

**NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/
Harvard School of Public Health**

The Burden of Stress in America

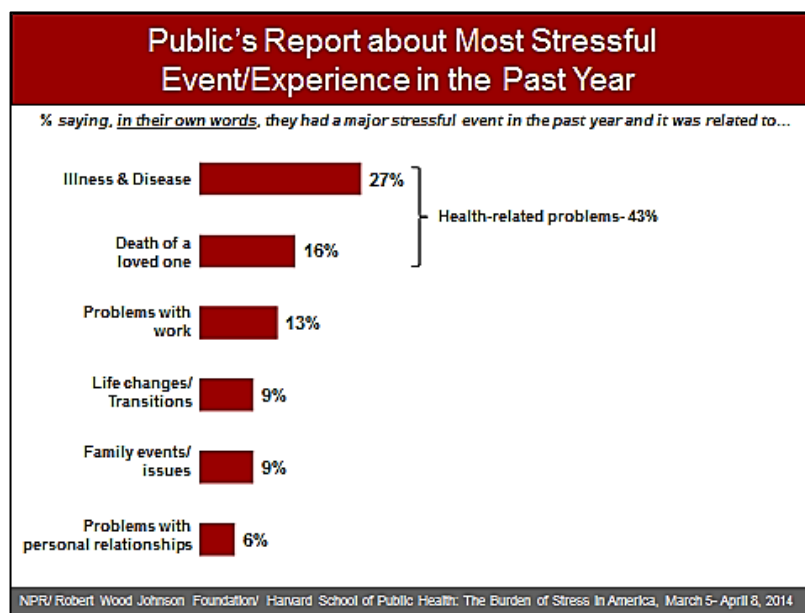
THE BURDEN OF STRESS IN AMERICA

The NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health Burden of Stress in America Survey was conducted from March 5 to April 8, 2014 with a sample of 2,505 respondents. The survey examines the role stress plays in different aspects of Americans' lives, including the public's personal experiences of stress in the past month and year, the perceived effects of their stress and causes of that stress, their methods of stress management and their general attitudes about effects of stress in people's lives.

I: STRESSFUL EVENTS OR EXPERIENCES IN THE PAST YEAR

Half of Public Had a Major Stressful Event or Experience Last Year; Health-related Issues Most Frequently Mentioned

The survey asked whether people had had a major stressful event or experience in the past year. About half of the public (49%) report that they did have such an event or experience in the past year. Those who said they did were then asked to describe *in their own words* what the **most** stressful event or experience had been. Over four in ten (43%) reported stressful events or experiences related to health, including 27% who mentioned illness and disease and 16% who said they had experienced the death of a loved one. Smaller numbers reported that their most stressful events and experiences related to work (13%); life changes, such as moving (9%); family events or situations, like problems with children (9%); or problems with personal relationships, such as their own divorce or separation (6%).

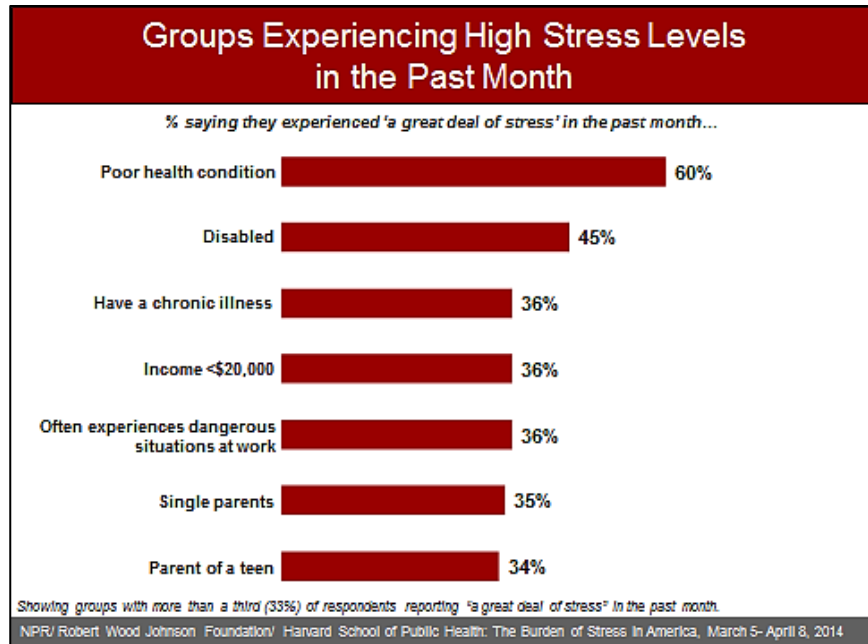


II: STRESS IN THE LAST MONTH

A Quarter of People Report a Great Deal of Stress in Past Month; Those in Poor Health More than Twice as Likely to Say So

The survey also looks at the stress the public has had in just the last month. The public reported various levels of stress over the past month; about a quarter reported having a “great deal” of stress (26%), 37% experienced “some” stress, 23% reported “not very much” stress, and some report having “no stress at all” (14%). Because the impact of stress on different areas of life for those reporting a great deal of

stress (26%) in the past month was so much greater than those with a lesser amount of stress, this report focuses on the experiences of this group.

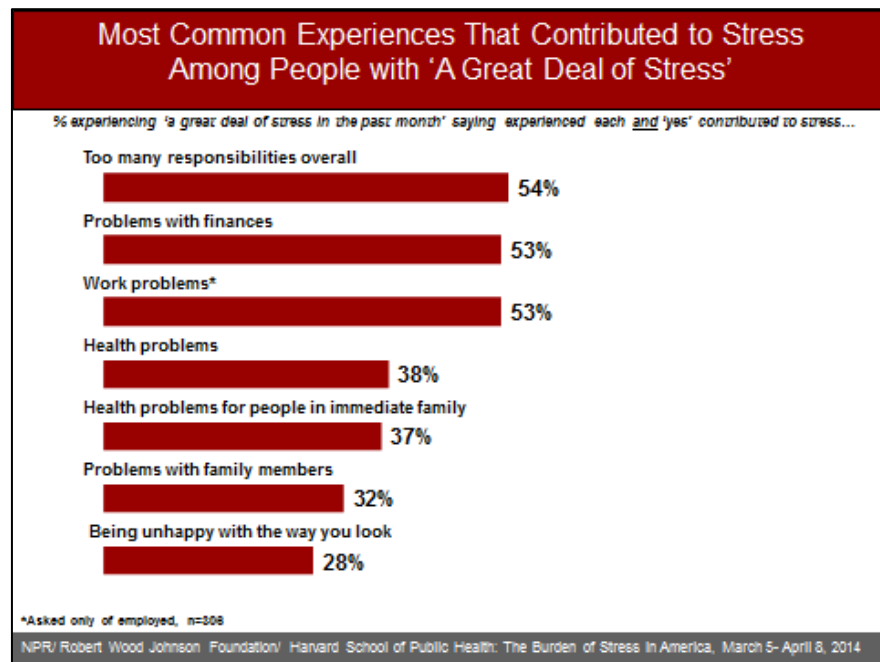


People in poor health are more than twice as likely as the public as a whole to report a great deal of stress in the past month (60%). People who are disabled are also much more likely to report a great deal of stress (45%). Other groups likely to report a great deal of stress include those with a chronic illness (36%), those with low incomes (<\$20K) (36%), those who face potentially dangerous situations in their jobs (36%), single parents (35%), and parents of teens (34%).

III. CONTRIBUTORS TO STRESS AMONG THOSE WHO EXPERIENCED A GREAT DEAL OF STRESS IN THE LAST MONTH

Too Many Overall Responsibilities and Financial Problems Were Key Contributors to Stress for Those Who Experienced a Great Deal of Stress

In addition to asking about the events or experiences which were the most stressful in the last year, the survey also asked about whether various experiences contributed to stress in just the last month. When focused on this short period of time, too many responsibilities overall and financial problems are the most often



reported contributors, though health issues are also frequently reported. More than half of those who experienced a great deal of stress in the past month say too many overall responsibilities and financial problems were contributors (54% and 53% respectively). More than a third of those with a great deal of stress said the contributors included their own health problems (38%) and health problems of family members (37%). Other contributors included problems with family members (32%) and negative feelings about their own appearance (28%). For those who are employed and experienced a great deal of stress, over half (53%) said problems at work contributed to their stress.

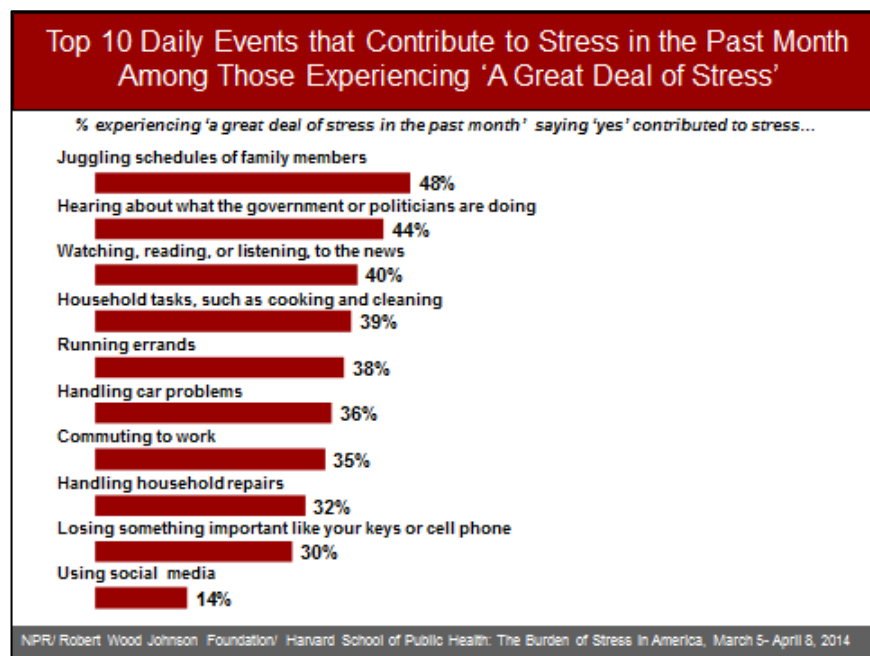
Even among those who have been under a great deal of stress in the last month, those who are in poor health report high levels for multiple contributors to stress. Eight in ten (80%) said their own health problems contributed to their stress, and nearly six in ten (58%) said the health problems of family members did. Over two-thirds (69%) reported financial problems contributing to stress, and more than four in ten (46%) said being unhappy with the way they look was a contributor.

There were some notable differences in key contributors to stress among particular groups who were under a great deal of stress in the past month. Nearly half of women (48%) who were under a great deal of stress in the last month said other family members' health problems were a contributor to stress, much more than the quarter of men (25%) who said so. Seven in ten (70%)

of those with household incomes under \$20,000/year said that financial problems were a contributor to their experiencing a great deal of stress, twice as many as those with incomes of \$50,000 or higher who say so (35%). About half (51%) of those aged 65 and older said that their own health problems were a contributor to their stress, more than the 36% of those under 65 who said so.

Daily Events and Routine Hassles Also Impact Stress Levels

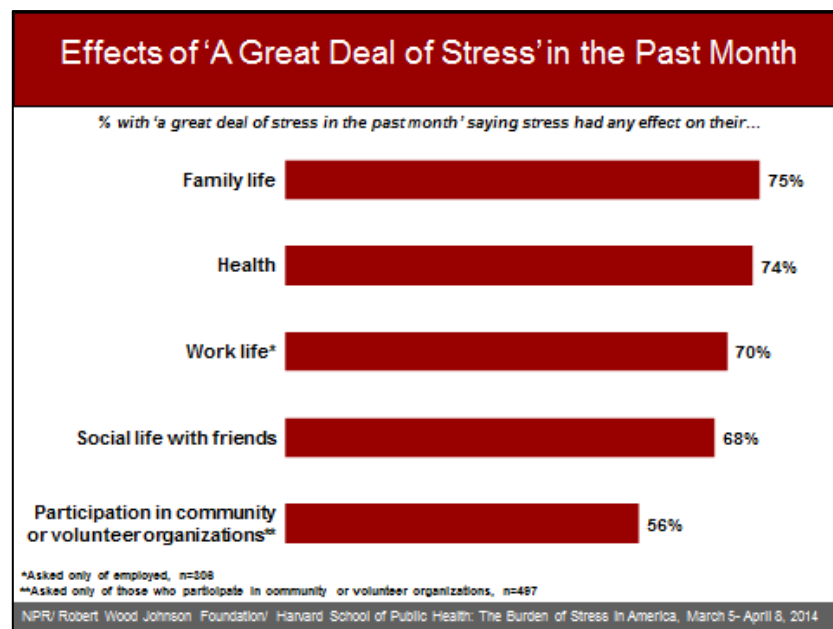
The survey asked about a number of daily events that can contribute to people's stress levels. About half of those who experienced a great deal of stress in the past month report that juggling schedules of family members caused stress (48%). Other daily events causing stress for those who experienced a great deal of stress include: hearing about what the government or politicians are doing (44%), watching, reading, or listening to the news (40%), household tasks, such as cooking and cleaning (39%), and running errands (38%).



IV: EFFECTS OF A GREAT DEAL OF STRESS ON ASPECTS OF PEOPLE'S LIVES

Public Reports Having a Great Deal of Stress Affects Major Aspects of Their Lives

When asked about the different spheres of their lives that might be affected by stress, substantial shares of people who report experiencing a great deal of stress in the past month say it affected their family life (75%), their health (74%), and their social life (68%).



Impact of Stress on Family Life

More than four in ten of those under a great deal of stress in the last month reported that this stress made it harder to get along with family members (45%) and prevented them from spending time with family members (44%). Similar numbers reported stress caused more arguments with family members (42%), prevented them from handling household tasks (40%), and prevented them from caring for family members in the way they want to (39%).

Impact of Stress on Health

The most commonly reported effect on health among those under a great deal of stress in the last month are bad effects on emotional well-being (63%), problems with sleep (56%) and difficulty in thinking, concentrating or making decisions (50%). About half of those who had experienced a great deal of stress and had a chronic illness or disability said stress made the symptoms worse (53%) or made it harder for them to manage their chronic illness or disability (52%).

Impact of Stress on Social Life

About half of people who have experienced a great deal of stress over the past month say stress prevented them from spending enough time with friends (49%). A quarter (25%) reported stress made it harder for them to get along with friends.

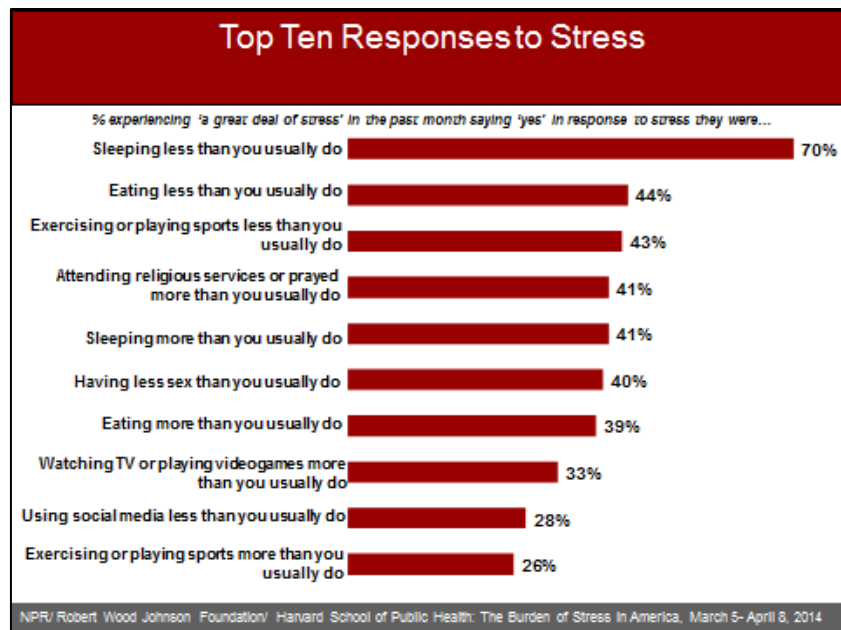
Impact of Stress on Work and Other Aspects of Life

In addition to family life, social life, and health, about two-thirds (70%) of those who experienced a great deal of stress in the last month and are employed say stress impacted their work life. Half said stress made it harder to concentrate at work (51%), and 41% said it made harder to get take on extra responsibilities that could help advance their career. Over a third (37%) said it made it harder to get their work done on time. Among those who experienced a great deal of stress in the last month and participate in community or volunteer organizations, over half say their stress had an effect on their participation (56%), with 47% saying it reduced the amount of energy they had for involvement in community organizations.

Many Who Experienced a Great Deal of Stress in the Last Month Report Changes to Normal Sleeping and Eating Patterns Because of Stress

When asked about things they do because of stress, many report behavioral changes that could affect health. Substantial numbers of people who experienced a great deal of stress said it was disruptive to their normal patterns of sleeping and eating – sometimes in multiple ways. For example, seven in ten (70%) said they slept less than they normally do,

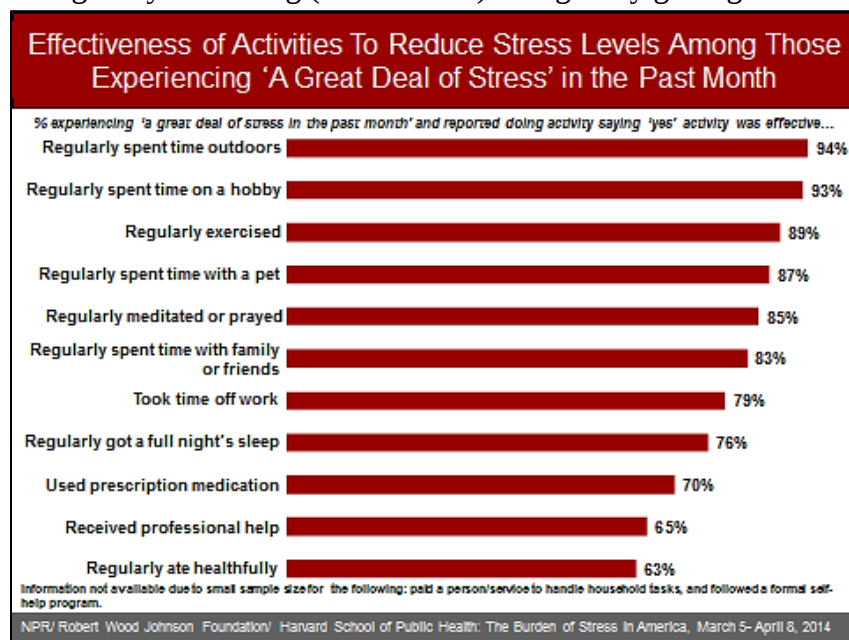
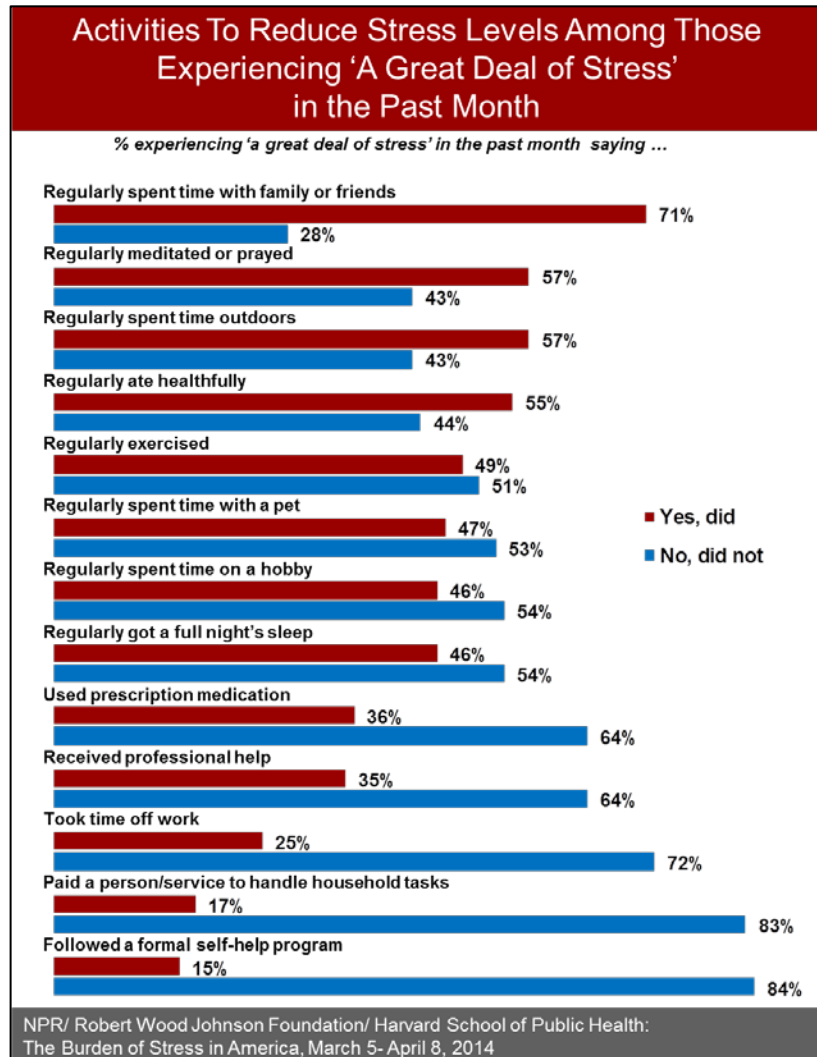
and 41% said they slept more. More than four in ten (44%) said they ate less than they usually do, while 39% said they ate more.



V. STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG THOSE WHO EXPERIENCED A GREAT DEAL OF STRESS

Stressed People Try to Reduce Stress Levels in Many Ways

The survey asked about the things that people did to help reduce their stress over the last year. Those who have experienced a great deal of stress over the past month tried to reduce their stress in many ways. About seven in ten (71%) say they regularly spent time with family and friends to reduce stress, while just under six in ten said they regularly prayed or mediated (57%), spent time outdoors (57%) or ate healthfully (55%). However, more than half of respondents did not take certain steps to reduce their stress that are often recommended by experts, such as regularly exercising (51% did not) or regularly getting a full night's sleep (54% did not).



Most People Find the Things They Do to Reduce Stress Effective

Those who had taken these steps to reduce stress were then asked if the things they had done were effective. Majorities of those who had experienced a great deal of stress in the last month and taken steps to manage it said

each of the things they did to reduce stress were effective. More than nine in ten said that regularly spending time outdoors (94%) or spending time on a hobby (93%) was effective.

About a Third of People Who Experienced a Great Deal of Stress in the Last Month Believe They Have a Great Deal of Control over Their Stress

Among those who experienced a great deal of stress in the last month, a third (34%) say that, in their current situation, they have a great deal of control over the stress in their life. Another four in ten (40%) say they have some control.

VII. BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT STRESS

Majorities Believe Stress Has a Major Impact on Most People's Health, Family and Work Life

About seven in ten of those who experienced a great deal of stress in the last month say that stress has a major impact on most people's health (72%) and family life (69%). Over half (56%) believe that stress has a major effect on most people's work lives.

Many Believe Stress Has Caused Problems for Them in the Past – But Most Do Not Expect Stress to Contribute to Problems in the Future

More than half (55%) of those experiencing a great deal of stress in the past month say that at some point in their lives, stress contributed to a major problem for them. Nearly four in ten (38%) say it contributed to a major problem in their families, and similar numbers (35%) say it contributed to a major health problem. However, those under a great deal of stress in the past month are somewhat more optimistic about the role stress will play in their lives in the future. Just under four in ten (39%) expect stress to contribute to a major problem in their lives. Under three in ten specifically expect it to contribute to a major health problem (28%) or a family problem (22%).

Stress Not Always Perceived as Negative; Majorities Believe at Some Time Stress Has Been Positive in Their Lives

Many of those dealing with stress do not see stress as always having only negative effects. A majority (67%) of those with a great deal of stress in the past month believe that, at some point, stress has had a positive effect on some aspect of their life. About four in ten (41%) say it has had a positive effect specifically on their work life.

VI. THE NON-STRESSED

Majority of Those Who Report No Stress in Last Month Credit Personality

While about a quarter of Americans report a great deal of stress in the past month, one in seven (14%) report that they had no stress at all. When asked why they had experienced no stress, two-thirds (66%) said it was due to their personality. About half said reasons include the steps they take to reduce stress (52%) and not having any stressful events in their lives over the last month (51%). About four in ten (43%) reported their religion or faith is a reason they were not stressed over the last month.

Those Who Report No Stress See Themselves Having Control over the Stress in Their Lives

Those who experienced no stress in the past month are much more likely than those who were under a great deal of stress to see themselves as having control over their stress levels. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of those who say they experienced no stress in the past month say they have a great deal of control over the stress in their life.

The Non-Stressed Don't Expect Major Problems from Stress in the Future

In contrast to those under a great deal of stress in the past month, only 2% of those who said they experienced no stress in the past month expected that in the future stress would contribute to a major problem in their lives. Less than 1% said it would contribute to a major health problem.

Methodology

This poll is part of an on-going series of surveys developed by researchers at the Harvard Opinion Research Program (HORP) at the Harvard School of Public Health in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and NPR. The research team consists of the following members at each institution.

Harvard School of Public Health: Robert J. Blendon, Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis and Executive Director of HORP; Gillian K. SteelFisher, Research Scientist and Assistant Director of HORP; Kathleen J. Weldon, Research and Administrative Manager; John M. Benson, Research Scientist and Managing Director of HORP, and Mandy Brulé, Research Specialist.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Fred Mann, Associate Vice President, Communications; Carolyn Miller, Senior Program Officer, Research and Evaluation; and Ari Kramer, Communications Officer.

NPR: Anne Gudenkauf, Senior Supervising Editor, Science Desk; Joe Neel, Deputy Senior Supervising Editor, Science Desk.

Interviews were conducted via telephone (including both landline and cell phone) by SSRS of Media (PA), March 3 – April 8, 2014, among a nationally representative sample of 2,505 adults age 18 and older. The interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The margin of error for total respondents is +/- 2.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Of the total sample, 633 said they have experienced a great deal of stress in the past month. The margin of error for this group is +/- 4.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases and for variations in probability of selection within and across households, sample data are weighted by household size, cell phone/landline use and demographics (sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, marital status and census region) to reflect the true population. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

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