

PRCA MENA MENTAL HEALTH

REPORT 2021



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METHODOLOGY

PRCA MENA worked with YouGov to survey a total of 1,728 PR and communications professionals across the MENA region between 5 July and 9 August 2021.

WELCOME



HAYLEY CLEMENTS MPRCA
General Manager, PRCA MENA

Since PRCA MENA produced its **first Mental Health Report** in October last year, I've had a number of conversations about the importance of this topic in a profession that is exciting, rewarding and even glamorous at times – but can also, as we all know, be draining and stressful.

It's good to know that the industry is taking the topic seriously. I'd love to talk to even more of you over the next year about making change happen, and making the profession an even happier, healthier place.



AHMAD ITANI CMPRCA
Chairman, PRCA MENA
Founder and CEO, Cicero & Bernay
Communication Consultancy

The first step to improving an organisation's mental wellbeing is dedicating time to talking and thinking about it. Mental health is not always an easy topic, but it is an incredibly important one on both human and business levels, especially during a pandemic.

No matter where you or your organisation are on your mental health journeys, I hope you find this report useful as it comprises insights regarding regional PR practitioners' sentiments on mental wellness.

(*CHANGE AGAINST 2020)

FOREWORD



FRANCIS INGHAM MPRCA
Director General, PRCA

If you're reading this report, it probably means that you're interested in how to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the place where you work.

You're in good company: across the world, PR and communications leaders are increasingly recognising the importance of positive mental health in their organisations, their clients, their teams, and themselves. The PRCA has long been committed to supporting the industry in improving its mental wellbeing, and this commitment has only been strengthened by the COVID-19 pandemic and the strains it has put on all of us.

Looking through this report, I'm struck by a few specific findings. First, the proportion of people reporting uncertainty regarding job security is down from 34% last year to 28% this one. This is an indication that the state of shock and nervousness in which many companies found themselves last year has dissipated to at least some extent – and this is a good thing for the mental health of the people who work for those companies.

Nonetheless, the number of people saying that COVID-19 has worsened their mental health is 42%, virtually unchanged from last year. It is clear that the mental health impact of COVID-19 is not going away quickly even if we have, I hope, now seen the worst of this pandemic.

It is good to see that 81% of respondents say they would feel comfortable with a colleague discussing their mental health problem. In an ideal world, that figure would be higher: in fact, last year it was slightly higher, at 84%. While I don't think that that drop should be taken out of proportion, it does show that progress is not inevitable – workplace culture is something that needs to be nourished and worked on continuously. I'm sure that in years to come, numbers like these will move in the right direction, as both this profession and societies in general improve their understanding of, and response to, mental health challenges.

I'm very proud that PRCA members across the MENA region, and indeed around the world, are taking the issue of mental health seriously. I hope that this report will help even more of them to do exactly that.

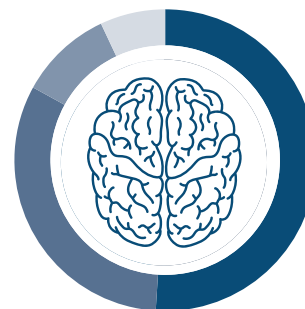
SYMPTOMS, RISKS, AND AWARENESS

MENA PR practitioners are in no doubt that mental health and wellbeing is an important issue – and the majority agree that the workplace has an impact on their mental state.

Just as in the **debut PRCA MENA Mental Health Report in 2020**, 92% of respondents this year agreed that mental health and wellbeing was 'very important' to overall quality of life, with only a small minority (1%) calling it 'not very important' or 'not important at all'. Women (94%) are slightly more likely than men (91%) to select 'very important'.

The survey sees a rise in the number of respondents saying they have suffered from a mental health illness – this year it is 10% of respondents, up from 8% in 2020. There is little gender difference in this answer, but more variation by age group.

HOW MUCH INFLUENCE DO YOU THINK YOUR WORKPLACE HAS ON YOUR OVERALL MENTAL HEALTH?*



- **Strong influence** 51% (↓1)
- **Moderate influence** 32% (↓1)
- **Slight influence** 10% (=)
- **No influence at all** 7% (↑2)

I HAVE SUFFERED FROM A MENTAL ILLNESS



| ALL AGES | 10% (↑2) |
|----------|----------|
| 18-24 | 16% (↑4) |
| 25-34 | 11% (↑3) |
| 35-44 | 7% (↑1) |
| 45+ | 2% (↓3) |

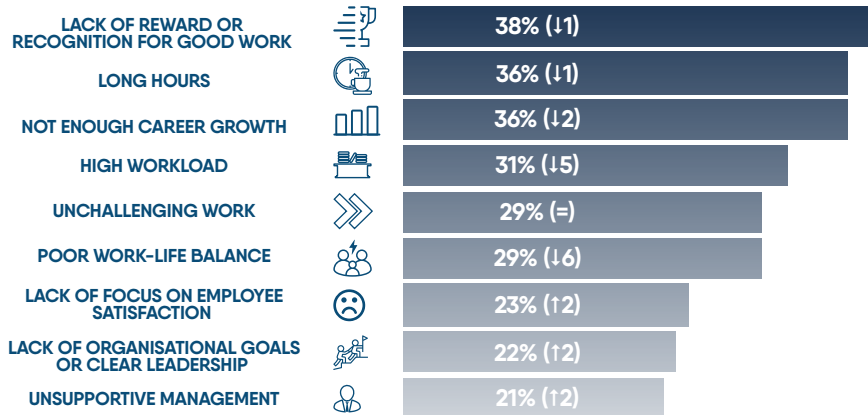
(*CHANGE AGAINST 2020)

We asked respondents whether they faced certain potential triggers of poor mental wellbeing at work. The top four remain the same as in last year's survey. Only 8% of respondents did not experience any of these, the same level as last year.

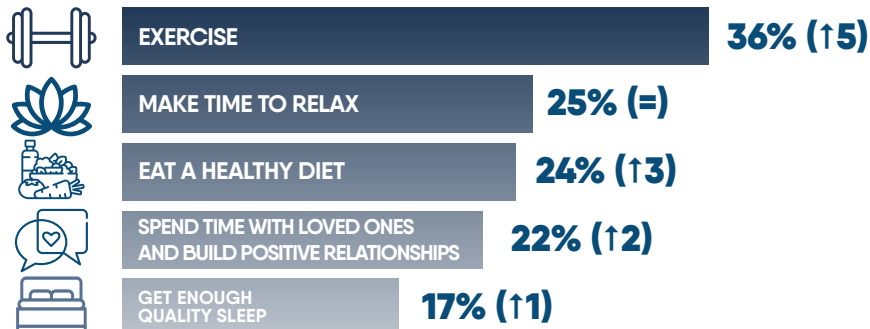
There is little gender split - the top three are the same for both men and women. There is some variation based on age: for those aged 45+ the number one issue was lack of reward or recognition (43%), and for ages 35-44 it was not enough career growth (41%). For those earlier in their career the top issue was long hours - it was selected by 37% of 18-24-year-olds, and 40% of those aged 25-34. The PRCA's most recent Middle East PR and Communications Census showed the region's practitioners working on average an extra day each week versus their contracted hours.

A significant number of respondents - a slightly increased number, in fact - say they are struggling to find time to do things that can be conducive to positive physical and mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH TRIGGERS FACED BY RESPONDENTS*



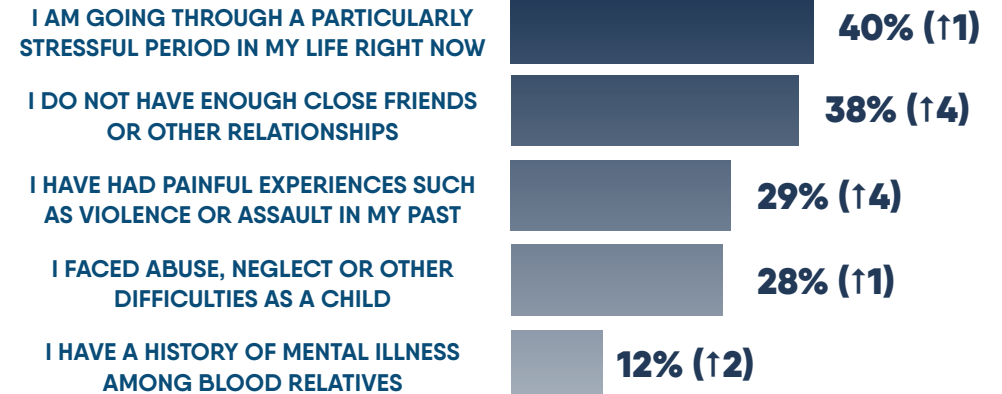
I NEVER, OR RARELY...



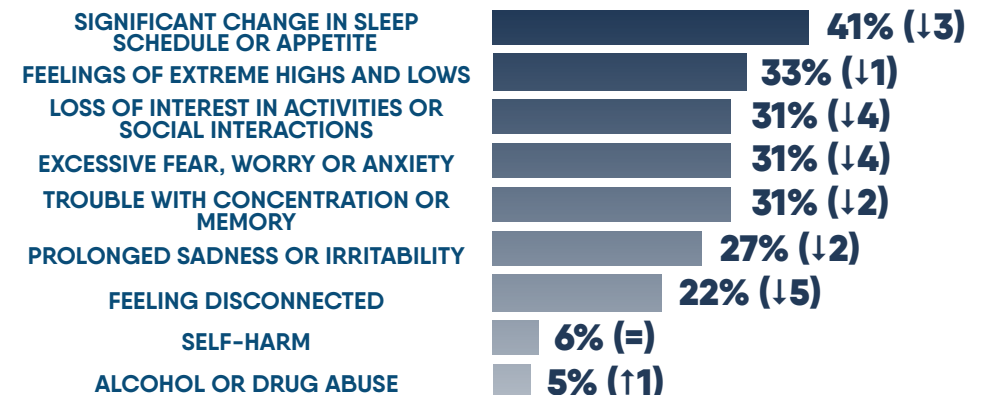
Alongside the increase from 8% to 10% of respondents saying they have had a mental health illness, we see a small increase in the number of respondents disclosing other issues. The pandemic may have prompted some of them to think more about their mental wellbeing and mental health history, and it appears to have made it even harder for people to maintain close friendships.

However, fewer respondents report potential symptoms of mental ill health (eg changes in sleep or appetite, or extreme highs) than last year. It appears that some people may have managed to improve their mental health during this period. However, a small but worrying number continue to suffer with self-harm and substance abuse.

MENTAL WELLBEING ISSUES EXPERIENCED*



IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS I HAVE EXPERIENCED...*



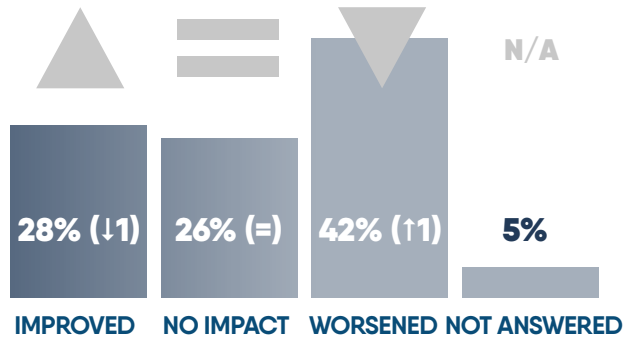
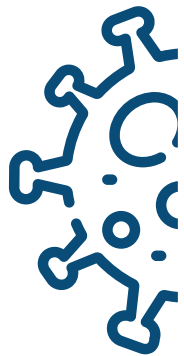
(*CHANGE AGAINST 2020)

In last year's survey, we heard that 9% of respondents had themselves contracted COVID-19 at some point. That number is now 17%. Tragically, the number of respondents who have lost someone to the virus has also nearly doubled, from 12% to 21%.

The pandemic also continues to affect many people's mental health. Like last year, two-fifths of respondents said their mental health has been negatively affected by COVID-19, with a little more than a quarter saying it had improved it.

The stresses related to the pandemic remain widespread - like last year, just 7% of respondents said they had not experienced any anxieties as a result of the virus.

HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?*



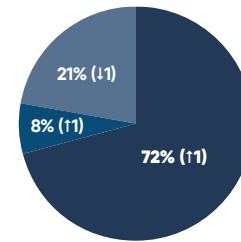
ANXIETIES OR DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO COVID-19

- Stress of exposure to COVID-19 **35% (↓4)**
- Feelings of isolation due to social-distancing and lockdown **35% (↓4)**
- Concern over high-risk loved ones contacting COVID-19 **35% (↓1)**
- Delayed or reduced salaries **30% (↓4)**
- Uncertainty regarding job security **28% (↓6)**

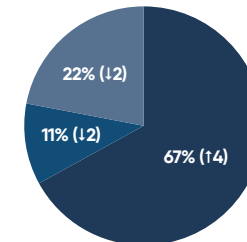
SEEKING HELP (OR NOT)

Our research again shows that the region's PR professionals are confident that they can identify and deal with mental health issues, and comfortable talking to colleagues about their problems.

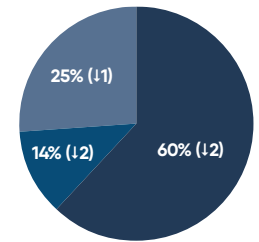
Overall, 61% (up from 60% last year) agree that they are 'very well-informed and educated about mental health' - another 10% disagree, and the remainder were unsure. In response to other questions, a majority of respondents demonstrated confidence in their ability to respond to mental health challenges - but this does leave a sizable minority feeling less confident, or unsure.



I FEEL CONFIDENT I CAN NOTICE SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN MYSELF AND IN OTHERS



I KNOW WHERE TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS



I AM WILLING TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP FOR ANY MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS I MAY FACE

■ I AGREE ■ I DISAGREE ■ NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE

HOW COMFORTABLE WOULD YOU BE IF...

...a co-worker spoke to you about it?

Comfortable: 81% (↓3) | Uncomfortable: 19% (↑3)

...a co-worker took some time off to deal with mental health problems?

Comfortable: 93% (=) | Uncomfortable: 7% (=)

...a co-worker's deadlines/targets were eased to help them deal with it?

Comfortable: 92% (↓1) | Uncomfortable: 8% (↑1)

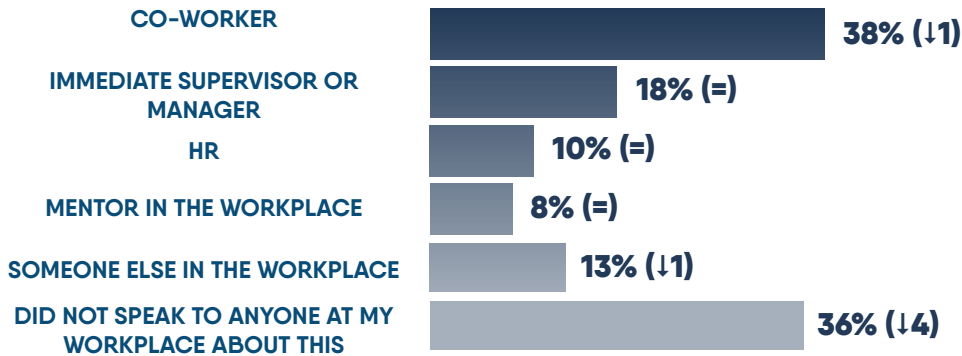
(*CHANGE AGAINST 2020)

Our data reveals that the majority of people (64%) who had faced a mental health issue in the past year, had discussed this with one or more colleagues. There is some gender split, with that number rising to 67% of men and dropping to 59% of women.

People in younger age groups are more likely to have spoken about their mental state to someone at work – 69% of those aged 18–24 did so, a number that drops to 65% for those aged 25–34, 62% for those aged 35–44, and 57% for those over 45.

Happily, a large majority of people who talked about mental health issues with someone at work (79%) said they were satisfied with their colleagues' response.

YOU FACED A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS – DID YOU SPEAK TO ANYONE AT WORK ABOUT IT?



...AND HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH THEIR REACTION AND RESPONSE?

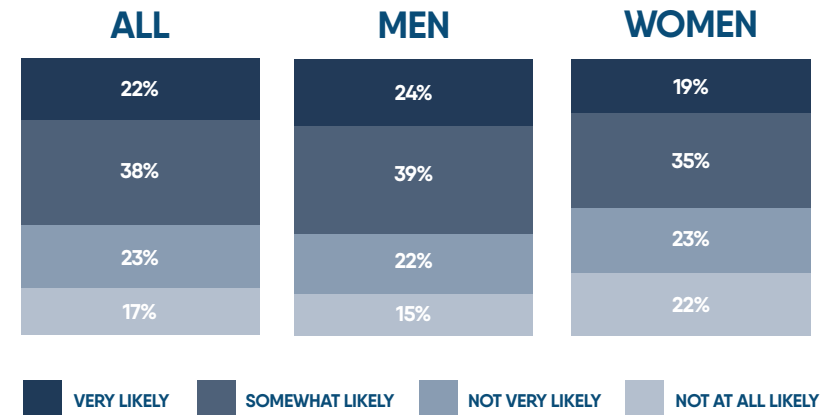
Very satisfied: 30% (↑1)
 Somewhat satisfied: 50% (↓1)
 Not very satisfied: 16% (=)
 Not at all satisfied: 5% (=)



Our data shows that the majority of respondents (60%) would be likely to talk to a colleague if they were faced with a mental health issue in the future. This figure drops to 55% among women, and there is little change in these numbers since last year.

There are several reasons given by those who say they would not speak to a colleague – 'it is a private issue' being much more commonly mentioned by female respondents than males (49% versus 39%).

IF YOU WERE FACED WITH A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM IN FUTURE, HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO TALK TO SOMEONE AT YOUR WORKPLACE ABOUT IT?



REASONS FOR NOT SPEAKING TO SOMEONE AT WORK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

It is a private issue 42%
 I do not think it would be appropriate 37%
 There is no one at work with whom I would feel comfortable talking 28%
 I do not think colleagues would understand my problems 28%
 I do not think talking would make any difference 33%
 I would not want colleagues to think less of me 22%
 I would worry it could have a negative impact on my career 22%
 I would be too embarrassed 14%

However, like last year, we see that just because many people know what they 'should' do if faced by a mental health issue, it's not always that way in practice.

For example, respondents were asked what someone should do if they experience feelings of extreme highs and lows. Two-thirds (63%) said see a doctor, GP or mental health professional – but in reality, only 19% of people who had experienced that in the last 12 months did see a practitioner.

A similar pattern is repeated with other issues – the majority of respondents say you should seek that type of support if you suffer with self-harm (77%) – but only 47% of people who experienced that issue last year did seek that support. Another example of this disconnect is shown below – it also illustrates that outside of colleagues and health professionals, many people find it useful to speak to friends, family or a religious authority.

Worryingly, many respondents think these issues do not need intervention – for example, 14% of those surveyed say someone experiencing suicidal thoughts can 'deal with it on their own' and 2% thought no action was needed in this case.

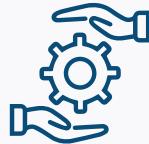
HOW SOMEONE SHOULD DEAL WITH EXCESSIVE FEAR, WORRY OR ANXIETY...

- No action needed **3**
- Deal with it on their own **25%**
- Seek support online **11%**
- Talk to family/friends **35%**
- Talk to a religious authority **20%**
- Talk to someone at work **18%**
- See a doctor, GP or mental health professional **70%**



...AND WHAT PEOPLE DID IN PRACTICE WHEN THEY EXPERIENCED THIS

- Did not take any action **15%**
- Dealt with it on my own **48%**
- Looked for support online **15%**
- Talked to family/friends **36%**
- Talked to a religious authority **17%**
- Talked to someone at work **16%**
- Saw a doctor, GP or mental health professional **27%**



ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Surprisingly, many employers (44%, the same figure as last year) have not communicated with staff around mental health in the last year, our respondents say.

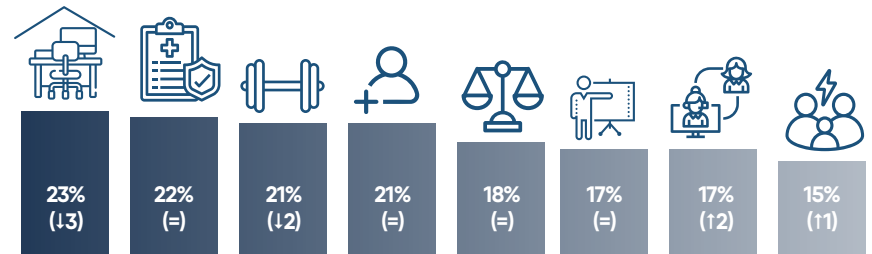
When it comes to which mental health-related benefits they offer, mid-sized companies appear slightly better – 27% of those with 10-49 and 26% of those with 50-249 staff offer and encourage flexible working. This compares to 21% of those with less than 10 or more than 250 people. In terms of other benefits, the differences between company size are smaller.

It also appears that older staff are less likely to notice or feel engagement with such benefits – 43% of respondents aged 45+ said their employer offered no mental health-related benefits, compared to 19% of those aged under 24.

HAS THERE BEEN ANY COMMUNICATION REGARDING MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUR WORKPLACE IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

| | | |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| ALL FIRMS | 56% YES | 44% NO |
| 250+ STAFF | 62% YES | 38% NO |
| 50-249 STAFF | 58% YES | 42% NO |
| 10-49 STAFF | 61% YES | 39% NO |
| <10 STAFF | 53% YES | 47% NO |

WHAT DOES YOUR COMPANY OFFER TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH?*



Offering and encouraging flexible working **23% (13)** | Including mental health in company health insurance **22% (=)** | Organising physical and wellness activities **21% (12)** | Creating and communicating guidelines for fair treatment of employees **21% (=)** | Implementing policies to promote work-life balance **18% (=)** | Arranging training around mental health **17% (=)** | Assigning mentors for new hires **17% (12)** | Organising events around mental health **15% (11)**

Like last year, many respondents rate their workplaces as being good around general cultural principles, but less positive when it comes to specific mental health-related measures.

There is again some variation between age groups - those aged 18-24 are much more likely (61%) than those aged 45+ (44%) to agree that their employer is good at communicating organisational values of respect, civility and empathy. The same goes for providing resources to employees to tackle mental health issues (51% versus 32%).

Employers of different sizes also perform differently. In eight out of 10 measures in the survey, companies with 10-49 staff achieve the highest rating. Companies with 50-249 staff, and those with fewer than 10 staff, are generally slightly behind. The largest companies are often much further back - in every single category, firms with 250 staff or more get the lowest rating.

HOW DO YOU RATE YOUR EMPLOYER ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURES?

(Balance of respondents saying 'very good' or 'good' minus those saying 'poor' or 'very poor'.)

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| MAKING ALL EMPLOYEES FEEL RECOGNISED AND VALUED | +29% (IN 2020: +23%) |
| COMMUNICATING ORGANISATIONAL VALUES OF RESPECT, CIVILITY AND EMPATHY: | +28% (IN 2020: +27%) |
| PROMOTING SOCIAL CONNECTION AT THE WORKPLACE | +26% (IN 2020: +24%) |
| FOSTERING A CULTURE WHERE MENTAL HEALTH IS TREATED ON PAR WITH ANY OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS: | +9% (IN 2020: +4%) |
| PROVIDING RESOURCES TO EMPLOYEES TO TACKLE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES | +5% (IN 2020: +1%) |
| PRIORITISING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF EMPLOYEES: | ZERO (IN 2020: -2%) |

MY EMPLOYER PROVIDES RESOURCES TO EMPLOYEES TO TACKLE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES:

<10 STAFF: **+7%** | 10-49 STAFF: **+13%** | 50-249 STAFF: **-1%** | 250+ STAFF: **-6%**

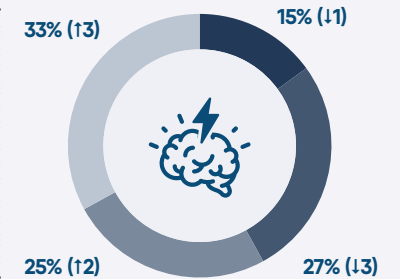
MY EMPLOYER COMMUNICATES ORGANISATIONAL VALUES OF RESPECT, CIVILITY AND EMPATHY:

<10 STAFF: **+33%** | 10-49 STAFF: **+34%** | 50-249 STAFF: **+31%** | 250+ STAFF: **+9%**

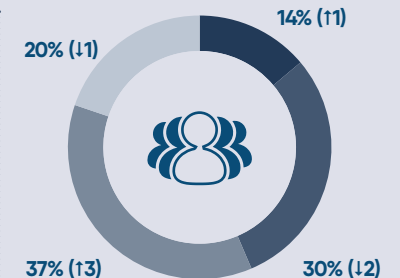
While the picture is not completely gloomy, it is clear that the region's PR practitioners still want more support around their mental health. Just 15% of respondents say they feel completely supported, a slight drop on last year, and only 14% feel their employer is doing 'more than enough' around mental health - again, this figure has dropped slightly since last year.

These answers vary relatively little when we examine differences between gender, and variations for company size. They do however change somewhat with age - 50% of 18-24s say they feel 'completely supported' or 'moderately supported' compared with 35% of those aged over 45.

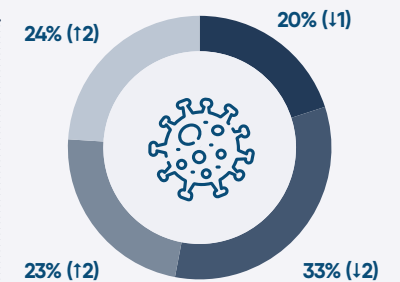
HOW SUPPORTED DO YOU FEEL BY YOUR ORGANISATION WITH RESPECT TO YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?*



OVERALL, DO YOU THINK YOUR ORGANISATION IS DOING ENOUGH TO SUPPORT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF THEIR EMPLOYEES?*



DURING COVID-19, HOW SUPPORTIVE HAS YOUR ORGANISATION BEEN WITH RESPECT TO MENTAL HEALTH?*



(*CHANGE AGAINST 2020)

CONCLUSIONS

COVID-19 IS A MAJOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE - FOR BETTER OR WORSE

It may be a surprise to some readers that 28% of respondents say the pandemic has improved their mental health, and that only 42% say it has made it worse. One way or another, more than two-thirds of people say it has changed or impacted their mental health.

As the pandemic evolves, with companies and sectors continuing to experience changes in their work and operations, it is sensible to assume that, for better or worse, people's mental health will continue to be particularly changeable thanks to the pandemic. Things like returning to the office, trying to resume your pre-pandemic social life, and adapting to a changed industry, could all pose challenges.

DON'T IGNORE GENDER - BUT DON'T FOCUS TOO MUCH ON IT

There are two striking gender-related differences in the report. Women who faced a mental health issue are less likely than men to have discussed it with colleagues (see p11), and are less likely to feel comfortable doing it in the future (p12).

The PRCA knows that there is a global gender pay gap in this profession, and is working hard to combat it, and there is no question that women face extra barriers in both their work and professional life. Nonetheless, the relative lack of gender split in our data reinforces the need to avoid old-fashioned stereotypes around male versus female behaviours and characteristics.

DON'T FORGET YOUR MORE SENIOR COLLEAGUES

Looking at different generations, younger demographics generally appear to be more engaged and in touch with mental health issues than older respondents, and are more likely to say they have had a mental health illness (p6). But this does not mean that more senior members of the profession do not have mental health needs. We see that those aged 45+ are much less likely than those under 25 to feel supported by their organisation around mental health (p16).

Perhaps some companies assume that those in older age groups are less in need of support, and perhaps that support is more focussed towards younger workers. Everyone, of all ages, has mental health - whether good or bad.

'SHOULD' VERSUS 'DOES' - A TRICKY QUESTION

Few people (p10) say they are unwilling to seek professional help if they have a mental health issue. But, just like in the 2020 version of this report, there is a substantial gap between what people think someone should do about symptoms of mental ill health versus what they do in reality. Asking for help is one of the most difficult things to do, in any area of life, particularly one which has historically had an amount of stigma around it.

This is not something that can necessarily be fixed quickly. At the very least, companies must give their employees the knowledge of how to seek help. In future reports, it would be good to see an increased proportion of companies having communicated around mental health, and making resources available to their staff.

ABOUT PRCA MENA

The PRCA was founded in London in 1969 and launched PRCA MENA in 2016 with the aim of raising standards in PR and communications, providing members with industry data, facilitating the sharing of communications best practice, and creating networking opportunities.