

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

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.

HEADLINES – IRELAND

Financial pressures outweigh employment concerns in Ireland

Irish adults are more likely than the global average to identify money and debt as a source of stress (36% vs. 32%), despite reporting significantly lower concern about jobs (20% vs. 32%) and unemployment (9% vs. 15%). Financial pressures are particularly evident among women, with 41% reporting money or debt as a source of stress compared with 31% of men. Among women aged 35-54, this rises to 51%, making financial concerns one of the most significant stressors for this group.

Digital pressures and life changes are reshaping stress for younger adults

The drivers of stress shift as people get older. Younger adults are significantly more affected by digital and transitional pressures, with 38% of 18-24s identifying doomscrolling as a source of stress and 28% of 25-34s reporting major life changes. Women aged 18-34 are particularly affected, being more likely than men of the same age to identify both doomscrolling (29% vs. 20%) and major life changes (32% vs. 17%) as sources of stress.

Family and health concerns remain constant throughout life

While many stressors vary by age, family and health concerns remain prominent across generations. Family pressures peak among those aged 45-54 (41%) but remain elevated among adults aged 65+ (33%). Health concerns show a different pattern, increasing steadily with age and becoming the leading source of stress among older adults (41%). Women are more likely than men to identify both family (36% vs. 28%) and health concerns (32% vs. 29%) as sources of stress, with younger women especially likely to report health-related stress (31% vs. 22% among men aged 18-34).

Older adults are more affected by global and political events

Older adults are significantly more likely than average to identify wars around the world (37%), politics in Ireland (28%), global politics (24%) and environmental disasters (12%) as sources of stress. Men aged 55+ are more likely than women of the same age to identify Irish politics as a source of stress (31% vs. 21%), while concern about environmental disasters is notably lower among adults aged 35-54 than among both younger and older generations.

HEADLINES WORLD

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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NOTES FOR EDITORS

About the research

The findings are based on approximately 44,000 interviews conducted across 44 countries as part of the WIN Worldviews Survey 2026, exploring pet ownership in the household: what proportion of the population lives with animals, which types of pets are most common, and how many different species live under the same roof.

About WIN:

The Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WIN) is a global network conducting market research and opinion polls in every continent.

Our assets

- Thought leadership: access to a group of the most prominent experts and business entrepreneurs in Market Research, Polling and Consultancy
- Flexibility: tailor-made global and local solutions to meet clients' needs
- Innovation: access to the latest strategic consultancy, tool development and branded solutions
- Local experts: access to a network of experts that truly understand the local culture, market and business needs.
- Trust: highest quality of talented members in all countries covered

Over the years, WIN has demonstrated wide competences and ability to conduct multi-country surveys following the highest standards requested by the market. The accumulated expertise of the Association is formidable: among others, researched themes are gender equality and young people, communication and media research, and brand studies.

Methodology Sheet

	Country	Company Name	Methodology	Sample	Coverage	Fieldwork Dates
1	Argentina	Voices Research & Consultancy	CAWI	1007	NATIONAL	2-15 Jan '26
2	Australia	Luma Research	CAWI	549	NATIONAL	29-30 Jan '26
3	Brazil	Market Analysis Brazil	CAWI	1000	INTERNET POP	9-16 Jan '26
4	Canada	LEGER	CAWI	1000	NATIONAL	12-25 Dec '25
5	Chile	Activa Research	CAWI	1095	NATIONAL	8-13 Jan '26
6	China	WisdomAsia	Online Panel	1000	URBAN	14-19 Jan '26
7	Colombia	Centro Nacional de Consultoría	CATI	500	NATIONAL	6-12 February 2026
8	Côte d'Ivoire	EMC	CATI	502	NATIONAL	24-30 Jan '26
9	Croatia	Institute for market and media research, Mediana Fides	CAWI	591	NATIONAL	8-12 Jan '26
10	Denmark	Opinion Denmark A/S	CAWI	1007	NATIONAL	13-21 Jan '26
11	Ecuador	Centro de Estudios Y Datos - CEDATOS	CAPI	1104	NATIONAL	28-31 Jan '26
12	Finland	Taloustutkimus Oy	Online Panel	1093	NATIONAL	31 Dec '25 – 7 Jan '26
13	France	OpinionWay	Online Panel	1007	NATIONAL	16-19 Jan '26
14	Georgia	GORBI Eurasia LTD	F2F	2050	NATIONAL	31 Jan – 13 Feb 2026
15	Germany	Produkt+Markt	CAWI	1000	NATIONAL	19 Dec '25 – 6 Jan '26
16	Greece	Alternative Research Solutions	CAWI	502	NATIONAL	3 Dec '25– 12 Jan '26
17	Hong Kong	Consumer Search Group (CSG)	Online Panel	500	TERRITORY WIDE	9-15 Jan '26
18	India	DataPrompt International Pvt. Ltd.	Online	1000	NATIONAL	29 Dec '25 - 21 Jan '26
19	Indonesia	DEKA	Online	987	INTERNET POP	16-31 Jan '26
20	Republic of Ireland	RED C Research & Marketing Ltd	CAWI	1013	NATIONAL	8-13 Jan '26
21	Italy	SWG S.p.a	CAWI	1002	NATIONAL	7-12 Jan '26
22	Japan	Nippon Research Center, LTD.	CAWI	1100	NATIONAL	22-27 Jan '26
23	Latvia	Marketing and Public Opinion Research Centre SKDS	CAWI	1005	NATIONAL	17-19 Jan '26
24	Malaysia	Central Force International	CAWI	1001	INTERNET POP	27 Nov '25 – 3 Dec '25
25	Mexico	Brand Investigation S.A.de C.V	Online	1000	NATIONAL	7-12 Jan '26
26	Morocco	Integrate Consulting	Online	500	NATIONAL	8-9 Jan '26
27	The Netherlands	Motivaction International B.V.	CAWI	1005	NATIONAL	6-20 Jan '26
28	Norway	Opinion AS	CAWI	1029	NATIONAL	13-19 Jan '26
29	Pakistan	Gallup Pakistan	CATI	1000	NATIONAL	6 Dec '25 -14 Jan '26

30	Paraguay	ICA Consultoría Estratégica	CATI	501	NATIONAL	2 Dec '25- 29 Jan '26
31	Peru	Datum Internacional	P2P	1202	NATIONAL	16-10 Jan '26
32	Philippines	The Philippine Survey and Research Center (PSRC)	PAPI	1000	NATIONAL	9-26 Jan '26
33	Poland	Mareco Polska	CAWI	530	NATIONAL	8-14 Dec '25
34	Serbia	Institute for market and media research, Mediana Adria	CAWI	522	NATIONAL	8-15 Jan '26
35	Slovak Republic	Go4insight	CAWI	1000	NATIONAL	16-26 Jan '26
36	Slovenia	Institute for market and media research, Mediana	CAWI	1018	NATIONAL	8-9 Jan '26
37	South Korea	Gallup Korea	CAWI	1200	NATIONAL	21-28 Jan '26
38	Spain	Instituto DYM	CAWI	1000	NATIONAL	15-18 Jan '26
39	Sweden	Demoskop AB	CAWI	1012	NATIONAL/ INTERNET POP	19 Dec '25 – 23 Jan '26
40	Thailand	INFOSEARCH LIMITED	F2F	500	NATIONAL	16 Dec '25– 15 Jan '26
41	Turkey	BAREM Research	CATI	725	TR Urban	30 Jan – 4 Feb '26
42	United Kingdom	ORB International	Online	1194	NATIONAL	12-22 Dec '25
43	USA	LEGER	CAWI	1000	NATIONAL	12-25 Dec '25
44	Venezuela	Centro Nacional de Consultoría	CATI	302	NATIONAL	1-5 Feb '26
45	Vietnam	DXL Research & Consulting	F2F	900	URBAN	12-28 Dec '25