



# Wellbeing Index

## 01 | Spotlighting Stress

A quarterly in-depth look into the state of the nation's wellbeing, at home and in the workplace.

# Becoming a nation of 'well beings'

Introduction from  
David Capper, CEO, Westfield Health



The conversation around health is changing. It's no longer just about physical illness, it's about mental health and the mind-body connection both at home and in the workplace.

A quick Google search for 'how to improve wellbeing' yields a staggering 110 million results, including the NHS's dedicated advice service on mental health.

Despite this, there's a lot of confusion around how best to improve our wellbeing and who is responsible; how much support should employers offer their staff?

Though wellbeing is often discussed in the context of work or home, in reality, it affects us 24 hours a day. From how much time we have to relax in the evening to how well we sleep, it affects our motivation and energy levels at work and home.

It's also incredibly personal. From financial worries to feeling lonely, different pressures take their toll on our wellbeing, affecting us in different ways and to varying degrees.

Though many people now talk more openly about mental health, more can be done, particularly in terms of taking a proactive, preventative approach to wellbeing.

In launching our Wellbeing Index we surveyed 2,001 UK employees and 251 HR professionals to create a barometer of the nation's wellbeing across key areas; financial, physical, mental and social wellbeing.

We'll be exploring how our wellbeing impacts us at home and at work, enabling employers and employees to take collective responsibility for building a happier, healthier and more productive nation.

Repeated on a quarterly basis, our Wellbeing Index will identify trends, evidence the effect of wellbeing and the potential opportunities and threats that face UK businesses.

Alongside our Wellbeing Index, a series of benchmarking reports will look in detail at the most pressing health and wellbeing issues.

Our first report will shine a spotlight on the mental health crisis facing the UK's workplaces and the serious impact stress can have on our wellbeing.

## Definition: wellbeing

The state of being comfortable, healthy or happy.





# Overall wellbeing

**When we think of wellbeing, it tends to be in the context of mental health. But there are many more aspects to being happy and healthy.**

The top five wellbeing worries and concerns people had over the past three months were money, lack of sleep, physical ill health, self-esteem and confidence.

Money is the top concern, with two in five saying they have had financial worries during the past three months. Financial wellbeing support was also the number one area where employers fell short, suggesting there is an opportunity for employers to do more.

In this chapter, we'll look at financial wellbeing, physical health and the support networks people draw on to boost their wellbeing.





## Increased salary satisfaction without a raise

We all know how stressful personal finances can be; just under a third of working adults are unhappy with their financial situation and disposable income, especially those living in Belfast and Brighton.

There's a real opportunity for employers here. Over a fifth of people feel that the support they received at work with their financial wellbeing was below average.

Whilst concerns about financial wellbeing often manifest themselves as requests for a raise, providing more financial advice and support could help improve employee satisfaction.

Our research highlights a noticeable difference in gender when it comes to financial wellbeing, men are 28% more likely to be happier than females, which could be linked to the growing gender pay gap.

The happiest age group for financial wellbeing is 25-35 and the unhappiest is 45-54.



## Sofa syndrome

Though the majority understand the importance of physical wellbeing, there's a real divide when it comes to putting recommendations into practice.

37% of working adults get the recommended 150 minutes or more of exercise a week, yet 35% admit they rarely or never meet that goal.

Whilst almost a quarter of people in Belfast, Nottingham and Birmingham say they go above and beyond the recommended weekly amount of exercise, Manchester and Sheffield struggle to get active.

For those working in an office, hours sitting at their desk can take their toll, clocking up 67 sedentary days per person each year<sup>1</sup> and doubling the risk of premature death<sup>2</sup>.

Frustration with desk-based working could be behind more than 20% of employees feeling that their employer doesn't do enough to support their physical wellbeing.

Whether it's discounts at a local gym, an on-site studio or even just a lunchtime walking group, companies need to address employee demand for a more active workspace.



## A little help from your friends

Mental health can often be a team effort: a listening ear can make all the difference when it comes to breaking the cycle and feeling supported.

Though three in ten tell us their mental wellbeing is 'quite good', over a fifth report that their mental health is poor or quite poor.

A big part of that is the support network people have in place. Southampton ranks highest when it comes to support from friends and family with over a third of respondents saying they feel supported and accepted within their social circle.

In contrast, people in Birmingham and Sheffield feel the most unsupported by their social circles.

With mental health problems costing UK employers almost £35 billion a year<sup>3</sup>, there's an opportunity both to support employees and increase productivity at work.

Wellbeing initiatives with a social aspect, such as a book club or walking group, could also be an opportunity for employers to boost morale.

**32%**

are unhappy with their financial situation

**1 in 5**

are unhappy with help from their employer

### Most financially unhappy cities\*

Sheffield	20%
Belfast	17%
Brighton	17%

**67**

sedentary days per year

**2x**

more likely to die a premature death

### Most inactive cities\*

Sheffield	26%
Manchester	25%
Cardiff	22%

**1 in 5**

have poor or quite poor mental health

**£35bn**

cost of mental health to employers

### Most socially supported cities\*

Southampton	34%
Bristol	30%
Newcastle	30%

\*percentage of people who are very unhappy with their financial situation

\*percentage of people who never get the weekly recommended amount of physical activity

\*percentage of people who feel well supported by their social group

# The state of the nation's wellbeing

across financial, physical, mental and social wellbeing

## Wellbeing leaders:

### London:

In the top five for all measures and the overall best city for wellbeing. Its strongest performance is in mental wellbeing where it's the third happiest city.

### Bristol:

With very low scores for unhappiness, Bristol is the second best city for health and wellbeing. People are especially happy with their financial wellbeing (52% happy).

### Newcastle:

A good overall performance sees it rank third in the overall index. It's one of the top cities for physical wellbeing with 42% saying they're happy, narrowly beaten to the top spot by Birmingham (43%).

## Room for improvement:

### Sheffield:

Coming bottom of the ranking, it's also the lowest scorer for physical wellbeing with almost half (46%) saying they're unhappy or very unhappy with their physical wellbeing. It's also second last for social (16% unhappy) and mental wellbeing (30% unhappy).

### Brighton:

Bottom five for people saying they're happy, bottom of the table for financial (47% unhappy) and mental wellbeing (32% unhappy), and Brighton is in the bottom three of the overall Wellbeing Index.

### Belfast:

Bottom three for three of the four measures, it comes second to last in the overall ranking. However, physical wellness is a strong area with over a third (35%) saying they're happy or very happy.

# The UK's overall wellbeing league table

01 London

02 Bristol

03 Newcastle

04 Nottingham

05 Southampton

06 Plymouth

07 Leeds

08 Liverpool

09 Birmingham

10 Edinburgh

11 Manchester

12 Glasgow

13 Cardiff

14 Norwich

15 Belfast

16 Brighton

17 Sheffield

# Engagement with work

Long gone are the days of leaving personal issues at the office door. The link between home life, wellbeing and performance at work was clear in the Wellbeing Index responses.

In the past three months alone, the average employee has taken two days off for stress, anxiety or depression. It's an epidemic: according to the HSE, 15.4 million business days were lost in 2017/18 due to stress, depression and anxiety<sup>4</sup>.

Stress and exhaustion are major causes of absence in the Sales, Media and Marketing industries, closely followed by IT and Telecoms; those working in IT and Telecoms also take the most days off due to feeling overwhelmed.

This may be linked to working beyond contracted hours with 79% of employees working in the Sales, Media and Marketing industries admitting to working overtime recently.

The industry putting in the most overtime, however, was Education with almost 90% stating they had worked outside their contracted hours.

There's a clear call to businesses here to think long term. A culture that rewards staying late and heaps pressure on its staff will pay the costs in days lost to mental health issues due to burnout.

## Stats at a glance:

The average employee has taken



The number of business days lost were



Sales and Media employees take the most time off due to stress

The average employee has worked



Reasons for working beyond contracted hours

32% are overloaded with work

23% feel like it's expected

12% believe it will help a promotion

12% want to impress their managers



# Wellbeing in the workplace

**Between high workloads and long hours, UK workplaces are becoming pressure cookers that impact wellbeing.**

A shocking 28% of working adults said stress and pressure has often or very often reached unmanageable levels over the last three months, citing workload, long hours and job security as the main causes.

The average employee worked 13 hours of overtime in the past three months, suggesting people may be working extra hours to cope with expanding workloads, feeling reluctant to say no due to worries about job security.

**Definition: presenteeism**  
At work in body but not in mind, due to physical or mental wellbeing.



## Present in body but not mind

By not dealing with these issues that contribute to stress effectively, organisations are at risk not only of absenteeism, but of presenteeism, where staff are at work in body but not in mind.

According to the CIPD, 86% of employers have observed presenteeism in their organisation in the last 12 months <sup>5</sup>. Not only does this have an impact on company bottom line, but it can also cause a drop in productivity levels, affect workplace morale and impact the wellbeing of other members of staff.

Research from the University of Nottingham indicates that when presenteeism becomes an issue, employees only operate at 84% capacity on average, which equates to a lost productivity cost of £4,059 per person per year <sup>6</sup>.

## Where employees feel happy

Our research indicates that only half of working adults feel happy or very happy at work.

Though workplace culture plays a huge part in wellbeing, almost two in five claim that their organisation's culture doesn't support wellbeing.

While small companies with less than ten employees manage to make their employees feel supported, organisations with more than 500 employees are falling short.

Those who work in the IT and Telecoms and Architecture, Engineering and Building industries felt the most supported by their employers. However, it's interesting to note that whilst IT and Telecoms employees say they feel supported, they still rank the highest for days taken off due to stress, exhaustion and being overwhelmed. This highlights a significant problem, indicating more can be done.

Whatever the business size or industry, employers, and more specifically line managers, need to be able to spot the signs of stress and other mental health issues in order to provide the necessary support and ensure a healthy and productive workforce.

## Stats at a glance:

79%

of people are happy at home compared to 50% who are happy at work

2 in 5

people feel their company doesn't support wellbeing

80%

of employers have observed presenteeism

## The most successful industries for supporting wellbeing



IT and Telecoms



Legal



Architecture, Engineering and Building



# Wellbeing at home

**One of the main debates when it comes to corporate wellbeing is the line between workplace support and personal responsibility.**

Our Wellbeing Index suggests that there's scope for individuals to take greater responsibility for their personal wellbeing.

Over one in eight admit they haven't done anything to support their own wellbeing in eight key areas outlined by the NHS<sup>7</sup> during the last three months<sup>7</sup>.

Just half of UK adults say they spend satisfactory time with their family and only two in five had participated in physical activity in the last three months.

In terms of taking control of their own health and wellbeing, 25-34 year olds are the most proactive, with over 90% actively engaging in wellbeing-related activity.

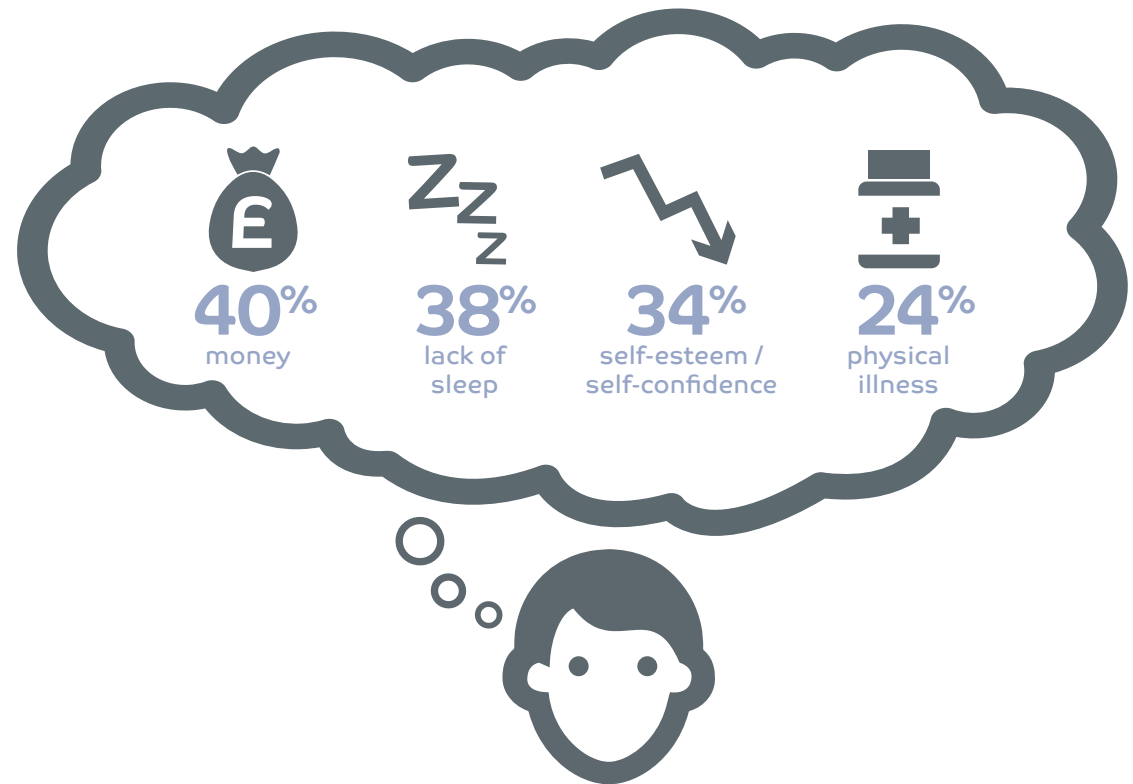
In contrast, almost a fifth of people within the 45-54 age bracket say they hadn't done anything in the past three months in relation to their wellbeing.

Wellbeing solutions that employees can access both at home as well as at work could be a good way for companies to highlight the importance of personal responsibility when it comes to wellbeing.

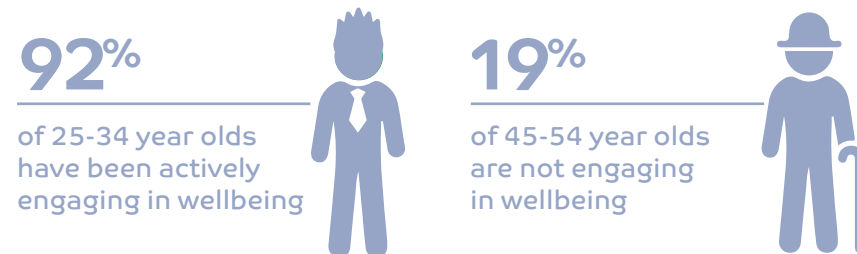
Employers also need to recognise the importance of implementing 'whole of workforce' solutions in order to truly make a positive difference.

## Stats at a glance:

### Biggest wellbeing concerns over the last 3 months



### Who's taking control of their own health and wellbeing?



# What the HR community are saying

When it comes to workplace wellbeing and culture, the HR team are on the front line.

HR professionals are reporting an increase in sick days and short-term sign off from work, with over a third reporting an increase in long-term sign offs.

## **Definition: leavism**

Working during non-paid hours or annual leave.



Though minor illnesses used to be the main cause of workplace absence, stress, anxiety and depression accounted for over three out of five absences over the last three months according to our Wellbeing Index.

In addition, people aren't using their annual leave entitlement or consistently work outside of their contracted hours: two thirds say this culture of 'leavism' is a problem in their organisation.

Leavism is when employees continue to work during non-paid hours or annual leave. As discussed in chapter 3, this may be linked to unmanageable workloads and fears around job security causing people to put in extra hours.

Half of HR professionals agree staff are unable to complete what is expected of them during the day, but almost two thirds aren't doing anything to prevent employees working late and three in five admit they do nothing to stop employees taking work home.

Top reasons for taking work home reveal a workplace culture where staff believe it's expected of them as a way to impress their line manager and help them get a promotion.

Leavism can even affect lunch breaks: three in ten employees believe that they are expected to eat lunch at their desks and a quarter think they are expected to miss lunch.

There's a clear impact on work-life balance with over a fifth of employees believing they are expected to miss social plans or stay at work and miss dinner.

Even after working late, almost a quarter of respondents say they feel ashamed to use their time in lieu.

These unhealthy working habits highlight the importance of building a positive organisational culture where staff feel comfortable enough to call out and discourage these behaviours.

With almost two in five reporting that they don't feel their organisation supports wellbeing, it's clear HR professionals are facing pushback on implementing the support that employees want and need.

Those who have managed to implement solutions list flexible working, ensuring staff take annual leave and introducing regular one to one meetings as ways to combat leavism and promote cultural change.

## Stats at a glance:



**How many days a week do employees do the following due to work volume and/or stress?**

stay late/arrive early

4

miss dinner

1

eat at desk

2



**What percentage of employees feel the following is expected of them within their organisation?**

stay late/arrive early

31%

miss dinner

20%

eat at desk

30%

## Where are HR professionals seeing increased issues in the workplace?

67% ↑

believe leavism is a problem within their organisation

51% ↑

have seen an increase in staff sick days

38% ↑

have seen an increase in short-term sign off from work

36% ↑

have seen an increase in long-term sign off from work

30% ↑

have seen an increase in health and safety issues

28% ↑

have seen an increase in workplace complaints



# Stress

**Stress in the workplace is rising and pressure on the job is having a detrimental effect on wellbeing. Bristol and Brighton were found to be the most stressed cities at work with over a fifth of workers feeling extremely stressed, followed by Leeds, Belfast and Nottingham.**

## The unspoken illness

Two in five admit they have taken time off due to mental ill health but have given another reason for their absence, such as a different illness or taking the absence as annual leave.

Employees feel unable to be honest about their mental health. Two in five think colleagues would assume they were making it up, whilst others feared the perceived stigma associated with mental health conditions.

Almost a third of working adults believe their organisation doesn't take mental health seriously, suggesting that stigma does exist and needs to be addressed. There's no doubt that the inability to speak openly about mental health issues at work is contributing to elevated levels of stress, absenteeism and leavism.

## The impact of stress

The top negative effect of stress was trouble sleeping, which over two in five people had recently experienced. Other effects included anxiety, fatigue, sadness, depression and lack of motivation.

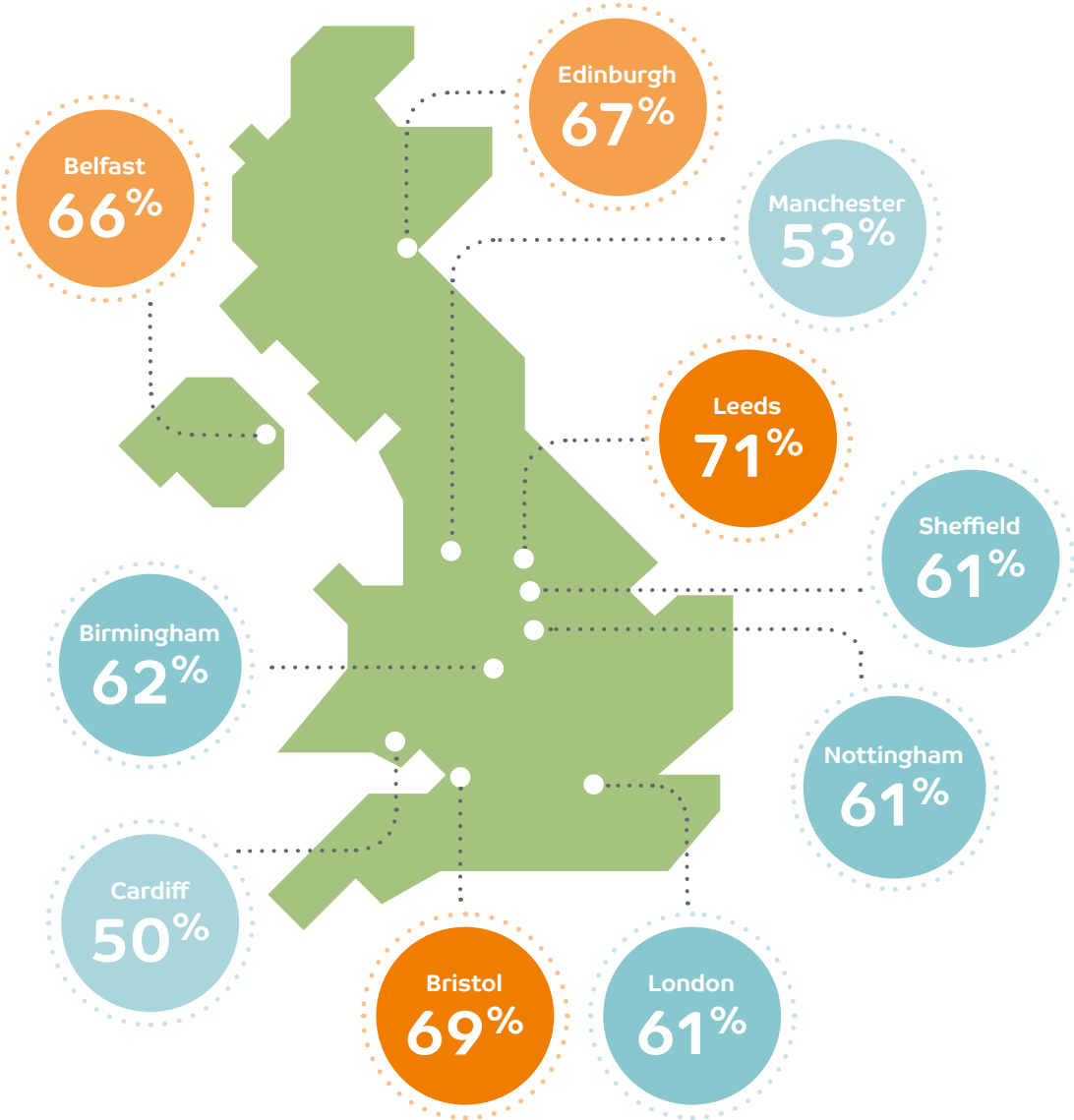
These negative effects are impacting people's ability to do their jobs: over fifty percent of employees (56%) wait until they are physically unable to work to call in sick.

Whilst steps are being made in the right direction, there's still a lot more to be done by employers to reduce stress and create a culture that doesn't encourage stress-inducing employee behaviours as a way to get ahead.



# Stats at a glance:

## The UK's most stressed cities



\*percentage of people who say they are stressed at work

## Steps that HR professionals are taking to prevent leavism



# We believe in **well beings**

Start your health and wellbeing  
journey today:



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## References

1 Workplace Insight, 2018

2 Independent Newspaper Online, 2017

3 Centre for Mental Health, 2018

4 British Safety Council, 2018

5 CIPD, 2018

6 Nottingham Trent University, 2018

7 NHS Moodzone, 2018

