

Supporting Neurodivergent Workers

Insights from SuperFriend and
Specialisterne for a Thriving Workplace





Introduction

Workplace wellbeing, diversity and inclusion initiatives are expanding to recognise and support neurodivergent individuals – those with conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other natural variations in the way human brains are wired. Neurodiversity challenges traditional workplace norms by emphasising that neurological differences are not deficits but natural variations of human cognition that can bring unique strengths to workplaces.

This white paper explores the importance of supporting neurodiversity in the workplace, highlighting data collected in SuperFriend's ongoing Indicators of a Thriving Workplace (ITW) survey. 2024 was the first year the ITW survey covered neurodiversity in response to the recent increase in awareness and spike in diagnoses. SuperFriend has worked with Neuro-inclusion experts Specialisterne, a proud Preferred Provider of SuperFriend's, to interpret the data in the context of broader research findings.

Using Specialisterne's expertise, combined with SuperFriend's mental health knowledge and extensive data, we have developed a comprehensive set of recommendations. We believe that this document is an important advocacy piece to support those in the workforce who identify as being neurodivergent. As with all research documents, true insights come from the quantitative data as well as the qualitative and anecdotal data that comes from lived experience, which has been brought together by both research teams.





Summary

In 2024, SuperFriend's Indicators of a Thriving Workplace (ITW) survey collected data from Australian workers which indicated that 12% of the national workforce identifies as neurodivergent.¹

The ITW collects a wide range of quantitative information about the workplace environment and individual outcomes, which can paint a picture of the lived experience of neurodivergent workers. The findings include high levels of burnout, limitations to job performance, lower intent to stay, and inappropriate workloads. A key challenge to address is the high-risk of harmful workplace experiences (such as bullying, violence, and discrimination) that neurodivergent workers face.

A positive sign for neurodivergent workers is that they are actively seeking support for their mental health, both externally from friends and family, as well as utilising workplace resources such as an EAP.

As part of the ITW survey, neurodivergent workers were invited to share the workplace adjustments which would support them to thrive. There were 5 themes which emerged from this qualitative data summarising the most frequently desired workplace adjustments. These included requests for a supportive and empathetic manager, the regulation of the sensory environment, clear and consistent work processes, support for stress and workload concerns, and a proactive approach to promoting diversity in the workplace.

A strengths-based and human-centred approach can support these workers to improve both their job outcomes, as well as their mental health. When given the right supports in an understanding environment, neurodivergent workers have the opportunity to derive benefit from their workplace – that is 13% indicated that their workplace made a positive impact on their mental health condition.

The findings reported in this paper have reinforced the significant value of employing a neurodiverse workforce, but also the critical importance of supporting neurodivergent workers to thrive in the workplace by cultivating an inclusive workplace. We know neurodivergent employees offer unique skills and thinking to the workplace, bringing innovative, out-of-the-box thinking, with strengths in pattern recognition, problem-solving, and analytical skills when provided with a supportive environment and individualised workplace adjustments. Most of the adjustments and supports simply require empathetic leadership and good communication practices, such as structured tasks, role clarity, regular feedback and flexibility.

When provided with the right support, neurodivergent employees can drive higher productivity, stronger teamwork, and greater retention rates than the general workforce. Research shows that neurodiverse teams boost productivity by 30% (Harvard Business Review, 2017) and companies with neurodivergent employees outperform competitors, generating 28% higher revenue and stronger returns on investment (Accenture, 2018).

However, without appropriate support, this survey reinforces that a lack of understanding and accommodations leads to lower productivity, higher rates of burnout, poorer mental health and psychological distress. When neurodivergent employees feel unsupported or psychologically unsafe, they are more likely to leave their job, as echoed by broader research showing that 51% of neurodivergent professionals have quit or considered quitting due to a lack of managerial support (Christ, 2023).



Key Recommendations

To build a truly inclusive and high-performing workplace where neurodivergent employees can thrive, it is essential for leaders and organisations to take proactive steps.

SuperFriend and Specialisterne outline several key recommendations to cultivate a neuro-inclusive workplace, prioritising mental health, wellbeing and sustainable employment for neurodivergent employees:

1. Address Burnout and Workplace Stressors to Improve Psychological Safety

Burnout is a direct consequence of operating in a neurotypical world without adequate support. Psychosocial risks such as excessive or underloaded workloads, unclear expectations, and the pressure to mask neurodivergent traits can contribute to stress and burnout. Without proper accommodations, such as manageable workloads, role clarity, and flexible working arrangements, neurodivergent employees are more likely to experience bullying, psychological distress and leave their employer.

2. Provide Clarity, Structure, and Direct Feedback

Many neurodivergent employees find lack of structure and clarity can lead to increased mental health issues and psychological stress. The survey highlights that clear, structured tasks, written instructions, and regular, constructive feedback help employees feel more confident and capable in their roles, enabling them to thrive. Setting realistic deadlines and offering appropriate adjustments will help reduce anxiety and improve productivity.

3. Invest in Leadership Training

The study confirms that neurodivergent employees seek a more empathetic and supportive approach from managers. We know that education and training on neurodiversity builds a more supportive and psychologically safe work environment, leading to improved collaboration and morale (Harvard Business Review, 2017).

Building the capacity of leaders should provide them with the skills and confidence to understand individual employee needs, engage in open discussions, provide clear and direct feedback, and avoid assumptions about individual neurodivergent experiences. Trust is built through consistency, follow-through, and active listening.

4. Create Neuro-Friendly Workspaces

Sensory-friendly environments significantly impact productivity and wellbeing. Employees identified quiet rooms, noise-cancelling headphones, and flexible work-from-home options as essential. Understanding that sensory sensitivities vary, workplaces should allow flexibility in how and where employees work to prevent sensory overload and executive functioning challenges.

5. Build a Culture of Neuro-Inclusion

Managers have a responsibility to create an environment where neurodivergent employees feel psychologically safe, valued, and supported. This means actively working to reduce stigma and bullying, fostering open communication, and ensuring that workplace adjustments are in place to improve wellbeing, career outcomes and to prevent psychological harm.

6. Create Open Communication and Individualised Support

Effective leadership means actively listening to employees and understanding their unique needs. Rather than making assumptions about a neurodivergent employee's capacity, managers should have open conversations about workplace adjustments and support. A human-centred approach benefits all employees, ensuring they have the tools and environment needed to thrive.

7. Address Stigma

Neurodivergence should be recognised as a strength that enhances workplace innovation and success in the workplace. At Specialisterne, we know education and awareness are key to breaking down stigma, reducing bullying, to foster a culture of psychological safety and understanding in the workplace. By increasing awareness and knowledge, we can create a workplace that celebrates inclusion where all employees have the opportunity to thrive.



Workplace Outcomes

The variations in sociability, cognition and emotional processing among neurodivergent individuals can impact workplace experiences of neurodivergent individuals, often creating barriers to sustaining employment. While these differences can present challenges, when supported appropriately the unique strengths of neurodivergent individuals can drive innovation and productivity.

Retention

When asked about their current plans, neurodivergent workers were more likely to say that they do not intend to stay in their current position. That is, 16% intended to leave compared to 12% of other workers ($\chi^2 = 10.0, p < .01$).

The question this raises is why? When neurodivergent individuals aren't sufficiently supported with appropriate adjustments, they are more likely to leave their employer. However, when neurodivergent individuals are well valued, included and understood in the workplace there are higher associated retention rates compared to the general population (The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, 2023).

Workload Rating

Workers also rated their perceived workload on a scale of 0 (don't have enough work) to 10 (too much work). Average scores were remarkably similar, and there was no significant difference found between the neurodivergent (6.9) and the other worker group (6.8) ($t = -84, p > .05$).

However, 27% of neurodivergent workers perceived their workload to be inappropriate (that is, either too much or too little) compared to 20% of the other worker group, suggesting that work design and achieving a balance should be a priority ($\chi^2 = 23.4, p < .001$). This is consistent with Specialisterne's observations that many autistic and neurodivergent individuals are either underemployed or in casualised employment (Baldwin et al., 2014), confirming that many neurodivergent individuals aren't working to their full potential or are underloaded and at risk of associated psychosocial hazards.

Intent to Stay

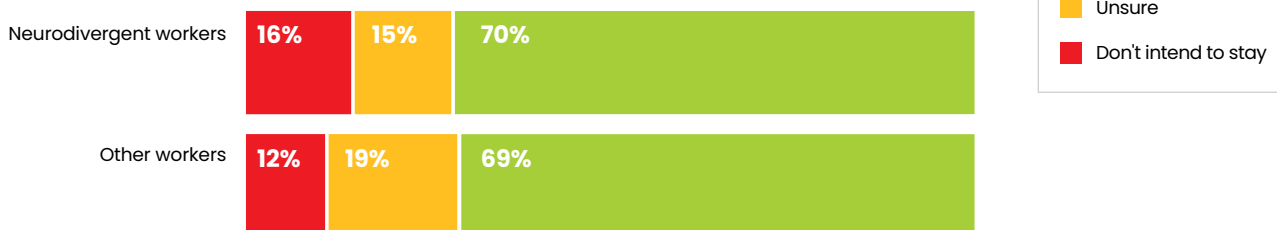


Figure 1: Responses to 'Do you intend to stay with your current organisation for the next 12 months?' for both neurodivergent and the other worker group.



Burnout

Burnout can be defined as ‘a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed’ (World Health Organization, 2019).

The Burnout Assessment Tool was used to assess the risk level of workers for burnout, where a higher score indicates more evidence of burnout (Schaufeli et al. 2020). The average score for neurodivergent workers (2.8) was significantly higher than the other worker group (2.6) ($t = -5.9, p < .001$). Risk level cut-offs were used to classify the workers into one of: no burnout, risk of burnout, or already burnt out. 43% of neurodivergent workers were already burnt out, with a further 20% at high risk of burnout, figures significantly higher than the other worker group ($\chi^2 = 29.0, p < .001$).

This evidence supports other findings that 9 in 10 neurodivergent women have experienced burnout at work and that up to 75% of autistic women want to work part-time due to burnout and exhaustion (Alludo, 2023). Further, 1 in 2 neurodiverse employees reported feeling burnt out from work, while this figure sits at 38% for neurotypical employees (Willis Tower Watson, 2022).

Burnout and exhaustion often result from navigating a neurotypical world and striving to meet the social expectations of the workplace.

Spending their lives feeling either “too much” or “not enough,” as highlighted in this survey, many neurodivergent individuals grapple with imposter syndrome, face a high incidence of bullying and discrimination, and work twice as hard to mask their challenges putting in extra effort just to prove their worth and fit in.

We know that for many, masking is required throughout the day, which take a significant cognitive and emotional load and would contribute to these exhaustion levels becoming unmanageable.

When a workplace is supportive and puts in place simple yet effective adjustments to make the work environment more appropriate for neurodivergent people, burnout is less likely to occur. Some of these adjustments include flexible working options, such as work from home, role clarity, appropriate workload and creating a safe environment where they feel comfortable to seek support and adjustments.

Recommendation 1: Address Burnout and Workplace Stressors to Improve Psychological Safety

Burnout is a direct consequence of operating in a neurotypical world without adequate support. Psychosocial risks such as excessive or underloaded workloads, unclear expectations, and the pressure to mask neurodivergent traits can contribute to stress and burnout. Without proper accommodations, such as manageable workloads, role clarity, and flexible working arrangements, neurodivergent employees are more likely to experience bullying, psychological distress and leave their employer.

Burnout Risk Level

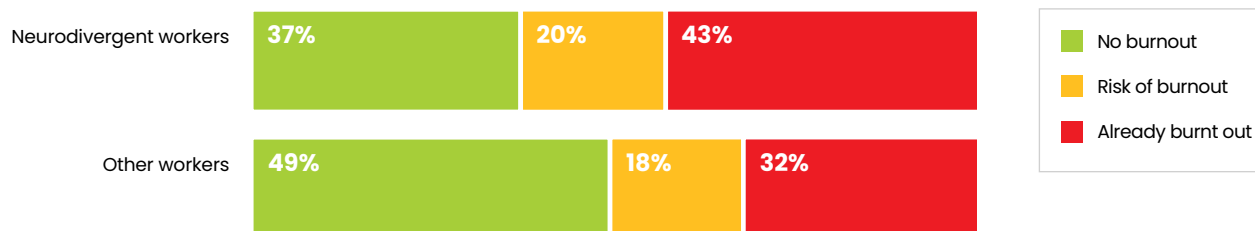


Figure 2: Burnout risk level based on scores from the Burnout Assessment Tool, comparing the proportion of neurodivergent workers to the other worker group.



Self-Rated Productivity

Neurodivergent workers had a lower self-rated job performance. When asked to rate their work ability during the past 4 weeks on a scale from 0 (unable to work) to 10 (work ability at its best), they had a significantly lower average rating (6.7) than the other worker group (7.2) ($t=5.2, p<.001$). Only 38% of neurodivergent workers perceived that they were operating at their best, compared to 48% of other workers ($\chi^2 = 27.9, p < .001$).

Specialisterne observe that the neurodiverse population typically have poor self-esteem and lower confidence in their abilities at work due to the increased harmful experiences in the workplace, including higher incidences of bullying and harassment and work overload and underload, reinforced in this report. All of these factors contribute to lower psychological safety at work, influencing the individuals self-report on their own productivity and their own self-concept in the workplace.

Under the right circumstances and with adequate support, these individuals have the opportunity to showcase their strengths for the benefit of both themselves, and the productivity of their employers and can often utilise their creativity and ability to 'think outside the box' for effective problem solving (Coplan et al., 2021).

Recommendation 2: **Provide Clarity, Structure, and Direct Feedback**

Neurodivergent individuals need clear and direct feedback to know if they are doing their work accurately. It is important that managers provide this regularly to build their confidence. Typically, neurodivergent employees are more likely to say they have understood a task or project even if they haven't in fear of being judged or to meet social expectations. They may also be more likely to take on extra work to compensate for their perceived challenges. Clear communication about roles and responsibilities is vital both for productivity, but also to reduce the risk of burnout.

Self-Rated Job Performance

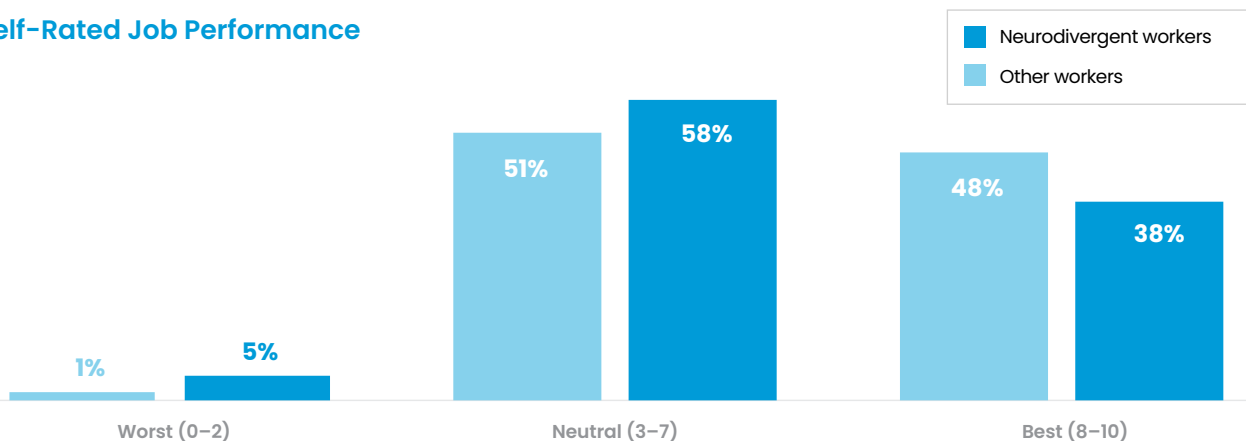


Figure 3: Self-rated job performance on a scale of 0 (unable to work) and 10 (work ability at its best) grouped by worst, neutral and best and compared for the proportion of neurodivergent and other worker group.



Harmful Experiences

Unfortunately neurodivergent individuals are at higher risk of negative workplace events such as violence, bullying or discrimination. 49% of neurodivergent workers reported one or more negative workplace events in the past 12 months, compared to 32% of the other worker group ($\chi^2 = 70.6, p < .001$). This is consistent with research in the UK that finds approximately half of the sample of autistic employees report bullying or harassment (48%) or other discrimination or unfair treatment (51%) due to their autism (National Autistic Society, 2016), whilst other studies have shown bullying involvement rates as high as 58% in individuals with ADHD versus 35% in the general population (Fogler et al., 2022).

Bullying and discrimination were 2 of the most common experiences, with 17% reporting bullying and 16% reporting discrimination.

Further, neurodivergent workers are at a particularly high risk of violence from external sources, such as customers or suppliers. Over 1 in 10 reported this, compared to only 6% of the other worker group ($\chi^2 = 10.2, p < .001$).

This finding brings light to the significant impact of bullying and discrimination on the wellbeing and career outcomes of neurodivergent employees, with these experiences often leading to poor mental health, lack of support, reduced confidence and long-term unemployment (National Autistic Society, 2016), perpetuating the high unemployment rate of autistic adults (ABS, 2022).

This data emphasises the critical need for employers to implement proactive strategies and supports to protect neurodivergent workers from psychological harm, poor mental health and job insecurity.

Harmful Experiences

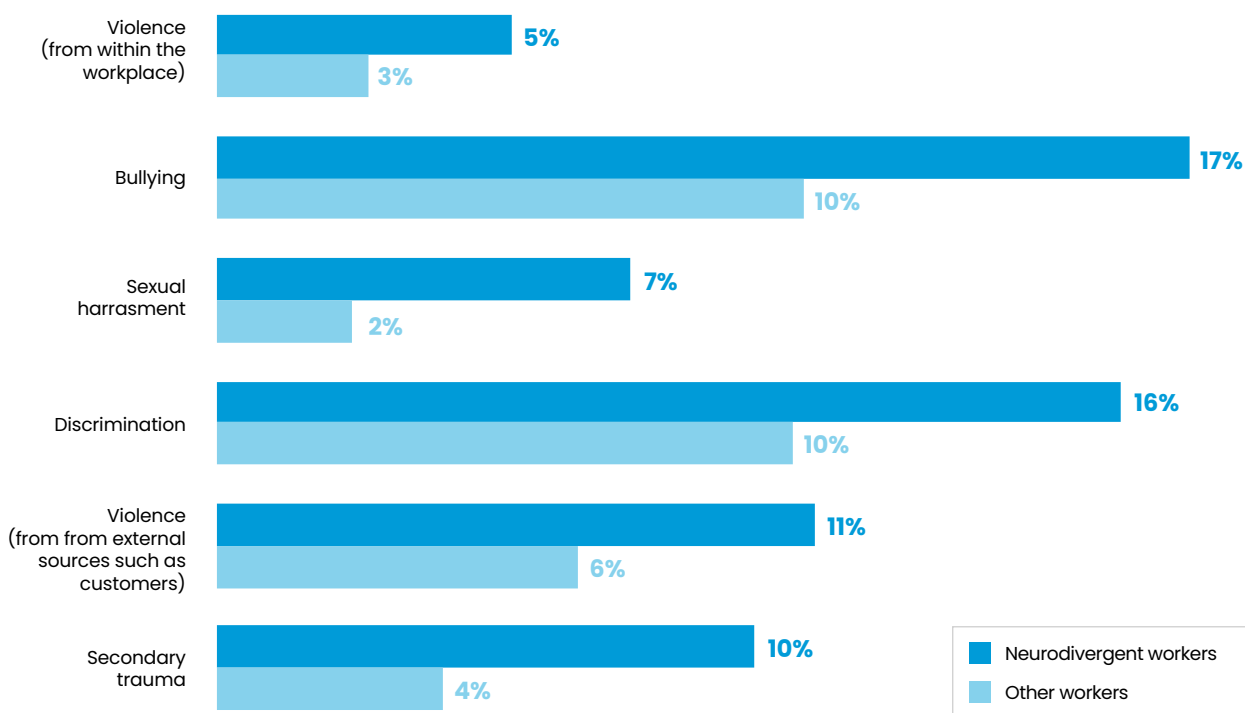


Figure 4: Proportion of workers reporting the above harmful experiences in the past 12 months for neurodivergent workers compared to the other worker group.

Mental Health Outcomes

It is known that neurodivergent individuals are vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes. However, the workplace has the potential to have a positive impact on their mental health and protect from harm.

Accessing Support

Neurodivergent workers were significantly more likely to utilise support from a health care professional via their workplace (16%) compared to other workers (8%) ($\chi^2 = 21.2, p < .001$). It is important to continue encouraging neurodivergent workers to properly utilise the resources available to them through the workplace.

Seeking support from friends and family was the most common avenue (42%), followed by taking paid leave (35%). Only 18% reached out to their co-workers for support suggesting that neurodivergent workers might feel less comfortable being open about their mental health in the workplace, particularly if they don't feel they have support and understanding from an empathetic manager.

Due to the fact that most neurodivergent workers are not seeking support in the workplace but rather from friends and family, it is crucial for those who are not neurodivergent to be informed and able to act as allies and to support their loved ones. The data also highlights a critical gap in the workplace support services for neurodivergent individuals and their managers.

It has been identified that tailored, strengths-based coaching support is a highly effective strategy to support neurodivergent employees to thrive in the workplace. (Wilson et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2024). Specialisterne adds that one of the most popular and effective adjustments for neurodivergent employees is their [Neurodiversity Coaching](#), providing specialist coaching for neurodivergent employees to develop workplace skills, such as planning and organising, as well as building confidence and mutual understanding, improving wellbeing and benefiting both employees and their leaders (Doyle, 2020).

Sources of Mental Health Support

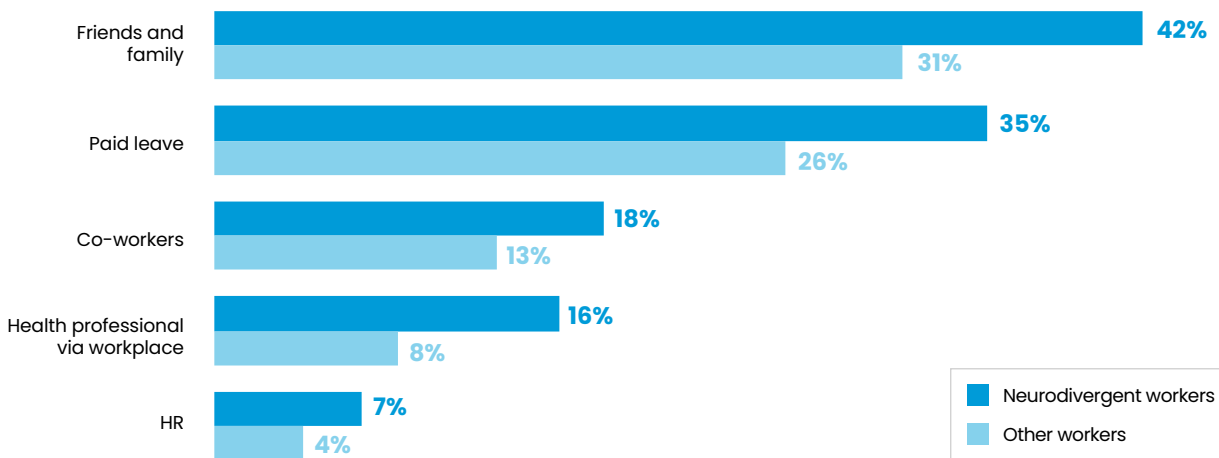


Figure 5: Proportion of workers who accessed the above sources of mental health support in the past 12 months in the neurodivergent worker group compared to the other worker group.



Psychological Distress

When levels of psychological distress (that is, non-specific symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression) were measured (Kessler et al., 2002), the neurodivergent worker group had a significantly higher average score (10.0) than the other worker group (7.3) ($t=-10.0, p<.001$). The measure taken refers to the 4 weeks before completing the survey.

The graph below indicates that neurodivergent workers were far more likely to fit into the moderate or severe categories of psychological distress, compared to the other worker group.

That is, almost one third of neurodivergent workers experienced severe psychological distress over the past 4 weeks, compared to 17% of the other worker group ($\chi^2 = 91.9, p < .001$). Almost 8 in 10 of the neurodivergent workers had experienced at least moderate psychological distress.

Further, of those that had experienced psychological distress, 64% reported that these feelings had made it difficult to manage their work activities. Over half of these workers had been absent from work for at least one day over the past four months due to their psychological distress.

Psychological Distress Levels

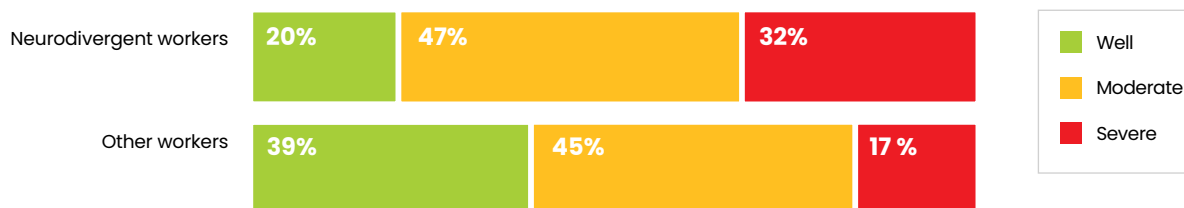


Figure 6: Psychological distress level based on scores from the K6, comparing the proportion of neurodivergent workers to the other worker group.



Workplace Adjustments

Neurodivergent workers are at higher risk of many negative outcomes compared to other workers. However, of those with a mental health condition, 13% of neurodivergent workers stated that their workplace had a positive impact on their condition. This indicates that given the right workplace conditions, neurodivergent workers can have the opportunity to thrive. The following section outlines how the workplace can be optimised for these workers.

In the ITW survey, neurodivergent workers reported a range of adjustments to the workplace that could be implemented to support them. Quotes from their lived experience are displayed throughout this section. A thematic analysis revealed that the most commonly requested work adjustments fell into the following themes (ranked from most to least frequent):

- Provide a supportive and empathetic environment,
- Monitor the sensory environment,
- Implement clear and consistent work processes,
- Better manage stress levels and workload, and
- Build appreciation for diversity.

Themes by Frequency Mentioned

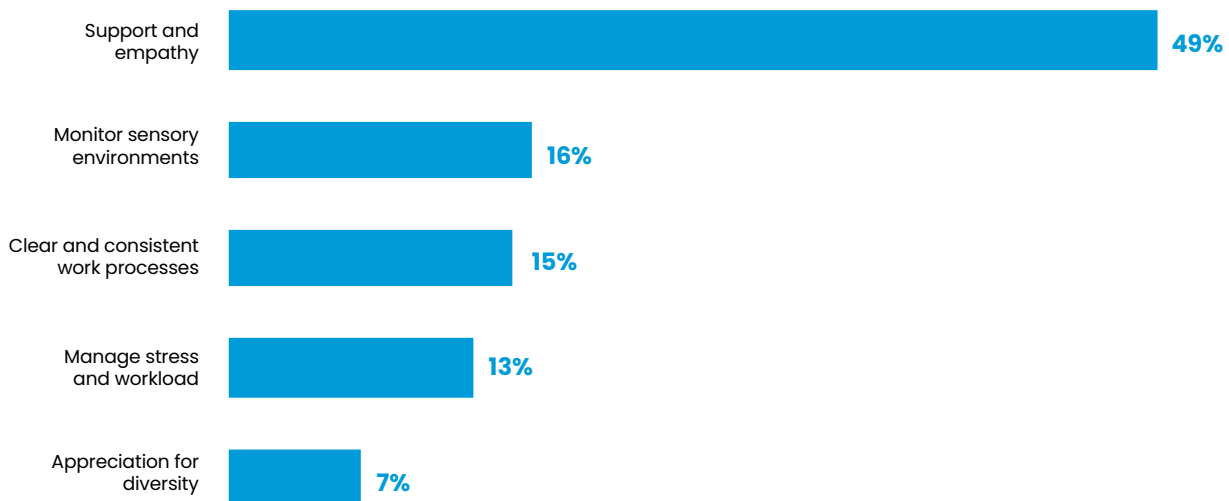


Figure 7: Proportion of neurodivergent workers who requested workplace adjustments that align with the above themes.



Support and empathy

The most frequently present theme, workers outlined a strong desire for workplaces to have an overall more supportive and empathetic approach towards their neurodiversity. Largely, it is not sufficient to simply be empathetic, but employers need to be proactive in understanding and responding to their worker's individual needs.

Not all neurodivergent workers are the same, so it is important that managers tailor their support to the individual. Empathetic leadership means actively listening to employees and understanding their unique needs, rather than making assumptions about a neurodivergent employee's capacity. A human-centred approach benefits all employees, ensuring they have the tools and environment needed to thrive.

Broad research highlights the significant role leaders play in shaping inclusive and supportive workplace environments. Leadership qualities such as empathy, adaptability, and clear communication are critical in fostering settings that enable neurodivergent employees to thrive (Kaaria, A., & Karemu, G, 2024). Specialisterne consistently observe that the strongest predictor of success for a neurodivergent employee is having a manager who is patient, understanding, and proactive in meeting their individual needs. The ITW survey reinforces that insight, with neurodivergent respondents stating they are seeking a more supportive and empathetic approach towards their neurodivergence.

Recommendation 3: Invest in Leadership Training

Neurodivergent employees thrive when supported by managers who are patient, understanding, and proactive in meeting their individual needs. Specialisterne emphasises the vital importance of accessible neurodiversity awareness training for leaders at all levels, as well as managers engaging directly with their neurodivergent employees to learn what practical support and strategies they need to succeed and maintaining open communication and regular check-ins. Building a trusting, understanding relationship is key, which requires leaders to not make assumptions and to be accountable, follow through on commitments and create a safe working environment.

"Join the hidden disabilities sunflower program and actually listen to accommodation requests and take them as that not as complaining or special treatment."

Clerical worker aged 40–44 years old working at a performing arts business in QLD.

"Be more understandable and considerate of everyone's individual mental health needs."

Hospitality worker aged 20–29 years old working in VIC.

"They could do their own research about mine and others mental health, so they can understand what we are going through."

Small business owner aged 30–34 years old working in NSW.



Monitor sensory environments

Individuals who are neurodivergent, and particularly those on the autism spectrum, often experience sensory sensitivities. This can include being over or under-sensitive to sensory information such as sound, light or touch (Weber et al., 2022), which can have significant impact on executive functioning and productivity.

Workers frequently described that they were more likely to thrive when they had access to workspaces that were not overstimulating. Every employee will have a different sensory profile with individual sensitivities, so employers should adopt individualised supports for each employee.

Recommendation 4: **Create Neuro-Friendly Workspaces**

To support neurodivergent employees, workplaces should be designed with sensory needs in mind, considering factors such as noise, lighting and workspace layout. Specialisterne recommends having access to quiet spaces, but if this is not possible, employers can provide alternative accommodations such as regular breaks, noise cancelling headphones and flexible hours (i.e. to avoid peak hour in the office and on the commute). Avoiding hot desking and instead offering a fixed workstation with appropriate lighting and low-noise surroundings can be vital for employee success.

Employers must be proactive in supporting neurodivergent employees through personalised, structured response plans to help manage overwhelm, psychological distress, burnout and meltdowns. Recommended strategies can include reducing environmental triggers, providing access to a quiet and dim room, or personalised sensory regulation options such as a hug or listening to music, speaking with an understanding colleague or friend, or using a break to engage in a hyperfocus or special interest. These strategies help employees regulate emotions and reduce overwhelm.

"Flexibility in delivery methods, flexibility in locations, better office space for quiet time and reflection more private meeting rooms."

Manager aged 55–59 years old working at a large hospital in NSW.

"Having more focus/quiet spaces to work (if mandating days in the office) and also lights that aren't so bright – they cause a lot of headaches after focusing for long periods of time."

IT professional aged 35–39 years old working at a large finance company in WA.



Clear and consistent work processes

It was common for neurodivergent workers to say that they are more productive when there is structure and consistency in their work environment. Some more specific requests included that workplaces have clear, accessible and consistently applied written policies and procedures. They also wanted role clarity, as well as specificity surrounding the tasks they are responsible for.

Recommendation 5: Build a Culture of Neuro-Inclusion

Specialisterne highlights that it is common for autistic individuals to thrive in sameness (Powers, 2018). Structure and routines offer autistic people clarity, consistency and the foundations they need to perform their role. As for role clarity, as an indicator of psychosocial safety this is important for every employee, but for neurodivergent employees, it's essential as they need clear, direct instructions and regular feedback to feel confident and be productive. In turn, we believe this would also increase self-perceived productivity.

"Understand I can't instantly switch tasks, it takes a few seconds or minutes to process. Use specific detail when requested something and not expecting me to fill the gaps (the gaps are usually not logical to me and typically only requires a few more words to provide exactly what they want). Have written policies and procedures and actually follow them."

Finance professional aged 35–44 years old working at a large company in NSW.

Manage stress and workload

Neurodivergent workers are at high risk of burnout and more likely to have an inappropriate workload. Stress can increase due to an unbalanced workload, worker's masking to fit in (i.e. suppressing neurodivergent traits), as well as sensory overload discussed above, or emotional dysregulation. Given this, it is not surprising that workers often mentioned the negative impact of stress, anxiety and high workloads in the workplace. They expressed a need for assistance and extra support to manage these.

Recommendation 6: Create Open Communication and Individualised Support

Effective leadership means actively listening to employees and understanding their unique needs. Rather than making assumptions about a neurodivergent employee's capacity, managers should have open conversations about workplace adjustments and support. Specialisterne recommends all workplaces adopt an employee profile tool such as their Employee Success Profile. This tool offers a human-centred and strengths-based approach to documenting individual strengths, working preferences, support strategies, accommodations, learning and communication profiles, which in turn creates inclusion and safety for all employees.

"Lightening the load on my role. I am in a position which requires that I have to get heavily involved in political activities, rather than just leading my team, which is what I am engaged to do. It is draining, frustrating, and unproductive."

Manager aged 35–39 years old working at a university in NSW.

"Adjust workload expectations based on individual capacity, ensuring realistic deadlines and clear priorities to reduce stress."

Sales worker aged 30–34 years old working at a large wholesaler in VIC.



Appreciation for diversity

Workers expressed a need for an open and accepting environment that is free from stigma, and where they feel comfortable sharing information about their experiences as a neurodivergent person. Research suggests that appreciation of diversity in the workplace leads to higher retention, higher morale and engagement at work (Downey et al., 2015; Paldon, 2024).

Neurodivergent employees need to feel valued and appreciated for their unique contribution to the workplace to feel safe and supported, which will build their confidence and enable them to bring even more value to the workplace. Education is the key to building an appreciation and understanding.

Recommendation 7: Address Stigma

Neurodivergence should be recognised as a strength that enhances workplace innovation and success. At Specialisterne, we know education and awareness are key to breaking down stigma reducing bullying, to foster a culture of psychological safety and understanding in the workplace. By increasing awareness and knowledge, we can create a workplace that celebrates inclusion and fosters a neuro-inclusive workplace where all employees have the opportunity to thrive.

"A better understanding of what these things mean, and for society at large to stop looking at these as a nuisance and be more aware and considerate of people's needs for different ways of working."

Business professional aged 40–44 years old working at a university in VIC.

"Allow me to be me."

Real estate agent aged 20–24 years old working in VIC.

"Create an open and inclusive work environment, encourage employees to share their mental health issues, and eliminate stigmatization of mental health."

Senior manager aged 30–34 years old working at a large mechanic business in NSW.



Conclusion

Embracing neurodiversity and prioritising mental health in the workplace is not just a moral imperative, it is a strategic advantage. By creating an inclusive environment that acknowledges and accommodates diverse brains and ways of working, workplaces can unlock the full potential of their workforce, driving innovation, collaboration, and overall wellbeing. Acknowledging and addressing neurodivergence as well as mental health needs in every team and at an organisational level ensures that all employees have the chance to feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute their best work.

To create lasting change, businesses must implement practices that promote psychological safety, provide flexible work arrangements, and offer education on neurodiversity and mental health. Leadership commitment, taking a human-centred management approach inclusive hiring practices, and workplace accommodations are essential components of a truly supportive work environment. By investing in these initiatives, organisations will enhance employee satisfaction and retention not only for their neurodiverse workforce, but all employees will benefit from working in an inclusive, supportive team and organisation.

Ultimately, a workplace that values neurodiversity and mental health builds a culture of belonging, where all individuals can thrive, innovate, and reach their full potential.

Further Resources

1. [Specialisterne Australia](#).
2. Specialisterne [Neurodiversity Coaching](#) and [Training](#).
3. [Neurodiversity Employment Toolkit](#), La Trobe University.
4. Disability Inclusion at Work [Report](#) by Deloitte.
5. [Neurodiversity at Work Report](#) by Birkbeck University and Neurodiversity in Business.
6. [Neuroinclusive Recruiting](#) Resource page, Autism South Australia Resource.
7. [SuperFriend's Burnout Whitepaper](#)
8. The [Thriving Workplace Index](#)

Methodology

SuperFriend's Indicators of a Thriving Workplace (ITW) survey has been gathering a wide range of workplace mental health data for the last 10 years. In September and December 2024 SuperFriend asked workers to self-identify whether they were neurodivergent and 12.1% (n=865) of the total sample (n=7,134) did so. We defined neurodivergent as:

*"A **neurodivergent person** is someone whose brain processes information differently from what is considered typical. This term encompasses a range of cognitive variations, including those on the autism spectrum, individuals with learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Tourette's syndrome."*

This group was case matched to a comparison group of 865 Australian workers who did not identify as neurodivergent. Given that the neurodivergent group had a high proportion of females and younger workers, cases were matched for both gender and age group (on a pseudorandom basis) by SPSS statistics software. Statistical comparisons were conducted using chi-square tests of independence and t-tests for independent groups with test statistics reported throughout the paper.

Qualitative data was also collected in September from 356 of these workers with written responses to the question "How could your workplace better support your individual mental health needs in the workplace?" This data was analysed using the text analytics program Kapiche, which uses natural language processing to analyse common concepts and themes.



		Other workers		Neurodivergent workers	
		Count	%	Count	%
Gender	Male	304	50.00%	304	50.00%
	Female	561	50.00%	561	50.00%
Age	18 to 24 years	154	50.00%	154	50.00%
	25 to 34 years	299	50.00%	299	50.00%
	35 to 44 years	227	50.00%	227	50.00%
	45 to 54 years	135	50.00%	135	50.00%
	55 to 64 years	41	50.00%	41	50.00%
	65+ years	9	50.00%	9	50.00%
Role	Business owner	39	44.80%	48	55.20%
	Senior manager	112	48.90%	117	51.10%
	Junior/middle manager	400	54.90%	328	45.10%
	Non-manager	304	47.30%	339	52.70%
	Contractor/freelancer	10	23.30%	33	76.70%
Organisation	Small (2-19)	167	44.90%	205	55.10%
	Medium (20-199)	270	51.90%	250	48.10%
	Large (200+)	428	51.10%	410	48.90%
Industry	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	17	47.20%	19	52.80%
	Mining	32	51.60%	30	48.40%
	Manufacturing	38	55.90%	30	44.10%
	Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	16	47.10%	18	52.90%
	Construction	50	53.20%	44	46.80%
	Wholesale Trade	15	41.70%	21	58.30%
	Retail Trade	92	49.20%	95	50.80%
	Accommodation and Food Services	36	42.40%	49	57.60%
	Transport, Postal and Warehousing	27	42.90%	36	57.10%
	Information Media and Telecommunications	36	48.00%	39	52.00%
	Financial and Insurance Services	54	50.50%	53	49.50%
	Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	19	51.40%	18	48.60%
	Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	77	53.50%	67	46.50%
	Administrative and Support Services	20	40.00%	30	60.00%
	Public Administration and Safety	59	63.40%	34	36.60%
	Education and Training	99	51.00%	95	49.00%
	Health Care and Social Assistance	136	48.20%	146	51.80%
	Arts and Recreation Services	17	48.60%	18	51.40%
	Other Services	25	52.10%	23	47.90%
State	NSW	284	52.50%	257	47.50%
	VIC	247	52.00%	228	48.00%
	QLD	144	44.00%	183	56.00%
	SA	55	50.50%	54	49.50%
	WA	91	49.50%	93	50.50%
	TAS	13	43.30%	17	56.70%
	NT	11	39.30%	17	60.70%
	ACT	20	55.60%	16	44.40%
Total		865		865	



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About

SPECIALISTERNE



Specialisterne is a pioneering international not-for-profit social enterprise, established in 2004, with a mission to build neuroinclusive workplaces where neurodivergent individuals can thrive. We partner with employers to unlock the potential of neurodivergent talent – fostering inclusive, neuro-affirming environments that recognise and value the unique perspectives and strengths neurodivergent people bring. Operating in 26 countries, we have helped create over 10,000 meaningful careers for neurodivergent individuals while supporting businesses to achieve their inclusion goals.

Specialisterne Australia was established in 2015 to advance this global mission locally. Since then, we have worked with leading Australian employers and government agencies to deliver strategic advisory services, education, training, recruitment programs, and workplace coaching. Our goal is to support sustainable inclusion and empower neurodivergent individuals to thrive at work. Our clients include some of Australia's most recognised organisations, including Deloitte, Westpac, EY, IBM, ATO, Services Australia, Coles, Lendlease, Weir Minerals, Transport for NSW, Harvey Norman, and Cummins.



SuperFriend is a not-for-profit organisation backed by our Partners in the Superannuation and Life Insurance industries. We're dedicated to transforming mental health research into practical, powerful solutions that benefit workplaces and their employees. Employers and their leaders have a legal duty of care in providing psychologically safe workplaces, and we can support in this. Through this work, we empower workplaces to improve the status quo and as a result, boost retention, wellbeing, and productivity.

Find out more about SuperFriend by visiting our [website](#).

For a diagnostic tool that can benchmark your organisations mental health against National and Industry averages and to streamline activity to target the root cause, check out our [Thriving Workplace Index](#).

To see all our research including the Indicators of a Thriving Workplace Report and other Whitepapers, visit our [Research Library](#).

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