

# How to decrease the risks to employees' mental health

*Prioritising one's mental health leads to more sustainable routines, greater life satisfaction and an increase in productivity, whereas continuous stress over extended durations can lead to long-lasting, irreversible health effects, including musculoskeletal and cardiovascular health problems, exhaustion and debility. **Arveen Gray** and **Jasmine Virhia** discuss some actions organisations and employees can take to decrease mental health risks.*

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As we approach World Mental Health Day 2023, you may be reflecting on the commitments you made to new behaviours and well-intentioned changes in routine that are proposed to bring about healthier and happier lives. This day focuses on raising awareness and increasing efforts to support mental health worldwide; the theme for this year's World Mental Health Day is 'Mental health is a universal human right' ([Mental Health Foundation, 2023](#)). Our health is the most important thing that we own, and the right to mental health is a crucial element in the right to health itself ([Cosgrove & Shaughnessy, 2020](#)). Mental health is defined by The [World Health Organisation](#) (2018) as "a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community." It's important to note that *everyone has mental health to attend to*. It is a distinct portrayal of overall health and wellbeing as opposed to the inexistence of mental disorder ([Gatt et al., 2014](#)).

It is generally recognised that there are significant psychological risks to employee mental health at work ([CIPD, 2021](#)); stress, depression and anxiety accounted for 51 per cent of all work-related inadequate health outcomes, and 55 per cent of all working days were lost as a consequence between 2021 and 2022 ([Liversedge, 2022](#)). In the finance sector, over 80 per cent of employees are looking to move careers due to the detrimental effects on their mental health ([MHFA England, 2023](#)). The current approaches to mental health and wellbeing in the finance sector need to be reevaluated so that action is taken

to ensure employees have a right to mental health and are able to flourish ([MHFA England, 2023](#)). The prioritisation of one's mental health leads to more sustainable routines, greater life satisfaction and an increase in productivity ([Bieda et al., 2019](#)), whereas continuous stress reactions over extended durations can lead to long-lasting, irreversible health effects, including musculoskeletal and cardiovascular health problems, exhaustion and debility ([Hassard & Cox, 2015](#)).

Whilst there are various advantages to working in finance, such as career trajectory and remuneration, the finance sector is well known for inducing work-related stress, since people often work for lengthy periods of time, with unsatisfactory work-life balance. The industry is often criticised for the lack of awareness surrounding the negative effect on employee mental health and wellbeing, further highlighting the stigma that still remains around mental health in the finance sector ([Burgess, 2021](#)). Results of a quantitative survey focussed on self-measurement of mental health and workplace productivity of employees across the finance sector showed that mental health is a significant predictor of workplace productivity and that the overall state of self-measured mental health of finance workers is lower in comparison to the general population (Graya & Rees, 2022). The findings of the survey also highlighted that the top three factors that had a negative impact on the self-measured mental health of employees were poor management, a lack of defined goals and not being motivated by the work. When compounded together, these factors resulted in lower workplace productivity levels (Graya & Rees, 2022).

What works for some, won't work for others and it's important for firms to recognise this. A recent study from Westfield Health found that in regard to the pandemic, employees in the finance sector were most likely to have their mental health negatively affected, with 52 per cent stating that their mental health had declined in the past year, highlighting problems with the working environment they experience ([Cumber, 2021](#)). However, a qualitative investigation into the attitudes towards the re-organisation of work across financial and professional services found that ill-being was reduced by increasing the amount of autonomy they are given regarding their working practices ([Virhia et al., 2022](#)). A variety of unique features impact an individual's coping abilities, such as disposition, ambitions, principles, and situational factors, all with the potential to aggravate or diminish the impact of hazards in the workplace and occurrences of stress ([Hassard & Cox, 2015](#)).

An increase in autonomy, trusting your employees to manage their work and non-work

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responsibilities will allow them to reap the benefits of a work-life balance. Moreover, organisational interventions such as controlling the pace of work, autonomy, social support and a quality relationship with a supervisor alleviate the detrimental effects of job pressure and workload that contribute to work-life conflict and burnout ([Alarcon, 2011](#); [Gu & Wang, 2019](#)). Not only do supportive job resources protect workers against experiences of ill-being, but ample evidence indicates a clear link between job resources and well-being ([Brauchli et al., 2015](#), [Hakanen et al., 2021](#)).

Human resource departments can take a practical psychology-based perspective in facilitating employee mental health in the workplace. The implementation of a strategic approach must be subject to the specific needs of employees (Graya & Rees, 2022). Examples of this include mental health training in the workplace so that organisations are effectively handling mental health-related concerns (Train, 2016). Organisations in the finance sector could also consider joining enterprises such as 'The Mental Health at Work Commitment', which provides an opportunity for companies to openly announce that they value mental health, demonstrating that they value their employees and gaining a competitive edge in acquiring and retaining top talent (Simpson, 2020).

For you to improve your mental health as an employee, ensure that you use strategies such as taking regular short breaks and journaling, to slow down and concentrate at work. Engaging in self-reflective techniques like these will allow you to take charge your mental health, especially in a sector like finance, where the experience of work-related stress is established ([Castrillon, 2022](#)). Improving your mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is linked to higher levels of productivity as well, highlighting the long-term importance of being proactive with it ([Wu et al., 2021](#)).

In addition, it is important to set yourself boundaries in the workplace, regardless of whether you work in the finance sector or not, to ensure that you do not spread yourself too thin to a point where you cannot deliver to the standard you would like, resulting in compromised work performance. Technology allows everyone to be accessible, with it reaching a point where working culture is constant. Some employees struggle to switch off outside of work. It is crucial that you keep boundaries in place to ensure that work does not consume your daily life outside of working hours ([CMI, 2020](#)).

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