

Addressing Mental Health Challenges of Remote Workers

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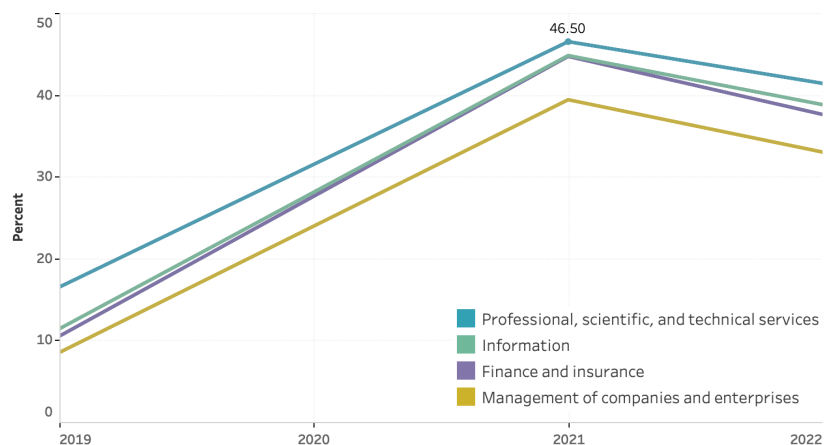
Introduction

The rise of online work due to COVID-19 has allowed millions of people to continue working their jobs from home. However, this change has also led to a growing mental health crisis among online workers, whose mental health is often overlooked. Remote workers are commonly facing the feelings of isolation, loneliness, or work-life imbalance. The ability to separate work and home life has become increasingly difficult for these employees. This brief highlights the importance of mental health services for remote workers and offers recommendations to raise awareness of the mental health needs of every employee.

Remote Work Background

The number of remote positions has increased substantially since COVID-19 forced people into isolation. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reflects data on work locations through the

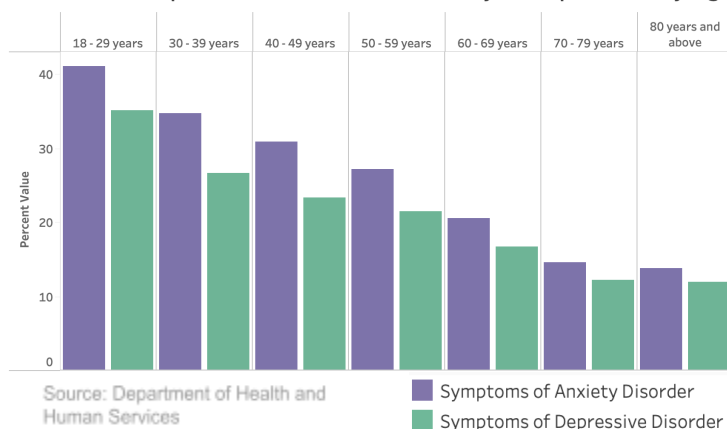
Yearly Percentage of Remote Jobs by Industry



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Survey, American Community Survey

American Community Survey, which highlights this increase by showing the percentage of remote positions across different industries. From 2019 to 2021, the top four industries for remote work saw an average increase of about 32.13% in the number of remote jobs. While the percentage of remote jobs has decreased from 2021 to 2022, there remains a large amount of workers spending their hours clocked in at home.

Percent of People with Indicators of Anxiety or Depression by Age



Source: Department of Health and Human Services

■ Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder
■ Symptoms of Depressive Disorder

Mental Health Background

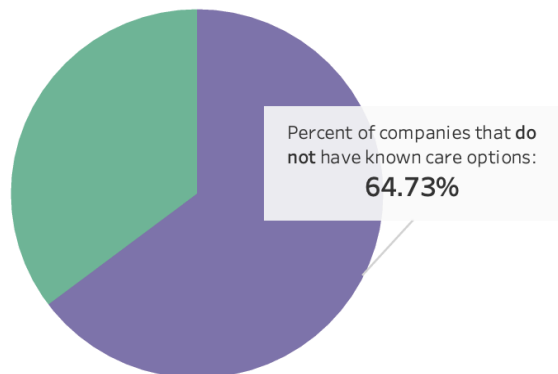
The World Health Organization refers to mental health as “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community” (World Health Organization, 2022). Historically, mental health issues were misunderstood, with those suffering from mental

illness being stigmatized or institutionalized. However, in recent years, mental health has not only become normalized, but encouraged. Despite the awareness brought upon mental health, people still struggle with psychological problems every day. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services conducted a survey to assess symptoms of anxiety or depression experienced by individuals over the past seven days. The survey results show that 35.51% of people in their prime working years, ages 18 - 49, have symptoms of anxiety and 28.38% have symptoms of depression. This highlights the ongoing challenge of mental health, especially among the workforce, emphasizing the need for continued support and resources to address these issues. One area where support is particularly crucial is remote work, which, despite its many advantages, also presents mental health challenges.

Remote Works Effects on Mental Health

While working from home seems to pose many benefits including comfort, more opportunity for physical activity, or flexibility, these benefits are often accompanied by negatives. Feelings of isolation and loneliness are common side effects of working from home as there are less face-to-face human interactions than one would have at the office. An unanticipated negative that a lot of remote workers are experiencing is increased stress regarding their work. A global survey of over 5,000 employees

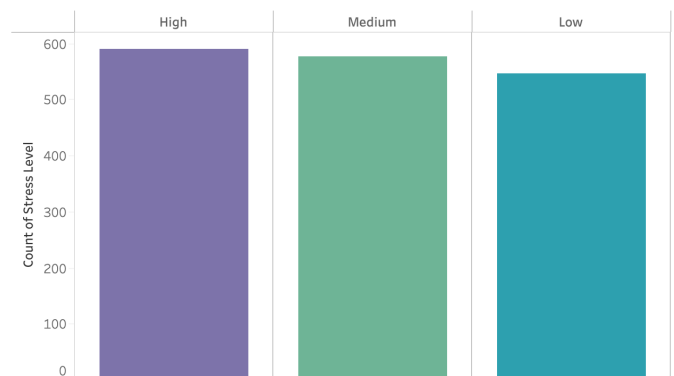
Percent of Workplaces with Wellness Programs



Source: Kaggle
Mental Health in Tech Survey

reveals that a higher proportion of remote workers experience high or moderate stress levels as opposed to low stress levels. Increased stress among remote workers is often due to blurred boundaries between work and personal life, longer work hours, and feelings of isolation. The lack of face-to-face interactions and unclear expectations can exacerbate anxiety, leading to burnout and decreased well-being.

Stress Levels of Remote Workers



Source: Kaggle
Remote Work & Mental Health

Current State of Mental Health

Resources

Despite the overwhelming amount of stress some remote workers experience, there remains a lack of resources available to help improve well-being. In fact, even in-person work environments often fail to provide adequate mental health support. Survey responses from workers in the tech industry show that 64.73% of all workers (remote or not) do not have known mental health care options at their workplace. This lack of resources highlights a significant issue in workplace culture, where mental health resources are either insufficient or not widely communicated, leaving employees to navigate stress on their own. It is important that companies take initiative to ensure the wellbeing of their employees.

Recommendations

Adopting an Online Workplace Wellness Program:

Many companies offer wellness programs, providing resources and support for employees' mental health. Adopting this same program with opportunities for remote workers to connect with therapists via video calls or offering mental health days could have substantial benefits to those suffering from mental health conditions. Simply providing remote workers with the opportunity for human interactions throughout their day can also be beneficial.

Regular Mental Health Check-Ins:

Implementing a monthly online check-in with managers or HR to discuss remote workers mental health status. This would allow employees to not only request mental health resources but also openly discuss any work-related challenges they're experiencing and how these may impact their mental well-being.

Offering In-Person Social Events:

Reduce feelings of isolation among remote employees by hosting in-person events encouraging all workers to engage, fostering stronger connections with one another and the company. These events provide valuable opportunities for team bonding, collaboration, and a sense of belonging throughout the company.

Resources

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