

Connected at work yet feeling alone

The workplace connection gap

Employees today are more digitally connected than ever, through constant messages, meetings and shared platforms, yet a growing number still feel alone at work. Globally, 15% of working-age adults live with a mental disorder in 2019, and depression and anxiety cost the global economy roughly US\$1 trillion in lost productivity every year¹.

Country snapshots

Philippines

30%

of Filipino employees felt lonely a lot of the previous day (the highest rate in SEA) despite the Philippines also having the region's most engaged workforce at 39%³

Indonesia

23%

of Indonesian employees felt lonely a lot of the previous day, above the Southeast Asia average of 19%⁴.

Thailand

83%

of Thais report feeling lonely, with office workers experiencing the highest levels of loneliness of all groups surveyed⁵.

Malaysia

41%

of Malaysian employees report feeling burnt out or exhausted, alongside broader concerns about workplace stress⁶.

Singapore

14%

of employees in Singapore are engaged at work, against a 20% global average⁷, and Singapore also ranks lowest in the region for psychological safety⁸.

Hong Kong

~80%

of Hong Kong employees report feeling emotionally exhausted, overly tired or significantly demotivated at work⁹.

Japan

8%

of employees in Japan are engaged¹¹. Despite relatively low reported loneliness (11%), disconnection may surface through quiet withdrawal and disengagement linked to long working hours.¹²

India

59%

of Indian employees report burnout symptoms, the highest of 30 countries surveyed by McKinsey, against a 22% global average¹⁴.

From psychosocial risk to organisational resilience



What are psychosocial risks?

Workplace conditions, such as excessive workloads, unclear roles and low psychological safety, that can impact both employee wellbeing and organisational performance.

Why psychological safety matters?

When employees feel safe to speak up, ask questions, admit mistakes or seek help without fear of embarrassment or punishment, organisations are better placed to address emerging risks before they affect wellbeing, performance and productivity¹⁶.

Potential hidden costs to organisations



Reduced productivity, engagement and quality of output



Higher absenteeism, presenteeism and burnout-related turnover



Weaker collaboration, innovation and psychological safety



Increased mental health related medical and insurance costs



Reputational and talent attraction risks in competitive labour markets

Areas organisations can consider supporting



Identifying and managing psychosocial risks as part of health, safety and enterprise risk frameworks



Building workload governance and manager accountability into everyday practice



Establishing regular, structured checks on psychological safety



Creating real opportunities for connection, e.g. mentoring, peer networks, cross-team collaboration



Equipping managers to hold proactive, ongoing wellbeing check-ins, as routine as task check-ins, not an annual formality



Five questions for leaders, including HR, may consider asking

1 **Are workloads realistic and sustainable?**
Routine work beyond capacity is a risk factor, not just an inconvenience.

2 **Do employees understand what is expected of them?**
Ambiguity is one of the most common, most fixable, drivers of stress.

3 **Do managers have the capability and time to support their teams?**
Stretched managers can't spot early signs of burnout or disengagement.

4 **Do employees feel safe to speak up without fear?**
When speaking up feels unsafe, people stay quiet, and issues stay hidden.

5 **Do employees feel that they genuinely belong?**
Belonging is the difference between showing up and being seen.

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For references visit: <https://www.howdengroup.com/connected-at-work-feeling-alone>