Mental Wellbeing
in the Canadian Research Sector

Summary of findings

January 2022

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What people think,
feel and do

@opiniumresearch

LONDON | NEW YORK | AMSTERDAM | CAPE TOWN

We are Opinium

Strategic Insight Agency:
Thought Leadership, Brand & Comms, NPD, Stakeholder Engagement

London + New York + Amsterdam

70 people

Method neutral

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What people think,
feel and do

We all have
mental health

Our audit at a glance…

1 **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale**

14 positive statements about mental wellbeing, each scored 1-5 based on feeling over past 2 weeks.

Sum scores for each statement to give a **score for mental wellbeing**

2 **Overall Wellbeing**

- **Experiences** of poor mental and physical wellbeing
- How this has impacted their work
- **Days off** work
- **Attitudes** towards taking time off

3 **Mental health at work**

- **Stress** levels and **sources** at work
- Attitudes towards mental wellbeing
- Opening up to employers: reactions and barriers

4 **Support at work**

- **Awareness** of current support
- **Usage** and effectiveness of support
- What would they like to see in the future
- **Ideas** for mental wellbeing support

5 **Covid-19 module**

- Feelings of **support at work**
- Experience of WFH
- **Impact of WFH** on mental wellbeing
- Return to the office

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Thank you!

Fieldwork

July – August 2021

Sample size

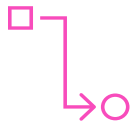122 Canadian research professionals

Key findings and recommendations

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Key recommendations from the research

Manage workloads, first and foremost, to break the link between stress and poor mental health

Leaders must model culture of wellbeing and proactively support junior employees

Incorporate flexibility and personalization into working practices as we emerge from the pandemic
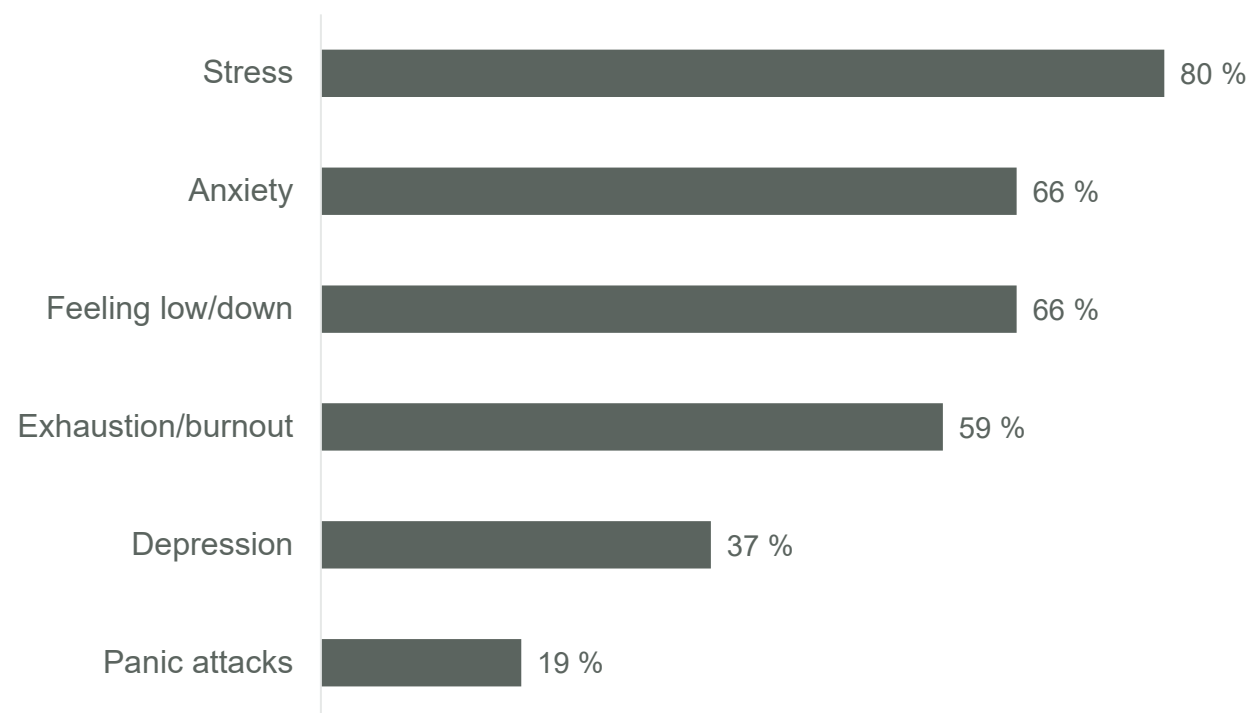
Recommendation 1:

Manage workloads, first and foremost, to break the link between stress and poor mental health

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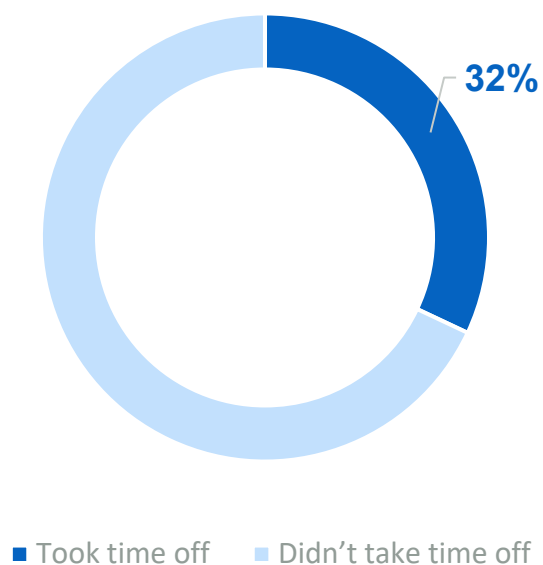# 9-in-10 have experienced poor mental health at some point in the last 12 months

86%

have experienced poor mental health in the last 12 months

Experienced the following in the past 12 months

Category	%
Stress	80 %
Anxiety	66 %
Feeling low/down	66 %
Exhaustion/burnout	59 %
Depression	37 %
Panic attacks	19 %

Q:Q1. Thinking about the last twelve months, have you experienced any of the following? Please select all that apply Base: all participants, 122
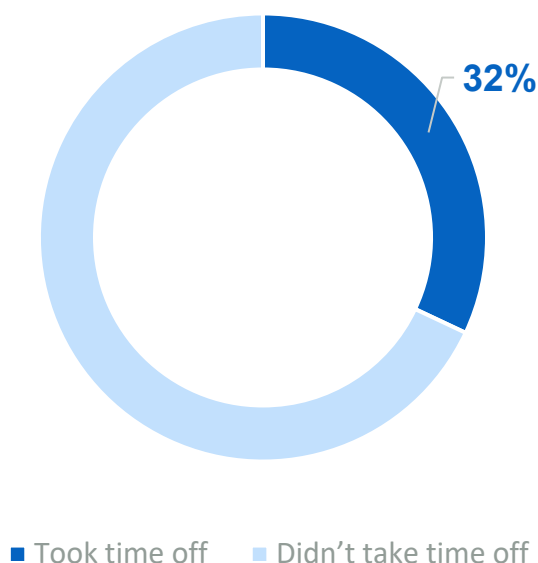
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A third who were experiencing poor mental health took time off to recover

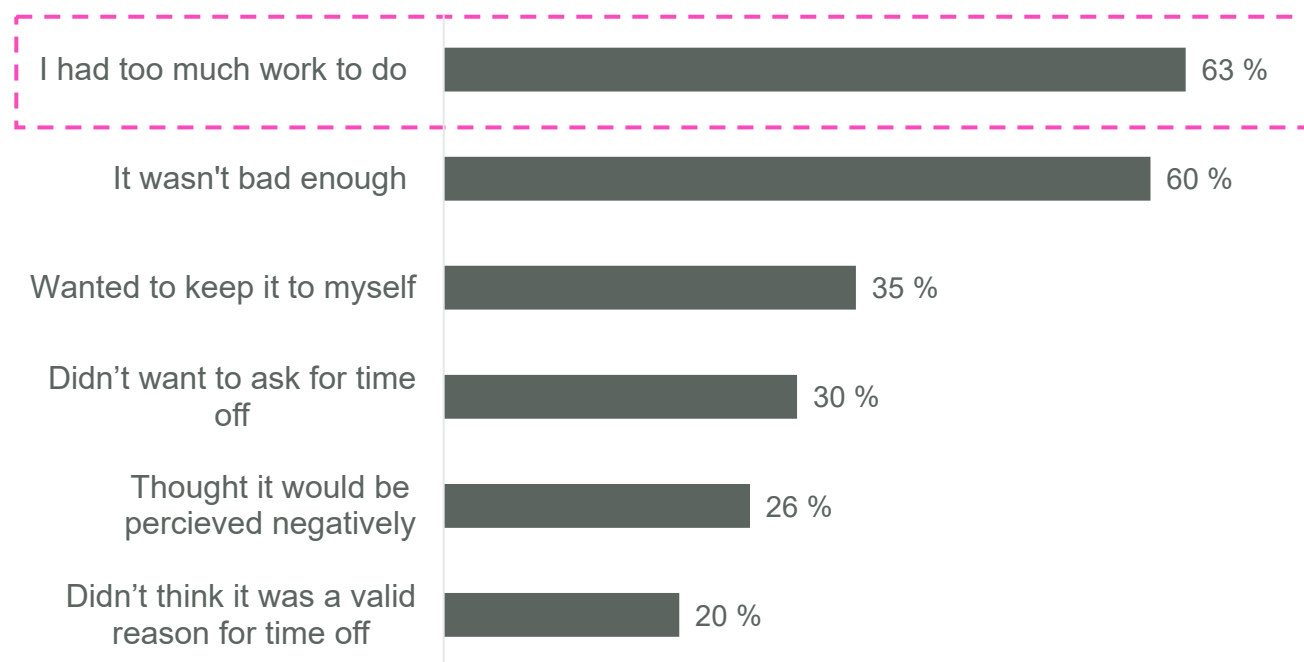**Proportion who took time off to recover from a period of poor mental health**

32%

■ Took time off   ■ Didn't take time off

Q:Q1. Thinking about the last twelve months, have you experienced any of the following? Please select all that apply Base: all participants, 122

Having too much work to do is the most common reason for not taking time off

Proportion who took time off to recover from a period of poor mental health

32%

■ Took time off   ■ Didn't take time off

Reasons for not taking time off

Reason	%
I had too much work to do	63 %
It wasn't bad enough	60 %
Wanted to keep it to myself	35 %
Didn't want to ask for time off	30 %
Thought it would be percieved negatively	26 %
Didn't think it was a valid reason for time off	20 %

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Q:Q1. Thinking about the last twelve months, have you experienced any of the following? Please select all that apply Base: all participants, 122

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A heavy workload is the most common cause of stress at work

Top 6 causes of stress at work

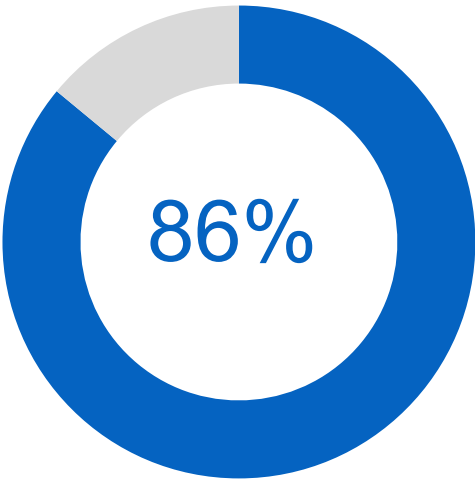| Cause	%
Workload	57%
Deadlines/targets	51%
Risk of projects going wrong	43%
Unclear expectations	40%
Client demands	40%
Poor work-life balance	40%

53% say they experience this often of all of the time
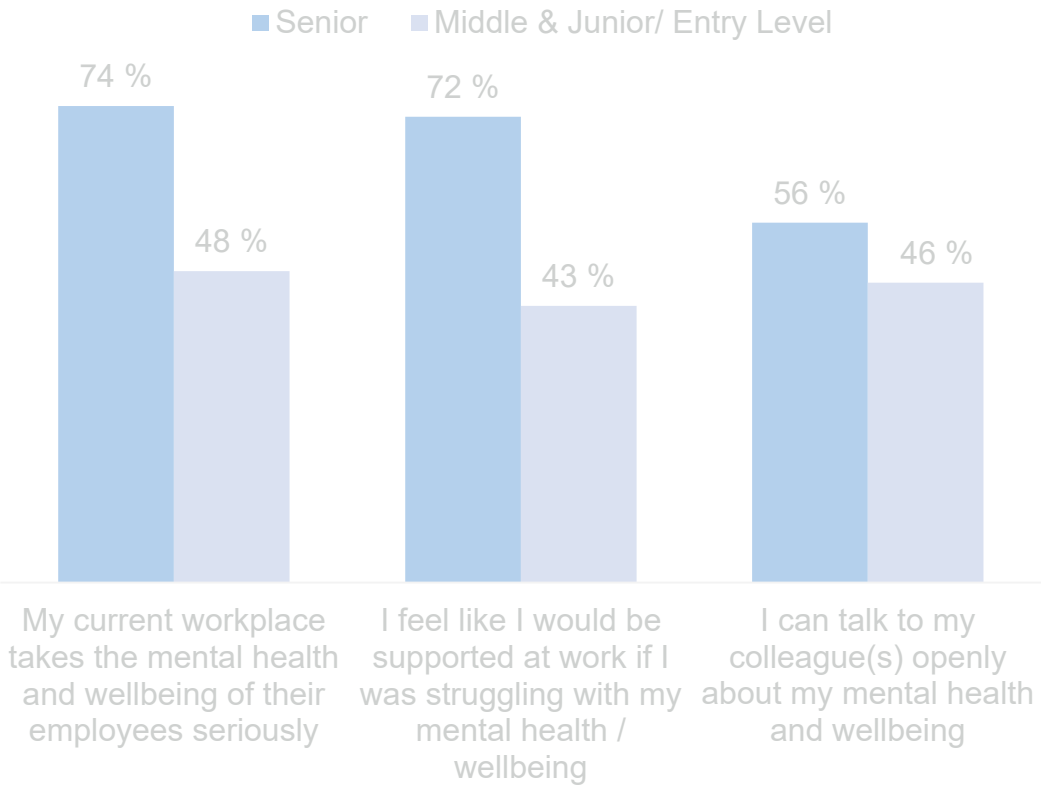
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Recommendation 2:

Leaders must model culture of wellbeing and proactively support junior employees

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Nearly all agree that their workplace has a responsibility to address mental wellbeing

Agree, by seniority

■ Senior ■ Middle & Junior/ Entry Level

86%

Agree their workplace has a role to play in looking after the mental wellbeing of their employees

74 %
48 %
72 %
43 %
56 %
46 %

My current workplace takes the mental health and wellbeing of their employees seriously

I feel like I would be supported at work if I was struggling with my mental health / wellbeing

I can talk to my colleague(s) openly about my mental health and wellbeing

Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 122 total; 66 senior level, 56 middle & junior/entry level

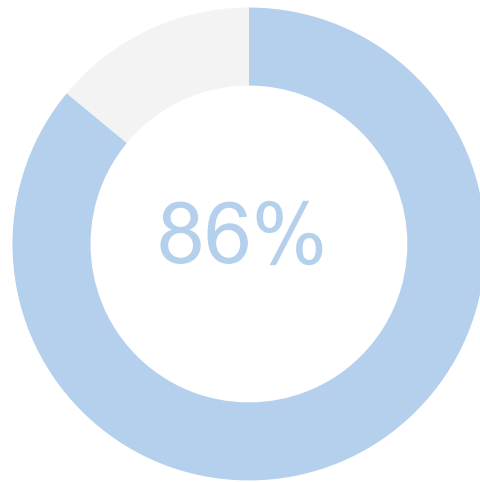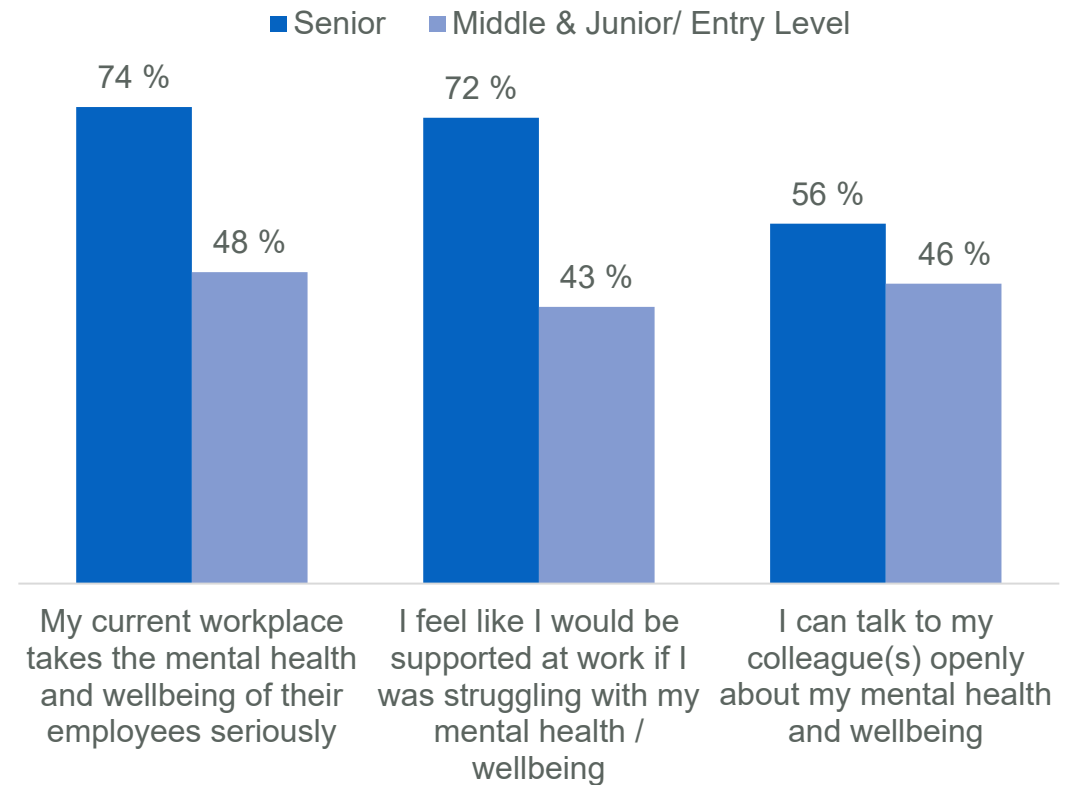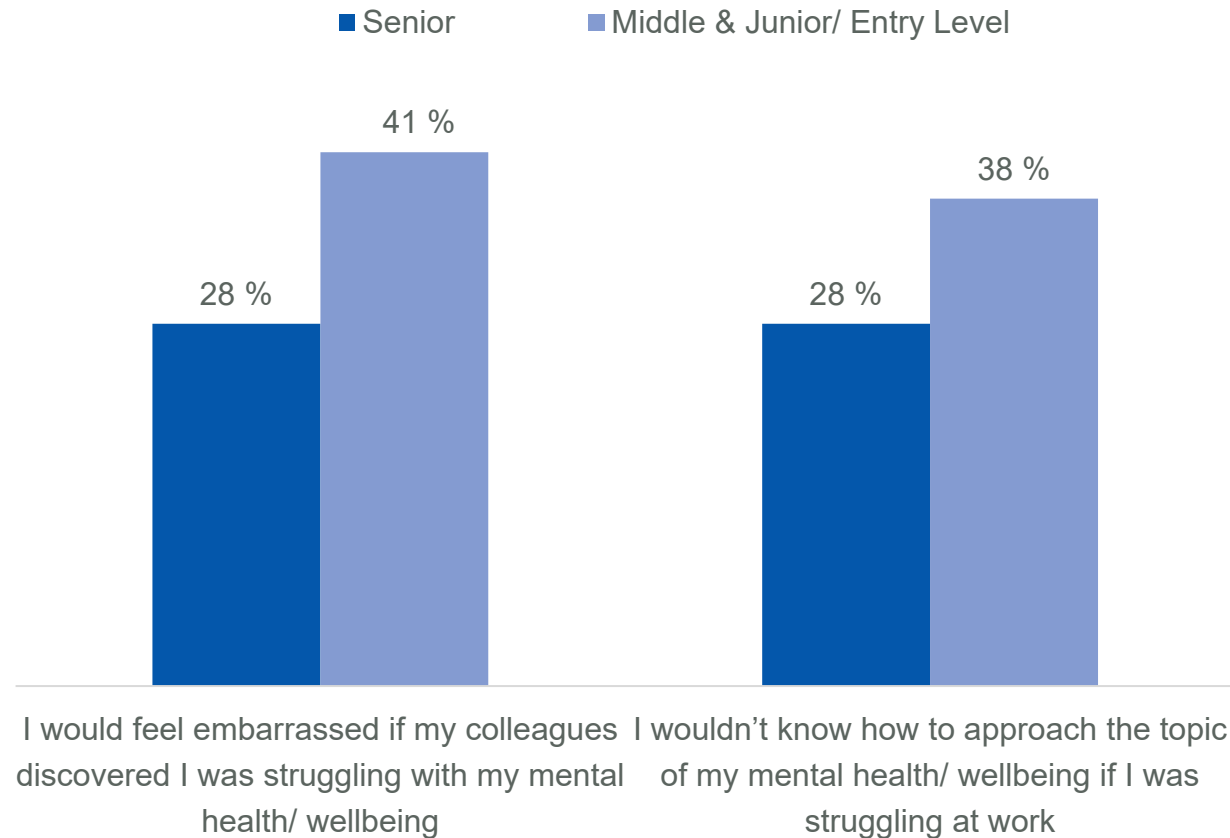# But junior employees less likely to feel supported or believe that workplace takes wellbeing seriously

86%

Agree their workplace has a role to play in looking after the mental wellbeing of their employees

Agree, by seniority

■ Senior ■ Middle & Junior/ Entry Level

	Senior	Middle & Junior/ Entry Level
My current workplace takes the mental health and wellbeing of their employees seriously	74 %	48 %
I feel like I would be supported at work if I was struggling with my mental health / wellbeing	72 %	43 %
I can talk to my colleague(s) openly about my mental health and wellbeing	56 %	46 %

Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
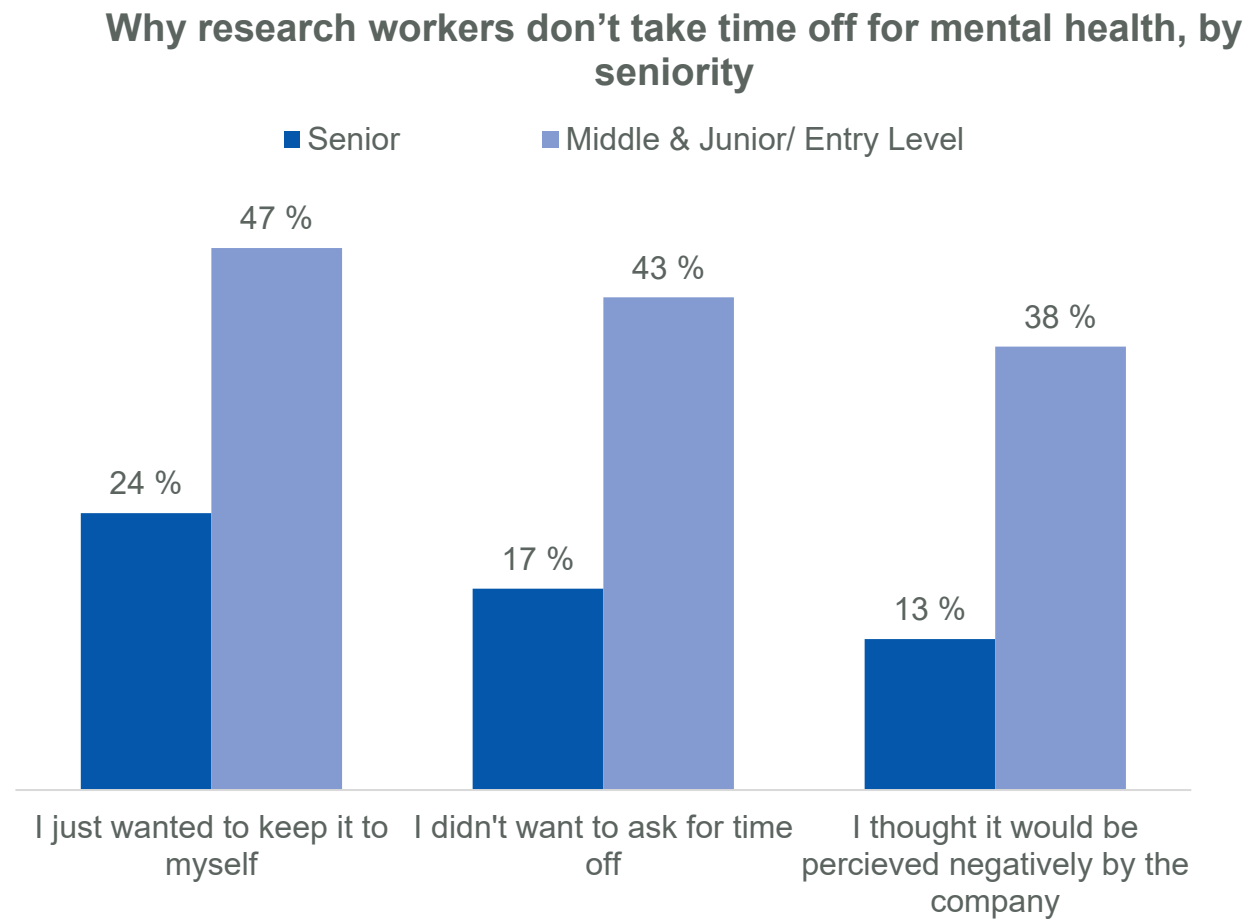Base: 122 total; 66 senior level, 56 middle & junior/entry level

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…and more likely to feel embarrassed about or unsure of how to approach mental health at work

Percentage who agree to wellbeing statements, by seniority

■ Senior ■ Middle & Junior/ Entry Level

	I would feel embarrassed if my colleagues discovered I was struggling with my mental health/ wellbeing	I wouldn't know how to approach the topic of my mental health/ wellbeing if I was struggling at work
Senior	28 %	28 %
Middle & Junior/ Entry Level	41 %	38 %

Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 122 total; 66 senior level, 56 middle & junior/entry level

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Middle & junior employees more worried about how they will be perceived

Why research workers don't take time off for mental health, by seniority

■ Senior　　　■ Middle & Junior/ Entry Level

47 %
43 %
38 %
24 %
17 %
13 %

I just wanted to keep it to myself　　I didn't want to ask for time off　　I thought it would be percieved negatively by the company

Q4. You mentioned that you have experienced the following over the last 12 months, but you didn't take any time off work for this. Why didn't you take time off work for each of the following?
Base: 93 total; 46 senior level, 47 middle & junior/entry level

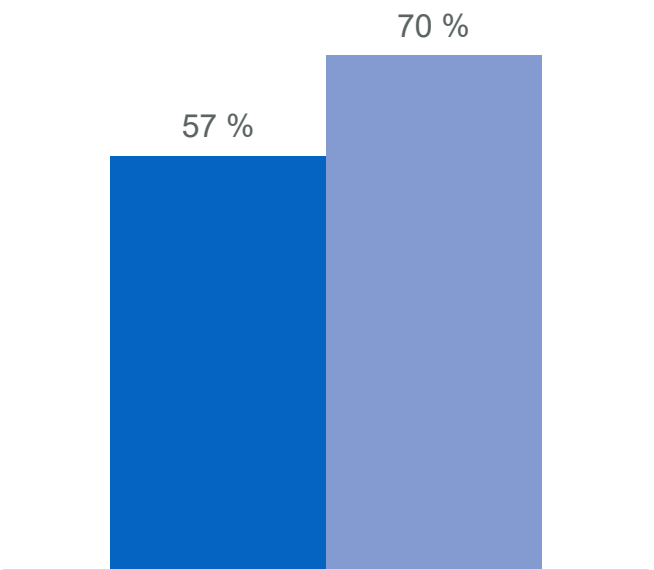# Junior employees more likely not to take time off for mental health due to workload

"Too much to do at work to take time off for mental heath reasons…"

Agree, all employees
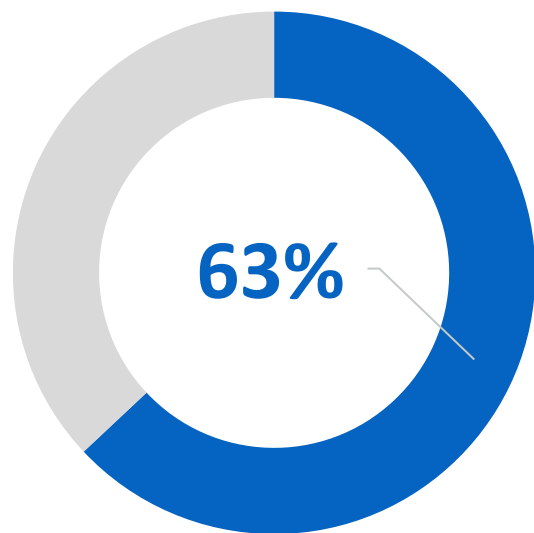
63%

Agree, by seniority

■ Senior ■ Middle & Junior/ Entry Level

70 %

57 %

Q4. You mentioned that you have experienced the following over the last 12 months, but you didn't take any time off work for this. Why didn't you take time off work for each of the following?
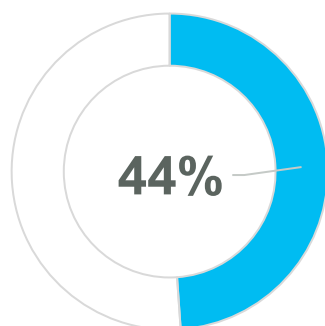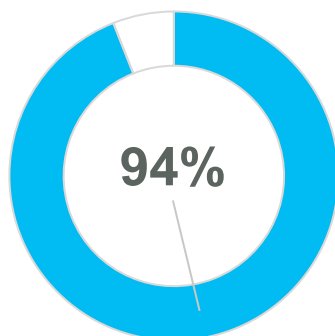Base: 93 total; 46 senior level, 47 middle & junior/entry level

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Recommendation:

Incorporate flexibility into working practices as we return to the office

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Working from home has become the new normal

Working from home BEFORE Covid-19

44%

94% want working from home to continue after Covid-19

Working from home AFTER Covid-19

94%

C3A. Have you been working from home due to the coronavirus pandemic C3B. And did you work from home before the coronavirus outbreak? Base: all respondents (122)
C3. Would you like to continue to work from home once the coronavirus lockdown is over? Base: all working from home (103)

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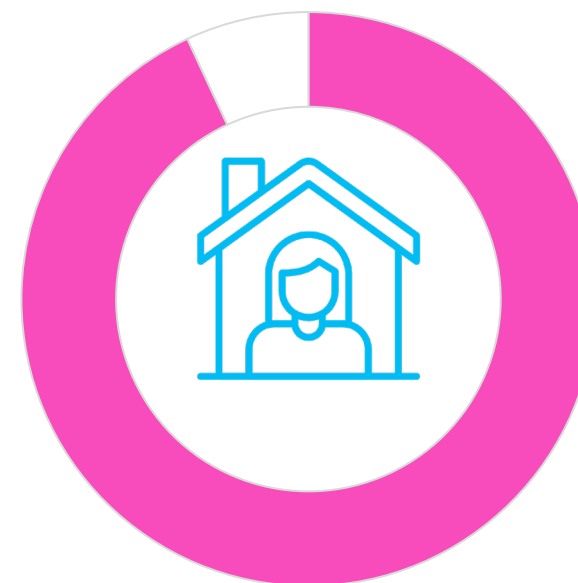
Many are benefiting from working from home...

Benefits of working from home

Benefit	%
Feeling more relaxed working from home	72%
Not having to commute has improved my mental health	65%
Better work life balance now	56%
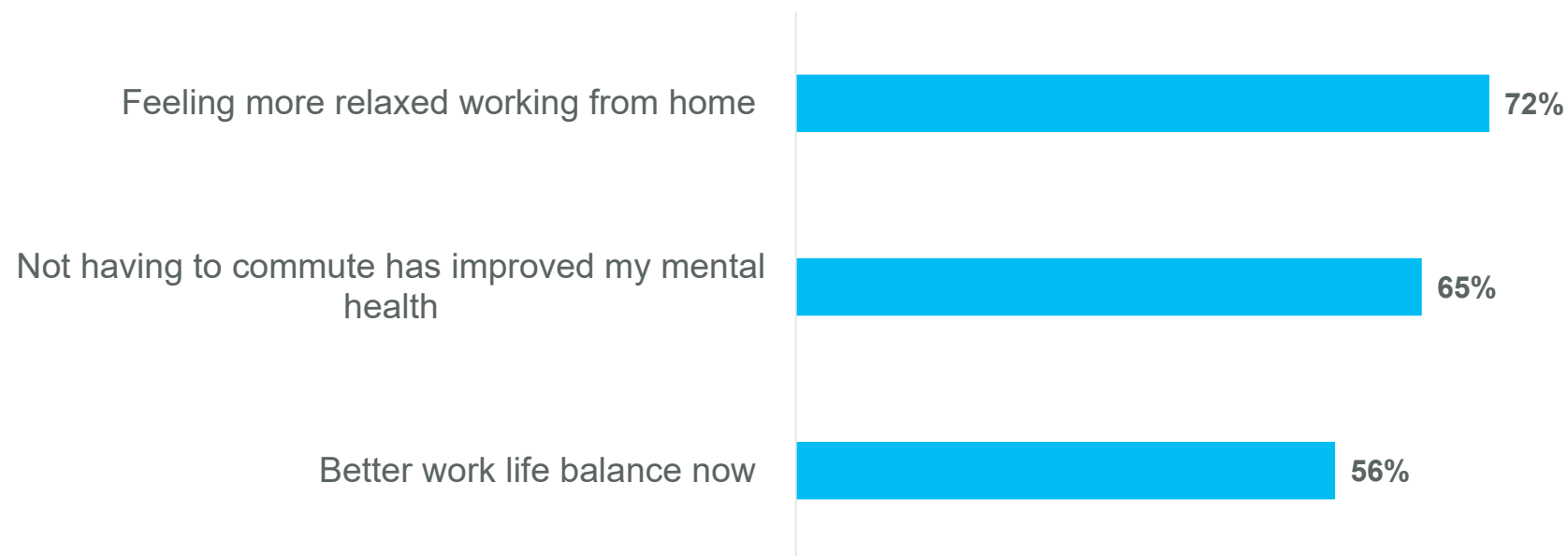
44% report WFH **improved** their mental wellbeing

C4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about working from home?
C5. How do you feel that working from home because of coronavirus has impacted your mental wellbeing?
Base: all working from home (103)

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...but most struggle to draw boundaries

Challenges of working from home

Struggle to build in time to get outside during the day	53%
Find it hard to draw boundaries between work and rest	53%
Working longers hours when WfH	47%
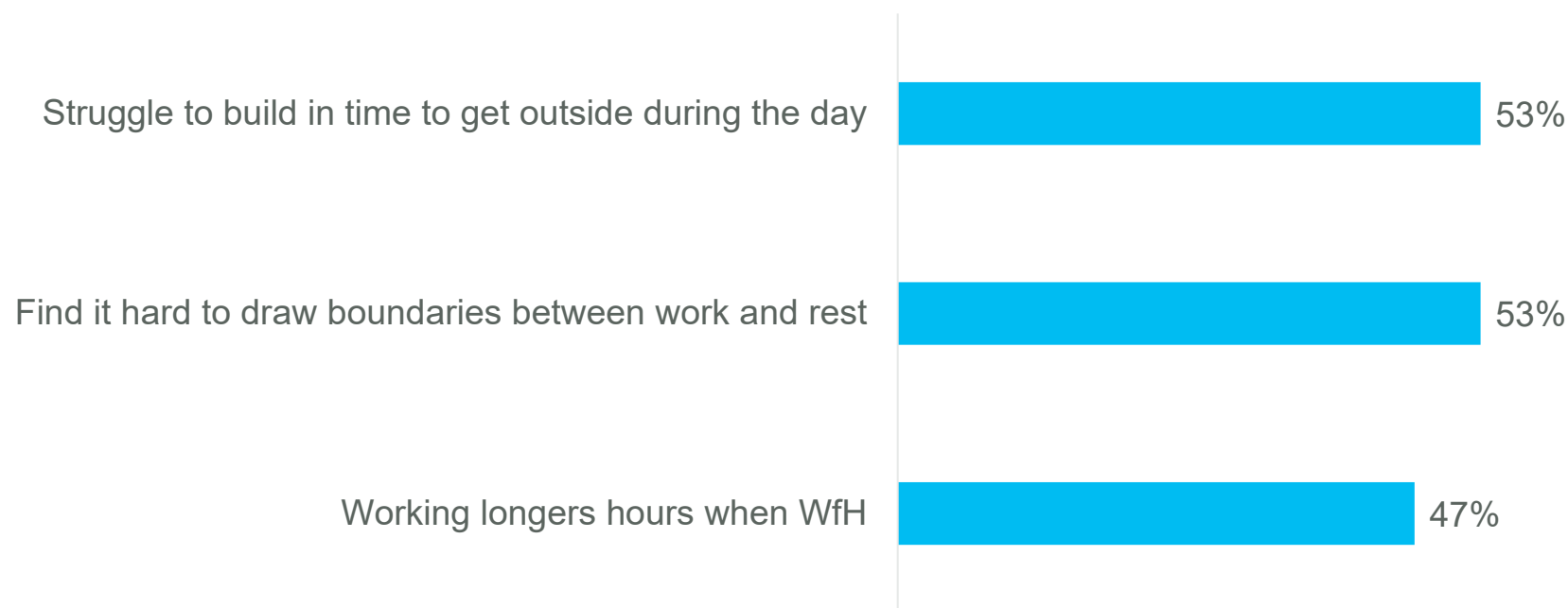
34% report WFH decreased their mental wellbeing

C4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about working from home?
C5. How do you feel that working from home because of coronavirus has impacted your mental wellbeing?
Base: all working from home (103)

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Ambivalent feelings

'Working from home has been a positive thing, but doing it all the time for such a long period can be hard at times. It feels stale by now.'
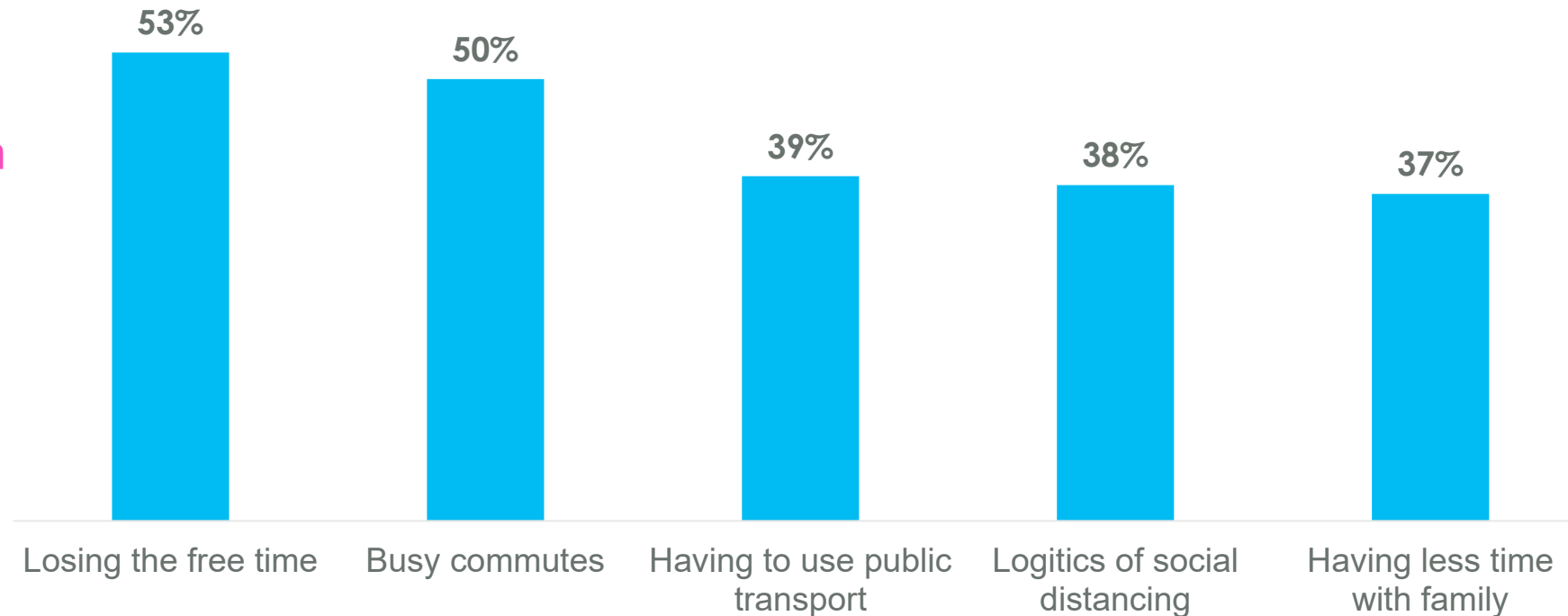
'We are often expected to stay late (because we don't have to commute) or work overtime (because we are already at home). […] This also means we get messages in our inbox at all times of the day.'

'I miss the social aspects of working at an office.'

C6. You mentioned that working from home due to the coronavirus outbreak has had a negative impact on your mental wellbeing, could you tell us a bit more about why you feel it has negatively impacted your mental wellbeing?
Base: all working from home (103)

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Losing free time and busy commutes are the biggest concerns about returning to the office

Top 5 concerns

Only **7%** have **no concern** about returning to the office

53%	50%	39%	38%	37%
Losing the free time	Busy commutes	Having to use public transport	Logitics of social distancing	Having less time with family

C8. Do you have any concerns about returning to the office?
Base: all working or furloughed, 116

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Thank you. Any questions?

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