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the legal profession®

IBA Professional Wellbeing Commission

Workplace Wellbeing Survey 2024

Analysis and Discussion



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Summary

This document reports on the findings of a survey on workplace wellbeing in the legal profession, run by the IBA Professional Wellbeing Commission in July 2024 and completed by 236 participants.

Key findings include:

- There remain low levels of awareness within the legal sector regarding the value of law firms engaging with workplace wellbeing issues, with a lack of appropriate engagement in promotion and support for positive mental health and wellbeing.
- Developing a proactive policy for preventing wellbeing issues from arising appears to be a significant challenge for most law firms.
- Many organisations are failing to recognise the wider ethical implications of their lack of engagement on these issues.
- Many organisations have changed their attitudes to mental health and wellbeing issues since Covid-19 but this has had both positive and negative impacts.
- A breakdown of responses indicates that current top-down initiatives in jurisdictions may not be effecting substantive change across organisations or challenging the gendered nature of wellbeing issues.
- Some individual organisations are promoting positive workplace practices.
- For many organisations there is a mismatch between the intention to support/promote workplace mental health and wellbeing, and taking practical, concrete steps to back it. This is reflected in the failure of many organisations to regularly evaluate/monitor the effectiveness of the measures they have in place and/or to introduce and actively enforce a code of conduct or similar.
- Line managers are crucial to supporting workplace mental health and wellbeing, but do not receive the necessary recognition, support and training.
- Organisations are struggling to integrate their workplace wellbeing policy into the overall strategic aims of the business.

Introduction

The IBA Professional Wellbeing Commission was formed in 2021, following the publication of the IBA’s 2021 landmark study *Mental Wellbeing in the Legal Profession: A Global Study*. The Commission was invited to circulate a survey via a number of IBA Committees to inform its continued work. The survey was carried out in July 2024.

Methodology

The survey was circulated by the IBA to a number of IBA Committees. It was also circulated by individual Wellbeing Commissioners through their networks.

A total of 236 participants completed the survey from approximately 68 different jurisdictions, with the highest proportions of participants from Nigeria (9.2 per cent), Italy (5.9 per cent), Switzerland (4.6 per cent), the UK (4.4 per cent) and the US (4.1 per cent). Participants described their identity as female (50.4 per cent) and male (48.7 per cent) with 0.8 per cent preferring not to say.

Participants described their job roles in a wide range of ways, however, 52 per cent of titles contained the word ‘Partner’ and another 8.8 per cent contained other terms indicating seniority, such as ‘Director’ or ‘President’.

Participants had the following IBA memberships (by percentage of participants):

Law Firm Management Committee	20.8%
Women Lawyers’ Committee	16.1%
Young Lawyers’ Committee	14.4%
Other (please specify)	37.3%
Unknown	10.2%

The ‘Other’ category included participants from approximately 38 other IBA Committees/Sections and a number who indicated they were not a member of any.

Attitudes to wellbeing

Participants were asked to score five statements on a five-point scale from ‘Strongly agree’ to ‘Strongly disagree’. The statements were as follows:

1. Law firms in my jurisdiction are generally effective at supporting members of staff experiencing poor mental health or poor wellbeing.
2. Law firms in my jurisdiction are generally effective at preventing work-related mental health and wellbeing issues from arising.
3. Law firms in my jurisdiction are generally effective at actively promoting positive workplace mental health and wellbeing for members of staff.
4. Law firms in my jurisdiction generally recognise that actively promoting positive workplace mental health and wellbeing can lead to greater productivity and higher performance.
5. Law firms in my jurisdiction generally recognise that there is an ethical duty upon them to actively promote positive workplace mental health and wellbeing.

For statements 1, 2, 3 and 5, more participants selected ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ than any other option. The highest levels of disagreement were with statements 1 and 2 (focused on effective support and prevention), totalling 47.84 per cent for statement 1 and 57.69 per cent for statement 2. For statement 4 (wellbeing and productivity/performance), only 28.76 per cent selected ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with 28.76 selecting ‘neither agree nor disagree’ and 44.2 per cent selecting ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’. This suggests that law firms have some (although still relatively low) awareness of the links between wellbeing and productivity/performance, but are not yet effectively preventing, or providing support for, wellbeing issues, or recognising their wider ethical implications.

Overall, members of the Law Firm Management Committee were more likely to ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statements (on occasion it was general members or those who responded ‘unknown’ when asked about affiliations). Members of the Young Lawyers’ Committee and Women Lawyers’ Committee were more likely to ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ (with the same caveat as above).

The exception was statement 4 (wellbeing and productivity/performance), where members of the Women Lawyers’ Committee were most likely to ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ and members of the Young Lawyers’ Committee were most likely to ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’.

When analysed by gender, participants identifying as female were most likely to ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with each statement. This suggests the forms of disjuncture identified in the IBA’s 2021 report between the (more positive) views of employers and (more negative) views of employees and the gendered nature of wellbeing issues still persist within law.

The final question in this section asked: ‘Do you think attitudes to mental health and wellbeing issues within the legal profession in your jurisdiction have changed materially from pre-Covid-19 to now?’ 40.71 per cent of participants answered ‘yes’, 26.92 per cent answered ‘no’ and 22.22 per cent were unsure.

Participants were given the option to explain their answer and 26 chose to do so. The majority of comments indicated that there had been a greater awareness of mental health and wellbeing issues since Covid-19:

Yes, I believe Covid put mental health issues on display and currently the awareness is much higher. Still room for improvement of course.

However, several indicated there had been no change, or suggested that this awareness had not yet been translated into effective action or that law firms were simply paying 'lip service' to concerns:

No, because profitability has become even more important, and everyone is required to work more in order to increase profitability.

On the surface level law firms are instituting wellbeing programmes and acknowledging mental health but their performance requirements, behind closed door attitudes about folks with mental health issues, and leadership still focusing on squeezing every last bit from subordinates is the same...

Hybrid working was mentioned in both positive and negative terms:

Working from remote is more accepted than before Covid.

More awareness of remote work, which caused work to be omnipresent in everyone's lives. Clients are ruthless in demanding presence 24/7.

Therefore, it appears that changes in attitude have had both positive and negative impacts.

Organisational approach

Participants were asked a series of questions about the approach of their current (or most recent) organisation to mental health and wellbeing, requiring 'yes', 'no' or 'unsure' answers.

A majority of participants (62.56 per cent) indicated that the support and promotion of employees' mental health and wellbeing is an integral part of their organisation's overall strategy and that their organisation has a workplace culture that supports and promotes the mental health and wellbeing of its employees (64.29 per cent). However, only 39.21 per cent of participants indicated that their organisation regularly evaluated/monitored the effectiveness of the measures it had in place to support and promote employees' mental health and wellbeing, and only 22.12 per cent indicated that their organisation has (or have signed up to) a workplace code of conduct or similar. Of those organisations which have signed up to such a code, just over half (57.73 per cent) were perceived to be actively enforcing it and of those which actively enforced it, only just over a third (38.89 per cent) were engaging with clients to enforce it. This translates to only five per cent of law firms signing up to a workplace code of conduct which is enforced through active client engagement.

It was members of the Law Firm Management Committee who were most likely to answer that their organisation has a workplace culture that supports and promotes the mental health and wellbeing of its employees 'yes' (69.4 per cent). Members of the Young Lawyers' Committee were most likely to answer 'no' (38.2 per cent). There was no significant gender difference. This finding again supports the notion that there is a disjuncture between the views of employers and their employees, particular in this case their younger (and likely more junior) employees.

The role of line managers

Participants were asked a series of questions about the role of line managers in their current (or most recent) organisation to mental health and wellbeing, requiring 'yes', 'no' or 'unsure' answers. There was less variation between genders in these answers.

A majority of participants (59.82 per cent) indicated that their organisation views supporting employees' mental health and/or wellbeing as an important part of the role of line managers. However, less than a third (31.11 per cent) agreed that their organisation provides line managers with sufficient resources to enable them to do this.

In relation to both of the above questions, it was the Law Firm Management Committee members who were most likely to answer 'yes' and the Young Lawyers' Committee members who were most likely to answer 'no'.

27.11 per cent indicated that their organisation provides appropriate skill-based training for line managers in how to build an effective and supportive team, and 21.33 per cent said their organisation provides appropriate skill-based training for line managers in supporting and promoting the mental health and wellbeing of its employees. Interestingly, it was members of the Young Lawyers' Committee who were most likely to answer 'yes' to these questions, and members of the Law Firm Management Committee who were most likely to answer 'no'. This could suggest that those in line manager positions feel they lack the support and training to undertake aspects of this role effectively.

When asked whether the performance indicators applicable to line managers in their organisation encourage line managers in supporting employees' mental health and/or wellbeing, the results were mixed with 10.67 per cent of participants saying 'yes – fully', 30.22 per cent saying 'yes – partially', 40.44 per cent saying 'no' and 18.67 per cent unsure. Clearly, further work is needed in integrating any wellbeing policy into the overall strategy of many law firms.

Discussion

In relation to attitudes to wellbeing, participants' responses suggest that there remain low levels of awareness within the sector regarding the value of law firms engaging with workplace wellbeing issues, with a lack of appropriate engagement in promotion and support for positive mental health *and wellbeing and a failure to recognise the wider ethical implications. Developing a proactive policy preventing wellbeing issues from arising also appears to be a significant challenge for most law firms.*

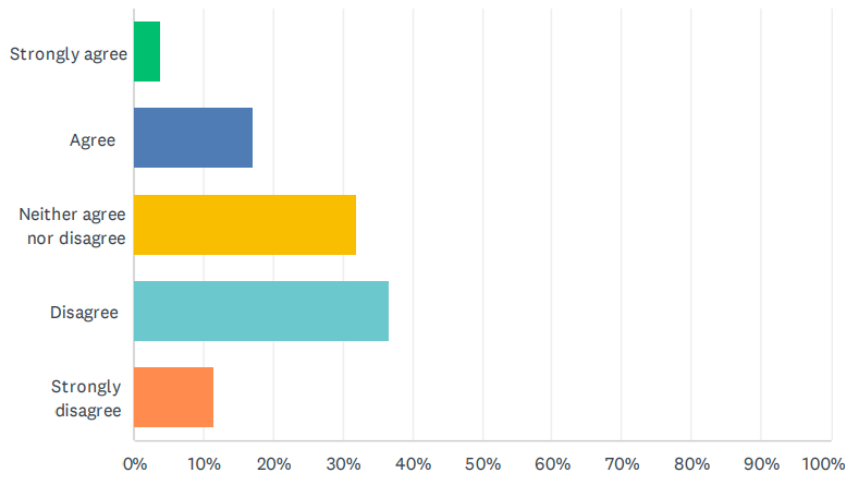
Although it was indicated that some law firms have an awareness of the the links between wellbeing and productivity/performance, still only 44.2 per cent of participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that this was the case. Although there were indications of material change since Covid-19, this was not necessarily seen as positive in nature. The breakdown of responses by committee suggests that current top-down initiatives may not be effecting substantive change across organisations or challenging the gendered nature of wellbeing issues.

In relation to participants' organisations, the picture was mixed, with some indications that individual organisations are seeking to promote positive workplace practices. However, there continues to be a significant mismatch between the intention to support/promote workplace mental health and wellbeing, and firms taking practical, concrete steps to back it up either through active monitoring and evaluation of measures, or through introducing a code of conduct enforcing these standards. In particular, law firms appear to be very reluctant to engage with clients on these topics.

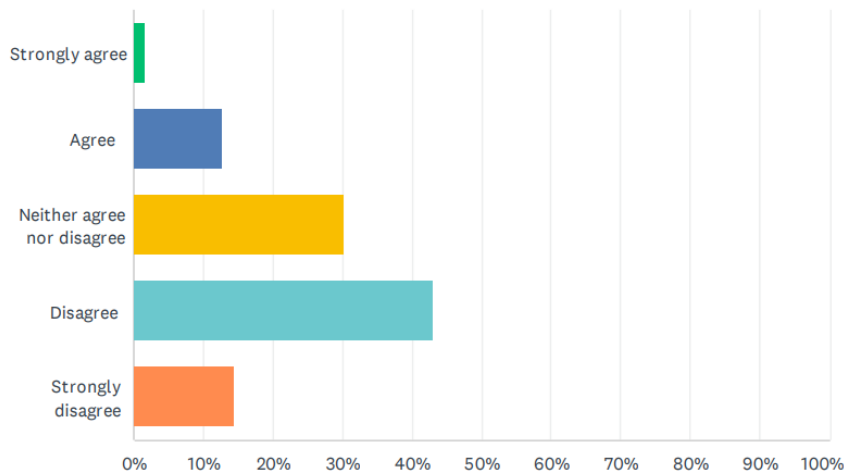
In relation to the role of line managers, while a majority of law firms recognise the crucial role of line management in supporting workplace mental health and wellbeing, this is not being followed up with practical support and training. It appears relatively few line managers are given the recognition (via performance indicators), resources and the skills training to support them in this role. *This has clear implications for any law firm seeking to integrate mental health and wellbeing considerations into their strategy.*

Appendix: Visual representation of responses

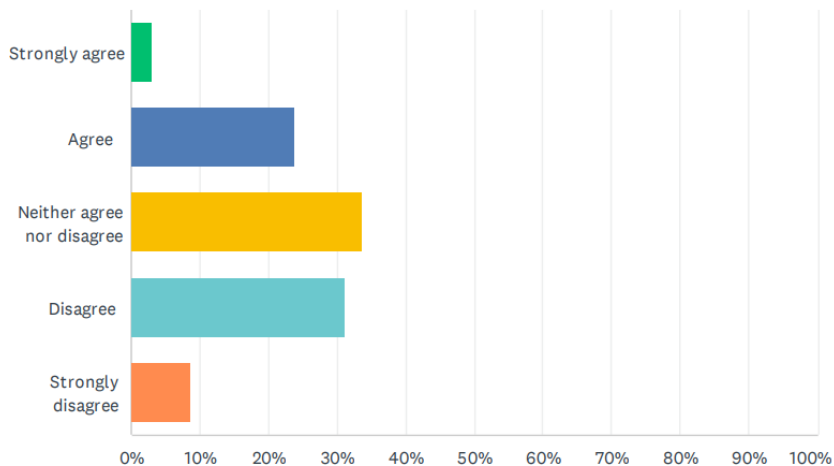
Law firms in my jurisdiction are generally effective at supporting members of staff experiencing poor mental health or poor wellbeing.



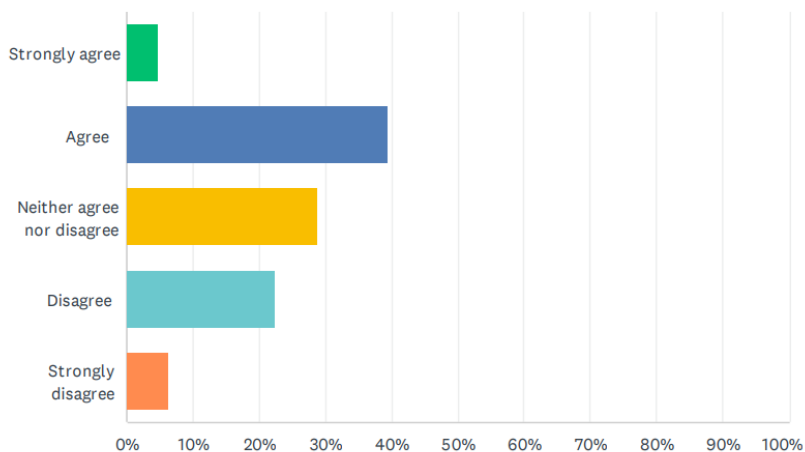
Law firms in my jurisdiction are generally effective at preventing work-related mental health and wellbeing issues from arising.



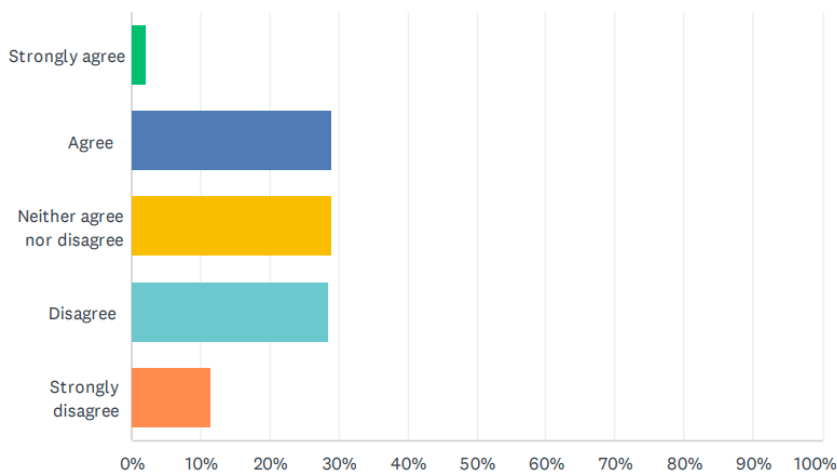
Law firms in my jurisdiction are generally effective at actively promoting positive workplace mental health and wellbeing for members of staff.



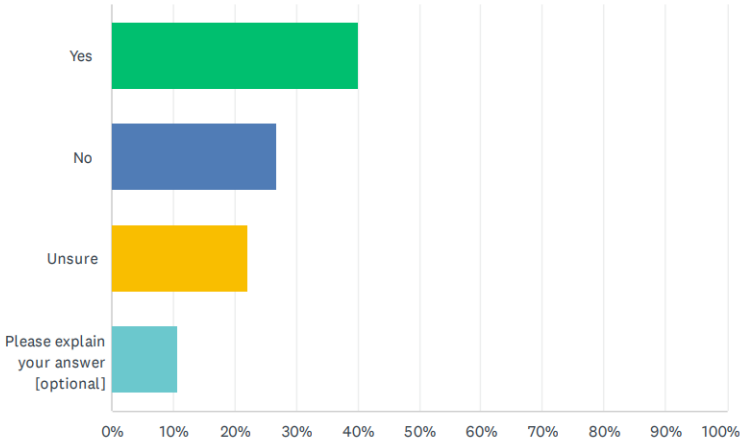
Law firms in my jurisdiction generally recognise that actively promoting positive workplace mental health and wellbeing can lead to greater productivity and higher performance.



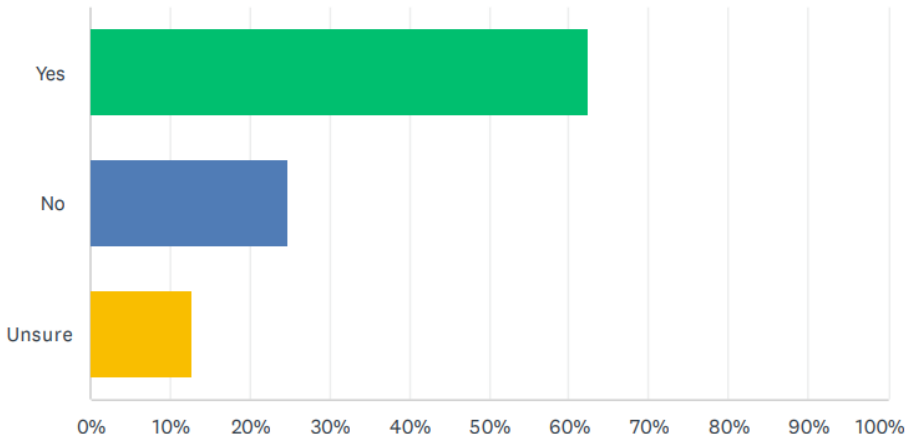
Law firms in my jurisdiction generally recognise that there is an ethical duty upon them to actively promote positive workplace mental health and wellbeing.



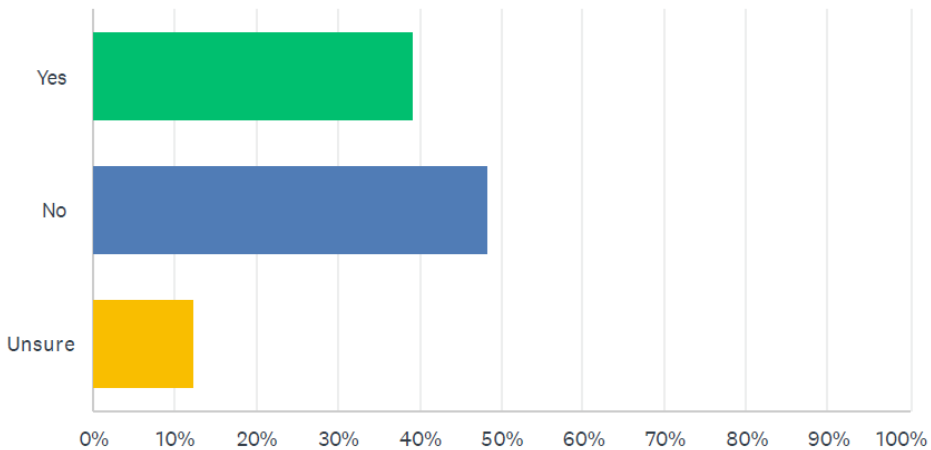
Do you think attitudes to mental health and wellbeing issues within the legal profession in your jurisdiction have changed materially from pre-Covid-19 to now?



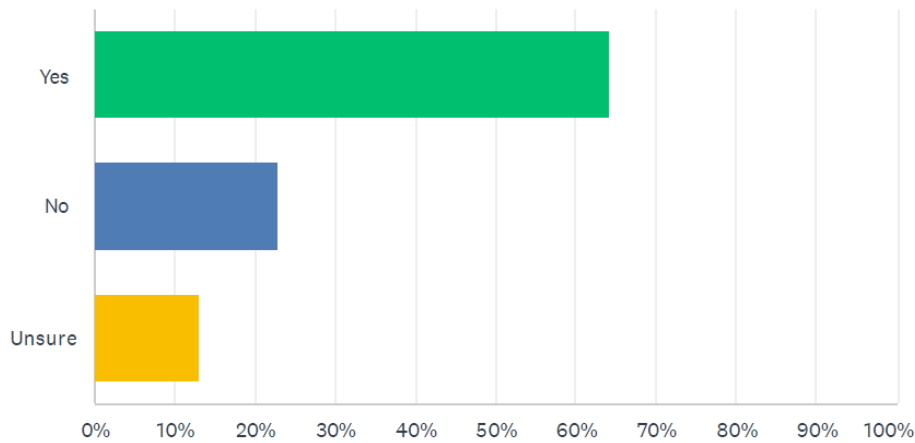
Is the support and promotion of employees' mental health and wellbeing an integral part of your organisation's overall strategy?



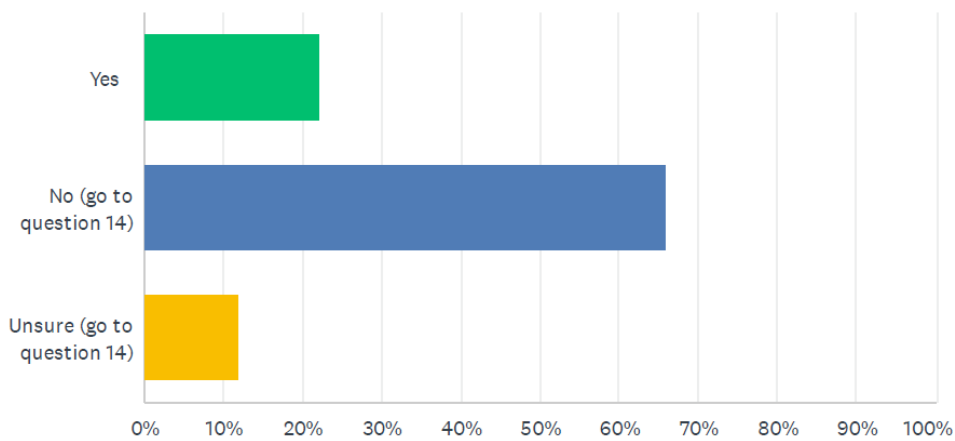
Does your organisation regularly evaluate/monitor the effectiveness of the measures it has in place to support and promote employees' mental health and wellbeing?



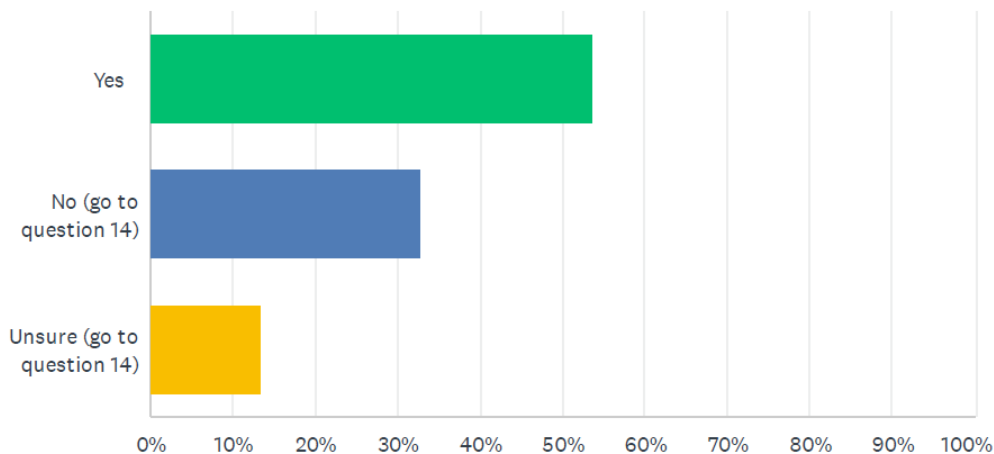
Do you consider that your organisation has a workplace culture that supports and promotes the mental health and wellbeing of its employees (eg, family-friendly working hours, ability to take time off for wellbeing reasons, open-door discussion policies relating to mental health and wellbeing).



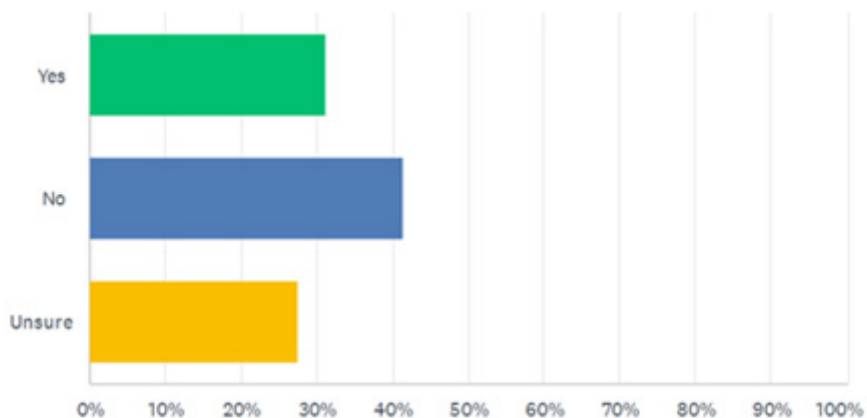
Does your organisation have (or has it signed up to) a workplace code of conduct or similar (for example, the Mindful Business Charter) that seeks actively to promote the mental health and wellbeing of its employees?



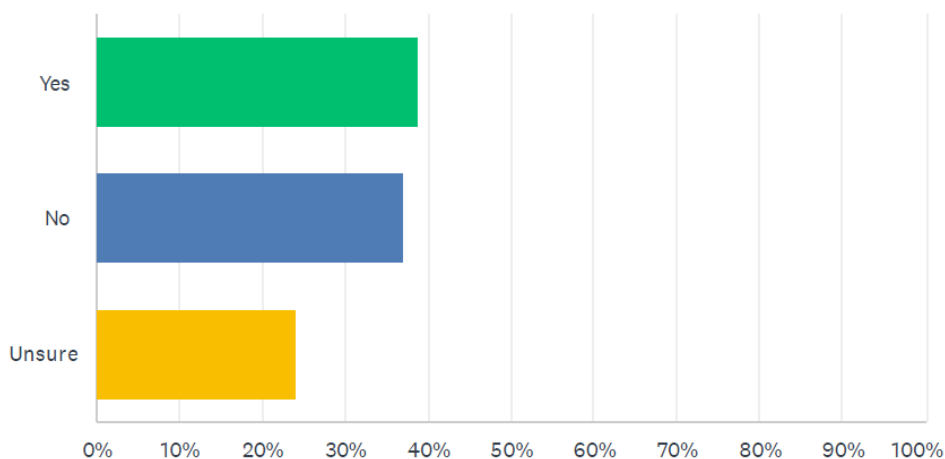
If so, does your organisation actively enforce such a code of conduct?



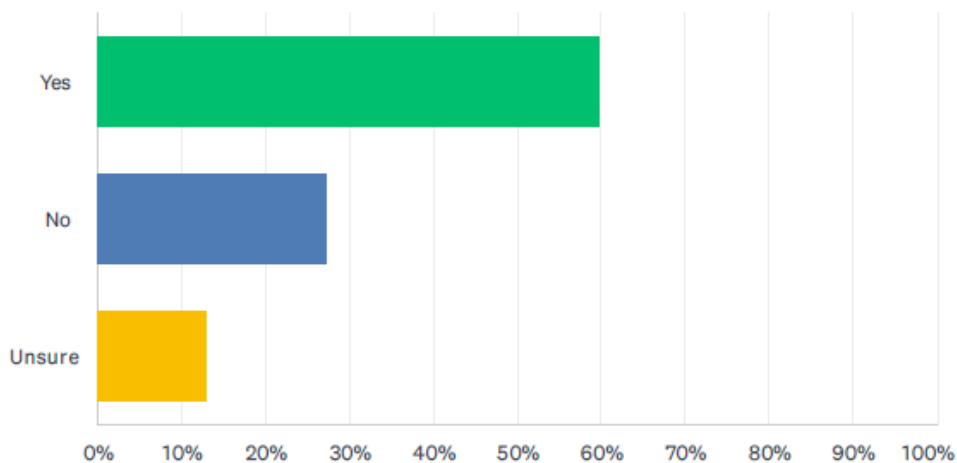
Does your organisation provide line managers with sufficient resources to enable them to support employee's mental health and wellbeing?



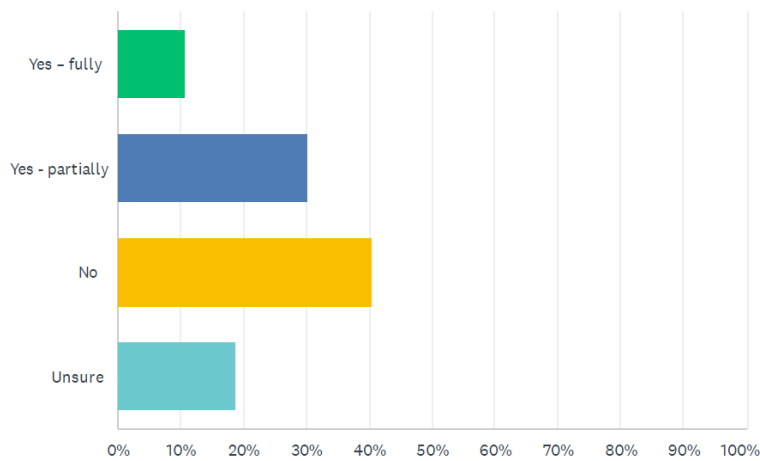
If so, does your organisation seek to engage with clients in enforcing such a workplace code of conduct?



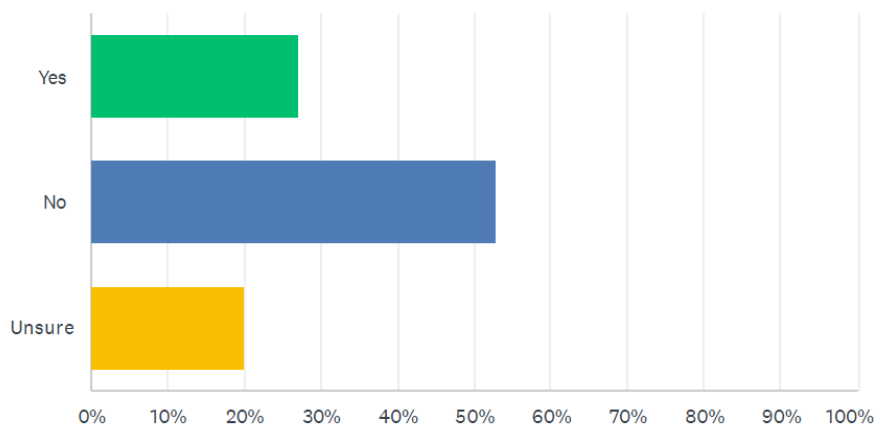
Does your organisation view supporting employees' mental health and/or wellbeing as an important part of the role of line managers?



Do the performance indicators applicable to line managers in your organisation encourage line managers in supporting employees' mental health and/or wellbeing?



Does your organisation provide appropriate skill-based training for your line managers in how to build an effective and supportive team?



Does your organisation provide appropriate skill-based training for your line managers in supporting and promoting the mental health and wellbeing of its employees?

