

Mental health in the automotive industry: moving up a gear

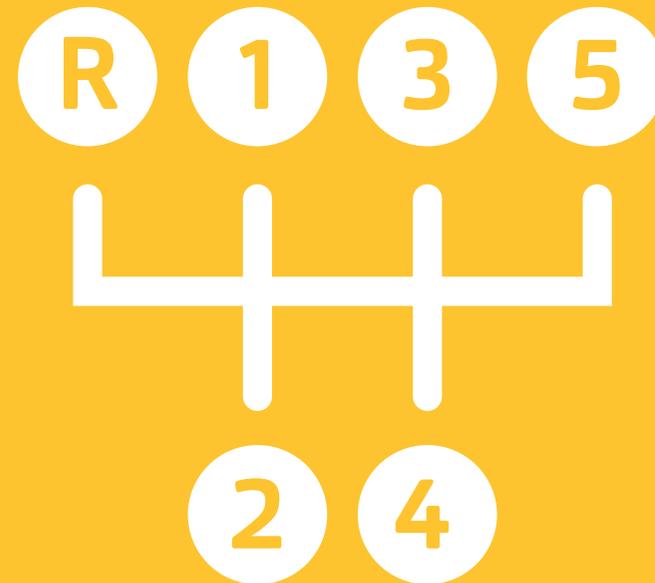
A £1.2bn cost to the automotive industry

October 2019



Summary

This whitepaper analyses the evidence about mental health in the automotive industry, outlines the facts and builds a clear case for businesses to take action in support of their employees. As part of this, Ben wants to work in partnership with automotive industry employers to make a positive difference to the mental health of those who work in the automotive industry.



An introduction

Mental health is something we all have, just like physical health.

It is all too easy to forget we can wake up one day feeling full of energy, refreshed with little or no physical discomfort. Yet, on another day we might wake up feeling tired, lethargic with a few aches and pains. The same is true of our mental health, but it can be harder to identify with or acknowledge. It isn't so tangible but probably explains the well-known analogy of 'getting up on the wrong side of the bed'. Physical and mental health can therefore sit anywhere on a scale from good to poor, at any point.

It's commonly accepted that adults spend roughly 1/3 of their lives at work – a significant amount of time. Whilst work is generally considered good for our health and wellbeing, mental health concerns are on the rise. Around 1 in 4 people in the UK

experience a mental health problem each year so it's unsurprising that poor mental health alone is costing employers.

Mental health is a very broad term and for the purposes of this paper:

- Clinically diagnosed conditions such as anxiety and depression are a main area of focus given that these conditions are manageable, treatable and preventable with the right support, at the right time
- We are not considering stress as a diagnosed condition, but we will discuss how to support employees with the management of stress, including developing coping strategies to improve personal resilience
- Examples of severe and enduring diagnosed mental health conditions including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder will be referenced as applicable in the paper
- We will also be discussing the concept of wellbeing and how this can contribute to both positive mental and physical health.



An introduction

In November 2018, the government published **Thriving at Work**. The report uncovered that those who are working and struggling with mental health problems still feel stigmatised and are very often not getting the support they may benefit from.

Meanwhile, many employers remain unsure how to provide the right support and the UK economy is losing billions as a result. Mental health, therefore, continues to be a huge concern for UK employers and the automotive industry is no exception to this.

Ben is supporting more and more individuals with mental health issues each year, including anxiety and depression, as well as more severe, enduring cases. Mental health has become the main reason why automotive industry people contact Ben for support.

Last year, mental health issues represented **52% of our helpline enquiries (April 2018-March 2019)**, compared to 29% the year before and, during January to September 2019, this figure was 47%. Further, 53% of our **Automotive Industry Survey 2018** participants said that mental health and wellbeing issues had the biggest impact on them in the past 12 months.

The Automotive Industry Survey 2018 was our second piece of automotive industry-wide health and wellbeing research. As part of this, Ben carried out two surveys – one for individuals in the automotive industry, and one for senior leaders and HR professionals. Our research and its findings have helped us identify and more fully understand the key issues facing both employees and employers placing us in a strong position to respond to the needs of our industry.

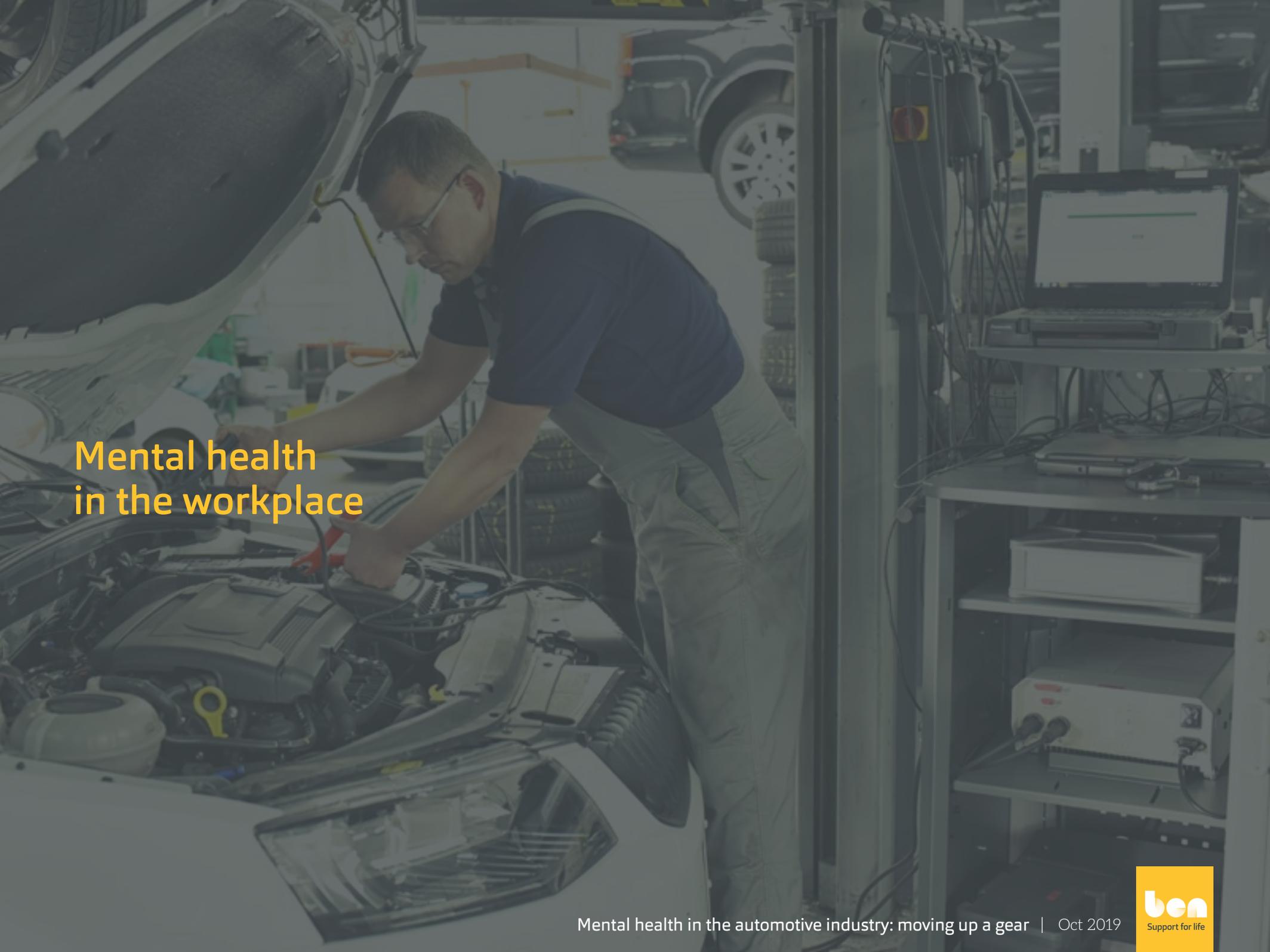
Ben's findings are loud and clear: **mental health is one of the biggest issues affecting the wellbeing of the automotive industry workforce**. In this whitepaper, we will examine the evidence and what we, in the automotive community, can do to drive positive mental health across the industry.



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of our survey participants say mental health and wellbeing issues has the biggest impact on them



Mental health in the workplace

Mental health in the workplace

When it comes to workplace issues, mental health can still be considered a difficult area to talk about. Furthermore, although the topic of mental health is higher up on the news agenda these days, there is still a stigma attached to it, according to [Public Health England](#) - both in and outside of the workplace.

A lack of awareness and understanding, coupled with a perceived lack of advice and support, can lead to mental health issues in the workplace being ignored or downplayed.

There are also inconsistencies regarding support offered to employees and how openly mental health is discussed. Yet, the stigma that still exists isn't just down to employers, it can also come about because individuals themselves find it difficult to open up about their challenges, with their own perceptions of mental health.

Our experience of working with automotive employers is demonstrating an increase in

businesses embracing initiatives to promote positive mental health in the workplace, but there are inconsistencies. We believe a more consistent, continuing approach is needed across the industry. Employers can help initiate conversations about mental health by adopting an open culture and embracing training and workplace programmes or initiatives.

This year's survey showed that the automotive industry recognises the impact that mental health issues can have on a business, as well as its employees¹. Yet, one finding stood out in particular: **91% of employees** in the automotive sector have been affected by a health and wellbeing issue in the last year².

Out of all issues revealed, anxiety had the most detrimental impact on employees' health and wellbeing overall.

Our findings are also providing insights that suggest more automotive employees are feeling stressed and anxious which could be due to uncertainties and changes in the political, technological and economic landscape.

Also, cuts in benefits and other support systems mean that the social safety net is not as strong as it used to be. These services are not always able to provide responsive access to assessment and treatment for mild to moderate mental health issues, with waiting lists for talking therapies.

In addition to this, just 1 in 4 employees reported that they received support to help understand or manage their mental health³. Further, 44% of employees said their line manager doesn't regularly check in with them about how they are doing.



employees who received support to understand or manage their mental health



of employees say their line manager doesn't check in with them about how they are doing

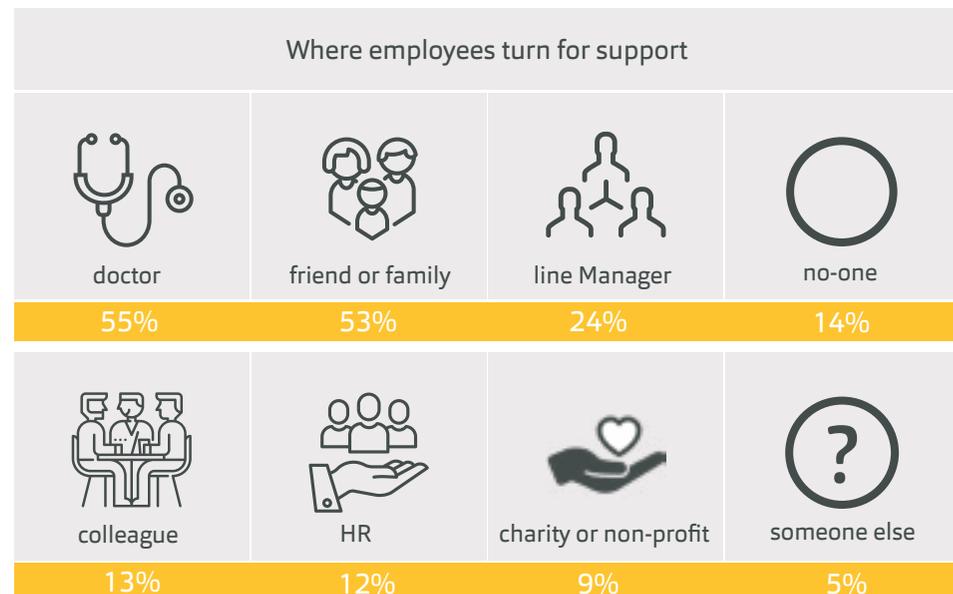
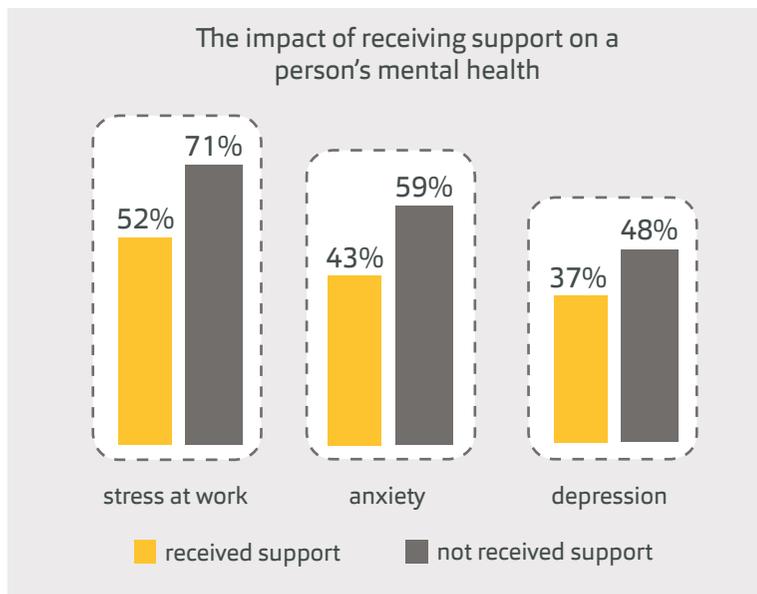
Mental health in the workplace

We know from our survey findings that, if employees have received support to understand and manage their mental health, they are less likely to report issues such as stress at work, anxiety and depression. It's also important to note that, if an employee has an issue with their mental health, they would prefer to approach a line manager (24%)

over a colleague (13%) or HR (12%)⁴. This highlights the real need for line managers to be trained in how to support their team members, not only when someone discloses an issue with their mental health, but also to recognise the signs. They need the skills and the confidence to tackle this sooner rather than later.

There's a clear need for mental health support, reflected in the thousands of visits to our mental health webpages and over half of all calls to our helpline. Anxiety and depression consistently remain in the top 10 reported issues⁵ and the most searched for topics on our website.

In August alone, our depression web page had over 3,600 views and our anxiety web page was viewed over 2,500 times. In addition, we have commissioned a total of 286 mental health assessments – an increase in 136% year on year (comparing April-August 2018 to April-August 2019).



The scale of workplace mental health challenges



The scale of workplace mental health challenges

In our survey, a total of 25% of automotive industry businesses reported that their employees had been unable to work because of mental health issues - something most prevalent in larger organisations, with 100+ employees.

When asked what issues had most affected their employees' health and wellbeing over the past 12 months, CEO and HR professionals put stress at the top of the list, at 61%. Further, 57% of employees said that stress at work affected their health and wellbeing. Yet, it's not just stress at work that affects people - there are a number of reasons why people can be stressed. Stress at home can impact a person's ability to concentrate at work and a combination of stress at home and stress at work creates added pressure on individuals.

Our survey also showed that those working in the automotive manufacturing and retail sectors are most affected by stress⁶. We believe this is because the retail sector can be a pressured environment, with targets and commission-based salaries.

As for the manufacturing sector, employees don't have a great deal of autonomy, they can be on low incomes and shift patterns can make home life more difficult. They also are affected by the changes in manufacturing such as diesel vs electric and other political and environmental changes.

While not a mental health condition itself, stress can have a knock-on effect on an individual's mental health. In fact, there is a direct correlation between stress and anxiety, as [Harvard Medical School reports that anxiety is a physical reaction to stress.](#)



25%
of automotive businesses report their employees have been unable to work due to mental health issues



61%
of CEO & HR professionals say that stress has most affected their employees' health



57%
of employees say that stress at work affects their health

The scale of workplace mental health challenges

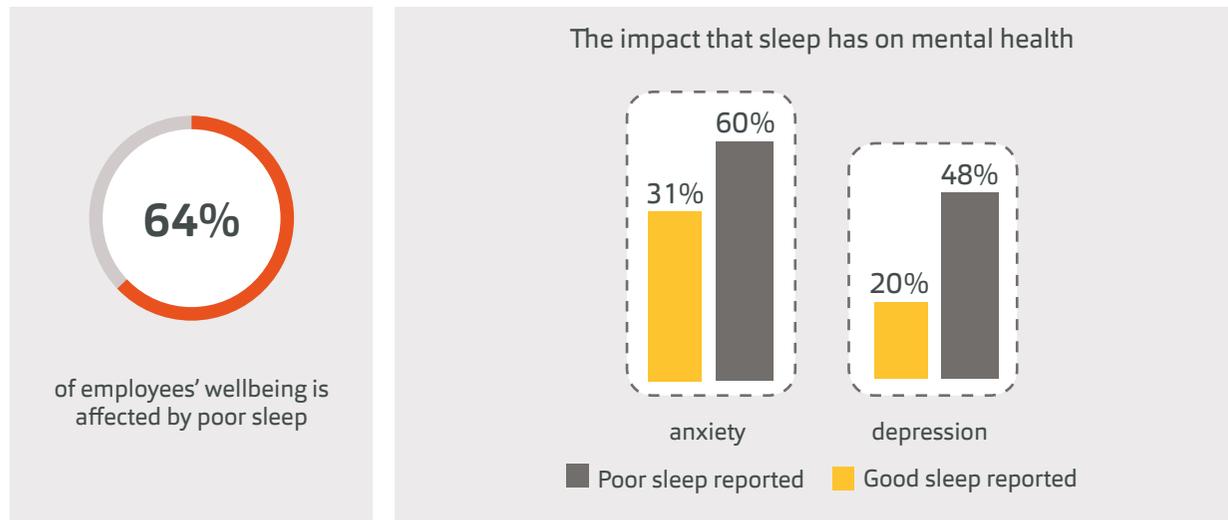
Stress can also affect other areas of a person's life which also directly impact on mental health. Sleep problems are common for an individual experiencing stress, according to the [Mental Health Foundation](#). In fact, poor sleep was the most common issue that affected automotive employee wellbeing (64%) last year⁷.

Stress and anxiety can make it difficult for an individual to fall

asleep, which can become self-fulfilling as they end up feeling anxious about getting to sleep. Sleep is crucial to our health and wellbeing and helps the body to function properly. In fact, our survey showed that those who experienced poor sleep were more likely to suffer with anxiety (60%), compared to those with good sleep (31%)⁸. The same applied to those suffering with depression - with a 48% versus 20% split.

The automotive industry is certainly not unique in workplace mental health issues, far from it. The most recent [BITC report into mental health at work](#), highlighted that mental health has a much higher profile than it did a generation ago, but the job is far from done. The report highlights that, despite progress, too many employees continue to suffer in silence at work, unable to fulfil their potential through a fear of prejudice and exclusion.

According to the same report, the prevalence and impact of mental health issues is severe, and employers need to urgently ramp up the breadth and quality of support they're providing. 3 in 5 employees have experienced mental health issues - this figure has remained consistent since BITC started reporting back in 2016.



The scale of workplace mental health challenges

These figures should be concerning for leaders and managers across all industries and sectors, including the automotive industry.

Putting aside the moral and reputational reasons for caring about employees' mental health, individuals struggling emotionally are unlikely to be performing at their best, which can impact on other colleagues. And, of course, there could be legal implications if the workplace is deemed to be adversely affecting mental health or discriminating against someone with a mental health issue under the [Equality Act 2010](#) or the [Health and Safety Act](#).

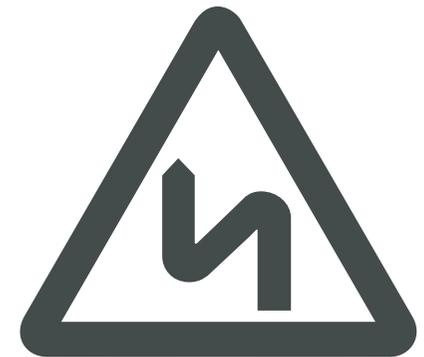
Such is the scale of the challenge that, if you are running a team of any size, the chances are that one or more members of that team could be experiencing issues with their mental health. And, of course, leaders and managers may also be struggling with their mental health, they are certainly not immune especially as they work in high pressured and demanding roles.

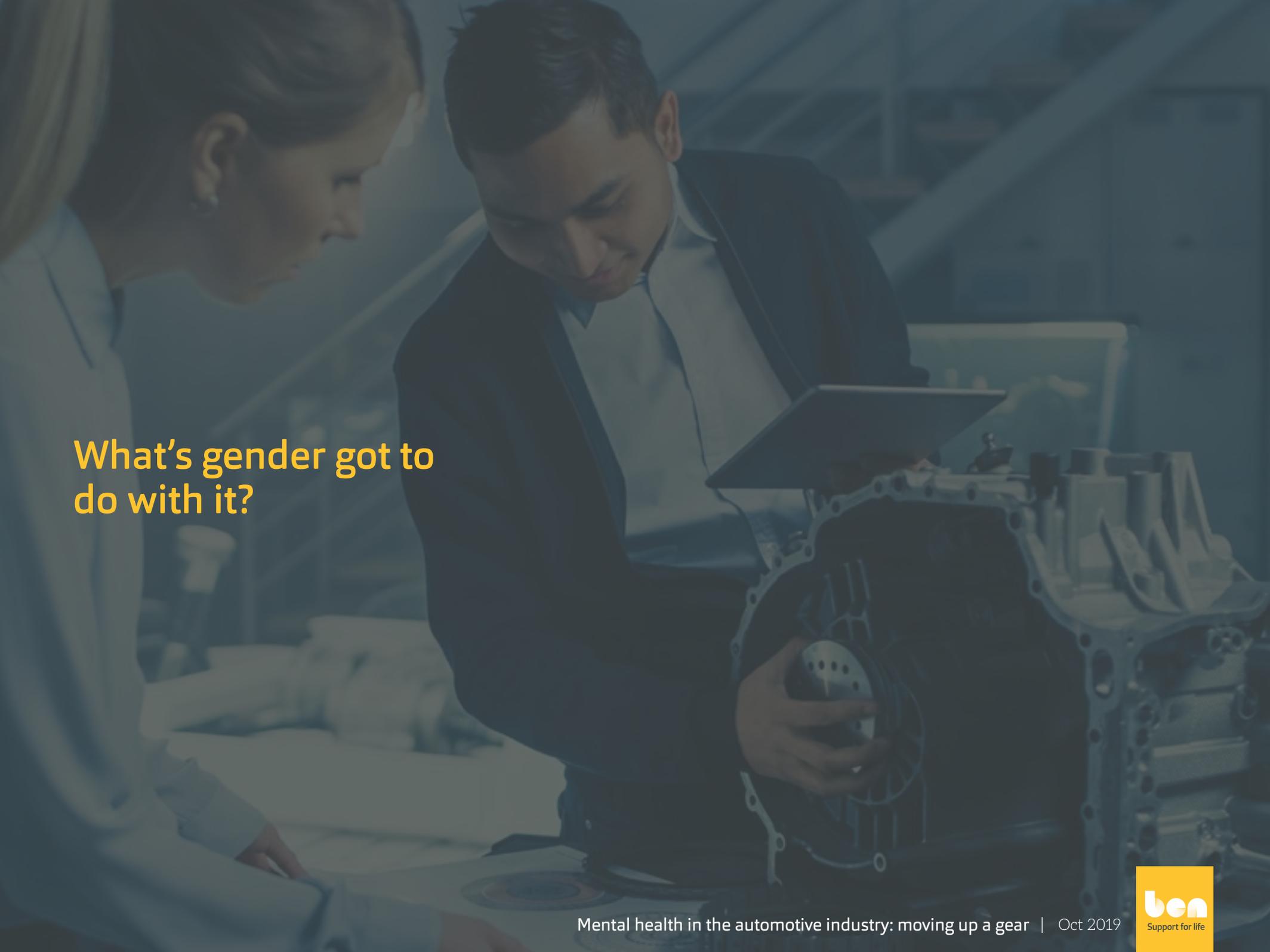
That's why it's so important that organisations take a holistic approach to their health and wellbeing strategy, in which mental health is just one part, and it offers support at all levels across the business. The process of embedding health and wellbeing into an organisation should take a top down and bottom up approach to be most effective.

While senior leaders need their own support, they also need to 'be the change' to drive the change forward, as well as being role models to motivate and enable other employees to do the same.

If those who are facing a mental health condition have the right support around them, they are likely to thrive at work, according to the government-commissioned [Stevenson/Farmer Review of Mental Health and Employers](#). Therefore, employers have a big role to play in providing support for those who have a mental health condition, but also in helping to prevent others developing low level mental health issues.

“Those facing a mental health condition are likely to thrive at work with the right support around them”



A man and a woman in business attire are examining a car engine part in a workshop. The man is holding a tablet and pointing at the engine, while the woman looks on. The background is a blurred industrial setting.

What's gender got to do with it?

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It's clear that mental health issues aren't confined to any particular group, but some industries and professions do have a particular problem.

In employment terms, one of the most significant things about the automotive industry is the high proportion of men employed. According to workplace monitors **Catalyst**, only 15.8% of employees in motor vehicle manufacturing are female; the percentage employed in retail and repair is only marginally higher at 17.6%.

So why is this significant in terms of mental health? **Studies** have indicated that, as a group, men appear to deal more poorly with mental health issues than women. A **YouGov survey** which polled over 2,500 people who have had mental health problems, showed 28% of men had not sought medical help, compared with 19% of women.

The survey also shows that men are believed to under-report mental health problems and struggle to admit vulnerability.

Mental health charity, Mind, has also warned that men are twice as likely as women to experience work-related mental health problems⁹. Yet, according to the **Men's Health Forum**, most men would take time off work to have a physical ailment checked, while fewer than 1 in 5 would do the same for anxiety, and even fewer (15%) for 'feeling low'.

Ben's own research¹⁰ also shows a difference in how men and women perceive the importance of getting support with their mental health. Both genders rate mental health issues such as anxiety and depression in the top seven issues that affect them, however men were less likely to seek support than women.

When asked who they would approach for mental health support, 17% of men said 'no-one', compared to 10% of women. A total of 52% of men said they had not received support to manage their mental health, compared to 39% of women, which could be because they have not sought it.

Therefore these figures highlight that men are more likely to experience mental health problems at work, but find it more difficult than women to admit they are struggling and are less likely to seek support.

Gender split of those who don't seek help



28%



19%

What's gender got to do with it?

There is a clear link between mental health issues and suicide, with conditions such as depression making a person more likely to have suicidal thoughts¹¹. The Mental Health Foundation reports that suicide is not a mental health problem, but it is linked with mental distress¹². Suicide is also the leading cause of death among men under 45, and more than three-quarters of those who take their own lives are male¹³.

Through our **Critical Response Service**, we provide on-site trauma support which, to date, has seen us predominantly supporting employers and employees after a colleague has taken their own life. This is a stark reality for us and the industry.

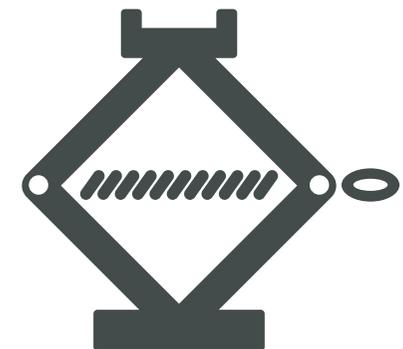
Add to this the chances that automotive industry employees often find themselves working in a male-dominated (and potentially 'macho') culture - where it can be hard, particularly for men, to be

open about their mental health - and you can see why the automotive community should be concerned about this.

So, what we have is an automotive industry that is dominated by men, who rate mental health as less important than women do. Their environment may be 'macho', which can exacerbate mental health issues and men, compared with women, deal more poorly with mental health issues.

That is not to downplay in any way the impact of poor mental health on women - but it does paint a picture of an industry that is more likely to struggle with mental health issues, with what can be fatal consequences if left unaddressed.

“This paints a picture of an industry that is more likely to struggle with mental health issues”





**Lets talk money:
a £1.2bn bill for automotive**

Let's talk money: a £1.2bn bill for automotive

The cost of poor mental health to individuals can be measured by health and social care consumption, quality of life and lives lost.

It's harder for the industry to measure the impact, because identifying and recording mental health issues is anything but easy, particularly given the belief that they are widely under-reported. But there are figures available which can give us an idea of the scale of the costs.

Analysts at Deloitte estimated that the costs of mental health related absence in the UK workplace is **£7.9bn**. Deloitte also estimates that poor mental health costs UK employers between £33bn and £42bn every year. The cost to the country – including lost output and NHS bills – is somewhere between £74bn and £99bn.

What does this mean for employers in the automotive industry? Costs do vary by sector but, for an estimate of the annual cost of poor mental health in your business, multiply the number of employees you have by £1,119 for a low estimate and by £1,481 for a high estimate.

So, if you run a garage with 10 employees, poor mental health could be costing you around £10,000-£15,000 a year. And if you are a business with over 13,000 UK employees, the bill could be nearer £15m-£20m.

These figures take account of factors including basic absenteeism costs, staff turnover costs and even 'presenteeism' costs – when people turn up for work despite feeling unwell.

The **SMMT** estimates that the UK automotive industry employs 823,000 individuals which means poor mental health costs our sector between £0.9bn and £1.2bn each year.



Let's talk money: a £1.2bn bill for automotive

Now let's talk ROI. Research from **Deloitte** shows that the ROI of proactive mental health interventions such as training and other tools can range up to 6:1. Early stage intervention and supporting activities can achieve ROI of up to 8:1 and, because not everything can be detected at an early stage, Deloitte's research also states that the ROI for reactive interventions can range up to 5:1.

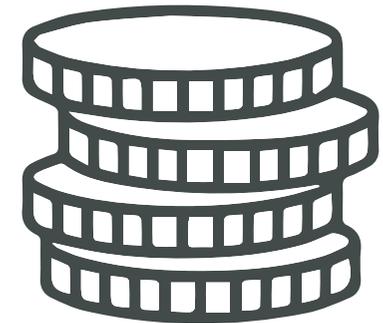
In fact, a study by the **Lancet** found a manager's mental health training programme could achieve a return on investment of £9.98 for each £1 spent. This certainly makes the case for investment in workplace mental health support and initiatives, especially in the proactive and preventative space.

Regardless of the moral case for automotive employers helping employees manage their mental health, the financial case is very hard to ignore.

Ben already provides a range of services to support the mental health services to individuals

directly and through partnering with automotive industry companies.

You can find out more about how we can work with you to support the mental health of your people on p19.





Ben can help you improve the mental health of your workforce

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The evidence presented in this whitepaper demonstrates that mental health is still a significant issue in the automotive workplace and isn't something that can or should be ignored. A lack of investment in this area is likely to affect the performance, productivity and the bottom line of any business.

Our unique understanding of the automotive industry, gained from over 100 years' experience of providing support to employees and their families, has enabled us to develop a range of products and services specifically for employers.

Our [Ben4Business](#) programme, most of which is free to automotive employers, promotes best practice approaches to dealing with both mental health and broader health and wellbeing issues in the workplace.

Hundreds of automotive employers, from SMEs to global businesses, have already adopted the programme and its four simple components:

1. **BenAware** – using internal communications to raise awareness of Ben's free, confidential support service for automotive industry employees and their family dependents
2. **BenatWork** – our teams spend time on-site in your business, meeting with employees and talking about specific issues such as mental health in an engaging way. We also work with HR, Occupational Health and wellbeing teams to ensure line managers can quickly and easily refer colleagues to Ben for support
3. **BenTraining** – thousands of automotive employees right across the industry attend Ben's mental health training courses. These include Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and our unique 'Managing Mental Health in the Workplace' course, which are aimed at people managers and focused on dealing with the performance and business issues posed by poor mental health in the workforce
4. **BackingBen** – providing businesses and their people with opportunities to support Ben by fundraising to ensure we are always there when automotive industry employees need us most. We support fundraising activities from dress-down days to exciting challenge events and much more.



Ben can help you improve the mental health of your workforce

Currently, 1 in 3 referrals of individuals contacting our helpline for support are from our Ben4Business partners. Of these, 52% are initially connecting with us for support with their mental health. This shows the importance of our partnerships with automotive industry employers and demonstrates how prominent mental health issues are.

How Ben can help your employees

Our free, confidential support is available to anyone who works (or has worked) in the industry – from the assembly line to the boardroom – and their family dependents.

When individuals are referred to Ben by their employer, we work with the individual to understand their challenges and causes of the underlying issues affecting their life. We then provide tailored support plans, information, advice and guidance, case management and interventions such as counselling,

life coaching and mentoring, as well as the ability to provide financial assistance.

Through everything we do, we are responding to the needs of the automotive industry and its people, providing the relevant products and services to meet these needs.

Together, we want to make a positive difference to the mental health of those who work, or have worked, in the automotive industry.

What we're doing to stay ahead of the game

We're currently developing a new workplace wellbeing training programme, 'Fuelling your Wellbeing', to support employers in preventative measures, where the highest ROI can be realised. This training will explore personal wellbeing, the management of work-life integration and coping with life's challenges, offering tools to improve resilience.

We will also launch a new mental health pathway which will offer employees more informed choice about how they receive support for their mental health. This will be a stepped care model of delivery including online, digital, telephone and face-to-face support.

Action you can take right now

You can read our [A-Z of mental health in the workplace](#) for more guidance on how to start supporting the mental health and wellbeing of your workforce.

Find out more

Are you ready to support the mental health of your workforce? Then let's look at what we can do together to address the mental health of your workforce.

Contact us:

www.ben.org.uk/ben4business
or call **01344 298135** to speak with one of our Ben4Business Partnership Development Managers.



References

- Ben's **Automotive Industry Survey 2018**
 - A total of 563 people took part in the 2018 survey which was a total of 67% men and 32% women
 - Ben's annual Automotive Industry Survey has been running since 2017, with both industry employees and employers taking part
 - The survey asks employees and employers questions about a range of health and wellbeing issues, including mental health
 - **Objectives:**
 - To identify health & wellbeing issues that have affected individuals in the automotive industry in the last 12 months to inform our service provision
 - To understand where individuals look for help and support
 - The survey enables Ben to gain important insights into the health and wellbeing of automotive industry people
 - Ben uses the survey results to help shape its future support services and ensure its services remain relevant to automotive industry people.
- Ben's **Impact report 2018-19**, Making a positive difference to people's lives
- Public Health England, **Wellbeing and Mental Health: Applying All our Health**
- BITC **Mental health at work 2018** summary report - seizing the momentum
- Harvard Medical School **Anxiety and physical illness**
- **SMMT Motor Industry Facts 2019**
- Catalyst **Women in the automotive industry**, August 2018
- **YouGov and Mental Health Foundation study**, November 2016
- Mind's **Workplace Wellbeing Index 2017-18**
- Men's Health Forum, **Key Data: mental health**, September 2017
- Deloitte's **Mental health and wellbeing in employment**, October 2017
- **Thriving at Work**: the Stevenson/Farmer review of mental health and employers, October 2017
- **MQ Mental health, suicide**
- **The Lancet Psychiatry**, Workplace mental health training for managers and its effect on sick leave in employees: a cluster randomised controlled trial, 2017

1-7 [Automotive Industry Survey 2018](#)

9 [Mind Wellbeing Index](#)

10 [Automotive Industry Survey 2018](#)

11 <https://www.mqmentalhealth.org/articles/suicide>

12 <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-suicide>

13 <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-suicide>