



# SPOTLIGHT REPORT

## Mental Health

THIS IS A SECTION OF A LARGER REPORT. READ THE FULL REPORT AT [WOMENOUTOFWORK.CA](https://womenoutofwork.ca)



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**“I feel like I’ve lost all control on my mental health. Things happen to me and I can’t stop them. Which makes dealing with them infinitely harder.”**

*- a survey respondent*

The health and wellbeing of our workforce is of vital importance. Aside from the physical challenges that have plagued our community since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mental distress experienced by Hamiltonians cannot be overlooked.

Throughout the survey and during the focus groups, we repeatedly heard about concerns our participants had about mental health, including a concern for themselves, for their friends and family, and for their children.

Given this theme was so prevalent, it’s been given its own spotlight report in an effort to help highlight the ways in which women specifically have experienced changes and impacts to their mental health as a result of COVID-19.

Key findings include:

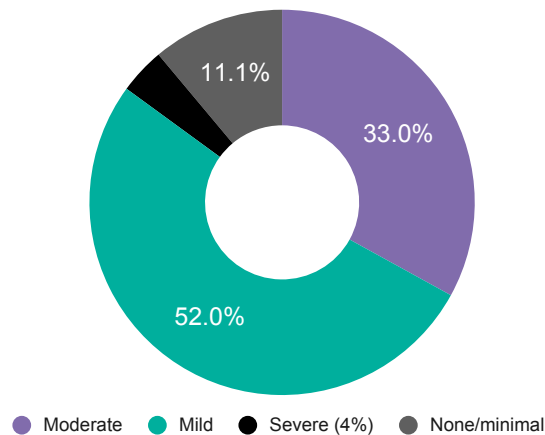
- Just over a third of women surveyed indicated that their daily stress level has increased due to the pandemic, and is getting worse (36%). For respondents who live with children/dependents in the home, 40% reported that their daily stress has increased and is getting worse.
- 83% of respondents were worried or somewhat worried about increasing anxiety, and 72% were worried or somewhat worried about long-term impacts of the pandemic on their mental health.
- 69% of women with children at home reported feeling overwhelmed trying to balance work and caregiving responsibilities.
- 46% of respondents have reached out to their friends and family for support, and 19% have considered reaching out to someone but have not yet done so.
- We received over 150 comments on the need for more mental health supports.

## STRESS LEVELS

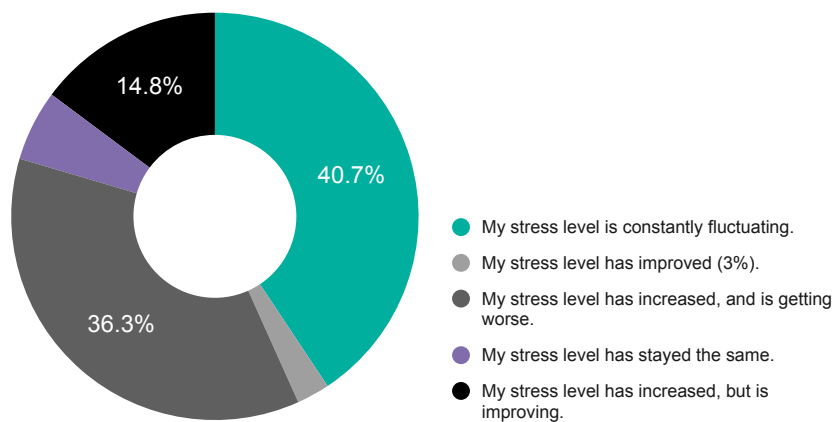
In the survey, respondents were asked about their stress levels and mental health before and during the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, over 60% of women described their daily stress as mild or minimal.

Since the pandemic began 36% of women reported that their stress level has increased and is getting worse. A further 41% noted that their stress level is constantly fluctuating, and another 15% noted that their stress level initially got worse but is now improving. Just over 5% reported that their stress level has stayed the same as before the pandemic, and 3% of respondents noted that their stress level has improved.

Before COVID-19, how would you describe your average daily level of stress?



Since COVID-19 began, how would you describe your average daily level of stress?

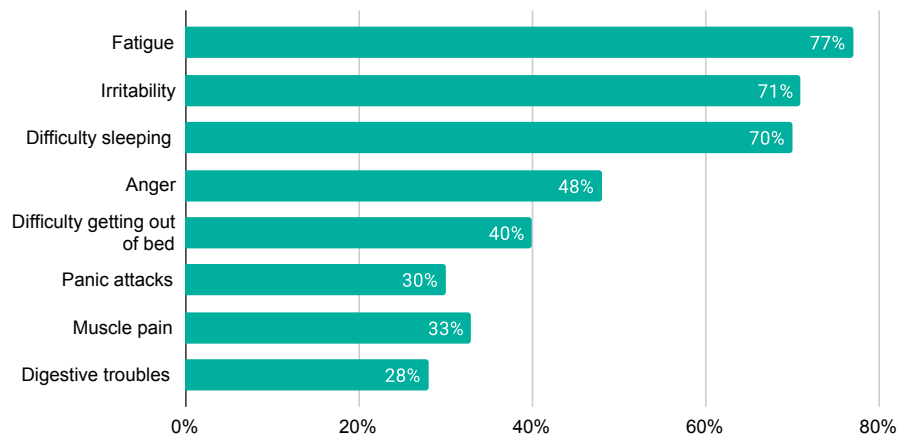


**“I wish it was more built into workplace culture to take breaks and focus on mental health instead of ramping up and doing even more than before. I feel like a lot of managers don’t know how to model this well for staff.”**

## **SYMPTOMS**

Fatigue was the most commonly reported stress-related symptom, with 77% of respondents indicating they experienced it. 71% of respondents reported irritability, 69% reported difficult sleeping, and 48% of respondents reported feeling angry. 41% of respondents reported experiencing 5 or more symptoms due to stress.

Has stress due to COVID-19 caused you to experience any of the following symptoms?



**41%**

**OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED EXPERIENCING  
5 OR MORE STRESS-RELATED SYMPTOMS AS  
A RESULT OF COVID-19**

When asked if the pandemic has had any impact on existing mental health conditions, 636 people wrote in comments detailing the impacts, or 41% of the overall sample.

- “Yes, pre-existing depression and anxiety have been made more difficult due to uncertainty in my job and the environment around covid. Social isolation and general boredom as a result of shutdowns has also increased anxiety and depression levels.”
- “Yes, my anxiety is far worse as is my insomnia.”
- “Financial stress, loneliness has increased my anxiety.”
- “Yes. I feel like I’ve lost all control on my mental health. Things happen to me and I can’t stop them. Which makes dealing with them infinitely harder.”



**“Pre-existing depression and anxiety have been made more difficult due to uncertainty in my job and the environment around covid.”**

## WORRIES AND CONCERNS

83% of respondents were worried or somewhat worried about new or increased feelings of anxiety. 74% of respondents were worried or somewhat worried about ongoing feelings of isolation and loneliness, while 72% were worried or somewhat worried about long-term impacts of the pandemic on their mental health. 64% were worried or somewhat worried about their ability to perform well at their jobs. Clearly, there is a need for current and ongoing mental health support to help women recover from the pandemic.

**74%**  
**OF RESPONDENTS WERE WORRIED OR SOMEWHAT WORRIED ABOUT ONGOING FEELINGS OF ISOLATION AND LONELINESS**

WHEN IT COMES TO COVID-19 AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, ARE YOU CONCERNED WITH:			
	Yes	Somewhat	No
Ongoing feelings of isolation and loneliness	35%	39%	26%
New or increased feelings of depression	38%	34%	29%
Fear of social interaction due to the risk of getting sick	38%	36%	26%
New or increased feelings of anxiety	47%	36%	18%
Your ability to perform well at your job	32%	32%	35%
Your ability to meet the demands of your homelife	40%	34%	26%
Any long-term impacts on your mental health	37%	35%	28%



**“I do not have time  
for support between  
managing a job with  
demanding hours/  
expectations and  
being the full time  
care provider.”**

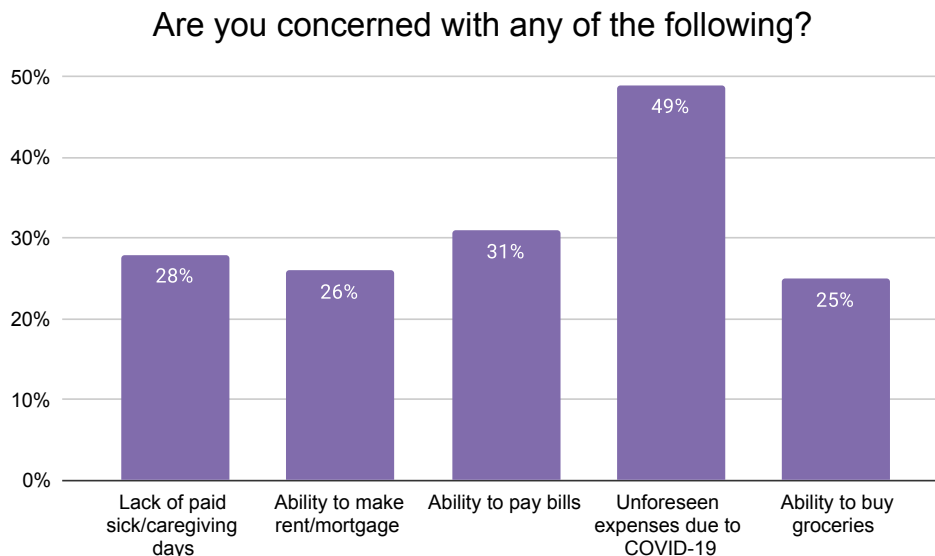
When looking at mental health concerns by sector, we found that respondents who worked in hospitality, retail, and arts, entertainment and recreation experienced higher rates of concern than the overall group. 88% of women working in those sectors reported worries about new or increased feelings of depression (compared to 72% for all respondents). 78% of hospitality, arts, and retail workers reported being worried about long term impacts on their mental health (compared to 72% for all respondents).

Education and healthcare workers were less likely to be worried about new or increasing feelings of depression (59% and 65%) than the overall group, although the majority of workers in all sectors being concerned about new or increasing feelings of anxiety and depression clearly signals that workers in all sectors are struggling a great deal.

For women with children at home, 69% reported feeling overwhelmed trying to balance work and caregiving, and 40% reported that their daily stress has increased and is getting worse.

**78%**  
**OF HOSPITALITY,  
ARTS, AND  
RETAIL WORKERS  
REPORTED BEING  
WORRIED ABOUT  
LONG TERM  
IMPACTS ON THEIR  
MENTAL HEALTH**

Respondents were asked about other concerns they might have, and 49% indicated they were worried about unforeseen expenses due to COVID-19. 31% were concerned about their ability to pay bills, 26% were worried about their ability to make rent or mortgage payments, and 25% were worried about their ability to buy groceries. 28% of respondents were worried about lack of paid sick/caregiving days, as shown in the chart below.



Some respondents shared further comments on their mental health during the pandemic:

- “The lack of social interaction is a detriment to our daily life - not being able to visit our elderly relatives especially with our baby has been difficult.”
- “Having my partner home so often has absolutely improved my mental health tenfold! I had more support during the day, the household duties and child parenting wasn’t all on my shoulders. I connected better with myself and with my partner. I was able to identify and process underlying mental health concerns which eventually led to me seeking help from my doctor.”
- “Our mental health is healthy when daycares are open.”
- “I wish it was more built into workplace culture to take breaks and focus on mental health instead of ramping up and doing even more than before. I feel like a lot of managers don’t know how to model this well for staff.”
- “I have panic attacks and mental breakdowns while on the job. Company does not care about the well-being of its employees.”
- “Trying to keep it together for the rest of the family, feelings of guilt.”
- “I do not have time for support between managing a job with demanding hours/expectations and being the full time care provider.”
- “Everyday is groundhog day and while people say things like, enjoy this time with your children, I mourn the loss of their independent experiences at school and my own personal growth I had planned for so long during this year when they would both finally be in school.”




## REACHING OUT FOR SUPPORT

When asked if they have reached out or have considered reaching out for mental health support:

- 46% of respondents said they have reached out to family and friends for support
- 12% reached out to crisis lines or sexual assault centres
- 19% have considered reaching out but haven't yet done so, and
- 23% have not considered reaching out for support

Respondents were asked to comment on supports that might be helpful to them. We received over 150 comments that mentioned the need for more mental health supports:

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- "Affordable mental health counseling, paid mental health sick days from work."
  - "Better and more affordable counseling services."
  - "Increased availability/accessibility of affordable mental health supports."
  - "Covered mental health costs. My therapy is so expensive."
  - "Mental health services for self-employed individuals who can't afford to pay out of pocket and have no workplace benefits or insurance coverage."
  - "Mental health & academic support for my children. I don't have time or energy to deal with everything."
  - "Lockdowns are understandable given the current situation however I am very concerned about long-term mental health impact on my children. I feel that there should be more emphasis on this and an investment made in the school system to provide additional support in this area to all students."
  - "Mental health support and more support for aging parents. I have found that my role as my parents caregiver has increased especially with them not able to participate in normal socializing activities. My parents are active seniors who had a very active social life, I find myself now making sure I can plan activities that are safe and fun for them."

In the focus group discussions, many participants discussed the need for mental health days and the stigma that can come with taking time off for mental health reasons. Most participants, even those with no prior history of mental health issues, struggled with their mental health at different points during the pandemic. Some spoke of the challenges of affording therapy, some spoke about the vital importance of social support systems. All participants agreed that mental health services need to be made accessible and affordable to help people recover from the pandemic.

Parents in the focus groups were worried about their children's mental health in addition to their own. They worried that increased screen time and lack of social support is affecting their children negatively.

**46%**  
**OF RESPONDENTS  
SAID THEY HAVE  
REACHED OUT TO  
FAMILY AND FRIENDS  
FOR SUPPORT.**

**ALL PARTICIPANTS  
AGREED THAT MENTAL  
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