



Infinite Potential

LEADERSHIP • CULTURE • ANALYTICS

2026 RESEARCH REPORT

The State of Workplace Burnout

The widening divide in the workplace
and the decisions that close it



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A message from Beyond Blue



Georgie Harman AO

Chief Executive Officer
Beyond Blue

Work plays a profound role in our lives. It provides purpose, connection, security and opportunity. In doing so, it can influence our mental health and wellbeing in powerful ways.

This research presents a compelling picture of the modern workplace. The overall burnout rate remains high at 36 per cent, and the experiences of employees vary significantly depending on the conditions surrounding

their work. People who feel secure, supported and equipped to do their jobs experience stronger wellbeing and lower rates of burnout, while those facing insecurity, excessive demands and workplace friction carry a much heavier burden.

The findings highlight the importance of job security, organisational support, manageable workloads, effective systems and meaningful workplace connection. They also draw attention to the widespread experience of workplace loneliness, with almost half of respondents reporting feeling isolated at work. These conditions can affect wellbeing, engagement, and productivity across organisations.

Beyond Blue has contributed to workplace mental health strategy, research and product design and implementation over more than two decades. Drawing on that experience, we know that creating mentally healthy workplaces depends on the choices organisations make every day. Choices that create cultures grounded in trust, psychological safety, inclusion and sustainable work design provide strong foundations for the mental health and productivity benefits that can flow from mentally healthy workplaces.

This report offers practical insights for leaders, boards and decision-makers. Through thoughtful action, every employer can create workplaces that support wellbeing, unlock potential and contribute to a healthier and more equitable society.

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The future of work is creating two workplaces

One gives people security, functioning systems, support and enough capacity to absorb change. The other transfers the costs of change onto workers through insecurity, friction, fragmented attention and additional hours. Burnout is one consequence of that divide.



The average hides two workplaces.

The overall burnout rate is 36%, but the spread is the story. Burnout ranges from 14% among the best supported employees to 66% for the least supported.



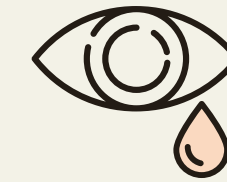
The people with the least protection absorb the most cost.

There are clear differences in the levels of burnout, wellbeing and perceived organisational support across class, gender and disability status, with job insecurity a major driver.



The conditions around work matter more than the work itself.

How difficult it is to get work done and the level of distraction has the biggest impact on an individual.



The human costs are mounting.

48% feel lonely in the workplace. 45% feel their wellbeing is worse than a year ago.



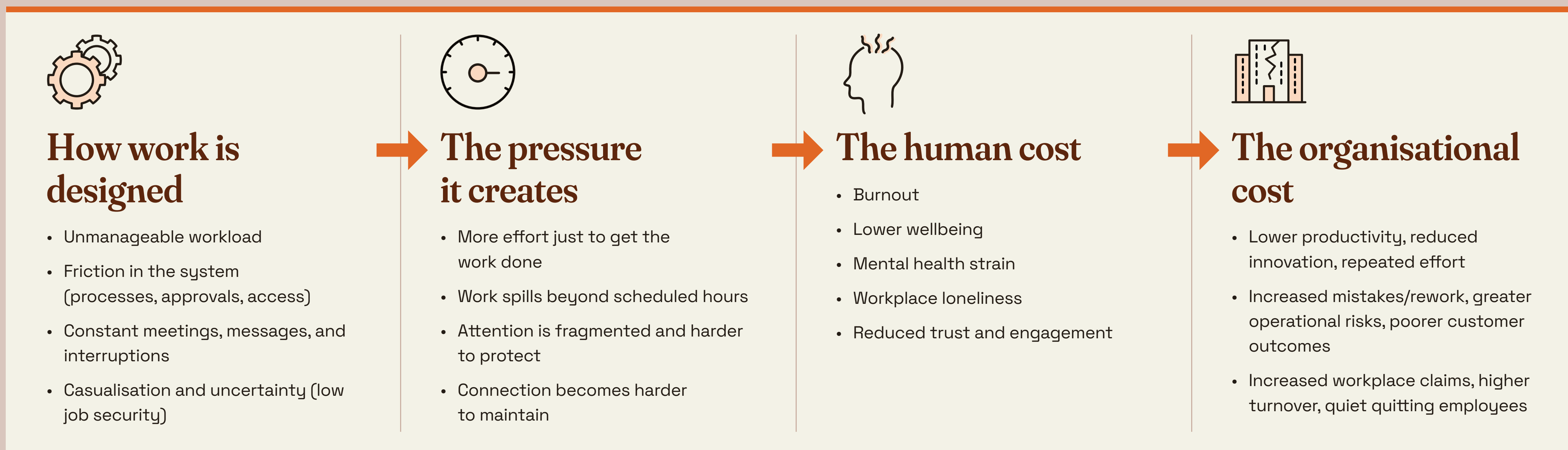
The divide is a design problem.

Job security, systems that manage workload, support, leadership, and connections are organisational conditions that can be changed.

Work is becoming increasingly unequal, not because people are inherently different, but because workplaces are amplifying existing differences.

The workplace divide is designed

Burnout, loneliness, declining wellbeing and mental health strain are not separate workplace problems. These conditions are the downstream result of decisions about how work is designed, resourced and rewarded.



Breaking this chain will require a more intentional conversation about how we design work and the workplace more equitably. The future of work is not simply an organisational challenge. It is a societal choice.

CHAPTER 1

The Workplace Divide

Employees are not experiencing workplace transformation equally. Some have security, resources, flexibility and influence. Others carry more work, more uncertainty and greater psychological cost.



Burnout average hides more than it reveals.

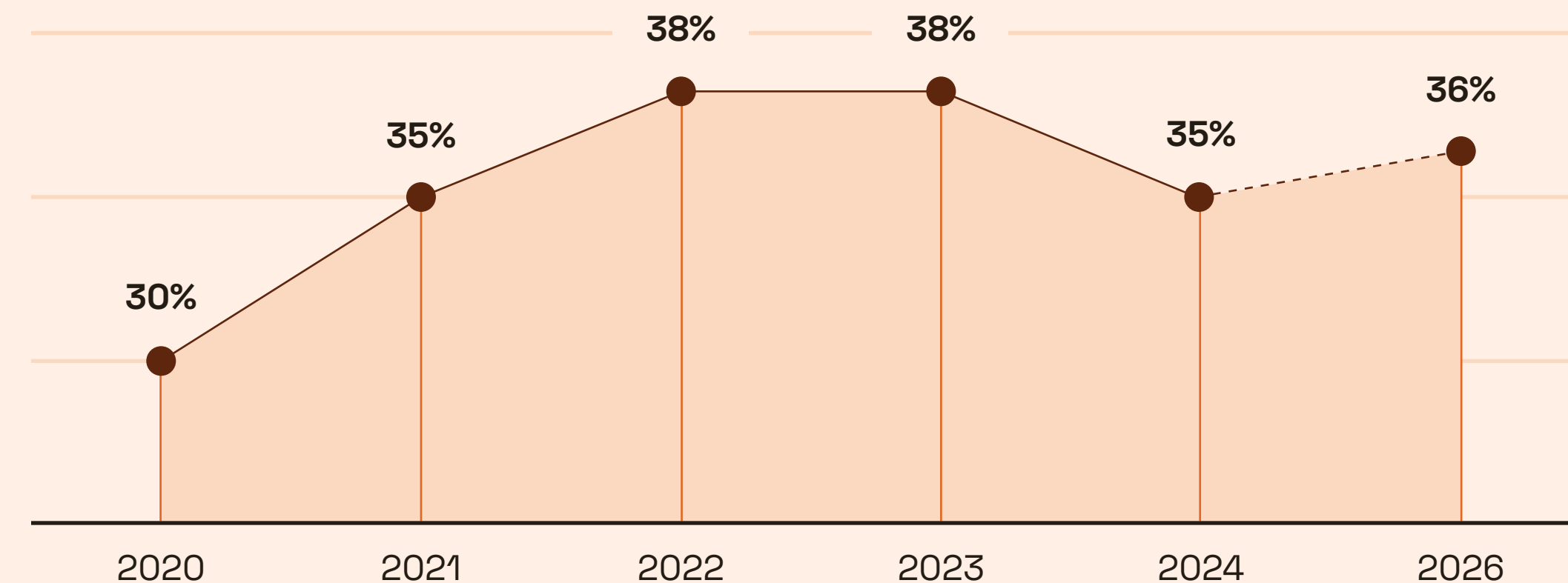
A 45-point burnout gap separates those who feel most secure versus the least secure in their job.

Class, gender and disability reveal who is carrying more of the burden.

Job security, money worry and job satisfaction each split the workforce in two.

Burnout remains deeply entrenched as a stable feature of work

BURNOUT RATE*



*Burnout is counted only where all three dimensions are present together: exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy. No study was conducted in 2025.

Burnout defined

The World Health Organization defines burnout as *a **syndrome** resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed, which is characterised by three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy.*

Burnout occurs when an individual experiences all three dimensions simultaneously.

74%

end a typical workday mentally and emotionally exhausted.

54%

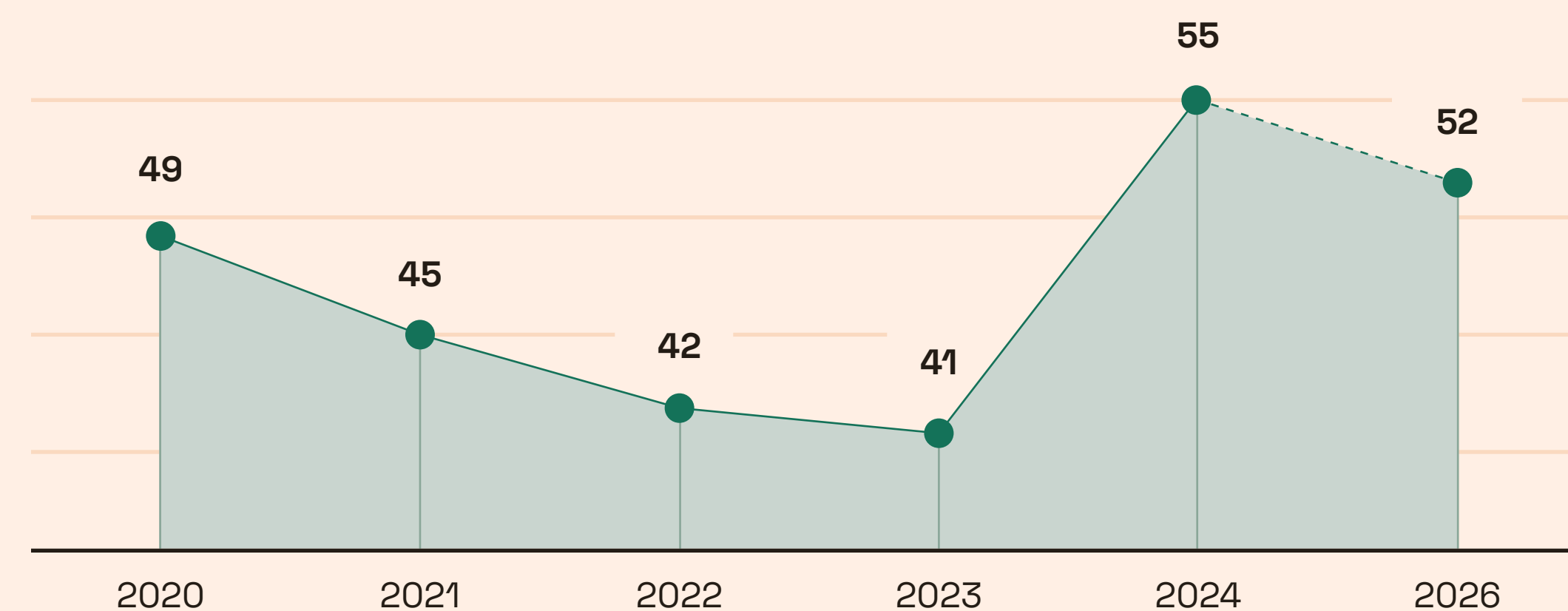
struggle to keep up with the pace and volume of work expected of them.

33%

still have enough energy for life outside work at the end of the day.

The wellbeing average tells only part of the story

OVERALL WELLBEING (0 Completely Depleted - 100 Thriving)



What drives wellbeing



Organisational
support



Exhaustion



Engagement

Organisational support is measured by the question 'How well supported have you felt by your organisation over the past six months?'

An individual's perception of organisation support along with their level of exhaustion and engagement with the organisation are the strongest drivers for individual wellbeing.

45%

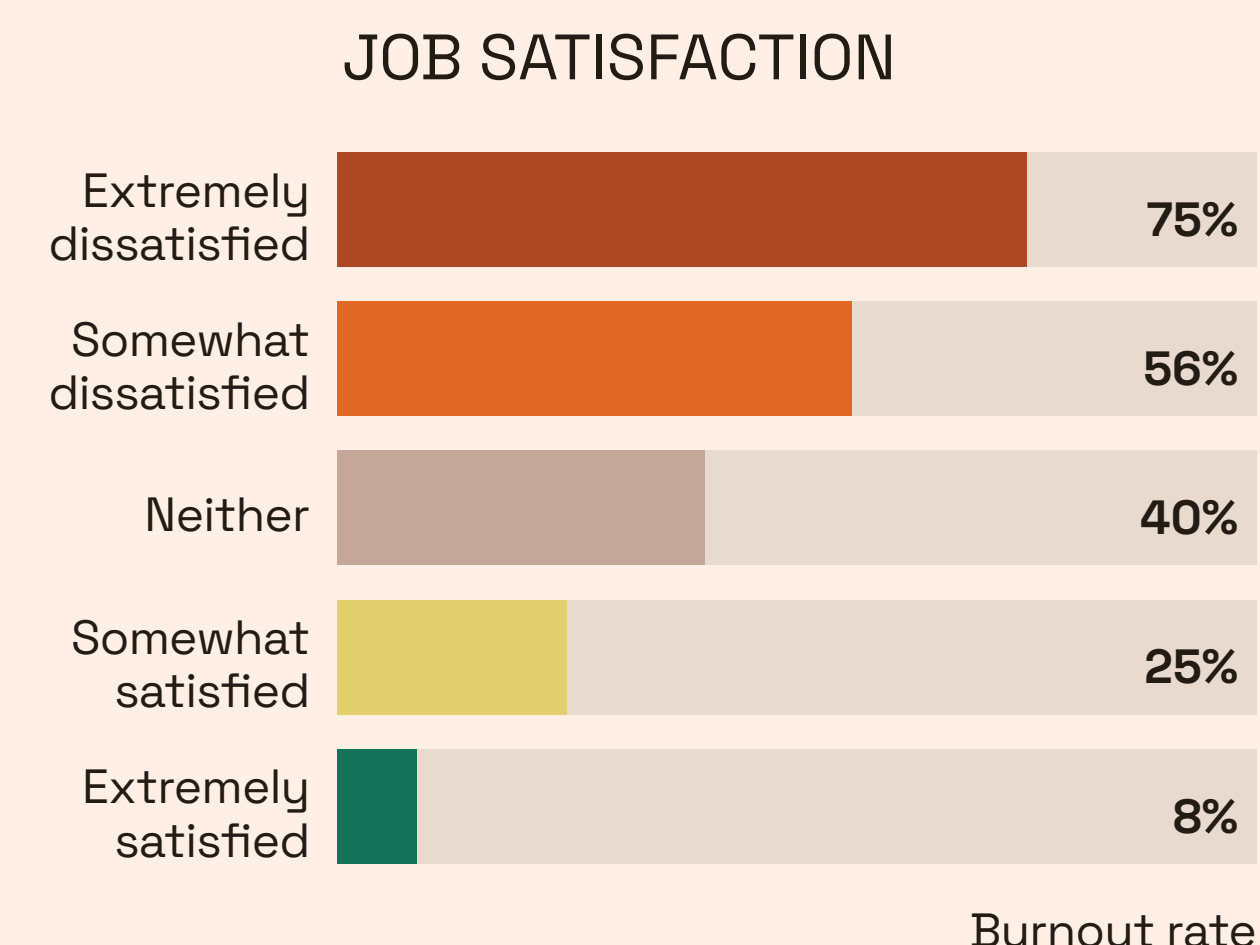
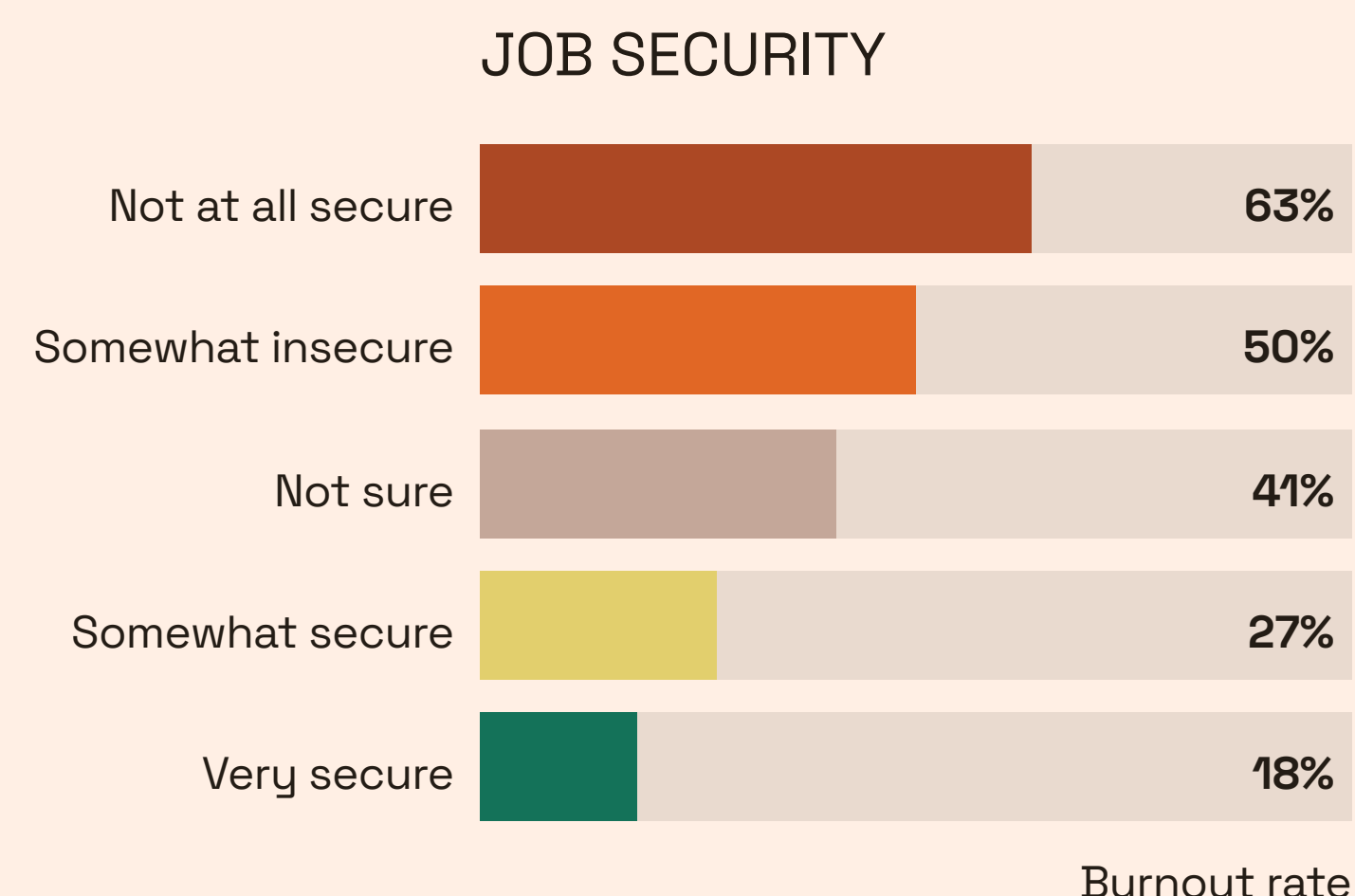
indicated they are worse off today than 12 months ago. "How is your wellbeing compared to 12 months ago?"

-20 points

People experiencing burnout report average wellbeing of **39** compared with **59** among those who are not burnt out.

Three factors predict burnout better than any demographic

Three factors about job security, financial stress and job satisfaction separate people's likelihood of experiencing burnout far more sharply than any demographic variable in this study. Below are burnout rates by response group.



A 45-point gap

The more secure you feel in your job the less likely you are to experience burnout. Job security produces one of the largest differentiators for burnout.

A 28-point gap

Financial stress sits partly outside work, but pay, contract security and shift predictability are all employer decisions.

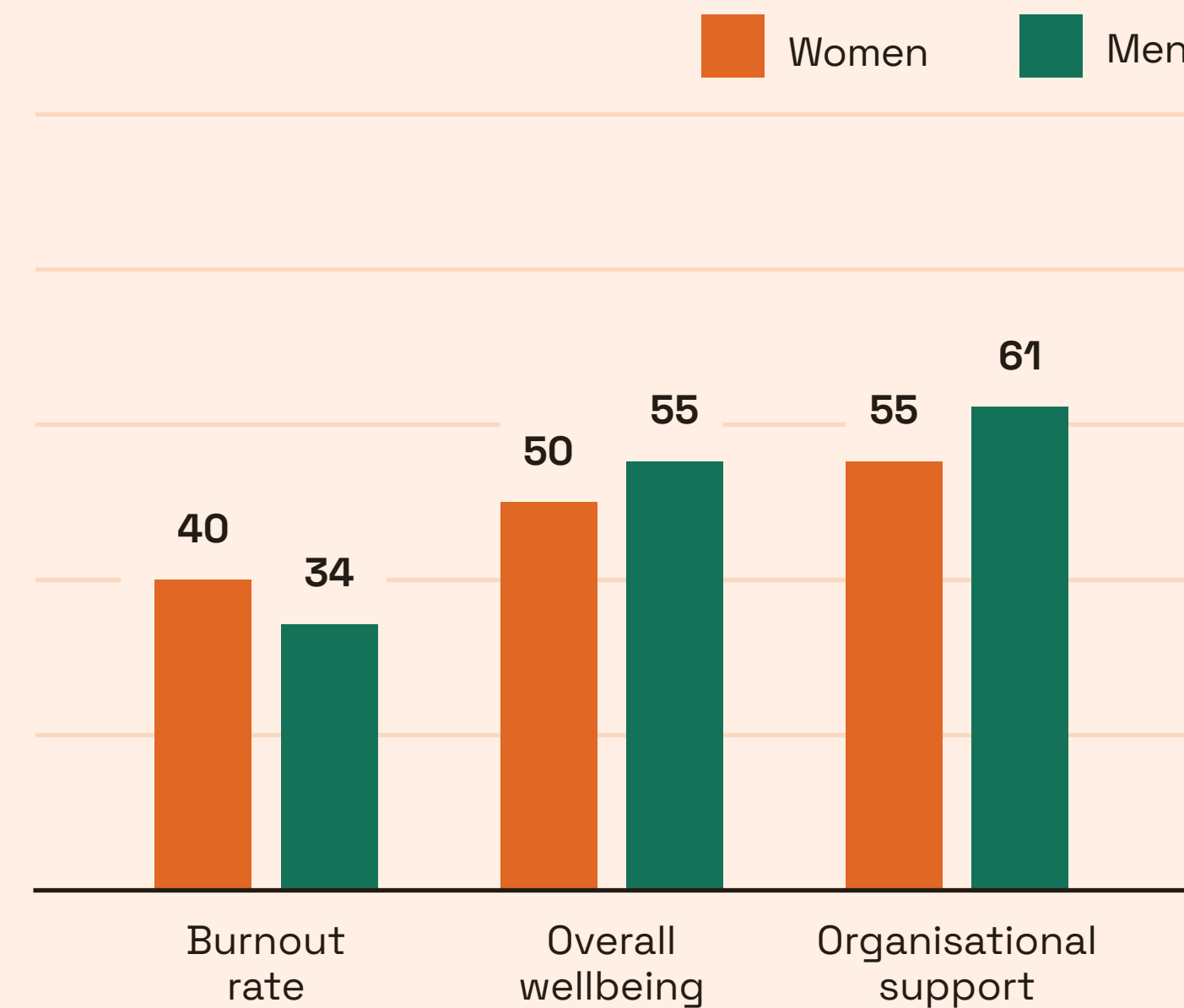
A 67-point gap

Performance masking: those dissatisfied with their job are more likely to experience burnout, but burnout also affects those who are satisfied with their jobs.

Demographics still plays a role in the divide

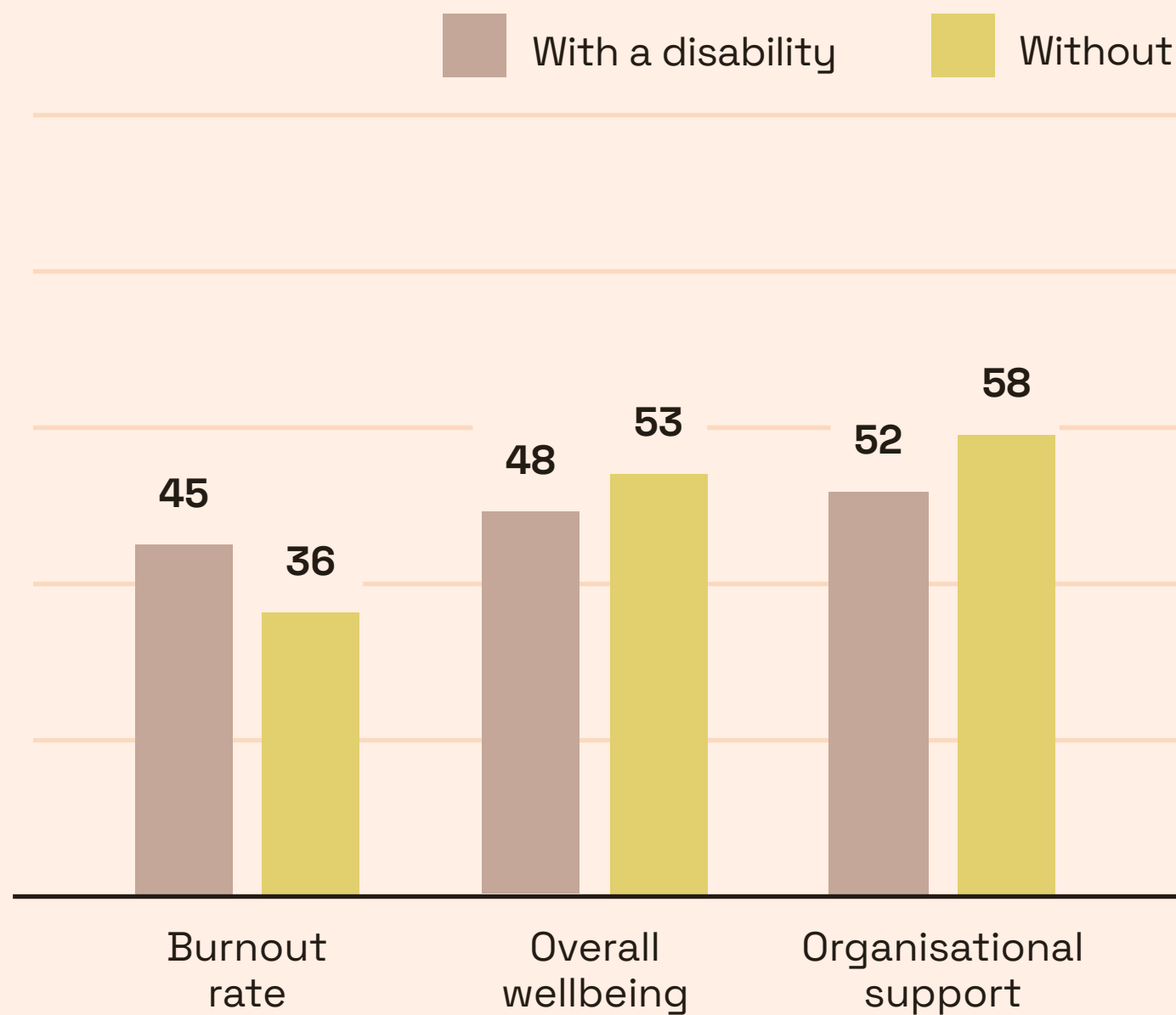
Demographics do not cause burnout. They do predict who is more exposed to the conditions that do.

GENDER



The divide between women and men in the workplace persists.

DISABILITY OR CHRONIC CONDITION



The broadest disparity in the study showed worse outcomes for those with a disability across the outcomes shown.

What factors don't differentiate

When it comes to burnout, these common identity-based factors showed no significant differences on burnout or wellbeing this year:

Age group

Caring responsibilities

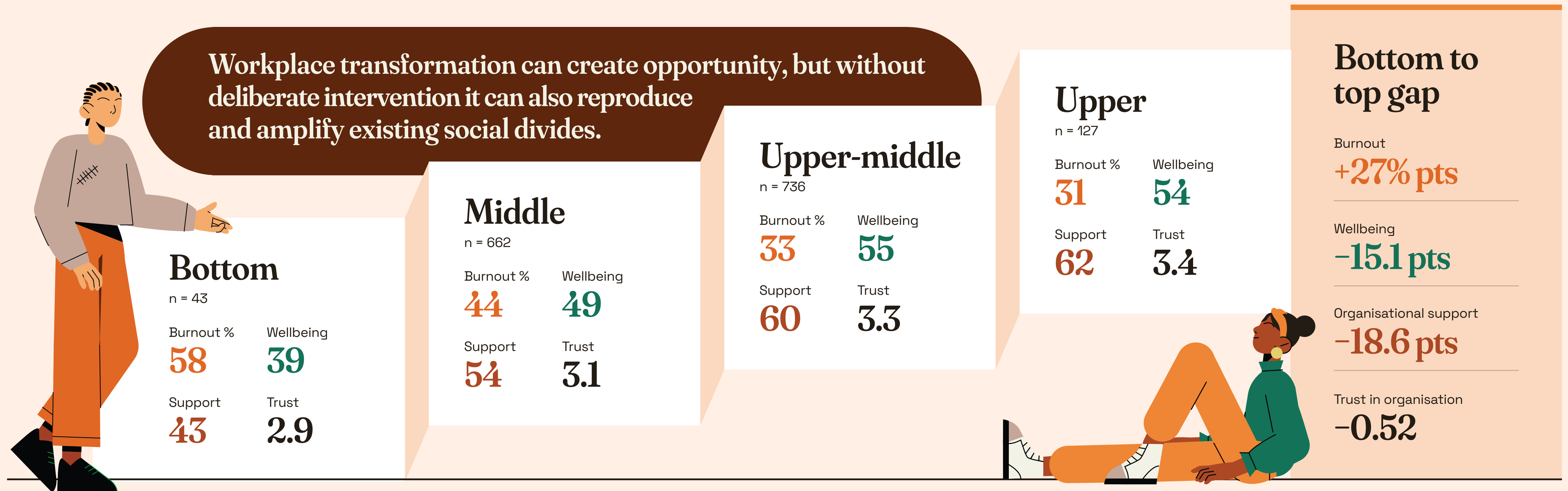
People managing responsibilities

Job level (e.g., individual contributor, Management), and

Job location (e.g., hybrid)

Where you sit in the org chart does not predict burnout; where you sit in society does.

This year's study used the MacArthur ladder, a 10-rung self-placement of where people stand in society, and showed clear differentiation between socioeconomic classes. Those in the bottom levels of the ladder experience more negative outcomes from work.



The bottom and upper class groups are small so read as a trend.

Burnout is a percentage. Wellbeing and organisational support are indexed /100. Trust is scored /5.

CHAPTER 2

The New Drivers of Burnout

The impact of cognitive load and extra work hours.



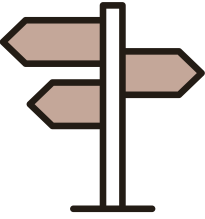
The problem is not demanding work, but the avoidable effort surrounding it.

71% work around poorly designed systems to do their job.

Unpaid overtime increases burnout and decreases wellbeing.

People are overwhelmed by friction, not by complexity

Three types of mental demand can feel equally tiring. Only two of them are linked to burnout.



Necessary challenge

Complex cases, difficult decisions and work that requires prolonged concentration.

This is the thinking the job requires.

ASSOCIATION WITH BURNOUT

No significant increase



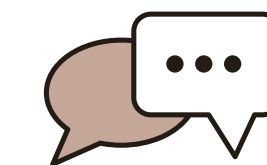
System friction

Broken systems, duplicated work, unclear instructions, chasing information and unnecessary approvals.

This is work created by the organisation, not by the job.

ASSOCIATION WITH BURNOUT

+74% higher odds of burnout



Fragmentation

Constant messages, interruptions, task switching and too many competing decisions.

This is the cost of never being able to focus.

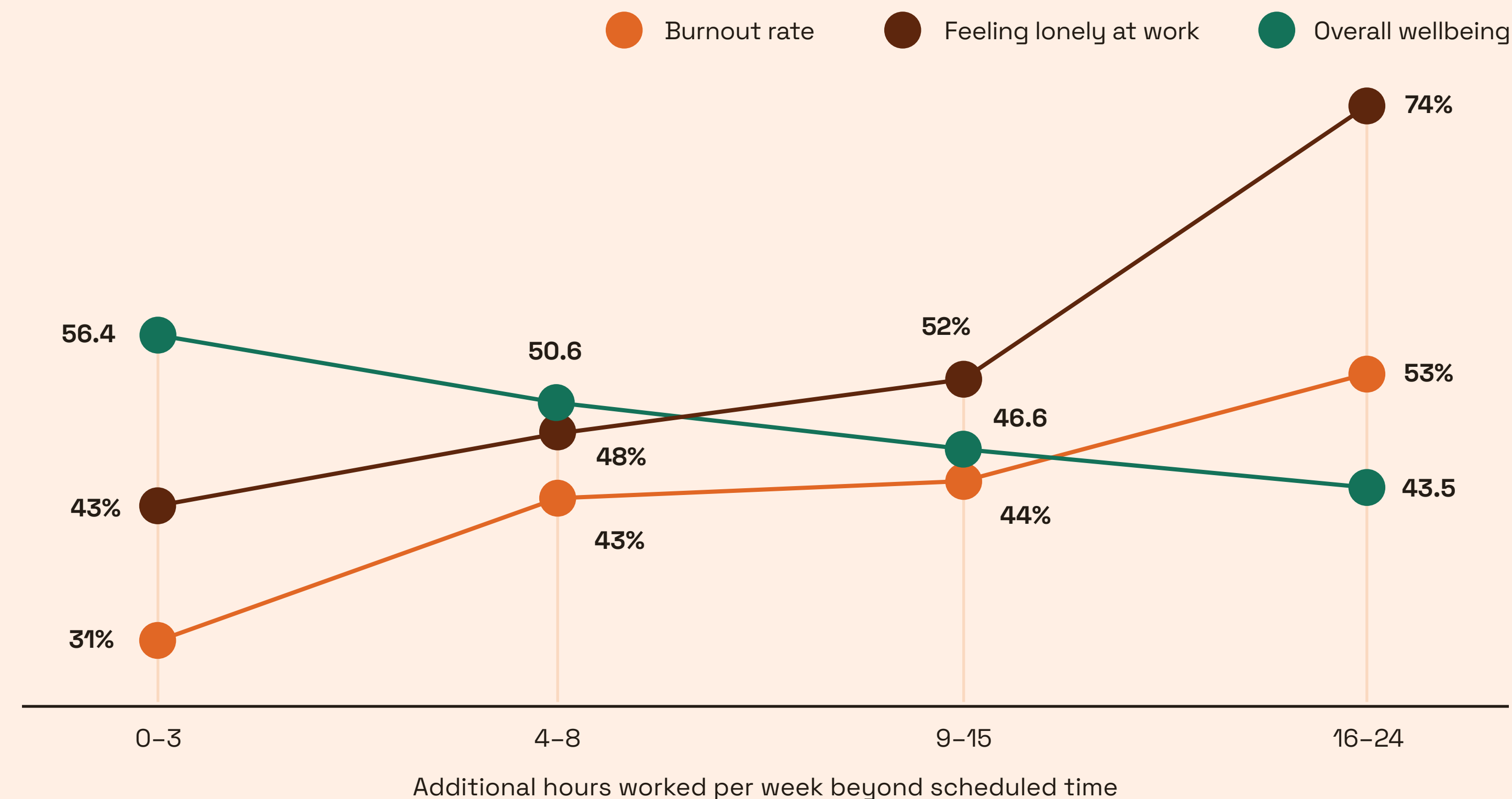
ASSOCIATION WITH BURNOUT

+53% higher odds of burnout

Complex work is not the problem. Work becomes damaging when people must fight the system and continually rebuild their focus.

Extra hours don't just tire people, they isolate them

This year's study asked about hours worked beyond a regularly scheduled week. It is a sharper measure, because it isolates the extra load rather than the contracted one.



* The 25+ hour group is too small to report.

Burnout rises 22 points across the range, wellbeing falls 12, and loneliness rises 31% points

Burnout is a percentage. Wellbeing and organisational support are indexed /100. Trust is scored /5.

Extra hours should trigger a work-design review

People working the most extra hours are the people who are most likely to experience burnout and lower wellbeing.

In addition, the data suggests that extra work hours are also associated with a person feeling lonely at work.



CHAPTER 3

The Human Cost

Mental health, loneliness, trust and productivity.



65% self-reported experiencing a mental health issue in the past 12 months.

39% of all respondents indicated needing professional mental health support and did not get it.

48% feel lonely at work and it has strong effects on productivity, engagement and trust.

Those not experiencing burnout are nearly 3x more likely to report improved productivity.

Mental health is interconnected with the workplace

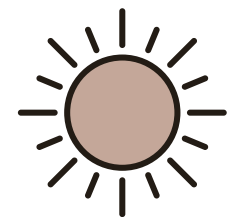
The workforce broadly accepts that life outside work affects performance, but mental health issues, absence and support seeking are deeply patterned by differences in work conditions and individual circumstances.



65%

report a mental health issue* in the last 12 months.

“Have you experienced any sort of mental health issue in the last 12 months, where your social and emotional wellbeing has been negatively affected for several weeks?”



64%

agree positive personal circumstances improve productivity.

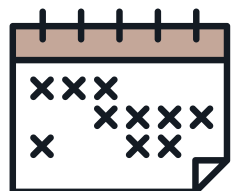
“When things are going well in my personal life, I feel more productive at work.”



60%

agree personal difficulties affect work performance.

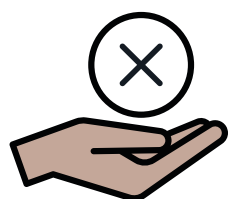
“When things are difficult in my personal life, it affects my performance at work.”



75%

of those with a mental health issue took at least one day off.

“In the past 12 months, how many days, if any, did you take time off work due to a mental health issue?”



29%

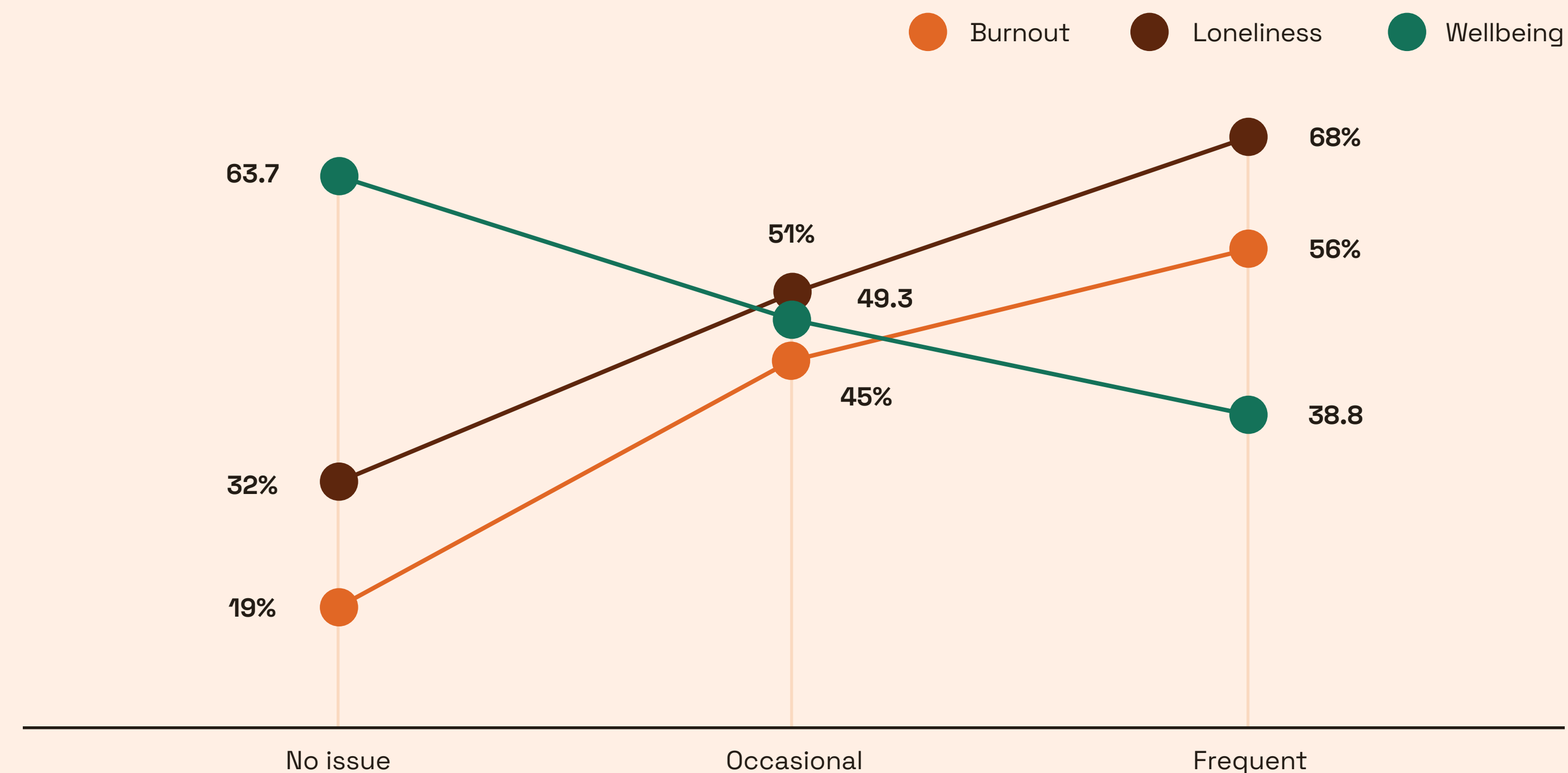
of those reporting having a mental health issue did not seek any support.

“In the past 12 months, have you sought mental health support from a mental health professional or someone you know?”

* Mental health issue is defined as the times when your social and emotional wellbeing has been negatively affected, impacting your feelings, thoughts, relationships, routines and daily activities.

Mental health strain shows up in every organisational outcome

While commonly seen as an individual issue, mental health has a major effect on organisational metrics.



All differences are statistically significant

Burnout is a percentage. Wellbeing and organisational support are indexed /100.

The odds, not the averages

Compared with people reporting no mental health issues, those reporting occasional or frequent issues increases their odds by over 4x for burnout and almost 3x for loneliness.

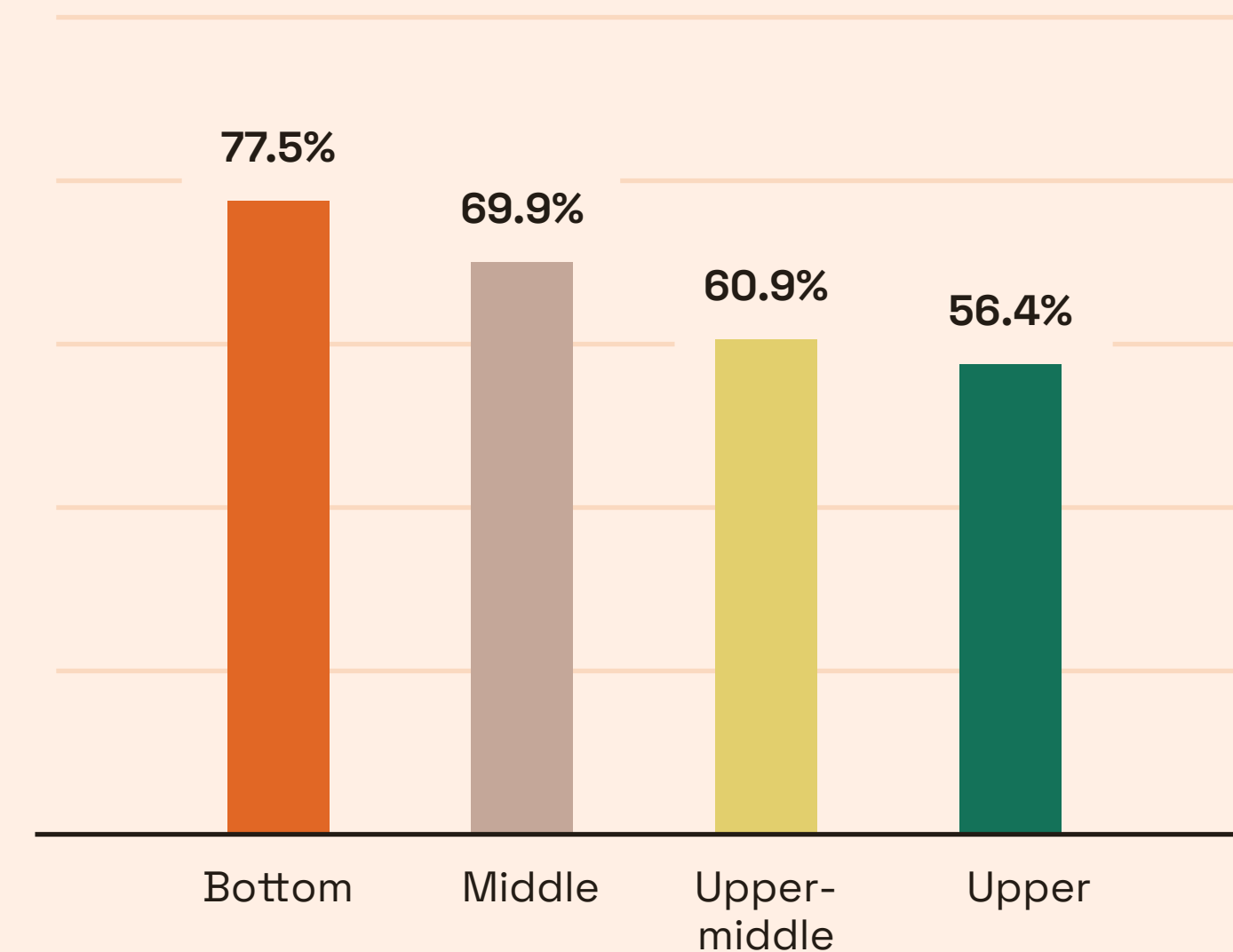
Why it matters

By the time workplace metrics show a deterioration in performance, it is a lagging indicator of something already broken in the system and will likely continue to deteriorate.

Mental health strain and burnout follow the social ladder

Both the incidence of mental health issues and burnout steadily rises as socioeconomic class falls.

REPORTED A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE



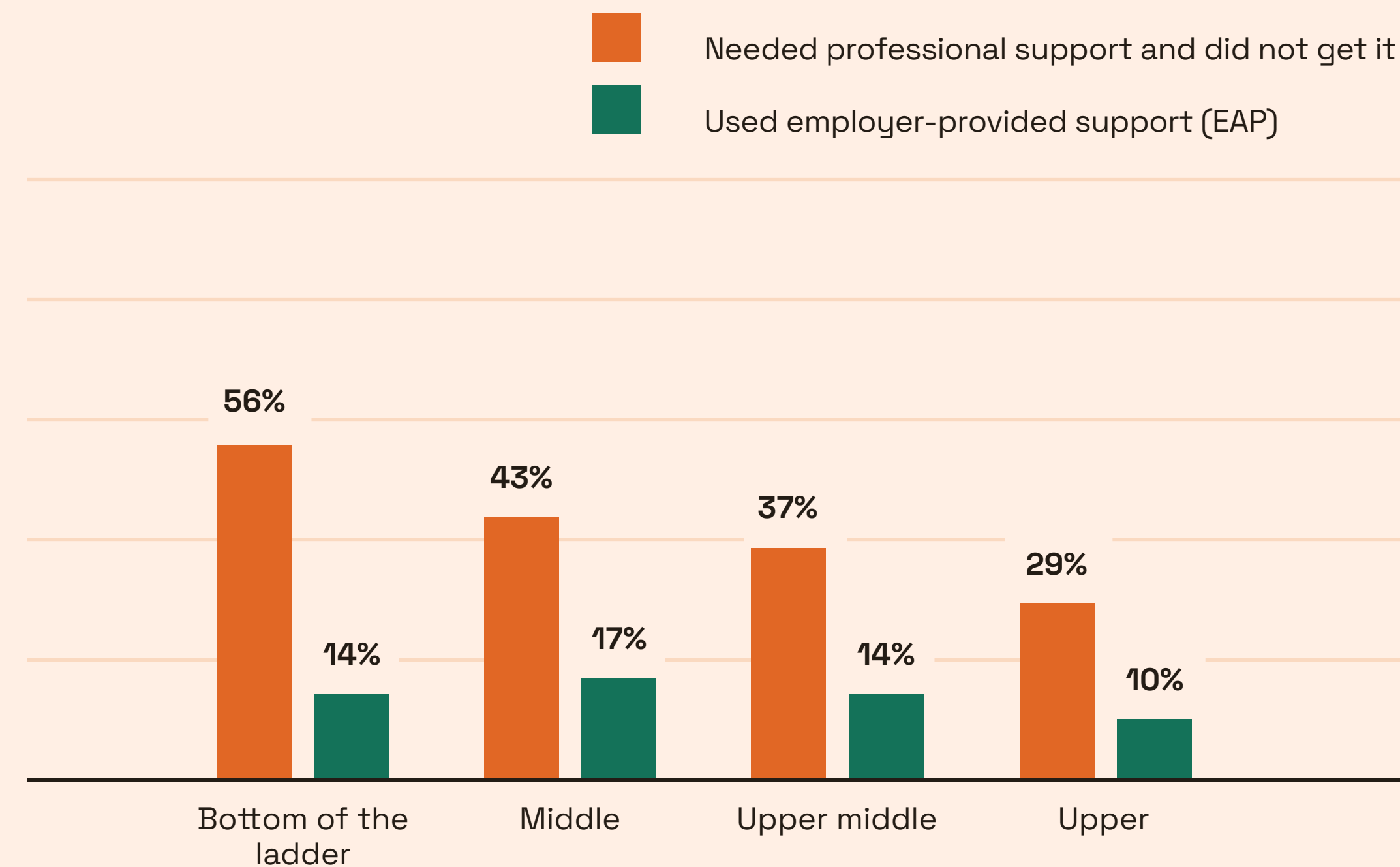
BURNOUT DIMENSIONS



The class difference is statistically significant. The bottom and upper class groups are small so read as a trend.

The support runs out exactly where it is needed most

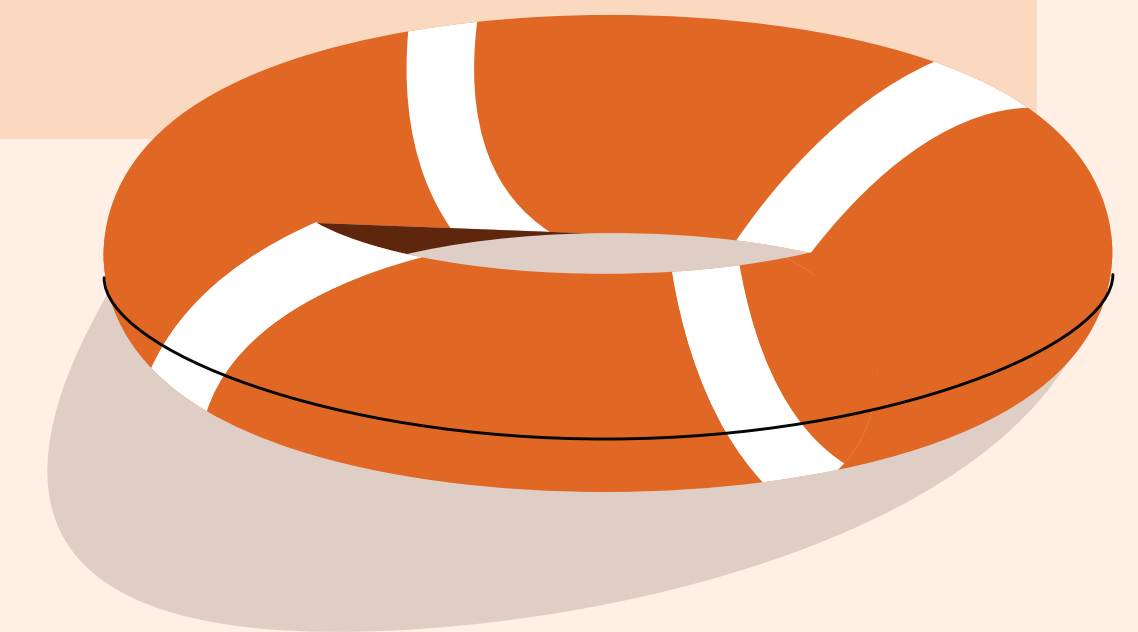
The proportion who needed professional mental health support but did not get it increases significantly for the bottom half of the ladder. Use of the support employers actually provide does not.



A benefit that misses

56% of people at the bottom of the ladder needed professional mental health support in the past year and did not get support when needed compared with 29% at the top.

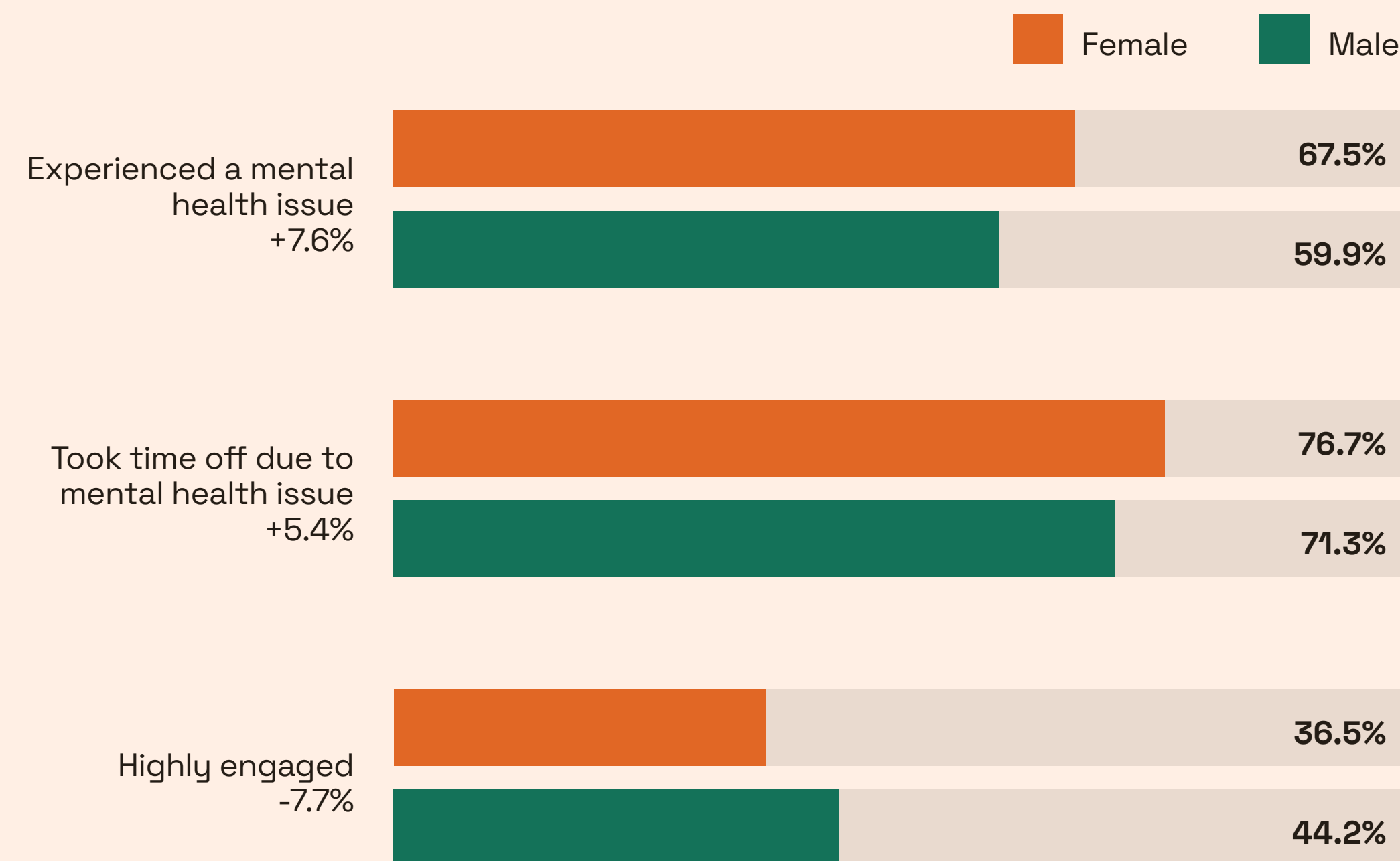
Unmet need for professional support rises sharply lower down the ladder. Before adding another service, examine awareness, eligibility, accessibility and suitability and the working conditions people are seeking help about.



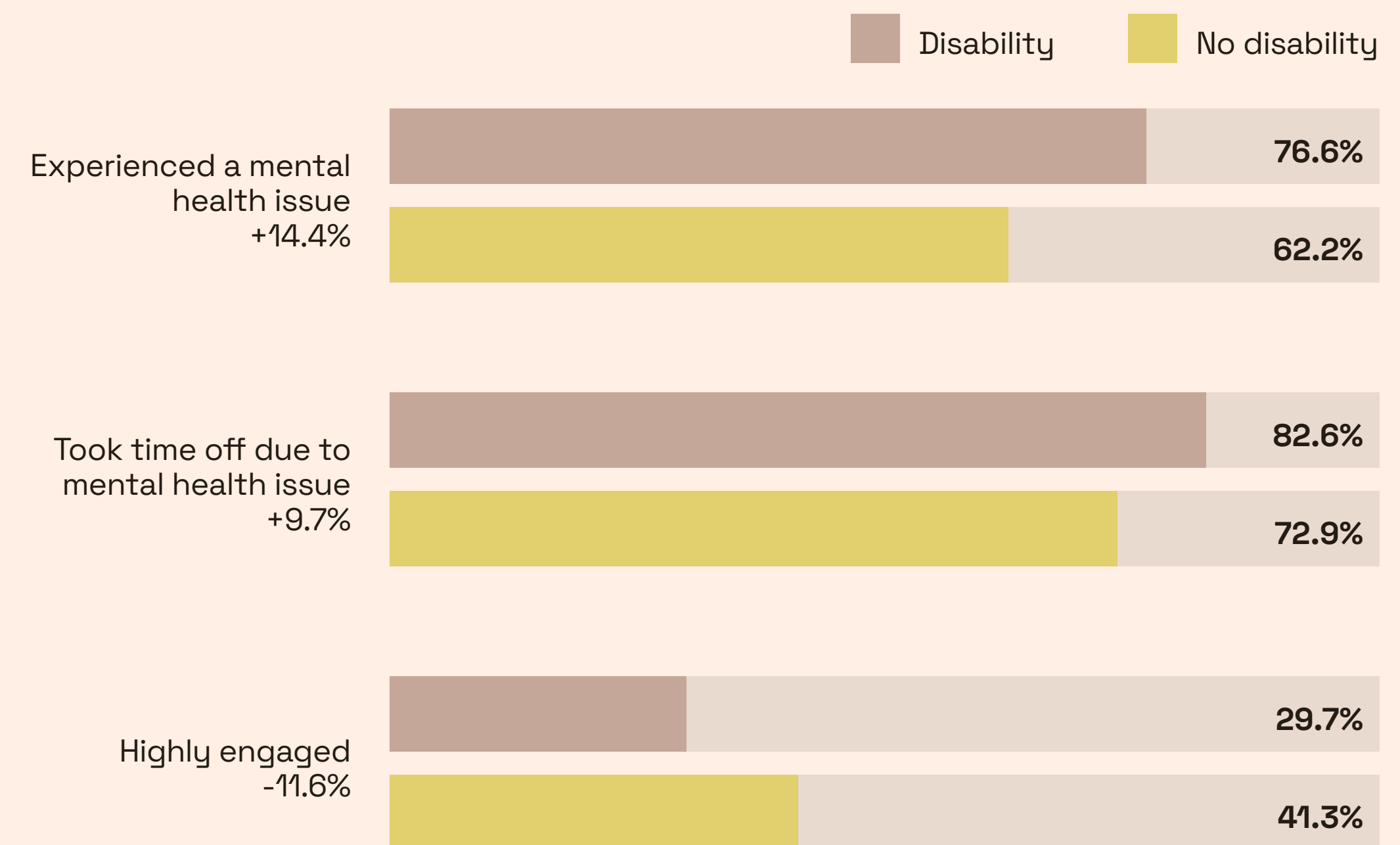
The same job costs some people more

Women and people with disability or chronic condition are more likely to report mental health issues and less likely to be highly engaged at work.

GENDER · FEMALE VS MALE



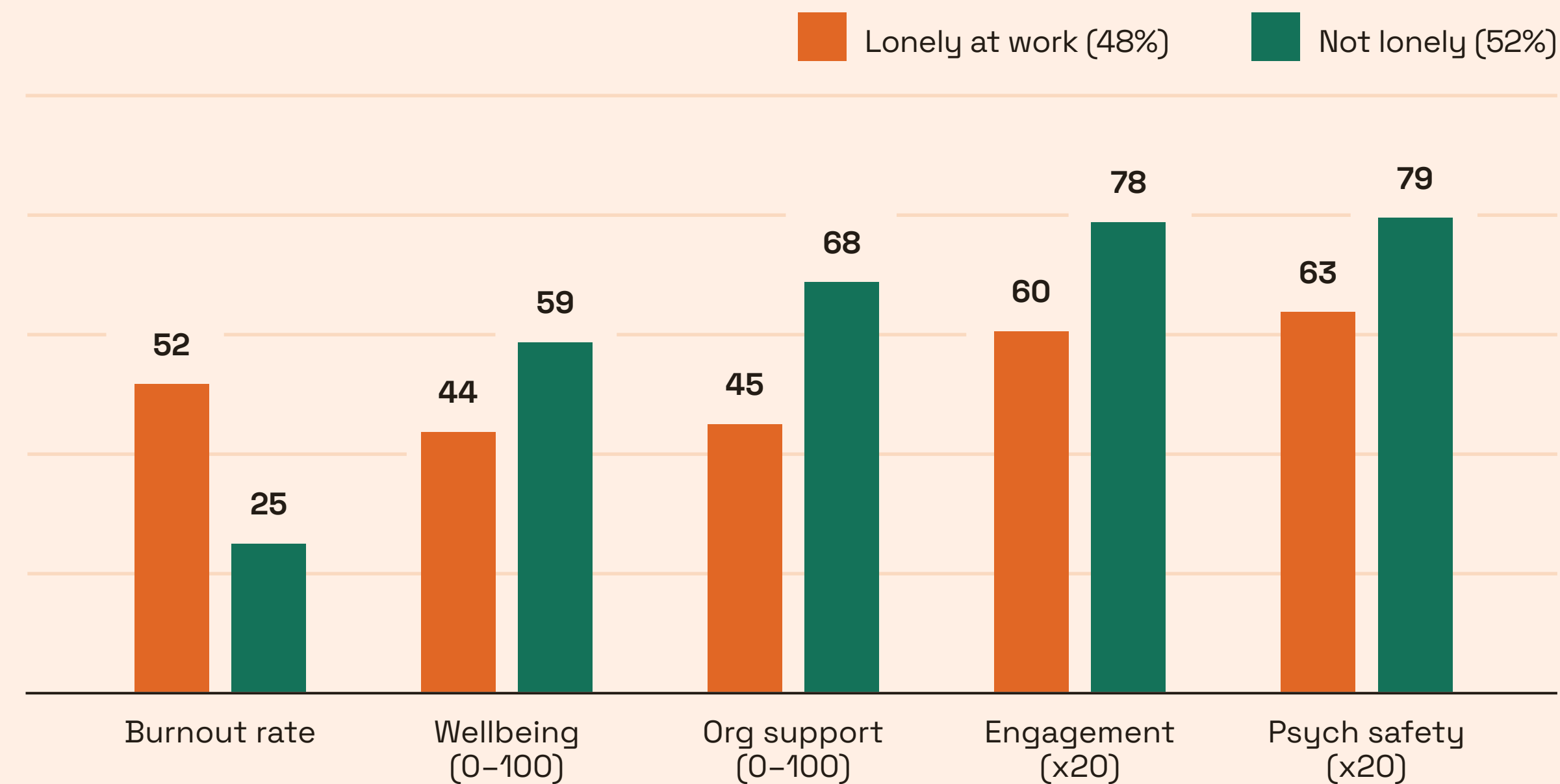
DISABILITY · WITH VS WITHOUT



All comparisons statistically significant.

Loneliness in the workplace is rampant

Almost one in two (48%) respondents report lacking companionship or feeling left out or isolated at work at least some of the time.



Lonely respondents are burnt out at more than twice the rate of everyone else — 52% against 25% — and score 23 points lower on perceived organisational support.

Burnout is a percentage. Wellbeing and organisational support are indexed /100. Trust is scored /5.

Loneliness can remain hidden by performance

Among respondents classified as lonely, 62% report the same or greater productivity.

72% report the same or higher quality.



Loneliness is not burnout wearing a different name

Nearly half the people classified as lonely are not burnt out. A burnout-only strategy would never find them.

48%

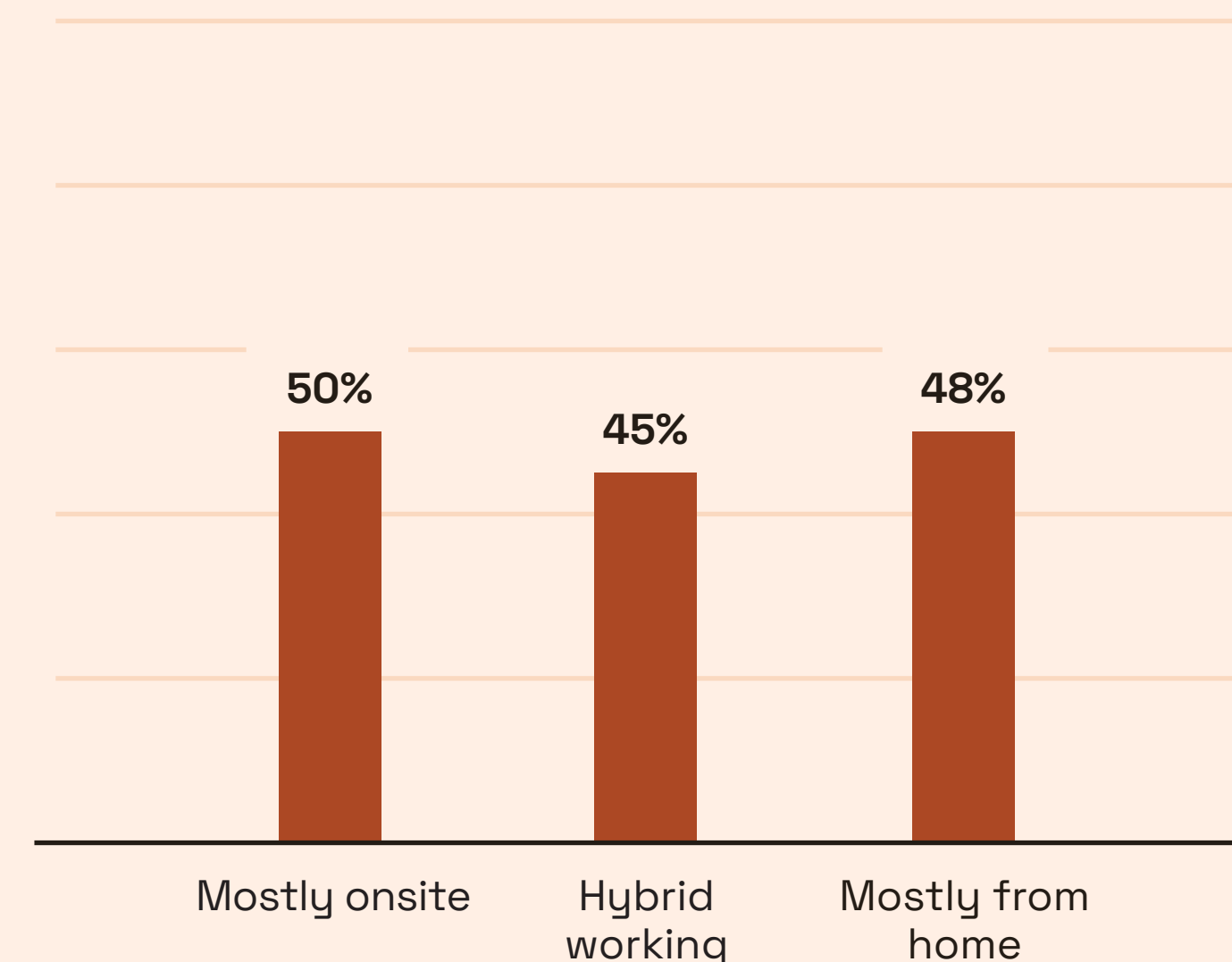
of the workforce is classified as lonely at work. Of those, 52% are experiencing burnout.

Loneliness hides behind output

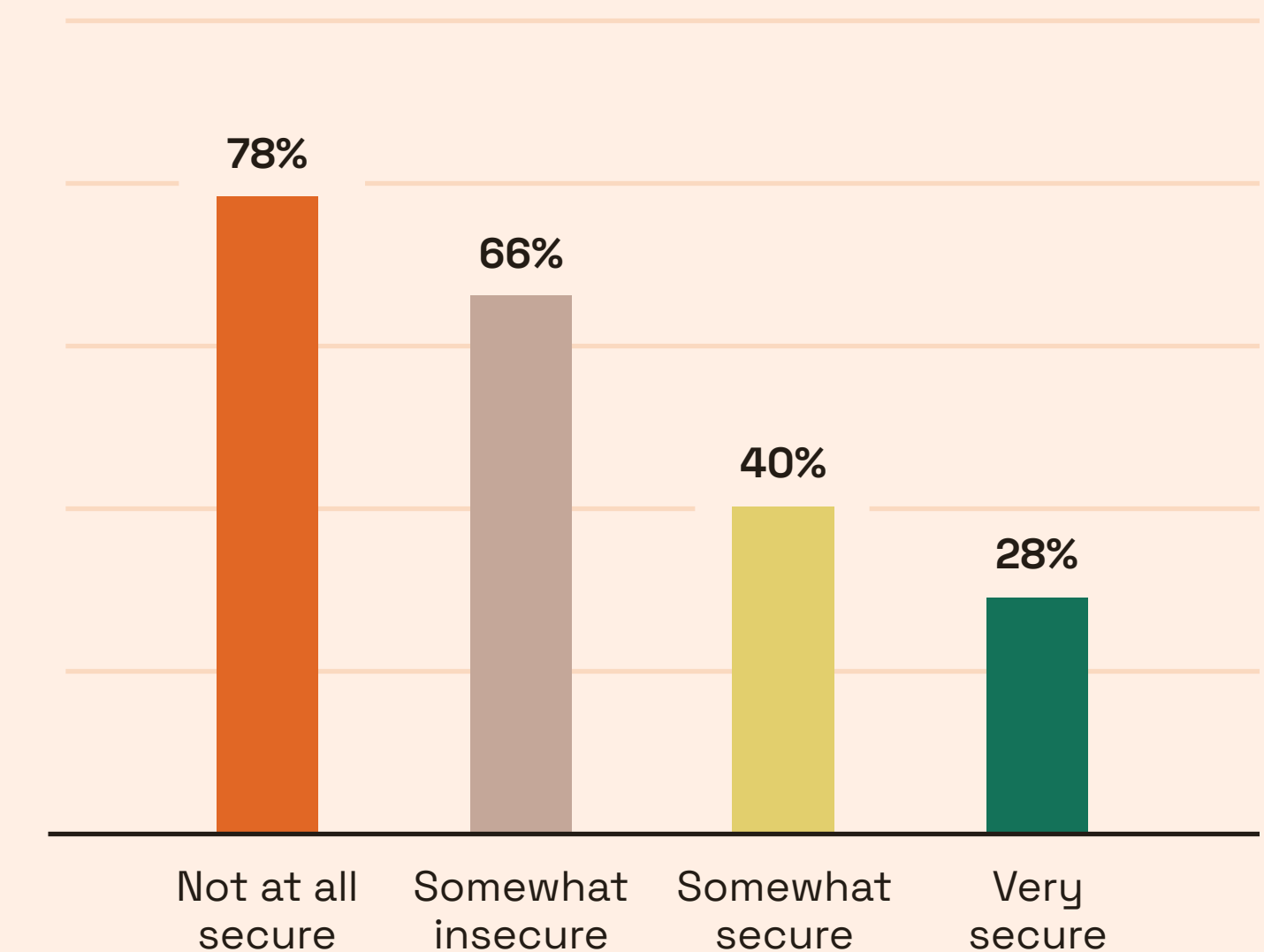
31% of those experiencing loneliness in the workplace report improved productivity in the past 6 months. However, only 23% of those experiencing loneliness reported being engaged.

It is not about where people sit. It is about whether they feel safe.

WHERE PEOPLE WORK
(% experiencing workplace loneliness)



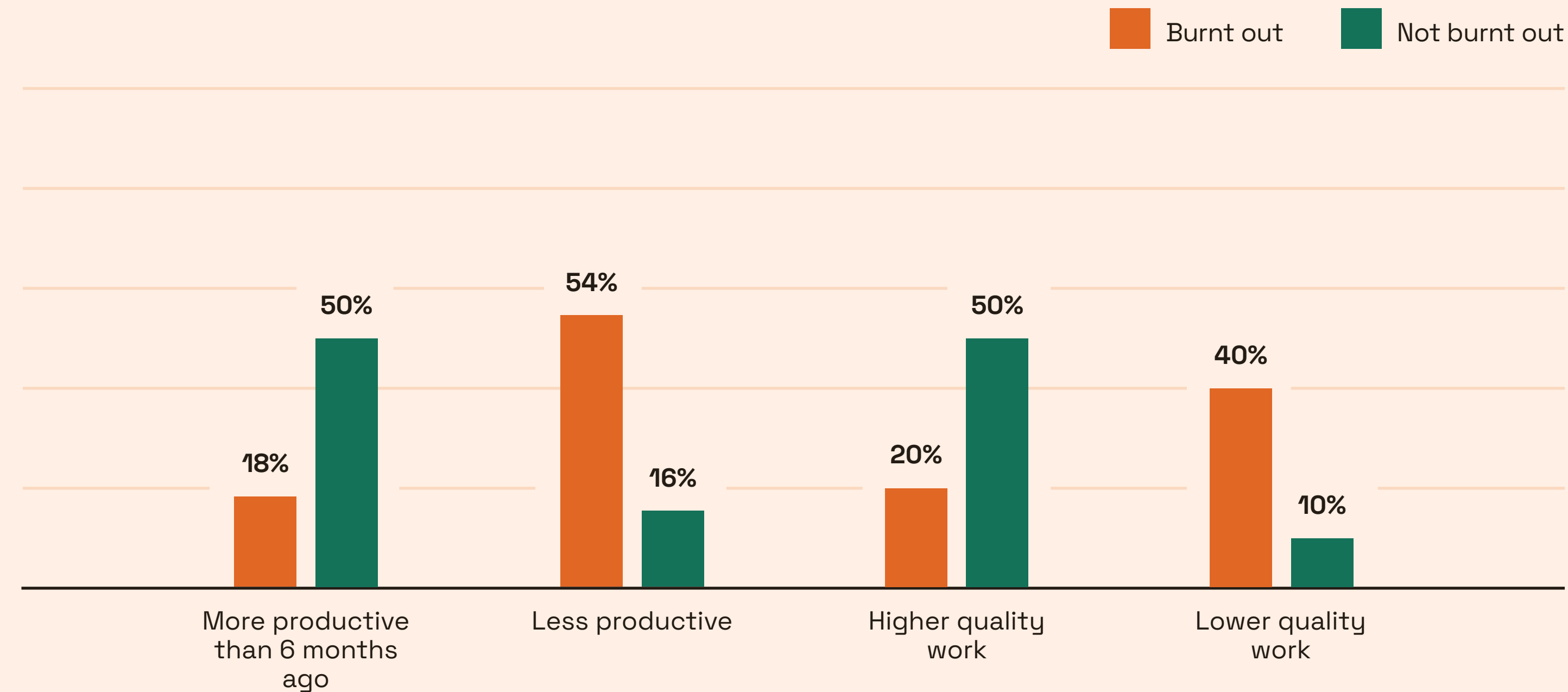
WHETHER THEY FEEL SECURE IN THEIR JOB
(% experiencing workplace loneliness)



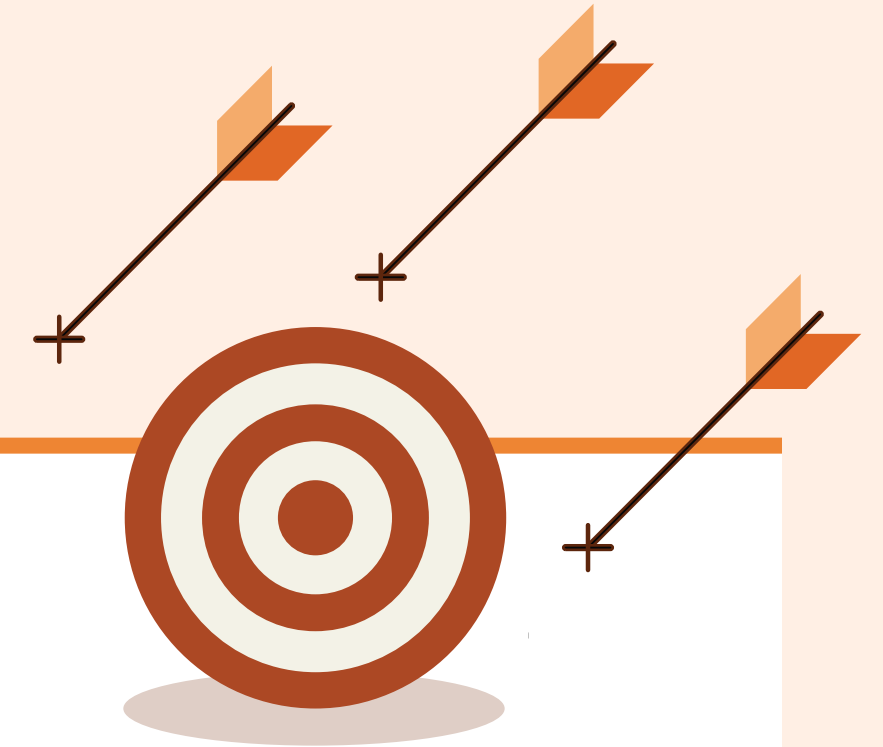
Adjusted for other variables, strong psychological safety cuts the odds of experiencing loneliness by 32% and increases engagement by 37%.

Pushing a depleted workforce does not produce more output

Depleted people produce less, and worse. Burnout is a productivity and duty of care problem that makes it a board level issue. Boards must review workforce health alongside productivity and ask whether current targets will significantly affect the workforce's wellbeing.



2.8×



People who are not burnt out are 2.8 times more likely to report higher productivity in the past 6 months.

2.5×

People who are not burnt out are 2.5 times more likely to report higher quality work in the same period.

CHAPTER 4

Closing the Divide

The divide was designed. It can be redesigned to build sustainable workplaces.



Who pays for the future of work is a design decision, not a forecast.

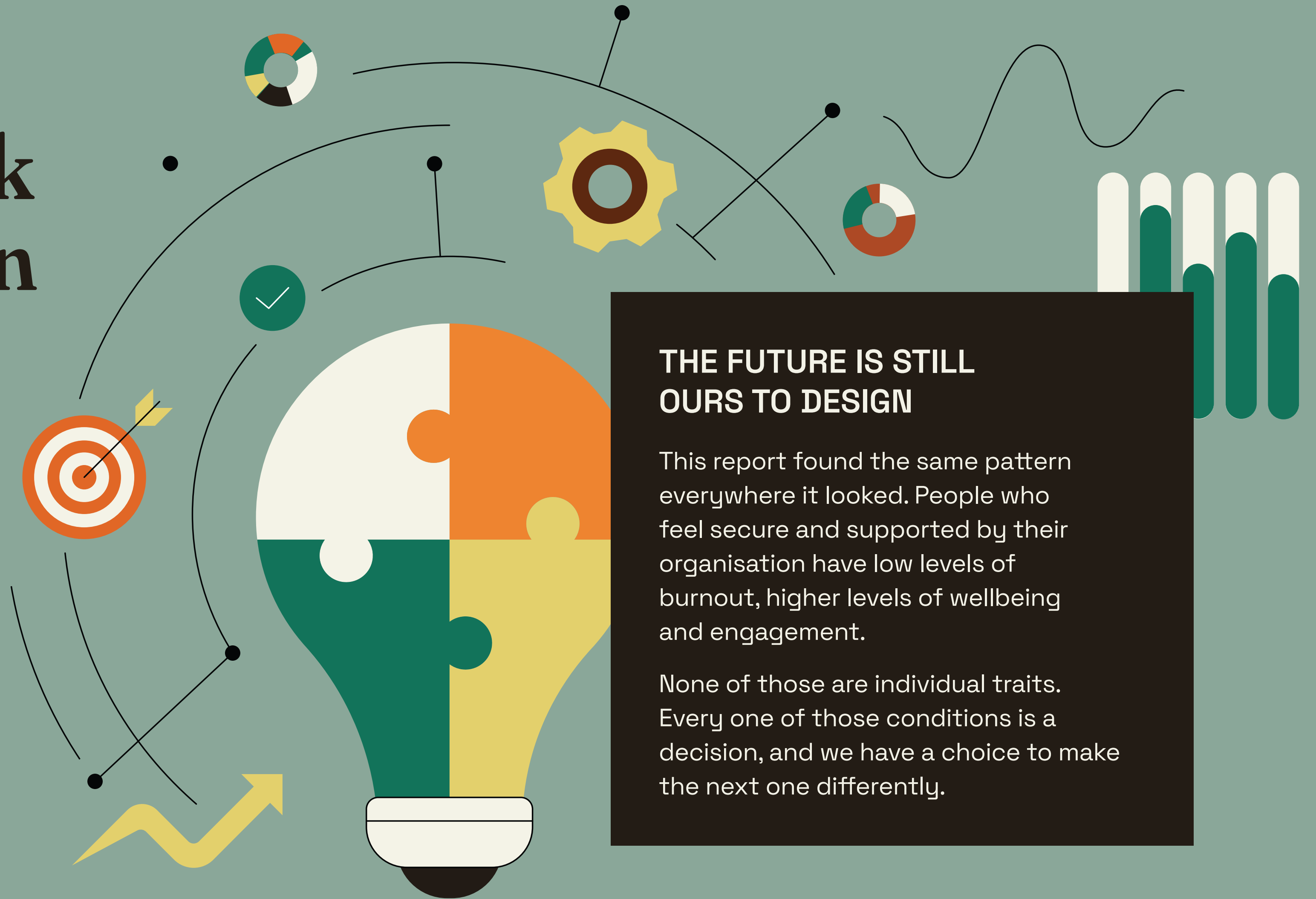
Five design choices to close the divide.

The questions boards should be asking this year.

The future of work is a design decision

Technology and workplace transformation can improve jobs, increase flexibility and create new opportunities. Those benefits are not shared automatically.

Without deliberate work design, the employees with the greatest resources capture the benefits of change, while those with the least security carry more of the workload, the uncertainty and the mental health cost.



THE FUTURE IS STILL OURS TO DESIGN

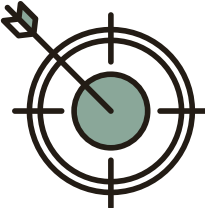
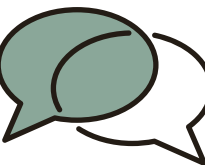
This report found the same pattern everywhere it looked. People who feel secure and supported by their organisation have low levels of burnout, higher levels of wellbeing and engagement.

None of those are individual traits. Every one of those conditions is a decision, and we have a choice to make the next one differently.

The challenge is not to prepare people for the future of work. It is to decide what future we are building, who benefits from it and who is left carrying its cost.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Five design choices leaders can make now to close the divide

01		Design the friction out of the work	Run quarterly work-redesign reviews focused on duplicated processes, unclear approvals, unnecessary reporting, meeting overload, interruptions and repeated rework.
02		Make extra working hours visible, then reduce them	Measure hours worked beyond schedule for each team/team member. Identify sources for extra hours (e.g., workload, process) and reduce.
03		Convert superficial support into real support	It's not about fruit bowls and gym memberships. Review workload, staffing and manager capability, and discuss with your people what type of organisational support will most help them create a sustainable workplace.
04		Treat job security as a psychosocial risk control	During any major organisational change, establish a 'no-surprises' standard: communicate what is known, what remains uncertain, when decisions will be made, how roles may change, and what redeployment or reskilling options exist.
05		Build trust and belonging as a route to productivity	Trust and productivity move together. Building trust and belonging needs to be in the same conversation about improving performance and productivity.

From evidence to sustainable workplaces

The findings point to a clear conclusion: sustainable high performance depends on the conditions around the work, not on how much pressure individuals can absorb.

Advances in technology, new ways of working and a genuine appetite for a sustainable working life have created an opportunity to reshape the workplace where the benefits all go to those who already had the most, and the costs settle on those who had the least.



Workplace sustainability is the intentional design of a workplace to create **mutual value for the organisation and its people.**

Elements of workplace sustainability

Better work design → healthier people → more sustainable performance

ELEMENT

EVIDENCE

Protection from harm

Job security and excessive hours expose people to increased likelihood of **burnout**. Where are sustained overload concentrated in your organisation?



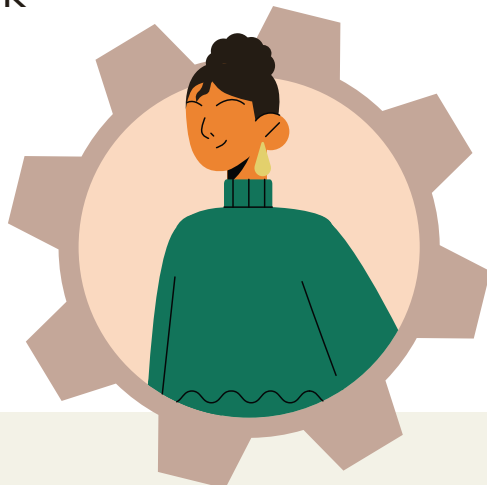
Human leadership

Trust is a foundation of **productivity**. Do your leaders have the skills and support to build trust with their teams?



People-centred structures

The productivity problem lies with poorly designed systems that create friction and **constant distractions**. Where can we remove the friction to do good work and protect our people's focus?



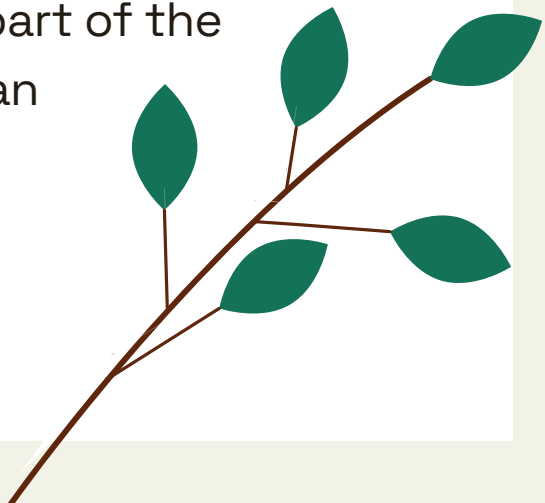
Team connection

Nearly half the workforce is **lonely in the workplace**. How do we better prioritise and resource efforts to build meaningful connections in our workplaces?



Growth culture

Sustainable high performance requires **capability and capacity**. How are we ensuring we provide the time, access, and support to professional growth as part of the job, not as an extra?



Five questions boards must ask

A board’s role is to set strategic direction, oversee risk and hold management accountable for long-term performance. These questions help directors assess whether decisions are made for sustained long-term wellbeing of the organisation and its people.

1	Are we funding the capacity our strategy requires? STRATEGY, INVESTMENT AND RESILIENCE	Do our plans provide sufficient staffing, functioning systems, development and recovery time? Have we accounted for the cumulative demands of change?
2	What is the full cost of sustainable performance? FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE	Where do current results depend on recurring additional hours, avoidable effort or declining wellbeing? What could this mean for future capability, quality and organisational resilience?
3	Who benefits from the way work is designed today and who carries the cost? STAKEHOLDER INTEREST AND PEOPLE RISK	Which groups report poorer experiences, and what do those differences reveal about access to security, support and opportunity? How will our next decision affect those gaps?
4	What evidence shows that workplace risks are being managed and our controls are working? DUE DILIGENCE AND ASSURANCE CONTROLS	What workforce indicators and employee feedback reveal alongside financial and operational results? Are improvements reaching the most affected groups, and what will trigger further board action?
5	What culture are our leaders and incentives creating? LEADERSHIP, INCENTIVES, AND EMPLOYEE LISTENING	Do executive targets and rewards support sustainable performance? Can people safely raise concerns about workload, support and connection, and what happens when they do?

“Every decision about work is a decision about who gets to thrive. We have the choice to build a future that works for more people and creates a more equitable society.”

- Dr. John Chan

About the study

1,815 participants* • 12 countries

GENDER		WORK LOCATION		ORGANISATION TYPE	
Woman or female	61%	Mostly onsite	45%	For-profit	49%
Man or male	37%	Hybrid working	34%	Non-profit/NGO	24%
Non-binary/ Prefer not to state	2%	Mostly from home	20%	Government	16%
				Self employed	11%
JOB LEVEL		ORGANISATION SIZE		AGE PROFILE	
Individual contributor	61%	Less than 10	18%	18–24	7%
People leader	16%	10–24	9%	25–34	21%
Middle management	11%	25–99	17%	35–44	27%
Executive/C-suite	10%	100–999	33%	45–54	25%
		1,000 +	22%	55–64	16%
				65 +	4%

* Drop out rate of 7.5%. Analysis based on 1,679 completed responses. Certain items may have additional drop-offs. Percentages are of those answering each item, excluding ‘prefer not to answer’.

This is a cross-sectional study. Relationships described are associations, not causal effects.

This study received ethics approval from the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (UTS HREC),Approval No. HE-2026-0537.

CITATION

Chan, F. M. (2026). The State of Workplace Burnout 2026: The Workplace Divide. Infinite Potential, Sydney, Australia.

GLOSSARY

Burnout

An occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Measured across three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy by the Infinite Potential Burnout Scale.

Wellbeing

A person’s optimal overall physical, mental, emotional and financial health.

Socioeconomic class

The MacArthur Scale measures an individual’s subjective social status by assessing their self-perceived position in society relative to others based on a combination of their income, education level, and occupational prestige.

Loneliness

A distressing experience arising from perceived isolation or inadequate meaningful connection at work. Measured with the UCLA three-item scale.

Cognitive load

The total mental effort a role demands. Separated into three sources: intrinsic (the work itself), extraneous (effort lost to poor systems and unclear direction) and fragmentation (excess information and interruption).

Mental health issue

Mental health issue is defined as the times when your social and emotional wellbeing has been negatively affected, impacting your feelings, thoughts, relationships, routines and daily activities.

The people behind the study

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr John Chan

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Dr John Chan is an industrial/organisational psychologist and the Managing Director of Infinite Potential. With more than 20 years of global experience, John has dedicated his career to transforming our ways of working and our relationship with work. His mission is to make the workplace a haven in an unpredictable world, redefining how organisations sustain high performance and support their people.

John has worked across diverse industries, from Silicon Valley start-ups to NYSE and ASX-100 companies to community service organisations. He is a leading voice in workplace burnout and sustainability, a regular contributor to academic and media publications, and a sought-after speaker at national and international conferences.

About Beyond Blue

Beyond Blue is a leading Australian mental health organisation, working to help people feel better earlier, get support when they need it and stay well. For more than 25 years, Beyond Blue has been a trusted source of mental health information, advice and support, while advocating for change to improve the mental health of people across Australia. Beyond Blue delivers free, confidential support services, develops evidence-informed resources and programs, undertakes research and works with governments, workplaces, communities and partners to create environments that support good mental health.

About The Ultimo Institute

The Ultimo Institute at UTS is a centre for research, dialogue and action dedicated to strengthening democracy by rebuilding the economic foundations of trust, opportunity and shared prosperity. Through research and cross-sector collaboration, the Institute shapes contemporary debate on the critical challenges linking economic inequality, corporate power, democratic resilience and social justice.

The State of Workplace Burnout 2026

Thank you

Media enquiries

Interviews, presentations, and additional breakdowns are available on request.

Contact info@infinite-potential.com.au for more information.

www.infinite-potential.com.au

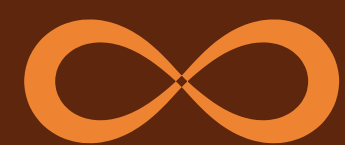
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About Infinite Potential

Infinite Potential is an independent think tank focused on research and evaluation of complex workplace matters. Using a systems approach, we partner with leaders in business, government and community services to provide insights and solutions through robust research and analysis.

Our mission is simple: To make work a haven of enrichment and engagement for everyone. We believe that by building better workplaces, we can build a better society.



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