

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

# Mental Health in the Coronavirus Era

JULY 2020



## ABOUT THIS STUDY

As providers of mental health benefits for employees, we at Modern Health wanted to take a snapshot of mental well-being in America at the height of stress surrounding COVID-19. By May 2020, most US states had sent non-essential workers home and instituted at least some policies restricting movement. That's when we conducted our poll on the mental health attitudes of 500 Americans. While it's obvious the pandemic has brought new stressors with it—increased child care obligations for some, the dissolution of work/life boundaries for others, a constant barrage of distressing news for us all—as trained clinicians espousing the benefits of evidence-based care, we know not to assume, but to ask. We wanted to know: How acute is the stress? Is it the worst it's ever been? Are you thinking about your mental health, and do you want support?

We asked these questions and many more in hope that our findings will help shape the projects, policies, and care plans we're all working on in our own spheres—after all, when it comes to knowledge, more is more. From our perspective, if anything positive comes from this pandemic (spoiler: people are feeling more grateful; see page 13), we sincerely hope it's a greater awareness of mental health and increased efforts to provide care for all.

## METHODOLOGY

To conduct this study, Modern Health partnered with [Spectacle Strategy](#) to survey more than 500 US adults about the impact of COVID-19 on their mental health, relationships, finances, and work. The research was fielded in May 2020 and included people aged 21 to 65, with demographic details representing a natural representation of the US general population. 5% of respondents were recently unemployed due to COVID-19, and the rest work for companies ranging in size from one (self-employed) to more than 50,000. Respondents' annual household incomes ranged from less than \$50k to more than \$250k.

## WELCOME

### from our Vice President of Clinical Care

Reflecting the complexities of 2020, our study found that COVID-19 has caused pain, suffering, and loss, but it has also produced resilience, gratitude, and hope. While some of these findings are intuitive—we know even as bystanders we've experienced these emotions ourselves—many of our findings, including some silver linings, are not. For example, I was personally heartened to learn that almost half of fathers reported improved relationships with their children during the pandemic, and almost 80% of respondents are optimistic about our collective ability to get through the pandemic together. More than a third of respondents are more willing to seek support for their own mental health than they were before COVID-19; as a clinician, that gives me hope. But I'd be remiss not to acknowledge the pains: The pandemic alone was making people more stressed than ever—almost half reported feeling more stress and anxiety throughout this outbreak than at any other time in their lives. These data give us great ideas for what we could do as individuals, organizations, and as a society to support mental health, whether through greater balance between work and life, more empathy and volunteering, or addressing systemic barriers to mental health.

And it was after this survey concluded when America witnessed the killing of George Floyd, which sparked off activist protests and even more suffering, globally. We are facing compounding crises in America that are elucidating a stronger and more urgent need for mental health support. 2020 must be the year that we prioritize mental health in our organizations and communities, by making mental health care accessible for all and addressing the systemic factors that contribute to our well-being.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Myra Altman PhD". The signature is fluid and cursive.

MYRA ALTMAN, PhD  
VP of Clinical Care, Modern Health

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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**05**      **STRESS**

---

**12**      **GRATITUDE**

---

**16**      **MONEY**

---

**19**      **PARENTING**

---

**21**      **WORK**

---

**28**      **MENTAL HEALTH**



# STRESS

## If you're feeling majorly stressed right now, you're not alone

Our study confirms what experts [widely predicted](#): COVID-19 has led to significant strain on mental wellness throughout the United States. 47% of respondents report feeling more stress and anxiety during this pandemic than at any other time in their lives.

68%

worry "a lot" about the health and well-being of their families and communities

58%

report the pandemic has made day-to-day life more stressful

53%

worry we will never "go back to normal"

Source: Modern Health, 2020

“



*"There's no point in pretending our lives are the same as they were before. We're cooped up at home, people have lost their jobs, and many have increased obligations to family. It's that much more important to figure out what works well for each of us right now, so we can build up our mental and emotional resilience and not get burned out."*

Alyson Friedensohn, CEO OF MODERN HEALTH

## If you're nearing retirement age, you're feeling the biggest increase in stress

While all demographic groups reported higher levels of stress as a result of the pandemic, stress levels vary significantly by age. While adults aged 56-65 experienced the least stress pre-COVID, they reported the largest overall stress increase. This is understandable, given [ongoing messaging by the CDC](#) that advanced age increases the risk of complications and death from COVID-19.



### PEOPLE AGED 56-65 FEELING VERY STRESSED

PRE-COVID

14%

DURING COVID

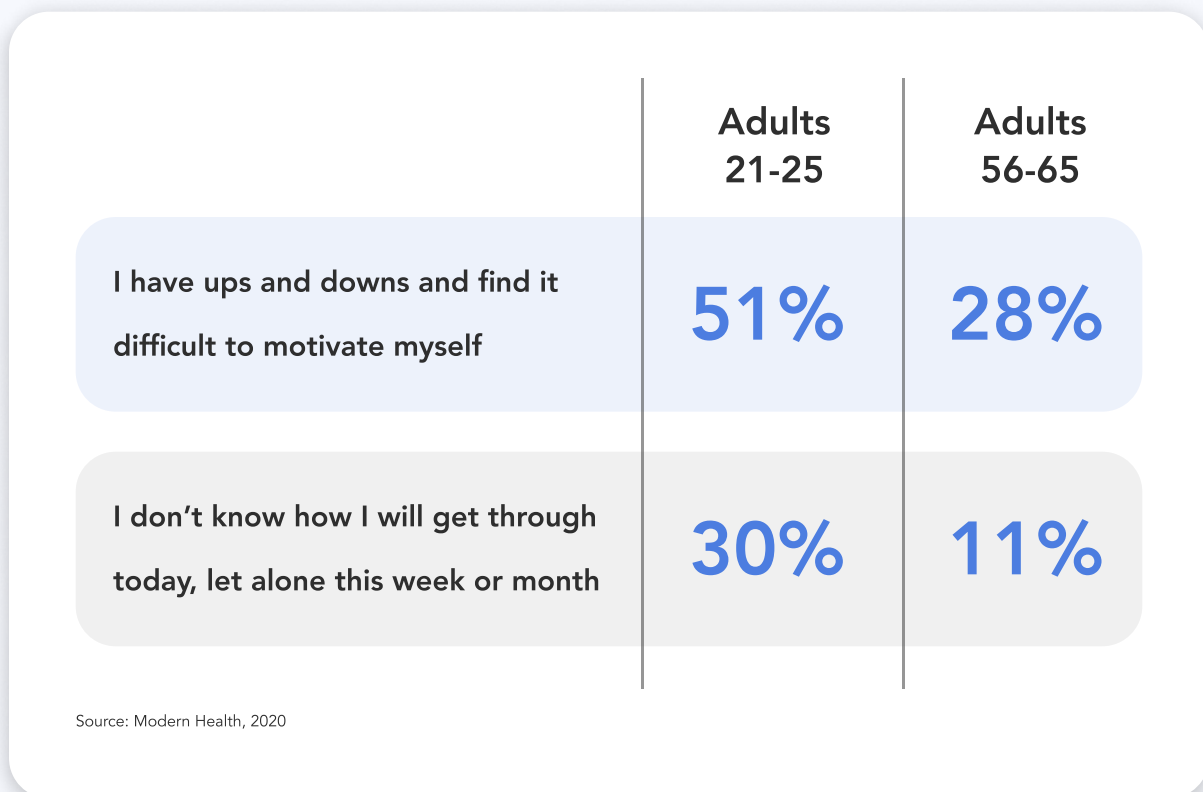
33%

Source: Modern Health, 2020

## If you're young, you're feeling more isolated and depressed. You're also most likely to ignore social-distancing rules

Feelings of isolation are affecting young people more than older people. 59% percent of people under 25 report feeling "much more isolated on a daily basis" since the start of COVID-19, while only 39% of people over 55 feel this way.

**They also report sentiments associated with anxiety and depression far more frequently than older respondents**



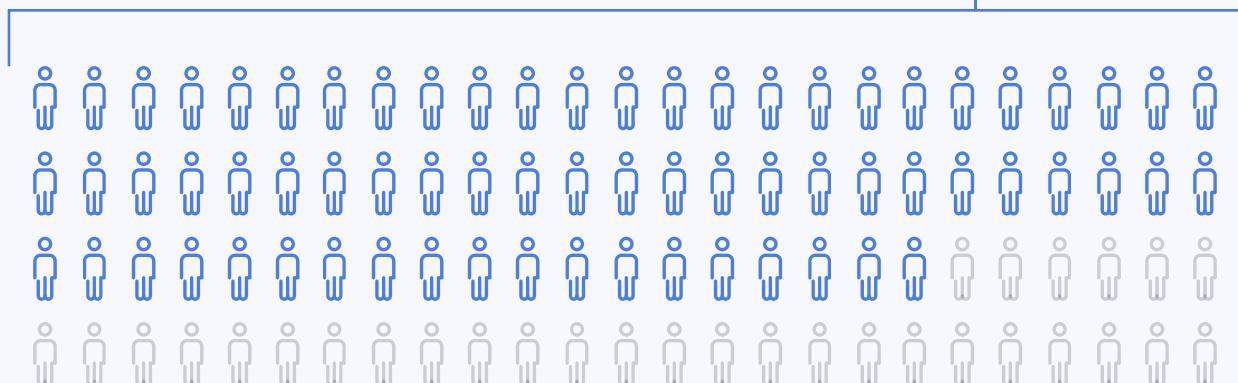
These findings are in line with a [Stanford survey](#) reporting that at the onset of the pandemic, young people were more likely to express anxiety regarding COVID-19 than older adults. They were also the least likely to be practicing social distancing. While our report found the percentage of people reporting COVID rule-breaking behavior to be low overall, younger people were more likely to report breaking the rules of lockdown to prioritize their mental health over their physical health than were older people. (26% of people aged 21-45 reported breaking lockdown directives, while only 10% of respondents over age 45 reported the same.) These findings were prescient; come June and July 2020, COVID-19 cases were rapidly on the rise among [young adults](#).

**But everyone gets mad when  
people break the rules**



**report feeling angry when  
they see people ignoring  
quarantine directives or  
gathering in groups. This  
sentiment is shared equally  
across all age groups**

Source: Modern Health, 2020

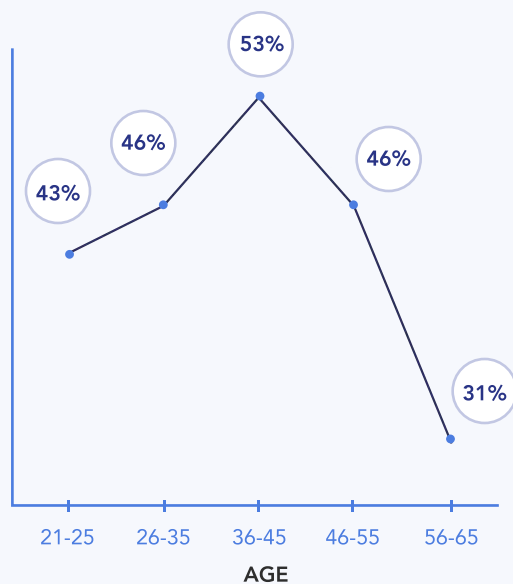


## If you're middle-aged, the pandemic might be the most stressful thing that's ever happened to you

Though 47% of people overall reported feeling more stress and anxiety during COVID than at any other time in their lives, that sentiment follows a bell curve by age. Middle-aged people were most likely to report that the pandemic is their lifetime's most stressful event.

Perhaps not coincidentally, people are also known to experience their lowest levels of overall happiness at that age. A study by the [World Economic Forum](#) found that people generally report a nadir of happiness and satisfaction around age 50. Then things start to pick back up, soon matching the levels of happiness they experienced earlier in their lives.

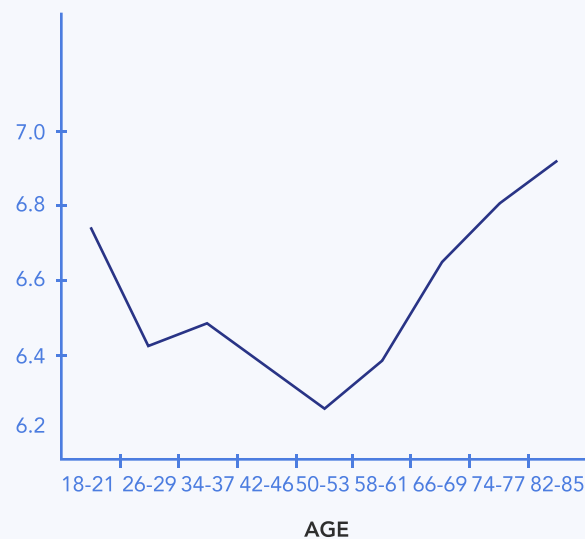
### STRESS DURING COVID



I HAVE FELT MORE STRESS AND ANXIETY DURING COVID-19 THAN ANY OTHER TIME IN MY LIFE

Source: Modern Health, 2020

### OVERALL LIFETIME HAPPINESS



SELF-REPORTED WELL-BEING ON A SCALE OF 1-10

Source: Nielsen



**But there's good news!**



across all ages agree

**Times are tough, but I  
know we'll all get  
through this**

This statement points to resilience, a mental health concept describing the ability of an individual or community to successfully cope with and adapt to adverse experiences (greater resilience correlates with better mental health). While people vary in their natural predisposition for resilience, evidence suggests that resilience is a skill that can be learned and practiced over time through interventions like mindfulness exercises, skills classes, and mental health treatment.

# GRATITUDE

The bottom of the page features an abstract geometric design. It consists of three overlapping shapes: a large dark blue triangle on the right, a medium teal triangle on the left, and a light blue semi-circle in the center where they meet.



## The good news: We're all more grateful for what we do have

On the plus side, COVID has shined a light on all that we hold dear, and people are feeling more grateful for their health, relationships, and careers. That's good news for mental health: Studies show that people who [practice gratitude](#) are generally happier and feel less depressed—so we're hopeful those feelings of gratitude might offset some pandemic-induced stress.

### GRATITUDE IS ON THE RISE

I feel more grateful for my health and the relationships/life I've built

75%

I've been feeling more grateful for what I have in recent weeks

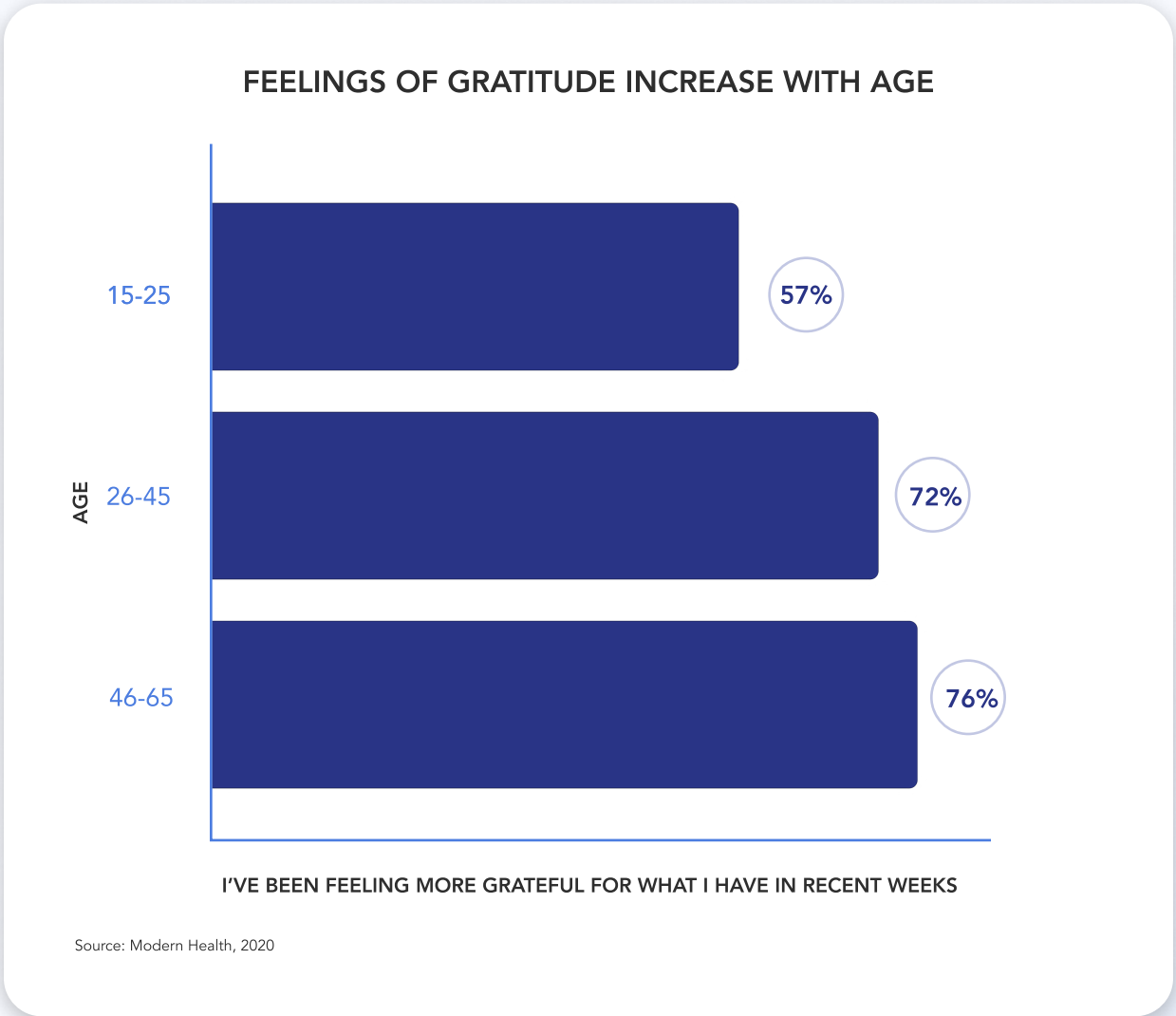
72%

I have been inspired by the acts of giving and kindness shown by those around me

68%

Source: Modern Health, 2020

As age increases, so do feelings of gratitude. In our study, older adults were least likely to report the pandemic as their lifetime's most stressful event and most likely to report that COVID has inspired feelings of gratitude. In short: Older adults have seen more in their lifetimes and feel more grateful for what they have after a stressful event—either despite or because of it.



60%

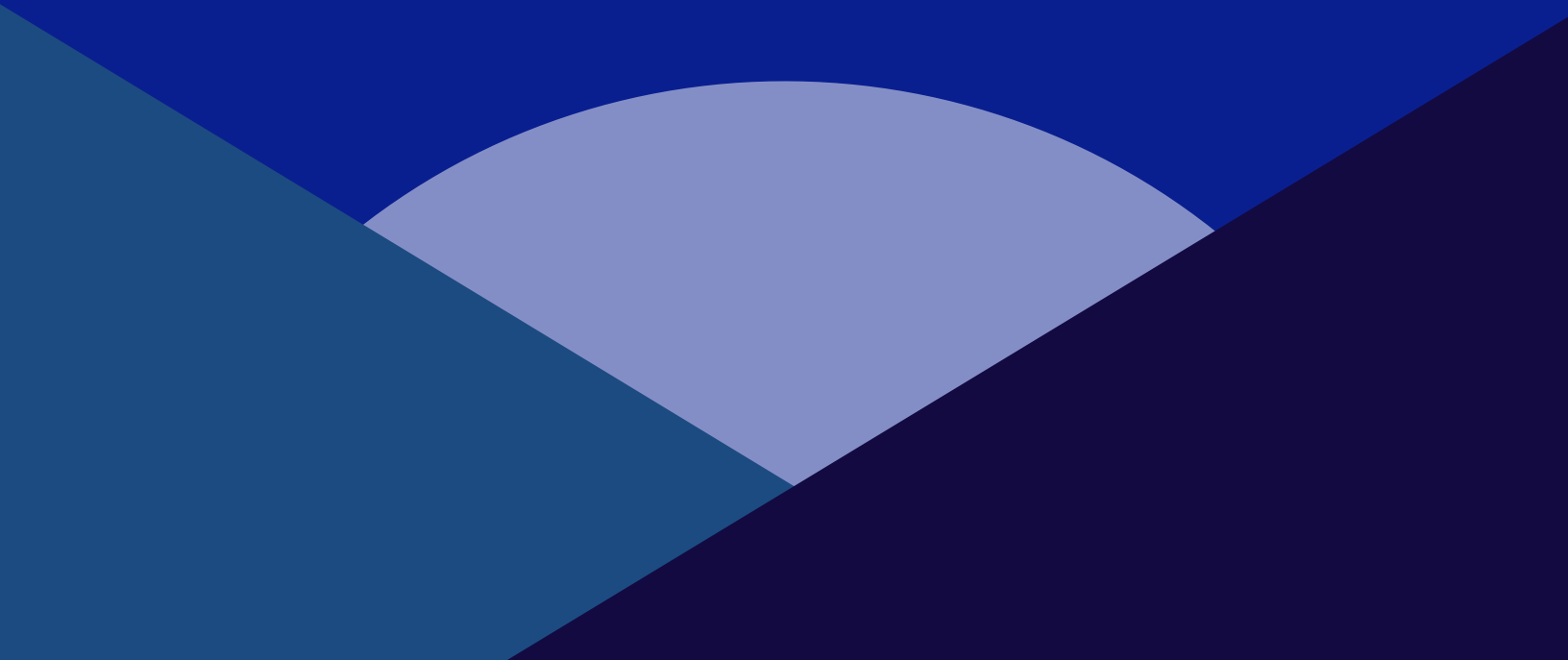
say "I appreciate my job more so than I did before"



By the end of April 2020, more than [21 million Americans](#) were unemployed, the vast majority of whom had lost their jobs within the preceding 14 weeks. That number would soon climb to more than [40 million](#). Studies show that involuntary joblessness is [damaging to mental health](#); some impacts include feelings of helplessness, loss of social connection, and [increased substance abuse](#). As a society, we should anticipate significant mental health distress among the formerly employed as one outcome of the pandemic.

But people who kept their jobs are feeling more grateful for them. In our study, 60% of respondents reported feeling more appreciative of their jobs than they did before COVID. That percentage is roughly statistically consistent across income levels, and between "knowledge" and "frontline" workers. Dr. Myra Altman, Vice President of Clinical Care at Modern Health, analyzes these findings: "Confronting loss often increases our appreciation for what we have lost and for what we still have."

# MONEY



## And we realize that our health and happiness matter more than money

COVID-19 has wrought devastation on many American businesses and caused mass layoffs as a result. Accordingly, financial priorities have shifted within many US households: some are more stressed, some are worrying less, and others see new opportunities ahead.



**58%**

I've realized money  
isn't as important as  
health and  
happiness



**60%**

COVID-19 has  
changed the way I  
think about  
saving/investing

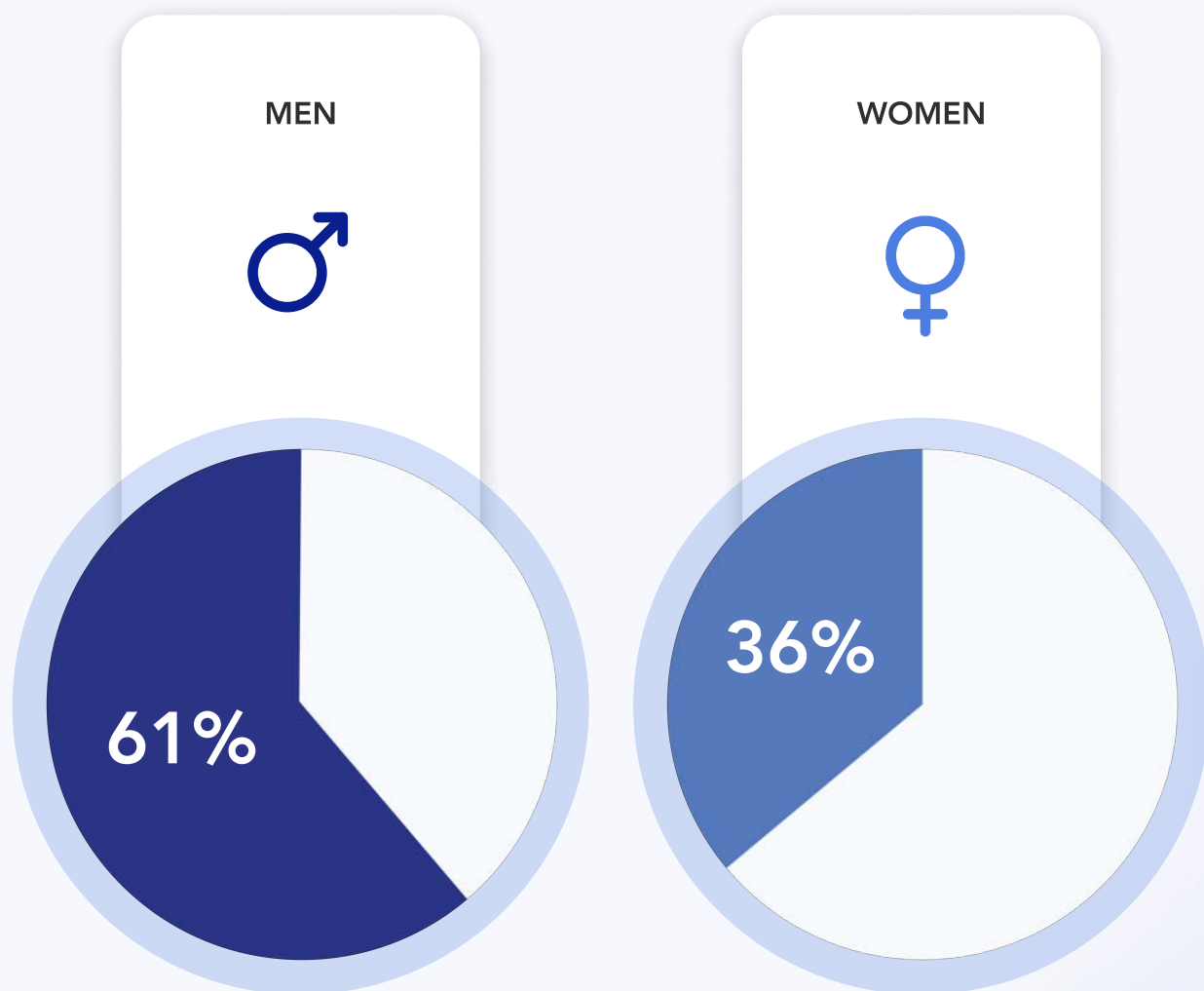


**63%**

I'm saving more  
money on  
discretionary  
spending during the  
pandemic

Source: Modern Health, 2020

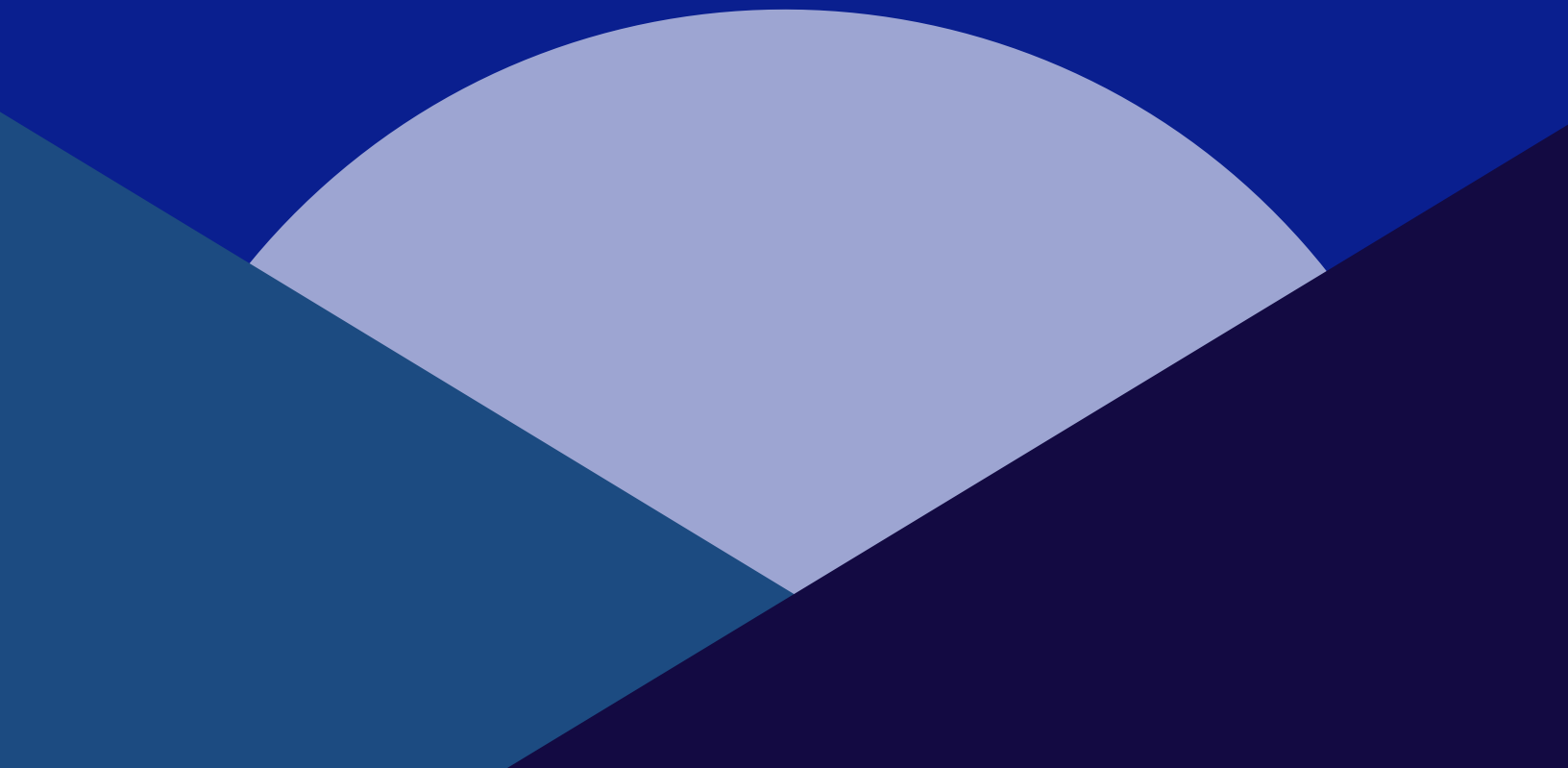
## Men and women see differences in the opportunities ahead



**AFTER COVID-19, THERE WILL BE NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES  
TO INVEST TIME/ENERGY IN**

Source: Modern Health, 2020

# PARENTING

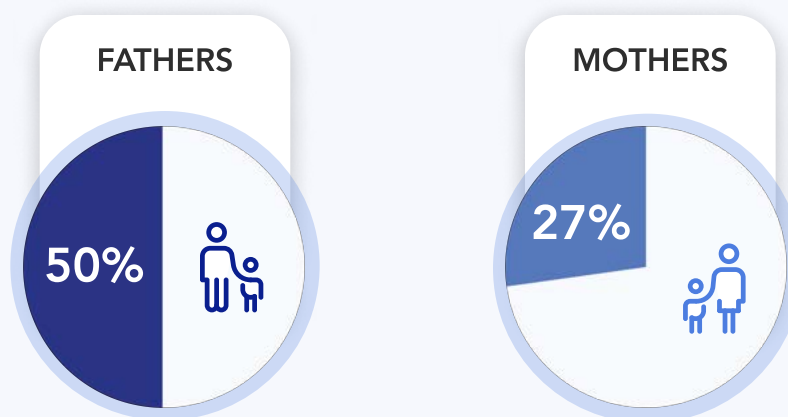


## Parents are more stressed by added duties at home, but quarantine has meant more quality time with their children

Both moms and dads report spending [more time caring](#) for children during the pandemic than before, but the results of our survey suggest a difference felt between men and women. 40% of men and 22% of women reported feeling stressed over homeschooling while working and nearly 50% of men and 38% of women reported that working from home has made it hard to balance their personal and professional lives.

There are many nuances that may contribute to the difference in reactions. One possible reason could be that men [overestimate their contributions](#) to household and child care duties. A study by The New York Times found that while women are disproportionately responsible for doing the homeschooling during the pandemic, men and women don't agree on who's doing more.

Overall, the pandemic has appeared to bring parents closer together with their children. Almost half of fathers report that quarantining with their kids has improved their relationship and 27% of mothers report the same.



### PARENTS REPORTING SHELTER-IN-PLACE HAS IMPROVED THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR KIDS

Source: Modern Health, 2020



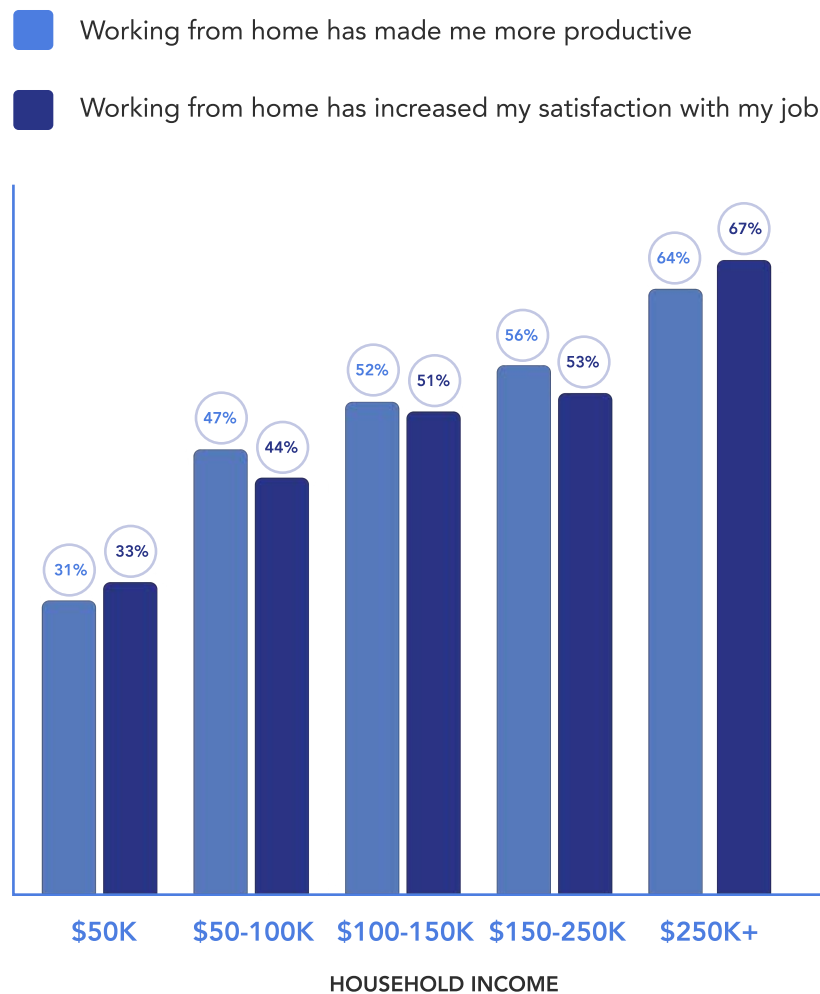
# WORK



## Productivity and satisfaction are up

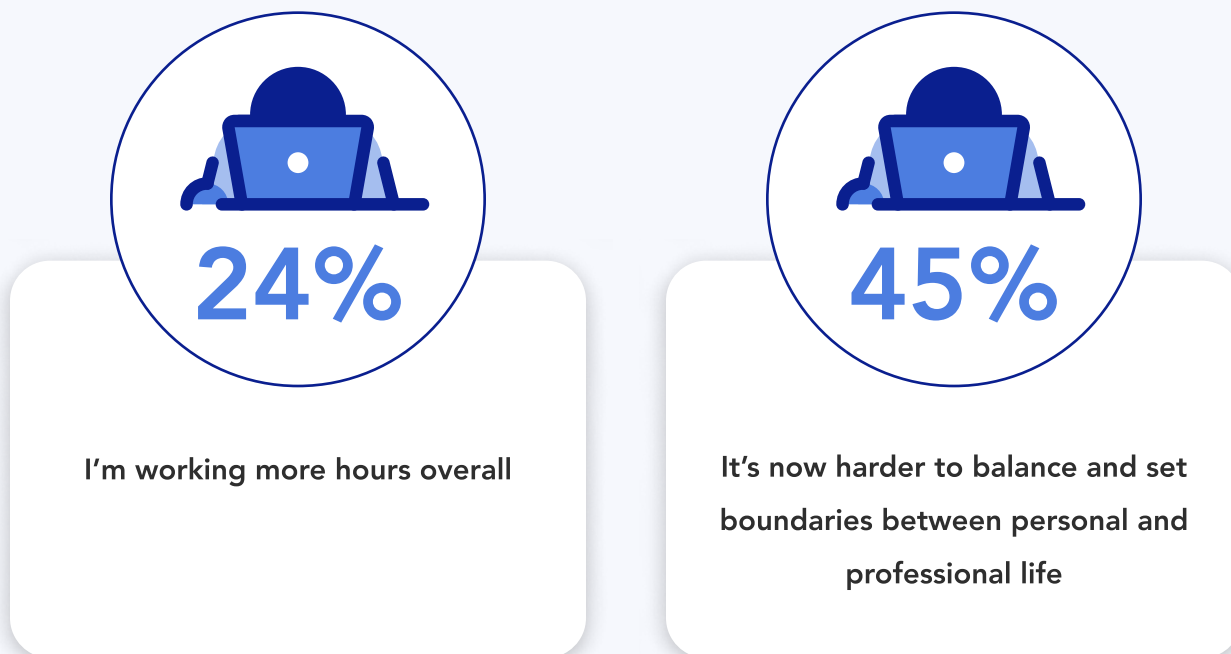
Overall, almost 50% of respondents report they're getting more work done from home than they were in the office, working from home has increased their job satisfaction, and they're more in control of their hours with a better work-life balance than they had before.

These findings correlate strongly with household income. The higher the income, the higher the likelihood of reporting increased productivity, satisfaction, and balance.



Source: Modern Health, 2020

## But hours are also up, as boundaries dissolve



Source: Modern Health, 2020



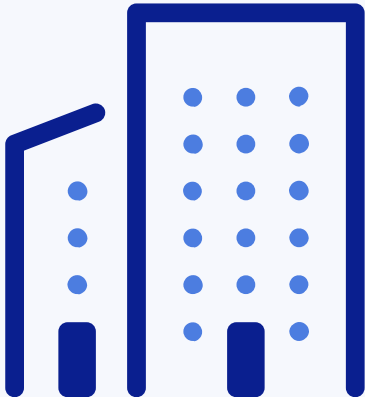
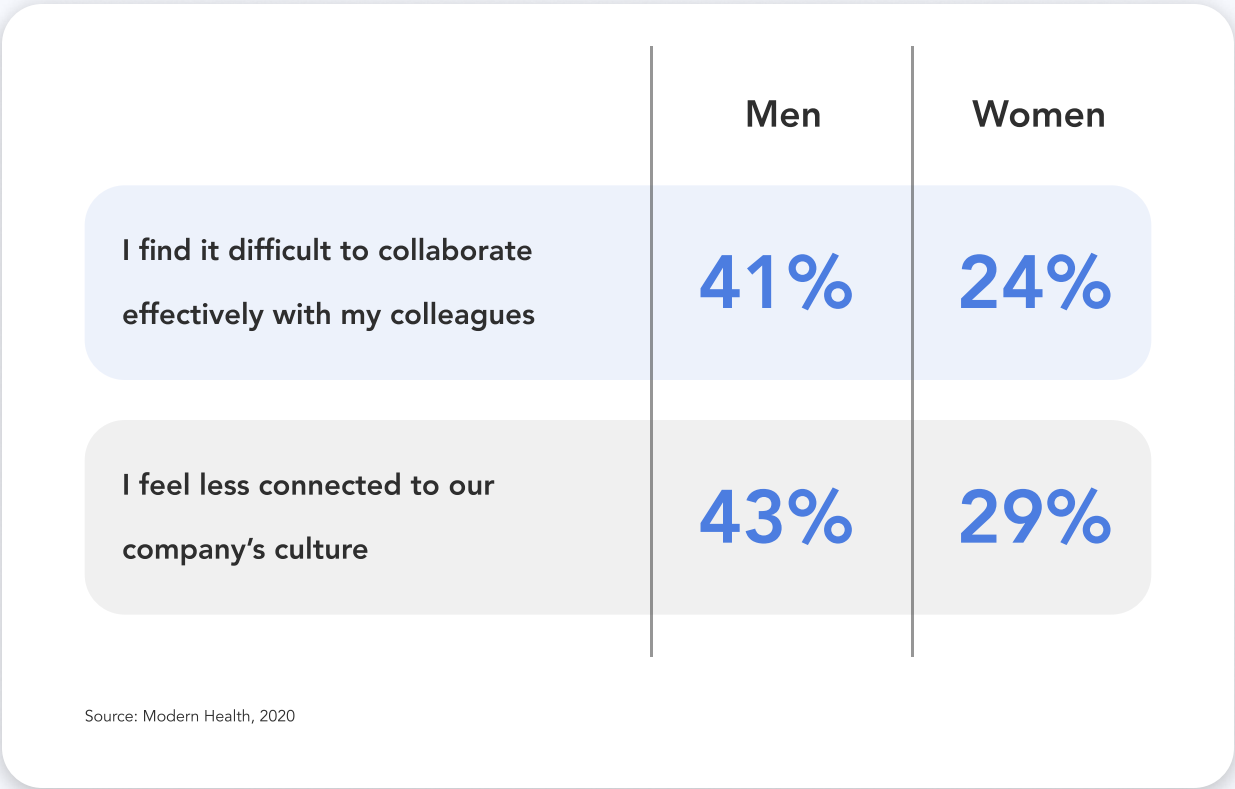
twitter

*"As employees do experience more overlap between work and life, it's important for employers to encourage time to recharge. We encourage people to talk about work-life balance and ask what they're doing to stay balanced in their day."*

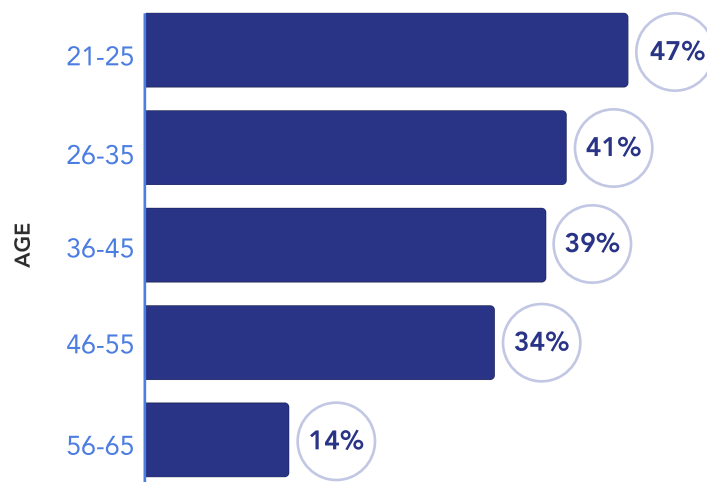
Candice Schaefer, GLOBAL HEAD OF WELLNESS AT TWITTER

## Some workers, mostly men, are struggling at home

While many observers have noted that [company culture](#) may be adversely affected by the pandemic, our study finds that men are feeling more detached from their companies than women are.



## Younger respondents are also feeling less connected to company culture than older respondents



Source: Modern Health, 2020

I FEEL LESS CONNECTED TO OUR COMPANY'S CULTURE

Many workers also feel trepidation about the long-term effects the pandemic may have on their careers, but there's a modest gender divide. Even though it's been reported that mass [layoffs are affecting women](#) more than men and that women's careers are likelier to sustain [long-term damage](#), in our study, men were 11% more likely to report believing the pandemic will have a negative impact on their careers and income.

“



 Nextdoor

*“Over the long haul, you really have to think about the productivity and relationships among coworkers [when remote]. We weren't built from the ground up to be remote, so we really have to look for that connection together.”*

Bryan Power, HEAD OF PEOPLE AT NEXTDOOR

## Looking to the future, most of us will miss working from home—but feelings are mixed

Since the conclusion of our study, many companies have announced permanent work-from-home policies and others are previewing what a return to the office might look like (think spatial dividers and temperature checks and the glory days of office snacks are over). Many studies report that workers want to stay home for the long term, but our survey points to mixed sentiments.

**36%**

fear returning to the office after the pandemic



**56%**

will miss the opportunity to work from home



Source: Modern Health, 2020



## People are anxious about returning to the office

- 44% say they will have a hard time readjusting to an office workday
- 50% are anxious about future work travel and in-person meetings
- 58% will miss the chance to spend more time with their families



## But others see the upsides of the office life

- 48% think their team will be more productive back in the office (54% of men and 39% of women feel this way)
- 48% think they will feel less stressed day-to-day



## And many have gotten used to staying home

- 41% do not feel like they ever need to work in an office again
- 56% will miss the opportunity to work from home
- 30% think their company will eliminate physical office space



## All age groups are excited to interact with people again. 66% are excited to see their coworkers

Interestingly, this reporting correlates strongly with household income. Only 48% of people with a household income less than \$50k are excited to see their coworkers again, while 83% of those making more than \$150k report this.

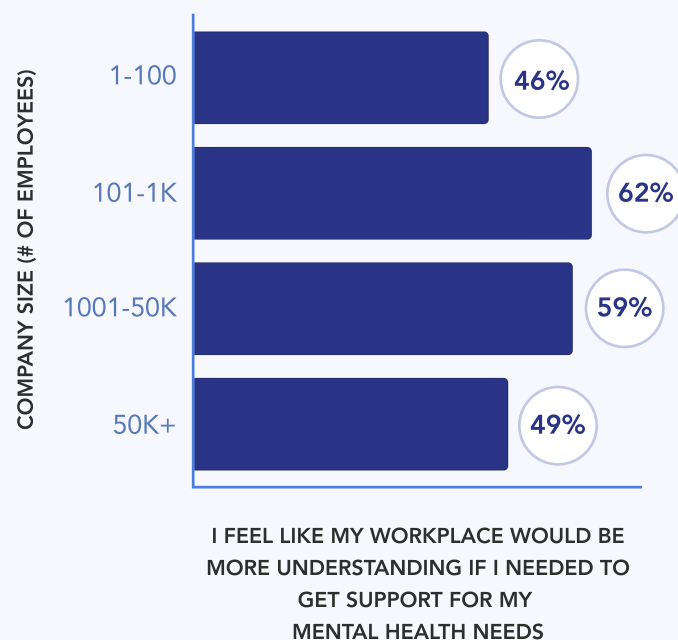
# MENTAL HEALTH



## If your thoughts on mental health are changing during this time, you're not alone

Not only are workers feeling broadly stressed by the pandemic and anxious about the return to office life, there's now [some evidence](#) that infection from the COVID-19 virus can manifest psychiatric effects. From all angles, the pandemic makes a strong case for a global collective [focus on mental health](#).

The good news is that the pandemic has reduced the stigma surrounding mental health support. In our study, 35% of respondents indicate they are now more willing to seek help with mental health than they were before COVID, and 54% feel that their workplace would now be more understanding if they needed to find support. The sentiment is especially common among workers at midsize companies.



Source: Modern Health, 2020

*"The psychiatric effects of the COVID-19 virus are of increasing concern. In addition to direct effects on the brain ranging from depression and anxiety to delirium and chronic executive dysfunction, the COVID-19 pandemic is causing unprecedented psychological distress, threatening a 'crashing wave' of mental health problems."*

- [Grant Hilary Brenner, MD](#)

## Post-COVID, workers expect mental health benefits from their employers

Thought leaders are [urging employers](#) to put employee mental health on par with physical health as they plan their work-from-home and return-to-office support strategies. According to our findings, mental health support is not only desired, but increasingly expected by the workforce.

*"It is not just physical well-being that employers must take into account. Equally important is how organizations will respond to employees' emotional and psychological health—a topic that, regrettably, is discussed far less frequently."*

- [Harvard Business Review](#)

64%

believe it's important that they are offered more mental health benefits after the pandemic

67%

believe it's their company's responsibility to provide access to mental health services

Source: Modern Health, 2020

“



( ) 01 Advisors

*"More companies are going to realize that mental and emotional health are just as important as the rest of the annual enrollment plan. Leading companies already recognize that, and it's pretty obvious to me that even more soon will."*

Dick Costolo, MANAGING PARTNER & CO-FOUNDER AT 01 ADVISORS

## Employees want varied support, delivered with flexibility

At Modern Health, we understand mental well-being through the lens of five pillars—social, emotional, professional, financial, and physical health—all of which require stability for overall mental wellness. In our study, respondents identified wanting support from their employers across a variety of these needs.

### Employees want support on a variety of topics



33% advice on sleep



46% managing difficult work conversations



46% meditation content & being encouraged to schedule this into my week



50% advice on managing my finances

### How they want help delivered:



42% teletherapy with a licensed physician specialized in my area of need



43% real-time text messaging support



46% virtual coaching with a certified professional specialized in my area of need

**Food for thought:** Individual employees have unique needs, and companies should make an effort to meet team members where they're at—with a flexible system of mental health support.

“



TripActions

*“Now more than ever, people need mental health support. Companies need it, and I think employers will want to engage more and more in activities that show they are really taking care of their employees.”*

Ariel Cohen, CEO OF TRIPActions

## CONCLUSION

Before COVID, many employers were already paying attention to mental health in the workplace. Some were early adopters of mental health benefits for employees, while others were championing open dialogue surrounding self-care and well-being.

For those employers who weren't already thinking about mental health, COVID has forced the issue. Companies need to find ways to support their employees' mental health, especially as workers are giving more time and energy to their jobs now than before. Along with the uptick in gratitude, we hope compassionate attention to employee well-being is a lasting outcome of this uniquely stressful era.

## ABOUT MODERN HEALTH

Modern Health is the comprehensive mental well-being platform that combines the WHO well-being assessment, evidence-based digital resources, and an international network of certified coaches and licensed therapists available in 35 languages all accessible in a single app. Modern Health empowers employers to lead the charge in acknowledging that mental health is just as important as physical health, de-stigmatizing the conversation, and increasing accessibility of mental health services for all.

Founded in 2017, Modern Health incorporates evidence-based psychology principles and seamless technology to serve the needs of over 90 companies globally including Pixar, SoFi, Nextdoor, EA, and Rakuten. Headquartered in San Francisco, Modern Health has raised more than \$45 million from Founders Fund, Kleiner Perkins, actor Jared Leto, StitchFix CEO Katrina Lake, and 01 Advisors (Dick Costolo and Adam Bain).

## ABOUT SPECTACLE STRATEGY

Spectacle Strategy is a creative strategy consultancy that helps clients grow smarter and faster through branding, insights, customer experience, and communications. With over 20 years of experience working with Fortune 500 incumbents, Spectacle set out to create a consultancy that reflects the current business climate where disruption is the new normal.

Spectacle focuses on purpose-led companies that seek to make a positive impact in their industry and the world. Spectacle has worked with numerous brands in the emerging technology and health and wellness space and specializes in creating brand experiences reflective of targeted consumer needs.