

Improving workplace wellbeing and productivity in APAC

intellect

Introduction

Asia-Pacific countries have an unspoken stigma against mental health, which means that many cases often go untreated. Reasons vary from country to country, but are partly due to a lack of resources to address issues.

The onset of COVID-19 saw a rapid shift in the lifestyles of workers and workplaces. From a highly physical and in-person work set-up, many employees suddenly found themselves more sedentary and working from home. The situation brought the need to address employees' mental and physical wellness to the fore.¹

“*The scale of mental distress since the start of the pandemic requires more integrated, whole-of-society mental health support if it is not to lead to permanent scarring.*

–OECD

Companies spend as much as 70%² of costs on labour but do not invest in employee welfare and development. For many, the realisation to prioritise mental health came too late, as seen in the sudden flux of resignations across industries during the pandemic's peak. What has since been named “The Great Resignation” has led to trends in non-monetary benefits, such as better employee engagement, flexible working arrangements, training, upskilling, job enrichment, and job re-design.³

It has become imperative for businesses to provide a happy, safe, and sustainable environment for their workers—be it in-office, from home, or remote.

Thus, from July to September 2021, Intellect ran a survey for over 880 respondents in seven APAC countries. Based on the analysis of 770 answers from these respondents, we have come up with suggestions that companies can adopt to create a better environment for their employees.

1. OECD, [Tackling the mental health impact of the COVID-19 crisis: An integrated, whole-of-society response](#), 2021

2. People Matters, [“Analytics will help shape the future of work,” says Experian’s Olly Britnell](#)

3. Sabharwal, [Dealing with the “Great Resignation” in Asia](#)

A woman with long dark hair is sitting at a desk in an office. She is looking down with a stressed expression, holding her glasses in her right hand. Her left hand is resting on her forehead. On the desk, there is a white coffee cup and some papers. The background shows a window with a view of a city skyline.

Major Mental Health Triggers

In the seven APAC countries where Intellect conducted the study, we highlighted some key findings regarding primary mental health triggers and concerns: Sleep, stress, and anxiety; burnout; COVID-19 impact; disengaged coping style; and absenteeism and presenteeism.

According to Science Direct,⁴ common mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression are prevalent in APAC countries. The pandemic has only aggravated these stressors. Despite looser restrictions and vaccine availability, COVID-19 remains a real threat and concern. Employees' lack of control over the pandemic may further worsen their anxieties. If not appropriately addressed, employees may feel that superiors disregard their concerns, worsening their ongoing mental health struggles.

In our survey, workers across the seven APAC countries exhibited an ongoing struggle with sleep, stress, and anxiety. They shared the need to manage and cope with these better. Mismanaging these struggles could potentially lead to burnout. Burnt out workers may suffer from decreased productivity, poor decision-making, and an increased likelihood to leave their jobs. Stressed workers are three times more likely to quit when burnt out,⁵ putting overall workflows for companies at risk.

Closely related is the phenomenon of absenteeism and presenteeism, the former characterised by unexplained and unscheduled work absences and the latter as the physical presence but mental absence of an employee at work. According to a paper by Labour Economics,⁶ workers' reduced productivity resulting from poor mental health directly correlates with absenteeism and presenteeism, which costs employers thousands of dollars per employee per year. These individuals may be disengaging from work to better cope with anxiety, exhaustion, and pressure to perform.

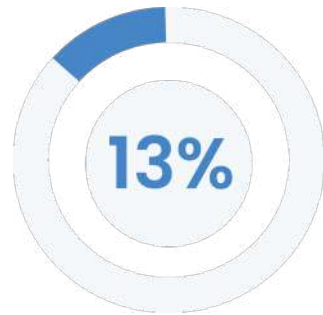
4. [OECD, Tackling the mental health impact of the COVID-19 crisis: An integrated, whole-of-society response, 2021](#)

5. [People Matters, "Analytics will help shape the future of work," says Experian's Olly Britnell](#)

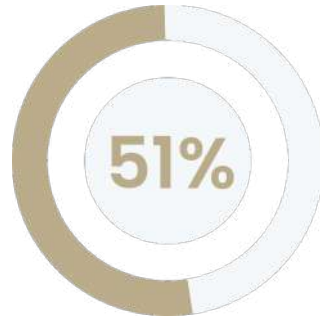
6. [Sabharwal, Dealing with the "Great Resignation" in Asia](#)



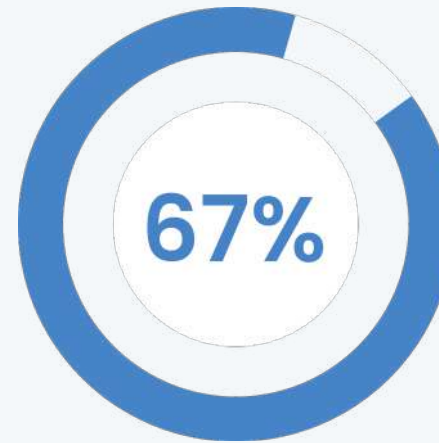
1. Sleep, Stress, & Anxiety



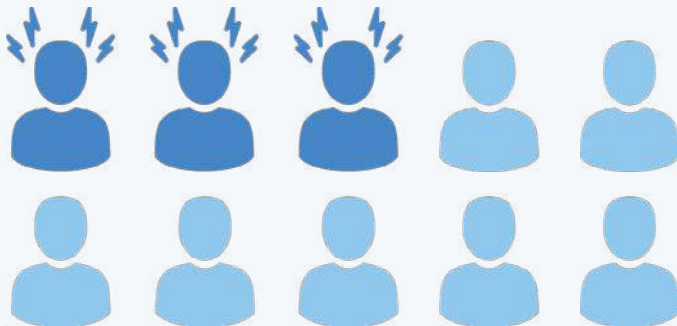
of APAC respondents reported having **poor sleep quality**



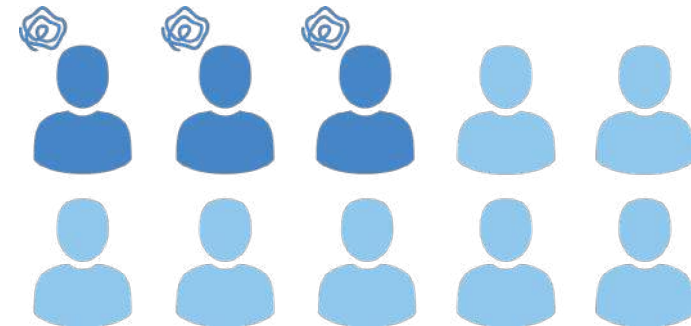
of APAC respondents reported **feeling stressed**



of APAC respondents reported having **anxiety**

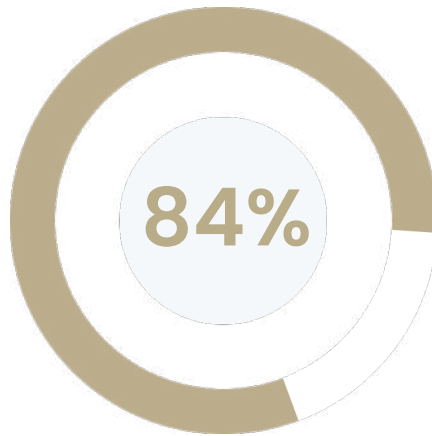


Where **3 out of 10** respondents rated their **stress level as 7 or above**

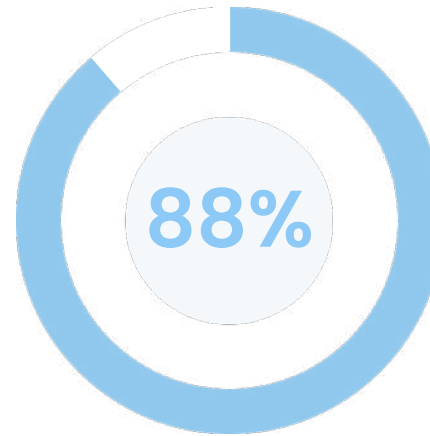


Where **3 out of 10** respondents rated their **anxiety level as 7 or above**

2. Burnout

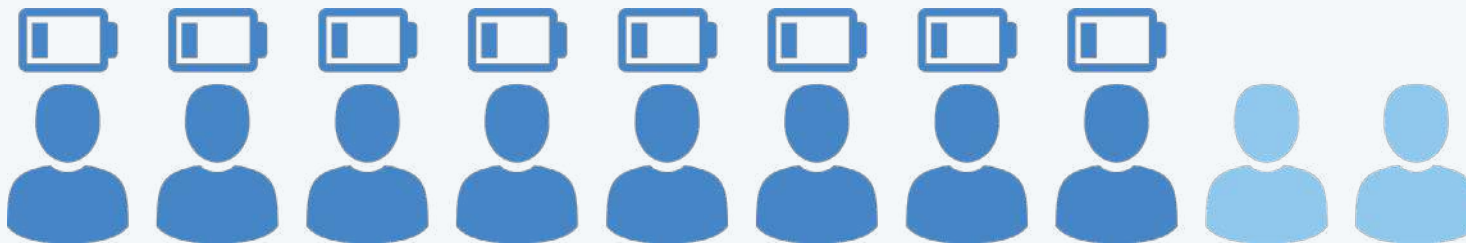


Of APAC respondents reported **experiencing exhaustion**



Of APAC respondents reported **being disengaged from work**

8 out of 10 respondents reported **experiencing burnout (i.e. disengaged and exhausted)**



3. Covid-19 Impact

CONCERN

What are the main concerns that you have now?

 **17.9%**

reported being concerned about their **personal and family health**

 **13.8%**

reported being concerned about their **stress and mental health**

 **13.3%**

reported being concerned about their **personal finances**

IMPACT

Which of the following areas have you felt the biggest impact in?

 **14.5%**

reported to experience **poorer mental health**

 **14.4%**

reported to experience **disturbance in their work-life balance by means of having an increased workload.**

 **13.4%**

reported reduced **physical health**

SUPPORT

What are the main areas your employer can support you in now?

 **17.5%**

reported wanting more **resources and support on their work-life balance**

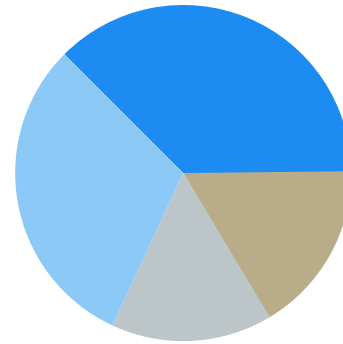
 **16.7%**

reported wanting more **learning and development opportunities** from managers and leaders within the firm

 **15.2%**

reported wanting **more recognition from managers** and leaders within the firm

4. Coping Style: Disengagement



37.5% Emotion-focused engagement

30.3% Problem-focused engagement

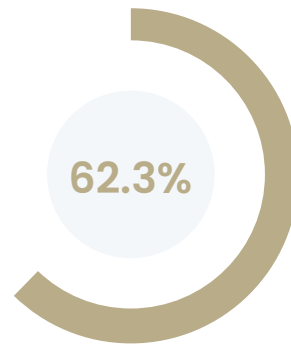
15.6% Emotion-focused disengagement

16.6% Problem-focused disengagement

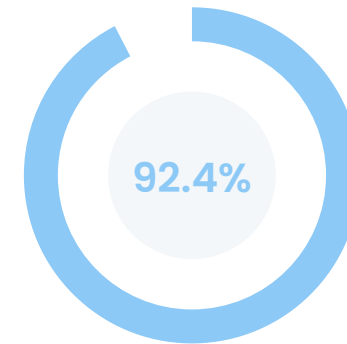
39%

of APAC respondents adopted the disengagement coping style

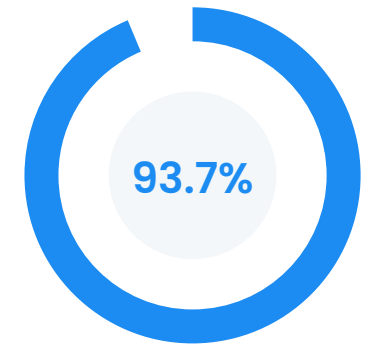
Disengagement Coping Style or Avoidance refers to a strategy that involves seeking to limit exposure to stressors.



experienced feelings of anxiety



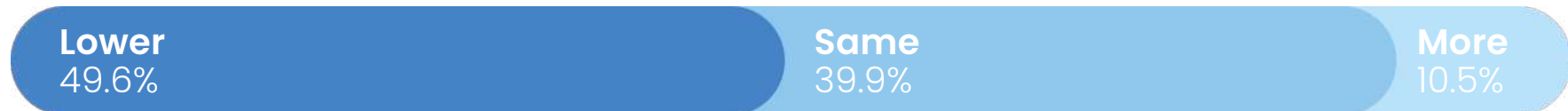
are highly exhausted from work



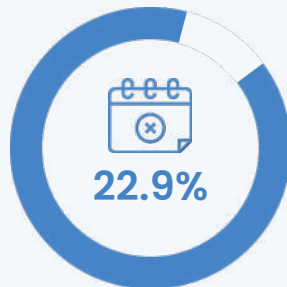
are highly disengaged from work

5. Absenteeism and Presenteeism

49.6% of respondents reported **lower productivity since the pandemic**

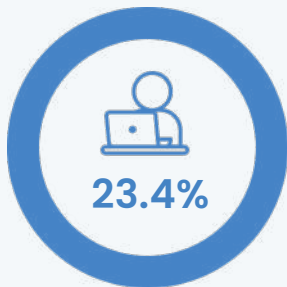


Yet, the number of **absenteeism and presenteeism** reported by respondents are very alarming



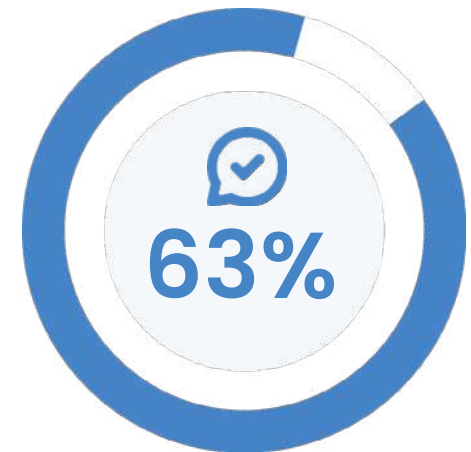
Most respondents (22.9%) reported being **absent from work for 12-36 days per year**

Taking income range into account, Absenteeism is costing employers **US\$3,426.1 - US\$6,313.6 per employee per year**



Most respondents (23.4%) reported being **absent from work for 12-36 days per year**

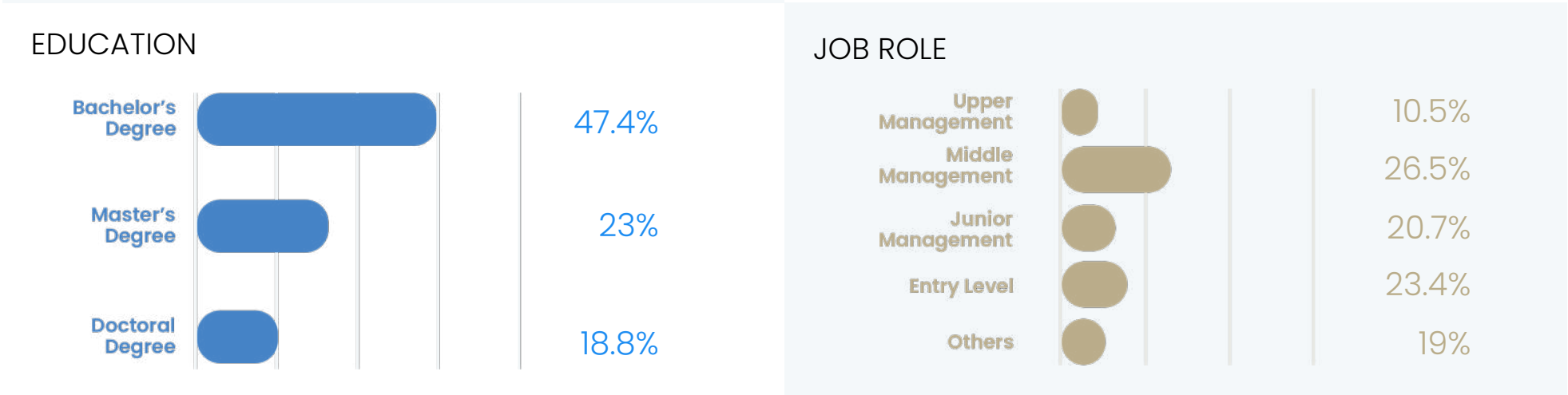
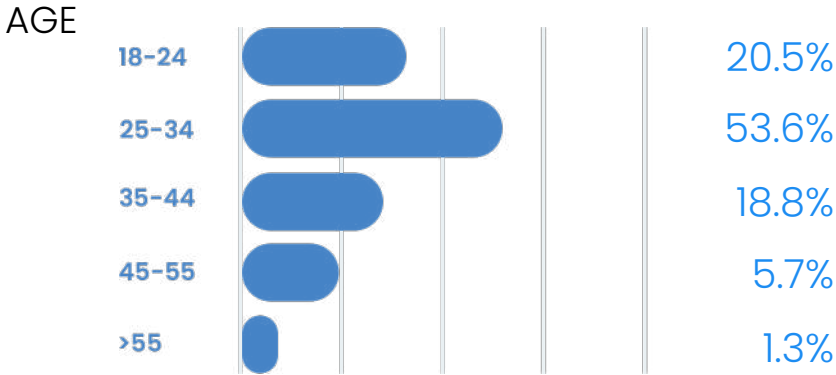
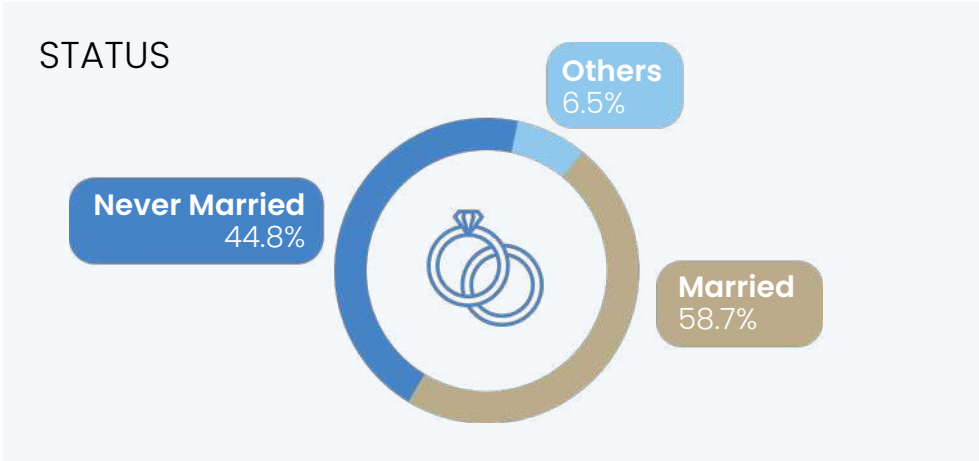
Taking income range into account, Presenteeism is costing employers **US\$4,331.1 - US\$7,207.1 per employee per year**



BUT, 63% are satisfied with work-life balance, suggesting that there might be other aspects of their work environment **impacting their mental health.**

Demographics

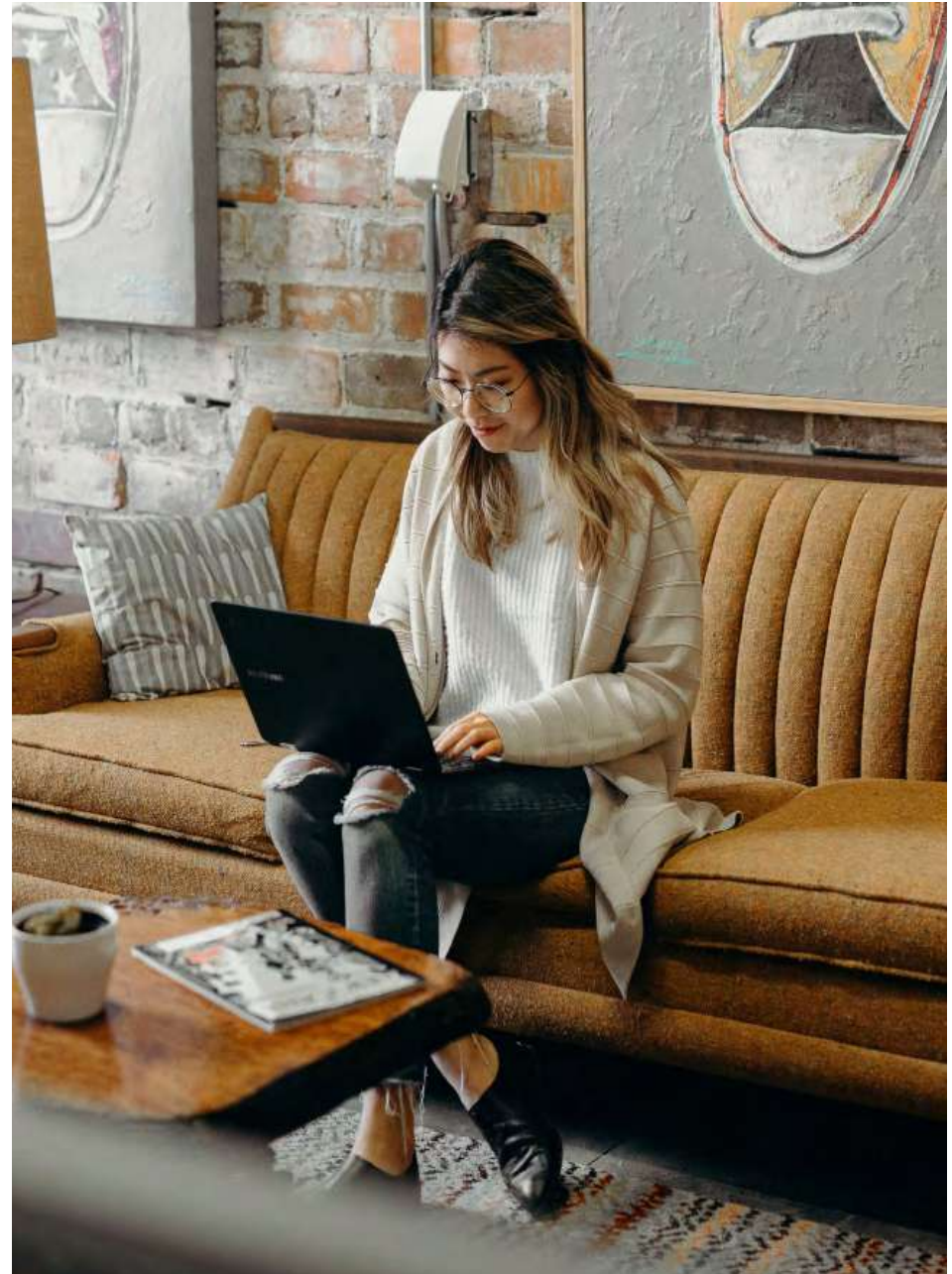
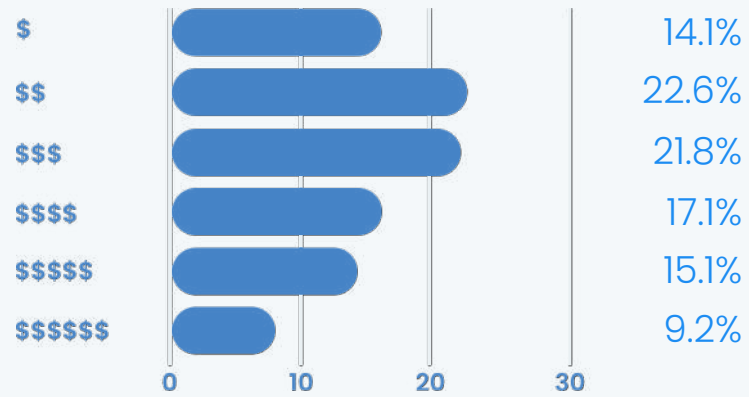
A total of **881 responses** was collected over 8 weeks. Final analysis was conducted based on 770 responses



REMOTE WORK FREQUENCY



INCOME



Addressing Major Triggers

In the following pages, we will tackle three main ways in which employers can address major triggers that were described in the previous section. These suggestions are specifically based on APAC workers' concerns and contexts, but their effectiveness need not be limited to only these countries.

1. Promote Anxiety and Stress Management

This involves using different avenues to help employees cope and share their stresses and anxieties. The availability of workplace counselling, for example, can address various major concerns, like problems with sleep, burnout, and disengagement.

Some ways to actively engage employees, whether they are on-site or remote, are:

01 Offering channels—whether online or in-person—that give employees access to trained counsellors



02 Choosing services that send reports on issues and improvements so employers can view what their employees' main concerns are



03 Encouraging time-blocking for mental health or counselling sessions



2. Actively Engage Employees

Engaging employees and emphasising personal and professional wellbeing are other ways to counter burnout and stress. When employees are more aware of the state of their health—mental and physical—it could potentially lessen anxieties surrounding COVID-19 concerns, job security, workplace set-up, and more.



Some ways to actively engage employees, whether they are on-site or remote, are:

01 Creating a buddy system, where team members can check in on each other



02 Integrating flexible work schedules



03 Encouraging rest and paid time off



04 Setting realistic goals for work



05 Promoting counselling with teams



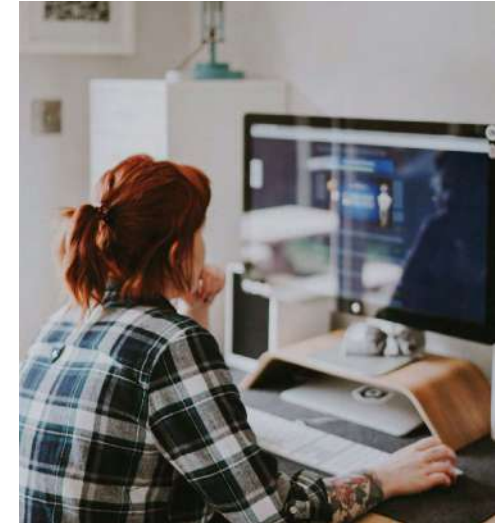
06 Having supervisors regularly check in on their teams



3. Improve Organisational Behaviour Through Learning and Development

Lastly, improving organisational behaviour through learning and development opportunities involves providing workers with the means to grow within an organisation. This avoids stagnation and allows them to explore other possibilities within their careers.

This signals the value a company puts in their employees, thus winning their trust and active participation in the business. This also addresses concerns like job security, disengagement or disinvolvement of employees, absenteeism, and presenteeism.



Some methods to improve organisational behaviour are:

01 Providing learning and development workshops



02 Presenting clear growth opportunities



03 Developing career paths within the company



04 Providing incentives to upskill



05 Recognising employee efforts



06 Setting clear boundaries



07 Matching people to the right roles

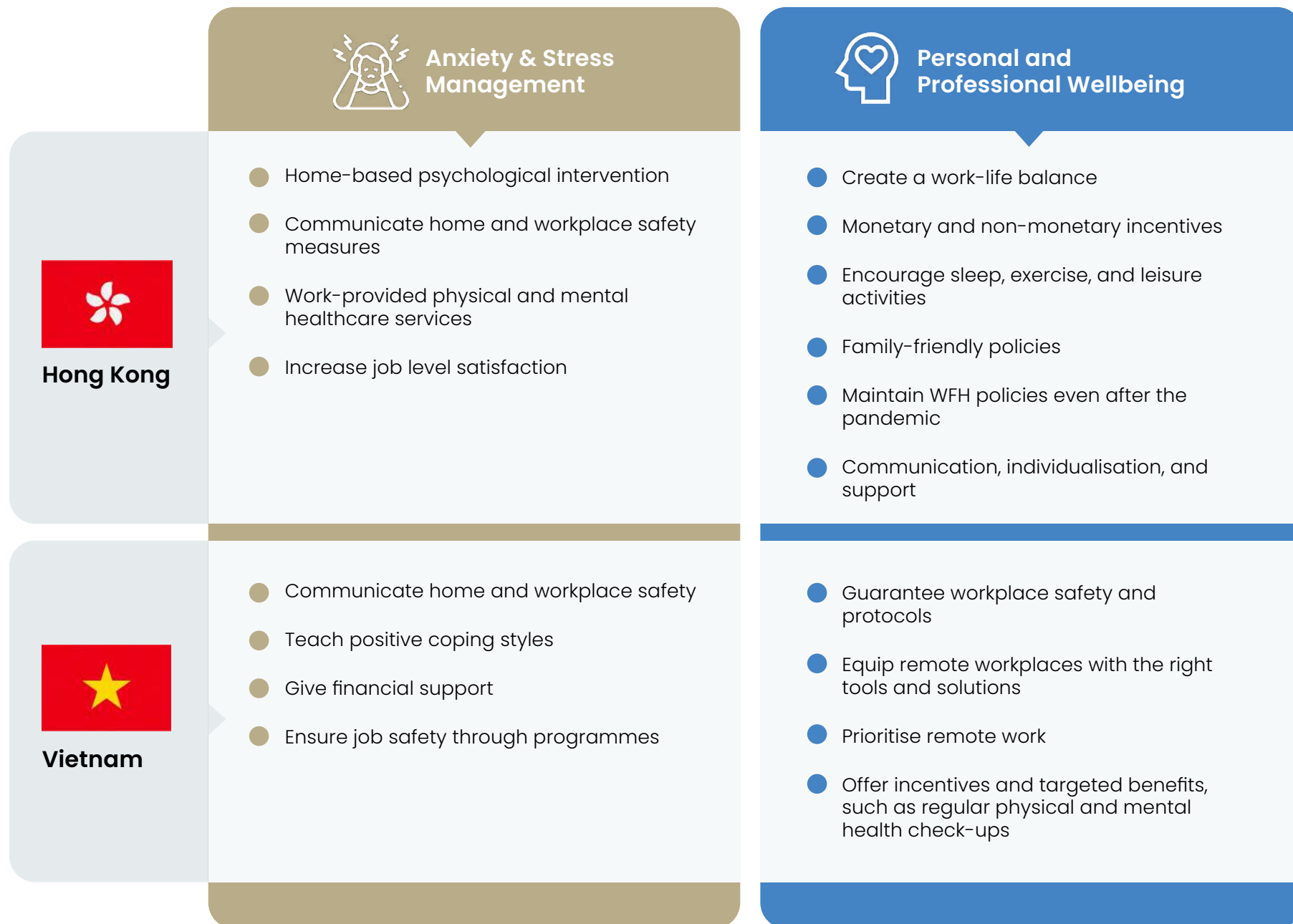


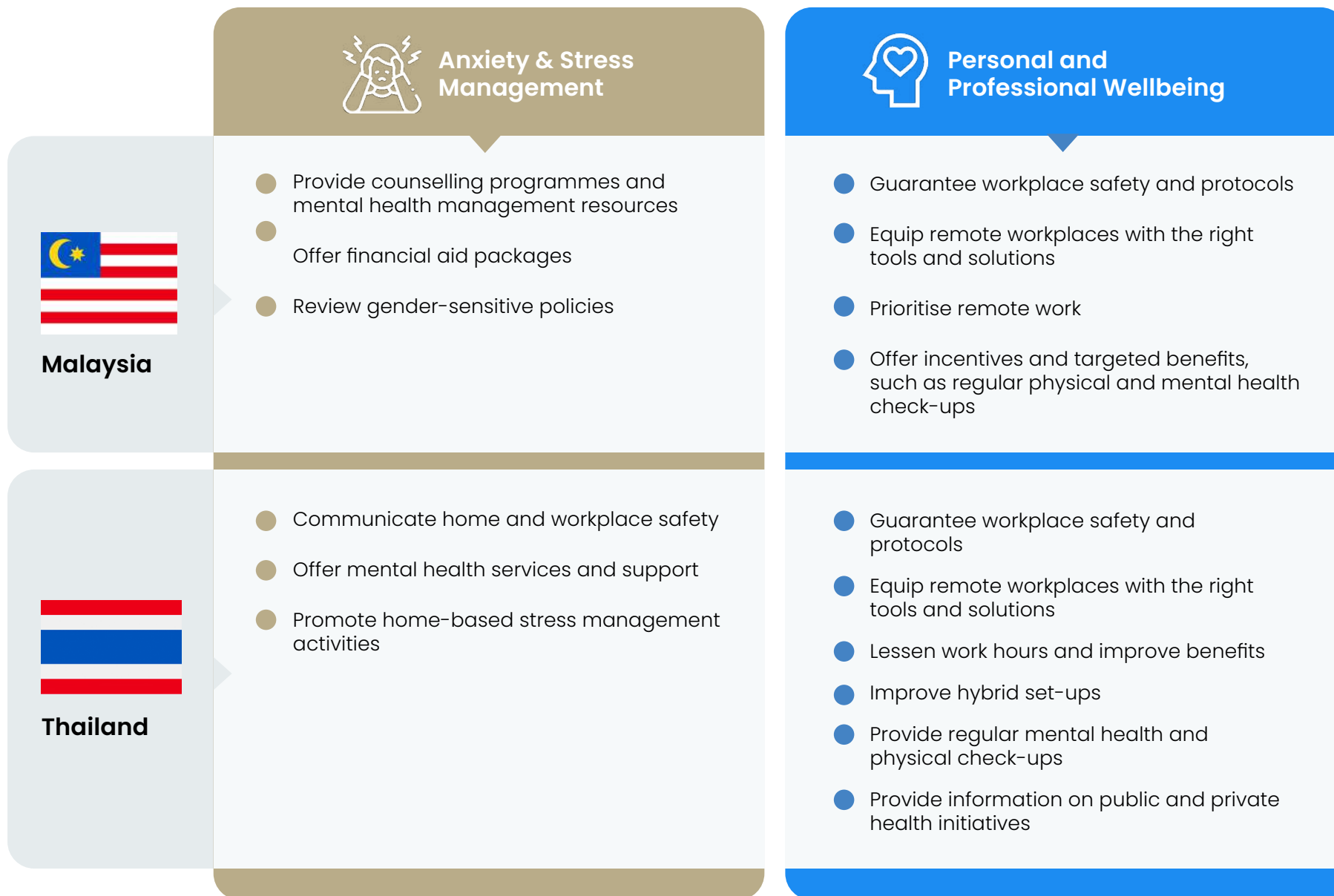
Actions per Country

Below is an infographic that shows possible solutions to the aforementioned issues that companies from the seven APAC countries can do to address their employees' needs.



	 Anxiety & Stress Management	 Personal and Professional Wellbeing	 Learning and Development
 Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate home and workplace safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equip remote work set-ups Implement flex time Reduce overtime and promote healthy work boundaries Include mental health programmes and services in job benefits Partner with telehealth or digital healthcare services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure job security through upskilling, reskilling, or new business initiatives
 The Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate home and workplace safety Strengthen social connections and engagements Highlight workers' roles and contributions to the organisation Regular physical and mental health check-ups with reliable providers Easy access to telehealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equip remote work set-ups Implement flex time Reduce overtime and promote healthy work boundaries Include mental health programmes and services in job benefits Partner with telehealth or digital healthcare services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure job security through upskilling, reskilling, or new business initiatives





Conclusion: Act Now to Foster Healthier Working Cultures

While both employers and employees are mutually struggling to adjust to the next normal set-up, organisations must act now and address employees' long term wellbeing. Though some nuances exist between APAC countries, our survey suggests that there are many commonalities between employee experiences when it comes to stressors and triggers.

Through this study, employers can take cues to understand how they can shape their policies and systems to suit their people's specific needs, thus fostering a healthier working culture within the company.

For more details on Intellect's workplace mental wellbeing solutions, reach out to team@intellect.co to book a demo today

