

Poll: More than four in ten working adults think their work impacts their health

July 12 2016

A new NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health poll finds that more than four in ten working adults (44%) say their current job has an impact on their overall health, and one in four (28%) say that impact is positive.

However, in the survey of more than 1,600 workers in the U.S., one in six workers (16%) report that their current job has a negative impact on their health. Workers most likely to say their job has a negative impact on their overall health include those with disabilities (35%), those in dangerous [jobs](#) (27%), those in low-paying jobs (26%), those working 50+ hours per week (25%), and those working in the retail sector (26%).

A number of working adults also report that their job has a negative impact on their levels of stress (43%), eating habits (28%), sleeping habits (27%), and weight (22%). "The takeaway here is that job number one for U.S. employers is to reduce stress in the workplace," said Robert J. Blendon, Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, who directed the survey.

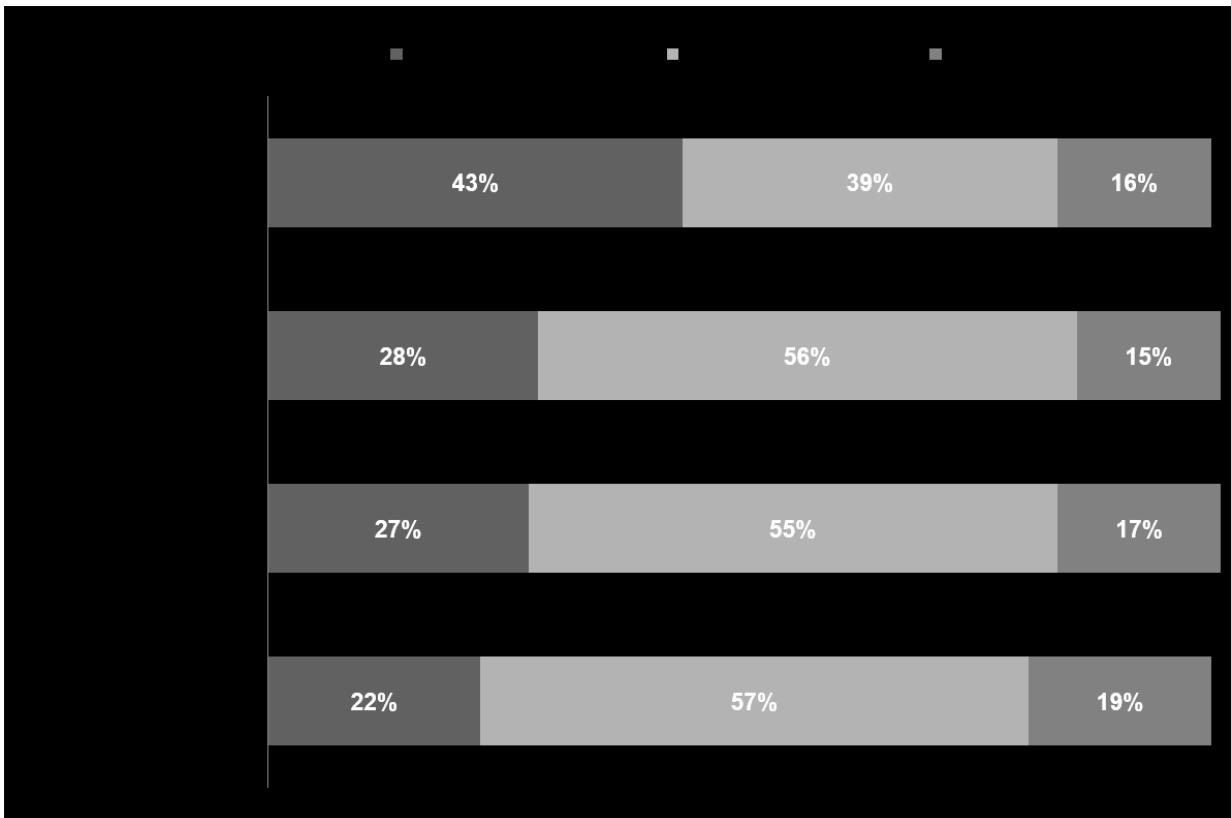
Note: Tune in to The Forum at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health on July 11, 2016 from 12:00 – 1:00 PM ET for expert perspectives on the topic. Visit [this link](#) to learn more about the event, watch the live broadcast, and access the on-demand recording once it becomes available. A summer-long series will also air on NPR starting July 11, 2016.

A summer-long series on the topic began airing July 11, 2016 on NPR.

View the [complete poll findings](#).

Key Findings

Figure 1. Do you think your current job is good or bad for your [INSERT ITEM], or does it not have an impact one way or another?



Credit: Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because Don't Know/Refused responses are not shown.

Chemicals and contaminants top list of biggest health concerns in the workplace

About one in five working adults (22%) say that something at their job may be harmful to their health, including 43% of construction or outdoor workers and 34% of workers in medical jobs.

Among workers with any health concerns about their workplace, the most frequently cited health concerns mentioned are chemicals and other contaminants (30%), unhealthy air (13%), accidents or injuries (12%), and stress (11%).

About one in four workers rate their workplace as fair or poor in providing a healthy work environment; about half are offered wellness or health improvement programs

About one in four workers (24%) rate their workplace as only fair or poor in providing a healthy work environment; however, 34% give their workplace a rating of excellent. About half (51%) say their workplace offers any formal wellness or health improvement programs to help keep themselves healthy.

"Every year, U.S. businesses lose more than \$225 billion because of sick and absent workers," said Robert Wood Johnson President and CEO Risa Lavizzo-Mourey. "But I believe that business drives culture change and with them on board we can succeed in building a Culture of Health in America. It's not a hard connection to make. In many companies as

much as 50 percent of profits are eaten up by health care costs."

Nearly half of all workers (45%) rate their workplace as only fair or poor in providing healthy food options. Over half of workers in factory or manufacturing jobs (55%), medical jobs (52%), retail outlets (52%), and construction or outdoor jobs (51%) give their workplace a fair or poor rating at providing healthy food options.

A majority of 'workaholics' say they work longer hours because it is important to their career; half say they enjoy working longer hours

About one in five working adults (19%) say they work 50 or more hours per week in their main job; these workers are called 'workaholics' in this study. When given a list of possible reasons why they work 50+ hours per week, a majority of these workers (56%) say they do so because it's important for their career to work longer hours, 50% say they enjoy doing so, and just 37% say they do it because they need the money.

A majority of working adults say they still go to work when they are sick

A majority (55%) of working adults say they still go to work always or most of the time when they have a cold or the flu, including more than half (60%) of those who work in medical jobs and half (50%) of restaurant workers.

Types of workers who are most likely to still go to work always or most of the time when they are sick include those working 50+ hours per week in their main job (70%), those working two or more jobs (68%), workers in low-paying jobs (65%), and younger workers ages 18-29 (60%).

Low-wage workers often face worse conditions than high-wage workers

Working adults in self-reported low-paying jobs often report worse working conditions than those in high-paying jobs. For instance, more than four in ten workers in low-paying jobs report facing potentially dangerous situations at work (45% vs. 33% in high-paying jobs), and almost two-thirds (65% vs. 48% in high-paying jobs) say they still go to work always or most of the time when they are sick.

One in four workers in low-paying jobs (26%) say their job has a [negative impact](#) on their overall health, compared to just 14% of those in high-paying jobs. "In an era of concern about low-wage [workers](#), it's clear they face more negative [health](#) impacts from their jobs compared to those who are paid substantially more," said Blendon.

Provided by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

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