

April 2020

COVID-19: *Four Radical Changes* in U.S. Worker Mental Health Needs



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Background

Last year, Ginger began tracking U.S. worker sentiment toward mental health with our annual Workforce Attitudes Towards Mental Health Report. For the February 2019 and 2020 surveys, we surveyed 1,200 full-time U.S. workers with benefits.

Just after receiving the results from this past February, the COVID-19 pandemic hit in the U.S. At the time of publishing this (April 2020), the numbers are staggering. Over 1.3M people in the world have been diagnosed with COVID-19, including 363,800 people in the U.S. Nearly 11,000 people in the U.S. have died as a result. U.S. unemployment is its highest ever in record history at 6.6 million.

This unprecedented event has had a sudden and dramatic impact on our society - including our collective mental health. To better understand how employers need to think about these changes, we decided to re-run a series of the original questions in late March 2020 and added a handful of new questions specific to the impacts of the pandemic.

Here are four key takeaways that all companies need to consider as they plan for the long-range impacts of COVID-19.

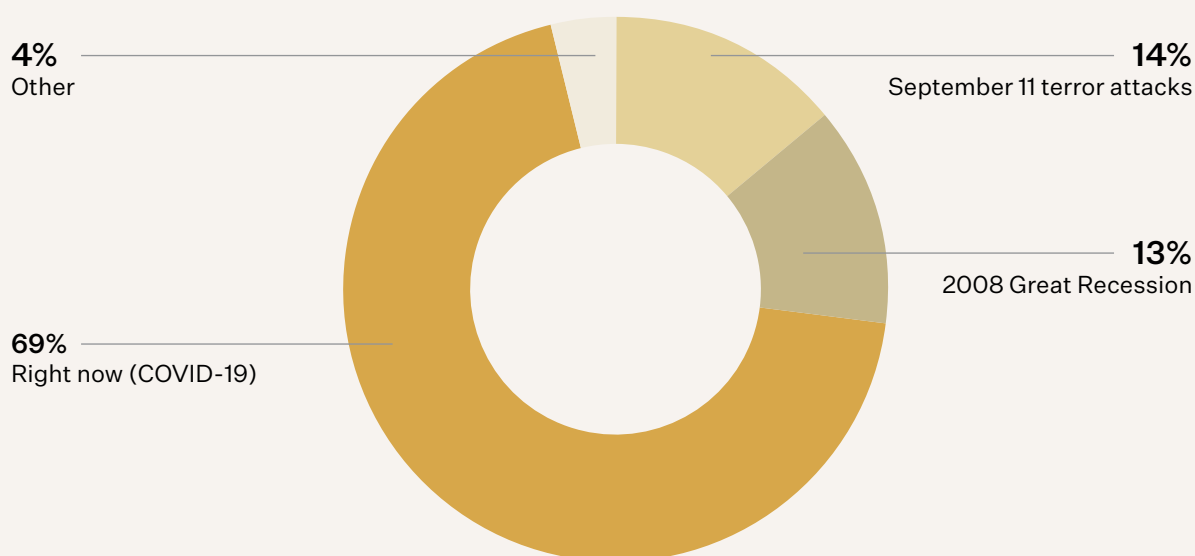
1.

U.S. workers were stressed before COVID-19; now, *stress levels are through the roof*

Before the onset of COVID-19, nearly 60 percent of workers shared that stress had brought them to tears at work, a 23% increase from 2019. Surveyed following the onset of COVID-19, workers report that their stress levels are significantly higher:

- 88% of workers reported experiencing **moderate to extreme stress** over the past 4-6 weeks.
- 69% of workers claimed this was the **most stressful time of their entire professional career**, including major events like the September 11 terror attacks, the 2008 Great Recession and others. Every demographic, including adults over the age of 55, rated COVID-19 as the most stressful time.
- 91% of employees working from home reported experiencing moderate to extreme stress.
- 43% of employees **have become physically ill** as a result of work-related stress.

“During what period of time were you the most stressed at work?”



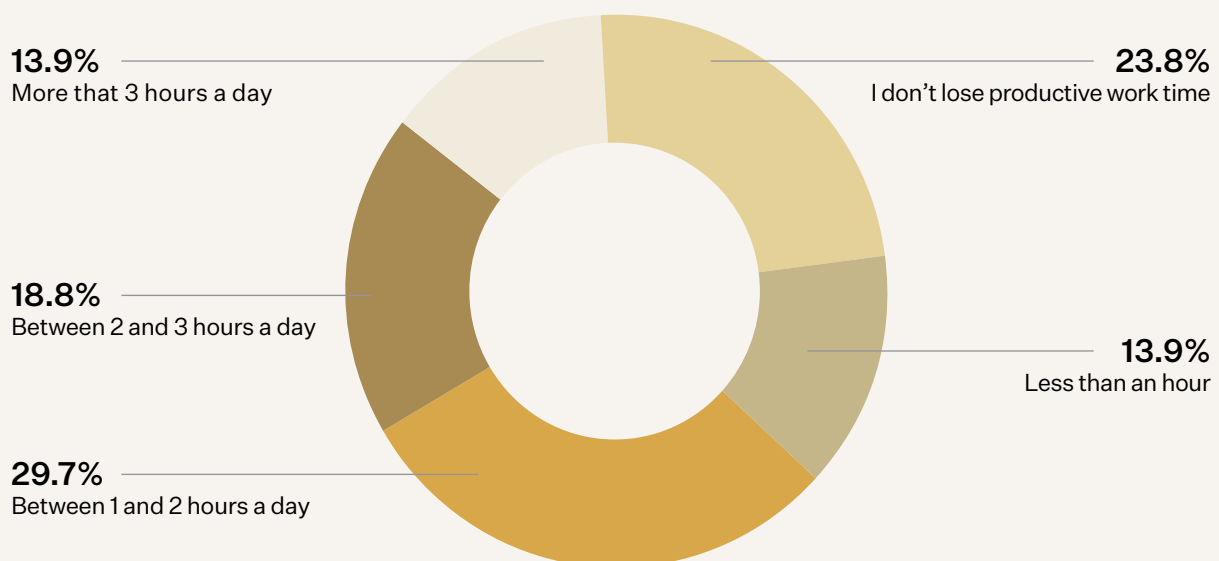
2.

COVID-19-related stress is having a dramatic impact on employee productivity, and *men appear to be disproportionately impacted.*

- 62% of workers reported losing at least one hour a day in productivity due to COVID-19 related stress, with 32% losing more than two hours per day.
- 70% of workers agreed that employees at their company are significantly less productive because of stress and anxiety surrounding COVID-19.
- Men are 27% more likely to lose hours of productivity. In fact, men report that their work lives are significantly more impacted by stress:

Impact	Men	Women
Unable to attend meetings	33%	13%
Harder to collaborate with coworkers	51%	36%
Missed days of work	28%	15%
Increase in illness or health issues	36%	21%

“Approximately how many hours of productive work time are you losing each day as a result of COVID-19 pandemic-related stress?”



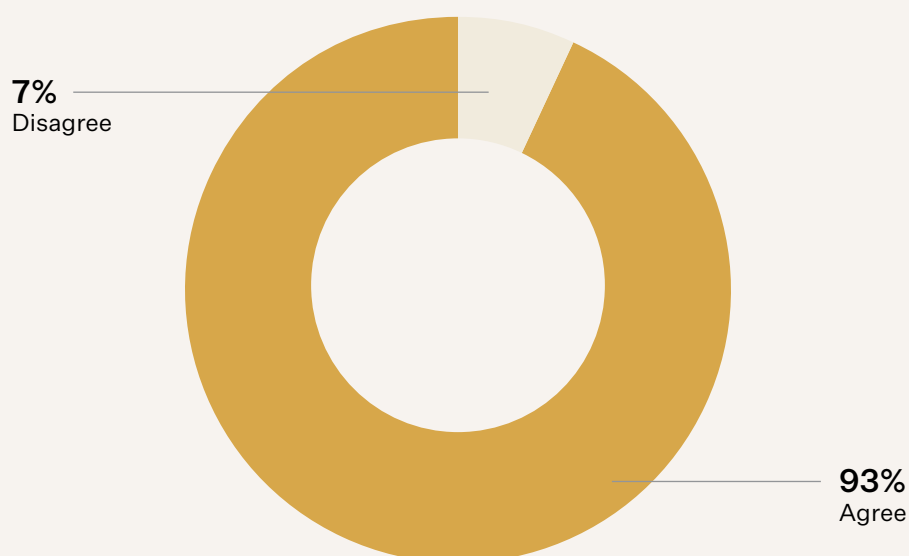
3.

Employees believe their company could do more to *support their emotional and mental health*

While 53% of workers said their company has increased its focus on employee mental health as a result of COVID-19, the research shows that there's room for improvement:

- 63% of workers reported that **their company could do more to support their emotional and mental health** during the COVID-19 pandemic. Within this group, 22 percent of workers said their company's response was "barely adequate", "a disaster" or "non-existent".
- Only 35% of people **strongly agree** that their employer is taking more of an interest in the emotional and mental health of employees now than in the past.
- 93% of employees believe that **companies that survive COVID-19** will be those who support their employees' mental health.

“Companies that have strong emotional and mental health support for employees will be more likely to survive the impact of COVID-19”



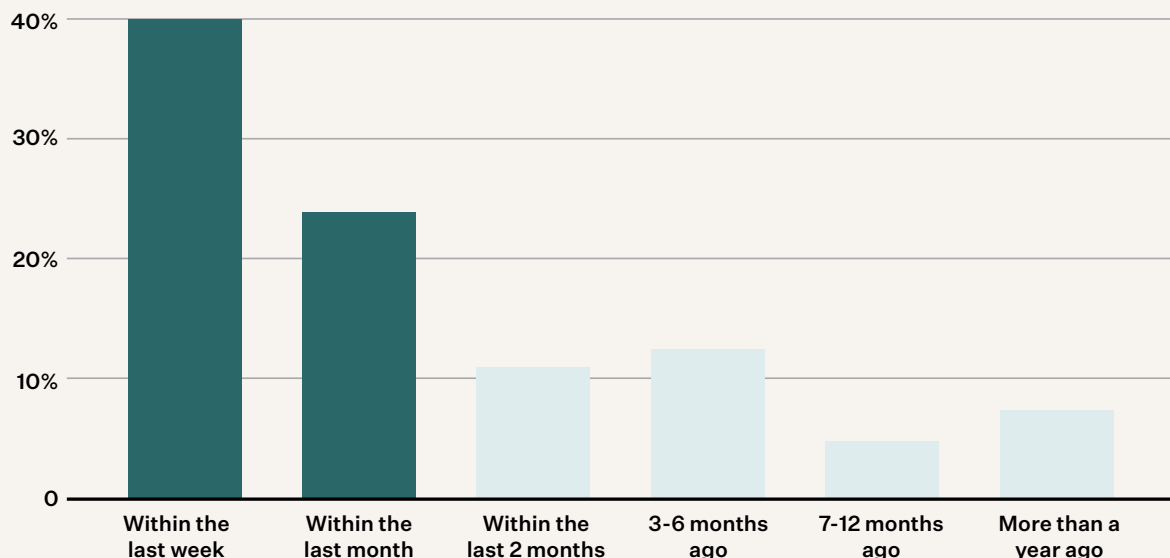
4.

Employees were already interested in the *virtual delivery of mental healthcare*, and now they're quickly turning to it for support

Before COVID-19, employees rated the ability to text or video chat with a mental health professional as the top service they desire from their mental health benefits - across almost all demographics including age, gender and role. Now, employees are rapidly turning to online solutions for support:

- 38% of employees have **tried a technology-based mental health service**. Of this group, 40% have tried it within the last week (3/25/20-4/1/20), 24 percent within the last month and 11 percent within the last 2 months.
- 70% of employees who used a technology-based mental health service **for the first time in the past month** did so to deal with COVID-19 stress. 48% tried it because their regular counselor had moved to online sessions.
- 80% of employees **would be more likely** to use an emotional or mental health benefit if they access it through their smartphone.

“When was the first time you used a technology-based emotional or mental health service such as online counseling or a mental health app?”



The bottom line: Accessible mental health support is a *critical pillar of business continuity planning*.

As companies wrestle with business continuity planning, they must consider investing in mental health as a way to manage the dramatic increase in U.S. employee stress level and significant drop in productivity. The good news? The rapid uptick in consumer acceptance of virtual mental healthcare.

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