

Workers most invested in their jobs have highest stress levels, study shows

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A workplace's key employees may be at the greatest risk of experiencing high levels of work stress, according to a new study by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

In a survey of 2,737 workers, 18 per cent reported that their job was "highly stressful."

The odds of having high stress were greater if workers were managers or professionals, if they thought their poor job performance could negatively affect others, or if they worked long or variable hours. The study was published in this month's [International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine](#).

"The people who report high stress are the ones most invested in their jobs," says Dr. Carolyn Dewa, Senior Scientist and Head of CAMH's Work and Well-being Research and Evaluation Program. "Employers should be very concerned with keeping this population healthy. From a business perspective, it is in a company's best interest to support these workers."

The job characteristics associated with stress pointed to workers who were engaged and responsible. If workers felt their poor job performance could result in any physical injury, damage to company's equipment or reputation, or a financial loss, they were twice as likely to report high stress.

Having a worksite remote from their home, or having to entertain or travel for their jobs also increased the odds of being stressed. So did variable hours such as being on call, doing [shift work](#) or having a compressed work week.

[Chronic stress](#) can lead to [burnout](#), and can worsen existing [mental health problems](#) or physical disability.

The study's goal was to learn how workers view

their responsibilities and job characteristics, and their experience with stress. This information could be used to help develop interventions targeting both workers and their work environment, which is considered a more effective approach.

"It is important that employees have access to resources that address their mental health concerns. In the long run, these interventions can help save some of the annual \$17 billion in lost productivity in Canada," said Dewa. "Employers should be asking, 'What am I doing to reduce stress in my most valuable people?'"

The survey included Alberta adults aged 18 to 65 who had worked the previous year in full range of settings, including offices, manufacturing, construction, farming and services, among others. Dewa notes, "These sources of stress that we identified will be the same for Canadian workers wherever they are based, as they held true across different locations and workplaces in our survey."

On the other end of the scale, 82 per cent of workers reported low or no stress. This group was more likely to be male, single, under the age of 25 or work in a small business. In addition, if [workers](#) were satisfied with their jobs, they were less likely to identify their jobs as being highly stressful.

Compared with the rest of Canada, Alberta reports slightly lower levels of [stress](#) than the rest of the country, the study notes.

Provided by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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