



Keywords
Studios
Imagine More

Keywords Studios

The Moderator Wellbeing Report: 6 Key Insights Every Studio Needs to Know

2025

Foreword

Content warning

This report includes discussions of sensitive topics, including hate speech, distressing content, sleep crises, and mental health challenges faced by video game content moderators. Readers may find some material emotionally challenging.

This report shines a light on the lived experience of the video game content moderators who play a vital role in safeguarding both players and brand reputation. By sharing these insights, our aim is to foster a deeper industry-wide understanding of the emotional and psychological demands inherent in moderation work.

We believe that prioritizing moderator wellbeing is not only a moral imperative, but also essential for maintaining quality, consistency, and trust in online communities. We invite all stakeholders to engage with these findings, reflect on the shared responsibility for moderator care, and join us in shaping a safer, more supportive future for everyone in gaming.

Learn more about
Trust & Safety at
Keywords Studios

[Click here!](#)





Introduction

At Keywords Studios, we believe that content moderators are the secret superheroes of the internet. These individuals are far more than simple "button pushers".

Instead, moderators are highly skilled professionals who possess an intricate understanding of language, trends, context, and nuance, coupled with incredibly fast decision-making and bias control.

Most importantly, moderators shield online communities from harmful and illegal user-generated content (UGC), including hate speech, extremist ideology, violent threats, and child exploitation.

By doing so, they take on the risk of exposure to unsafe content themselves, ensuring that players on the other side of the screen remain safe and protected from its harm.

Just as the offline world relies on emergency dispatchers and EMTs to respond to crises, the online world needs its own first responders. Like their counterparts in the physical world, content moderators are susceptible to significant psychological challenges — such as secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and reduced wellbeing — due to their exposure to distressing material, highlighting the need for robust support systems.

Despite being integral to our online games, content moderators' mental health has often been overlooked, leading to serious personal and business consequences. The impact of unaddressed mental health issues and burnout [i](#) extends far beyond the individual moderator. Without a comprehensive system to care for moderator wellbeing, companies may face decreased productivity [ii](#), poor decision-making, and high employee turnover — all of which directly affect the bottom line. Not only that, the extensive training and onboarding required for high-quality moderation

make retention crucial for maintaining effective operations.

While users often remain unaware of these risks and their consequences — precisely because moderators shield them from harmful content — recent research has shed light on the challenges faced by social media moderators. However, video game moderators have been largely overlooked — a critical oversight we can no longer afford. To safeguard our players, the superhero moderators who protect them, and our businesses, it is imperative that Player Experience, Live Ops, Trust & Safety, and Community Management teams at studios urgently address the following questions:

- 1 What types of distressing and potentially traumatic content are video game moderators repeatedly confronted with in the course of their work?
- 2 How does this continual exposure to harmful content impact their mental wellbeing and job performance?
- 3 How can we design effective wellbeing programs that proactively address their unique needs, mitigate the risks, and prevent burnout?

Introduction

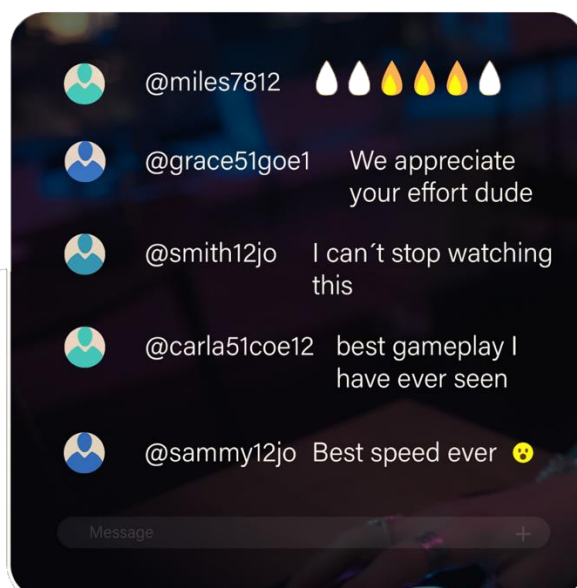
As a leading provider of moderation services to the gaming industry, Keywords Studios is uniquely positioned to address the critical gap in moderator wellbeing. We've taken significant steps, including revamping our wellbeing approach in 2022 and launching the Superhero Wellbeing & Resilience Program in 2023.

Our commitment extends beyond our own team: we aim to raise awareness, conduct research, and set new standards for moderator care across the industry, ultimately enhancing the safety and quality of online experiences.

This year, we collaborated with researchers from the [Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies at Middlesex University](#) to better understand the challenges our teams of video game moderators are experiencing, and to evaluate whether our custom wellbeing program could effectively mitigate risks to moderators' mental health while simultaneously enhancing the quality of our content moderation services.

We believe that by equipping moderators with tools to maintain their mental wellbeing, we not only support these crucial team members but also ensure higher quality work, lower attrition rates, and ultimately, better protection for your players and platform.

This report presents our [top six insights](#) alongside actionable recommendations and best practices.



Executive Summary



Insight #1

Moderators are regularly exposed to hate speech, impacting their wellbeing. Offer ongoing psychological support and workshops to help moderators manage hate speech exposure.



Insight #2

The evolution of games has changed how moderators encounter distressing content. Use advanced moderation tools and seek out industry best practices to reduce exposure to the most harmful content.



Insight #3

Moderators face significant sleep issues. Add sleep health resources and specialist access to your wellbeing program.



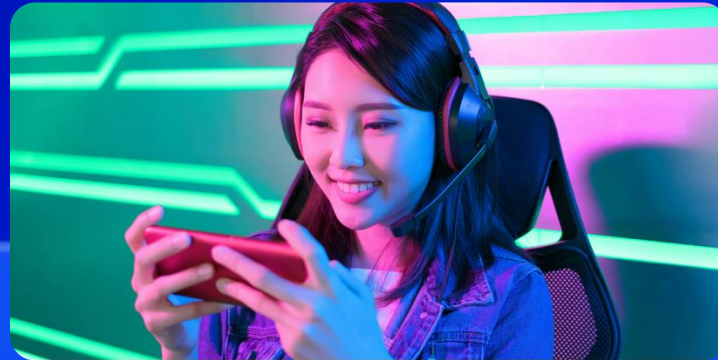
Insight #4

Moderators use both helpful and harmful coping strategies. Provide training in healthy coping and foster a supportive environment.



Insight #5

Exposure to distressing content can lower wellbeing, but support helps. Invest in resilience and tailored wellbeing programs to reduce secondary trauma.



Insight #6

Wellbeing programs improve moderator health and performance. Continue and expand wellbeing initiatives to boost mental health, reduce attrition, and increase productivity.

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Insight #1

Video game moderators are frequently exposed to hate speech, and it's harming their wellbeing.

Nearly 30% of moderators encounter distressing content [iii](#) daily, with over half (55.6%) exposed on a daily, weekly, or monthly weekly basis. Hate speech [iv](#) is the most prevalent form of distressing content (76%), far outweighing other types such as Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), humiliation, and pornography. Our research found that frequent exposure to hate speech and graphic violence significantly increases psychological distress [v](#) and decreases wellbeing, with a strong association with secondary trauma. [vi](#)

Insights to action

Exposure to distressing content can have additional negative consequences for content moderators. According to a

2023 study [vii](#), repeated exposure to hate speech can lead to decreased empathy for targeted groups and desensitization to pain. This can make it harder for moderators to accurately identify and address hateful content, potentially perpetuating social division rather than preventing it. For example, moderators who are desensitized to hate speech may overlook hateful comments or fail to take appropriate action, allowing the harmful behavior to continue unchecked.

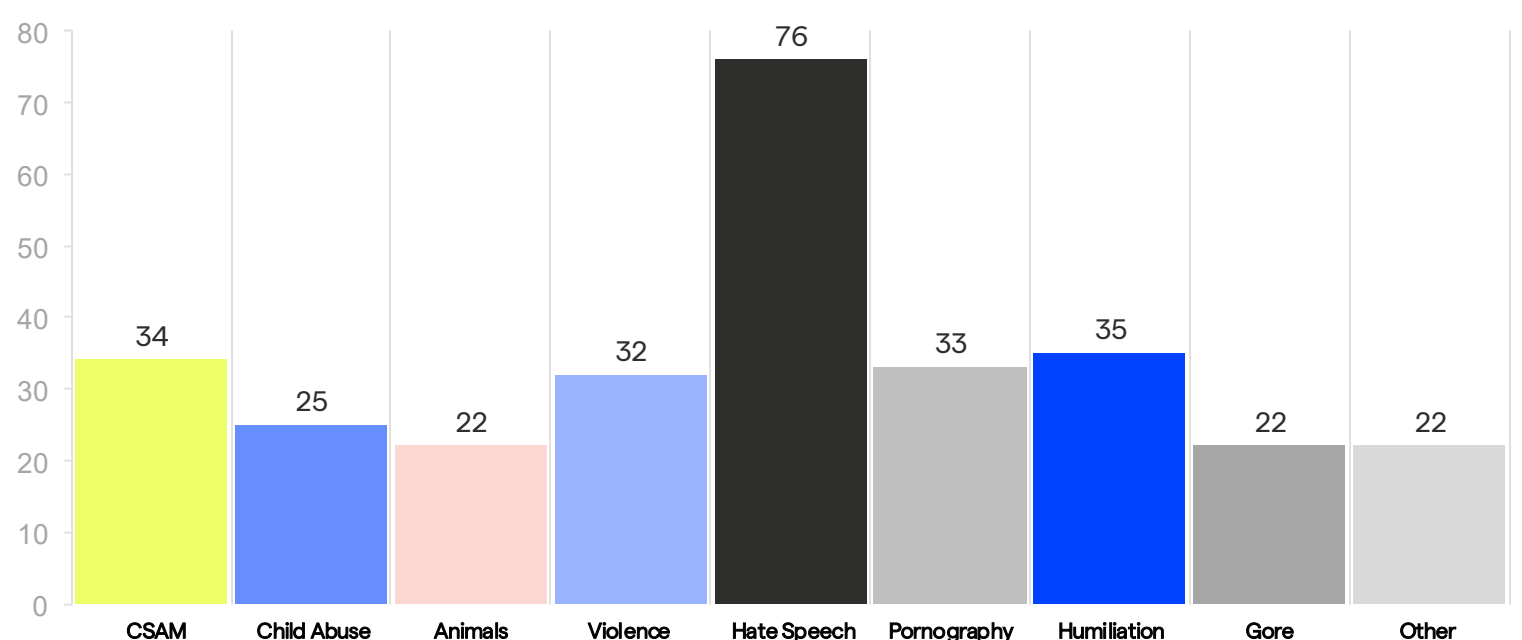
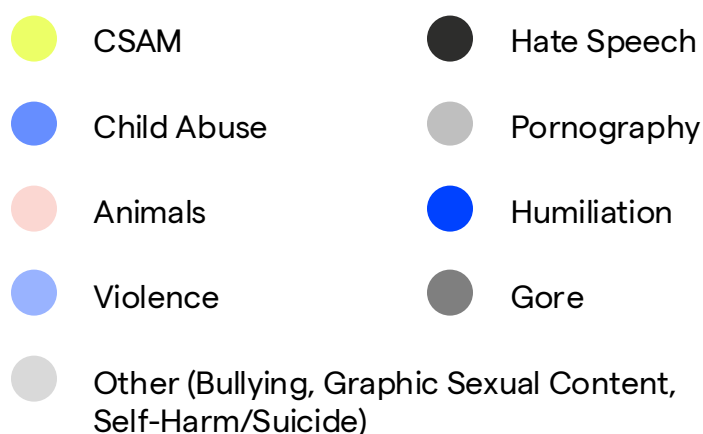
We haven't observed decreased empathy or desensitization in our teams at Keywords Studios, but it's crucial that we and other video game platforms proactively address this concern.

Workshops led by expert psychologists can provide strategies for coping with

distressing content and prevent desensitization, particularly for specific categories of hate speech.

Additionally, creating a supportive network of peers and leaders [viii](#) through regular check ins and discussion groups will enable moderators to share their experiences with colleagues who understand their daily challenges, exchange positive coping strategies, and offer mutual encouragement.

What categories of distressing content are you exposed to?



Insight #2

The evolution of games has fundamentally changed how moderators are exposed to distressing content.

As video games have evolved to resemble social networks, the variety of UGC hosted on these platforms has expanded significantly. Unsurprisingly, our findings show that while text remains the predominant form of UGC in gaming, with 57% of video game moderators exposed to distressing content in text (such as in-game chat, usernames, and community servers), other forms have become more common.

A substantial 43% encountered distressing images, nearly 20% were exposed to distressing videos, and 6.2% had to listen to distressing audio [ix](#). It's important to note that moderators often moderate a wide range of content within a single game.

Insight to action

The design of effective wellbeing programs will be informed by the varying ways moderators react to distressing content across different types of UGC. While text remains the predominant form of UGC in gaming, other forms like images, videos, and audio have become more common. Anecdotal evidence suggests that video and audio content may be more distressing for moderators, but the industry has yet to conduct widespread research on this topic.

Several studies have examined the impact of proactive wellbeing interventions on imagery — blurring and greyscale being the most cited — but there is little to no research on similar interventions for text. Currently, the most effective approach involves using

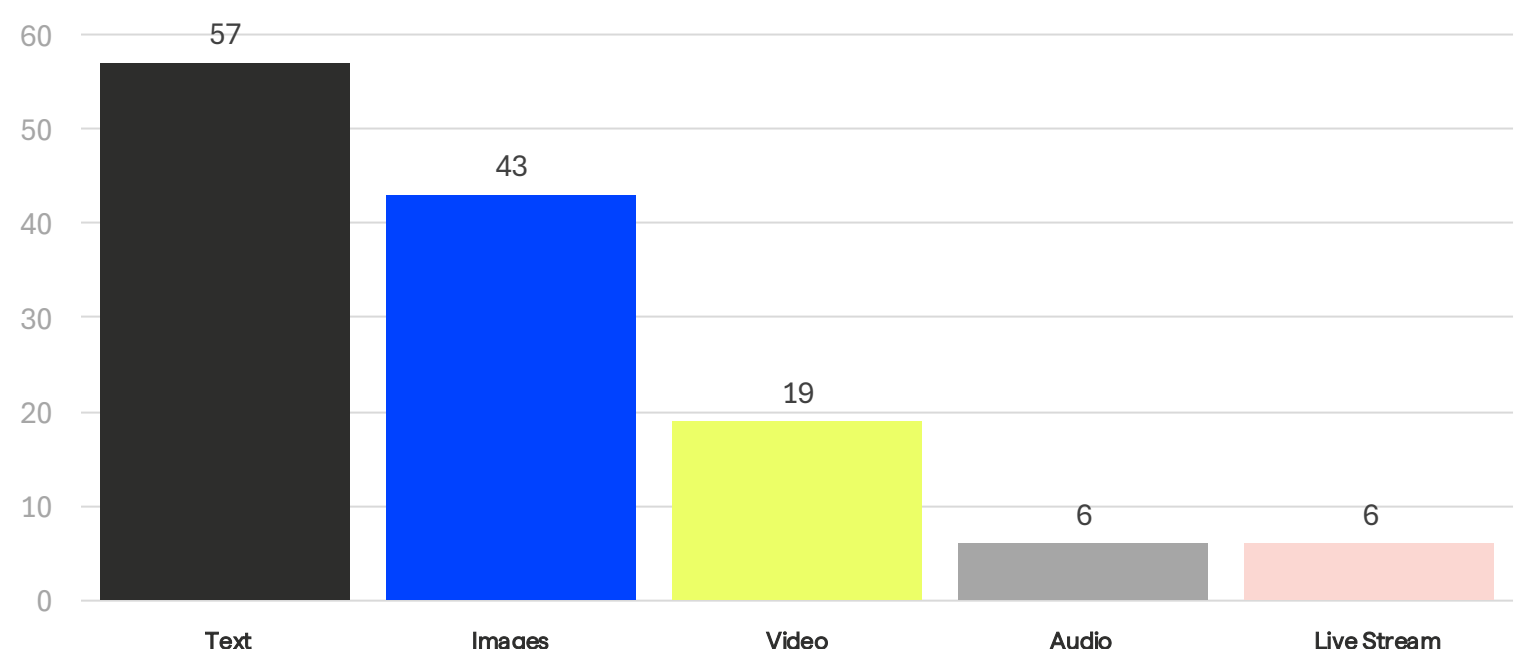
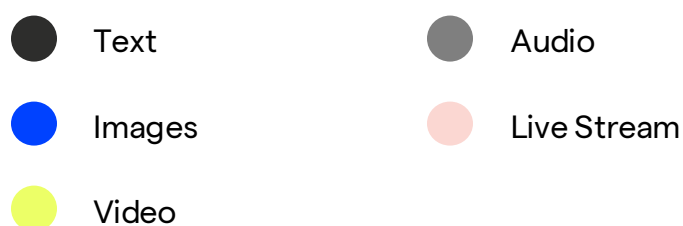
automated moderation tools to proactively detect and remove the most severe content before it reaches moderators or players and implementing wellbeing programs to support moderators retroactively in dealing with exposure.

● ● ●
Might there be a more effective way to present text to moderators that reduces its impact?

We welcome opportunities to collaborate with industry stakeholders to further study this topic and develop industry-wide best practices to better support video game moderators.

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How are you exposed to distressing content?



Insight #3

Video game moderators are experiencing a sleep crisis.

Nearly half of moderators experience sleep disturbances. Among them, the most common problems are difficulty falling asleep (50%) and staying asleep (30%), while 25% also tend to oversleep.

Additionally, 10% of these moderators suffer from nightmares.

Insight to action

Numerous studies have established a link between sleep deprivation and lowered

wellbeing, as well as other adverse mental health outcomes. Sleep disturbances can also have a tangible impact on content moderators' work performance, potentially lowering productivity, accuracy, and their ability to learn new policies and tasks — through no fault of their own.

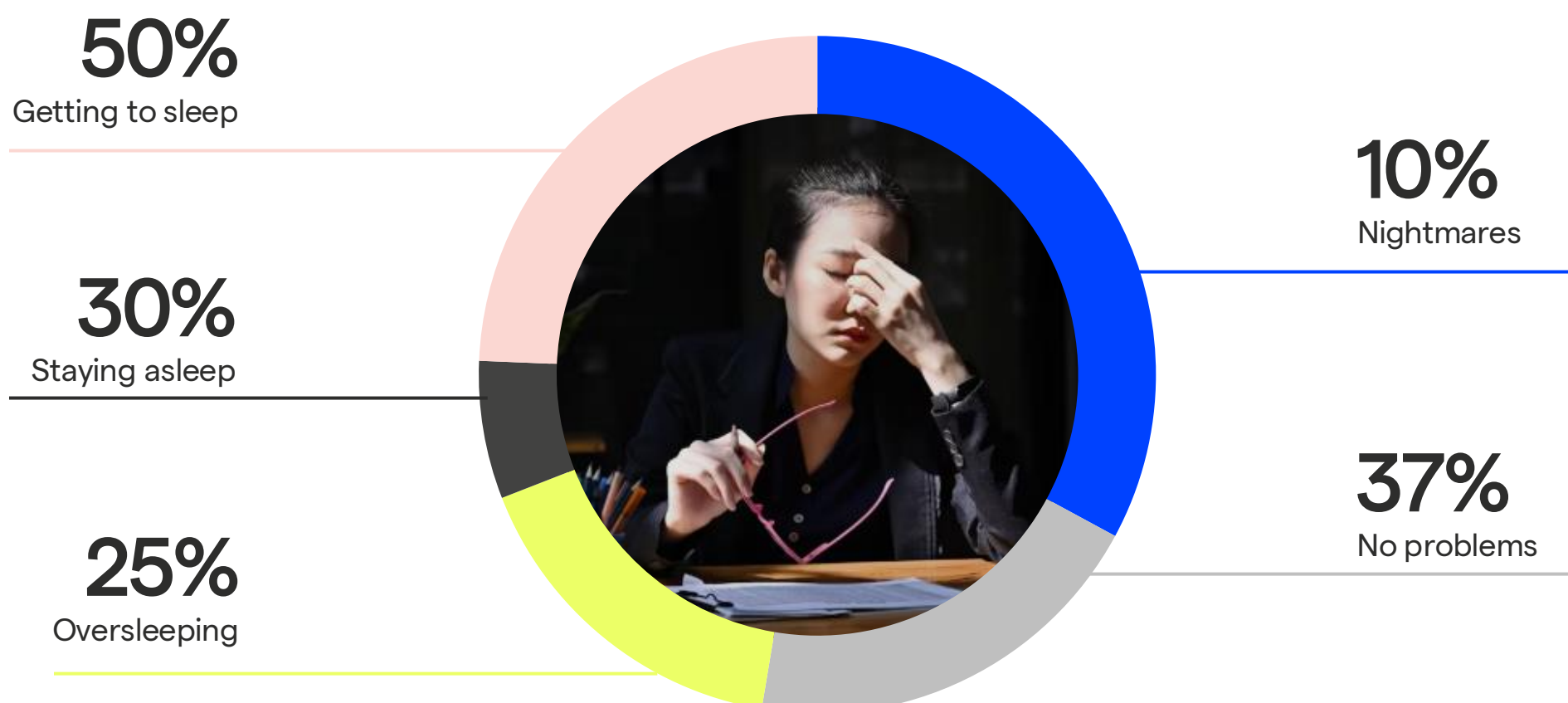
Sleep issues are likely due to a combination of factors, including personal matters, shift work (often necessary for round-the-clock moderation coverage on global platforms) and frequent exposure to

distressing content, the effects of which can persist well beyond working hours.

These findings emphasize the value of integrating third-party experts, such as sleep specialists, into your wellbeing program. One effective approach is to regularly arrange for these professionals to provide tailored guidance and address sleep challenges for your teams.

In the last three months, have you had troubles...

Moderators could select more than one answer, so the total percentage exceeds 100%.



Insight #4

Video game moderators leverage various coping strategies – from adaptive to maladaptive — to manage their exposure to distressing content.

The research shows that moderators who relied solely on emotion-focused coping [x](#) (strategies aimed at reducing emotional stress without changing the external issues that contribute to stress, such as talking to a friend or journaling) and avoidant coping (attempts to avoid dealing with the stressor through denial or substance use) experienced increased psychological distress, secondary trauma, and decreased wellbeing.

In contrast, moderators who employed problem-focused coping (directly addressing the source of distress through action or planning) experienced decreased psychological distress,

secondary trauma, and increased wellbeing.

We also explored alcohol and tobacco consumption, two common coping methods. [xi](#)

Insight to action

These results highlight an opportunity for training that explores problem-focused coping skills. While the primary source of stress — frequent exposure to distressing content — is unavoidable, a robust wellbeing program can explore problem-focused coping methods to

address it. These methods target the root cause of stress, aiming to reduce or eliminate issues. Examples include alternating tasks to minimize continuous exposure to distressing content and allowing moderators to take additional breaks as needed. [xii](#)

Much like the issue of sleep disturbances, these findings highlight an opportunity to engage third-party experts in leading constructive workshops on diverse coping strategies. However, it is essential that these discussions take place in a judgment-free environment, prioritizing care and compassion at all times.

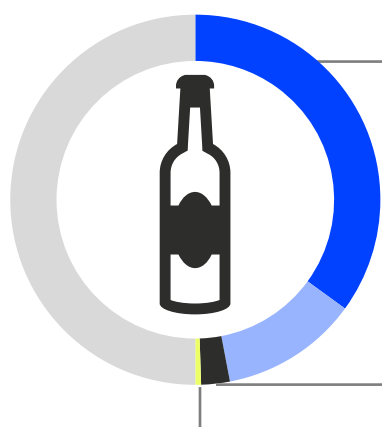
Approximately half of moderators consume alcohol...



75% drinking less than once a week.

2.5% reported an increase in alcohol intake since starting their role.

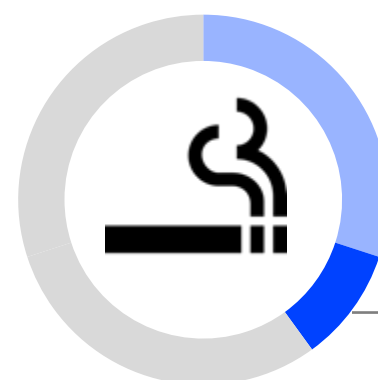
Of the **50%** of moderators who drink, **25%** either want to reduce their consumption **OR** have been encouraged to drink less by others.



...while only one-third of moderators smoke or vape.



30% of smokers report increased usage since beginning their work as moderators.



Insight #5

Decreased wellbeing may be a natural (and normal) consequence of moderation, but tailored support can mitigate the impact.

Just over half of moderators (52.4%) scored in the low to mild range of the Core-10, which assesses psychological distress over the previous week, with an additional 13.8% scoring in the healthy range. Approximately one-third (33.8%) of moderators scored in the moderate to severe range, highlighting the variables in individual responses to the role.

Additionally, the research showed that moderators who use wellbeing services reported significantly lower secondary trauma symptoms.

Insight to action

It is natural and expected for content moderators to experience varying levels of psychological distress, given their exposure to distressing content regularly. These results indicate that while some moderators are experiencing considerable distress, many are managing their wellbeing effectively.

Our findings suggest that while some individuals may be naturally more resilient to the stressors of content moderation, access to wellbeing services is essential for maintaining mental health. To better support content moderators,

future research should focus on identifying the factors that contribute to resilience in this high-stress role. This understanding can inform screening processes for candidates and shape broader wellbeing policy development.

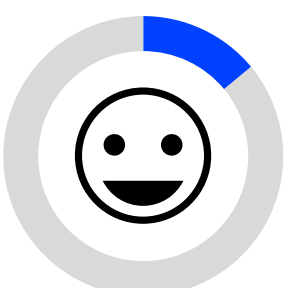
[xiii](#)

We recommend continued investment in and development of wellbeing programs, in addition to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), that specifically target the reduction of secondary trauma symptoms. [xiv](#) Their efficacy is evident from our results.

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Just over half of moderators

scored in the low to mild range of the Core-10, which assesses psychological distress over the previous week.



Nearly 14% scored in the healthy range.

Approximately one-third

scored in the severe range, highlighting the variables in individual responses to the role.



| | Not at all | Only occasionally | Sometimes | Often | Most or all of the time |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. I have felt tense, anxious or nervous | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. I have felt able to cope when things go wrong | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. I have felt I have someone to turn to for support when needed | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Talking to people has felt too much for me | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. I have felt panic or terror | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. I made plans to end my life | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. I have had difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. I have felt despairing or hopeless | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. I have felt unhappy | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. Unwanted images or memories have been distressing me | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Insight #6

Moderators perceive wellbeing programs as beneficial for mental health and work performance.

When asked how the Keywords Studios moderator wellbeing program has impacted them at work, the majority of moderators (over 50%) felt the wellbeing program made them feel heard and valued. Nearly 40% said they experienced improved mental health.

Approximately one-third reported that the program made them more productive at work, and almost 10% of participants reported having fewer sick days [xv](#) because of the program.

Insights to action

Moderators face considerable challenges, including repeated exposure to hate speech, the different impacts of distressing content in video and audio, and sleep disturbances. Despite these challenges, they can still benefit substantially from a purpose-built, custom wellbeing and resilience program. These results highlight the importance of maintaining and enhancing such programs.

These results, specific to Keywords Studios' Superhero Wellbeing &

Resilience Program, allow us to confidently conclude that the program's core practices are key to its success in supporting video game moderators in their vital work, protecting their wellbeing, and fostering their resilience. This, in turn, contributes to enhanced productivity, better decision-making accuracy, reduced employee churn, and, ultimately, safe and thriving online communities.

Next, we share the core practices that drive the success of our program, and create meaningful change for video game moderators.

How has the Keywords Studios wellbeing program impacted you at work?

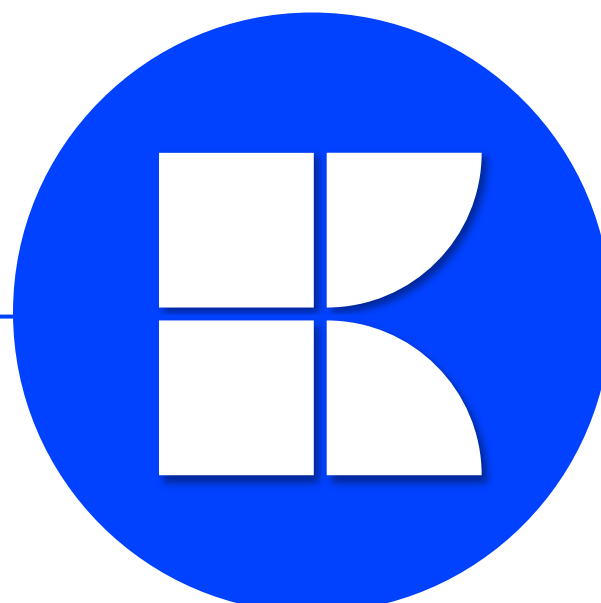
Moderators could select more than one answer, so the total percentage exceeds 100%.

I feel heard and
valued

Over **50%**

I am productive in
my job

33%



My mental health has
improved

40%

I require fewer sick
days

10%

Raise the Bar With Keywords Studios' Pioneering Superhero Wellbeing & Resilience Program

The Superhero Wellbeing & Resilience Program is designed to support and uplift video game moderators at every stage of their journey, from recruitment to retention.

Crafted by our Wellbeing Program Manager, who has unique expertise in both content moderation and social work, this trauma-informed initiative sets a new standard for moderator care in the video game industry.

Recruitment & Hiring

Tailored in-house psychological and analytical evaluations to assess candidate's suitability for the position.

Onboarding

Establish a solid foundation of wellbeing support and moderation skills through group workshops, instructor-led training, and the introduction of wellbeing and resilience practices.

Everyday Care

Ongoing, proactive initiatives focused on wellbeing and skill development. Includes practical workshops led by experts, monthly moderation lessons, and daily practices dedicated to enhancing wellbeing.

Crisis Care

Always available for superheroes requiring clinical support. Employee Assistance Program (EAP), emergency hotlines, professional counselling.

Three Pillars of Excellence

Proactive Mental Health Support to Prevent Burnout

The program focuses on proactive, everyday care that builds resilience, rather than simply reacting to issues as they arise. By prioritizing moderators'

Continuous Learning for Optimal Performance

wellbeing, we address a crucial industry challenge: the longer moderators stay in their roles, the more susceptible they become to burnout and decreased

Empowering Compassionate Leaders that Drive Results

wellbeing. Our program equips these superheroes with the tools to maintain their mental health, resulting in higher quality work and lower attrition.

Raise the Bar With Keywords Studios' Pioneering Superhero Wellbeing & Resilience Program

Program Benefits

- Retention of High-Quality Moderators: With an average attrition rate below 2%, the longer our moderators stay, the better they become at protecting your players and platform. With extensive training and onboarding being costly, retaining these skilled professionals is crucial for your bottom line.



"Moderators who had previously considered leaving the role told us that they decided to stay with the team because of our focus on their wellbeing."

[Read Case Study](#)

- Increased Productivity: We've seen a remarkable 69.1% increase in Actions Per Hour, showcasing a dramatic boost in efficiency.
- Enhanced Decision-Making: Our program has led to a 5.1% improvement in decision-making accuracy, as measured by quality assurance reviews.

- By investing in moderator wellbeing, we don't just support our teams, we enhance the overall quality of our content moderation services. This approach ensures that your platform benefits from experienced, resilient moderators who are equipped to handle the unique challenges of their role while consistently delivering top-tier protection for your players and your brand.

"The Keywords Studios team stood out for its experience in understanding Trust & Safety risks comprehensively... [as well as] the leadership team's commitment to ensuring their moderation staff worked under supportive and safe conditions as they protect our platform from bad actors."

[Read Case Study](#)

The Superhero Wellbeing & Resilience program is the foundation of our content moderation services, setting a new industry standard for superhero moderator retention, operational excellence, and proactive mental health support.



The Transformative Impact of Wellbeing Programs

The mental health of video game moderators isn't just a personal issue; it has wide-reaching implications for the video game industry as a whole. Unaddressed mental health issues can lead to high turnover rates, reduced productivity, and potentially even legal consequences, all of which ultimately affect your organization's bottom line.

At Keywords Studios, we are committed to driving positive change in the video game industry. We invite industry leaders to partner with us in creating a safer and more supportive work environment for our content moderators. Whether through collaborative research projects, sharing best practices, or leveraging our skilled teams of superhero moderators to protect your communities, we recognize the value of collective effort and collaboration.

Together, we can safeguard our online communities, support our superheroes, and protect the future of our industry. Let's make this a collective priority and ensure that the guardians of our player communities are equipped with the proper armour to confront the challenges they face every day.

Elevate Your Player Community with Keywords Studios

Where Wellbeing Meets Excellence

Keywords Studios offers a full range of Trust & Safety services for all platforms, from indies to AAAs, at any development stage. In addition to our full-service content moderation offering, we can also help with strategy development and technology management and support.

Superior Brand Protection with Seasoned Moderators

Elevate player experience and safeguard your platform's reputation with our superhero moderation teams, dedicated to exceptional service and supported by a culture of wellbeing and continuous development.

Scalable 24/7 Moderation for Community and Platform Protection

Protect your community and your business with scalable 24/7 moderation by our global studios and diverse, multilingual teams, led by experienced Trust & Safety leads.

Minimize Risks with Proven Real-Life Threat Management

[Click here](#)

Ensure regulatory compliance and save lives with our battle-tested Real-Life Threats Management service. Trust & Safety Threat Analysts investigate and escalate real-life harms (child exploitation, self-harm/suicide threats, extremism) to global law enforcement agencies.

Management of Your Moderation Tech Stack

Implement proactive solutions from the best moderation technology companies and leverage our expertise to manage solutions tailored to your needs.

Learn more about Trust & Safety at Keywords Studios

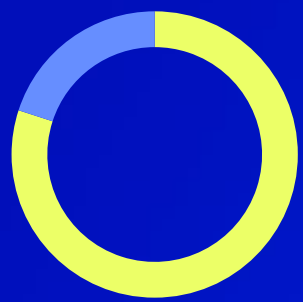
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Appendix

Methodology & Demographics

We collaborated with distinguished researchers Jeffrey Demarco and Ruth Spence from the [Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies at Middlesex University](#), a team known for their groundbreaking work on moderator wellbeing. Having recently completed the research paper [Content Moderator Coping Strategies: Associations With Psychological Distress, Secondary Trauma, and Well-Being](#), they were an excellent fit for our needs.

We worked with the research team to replicate their survey questions, augmenting them with Keywords Studios-specific questions to gain specific insights into our video game moderation teams. The survey was distributed to all moderation teams, with dedicated work time provided for completion, and responses were kept entirely anonymous to encourage honesty.



We are proud to report an
80% response
rate



The majority of participants were
male and located in Asia...



63.75%



... with the remaining moderators
located in Canada and Mexico.



Most moderators were between

26 - 35 years
old



And were most commonly in
the role between

6 to 2
months years

Appendix

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Understanding And Addressing Burnout In The Workplace ii. The Role of Mental Health on Workplace Productivity: A Critical Review of the Literature iii. Defined as “content that “the average person would find distressing”. iv. This study predates Meta's changes to its hate speech policy, which we anticipate will influence other social media and even gaming platforms. We will continue monitoring hate speech prevalence to assess any shifts in the landscape. v. A state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety. vi. Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS or secondary trauma): STS has similar symptoms to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) such as intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal and hypervigilance. vii. Exposure to hate speech deteriorates neurocognitive mechanisms of the ability to understand others’ pain viii. Leadership support is crucial in this role. In our study, we found that moderators most frequently talked to their managers after facing distressing content, with nearly 16% indicating that they talk to their managers “all the time.” 66.1% found talking to their manager helpful. They also reach out to fellow moderators, with almost 21% reporting that they speak to teammates frequently. ix. The majority of the platforms our teams moderate support text, image, and video UGC. If we supported more games with voice chat, we would expect to | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> see higher audio-related results. x. Other research indicates that combining emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies is the most effective stress management methods. At Keywords Studios, our wellbeing program currently incorporates both approaches. However, guided by our research findings, we are exploring a greater emphasis on problem-focused coping strategies within our program. xi. While drinking alcohol and smoking can be socially acceptable, enjoyable, and even beneficial in moderation, an increased reliance on these avoidance-focused coping activities could be cause for concern, especially if it’s in reaction to role-related stress. xii. Informed by prior research highlighting the benefits of short, frequent breaks after exposure to distressing content, we made guilt-free breaks a cornerstone of our wellbeing program. Our findings indicate that moderators are utilizing this initiative and that team leads are fostering a compassionate work environment by encouraging it: approximately 75% of moderators reported being able to take a break 'always' or 'often' after encountering distressing content, and over 75% 'never' or 'rarely' felt guilty about taking breaks. xiii. Before launching our Superhero Wellbeing & Resilience Program, we substantially revamped our hiring process to include a resilience-focused pre-screening process that includes targeted interview questions and a custom, in-house psychological and analytical assessment to determine whether the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> candidate is well-suited for the role. xiv. Symptoms include intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal and hypervigilance. xv. We should not rely solely on reduced time off as a measure of program effectiveness, as taking time off— whether for physical or mental health — is essential for maintaining overall wellbeing. |
|--|--|--|