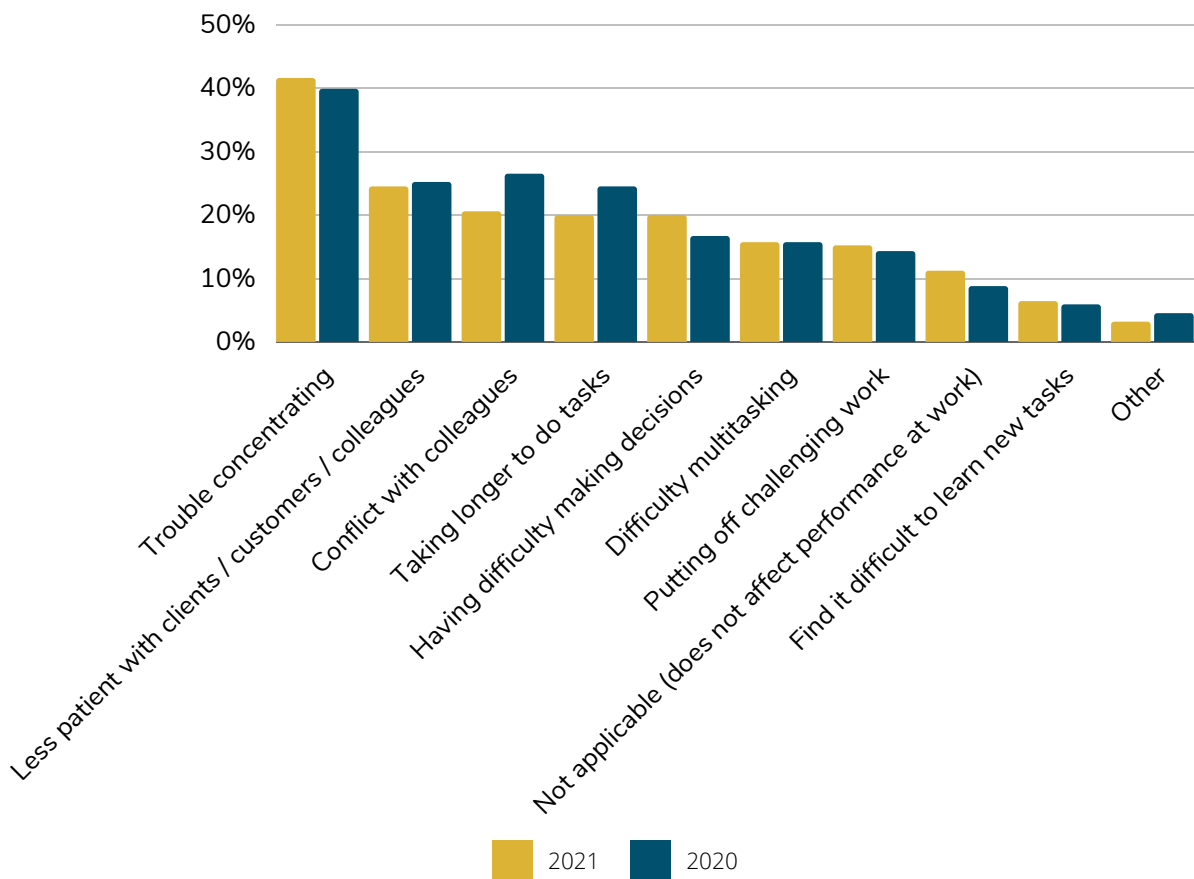
The research showed that pressure (44%), heavy workload (34%) and tight deadlines (34%) are often experienced at work. We have noted a slight drop in numbers when compared to 2020. The chart below portrays the difference between 2020 and 2021.



Do you experience any of the following on your job?

# MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

Poor mental wellness affects employees' output and therefore their productivity. MISCO therefore sought to understand what respondents think about poor mental wellness and its effect on someone's performance at work. Experiencing difficulty in concentrating (42%), being less patient with clients, customers, and colleagues (24%), and conflict with colleagues (21%) were the top three factors picked by respondents.



Which two of the following do you think that poor mental wellness in the workplace affects performance?

## MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

2021 has brought forward a great deal of changes to our working style. What used to make employees anxious or nervous might have changed due to the coronavirus. MISCO wished to understand whether employers implemented any initiatives to improve the mental well-being of their employees at work. Are employers micromanaging their employees? Or on the contrary, are they finding it difficult to communicate with their employees causing isolation and a loss of a sense of belonging?

MISCO studied again how employers are perceived by their employees in dealing with the mental health and wellness of their employees. It has been noted that respondents still feel that it is the employer's role to do something about the mental well-being of the employees. Whilst in 2020, 50% agreed that their employer takes the mental health and wellbeing of their employees seriously, this increased to 53% in 2021. Also, in 2020 41%, agreed that their organisation encourages employees to talk openly about mental health problems and this increased to 47% in 2021.

Even though we are noting these developments, employees still do not feel comfortable speaking openly about their well-being. Whilst in 2020, 51% of respondents stated that they do not know who they would turn to in the office if they were suffering with mental health issues, this increased slightly to 53% in 2021. It is interesting to note that 75% of the respondents agree that their colleagues would be supportive if they were struggling with mental health.

## MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

	2021		2020	
	Strongly Agree - Agree	Strongly Disagree - Disagree	Strongly Agree - Agree	Strongly Disagree - Disagree
Employers have a role to play in looking after the mental wellbeing of their employees	89%	11%	92%	8%
My colleagues would be supportive if I was struggling with my mental health/ well being	75%	25%	75%	25%
I wouldn't know how to approach the topic of my mental health / wellbeing if I was struggling at work	55%	45%	56%	44%
My employer takes the mental health and wellbeing of their employees seriously	53%	47%	50%	50%
I do not know who I would turn to in the office if I was suffering with mental health issues	53%	47%	51%	49%
I feel my organization encourages employees to talk openly about mental health problems	47%	53%	41%	59%
My employer has introduced policies/programs/processes to look after employee mental well being	44%	56%	41%	59%

## SUPPORTING MENTAL WELLNESS

Supporting mental wellness in 2021 has been more challenging than in previous years. We are experiencing people working remotely, home schooling whilst working from home, employees being worried to work from the office because of health issues are all possible reasons for this. Employees have reacted differently to these new realities. Everyone had to find a way of working whilst keeping up a positive approach and remain productive.

Respondents were asked to choose two out of a list of initiatives that could be introduced by employers in order to improve the health and well-being of their employees. Our research shows that 33% of respondents would like their employer to introduce healthy lifestyle initiatives related to, among either things, physical activity and eating. whilst another 32% of respondents would like their employer to introduce work-life balance initiatives such as flexible hours. Other initiatives which were chosen by respondents were stress reduction (30%), training for line managers in managing and supporting people with mental health problems (22%), and employee assistance programme or therapy (17%) which is an outsourced service a company can opt for.



## SUPPORTING MENTAL WELLNESS

	2021	2020
Healthy lifestyle initiatives (gym, food, lifestyle etc)	33%	34%
Work life balance initiative - Flexible hours	32%	35%
Stress Reduction	30%	-
Training for line managers in managing and supporting people with mental health problems	22%	26%
Employee assistance program/ Therapy	17%	21%
Open communication culture	15%	22%
Mental health first aider	11%	15%
Phased return to work after long absence	9%	6%
None of these	7%	3%
Other	3%	4.6%
Virtual meet ups	2%	-

Which two of the following would you like to see your workplace introduce in order to improve the health and wellbeing of their employees?

## SUPPORTING MENTAL WELLNESS

Although many organisations look at productivity as a valid reason to invest in well-being measures, a third of businesses still do not invest in mental well-being initiatives. Also, the study reveals low take up of certain well-being initiatives, with work life balance initiatives being the top initiative at 46%.

	2021	2020
Work life balance initiative - Flexible hours	46%	42%
None of these	32%	31%
Open communication culture	27%	22%
Healthy lifestyle initiatives (gym, food, lifestyle etc)	19%	18%
Employee assistance program/ Therapy	17%	21%
Virtual meet ups	17%	-
Empowerment	14%	-
Training for line managers in managing and supporting people with mental health problems	13%	12%
Mental health first aider	8%	6%
Stress Reduction initiatives	7%	-
Phased return to work after long absence	3%	4%

Does your workplace provide any of the following in order to improve the mental wellbeing of the employees?

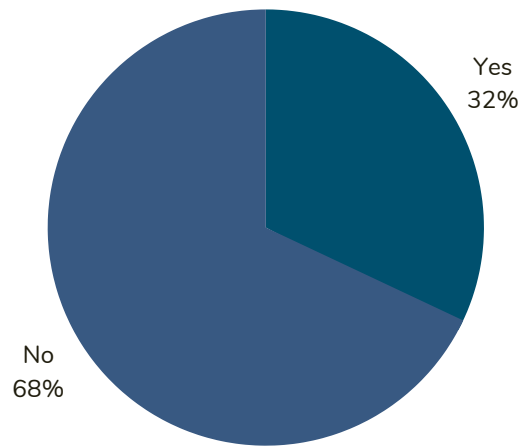
## SUPPORTING MENTAL WELLNESS

The study revealed that half of the respondents do not feel confident to disclose unmanageable stress or mental health problems to their current employer or manager. Moreover, 68% stated that they never disclosed such problems to their current employer or manager. Disclosing stress can be very helpful as it will avoid unpleasant situations taking place such as burnout, sick leave, less concentration, and lower productivity.

The research found out that 66% of those respondents who disclosed stress or mental health problems, did not experience any adverse treatment for divulging their state of mind. Of those who have not brought up this issue with their manager, 31% stated that they did not do so because the need did not come up. 30% stated that they do not feel comfortable bringing up such issues and 20% feel that their mental well-being has not affected their work. These numbers are showing that employees might lack knowledge on how to deal with mental health issues.

Choosing the right initiative to help improve the well-being of employees at work might be tricky and many a times is not tackled due to the sensitive nature of the subject. As such it is strongly recommended that employers conduct an objective Employee Wellbeing Assessment to understand the wellbeing of their employees. Such an assessment would ask employees about their mental health and obtain a snapshot of the company employees' wellbeing at work and initiatives that may be welcomed. This MISCO study has indicated that 85% of respondents would attend a workshop on how they could achieve a positive work-life balance if this was offered at work, and 85% would also be willing to take part in employee team building activities.

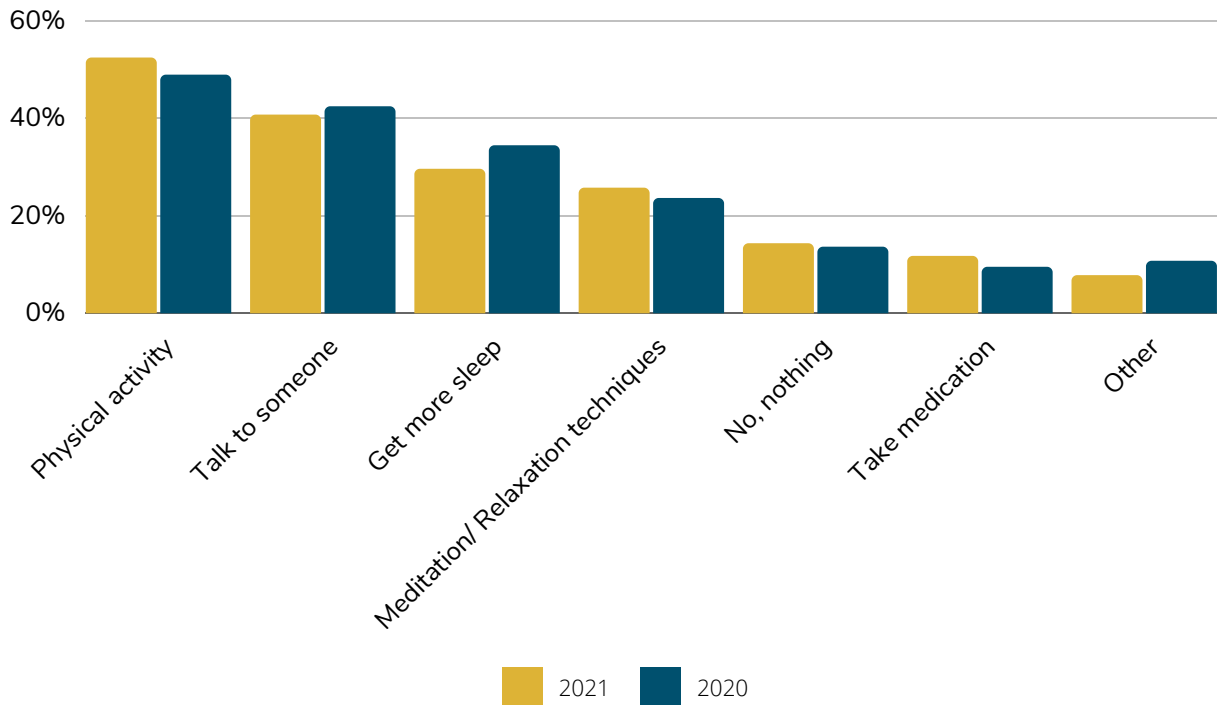
Stress or anger management sessions (83%), leadership development programmes (81%), workshop on conflict management (79%), and workshops or talks on Mental health awareness (78%) were also mentioned.



Would you feel confident disclosing unmanageable stress or mental health problems to your current employer or manager?

## SUPPORTING MENTAL WELLNESS

Another interesting fact is that the number of respondents who do physical activity to reduce stress increased from 49% in 2020 to 52% in 2021. 41% stated that they prefer to talk to someone, 30% get more sleep and 26% utilise meditation/relaxation methods which also saw an increase from 2020. These stress-reducing methods are positive, as this shows that there is a willingness among employees to act on the stress which they are experiencing.



### Do you do anything to reduce stress?

To summarise, the MISCO research shows that it is evident that the incidence of mental health issues at the workplace is greater than thought to be the case. On the other hand, several employers do implement certain initiatives in place to address this topic. The 2021 research indicates that employers are increasingly giving this subject more attention and importance. It is striking however, that although employees are finding the necessary help, they are still not comfortable sharing their issues. It is pertinent for employers to understand what is causing these boundary walls in communication. The coronavirus has certainly not helped in this scenario.

If you have any questions about 'Employee Wellbeing Assessment' or require any assistance please feel free to contact us on [advisory@miscomalta.com](mailto:advisory@miscomalta.com) or 22054000.

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