



**mHub**  
THE MENTAL HEALTH HUB

# **State of Mental Health at Work**

**Report 2021: Rwanda**

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# Introduction

Mental health and wellbeing at work are a growing concern for employers worldwide. Even before Covid-19 turned our lives upside down, we saw an increase in the global rates of common mental health challenges such as depression or anxiety. This went hand in hand with decreases in productivity and rising costs.

The Covid-19 pandemic has further aggravated the situation. Individuals and communities who have previously never given a second thought to their mental health and wellbeing are suddenly confronted with considerable degrees of stress, uncertainty, fear, worry, and concern. The changes that people face are major known psychological risk factors. As a result, it is undisputed among experts that the pandemic will have long-lasting consequences and effects on the mental health and wellbeing of billions of people both now and into the future.

Employers have a compelling interest to take effective and sustainable action. Leave alone the life-altering impact of untreated mental illness on workers and their families, they face rising healthcare costs, reduced productivity, and employee turnover. A growing number of studies show that comprehensive long-term approaches to employee wellbeing that especially also focus on evidence-based prevention and early intervention activities can not only be cost-effective but actually save employers money.

Over the past year, we noticed a significant interest among employers in mHub countries in Africa to introduce effective and sustainable Employee Wellbeing Programs. They also desire to launch workplace-wide dialogue about mental health challenges in order to fight the stigma and discrimination that remain pervasive in our countries' societies and cultures.

For our 2021 report, we surveyed 214 full-time workers across Rwanda to better understand their attitudes and experiences related to workplace mental health and wellbeing.

# State of Mental Health at Work 2021: Top 3 Insights

## 1. Stress levels are very high

Three out of four Rwandan employees indicate that they face moderate, high, or extreme levels of stress. This finding is alarming, especially because a third of respondents qualify their stress levels as high or extreme.

The impact of Covid-19 on stress levels cannot be overstated. Only 7.9% of respondents say that the pandemic has not been extra stressful for them.

The majority of respondents are worried about their health or the health of others (58.9%). Many face increased financial stress (43.9%). And more than a third point out that they experience disruptions in their usual routine (37.4%) and do not have their usual stress relievers, such as social events or exercise (37.4%).

Health concerns are greatest for executives (75.0%) and managers (64.8%). They also experience the greatest disruptions in their usual routine (40.0% and 48.1% respectively). Junior professionals,

on the other hand, worry a lot more about the financial implications of the pandemic (55.0%).

Unsurprisingly, the financial stress is greatest in some economic sectors, such as hospitality/tourism (81.8%) or manufacturing (62.5%). For employees in NGOs, the disruptions in their usual routine (46.3%) and not having their usual stress relievers (55.0%) are more severe. The least impacted are public sector workers.

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### Stress levels of Rwandan workers:

**77.6%** moderate/high/extreme stress

**34.1%** high/extreme stress

## 2. The impact of stress on the work life is serious

The high stress levels of Rwandan employees have serious consequences for their work life. A full two thirds of respondents believe that the current stress negatively impacts their work performance.

Absenteeism has to be of great concern to employers. On average, the respondents have missed about 2.7 days over the past 12 months due to stress. This number is significantly higher for employees in for-profit companies (3.2 days) and particularly so for executives (3.5 days). Overall, 43.5% of respondents have missed at least 1 day of work; 32.2% even 3 or more days.

While absenteeism is easy to measure, lost productivity – also called presenteeism – is more complicated but at least as severe. On the whole, 43.9% believe that they are less productive at the moment than they used to be before the pandemic. This percentage is even higher for managers (50.0%). We calculate that, on average, Rwandan employees across the board miss about 1.3 hours of work each day as a result of stress. 44.4% miss at least an hour of work every day; 23.4% even at least two hours. This has severe implications for Rwandan employers who would

do well to empower their workers to better manage their stress.

21.0% of respondents further find it harder to collaborative with co-workers, a finding that is unsurprising in light of lockdown measures and working from home orders. This is particularly the case of younger employees below the age of 30 (28.3%) who benefit from a greater degree of guidance and supervision as well as opportunities to learn from and socialize with colleagues.

It is also noteworthy that 15.9% of respondents experience an increase in illness or health issues as a result of stress. This percentage is particularly high for older employees aged 40-54 (24.0%) and for women employees (25.3%).

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### Absenteeism and presenteeism rates over the past 12 months:

**2.7 days** The average amount of days of work lost due to stress.

**1.3 hours** The average amount of hours of work lost every day due to stress.

### 3. Employers are expected to do more to support employee mental health and wellbeing

Only about a third of respondents currently receive some form of emotional and mental health support services from their employers (36.9% on average). This is higher in NGOs (45.0%) and lower in the public sector (26.8%).

What is important to note is that “some form of support” does not necessarily mean effective and sustainable support. In fact, a staggering 88.8% of respondents say that they wish their employer did more to support employee emotional and mental health. This desire is greatest in for-profit companies (93.6%).

What’s more, a stunning 95.8% of respondents believe that greater employer support will have a direct positive impact on worker productivity. Likewise, three out of four employees agree that companies that have strong emotional and mental health support for employees will be more likely to succeed and grow.

HR leaders should take particular note of the following finding: When evaluating new job offers, 95.8% of respondents say that it is important for them that their future employer offers emotional and mental health

support services. In fact, more than half find it ‘very important’ and almost a fourth even ‘critically important’.

We also wanted to know how respondents perceive the stigma attached to mental ill health at their workplace and what effects Covid-19 might have. The encouraging finding is that two thirds of respondents agree that their workplace is more accepting of emotional and mental health issues now than a year ago. What is particularly important is that almost half of those who already use mental health services on a regular basis ‘strongly agree’ that stigma and discrimination towards them is improving.

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#### Employees in Rwanda call upon their employers to do more:

**88.8%** wish their employer did more.

**95.8%** consider employer support as important when evaluating new job offers.

## Conclusion

Our survey findings paint a gloomy picture. The effects and consequences of Covid-19 and related economic hardship and social disruptions on the mental health and wellbeing of Rwanda's workforce are devastating. Stress in particular is omnipresent and takes its toll on worker health and productivity. As a result, absenteeism and presenteeism rates are high and productivity and performance levels have decreased.

While it is encouraging that more than a third of respondents already receive some form of emotional and mental health support services, the data suggest that existing services are frequently insufficient. This is in line with our general belief that the frequently chosen reactive piecemeal approach that mainly responds to existing health concerns is wholly inadequate. It needs to be replaced with a comprehensive long-term approach to employee wellbeing that especially also focuses on evidence-based prevention and early intervention activities.

We were happy to note that there is also cause for optimism. If the pandemic had one positive effect, it is that awareness of the importance

of mental health and wellbeing at the workplace is growing. Affected persons feel less stigmatized and discriminated against than a year ago. This is a highly encouraging situation that tells HR leaders that their investments in employee wellbeing will fall on increasingly fertile ground and that employees will embrace new opportunities such as stress management, resilience building, counseling, and therapy.

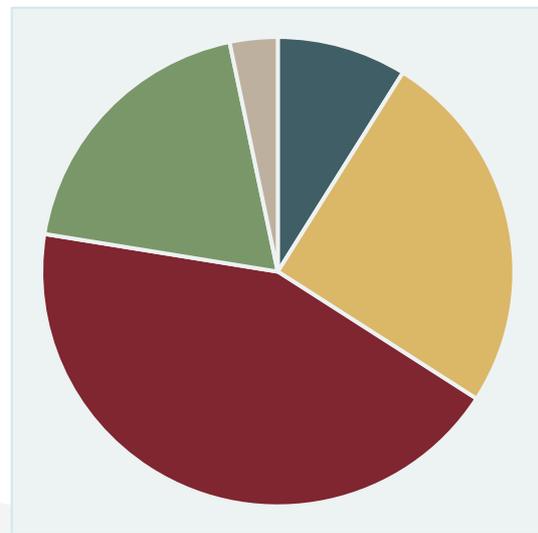
As Covid-19 has severely impacted the way we work, HR leaders have an extraordinary opportunity to rethink their approach to mental health and wellbeing at the workplace. That requires them to become proactive and to develop efficient and sustainable long-term programs. Their incentives are certainly increasing. Not only have international studies shown that investing in appropriate programs leads to significant return on investment. But the fact that Rwandan professionals also increasingly look at the support that prospective future employers provide in the area of mental health and wellbeing means that employers who seek top talent will no longer have the luxury of ignoring the issues at hand. And that is truly encouraging!

# Key Dimensions

## 1. Stress

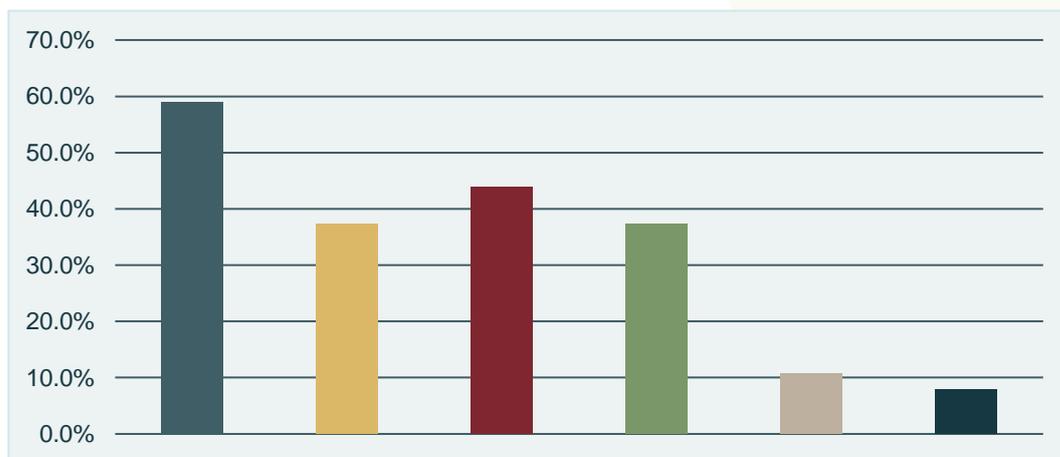
How would you characterize the overall level of stress you have experienced within the past 12 months?

- Extreme (every day)  
8.9%
- High (most days)  
25.2%
- Moderate (at least once a day)  
43.5%
- Low (rarely)  
19.2%
- No stress  
3.3%



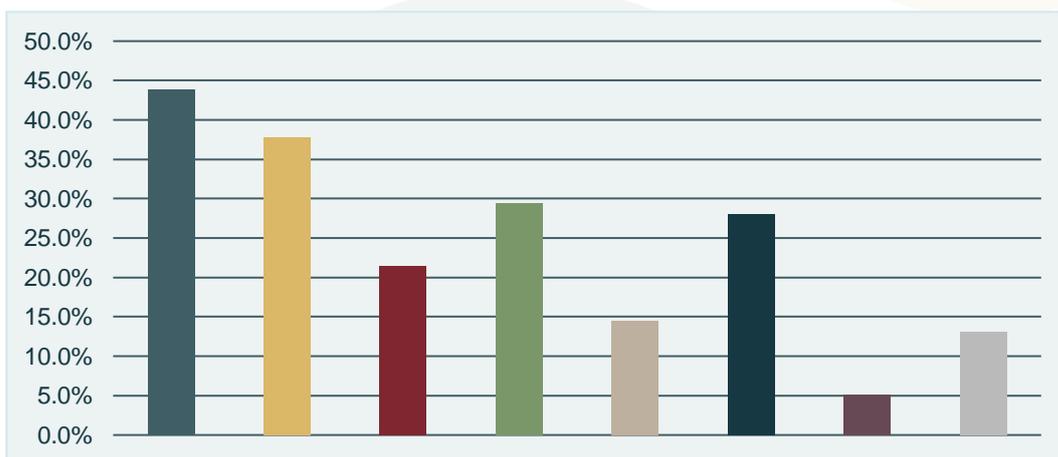
**Which of the following statements would you agree with during these current times (Covid-19)? Multiple answers are possible.**

- I am worried about my health or the health of others.  
58.9%
- I experience disruptions in my usual routine.  
37.4%
- I face increased financial stress.  
43.9%
- I do not have my usual stress-relievers (social events, exercise, etc).  
37.4%
- I am frustrated with my employer's response to the pandemic.  
10.7%
- Covid-19 has not been extra stressful for me.  
7.9%



**What are the top issues currently impacting your stress levels at work?  
Multiple answers are possible.**

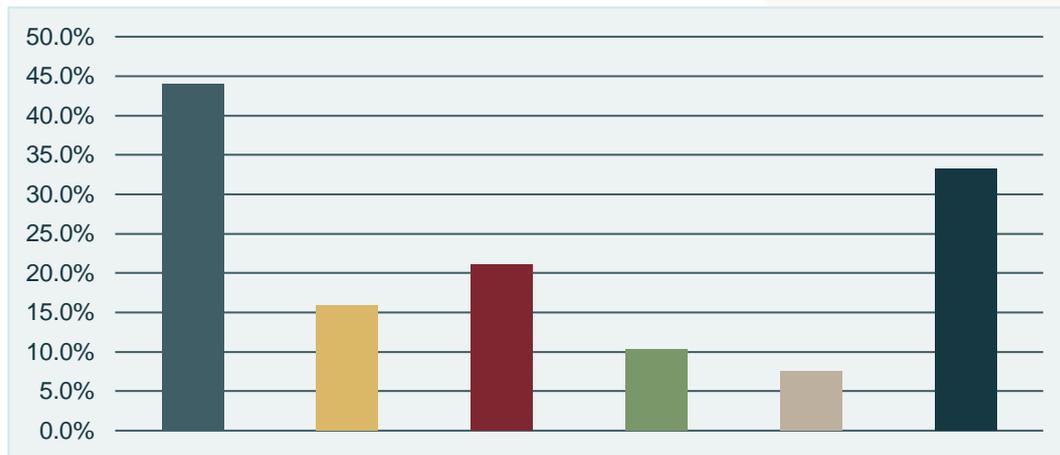
- Covid-19  
43.9%
- Personal finances  
37.9%
- Health concerns  
21.5%
- Lack of job security  
29.4%
- Poor management / leadership  
14.5%
- Personal family responsibilities  
28.0%
- Conflict with co-workers  
5.1%
- Other  
13.1%



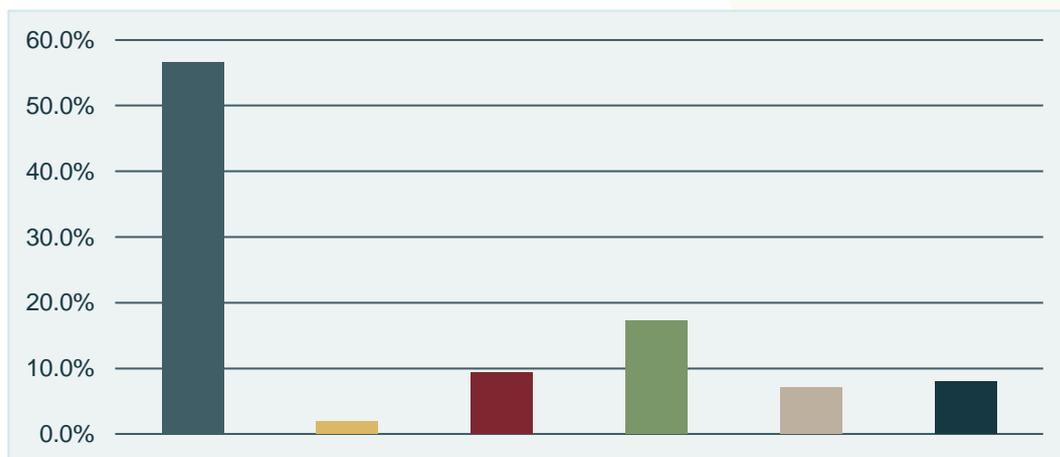
## 2. The Impact of Stress on the Work Life

How does stress impact your work life? Multiple answers are possible.

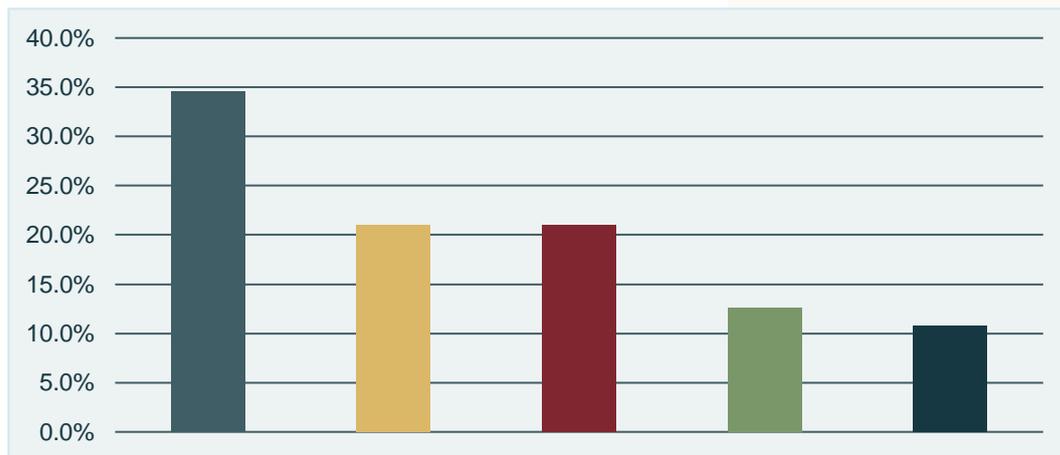
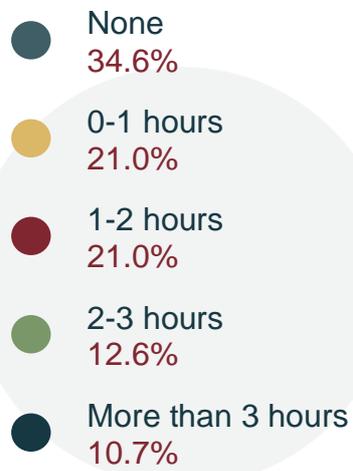
- I am less productive. 43.9%
- I experience an increase in illness or health issues. 15.9%
- I find it harder to collaborate with co-workers. 21.0%
- I have missed days of work due to stress. 10.3%
- I am unable to attend meetings. 7.5%
- My stress does not impact my work. 33.2%



## How many days of work have you missed over the last 12 months due to stress, anxiety, or any other emotional or mental health challenge?

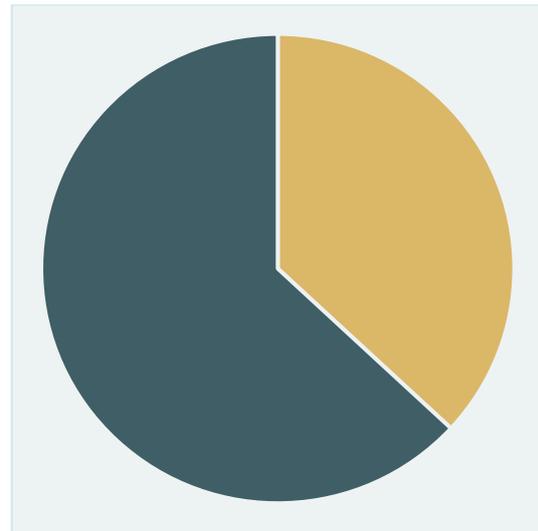
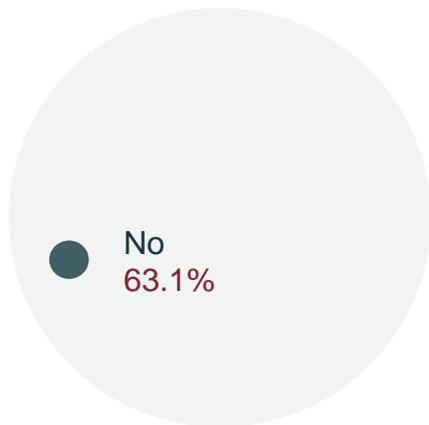


## Approximately how many hours of productive work time are you losing each day as a result of Covid-19 related stress?



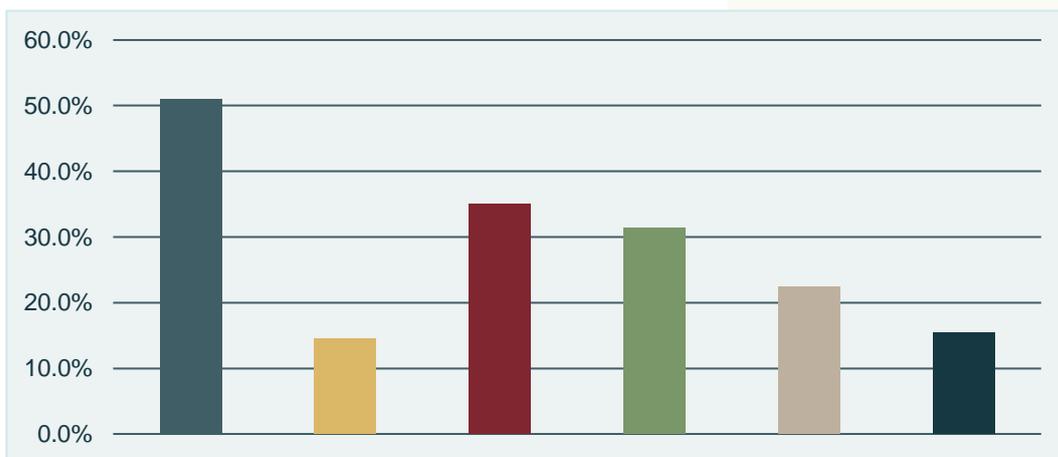
### 3. Employer Engagement in Mental Health and Wellbeing

Does your employer offer any emotional and mental health support services?



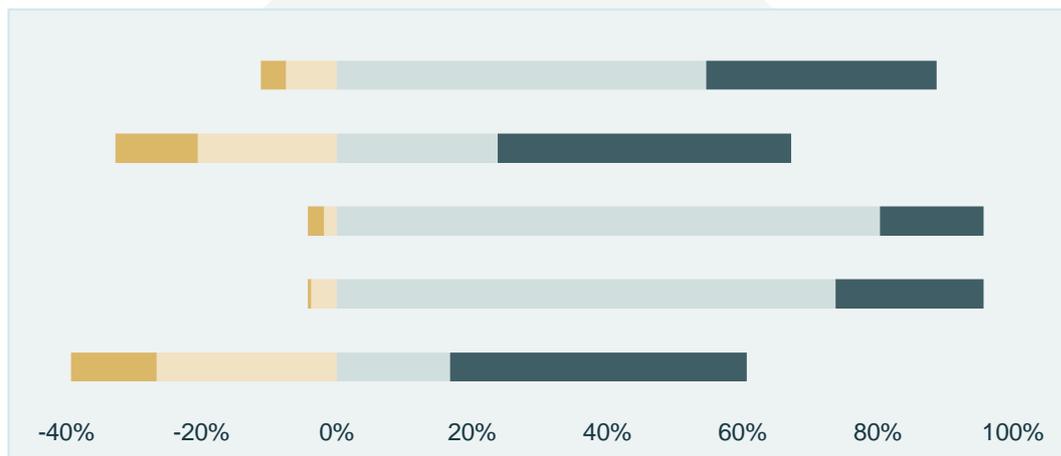
**Which of the following services would you ideally want your employer's mental health provider to offer? Multiple answers are possible.**

- Counseling / therapy sessions (physical or virtual)  
50.9%
- The ability to text with a mental health professional  
14.5%
- Virtual stress prevention workshops  
35.0%
- Virtual wellness classes (yoga, mindfulness, breathing, meditation, etc)  
31.3%
- Online database with self-care materials  
22.4%
- None of these are interesting to me  
15.4%

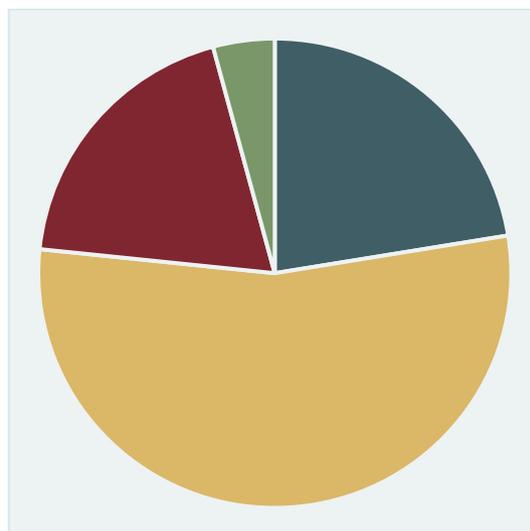
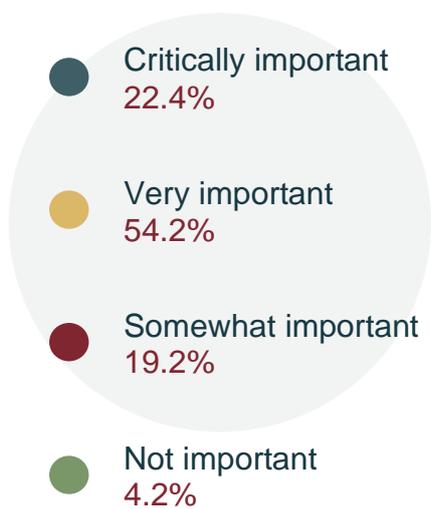


Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

|   | Strongly disagree | Disagree somewhat | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| I wish my employer did more to support employee emotional and mental health.  | 3.7%              | 7.5%              | 34.1%          | 54.7%          |
| My workplace is more accepting of emotional and mental health issues now than a year ago.                             | 12.1%             | 20.6%             | 43.5%          | 23.8%          |
| When employers are highly supportive of their staff, it has a direct positive impact on worker productivity.          | 2.3%              | 1.9%              | 15.4%          | 80.4%          |
| Companies that have strong emotional and mental health support for employees will be more likely to succeed and grow. | 0.5%              | 3.7%              | 22.0%          | 73.8%          |
| Employees at my company are significantly less productive because of the stress and anxiety of Covid-19.              | 12.6%             | 26.6%             | 43.9%          | 16.8%          |



## When evaluating new job offers, how important is it for you that your future employer offers emotional and mental health support services?



# Methodology & Demographics

## Methodology

We have conducted our mHub survey on the State of Mental Health at Work in Rwanda with the goal of better understanding employees' views and experiences related to mental health and wellbeing at the workplace.

214 workers across Rwanda participated in an online survey between March 17 and April 17, 2021. All respondents were at least 18 years of age, employed full-time, and living in Rwanda when the survey was completed. They represented a decent cross-section of the Rwandan workforce in terms of age, gender, education level, job level, industry, and employer size.

The respondents participated voluntarily and did not receive any monetary or other compensation for completing the survey. To promote our study, we mainly used social media, WhatsApp groups and relevant mailing lists.

## Demographics

- **Age:**  
<30 (28.0%), 30-39 (59.3%), 40-54 (11.7%), 55+ (0.9%)
- **Gender:**  
Female (44.4%), male (55.6%)
- **Education level:**  
High school (2.8%), Bachelor's (60.7%), Master's or higher (36.4%)
- **Job level:**  
Executive (9.3%), manager (25.2%), senior professional (46.7%), junior professional (18.7%)
- **Industry:**  
For-profit (36.4%), non-profit (37.4%), public sector (26.2%)
- **Employer size:**  
1-50 (31.3%), 51-100 (14.0%), 101-350 (31.8%), 351+ (22.9%)
- **Prior experience with mental health services:**  
Never (53.3%), at least once (12.6%), occasionally (27.6%), regularly (6.5%)
- **Living environment:**  
Kigali (71.5%), other larger urban area (15.0%), rural area (13.6%)

## About mHub

The mHub is a global network of mental health organizations that help people achieve mental and emotional wellbeing. We are a social purpose business that strives to bridge the gaps in access and quality of mental health services worldwide, with a particular focus on low- and middle-income countries in Africa. We currently have a presence in Rwanda, Kenya, and South Africa and serve the wider East and Southern Africa regions with our programs.

With our mHub centers in Nairobi and Kigali, we are the leading private mental health hub in East Africa. Through our parent organization, the Global Engagement Institute (GEI), we can look back at more than a dozen years of engagement and expertise in African mental health and wellbeing. The key to our success lies in the combination of our global leadership and our in-country expertise and closeness to customers, as well as the right blend of international and local knowledge, support, and commitment.

### **mHub Rwanda**

At our Kicukiro Center in Kigali, we house an outpatient clinic, an education and training center, an area for wellness classes, and a general community space for networking events and social gatherings. We provide the country's first all-in-one Employee Wellbeing Program with a comprehensive package of proven interventions, grounded in science, and provided on a single digital platform. Services range from sensitization and prevention to effective treatment and the sustainable change in workplace culture.

More information: [www.mhub-rwanda.org](http://www.mhub-rwanda.org)



*mHub Center & Clinic (Kicukiro)*



## Now, more than ever, a mentally healthy workplace matters

*Organizations depend on their employees to deliver their mission, vision, products, and services to drive overall success. Creating a healthy and safe workplace, one that protects both the physical and mental health of employees, is essential to achieving business objectives and shareholder returns. Clearly, investment in a mentally healthy workforce is required.*

(Deloitte, 2019)