



Cigna International Health Study: UAE Edition



The UAE makes well-being a national priority as people's vitality remains high - but the workplace and stress remain a challenge.

Message from Cigna Healthcare spokesperson

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) stands out as a nation committed to enhancing the well-being of its citizens and residents.

With a focus on holistic health encompassing physical, mental, social, and emotional aspects, the UAE has made significant strides in promoting vitality within its people.

However, despite these advancements in overall well-being, challenges in workplace well-being persist, particularly in areas such as financial stress, mental health, and work-life balance.

This white paper delves into the latest findings from the UAE Edition of Cigna International Health Study offering insights into the current state of well-being.

Our study spanned twelve global markets and delved into eight key aspects of well-being – social, occupational, financial, intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional, and environmental.

To paint its picture of how the UAE's population fares Cigna Healthcare focussed on the Emirates and compared its results to the US, UK, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Saudi Arabia, mainland China, Singapore, and the Hong Kong SAR.

As the world evolves, new challenges in workplace well-being continue to emerge, our latest International Health Study reveals that while physical well-being in the UAE remains strong, areas such as mental, social, and financial health require greater attention.



Leah Cotterill

CEO
Cigna Healthcare MEA
outside KSA

Introduction

Well-being in the UAE is more than a policy objective; it is a national priority.

In the past year, the UAE government has introduced multiple initiatives aimed at fostering a healthier, more resilient population as it focuses on the well-being of its people.

Chief among these is the UAE Federal Mental Health Law, which came into effect in May 2024, prohibiting employers from discriminating against employees suffering from mental health conditions.

In Dubai, guided by the directives of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai, the **Mental Health Framework** has been launched, backed by an **AED 105 million fund**, designed to support the mental well-being of everyone in the Emirate, targeting 'the pace of life' in the fast-moving city.

And, in Abu Dhabi, the Parent-Friendly Label, launched by the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority, seeks to convince employers to offer more flexible working arrangements for parents, with companies who embrace this honored by the president of the UAE himself, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.



Image credit: Dubai Fitness Challenge 2023

Despite these efforts, vitality scores captured by the International Health Study 2024 have seen a slight decline on the previous year, indicating that while physical well-being remains relatively high, other critical aspects—such as mental, social, and financial health—remain a work in progress.

This whitepaper focuses on key findings related to workplace well-being challenges in the UAE.

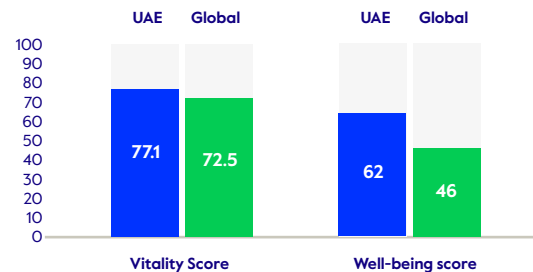
Drawing from the data, we explore well-being, and how that is impacted by the nuances of employee satisfaction, resilience, and stress.

Well-being in the UAE: a varied picture

The UAE has performed strongly in overall well-being and vitality. However, the vitality score has dropped by 4.6 points to 72.5 compared to the previous year, highlighting areas to focus on.

The overall well-being score has gone up by 3% from previous year at 62, but pillars such as mental, social, financial, and family well-being have experienced declines, particularly mental well-being, which has seen a 17-point drop.

Well-being and vitality scores - UAE vs Global



Key data points at a glance:


72.5



Vitality:

UAE maintains high vitality score of 72.5

49%



Mental well-being:

Mental well-being in the UAE has declined year on year, particularly among women (49%) and single respondents (49%). This suggests a growing gap in the support systems available for mental health.

14



Social well-being:

Social well-being has also seen a 14-point drop, with younger age groups (18-24) reporting the most declines.

32%



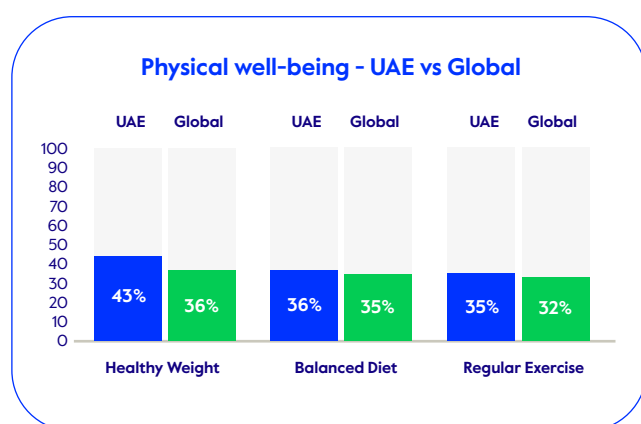
Financial well-being:

Financial stress is a prominent concern, with financial well-being dropping 10 points to 32%. Financial pressures, particularly related to personal and family finances, are significant contributors to stress in the UAE.

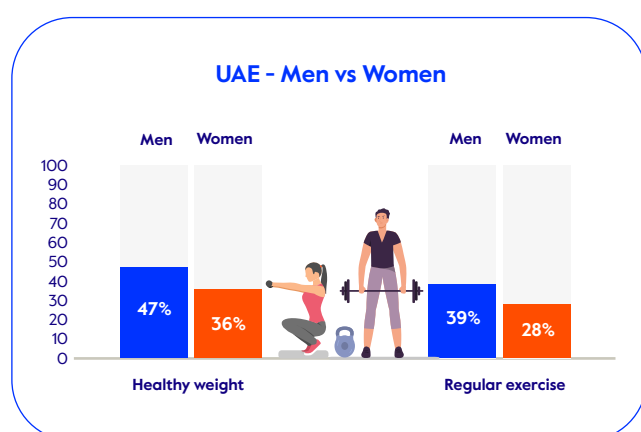


Physical well-being: UAE health drive continues

Physical well-being remains a strong pillar for UAE as initiatives such as the Dubai Fitness Challenge continue to attract thousands. Indeed, 43% of respondents in the Emirates considered themselves a **'healthy weight'** compared to the global average of 36%, and they were slightly above par when it came to having a **'balanced diet'**, 36% vs 35% globally, and **'regular exercise'**, 35% rather than 32%.



That said, while beating the global scores in all aspects of physical well-being, the UAE scores represented a drop year on year with **'balanced diet'** slipping 12 percentage points and **'regular exercise'** 11 points.



Also, there is a disparity across the genders with nearly half of the men who responded to the study in the UAE, saying they felt they were at a **'healthy weight'** (47%) vs just over a third of women (36%).

That gap also presented itself when asked about **'regular exercise'** with men working out more, 39% vs 28% of women.



Respondents in the UAE are also sleeping better than the global average, with 45% saying they got **'quality sleep'** vs the global average of 34%. Though, money worries are keeping respondents awake at night.

The UAE workplace: a double-edged sword

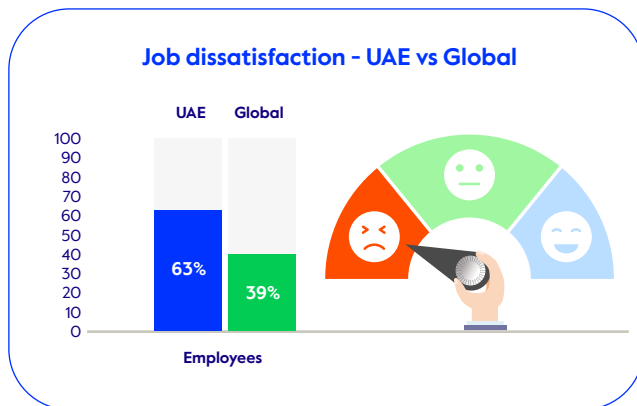
While the UAE workforce enjoys high vitality and overall well-being, workplace stress and dissatisfaction are mounting concerns.

Job satisfaction and enthusiasm for work remain high, with 80% of UAE employees expressing a willingness to work hard, and 75% showing job enthusiasm — both figures significantly higher than global averages. However, this comes at a cost.

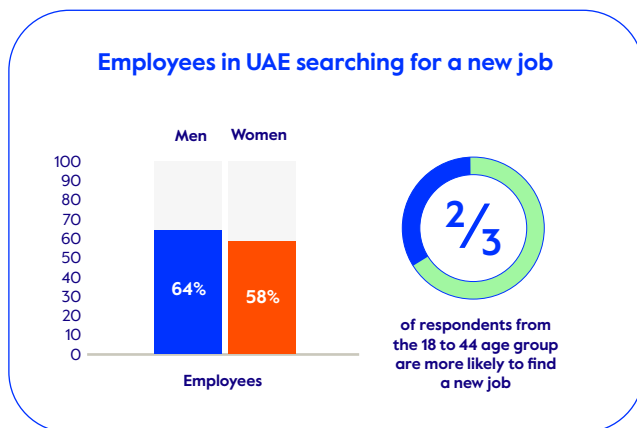


Job dissatisfaction

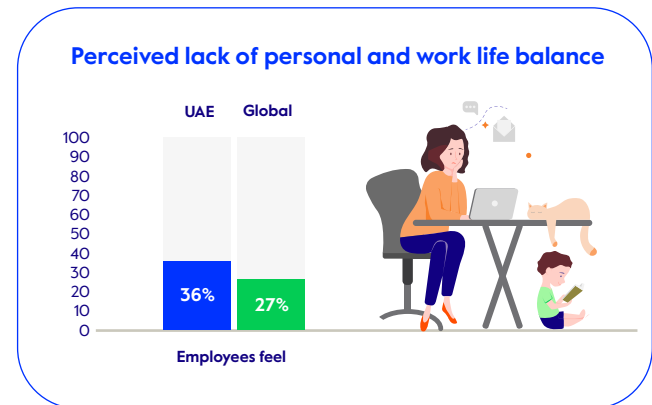
Despite the high levels of job enthusiasm, many UAE employees report growing dissatisfaction. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of UAE employees are likely to search for a new job, a stark contrast to the global average of 39%.



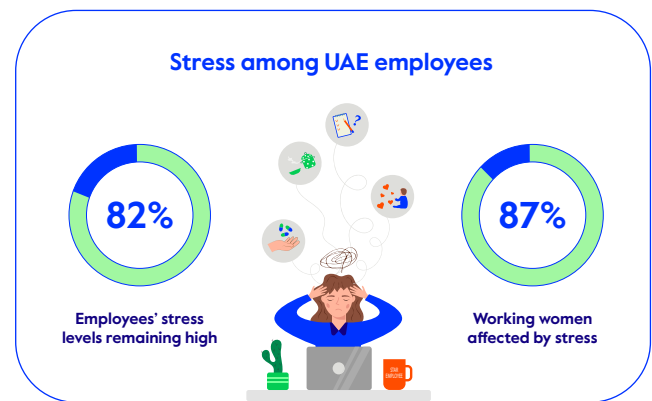
One alarming statistic for employers is that more than two-thirds of respondents from the 18 to 44 age group said they are more likely to find a new job. This remains high across the gender divide, with 64% of working men and 58% of women likely to find a new job.



The reasons for this include a perceived lack of support in balancing employees' personal and work lives, with 36% of employees feeling that their personal life suffers because of work—a figure much higher than the global average of 27%.



Moreover, with stress levels remaining high at 82%. Working women are particularly affected, with 87% of them reporting stress. These figures point to a work culture that demands much from employees, often at the expense of their personal well-being.



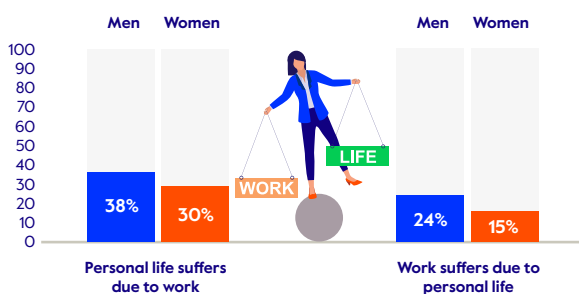
“64% of working men and 58% of women likely to find a new job”

Work impacting personal life

The UAE workforce also feels that the boundaries between work and personal life are increasingly blurred. Nearly 25% of employees feel not supported of their personal and family commitments.

More men (38%) than women (30%) feel that their personal life suffers due to work, and the reverse is also true, with 24% of men and 15% of women feeling that work suffers because of personal life.

Employees struggle with work-life balance



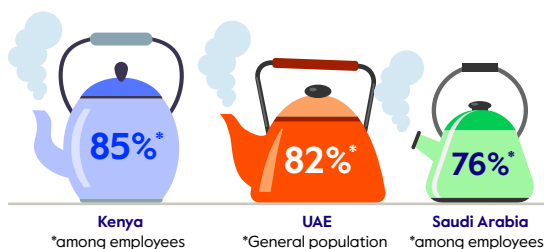
The disconnect between job satisfaction and personal well-being suggests that while employees may feel motivated in their work, they are struggling to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Stress: the leading cause of employee turnover

Stress in the UAE workplace is a critical issue.

While stress levels have been declining in the MEA region, the UAE's is 82% putting it second only to Kenya (85% in employees), with Saudi Arabia a close third on 76% in employees.

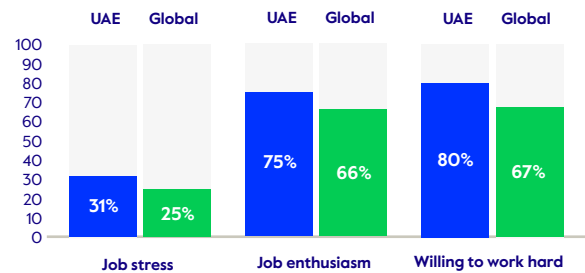
Stress levels in the Middle East and Africa region



Among those working, women and 18-24 year olds are the most stressed demographics, reflecting the dual pressures of professional and family responsibilities.

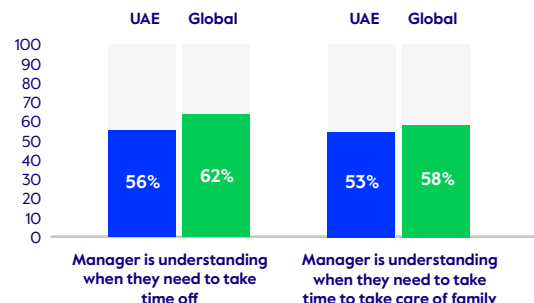
Job stress at 31% in the UAE, higher than the global average of 25%, and yet the willingness to work hard is higher in the Emirates (80% versus global 67%), and job enthusiasm also beats global normals (75% versus global's 66%).

Job stress - UAE vs Global



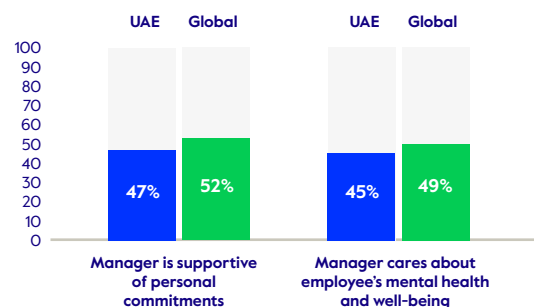
But employees in UAE feel less likely than across the world to feel understood by their manager when they need to take time off for emergencies or appointments (56% in the UAE, globally 62%), take time off to care for their families (53% in the UAE, globally 58%).

How employees feel - UAE vs Global



They also feel managers are less supportive of their personal commitments (47% vs 52% globally), and that they care less about the employee's mental health and well-being than in other places in the world (45%, globally 49%).

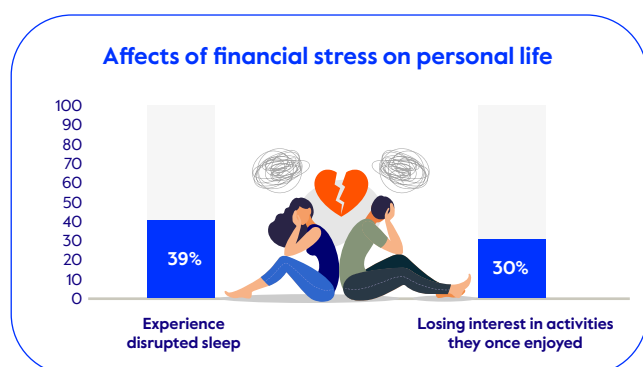
How employees feel - UAE vs Global



Financial stress, in particular, is a major driver of anxiety, with 43% of UAE employees citing personal finances as their top stressor. For 41% of employees, rising living costs, and for 38% of respondents family financial issues are the two key causes of stress.



The financial pressures are taking a toll on sleep and personal relationships, with 39% of employees experiencing disrupted sleep and 30% of employees losing interest in activities they once enjoyed.



Although high levels of job enthusiasm and willingness to work hard suggest a committed workforce, this is not sustainable without proper support mechanisms in place to alleviate stress and promote work-life balance.

Financial and social well-being: emerging concerns

In addition to workplace-related stress, financial well-being is a significant concern for UAE employees. The financial well-being pillar has seen a 10-point drop to 35% in employees, reflecting growing anxiety about personal and family finances. Working women are particularly affected, with financial well-being scores dropping significantly compared to the previous year.



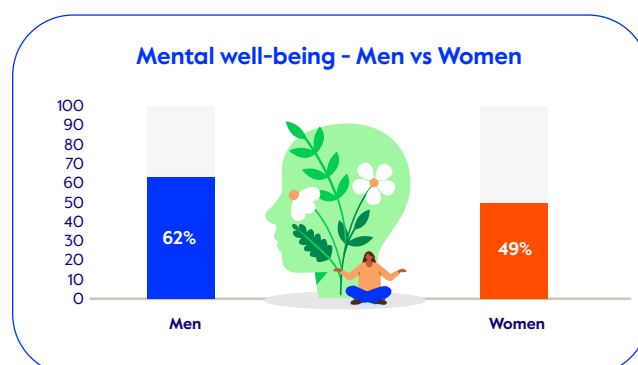
Social well-being has also declined, with younger individuals (aged 18-24) feeling increasingly disconnected. This age group has reported a 20-point drop in social well-being, a concerning statistic given the importance of social connections in fostering resilience and mental health.



Mental well-being: a declining pillar

One key focus for the UAE's well-being landscape is the decline in mental health, especially for women, not working and single.

While mental well-being among men remains higher (62%), women (49%). The drop in mental well-being among women - single and not working, is particularly stark, having dropped more significantly by 21 and 31 respectively.



Conclusion

The well-being landscape in the UAE presents a complex picture.

While vitality and overall well-being scores remain above global averages, the decline in mental, social, and financial well-being, along with rising workplace stress, indicate that more needs to be done to support employees.

Job satisfaction may remain high, but the blurred lines between work and personal life, compounded by financial stress and an overwhelming workload, are driving many employees to consider leaving their current roles.

To maintain a productive and resilient workforce, organizations

in the UAE's private sector must take proactive steps to address the growing concerns around stress, work-life balance, and financial well-being. By doing so, they can create a more supportive and sustainable work environment that enhances both employee satisfaction and organizational success.

The UAE has made great strides in promoting well-being, but challenges remain, particularly in addressing mental health, social well-being, and financial stability.

The private sector a key role to play in supporting their employees through these challenges. By

investing in comprehensive well-being programs that address the mental, social, physical, and financial health of employees, companies can create a more resilient, engaged, and productive workforce. This will not only help reduce stress but also foster a culture of well-being that enhances employee satisfaction and retention.

As the UAE continues to lead in vitality, its workplaces must evolve to meet the changing needs of its people, ensuring long-term success for both individuals and organizations.



A call to action

“Employees in the UAE are more willing than ever to seek new job opportunities if they feel their well-being is not adequately supported.”

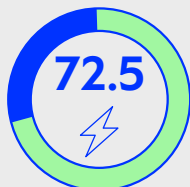
“With 63% of UAE employees likely to search for a new job, it is clear that employers must do more to create supportive environments that foster mental, social, and financial well-being.”

“At Cigna Healthcare, we urge organizations to act now—by investing in comprehensive health programs, they can retain talent, and ensure long-term success for both their employees and their business.”

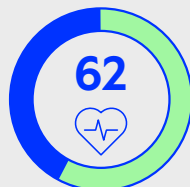
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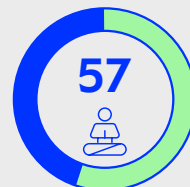
10 big numbers



UAE's vitality score
which has dropped
by 4.6 points from the
previous year



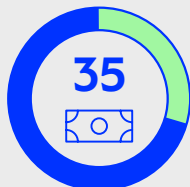
Overall well-being score
in the UAE, which slightly
increased by 3pts compared
to the previous year



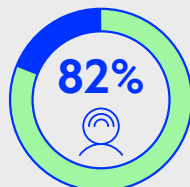
Mental well-being score
in the UAE, which
dropped by 17 points
from the previous year



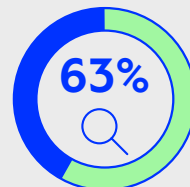
Social well-being score
which declined
by 14 points



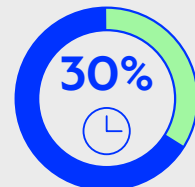
Financial well-being score
a 10-point drop from the
previous year



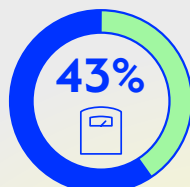
Stress incidence
in the UAE, one of the
highest globally



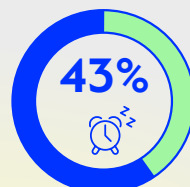
**UAE employees likely
to search for a new job,**
compared to 39% globally



**UAE employees losing
interest in activities**
they once enjoyed



**UAE respondents consider
themselves to be of healthy
weight,** higher than the
global average of 36%



**UAE employees
experiencing
disrupted sleep**



Five key recommendations



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