



Mothers, Sisters and Daughters Alike: Women Suffer Work Stress in Different Ways Than Men

Research conducted by the Kenexa® Research Institute (KRI) investigated the stress caused by work, and a worker's ability to balance both his/her professional and personal lives. According to the study, in the United States, work stress is a driver of employee engagement, which means that unreasonable levels of stress detract significantly from an employee's job satisfaction and enjoyment at work, and contributes to their intention to leave the company. The report is based on the analysis of data drawn from a representative sample of 10,000 U.S. workers who were surveyed through WorkTrends™, KRI's annual survey of worker opinions.

The results indicate regardless of gender, employees are more than twice as likely to think about leaving their job if they have a high level of work stress. For professional and technical workers, the issues of work/life balance, doing exciting work that they are good at, having a respectful manager, being paid fairly, working on a resourced and functioning team and having a career path all contribute to the level of work stress one experiences.

Looking at the differences between genders, results show that women's work stress is more related to managerial support and equal opportunity, whereas men's stress drivers focus more on product quality and trust in senior leadership.

Brenda Kowske, Ph.D., research consultant, Kenexa Research Institute, said, "Organizational leaders can reduce stress by providing a career path while still supporting work/life balance. Managers need to be in on the effort by ensuring fair treatment in evaluation and compensation, tapping employee motivation and ensuring adequately resourced teams. Honesty and integrity also matter. Employees need to be able to report unethical behavior. In sum, work stress is about fairness, honesty, and doing what you love—but not having it consume your life."

In the United States, women report more work stress than men. Fifty-six percent of women indicate that their "stress level was reasonable," while more than a quarter of women (26%) felt that their work stress has reached unreasonable levels.

Across occupations, more often women reported unreasonable amounts of stress than men did, with the largest difference between men and women being in front-line supervisory roles (10% more women rate their work stress as unreasonable), service and production jobs (8%) and middle and upper management (6%).

"This research may partially explain why there are fewer women in management roles in the United States. The media and academia have substantiated the existence of the glass ceiling. Women also fight the commonly held perception that they may lack the motivation to climb the corporate ladder, and our data indicate that fewer women feel that achieving career goals is likely while maintaining a balance between their personal and professional lives. All of these factors may increase stress for women managers. It is difficult to ascertain, however, if women feel more stress, or if their stress is equal to a man's, but they more freely report their stress levels."

Database Overview

The WorkTrends database is a comprehensive normative database of employee opinions on topics including leadership, employee engagement and customer orientation. In 2008, 10,000 United States workers and 1,000 workers in each of the following countries/regions took the survey online: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and 500 workers in Russia.

Study Details

The WorkTrends survey asked participants to rate the following question “The stress level at work is reasonable.”

Top 10 Drivers of Work Stress for Men

1. I am paid fairly for the work I do.
2. My organization has appropriate processes in place for me to report a policy violation.
3. I feel there is a promising future for me at my company.
4. I feel free to try new things on my job, even though my efforts may not succeed.
5. I like the kind of work I do.
6. My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.
7. In my company, employees are encouraged to participate in making decisions that affect their work.
8. I have confidence in my company’s senior leaders.
9. When my company’s senior management says something, you can believe its true.
10. Senior management demonstrates that employees are important to the success of the company.

Top 10 Drivers of Work Stress for Women

1. I am paid fairly for the work I do.
2. All employees, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and culture have equal opportunities for advancement.
3. Where I work, ethical issues and concerns can be discussed without negative consequences.
4. My company strives to serve the interests of multiple stakeholders (e.g., customers, employees, suppliers and community), not just the shareholders.
5. I feel there is a promising future for me at my company.
6. My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.
7. I get excited about my work.
8. I excel at my job.
9. My performance on the job is evaluated fairly.
10. Senior management is committed to providing high quality products and services to external customers.

Across occupations, more often women reported unreasonable amounts of stress than men did, with the largest difference between men and women being in front-line supervisory roles (10% more women rate their work stress as unreasonable), service and production jobs (8%) and middle and upper management (6%) (see Figure 1).

Fifty-six percent of women indicate that their “stress level was reasonable,” while more than a quarter of women (26%) felt that their work stress has reached unreasonable levels. Fifty-eight percent of men indicate that their “stress level was reasonable,” while 22% of men felt that their work stress has reached unreasonable levels (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Work Stress by Job Type

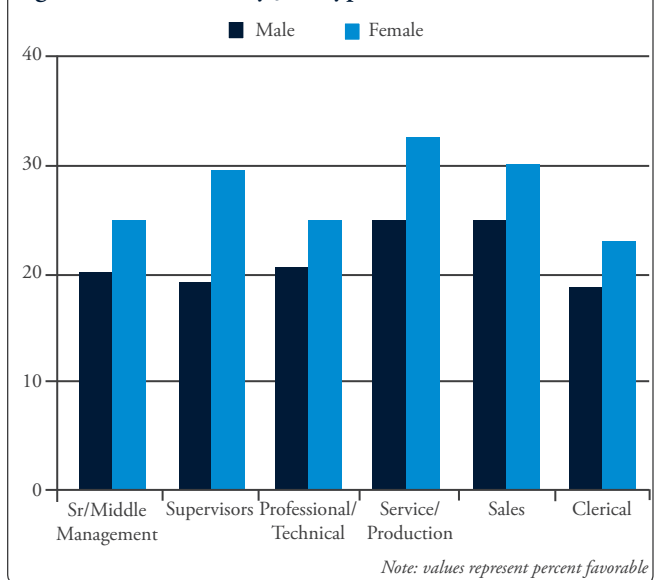


Figure 2: Stress Levels by Gender

	Male	Female
Unfavorable	22	26
Favorable	58	56

About Kenexa

Kenexa provides business solutions for human resources. We help global organizations multiply business success by identifying the best individuals for every job and fostering optimal work environments for every organization. For more than 20 years, Kenexa has studied human behavior and team dynamics in the workplace, and has developed the software solutions, business processes and expert consulting that help organizations impact positive business outcomes through HR. Kenexa is the only company that offers a comprehensive suite of unified products and services that support the entire employee lifecycle from pre-hire to exit.

Media Contact

Jennifer Meyer, Kenexa
 1.800.391.9557
 jennifer.meyer@kenexa.com

