

# Mental Health at Work Report 2016

National Employee Mental Wellbeing  
Survey Findings 2016

**Workplace mental health is a collective responsibility.** *3 in 4 employees have experienced symptoms of poor mental health. A pervasive culture of silence.*

**We all have mental health.** Elevate mental health on a parity with physical health.

**Duty of care to mental and physical health.** *A leadership disconnect.* Line

managers see employee wellbeing as their responsibility. **A disconnect between good**

**will and capability.** *Line managers need training.* **Reasonable adjustments.** Work can

support recovery. ***Talk, train and take action.***

**It is time for a new partnership in mental health between employers and employees.**

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# Contents

Foreword from Peter Simpson	01
Foreword from Louise Aston	02
Foreword from Professor Dame Carol Black	03
Executive summary	04
<b>1. We all have mental health</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>2. Disconnect: the aspiration and the reality</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3. The pervasive culture of silence</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4. The role of line managers</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5. Responding to employees</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Spotlight: Gender</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Spotlight: Age</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Spotlight: Clinically diagnosed mental health conditions</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Case studies</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Calls to action and recommendations</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Methodology and appendix</b>	<b>44</b>

“ Considering the amount of time people spend in work, achieving a stronger focus on employee mental health must be an absolute priority. Health and safety at work has overwhelmingly focused on physical health in the past, but we should be looking to big employers and senior business people to lead the way in adopting a more enlightened approach to staff wellbeing.

Initiatives such as Time to Change have made a huge difference by encouraging employers to take action to promote good mental health in the workplace and to challenge stigma and discrimination. I've seen first-hand the benefits this can bring, and succeeded in persuading each government department to sign up to become Time to Change employers when I was a minister.

It makes total sense from an economic as well as a moral perspective. The evidence is clear: employers will reap the benefits of reduced staff sickness absence and ultimately a healthier, happier and more productive workforce. It is in the interest of all employers – from the public, private and non-profit sectors – to start taking employee mental wellbeing more seriously. ”

*Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP*

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# Foreword

by Peter Simpson



**This is a landmark survey which gives us an extraordinary opportunity: by listening to the voices of employees and managers, employers are able to fundamentally change the way that businesses approach mental wellbeing in the workplace.**

There is not only a moral urgency for acting on mental health but there is also a clear business case for doing so. As the Chief Executive of a major employer, I understand that we must act now to address mental health as actively and effectively as we do physical health. This will lead to improved lives for millions more people, as well as more productive, competitive and progressive businesses for the long term.

The significant role of line managers and the support they need to do their job well is expressed in clear terms in this survey. So too is the need for clear and decisive leadership to create organisational cultures that drive positive change. It is great to see so many of the priorities that Business in the Community has set backed up by robust evidence through this survey.

These findings are just the beginning. This is a three-year process, with the same questions being asked of employees again over the next two years. Each year we can see where we are collectively making a difference and what is having an impact, but we can

also identify problems that need to be resolved. The longevity of the study is therefore an important signal in itself, showing how the businesses and organisations that have collaborated to make this survey and report possible are committed to working together over the long-term to ensure we collectively improve employee mental wellbeing.

There are already many inspiring steps being taken by businesses to address workplace mental health and we are really excited to see what other innovations and commitments emerge as a result of this pioneering survey. Many businesses talk about their people being their greatest asset – now is the time to prove it.

## **Peter Simpson**

CEO, Anglian Water Group  
Chair, Business in the Community  
Wellbeing Leadership Team

# Foreword

by Louise Aston

**BUSINESS  
IN THE  
COMMUNITY**



**If society is to be judged by the way in which it cares for the most vulnerable then business must be measured by the support it gives to employees in their hour of need. When it comes to health, employers have a duty of care concerning mental, as well as physical, ill health.**

Alarming, our comprehensive survey of workplace mental health suggests that many companies are failing employees who suffer from poor mental health. We have the voices of nearly 20,000 people currently in employment in the UK, gathered through a public open survey and a YouGov panel survey.

It is clear that thousands of employees are suffering in silence, feeling unable to share their experiences at work. When they do reach out for support, many are met with an inadequate response. We must end this injustice.

This is why Business in the Community has formed an unprecedented alliance with our partners the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, The Institute of Leadership and Management, Maudsley Learning at Work, Mental Health First Aid England, Mind and The Work Foundation, to transform workplace mental health. Working together we will be a powerful force for change that will improve the lives of millions of employees and their families.

We hope this report will represent a significant milestone in the national understanding of mental health in the workplace. It has been made possible thanks to the generous support of our sponsors Anglian Water Group, National Grid, P&G and

Business in the Community's Leadership Team on wellbeing whose collaborative efforts have done so much to change perceptions of workplace mental health. We are also grateful for the support of many organisations and businesses that have supported this survey, including Public Health England, What Works Centre for Wellbeing, the TUC and some of Britain's biggest employers.

While some of our findings give cause for concern, they should be read alongside elements of progress and the inspiring stories from these progressive businesses, large and small and across all sectors, which are tackling mental health directly. It is hugely encouraging to know that 76% of line managers believe that wellbeing is a responsibility of their role.

Workplace mental health is a collective responsibility – by sharing what works, these ideas become embedded and real change takes place. I hope you will join us in taking the next step to healthy workplaces that are good for individuals, good for business and good for society.

The voices of 20,000 employees cannot be ignored.

**Louise Aston**

Wellbeing Director  
Business in the Community

# Foreword

by Professor Dame Carol Black, DEB, FRCP



## I congratulate Business in the Community and its partners for this timely and highly informative project.

The survey of thousands of employees gives us a unique insight into the current state of mental health in the workplace and will make an invaluable contribution to our understanding of what works well and what challenges must be overcome to ensure equality of opportunity for all.

In recent years we have made significant progress in improving attitudes to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Business in the Community, along with Mind and Time to Change, have helped employers to understand the importance of good mental health and provided the tools to foster a culture of openness that supports employees with mental health problems. However, much work remains to be done to ensure the best practice of some of the most progressive companies is shared across all organisations, from the largest to the smallest.

Employers have a duty of care to respond to their employees' mental health needs in the same way they respond to physical conditions, such as cancer or diabetes. And it makes compelling business sense. Mental health problems are one of the main reasons why people cannot give their best at work. They have an adverse impact on productivity and affect recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced employees. Mental ill health has a profound impact on the economy.

There are no simple answers to the questions posed by the findings of this survey. We need to do more of what we know works well. We must make training more widely available to the managers who are on the frontline, and we need to intervene early to prevent an escalation of mental health problems. That means learning to recognise the signs and making it easier for people to talk about mental health at work. It is about taking a preventative approach and building resilience across the organisation. This can be achieved without incurring significant cost, yet the financial benefits can be substantial for businesses of all sizes.

It is crucial for senior management to show leadership on mental health, with a sustained and visible commitment to change. They must encourage and take part in an open conversation to normalise discussion about mental health in the workplace. I urge all employers to consider how these findings can help improve their own response to workplace mental health and wellbeing.

Thousands of employees have chosen to share their experiences for the benefit of others. We owe it to them to listen, and to act now.

**Professor Dame Carol Black, DEB, FRCP**

Senior policy advisor on work and health to the British Government

# Executive summary

In the UK today, thousands of people with poor mental health are suffering in silence, unable to share their condition or illness with colleagues or managers at work.

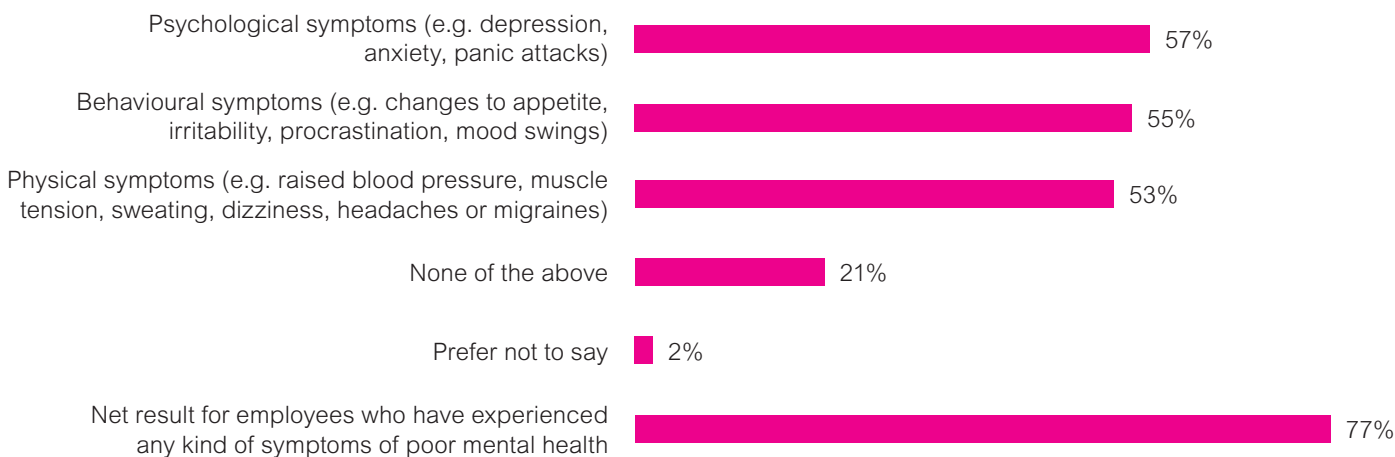
Although some progress has been made, the stigma of mental health remains deeply entrenched in UK business. There is greater awareness of the issue, but a devastating disconnect exists between employers' intentions and perceptions and what is actually happening in the workplace. This means that employees are not getting the help they need to maintain a fulfilling and productive working life, and managers are frustrated by the lack of support to do what they know is right.

**29% of employees have been diagnosed with a mental health condition**

Business in the Community's National Employee Mental Wellbeing survey is a comprehensive assessment of workplace mental health in the UK. Participants took part via a YouGov panel survey (3,036 respondents) and a public open survey (16,246 respondents). In this report the experiences of thousands of men and women currently in employment are shared, from front line workers to directors and senior managers, specifically leading with the YouGov panel data that is representative of UK employees. Throughout the report reference is made to the open survey as a verification of the panel data – in some cases amplifying and reinforcing it.

**77% of employees have experienced symptoms of poor mental health at some point in their lives**

## Which of the following, if any, have you ever experienced?



## Findings show that:

- **A majority of employees have been affected by symptoms of poor mental health.<sup>i</sup>** 77% say they have experienced symptoms of poor mental health at some point in their lives and 29% have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. 62% of employees attributed their symptoms of poor mental health to work or said that work was a contributing factor. The results from the open survey are even starker, with 84% having experienced physical, psychological or behavioural symptoms of poor mental health where work was a contributing factor.

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**62% of employees attributed their symptoms of poor mental health to work or said that work was a contributing factor**

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- **There is a concerning disconnect between employees' experience in the workplace and what those running the company believe is taking place.** 60% of board members and senior managers believe their organisation supports people with mental health issues. Despite this, only 11% discussed a recent mental health problem with their line manager, and half of employees say they would not discuss mental health with their line manager.

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**Only 11% of employees discussed a recent mental health problem with their line manager**

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- **Line managers are having to respond to something they know little about.** 76% of line managers believe employee wellbeing is their responsibility, yet only 22% of managers have received some form of training on mental health at work. 49% of line managers would find even basic training in common mental health conditions useful and 38% would find it useful to have training on how to talk to employees about wellbeing. The default responses to employees experiencing symptoms of poor mental health appear to be arranging time off or a job move, which do not align with what the employee wants or what good practice would dictate.

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**76% of line managers believe they are responsible for employee wellbeing, but only 22% have received training**

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- **A pervasive culture of silence remains entrenched across workplaces.** Employees are least comfortable talking about mental health at work (out of nine equality and social issues asked about in the survey). More than a third (35%) of employees did not approach anyone for support on the most recent occasion they experienced poor mental health. Only 25% of employees approached someone at work for support (rising to 26% when including those who contacted an Employee Assistance Programme). Despite believing that colleagues care about each other's wellbeing (77% felt that their colleagues were very or fairly considerate), 86% would think twice before offering to help a colleague whose mental health they were concerned about. Only 14% feel that nothing would stop them from approaching someone if they were concerned.

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**35% of employees did not approach anyone for support the last time they experienced poor mental health**

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- **The threat of disciplinary action when experiencing mental ill health is very real.** Results showed that 9% of employees who experienced symptoms of poor mental health experienced disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.<sup>ii</sup> This could be a worrying indication of illegal employment practice.

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**9% of employees who experienced symptoms of poor mental health experienced disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal**

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- **There are big differences between women and men in relation to workplace mental health.** Women are more likely than men to talk about mental health with their line manager. Male managers are less confident than female managers in responding to poor mental health, yet are less enthusiastic about mental health training. In the case of a staff member with depression – 68% of female managers would feel confident responding, compared to 58% of male managers.

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**68% of female managers feel confident responding to poor mental health, compared to 58% of male managers**

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*i and ii: see Methodology and Appendix for definitions of symptoms of poor mental health and formally diagnosed mental health conditions*



# Executive summary

## continued

- **The experience of mental health at work greatly differs between generations.** Younger workers (18-29 years old) are more likely to experience symptoms of poor mental health but feel less confident about discussing it with their manager. They are also less trusting in their employer's commitment to mental health and wellbeing. Older employees talk more freely about mental health and are more likely to feel that their employer is concerned with mental health and wellbeing.

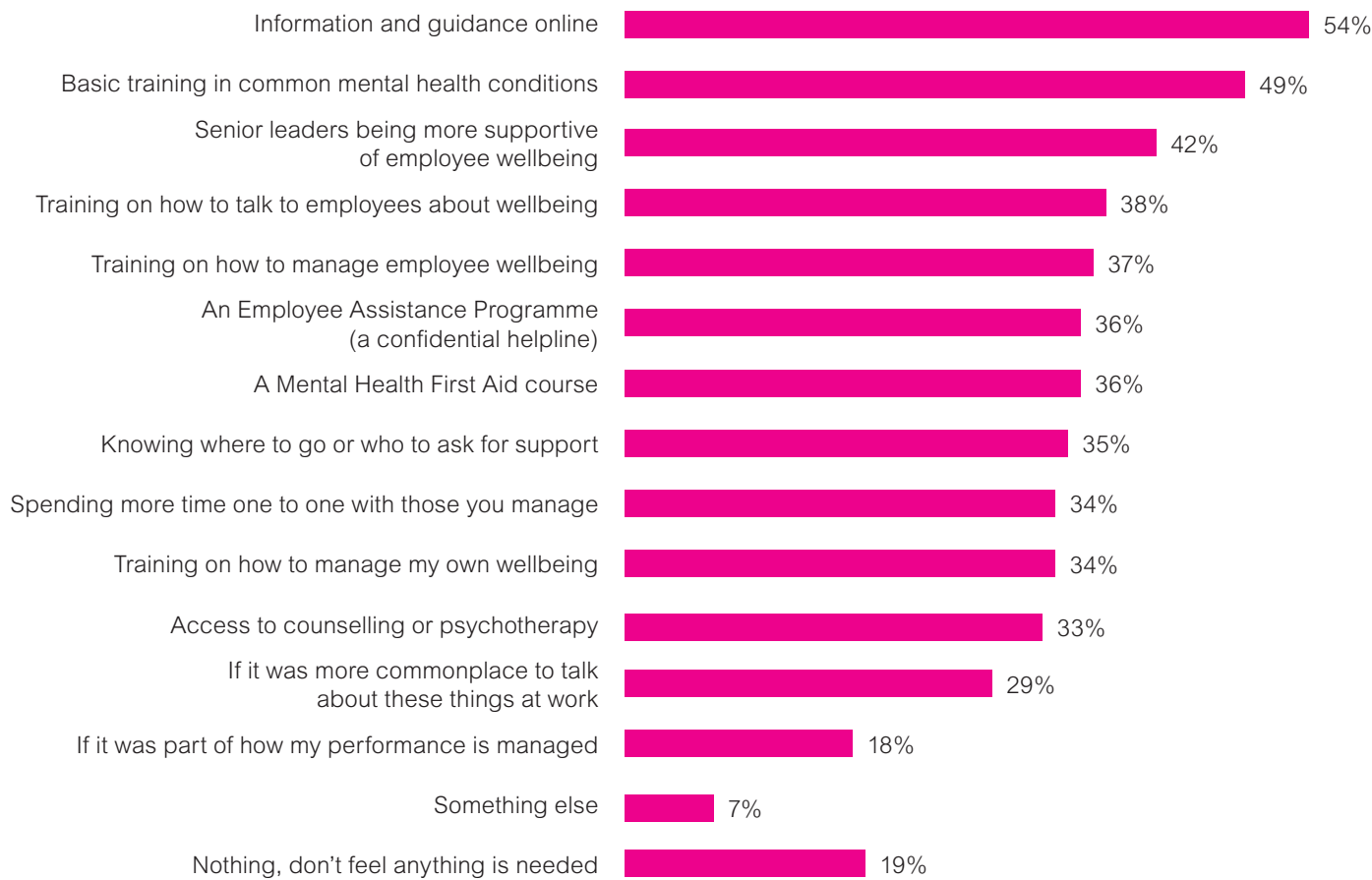
Employers need to recognise the scale of poor mental health in work, and take significant steps to reduce the risk of their workplace being a contributor to poor mental health. Employers have a duty of care to their employees to respond to mental ill health just as they would to a physical illness, such as cancer, diabetes or back pain. Organisations should equip their managers with the tools, support and organisational culture they

need to do their job well, which must include managing employees with mental health issues. It makes good business sense to foster a culture of openness that supports employees with a mental health issue to work and stay in work.

### 49% of line managers would appreciate basic training in common mental health conditions

We undertook this survey to understand the reality of how mental health is experienced at work. We have found that progress is being made with greater organisational awareness of the need to support better mental health at work, yet significant and potentially damaging disconnects exist that demand an urgent response from business.

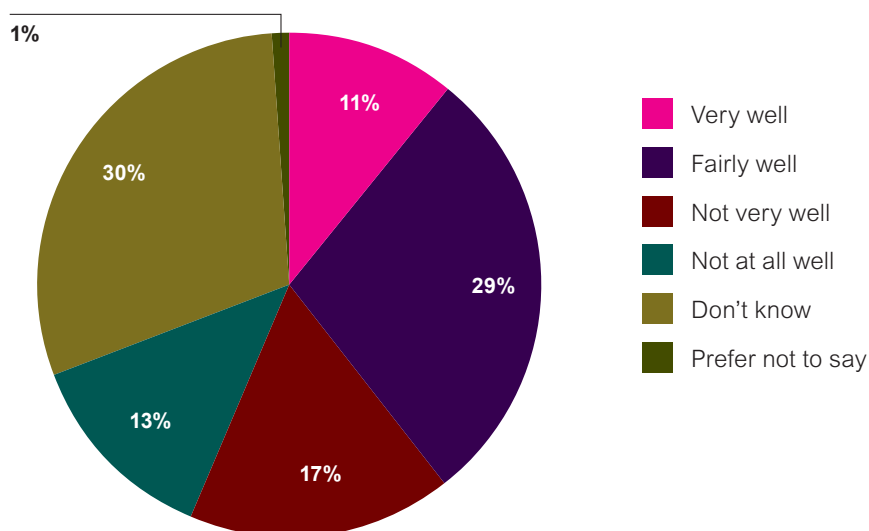
#### Which, if any, of the following would be useful for you, as a line manager, to support the wellbeing of your employees?





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**In your opinion, how well does your organisation support employees who experience mental health problems?**



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We know it will take time to achieve parity of mental and physical health in the workplace. One of our first calls to action in campaigning for better mental health at work was to urge employers to tackle the culture of silence by signing up to the [Time to Change Employer's Pledge](#). Next, we highlighted the need for improved line manager capability through Mental Health First Aid Training. Both of these actions remain pertinent for businesses today and form part of this report's call to action.

Our report gives employers crucial insight into what needs to change, with recommendations to inform transformative steps that will help to close these gaps.

**It is time for a new partnership in mental health between employers and employees. It is time to end the disconnect.**

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**30% of employees think their employer doesn't support people well who experience mental health problems, and 30% don't know either way**

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# Section 1

## We all have mental health

- 77% of employees have experienced symptoms of poor mental health
- 62% of all employees have experienced these symptoms due to work or where work was a contributing factor, rising to 84% of those who took the public survey
- In the last month alone 24% of employees have experienced symptoms of poor mental health where work was a contributing factor
- 29% of all employees have been diagnosed with a mental health condition
- 11% of all employees are currently experiencing 'poor' or 'very poor' mental health

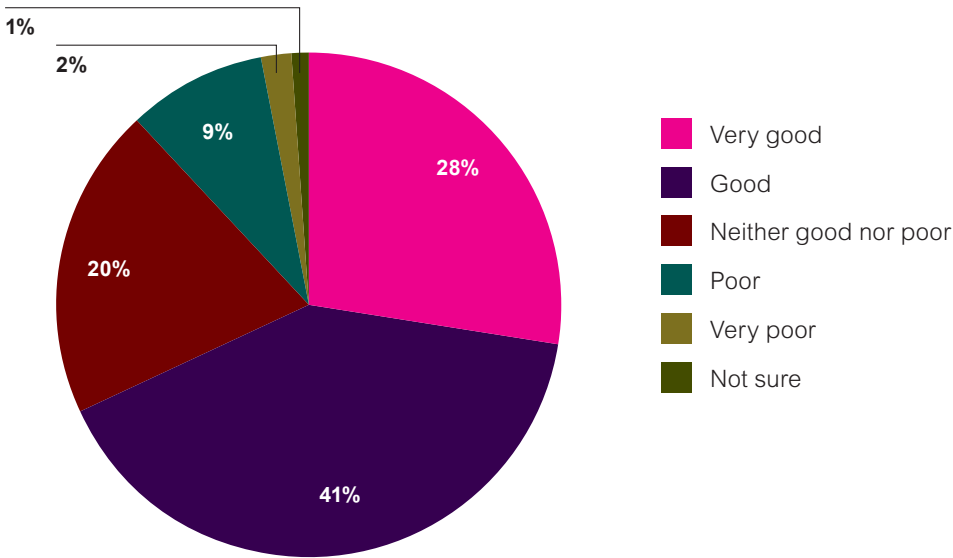
We all have mental health – and our survey findings indicate that most of us have experienced symptoms of poor mental health at one time in our lives. The scale of mental health problems in the workplace is significant.

Our survey found that 77% of employees have experienced a symptom of poor mental health, either diagnosed or undiagnosed at some point in their lives. 29% of employees report that they have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. It also found that one in three employees experienced these symptoms in the month prior to taking the survey, and around 15% of employees experience symptoms of poor mental health in any given month.

Mental health issues are complex and diverse. The spectrum can range from common mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety and depression, through to severe and enduring mental illness.

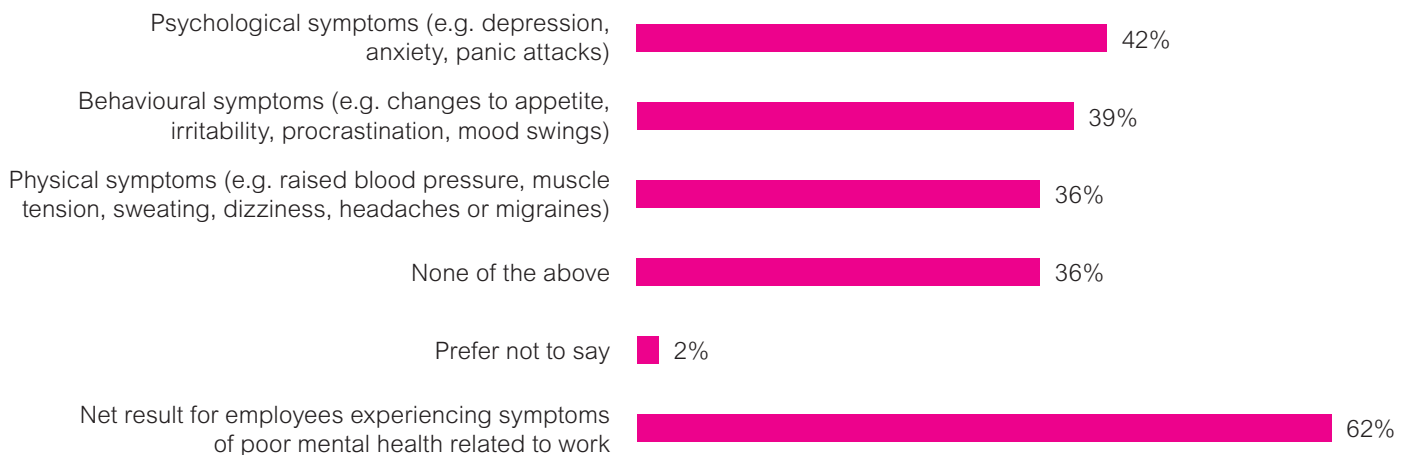
11% of employees are currently experiencing 'poor' or 'very poor' mental health

How would you describe your mental health at this time?



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**Which of the following, if any, have you ever experienced due to work or where work was a contributing factor?**



Our survey asked respondents to identify whether they had experienced any symptoms associated with poor mental health, including psychological symptoms (such as depression, anxiety or panic attacks), behavioural symptoms (such as loss of appetite or mood swings), or physical symptoms related to mental health (such as raised blood pressure). We found that psychological symptoms were the most common (42%), with behavioural (39%) and physical symptoms (36%) close behind.

“ Small steps are being taken and awareness of the issue of mental health is growing. But it is not happening quickly enough given the scale of the challenge. ”

*Paul Farmer, CEO, Mind*

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**62% of employees experiencing symptoms of poor mental health say that it is due to work or work is a contributing factor**

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“ Having so many people saying that work is a contributing factor to their mental health problems is huge, but it's important to remember that work can also be a contributing factor to someone's recovery. ”

*Poppy Jaman, CEO, Mental Health First Aid England*

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**24% of employees experienced symptoms of poor mental health in the last month where work was a contributing factor**

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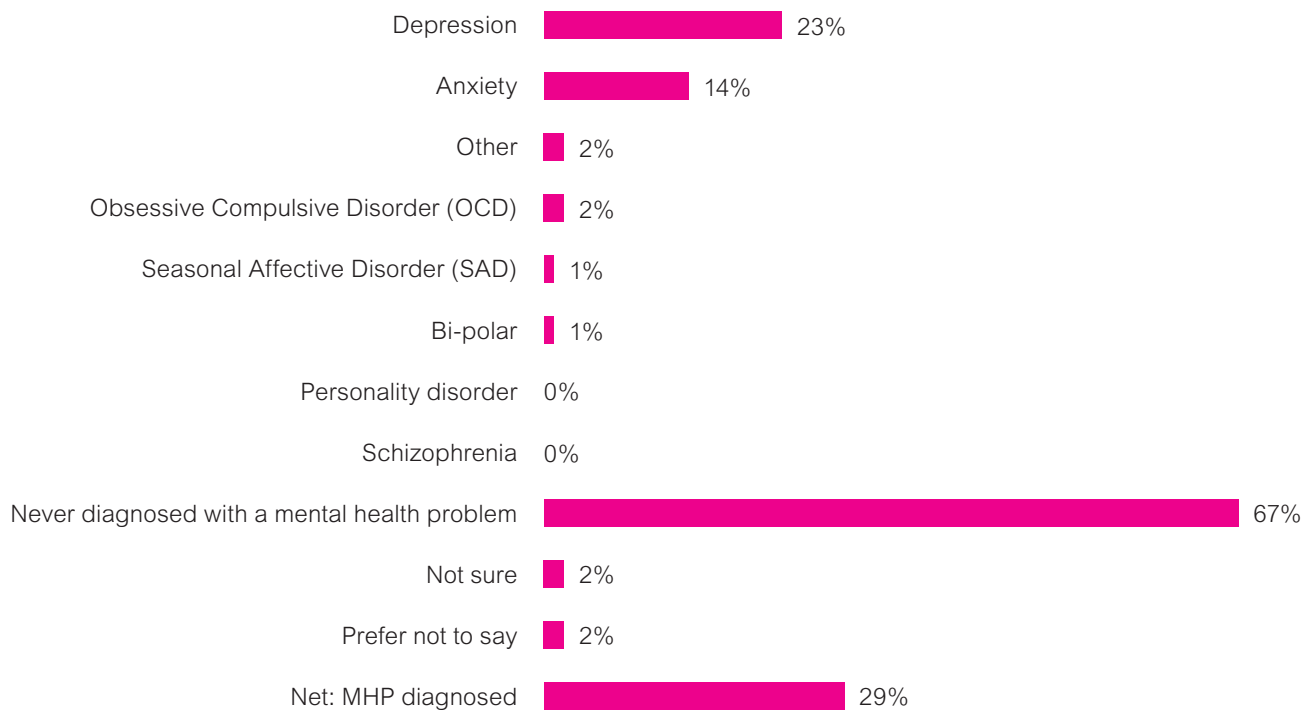
“ We've known since the recession that workplace stress has increased – businesses had to downsize to survive which resulted in fewer workers having to work longer and harder. But while the recession created this situation initially, businesses have maintained the approach to downsizing and streamlining, with the result of employees no longer feel they have any job security. They feel that the psychological contract between employer and employee is now a one-way contract: employer expects commitment from the employee but gives none back. ”

*Professor Sir Cary Cooper, 50th Anniversary Professor of Organizational Psychology & Health at University of Manchester and President of CIPD*

# Section 1: We all have mental health

continued

## Have you been formally diagnosed with a mental health problem?



We know that being in good work generally contributes to improved mental health and wellbeing, yet the findings suggest that many employers are failing to foster a working culture that is conducive to good mental health across the workplace. Our survey specifically asked employees and managers to consider the issue of mental wellbeing within the context of their work. More than 1 in 10 (11%) are currently experiencing a level of mental health that they describe as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’, and almost two-thirds (62%) of employees who have experienced symptoms of poor mental health said that was specifically due to their work or said that work was a contributing factor.

### 29% of employees have been diagnosed with a mental health condition

“ The survey is telling us that nationally over a quarter of employees have had a formal diagnosis of mental ill health, which is a simply staggering statistic. This strongly reinforces the need to address mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. ”

Neil Pullen, Group Director of Safety, Sustainability and Resilience, National Grid

It is necessary to acknowledge that an employee’s mental health condition may be wholly unconnected to work, but that work could be exacerbating the situation. Employers are not accountable for external elements, however there is a duty of care to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to support mental health, as are made for physical health. At a preventative level, employers have a responsibility to reduce the likelihood of work-related stress, by ensuring they are offering good work and good working conditions. This includes providing work environments where work is well-designed, organised, managed, and assessing for risk of work-related stress, as they would assess for physical health and safety concerns.

“ The person involved did not discuss or reveal anything was wrong, I picked up on it and felt worried enough to discretely discuss it with my line manager. We agreed she needed to at least talk with our occ health. I then let my line manager deal with it. ”

*Line manager, panel respondent*

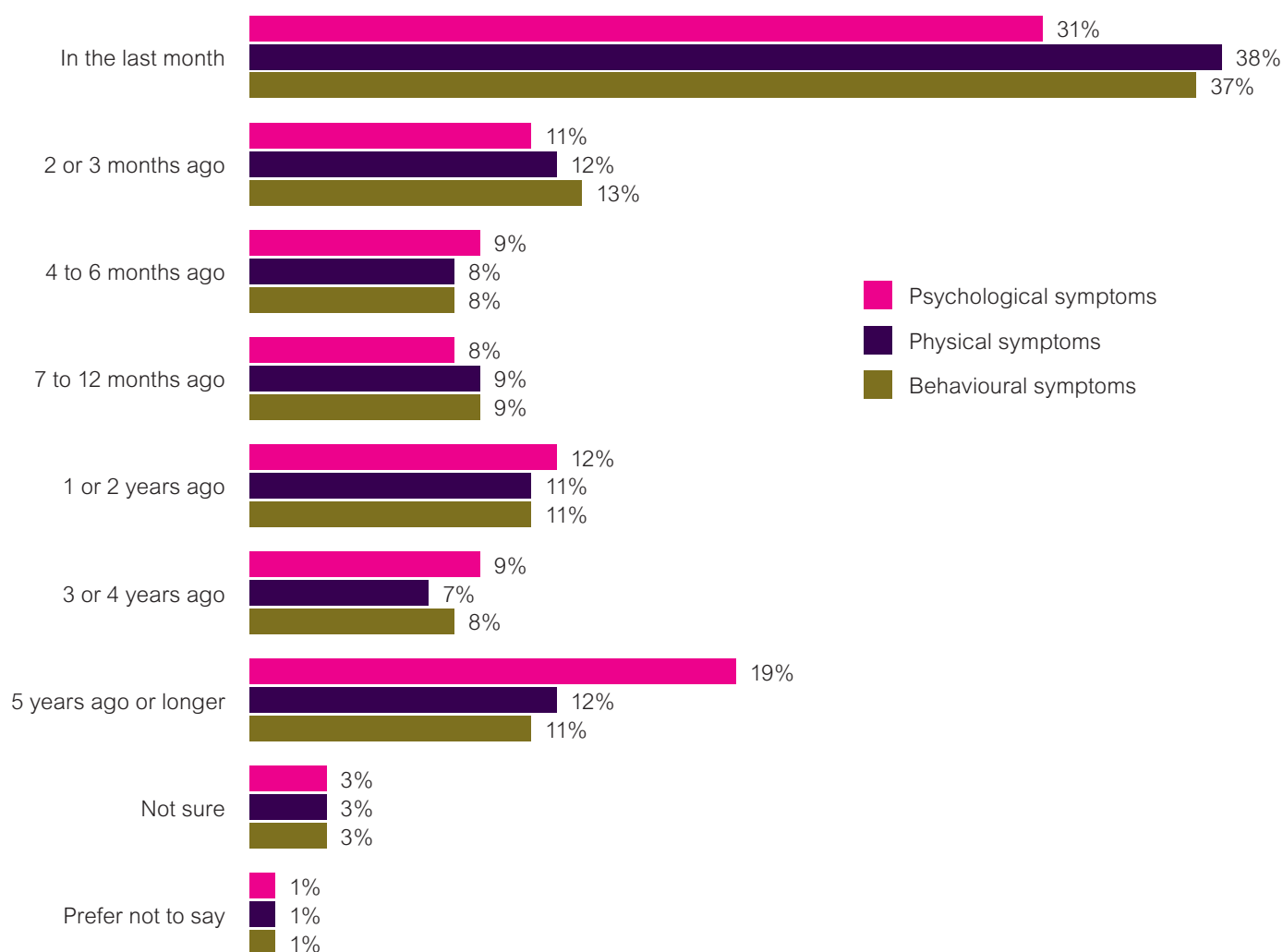
Until employers recognise the scale of mental health problems in the workplace, and respond with the same determination as they do to physical health problems, millions of employees will continue to suffer in silence.

**84% of employees who took the public survey have experienced symptoms of poor mental health where work was a contributing factor**

“ [I have] possible post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – but I tend to keep my anxieties to myself. If possible it would be nice to have someone at work to talk to. ”

*Employee, public survey respondent*

#### When was the most recent occurrence related to work?



# Section 2

## Disconnect: the aspiration and the reality

**60%** of board members feel their organisation supports mental health at work

Only half (**51%**) of employees would feel confident telling their line manager about a mental health problem

**80%** of line managers believe barriers exist to supporting mental health

Just **22%** of line managers have undertaken mental health training

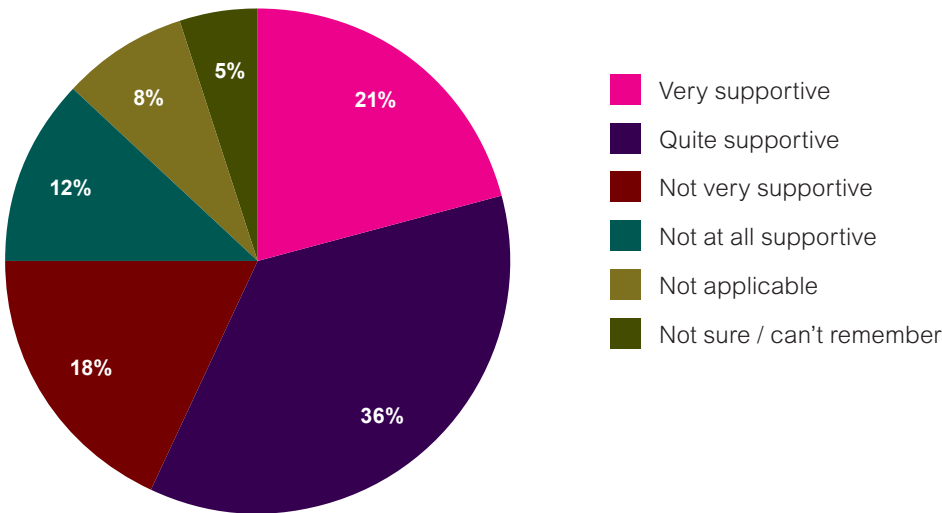
Our study reveals that real progress in mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is being held back by a disconnect between what the organisation believes is taking place across the business and what employees experience.

Senior executives are more likely to feel their organisation supports employees with mental health problems, yet the actual experiences of employees do not match this viewpoint. 97% of senior managers believe they are accessible if employees want to talk about mental health, but just 11% of employees discussed their most recent period of poor mental health with their line manager. 60% of board members say that mental

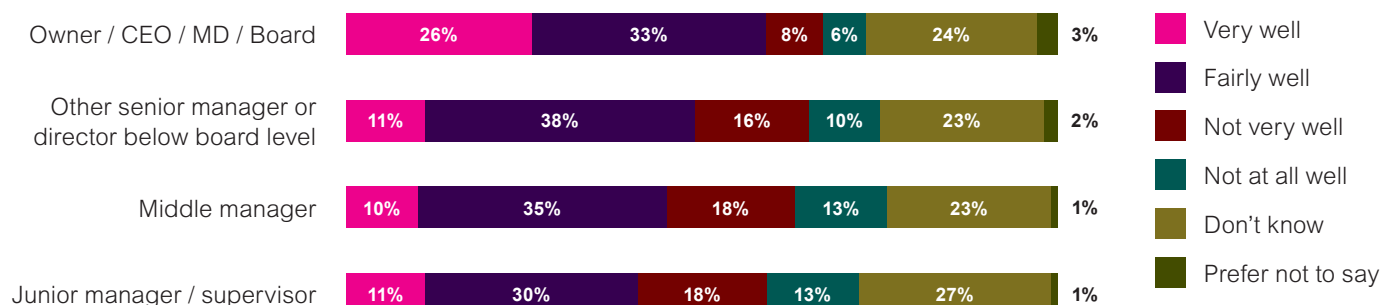
health is supported at work, but only 26% of employees turned to someone at work or an Employee Assistance Programme on the most recent occasion that they experienced symptoms of poor mental health.

**Only 11% of employees discussed their most recent period of poor mental health with their line manager**

How supportive were your senior managers when you made changes to support someone?



**In your opinion, how well does your organisation support employees who experience mental health problems?**



“ My manager just did not understand how I felt – line managers need training, and they need to stop applying more and more pressure when they are told that someone is at breaking point. ”

*Employee, public survey respondent*

**63% of line managers feel they are obliged to sometimes put corporate interests before the wellbeing of colleagues**

achieve this responsibility. 63% of line managers feel they are obliged to put corporate interests before the wellbeing of colleagues (every day/ often/sometimes). An astonishing 80% of line managers say that barriers prevent them offering appropriate support, and just 22% of line managers have taken part in mental health training that would provide the skills to help them do this element of their job effectively.

**76% of line managers see employee wellbeing as their responsibility**

There is some good news. The vast majority of line managers (76%) understand that workplace mental health is one of their responsibilities, reinforcing the case we made in our [Leading on Mental Wellbeing](#) report, aimed at providing line managers with the skills and capabilities to support wellbeing. There is disconnect between the intent and the reality of line managers being able to

“ I was able to put together a package of workplace adjustments that alleviated many of the barriers faced by the person, and he let me know that he appreciated the time I spent with him finding out about his issues and looking for solutions. ”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*

“ It is pleasing to see so many managers say they understand wellbeing is part of their role, and yet it is frustrating to find that so many still feel they do not have the skills or training to act when needed. ”

*Peter Cheese, CEO, Chartered Institute of Personnel Development*

**60% of board members feel their organisation supports mental health at work**

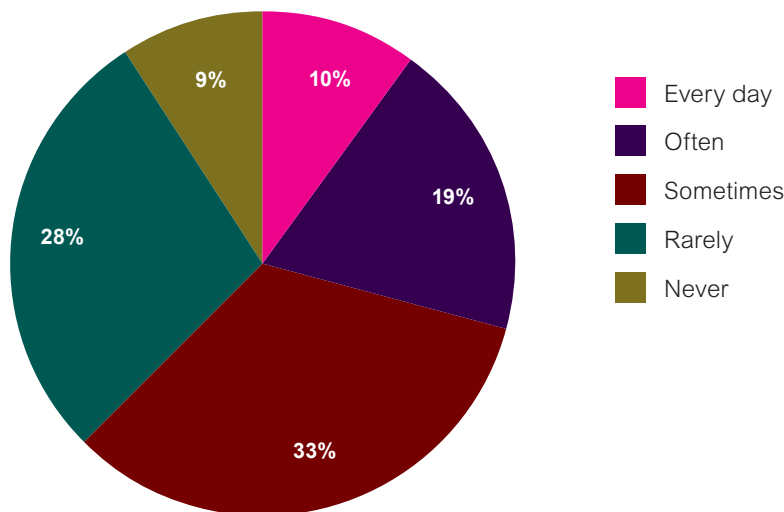
“ The organisation almost sees mental health issues in individuals as a potential disciplinary matter. ”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*



## Section 2: Disconnect: the aspiration and the reality *continued*

How often do you face situations where you have to put the interests of the organisation above the wellbeing of your team members?



“ While mental health is a priority for many businesses, this survey continues to highlight the disconnect between what businesses think they’re offering employees and what employees are experiencing. More needs to be done to break down the stigma that comes with mental health. ”

*Patrick Watt, Corporate Director, Bupa UK*

We found significant differences between how men and women and older and younger workers experience or manage mental health at work. This should be taken into account when employers design support systems for mental health and wellbeing. Male managers are less likely to be asked for support by an employee experiencing poor mental health

**63% of line managers feel they have to put corporate interests before employee wellbeing**

(30%, compared to 41% for women). When employees do approach their male manager, the resolution is more likely to be a job move and less likely to be signposts to help and information. Younger employees are more likely to experience the symptoms of poor mental health than older workers, and less willing to discuss it with their line manager.

“ I managed the employee's workload to the best of my abilities; however the main problems lay with the organisation and they were not addressed by senior management. ”

*Line manager, panel respondent*

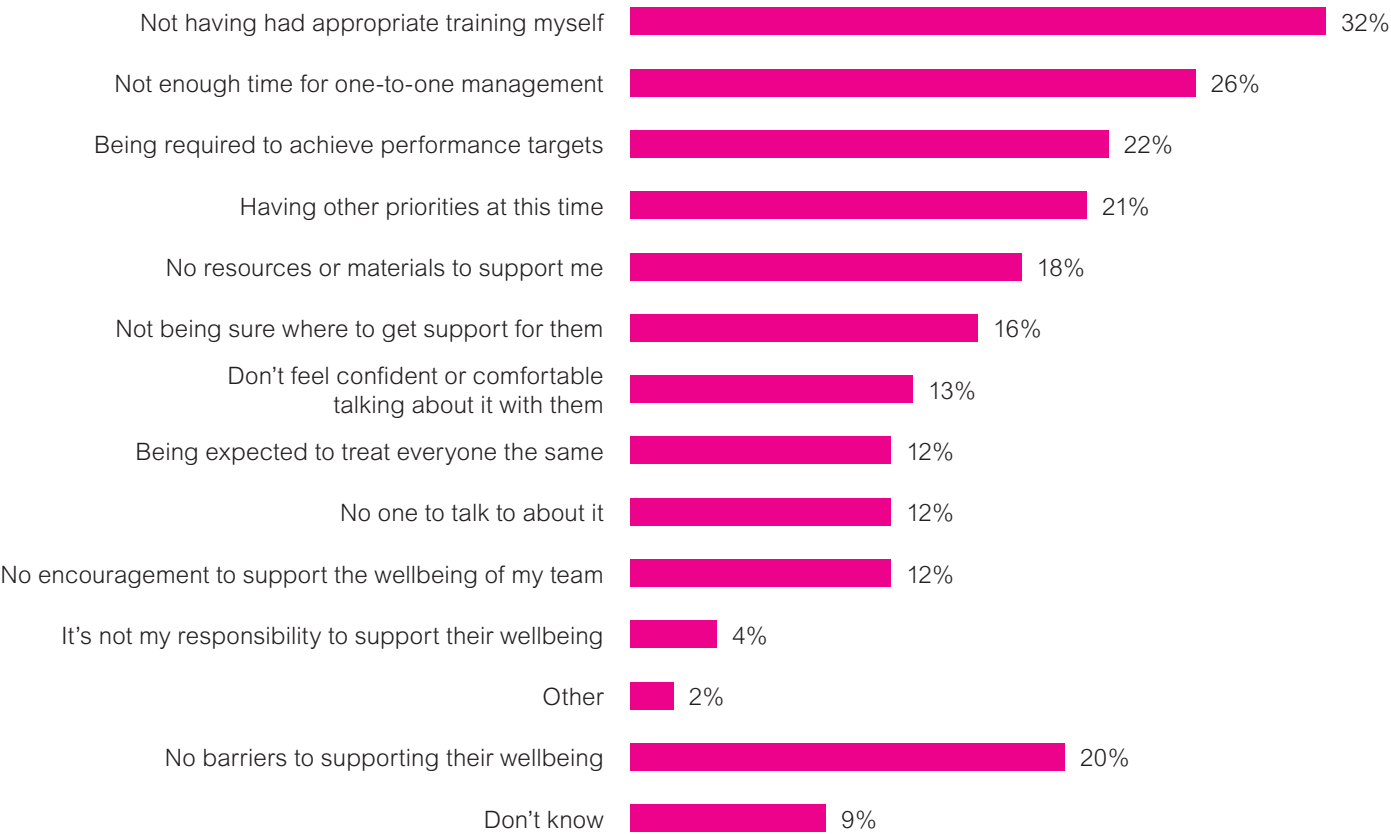
“ The organisation puts things in place for employees, but really it's there to protect the organisation from being sued. The work needs to be done and we just need to get on with it. ”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*

Mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is everyone's business, from the boardroom to the shop floor. Employers require a deeper understanding of what is happening in their workplace to be able to convert the aspiration into reality. Our survey should inform their approach to mental health.

**Just 22% of managers have undertaken mental health training**

**Do you think any of the following are barriers to supporting the mental wellbeing of those you manage?**



# Section 3

## The pervasive culture of silence

Half of all employees would not feel comfortable discussing mental health issues at work

**49%** would not discuss mental health with their line manager

**86%** said they would think twice before offering help to a colleague with poor mental health

Less than **4%** say they would ask HR for help with a mental health issue, and only **2%** have actually done so following their most recent experience

Many employees feel they cannot talk about mental health in the workplace. Mental health came last out of nine equality and social issue topics they felt able to talk about, including sexual orientation, disability and religion.

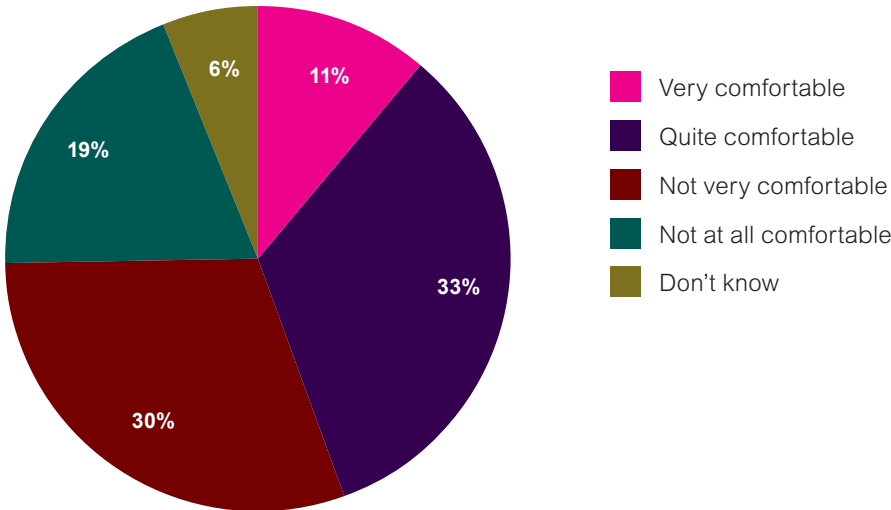
Just half (50%) of employees think they would feel comfortable talking about mental health at work. Generally, women and older people find it easier to talk about mental health at work than younger colleagues, and 60% of those with managerial responsibilities are comfortable talking about mental health compared to 46% of those without.

**49%** of employees would not discuss mental health with their line manager

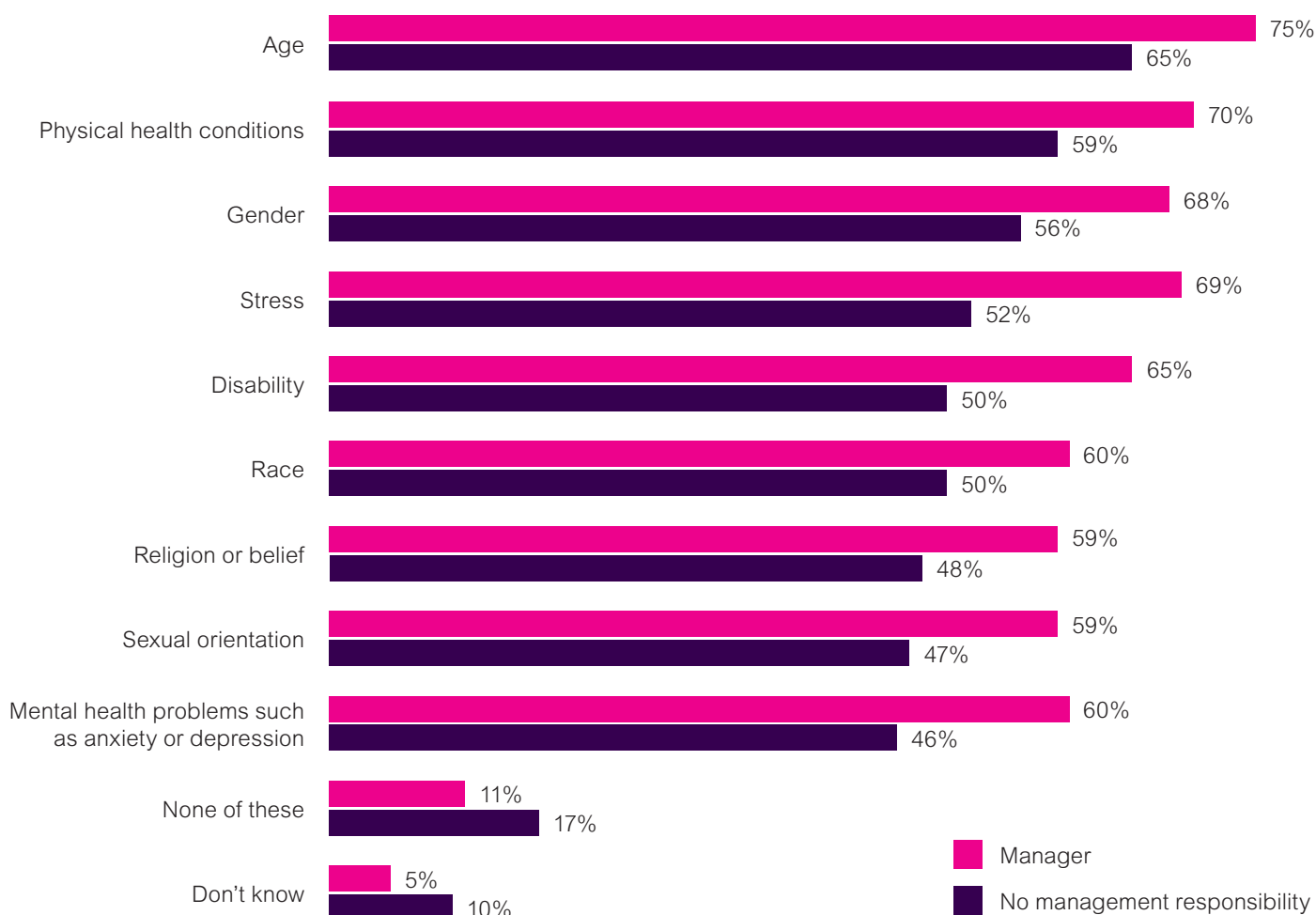
“ The finding that three quarters of workers surveyed have had a mental health problem (with over a quarter experiencing frank mental illness) demonstrates the importance of this issue to businesses. It is therefore an indictment of our society that people continue to feel unable to talk about mental health at work. ”

*Dr Paul Litchfield, Chair, What Works Centre for Wellbeing & Chief Medical Officer, BT Group*

How comfortable or not would you be in talking to your manager about a mental health problem?



### Which of the following issues are you comfortable talking about at work?



Half of employees (49%) say they would not feel comfortable talking to their line manager about a mental health problem. Those with more than one experience of mental health problems were less likely to report the subsequent episodes, which may indicate their previous experience when sharing the experience was poor.

**86% of employees would think twice before offering to help a colleague with poor mental health**

“ I strongly feel there is still a huge social stigma when it comes to mental health in a competitive environment, that is life. Why would you want to show any weakness? It is hard to predict the negative ramifications any kind of admission would have on your job / career. ”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*

Over a third (35%) of employees did not turn to anyone (inside or outside work) for support during their most recent experience of symptoms of poor mental health. Those who did seek support were most likely to consult a GP (28%) or talk to family (27%) or friends (22%). Only 11% said that they discussed it with their line manager and the same proportion did so with another colleague. Many are keeping the conversation out of the workplace, even if it has been caused by work or is affecting their work.

# Section 3: The pervasive culture of silence

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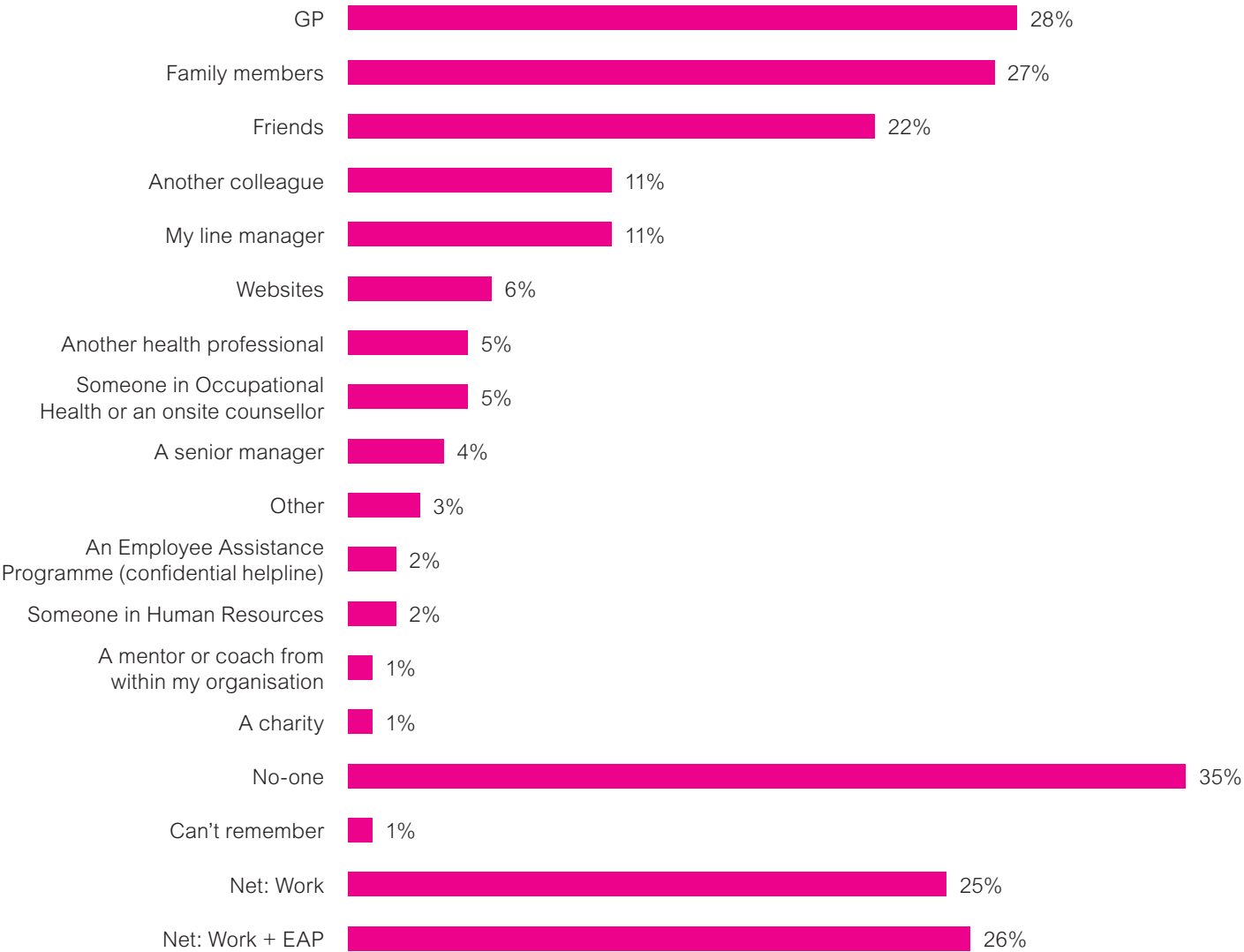
Our open survey data indicates that those experiencing symptoms of poor mental health may be more likely to seek support from family and friends than those from the YouGov panel. However, the gap between men and women seems to be clearer, with 28% of men reporting that they did not go to anyone for support, compared to 15% of women.

Few employees consider discussing mental health problems with Human Resources (HR) departments. According to our survey, fewer than 2% of employees have been to HR with their mental health problems. However, 23% of line managers consulted HR during the most recent experience of managing someone with symptoms of poor mental health.

“ When trying to break the culture of silence about mental health, you have to ensure that employees have places to go where they can talk openly, in the real world and online. ”

Peter Simpson, CEO, Anglian Water Group

Thinking about the most recent time, did you go to any of the following for help?



**Which, if any, of the following might stop you from approaching someone at work who you think might be experiencing mental health problems**



“ There isn't a good reason to bring it up out of the blue. It simply isn't something encouraged to be discussed unless a person is not performing or takes time off. ”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*

The culture of silence discourages employees from offering support to colleagues they suspect of experiencing poor mental health, even when they believe that their intervention could be helpful.

**Fewer than 2% of employees have turned to HR for help**

77% of employees believe that their colleagues care about their wellbeing, but a significant majority of employees (86%) say they are reluctant to approach a colleague to help as they feel they are either interfering or do not know what to do. 34% said the reason was that they did not know how to start the conversation. 22% did approach a colleague, and of these 81% thought that their actions had been helpful.

**77% of employees believe their colleagues care about their wellbeing**

The stigma of mental health in the workplace is preventing employees from asking for the help and support that they need, despite a general belief that they care about one other's wellbeing. Organisations must make it a priority to break this culture of silence.

“ I was able to recognise changes in the employee [I was managing] and approach him in order for him to open up and for me to make him aware he could talk to me. His behaviour was very irrational, but making him aware he could talk to me allowed him to seek further help with our support. Although we did everything to support him, sadly he did go on to take his own life. I feel very strongly that in the workplace we need to have support and give support to stop the stigma. ”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*

## Section 4

# The role of line managers

**76%** of line managers say that employee wellbeing is their responsibility

**63%** of line managers often/sometimes put corporate interests ahead of wellbeing of team members

**32%** of managers lack the confidence to recognise symptoms of a mental health issue

**26%** said they lacked time for one-to-one contact with employees

Line managers know that workplace mental health and wellbeing is part of their job, and they want to do it well.

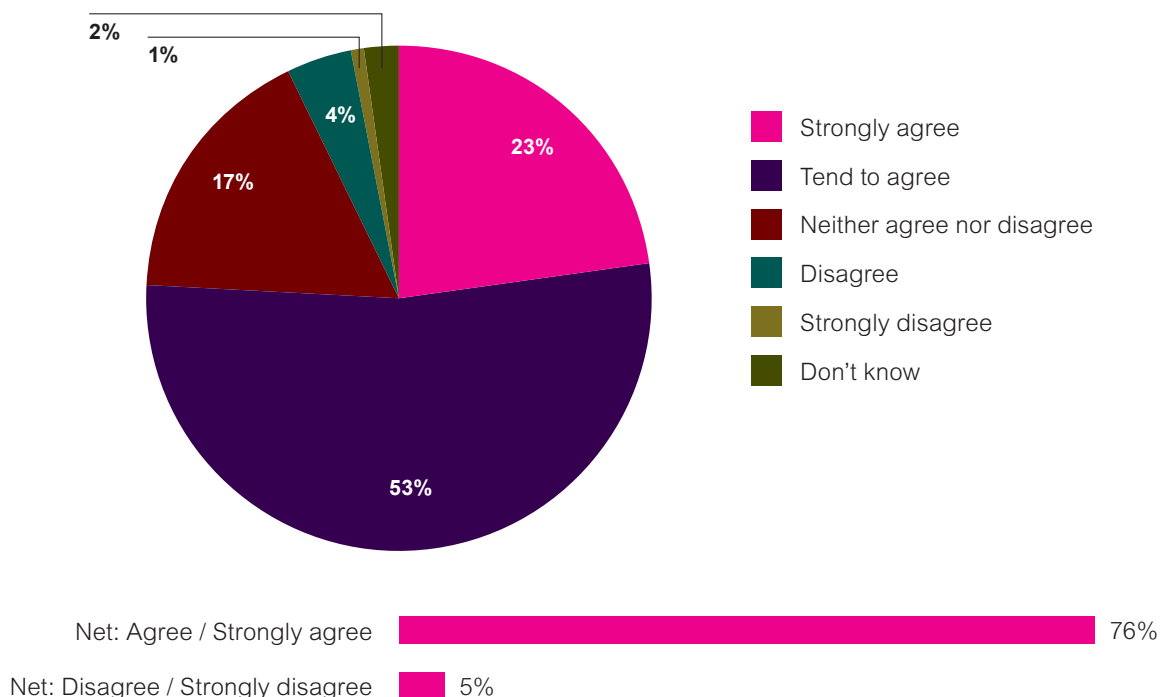
Encouraging employees to discuss mental health is vital, because you cannot manage issues that people are not willing to talk about. Capability, literacy and organisational barriers also prevent managers from giving mental health the priority it requires.

**76%** of line managers see employee wellbeing as their responsibility

“ The most important thing is to create an atmosphere where people are confident that talking about a condition as part of normal conversation is NOT treated as a taboo subject and won't lead to a 'dressing down' by management. ”

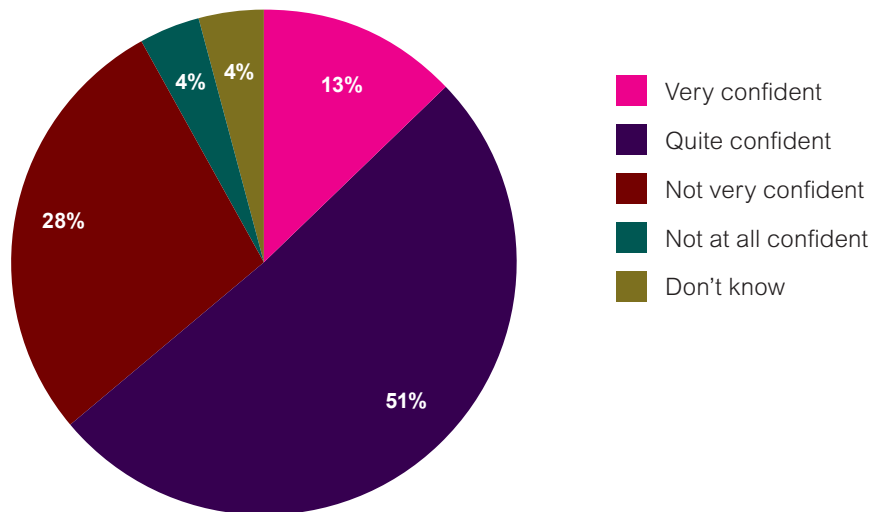
*Line manager, panel respondent*

As a manager, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
'As a manager, the wellbeing of my employees is my responsibility'





**How confident are you that you would recognise the potential symptoms of mental health problems in the people you manage**



Net: Very confident / Quite confident 64%

Net: Not very / Not at all confident 32%

“ The quality of work affects the extent to which it enhances or diminishes our psychological wellbeing. The evidence is increasingly clear that good quality work – work in which an employee feels rewarded for their effort, challenged but in control, that they have a voice, that is varied and fulfilling, and in which they can learn and grow – is beneficial for psychological health. In turn, evidence indicates that bad quality work is bad for psychological health – in fact it can even be worse for health than unemployment. ”

*Karen Steadman, Senior Researcher, The Work Foundation*

**48% of line managers have managed someone experiencing symptoms of poor mental health**

In our survey three out of four (76%) line managers recognise that employee wellbeing is one of their responsibilities. Almost half of all managers (48%) report having managed a member of staff experiencing symptoms of poor mental health. More than one third of managers (35%) have been specifically approached by a member of staff wanting to discuss a mental health problem, and 6% have been approached in the past month alone. Most line managers report taking steps to support employees with mental health problems, which are most likely to include support with their workload (49%).

“ Much more has to be done to support those with mental health issues, and, as this report shows, line managers have a major role to play. It is also important that the workers themselves are a part of the solution and I hope that employers will use this report to work with their unions to make the changes necessary to achieve a real, practical, difference. ”

*Frances O'Grady, General Secretary, TUC*

**6% of managers have been approached in the last month by an employee wanting to discuss a mental health problem**

# Section 4: The role of line managers

continued

“ As a junior doctor I experienced several periods of clinical depression. During some of these periods I had good line managers who worked with occupational health to support me. They did this by altering my rota to give me stability and routine and touching base regularly when I was off sick to keep me engaged and worked with me to support my return to work. However I did have a couple of managers who were not supportive, saw my health issues as a burden and marginalised me, which almost drove me out of medicine. Fundamentally it was the good line managers who kept me in employment when I could have easily slipped away. ”

Anonymous

## Managers are most likely to turn to their own line managers for support when managing someone experiencing symptoms of poor mental health

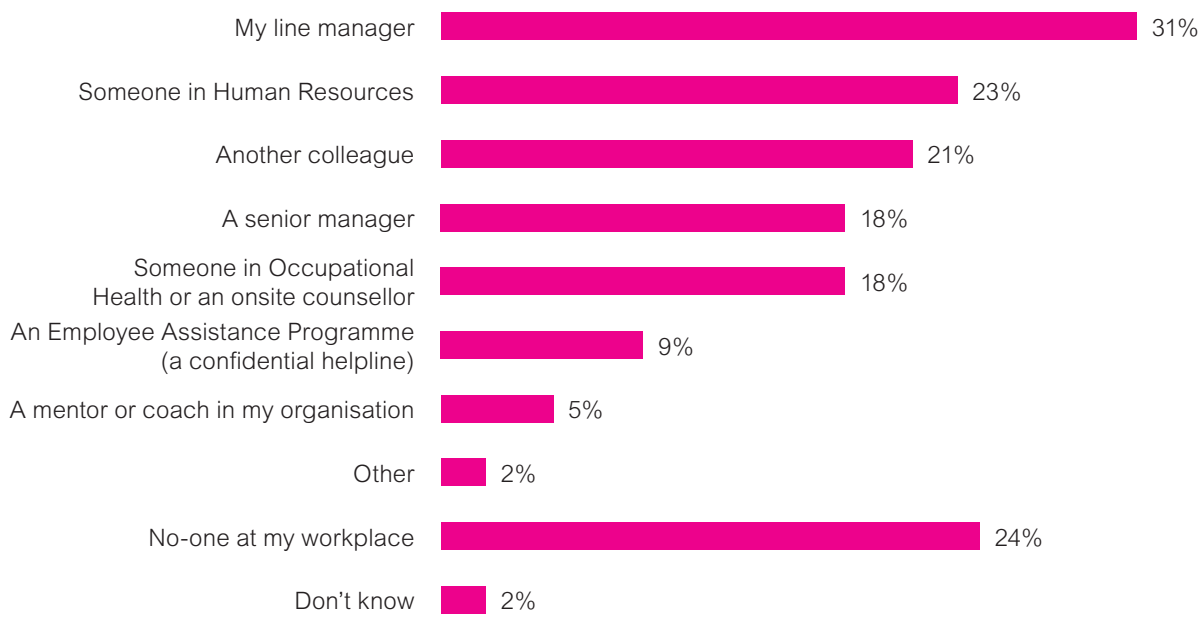
When a problem is presented, line managers themselves often seek advice or support in their decisions – 31% from their own manager, 23% from someone in HR. Other channels of support include speaking to another colleague (21%), a senior manager (18%) or someone in Occupational Health (18%). However, a quarter of managers (24%) say they did not talk to or receive support from anyone else in their organisation the last time an employee approached them about a mental health issue.

“ I listened to what she said, made time for her. We referred through to OH and put reduced hours in place. She had a period of absence, but I kept in regular contact. When she returned to work, it was on a phased return. I ensured that her sickness absence meetings focused on her wellbeing, and not on restrictive bureaucratic targets. She lets me know if she feels unwell and I amend her caseload to prevent her becoming overloaded. ”

Line manager, public survey respondent

## 64% of managers feel confident they can spot the symptoms of poor mental health in employees

Thinking about the most recent time that someone you manage experienced mental health problems, did you talk to or receive support from any of the following people at work?



“ The case was due to absenteeism but it soon became obvious that the colleague had mental health issues. We obviously had a duty of care and provided as much support as possible but we're not trained professionals and our HR department is quite detached from us...”

*Line manager, panel respondent*

Generally, managers believe they do a good job when employees ask for support. A significant majority (90%) feel that they were helpful with the most recent incident. 24% felt they had dealt 'very well' and 59% 'quite well' with the most recent occurrence and only 12% were critical of themselves. Belief increases with age, with the 30-39s in particular being harder on themselves (18%), compared to 11% of 50-59s.

**90% of line managers feel that their most recent experience of supporting an employee was helpful**

“ I can help with stress and perhaps anxiety but anything greater I feel completely out of my depth. And even with these, I can only support within a very limited framework of their job role. Also, sometimes I just can't change a situation with colleagues or senior management to make daily working life for team better.”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*

**Only 49% of employees feel their line manager balances employee needs with the needs of their organisation**

64% say they can recognise the symptoms of poor mental health in employees and 74% say they feel confident in talking to a person with a mental health problem.

**Data from the open survey supports these findings: 79% are confident they would recognise if people they were managing experienced symptoms of poor mental health, and 84% feel they would be confident enough to talk to those concerned about these problems.**

Stress was the symptom which managers felt most confident in responding to (77%). This reiterates the need for training as more complex conditions might be less likely to be spotted. Experiences such as panic attacks, depression and mood swings are less familiar and up to two-fifths of managers feel not very or not at all confident in responding. Almost one in three (32%) said they did not have adequate mental health training.

However, the line managers' experience of workplace mental health often does not align with the experience of the people they manage. We know that many employees are unlikely to approach their line manager about mental health, and that the employer's response is not always seen as helpful. Just over half of employees (52%) felt that their line manager offers to solve problems together. Similarly, just under half of employees (49%) felt that their line manager balanced the needs of the organisation with the needs of individual employees.

“ While most line managers want to help others, they often lack the skills and resources to do so. I think the next few years promise to be exciting, as increasing numbers of employers develop and implement interventions and tools aimed at enhancing the mental health of all their employees.”

*Pete Rodgers, Chair, City Mental Health Alliance*

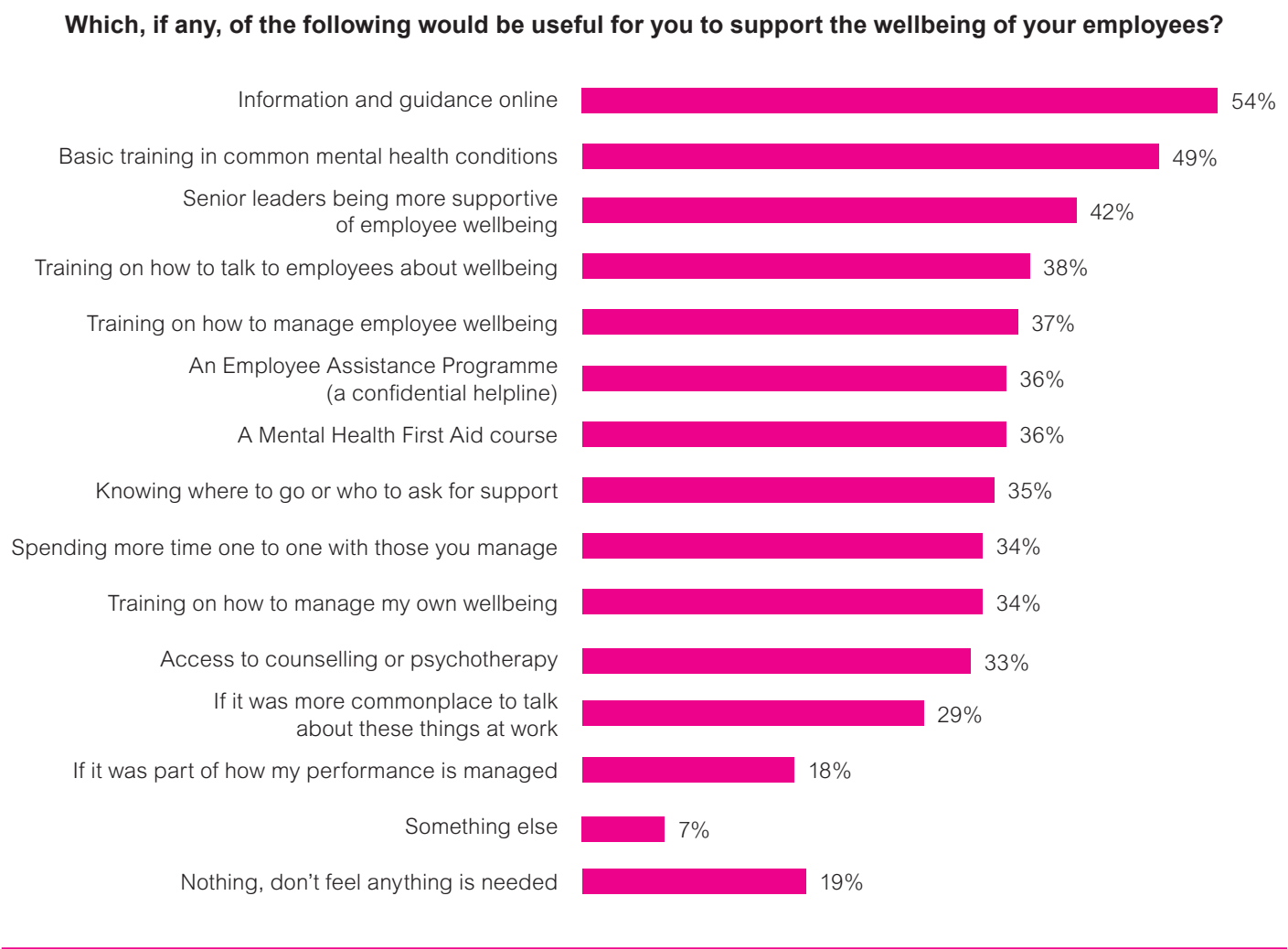
**Managers feel more confident in spotting stress than any other symptom of a mental health problem**

“ The HR team must also help in setting the organisational culture to promote good mental health; to ensure it is understood and talked about. Of all functions within a business, HR must be attuned to the cultural dynamics of the organisation and understand the levers of change that can help create the right cultural context.”

*Peter Cheese, CEO  
Chartered Institute of  
Personnel Development*

# Section 4: The role of line managers

continued



Our survey highlights the tension between meeting business objectives at the same time as supporting the wellbeing of employees. Just over half (55%) of employees believe their manager is genuinely concerned about their wellbeing. This is not surprising when 63% of managers believe they are sometimes or even always obliged to put the interests of their organisation above the wellbeing of team members (53% feel this happens often or sometimes and 10% of managers believe this happens every day). In addition

to the lack of adequate mental health training, line managers acknowledge further notable barriers to providing appropriate support – insufficient time for one-to-one meetings (26%), the focus on performance targets (22%) and other priorities (21%).

**Only 55% of employees believe their manager is concerned about their wellbeing**

“ Training for line managers would allow them to better understand what I was going through. I was told things like “you are obviously not strong enough for [the next grade up]” and “you should learn to be more resilient” which I think are the result of misunderstandings about anxiety etc. ”

*Employee, public survey respondent*

## Section 5

# Responding to employees

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More than half **(56%)** of employees said no action was taken when they last experienced symptoms of poor mental health

Only **7%** of employees were offered help with their workload

**4%** of employees were allowed time to work from home

**5%** of employees who were experiencing the symptoms of poor mental health were sacked or forced out

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**We asked what happens in work when employees experience symptoms of poor mental health and found that there was an inconsistent response across organisations.**

Over a third (35%) of employees did not turn to anyone for help or support. Only 11% discussed it with their line manager and the same proportion did so with another colleague. It is also notable how few (about 6%) gained information from websites or charities.

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**Only 11% of employees discuss their mental health problems with their employer**

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More than half of employees (56%) experiencing symptoms of poor mental health said that no mitigating actions were taken by their employer. The most common supportive action was to be given time off work (14%). This gives rise to a concern that removing people from the workplace may be the default response to mental health problems, even though good practice suggests that good work can be beneficial and contribute to preventing escalation of poor mental health.

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**9% of employees experiencing symptoms of poor mental health reported being sacked, forced out or facing disciplinary proceedings**

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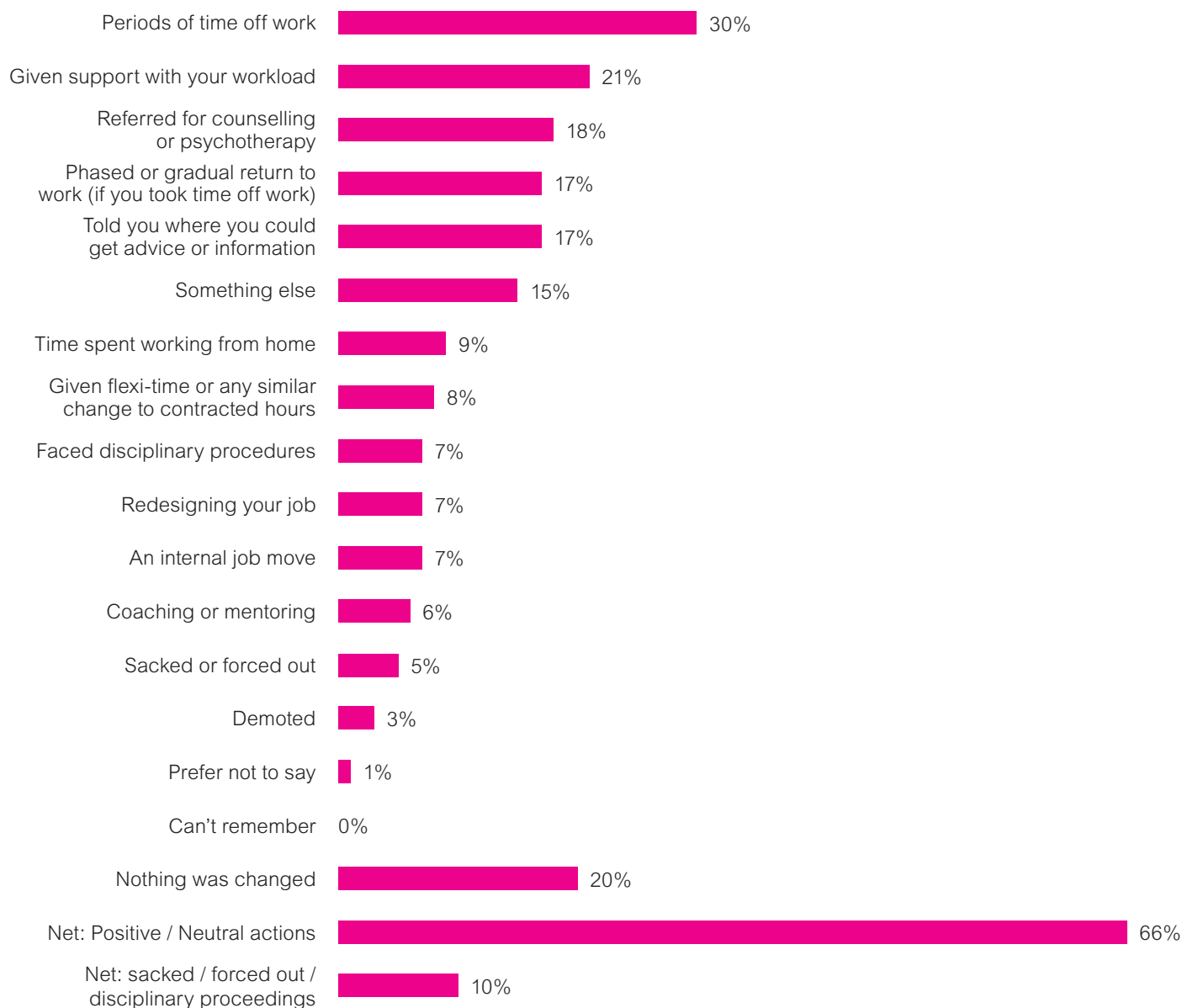
“ If you are going to increase openness on mental health and better address it, then line manager training and education is a critical part of that. Everyone’s mental health exists on a continuum from wellness to illness, with issues somewhere in the middle. A manager must feel that they can open a conversation on mental health before an issue escalates. ”

*Alison Pay, Marketing Director, Maudsley Learning at Work*

A total of 7% of employees who disclosed symptoms of poor mental health were referred to some form of counselling and 5% said they were told where to get help or advice. A relatively small number of people had their working conditions or focus changed – this included being offered flexi-time or some changes to hours (3%) and having the job role redesigned (3%).

## Section 5: Responding to employees *continued*

### When you experienced mental health problems and disclosed them to your employer did any of the following things happen?



“ I was forced to take annual leave for the day after I tried to commit suicide and ended up in A&E. Manager was made aware of issue but still forced annual leave. ”

*Employee, public survey respondent*

**20% of employees say nothing was changed when they reported experiencing symptoms of poor mental health**

“ You want everyone to feel they can contribute to the conversation about mental health without being judged, and you want to see ensure that involvement with this issue is a positive part of their development. Whilst senior leaders may take informal actions to role model this behaviour, this should be accompanied by more formal statement of intent, and a formal agreement at the highest level that this is an agenda that everyone should commit to. ”

*Kate Cooper, Head of Research, Policy & Standards, The Institute of Leadership and Management*

Reassuringly, 66% of those who did talk to their manager or to HR about their symptoms experienced positive or neutral actions as a result.

### 66% of employees who reported symptoms of poor mental health experienced positive or neutral actions

Access to workplace services and facilities, including Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP), which are designed to help employees deal with personal problems that might adversely impact their work performance, health and wellbeing, is still limited.

Although they are becoming more widely available they are still more likely to be provided by larger employers. In our survey 37% of employees reported not having access to such facilities or services. 23% of employees had access to an EAP, but just 2% of employees sought help from an EAP for recent symptoms of poor mental health.

### Only 2% of employees sought help from an EAP when experiencing symptoms of poor mental health

## Have you ever put any of the following in place as a result of an employee experiencing a mental health problem?





## Section 5: Responding to employees *continued*

“ Mental ill health is common among employees, and should not be seen as a barrier to working. Keeping a good employee in a good job is an infinitely better outcome for both the employee and the employer. Sometimes finding the right approach can be challenging – but positive, long-term solutions can often be achieved through openness, trust, and a bit of creativity, with employers, managers, and employees working together to find the way forward. ”

*Karen Steadman, Senior Researcher, The Work Foundation*

Many managers reported having taken steps to help employees, but 13% considered that no action has ever been necessary. Half (49%) report having added support for their staff member's workload as the most common response.

**13% of managers thought no action was necessary when managing employees experiencing symptoms of poor mental health**

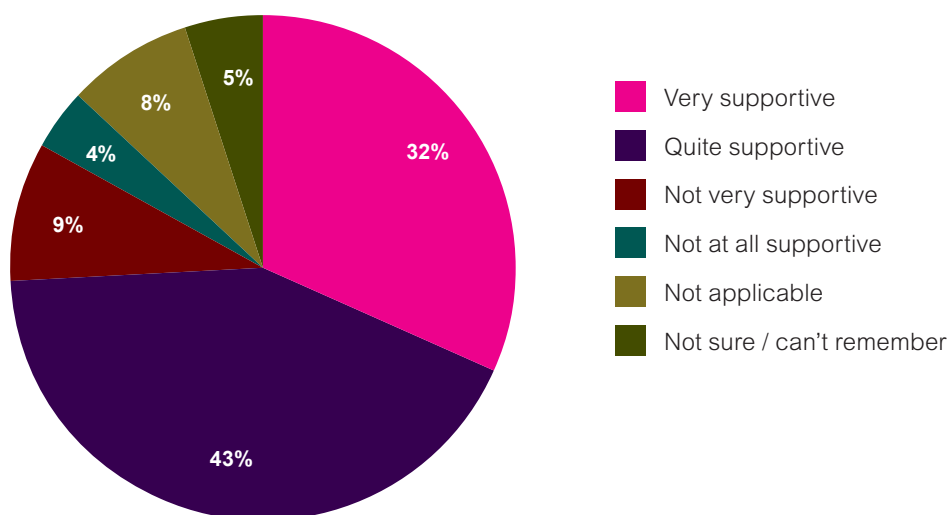
75% of managers report that colleagues of the person with symptoms of poor mental health were either very (32%) or quite (43%) supportive when changes were made to assist them.

However, one-third felt that senior managers and HR departments had either been not very or not at all supportive.

“ The organisation I work for has procedures in place that I would be expected to follow – however, from personal experience I can say that the 'solutions' offered are not always what a person needs or wants (i.e. a job move rather than addressing the underlying problem). ”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*

**How supportive or not were the colleagues in your employee's team or groups in your organisation when you made changes to support someone?**



Net: Very / Quite supportive 75%

Net: Not very / Not at all supportive 12%

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### When you experienced mental health problems, which of these, if any, would have been helpful?



There is a disconnect between the stated aims of employers regarding workplace mental health and wellbeing and the experience of employees with symptoms of poor mental health. Workplaces should be environments in which employees feel comfortable disclosing their current state of mental health. Employees need support at an early stage and line managers should agree and implement a personalised plan that works best for employees. Better signposting to support mechanisms such as EAPs is vital.

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**49% of managers say they offered help with workload, while only 7% of employees say they received it**

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“ [What would have been helpful would be] improved awareness on on-going challenge of living with a mental health diagnosis amongst the HR and management teams. ”

*Employee, public survey respondent*

“ [What would have been helpful would be] understanding and a willingness to work with me in my recovery. There was a limited phased return to work, but in the end there was an ultimatum to do so on my employer's terms, which almost forced me out altogether. ”

*Employee, public survey respondent*



## Spotlight: Gender

### Personal experiences of men and women

There are significant differences between the way men and women experience mental health at work, and in a management capacity. Female employees appear more likely to be affected by symptoms of poor mental health and more likely to seek help, although this may partly be a reflection of male colleague's difficulty in recognising symptoms of mental ill health.

**47% of men feel comfortable talking in the workplace about mental health problems compared to 54% of women**

More women have experienced symptoms of poor mental health either because of work or where work was a contributing factor (this includes psychological, behavioural and physical mental health problems): 66% of women have done so, compared to 58% of men.

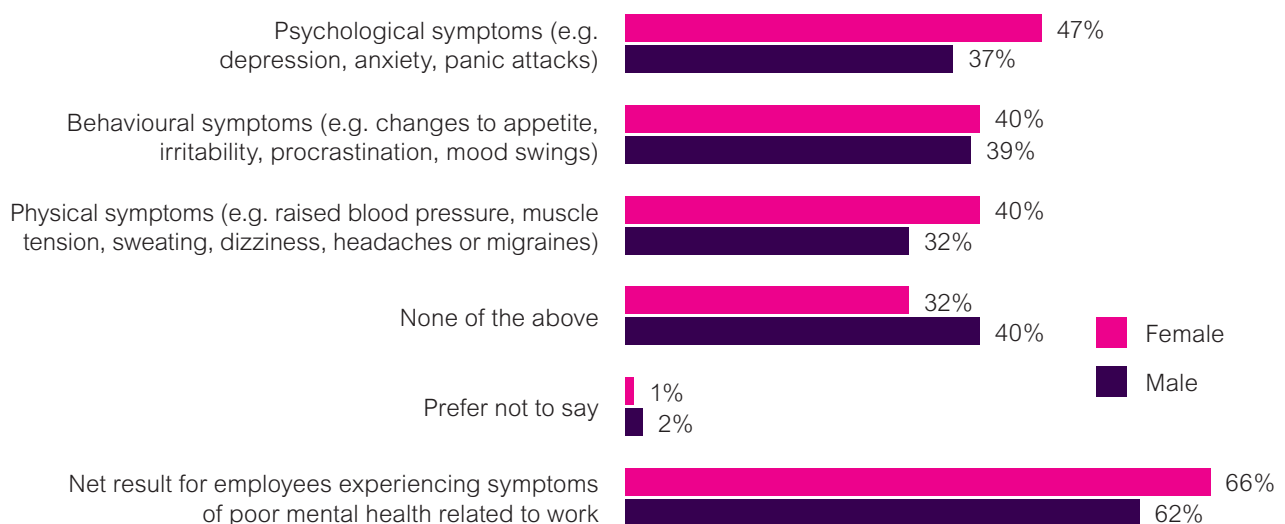
They are also more likely to seek support. For the last experience of the symptoms of poor mental health, 13% of women raised it with their line manager compared to 9% of men. More women also raised it with their friends (28% compared to 16%) and family (30% compared to 22%) and with HR.

Men generally feel less confident around the issue; 47% of men feel comfortable talking in the workplace about mental health problems, compared to 54% of women. This means that any problems or concerns that men have are less likely to be addressed early on. It also helps to explain why after experiencing symptoms of poor mental health, 59% of men said nothing was changed compared to 53% of women.

53% of men feel their line manager is genuinely concerned about their wellbeing, compared to 57% of women, and 36% of men believe their workplace supports people who experience mental health problems very or fairly well, compared to 43% of women.

**13% of women raised their symptoms of poor mental health with their line manager compared to 9% of men**

#### Which of the following, if any, have you ever experienced due to work or where work was a contributing factor?



## Experience of male and female managers

Female managers are much more likely to be approached by an employee wanting to talk about a mental health problem – 41% of women report an occurrence compared to 30% of men. And 10% of female managers said they had been approached in the previous month compared to 4% of male managers. Given they are more likely to have a problem disclosed to them, it is perhaps not surprising that more female managers (54%) than male (44%) believe they have managed people with mental health problems in the past.

“ They may find it hard to share with me, they are mostly men. ”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*

Female managers report being more engaged with the topic and are motivated to improve their own competencies in managing mental health issues at work. They are more likely than men to want to receive basic training in mental health (56% to 44%); to want to take part in a Mental Health First Aid course (41% to 33%); and to want training to manage their own wellbeing (38% to 31%). This is a significant concern to employers, because the data shows that there is a greater need for male managers to be better equipped to respond to mental health problems.

Female managers feel more confident than men in responding to a mental health problem, especially on being able to help someone to get support. For all symptoms of mental health problems, except mood swings, female managers feel more confident than their male counterparts in responding. In the case of a staff member with depression – 68% of female managers would feel confident responding, compared to 58% of men.

Male managers are less likely to signpost their staff for help and information (30% compared to 42% for females). 12% of male managers have organised an internal job move for staff members with symptoms of poor mental health, compared to just 4% of women.

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**44% of female managers have been approached by an employee wanting to talk about a mental health problem, compared to 30% of male managers**

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Consistent, high quality training for all line managers is absolutely crucial to ensure that all line managers are able to respond effectively, regardless of gender. Many male managers understand that mental health and wellbeing is one their responsibilities, and they should be supported by their employer in knowing how to communicate to all employees that they are willing to listen and take appropriate action.

It is possible many managers are acting on instinct in the absence of clear company policies or guidance on how to manage and respond to mental health issues. Each business must provide clear guidance to line managers and ensure this is communicated clearly to staff.

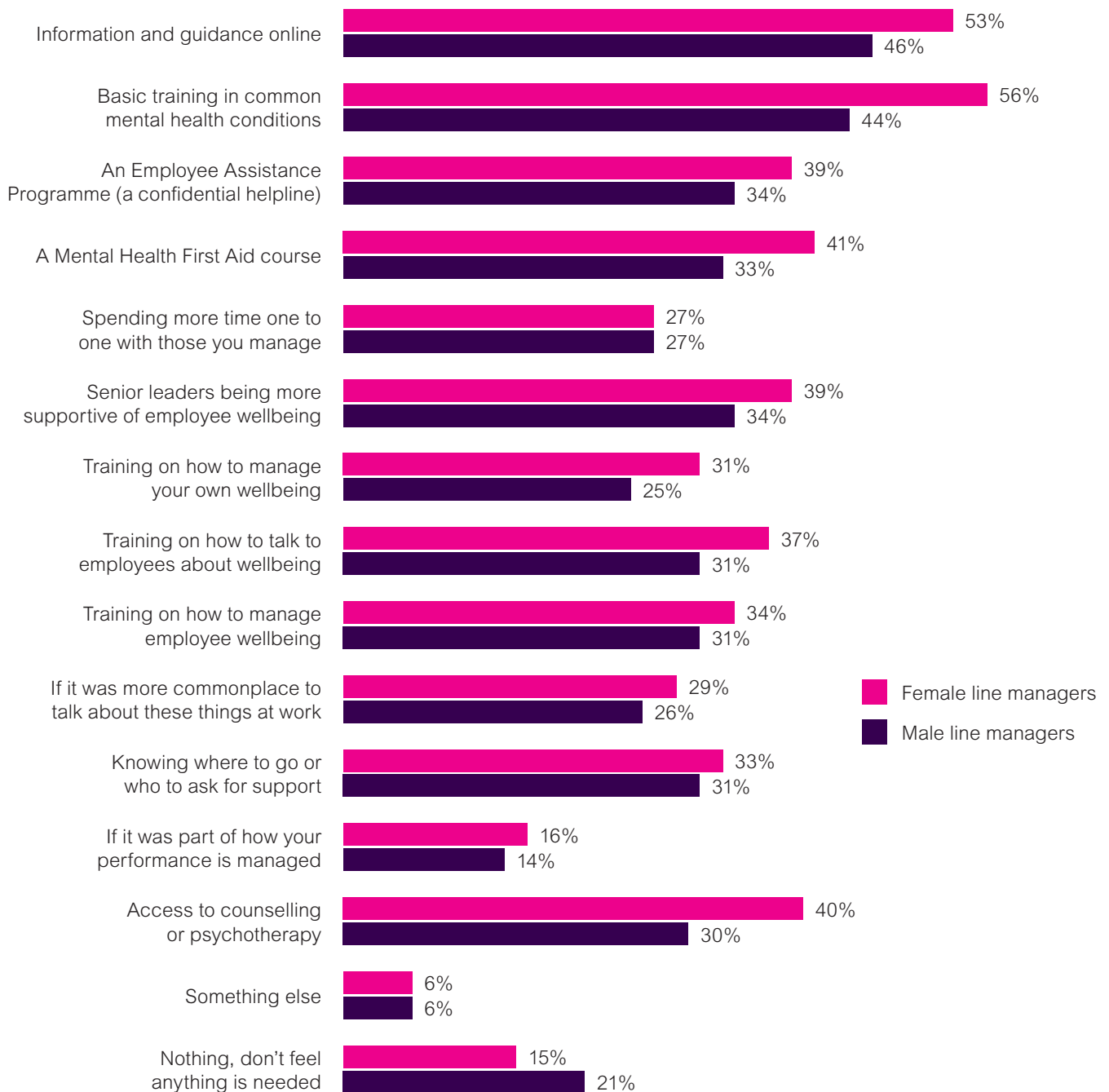
“ [I work for a] very white male organisation that is often aggressive, and due to lack of diversity does not appreciate mental health issues. ”

*Line manager, public survey respondent*



## Spotlight: Gender *continued*

### Which, if any, of the following support would be useful for you as a line manager to support employees experiencing a mental health problem





## Personal experiences of the generations

The experiences of younger and older workers with mental health and the workplace vary significantly. Younger workers are more likely to experience symptoms of poor mental health, feel less comfortable discussing mental health with a line manager and are less trusting in their employer's commitment to mental health and wellbeing.

### Younger workers are more likely to experience symptoms of poor mental health than older workers

Younger people are twice as likely to describe their current mental health as 'poor' or 'very poor' – 16% of 18 to 29 year olds as compared to 8% of 50 to 59 year olds.

There is consistency across the ages of those who have experienced symptoms of poor mental health where work has been a contributing factor. However, younger groups are more likely to have experienced this recently – 43% of 18 to 29 year olds who have experienced these symptoms said the most recent episode was in the past month, compared to 29% of 50-59 year olds.

Despite symptoms of poor mental health being more prevalent among younger groups, older workers are more open about the problems they are experiencing. Comfort with talking about mental health generally rises with age, from 40% of 18-29s

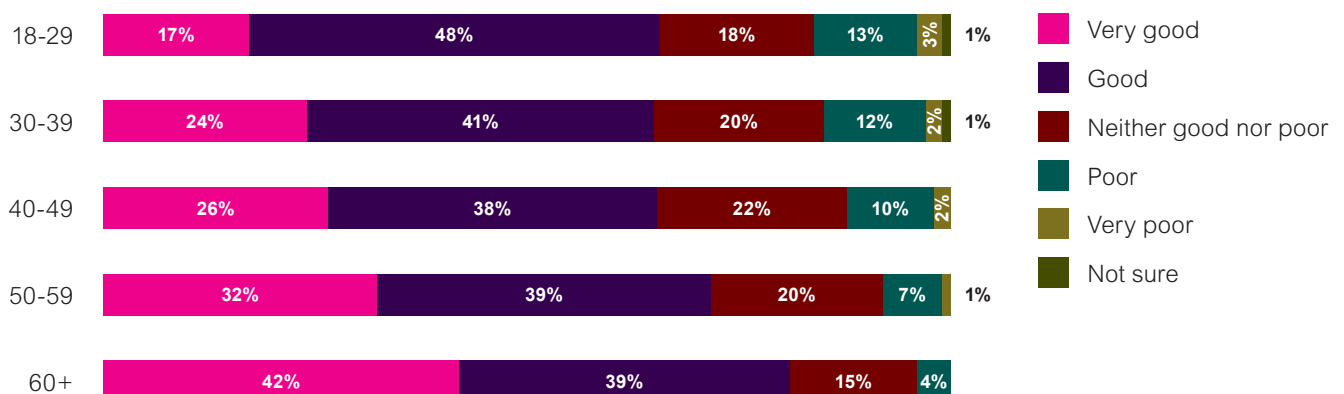
reporting they feel comfortable to 54% of those aged 50 to 59. This trend is also true of confidence in speaking with their line manager specifically about a mental health problem – 46% of employees aged 18-29 would be confident to tell their manager about a mental health problem, and 58% of those aged over 60 would be confident.

Confidence that the workplace is supportive also rises with age. 36% of those aged 18 to 29 think their employer supports people with mental health problems, compared to 41% of those aged over 50. Older employees are also more likely to have approached someone because they were concerned about their mental health – 28% of employees aged 50-59 have done this as opposed to 17% of those aged 30-39.

In terms of what different age groups do when they experience symptoms of poor mental health, older employees were more likely to visit their GP whilst younger employees focused on support from family, friends and other colleagues. All age groups were close to the average of just 11% who had gone to their line manager when they most recently experienced these symptoms.

The difference in how age groups experience and talk about mental health at work shows that there is no 'one size fits all' approach that can be taken by employers; each conversation must be had individually.

### How would you describe your mental health at this time?





### Experience of managers

Younger managers are more likely than older managers to ask for support and advice in managing an employee's mental health problem. They are also more likely to sign up for relevant training. 53% of managers aged 18-29 want training on how to talk to employees about wellbeing, compared to 34% of those in their 50s, while 47% of 18-29 year olds are interested in a Mental Health First Aid course compared to 34% of 50-59 year olds.

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#### **Younger managers are more interested in mental health training**

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Younger managers are more likely to say there are barriers to supporting people with mental health problems – just 12% of those under 30 thought there were no barriers compared to 28% of those over 60. Older managers are more likely to say they feel they were helpful the last time someone had a problem and also are more likely to have approached someone because they were concerned about their mental health.

“ The report highlights that although young adults are disclosing more mental health issues they have concerns about talking to line managers about these issues, which is a real challenge as we know from other research that this age group can be particularly vulnerable to social isolation as they enter the job market for the first time. ”

*Dr Justin Varney, National Lead for Adult Health and Wellbeing, Public Health England*

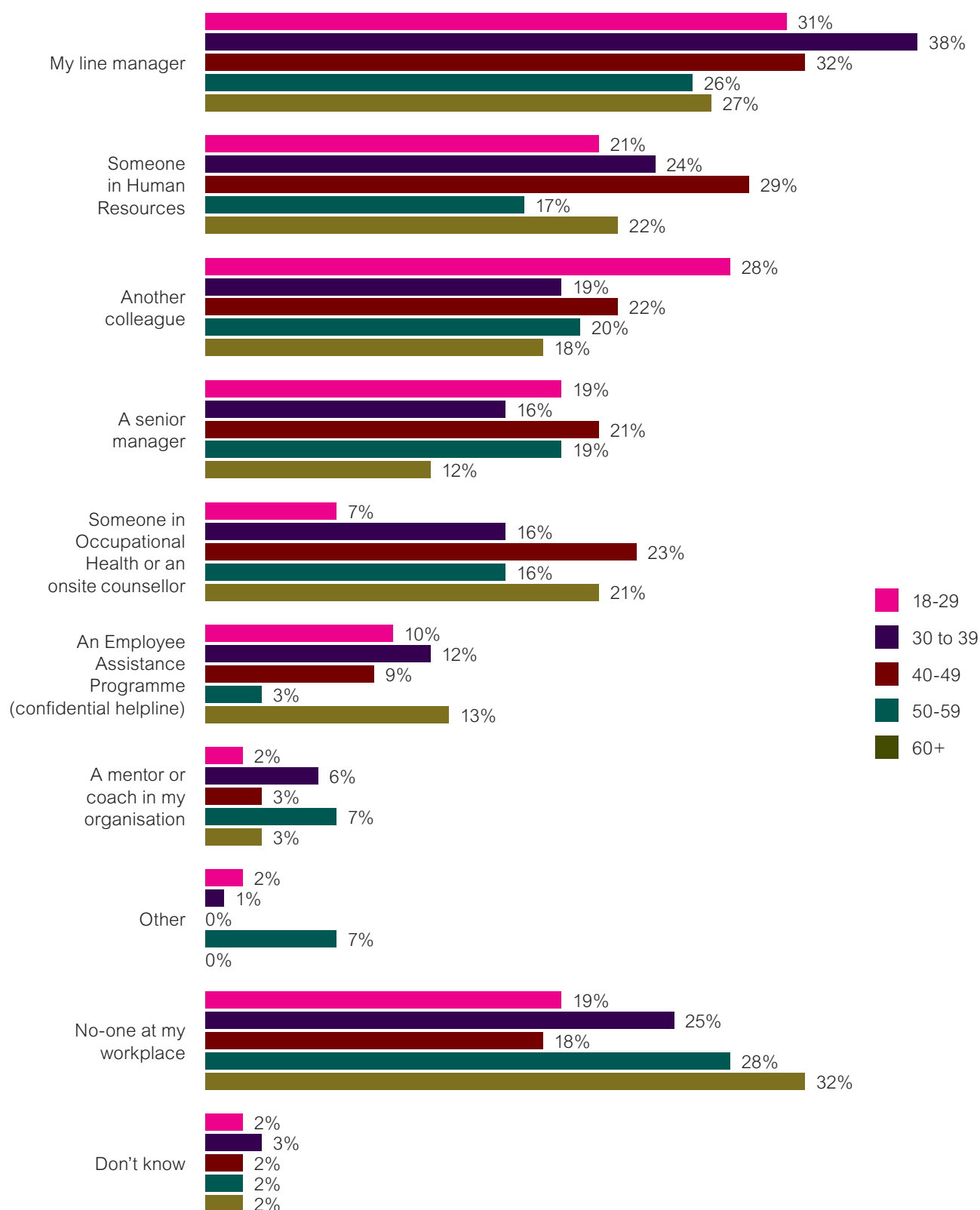
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#### **Comfort with talking about mental health generally rises with age**

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**Thinking about the most recent time that someone you manage experienced mental health problems, did you talk to or receive support from any of the following people at work?**





# Spotlight: Clinically diagnosed mental health conditions

## Personal experiences

Those who have previously been diagnosed with a condition are more likely to have experienced symptoms of poor mental health recently, but they are also seen to be more approachable and respond better to others who have also experienced problems.

### **29% of employees report being diagnosed with a mental health problem**

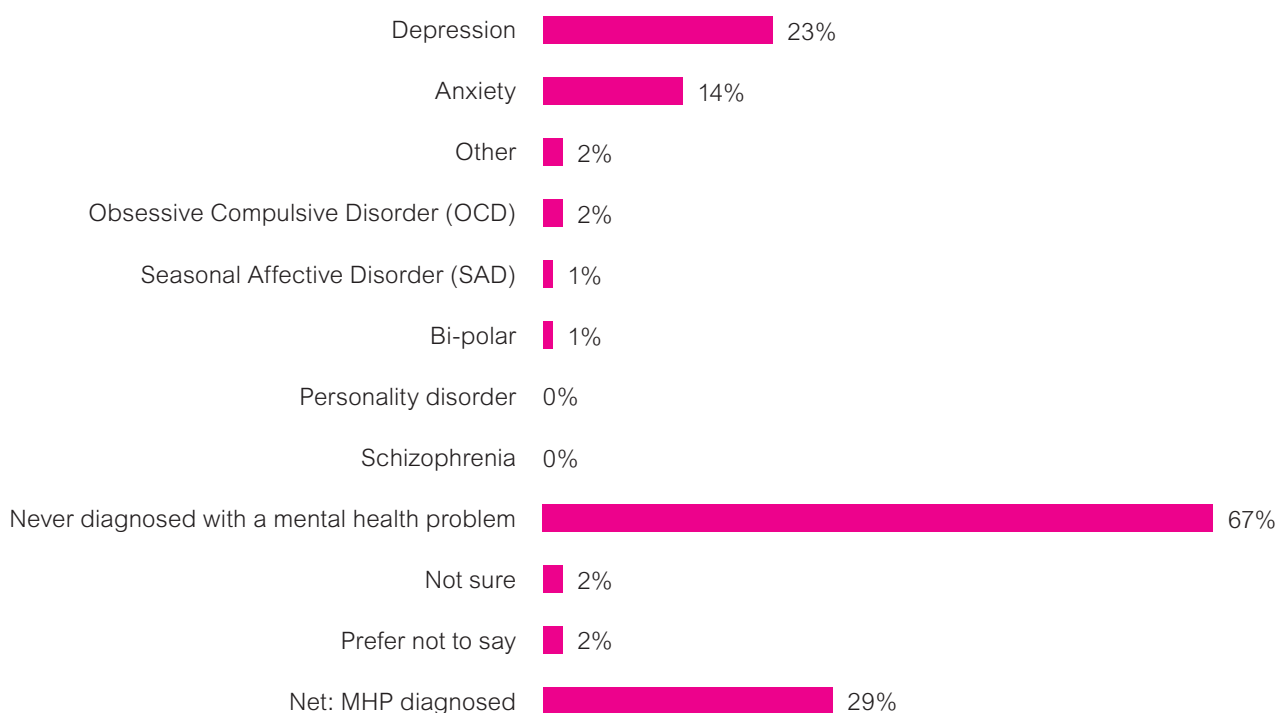
A quarter (25%) of those who have been formally diagnosed with a mental health condition at some point in their lives say their mental health is currently 'poor' or 'very poor', as opposed to 5% of those that have never been diagnosed with a condition. They are more likely to have experienced symptoms of poor mental health because of work or where work was a contributing factor (80% compared to 55% of those that have

not been diagnosed). They are more likely to have experienced psychological symptoms in the last month (34% compared to 27% without a diagnosis).

### **People diagnosed with a mental health problem are more likely to cite work as a source or contributing factor**

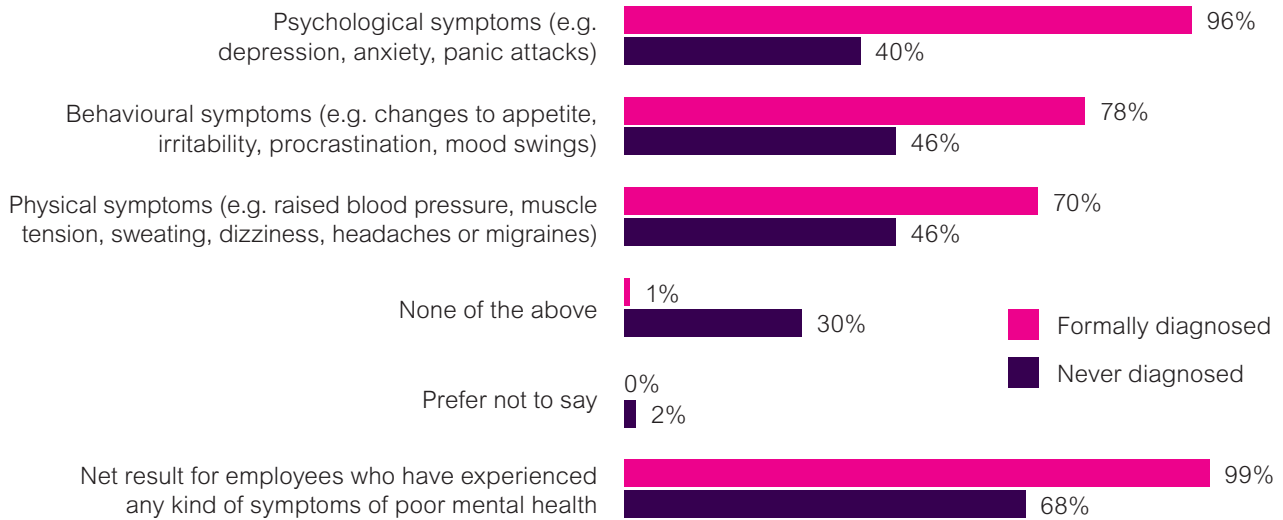
In general, those who have been diagnosed were far more likely to seek help when they do experience symptoms of poor mental health. Only 18% did not seek help from anyone – regardless of whether they were in or out of work – when they last had an issue, compared to 45% of those without a diagnosed condition. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who have been diagnosed with a condition are far more likely to have gone to a GP during their most recent experience of poor mental health (49% compared to 15%).

## Have you been formally diagnosed with a mental health problem?



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### Which of the following, if any, have you ever experienced?



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## Experiences of managers

A quarter (25%) of managers who have been previously diagnosed with a mental health condition were approached by someone to talk about mental health in the last month, compared to 15% of other managers. They are also more proactive – they are more likely to have approached someone because they were concerned for their mental health.

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**Managers who have been diagnosed with a mental health problem are more likely to be approached by their employees**

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Those with their own experiences, through having a diagnosed condition, feel more confident that they could recognise the symptoms that those they manage need help (75% compared to 61% of those that have not been diagnosed). They are also more confident that they could talk to the employee about it, suggesting more appropriate actions can be taken. Businesses can learn from those with lived experiences of mental health conditions and use that to build awareness and confidence in others.

# Case studies



## BANK OF ENGLAND

Adam Spreadbury is a financial regulator with the Bank of England. He joined via the Bank's graduate recruitment scheme 20 years ago. After being ill with bouts of depression, Adam felt he was strongly supported by his employer and he has played a leading role in helping the Bank to remain at the forefront of best practice in workplace mental health.

With strong and visible support from the senior leadership, the Bank is fostering a culture in which mental health can be discussed as openly as physical health. In 2012 Adam helped to set up a mental health network to provide support to colleagues. "We try to normalise mental health," Adam says. "If you do struggle, it need not be a problem."

The most significant innovation has been the introduction of mental health training programmes for line managers, developed by Bank Workers Charity and Mind. More than 200 line managers have learned how to spot signs of mental ill health and how to engage with colleagues. Training for line managers also stresses the importance of looking after their own mental health and wellbeing. The Bank has introduced 'reasonable adjustment passports'. The passports hold information about changes that have been made to an individual's working arrangements, to be shared with new line managers in the event of a change in role.

Adam says that many of the measures taken by the Bank can be implemented by small and medium-sized businesses: "The majority of things we have done require time, rather than expense. Raising awareness doesn't cost money. It is about having that conversation and demonstrating the commitment to support staff.

"The Bank does it because it is the right thing to do. But it also recognises the business benefit."



Jessica Carmody is a manager at KPMG. She has lived with ongoing situational depression since her teens, and flagged this as a health condition with Occupational Health when she received her job offer. With flexible and understanding support from KPMG Jessica has been able to maintain the best possible work-life balance and keep doing the work that helps her with her condition. She also chairs the organisation's mental health network which encourages open conversation in the workplace about mental health and wellbeing.

Jessica found that support from her line manager and the chance to adapt her approach to work has been invaluable. She works from home two or three days a week, which allows her to spend time away from a busy office while staying in touch with her colleagues and keeping on top of her job. Stopping working altogether was never even a consideration: "I find that in general, keeping working helps me with my depression."

KPMG offers a wealth of support for employees and line managers around mental health, from provision of information for employees about where to go for help, and guides for line managers, through to training and development. All performance managers also have to do training which includes a case study on talking to someone with mental health issues, and people leaders attend a course which includes mental health training.

Jessica believes that KPMG's senior leadership leads from the top when it comes to mental health. "Our Chairman is very supportive of our mental health network and our senior leaders speak at our meetings and talk openly about their own experiences. We all work to avoid any stigma about discussion of mental health in the workplace."

# MARS

Alison Roper has worked for Mars for 27 years, starting in customer services and ending up as Knowledge Connections Internal Consultant. The organisation supported her through an extremely difficult personal time, and she feels that her loyalty has increased tenfold as a result.

Alison's young daughter passed away suddenly in 2004. Her line manager was supportive both immediately and in the months afterwards. "Three weeks after my daughter's death, I asked my manager about coming back to work and he told me not to worry about it; that there was no pressure at all. He never made me feel guilty or worried about the time I was having off work and in the end, I was off from April to August."

It was the little things that made a huge difference to Alison during that time, "for example, I spoke to my boss' boss, who was not usually the most talkative person in the room at work, for an hour and a half and he showed great compassion and empathy with my situation." She was provided with the right support for her to get back to work, when she was ready – with access to a life coach and counselling at work which she refers to as a "safety net".

Alison thinks that the role of an employer is critical in supporting employees with mental wellbeing. "You could be good at dealing with broken arms or legs, but good mental health care has a more profound effect on your ability to work. It works in two ways; it helps the person and it helps the organisation and people really want to continue working at a place that has supported them through thick and thin."

While Alison encourages people to talk openly about the mental health challenges they might have faced, she recognises that not everybody feels that they can do this. "At Mars, people have the option to talk to our ombudsman if they don't feel that they are being listened to. If you don't want to bring your problem to work, it doesn't have to be your line manager that you talk to – it could be anyone you trust. Businesses do need to do more to educate line managers and help them feel confident in dealing with the issues of their employees or at least signposting them to help. Mars is doing a lot of work to help line managers notice the early warning signs of mental health challenges."

Ultimately, Alison felt supported by the entire organisation and is keen for other employers to recognise the loyalty that such support can create in employees. "I was loyal before, but on a whole different scale now. I was grateful to be given that space to grieve. The reality is that at Mars we look after our people and you can't put a price on that."

## Case studies

### continued

# M&S

EST. 1884

At Marks & Spencer employee wellbeing has traditionally focused on physical rather than mental health. When Beth Ryder joined as Wellbeing Manager two years ago she saw the opportunity to address this imbalance. “Our business, just the same as many others, needed to do more to support employees’ mental health.”

Beth worked with Business in the Community and other companies to identify solutions for M&S. With the organisation undergoing a period of change, Beth seized the opportunity to get mental wellbeing on the agenda of the senior leadership team. 20 of M&S’s 160 senior leaders embarked on a period of self-learning as part of their ‘Fit to Lead’ development programme: spending time with Mind and getting involved with initiatives linked to mental health. The 20 became so passionate that they set up a wellbeing group, whose champion is now M&S’s CEO, and spearheaded a programme of wellbeing ‘Dare to Care’ principles, tackling unhealthy work habits.

M&S launched an annual employee wellbeing campaign in October 2015, which promoted the company’s existing employee assistance programme, Live Well Work Well, and encouraged an open atmosphere for employees to discuss mental health. M&S’s 40 policy specialists, who are on hand to support line managers, received Mental Health First Aid training. Beth worked with Mind to create a comprehensive line managers’ guide to employee wellbeing.

Beth says that the feedback from employees underlines the importance of the initiative. Says Beth: “Recently a colleague who works in one of our stores was so reassured and touched by the help from her line manager, she got in touch with our central office to say thank you. Thanks to our new resources and training her manager had been able to make simple little changes – from regular ‘are you OK?’ check-ins to regular breaks from the shop floor – which have helped address her mental health problems and have kept her in work.”

Supporting mental wellbeing is now embedded in the company’s DNA. “There will always be opportunities for us to develop line manager capability and how we operate on this agenda continues to drive better awareness on this issue. This is not just critical to our people but to our business performance as well.”



Procter & Gamble, the consumer products company, launched its Healthy Minds programme two years ago to promote positive mental wellbeing across the business.

During the first year P&G embarked on a campaign to raise awareness, beginning at the company’s head office in Weybridge, Surrey. This initiative included placing posters with a mental health theme around the workplace featuring quotes from P&G leaders, including some who were open about their own experience of mental health. An internal speaker series gave employees the opportunity to share their own experiences of mental health, whether individually, as a friend of someone affected or within the workplace.

P&G supported Time to Talk Day, encouraging employees to take part in five minute conversations about mental health.

The second year of Healthy Minds has focused on building knowledge and capability across the organisation, including the recruitment of Mental Health Champions to take a positive, proactive role in tackling the barriers to good workplace mental health and wellbeing.

P&G also launched Healthy Minds for Line Managers, a training course to help managers build their base knowledge, become confident in discussing this topic and proactively setting the right culture to create an environment for positive mental wellbeing.

Richard Seville, Senior HR Manager, Northern Europe, said: “Our surveys show that there has been an improvement in employees’ work life balance and wellbeing. Mental health is much more common as a topic of discussion in the workplace – we all have mental health just as we have physical health.”

“ Our Healthy Mind Champions are very much integrated into how we work. They are the first port of call at work for colleagues who want to talk about mental health, and need advice or support. New recruits learn about our approach to mental health and wellbeing as part of the onboarding training. ”

*Helen Tucker, HR Director, P&G Northern Europe*

# Calls to action and recommendations

**We know that there is no one single solution to stop thousands of employees from suffering in silence. This report highlights a concerning disconnect between organisational and leadership awareness and action on mental health, and the line manager and employee experience.**

An ongoing culture of silence around mental health, perpetuated by a lack of mental health literacy amongst management and employee populations, continues to be a major barrier to significant progress.

We are asking employers to implement three calls to action that will help to tackle these barriers.

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## Calls to action for employers

### 1 Talk

break the culture of silence that surrounds mental health by taking the [Time to Change Employer's Pledge](#)

### 2 Train

invest in basic mental health literacy for all employees and first aid training in mental health to support line manager capability

### 3 Take action

close the gap by asking all staff about their experiences in order to identify the disconnects that exist in the organisation between what you have committed to and what your employees are experiencing

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Our first two calls to action have been previously advocated by Business in the Community, and our growing body of business case studies confirm these actions remain pertinent and effective.

Our third call to action is focused on addressing the gap between leadership perception and employee experience. It requires employers to look inwards and identify what their own gap is between awareness and action. What are the barriers, what are the challenges, what is working? Through an ongoing dialogue with employees, organisations can be certain their approach truly benefits individuals and the business as a whole.

Everyone has mental health and physical health, and we all move along a continuum between good and poor mental health throughout our lives. These calls to action alongside our recommendations will support employers to embed an ethos of parity of mental and physical health throughout their organisation.



# Calls to action and recommendations

## *continued*

## Recommendations

### 1 Set the tone: we all have mental health

#### Tone from the top:

- Sign the [Time to Change Employer's Pledge](#) to make a public commitment to tackle the culture of silence that surrounds mental health.
- Embed wellbeing into organisational culture by adopting Business in the Community's [Workwell Model](#). This helps organisations to take a 'whole systems' approach that is aligned to securing strategic objectives.
- Use the Business in the Community and Public Health England [Mental Health Toolkit for Employers](#) that supports all employers to take simple, positive actions to build a culture that champions good mental health.
- Send a clear message of parity of esteem between mental and physical health to normalise conversations around mental health.
- Appoint a mental health champion on to your senior team, with a remit to drive better mental health and encourage all leaders to act as role models, actively challenging myths and stigma both proactively and reactively.
- Ensure skills based learning is made available to leadership and management teams to develop awareness, confidence and capability in managing mental health.

#### Tone from the bottom up:

- Invest in providing employees with basic mental health literacy so they can spot the signs when they or a colleague may need help.
- Ensure all employees know where to go for guidance and are equipped to start a conversation about mental health with colleagues they are concerned about.
- Share Business in the Community's [Listen Up: Let's Talk Mental Health](#) with all employees. This guide contains practical tips on how to start a conversation with someone you are concerned about and how to talk about your own mental health.

### 2 Address the disconnect

- Acknowledge that a gap may exist in your own business between leadership perception of support for employee mental health, and reality of employees' experience. Take action to identify the gaps and be clear that you are committed to resolving this.
- Gather employee feedback using a range of informal and formal mechanisms to understand where your gaps exist, including annual and pulse surveys, focus groups, and various employee forums. Provide employees with a timeframe for when you will report back with findings and next steps – to reinforce your commitment to change and encourage participation in feedback.
- Take part in the free annual [Britain's Healthiest Workplace](#), which provides both employer and employee feedback on health and wellbeing.
- Identify and remove any specific organisational barriers that restrict line managers from effectively managing and supporting individuals experiencing a mental health issue.
- Identify the issues in your workplace that may be impacting on employee mental wellbeing and use this knowledge to inform changes to approach, policy, and organisational design.

### 3 The role of line managers

- Ensure managers are supported to manage their own wellbeing, via their own managers and appropriate resources and training.
- Train as many line managers as possible in first aid training in mental health and invest in improving their mental health literacy.
- Regularly communicate to line managers the support they can draw on when supporting colleagues.
- Encourage line managers to seek support as needed, when managing a colleague with mental health concerns, e.g. from HR or other specialists, or their own line managers.
- Ensure line managers understand what steps they can, or need to, take in order to agree reasonable adjustments with someone who is experiencing mental health issues.

- Introduce the concept of 'everyday wellbeing' as a core part of all 1-2-1 and/or personal development conversations. This will help to normalise conversations around mental wellbeing between staff.
- Use Business in the Community's [Leading on Mental Wellbeing: transforming the role of line managers](#) report to embed wellbeing and deliver a functioning framework that gives line managers the support they need to respond to and manage employee mental wellbeing.

#### 4 Tackle the culture of silence

- Instil an understanding in every employee that everyone has a state of mental health as they do physical health. Use awareness campaigns regularly to communicate this message, such as Time to Talk Day, Mental Health Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day.
- Normalise the conversation around mental health. Appoint volunteer wellbeing champions to be ambassadors, who can lead by example, raise awareness and share information to promote positive messaging about mental health.
- Work with change-makers, including key leaders, HR and other specialists, and wellbeing champions, to equip them with the confidence and knowledge to promote an open climate where discussion of mental health becomes normalised.
- Ensure every employee has access to (and knows where to find) appropriate support to stay well and to help manage mental ill health. Reinforce this information regularly.
- HR and any additional specialist support functions should clearly outline the role they can play in supporting all employees, so that employees feel they have a safe space to discuss mental health.
- Employers should follow best practice in handling any issues concerning performance, including taking account of any short or long-term mental health issues that may impact on performance.
- Make reasonable adjustments to enable people to remain in work when possible and take a phased approach to return to work after a period of ill health.

#### 5 Respond to employees

- Take a preventative approach to creating a work environment that promotes mental wellbeing, by adopting Business in the Community's [Workwell model](#), the [HSE Management Standards](#) and the [NICE Workplace Health Management Standards](#).
- Provide employees with a clear wellbeing offering, starting at induction, and reinforced on a regular basis, including resources to support employee resilience and mental wellbeing.
- Include employees in discussions to develop flexible, bespoke solutions to their mental health support needs, i.e. reasonable adjustments and Wellness Action Plans.

# Methodology and Appendix

## Methodology

This report presents the key findings from a survey of 3,036 full and part-time employees in the UK representative of gender, age, industry sector, region and business size, excluding sole traders and those working alone. The report leads on this main sample drawn from the YouGov panel of over 600,000 people in the UK. In addition, the report highlights upon data drawn from a parallel public open survey of 16,246 responses that was promoted by Business in the Community, partners, supporting organisations, and via social media. All fieldwork was conducted online during May-July 2016. The surveys explore mental health and wellbeing in the workplace with a focus on the role of the line manager.

All chart data represented in this report has been rounded to the nearest percentage.

## Appendix

### i Definitions of symptoms of poor mental health and formally diagnosed mental health condition

Definition of symptoms of poor mental health: In the National Employee Mental Wellbeing survey symptoms that are defined as an indicator of poor mental health are defined as: Behavioural (e.g. changes to appetite, irritability, procrastination, mood swings), Physical symptoms (e.g. raised blood pressure, muscle tension, sweating, dizziness, headaches or migraines), Psychological symptoms (e.g. depression, anxiety, panic attacks).

Formally diagnosed mental health condition: In the National Employee Mental Wellbeing survey participants were asked 'Have you been formally diagnosed with a mental health problem? Please tick all that apply': Anxiety, Bi-polar, Depression, Never diagnosed with a mental health problem, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Other, Personality disorder, Prefer not to say, Schizophrenia, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), Not sure.

### ii Disciplinary action

This is based on the percentage of respondents that selected 'sacked', 'forced out' or 'disciplinary procedures' when asked what happened at work when experiencing their most recent symptoms of poor mental health.

### Ethnicity data

In addition to investigating data by age and gender, YouGov considered Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) findings. YouGov did not find any strong differences between white and BAME employees from the panel survey data.

Business in the Community would like to thank the following individuals and organisations:

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**BUSINESS  
IN THE  
COMMUNITY**



**THE PRINCE'S  
RESPONSIBLE  
BUSINESS NETWORK**