

Money and work are the world's biggest source of stress: WIN finds who's most affected, and why

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The **Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WIN)** has released new findings for Mental Health Day 2026, revealing that stress is felt unevenly across the world. Based on responses from over 45,000 people across 45 countries, the research suggests that while the drivers of stress are broadly universal, who feels it most, and why, varies sharply by gender, age and life stage.

Broad rise in reported stress, though women and young people bear the brunt of it

Globally, 42% of people say they feel stressed very often or fairly often – a sharp rise from 32% last year. Over the same period, the share reporting low stress fell from 36% to 26%. Some of this increase may reflect a change in how the question on mental health was asked between 2025 and 2026*. However, the direction of change appears robust as stress levels rose in 34 of the 39 countries surveyed in both waves, across all genders and age groups.

Stress levels increased by 10 percentage points for both men and women compared with 2025. But a pattern seen every year since 2018 holds – women report markedly higher stress than men, at 48% versus 36% this year.

Stress levels fall steadily with age: 49-50% of 18-34 year olds report high stress, compared with just 24% of those over 65. By education and employment, those with only basic education report the highest stress (51%), on a par with students and unemployed (50% in each group). Even those who work in part-time (44%) or full-time (43%) are not far behind.

Of the 39 countries surveyed (included in both 2025 and 2026), 34 saw stress levels rise, with the sharpest increases in Ivory Coast (from 17% in 2025 to 56% in 2026), Turkey (40% to 70%), Ecuador (24% to 55%), Argentina (33% to 50%) and Thailand (8% to 38%). Only Poland (-5 points) and Australia (-2 points) saw stress levels fall, while China and Italy stayed flat.

WIN reached out to its members around the world for country insights into what may have influenced the change in stress levels. Local researchers point to a mix of economic and political pressures behind the sharpest national increases. Economic strain, such as cost of living, job losses, and increased intensity of work, features most heavily in Thailand and Turkey. Political instability is cited in Côte d'Ivoire, where there was a tense, and sometimes violent, election period, South Korea, with the impeachment of the former president, and Chile, which experienced changes in government alongside large-scale fires. In India, the rise is linked instead to anxiety over AI amongst younger and mid-career employees and their parents

Everyday pressures are the drivers of stress worldwide, not a global crisis

Globally, day-to-day survival pressures are the leading causes of stress: 32% cite debt or financial difficulty, and 32% cite their job, followed closely by family (29%) and health (28%). These concerns outweigh other stress drivers such as domestic politics (18%), unemployment (15%), war (14%), life changes (12%), geopolitics (11%), environmental disasters (9%) and phone use, or "doom-scrolling" (9%).

Moreover, these everyday pressures are the strongest drivers of frequent stress: amongst those who say they are frequently stressed, 44% cite finances, 40% cite their job, and 20% cite unemployment. Health and environmental concerns, by contrast, show the weakest link to frequency – people cite these at fairly similar rates regardless of how often they feel stressed.

Stress drivers differ by gender. Women are more likely than men to worry about family (33% vs. 24%), money (34% vs. 29%) and health (30% vs. 26%), while men are more likely to point to their job (35% vs. 29%).

The picture also shifts clearly across the life course. Among 18–34 year-olds, money (34–36%) and job (30–39%) dominate, and doom-scrolling/phone use is far higher than at any other age (18% at 18–24). From 35-54, job and money remain the primary concerns and family stress peaks. From 55 onwards, the picture flips: health becomes the single biggest driver, while domestic politics and wars around the world become more prominent than amongst younger people. Job and money concerns fall to their lowest point amongst the over-65s.

Regionally, concern about war and geopolitics is distinctly European and MENA: Europe leads on both, at 19% and 13% respectively. Environmental disasters,

meanwhile, are a far bigger concern in APAC (14%), led by Indonesia (27%), India (26%) and Thailand (23%).

Richard Colwell, President of WIN International Association, said:

"What stands out here is how ordinary the biggest sources of stress actually are. People aren't telling us they're most worried about wars or politics — they're worried about paying their bills, keeping their job and looking after their family and their health. And it's exactly those pressures, finances and job security in particular, that are most closely tied to frequent stress. That has real implications for how governments, employers and communities respond: the priority isn't just raising awareness of stress, it's addressing the everyday economic insecurity that's driving so much of it."

*In 2025, stress-related questions were included amongst the broader 12-item health matrix questions. While the wording and response scale remained the same in the 2026 survey, stress was asked as a standalone question later on in the survey. This change of context and placement may have influenced the responses, though WIN concludes it is unlikely to explain the whole pattern of the findings.

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