

How We're Really Doing

The State of Stigma UK **2026**

What 2,000 adults in the UK shared about anxiety, AI, stigma, and the platforms shaping their mental health. Based on a survey of UK adults, fielded March 6–19, 2026. Results have a margin of error of <2%.

*Any YoY notes are comparing this year's data to last year's [State of Stigma report](#).

betterhelp



AI Opens Access But Not Acceptance

“Mental health needs are rising, but so is the hesitation to get help. In this year’s research, **84% of people in the UK say seeking support is wise, yet 67% say society still discourages it.** That gap is the real challenge: people believe in care, but stigma and friction still get in the way when taking the first step.

At the same time, we’re in the midst of a once-in-a-generation shift with AI – one that has the potential to break down those barriers. **Already, 15% of respondents say they’re using AI for mental health support,** making care more immediate and accessible. The question isn’t whether AI will play a role, but how responsibly it can be built and deployed to help people start – and stay in – care.


As a company committed to expanding access to mental health support, we have a responsibility to ensure AI helps refine how care is delivered – while maintaining the clinical rigour, safety and outcomes that truly matter.”

Fernando Madeira
President, BetterHelp



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A person in a dark shirt is standing in front of a window, covering their face with their hand. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and a body of water. The image is dimly lit, suggesting a somber or distressed mood.

The Stigma Persists

01



The contradiction continues.

In our first-ever State of Stigma report last year, we uncovered a real tension: people believe in support, but still hesitate to seek it. This year, that contradiction continues in the UK – people overwhelmingly believe in the value of therapy, but most aren't acting on it:

84%

agree seeking support is wise (+6pp YoY*)

67%

believe society discourages seeking help (+7pp YoY*)

**pp = percentage points*



Younger generations are leading the shift in attitude, but paradoxically, are also most likely to feel the pressure to cope alone.

MILLENNIALS

92%

GEN Z

87%

say seeking support is a sign of strength

MILLENNIALS

50%

GEN Z

51%

feel pressure to handle mental health issues on their own, rather than seek professional help

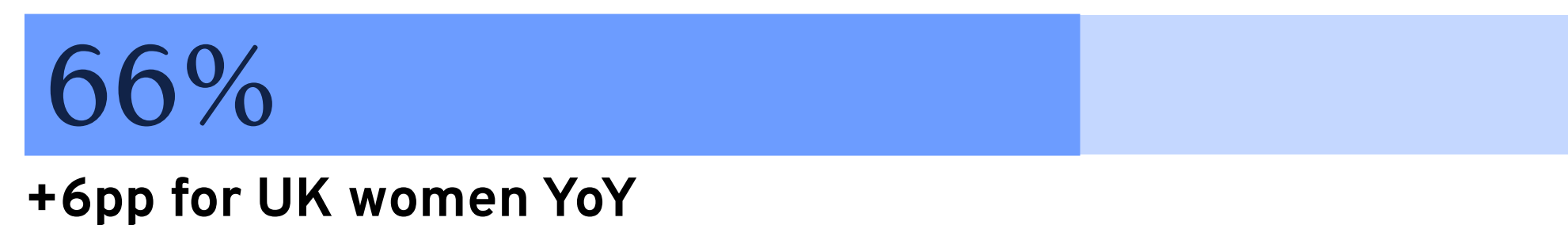
Stigma isn't fading – it's actively widening the gap between what people believe and how they act. Nearly half of the people in the UK (45%) say it's not easy to find help when they need it, suggesting that both real and perceived barriers, including stigma, continue to stand in the way of taking action.

Stigma-related concerns are cited more often in the UK than across the EU (20% vs. 13%) among individuals who have experienced mental health challenges but did not pursue care.

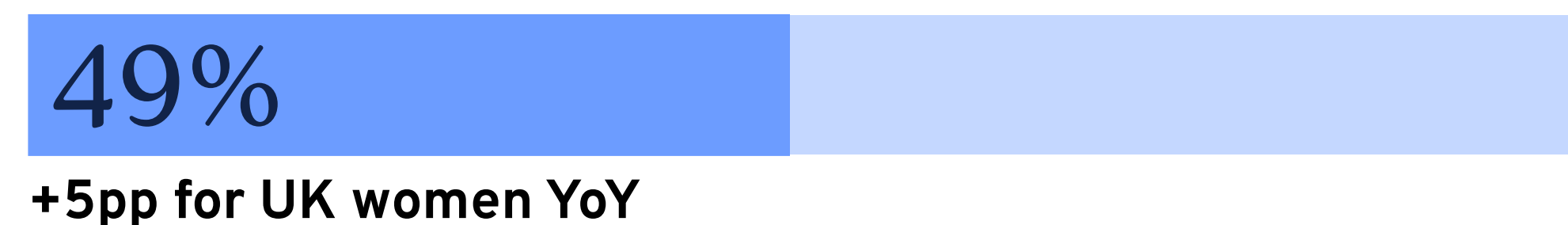
Brits are feeling the strain.

UK adults are reporting higher levels of mental distress than their EU counterparts. Six in ten (60%) say they feel nervous, anxious, or on edge, compared to 54% across the EU.

Anxiety



Depression



Top Issues

73% **feel tired or have little energy**

70% **are worrying about too many things**

64% **have trouble falling asleep**

UK adults are feeling the strain of financial pressure more acutely than the EU average, with higher levels of financial stress (49% vs. 46%) and more reporting that current economic conditions are harming their wellbeing (52% vs. 47%). This broader pressure may also be spilling into personal lives, with more people in the UK reporting concerns around intimacy (21% vs. 17%).

What's stopping Brits from seeking support?

67% of people in the UK believe societal attitudes discourage seeking help (+7pp YoY), underscoring a persistent gap between recognising the value of mental health care and actually seeking it. This disconnect is driven by a combination of structural and cultural barriers, with stigma and perceived inaccessibility continuing to shape how – and whether – people seek support.

Top reasons for not seeking support among those who reported experiencing symptoms:

41% mention cost
(+13pp YoY)

39% say they fear judgement
from others if they found
out (+4pp YoY)

37% say they don't
believe it will help
(+3pp YoY)

29% cite time constraints
(+11pp YoY)

“ At critical moments, receiving timely support can be pivotal. The pressure many feel to cope on their own can still create distance between people and the support they need. When help is available sooner, it doesn't just influence whether someone reaches out – it can gently shape how they steady themselves and move through what they're facing. ”

Sana Khwaja

BACP, accredited therapist at BetterHelp

The Rise of AI Support

02



More people are turning to AI as a gateway to mental health.

Compared to their EU counterparts, UK adults are more cautious of AI. Specific concerns relate to loss of human connection (78% UK vs. 68% EU), AI overdependence i.e. loss of critical thinking (85% vs. 76%), and surveillance (71% vs. 66%). Despite these concerns, Brits are turning to AI more frequently for support with real-life challenges, suggesting a growing reliance on fast, accessible tools despite underlying hesitation.

AI Adoption & Use

Higher usage than EU peers for everyday pressures:

15%

of UK adults already use AI for mental health (+5pp YoY)

	UK	EU
Work Stress	80%	72%
Financial Worries	79%	74%
Romantic Relationships	66%	49%

Top use cases in the UK

Career decisions

Self-esteem issues

Work stress

For many, engaging with AI for mental health is already making a difference: 81% report a positive impact on issues like stress, sleep, and relationships.



When do people turn to AI, therapy, or both?

Among those who have used AI for mental health support, it stands out for emotional support and reducing concerns about others' reactions when discussing mental and emotional challenges.

45%

say AI is more effective for talking through emotions

44%

say it is better for discussing mental or emotional concerns without worrying about others' reactions

Still, people currently prefer therapists for the discretion, communication, and emotional nuance that drive meaningful care and better outcomes.

“This is the opportunity ahead: a new model of care where AI expands access and drives better outcomes, all within a clinically governed experience.”

Dr. Russell DuBois

VP of Clinical Quality, Operations & Innovation at BetterHelp

Which of the following do you believe would be better coming from AI vs. hybrid (AI + Therapist)?

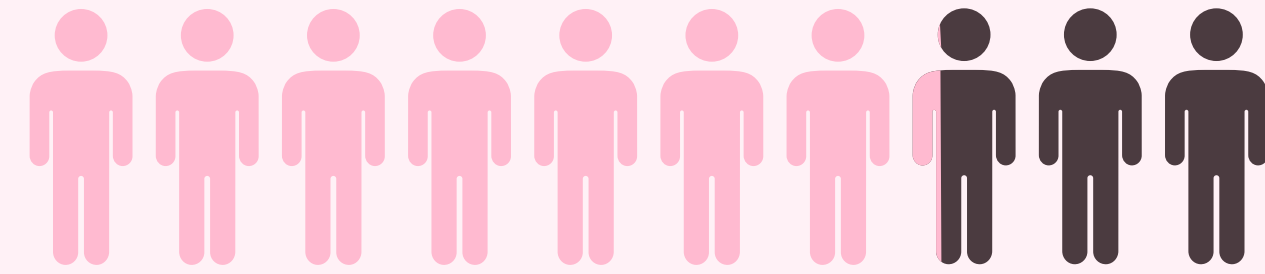
	AI	Hybrid (AI + Therapist)
Reaction Managment Concern of how others would respond to your mental health discussions		✓
Privacy/Anonymity Confidentiality around your mental health discussions		✓
Comfort Level Level of comfort when discussing mental health concerns		✓
Communication Preference Preference for written responses or spoken responses		✓
Convenience/Availability Ability to connect instantly when you need help	✓	
Affordabilty / Cost	✓	



A new clinically governed model, powered by AI.

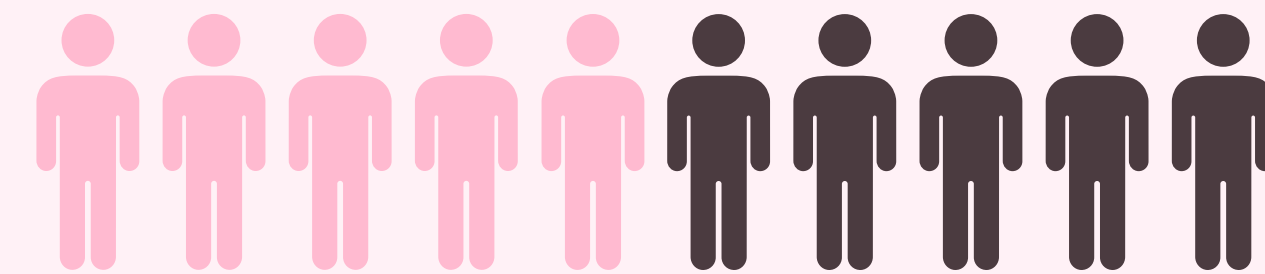
People want the right care – support that’s accessible and affordable – revealing an appetite for a hybrid approach of AI and human therapy, and a new model that can drive stronger outcomes.

72%



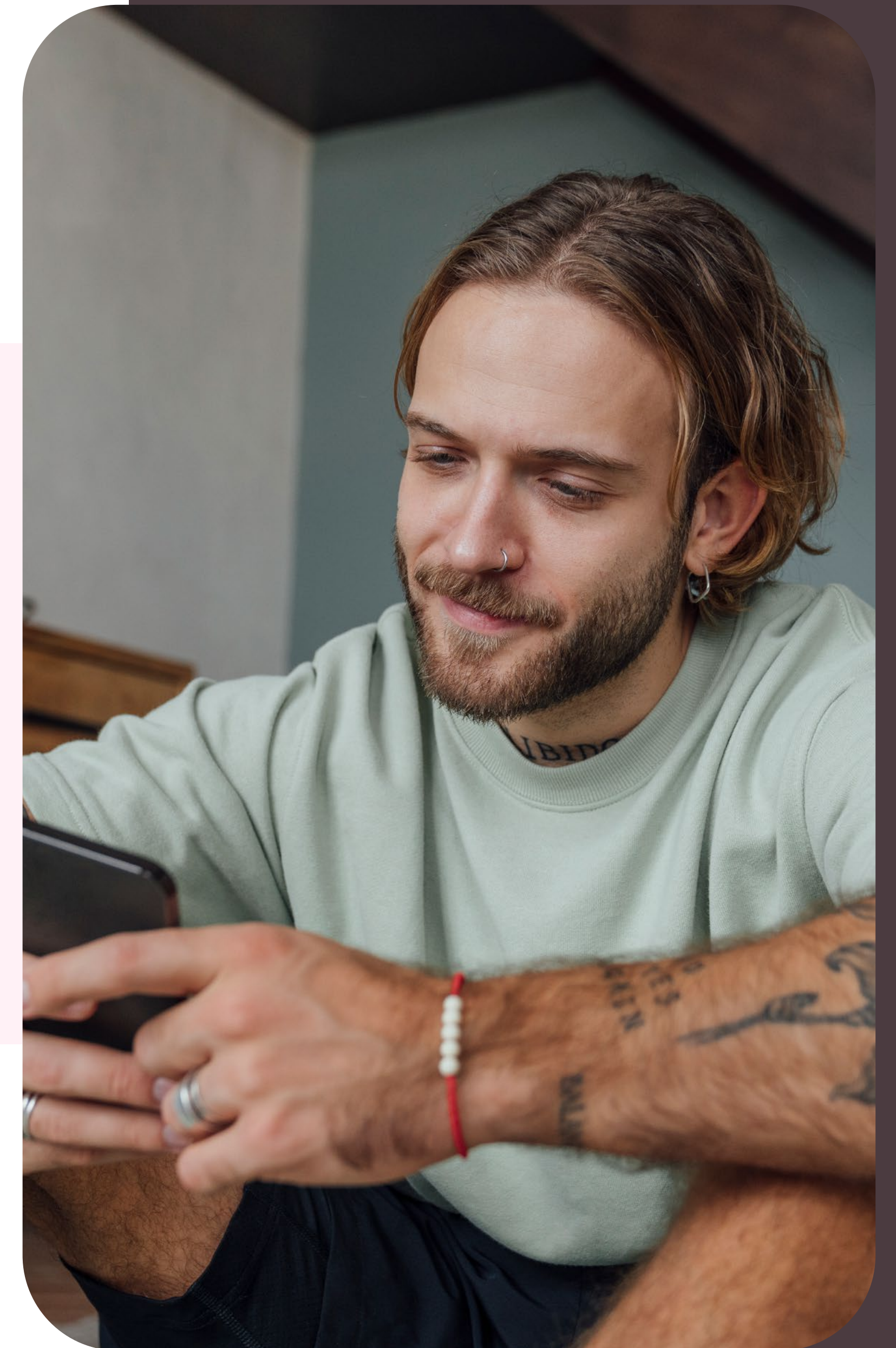
say they would never trust AI more than a qualified professional

50%



agree that AI services for therapy are most effective when coupled with care from a medical professional

As AI continues to evolve in mental health care, it can help lower barriers to getting started and help shift support from episodic to continuous. When paired with clinical oversight, it can ensure care remains safe, trusted, and effective over time.





The Ways We Seek Support

03



Younger people are using more interventions for support & care.

Rather than relying on a single pathway, younger generations combine social, self-directed, and digital forms of support depending on what feels most accessible and natural to them. For example, 44% of Gen Z speak with friends about their mental health (vs. 13% of Boomers), while 49% of Millennials engage in lifestyle practices like exercise and mindfulness (vs. 21% of older adults).

This pattern extends to emerging forms of support as well, particularly AI. Younger generations are far more likely to use AI for mental health support.

Use of AI for mental health support

35%
of Gen Z

32%
of Millennials

12%
of Gen X

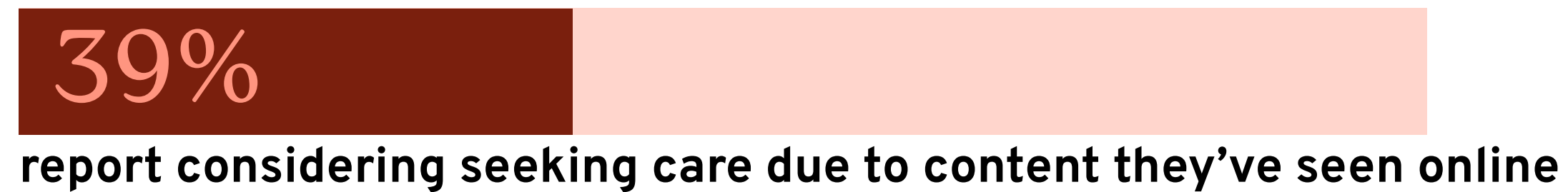
7%
of Boomers

This broader, more flexible approach to support may also be shaping how younger generations think about the future. Brits are more optimistic than their European counterparts about the next generation's mental health, with 44% believing it will be better than their own (vs. 36% in the EU).

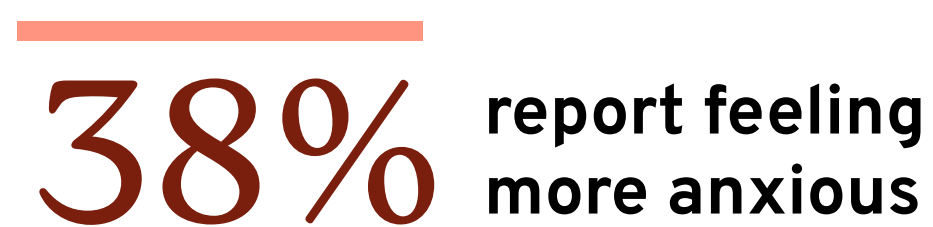
The Gen Z paradox continues.

This broader engagement is also reflected in how younger generations interact with mental health content online.

Digital environments are shaping how Gen Z discovers and accesses support:



At the same time, these environments introduce new pressures for Gen Z.



Together, these points to a dual reality: social media is expanding awareness and pathways to care, while also amplifying the pressures that can undermine mental wellbeing.





Men believe in support, but don't act on it.

While men in the UK broadly recognise the importance of mental health – 83% say seeking help is a sign of strength – stigma and scepticism continue to shape how they engage with care.

Hesitation is driven by perception:

42% worry they will be judged for seeking support

41% feel uncomfortable discussing mental health

42% feel pressure to handle challenges on their own

41% of those who experienced symptoms but did not receive care do not believe therapy would help

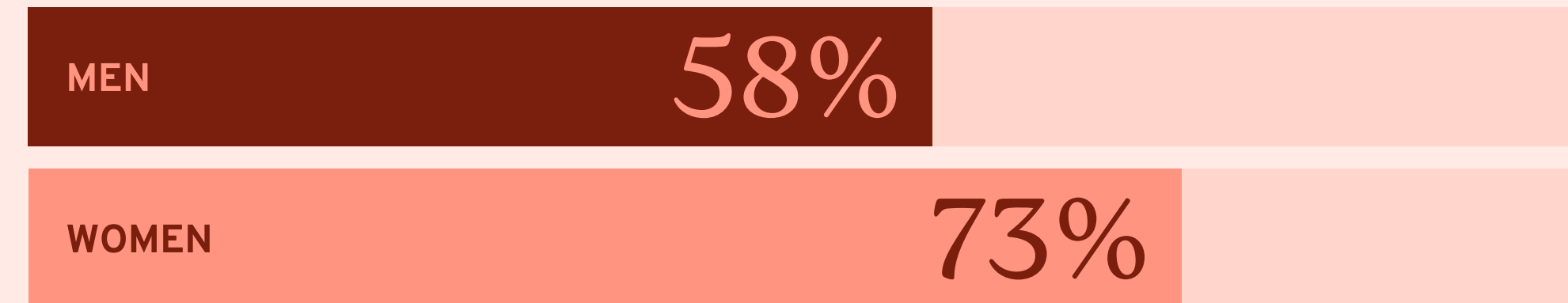
“ Interestingly, here in the UK we see Millennial men reporting the highest levels of life satisfaction of any generation – 55% report being satisfied with their lives. Yet in clinical practice, this picture can be more nuanced – men’s greater reported satisfaction may sometimes reflect the quieter ways distress is experienced, recognised, or spoken about, rather than its absence. ”

Richard Whitenstall

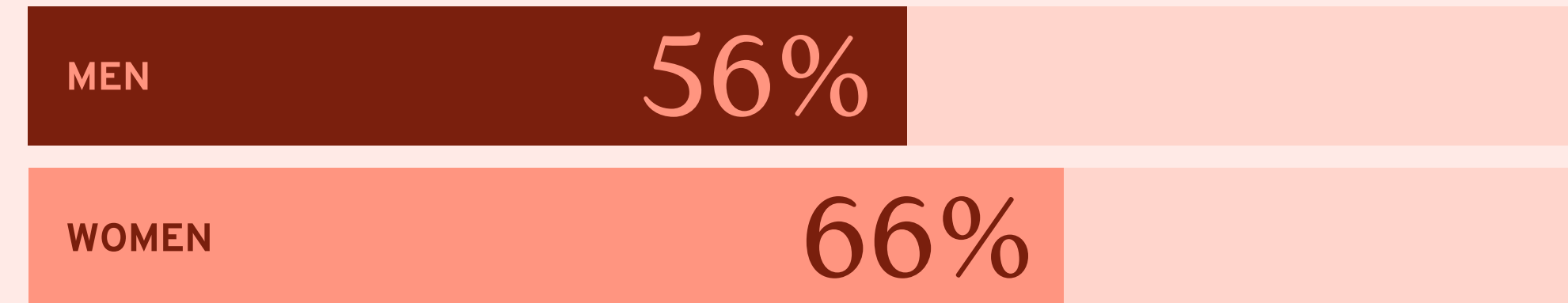
BACP, accredited therapist at BetterHelp

This shows up in behaviour. Compared to women, men are less likely to seek support across every channel:

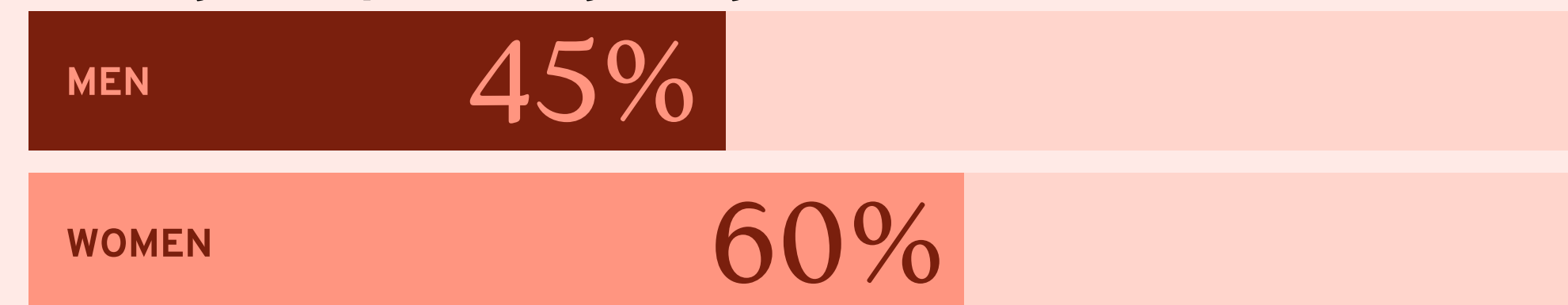
Confiding in friends:



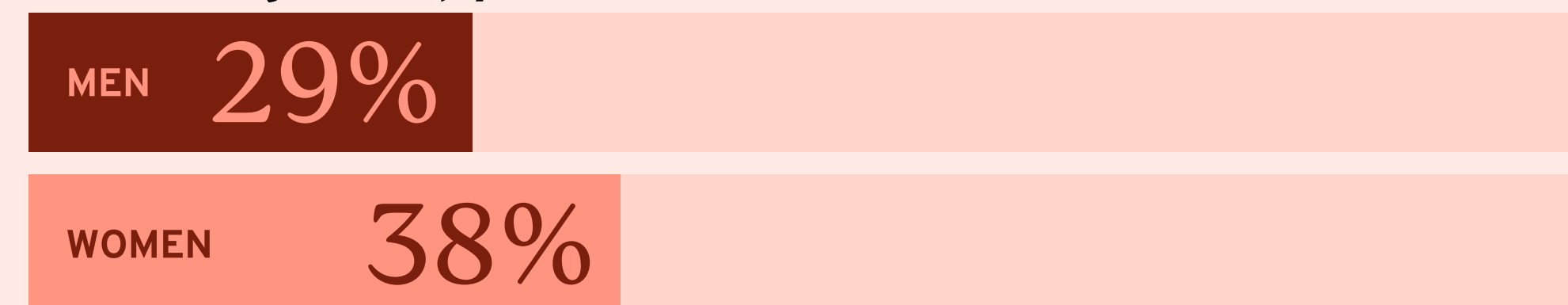
Confiding in family:



Making lifestyle changes e.g. exercise, mindfulness:



Attending therapy:





The Path Forward

04

What's Next

The opportunity ahead is not just to expand access, but to fundamentally rethink how mental health support is delivered. This year's State of Stigma report makes one thing clear: people still need help getting help, and the way they seek support is rapidly evolving with AI. The next chapter isn't episodic care – it's continuous care, where support is available not just in sessions, but in the moments people actually need it.

AI has the potential to open that door as evident in how it's reducing friction, helping people get started sooner, and keeping them engaged over time. Expanding access is only part of the equation, and how care is delivered matters just as much, which is why this model must be grounded in clinical governance, ethical oversight, and trust.



About BetterHelp

Whether it's teaming up with [Lewis Capaldi](#) or [Billboard](#) to help Gen Z and Millennials overcome stigma, creating space for open conversations through our podcast [Mind If We Talk?](#), or partnering with [Cybersmile](#) to address the mental health impacts of cyberbullying and online abuse, BetterHelp continues to find new ways to introduce people to therapy.

Here's the impact we've made with BetterHelp users worldwide:

72%

reported having a positive overall experience with the platform

82%

would recommend their therapist to someone else

7 in 10

surveyed users reported positive changes in their mental wellbeing

Based on a BetterHelp clinical outcomes 2024 survey of BetterHelp users in the US in [BetterHelp Platform Quality & Outcomes In 2024](#) | BetterHelp

These results reflect self-reported data collected using PHQ-9 and GAD-7 scores. Individual outcomes may vary.

Therapy through BetterHelp is provided by qualified therapists. BetterHelp's AI tools and features are designed to support therapists and clients and are not intended to diagnose, treat, or make clinical decisions.



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