

Anxiety And Stress In The Workplace



ANXIETY AND STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

A day of worry is more exhausting than a week of work.
– John Lubbock, English statesman, banker, scientist and polymath

Most people feel stressed, anxious or worried at some point during their day. In small amounts, stress or worry can be a good thing. A new deadline at work or an upcoming performance review can motivate us to stop procrastinating and work harder on the task at hand. As the English writer Samuel Johnson aptly noted, “When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.”

Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a public health crisis; it is, for some, a mental health crisis. Social distancing, unemployment and daily discussions of the toll of COVID-19 have increased worry and stress. The workplace is just, for the lack of a better word, different. While we may have found humor in a co-worker forgetting to mute him- or herself on Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype or Zoom, many of us found little to smile about from needing to work remotely, having reduced hours or being furloughed or unemployed due to the recession. Work in the reopened economy, for now, includes temperature checks, masks, plexiglass shields and restrictions on breakrooms and other common spaces.

Approximately 70% of workplace anxiety and stress costs arise from lost productivity (e.g., sickness absence, leaving the workforce early) and about 30% come from direct medical costs borne by health care systems. In 2016, the estimated annual cost per worker of workplace anxiety and stress in the United States was \$1,212.¹ Extending this result, we estimate that workplace anxiety and stress cost the Hampton Roads economy \$1.1 billion in 2019.

Uncertainty and a sense of helplessness associated with COVID-19 and social distancing led to increased anxiety among some Hampton Roads residents.² In March, in the midst of the pandemic, Gary Rotfus, a licensed clinical social worker in Virginia Beach, noted, “This is going to be a prolonged crisis and that’s probably the most difficult part of coping with it. That’s a challenge for all of us.” Therapists across Hampton Roads reported more patients asking about how to deal with anxiety and isolation resulting from the need to socially distance from family, friends and co-workers. Louis Miller, a clinical psychologist in Norfolk, said, “Anxiety takes us away from where we actually are, down the road where you don’t want to go.” Miller, who works with clients on improving mindfulness, further noted, “You have to focus on the right here, right now.”

1 J. Hassard, K.R. Teoh, G. Visockaite, P. Dewe and T. Cox, (2018), “The cost of work-related stress to society: A systematic review,” *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 23, 1-17, doi: 10.1037/ocp0000069.

2 Katherine Hafner, “How to deal with the stress of coronavirus? Hampton Roads therapists offer advice as they move to virtual appointments,” *The Virginian-Pilot* (March 23, 2020).

The costs of workplace anxiety and stress extend beyond lost productivity due to workers taking sick days or medical leave. At least half of all employees spend an hour a week at work worrying, and one-fifth spend five or more hours a week consumed by worrying thoughts.³ With approximately 830,000 workers in Hampton Roads, worry and anxiety consumed over 60 million labor hours in 2019. Often these work-related feelings occur at home too. Employees in Hampton Roads believe that companies are moving at a faster pace, and with technology allowing us to work from almost anywhere, we are worried about falling behind and then anxious because we need to respond immediately to our boss, co-workers or customers.⁴

In this chapter, we define and differentiate anxiety, worry and stress as these conditions relate to workers and organizations. We explore who is more likely to feel worried and anxious because of work and how this impacts productivity and the bottom line. Most of the chapter focuses on subclinical levels of anxiety, meaning we discuss the milder levels of anxiety that people may feel periodically, as opposed to anxiety that reaches a clinical level requiring medication or therapy. We also focus on worker perspectives instead of organizational initiatives or policies. In addition, we address anxiety caused by work itself or typical workplace dynamics (e.g., concerns about work performance). For most of this chapter, we do not specifically focus on anxiety coming from other sources, such as feeling anxious about personal or family issues, although these feelings can spill over into the workplace. However, we close the chapter discussing more extreme circumstances, such as how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced employers and employees in Hampton Roads. Although successfully resolving these issues is hardly as easy as the song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” might suggest, we conclude with recommendations for individuals and employers in the area.

3 <https://www.coloniallife.com/about/newsroom/2019/march/stressed-workers-costing-employers-billions>.

4 https://www.pilotonline.com/inside-business/article_bf28a5de-a819-11e9-8992-27fe096076b6.html.

A Primer On Workplace Anxiety And Stress

Workplace well-being can mean a lot of things. For some organizations, well-being is all about reducing the number of workplace accidents or addressing other safety issues. For other organizations, well-being means having high levels of employee engagement or job satisfaction. But what about other aspects of well-being, such as employees feeling worried or anxious at work or about work? Workplace well-being is such an all-encompassing term, covering topics ranging from occupational safety to employee wellness programs, that it’s not as useful for analysis. We focus instead on workplace anxiety and stress.

Stress, worry and anxiety are often used interchangeably in the workplace; however, there are subtle but important differences to understand. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines stress as an emotional response that has a physical manifestation (like an elevated heart rate or sweating) and an external trigger.⁵ Triggers may include a short-term work deadline or a long-term span of unemployment. The external trigger can create a “fight or flight” response in our bodies.

On the other hand, worry is a cognitive process and does not require an external trigger. Worry occurs when one dwells on a potential negative outcome. Worry, by itself, does not induce a physical response in our bodies. A worker who is consumed with thoughts about potential layoffs may be less productive or make poor decisions that lead to an actual negative outcome.

Anxiety encompasses worry and includes a physical response. Whereas worry consists of repetitive negative thoughts, anxiety constitutes these thoughts and a physical manifestation of these thoughts. An individual suffering from anxiety may exhibit physical strains such as tension, headaches or heart palpitations.⁶ Anxiety, however, is more generalized and persistent than stress and does not have a specific external trigger. Anxiety, unlike stress, persists even when deadlines are met or sales are made. An individual with anxiety

5 <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress-anxiety-difference>.

6 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/26/smarter-living/the-difference-between-worry-stress-and-anxiety.html>.

may exhibit symptoms regardless of circumstances. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, there is a high level of self-reported anxiety symptoms in the U.S. **Overall, 72% of individuals who have daily stress and anxiety report that this interferes with their daily lives in some way, and approximately 9% of adults are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.**⁷

Why We Should Worry About Anxiety At Work

How organizations respond to concerns about anxiety and stress depends on a range of factors. In many military units, an ethos of “embrace the suck” exists – in other words, “This is bad, we know, deal with it.” Cavalier attitudes toward workplace anxiety and stress may lead to an environment that is hazardous to employees and the organization.

Attitudes toward anxiety and stress vary by organization. Police officers who reported higher levels of workplace anxiety earned lower job performance evaluations from their supervisors.⁸ Workers with higher levels of workplace anxiety were more likely to ruminate about work events when at home and were also rated as being less helpful by their co-workers.⁹ The impact of anxiety also includes individuals in the C-Suite, a term describing a business organization’s most senior executives. CEOs with higher work-related anxiety take fewer strategic risks. Furthermore, these CEOs surround themselves with supportive individuals, inhibiting their ability to recognize and respond to potential threats.¹⁰ All of these studies show that even milder, subclinical levels of anxiety still impact organizations.

⁷ <https://adaa.org/workplace-stress-anxiety-disorders-survey>.

⁸ J.M. McCarthy, J.P. Trougakos and B.H. Cheng, (2016), “Are anxious workers less productive workers? It depends on the quality of social exchange,” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101, 279-291, doi: 10.1037/apl0000044.

⁹ C. Calderwood, A.A. Bennett, A.S. Gabriel, J.P. Trougakos and J.J. Dahling, (2018), “Too anxious to help? Off-job affective rumination as a linking mechanism between work anxiety and helping,” *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 91, 681-687, doi: 10.1111/joop.12220.

¹⁰ M.J. Mannor, A.J. Wowak, V.O. Bartkus and L.R. Gomez-Mejia, (2016), “Heavy lies the crown? How job anxiety affects top executive decision making in gain and loss contexts,” *Strategic Management Journal*, 37, 1968-1989, doi: 10.1002/smj.2425.

A pair of deadly collisions at sea in 2017 led the U.S. Navy to the realization that its seafaring culture had fallen into a sense of complacency. Sailors were arriving at the fleet without basic seamanship skills.¹¹ “We’re not even training them to be sailors” was a refrain that U.S.-based officers were hearing from ships in the fleet.

With gaps in personnel and maintenance, sailors were asked to do more with less, leading to extended watches, poor training and increased levels of stress and anxiety. To change the culture, the Navy realized it needed to shift its focus, starting with Recruit Training Command. Not only is the Navy now emphasizing basic skills, it is also tackling the “tough it out” mentality that may have led to excessive risk-taking.

Classroom-based instruction on computers has been de-emphasized and replaced with practical evolutions – that is, the skills and techniques of basic seafaring, including firefighting, standing watch, navigation and other core competencies. The basic course is now tougher, with higher attrition, but the outcomes are better-prepared and more resilient sailors.

¹¹ Lauren Weber, “How the Navy Revamped Boot Camp,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 2020.

Not all the news is bad. Individuals who learned to reframe anxiety into a positive emotion experienced improved performance. By taking control of worrisome thoughts and redirecting them toward excitement, they created a more positive mindset about the potentially anxiety-inducing event.¹² Furthermore, supporting individuals who were experiencing anxiety did not lead to lower performance. While there may be times to “tough it out,” an accumulating body of evidence illustrates the negative consequences of keeping employees in a perpetual state of stress. Employers who are proactive may find benefits in terms of improved employee morale and, over time, increased productivity.

Chris Shelton is the co-owner of two businesses: Cure Coffeehouse in Norfolk and Smithfield and Cureo Coffee Liqueur. He’s also the former executive director of Startwheel, a nonprofit organization focused on mobilizing entrepreneurial growth in Hampton Roads. Shelton says, “You’re always worried about something when you own a business – it could be whether a new product will traction in the market, if profit margins are high enough to keep supporting employees or what’s going to happen next with the economy.” However, these worries don’t stall him. Instead, his mindset is that these concerns also represent possible opportunities for growth. The COVID-19 pandemic has created anxiety and stress among business owners, and Shelton and his staff responded with an entrepreneurial mindset. They recognized there were a lot of things beyond their control, including when the coffee shops could reopen inside for customers, but they worked hard and found new ways to deliver products and services that could generate revenue during both normal and abnormal situations.

¹² A.W. Brooks, (2014), “Get excited: Reappraising pre-performance anxiety as excitement,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143, 1144-1158, doi: 10.1037/a0035325.

Who Is More Likely To Be Worried About Work?

Although there is a large amount of national-level data about the prevalence of clinically diagnosed anxiety (in the form of generalized anxiety disorder and other anxiety-related disorders, such as social anxiety disorder), there is less information about the prevalence of anxiety and worry in the overall population. Graph 1 displays responses to the National Health Interview Survey from 2010-2018. While the percentage of respondents who reported being worried, anxious or nervous was mostly stable over time, there were signs that more people were anxious in recent years, with 63% of U.S. adults having at least some level of worry, nervousness or anxiety in 2018. Graph 2 highlights the frequency of how often individuals felt worried, nervous or anxious in 2018.

The last national survey that examined workplace worry and anxiety was in 2010. Although dated, it found that 30.2% of all individuals reported feeling some level of tension and anxiety on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. In general, more than 70% of these individuals who felt some worry and anxiety also believed that everybody has these feelings and that they are a normal part of life. Related to the study which found reframing can be beneficial, the 2010 survey found that 37.5% of individuals who felt some anxiety or worry also believed this was a positive feeling which helped them be productive and accomplish goals.

Of those who felt at least some regularly occurring anxiety, more than 31% said that this feeling of worry and anxiety was caused by the amount or type of work they were doing. Males reported feeling more worried about work than females by a 37.9% to 28.6% margin (Graph 3).

Examining differences by age, Graph 4 reveals that working individuals in the 30-39 age range reported the highest frequency of feeling worried because of work. Feelings of worry about work generally increased over time in one’s 20s and 30s and then decreased over time until retirement. There are likely many explanations for this trend, including employment stability and increased

tenure within an organization, as well as anxiety and worry occurring from other sources, such as children, other family members or personal health.

There also were differences regarding how many people reported feeling worried because of work in relation to levels of household income. Almost half of the individuals with household incomes over \$100,000 per year responded that they were worried because of work (Graph 5), whereas less than one quarter of individuals with household incomes under \$35,000 per year felt that their worry was caused by the amount or type of work they do. Money may not buy happiness but a different set of worries.

There are a number of potential explanations for why the source of worry differs by household income. Relatively low-income households may experience worry and anxiety in terms of food, housing and job security.¹³ If you are worried about where your next meal comes from or making the monthly rent payment, concerns about work, transportation and even health care may seem trivial in comparison. The immediacy of the “now” triumphs over longer-term concerns.

Relatively higher-income households may experience worry and anxiety in terms of health care, education costs and pressures to “keep up” with the neighbors.¹⁴ Access to reliable sources of food and housing are less of a concern for these households because employment is relatively secure. While the sources of anxiety and worry may be different, the end result is the same.

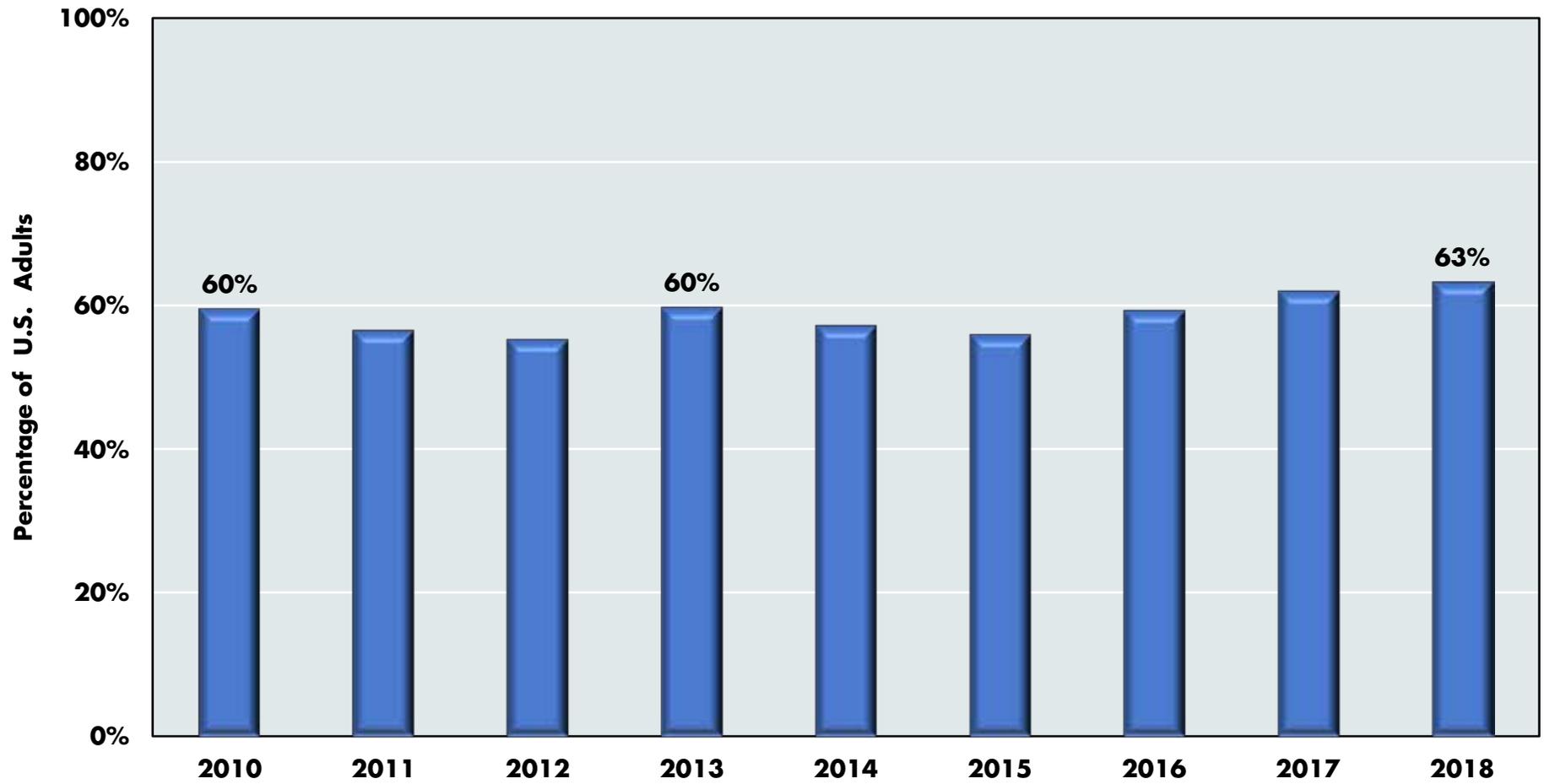
Most people feel nervous about starting a new job. Kate Brinn, president of Bon Secours Maryview Medical Center in Portsmouth and Harbour View Medical Campus in Suffolk, recalls feeling anxious about this experience. “I was nervous about making sure I created the time to get to know people. I think that is the hardest part of starting any new job. In this new position, there are over a thousand people on our staff, and it’s my responsibility to get to know them and what they need so I can help us all grow together.” Then, just 12 days after Brinn started her new job, the governor, on March 12, declared a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “There were suddenly so many more things to think about. I was already so emotionally invested in all of the people, both associates and patients, in our hospital that I wasn’t sleeping well. Fortunately, with national guidance and our amazing team, we quickly put together an emergency operation plan that made sense for our community. Knowing we had a plan in place that we could communicate and implement, built confidence that we could manage this, and I think it helped others too.”

¹³ <https://adaa.org/low-income-communities>.

¹⁴ <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2014/stress-report.pdf>.

GRAPH 1

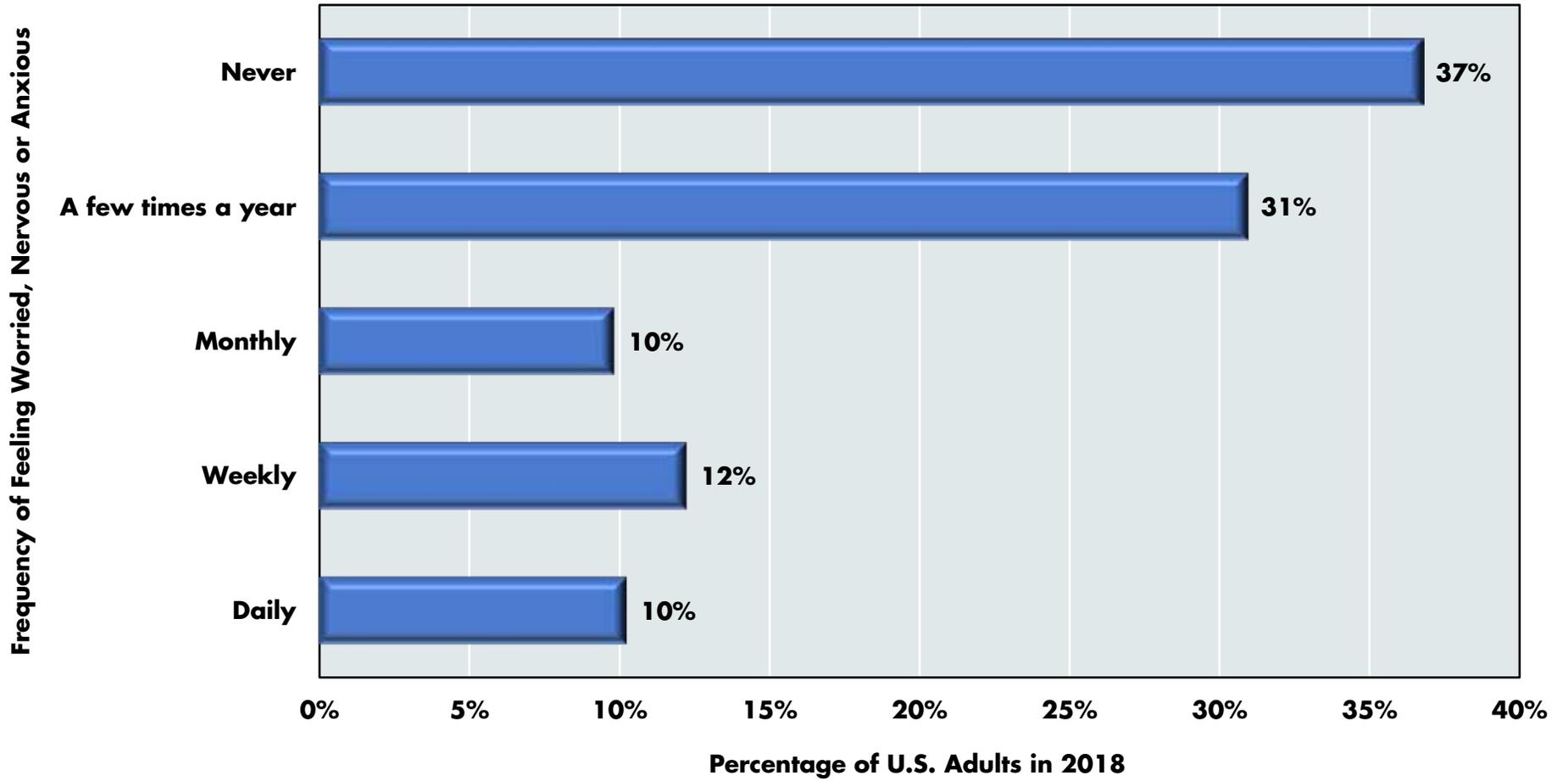
PERCENTAGE OF U.S. ADULTS WHO FEEL WORRIED, NERVOUS OR ANXIOUS, 2010-2018



Source: IPUMS Health Surveys: National Health Interview Survey, <https://nhis.ipums.org/>

GRAPH 2

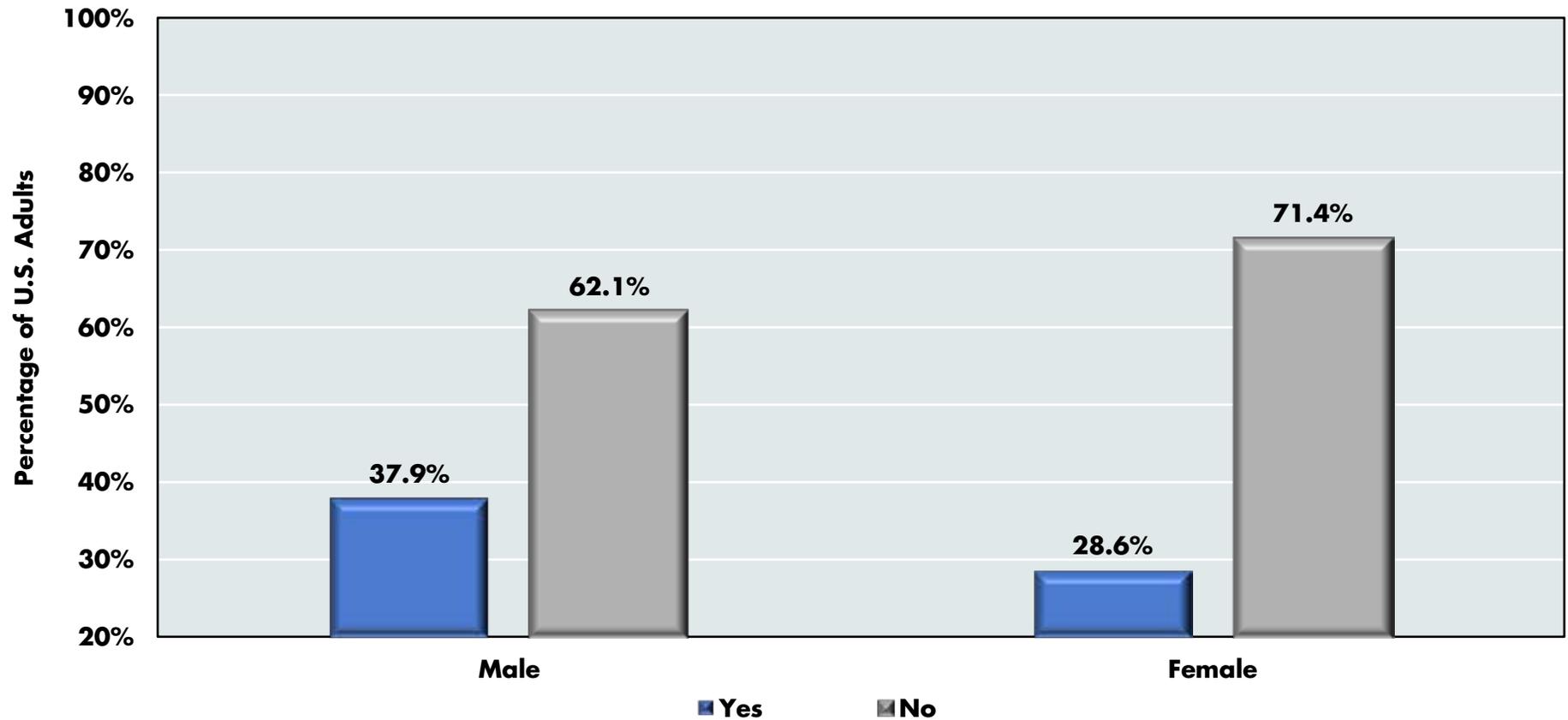
PERCENTAGE OF HOW OFTEN U.S. ADULTS FELT WORRIED, NERVOUS OR ANXIOUS IN 2018



Source: IPUMS Health Surveys: National Health Interview Survey, <https://nhis.ipums.org/>

GRAPH 3

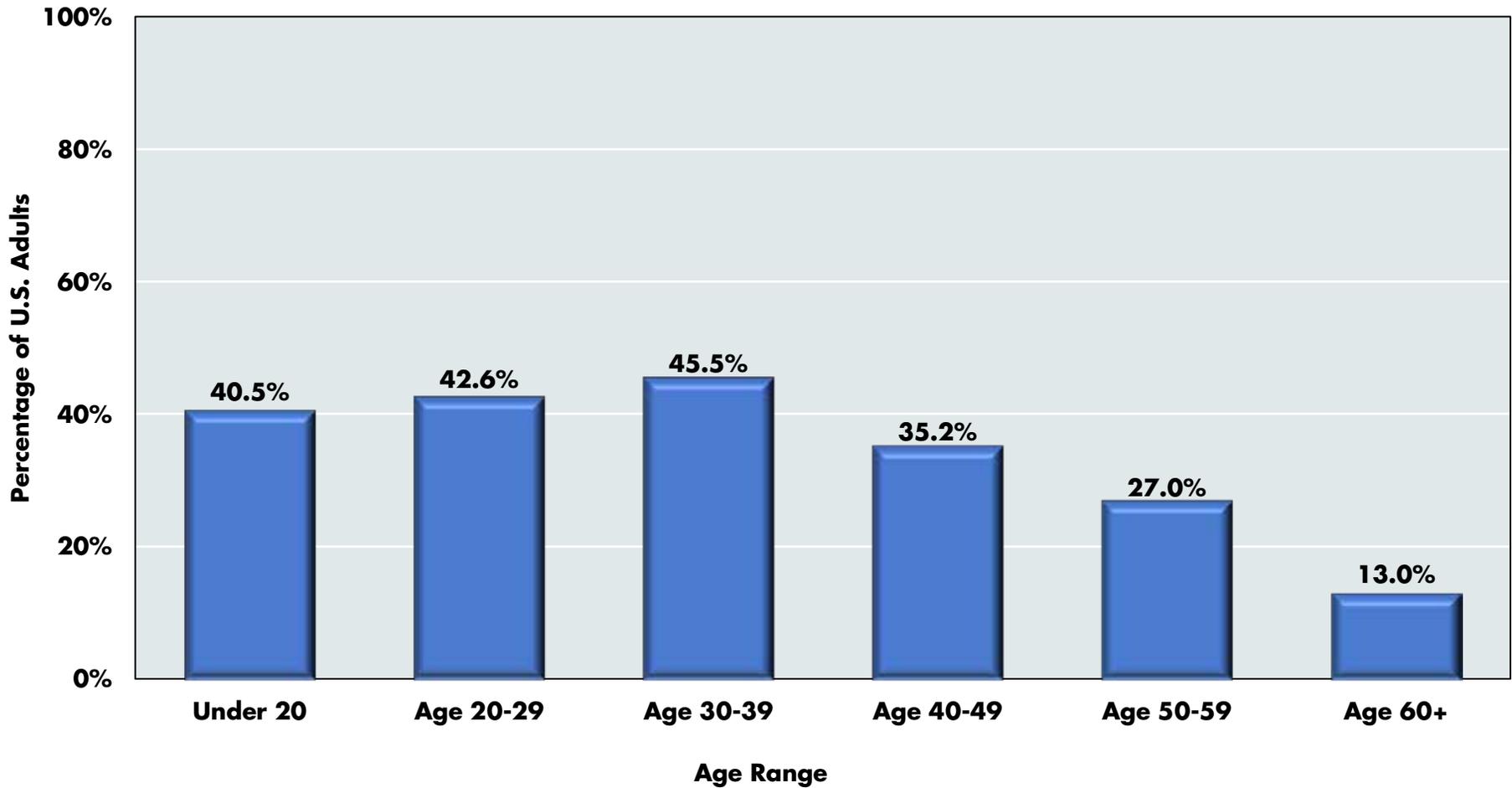
**PERCENT OF ADULTS REPORTING FEELINGS OF WORRY CAUSED BY AMOUNT AND TYPE OF WORK:
UNITED STATES, 2010**



Source: IPUMS Health Surveys: National Health Interview Survey, <https://nhis.ipums.org/>

GRAPH 4

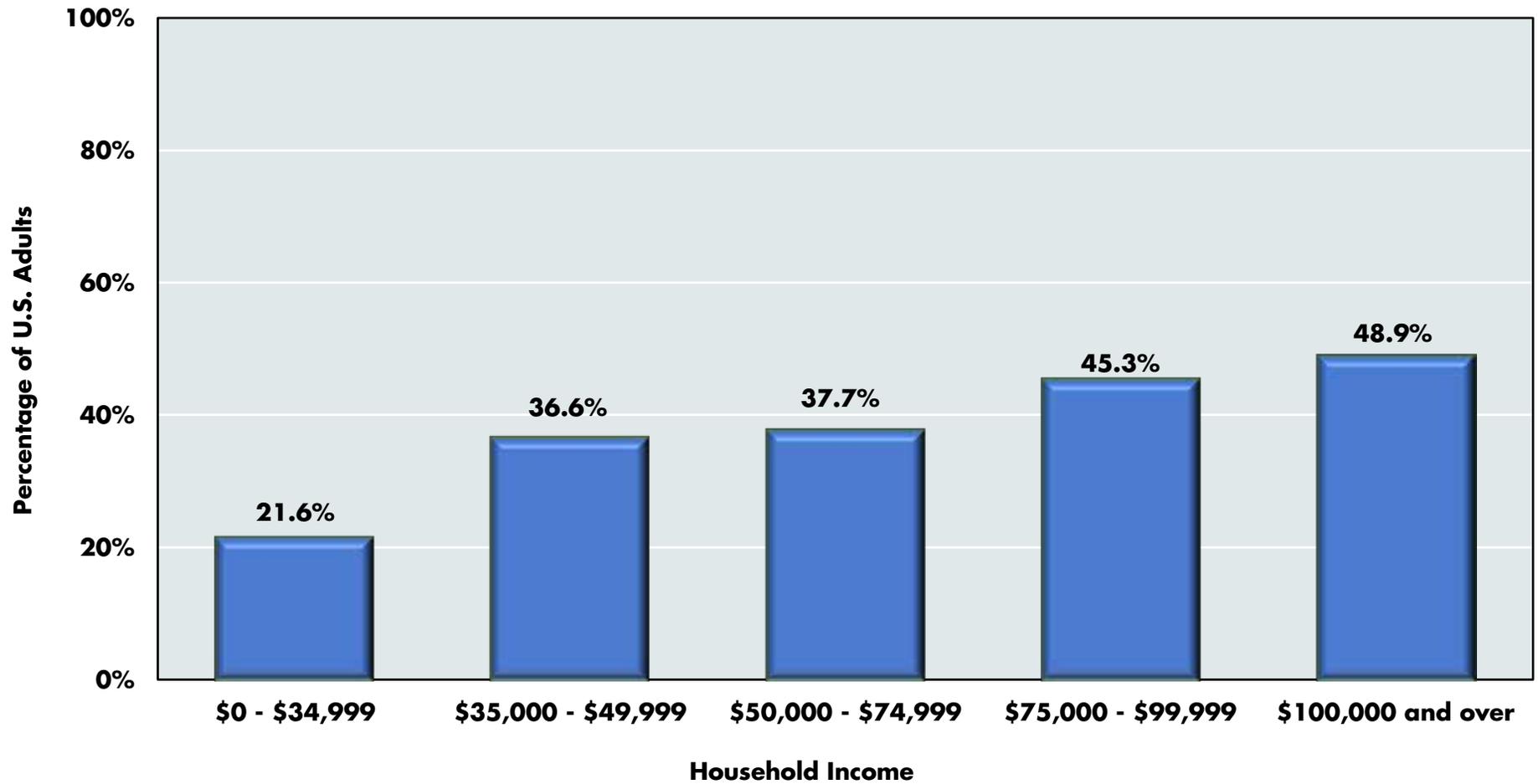
**PERCENT OF ADULTS REPORTING FEELINGS OF WORRY CAUSED BY AMOUNT AND TYPE OF WORK BY AGE GROUP:
UNITED STATES, 2010**



Source: IPUMS Health Surveys: National Health Interview Survey, <https://nhis.ipums.org/>

GRAPH 5

**PERCENT OF ADULTS REPORTING FEELINGS OF WORRY CAUSED BY AMOUNT AND TYPE OF WORK BY INCOME:
UNITED STATES, 2010**



Source: IPUMS Health Surveys: National Health Interview Survey, <https://nhis.ipums.org/>

Race and Anxiety In The Workplace

Workplace stress and anxiety are undoubtedly affected by the environment in which work takes place. Black and African American men, for example, are more likely than white or Hispanic men to work in low-complexity jobs that include exposure to stressors, such as shift work, a lack of health insurance, longer hours and job volatility. Individuals in a work environment characterized by a combination of high demands (tasks, hours, risks) and low control (low autonomy, flexibility, discretion) have a 34% higher risk of mortality than individuals in a low-demand, high-control environment.¹⁵ In Graph 6, we present estimates from research in 2016 regarding the expected loss in life expectancy due to workplace conditions for individuals with a high school education or less. Blacks, African Americans and Hispanics have statistically significantly higher estimated losses than whites with comparable education.¹⁶

One potential remedy for the disparities displayed in Graph 6 is education. Ideally, as education increased, individuals would transition from high-demand/low-control work to low-demand/high-control work. In other words, education would empower individuals and, as a result, lower workplace anxiety and stress.

Yet, research suggests that while education can reduce disparities, it also does not entirely eliminate them. Racial differences persist even after controlling for differences in socio-economic characteristics. In other words, education alone cannot address the systemic problems that contributed to the disparities in the first place.

The American Psychological Association's 2017 report, *Stress and Health Disparities*, noted that there are not only economic disparities at work, but also network disparities.¹⁷ Job security, stability and nonwage compensation have declined for low-wage earners. The report notes that from 1982 to 1996, among individuals in the 10th percentile of income or lower, there was a 75% decline in nonwage compensation (benefits, including health insurance). With lower socioeconomic-status individuals relying more on familial connections than business connections, the ability to move up the economic ladder is diminished, increasing economic stress. The APA report notes: "Prejudice and discrimination affect the ability to accumulate social, personal, educational, and material capital." Without this capital, lower-income and minority households are less able to adapt to changes in the workplace and are left further behind.

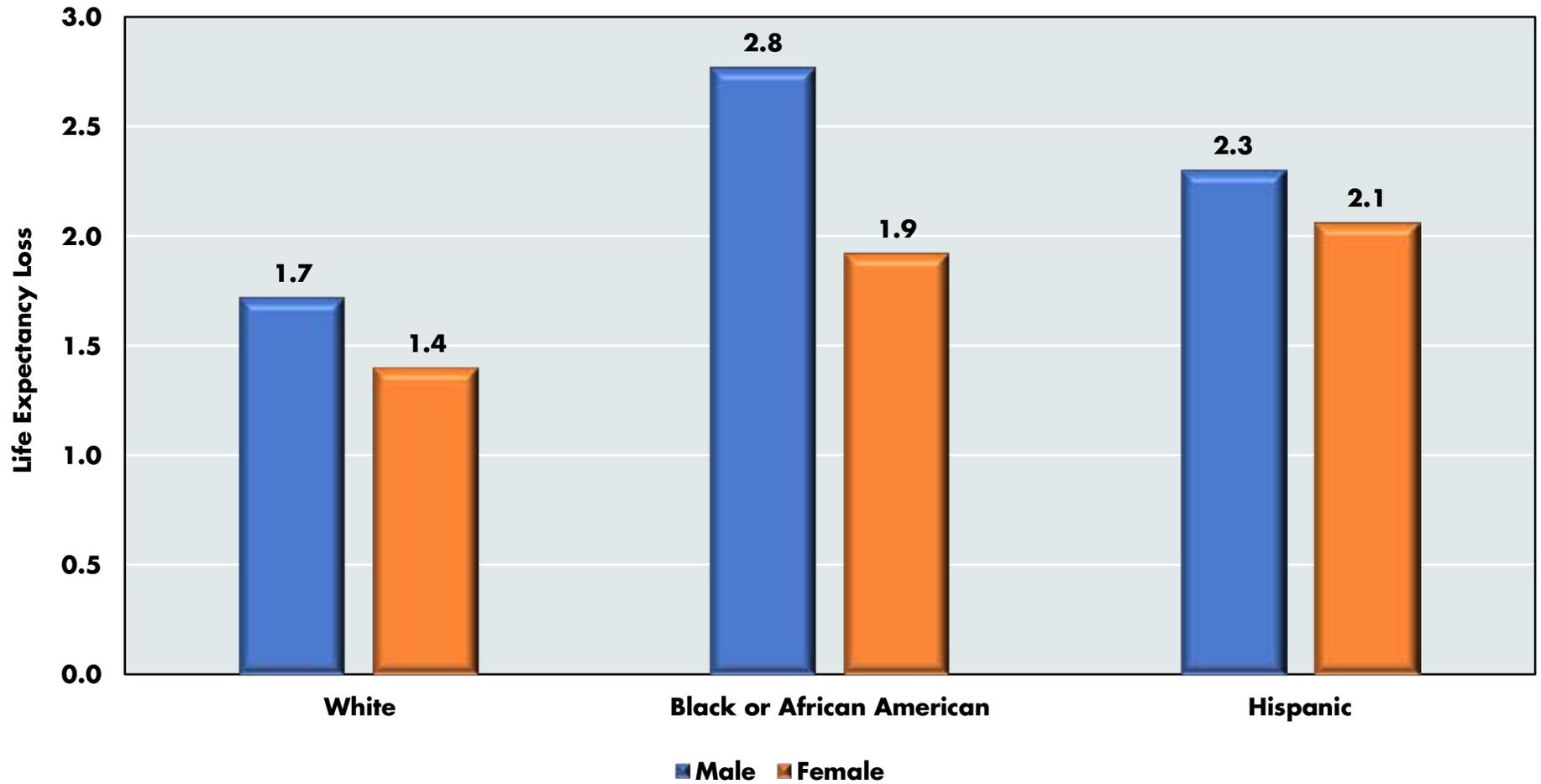
¹⁵ E. Gonzalez-Mulé and B. Cockburn, (2017), "Worked to Death: The Relationships of Job Demands and Job Control with Mortality," *Personnel Psychology*, 70: 73-112. doi:10.1111/peps.12206.

¹⁶ J. Goh, J. Pfeffer and S. Zenios, "Exposure to harmful workplace practices could account for inequality in life spans across different demographic groups," *Health Affairs*, 2015;34(10):1761-1768. 10.1377/hlthaff.2015.002210.1377/hlthaff.2015.0022.

¹⁷ <https://www.apa.org/pi/health-disparities/resources/stress-report.pdf>.

GRAPH 6

ESTIMATED LOSS IN LIFE EXPECTANCY DUE TO WORKPLACE CONDITIONS, HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS EDUCATION



Source: J. Goh, J. Pfeffer and S. Zenios (2015)

Worry And Anxiety About Work During A Crisis

As we saw during the early months of 2020, a public health crisis can quickly place many workers in unfamiliar situations. For some employees, working remotely for the first time while juggling family demands increased anxiety. Others found themselves out of work and needing to file for unemployment benefits. These drastic shifts in working arrangements caused half of adults in the country to believe that the COVID-19 crisis would negatively impact their work or workplace.¹⁸ It is not surprising that a Pew Research Study found that nearly twice as many U.S. adults reported feeling anxious and worried in March 2020 than during the same period in 2018.¹⁹ Nor is it surprising that individuals who experienced job loss or a work reduction during COVID-19 reported more feelings of anxiety than those whose job status did not change.²⁰

Worry and concern about health during a global pandemic seems natural, but just as the national data found there were many sources of worry, we argue that the crisis caused a sizable increase in anxiety and worry. The specific causes of worry were likely different as individuals throughout the labor force faced this crisis. For Virginians in the hospitality and service industries,²¹ anxiety likely arose out of concerns about future income, paying bills without consistent income and how to file for unemployment benefits. For Virginians who maintained employment, a previous worry about a possible confrontation with a co-worker or boss was less likely to occur as employees changed work environments. Instead, new worries appeared in our lives, such as how to complete work at home while attending to other demands for attention (like children) or feeling anxious about completing work tasks without all of the traditional means of support just a few steps away. The old worries didn't go away; they just took a back seat to new concerns as major adjustments to work were made.

18 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/295508/half-workers-expect-covid-harm-workplace.aspx>.

19 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/30/people-financially-affected-by-covid-19-outbreak-are-experiencing-more-psychological-distress-than-others/>.

20 <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/returning-to-resilience-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-behavioral-health#>.

21 <https://www.pilotonline.com/business/vp-bz-unemployment-claims-20200326-5lgylij4ybaivc5sesethrntm-story.html>.

It is also important to recognize that as work changed from on-site to remote (or off-site) work, a major concern among employers was the potential for employees to experience increased loneliness due to working at home.²² In a time of social distancing and stay-at-home orders, many of us miss human contact. Virtual meetings and phone calls don't provide the same stimuli that we need, such as a high-five, hug or handshake.²³

Other critical moments in recent history also have impacted workplace well-being and employee mental health. For example, more than three-quarters of U.S. adults have experienced some stress caused by the possibility of a mass shooting.²⁴ The aftermath of these horrific events can be catastrophic to individuals and costly to organizations too. At least 450 city of Virginia Beach employees filed workers' compensation claims after the 2019 mass shooting, mostly for mental health reasons.²⁵ Whether it is feeling fearful about a virus, worried about a mass shooting or anxious about some other major event, it is normal for people to feel this way. A crisis causes us to react and change, and those changes can be difficult. According to the World Health Organization, work can be good for mental health. We agree with this belief, perhaps especially during or after a crisis. Work can create a sense of purpose and meaning and can force us to create routines and return to a sense of normalcy. A positive work environment with supportive co-workers and supervisors can help alleviate feelings of worry and anxiety for some people, and we encourage everyone to be the supportive colleague that you would want to have during a time of change.

22 <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/268076/manage-loneliness-isolation-remote-workers.aspx>.

23 <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/02/health/coronavirus-human-contact-wellness-intl/index.html>.

24 <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2019/08/fear-mass-shooting>.

25 <https://www.pilotonline.com/news/virginia-beach-mass-shooting/vp-nw-ptsd-workers-compensation-20191208-prczwn6wzcs7jlywat4a3gwwm-story.html>.

The Cost Of Worry In Hampton Roads

How much do worry and anxiety cost? In 2016, researchers estimated that the cost of workplace anxiety and worry to the U.S. economy was \$1,212 per worker annually, or \$1,314 in 2019 dollars.²⁶ Using data on individual employment, we estimate that worry and anxiety in the workplace cost the region approximately \$1.1 billion in 2019. In other words, if Hampton Roads was worry- and anxiety-free in the workplace, its economic activity may have increased by up to 1% in 2019.

Worry and anxiety in the workplace are not cheap. These conditions reduce productivity, which, in turn, reduces profitability. If employees are worried or anxious about their jobs, their focus is elsewhere; mistakes accrue and business suffers. Worry and anxiety also have physical manifestations. Employees may call in sick or seek medical attention. These behaviors may drive up insurance premiums. Businesses cannot simply hope that worry and anxiety go well; they need to be proactive in addressing employee well-being and mental health.

TABLE 1
ESTIMATED COST OF WORRY AND ANXIETY
IN HAMPTON ROADS, 2020

| Locality | 2019 Employment | 2019 Estimated Cost of Worry and Anxiety |
|----------------------|-----------------|--|
| Camden County | 4,481 | \$5,892,515 |
| Currituck County | 13,609 | \$17,895,835 |
| Gates County | 5,145 | \$6,765,675 |
| Gloucester County | 19,198 | \$25,245,370 |
| Isle of Wight County | 19,017 | \$25,007,355 |
| James City County | 35,860 | \$47,155,900 |
| Mathews County | 4,048 | \$5,323,120 |
| Southampton County | 8,895 | \$11,696,925 |
| York County | 32,110 | \$42,224,650 |
| Chesapeake | 119,957 | \$157,743,455 |
| Franklin | 3,453 | \$4,540,695 |
| Hampton | 62,353 | \$81,994,195 |
| Newport News | 86,310 | \$113,497,650 |
| Norfolk | 108,487 | \$142,660,405 |
| Poquoson | 6,271 | \$8,246,365 |
| Portsmouth | 42,831 | \$56,322,765 |
| Suffolk | 43,564 | \$57,286,660 |
| Virginia Beach | 228,266 | \$300,169,790 |
| Williamsburg | 6,475 | \$8,514,625 |
| Hampton Roads | 833,499 | \$1,096,051,185 |

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey; the Dragas Center for Economic Analysis and Policy, Old Dominion University; and J. Goh, J. Pfeffer and S. Zenios (2015). Employment is annual average individual employment. Consumer Price Index is used to obtain 2019 dollars.

²⁶ J. Hassard, K.R. Teoh, G. Visockaite, P. Dewe and T. Cox, (2018), "The cost of work-related stress to society: A systematic review," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 23, 1-17, doi: 10.1037/ocp0000069. Consumer Price Index from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

What Can You Do If You Feel Worried Or Anxious?

Matt Judah is a licensed clinical psychologist specializing in anxiety and a faculty member of the Virginia Consortium Program in Clinical Psychology, a collaborative program offered by Eastern Virginia Medical School, Norfolk State University and Old Dominion University. He suggests that you first must understand what anxiety is. "Anxiety is normal and, believe it or not, it is there to help you," he says. "Anxiety is an alarm system. It prompts you to put your seatbelt on, to look both ways before crossing the street and to get work done on time. Like any alarm, anxiety does not feel comfortable. It needs to be uncomfortable to motivate us to do what we need to do. Understanding that anxiety is normal, helpful and that it needs to feel uncomfortable can help us accept anxiety. Nonacceptance of anxiety can lead to frustration and anxiety about feeling anxious. That type of anxiety is not helpful, and it can lead to high levels of anxiety that are difficult to tolerate." However, if you find yourself consistently stressed, worried or anxious, seek help from a mental health professional. Although many feel alone (especially during COVID-19 and other times of crisis), the fact is that over 3% of the U.S. adult population is diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder.²⁷ This percentage likely underestimates the actual number of Americans that have an anxiety disorder.

It is important to find ways to cope with anxiety. "Anxiety thrives off of time to sit and think. Being active can help," says Judah.²⁸ Exercising, playing games and learning a new skill are all great ways to stay active. Listening to music or podcasts keeps your mind alert during activities like driving or doing chores, leaving less time for worry. Another common recommendation is to start a "worry journal." This is a technique that is part of cognitive behavioral therapy and is one of the more effective and low-cost options for reducing anxiety.

Keeping a worry journal can be as simple as taking five to 10 minutes each day to write down all the things that are causing you to feel worried. Research continues to show that this can help alleviate obsessive thoughts. This works similarly to setting weekly goals or making a to-do list, which can improve thoughts of control over one's time and reduce stress and tension from feeling overwhelmed by work.²⁹



27 <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/generalized-anxiety-disorder-gad>.
28 https://odu.edu/news/2020/4/q_a_with_matt_judah.

29 T.H. Macan, (1994), "Time management: Test of a process model," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79, 381-391.

Final Thoughts

Work is good for mental health but a negative working environment can lead to physical and mental health problems.

– World Health Organization³⁰

It is normal to feel worried and anxious at times. In small doses, these feelings can provide temporary boosts to motivation and productivity. However, prolonged worry, stress and/or anxiety are cause for concern. A considerable number of employees spend time at work worrying, and many adults worry specifically about work, even when they aren't physically in the work environment. This creates a huge cost to organizations and the economy overall, both in terms of lost productivity at work and higher health care costs. Based on the past decade of national data, this would mean that nearly 100,000 adults in Hampton Roads are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and over 300,000 workers in our region feel anxious, nervous or worried at least once a month.

In addition to individuals seeking out help, we believe that organizations can play an important role in facilitating a broader conversation and providing resources for individuals to deal with worry and anxiety. Companies can make changes to health care policies to elicit a positive response. Small changes in corporate culture can help too. Leaders can take an active role by talking about their own experiences, asking questions and listening to employees.

A phenomenon that likely isn't new but is entering the public conversation these days is that a number of employees, including highly productive employees who like their jobs, are experiencing a feeling called the "Sunday scaries" or the "Sunday blues."³¹ This is a feeling of worry and anxiety that happens at the end of the weekend as a person begins to think about (and worry about) the workweek ahead. Overall, given how prevalent these feelings of worry and anxiety are among the U.S. adult population, it's time we explore them a little more within ourselves and talk about them a little more with loved ones, friends and co-workers.

³⁰ https://www.who.int/mental_health/in_the_workplace/en/.

³¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/02/sunday-scaries-anxiety-workweek/606289/>.



