



WHAT GLOBAL WORKERS WANT AND THE GLOBAL WORKER EXPERIENCE



**GLOBAL WORKER PROJECT
RESEARCH REPORT**

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INTRODUCTION

In today’s competitive global labor market, the concept of a “good job” is being redefined. Workers now seek more than just good pay; they desire meaningful work, a sense of purpose, and a positive work environment. This shift necessitates a deeper exploration of what constitutes a “good job” from the perspective of the global workforce.

Several entities have made a concerted effort to define what “good jobs” are. For example, according to the [U.S. Department of Labor’s Good Jobs Initiative](#), a “good job” is one that provides stability and security, good pay and benefits, a safe and healthy work environment, opportunities for skill and career advancement, an inclusive and respectful workplace culture, and equitable opportunities for all workers. Similarly, [the United Nations has defined “decent work”](#) as employment that is productive; delivers a fair income; ensures workplace security; and offers social protection, fair treatment, and prospects for personal development and social integration. As organizations worldwide grapple with persistent labor shortages, understanding workers’ access to “good jobs” is more crucial than ever to attract and retain top talent.

This report delves into the expectations and experiences of the global workforce, examining the key job features that matter most to them and how workers’ level of satisfaction with these features impacts two important outcomes: workers’ mental health and their perceptions of job quality. By exploring and highlighting the multifaceted nature of workers’ expectations and experiences, this report underscores key opportunities for employers to build a more resilient and motivated workforce while simultaneously driving better business outcomes.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- » **The global workforce rated good pay and benefits¹ and a fair and respectful work environment as their top two most important job features.** Globally, **roughly 9 in 10** workers rated good pay and benefits and a work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully as very or extremely important to them in a job, the strongest rankings among the 17 job features explored in the study.
- » **There are significant gaps in worker satisfaction among the job features that the global workforce values most.** Although **over 80%** of global workers ranked good pay and benefits, a work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully, job security and stability, opportunities to use their skills and abilities, and flexibility to manage both life and work issues as very or extremely important job features, only **about 40% to 60%** said they are very or extremely satisfied in each of these five areas.
- » **Only about half of workers globally said their jobs are high-quality.** When assessing job quality, **just over half** of global workers (**55%**) gave a high rating, while **about a third (31%)** rated their job quality as average and **13%** rated their job quality as low.
- » **Independent workers reported higher job quality and more-positive mental health impacts than workers of other types.** Among independent workers, **over half** rated their job as high-quality (**61%**) and said their job has had a positive or very positive impact on their mental health in the last six months (**54%**).
- » **Over half of workers facing low job quality and negative mental health impacts from their work are actively job hunting.** Of the workers who said their job has negatively impacted their mental health, **half (51%)** are actively job seeking versus only **19%** among those who said their job has had a positive mental health impact. **Roughly 3 in 5** workers who rated their job quality as low (**61%**) said they are actively seeking another job, but only **14%** of workers who rated their job as high-quality said they are doing so.



¹For this research, the term “good pay and benefits” was left open to workers’ personal interpretations, recognizing that its meaning is likely to vary depending on each worker’s individual circumstances.

DEFINING A ‘GOOD JOB’ GLOBALLY: WHAT GLOBAL WORKERS WANT

To understand how well jobs across the globe are currently meeting workers’ needs and to explore what constitutes a “good job” to the global workforce, we asked workers about their attitudes and experiences across 17 key job features, including compensation, security, autonomy, flexibility, learning, meaning, and belonging. We found that when it comes to defining a “good job,” workers globally don’t value just one thing. Rather, there’s a wide range of job features that contribute meaningfully to the global worker’s workplace experience.

Globally, the data showed that workers highly value good pay and benefits as well as a work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully, among other features or characteristics. However, a notable portion of the global workforce indicated that their current jobs are falling short of these expectations. Despite the high importance that workers assigned to these key job features, there are notable discrepancies between what workers rated as important to them and how satisfied they said they are with these aspects of their job.

For example, some of the largest gaps are in areas that workers rated as most important: good pay and benefits, a work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully, job security or stability, opportunities to use your skills and abilities, the flexibility to manage both life and work issues, and a good relationship with your manager. **Over 80%** of global workers ranked these aspects of their job as very or extremely important, but only **about 40% to 60%** said they are very or extremely satisfied in these six areas.



How Well Do Jobs Meet Global Workers' Needs?



Percentage of workers who rated the following job features as very or extremely important to them in a job versus the percentage who said they are very or extremely satisfied with this feature in their current job.



| | % Who Said This Feature Is Very or Extremely Important | % Who Are Very or Extremely Satisfied with This Feature | Gap ▼ |
|---|---|---|-------|
| Good pay and benefits | 90% | 43% | 47 |
| Career advancement opportunities | 72% | 43% | 29 |
| A work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully | 89% | 62% | 28 |
| Job security or stability | 88% | 60% | 28 |
| Opportunities to use your skills and abilities | 82% | 55% | 27 |
| Recognition for doing good work | 76% | 50% | 26 |
| Learning and development opportunities | 76% | 51% | 25 |
| A manageable workload | 78% | 55% | 24 |
| Flexibility to manage both life and work issues | 82% | 58% | 23 |
| Opportunity to do work that is meaningful to you | 78% | 56% | 23 |
| A good relationship with your manager* | 81% | 61% | 19 |
| Flexibility in work hours and schedule | 73% | 57% | 16 |
| Autonomy and independence over how you do your work | 73% | 60% | 13 |
| The ability to give input on your work schedule (i.e., the hours or days that you work) | 68% | 55% | 13 |
| A sense of belonging or community | 68% | 56% | 11 |
| A predictable work schedule | 67% | 58% | 10 |
| Freedom to reject work projects | 41% | 40% | 1 |

*"A good relationship with my manager" was not shown to independent workers who own their own business as their primary job.

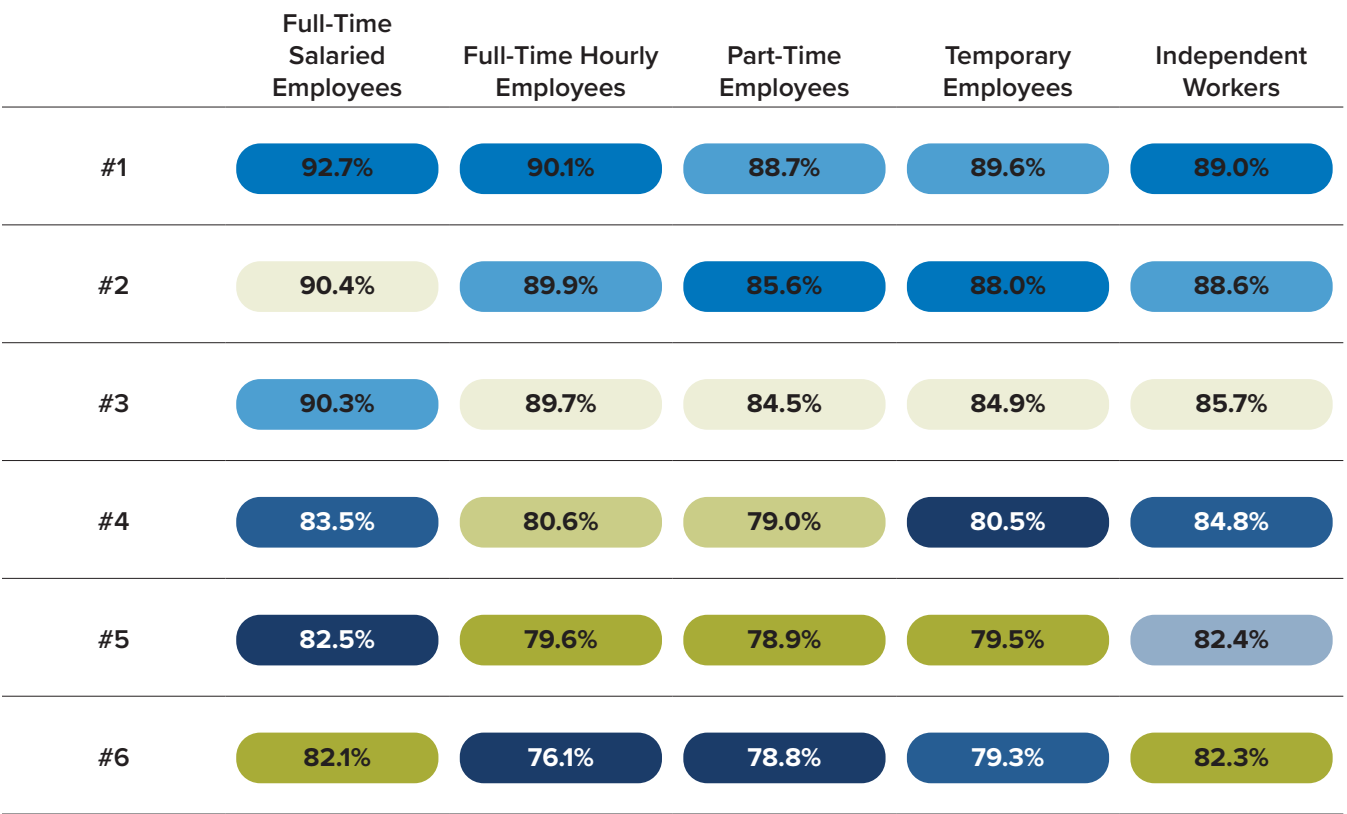


WHAT WORKERS WANT VARIES BY WORKER TYPE

Globally, workers of different types — full-time salaried employees, full-time hourly employees, part-time employees, temporary employees, and independent workers — converge on several aspects of work that they value the most. Regardless of worker type, **good pay and benefits, a work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully, job security or stability, and flexibility to manage both life and work issues** all rank among the top six job features that workers of each type said are very or extremely important to them, making them essential elements of good jobs globally. This list demonstrates that while good pay and job security are baseline needs that are important to all workers, what makes for a “good job” goes beyond pay alone.

There are commonalities between the top six job features that workers of each type value most in a job, but there are also differences. For example, full-time salaried employees, temporary employees, and independent workers particularly value jobs that offer them opportunities to leverage their skills and abilities to their full potential, whereas full-time hourly employees and part-time employees particularly value jobs that offer a manageable workload. Full-time salaried employees, full-time hourly employees, part-time employees, and temporary employees place a high value on having a good relationship with their manager, whereas independent workers place particular emphasis on jobs that give them the opportunity to do work that they find personally meaningful.

The Top 6 Features Rated as Very or Extremely Important by Worker Type 



■ Good pay and benefits
 ■ Opportunities to use your skills and abilities
 ■ A good relationship with your manager*
 ■ Flexibility to manage both life and work issues
 ■ A work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully
 ■ Job security or stability
 ■ A manageable workload
 ■ Opportunity to do work that is meaningful to you

*Response was not shown to independent workers who own their business as their primary job.

WHAT WORKERS WANT VARIES BY COUNTRY

Echoing the findings by worker type, workers across the different countries explored in the study also converged on many of the aspects of work that they value the most. Across all 16 countries, either good pay and benefits or a work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully were ranked by the greatest percentage of workers as a job feature that is very or extremely important to them. For the few countries for whom both of these job features were not the two ranked highly by the most respondents, they were still within the top five job features workers said are very or extremely important. This suggests high convergence on good pay and benefits and a fair and respectful work environment as highly important to workers across the globe. The only other job feature that consistently ranked in the top five features that the most workers, regardless of country, consider very or extremely important was job security and stability.

| Regardless of country, workers consistently ranked good pay and benefits and a fair and respectful work environment as top job features that are very or extremely important to them. | | | | |
|---|--|---------|---|---------|
| Good pay and benefits | | | A work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully | |
| | % Who Said This Feature Is Very or Extremely Important | Rank | % Who Said This Feature Is Very or Extremely Important | Rank |
| Nigeria | 97% | 1 | 96% | 2 |
| Mexico | 97% | 1 | 95% | 2 |
| Indonesia | 96% | 1 | 94% | 2 |
| Brazil | 96% | 2 | 96% | 1 |
| Dominican Republic | 96% | 2 | 98% | 1 |
| South Africa | 95% | 1 (tie) | 95% | 1 (tie) |
| India | 95% | 1 | 92% | 4 |
| UAE | 92% | 1 | 89% | 2 |
| Canada | 89% | 2 | 90% | 1 |
| U.S. | 89% | 2 | 90% | 1 |
| Australia | 89% | 2 | 91% | 1 |
| U.K. | 88% | 1 | 87% | 2 |
| Italy | 86% | 3 | 87% | 1 |
| Germany | 86% | 2 | 89% | 1 |
| China | 82% | 1 | 76% | 4 |
| Japan | 73% | 1 | 66% | 5 |

These findings continue to highlight that across the globe, workers not only highly value practical benefits such as compensation but also value less-material workplace features such as access to fair and respectful workplaces with similar regard.

THE GLOBAL WORKER EXPERIENCE: HOW WORKERS' SATISFACTION WITH THESE JOB FEATURES IMPACTS KEY WORKPLACE OUTCOMES

A variety of job features play a critical role in how workers perceive and experience their jobs globally. To further understand how these features shape the global worker experience, we assessed two worker health and well-being indicators: how workers rate the overall quality of their job and how their job impacts their mental health.

JOB QUALITY PERCEPTIONS

When evaluating how workers perceive their jobs, it is crucial to consider their perceived job quality. Workers frequently serve as ambassadors for their workplaces through word of mouth, and their job quality ratings can serve as indicators to prospective job seekers about whether an organization is a good place to work. This may impact an organization's ability to attract and retain top talent. Independent workers who do not work for organizations may also contribute to the perception and reputation of certain gig work opportunities and professions and, in turn, affect the interest of others in pursuing independent work.

Gaining insight into job quality ratings can provide an assessment of how jobs are perceived by the global workforce, helping organizations and policymakers look deeper and discover where potential issues are. When global workers were asked to rate their jobs on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the worst possible job and 10 is the best possible job, **just over half (55%)** rated their job quality as high (8 to 10 rating). **About a third** of global workers (**31%**) rated their job quality as average (6 to 7 rating), and **13%** rated their job quality as low (1 to 5 rating).

Over Half of Workers Globally Rated Their Job Quality as High

On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 representing the worst possible job and 10 representing the best possible job), how would you rate the overall quality of your primary job?



Note: Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

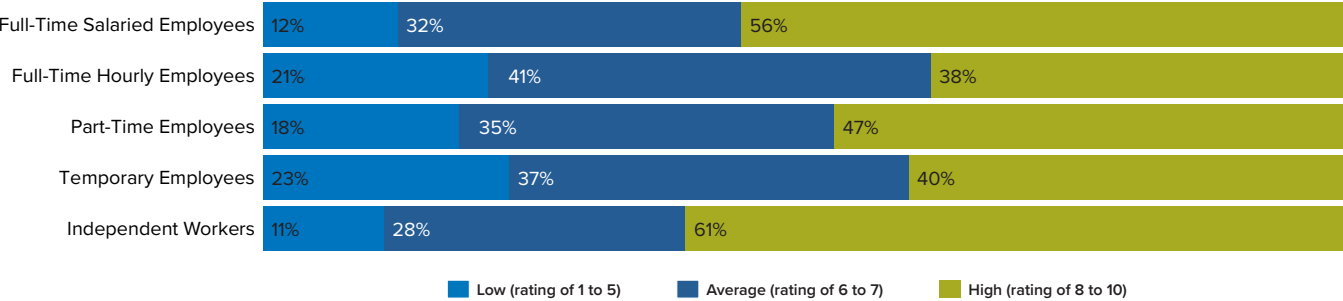


COMPARING JOB QUALITY RATINGS ACROSS WORKER TYPES

When looking at ratings of job quality across the five worker types, independent workers (61%) and full-time salaried workers (56%) were significantly more likely than workers of other types to rate their job quality as high (rating of 8 to 10 on a 10-point scale).

Comparing Job Quality Ratings Across Worker Types

Percentage of workers who rated the quality of their job as low, average, or high on a scale of 1 to 10.



UNDERSTANDING THE JOB FEATURES THAT DRIVE WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS OF JOB QUALITY

Recognizing that only **55%** of workers consider their jobs to be high-quality, employers might wonder how they can improve these perceptions. With numerous options available, where should employers focus their efforts to have the greatest impact? Based on a driver analysis of the 17 job features explored in the study, the data showed that workers' satisfaction with their pay and benefits, the number of opportunities they have to use their skills and abilities, and the level of opportunity they have to do work that is meaningful to them are among the top five drivers of workers' job quality perceptions, regardless of worker type.²

Some unique drivers emerged, as well. For example, among independent workers, satisfaction with their level of job security or stability emerged as a unique top-five driver of job quality perceptions. This driver of job quality aligns with how many independent workers tend to operate, because they are often freelancers and gig workers with more-variable work schedules or self-employed individuals who rely on multiple jobs or clients for consistent work. For part-time employees, satisfaction with their relationship with their manager was a unique top-five driver of job quality perceptions. Given that many part-time workers work part time for the flexibility it offers, having a manager who understands and can accommodate those needs is likely to boost perceptions of job quality.

The Top 5 Drivers of Job Quality by Worker Type



| Full-Time Salaried Employees | Full-Time Hourly Employees | Part-Time Employees | Temporary Employees | Independent Workers |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Good pay and benefits | Opportunities to use your skills and abilities | Opportunity to do work that is meaningful to you | Opportunity to do work that is meaningful to you | Good pay and benefits |
| Opportunities to use your skills and abilities | Good pay and benefits | Good pay and benefits | Opportunities to use your skills and abilities | Opportunity to do work that is meaningful to you |
| Opportunity to do work that is meaningful to you | Opportunity to do work that is meaningful to you | A good relationship with your manager* | Autonomy and independence over how you do your work | Opportunities to use your skills and abilities |
| A sense of belonging or community | Career advancement opportunities | Recognition for doing good work | A work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully | Learning and development opportunities |
| Career advancement opportunities | Learning and development opportunities | Opportunities to use your skills and abilities | Good pay and benefits | Job security or stability |

*"A good relationship with your manager" was not shown to independent workers who own their own business as their primary job.

² "A good relationship with your manager" was excluded from the driver analysis for independent workers because independent workers who own their own business as their primary job were not shown this response.

As shown earlier in the report, independent workers and full-time salaried employees were significantly more likely than workers of other types to rate their job as high-quality. Notably, it is because independent workers and full-time salaried employees are significantly more satisfied than other types of workers across the key job features that their job quality perceptions are higher:

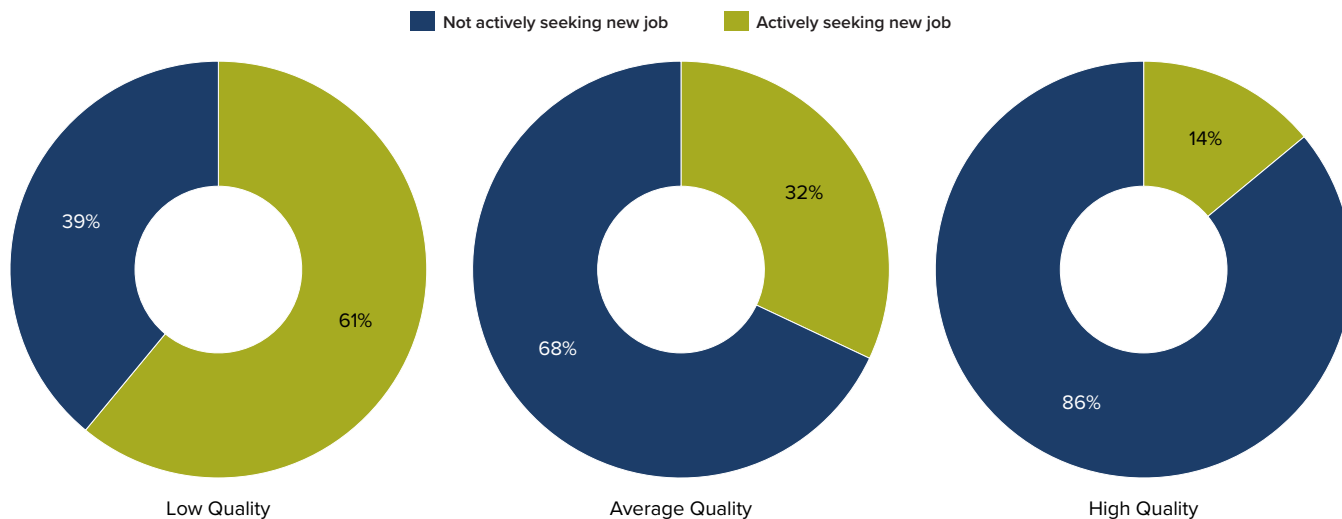
- » **47%** of independent workers and **43%** of full-time salaried employees reported being very or extremely satisfied with their **pay and benefits** versus **31% to 35%** of workers of other types.
- » **61%** of independent workers and **55%** of full-time salaried employees reported being very or extremely satisfied with **the number of opportunities they have to use their skills and abilities** versus **41% to 45%** of workers of other types.
- » **62%** of independent workers and **54%** of full-time salaried employees reported being very or extremely satisfied with **the level of opportunity they have to do work that is meaningful to them** versus **44% to 48%** of workers of other types.



HOW LOW-QUALITY JOBS DRIVE JOB-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Workers who perceived their jobs to be low quality were significantly more likely to be job hunting than those who said they believe they're working a high-quality job. **Sixty-one percent** of workers who rated their job quality as low said they are actively seeking a new job versus only **1 in 3** workers (**32%**) who rated their job as average and only **14%** of workers who rated their job as high-quality.

Workers Who Perceive Their Jobs to Be Low Quality Are More Likely to Be Actively Job Hunting



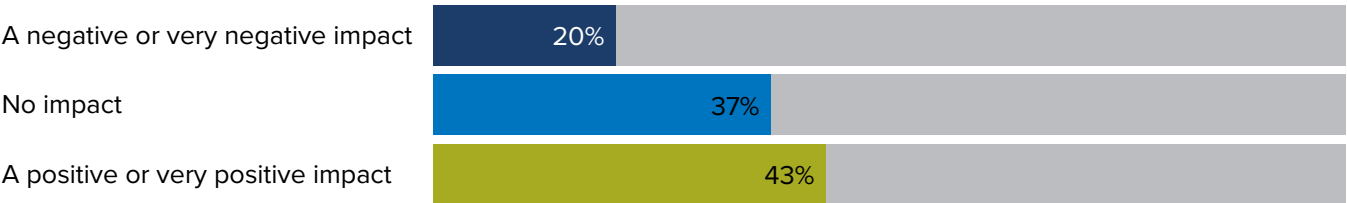
MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Conversations around mental health are increasingly garnering global attention, especially in the context of work, and there is increasing recognition from the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and the [U.S. Office of the Surgeon General](#) that work can play an active role in both helping and harming workers' mental health. Furthermore, research has shown that the impact jobs have on workers' mental health and well-being has important implications for key business outcomes. In fact, [global analytics and advisory firm Gallup estimated](#) that low employee engagement costs the global economy \$8.9 trillion, or 9% of global gross domestic product. Additionally, [the WHO estimated](#) that, globally, 12 billion working days are lost every year to depression and anxiety at a cost of \$1 trillion per year in lost productivity.

Our data found that **1 in 5** workers globally (**20%**) reported that their job has had a negative or very negative impact on their mental health in the last six months. **More than double that percentage (43%)** reported that their job has had a positive or very positive impact on their mental health. **Thirty-seven percent** of workers reported that their job has had no impact on their mental health.

How Jobs Are Impacting Workers' Mental Health Globally

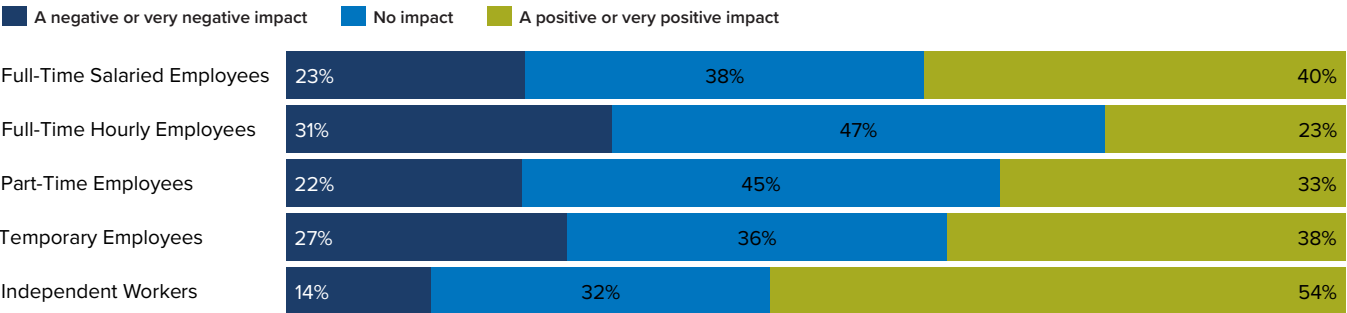
Over the past six months, what impact, if any, has your primary job had on your mental health?



However, certain types of workers were more likely than others to say that their job has had a positive impact on their mental health. Whereas **over half** of independent workers (**54%**) reported that their work positively impacts their mental health, only **23% to 40%** of workers of other types reported the same.

How Jobs Are Impacting Workers' Mental Health by Worker Type

What impact, if any, has your job had on your mental health over the past six months?



Note: Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

UNDERSTANDING THE JOB FEATURES THAT DRIVE WORKERS' MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Recognizing that **1 in 5** workers globally (**20%**) said their job has had a negative impact on their mental health in the past six months, employers might wonder how they can improve these experiences. Again, the question becomes: Where should employers focus their efforts to have the greatest impact? The results of a driver analysis illuminated key areas of focus for employers. Interestingly, while there is some convergence, the top five job features that drive workers' mental well-being at work look qualitatively different from the top five job features that drive their perceptions of job quality. Workers' satisfaction with the amount of recognition they receive for doing good work emerged as the only consistent top-five driver of mental health at work across all five worker types. This data showed that simply acknowledging when workers have done great work can go a long way in fostering a positive mental health environment for all workers, regardless of their role or position.

Notably, other top drivers of workers' mental health include workers' satisfaction with their sense of belonging or community, which emerged as a top-five driver among every worker type except for part-time employees. The absence of this factor as a top-five driver of mental health for part-time employees may stem from the shorter amount of time they spend in the workplace relative to full-time workers, reducing their dependence on workplace communities for social interaction. Workers' satisfaction with their relationship with their manager also emerged as a top-five driver of mental health at work for all worker types that operate in an employee capacity (i.e., all worker types except independent workers), highlighting the critical role that effective managers play in creating supportive work environments.³ In fact, [recent global research from the UKG Workforce Institute](#) revealed that 69% of employees reported that their managers influence their mental health, a figure that surpasses the impact of doctors (51%) and therapists (41%) and is on par with the influence of employees' spouses or partners (69%).



³ The relationship with one's manager was excluded from the driver analysis for independent workers because independent workers who own their own business as their primary job were not shown this response.

The Top 5 Drivers of Mental Health at Work by Worker Type



| Full-Time Salaried Employees | Full-Time Hourly Employees | Part-Time Employees | Temporary Employees | Independent Workers |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Recognition for doing good work | A work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully | A good relationship with your manager* | A sense of belonging or community | Good pay and benefits |
| A manageable workload | Recognition for doing good work | Recognition for doing good work | A work environment where people are treated fairly and respectfully | Career advancement opportunities |
| A sense of belonging or community | A manageable workload | A manageable workload | Opportunity to do work that is meaningful to you | Learning and development opportunities |
| Career advancement opportunities | A sense of belonging or community | Career advancement opportunities | A good relationship with your manager* | A sense of belonging or community |
| A good relationship with your manager* | A good relationship with your manager* | Opportunity to do work that is meaningful to you | Recognition for doing good work | Recognition for doing good work |

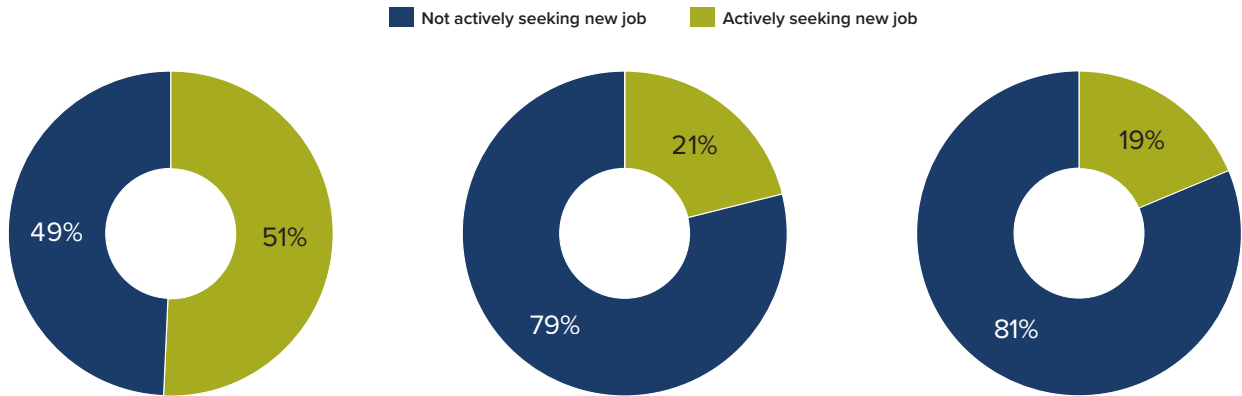
*"A good relationship with your manager" was not shown to independent workers who own their own business as their primary job.



HOW JOBS THAT NEGATIVELY IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH DRIVE JOB-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

The impact workers’ jobs have had on their mental health in the last six months meaningfully affects whether they are actively seeking a new job. **Half** of workers who said their work has negatively impacted their mental health (**51%**) are actively job seeking, versus only **21%** who said their job has had no impact on their mental health and **19%** who said their job has had a positive impact on their mental health.

Half of Workers Who Said Their Job Has Negatively Impacted Their Mental Health Are Actively Job Seeking



Workers whose jobs have had a **negative or very negative impact** on their mental health in the last six months

Workers whose jobs have had **no impact** on their mental health in the last six months

Workers whose jobs have had a **positive or very positive impact** on their mental health in the last six months



CONCLUSION

The SHRM Global Worker Project is focused on building a shared, human-centered understanding of the future of the workplace, shedding light on the intricate challenges facing today's workers and the emerging trends shaping tomorrow's workplaces. This study equips employers and policymakers with important information to develop inclusive and effective global policies and practices that recognize and value the unique, diverse needs of the contemporary workforce. By moving beyond a one-size-fits-all definition of a "traditional worker," global leaders can better foster workplaces where workers of all types can thrive.

Understanding workers' expectations and experiences is crucial for enhancing workers' job quality and their overall mental health. Beyond pay and benefits and job security, there are a wide variety of job features that can make for a "good job" and that drive a positive worker experience, such as meaningful opportunities for workers to use their skills and abilities, career advancement opportunities, flexibility to manage life and work issues, and access to a fair and respectful work environment. When organizations understand these features, they can more effectively tailor work environments that meet these needs and enable workers to thrive. This alignment can also lead to increased retention of talent because workers are more likely to stay with organizations that prioritize their well-being and recognize the unique skills and abilities they bring to the table. By investing in what matters most to the global workforce, employers can not only enhance productivity but also cultivate healthier work environments, ultimately driving long-term success.

Want to learn more? [Visit SHRM's Global Policy hub page.](#)

METHODOLOGY

SHRM surveyed 16,000 workers across 16 countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the Dominican Republic, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States) via a third-party online panel from Feb. 22 to June 7, 2024. Workers of all types and from a wide variety of industries were sampled. Responses were balanced to ensure representation of workers across age groups and genders. For each country, the survey was translated into the country's official language. In countries where English was the official language, the survey language was localized.



OUR PURPOSE IS TO ELEVATE HR

Our mission is to empower people and workplaces by advancing HR practices and by maximizing human potential. Our vision is to build a world of work that works for all.

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