



## Millennials and Generation Z—making mental health at work a priority

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“If business leaders want to actively help millennials and Gen Zs to thrive at work, they need to prioritize mental health and embed a workplace culture where stigma does not exist.”

- Emma Codd, Deloitte Global Inclusion leader

# Introduction

2020 forced many of us to tackle monumental new challenges while continuing to grapple with long-standing issues. For millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z) workers, the mental health challenges they faced pre-pandemic were further strained by last year's uncertainties. This year, as COVID-19 vaccination levels rise in some countries and economies begin to reopen slowly, signs of hopeful progress are emerging. Yet despite this, the [Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey](#) shows that stress and anxiety levels remain high – and that there is much more to do when it comes to mental health in the workplace.



Deloitte Global's research, which was conducted at the beginning of this year and surveyed nearly 23,000 millennial and Gen Z respondents from across 45 countries, reveals that some worrying mental health data trends from the 2020 Millennial Survey have continued into 2021. In general, millennials are still, first and foremost, worried about the health of their families and their financial futures – with both also being two growing causes of concern for Gen Zs. Both generations also noted that job prospects are a leading stress driver, with Gen Zs placing it at the top of their list. Women report experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety than men, likely because they continue to be disproportionately affected by job losses and increased family care responsibilities.

Although millennials and Gen Zs surveyed said that they're experiencing increased stress and anxiety, they remain hesitant about vocalizing these challenges at work, with nearly six in 10 saying that they did not tell their leader how they were feeling. The majority of respondents who feel increased stress did not take off to manage their mental health. And, as was true last year, of those respondents who did take time off work due to stress, nearly half gave their employer a different reason – suggesting that despite recent efforts to normalize conversations about mental health at work, workplace stigma persists.

As members of these two generations – who together account for a large part of the global workforce – juggle competing priorities and pressures, striking a healthy work-life balance is an enduring challenge. This perhaps explains why it is also a major priority for millennials and Gen Zs when it comes to the workplace, particularly for those in leadership positions.

# High stress levels continue

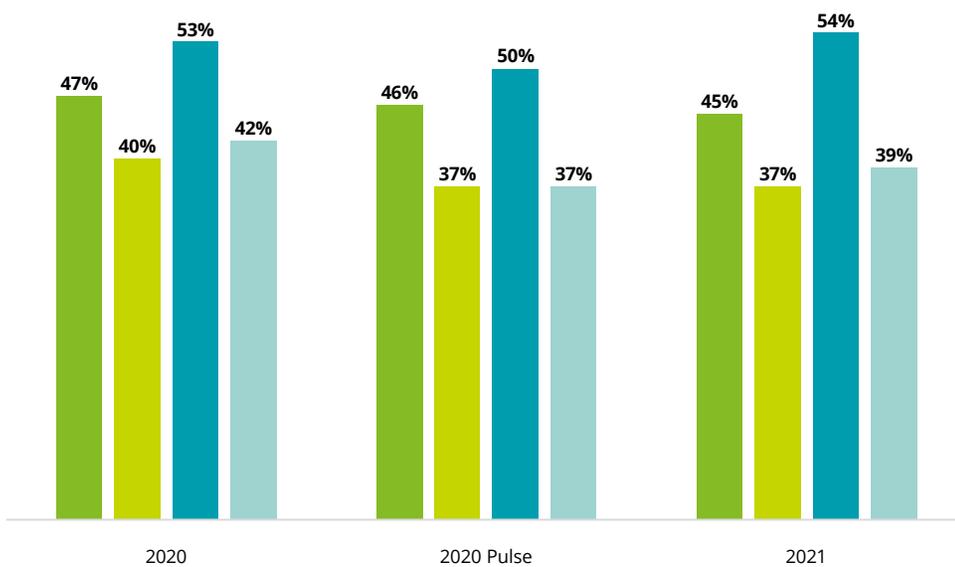
In the Deloitte Global survey, a concerning 41% of millennials and 46% of Gen Zs shared that they feel stressed or anxious most or all of the time, only a three percent drop for millennials and a two percent drop for Gen Zs from 2020. When comparing their current lives to the ones they led before the COVID-19 pandemic, around half of respondents say they feel more stressed than before the pandemic – with nearly a third of millennials (31%) and Gen Zs (29%) describing this as a ‘little more’ stress, and one in five reporting feeling a lot more stressed and anxious than before.

## Women are experiencing higher levels of stress

Although millennials and Gen Zs across the board are experiencing heightened stress, there are differences among men and women. Similar to last year’s survey, women report feeling stressed and anxious more than men; this ‘gender gap’ is 45% to 37% among millennials, and 54% to 39% among Gen Zs.

## Levels of stress have remained high throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for women

Proportion who say they are stressed “all” or “most” of the time (%)



Q13. How often would you say you feel anxious or stressed?  
 Millennial base: 2021 men 7,327, women 7,327; 2020 “pulse survey” men 2,750, women 2,750; 2020 men 6,857, women 6,857; Gen Z base: 2021 men 4,136, women 4,136; 2020 “pulse survey” men 1,800, women 1,800; 2020 men 2,355, women 2,355

MILLENNIALS GENZs  
 ● Women ● Women  
 ● Men ● Men

### Overall drivers of stress and anxiety vary widely

When asked to identify the sources of their stress and anxiety, these generations offer a wide range of factors. Both millennials and Gen Zs rank financial concerns or uncertainty the highest. And in a labor market that’s still fluctuating, it’s not hard to see why concerns about jobs and job security caused an increase in stress for nearly four in 10 millennials (37%) and just over one in four Gen Zs (32%) surveyed.

Outside of their economic worries, respondents also listed widespread concerns about their health, and that of their loved ones. When it comes to their own physical health, 50% and 46% of millennials and Gen Zs, respectively, say it contributes a little to them feeling stressed and anxious, and 33% and 35% report that it contributes a lot. On top of that, just over a quarter of millennials (26%) and 31% of Gen Zs say that the state of their mental health, or that of their family and friends, has heightened their anxiety levels. And overall, their family’s welfare was a leading stressor for both groups, as was the case in 2020.

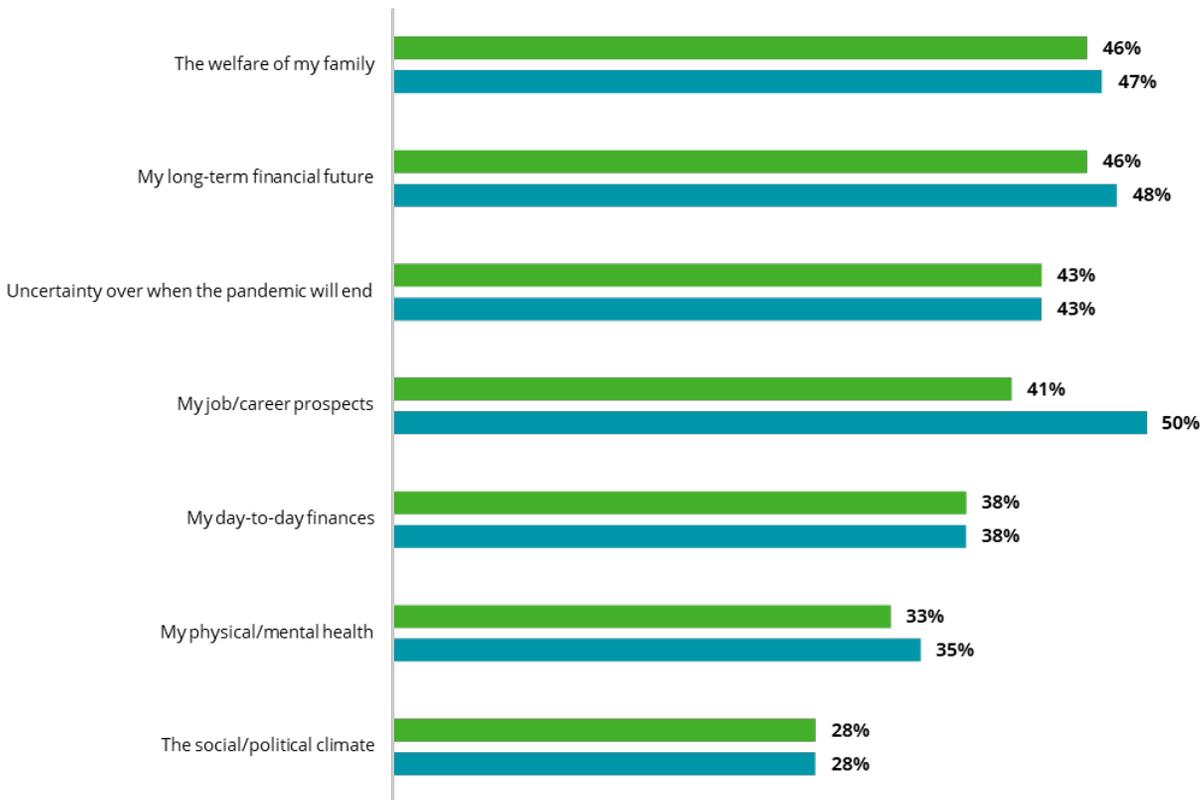
Percent of respondents who say that the state of their mental health, or that of their family and friends have made them feel more stressed since the pandemic started:



Q16. Since the pandemic started in early 2020 which of the following, if any, have made you feel **more** stressed/anxious? Please select up to three of biggest factors. Base: Those who feel more stressed form the pandemic.

### TOP STRESS DRIVERS

% who said the following factors contribute to stress



Q14. To what extent do each of the following contribute to your feelings of anxiety or stress? Base: All who feel stressed currently, millennials 13,416, all Gen Z 7,557

● Millennials ● Gen Zs

# Mental health stigma endures



Despite more discussion about mental health during the pandemic, the stigma at work endures

Although nearly half of millennials and Gen Zs (48%) report feeling more stressed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, their employers most likely don't know how much they've been affected. Indeed, almost six in 10 of these respondents admit that they have not spoken to their employers or line managers about their increased stress or anxiety.

Not only are they not talking about it, they seldom take time off to address it. Only 31% of millennials and 35% of Gen Zs have taken time away from work as a result of stress and anxiety, and those who do are still hesitant to disclose that it's for mental health reasons. An astounding 49% and 47% of millennials and Gen Zs who have taken time off work for mental health reasons have given their employer a different reason for this absence. And for those who have never requested time off for mental health reasons, 46% and 51% of them said that they would not give their employer the real reason if they did.

With an inclusive workplace being critical for removing stigma, it is noteworthy that only around 21% of millennials and 25% of Gen Zs say that their employer performs very well at enabling their employees to be their true, authentic selves at work. Nearly 45% of both groups say that their workplace is doing fairly well, which means that one in four millennials (25%) and Gen Zs (25%) give their employer a "poor" grade.

## Better workplace support is needed

When asked how their employers are performing when it comes to supporting their mental and physical health, only one in five millennials and Gen Zs said that their employer is doing well. Four in 10 ranked them as doing fairly well, and around three in 10 graded their workplace's performance as poor. While this is concerning as a data point in itself, it is more so when considering that those millennials surveyed who report lower levels of support from their employers when it comes to their mental health also report higher levels of feeling stressed and anxious all or most of the time.

## Work-life balance matters

Having a healthy work-life balance can also improve workers' mental health. And millennials and Gen Zs in positions below management aren't the only ones concerned about striking a balance or taking care of their mental health — indeed, those in leadership positions see these as key priorities too.

When asked to think about their top priorities beyond revenue and profit, millennials and Gen Zs in senior roles said that ensuring people have a good work-life balance and supporting employees' physical and mental health is the most important. Around a quarter of these respondents ranked work-life balance the highest (followed by 16% who put supporting the physical and mental health of employees at the top). However, only around one in five millennials and Gen Zs surveyed overall think their employer is performing very well at enabling them to have a work-life balance, while three in 10 say the support is poor. The plurality of respondents falls in the middle, with four in 10 reporting that their employer does fairly well. Thus, suggesting that much remains to be done, despite it being a priority for some leaders.

## Views on prevalence of discrimination are firm

A large number of millennials and Gen Zs polled during this year's survey believe that discrimination is prevalent in their home countries. Nearly half of millennials and 54% of Gen Zs report that discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender takes place a fair amount or a great deal in their country.

And when it comes to mental health-based prejudices, the numbers aren't much better. Approximately half of millennials (50%) and Gen Zs (53%) believe that discrimination based on the state of someone's mental health frequently happens. This paints a stark picture — and a significant challenge — when it comes to the removal of workplace stigma.

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Nearly four in 10 respondents do not believe their employers have taken actions to support their mental well-being during the pandemic.

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# Conclusion

The past year has seen people around the globe face unprecedented challenges - leading to increased stress and anxiety and a longing for better work-life balance for many surveyed.

This survey has provided an insight into the mental health and wellbeing concerns of a demographic that makes up a large part of the workforce; from concern for the health of their families to worrying about their financial futures and job prospects – stress and anxiety still prevails for many. Notably, women report higher levels of stress and anxiety over the past year than men, as they did in the 2020 survey.

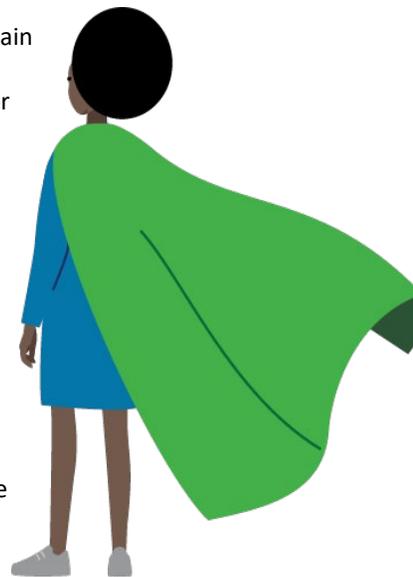
While the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the subject of mental health receive more focus by employers, many of those people surveyed remain reluctant to tell their employers when they experience mental health challenges – with nearly half of those who have taken time off work for mental health reasons (such as stress and anxiety) still not giving their employer the real reason, while those who have not taken such time off also say they would not disclose the reason should they need to take such an absence. Thus, this increased focus had not necessarily resulted in the reduction of workplace stigma.

The survey has also shown the positive impact of a supportive workplace - with a clear correlation between the support offered when it comes to mental health at work and the level of stress and anxiety reported by employees (with the survey finding that those who work for more supportive employers reported lower levels of stress and anxiety). Yet it has also shown that many organizations have more to do – with only one in five seeing their employer as doing a good job when it comes to supporting their mental and physical health, with around a third even describing such support as poor.

The findings also emphasize the criticality of employers enabling work-life balance, both as a contributor to good mental health and as a means to retain talent – but only one in five of those surveyed believe their employer is doing a good job of supporting them to achieve this.

Finally, the survey is a reminder of the importance of actions inside the workplace, even where the local environment may present a challenge, with around half of those polled reporting their view that discrimination based on someone's mental health frequently happens in their country.

This research has shown that there has never been a more pressing need for employers to make mental health at work a priority – to ensure that the workplace is stigma-free and to provide a working environment where all employees can thrive; one in which they feel supported and where work-life balance is the norm.





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