

Stress and wellbeing in Australia survey 2013



Snapshot of key findings

For the third year, the Australian Psychological Society – representing more than 21,000 members around Australia – commissioned a survey to examine the stress and wellbeing of Australian adults (aged 18 and over) across the nation. This year the survey included a special focus on working Australians.

Key survey findings

- In 2013, Australians reported significantly lower levels of wellbeing and significantly higher levels of stress and distress than in 2012 and 2011.
- Almost three-quarters of Australians (73%) reported that stress was having at least some impact with almost one in five (17%) reporting that stress was having a strong to very strong impact on their physical health.



Finances were the leading cause of stress for Australians.

- In 2013, significantly more Australians (65% 2013 vs. 60% 2012) reported that current stress was affecting their mental health, with one in five people reporting it had a strong to very strong impact on their mental health.

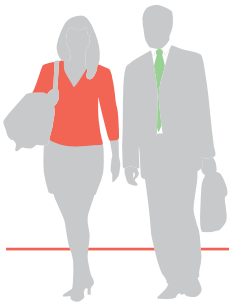
- One in four (24%) Australians reported mental health issues as a source of stress.
- Significantly more Australians reported visiting social networking sites, eating or sleeping more to manage stress than in previous years.
- Finances, family and health issues continued to rank as the top causes of stress for Australians.
- Working Australians reported significantly lower overall workplace wellbeing in 2013 compared with findings in previous years.
- Working Australians reported significantly lower levels of job satisfaction and significantly lower levels of interest in their jobs than in the previous two years.
- Generally, working women were significantly more likely than working men to report that they felt valued and supported to do their job.
- Women were significantly more likely than men to report being involved in their job.

Other key findings from the general stress and wellbeing survey are on page 3.

For the full report go to www.psychology.org.au/NPW

NEW – Spotlight on the workplace

The stress and wellbeing survey took a closer look at the lives of working Australians (a sub-sample of 999 Australians) in 2013. This year working Australians reported significantly lower levels of overall workplace wellbeing and job satisfaction than in the previous two years, as well as significantly lower levels of interest in their job than 2012.



Nearly half (47%) of working Australians reported workplace issues as a source of stress.

Overall, nearly half (47%) of working Australians reported workplace issues as a source of stress.

Working Australians also reported significantly higher levels of stress and distress than in the previous two years, as well as significantly higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms.

Psychological health at work

Working Australians were asked about a number of workplace factors that have been shown to support psychological health in the workplace. Workplace factors included such things as supportive leadership, feeling valued and cared for, receiving feedback and recognition, working in an environment where safety was prioritised and where support for family issues was provided.

Findings:

- Almost 85% of working Australians reported they were clear about what was expected of them.
- 60% reported having sufficient opportunities for learning and development.
- 67% reported feeling very involved in their job.
- 70% reported that their employer was serious about safety at work.
- 62% reported that their employer supports staff with physical injuries.

In contrast, only 52% reported that their employer valued their contribution and cared about their wellbeing, while less than half (46%) reported that they receive regular relevant feedback and recognition for their work. Only half (50%) reported their employer supports staff with mental health issues.

What makes a difference at work?

Having supportive leadership, receiving recognition and feedback, feeling valued and cared for by your employer, having clear role definition in your work, working in an environment where your health and safety is prioritised and where you receive support for family issues was linked with enhanced wellbeing and lower levels of stress and distress.

Working women

- One in four (25%) working women reported moderate to severe levels of distress.
- Over 80% of women (83%) reported that current levels of stress were having at least some impact on their physical health, with one in five (21%) reporting current stress was having a strong to very strong impact on physical health.
- Almost three in four Australian working women (74%) reported that current stress was having at least some impact on mental health.
- Close to one in four (24%) working women reported that current stress was having a strong to very strong impact on mental health.
- Almost three in five working women (57%) reported that their employers valued their work contribution and cared about their wellbeing at work compared to 47% of men.
- 67% of working women reported that their immediate managers were available to help them when they needed support to do their job compared to 53% of men.
- Working women were significantly more likely than men to report that their employers were supportive of family matters (70% female vs. 61% male) and they were significantly more likely to report being involved in their jobs (71% female vs. 63% male).

How stressed are Australians?

2013 finds Australians more stressed and distressed than in the previous two years, with younger adults reporting significantly higher levels of stress and distress compared with older Australians.

Overall, a substantial number of Australians (26%) reported experiencing severe levels of distress this year, significantly more than in previous years.

Wellbeing

In 2013, Australians reported significantly lower levels of wellbeing compared with findings from 2012 and 2011.

However older Australians (66-75 years old) reported much higher levels of wellbeing compared with younger Australians (particularly the 18-25 age group). There were no differences between males and females on levels of wellbeing

Mental health

In 2013, Australians reported significantly higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms than in the previous two years.

- 14% of Australians reported depressive symptoms in the severe to extremely severe range.
- 12% of Australians reported anxiety symptoms in the severe to extremely severe range.
- Younger adults continued to report much higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms compared with older Australians.
- Unemployed Australians and students (18+) reported the highest level of depressive and anxiety symptoms.

Impact of stress

Almost three-quarters of Australians (73%) reported that current stress was having at least some impact on physical health, with almost one in five (17%) reporting that current stress was having a strong to very strong impact on physical health.

In 2013, significantly more Australians reported that current stress was having at least some impact on their mental health (65%), with one in five (20%) reporting that current stress was having a strong to very strong impact on mental health.

Australians who had recently gone through a family or relationship breakdown were significantly more likely to perceive their stress levels as having a strong to very strong impact on their mental and physical health.

Causes of Stress

Overall, personal financial issues were the leading cause of stress for Australians, followed by family issues, personal health issues and issues with trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Many Australians, almost one in four (24%), reported mental health issues as a source of stress.

- 52% of respondents named financial issues as a cause of stress
- 47% cited family issues
- 43% named personal health issues
- 41% named trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle
- 38% reported concern over the health of others
- 34% reported issues in the workplace.

Younger Australians indicated concerns about finances, family, health and study as chief sources of stress, while older Australians indicated concerns with finances, the economy and their own health and the health of those close to them.

How Australians manage stress

Watching TV or movies was the most popular activity for managing stress among Australians (88%).

Spending time with family and friends (82%), listening to music (81%), focusing on the positives (81%) and reading (77%) were also popular methods of managing stress.

Seeking help

Family, friends and general practitioners were the most likely sources for seeking help.

Sixteen per cent of Australians reported seeking help from psychologists or other mental health professionals for help to manage stress.

Managing Stress

Learning to handle stress in healthy ways is very important. Fortunately, it is easy to learn simple techniques that help. These include recognising and changing the behaviours that contribute to stress, as well as techniques for reducing stress once it has occurred. For example:

- Identify warning signs that reveal you are getting stressed
- Identify the situations that trigger excessive stress, and take steps to reduce their frequency or impact
- Monitor negative 'self-talk' that may be contributing to unhappy feelings
- Look after your health, by eating well, exercising and undertaking calming activities
- Invest time with people you care about, who care about you. Don't bottle up your feelings.

For access to the full **Stress and wellbeing in Australia survey 2013** report go to:

www.psychology.org.au/NPW

Resources

The APS website includes a number of resources that can assist individuals with stress. Visit www.psychology.org.au/npw to download resources including a stress tipsheet

Individuals can find a psychologist in their local area qualified to assist with stress-related issues by calling the Find a Psychologist Service on 1800 333 497 (toll free) or visiting www.findapsychologist.org.au.

About the survey

The online survey made use of standardised measures of stress, wellbeing, anxiety and depression. It was conducted in August 2013, with 1,548 Australian adults taking part including a sub-sample of 999 working Australians. A representative spread across gender, age and geographical location was achieved*. As well as questions investigating sources of stress, strategies for addressing it and service utilisation, the stress and wellbeing of the nation was assessed using the following established psychological measures:

- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)
- Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K-10)
- Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)
- Depressive, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS)
- Workplace subscale of the National Accounts of Well-being Survey.

About the APS

The APS is the leading professional organisation for psychologists, representing more than 21,000 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to people's lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community well-being.

www.psychology.org.au

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*The survey was representative of the Australian adult population (18 and above) for age, gender, geographical location and work status (matched on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data).