

The Mental Health Index™ report

Regional Comparison –
Australia, Canada, United Kingdom
and United States, July 2020



LifeWorks
by Morneau Shepell

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Executive Summary

July marks the fifth month since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. The COVID-19 virus continues to proliferate globally with over 13 million cases this month. The United States faces rising daily case counts of COVID-19, especially in some key states, and far higher than the other jurisdictions surveyed. Case counts in Canada and the United Kingdom are at the lowest levels since the pandemic began. Across most of Australia, case counts also remain low, except in the state of Victoria, which is experiencing an outbreak and a return to lockdown.

Economic recovery is a priority in all four regions. While each region is at various stages of reopening and recovery, decision makers and public health officials share the common goals of trying to balance economic restart with managing the spread of COVID-19. Pandemic-related economic stimulus measures as well as special COVID-related and unemployment benefit programs, continue to play a critical role in fuelling the economy. Safely reopening schools continues to be a source of ongoing discussion in each jurisdiction. International travel remains restricted.

For the fourth consecutive month, the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the increased awareness and societal response to anti-Black racism continue to have an impact on the mental health of Australians, Canadians, Britons, and Americans.

The Mental Health Index™

Data from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States shows that the lowest Mental Health Index™ scores in the four regions are in:

- the United Kingdom (-12.5), followed by
- Australia (-12.3),
- Canada (-10.4), and then
- the United States (-5.1).

For the fourth consecutive month, the lowest Mental Health Index™ scores in the four regions are in the United Kingdom, followed by Australia



While some differences are evident, the Index for each region shows significant decline in mental health from the benchmark data. The greatest mental health improvement since last month is observed in the United States (0.7 points), followed by Canada (0.5 points). There were small decreases in mental health noted in the United Kingdom (-0.1 points) and Australia (-0.3 points).

Mental Stress Change

Comparing June 2020 to July 2020, there was a significant increase in mental stress in all regions. The increase in mental stress was the greatest in:

- the United Kingdom (58.4), followed by
- Australia (58.3),
- Canada (57.2), and then
- the United States (55.1).

The country with the greatest accumulation of mental stress over the past four months is Canada (110.5), followed by Australia (102.9), the United Kingdom (101.7), and the United States (99.6). The steepness of the increase has, however, been declining month-over-month. This indicates that over one-quarter of the population is experiencing more mental stress when compared to the prior month, with a small proportion experiencing less.

Additional findings

Relationships in 2020

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has been widespread. Prolonged social distancing and isolation have led people to crave human interaction and, in some cases, has had an impact on relationships, both personal and professional.

In all regions, approximately 30 per cent of respondents report some change in their personal relationships. In Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, 7 to 8 per cent more people report an improvement in their personal relationships over those reporting more strained personal relationships. In Canada, the percentage that report improved personal relationships is only 2 per cent higher than the percentage reporting more strained personal relationships.



In all regions, individuals reporting that their personal relationships have improved or stayed the same have considerably better mental health scores than those reporting that their relationships became more strained. In Australia, Canada, and the United States, those reporting an improvement in their personal relationships are observed to have lower mental health scores than those for whom their relationships remained the same.

In all regions, approximately 25 per cent of respondents report that there has been some change in their workplace relationships with months of social distancing, closed offices and workplaces, and many working from home.

In all regions, individuals reporting more strained workplace relationships have considerably lower scores than those reporting no change or an improvement. As well, respondents in all countries reporting that there was no change in their workplace relationships have the highest mental health scores.

The highest mental health scores are generally among those with no change in their personal or workplace relationships. This suggests that the quality of the support system contributes significantly to protecting mental health.

Racism and awareness of systemic racism

All respondents overwhelmingly agree that racism is a problem in their country. The highest proportion of respondents agreeing that racism is a problem in their country are in the United States (74 per cent). In contrast to the question of racism being a problem within their country, a much lower percentage indicate that racism is a problem in their workplace. Mental health index scores generally align with the likelihood of indicating that racism is a problem, with the lowest scores associated with seeing a problem and highest score associated with not perceiving a problem.

Individuals were asked if they felt that systemic racism will decrease in their country as a result of the heightened awareness related to the death of Black American, George Floyd. Respondents in Canada and the United States are most likely to report feeling that change is likely, while in Australia and the United Kingdom, respondents are least likely to report that changes in systemic racism are likely to occur.

For the fourth
consecutive month,
the two key drivers of
the Mental Health Index™
are financial risk
and isolation



Respondents were asked to consider the likelihood that systemic racism will change in the workplace. In all regions, respondents reported that systemic racism is unlikely to change in the workplace. This perception is most strongly observed in Australia (45 per cent), followed by the United Kingdom (44 per cent), the United States (39 per cent), and Canada (35 per cent).

Respondents were asked how much their thinking regarding systemic racism has changed over the last month. Canadians are mostly likely to report that they are more aware of systemic racism (34 per cent). In general, the highest proportion of responses is among those who responded that they are more aware, they were undecided/unsure, or that their thinking has not changed about systemic racism over the last month.

Additional data and analyses

Demographic breakdown of sub-scores, and specific cross-correlational and custom analyses as well as benchmarking against the national results or any sub-group, are available upon request. Contact MHI@morneaushepell.com

Individuals overwhelmingly believe that racism is a problem in their country yet comparatively, a much lower percentage indicate that racism is a problem in their workplace



Overview of The Mental Health Index™

The mental health and wellbeing of a population is essential to overall health and work productivity. The Mental Health Index™ provides a measure of the current mental health status of employed adults in a given geography, compared to the benchmarks collected in the years of 2017, 2018 and 2019. The increases and decreases in the Index are intended to predict cost and productivity risks, and inform the need for action by individuals, business and government.

The Mental Health Index™ report has three main parts:

1. The overall Mental Health Index™ (MHI), which is a measure of deviation from the benchmark of mental health and risk.
2. A Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score, which measures the level of reported mental stress, compared to the prior month.
3. A Spotlight section that reflects the specific impact of current issues in the community.

Methodology

The data for this report was collected through online surveys of representative groups of 5,000 residents of the United States, 3,000 residents in Canada, 2,000 residents of the United Kingdom, and 1,000 residents in Australia. All of those surveyed are currently employed or were employed within the prior six months. The same respondents participate each month to control for changes due to different samples. The respondents were asked to consider the prior two weeks when answering each question. The Mental Health Index™ is published monthly, starting April 2020. The benchmark data was collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The data for the current report was collected from June 22 to June 30, 2020 for all regions.



Calculations

To create The Mental Health Index™, the first step leverages a response scoring system that turns individual responses to each question into a point value. Higher point values are associated with better mental health and less mental health risk. Each individual's scores are added and then divided by the total number of possible points to get a score out of 100. The raw score is the mathematical mean of the individual scores.

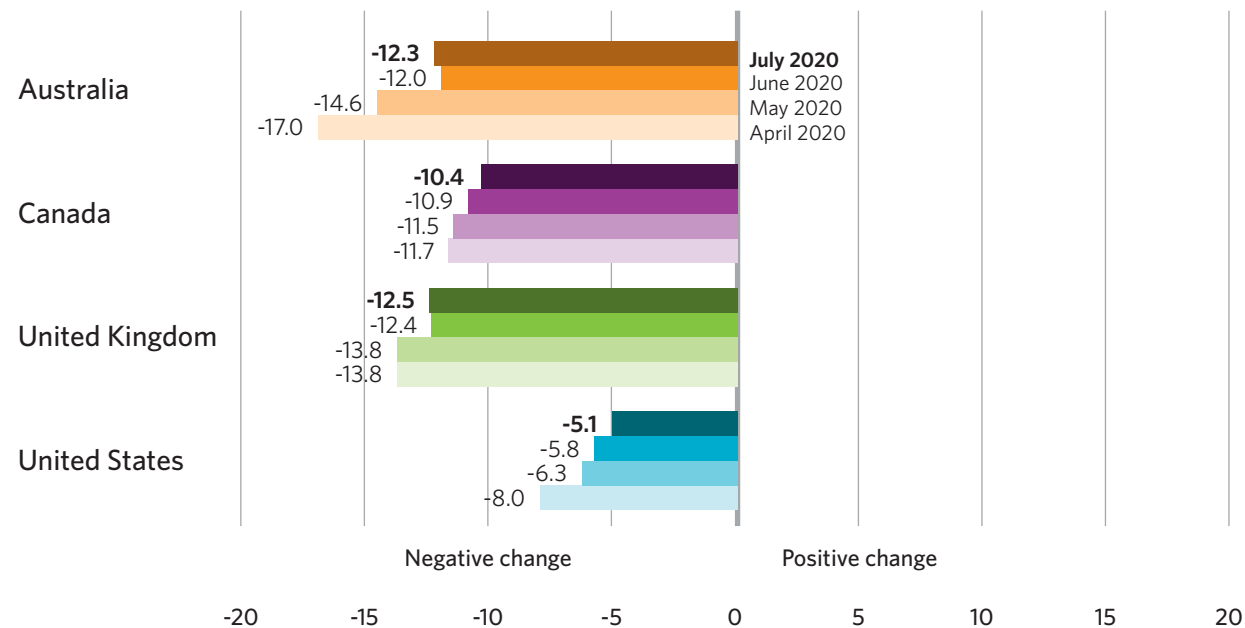
To demonstrate change, the current month's scores are then compared to the benchmark and the prior month. The benchmark is comprised of data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. This was a period of relative social stability and steady economic growth. **The deviation relative to the benchmark is the Mental Health Index™. A score of zero in the Mental Health Index™ reflects no change, positive scores reflect improvement, and negative scores reflect decline.**

A Mental Stress Change score is also reported given that increasing and prolonged mental stress is a potential contributor to changes in mental health. It is reported separately and is not part of the calculation of the Mental Health Index™. The Mental Stress Change score is calculated as (percentage reporting less mental stress + percentage reporting the same level of mental stress * 0.5) * -1 + 100. The data compares the current to the prior month. **A Mental Stress Change score of 50 reflects no change in mental stress from the prior month. Scores above 50 reflect an increase in mental stress and scores below 50 reflect a decrease in mental stress.** The range is from zero to 100. A succession of scores over 50, month over month, reflects high risk.



Regional comparisons – Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and United States

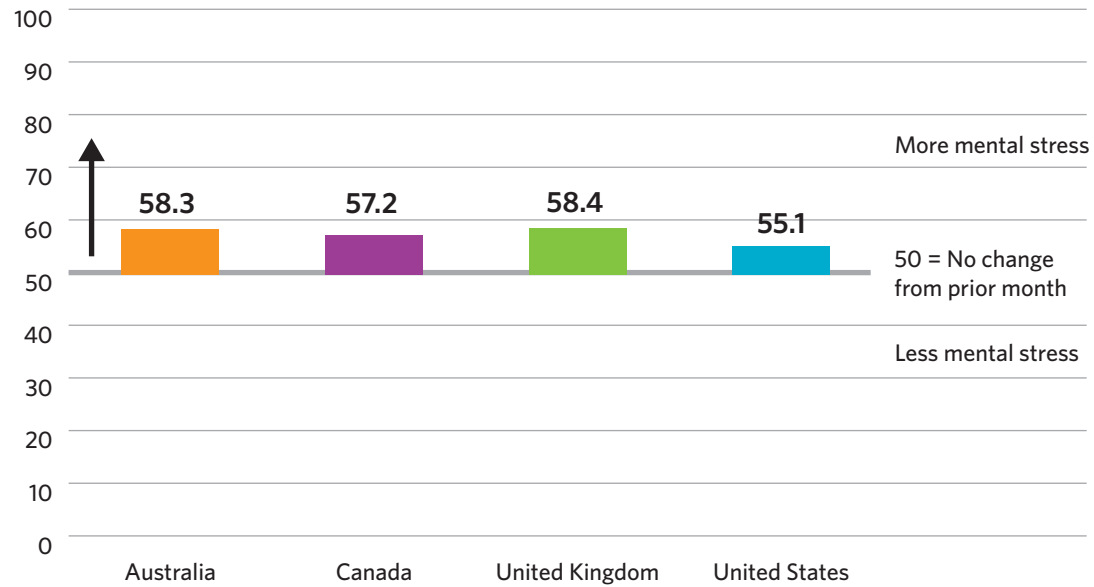
The Mental Health Index™ by region



The Mental Health Index™ is lowest in the United Kingdom, followed by Australia, Canada, and then the United States. While some differences are evident, the index for each region shows significant decline in mental health from the benchmark data. The greatest mental health improvement since last month was observed in the United States (0.7 points), followed by Canada (0.5 points). There were small decreases in mental health noted in the United Kingdom (-0.1 points) and Australia (-0.3 points).



The Mental Stress Change score by region



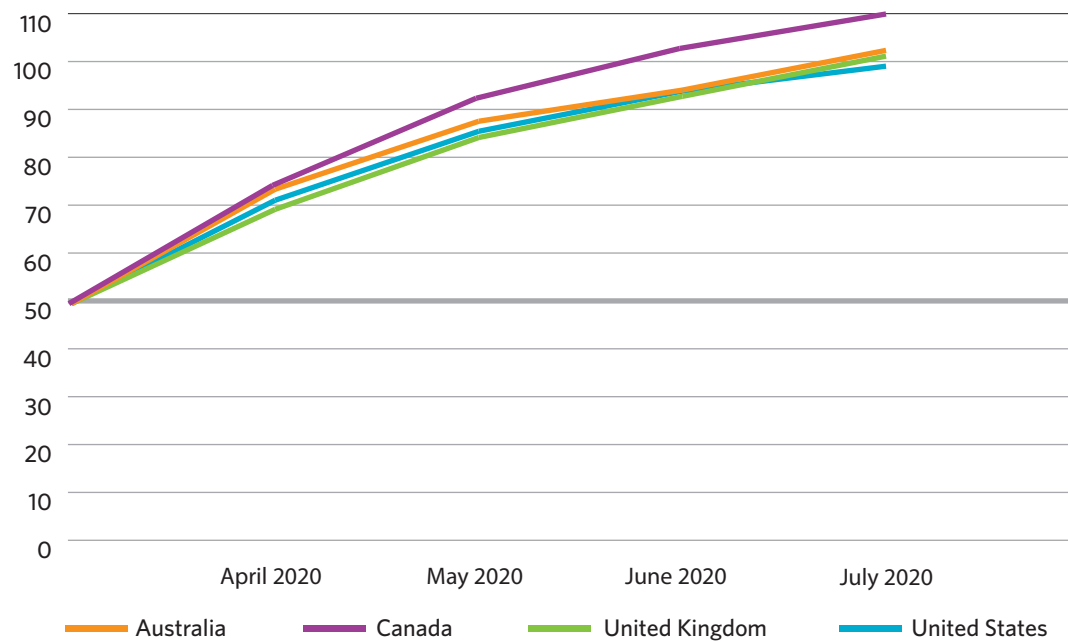
Comparing June 2020 to July 2020, there is a significant increase in mental stress in all regions. The increase is greatest in the United Kingdom, followed by Australia, Canada, and the United States.



Mental Stress Change (cumulative)

The Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score is a measure of the level of reported mental stress compared to the prior month. The change is rooted against a value of 50 implying no net mental stress change from the previous month, while values above 50 indicate a net increase in mental stress and values below 50 indicate a net decrease in mental stress. The graph below tracks the increases and decreases to account for the cumulative effect on mental stress.

The country with the greatest accumulation of mental stress over the past four months is Canada (110.5), followed by Australia (102.9), the United Kingdom (101.7), and the United States (99.6).





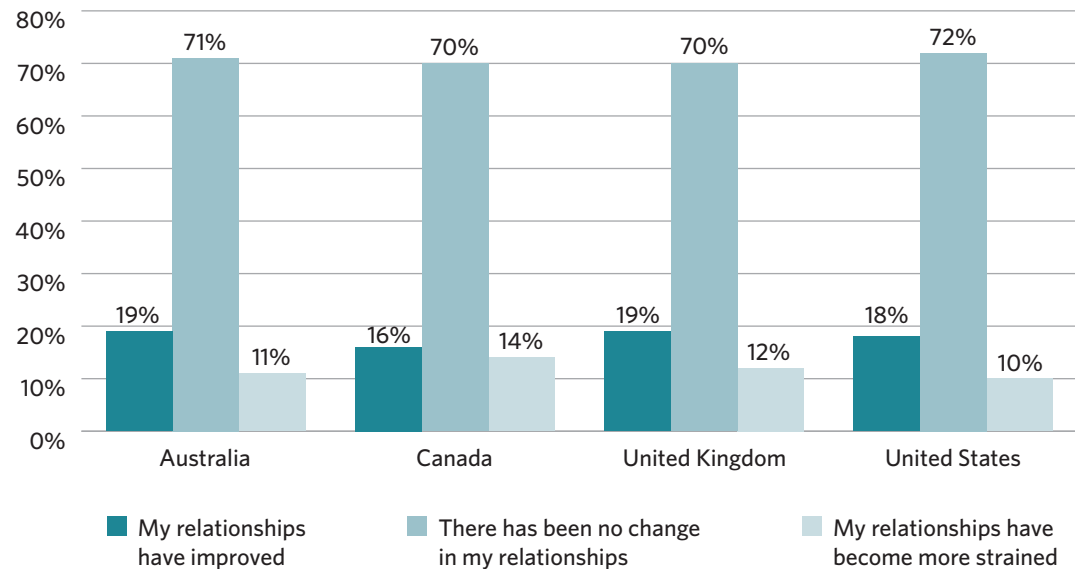
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on relationships

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has been widespread. Prolonged social distancing and isolation have led people to crave human interaction and, in some cases, has had an impact on relationships, both personal and professional.

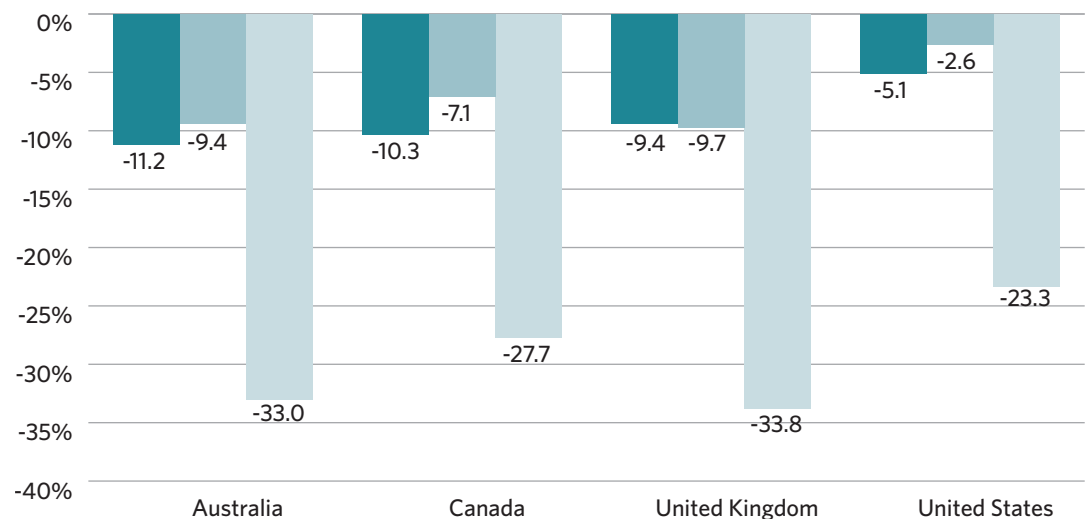
In all regions, approximately 30 per cent of respondents report a change in their personal relationships. In Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, 7 to 8 per cent more people report an improvement in their personal relationships over those reporting more strained personal relationships. In Canada, the percentage that report improved personal relationships is only 2 per cent higher than the percentage reporting more strained personal relationships.

In all regions, individuals reporting that their personal relationships have improved or stayed the same have considerably better mental health scores than those reporting that their relationships became more strained. In Australia, Canada and the United States, those reporting an improvement in their personal relationships have lower mental health scores than those for whom their relationships remained the same.

Personal relationships since last year

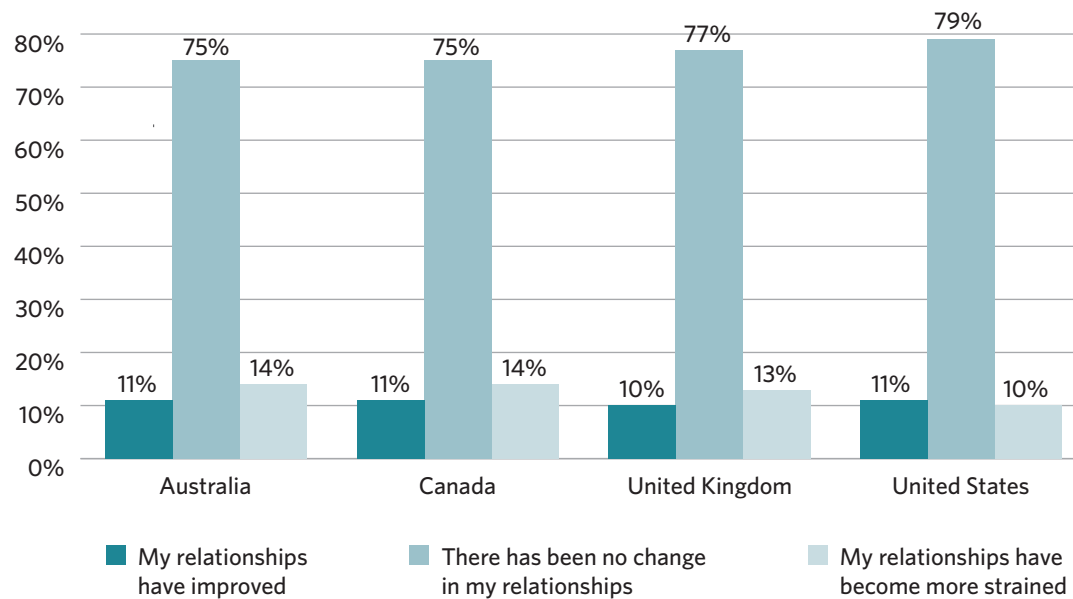


MHI by personal relationship changes





Workplace relationships since last year

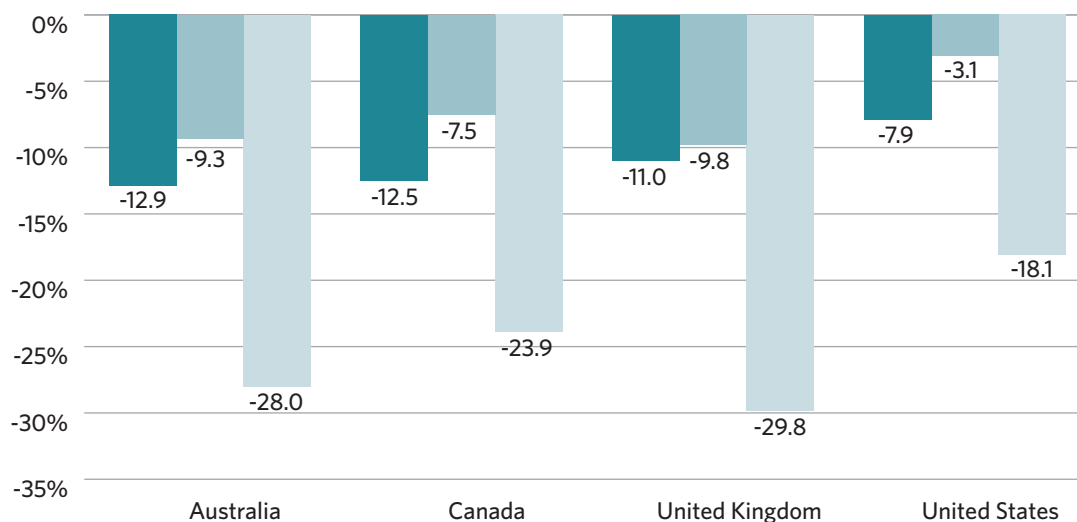


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MHI score by workplace relationship changes





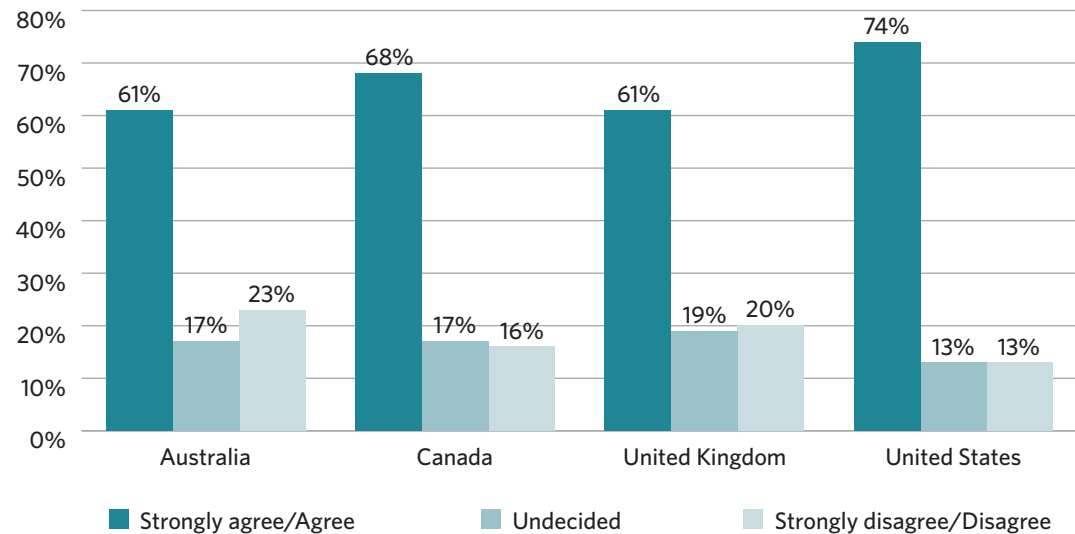
Racism and Mental Health

Racism in the country and in the workplace

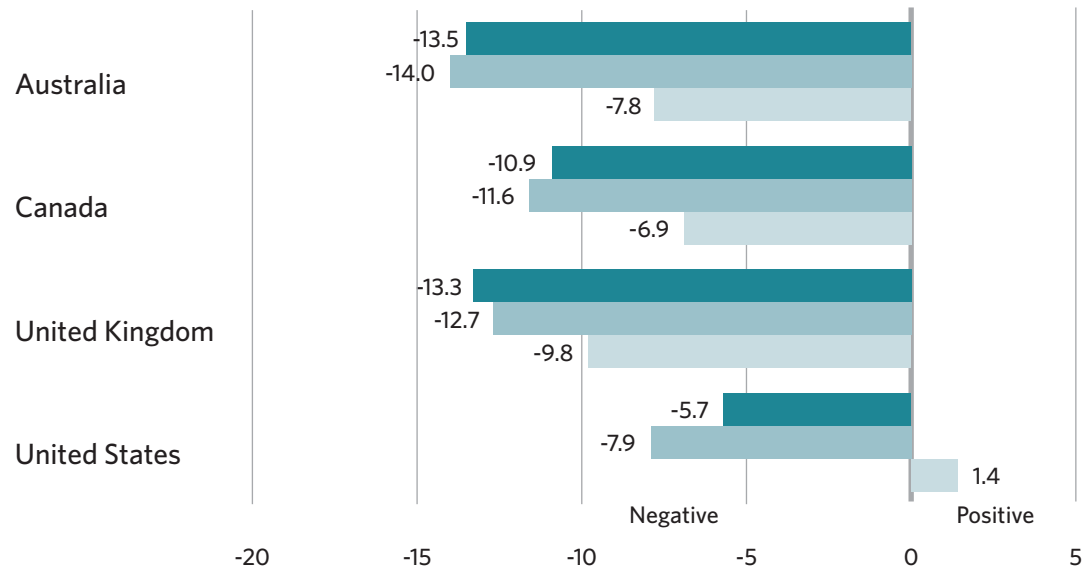
All respondents overwhelmingly agree that racism is a problem in their country. The highest proportion of respondents agreeing that racism is a problem in their country are in the United States (74 per cent).

In all countries, mental health scores align with likelihood to perceive racism in their country with the lowest scores being associated with those most likely to see racism in the country.

Racism is a problem in my country

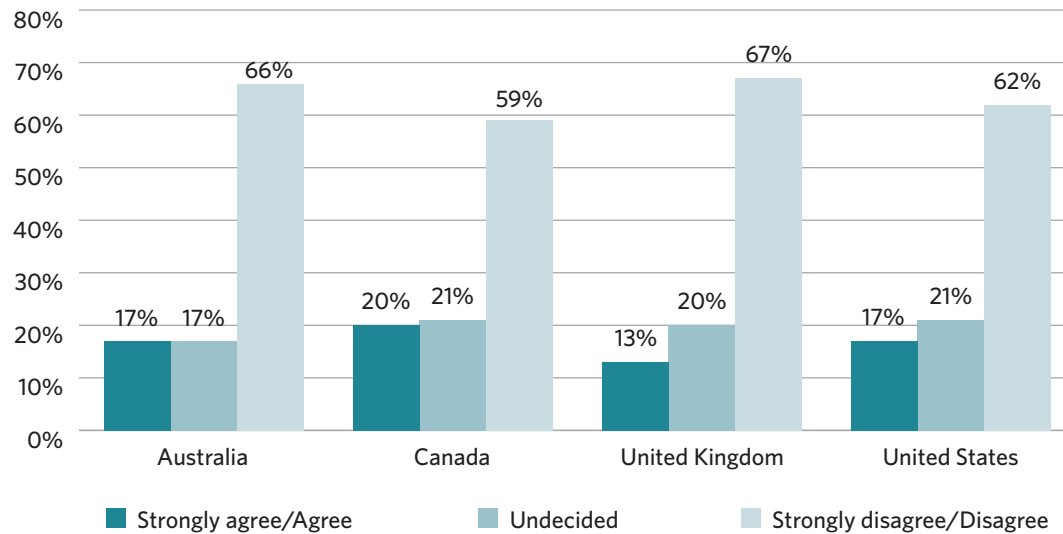


MHI score based on respondent agreement that racism is a problem in their country



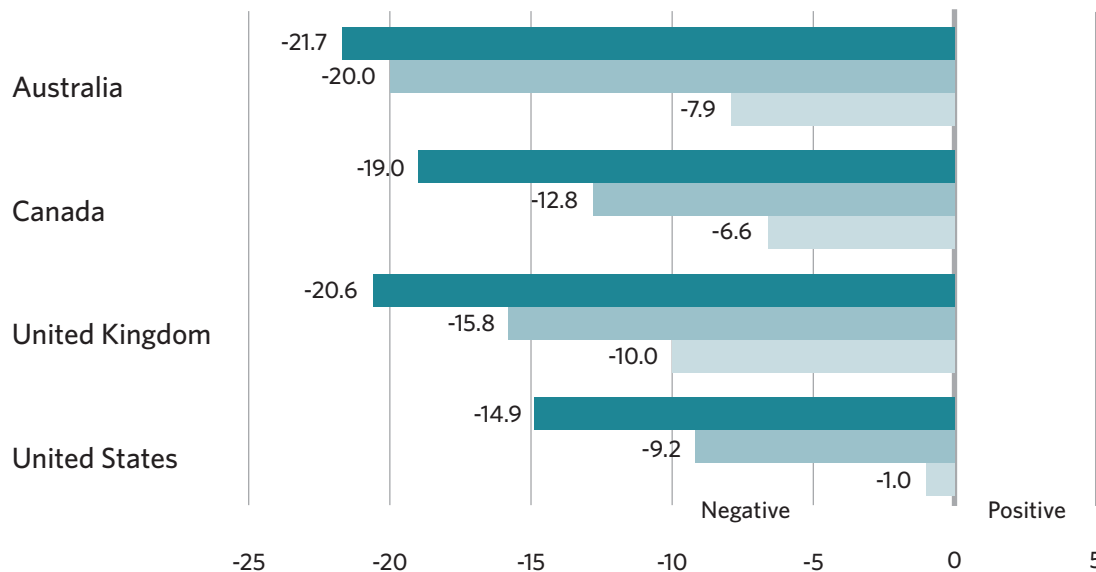


Racism is a problem in my workplace



In contrast to the question of racism being a problem within their country, individuals are much less likely to see racism as a problem in their workplace. Those most likely to see racism as a problem in the workplace have the lowest mental health scores.

MHI score based on respondent agreement that racism is a problem in their workplace



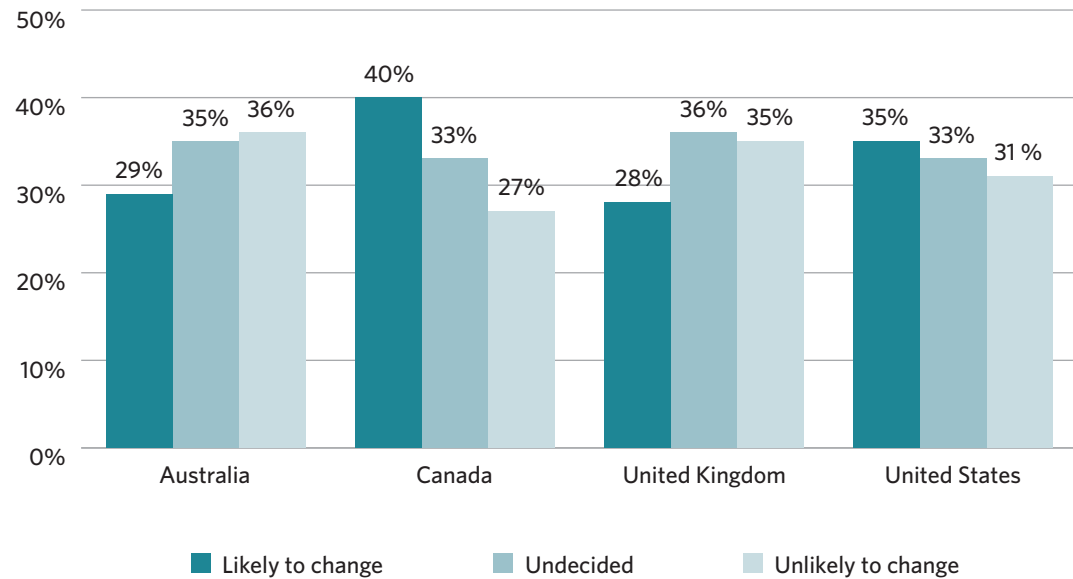


Awareness of systemic racism

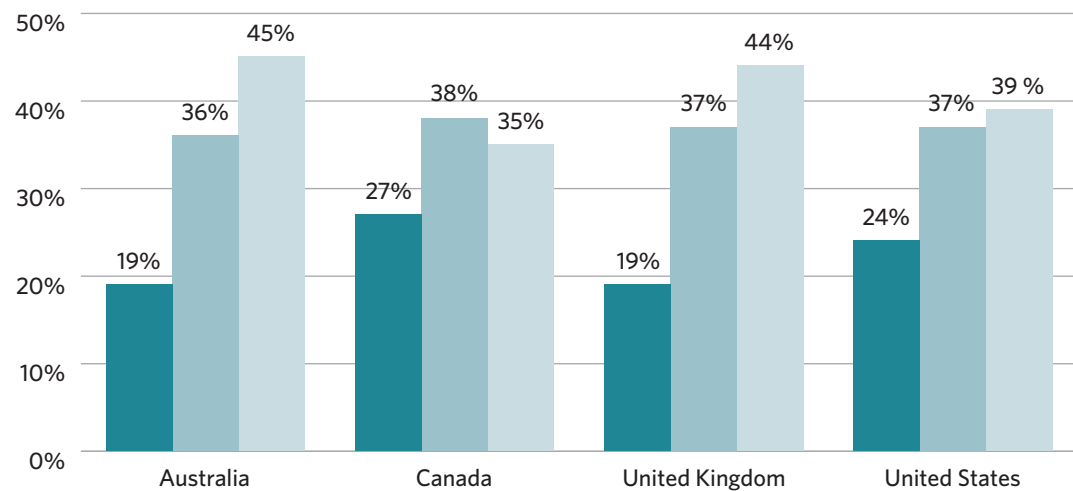
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Likelihood that systemic racism will change in the country



Likelihood that systemic racism will change in the workplace

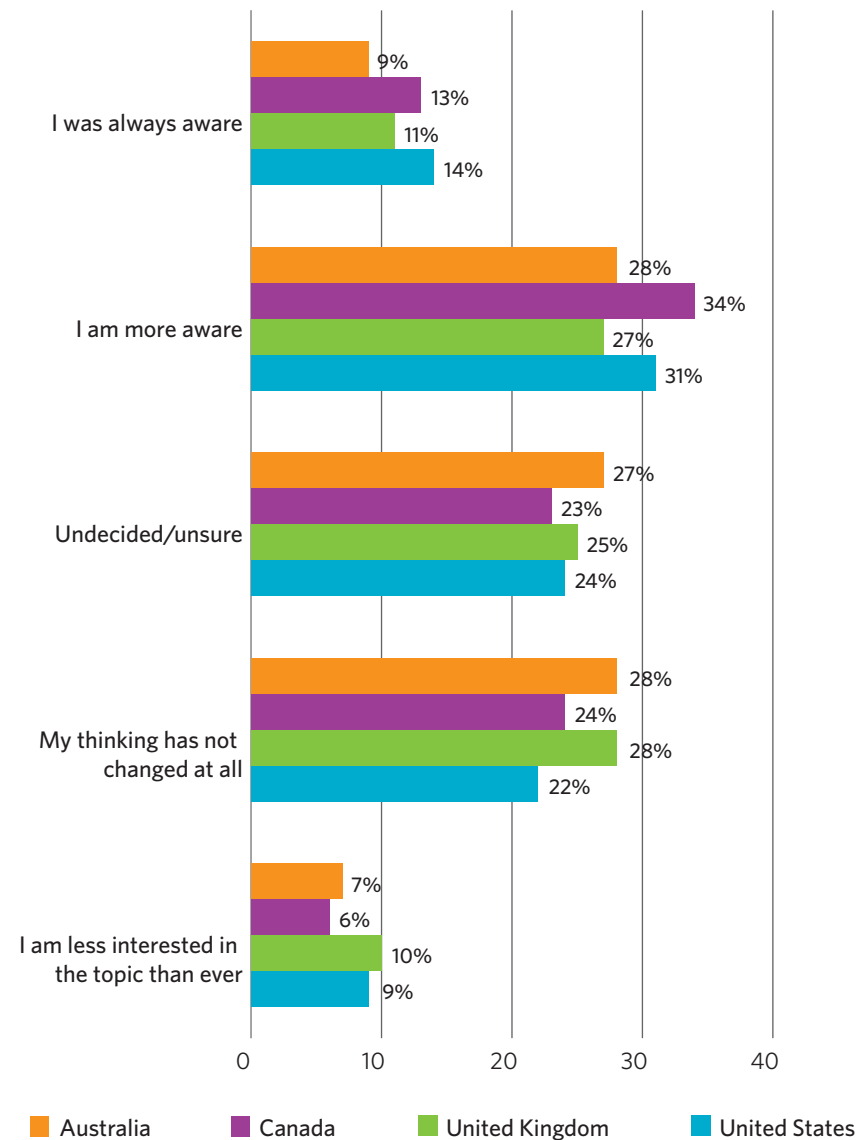




Changes in thinking about systemic racism

Respondents were asked how much their thinking regarding systemic racism has changed over the last month. Canadians are mostly likely to report that they are more aware of systemic racism (34 per cent). In general, the highest proportion of responses are among those who responded that they are more aware, they were undecided/unsure, or that their thinking has not changed about systemic racism over the last month.

Has your thinking about systemic racism changed over the last month?



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