

Continuing the Conversation: Mental Wellbeing in the Insights Sector in New Zealand 2021



Summary of Findings



84% have struggled with their mental health to some degree in the previous 12 months (*vs. 86% in 2020*)



69% who have suffered from mental health problems in the past 12 months have not told their workplace about it (*vs. 48% in 2020*)



Workload and having too much to do is the most common cause of stress among market researchers (**47%**) (*vs. 38% in 2020*)



46% feel that they had too much to do to take time off work for a mental health problem (*vs. 54% in 2020*)



43% do not feel that their mental health problem is a valid reason to take time off work (*vs. 32% in 2020*)



One in three (33%) do not feel that their workplace is doing enough to help employees with their mental health and wellbeing (*vs. 34% in 2020*)



83% feel more relaxed when working from home (*vs. 69% in 2020*)



57% feel that working from home has improved their mental wellbeing (*vs. 49% in 2020*)

Introduction

We designed our Workplace Mental Wellbeing Audit to help organisations understand the mental health of their employees and in turn take steps to help them. For this study, we partnered with Research Association New Zealand (RANZ) and surveyed 58 researchers in July and August 2020 and 2021 to look specifically at the mental wellbeing of those working in the market research industry in New Zealand and how they are coping in the context of a pandemic. The research took place over the following dates:

- 16th July 2020 – 17th August 2020
- 23rd July 2021 – 26th August 2021

The report will cover a brief overview of our findings including the top stresses market researchers in New Zealand face, and how employees feel when discussing mental wellbeing in the workplace. Suggestions for employers to help them improve the wellbeing of their staff will also be scattered throughout the report.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

A key element of our audit is the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale*; a rigorous and scientific method designed by the University of Warwick with funding from NHS Health Scotland. Looking at the scores of the scale, the mental wellbeing of an individual can be determined in terms of whether it falls above or below the national average. The scale enables us to quantify mental wellbeing, thus promoting wider understanding of mental wellbeing. A further use of the scale is to encourage effective improvement of mental wellbeing for the individual, by tracking scores over time, and to equip organisations and wider society to support the enhancement of mental wellbeing.

*Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) © University of Warwick, NHS Health Scotland, and University of Edinburgh, 2007, all rights reserved. If you would like to use the scale, please visit the University of Warwick website for more details: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

Overall wellbeing

Over eight in ten researchers have struggled with mental health problems in the last year

The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting changes to the way we live have negatively impacted many people's mental health and created new barriers for individuals already suffering from mental health issues. Over four in five (84%) have suffered with a mental health problem over the past year, which is a higher proportion than those who have experienced a physical health problem (78%).

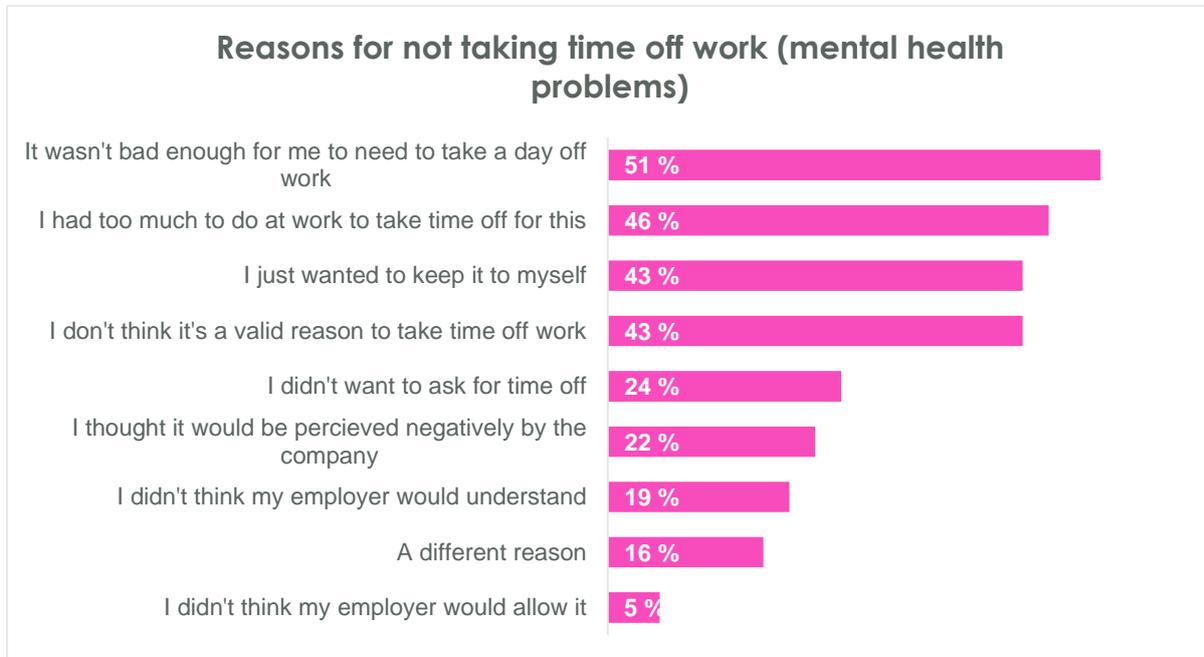
The most common mental health problems have remained prevalent among market researchers over the past 12 months:

	2020	2021	Difference
• Stress	68%	69%	+1%
• Anxiety	60%	62%	+2%
• Feeling low/ down	71%	60%	-11%
• Exhaustion/ burnout	42%	53%	+11%

While the prevalence of those who feel low or down has decreased by 11% over the past year, the proportion who have experienced exhaustion or burnout has increased by 11%.

Despite the high levels of mental health problems seen across the industry, there is a reluctance to take time off work for recovery; only one in three (33%) took time off to rest and recover following mental health problems, compared to six in ten (60%) who took time off for physical health problems. This has remained consistent with the proportion taking time off in 2020, when 62% took time off for physical health problems, compared to just 29% who took time off for mental health.

Two in five do not feel that their mental health problem is a valid reason to take time off work



Perception of health issues not being bad enough to take time off work is the most common barrier for taking time off for health problems (51%). However, there are other barriers which are more likely to prevent individuals from taking a day off for mental health problems versus physical health problems. For example, having too much work to do is more likely to be a reason for not taking time off for a mental health problem versus a physical health problem (46% versus 21% respectively), as is wanting to keep the issue to themselves (43% versus 10% respectively) and not feeling as though it is a valid reason to take time off work (43% versus 14% respectively). This suggests that those working in research still do not feel comfortable revealing that they are suffering from stress or telling employers that is the reason behind an episode of absence.

Mental health at work

A quarter of market researchers feel that their job is highly stressful

Almost a quarter (24%) of researchers feel that their job is highly stressful (giving it a rating of 8-10, with 10 being extremely stressful). This has increased from 18% in 2020. The aspects of working life which market researchers find stressful most regularly (NET often/all the time) are pressure (50%), impending deadlines and targets (50%), tight deadlines (38%), and demands from clients (33%).

More positively, confrontation is an issue faced by only a minority in the market research industry at just 3%.

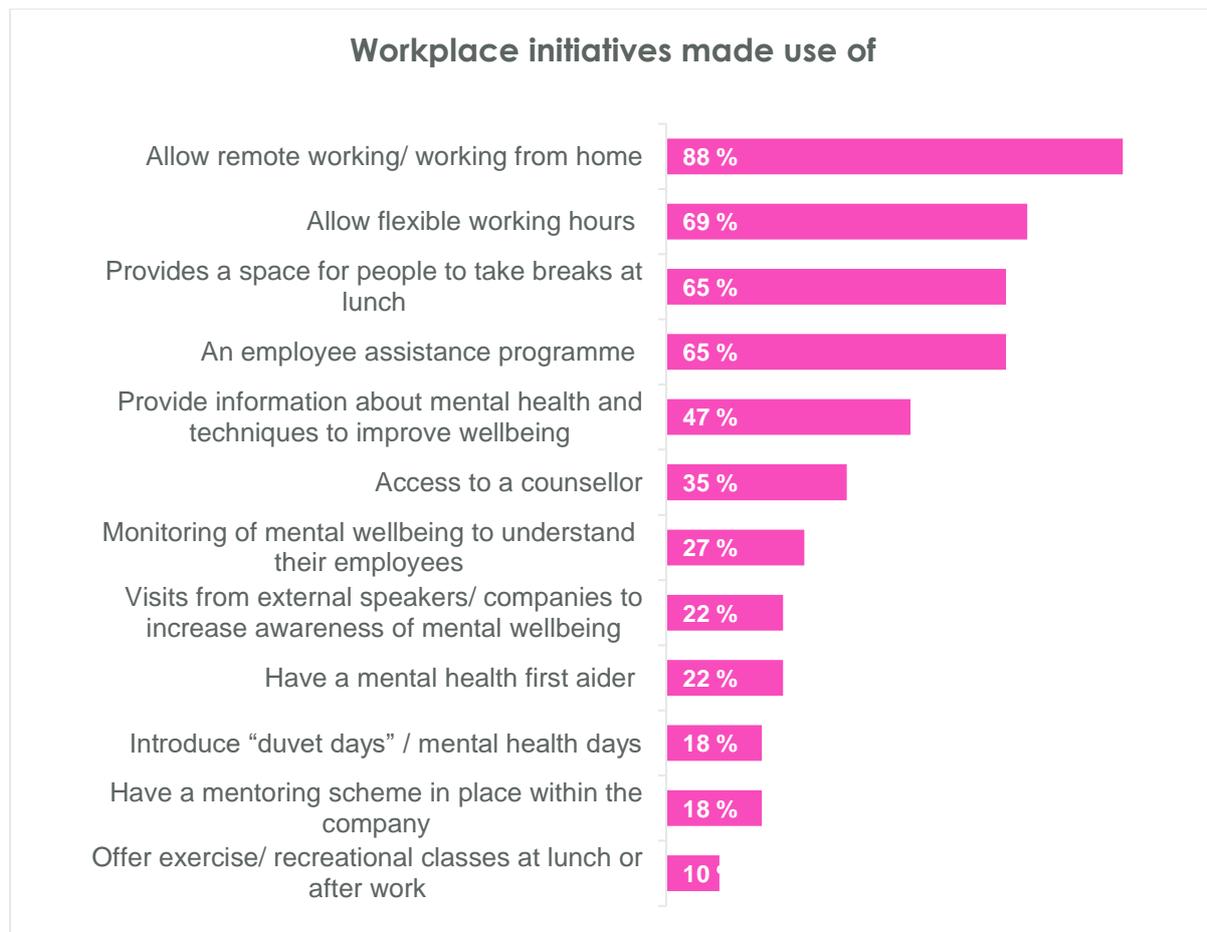
When probed on what makes them feel stressed at work, the top five issues were:

- Workload/ having too much to do **47%**
- The risk involved in projects going wrong **36%**
- Unclear expectations **34%**
- Inability to affect change **33%**
- Impending deadlines/ targets **31%**

A third of market researchers (33%) do not feel their workplace is doing enough to help employees with mental health and wellbeing

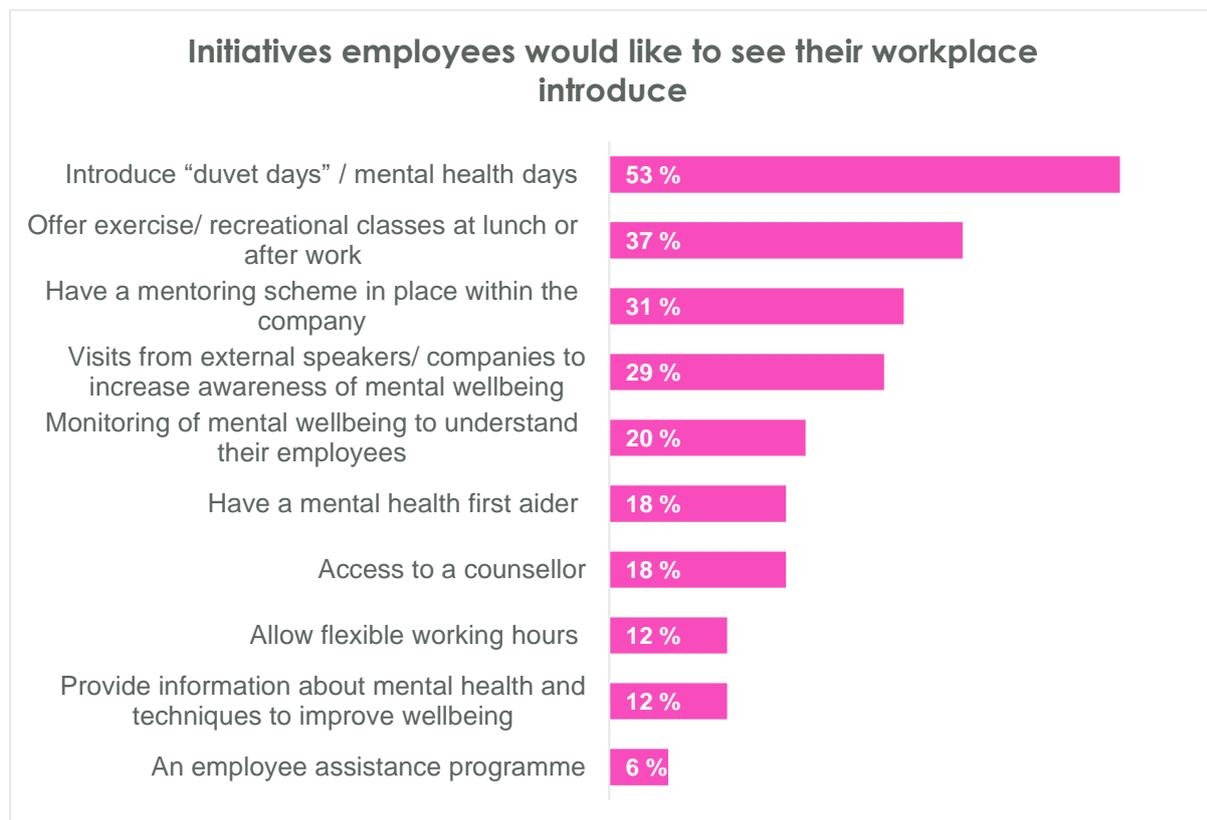
The onus is on the industry to support its employees through their mental health problems, with 98% of market researchers agreeing that their workplace has a role to play in looking after the mental wellbeing of its employees. The proportion who feel that their colleagues would be supportive if they were struggling with mental health or wellbeing is positive at 84% (compared to 75% in 2020). The proportion of market researchers who feel that they could talk to their manager openly about their mental health and wellbeing has also improved since 2020 (53% in 2021 versus 47% in 2020). The steps that companies are taking in promoting mental wellbeing among their employees can be demonstrated through the initiatives which are in place. Positively, there continues to be a high incidence of initiatives to facilitate mental wellbeing. For example, 88% offer remote working or working from home (compared to 83% in 2020), 69% allow flexible hours (compared to 72% in 2020), and 65% have access to an employee assistance programme, which has increased from 53% in 2020.

The top ten initiatives that market researchers have made use of are:



However, the extent to which market researchers feel that they have mechanisms in place to talk about their mental health in the workplace remains limited. Three in ten (29%) do not feel that they can talk to their manager openly about their mental health and wellbeing. On top of this, one in three (33%) feel that their workplace is not doing enough to help employees with their mental health and wellbeing, and three in ten (29%) would not know how to approach the topic of mental health or wellbeing if they were struggling at work. This research found that seven in ten workers who have suffered from mental health problems in the last 12 months have not told their workplace about it (69%). It is apparent from this that the decision to disclose distress at work is not taken lightly, and it is vital that the market research industry becomes an environment where workers feel safe to disclose the challenges they face.

Looking forwards, listening to what employees require for full support of their mental wellbeing is vital. When probed on the initiatives which they feel would improve the mental health and wellbeing of employees, the ten most sought-after suggestions were as follows, and are broadly in line with findings in the 2020 audit:



Impact of Covid-19 on wellbeing

Over the past year, employers and employees have been working together to slow the spread of Covid-19; a challenge which has remained a threat to the mental wellbeing of employees. Positively, nine in ten of those in the market research industry felt that their organisation handled the pandemic well (90%) and felt supported by their employer (94%).

Working from home has become commonplace across the world, and in the market research industry just under nine in ten are still working from home at least some of the time (88%). However, a minority of this group are working from home full time (8%), with the majority working from home some of the time (79%). The proportion working from home at least some of the time has doubled since before the pandemic (44%).

Eight in ten feel more relaxed when working from home

Despite the many challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been positive implications on some elements of mental wellbeing. More than eight in ten (83%) market researchers feel more relaxed when working from home, this has increased from 69% in 2020. Furthermore, many workers still feel that not having to commute has improved their mental health (74% compared to 76% in 2020). The proportion who feel that they have a better work life balance when they are working from home has improved since 2020 (71% in 2021 versus 61% in 2020).

However, working from home has continued to take its toll in other negative ways on workers. Some issues caused by working from home have worsened since 2020, for example more workers now find it difficult to draw boundaries between work and rest (50% in 2021 versus 37% in 2020). Socialisation is an issue, with more than one in four feeling isolated when working from home (29% versus 24% in 2020), and one in four who struggle to stay in contact with their colleagues when working from home (24% versus 29% in 2020). There are some negative implications of working from home which still exist but are felt to a lesser extent compared to last year. Fewer now feel that they are working longer hours when working from home (26% in 2021 versus 45% in 2020), and fewer feel worried about the impact that prolonged working from home will have on their mental health (21% in 2021 versus 33% in 2020).

Most market researchers feel that working from home during the pandemic has improved their mental health

The negative impacts of working from home on mental wellbeing have softened over the past year, with 17% who feel that working from home has worsened their mental wellbeing (compared to 27% in 2020), and 57% who feel that it has improved their mental wellbeing (compared to 49% in 2020).

When considering returning to the office full time, employers must consider the concerns that employees have. The biggest concerns are around busy commutes and losing the free time gained by working from home (both 30%). On top of this, workers are also concerned about having to use public

transport to get to work, general hygiene in the office, and having less time with their families (all 14%).

Conclusion

It's been a difficult and turbulent eighteen months, particularly regarding our mental wellbeing.

Market research is a hectic and fast-paced industry and whilst this makes it an exciting industry to work in it also means that long-hours and intense workloads can sometimes get the better of us. Indeed, deadlines and targets were some of the key factors that employees cited as causes of low mental wellbeing.

The good news is that employers are taking notice and our research has found that there are more programmes and initiatives available to workers. Similarly, we are getting much better at talking openly and honestly about mental health. However, the fundamental causes of low mental health at work remain the same; long-hours and heavy workloads. If employees are given the tools to support their mental wellbeing, then we may start to see real, tangible improvements in mental health.

The pandemic presents a perfect chance for us to reconfigure how we work. The report has shown that employees have really benefitted from working from home and are happier for being closer to loved ones, not having to commute, and being able to be more flexible with their working patterns. Equally, they still appreciate the benefits of going into work whether it be seeing their colleagues or getting out of the house.

Ultimately, the market research industry can choose to seize this moment and create a flexible working structure that gives workers the power to choose working patterns that suit them. We can use this as a chance to reassess what 'manageable' looks like when it comes to workload and emphasise the 'life' in 'work-life balance'.

Author



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Annie is passionate about mental health and works across a number of practice areas at Opinium, with a particular interest in charities and public affairs. Most recently Annie has worked with charities helping refine their communications strategy through quantitative and qualitative research. Annie works on a variety of projects from design to delivery, ranging from large scale quantitative studies to in depth qualitative research projects. She is heavily involved in the brand and comms space.

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