

# FACTSHEET

## GENDER AND MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

### Introduction

Business in the Community's (BITC) 2019 [Mental Health at Work: Time to Take Ownership](#) report, in partnership with Mercer March Benefits, was informed by a YouGov panel of more than 4,000 employees. This factsheet highlights some of the insights drawn from the research relating to differences between male and female employees and their experiences of mental health at work.

The survey found that:

- overall, almost two in five (39%) of employees, and 23% in the past month, have experienced poor mental health where work was a contributing factor in the past year (up from 36% in 2018). However, both of these figures increase for female employees, to 43% in the last year and 26% in the past month
- 66% of women had suffered psychological, behavioural, or physical symptoms of poor mental health caused from work at some point in their life, compared to 58% of men
- 51% of all employees feel comfortable talking about mental health problems at work. This increases to 53% of female respondents.

Of those who had experienced symptoms of poor mental health, the survey found that men were significantly more likely to have these triggered by work-related causes (35% compared with 24% of women). However, 60% of women reported mental issues caused by work and non-work issues compared to 51% of men. This suggests that the causes of mental health issues for women interact more between their work and personal life. The survey found that women were generally more

comfortable discussing a range of issues in the workplace. These included mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression, with 53% being comfortable compared to 49% of men. Of those who experienced mental health symptoms related to work, 12% of women cited their gender as factor in contrast to 4% of men. This is the case particularly for younger women, with 16% of females aged between 18 and 34 citing their gender as a factor for causing poor mental health symptoms compared to 6% of females aged 55 and above.

### **36% OF WOMEN HAVE BEEN FORMALLY DIAGNOSED WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION COMPARED TO 24% OF MEN**

Of those that experienced poor mental health symptoms citing work as a cause, there were significant differences between men and women. Women were more likely than men to cite not being supported in their role (38% compared to 32%), negative work relationships (37% compared to 30%), bullying or harassment from colleagues (17% compared to 9%) and sector-related pressure (13% compared to 7%) as issues that caused psychological, behavioural or physical symptoms at work. By contrast, men were more likely to say their organisation's performance was a factor (14% compared to 8% of women).

### **Mental health inequality on the agenda**

Mental health inequality has come under the spotlight with the UK government making women's mental health a priority -- a report was commissioned by the [Department of Health and Social Care](#) on mental health inequalities between



the genders in 2018<sup>i</sup>. Our survey confirms the work of the UK government and the [World Health Organization](#) that women disproportionately suffer from poor mental health. Within our survey, 36% of women had been formally diagnosed with a mental health condition compared to 24% of men. This breaks down to 25% of women being formally diagnosed with depression (this includes postnatal depression) compared to 15% of men, which was the highest mental health condition among both genders. After depression, as many as 18% of women had general anxiety diagnosed compared to 9% of men, and 8% of women had panic attacks diagnosed compared with 4% of men. This base inequality between the genders needs to be appreciated and addressed within the workplace.

### Causes for mental health inequality between the genders

The survey found significant differences between men and women on issues that caused or contributed to experiencing mental health issues outside of the workplace. Of those who experienced this, 19% of women cited caring responsibilities for children or of older relatives compared to 10% of men. While women consistently cited caring responsibilities in all age groups, it peaked with those aged 45 and above, with almost one in four (24%) citing it compared to 12% of males of the same age. Read [our toolkit on supporting carers in the workplace](#).

Within this sample, 16% cited abusive behaviour from a partner or family member compared to 10% of men. Domestic abuse disproportionately affects women's mental health. Within our survey, 7% of all employees suffered poor mental health symptoms as a result of domestic abuse at some point in their life of which 9% are women and 4% are men. With the lockdown and working from home, domestic abuse rates have soared during COVID-19 with people trapped at home with their perpetrators<sup>ii</sup>. Read our [COVID-19: domestic abuse and employees toolkit](#) for advice.

### Women in the workplace

While women clearly suffer disproportionately from mental health issues, this may lead to them being more effective at supporting others at work. Our survey found women to be consistently more confident and supportive of colleagues suffering from mental health problems at work. In general, more women than men believed it was OK for other employees to talk openly about mental health problems in the workplace with 68% agreeing to this sentiment compared to 63% of men. Of female managers, 74% were confident they could spot mental health problems in the people they manage, compared to 63% of men. Also, 78% of female managers were confident they could discuss these problems compared to 73% of male managers. Female managers were more confident they could support those suffering from mental health symptoms (72% compared to 68% of male managers). Asked what gave managers confidence in supporting those managed, 68% of men and women cited general life experience. A key difference arose, with 45% of women citing personal experience with mental health problems as giving them confidence compared to 31% of men.

### Failures within the workplace

Reflecting our understanding that women are more comfortable talking about mental health problems at work, 41% of women with work-related mental health problems were likely to seek help from within their workplace environment, such as talking to a line manager or a colleague, compared to 31% of men. In the survey, more than half of respondents (52%) felt that after disclosing their condition they were treated fairly. However, many disagreed and significantly more women (31%) than men (23%) felt they had not been treated fairly. Despite the higher propensity to seek help in the workplace there was a consistent gap in satisfaction of outcome between men and women. Of those that sought help from within the workplace, 36% of women felt they were ignored compared to 28% of men. Of those that disclosed issues at work, 30% of woman felt they were not listened to compared to 21% of men. As many as

45% of women felt they were unable to influence what happened afterwards compared to 33% of men.

A reason for this continued discrepancy between men and women in how they have been treated by their work could stem from a failure of tailored solutions. An example of a solution clearly valued by women over men is flexi-time, with 19% of women who experienced problems related to work thinking it would help compared to 12% of men. This perhaps reflects a tendency for women having more caring responsibilities. Another possible solution could be easing workload with 30% of women believing this to be helpful compared to 27% of men.

### **31% OF WOMEN FELT THEY HAD BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY AFTER DISCLOSING THEIR CONDITION. COMPARED TO 23% OF MEN**

#### **Menopause and mental health**

Evidence suggests that about 80% of women experience menopausal symptoms that interfere with their quality of life, and 25% of women describe their symptoms as being severe. Of those that did experience mental health symptoms, but not due to work, the menopause was cited as a reason for the development of symptoms by 32% of women aged of 45 and above. Read BITC's toolkit [Menopause in the workplace](#) for more details and advice on what employers can do.

#### **Financial wellbeing**

Financial stress can cause mental health issues and vice versa. Our survey found both these issues affect women disproportionately. The research found 21% of employees struggled financially (down from 25% in 2018) but this increased to 23% of woman compared to 19% of men. This problem could be exacerbated with 38% of women agreeing to the suggestion they spend more money when they feel down compared to 30% of men. Of women who are aged between 18 and 34, 28% felt they struggled financially to make ends meet and 47% spent money when they were down.

From the survey, 48% of women in this age group felt that their financial situation negatively affects their mental health. Further to this, 23% of women say their mental health negatively affects their financial situation and 36% say their financial situation negatively affects their mental health, as opposed to 31% of men. Additionally, 38% of women believe their employer did not deal with financial difficulties well compared to 32% of men.

#### **Transgender and non-binary**

The survey only had 18 respondents that described themselves as non-binary or chose to self-define. This sample is too small to draw meaningful results from. However, of this number 100% reported experiencing symptoms of mental health at work.

#### **What can employers do?**

BITC urges employers to implement three calls to action. These are priority actions we believe will have the biggest impact on organisational capability to support better mental health:

1. Create good work that enhances mental health for everyone.
2. Acknowledge and support poor mental health, whatever the cause.
3. Sign up to the [Mental Health at Work Commitment](#).

#### **Recommendations for leaders**

- Take an inclusive and employee-led approach to providing support.
- Introduce training for workplace adjustments and modifications so that support can be tailored.
- Reinforce and tailor mental health support for men and women as each has their own unique set of challenges.
- Promote and implement zero-tolerance policies and guidelines that:
  - develop awareness of non-inclusive behaviours and define those that are unacceptable

- support and encourage staff to be responsible bystanders when they witness bullying and harassment.
- Join up inclusion and wellbeing activity to enable a whole-person approach and track progress in these areas.
- Ensure all line managers can address the mental health issues of an employee no matter their gender, ethnicity or background.
- Use induction courses to emphasise the importance of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. The Government makes women's mental health a top priority gov.uk organisation and signpost ways in which support is provided.
- Embed mental health and wellbeing into apprenticeship schemes. Give apprentices opportunities to contribute to health and wellbeing policies.
- Provide training for line managers to ensure that they understand how menopausal symptoms may affect women in the workplace, and the policies and procedures that are in place to support menopausal women.
- Promote flexible working, which can lead to a reduction in absenteeism and an increase in wellbeing and productivity and build retention in your older workforce who may be suffering during menopause transition.
- Ensure policies and procedures include provision for support for menopausal women.

### Relevant resources:

- [BITC Mental Health at Work 2019 report](#)
- [The Mental Health at Work Commitment for Employers, through a COVID-19 lens](#)
- [Inclusive Succession Planning: A Toolkit for Employers](#)
- [BITC PHE Mental Health for Employer toolkit](#)
- [BITC Menopause in the Workplace: A practical guide for HR, Wellbeing and Occupational Health practitioners](#)
- [BITC PHE Mental Health for Employer toolkit](#)
- [COVID-19: supporting carers in the workplace](#)
- [COVID-1: domestic abuse and employees](#)

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## REFERENCES

<sup>i</sup> [Government makes women's mental health a top priority](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [Revealed: surge in domestic violence during Covid-19 crisis Guardian](#)