



# Research into UK workers stress levels

At the end of 2008, SkillSoft UK Ltd carried out an online survey designed to examine the levels of stress UK workers were under. We were keen to establish what made people feel stressed at work and what they thought would be the main contributor to their stress levels in the coming year.

We were interested to find out what percentage of UK workers have been off work due to stress and if they had informed their employer that stress was the reason for their absence. We were also interested to understand how they dealt with their levels of stress both in the work place and away from work, as well as establishing how the symptoms of stress manifested themselves.



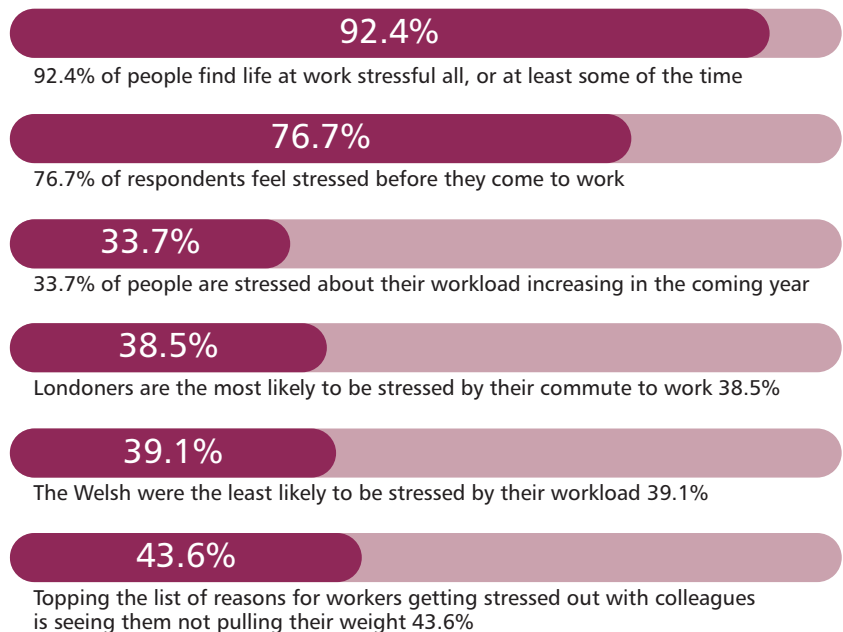
I became hyper-emotional and found it harder and harder to cope with everyday situations until I was signed off sick with stress and depression for over 2 years. I genuinely believe the huge amount of work we were expected to deliver was the main contributing factor.



## Methodology

The independent online study, conducted by OnePoll on behalf of SkillSoft, took place at the end of November 2008 and beginning of December and involved 3,000 respondents from both large and small organisations, across a wide range of business sectors and demographics including; job discipline, age, management/non-management and public/private sector.

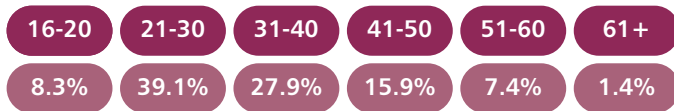
## Highlights





## Overall findings and information

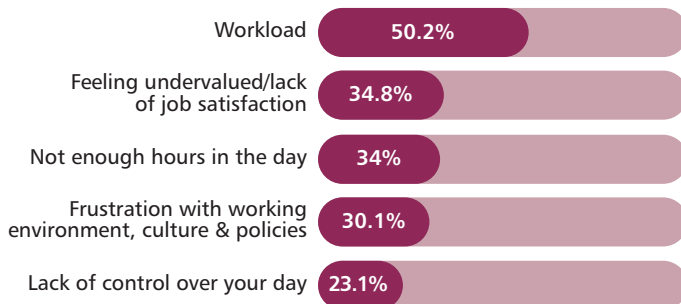
A range of ages were represented in the survey;



77.8% work in non-management roles  
50.7% work in the public sector  
49.3% work in the private sector

### Current and future causes of stress

A whopping 92.4% of us currently find our work life stressful either all of the time or sometimes. The top five reasons for this are;



We were interested to find out whether or not this was likely to continue into the New Year, so we asked people what the top three things they felt were most likely to cause them stress in the coming year, their answers were;

- Increased workload through having to take on others' work
- Fear of redundancy
- Company changes that impact you and your job

The top three industries who anticipate feeling the strain of taking on more work from others are, worryingly; those in the

Medical profession, with 46.7% of respondents citing this as their biggest fear in 2009, second is the HR profession, with 44.2% and third with 42.4% is the armed forces. Top of those fearing redundancy in the New Year are those working in Finance, with 44.9% of people in the finance industry making this their top fear for 2009. This is followed unsurprisingly by those working in the engineering sector, with 40.6%. The third highest group worrying about redundancy as we go into 2009 are our Administration professionals.

Worrying about company changes is the third item causing the most concern for people and the top three industry professionals with this on their list are again the Medical profession, with 33.2% citing this as their top worry for 2009, closely followed by the IT sector with 33.1% and the Administration professionals make this their third biggest worry with 32.3%. What is disturbing about this is both our medical professionals and our armed forces are worrying about having an increased work load in the future, due to taking on other peoples work on top of their own.

The top reasons for people expecting to feel stressed in the coming year remain consistent regardless of whether they work in the public or private sector, in a management role or not, what age they are and where they work in the country geographically.

## Stress and its impact on working relationships & home life

The three things that stressed people about the people they work with most were;

- Seeing others not pull their weight
- Lack of communication within the business
- Lack of support from managers

The sector putting, "seeing others not pulling their weight" in the workplace, as top of their list of things that stress them out is the Administration professionals with 47.8% of them putting this above all the other options. Those feeling the lack of communication most keenly within their organisation are surprisingly the HR professionals with 42.3% of them putting this top. Finally those feeling the lack of support from their managers the most, were those working in the IT industry with 33.7% of people putting this at the top of their reasons for being stressed with people they work with.

Seeing others not pulling their weight at work was the top thing that stressed out both men and women in the work place, with 36.6% and 46.6% respectively citing this as their top reason for getting stressed with the people that they work with.

Worryingly, the stress of work is even affecting people's home lives with 76.7% of respondents feeling stressed before they even come to work, with 40.3% citing the thought of the day ahead and the amount of work as the reason. Furthermore 64.5% of respondents said that during the day, they felt most stressed while at work.



## Dealing with stress at work and at home

The most popular ways that people deal with stress in the workplace are by taking a break which 26.7% of you do. Worryingly, 22.2% of respondents do nothing to alleviate the stress that they feel at work, while 18.6% of people would talk to a colleague about what is bothering them, showing that having

a good rapport with the people you work with is very important to some people. Surprisingly, only 2%, the lowest response to all the options given, of people would talk to someone in their HR department if they were feeling stressed out by work issues.

When asked what might help to reduce their stress levels at work, unsurprisingly, though perhaps not realistically, 47.9% of employees felt that a financial incentive would help to relieve their stress, 30.1% of people felt that receiving greater recognition for the work that they do would help this and 27.7% of people said getting a better work/life balance would be the factor that helped them to reduce their stress levels at work.

When questioned about more general ways in which they deal with stress on a day to day basis, the most popular choice, was to draw a clear line between work time and personal time, which 20.7% of you do. 18.9% of people again do nothing to alleviate stress in their personal life, while 16.6% of people head out to the shops to treat themselves to something new!

The most common symptoms of stress cited by people responding to our survey are not sleeping, which 43.5% of respondents suffer from, 31.6% of people are feeling over emotional, and 29.4% are comfort eating or dieting to extremes. Other symptoms reported were high blood pressure, vomiting, extreme anxiety, smoking and drinking alcohol.

## Stress in the Public and Private sector

Those in the public sector who responded to our survey were more stressed, "All of the time", with 20.3% of public sector respondents choosing this option as opposed to 15.1% of their private sector counterparts. However, more private sector employees, namely 76.3% admitted to being stressed "sometimes" than those in the public sector where the figure is only slightly less at 73.2% .

36.8% of respondents in the private sector cited fear of redundancy as a predicted cause of stress in the future compared to 25.5% in the private sector. Interestingly though, 37.4% of public sector workers cited increased workload through having to take on others work as a cause of stress compared to 29.9% of those in the private sector.

## Age and its bearing on stress

The over 61s were the least stressed by their workload with only 36.6% citing it as a cause of stress compared to 52.1% of 21-30 year olds. This may be as they are nearing retirement age their jobs may not have as high a number of hours in the workplace

or due to the fact that they are looking forward to retirement and letting work stresses get to them less. Interestingly this group were also least likely to take time off work due to stress than any other age group, with only 12.2% of them taking any time off.

In terms of what stresses people before they come to work the results differed greatly by age. Relationships were the biggest concern for those aged 16 to 20, financial worries were the most pressing for those 21 to 30 and health was the most common worry for those over 61.

Those aged 16-20 were the most likely to regularly take time off work because of stress but give employers another reason, while those over 61 were the least likely to do this.

## Stress as a Manager

Managers were more likely to be stressed all the time than non managers who were asked the same question, with only 15.4% of non managers feeling stressed all the time as opposed to 25.9% of managers. Managers were also most likely to feel stressed at work by meeting performance or financial targets, with 28.8% of them being stressed by these factors compared to 18.6% of non managers.

Currently, the item most likely to make managers stressed in the coming year is an increase in their workload through having to take on others' work, with 36.9% of the managers we questioned worrying about this.

Management staff were almost twice as likely to regularly take time off work due to stress but give employers another reason.

## Stress as a gender issue

Looking at the results of the survey from a gender perspective, we were surprised to see that there were some very big differences in the responses from men and women.

Almost twice as many women as men cited bullying behaviour by colleagues as a cause for stress about the people they work with. In addition 46.6% of women cited seeing other people not pull their weight as something which makes them stressed at work compared to 36.6% of men.

More women worried about the thought of the day ahead and the amount of work compared to men. Almost double the number of men admitted to taking time off work because of stress but gave employers another reason compared to 5.3% of women.

When asked how they dealt with stress, 20.3% of women admitted to shopping or treating themselves compared to 7.9% of men. In terms of dealing with stress in the workplace 21.4% of women said they would talk to a colleague compared to 12.1% of men.

The symptoms of stress also differed between men and women. 39.2% of women said their main symptom of stress was feeling overly emotional compared to 13.8% of men, 34.5% of women said they over-ate or took to extreme dieting compared to 17.4% of men and 31.3% of women said they took it out on their families compared to 20.5% of men.

## Stress and its geographical impact on the UK

The Welsh were the least likely to be stressed by their workload, with only 39.1% of them feeling stressed about it. While those in Yorkshire and the Humber are the most stressed out by their workload, with 55.6% of them citing this as their top stressor, above feeling undervalued with 38.8% and not enough hours in the day with 36.6%.

Those in Northern Ireland were the most fearful of redundancy, 40%, while those fearing it the least are those in the South East, 25.6%.

Londoners are in for a tough time, they are the most stressed before they even get to work, all the time or some of the time, 81.9% of them are stressed! Londoners are also those with the most worry about their commute to work, with 38.6% of them worrying about it, putting it way ahead of family issues, health and relationship issues and financial worries.

It's not all bad though, across the board, we as a nation, when asked to rate our stress levels on a scale of one to ten where ten is the worst, put ourselves at an average of 5.3 and only 17.3% of us ever get above a 7 on the scale!



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