

More working from home feel stressed than those on Covid-19 front line

Survey shows women are more likely to feel stressed at home and work

Joyce Teo
Senior Health Correspondent

IT project manager Valerie Lim, 45, is very relieved that Singapore is now in phase two of its reopening as her two children, aged five and 11, are back in school.

Managing her son's home-based learning programme and keeping her younger daughter occupied while attempting to keep up the same level of work productivity at home had been nothing short of challenging.

She was the primary caregiver for the children as her husband rotated between working from home and in office.

Mrs Lim was among the 1,407 respondents - including 114 front-line workers - who completed a recent workplace resilience survey, which found that more of those working from home feel stressed than those working on the front line of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The survey, conducted by the National University Health System's (NUHS) Mind Science Centre, found that 61 per cent of those working from home reported feeling stressed, compared with 53 per cent of front-liners.

More people in the work-from-home group (51 per cent) also reported feeling stressed at home, compared with the group who are on the front line of the pandemic (32 per cent).

And, women are more likely to report being stressed at work and at home, compared with men.

A greater proportion of women (61.3 per cent) reported feeling stressed at work, relative to men (49.7 per cent). It is the same case when it comes to feeling stressed at home - 50.2 per cent for women, versus 45.5 per cent for men.

On a positive note, most of the respondents said they found work manageable and generally felt well-supported at home and at work.

A separate survey on mental health resilience, that was done concurrently by the NUHS Mind Science Centre, found that younger people are more likely to report feeling anxious and to be less mentally resilient than those who are older.

The two surveys, conducted over May and June, are believed to be the first Covid-19 mental health population surveys in Singapore.

In each survey, the respondents, after checking off the age group they are in, their gender and if they are a front-line worker or working from home, were asked to give their responses to 10 statements. For instance, for "I feel stressed at work", they can choose from five responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

A combined total of 3,256 re-

sponses were collected from the surveys done on community resource platform iamaccb.sg, NUHS said. In the mental resilience survey, which had 1,849 respondents, the conclusion was that Singaporeans younger than 45 years are more likely to report feeling anxious than those aged 45 and above. They may also be less mentally resilient than the older ones.

The survey found that the older respondents are the more likely they are to perceive themselves as being mentally resilient.

For instance, half of the older respondents reported being able to handle unpleasant emotions such as sadness, fear and anger, relative to 40 per cent of the younger respondents.

Half of the younger respondents frequently worry that something bad is going to happen to them or their loved ones. In contrast, 38 per cent of the older respondents share that concern.

The survey also found that retirees and working adults tend to perceive themselves as mentally resilient compared with non-working adults and students.

A higher percentage of retirees (55 per cent) and working adults (46 per cent) reported being able to handle unpleasant emotions such as sadness, fear and anger, compared with non-working adults (31 per cent) and students (35 per cent).

Furthermore, the survey found that students were more likely to report having anxious thoughts and preoccupations than adults and retirees.

Just 15 per cent of retirees think about things that they cannot

control, compared with 38 per cent among working adults, 44 per cent among non-working adults and 53 per cent among students.

Lastly, men are generally more likely to report attributes of perceived mental resilience, such as being able to stay calm in difficult situations (47 per cent), compared with women (38 per cent).

Many of those who worked from home are in the age group where they have additional family and social roles, such as caring for their young children, or elderly parents at home," he said.

"The blurring of social and work space could create tension and conflicts, a situation they may not have had to contend with previously when working in the office."

When it came to more women working from home feeling stressed, relative to men, Prof Wong said it could be that women tend to take on more responsibilities at home. The added responsibilities when they are working from home culminates in a higher level of stress and anxiety, he said.

More importantly, the question is how should society support women such that they can manage the multiple roles, he said. This would entail getting men to take on more responsibilities at home, he added.

He said that younger Singaporeans are likely to feel more anxious because they have less life experience to lean on. While the young may not worry a lot about getting sick from the coronavirus, they are not immune to other effects of the pandemic.

An online survey that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) conducted in April had shown that the biggest concerns of people aged 15 to 24 are the toll of the pandemic on their mental health, employment prospects and education.

Prof Wong said that for younger people and in general, the pandemic is a good exercise in resilience building.

"The pandemic offers most countries a very unique 'stress inoculation' exercise. The learning experience is almost akin to developing antibodies to an illness... The inoculation effect will be very positive, though the level of immunity will vary."

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JOHN WONG CHEE MENG, director of the NUHS' Mind Science Centre and the lead clinician in the two surveys.



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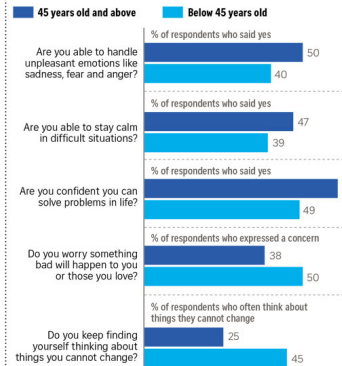
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joycetee@sph.com.sg

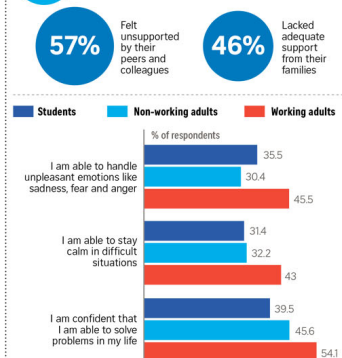
Are you stressed by Covid-19?

The National University Health System's Mind Science Centre conducted a mental health resilience survey and a workplace resilience survey to find out how people here are responding to the pandemic.

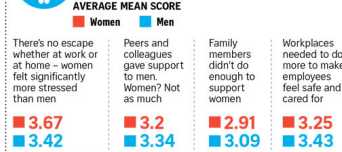
OLDER ADULTS COPING BETTER THAN YOUNGER ONES



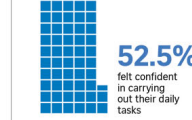
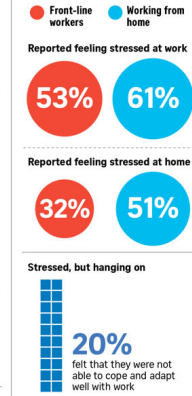
WORKING PROFESSIONALS COULD DO WITH MORE SUPPORT



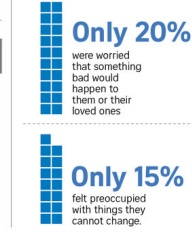
WOMEN FELT THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC MORE THAN MEN



STRESS FELT BY MANY



RETIRES HAVE HIGHER LEVELS OF MENTAL RESILIENCE



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