



2015 Psychology Week survey report

As part of its commitment to promoting community mental health awareness and psychological wellbeing, for the fifth consecutive year the APS commissioned a stress and wellbeing survey of Australians. As a special focus in 2015, Australians were asked additional questions about their use of social media and experience of FoMO (Fear of Missing Out). The survey also included a sample of young people, aged 13-17.

The 2015 survey provided the opportunity to examine five years of data to gain a half-decade snapshot revealing the state of Australians' mental health and wellbeing as well as insights into the social media phenomenon which is increasingly shaping how people behave and relate as well as having an effect on their wellbeing. The 2015 survey results were released during Psychology Week (PW) and generated significant media coverage.

Five year snapshot – Stress and wellbeing

The half-decade snapshot shows that Australians are faring worse than they were in 2011 when the survey began, reporting lower levels of wellbeing overall and in the workplace, and higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety symptoms.

Australians' levels of wellbeing have fluctuated over the five years. A slight improvement was recorded in 2014 and 2015 but wellbeing still remains lower than 2011 when the APS first surveyed Australians on this important measure.

However the news isn't all bad. In this year's survey, when Australians were asked about their wellness across six key life domains (physical, social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and vocational wellness), three in five rated themselves moderately to extremely well across these life domains.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS 5 YEARS

Key findings include:

- 35 per cent of Australians report having a significant level of distress in their lives;
- 26 per cent of Australians report above normal levels of anxiety symptoms;
- 26 per cent of Australians report having moderate to extremely severe levels of depression symptoms; and
- In 2015, anxiety symptoms were the highest they have been in the five years of the survey.

Wellbeing:

- **Age:** Younger people (18-25) have consistently reported lower levels of wellbeing than older Australians;
- **Employment status:** The unemployed report the lowest levels of wellbeing whereas the retirees report the highest levels of wellbeing;
- **Living arrangements:** Australians living with a partner reported significantly higher levels of wellbeing compared to all other groups (e.g. sole parents, living with parents, etc.);
- **Children:** Those with children have higher levels of wellbeing than those without children; and
- **Education/Income:** Wellbeing levels rise with education and income.

Experience of distress, depression and anxiety symptoms

Over the last five years (2011-2015), on average, 35 per cent of Australians reported experiencing distress, 36 per cent experienced depression symptoms and 26 per cent anxiety symptoms. Of those, 13 per cent experienced severe levels of distress, 12 per cent severe to extremely severe depression symptoms and 11 per cent severe to extremely severe levels of anxiety symptoms.

Of particular concern is the number of people in 2015 with higher levels of anxiety and depression symptoms and distress reporting that they used gambling, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and taking recreational drugs to manage stress.

- Of those reporting severe levels of distress, 61 per cent drink alcohol, 41 per cent gamble, 40 per cent smoke and 31 per cent take recreational drugs to manage stress;
- Of those reporting extremely severe levels of depression symptoms, 57 per cent drink alcohol, 46 per cent gamble, 41 per cent smoke cigarettes and 38 per cent take recreational drugs to manage stress; and
- Of those reporting extremely severe levels of anxiety symptoms, 66 per cent drink alcohol, 54 per cent gamble, 47 per cent take recreational drugs and 45 per cent smoke cigarettes to manage stress.

Causes of stress

Australians' worries about money have not abated. Financial issues rated as the top cause of stress over the five years, while also of concern is the increase in the number of people turning to gambling to manage stress (now one in five), growing from 13 per cent in 2011 to 19 per cent in 2015. After financial concerns (49%), the leading causes of stress over the five years were family issues (45%), personal health (44%), trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle (40%) and issues with the health of others close to them (38%).

Interestingly, younger people are significantly more likely than older people to be stressed by environmental issues.