

CHALLENGES IN

DEI & MENTAL HEALTH

A PERSPECTIVE OF THREE COUNTRIES —
MALAYSIA, INDIA, PHILIPPINES

A photograph of a modern office interior. The space features glass-walled partitions, a large potted plant in the center, and two green ergonomic chairs in the foreground. The floor is highly reflective, showing the surrounding environment. The overall atmosphere is clean and professional.

Workplace mental health (Malaysia)
The business costs

Executive Summary

Mental health conditions are often referred to as “invisible illnesses” but there are heavy costs to an individual’s health, family and friends, and even organizations .

According to the 2020 National Health and Morbidity Survey, 1 in 3 Malaysians grapples with mental health conditions.

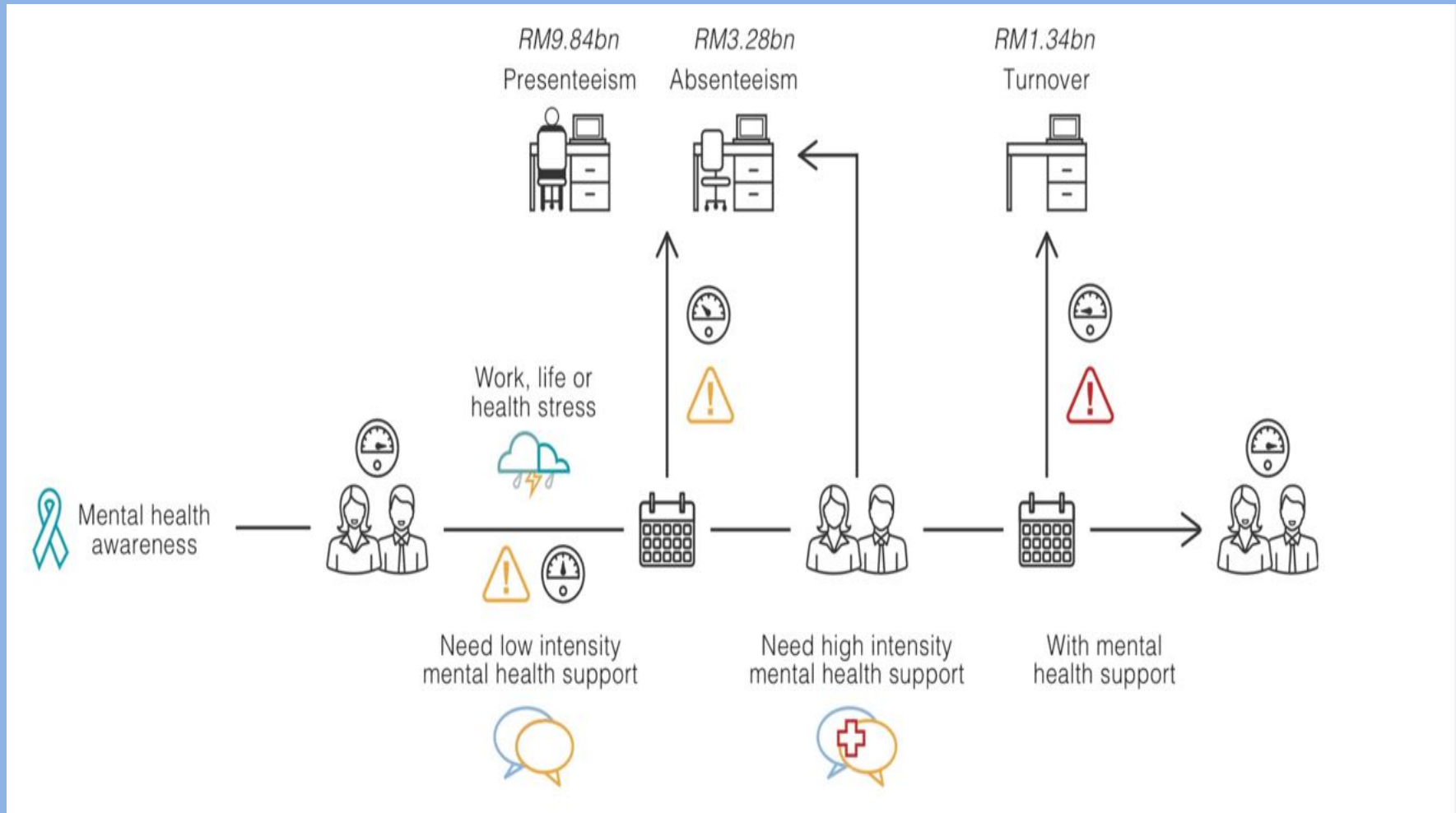
Within the context of organizations, 29% of workers on average will experience poor mental health with symptoms of depression, anxiety, or stress.



The cost of mental health issues in the workplace to the economy is conservatively estimated to be RM14.46bn or 1% of GDP in 2020 .

Productivity Cost of Mental Health Issues

Malaysia estimate the cost of poor mental health by looking at how it affects productivity in the three areas : absenteeism, presenteeism (loss of productivity), and staff turnover.



Cost of Presenteeism

Presenteeism is defined as attending work despite experiencing illness. Although presenteeism tends to be admired and encouraged in cultures that priorities duty and collectivism, it is associated with decreased job satisfaction, lower mental and physical health, and lower levels of job performance and productivity.

Overall, considering the high prevalence of presenteeism in Malaysia, a conservative estimate of **the cost of presenteeism in Malaysia would be three times that of absenteeism**



Productivity Cost of Mental Health Issues

The estimated costs of mental health problems to Malaysian employers in 2020 are summarized below in Table 3 . The estimated cost per worker per annum is RM946 (or 31% of the average monthly salary), and the total cost to employers is RM14.46bn, or 1% of GDP.

Table 3.

	Average cost per employee	Total cost to Malaysian employers (RM billion)	Percentage of total cost (%)
Absenteeism	RM214	3.28	22.68
Presenteeism	RM644	9.84	68.04
Turnover	RM88	1.34	9.28
Total cost	RM946	14.46	100

Data courtesy of : Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health & National Health and Morbidity

Table 4. Estimated cost of mental health issues at an organisational level.

	PETRONAS	Nestlé (Malaysia)	Large enterprises	Medium SME	Small SME	Civil service
Average number of employees	48,000	5267	227	66	12	16 mil
Absenteeism (RM)	28 mil	3 mil	49,760	11,553	1808	461 mil
Presenteeism (RM)	84 mil	9 mil	149,281	34,660	5424	1382 mil
Staff turnover (RM)	11 mil	1 mil	20,530	4767	746	190 mil
Total cost (RM)	123 mil	13 mil	219,571	50,980	7978	2033 mil

Data courtesy of : Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health & National Health and Morbidity

TYPE OF SUPPORT REQUIRED

(To improve mental health at the workplace)

Universal programs :

Mental health programs available to all employees for awareness

Targeted programs:

Mental health preventive programs offered to employees who have been identified as being risk of developing a mental health condition.

Treatment programs :

Mental health programs offered to employees with mental health condition.



What 's Next

Consider the diversity of your workforce

No two people are the same – we're as diverse as we are complex. But when it comes to our mental health and wellbeing, the studies which show that certain groups of people are more likely to struggle with mental health, varying by ethnicity, by age and by gender.

As such, to ensure that mental health and wellbeing strategies cater for the diversity of the workforce can help employers shape a strategy which provides targeted support for the whole of the workforce.

There will be lifestyle factors which also impact mental health and wellbeing, such as living situation, debt levels, hobbies, and exercise routines to name a few. All of these can impact someone's emotional and mental state, as well as their overall resilience.

What 's Next

Ensuring equity, not just equality

It's obvious, but often overlooked; different people require different solutions. Similar to physical health, employees will have different levels of mental health, wellbeing and resilience.

For some individuals, support may be focused around maintaining good mental health and wellbeing; education, mindfulness techniques and stress management could be sufficient.

Some may be at the early stages of struggling which is where a culture of speaking up and looking out for one another is really beneficial.

And some may have acute or chronic mental ill health – here offering good employee benefits, support from trained line managers and HR, appropriate workplace adjustments and so on can often help people remain productive and at work.

So to sum up, it is valuable to have appropriate support for employees no matter where they may be on the mental wellbeing spectrum.

What 's Next

Take an inclusive approach

Inclusivity goes hand-in-hand with diversity; you can't effectively cater to a diverse workforce without taking an inclusive approach.

Let's here consider how individuals differ; for instance, not everyone wants to talk about mental health at work (and this may not necessarily be categorized by the stereotypical generational divide you may expect). This doesn't mean they shouldn't be supported, but rather the approach could be tailored accordingly – perhaps communicated via email rather than face-to-face.

We should also consider an inclusive approach that flows across the hierarchy; leading from the top will help set the cultural tone for more open discussions about mental health and wellbeing plus the support that is available.

Visible leadership engagement and support on the topic helps to build a culture of trust, security and inclusion.

TYPE OF SUPPORT REQUIRED

(To improve mental health at the workplace)

Universal programs :

Mental health programs available to all employees for awareness

Targeted programs:

Mental health preventive programs offered to employees who have been identified as being risk of developing a mental health condition.

Mental Health First Aid Program working towards where people in organization has the first aid skills to identified & support people with mental health problems.

Treatment programs :

Mental health programs offered to employees with mental health condition such as **Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP)**

CONCLUSION

In the past decade, the number of Malaysians experiencing poor mental health (low mood, worry, feelings of tension, burn out and stress) has tripled from 10% in 2001 to 29% in 2020.

It is conservatively estimated that the total cost of poor mental health to organizations incurred through absenteeism, presenteeism and staff turnover is RM14.46bn in 2020.

Investing in effective psychological interventions in the workplace will reduce the cost significantly.

