

Report

Survey on work-related stress in the context of confinement

Survey

From May 12 to May 20, nearly 60% of APUO members participated to our survey on work-related stress in the context of confinement. **Table 1** describes the respondent's characteristics. The survey results show that approximately 75% of members are experiencing moderate to extreme stress in terms of teaching (professors)/professional duties (librarians) and conducting research and creation (**Table 2**). Moreover, statistical analysis demonstrated a relationship between gender identity (**Table 3**) and members of a visible minority (**Table 4**) and stress levels, respectively, in terms of performing their academic (teaching and research) duties. Overall, comments provided by members speak to an unsustainable situation. Some respondents do speak to their current capacities to complete work, but most speak to overlapping challenges that add up to increased burden, stress, etc. Whether members feel that the situation now (following the Winter 2020 semester) is manageable, or that it is (still) extremely stressful, the prospect of future work under similar conditions is ominous. In various contexts (as a Chair or program director, a parent, a researcher working within a consortium/a grant timeline/a lab, a graduate supervisor; a member of a visible minority) members feel at a breaking point and several expressly indicated that burnout is inevitable for themselves and fellow members. Responses indicated specifically the fact that the increased workload brought about by the pandemic conditions has caused members to experience significant stress, if not also exhaustion.

A large proportion of comments speak to the impossibility of having a work-life balance. Apart from the simple fact that working from home increases the difficulty to separate work from personal life, both the sense of increasing workload and managing family obligations at the same time and within the same space is an ongoing challenge.

Below are some of the dimensions of unsustainability that appear with some frequency in the members' responses:

Dimension 1: Being a parent / family dynamics /helping older parents/single parent

There is a relationship between being a parent or having to take care of family members (parents) and stress levels in terms of performing research and professional duties (**Table 5**). There is also a relationship between having children in daycare or with special needs in terms of teaching. For single parents, there was a relationship between single parenting and stress levels ($\chi^2=16.2$, $p>0.00^*$) in terms of conducting research. Finally, there were relationships between family caregiving and stress levels for teaching, research, and community services (**Table 6**). Overall,

comments related to stress in terms of being a parent and family caregiving recur in the survey. Although it affects people in various ways, it nonetheless has negative effects on the work-life balance and stress levels. Some examples speak to the reorganization of life, including extended work hours, diminished productivity (ex. ongoing distractions), new family tensions, anxieties with the fall semester should there be no support (socially and academically), etc. One element that is particularly relevant is the question of tenure in this context, where productivity expectations prove to be an added burden. 81% of non-tenured members communicated being moderately stressed to extremely stressed versus 75% of tenured members in terms of teaching; 82% of non-tenured members versus 75% of tenured members in terms of research; and 55% of non-tenured members versus 46% of tenured members in terms of community services.

It is generally not believed that achieving a balance in this context is possible – reinforcing the fact that the current situation is unsustainable. Most evident are the overlapping challenges being described, including: taking care of a family member, moving to online teaching, learning how to go online for many, continuing to attend meetings and support graduate students, trying to manage research or the stress of putting it on hold, being or living with someone who is at risk or in need of health care, etc.

When looking at these overlapping challenges, there is a specific critique calling the University to recognize the gendered issues related to COVID-19. It is noteworthy to indicate that gender identity displayed a significant association with stress levels experienced by our colleagues (40 to 48% of women responded being extremely stressed in terms of teaching [professors]/professional duties [librarians] and performing research and creation) (**Table 3**), respectively. Not addressing expectations such as the need to attend meetings, read reports and organize teaching for next year under current conditions is considered a lack of gendered understanding from the Central Administration. If anything, there is a clear request from the members that would like the Central Administration to recognize the difficult articulation of both parenting and work done simultaneously, looking for some meaningful assurances or acknowledgements of this from the Central Administration.

Furthermore, there is quite a bit of empathy from members who do not have children at home towards their colleagues who are also parents.

Dimension 2: Increased workload / Resource needs / moving to online teaching

These comments speak to the lack of resources available to members in the transition to work from home, but also in the anticipation of the fall semester. This includes needs for technology and workspace – many comments explain that people are not set up to work from home (internet needs, furniture needs, etc.). There needs to be a plan in place if this type of work continues.

A few comments highlight the fact that COVID-19 exacerbates pre-existing workload problems, while most talk about increased workload in general – from increase administrative load (ex. amount of required meetings, e-mails, turnaround times for decisions, etc.) to general capacity to generate outputs (ex. research).

Keeping up in this time of transition is synonymous to an increased (unsustainable) workload. Part of this new workload is meeting the increased demand from students who need more support.

Dimension 3: Health

The work-life balance comments also included specific issues related to health – highlighting some specific physical and psychological issues, but also speaking from a position of increased demands on the body due to the nature of working virtually. Health transcends workload/transition issues described in other dimensions – fearing burnout, screen time, migraines, depression, isolation, to name a few. For members with a disability or being immunocompromised (**Table 7 and 8, respectively**), levels of stress caused by work in the context of confinement is an important consideration for them to be able to do their work. 50% of members declaring a disability revealed that they were extremely stressed about teaching/professional duties and conducting research/creation, and 32% of them indicated extreme stress levels compared to 16% from the non-disabled members in terms of performing community service. There was also a statistically significant relations between being immunocompromised and stress levels in all three categories of duties.

Dimension 4: Poor Communication from the Central Administration, Questioning of Leadership

Members express frustration with the Central Administration's multifaceted incapacity to communicate clearly with members and chart consistent steps forward. Specifically, members cite concerns over the mixed messages, the lack of information provided to members, and apparent indecision (regarding online learning platforms), and rigidity (regarding decisions about fall teaching in relation to the unchanged registration dates). Working under such opaque and contradictory leadership has given a sense of instability located at the institutional level. All told, this affects members' ability to do the different components of their job. Members are frustrated that they found out more information about the University of Ottawa's plans for Fall teaching from the CBC than from their faculties or the Central Administration. They call for clear plans to be drawn up for the Fall term (and communicated directly with members) so that courses can be adequately prepared. While a pandemic cannot possibly be easy to manage, there is a strong sense that the Central Administration's response to it has made the situation even more difficult. For those already managing ongoing research projects, caregiving responsibilities, and the sudden switch to online teaching, it is very frustrating to have extra time taken up tracking and adapting to the incongruous directives from the administration.

Moreover, as a result of feeling that the administration is out of touch with the realities of being a professor or a librarian during COVID-19, and indeed just out of touch with our situation altogether, members question the integrity of the administration, and some appear to have lost (more) faith in its ability to manage the current crisis. Comparisons are made with other universities where more consideration seems to have been taken. Members request more than pats on the back for their industriousness and flexibility during COVID-19. They are swiftly and

rigorously adapting their various duties to pandemic conditions. They do not need sympathy or commiseration but instead actual support (clear, perceptive, and consistent planning; adequate consultation and communication with professors; and actually useful resources for moving to remote teaching and research).

All in all, there is the perception that there is a real sense of an inability and/or unwillingness on the part of the Central Administration to listen to and to comprehend the living/working realities of members.

Table 1. Respondents' characteristics

N = 755 respondents		%
Faculty		
Arts		18
Education		5
Engineering		7
Health Sciences		9
Law (Civil Law)		2
Law (Common Law)		4
Library		4
Telfer		6
Medicine		7
Science		12
Social Science		24
Gender		
Feminine		45
Masculine		46
Two-spirited		0
Intersex		0
Trans		0
Non-binary		1
Did not wish to specify		8
Other		0
Employment status		
Tenured/Continuing App		90
Non-tenured/non-Continuing app.		10
Age group		
39 years or younger		14
40 to 49yrs		39
50 to 59yrs		30
60 to 69yrs		15
70 and over		2
Member of visible minority		13

Indigenous	2
Disability	4
Immunocompromised	7
Children under 18	51
Children under 2	13*
Child in daycare	31*
Child in elementary school	67*
Child in highschool	43*
Child with special needs	16*
Single parent	4
Family caregiver	24

Table 2 – Level of stress expressed by APUO members by category of duties

Categories	<i>Teaching/Professional duties</i>	<i>Research and Creation</i>	<i>Community services</i>
Low (score 0-1)	24%	21%	53%
Moderate (score 2)	40%	34%	29%
High (score 3-4)	36%	45%	18%

Table 3 – Comparative tables based on gender identity***Teaching (professors) / Professional duties (librarians)***

Categories	Feminine	Masculine
Low (score 0-1)	21%	28%
Moderate (score 2)	37%	44%
High (score 3-4)	42%	28%
	$\chi^2=14.0, p=0.00*$	

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in females and males. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference. Other gender identities were included in the study (two-spirited, intersex, trans, non-binary). Due to low numbers, they were not used in the analysis.

Research and Creation

Categories	Feminine	Masculine
Low (score 0-1)	17%	27%
Moderate (score 2)	34%	34%
High (score 3-4)	49%	39%
	$\chi^2=11.4, p=0.00*$	

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in females and males. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference. Other gender identities were included in the study (two-spirited, intersex, trans, non-binary). Due to low numbers, they were not used in the analysis.

Community services

Categories	Feminine	Masculine
Low (score 0-1)	50%	56%
Moderate (score 2)	29%	29%
High (score 3-4)	21%	15%
$\chi^2=5.69, p=0.06$		

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in females and males. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference. Other gender identities were included in the study (two-spirited, intersex, trans, non-binary). Due to low numbers, they were not used in the analysis.

Table 4 – Comparative tables based on identifying as a member of a visible minority***Teaching (professors) / Professional duties (librarians)***

Categories	Yes	No
Low (score 0-1)	13%	27%
Moderate (score 2)	47%	39%
High (score 3-4)	40%	34%
	$\chi^2=8.4, p=0.02^*$	

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in members identifying in a visible minority vs not identifying in a visible minority. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Research and Creation

Categories	Yes	No
Low (score 0-1)	15%	22%
Moderate (score 2)	34%	35%
High (score 3-4)	54%	43%
	$\chi^2=16.6, p=0.00^*$	

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in members identifying in a visible minority vs not identifying in a visible minority. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Community services

Categories	Yes	No
Low (score 0-1)	52%	54%
Moderate (score 2)	25%	29%
High (score 3-4)	23%	17%
	$\chi^2=1.92, p=0.38$	

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in members identifying in a visible minority vs not identifying in a visible minority. $P<0.05$ denotes a significant difference.

Table 5 – Comparative tables based on having children***Teaching (professors) / Professional duties (librarians)***

Categories	None	under 18	under 2	daycare	Grade school	High school	w/special needs
Low (score 0-1)	28%	22%	19%	18%	21%	24%	12%*
Moderate (score 2)	38%	42%	46%	38%	40%	41%	37%*
High (score 3-4)	34%	36%	35%	43%	39%	34%	50%*
		$\chi^2=3.58;$ $p=0.17$	$\chi^2=1.91;$ $p=0.39$	$\chi^2=4.94;$ $p=0.08$	$\chi^2=4.38;$ $p=0.11$	$\chi^2=0.72;$ $p=0.70$	$\chi^2=9.02;$ $p=.001*$

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare each category with a child versus having no children. $P<0.05$ denotes a significant difference.

Research and Creation

Categories	None	under 18	under 2	daycare	Grade school	High school	w/special needs
Low (score 0-1)	27%	16%*	16%*	13%*	13%*	20%*	8%*
Moderate (score 2)	37%	32%*	27%*	24%*	31%*	33%*	32%*
High (score 3-4)	37%	51%*	58%*	63%*	56%*	47%*	58%*
		$\chi^2=20.8;$ $p=0.00*$	$\chi^2=8.05;$ $p=0.02*$	$\chi^2=26.98;$ $p=0.00*$	$\chi^2=27.7;$ $p=0.00*$	$\chi^2=4.95;$ $p=0.08$	$\chi^2=11.7;$ $p=0.00*$

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare each category with a child versus having no children. $P<0.05$ denotes a significant difference.

Community services

Categories	None	under 18	under 2	daycare	Grade school	High school	w/special needs
Low (score 0-1)	53%	53%	47%	48%	51%	57%	47%
Moderate (score 2)	31%	27%	28%	29%	28%	22%	30%
High (score 3-4)	16%	20%	15%	23%	20%	21%	23%
		$\chi^2=2.27;$ $p=0.32$	$\chi^2=0.23;$ $p=0.89$	$\chi^2=2.89;$ $p=0.24$	$\chi^2=2.51;$ $p=0.28$	$\chi^2=5.13;$ $p=0.08$	$\chi^2=1.73;$ $p=0.42$

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare each category with a child versus having no children. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Table 6 – Comparative tables based on being a family caregiver***Teaching (professors) / Professional duties (librarians)***

Categories	Caregiver	Not a caregiver
Low (score 0-1)	22%	26%
Moderate (score 2)	31%	43%
High (score 3-4)	48%	32%
$\chi^2=16.5, p=0.00^*$		

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare expressed stress levels between family caregivers and those that are not caregiving. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Research and Creation

Categories	Caregiver	Not a caregiver
Low (score 0-1)	15%	24%
Moderate (score 2)	28%	36%
High (score 3-4)	58%	40%
$\chi^2=18.1, p=0.00^*$		

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare expressed stress levels between family caregivers and those that are not caregiving. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Community services

Categories	Caregiver	Not a caregiver
Low (score 0-1)	46%	55%
Moderate (score 2)	29%	30%
High (score 3-4)	25%	16%
$\chi^2=9.29, p=0.009^*$		

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare expressed stress levels between family caregivers and those that are not caregiving. $P<0.05$ denotes a significant difference.

Table 7– Comparative tables based on having a disability

Teaching (professors) / Professional duties (librarians)

Categories	Disability	No
Low (score 0-1)	17%	24%
Moderate (score 2)	33%	41%
High (score 3-4)	50%	35%
$\chi^2=3.07, p=0.21$		

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in members declaring disability vs not declaring a disability. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Research and Creation

Categories	Disability	No
Low (score 0-1)	20%	21%
Moderate (score 2)	30%	34%
High (score 3-4)	50%	45%
$\chi^2=3.07, p=0.21$		

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in members declaring disability vs not declaring a disability. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Community services

Categories	Disability	No
Low (score 0-1)	39%	54%
Moderate (score 2)	29%	30%
High (score 3-4)	32%	16%
	$\chi^2=4.89, p=0.08$	

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in members declaring disability vs not declaring a disability. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Table 8 – Comparative tables based being immunocompromised***Teaching (professors) / Professional duties (librarians)***

Categories	Immunocomp.	No
Low (score 0-1)	6%	27%
Moderate (score 2)	49%	40%
High (score 3-4)	45%	33%
	$\chi^2=10.1, p=0.006^*$	

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in members declaring being immunocompromised vs declaring not being immunocompromised. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Research and Creation

Categories	Immunocomp.	No
Low (score 0-1)	10%	22%
Moderate (score 2)	28%	35%
High (score 3-4)	62%	43%
	$\chi^2=7.86, p=0.02^*$	

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in members declaring being immunocompromised vs declaring not being immunocompromised. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

Community services

Categories	Immunocomp.	No
Low (score 0-1)	35%	56%
Moderate (score 2)	36%	28%
High (score 3-4)	29%	16%
$\chi^2=7.91, p=0.02^*$		

Note: χ^2 test of independence was used to compare stress levels in members declaring being immunocompromised vs declaring not being immunocompromised. P<0.05 denotes a significant difference.

A note on methodology

- A survey to study work-related stress in the context of confinement was deployed to the members of the APUO between the dates of May 12 to May 20.
- More than half (~60%) of the APUO members completed the survey. The majority of respondents are tenured (90%); approximately half were women and half were men; 13% identified being of a visible minority; 51% of the members indicated having 1 or more children; 24% are a family caregiver; 8% are a single parent; 4% declaring a disability and 7% being immunocompromised. **Table 1** describes the respondent's characteristics.
- χ^2 tests of independence were performed to analyse the relationship between the categorical variables and the stress levels communicated by members. Frequency distributions are shown in the tables. In cases where members indicated “do not want to specify” data was not used to conduct the statistical analysis.