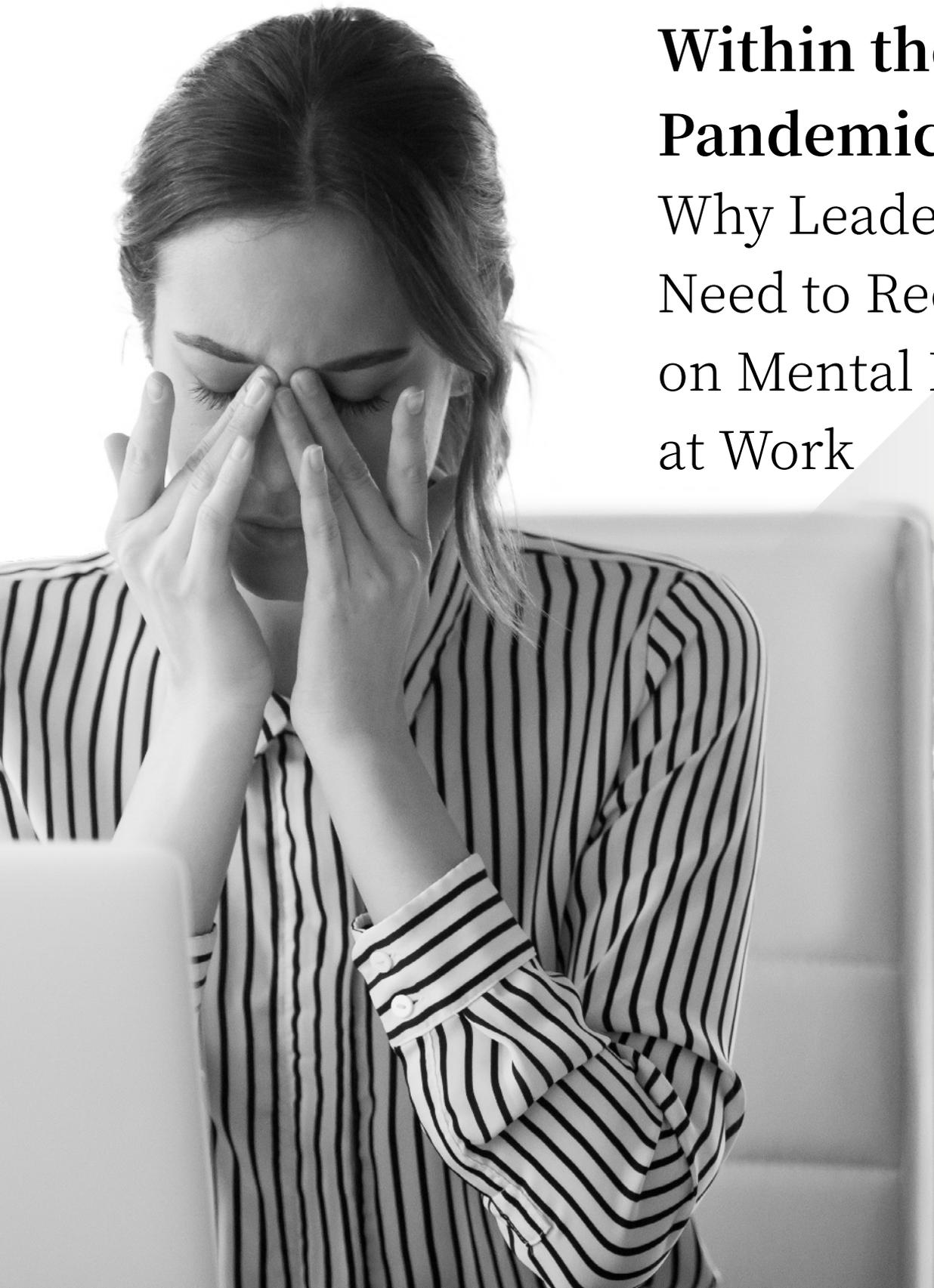




THE ADECCO GROUP



The Pandemic Within the Pandemic: Why Leaders Need to Reconnect on Mental Health at Work



Think of it as the pandemic inside the pandemic.

As the world ventures ever deeper into the late stages of a second year of battling COVID-19, the toll on our collective mental and physical well-being is starting to reach crisis proportions.

The threat of disease, social and economic uncertainty and a worrisome trend toward overwork have collided to create a massive incidence of work-related burnout. That is a public health threat distinct from, and yet very much connected to, COVID-19.

But how burned out are we?

The human capital industry has been closely watching this issue for some time now. In 2019, the World Health Organization reclassified work-related “burnout” to a distinct health-related syndrome, and issued a global call for employers to immediately address the toll it was taking on working people. It appears the pandemic has exacerbated this affliction.

To get a deeper and more accurate picture of the state of work-related burnout since the beginning of the pandemic, The Adecco Group

commissioned a new global study, *Resetting Normal: Defining a New Era of Work*.

In early 2021, an online survey reached 14,800 white collar workers between the ages of 18 and 60, spread across 25 countries. The respondents all had desk-based jobs, worked at least 20 hours a week and were required to work remotely during the pandemic.

The survey found that – to almost no one’s surprise – the pandemic is taking its toll on our mental and physical health. However, what was astonishing was the failure of leaders to perform regular wellness checks with their employees. The result is that at a moment when we most need support from our employers to weather the relentless threat from the novel coronavirus, it seems that our leaders are so caught up in the storm of chaos around them, they’ve lost sight of our overall wellbeing.

Give it to me straight – just how burned out are we?

The survey found that 38 percent of the world’s working people were suffering from burnout over the last 12 months, and 32 percent said their mental health had declined as a result. And within those global numbers, there are concerns around how burnout is affecting certain generations.

Broken down by generations, Generation Z workers at all levels (45 percent) and Millennials (42 percent) were more likely to suffer from burnout over the last 12 months. Generation X (35 percent) and Baby Boomers (27 percent) were still experiencing significant amounts of burnout, albeit at levels well below that of the younger generations.

Within the generational divide, we also found differences based on role. For example, although 45 percent of senior leaders reported burnout, that number jumped significantly when we focused just on younger leaders.

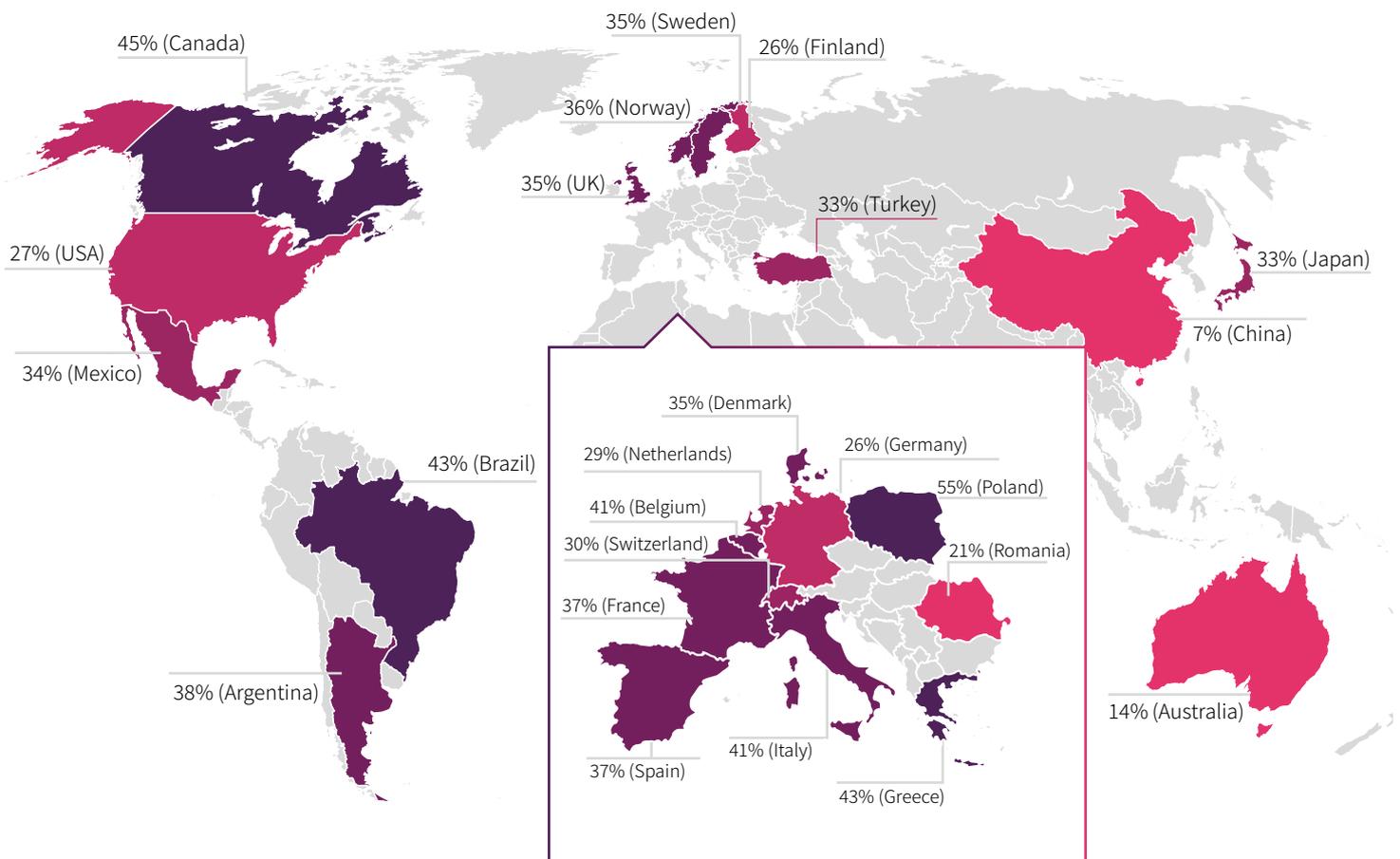
“It is very hard to imagine a company successfully managing a return-to-work initiative, or sustaining performance during the pandemic, with such high levels of burnout,” said Jessica Conser, LHH SVP Products and Solutions. “These are the people who must set the tone for their companies, and find a balance between home and office that will allow the people they lead to effectively manage their own stress and burnout. They can’t do that if they are completely worn down.”



A third say their mental health has got worse, rising to around half in Poland and Canada

32%

Say their mental wellbeing got worse in the last 12 months



Q6.Thinking about the following aspects of your own working life, which do you feel have gotten better during the last 12 months, and which have stayed the same or gotten worse? (NET Worse) Base: All respondents (14,800) [Detailed country bases in appendix]

Why are we so burned out at work?

It's easy to imagine that the threat posed by COVID-19 has certainly taken its toll on our respondents. From the threat of serious illness to the disruption our families have suffered from things like the closing of schools, sheltering at home, and even deaths, our overall stress levels have skyrocketed.

“There is certainly evidence in the survey to suggest that the pandemic has reframed our entire concept of the ‘work week.’”

Jessica Conser
Senior Vice President,
Product and Solutions
LHH

But within our jobs, the survey clearly shows some worrisome trends that are amplifying all this stress, and undoubtedly contributing to the epidemic of burnout that is afflicting many organizations. The top of that list is overwork.

The survey revealed that a majority of workers believe they have been more productive (40 percent) or as productive (42 percent) as they were before the pandemic began. That is a remarkable testament to the resilience and commitment that many people have to their jobs. But those productivity metrics may be hiding a more worrisome trend.

Globally, 63 percent of all respondents said they had to work 40 hours or more per week. And moving forward, 43 percent said they would likely have to continue working more than 40 hours per week to complete all work-related tasks.

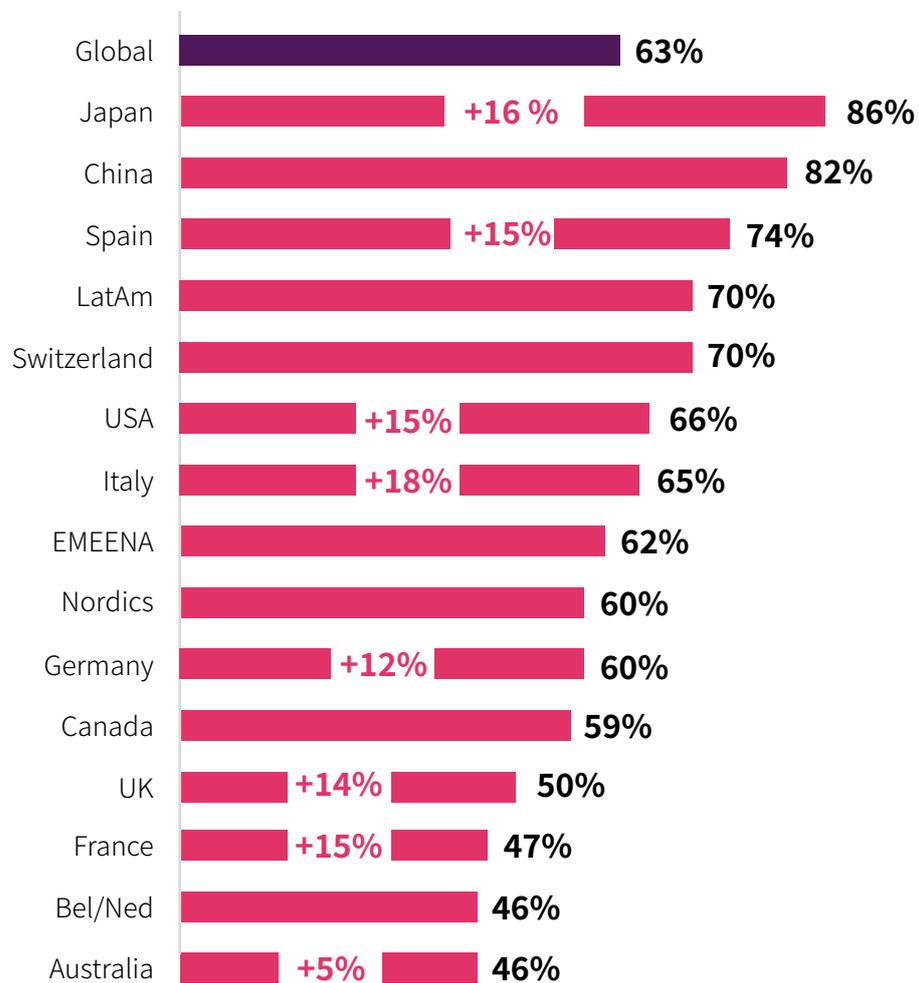
“There is certainly evidence in the survey to suggest that the pandemic has reframed our entire concept of the ‘work week,’” said LHH’s Jessica Conser. “Freed from daily commutes, it seems like a lot of people are just replacing the time they spent in a car or train with more time in front of their computers. Although that may be generating some productivity gains, it is not a sustainable model. Most of us will, ultimately, succumb to overwork.”



Working long hours is common, and on the increase



% Who worked 40 hours or more per week in the last 12 months



“Leaders, both at the senior-most levels and on the frontlines, need to be equipped with the skills to spot warning signs and open up discussions that can lead someone to seek help.”

Jessica Conser
Senior Vice President,
Product and Solutions
LHH

Q10. How many hours would you say you have been working during the last 12 months in an average week? Base: All respondents (14,800), Australia (1,000), France (1,000), Germany (1,000), Italy (1,000), Japan (1,000), Spain (1,000), UK (1,000), USA (1,000), Canada (1,000), China (1,000), Switzerland (800), Belgium / Netherlands (1,000), EMEENA (1,000), LatAm (1,000), Nordics (1,000)

The generational divide: the younger the employee, the heavier the burden

“If we’re going to do a better job of responding to mental and physical wellbeing, we need to equip leaders with skills like empathy so they can have frank and meaningful conversations with people they lead to find out how they are really doing.”

Jessica Conser
Senior Vice President,
Product and Solutions
LHH

The survey revealed a worrisome trend when it comes to younger employees across all job classifications. In short, those who identify as Generation Z or Millennials reported considerably higher levels of burnout than older generations.

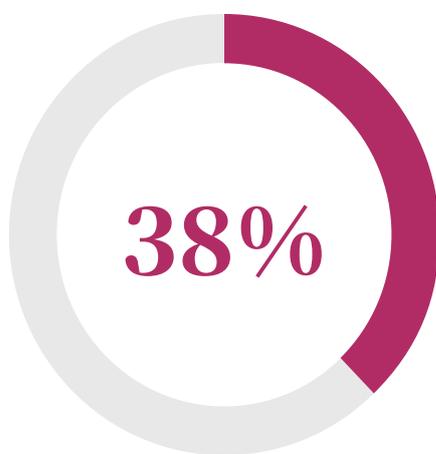
While 38 percent of all respondents said they had suffered burnout from working too hard over the past 12 months, 45 percent of Gen Z respondents and 42 percent of Millennials reported feeling burned out. In contrast, concerns about burnout dropped noticeably for Generation X (35 percent) and Baby Boomers (27 percent).

Within these generational cohorts, senior leaders seemed to bear the brunt of burnout: 54 percent of young leaders (Gen Z and Millennials) and 45 percent of older leaders (Gen X and Boomers) reported feeling burned out.

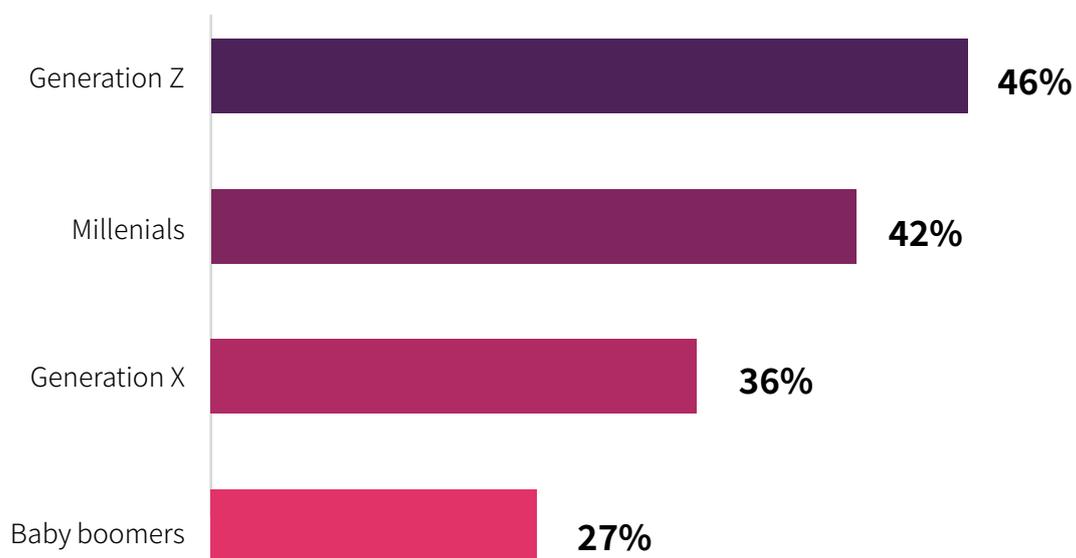


Burnout has been a significant issue over the last year, felt most among younger generations. Managers need help in spotting the signs

% Who say they have suffered from working too hard / burnout during the last 12 months (NET Agree)



Say they have suffered from working too hard / burnout during the last 12 months



Q30. Thinking about how the last 12 months may have affected your attitudes towards work, how far would you agree or disagree with the following? (NET Agree) Base: All respondents (14,800), Generation Z (380), Millennials (6,908), Generation X (6,159), Baby boomers (1,353)

The leadership dilemma: leaders are not only burned out, but they also don't know how to help others

As noted earlier, senior leaders and in particular younger leaders are among the most burned out in today's workplace. And that might explain, in part, why leaders are doing such a poor job of recognizing and responding to burnout in the people they are leading.

The survey showed very clearly that a strong majority of non-managers (67 percent) believe their leaders – both senior and frontline managers – are not checking on their mental or physical wellbeing.

Do managers not care about the welfare of their employees? The survey suggests this is more a case of managers not knowing how to broach the subject of wellbeing, or not having the right skills to recognize problems like burnout.



Better support for mental wellbeing is key and managers need guidance and support to deliver this

7/10

(71%) say having the right support for mental wellbeing at work will be important to them in future

67%

of **non-managers** say leaders **don't meet** their expectations for checking on their **mental wellbeing**



53%

of **all managers** say they have not found it easy to identify when staff may be struggling with **mental wellbeing**

Q12. Thinking this time about how you have found the experience of managing other people during the last 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found the following? (NET Not Easy Base: All managers (8,475) Q8. Thinking about how your manager / employer has performed in the following areas in the last 12 months, to what extent, if at all, have they met your expectations? (NET Haven't met expectations) Base: Non-managers (6,171)

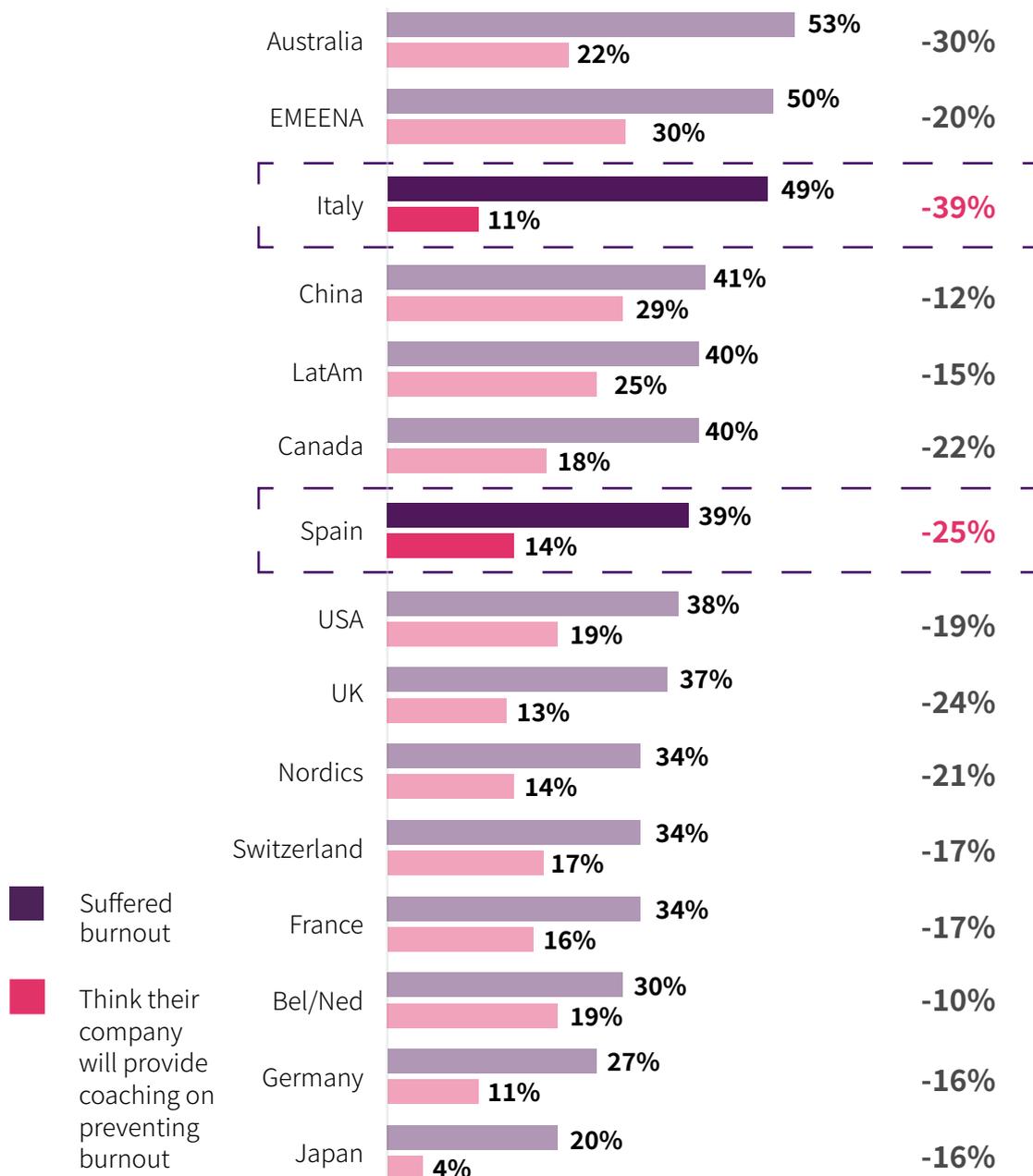
More than half (53 percent) of manager respondents said they have found it difficult to identify staff who are struggling with mental health. Similarly, 51 percent said they have trouble identifying the warning signs of burnout.

“If we’re going to do a better job of responding to mental and physical wellbeing, we need to equip leaders with skills like empathy so they

can have frank and meaningful conversations with people they lead to find out how they are really doing,” said LHH’s Jessica Conser. “Particularly in scenarios where people may be working remotely, it’s not enough to just ask someone ‘how are you?’ You have to show them you really want to know more about their mental and physical wellbeing to get to truth of how they are doing.”

There is vast disconnect between how burned out people feel and expectations of this being addressed in the future, especially in Italy and Spain

% Who say they have suffered burnout during the last 12 months (NET Agree) vs. who think their company will provide coaching on preventing burnout [Ranked by suffered burnout]



Q8. Thinking about how your manager / employer has performed in the following areas in the last 12 months, to what extent, if at all, have they met your expectations? Base: All respondents (14,800), Leaders (1,427), Managers (6,978), Non-managers (6,171)

Employers face great expectations going forward

In case there's any doubt, your people want you to acknowledge the stress they are under and be empathetic. They may have trouble telling you how they are doing, but they do want to know that you care and that you'll do your best to support them.

Seventy percent of respondents across all groups said that having support at work for mental wellbeing will be critically important going into the future. Those are some pretty great expectations for employers, and a signal that not asking about someone's mental or physical wellbeing is not going to be sufficient to keep employees engaged and productive.

“Just asking after someone's wellbeing isn't going to be enough to address this problem,” said Conser. “Leaders, both at the senior-most levels and on the frontlines, need to be equipped with the skills to spot warning signs and open up discussions that can lead someone to seek help.”

At the same time, organizations need to provide help to those leaders to ensure they are dealing with their own burnout. It must be an organization-wide effort.”



Conclusion

Improving employee wellness, both in a physical and mental health sense, requires more than just a mission statement or a memo to employees expressing concern. Companies must incorporate “organizational empathy” into the very culture of their organizations. Once leaders know that meaningful, one-on-one conversations that include regular wellness checks are part of normal business operations, then it will become second nature and there will be much less hesitancy. It will also help organizations identify and remedy policies or people who may be unwittingly creating a toxic work environment.

It’s often easy to portray physical and mental wellbeing as issues that should be addressed on the individual, rather than organizational level. Individuals must certainly play a role in self-care, but the organizations they work for must contribute to wellness as well. In this case, what’s good for the individual is most definitely good for the organization.

The purpose of building wellbeing into existing business practices is to produce happier, healthier and more engaged employees. That is a state of being that directly benefits both the individual and the organization.



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