

AI@Work Study 2020

# As Uncertainty Remains, Anxiety and Stress Reach a Tipping Point at Work

Artificial intelligence fills the gaps in workplace mental health support



# Stressed out remote workers turn to artificial intelligence for help

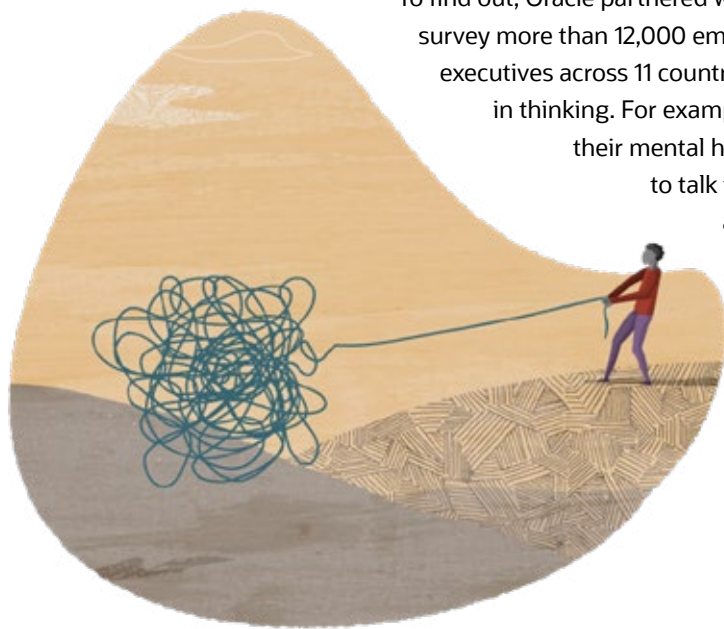
Never before have the lines between work and home been so blurred as in 2020. As people were forced to shift into remote work practically overnight—at the peak of a pandemic, no less—anxiety and stress reached new levels.

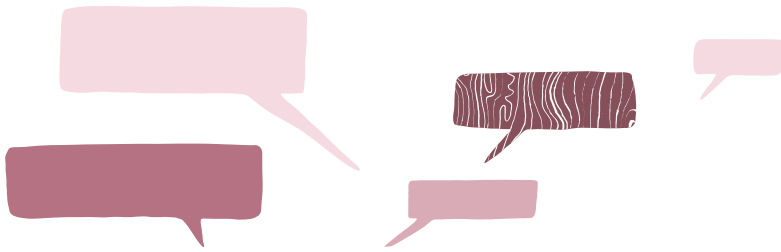
Staying home while trying to juggle work, childcare, schooling, and unpredictable finances has taken its toll on working families.

Mental health has become one of the biggest challenges for employees and employers to manage with the continuously evolving work dynamic. Organizations are realizing that they must address all aspects of employee health, including stress and anxiety, in order to avoid a decline in productivity and prevent work burnout. From a positive perspective, the pandemic has amplified conversations around mental health that weren't necessarily in the spotlight before.

So what role should organizations play in employee mental health? What types of support are employees asking for? Can AI and other technology help meet the mental health challenges we are facing, just as it has proven to be a solution for keeping people connected in digital workspaces?

To find out, Oracle partnered with research firm Workplace Intelligence to survey more than 12,000 employees, managers, HR leaders, and C-level executives across 11 countries. The results revealed eye-opening shifts in thinking. For example, 82% of people believe robots can support their mental health better than humans and 68% would prefer to talk to a robot over their manager about stress and anxiety at work. Also, we discovered three quarters of employees believe their company should be doing more to protect the mental health of their workforce.

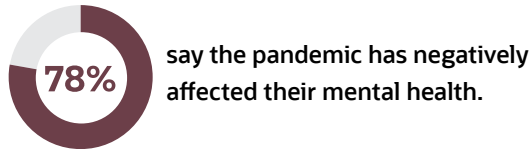




## Key findings

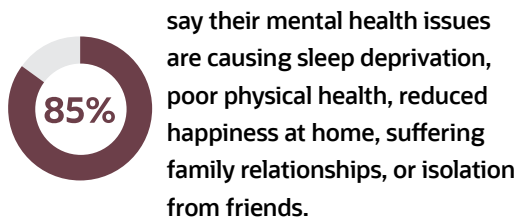
### 2020 is the most stressful year ever

COVID-19 has negatively impacted the mental health of the global workforce.



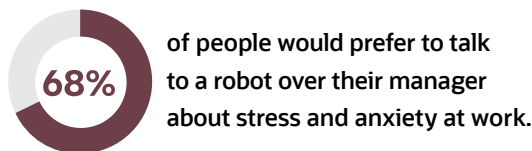
### The impact of mental health struggles at work affect home life

Mental health at work is not just a workplace issue; it's spilling over into people's personal lives, especially those who have been working from home.



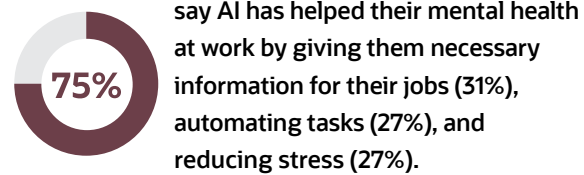
### Employees want help and are turning to technology

People are open to leveraging technology to help them through their struggles.



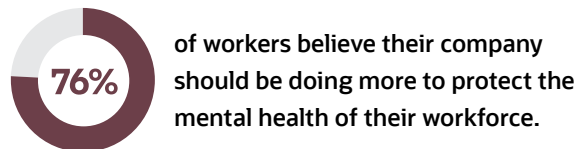
### AI can help improve mental health and well-being

Technology is and will continue to be a solution to support the well-being of the global workforce.



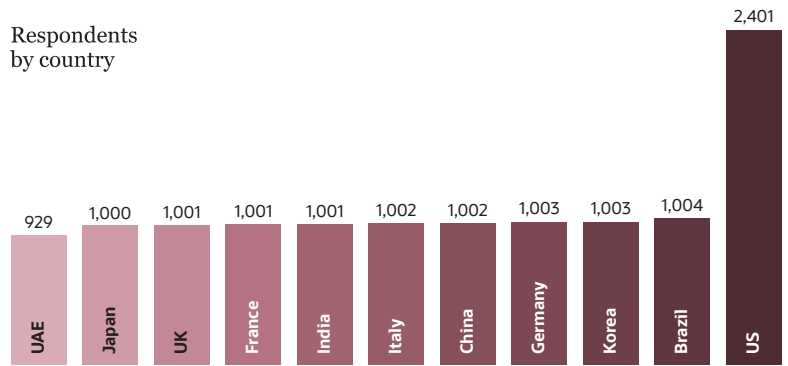
### Mental health needs to be an employer priority

Organizations need to ramp up these conversations. Not addressing the fact that the vast majority of remote workers are struggling could hurt global productivity.



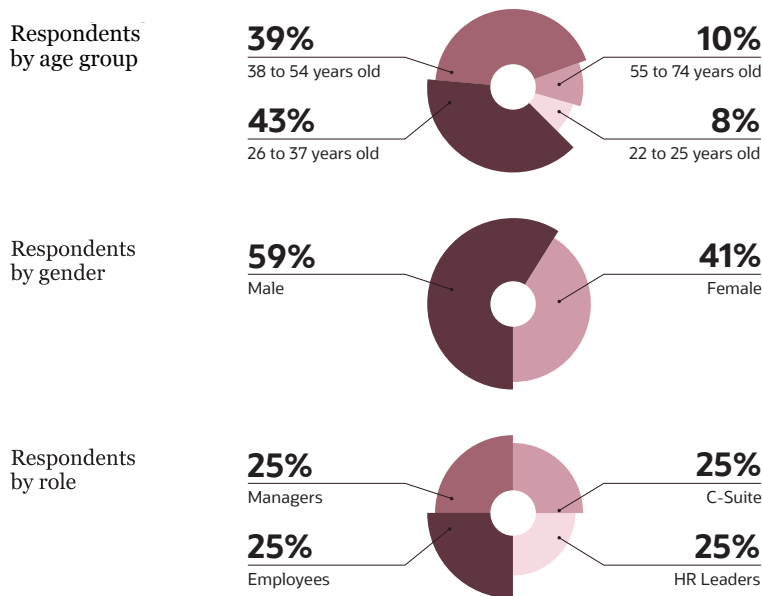
# Survey methodology

Research findings are based on a survey conducted by Savanta, Inc. between July 16 – August 4, 2020. For this survey, 12,347 global respondents (from the United States, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, France, Italy, Germany, India, Japan, China, Brazil, and Korea) were asked general questions to explore leadership and employee attitudes around mental health, artificial intelligence technology, digital assistants, chatbots and robots in the workplace.



The study targeted people between the ages of 22-years-old and 74-years-old. Respondents were recruited through a number of different mechanisms, via different sources to join the panels and participate in market research surveys. All panellists passed a double opt-in process and completed on average 300 profiling data points prior to taking part in surveys. Respondents were invited to take part via email and were provided with a small monetary incentive for doing so. Results of any sample were subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results.

In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 0.9 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.



# 2020: The year of the stressed out worker

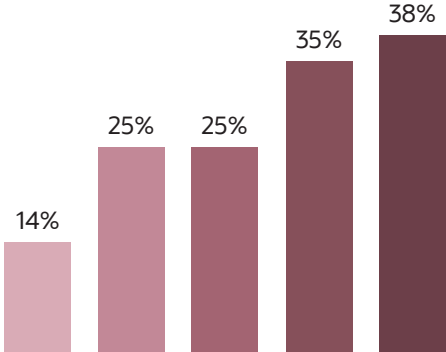
COVID-19 has negatively impacted the mental health of the global workforce, with **7 out of 10 people saying this has been the most stressful year of their working lives**. On top of health worries and complex family dynamics, **4 out of 10 people say they are also battling everyday workplace stressors** like the pressure to meet performance standards, routine and tedious tasks, and unmanageable workloads.

This is especially true for people working from home with other household members also working or schooling from home. The tension between doing one's job and helping children through their confusion, trauma, and online schoolwork has amplified workplace tensions they were already feeling pre-pandemic. At home, there is no break room to retreat to, and for many, no office door to close. Some workers might be carrying a heavier economic burden because of an unemployed spouse. And despite getting more comfortable with remote work, it's still hard to avoid work spilling over into evening hours and the feeling that the days and weeks blend into the next. In fact, 41% say there is no longer a distinction between personal and professional life.

In other words, this is not a problem that will simply go away on its own when a vaccine is developed. Workplace stress and the related mental health implications are not a new phenomenon. It's just that it took a novel coronavirus to call attention to another global workforce crisis—employee mental health.

## How has the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected your mental health?

- Loneliness
- Depression from a lack of socialization
- Burnout
- Lack of work-life balance
- More stress



The COVID-19 pandemic has created the most stressful work year in people's lives, negatively affecting the mental health of 78% of the global workforce.

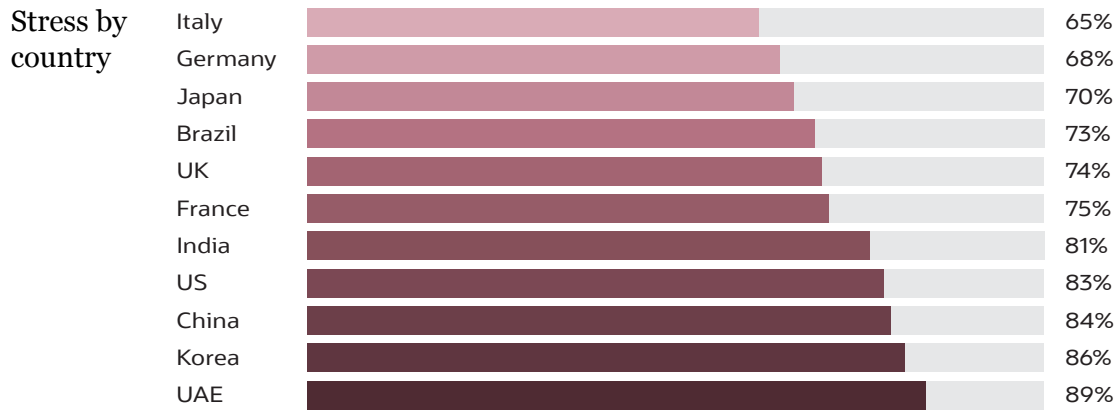
### Demographic differences

When it comes to age, younger respondents were more likely to say that the pandemic has had a negative effect on their mental health:



### Around the globe

The majority of workers are stressed, in some countries more than others:



**Brazilian workers lose the most sleep due to work-related stress and anxiety: 53% say so compared to the 40% globally.**

**The United States, United Arab Emirates, and India have the most respondents who say that they worked 15+ more hours during the pandemic.**



## Did you know?

35% of remote workers say they've been putting in significantly more hours since the pandemic started (10 or more per week)—that's over 40 extra hours per month!

# The stressful intersection between work and home life

While there may have been a time when people could leave their work stress at the office, when the workplace is in the home and staffers are always connected, it becomes harder to compartmentalize. Add to that the barrage of stress while trying to get work done—COVID-19 health concerns, money worries, etc.—and there’s a constant battle for mental health going on in many households.

What’s more, despite what one might think is the ultimate work-life balance—getting to work from home—people are spreading themselves thin. More than half of people say they are working more hours per week than before. And get this:

**85% of people say their mental health issues at work negatively affect their home life.**

There is a silver lining. Despite the bumps in the road, people have warmed up to the idea of working remotely for the rest of their careers. In fact, **6 in 10 say they find remote work more appealing now than they did before the pandemic.** The key for employers will be to help their workforce find balance, create boundaries between their work and personal time, and get support when it all feels overwhelming.

Employees are looking for ways to cope as their mental health issues are impacting other areas of their lives.

## The personal impact of workplace mental health issues

- Isolation from friends – 28%
- Suffering family relationships – 30%
- Reduced happiness at home – 33%
- Poor physical health – 35%
- Sleep deprivation – 40%



**25% say they have been burned out from overwork as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

## Workers embrace technology and AI solutions

Just as we may not have imagined the entire globe would be shifting to remote work simultaneously in 2020, it was also inconceivable to most that the global workforce would be open to robots providing their mental health support. But thanks to human resilience and the ability to adapt, there's been an almost universal open-mindedness to innovative solutions.

68% of people would prefer to talk to a robot over their manager about mental health at work, and 82% of people believe robots can support their mental health better than humans.

The pandemic launched a mass adoption of collaboration and video conferencing tools, and now that people have become comfortable with the wonderful ways that technology can support them, they are seeking more. This includes solutions that can help them cope with workplace stress and mental health issues.

In our survey, 68% of respondents say they would prefer to talk to a robot over their manager about stress and anxiety at work. People have grown more confident that technology innovations can help them in exciting new ways. But it also reflects that there is still a stigma, and therefore some hesitation, around discussing mental health at work.

That said, the acceptance of AI to support mental health is a positive thing for employees and employers alike.

51% of respondents say their companies changed benefits to offer mental health services or support as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, 76% say they felt their company should be doing more.





# Rise of the robots

With the demand for technology solutions to support remote work on the rise, organizations have already been turning to AI for a variety of workplace initiatives. This year, 75% of employees report that AI has actually helped improve their mental health either directly or indirectly.

AI is more than a one-off tool to support employees through tough times. This year, people shared the many benefits of incorporating AI, from increased productivity to improved company culture.

## Robots and mental health support: Why it works

- They offer a judgement free zone (34%)
- They are unbiased (30%)
- They provide quick answers to health questions (29%)

## 88% of people want AI solutions. Here's why:

- To deliver quick answers and information (63%)
- To automate administrative tasks (59%)
- To recommend new skills to learn (50%)

## AI tools are reducing stress levels by:

- Giving information needed to do their job more effectively (31%)
- Automating tasks and decreasing workload to prevent burnout (27%)
- Helping to prioritize tasks (27%)

## The bottom-line benefits of AI

- Increases employee productivity (63%)
- Improves job satisfaction (54%)
- Improves overall well-being (52%)
- Helps workers shorten their work week (51%)
- Allows them to take longer vacations (51%)



# Employers must step up with mental health support

While we don't know when the COVID-19 pandemic will end, its repercussions may affect the nature of work for the long term. This includes the mental health aspects of remote work. It is an issue that isn't going away and should not go ignored by organizations that wish to stay competitive.

Left unchecked, mental health issues at work can have a huge impact on both employees' personal and professional lives, as well as organizations' bottom line. Here's a look at the toll that workplace stress is taking:

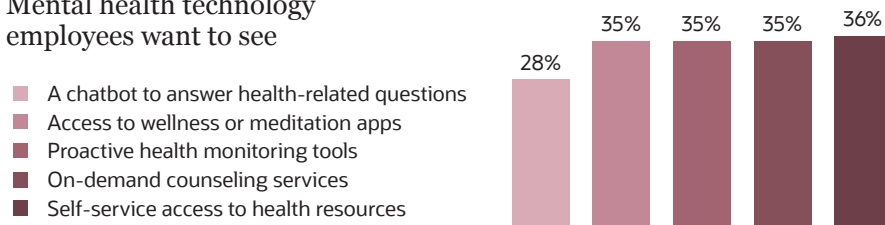
- 4 in 10 say their productivity has plummeted
- 4 in 10 say they make more poor decisions at work
- Almost 9 in 10 say work-related stress, anxiety, and depression affect their home lives

**Are you doing enough?** 76% believe their company should be doing more to protect the mental health of their workforce.

## Employees are asking for technology to help

83% would like their company to provide technology to support their mental health. They want:

### Mental health technology employees want to see



## Global perspective: Which countries are embracing AI the most?

- India and China are the most open to talking with a robot over their manager, with 91% of respondents in both countries saying so.
- Korea and Germany had the least number of people say that their organizations are making good use of AI technology, 54% and 52% respectively.
- Only 26% of Japanese respondents say their organizations are currently using some form of artificial intelligence in their workplace, well below the 50% global response.



## AI as a mental health support solution is just in its infancy. Are you ready to get on board?

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With 68% of workers stating that they are willing to engage with robots regarding their mental health at work, it shows a widespread acceptance of how AI can solve more than just work tasks.

While only time will tell if there will be widespread AI adoption for mental health in the future, it's safe to say that remote working experiences have helped alleviate digital apprehension that may have once created a barrier.

Organizations that are early adopters of technologies that improve the mental well-being of their workforces will be seen as forward-thinking and more supportive. And the business benefits of increased productivity and an enhanced culture of caring are clear.

**Employees are already accepting AI as an important tool for their work-life balance and for mental health support. Are you meeting their needs as the nature of work adapts and evolves?**