



## Millennials, Gen Z and mental health

Managing mental health in the workplace

Deloitte Global Talent

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“Employee mental health should be a priority for employers, if it’s not already...

Stress is real. So is its impact on business and the economy. It’s time for business leaders to act.”

- Emma Codd, Deloitte  
Global Inclusion leader

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered mental health to the forefront of the public's consciousness. Just about everyone these days seems to be either suffering from isolation and loneliness, or overwhelmed by caring for dependents. Many are mourning loved ones they've lost. Others are worried about protecting themselves and their families from illness and financial ruin. Accordingly, mental health is a hot topic in both the media and C-suites.

The countless news segments and conversations, however, habitually overlook an important reality: Mental health was a massive challenge before reports of a mystery virus began circulating in China. The [2020 Deloitte Global Millennial Survey](#), conducted both before and after the start of the pandemic, serves to confirm this.

Our primary survey, conducted before the global spread of COVID-19, reveals that even before the pandemic, a large number of millennial and Gen Z workers were frequently suffering from stress and anxiety—common factors that contribute to mental health. Interestingly, stress levels fell for both generations in the second survey (or “pulse” survey) conducted between April and May 2020, possibly due to an increase in remote working and a general slow-down of life. However, despite the slight decline in anxiety during the pandemic, both parts of the Deloitte survey confirm that young people are highly stressed.

These generations' uncomfortably high levels of tension and unhappiness are likely byproducts of the uneasiness and pessimism exposed by last year's Millennial Survey.<sup>i</sup> Climate change, the welfare of their families, financial stability, health care and long-term career prospects were identified as huge concerns before the pandemic. Poor work/life balance and the inability to be their authentic selves also weighed on respondents.

Because millennials and Gen Zs together account for most of the global workforce, their mental health issues present an enormous challenge for employers around the world. In 2016, a study published in The Lancet projected that in the world's 36 largest countries, more than 12 billion days of lost productivity were attributable to depression and anxiety disorders every year at an estimated cost of US\$925 billion<sup>ii</sup> — a figure that's surely higher in 2020.





# Stress and unhappiness abound

In the primary survey, a staggering 48% of Gen Zs and 44% of millennials said they feel anxious or stressed all or most of the time.<sup>iii</sup> Granted, the fieldwork for the survey was conducted during perhaps the most stressful time of the year<sup>iv</sup>—less daylight and colder temperatures (in the northern hemisphere), holiday activities<sup>v</sup> and year-end work responsibilities all contribute to heightened anxiety. Still, the results are concerning.





Women expressed more stress than men, 53% to 42% among Gen Zs and 47% to 40% among millennials. Parents were more stressed than average, especially Gen Z parents, whose children typically are younger.<sup>vi</sup> Geographically, the US, UK and Philippines were home to the most anxious millennials while Brazil and Singapore topped the list for Gen Zs. Respondents in Denmark and the Netherlands were among the least stressed in both groups.



Given their stress levels, it's no surprise that mental health is a priority for respondents. When asked to prioritize six aspects of their lives—ranging from personal safety to financial security—48% of Gen Zs and 44% of millennials ranked mental health either first or second. Only physical health ranked higher on the list of top-two priorities.

Deloitte Global's annual Millennial Survey first explored the topic of emotional well-being in 2017 when it asked whether respondents expected to be happier than their parents. That year, nearly half, 46%, said they did. This year's primary survey posed the question in a slightly different way, asking if these generations expected to be happier than their parents' generations. The results were startling: Just 26% of millennials and 28% of Gen Zs believed they would be happier. Conversely, 45% of millennials and 43% of Gen Zs believe they will be less happy than their parents' generations.



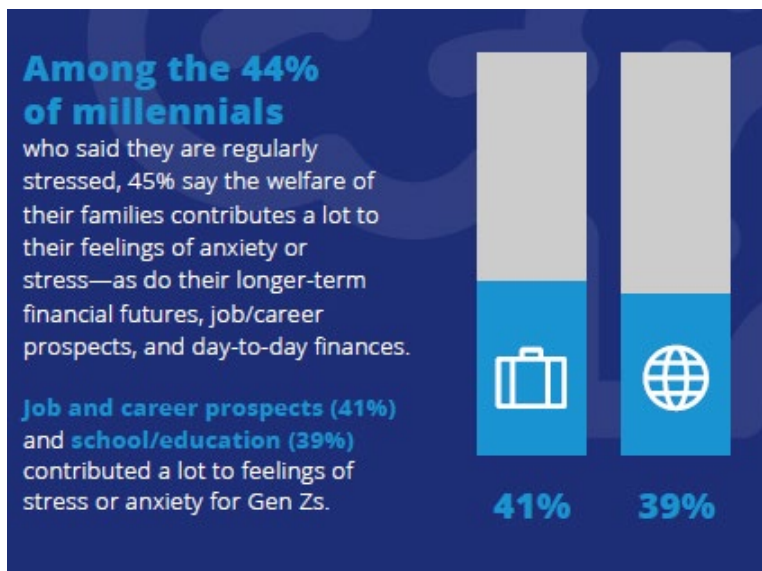
# What's behind the anxiety?

The causes for stress among these younger generations are varied. When all primary survey participants were asked, “There are many challenges facing societies around the world; which of the following are you personally concerned about?” all 20 potential concerns were selected by more than 60% of millennials as personal concerns.

When required to narrow down their top concerns from the same list to just three, no topic troubled millennials and Gen Zs more than climate change/protecting the environment. Around 30% of each group mentioned it as a top-three concern, far ahead of their second choices at 22% (crime/personal safety for millennials, unemployment for Gen Zs).

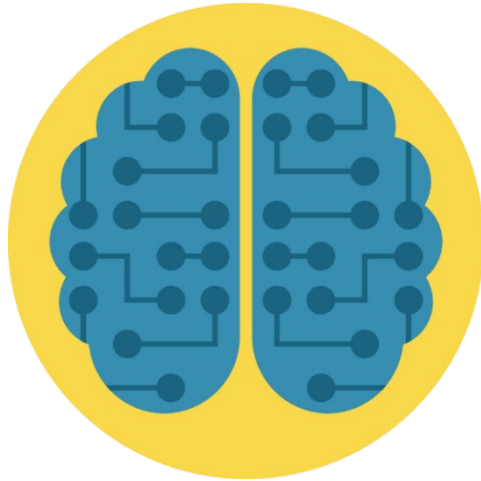
Among millennials who said they experience stress, 45% cited the welfare of their families as the top contributor to their feelings of anxiety. Their longer-term financial futures (43%), job/career prospects (40%) and day-to-day finances (39%) were close behind. For the almost half of Gen Zs who experience stress, job/career prospects (41%) ranked first, trailed by school/education (39%).

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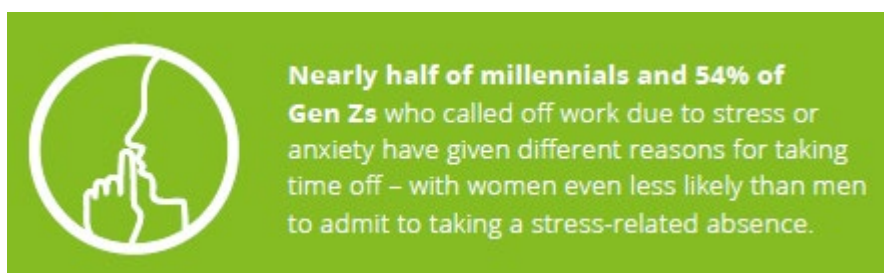
In terms of workplace-specific issues, among respondents who said they’d like to leave their employers within the next two years, nearly a quarter (23%) of millennials and 15% of Gen Zs gave poor work/life balance as a reason for wanting to depart. The inability to balance life and work can be a contributor to poor mental health,<sup>vii</sup> as is the inability to be one’s authentic self.<sup>viii</sup> Despite the focus on diversity in the workplace over the past few years, more than a quarter of respondents who feel regularly stressed said the inability to be their true, authentic selves contributed “a lot” to their anxiety. Another 40% said this contributed “a little.”

# Mental health stigma remains



Likely because mental health is a priority for many of those surveyed, slightly more than half of employed respondents of the primary survey said they believe feelings of stress and anxiety is a legitimate reason to take a sick day or an even a longer-term leave of absence. Almost a third of millennials (29%) and more than a third of Gen Zs (34%) said they have done it themselves.

Unfortunately, not all of them felt they could be completely honest with their employers. Nearly half of millennials and 54% of Gen Zs who called off work due to stress or anxiety have given different reasons for taking the time off. Millennial women were significantly less likely than males to tell their employers when they take a stress-related leave.



There are some interesting geographic differences in the data. In India, for example, more than three-quarters (77%) of millennials surveyed said stress is a legitimate reason to miss work, and people in India were most likely to take off work for that reason during the preceding 12 months. On the flip side, only a quarter (26%) of Russian millennials said stress is cause for sick leave, and they ranked last among those who did so. Russians and South Koreans were least likely to be forthcoming when they did take mental health breaks while Brazilians were the most candid.

The data not only suggests that many people believe mental health remains stigmatized in the workplace, but it also means employers probably are underestimating the impact of poor mental health on their productivity because they lack an accurate picture of the problem.



# Conclusion



An overwrought workforce is a less productive one. Unfortunately, the minds of many millennials and Gen Zs are preoccupied by concerns at home, at work and in the world at large. This survey touched on some of the larger causes of stress, but so many more exist. Marriage and relationship problems. Aging parents. Distracted coworkers. Elections. And now, COVID-19. The list is long.

Employee mental health should be a priority for employers, if it's not already. All employers should research and understand the root causes of mental health issues among workers in general, and their own people in particular—and create or update programs based on their learnings. Effective approaches are good for people and good for business. A recent Deloitte UK report suggests employers there realize a return of £5 (US\$6.22) for every £1 (US\$1.24) invested in mental health.<sup>ix</sup> And a 2019 Deloitte Canada report revealed companies with mental health programs in place for three or more years had a median annual ROI of \$2.18 (US\$1.56) for every dollar (US\$0.72) spent.<sup>x</sup>

Stress is real. So is its impact on business and the economy. It's time for business leaders to act. Doing so—doing it effectively—can benefit all stakeholders.

## How Deloitte supports mental health

At Deloitte, we believe that supporting mental health is a critical element of inclusion and are working hard to address the stigma that still too often exists within our societies on this issue. As a responsible organization, we recognize the importance of good mental health—and the need for our people to know where and how to seek support when they are facing mental health challenges.

This means enabling our people to feel able to raise any concerns around their mental health without fear of stigma. It also means helping our people to spot the signs of mental health challenges—to ask “Are you okay?”—helping them to know how to respond when someone says they aren't, and making sure they feel supported in reaching out for help.

Building on the progress made by firms in our global organization, Deloitte is working to drive consistency in approach to mental health.

Deloitte is also proud to be a founding member of the Global Business Initiative, a business-led coalition being established to advocate for, and accelerate, positive change for mental health in the workplace on a global basis.

# Survey methodology

The 2020 report is based on two sets of surveys. The first began prior to the COVID-19 outbreak using an online, self-complete-style interview; fieldwork was completed between November 21, 2019, and January 8, 2020. A second survey was conducted in a similar fashion between April 28, 2020, and May 17, 2020, in the midst of the worldwide pandemic.

The initial survey solicited the views of 13,715 millennials across 43 countries and 4,711 Generation Z respondents from 20 countries. The subsequent survey questioned 5,501 millennials and 3,601 Gen Zs in 13 large markets that were affected by the pandemic to different degrees. No respondents in the former survey were queried in the latter.

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- <sup>i</sup> Deloitte Global, [The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2019](#), 20 May 2019.
- <sup>ii</sup> Dan Chisholm, Kim Sweeny, Peter Sheehan, Bruce Rasmussen, Filip Smit, Pim Cuijpers, et al., [“Scaling-up treatment of depression and anxiety: a global return on investment analysis,”](#) *The Lancet*, 12 April 2016.
- <sup>iii</sup> Millennials: “All of the time” 11%, “most of the time” 32%; Gen Zs: “All of the time” 14%, “most of the time” 34%.
- <sup>iv</sup> Fieldwork conducted from 21 November 2019 through 8 January 2020.
- <sup>v</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, [“Holiday Stress,”](#) 12 December 2006.
- <sup>vi</sup> Stress among millennial parents 45%, nonparents 43%; Stress among Gen Z parents 53%, nonparents 47%.
- <sup>vii</sup> Mental Health Foundation, [“Work-life balance,”](#) accessed 8 May 2020.
- <sup>viii</sup> Djurdja Grijak, [“Authenticity as a Predictor of Mental Health,”](#) 2017.
- <sup>ix</sup> Deloitte UK, [“Mental health and employers: Refreshing the case for investment,”](#) January 2020.
- <sup>x</sup> Deloitte Canada, [“The ROI in workplace mental health programs: Good for people, good for business—A blueprint for workplace mental health programs,”](#) *Deloitte Insights*, November 2019.



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