

Report: Half The Workforce Is Uncomfortable Discussing Their Mental Health at Work

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Lululemon's SVP of people and culture says it's important to talk openly about mental health at work to reduce stigma.



Hannah Minh

With high levels of financial stress, record rates of depression, and a loneliness epidemic in the US, new research indicates that not only are many employees feeling down, it could be impacting work performance.

Struggling with well-being. While there's no single definition of well-being, it can be determined by several factors, including emotional and physical health, social wellness, financial security, and career. This year, one-third of people surveyed feel their well-being is lower than ever, according to sportswear brand Lululemon's Global Well-Being Report. The survey of more than 14,000 people across North America, parts of Europe, East Asia, and Australasia was conducted by Edelman Data & Intelligence.

And while low well-being appears to be a problem around the world, it impacts more groups than others. The study revealed that 42% of disabled people report low well-being compared to 29% of non-disabled people, and parents have a 10% higher instance of low well-being (40%) than those without children. Gender is a factor too; 48% of men said that society has made it hard to talk openly about their mental health.

Impacts at work. There's still societal stigma attached to people disclosing mental health struggles, including in the workplace. Some 50% of people surveyed said they don't feel comfortable speaking about their mental health at work. And sharing mental health struggles on social media may have unintended consequences for job-seekers; a limited study from North Carolina University found that people who post about anxiety or depression on LinkedIn are viewed as more "less emotionally stable" by hiring managers, Fact Company reported.

Susan Gelinas, SVP of people and culture at Lululemon, told HR Brew that employers should create an open dialogue around mental health so employees feel comfortable sharing if they are struggling, noting the company provides mental health training for its employees. She stressed the importance of "really equipping everyone, not just your leaders in the organization with the information and resources and support," so that colleagues are better prepared to have conversations about mental health.

Low well-being can impact productivity, too. Globally, 37% of respondents reported that they've fallen behind on their work responsibilities because of low well-being. Still, many people don't prioritize well-being, with most (51%) reporting financial constraints as the factor.

Many companies offer a variety of benefits to help employees manage their well-being. For instance, Johnson & Johnson offers energy classes, which coaches employees on how to best maintain their energy across their personal and professional lives. Employees at clothing retailer Hot Topic can take up to eight hours per quarter to volunteer in their community. And Lululemon provides employees with a monthly stipend for employees to take fitness classes of their choice.

Gelinas believes well-being is built through a combination of physical, emotional, and social health. She recommends employers, "really look at your overall suite of offerings and say, 'What are we doing to support all of those domains?'"