

# MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE: THE SOUTH AFRICAN PICTURE



## SECTION 1.

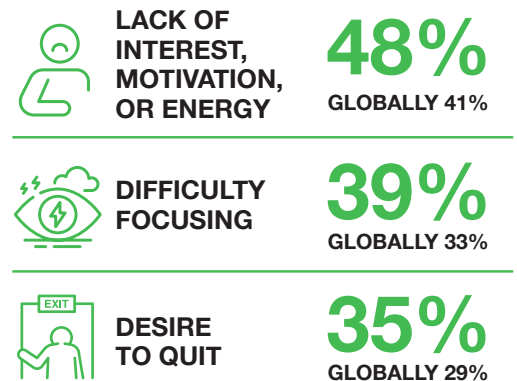
### THE STATE OF WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH



#### ISSUES EXPERIENCED IN THE PRIOR MONTH:



#### FEELINGS AT WORK IN THE PRIOR MONTH:



At 50%, South African workers' experience of mental health issues is broadly in line with global findings, but a higher proportion (75% vs 68%) have concerns about their mental health. When asked whether they had felt negative emotions at work over the previous month, 93% of workers who have experienced mental health issues in South Africa said they had felt one or more (compared to 78% of employees who have not experienced mental health issues).

A lack of interest, motivation or energy – symptoms often associated with burnout - was the most commonly experienced by those affected by mental health challenges (56% vs 39% amongst those not affected). Difficulty focusing came second (49% vs 29%). Worryingly, 35% considered their productivity was reduced (vs 22%), and three in ten felt angry or irritable towards co-workers or clients, or have felt a desire to quit their job over the previous month (both 29% vs 28% and 20% respectively) – showing the extent to which mental health can influence behaviours and mindsets in the workplace.

#### Feelings at work



The proportion of employees affected by work-related stress reaches 57% amongst Gen Zs and millennials.

While the reasons behind a person's mental health issues are often complex, the data shows that work-related causes could play a significant role. Fifty-three percent of workers in South Africa mention they have experienced stress at work in the month before the survey – making it the highest-ranking issue of the seven issues measured, behind concerns about money. The proportion of employees affected by work-related stress reaches 57% amongst Gen Zs and millennials. Three in ten workers in South Africa also mention experiencing difficult

relationships at work. Unlike the global picture, concerns about money increases with age in South Africa.

In considering the impact of work aspects on mental health, more South African employees indicate that workload supports (33%) rather than undermines (28%) their mental health (the opposite is true globally). Similarly, working remotely/from home is supportive for 47% of respondents (41% globally).

## SECTION 2.

### STIGMA AND THE BARRIERS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK

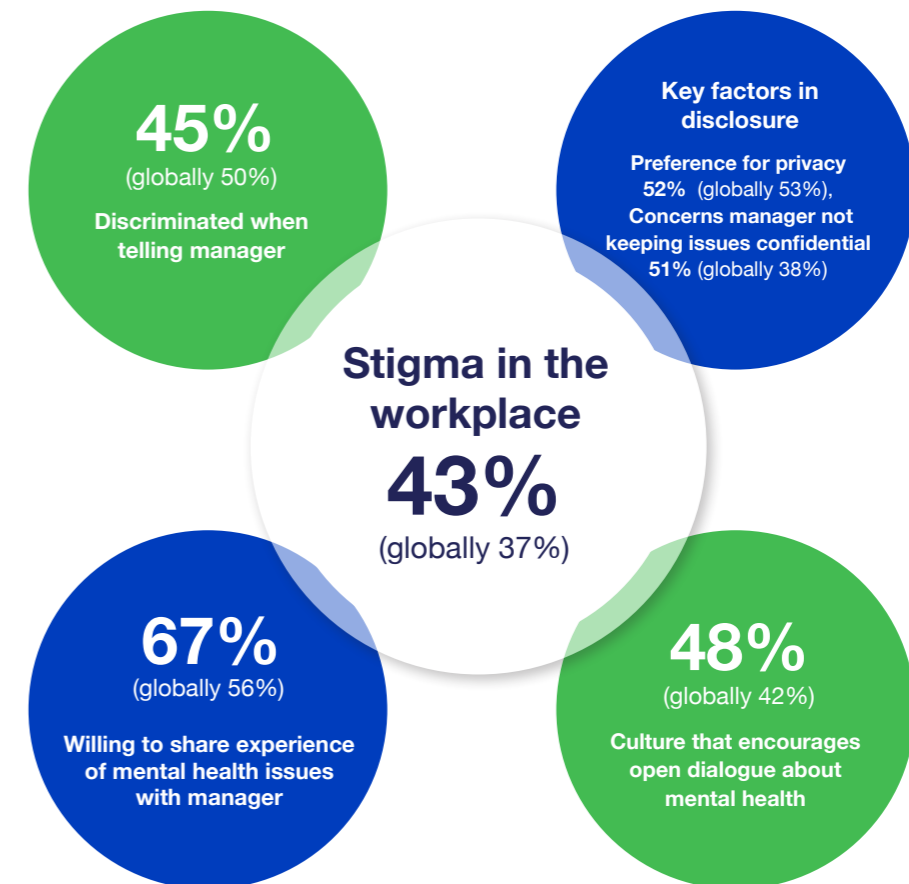
In South Africa, stigma is still holding people back from sharing mental health issues at work: 43% of respondents overall feel there is stigma in their workplace around mental health (37% globally). In those workplaces, 63% of those affected by mental health challenges say they have felt stigma personally as a result of those issues (with the global proportion being 57%).

Among those affected by poor mental health in South Africa, 60% have told their managers about their issues, which is higher than the global figure of 53%, but, of those that have, 45% have been discriminated against as a result (albeit this is lower than the global figure of 50%), with the proportion being markedly higher in some under-represented groups (74% neurodivergent, 64% with a disability). Workers in South Africa seem more willing to share mental health issues with their managers than seen globally.

Sixty-seven percent say they would tell their line manager if they encountered mental health challenges (versus a global average of 56%) and 71% would be comfortable disclosing them as the reason for taking time off (vs 61% globally).

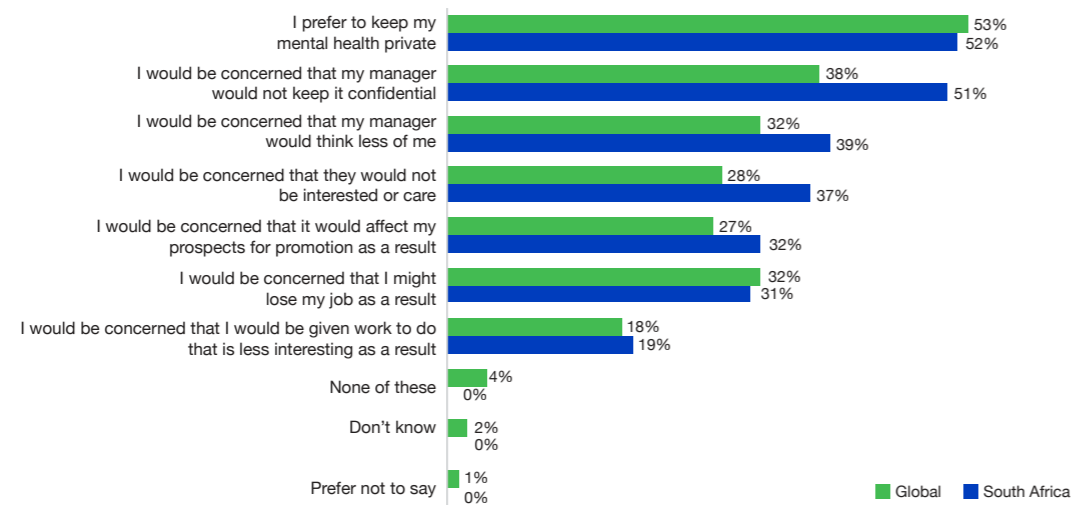
However, only half of respondents (49%) feel that people would not be adversely impacted if they shared their thoughts and emotions in their place of work.

Strikingly, over half (51%) of workers in South Africa who say they wouldn't disclose issues to their managers cite concerns about confidentiality – a much higher proportion than the global average (38%). Four in ten worry that their manager would think less of them, and three in ten say they would fear losing their job. Overall, workers in South Africa show higher levels of concern than average for nearly all factors that would cause them to withhold mental health challenges.



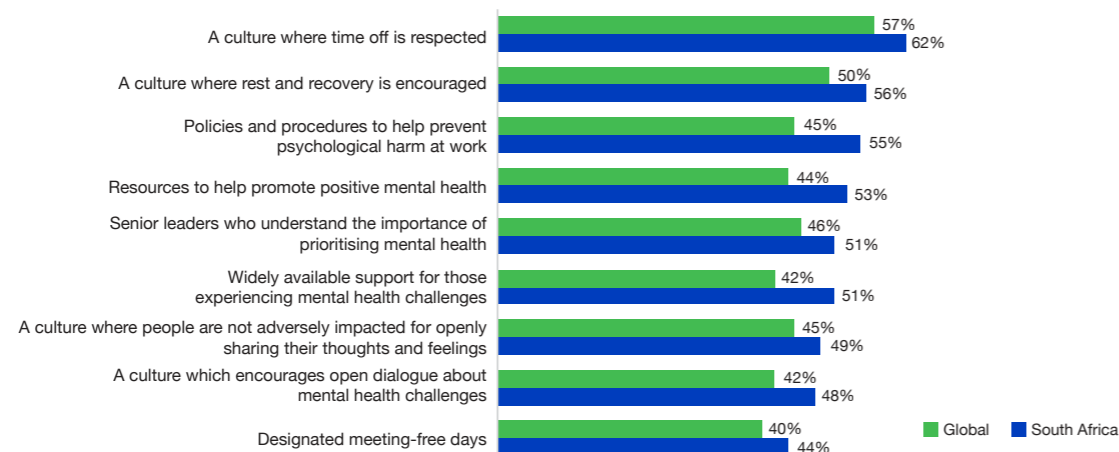
About half of people choose not to share issues due to a preference for privacy, but this number is higher for Gen X (57%). For millennials, confidentiality is the top reason for 64%. For women, both apply: they are more likely than men to say they would keep mental health challenges private (54% vs 49%) and to have concerns about their line manager keeping any disclosed issues confidential (56% vs 47%).

### Reasons for not disclosing mental health as the reason for taking time off



In comparison with global figures, several responses suggest a more positive workplace environment for mental health. For example, 55% agreed that there were policies and procedures to help psychological harm (vs 45% globally), and 53% that there were resources to help promote positive mental health (44% globally).

### Workplace culture and policies that are in place



## SECTION 3.

### SETTING THE TONE: THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF LEADERSHIP ON MENTAL HEALTH

Eighty-five percent of workers in South Africa feel that it's extremely or very important for employers to look after the mental health of their workforce. But less than two thirds (64%) believe that supporting employee mental health is a top or high priority for their leaders (globally 56%), and 51% consider they have senior leaders who understand the importance of prioritising mental health. When asked whether the head of their organisation talks about mental health under half of workers in South Africa (48%) answer positively, although that number is above the global average (40%).

Within organisations where leaders do not vocally address mental health, 76% of respondents think they should. This number is significantly higher than the global average (59%) and indicates the importance that workers in South Africa attach to their senior leaders showing visible ownership when it comes to supporting mental wellbeing.

This is significant, because the research shows a clear improvement in perceptions and attitudes to work when heads of organisations choose to speak about mental health: in organisations where they do speak, 83% of workers feel their organisation cares about their mental wellbeing, whereas only 31% do when their leaders do not address it.

A clear narrative from senior leaders on mental health also correlates with more people opening up about their own issues: where heads of organisations speak about mental health, 82% of people are willing to disclose their issues to their managers, compared to 49% where they don't.

Crucially, whether senior leaders speak about mental health or not seems to impact individual feelings and behaviours: those in organisations where senior leaders do not speak up are more likely to feel a lack of interest, motivation or energy (59% vs 40%), be irritable with clients or colleagues (35% vs 24%), or feel a desire to quit (35% vs 18%).



**48%**

Heads of organisations speak out (globally 40%)



**76%**

Would like their head of organisation to speak out, where they do not already (globally 59%)



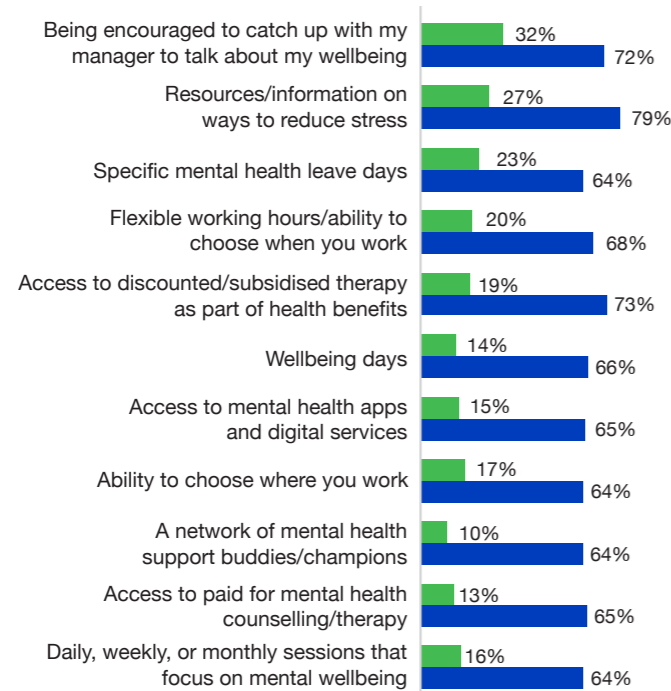
### WHERE THE LEADER SPEAKS OUT:

- The view of whether their "Employer cares about mental health" increases from **31% to 83%**
- Workers' desire to quit reduces from **35% to 18%**



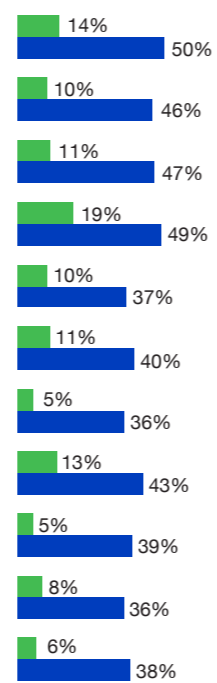
In organisations where the head of organisation speaks out, workers are more likely to report that support is available, and there is a greater tendency for that support to be used. For example, provision of resources on ways to reduce stress rises from 27% to 79%, and the use of mental apps and digital services increases from 5% to 36%.

### Types of support available



■ Head of organisation does not speak about mental health ■ Head of organisation does speak about mental health

### Types of support used



## SECTION 4.

### TRUST AND PROXIMITY: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF LINE MANAGERS

Besides the instrumental role that senior leaders can play in speaking about mental health, the personal behaviours and attitudes of those with line management responsibilities are likely to be a key factor in supporting people's wellbeing. Employees in South Africa who consider their direct manager well-equipped to hold conversations about mental health report even fewer negative feelings at work – including desire to quit or lack of interest, motivation and energy – than when they have a senior leader who speaks about mental health.

Conversely, workers who feel their manager is not equipped to have supportive mental health conversations report markedly worse experiences. Sixty percent felt low levels of motivation in the month before the survey (vs 40% in those whose manager is well-equipped), 38% felt irritable or angry with colleagues or customers (vs 24%) and 37% report having felt a desire to quit (vs 18%).

#### Feelings at work



Extent manager is equipped to have supportive conversations on mental health

Managers who haven't had training on mental health conversations report much lower levels of confidence in their ability to support people in their teams (65% vs 88% of those who have been trained). Similarly, 54% believe their manager is equipped to hold conversations that would help someone with mental health issues (vs 48% globally), although over 67% of workers overall feel their manager would be supportive if they shared their mental health challenges with them (compared with a global figure of 62%).

Despite this, many employers are under-investing in their managers' skills on mental health. Forty-five percent of managers had training, only a little above the global average of 41%. Even amongst those managers who have had training, 38% say this training was a 'one off' (globally 42%).

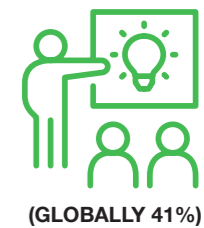
**54%**

OF MANAGERS ARE EQUIPPED FOR SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATIONS



**45%**

OF MANAGERS HAVE HAD TRAINING ON MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATIONS



### WHERE THE MANAGER IS WELL-EQUIPPED TO HAVE THOSE CONVERSATIONS:

FEELINGS OF LACK OF INTEREST, MOTIVATION OR ENERGY REDUCED

**60% TO 40%**

DESIRE TO QUIT REDUCED FROM

**37% TO 18%**

## SECTION 5.

### WORKPLACE SUPPORT: EXPECTATIONS VERSUS REALITY

85%

employees consider it important that workplace mental health is prioritised (globally 73%)



64%

perceive mental health to be a priority for their employer (globally 56%)



60%

say their employer provides mental health support (globally 53%)



25%

take up counselling/therapy where available (globally 18%)



49%

have access to paid-for mental health counselling therapy (globally 39%)



56%

have not used regular sessions focusing on mental wellbeing but are willing to do so (globally 45%)



Whether mental health issues stem from work-related causes or not, it is clear that workers look to their employers to provide support. When asked about what can make the most positive impact on them personally at work, 47% of people mention employers looking after their mental health – ranking it third highest of the seven aspects measured after providing a safe working environment (56%) and ensuring people feel safe reporting non-inclusive behaviours (49%), which themselves are both conducive to mental wellbeing.

Encouragingly, in South Africa, 60% of workers agree that their employer provides mental health support for staff, higher than the 53% globally. Indeed, across all areas of support, more support is available, respondents from South Africa are more likely to have utilised the support available to them, and are more open to utilising support than globally, especially when it comes to sessions that focus on mental wellbeing, counselling/therapy, mental health apps, and digital services.

#### Types of support available

#### Types of support used

#### Not used but willing to

