

Employee Assistance Programs: Trends and Technology

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Dr. Attridge is a research scholar and business strategy consultant as President of Attridge Consulting in Minneapolis. Since starting his own practice in 2007, he has supported over 70 corporate and non-profit clients across the United States and internationally, most of whom are providers of employee assistance programs (EAP) or other workplace mental health specialty services. Mark is a prolific writer, scholar and trainer with more than 30 peer-reviewed published papers and book chapters and 250+ other written works, presentations, industry workshops and corporate trainings. Get free downloads from: <https://www.eaarchive.org>

Overview

1. What are EAPs?
2. Utilization of EAPs
3. Outcomes of EAP Use
4. Technology Trends for EAPs

1

What are Employee Assistance Programs?

Employee Assistance Programs

EAPs serve organizations and employees in multiple ways, ranging from consultation at the strategic level about workplace issues to individual support to employees and family members with personal difficulties.

The delivery model and operation of each EAP varies from external vendors, internal staff programs or hybrids.

Source: Attridge, M. (2009). Employee assistance programs: A research-based primer. In J.C. Quick, C. Cooper, & M. Schbracq (Eds.), *The handbook of work and health psychology*, 3rd Edn. (pp. 383-407). New York: Wiley.

Core Services

Brief Counseling & Referral

High Risk Cases

Critical Incidents

Employee Trainings

Financial / Legal

Family Child Elder

Manager Consultations

Organizational

Face to Face

Telephone

Internet & mobile apps

EAP Benefit is More Popular Than Ever

- United States year 2020 – US Bureau of Labor Statistics national random sample survey:
 - 100% of federal government employees (Federal Occupational Health program)
 - 78% of all public sector / government local and state organizations
 - 84% of large employers in private sector
 - 66% of medium employers in private sector
 - 35% of small employers in private sector
- IFEBP survey 2021 year for USA:
 - 91% of Corporate employers
 - 92% of Public employers
 - 61% of Multi-employer trusts (smaller size)

EAP vendor business
estimated at \$2 Billion
industry in USA

International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans. (2021). *Mental health and substance use disorder benefits: Survey results 2021 (preliminary results)*. White paper. Held, J. Brookfield, WI: IFEBP. N = 337 USA.

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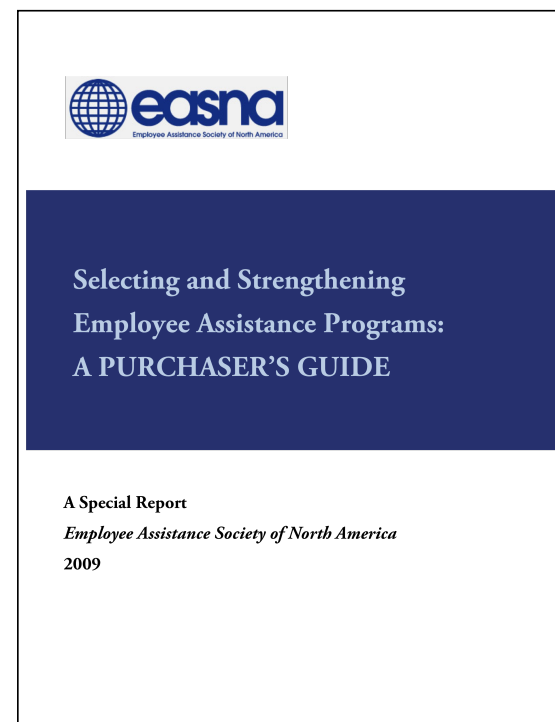
Utilization of EAPs

Levels of Utilization for EA Programs

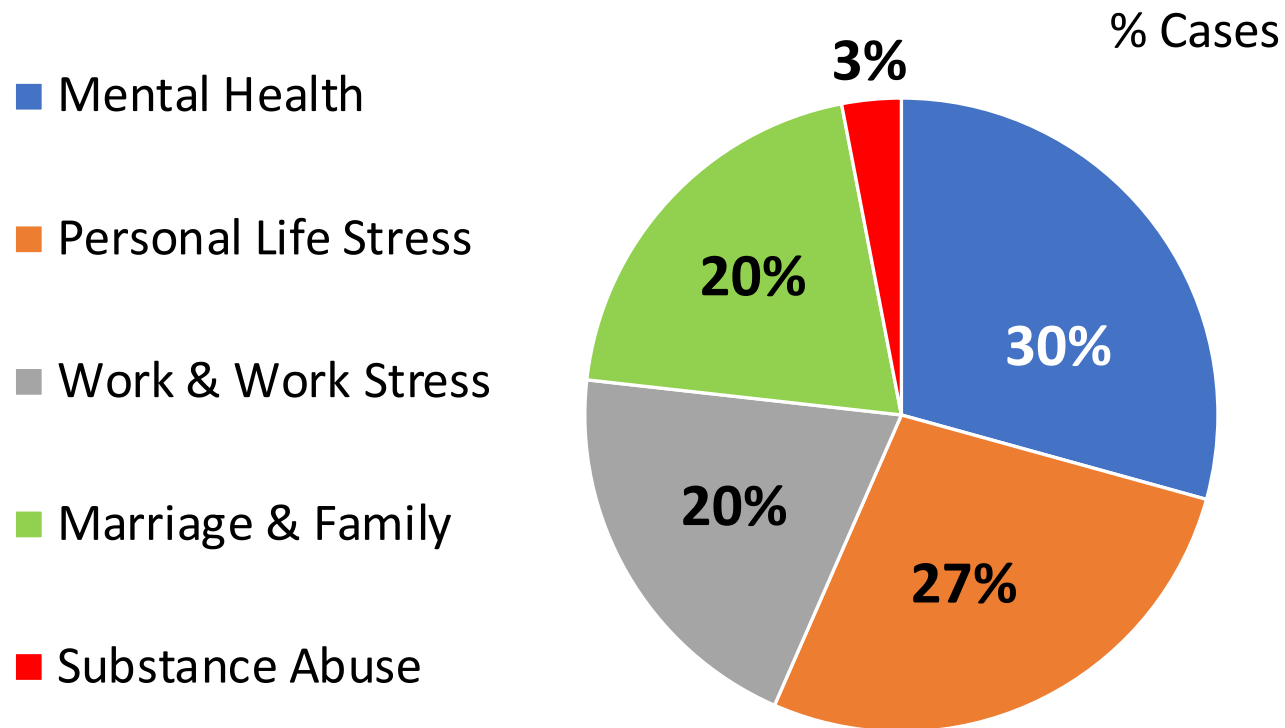
Clinical Case Use Rate. Number of people (employees and family members) who received a clinical assessment and had one or more counseling sessions from the EAP. This count of cases is divided by the total number of employees at the organization with access to the EAP benefit.

People Use Rate. Number of people who used the EAP for any reason – not just for clinical issues. Adds to total count the users of consultations with managers, trainings, critical incidents, coaching, work/life, legal, financial and so on.

Total Activity Rate. Adds to above rate to include educational and prevention types of users of the website resources and self-directed technology tools and so on.



Reason for Use of EAP Individual Counseling

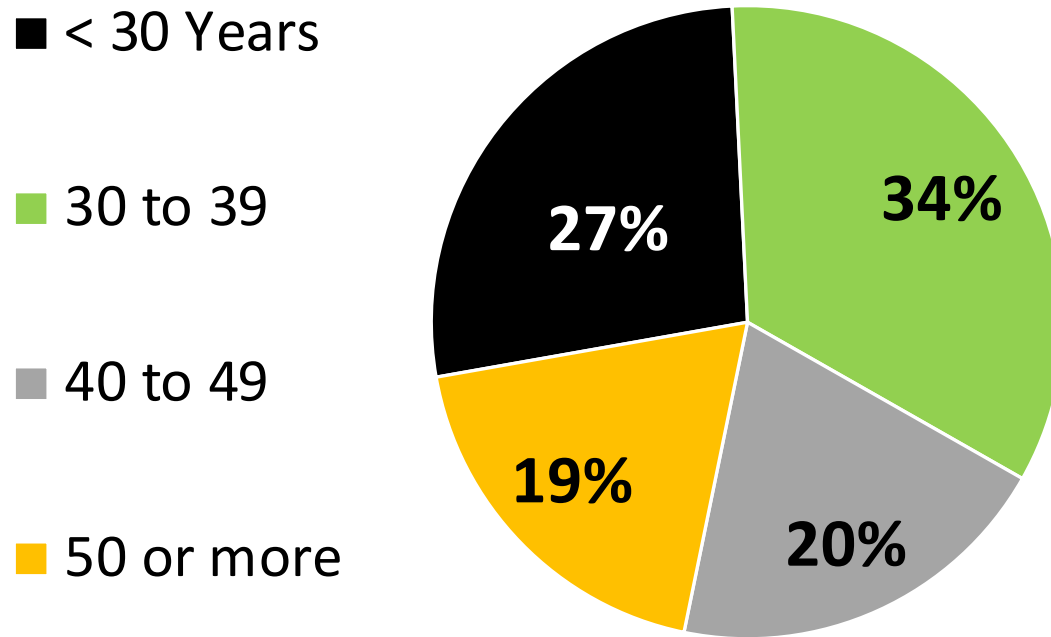


Source: N = 28,800 EAP cases globally in 2021 WOS Annual Report (in-press)

Age of EAP Client

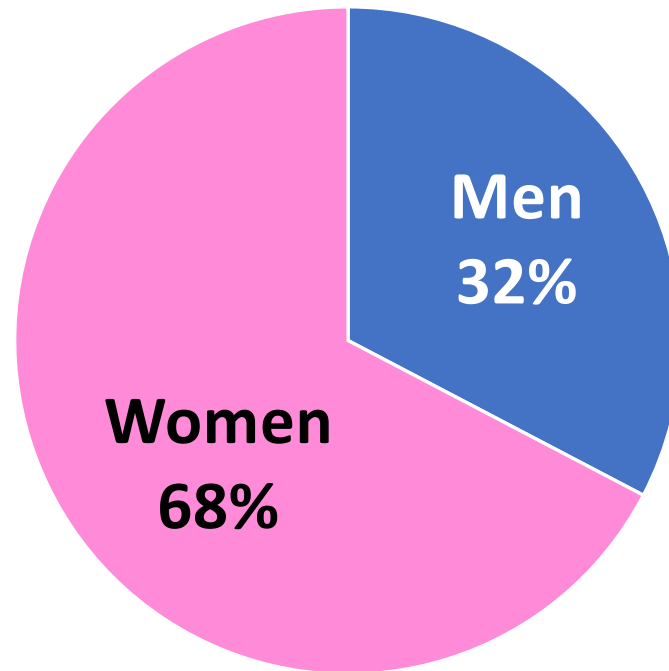
Average = 38 Years

% Cases



N = 17,863

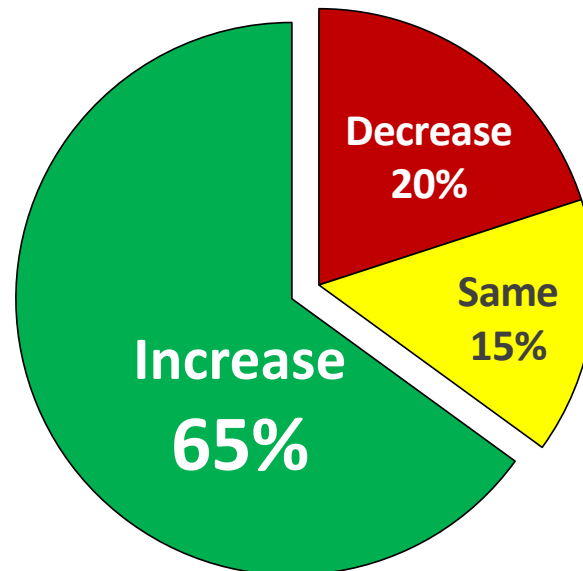
Sex of EAP Client



N = 17,053

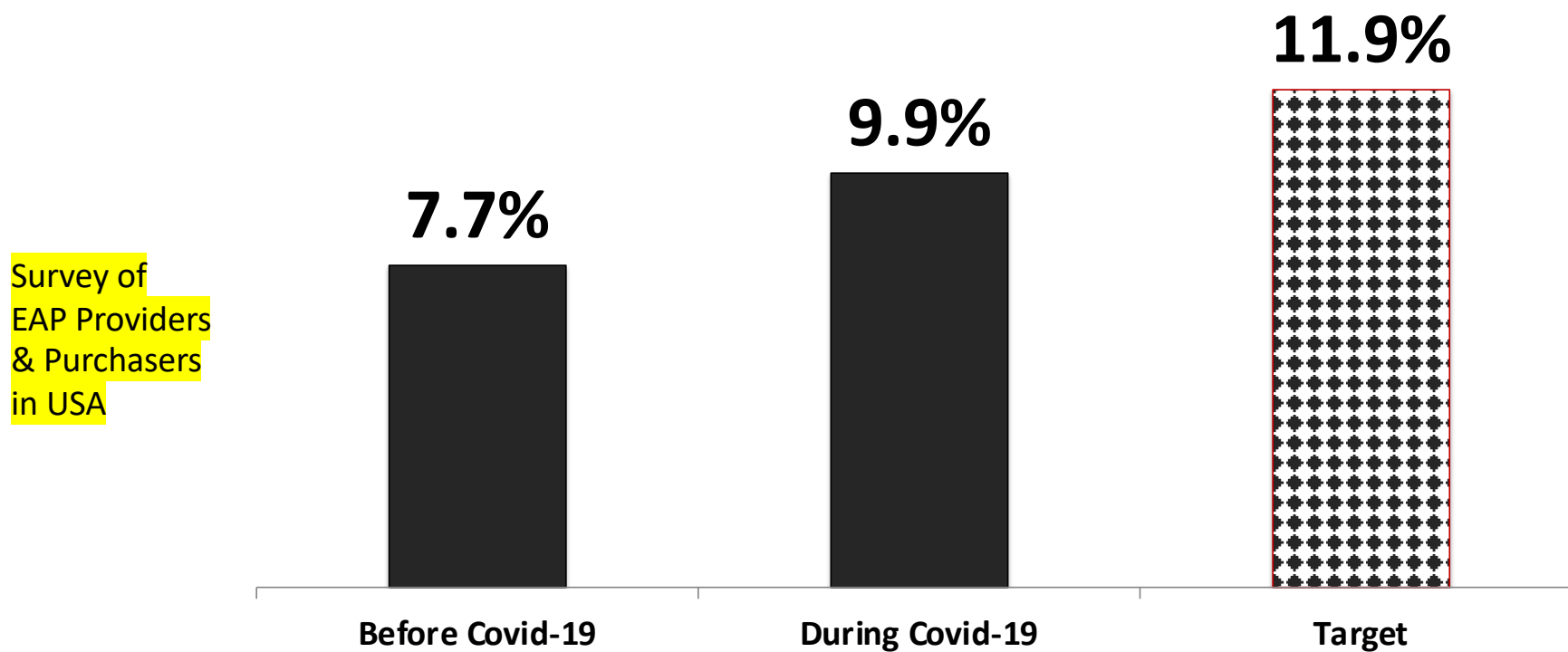
EAPs Reporting **CHANGE** in Annual Rate for Use of Counseling Services Since Pandemic

% of EAP Programs



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 96; EAP providers & purchasers in USA.

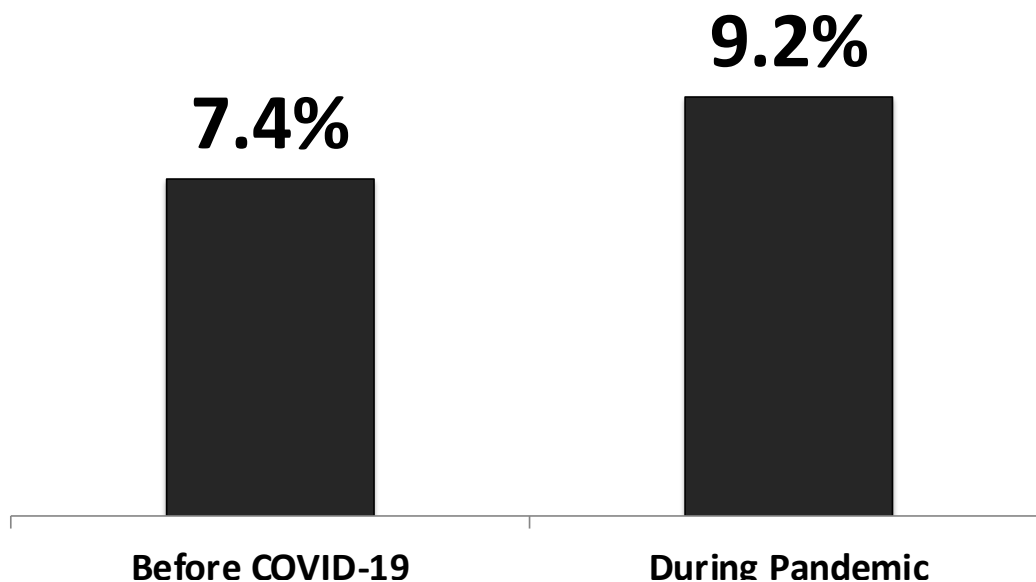
EAP Counselor Clinical Case Annual Use Rate: Pre-Pandemic 2019 vs. During Pandemic 2020/2021



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 96; EAP providers (vendors + internals) & purchasers in USA.

EAP Counselor Clinical Case Annual Use Rate: Pre-Pandemic 2019 vs. During Pandemic 2021 in USA

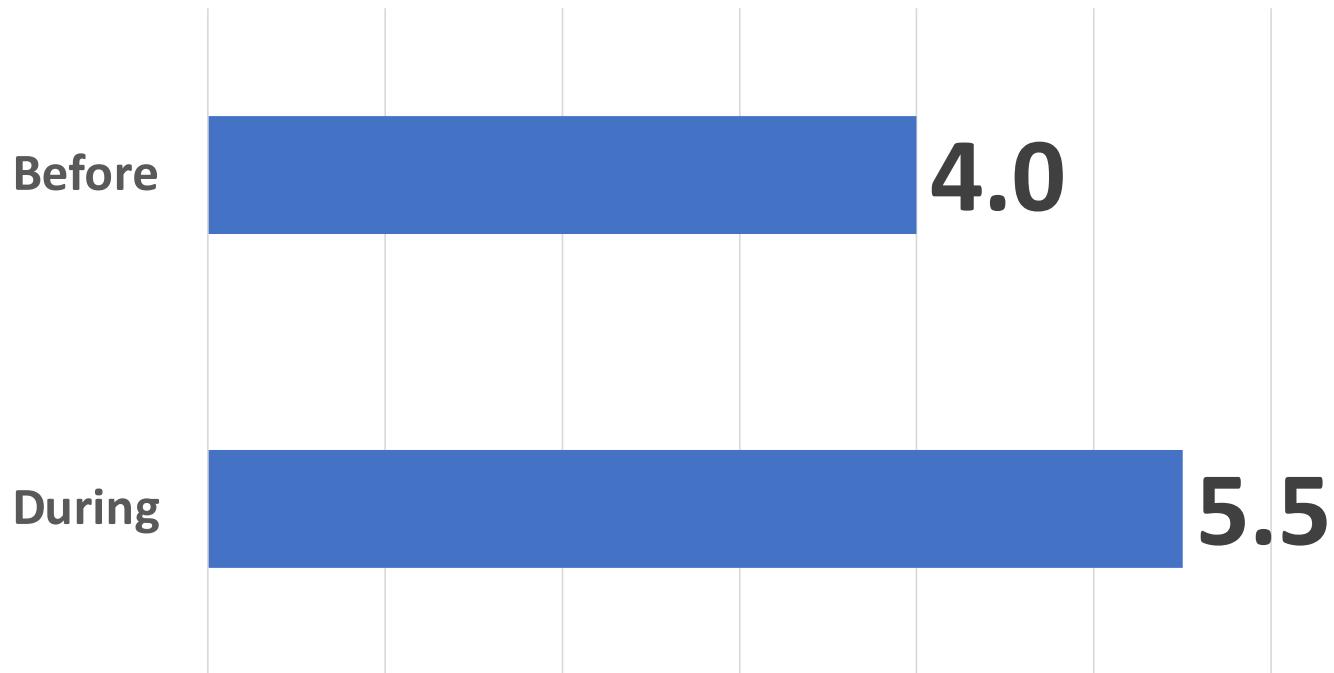
Survey of
Employers
in USA
by IFEBP



International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans. (2021). *Mental health and substance use disorder benefits: Survey results 2021*. White paper. Held, J. Brookfield, WI: IFEBP. N = 237 in USA.

Average Number of Counseling SESSIONS Per Case: Before vs. During Pandemic for EAPs in USA

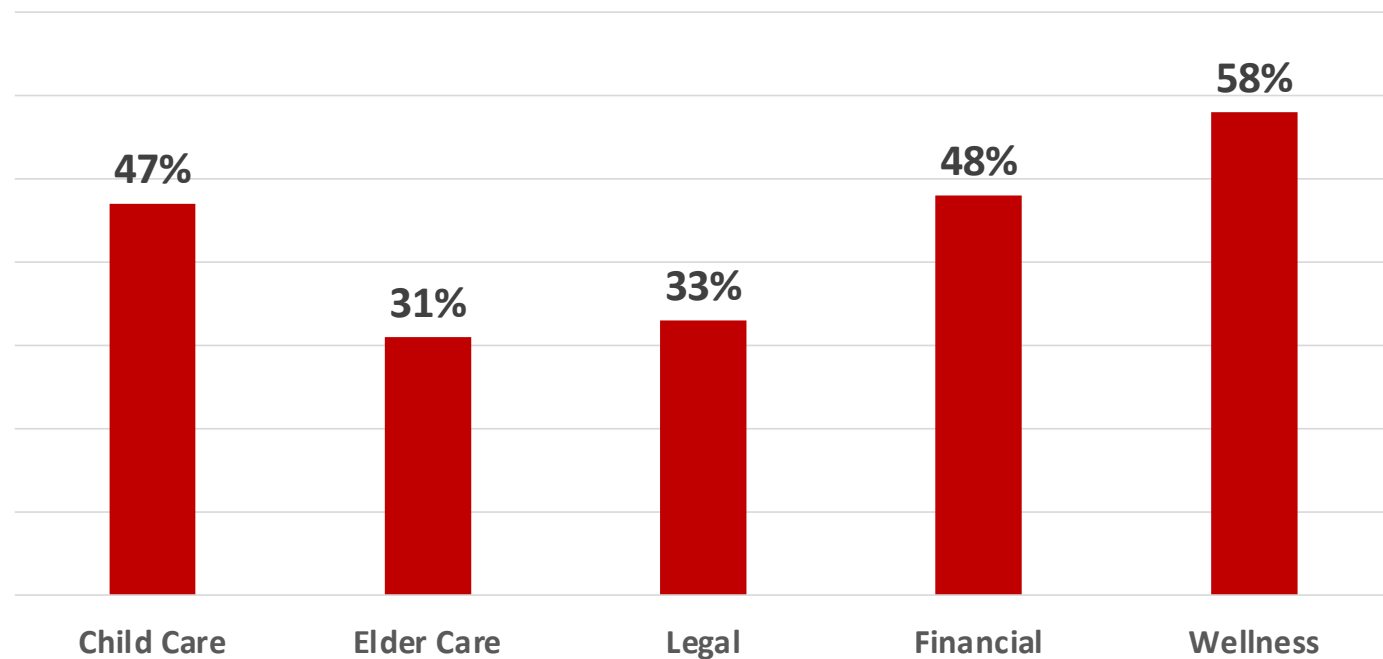
Survey of
EAP Providers
& Purchasers
in USA



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 85; EAP providers & purchasers in USA.

% of EAPs Reporting INCREASE in Use of Work/Life Services Since Pandemic

% of EAP Programs Reporting an Increase

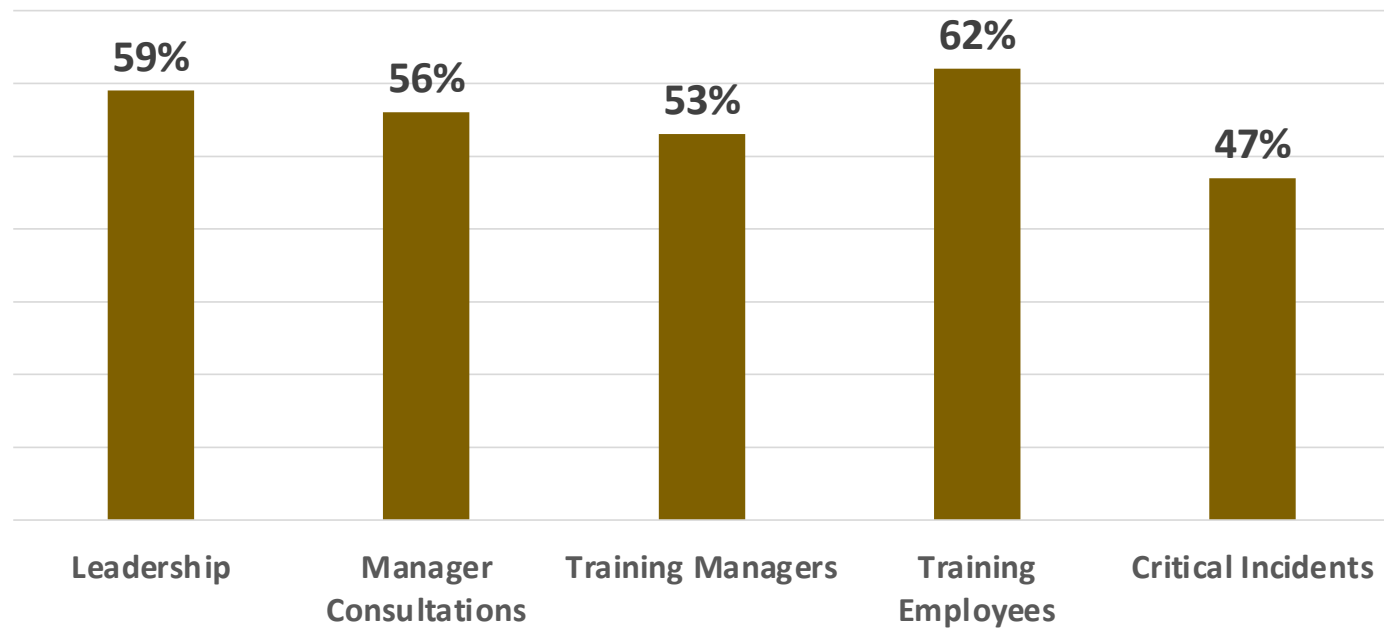


Survey of
EAP Providers
& Purchasers
in USA

Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 96; EAP providers & purchasers in USA.

% of EAPs Reporting INCREASE in Use of Organizational Services Since Pandemic

% of EAP Programs Reporting an Increase



Survey of
EAP Providers
& Purchasers
in USA

Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 96; EAP providers & purchasers in USA.

3

Outcomes of EAPs

2011 Literature Review EAP in North America

Based on 42 Studies of EAPs

“To state it as simply as possible, EAPs are effective. EAPs also increase the well-being of the majority of employees who actively participate in counseling.”

Csiernik, R. (2011). The glass is filling: An examination of employee assistance program evaluations in the first decade of the new millennium. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 26(4), 334- 355.

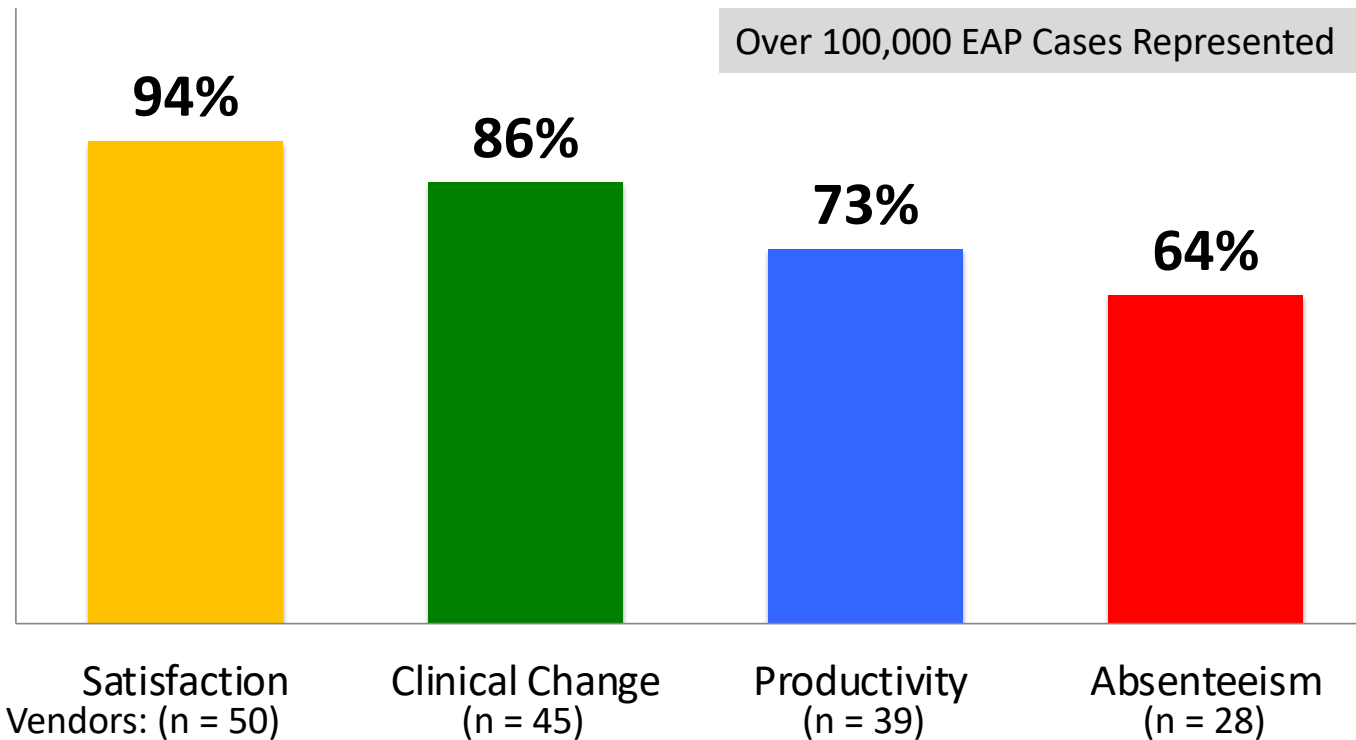
2018 Literature Review EAP in United Kingdom

Based on 17 Studies of EAPs

“EAPs enhanced employee outcomes, specifically improving levels of presenteeism and functioning. Presenteeism demonstrated a stronger effect size and greater improvement than absenteeism.”

Joseph, B et al. (2018). Evaluating the effectiveness of employee assistance programmes: A systematic review. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(1), 1-15.

EAP Vendor's Book of Business Results: Average % of EAP Counseling Users Surveyed with Positive Outcome



Attridge, Cahill, Granberry, & Herlihy (2013). The National Behavioral Consortium industry profile of external EAP vendors. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health. Special Issue, 28(4)*, 252-324. <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/3687>

2016 Mega-Analysis Review of Longitudinal Studies: Methodology

Sources of Data:

- Published Studies
- Conference Presentations
- White Papers
- Confidential Communications with EAP Vendors
- 20+ reports total

Outcomes of Interest:

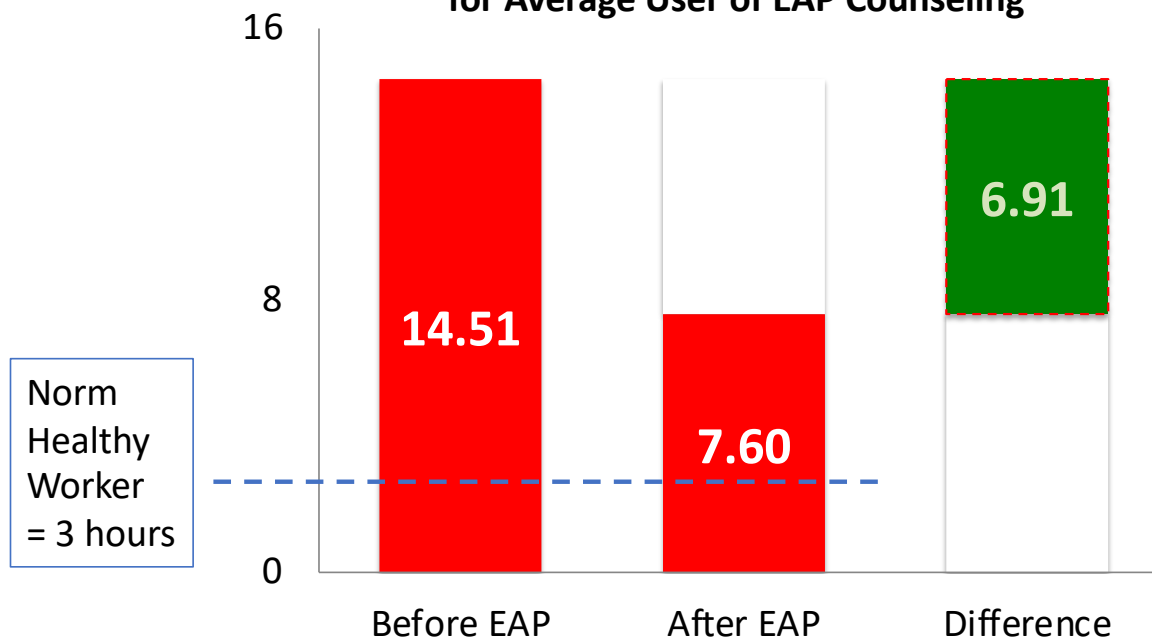
- Employee Absenteeism
- Employee Presenteeism / Productivity

Attridge, M. (2016, October). *EAP industry outcomes for employee absenteeism and presenteeism: A global research analysis*. Presented at EAPA Conference, Chicago, IL. <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/7203>

2016 Mega-Analysis Global Review: N = 222,234 EAP Counseling Cases

Absenteeism

Hours of Work Absence in Past Month
for Average User of EAP Counseling



Reduction in
Absenteeism
After Use of EAP

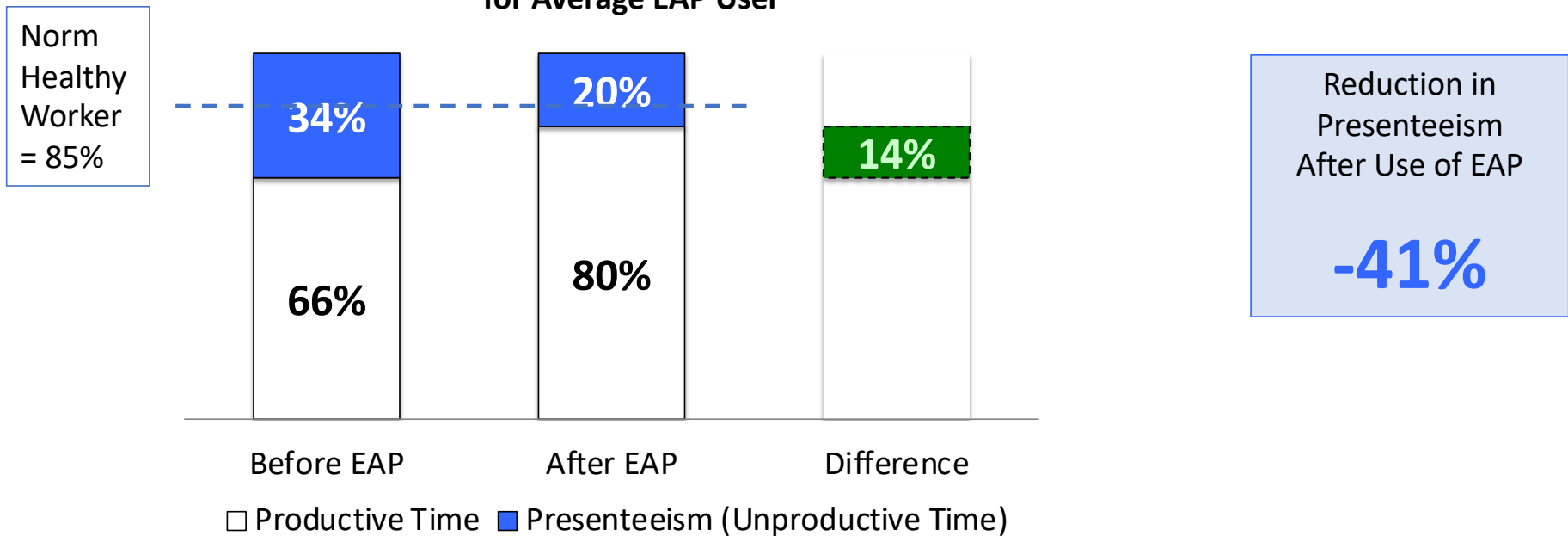
-48%

Attridge, M. (2016, October). *EAP industry outcomes for employee absenteeism and presenteeism: A global research analysis*. Presented at EAPA Conference, Chicago, IL. <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/7203>

2016 Mega-Analysis Global Review: N = 187,216 EAP Counseling Cases

Presenteeism

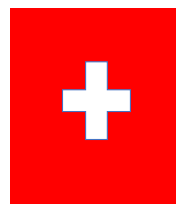
Job Performance at Work in Past Month on 0-100% Scale
for Average EAP User



Attridge, M. (2016, October). *EAP industry outcomes for employee absenteeism and presenteeism: A global research analysis*. Presented at EAPA Conference, Chicago, IL. <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/7203>

Workplace Outcomes Suite for EAPs

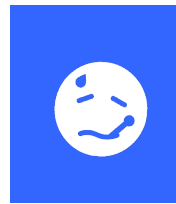
Developed in 2010 and licensed by over 150 EAPs globally. A 25-item full scale and 5-item brief version. Over 50 research reports measuring positives changes on the WOS from before to after use of EAP counseling. In 2021, WOS used by 92% of EAPs that measure work outcomes.



**Work
Absenteeism**



**Workplace
Distress**



**Work
Presenteeism**



**Work
Engagement**



**Hours of Lost
Productive
Time at Work**



**Life
Satisfaction**

Available at: <https://wellbeing.lifeworks.com/resources/wos/>

Special Edition of IJHP Journal on the WOS

December 2018
Featuring 5 Articles on the
Workplace Outcome Suite®



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HEALTH & PRODUCTIVITY

SPECIAL EDITION • December 2018 • Volume 10, Number 2

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK
International Journal of Health & Productivity (IJHP) Expands its Thought Leadership Role

ARTICLES
EAP Works: Global Results from 24,363 Counseling Cases with Pre-Post Data on the Workplace Outcome Suite® (WOS)
Demonstrating Value: Measuring Outcome & Mitigating Risk: FOH EAP Study Utilizing the Workplace Outcome Suite®
Development and Validation of a Critical Incident Outcome Measure
Validation of the 5-item Short Form Version of the Workplace Outcome Suite®
Measuring Coaching Effectiveness: Validation of the Workplace Outcome Suite® for Coaching



EAP Works: Global Results from 24,363 Counseling Cases with Pre-Post Data on the Workplace Outcome Suite® (WOS)

Mark Attridge, PhD, MA; David Sharar, Ph.D;
Gregory DeLapp, MHS, CEAP; Barbara Veder, MSW, RSW

Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/8962>

Is EAP Counseling Effective?

YES

on a per case basis for both clinical symptoms and work outcomes and to a similar extent under most demographic and clinical conditions and in most countries

4

Technology Trends for EAPs

Virtual Delivery of EAP Counseling and Workplace Support in COVID-19 Context

The past year during the pandemic has witnessed many changes in the ways that EAP and other kinds of workplace mental health services are provided.

There has been a shift from providing counseling and other support services from live and in-person at the worksite or at local clinical offices to now using remote technology channels. Industry trend survey found 71% of EAPs reported decrease in use of face-to-face counseling since pandemic.

Most of these options involve live interactions between the client and a licensed professional over the telephone or online video. Alternatively, some clients prefer asynchronous written exchanges in email, text, or chat.

Key Issue to Understand with Techno-Therapy Tools is if a Human Counselor/Coach is Involved or Not





Parmenter, E., & Attridge, M. (2021, May).
Can robots improve the mental health of the workforce?
Benefits Magazine, 38-45.



Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/14684>

New Virtual Behavioral Health Services in USA

\$2 Billion Investment Capital

MARKET MAP - VIRTUAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

LOW SEVERITY - DIGITAL APPS AND SELF-MANAGEMENT TOOLS



Type of Support:

Machine only
(no human)

TECH-FORWARD PLATFORMS FOR LOW / MODERATE SEVERITY



Human counselor
or coach engaged
via technology
channels (audio,
video, text)

Source: <https://www.triple-tree.com/TripleTree/media/Research/TripleTree-A-New-Era-of-Virtual-Health.pdf>

Major Reviews of Literature on Machine-Only Techno-Therapy

Andersson, G. (2018). Internet interventions: Past, present and future. *Internet Interventions*, 12, 181-188.

Davies EB., et al. (2014). Computer-delivered and web-based interventions to improve depression, anxiety, and psychological well-being of university students: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 16(5), e130.

Firth J., et al. (2017). The efficacy of smartphone-based mental health interventions for depressive symptoms: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *World Psychiatry*, 16(3), 287-298.

Kampmann IL., et al. (2016). Meta-analysis of technology-assisted interventions for social anxiety disorder. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 42, 71-84.

Karin E., et al. (2018). "Wish you were here": Examining characteristics, outcomes, and statistical solutions for missing cases in web-based psychotherapeutic trials. *JMIR Mental Health*, 5(2):e22

Karyotaki E, et al. (2015). Predictors of treatment dropout in self-guided web-based interventions for depression: An 'individual patient data' meta-analysis. *Psychological Medicine*, 45(13):2717-2726

Lattie, EH, et al. (2019). Digital mental health interventions for depression, anxiety, and enhancement of psychological well-being among college students: Systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 21(7), e12869.

Seyffert, M, et al. (2016). Internet-delivered cognitive behavioral therapy to treat insomnia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS One*, 11(2), e0149139.

Literature Review of Research on Machine-Only Techno-Therapy Effectiveness

Advantages:

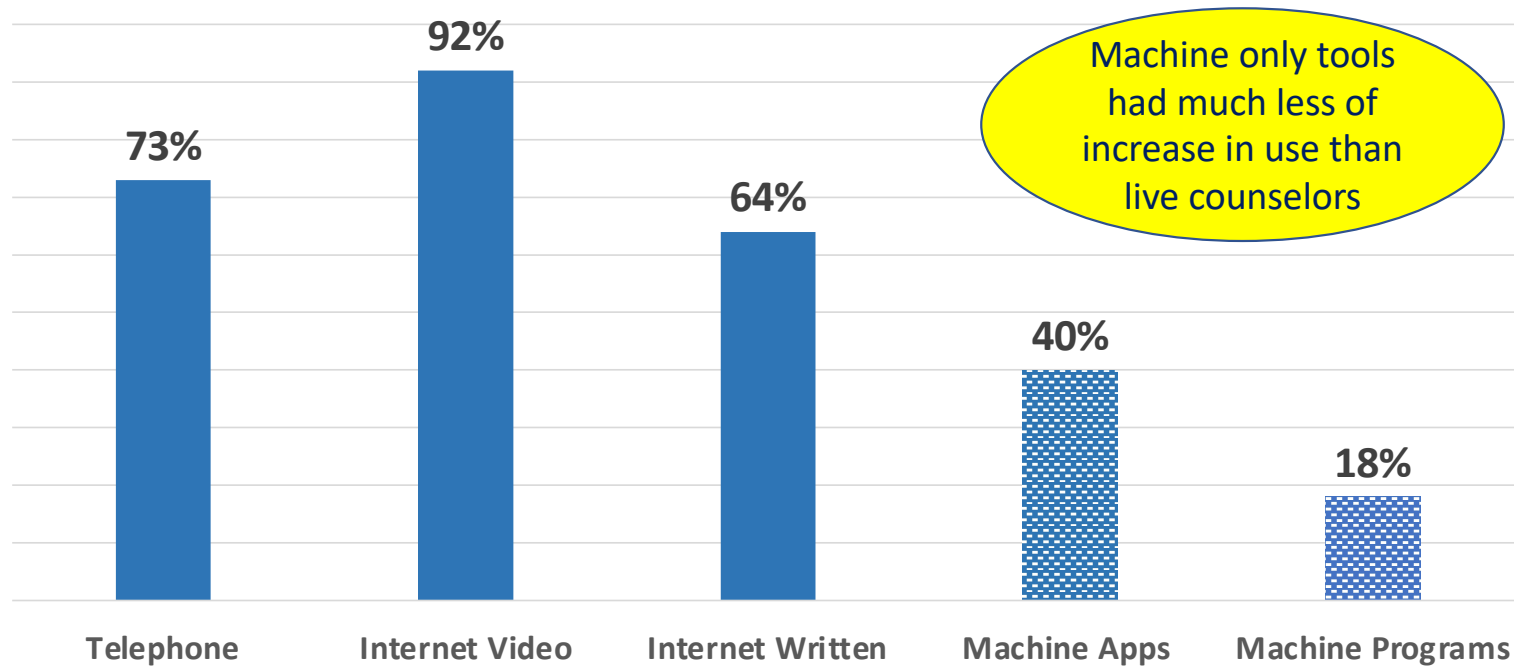
- Greater access to therapeutic supports when remote
- Greater flexibility when can use anytime from anywhere
- Helps offset the social stigma and barriers to help-seeking
- Can be as clinically effective as in-person therapy (IF used as designed)
- Natural language text-only tools that mimic dynamic live therapist-patient verbal exchanges are different than structured computer iCBT programs or Apps (x2ai.com - robot phone counselor “Tess”)
- Significantly lower cost to offer than in-person treatment services

Literature Review of Research on Machine-Only Techno-Therapy Effectiveness

Disadvantages:

- Vast majority of new Apps and tech tools lack research testing
- Early drop-out and lack of full participation in machine-based structured programs with multiple lessons
- Rigid application of iCBT approach and clinically specific content may not fit goals of user (pre-clinical vs. clinical)
- Human counselors need special training for effective delivery of clinical services via different technology channels (but most adapted well to do this now for pandemic period)
- Personal preference of user for live counselor or machine-only

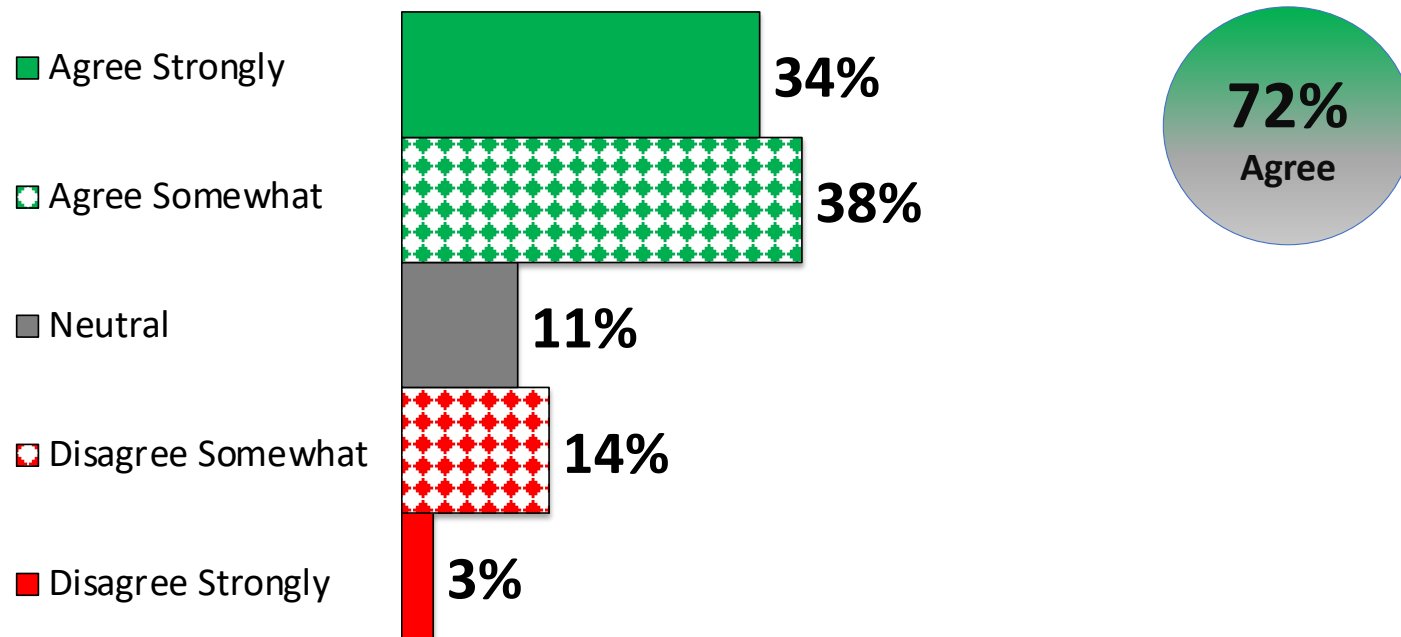
% of EAPs Reporting INCREASE in Employee Use of Technology-based MH Resources Since Pandemic



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 96; EAP providers & purchasers in USA.

Trends for Techno-Therapy:

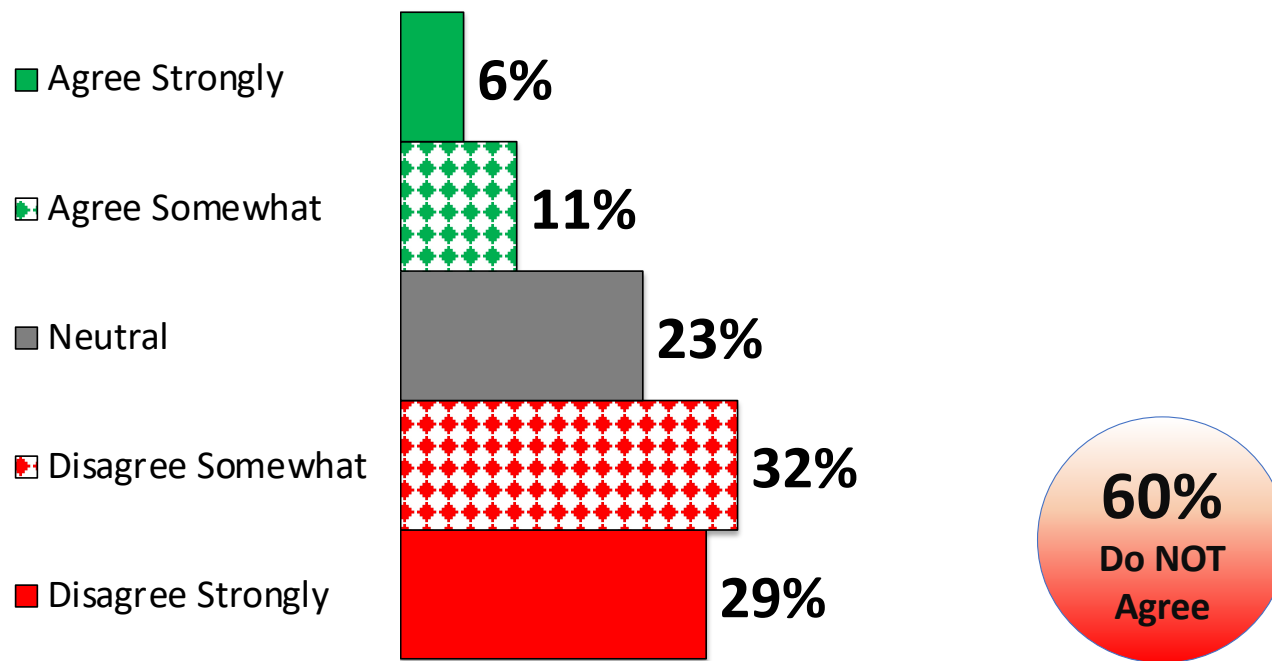
As long as it involves a licensed professional, live counseling provided remotely via technology is just as clinically effective as when it is provided face-to-face in an office.



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 351; EAP providers, clinicians & purchasers.

Trends for Techno-Therapy:

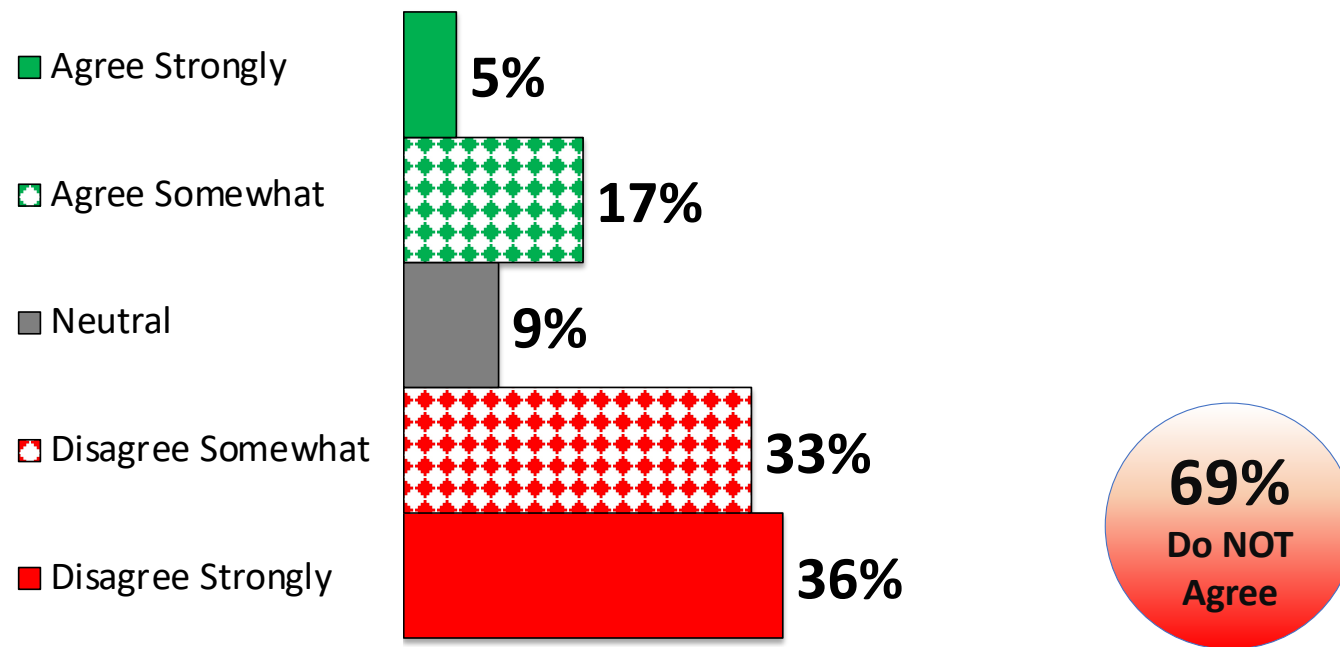
When used properly, non-human machine-based online support tools are just as clinically effective as live counseling.



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 351; EAP providers, clinicians & purchasers.

Trends for Techno-Therapy:

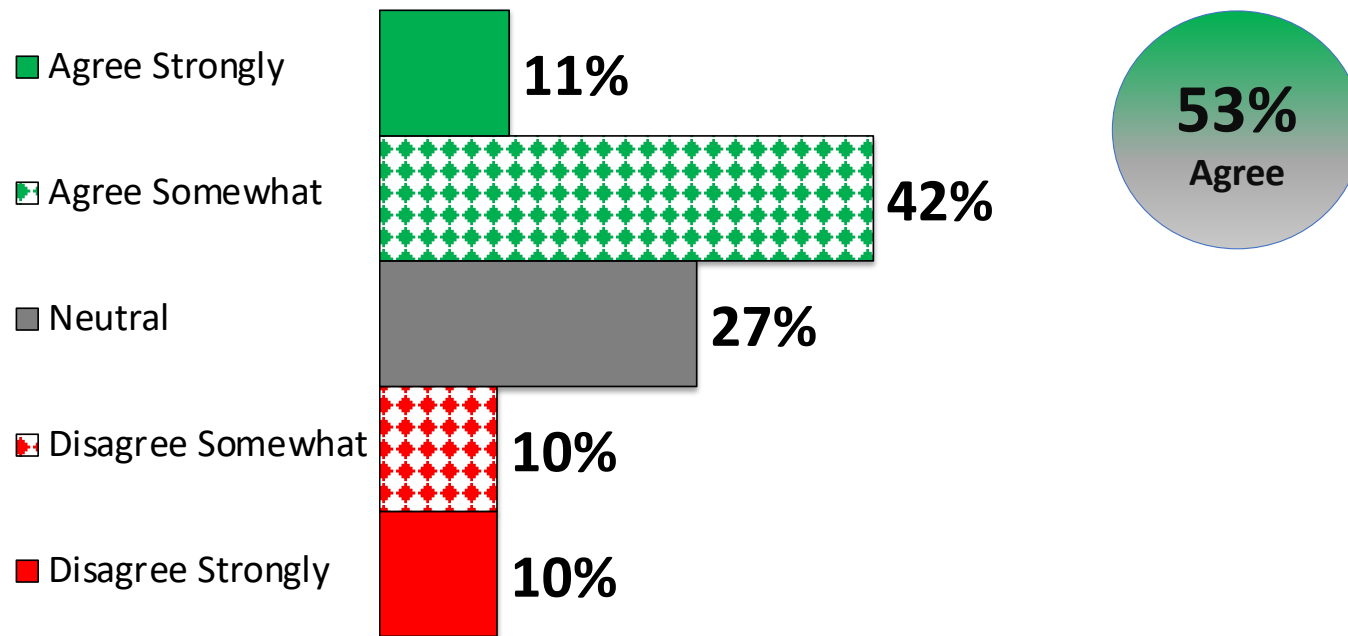
Traditional providers of in-person counseling are at serious risk of being replaced by machine-based self-guided resources on the Internet and smartphone Apps.



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 339; EAP providers, clinicians & purchasers.

Trends for Techno-Therapy:

Given the high drop-out rates, machine-based online support tools are perhaps more suited to conducting risk assessments than for providing clinical treatment.



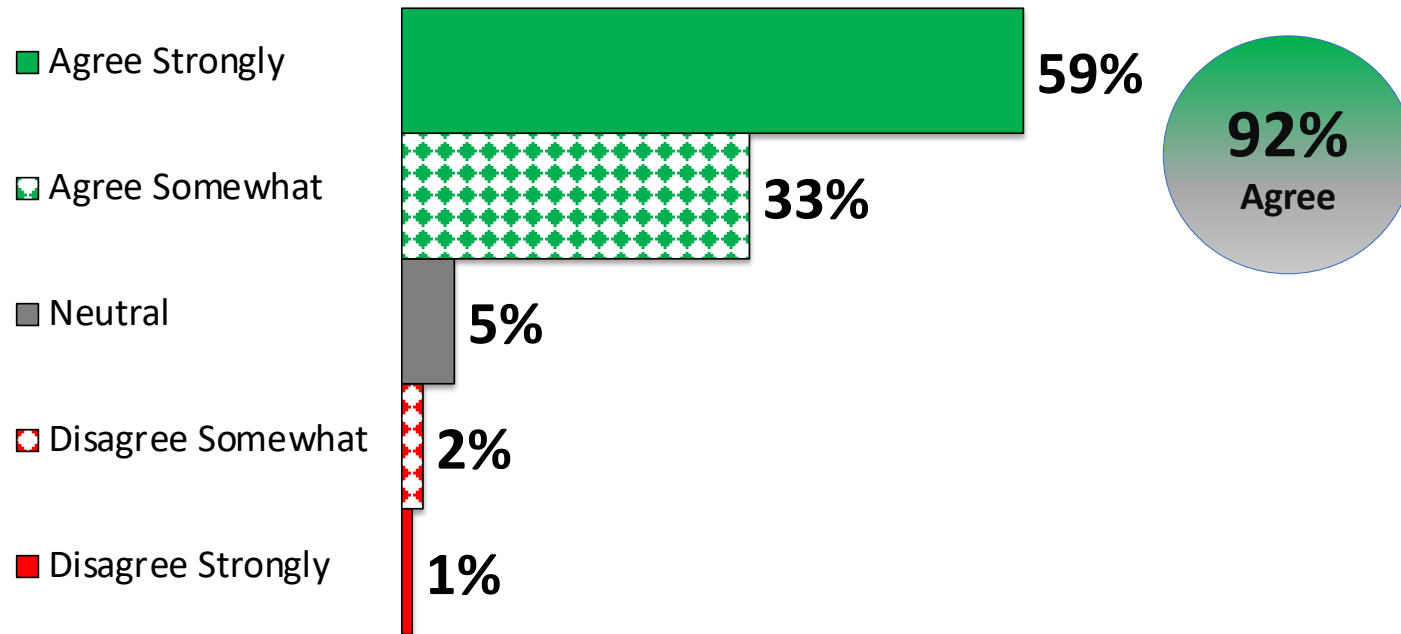
Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 339; EAP providers, clinicians & purchasers.

Pandemic Trends for EAP & Technology: Conclusions

- Live therapy provided by human counselors over remote technology is considered equally effective compared to in-person office context.
- Machine-only tools (Internet iCBT & phone Apps) - while often helpful in controlled studies that require participation - are not as effective in normal real-life use due to majority of people who try it and drop out.
- Machine-only tech tools are good fit for risk screening and education on mental health and for use in combination with live counselors.

Trends for Techno-Therapy:

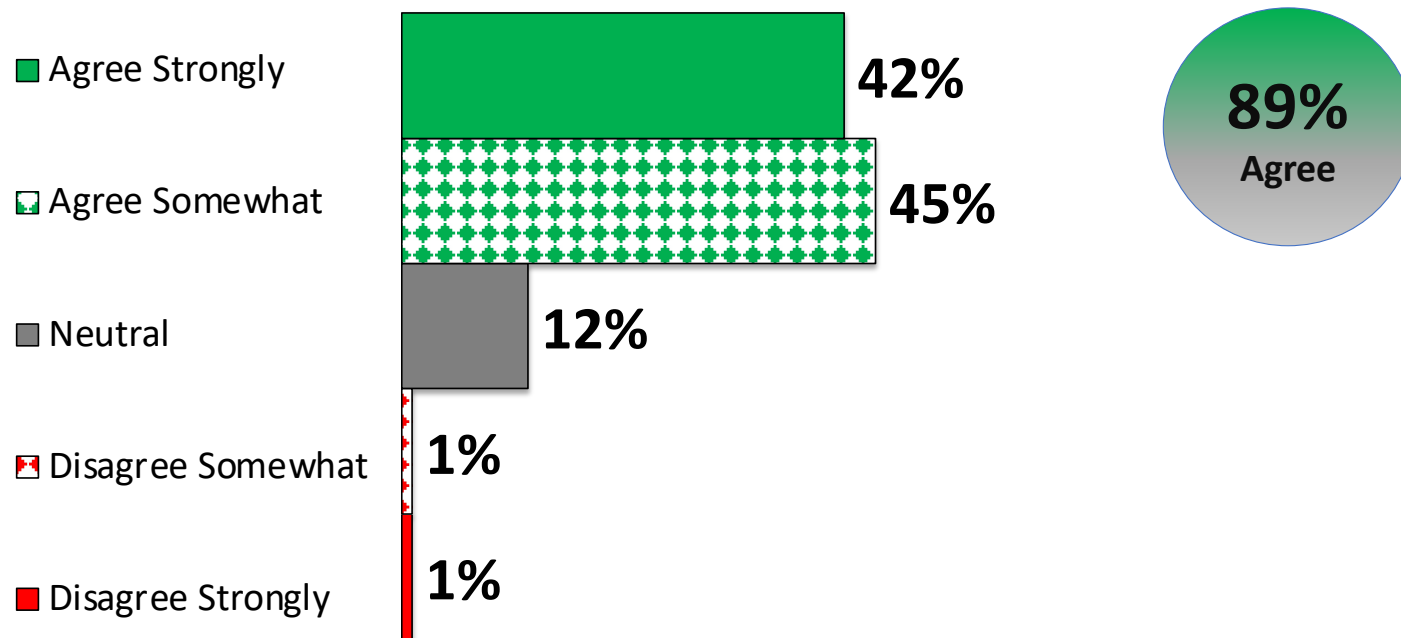
Interest in using technology-based mental health resources will continue after the pandemic.



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 339; EAP providers, clinicians & purchasers.

Trends for EAP:

EAPs and technology-based providers should collaborate more to integrate their respective services to improve prevention, risk identification, and clinical support.



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper. N = 339; EAP providers, clinicians & purchasers.

New Technology Tools: Integration is Future for EAPs

Most employers that added new technology-focused service providers already also sponsor an EAP benefit. Many just trying to do whatever they can to provide support options for mental health.

Yet, these benefits operate largely as separate and independent services. An interesting question for purchasers in this new era is how EAPs and other newer providers of workplace mental health services can become better integrated.

Goal of using the best of EAPs and new provider tech tools to provide higher-quality care across multiple access points to match the personal preferences of different employees with range of clinical severity needs.

Summary

1. What are EAPs?
2. Utilization of EAPs
3. Outcomes of EAP Use
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Key Sources

EAP Industry Trends Study 2021

Total Sample = 351 respondents.

EAP Industry = EAP Programs (52%), Clinicians (36%) & Employer Purchasers (12%)

Country = 90% United States & 10% from 15 other countries

Gender = 77% Female; 22% Male; <1% Other

Age = 55 years average (range 25 to 65+)

Job Type = Mix of 56% Clinician; 38% Managerial; 4% Other



Attridge, M. (2021). *Trends in Workplace Mental Health Survey*. White paper.

Ten Key Distinctions Between Traditional EAP and Technological Options For Workplace Mental Health

Attridge, M. (2020, June). *Mental health in the workplace during Coronavirus: 10 key points from the research on techno-therapy*. Online Seminar: Workplace Mental Health in the Workplace During COVID-19. Knowledge Resources, South Africa.

Slides available at EAP Digital Archive: <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/13162>

Video available at: <https://lnkd.in/eMKU2aR>