

Work tops stress lists



Work-life balance remains a key stressor for South Africans. | Freepik

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SOUTH African professionals are facing mounting levels of stress – with financial uncertainty and workplace pressure once again emerging as primary stressors.

This is according to the 2024 Profmed Stress Index, an annual survey conducted among 2 071 professionals on the Profmed member database.

The findings indicate a growing concern around fatigue and poor sleep, with these symptoms ranking highest among respondents; even surpassing last year's levels. Digestive issues have also emerged as a new stress-related symptom, pointing to the increasing toll that stress takes on a professional's physical health.

This year's results reiterate that stress remains a significant concern for South African professionals and needs to be taken seriously.

What stands out this year is that while professionals are open to exploring new ways to manage their stress, the majority (60%) still prefer in-person mental health support, while just under a quarter are comfortable with text-based support.

Moreover, three-quarters of workers surveyed by the non-profit SA Depression and Anxiety Group (Sadag) say they think about work constantly and cannot "switch off" in their free time, while more than a third said they worry about losing their jobs.

Key trends

Some key trends to emerge from the 2024 Profmed Stress Index include:

- ◆ Younger professionals and women report higher stress levels – Millennials (aged 30 to 39) and professionals (aged 50 to 69) experience the highest levels of stress. Women report higher stress levels than men, largely due to balancing multiple roles at work and home.
- ◆ Healthcare professionals and educators are among the most stressed – Long hours, emotional burnout and a lack of support systems contribute to heightened stress levels in these fields.
- ◆ Financial concerns drive stress – Economic uncertainty, inflation and job security are the top contributors to stress; highlighting the need for financial resilience among professionals.
- ◆ Workload and work-life balance remain major concerns – High workloads and difficulty maintaining a healthy work-life balance continue to be significant stressors.
- ◆ Self-isolation is on the rise – Many respondents report withdrawing from social interactions when experiencing stress; a concerning trend that has increased from previous years.

Support systems

We know that men and women deal with stress differently. Women often seek emotional support by talking through their experiences, while men are more likely to turn to escape activities like exercise for relief.

The survey results also highlight how professionals are increasingly open to digital solutions for stress management. However, a generational divide persists, with older members preferring in-person contact while younger professionals are more comfortable with digital and text-based support.

Although there is a definite advantage to face-to-face sessions with a mental health professional, this shouldn't stop anyone from seeking support – even if it is only a screen-to-screen consultation.

The 2024 Profmed Stress Index highlights the urgent need to continue addressing workplace stress, financial strain and mental health support for professionals. With stress levels on the rise, proactive intervention remains essential for long-term health and well-being.

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