

# Stress levels grow as more demands placed on workers, study finds

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Remedy: Elfa Moraitakis found help in yoga. Photo: James Alcock

Such was her laundry list of niggling work stresses, welfare centre manager Elfa Moraitakis would be wide-eyed at 3am each day, her mind in a ferment.

Worrying about elderly clients, funding submissions, deadlines and staff, she would "wake up already thinking about work. I became an insomniac ... it was one of the worst periods of my life," she said. "All this stuff is piling up and we don't give ourselves the time we need to breathe like normal human beings."

Research by The Australian Institute think tank due for release on Monday suggests millions can relate to Ms Moraitakis' plight.

Initial findings of the report *Hard To Get a Break?* showed more than half of those surveyed were unhappy with their work hours, and an estimated 2.9 million lose sleep due to work stress.

The fifth annual survey conducted with beyondblue found the number of dissatisfied workers had grown since last year.

Rhetoric around flexible workplaces and the advantages of new technology often did not match reality, the study found.

"The current labour environment is creating high levels of stress, depression and poor sleep patterns for many Australians with adverse effects on their health, family life and relationships," it said. This undermined "the national goal for greater economic productivity".

More than 1400 people chose to participate in the survey, about 800 of whom were in paid work.

The amount of unpaid overtime workers "donated" to employers has also jumped from about \$72 billion in 2009 to \$110 billion - or almost eight hours a week for full-time workers - the report said.

While many feel overworked, the problem of "underwork" is also pervasive. About 28 per cent of people are working more hours than they want to, while 24 per cent want to work more hours, the report showed.

University of Canberra psychology lecturer Brett Scholz, who specialises in men's mental health, said those who felt under-utilised could become stressed or depressed.

"Some men who have been demoted, lost their job or suffered a workplace injury ... sometimes they are sitting around feeling a bit superfluous," he said.

Ms Moraitakis, 47, of Casula, turned to yoga, Reiki and meditation to lower her stress levels and takes regular weekend breaks away.

Her sleep patterns have since returned to normal and her personal relationships have transformed.

"My family is so much happier because I go home and find myself ... trying to pick them up with my positive attitude, which was very different a year ago," she said.

Thrive Life Education coach Craig Scott said workplace stress was "reaching epidemic proportions".

It could be caused by "bullying, feeling trapped or not living up to what they could be doing, or that it's all cut throat and there is no recognition for the effort they put in," he said.

The survey was released as part of [Go Home on Time Day](#). The Australia Institute is encouraging workplaces to take part on November 20.

**Poll: Is your sleep suffering due to work stress?**

Yes 84%  
No 16%

Total votes: 1834. [CAST YOUR VOTE](#) | Poll closes in 8 days.

**Disclaimer:** These polls are not scientific and reflect the opinion only of visitors who have chosen to participate.

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« «

»In Australia you always feel the job is unsecured, people don't take ownership of their work, most of the companies keep talking about the reducing work and resources the year round. Companies put lot of expectations on the employees without giving them the confidence of belonging ness. Other factors such as school holidays, daylight savings, child are add more stress .«

» «

Jason | September 30, 2013, 6:44AM

« «

»Quite true, Australian job security ranks among the lowest in the world. What we really should aim for is an employment paradise, maybe somewhere like Cuba.«

»«

**Where it's at** | September 30, 2013, 8:54AM

« «

»Our working hours have grown exponentially yet we still only have the traditional 2 day weekend. As times change we should also change and to offset the average 55 - 60 hours a week most professionals work the weekend should now be extended to include the second half of Fridays. This would then give people half a day to do the mandatory house chores, shopping and other weekend distractions allowing for a full 2 days relaxation. As a society we have put so much emphasis on the working week without even considering the mental impact of these added hours. Businesses like to expout the work life balance motto but certainly do very little to help in achieving that. The first positive step would be for the weekend to start at 12pm on a Friday. Also for the poor people that work on weekends we should look at going back to basics and all shops shut by 12 noon on both Saturdays and Sundays. Time to slow the pace down a little for everyone!!«

»«

**Terry** | Sydney September 30, 2013, 6:50AM

« «

»The biggest epidemics around workplaces are surely hysteria related. Do we not remember the chronic pain syndrome epidemic? Where did that phenomenon go? «

»How is it that government workers fear losing their jobs and work place bullying more than private sector workers (those that can be fired or have far lesser appeals and rules based processes of redress than public sector workers)? «

»Many of us have observed symptoms that suggest that inefficient or dysfunctional workplaces are at the heart of all these syndromes. There is noting worse than having a job you are ashamed of or are contributing less than you feel you should because that is the cultural norm of the place. «

»Government addressing poor productivity and inefficiency with its internal operations and boondoggle cost plus (crony capitalist) schemes for its outsourced operations would be the best start in improving overall work place stress.«

»«

**archivista** | September 30, 2013, 6:50AM

« «

»You seem to focus on old stereotypes. Well try this one: I bet you are a Coalition voter, probably in middle to upper management, who believes that unions and workers have contributed to any perceived inefficiency in the 21st C«

»The reason you don't hear about chronic pain syndrome, RSI an the like is because the underlying problems were addressed by introducing better work practices, not because workers found something else to complain about.«

»If you have been following the election at all, and perhaps every election for the last 20 years, the first target that governments focus on to reduce government spending is the public service.No wonder their expectations of job security are low.«

»This is not the 1980s. The days of the idle public service and boondoggling have long passed. It is more likely that they are subject to stress of overwork due to slashes in staffing.«

»«

**stevek** | Sydney September 30, 2013, 8:48AM

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»If personal finances are a serious stressor, there's the place to start. Why do we work? To fund our lifestyles; asking ourselves to truthfully identify what factors in our lifestyles are costly in \$ terms, and honestly planning what is needed to reduce that burden is a top start. Being a self-funded retiree I thank the advice my parents gave me ... to live within one's means, and not to bend to what can mostly only be coveted.«

»«

**biggles2001** | Rockhampton September 30, 2013, 7:06AM

« «

»Summed up perfectly Biggles2001!«

»«

**Janie1** | September 30, 2013, 8:01AM

« «

»Second that!«

»«

**RA22** | September 30, 2013, 9:02AM

»«

»The old moral hazzard argument - No doubt there are some who are profligate with their 'lifestyles' or overreach their capacity, but the vast majority of workers live within their means and must pay the high rents and mortgages that self-funded retirees have benefited from«

»«

**Distopia** | September 30, 2013, 9:57AM

»«

»Work stress is eroding work life balance. Organisations should allow at least once a week option for working from Home using technology where ever possible with right checks and balances. That will save on travel time and reduce congestion on trains/bus/roads and reduce green house ( considering many drive). Organisations should also evaluate ways in improving productivity and reducing long working hours and provide more job security to allow employees to concentrate on work rather than on losing job and stop the greed for more and more profits.«

»«

**Good Worker** | Sydney September 30, 2013, 7:38AM

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