

The Workplace Stress Crisis



Understanding Burnout, Productivity &
Work Life Balance

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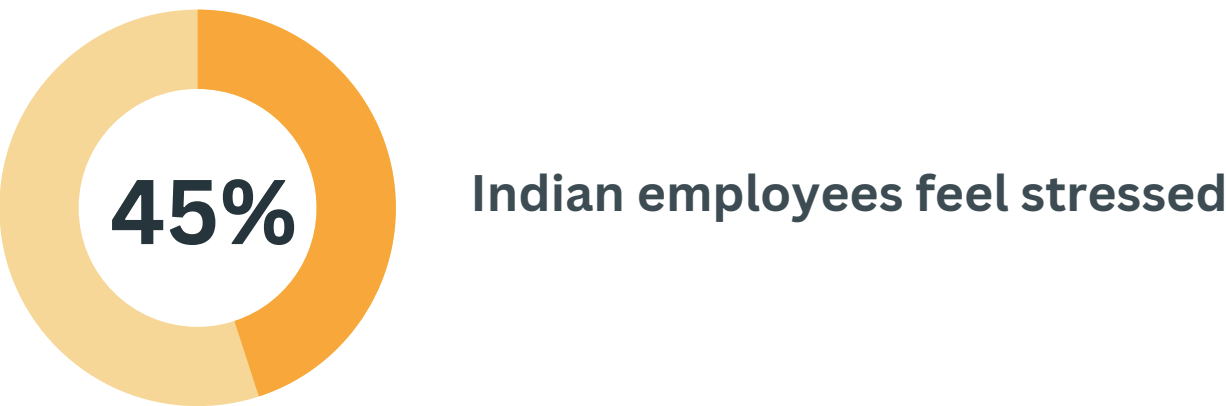
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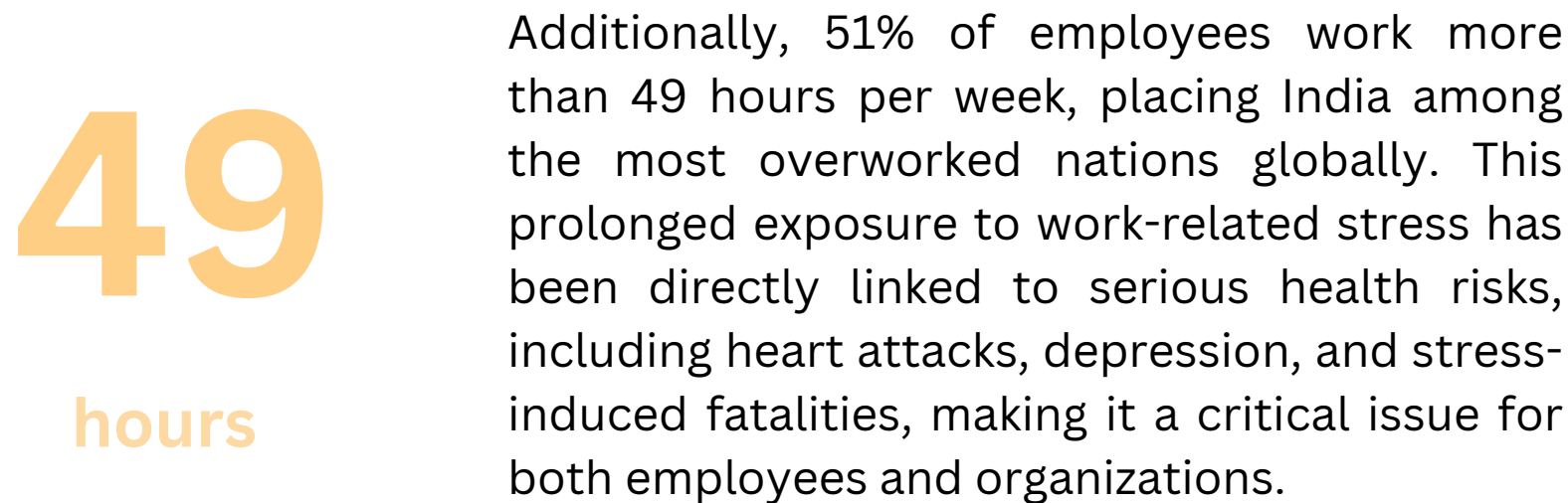
Executive Summary

WORKPLACE STRESS STATISTICS

Workplace stress has become a significant global concern, with Indian employees experiencing some of the highest levels of work-related pressure. Studies suggest that excessive work hours and burnout reduce productivity and severely affect employee well-being.



Recent data indicates that 45% of Indian employees feel stressed before the workweek begins, highlighting the psychological burden associated with work.



Several countries have adopted the **4-day workweek** to combat these challenges, which has shown promising results in improving workplace dynamics. Studies indicate that companies implementing this model report **higher productivity** levels while employees experience **better mental well-being**. Furthermore, a shorter workweek has significantly **improved work-life balance**, reducing overall stress levels and fostering a healthier workforce.

Addressing workplace stress through strategic interventions like flexible work arrangements and employee well-being programs is crucial to creating a more sustainable and productive work environment.



- 45% of employees feel stressed before their workweek even begins.
- 51% of employees work more than 49 hours per week, contributing to burnout.
- 60% of employees experience health issues related to workplace burnout.
- A 4-day workweek has led to 70% improved productivity among employees.
- 65% of employees report better work-life balance with a 4-day workweek.

Introduction

The Growing Crisis of Workplace Stress in India

Workplace stress has become a **critical issue** in India, affecting millions of employees across various industries. The **"hustle culture" and overwork mentality** have led to a rise in mental and physical health problems, significantly impacting both individuals and businesses. Despite the growing recognition of workplace well-being, employees struggle with long hours, high expectations, and inadequate support systems.

The Productivity Paradox: High Engagement, Low Well-Being

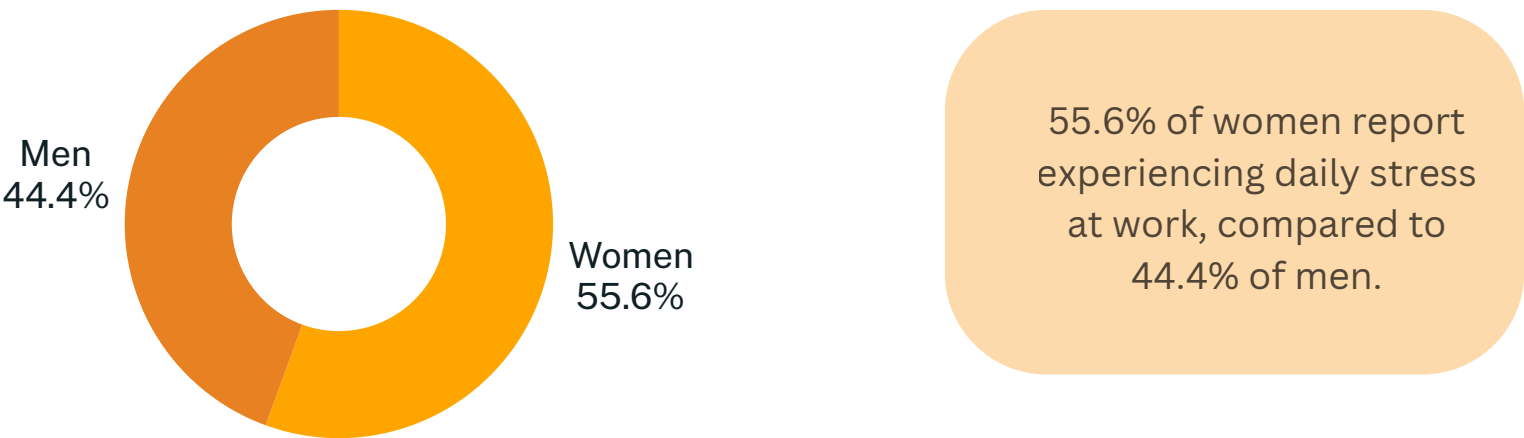
India presents a unique paradox—employees who demonstrate high engagement levels report low overall well-being. This discrepancy stems from long working hours, lack of work-life balance, and high-performance pressure. Many employees remain dedicated and motivated at work, but this engagement comes at the cost of their mental health and job satisfaction.

The Cost of Burnout: A Global and Indian Perspective

Workplace stress is not just a personal struggle—it has severe economic consequences. Studies show that workplace stress costs the global economy \$8.9 trillion annually, with India being one of the most affected countries. Increased absenteeism, lower productivity, and rising healthcare costs contribute to significant financial losses for businesses. Burnout, if left unchecked, leads to higher employee turnover rates, affecting long-term organizational stability.

The Reality of Workplace Stress

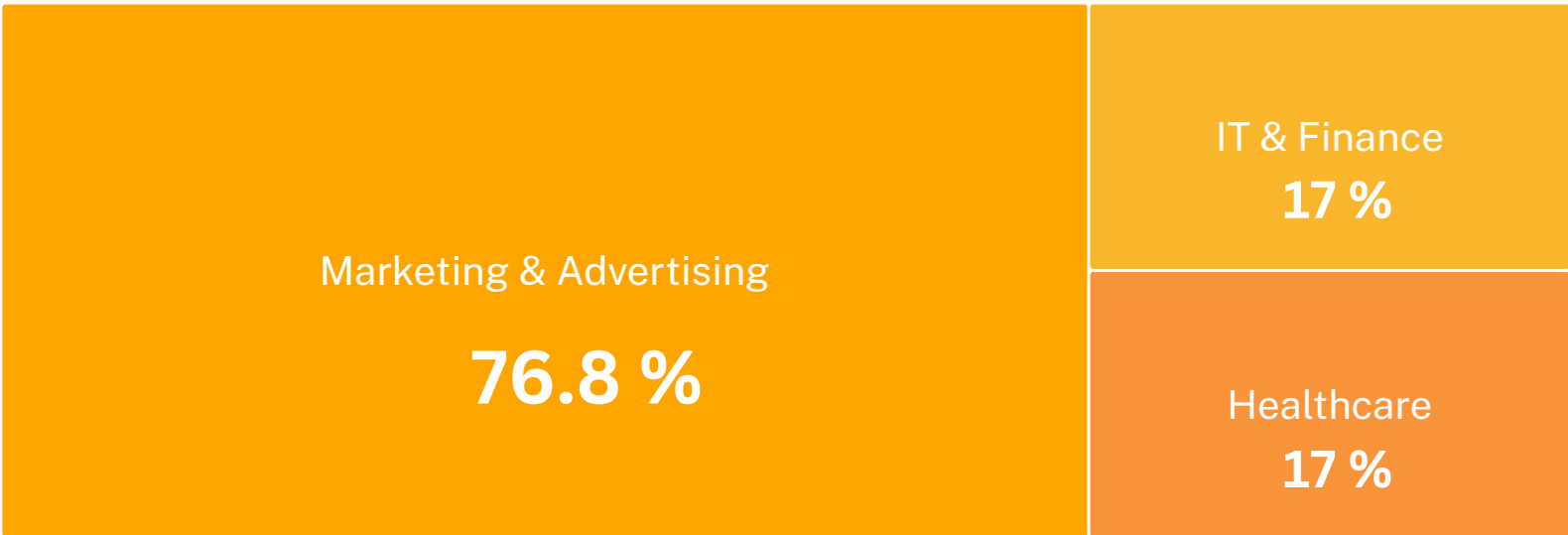
According to the Gallup Report 2024, stress levels among working men and women differ due to a combination of workplace demands, societal expectations, and industry-specific challenges.



80% of employees feel overwhelmed due to workloads, deadlines, and expectations.

Industry-Specific Workplace Stress Trends

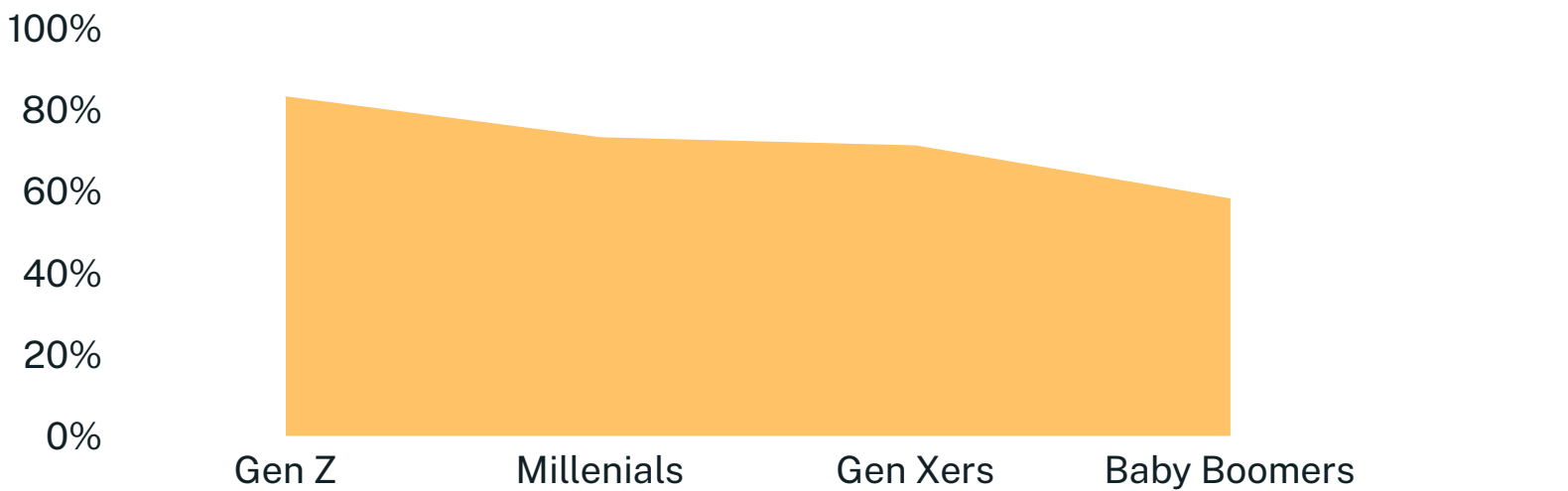
A report by CIO (2024) reveals alarming trends in workplace stress across various industries, with employees in IT, Finance, Healthcare, and Marketing facing high burnout rates. The study highlights the growing impact of workload pressure, AI integration, and evolving job expectations on different workforce segments. Notably, Gen Z employees experience the highest burnout levels (83%), surpassing other age groups.



The treemap diagram visually represents workplace stress levels across different industries, highlighting the severity of burnout in Marketing & Advertising, IT & Finance, and Healthcare. The largest block indicates that Marketing & Advertising employees experience the highest stress, averaging **3.84 days per week** due to tight deadlines and client demands. IT & Finance and Healthcare sectors show 17% of employees facing severe burnout, with IT professionals struggling with long hours, AI-driven workload increases, and high performance expectations, while healthcare workers experience emotional strain and extended shifts due to the demanding nature of patient care.

Gen Z Burnout: The Most Affected Workforce

The CIO Report 2024 identifies Gen Z (83%) as the most stressed workforce, surpassing millennials (73%), Gen X (71%) and Baby Boomers (58%).



AI & Upskilling Pressure

37% of employees are expected to rapidly adopt AI tools

35% are pushed into expanded job roles beyond their expertise.

Workload Overload

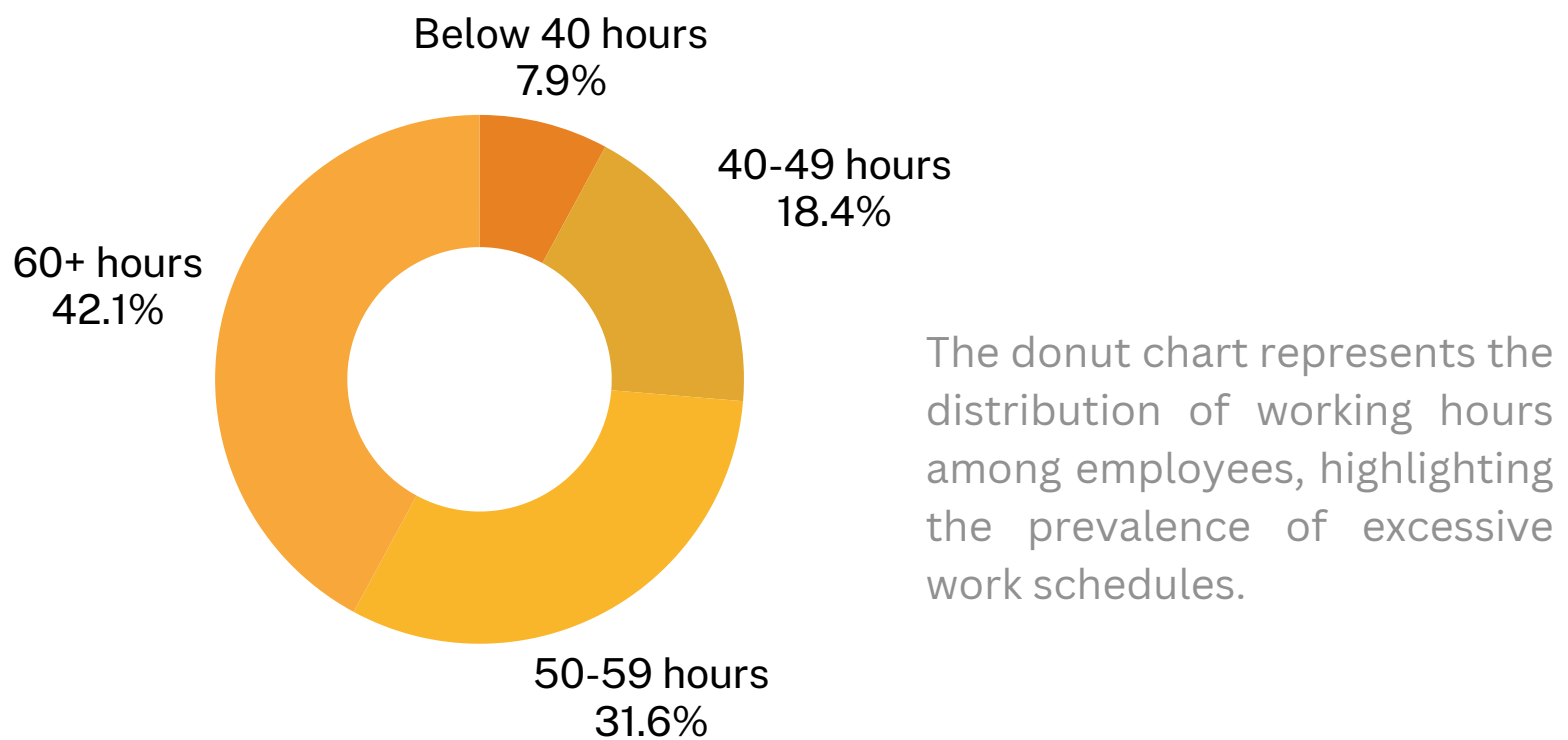
58% of IT workers feel overwhelmed, and cybersecurity professionals face excessive responsibilities

33% of IT workers are considering quitting their job

Return-to-Office Stress

27% of employees struggle with adjusting to in-office demands after experiencing remote work flexibility.

The Economic Toll of Workplace Burnout



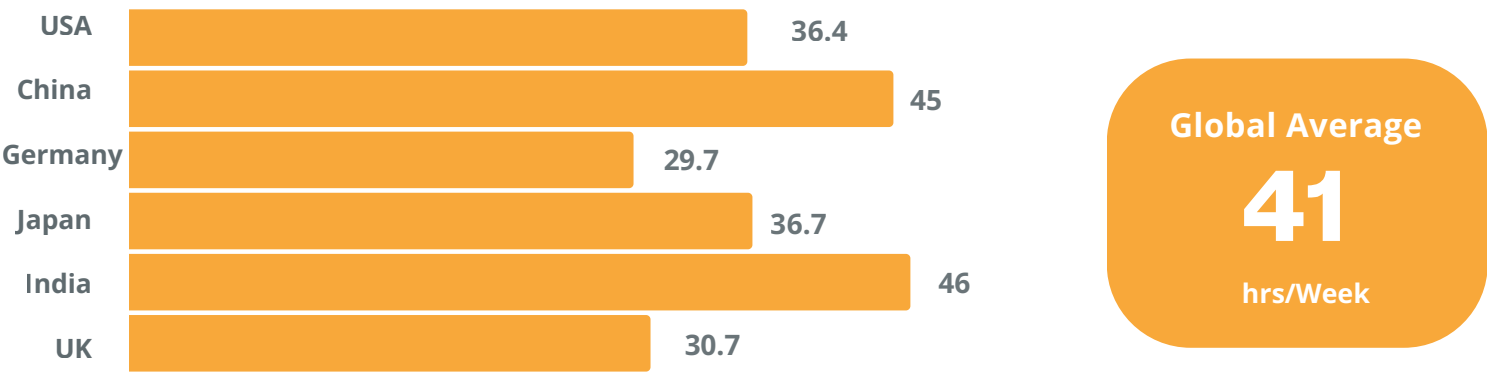
- 42.1% of employees work more than **60 hours** per week, indicating a dangerously high workload.
- 31.6% work between **50-59 hours**, placing them at significant risk of stress-related inefficiencies.
- 18.4% work within **40-49 hours**, still exceeding standard workweek expectations.
- Only 7.9% of employees work less than **40 hours**, highlighting that excessive working hours have become the norm rather than the exception.

\$ 8.9 trillion

Workplace burnout costs the global economy \$8.9 trillion annually, reducing productivity and raising costs.

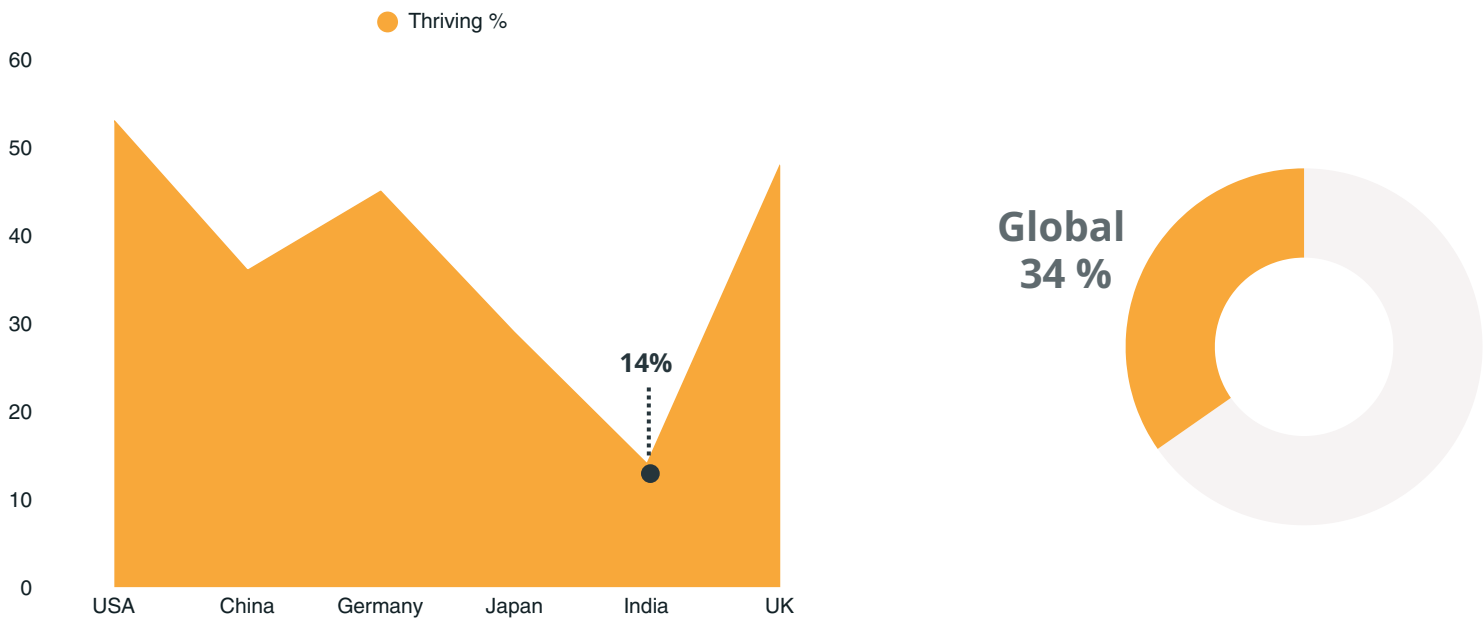
Impact of Working Hours on Well-Being

Average Weekly Working Hours Across Major Global Economies



India’s average working hours stand at 46 hours/week, higher than the global average of 41 hours. Despite this, a shocking 86% of Indian employees are either struggling or suffering in their jobs, according to the Gallup 2024 Workplace Report.

Thriving Percentage Across Major Economies Compared to Global Average

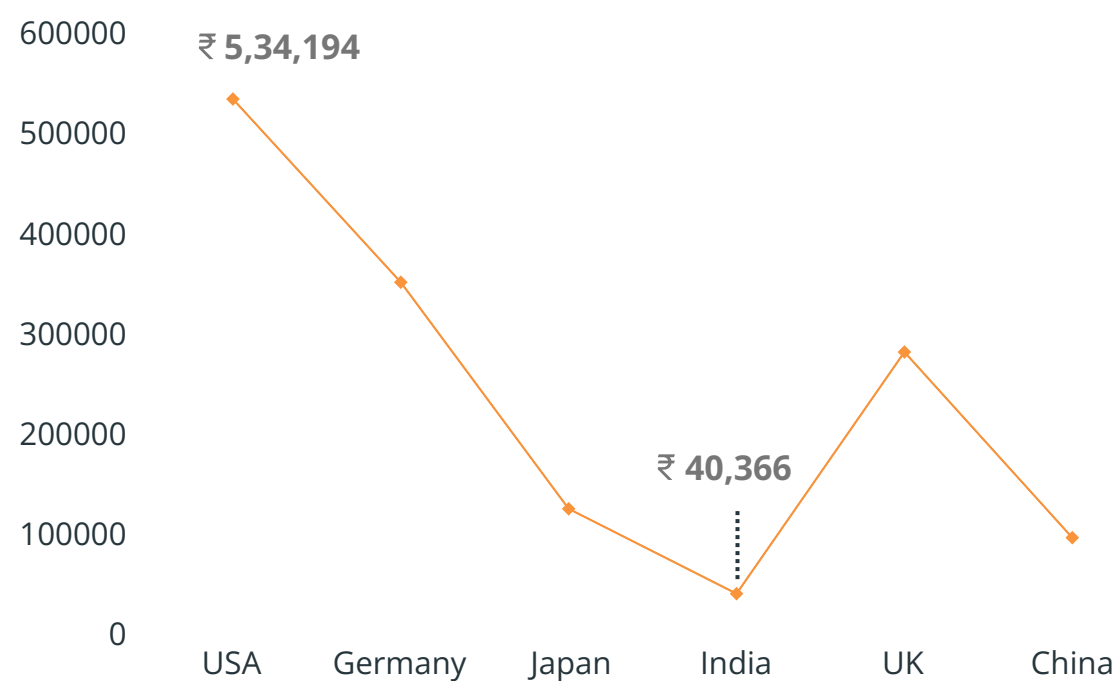


****Thriving:** These respondents have positive views of their present life situation (7 or higher rating on best life present) and have positive views of the next five years (8 or higher rating on best life future). They report significantly fewer health problems and less worry, stress, sadness, loneliness, depression and anger. They report more hope, happiness, energy, interest and respect.

Countries like the USA, Japan, and Germany, with fewer working hours, report better well-being results.

According to the Gallup 2024 Report, India’s thriving percentage is only 14%, significantly lower than the global average of 34%. This highlights **lower life satisfaction** despite high workforce participation.

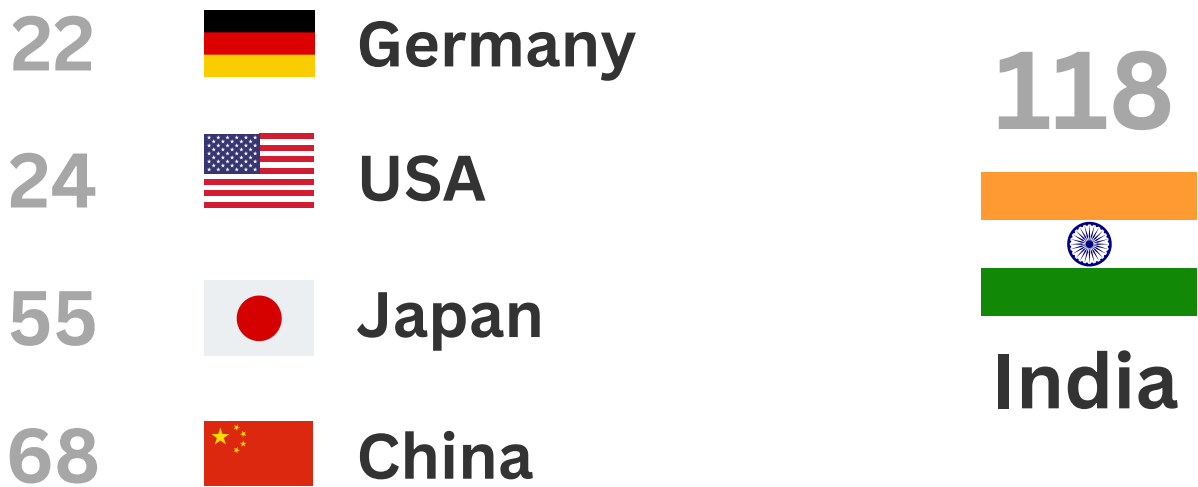
Average Monthly Salary (in Rs)



India presents a paradox when it comes to work culture. Despite having one of the longest working hours globally, averaging 46 hours per week, Indian employees earn significantly less than their counterparts in major economies. According to World Population Overview **51%** of Indian employees work more than **50 hours per week**, their average monthly salary stands at only ₹40,366, which is far below the earnings of workers in the USA (₹5.34 lakh), Germany (₹3.51 lakh), and China (₹96,284). This wage disparity, combined with excessive working hours, has led to a worrying decline in overall well-being and happiness. The Gallup 2024 Report indicates that only 14% of Indian employees are thriving, a stark contrast to the global average of 34%. In comparison, countries that emphasize work-life balance, higher wages, and shorter working hours, such as Germany and the UK, report thriving percentages of 45% and 48%, respectively.

A key reason for India’s low thriving percentage is the financial pressure and job insecurity that accompany long working hours. In economies like the USA, where the average workweek is 36.4 hours, salaries are more than ten times higher than those in India, allowing employees to achieve a better quality of life despite working fewer hours. Similarly, Japan, which has a reputation for its intense corporate culture, still offers significantly higher wages than India, ensuring that employees receive adequate financial rewards for their effort. In China, where work hours are comparable to India at 45 hours per week, salaries are still more than double those in India, leading to better financial security and a higher thriving percentage (36%) compared to India’s 14%.

Global Happiness Index

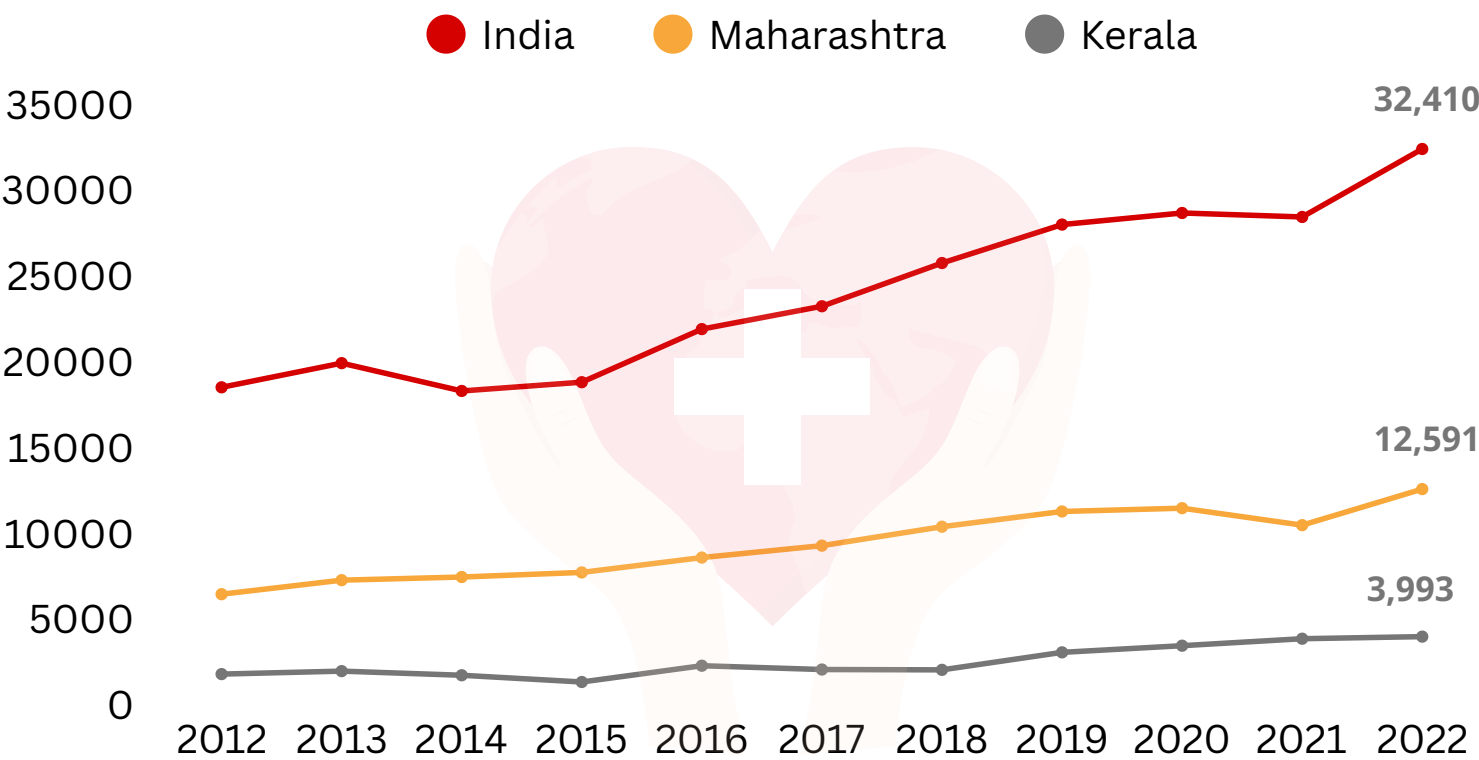


The prevailing assumption in India that working longer hours leads to greater economic progress is proving counterproductive. While employees devote more time to work, low salaries and lack of job satisfaction undermine their well-being, increasing burnout and workplace disengagement. Unlike their global counterparts who benefit from higher wages, structured breaks, and mental health support, Indian employees are often expected to work longer for less, which explains why happiness levels and productivity remain disproportionately low. As a result, India ranks 118th out of 147 countries on the Global Happiness Index, far behind nations that have embraced work-life balance policies to boost both economic performance and employee satisfaction.

The Impact of Stress on Health

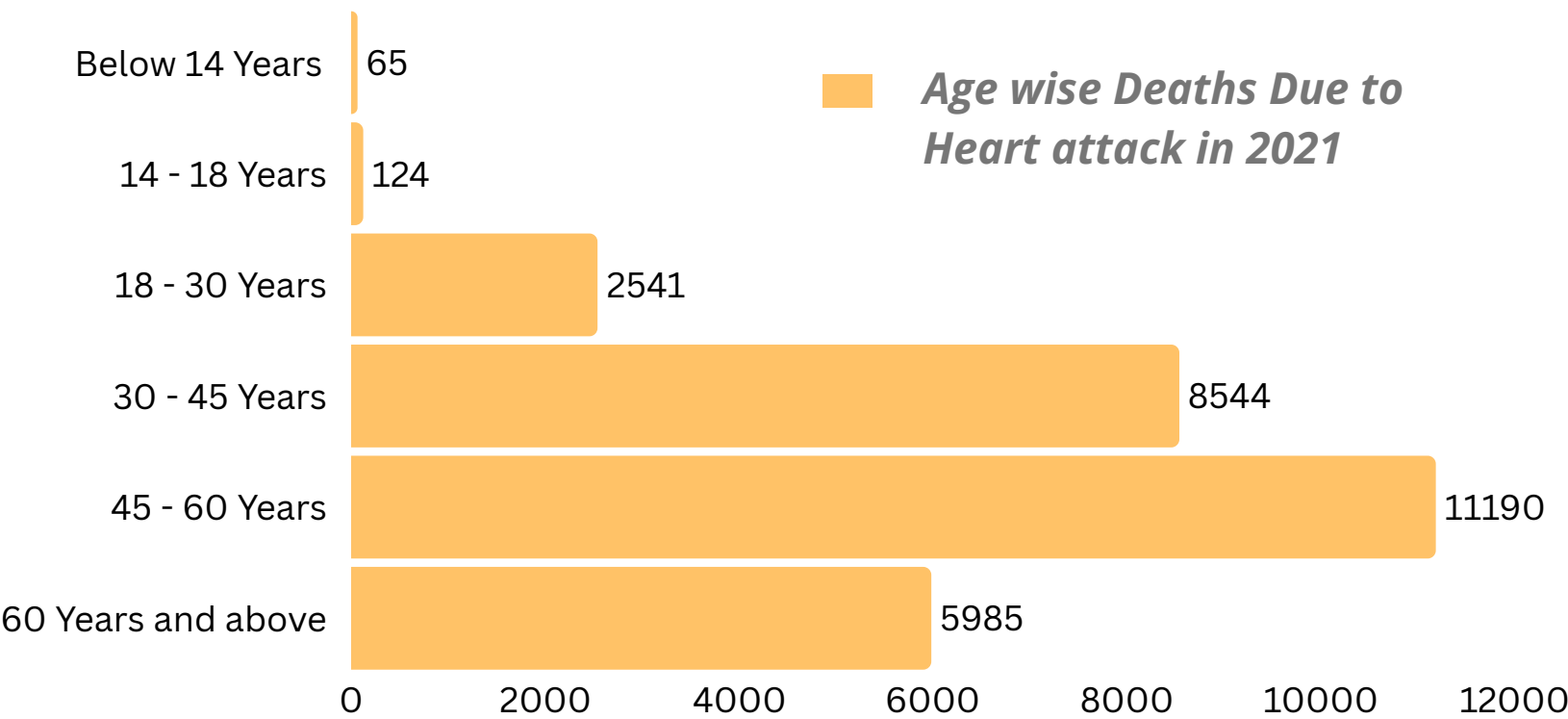
The alarming rise in heart attack deaths in India presents a major public health crisis. Data from NCRB and ADSI indicate a consistent increase in cardiovascular fatalities, with a sharp rise post-pandemic. The trend is particularly concerning among working-age individuals (30-60 years), who account for 70% of total heart attack deaths. Workplace stress, long working hours, and poor lifestyle habits have emerged as key contributors to this crisis.

Heart attack deaths



Heart attack deaths in India have been on a sharp rise over the past decade, with 32,410 fatalities recorded in 2022, up from 18,522 in 2012, reflecting an alarming increase in cardiovascular risks. Among Indian states, Maharashtra has consistently reported the highest number of heart attack deaths, largely due to high-stress urban environments, long working hours, and lifestyle-related health issues in cities like Mumbai and Pune. Meanwhile, Kerala has also witnessed a significant surge in heart attack fatalities. The state's rising trend is linked to high rates of diabetes, hypertension, and changing dietary habits, making it a critical region for heart disease prevention. In recent years, Maharashtra and Kerala together have accounted for nearly 50% of India's total heart attack deaths.

The rising incidence of heart attack deaths among working-age individuals in India is a growing public health crisis. According to the ADSI 2021 report, a staggering 70% of heart attack deaths occur in the 30-60 age group, highlighting the disproportionate impact of workplace stress, long working hours, and unhealthy lifestyle habits. The age-wise distribution of heart attack fatalities further underscores this trend:



The most shocking aspect of this data is that nearly 70% of victims were in their prime working years (30-60 years)—a stage where high job expectations, financial stress, and long work hours are at their peak. In contrast, only 21% of deaths occurred among those aged 60 and above, suggesting that age alone is not the primary risk factor; rather, workplace-related stress and lifestyle choices significantly contribute to cardiovascular risks. The tragic and sudden passing of Anna Sebastian, a young professional who recently succumbed to a heart attack, further highlights the severity of this issue. Anna’s case is not an isolated incident—several young professionals have fallen victim to work-related stress, burnout, and cardiovascular complications in recent years.

Workplace Stress in Kerala

Kerala Sector-Wise Working Hours & Stress Data



- High Prevalence: Workplace stress is widespread in Kerala, especially among young professionals and those in demanding sectors.
- Work-Life Balance: About 68.25% of employees report that their work-life balance is compromised due to job demands, with women experiencing this slightly more than men⁵¹.
- Gender and Age: Women (74.7%) report marginally higher stress than men (73.7%), and individuals aged 30–39 experience the highest stress levels

Despite Kerala’s relatively moderate working hours, averaging around 36 hours per week in the public sector compared to the national average of 42 hours, workplace stress remains alarmingly high across key industries. Over 84% of IT professionals and 83.5% of media workers report significant job stress, with nearly 68% of employees acknowledging that work disrupts their personal life. These high stress levels are linked to workload intensity, pressure to perform, and lack of recovery time rather than just the number of hours worked. The health consequences are evident: Kerala has witnessed a rise in stress-induced heart attacks, particularly among young professionals in the IT sector. Nationally, burnout affects up to 59% of employees—far above the global average of 22% and Kerala mirrors this troubling trend. This underscores a critical insight: employee well-being depends not only on working hours but also on the intensity, environment, and support systems within the workplace.

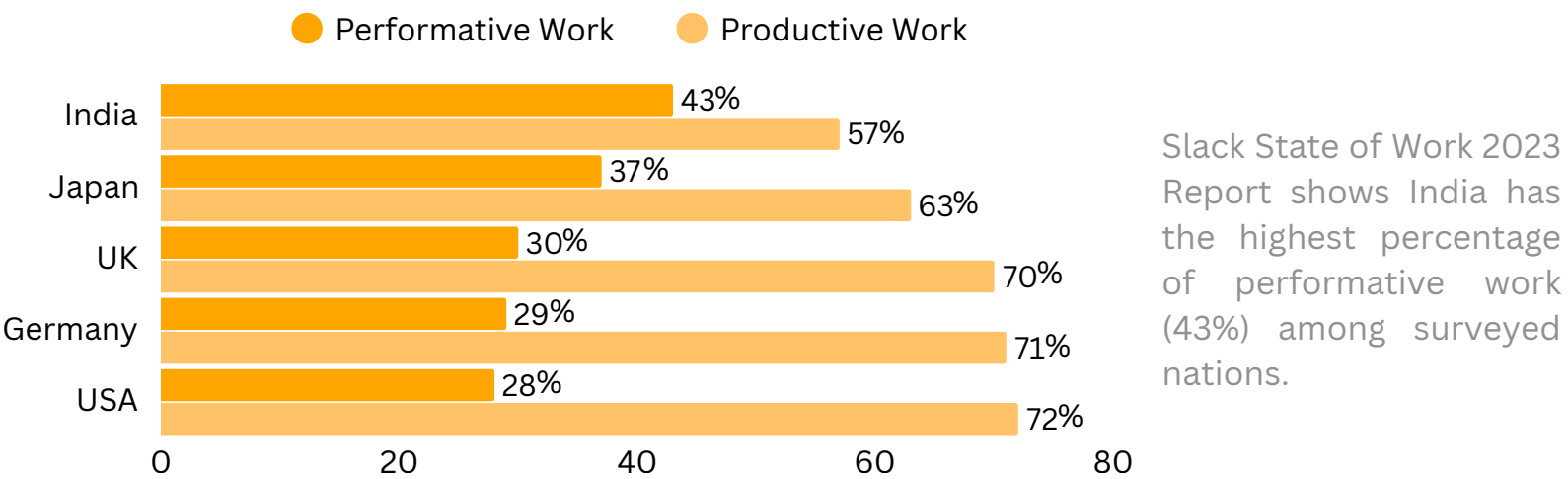
India’s Overwork Culture vs Need for Change

India is at a pivotal moment in redefining its corporate work culture. The traditional belief that longer work hours drive higher productivity remains deeply ingrained, with several business leaders advocating for extended workweeks to accelerate economic progress. This perspective suggests that India’s workforce should embrace 70+ hour workweeks to match global competition. However, modern workplace research and international benchmarks indicate that this approach is counterproductive, leading to burnout, inefficiency, and poor well-being among employees.

Current Trends in India’s Work Culture

- India has one of the longest average workweeks (46+ hours), yet productivity per hour remains lower than global benchmarks.
- Corporate expectations are shifting toward extended hours, with some industry leaders advocating for 70–90-hour workweeks as a means to enhance national economic growth.
- Despite long hours, India ranks among the highest in "performative work" (43%), indicating that a significant portion of time at work is spent appearing busy rather than being productive.

Performative vs Productive work across different countries



Performative work refers to time spent appearing busy rather than engaging in meaningful, output-driven tasks.

According to the Slack report countries like **Germany (29%)** and the **USA (28%)**, which have shorter workweeks, report significantly higher productive work percentages **(71% and 72%, respectively)**.

This data contradicts the argument that longer workweeks drive productivity, demonstrating that countries prioritizing efficiency over excessive work hours achieve better economic outcomes. It reinforces the need for India to shift towards structured, output-focused work models rather than relying on extended hours that contribute to inefficiency and burnout.

The Push for Longer Workweeks

Several high-profile corporate leaders have publicly promoted the idea that working longer hours is essential for India's growth. Their statements have reignited discussions on whether extended workweeks are truly beneficial or simply perpetuating an outdated mindset.



Narayana Murthy
(Infosys Co-founder)

"Young professionals should work 70-hour weeks to accelerate India's progress."

"Employees should work 90-hour weeks, including Sundays."



S. N. Subramanian
(L&T CEO)



“Weekends are a Western luxury that India doesn’t need.”

Bhavish Aggarwal (Ola CEO)



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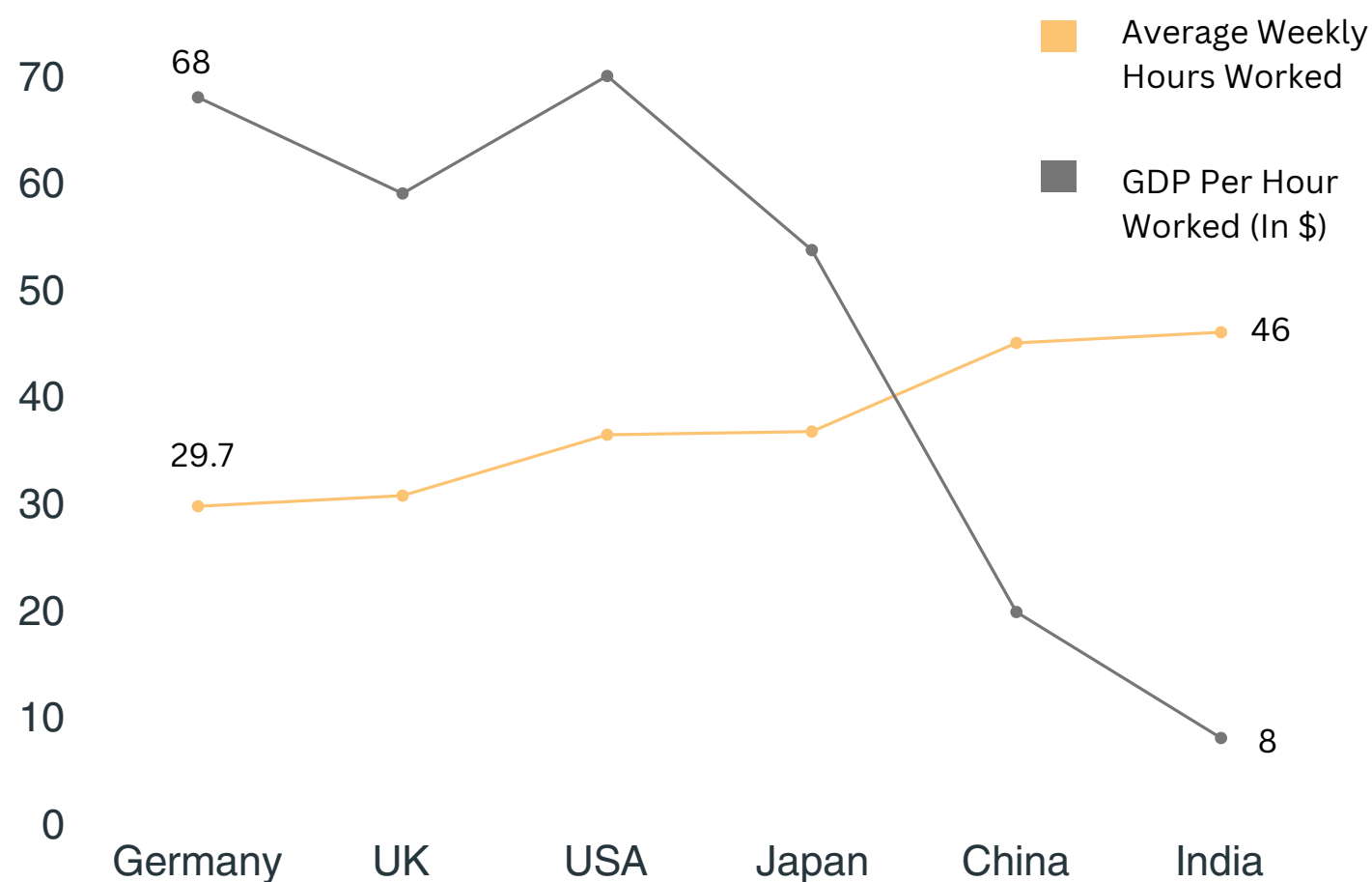
Bad news for techies: Karnataka govt plans to increase working hours to 12 hours per day; IT unions oppose move

Bad news for techies: Karnataka govt plans to increase working hours to 12 hours per day; IT unions oppose move

In a move that has sparked national discussion, the Karnataka government has proposed increasing the allowable working hours in factories from 48 hours to 72 hours per week, aligning with the controversial global narrative that extended workweeks enhance productivity. The bill, passed in the state assembly, allows 12-hour shifts and night work for women, citing industrial growth and global competitiveness as justifications.

However, this push towards longer workweeks runs counter to international evidence and India’s own data, which reveal that higher hours do not equate to higher productivity. India already has one of the longest average weekly work hours (46 hours) but ranks lowest in GDP per hour worked among major economies.

Productivity vs Work Hours Across Countries



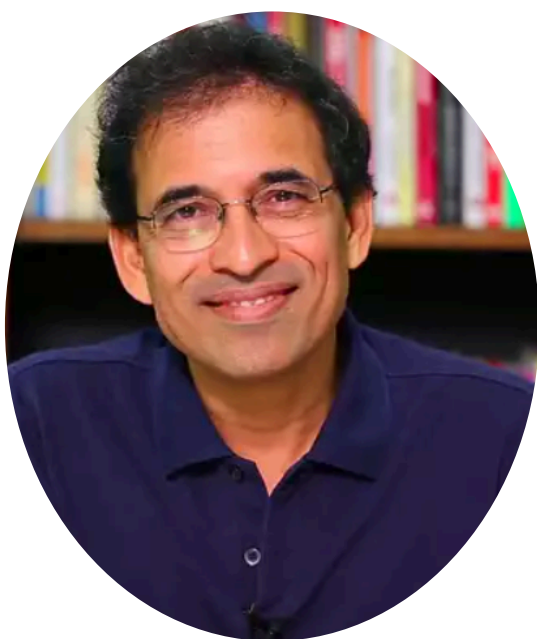
GDP per hour worked is a measure of labor productivity that indicates the economic output (in international dollars) generated per hour of work in a country. It reflects how efficiently labor is utilized, with higher values indicating greater productivity and economic efficiency per working hour

The graph on productivity vs. work hours across countries clearly contradicts the long-standing belief that extended workweeks drive economic growth. Business leaders such as Narayana Murthy, S. N. Subramanian, and Bhavish Aggarwal have argued that India's workforce should adopt 70–90-hour workweeks to stay competitive. However, international data proves otherwise—nations that prioritize shorter workweeks actually achieve higher productivity per hour.

The graph compares average weekly work hours to GDP per hour worked (in international dollars) across major economies. Germany, the UK, and the USA, which have shorter workweeks (29.7 to 36.4 hours per week), report significantly higher economic output per hour worked. In contrast, India, with one of the longest workweeks (46 hours), has the lowest GDP per hour worked (\$8), demonstrating that long hours do not translate to higher economic efficiency.

This directly contradicts the claim that more hours worked = greater economic success. If that were true, India should be among the highest in productivity, yet it ranks at the bottom in GDP per hour worked. Countries like Germany and the UK, which maintain work-life balance, generate up to 8 times the GDP per hour worked compared to India.

The Case for Balanced Workload Management



Harsha Bhogle's Analogy: Nurturing Talent

Renowned cricket commentator Harsha Bhogle draws a compelling parallel between nurturing cricketing talent and managing corporate employees. He emphasizes the importance of supporting high-potential individuals, akin to fostering a player like Jasprit Bumrah, rather than overworking them to the point of burnout. Bhogle cautions against turning India into a "stress factory," advocating for a work culture that prioritizes the well-being and development of its workforce.



Sridhar Vembu's Critique: The Pressure Cooker Environment

Zoho CEO Sridhar Vembu has criticized the stressful work culture prevalent in many Indian companies, describing it as a "big pressure cooker." He highlights issues such as burnout, loneliness from migration to big cities, and long commutes as factors contributing to an unhealthy work environment. Vembu advocates for a balanced work environment to build long-term, sustainable organizations.

Shashi Tharoor's Observations: The Overworked Indian

Shashi Tharoor has also commented on India's intensely competitive work culture, which often leads to excessive work hours and immense stress. He emphasizes the need for companies to prioritize employees' well-being and create a more balanced work environment to prevent burnout and other health issues.



Countries Adopting the Four-Day Workweek

The four-day workweek concept has gained momentum globally, with several countries exploring or implementing shorter workweeks to enhance work-life balance and productivity. Here's a brief overview of some notable initiatives:



United Kingdom

4 - Day Workweek Trial



61 Organizations



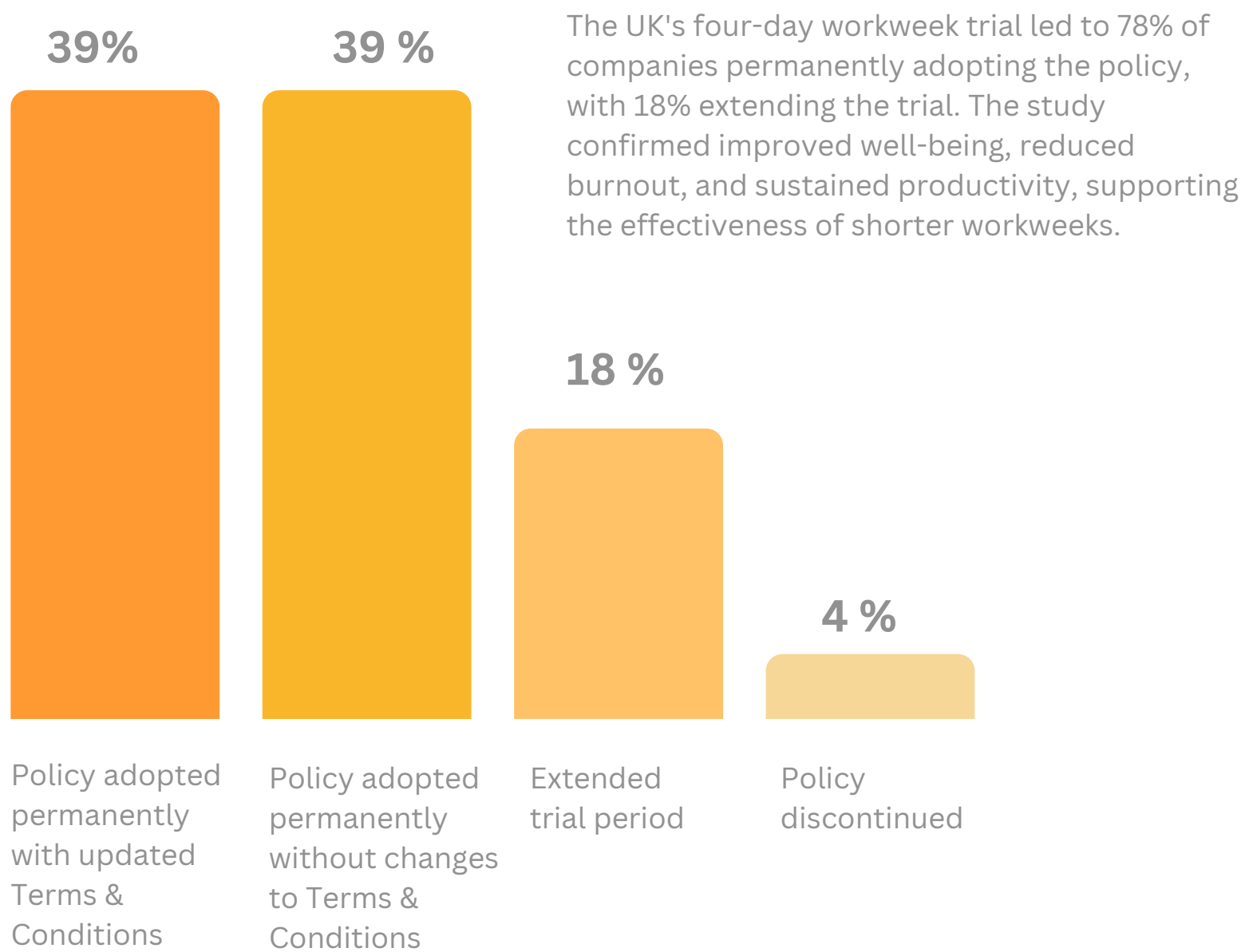
100 % Positive Response



82 % Employee well being

The UK's four-day workweek pilot, one of the largest studies on work time reduction, demonstrated significant positive outcomes for employees and businesses. Conducted in 2022, the study followed 61 organizations, of which 89% continued the policy a year later, and 51% made it permanent. The study found that 100% of consulted managers reported a positive impact, with benefits including improved employee well-being (82%), reduced staff turnover (50%), and enhanced recruitment (32%).

Outcome of the four-day week pilot at surveyed companies, one year on.



Additionally, a follow-up survey confirmed sustained improvements in physical and mental health, work-life balance, and reduced burnout. Employees experienced lower work intensity, higher job satisfaction, and increased efficiency without a decline in overall performance. The UK study is a key example of how reducing work hours can maintain productivity while improving quality of life, influencing similar initiatives worldwide.



12 Organizations



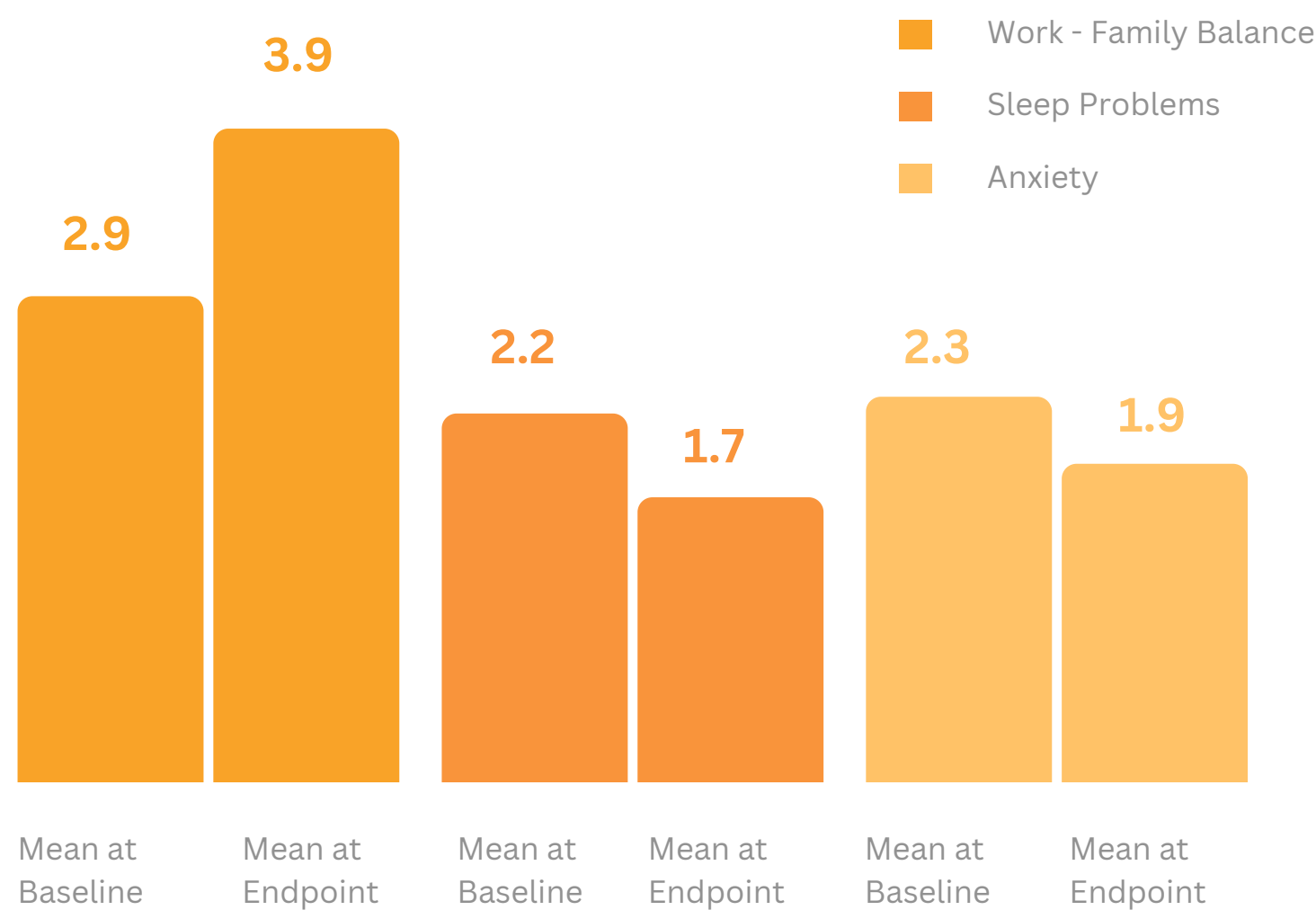
28% Work-Life Balance Improvement



75% Permanent Adoption

The Ireland four-day workweek trial involved 12 organizations across various industries. The study demonstrated significant improvements in employee well-being, productivity, and business performance. Companies that adopted the shorter workweek reported higher revenue, increased staff retention, and reduced absenteeism. Employees experienced better work-life balance, with a 20% reduction in work-to-family conflict, a 33% decrease in family-to-work conflict, and a 28% increase in their ability to balance work and personal life. Job satisfaction rose, while burnout levels dropped by 22%, and sleep deprivation fell from 32.9% to 9.4%. Notably, 75% of companies permanently adopted the four-day workweek, citing increased efficiency and streamlined workflows.

Improved Well-Being and Reduced Stress with the Four-Day Workweek

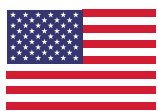


The graph illustrates the impact of the four-day workweek on employee well-being in Ireland, comparing mean values at baseline and endpoint. The study recorded notable improvements across key indicators. Work-family balance improved significantly, increasing from a mean baseline score of 2.9 to 3.9, reflecting better integration between work and personal life. Sleep problems showed a reduction, with the mean score declining from 2.2 to 1.7, indicating fewer sleep-related difficulties. Anxiety levels also decreased, moving from 2.3 to 1.9, highlighting reduced workplace stress.



Germany

Germany's 4-day workweek pilot showed improved productivity, reduced stress, and better work-life balance across 41 organizations in 13 industries. Conducted over six months, 75% of companies opted to continue, citing higher efficiency, fewer distractions, and shorter meetings. Employees reported lower stress, more physical activity, and increased satisfaction. With an already short 34-hour workweek, Germany's labor policies continue to emphasize work-life balance without compromising economic stability.



USA

The U.S. 4-day workweek pilot, conducted by 4 Day Week Global, involved 35 companies and nearly 2,000 employees across North America. The study found an 8% revenue increase, lower absenteeism, and improved work-life balance, with employees dedicating more time to leisure, exercise, and personal activities. Stress and burnout decreased, and job satisfaction rose, with 70% of employees unwilling to return to a five-day schedule without a significant pay increase. Additionally, commuting times and environmental impact reduced. While the U.S. work culture remains rooted in a 5-day, 38.7-hour workweek, the pilot results suggest growing interest in shorter workweeks for enhanced well-being and productivity.

Across the globe, countries are increasingly adopting or experimenting with the four-day workweek, with overwhelmingly positive results. The UK, Germany, Ireland, and the U.S. have conducted large-scale trials, demonstrating improved employee well-being, reduced stress, better work-life balance, and even increased productivity. In Germany, 75% of companies continued the model, while in the UK, 100% of managers reported a positive impact. Similarly, Ireland's study saw 75% of firms permanently adopting the model, and the U.S. observed an 8% revenue boost. Other nations such as Japan, Spain, Belgium, and New Zealand have also initiated government-backed or company-led experiments, further reinforcing that reducing work hours does not negatively impact efficiency.

Conclusion

Rethinking Work Culture for a Sustainable Future

The findings from global four-day workweek trials and workplace stress studies highlight a crucial shift in modern employment dynamics. Countries such as the UK, Germany, Ireland, and the U.S. have successfully tested shorter workweeks, proving that productivity, job satisfaction, and overall well-being improve when employees work fewer but more efficient hours. Across these trials, burnout decreased by up to 22%, work-life balance improved by over 30%, and employee retention increased significantly. Despite concerns about reduced working hours impacting business performance, companies in these studies maintained or even improved revenue and efficiency.

However, while the world moves towards output-focused, balanced work models, India's corporate sector continues to emphasize longer workweeks, with some leaders advocating 70- to 90-hour schedules under the belief that extended work hours drive economic growth.

Recent developments, such as the Karnataka government's proposal to extend daily work hours to 12, reflect this outdated mindset. Meanwhile, Kerala's experience highlights a different concern despite relatively moderate average working hours (around 36 hours per week in the public sector), workplace stress and burnout remain alarmingly high in key sectors like IT (84.3%) and media (83.5%), showing that poor work-life balance and sectoral demands, not just hours worked, drive employee strain.

The Slack State of Work 2023 data contradicts this notion, revealing that India has the highest rate of performative work (43%), meaning employees spend a significant portion of their time appearing busy rather than achieving real output. Additionally, data on GDP per hour worked shows that nations with shorter workweeks such as Germany and UK consistently outperform countries with longer working hours in terms of efficiency and economic output.

To remain competitive in a changing global economy, India must rethink its approach to work. Emphasizing structured work hours, efficiency-driven performance, and employee well-being rather than excessive work hours will be essential for long-term sustainability. Global evidence proves that reducing work hours does not compromise productivity; instead, it fosters greater innovation, higher retention, and healthier employees.

Studies indicate that India has one of the highest rates of burnout, with long working hours contributing to rising health issues, decreased job satisfaction, and increased attrition rates. The correlation between stress, declining mental health, and cardiovascular diseases in overworked populations further underscores the need for a shift in mindset.



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