

# Feeling the pressure?

UNISON stress report 2017

Stress is one of the biggest causes of health problems in the workplace. It led to 11.7 million working days lost in 2015/16: an average of 23.9 working days lost for each individual affected, (LFS/HSE, 2016).

The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) definition of stress is: "The reaction people have to excessive demands or pressures, arising when people try to cope with tasks, responsibilities or other types of pressure connected with their job, but find difficulty, strain or worry in doing so."

UNISON recognises the growing impact of stress on the workplace and campaign to improve working conditions so that stress can be reduced, and to provide people with protection against unfair working practices.

## **Key findings**

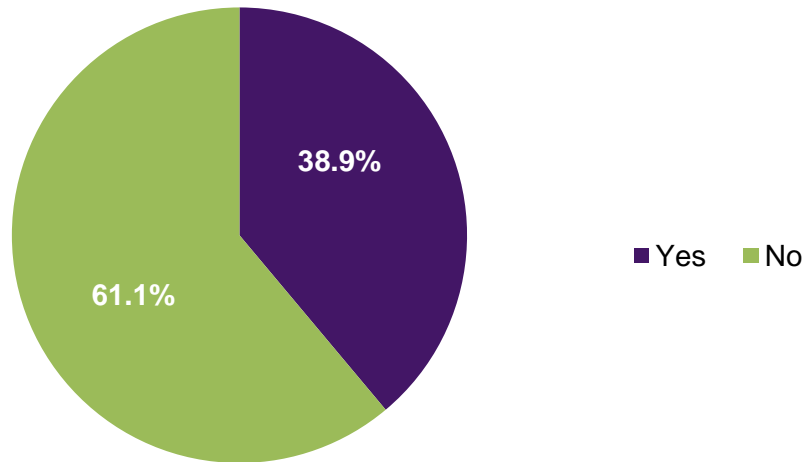
Almost 10,000 public service workers told us about their personal experience of stress and how stress is being managed in their workplace. Such a large sample provides a robust picture of the state of public service workplaces in 2017.

The survey also reveals how stress is perceived and managed by public sector service providers, and how employers are managing the situation.

In brief:

- nearly 10,000 members completed the UNISON stress at work survey;
- 60% of employers have not spoken to their staff about stress at work;
- 87% feel that services sometimes suffer due to pressure put on staff at work;
- 67% feel that "excessive demands of the job" are the source of their stress at work.

**Has your employer ever spoken to you about stress at work?  
(9,948 answered)**

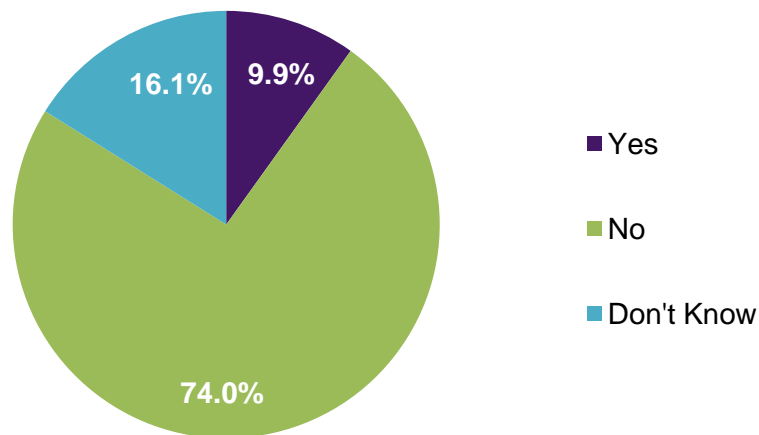


Six in 10 (61%) people told us their employer had never approached them about stress. This is a worrying indictment of the low priority given to stress in the workplace, particularly considering HSE stress management standards have been in place to guide employers for over 10 years. Legislation requires employers to manage stress like any other workplace hazard. This research shows too many employers are not fulfilling their legal duty to their employees.

Almost three quarters of people (74%) said their employer had never surveyed them or their colleagues about the risk of stress at work.

Employers should collect facts and information about stress in their workplace as part of a basic risk assessment. If they do not conduct a survey or discuss stress with their workforce, employers are unlikely to know what causes stress, or consequently how to best reduce stress in the workplace.

**Has your employer surveyed you / your colleagues about the risk of stress at work on you? (8,766 answered)**

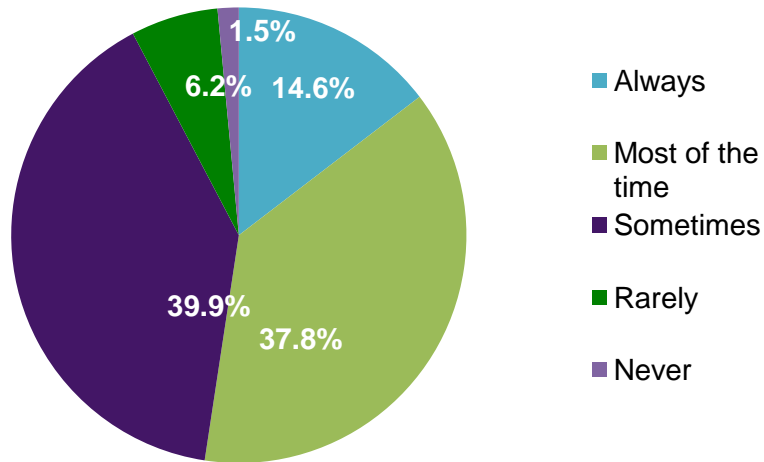


When asked "Have you felt under too much pressure at work in the last year?" less than one in 10 (8%) people stated "rarely" or "never". That leaves over nine in ten (92%) feeling they've been under too much pressure at work, at some point.

Examples of the way people have felt under pressure in the last year are listed, verbatim, below.

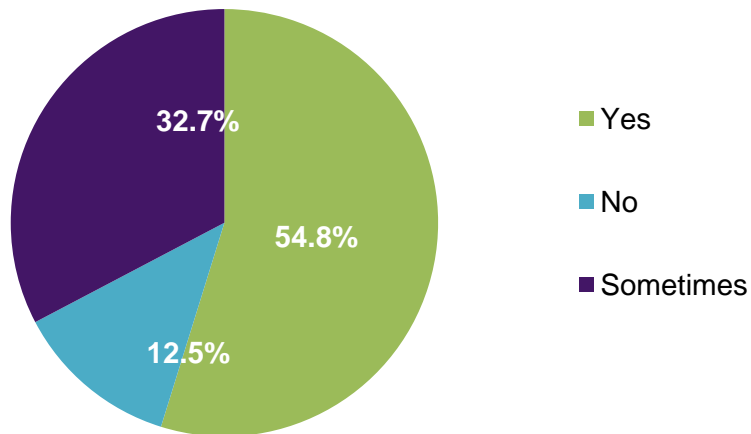
- "I am working 12 hours a day, all week, and then answering emails and working from home on a Sunday. Cutting other roles has meant I am now doing 2 jobs."
- "Our pay is being cut and we are not being listened to or supported."
- Multiple changes to job causing uncertainty for future."
- "Fewer staff to do the same amount of work - or even more. Talks about reducing the number of staff even more."
- "Difficulties with line manager, bullying."
- "Unrealistic expectation of work load."
- "Increased work and impact of budgets"
- "Demands at home and work in conflict."

**Have you felt under too much pressure at work in the last year?  
(9,972 answered)**



Public services are under threat, following years of austerity, job cuts and uncertainty. On this background, almost nine in 10 reported that the service they provide is suffering, due to high pressure and workplace stress.

**Do you feel the services your employer provides are suffering as employees try to cope with undue pressure at work? (9,050 answered)**

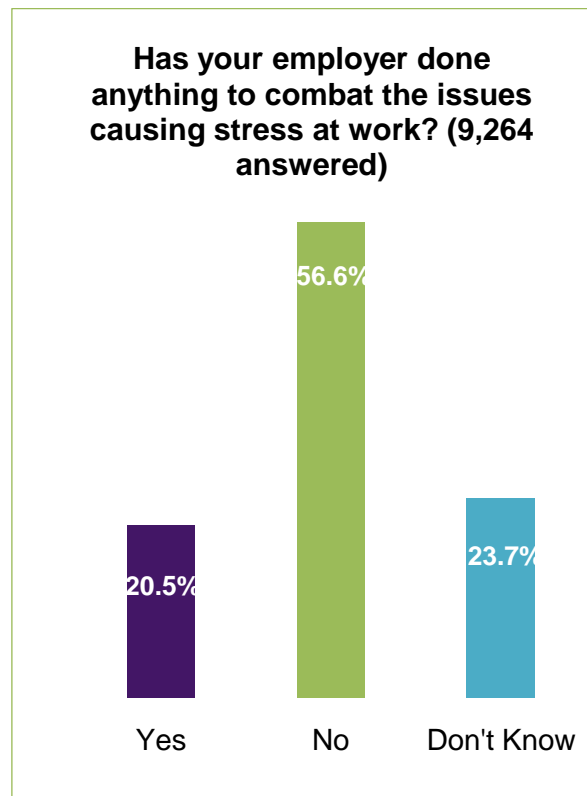


Respondents listed a number of reasons that caused them stress at work. Nearly seven in 10 (67%) cited "excessive demands of the job", with nearly half (48%) saying "change within the organisation" caused stress.

Nearly four in 10 (39%) said stress affected their work life balance. Just over a third, (35%) cited uncertainty over their role at work while just under a third (32%) said not feeling secure in their job caused them stress.

<b>Is pressure at work linked to any of the following? (tick all that apply)</b>	
Excessive demands of the job - feeling overworked	67.0%
Inter-personal relationships at work inc. bullying / harassment	29.6%
Lack of control to plan your own work / workload	29.7%
Lack of support from colleagues	28.5%
Uncertainty over your role at work	35.1%
Not feeling secure in your job	31.7%
Change within your organisation	48.4%
Fear of physical / verbal abuse	10.8%
Ability to take suitable breaks from work (inc. toilet breaks)	19.2%
Expectation to be "always available" to employers	26.3%
Low pay / making financial ends meet	29.5%
Work / life balance	39.1%
Other (please specify)	11.7%
Total respondents	9,276

The survey asked what employers had or had not done to combat stress. Only one fifth (20.5%) reported that their employer had done something to combat issues causing stress, while over half (56%) said their employer had done nothing.



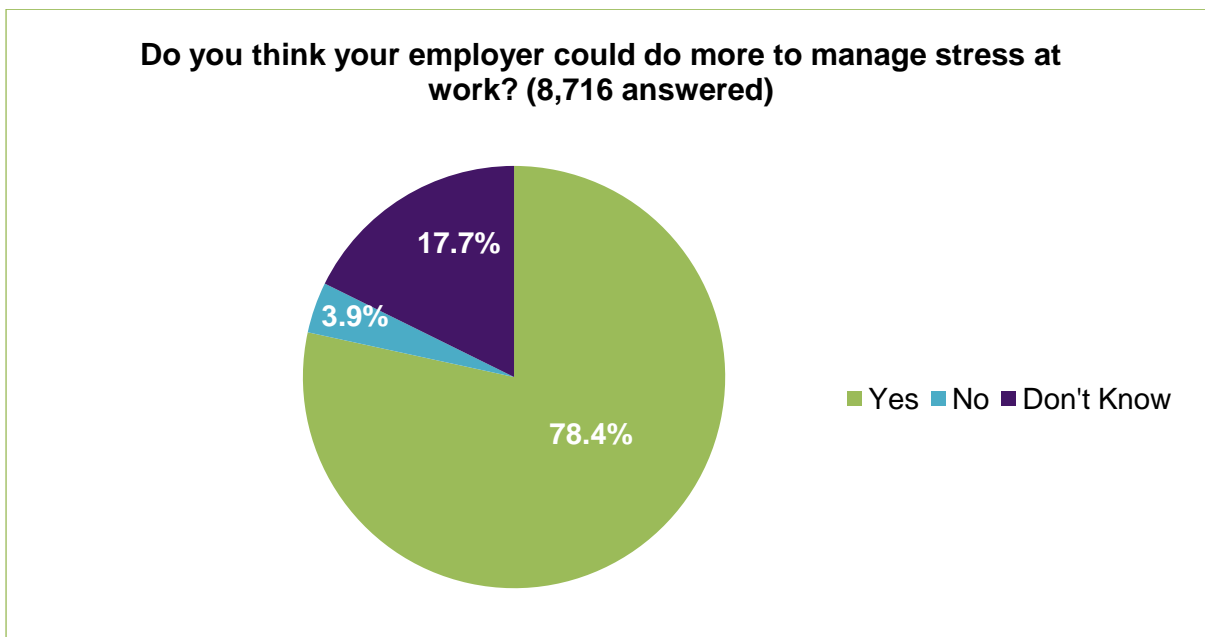
Many employers provide some support to cope with stress at work. However nearly a third (30%) of workers were not aware of any help systems provided to cope with stress. Four in ten (40%) had the support of an employee assistance program, which is a telephone- counselling service. Nearly a third (30%) reported that flexible working was an option open to them in their workplace.

Flexible working can accommodate earlier or later starts, which can take the strain off people struggling and help redress their work/life balance.

Other provisions highlighted in the survey included resilience training, which may help members “bounce back” from difficult situations they may have faced in the workplace. However it should be noted that this type of training should not replace the employer’s duty to eliminate or minimise the risk of stress at work in the first place.

Mental and physical well-being sessions, such as meditation, yoga, massage, healthy eating, weight loss or stop smoking programs, were mentioned by one in ten (10%). However this cannot replace the employer’s primary duty to eliminate or minimise stress risks.

It is noticeable that the systems in place that are most popular with employers - flexible working for example - do not address the biggest excessive demands or workload, which was the biggest issue people reported.



Over three quarters of respondents (78%) believe their employers could do more to manage stress. Only 4% said they did not think employers could do more to manage stress in the workplace.



When asked "What more can be done by employers?" most people said: "Communicate, listen and support staff".

Employers could do more to engage and communicate with their employees around the management of stress in the workplace, but this evidence shows they appear reluctant to do so.

UNISON suggests employers could:

- Speak and support employees more.
- Address workload.
- Recognise stress affects most of their staff.
- Raise their concern about cuts.
- Improve autonomy over job role,
- Consult employees when there are changes to the organisation or role.
- Employ more staff to meet job demands.
- Ensure the quality of service and care is maintained as the highest priority

## **In summary**

There is a distinct lack of engagement from employers to address stress in the workplace and this is having a detrimental effect on the health and well being of public sector workers.

Stress - including anxiety and depression - is becoming one of the primary causes for absence at work. It needs to be understood, tackled and managed in order to maintain healthy and safe working environments.

The lack of dialogue between employers and employees around the management of stress is concerning. UNISON workplace representatives need to focus on stress in their negotiations with employers, as a way to improve working conditions

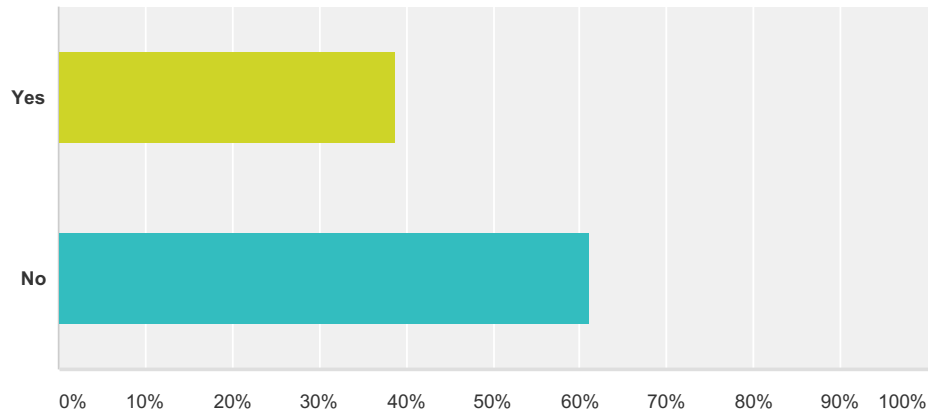
Some employers have put helpful and effective systems in place to support staff. They should be used as good practice examples.

UNISON will continue to put stress at the forefront of our health and safety agenda. We will produce effective and simple materials to implement support in order to improve people's working lives.

UNISON plan to produce a stress toolkit to support workplace representatives when tackling the issue of stress at work. It will include practical steps to engage with employers, case studies of good practice and helpful templates to use in branch negotiations.

### Q1 Has your employer ever spoken to you about stress at work?

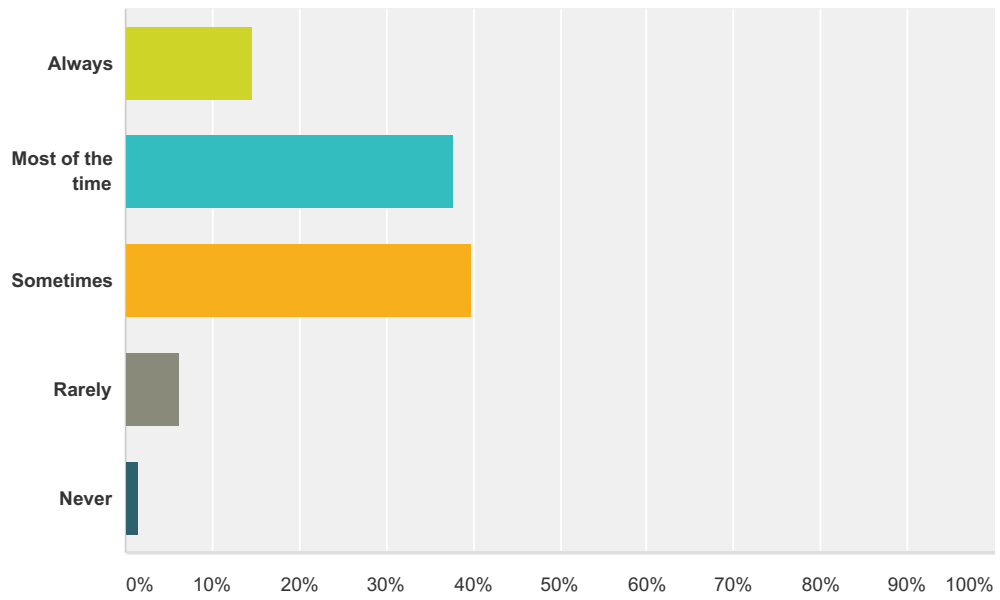
Answered: 9,948 Skipped: 41



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	38.89% 3,869
No	61.11% 6,079
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,948</b>

## Q2 Have you felt under too much pressure at work in the last year?

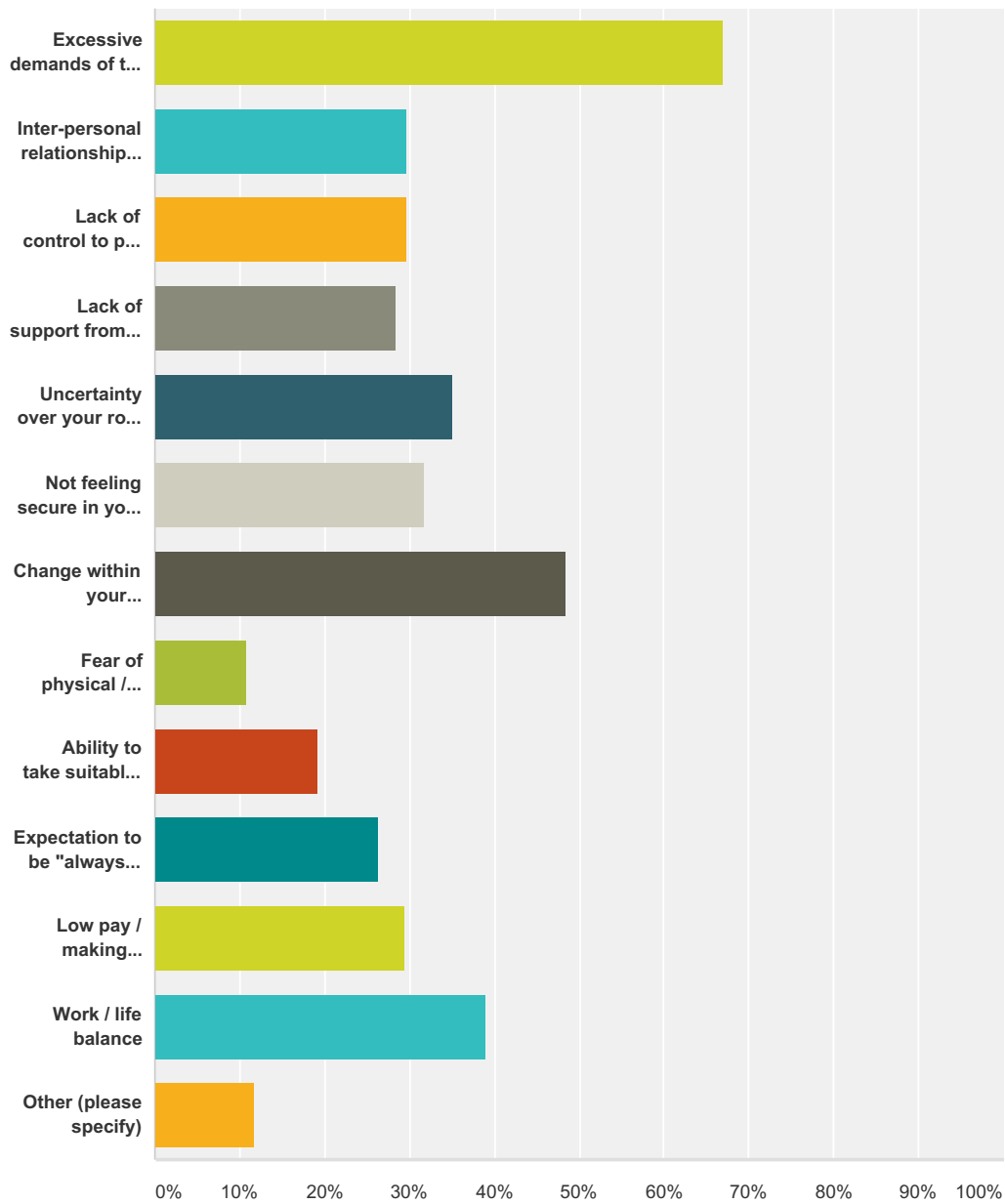
Answered: 9,972 Skipped: 17



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Always	14.58%	1,454
Most of the time	37.80%	3,769
Sometimes	39.90%	3,979
Rarely	6.18%	616
Never	1.54%	154
<b>Total</b>		<b>9,972</b>

### Q3 Is your pressure at work linked to any of the following? (tick all that apply)

Answered: 9,276 Skipped: 713



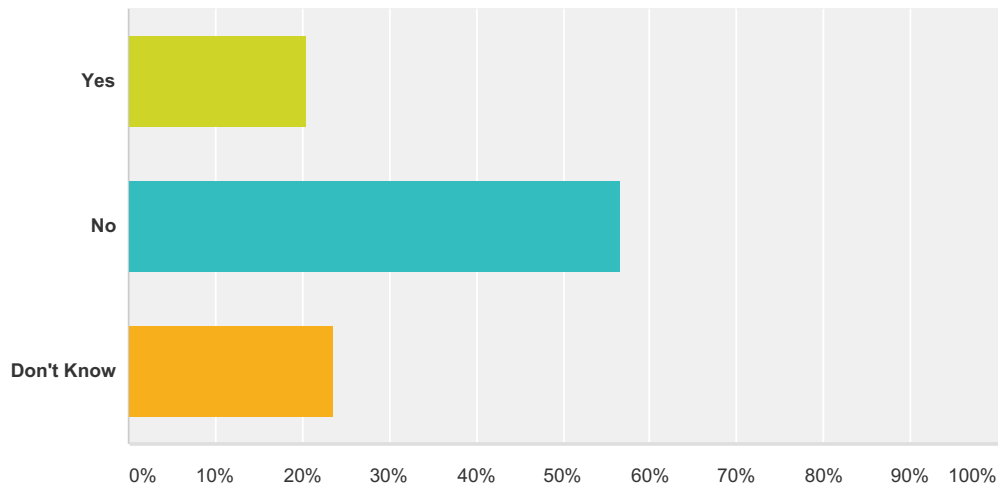
Answer Choices	Responses
Excessive demands of the job - feeling overworked	67.00% 6,215
Inter-personal relationships at work inc. bullying / harrassment	29.57% 2,743
Lack of control to plan your own work / workload	29.73% 2,758
Lack of support from colleagues	28.47% 2,641
Uncertainty over your role at work	35.09% 3,255

## "How Stressed Are You?" UNISON H&S Stress At Work Survey 2017

Not feeling secure in your job	31.73%	2,943
Change within your organisation	48.38%	4,488
Fear of physical / verbal abuse	10.80%	1,002
Ability to take suitable breaks from work (inc. toilet breaks)	19.17%	1,778
Expectation to be "always available" to employers	26.29%	2,439
Low pay / making financial ends meet	29.48%	2,735
Work / life balance	39.06%	3,623
Other (please specify)	11.68%	1,083
<b>Total Respondents: 9,276</b>		

### Q4 Has your employer done anything to combat the issues causing stress at work?

Answered: 9,264 Skipped: 725



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	20.47%	1,896
No	56.60%	5,243
Don't Know	23.69%	2,195
<b>Total Respondents: 9,264</b>		

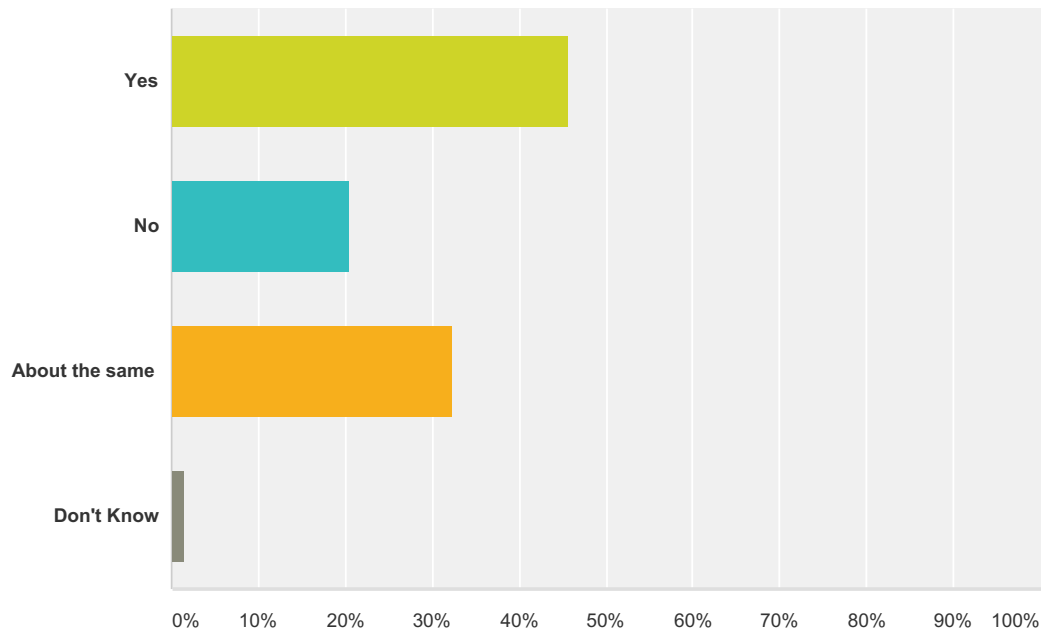
**Q5 What has your employer done to combat  
the issues causing stress at work?**

Answered: 1,701 Skipped: 8,288



### Q6 Do you feel under more pressure at work than 12 months ago?

Answered: 1,810 Skipped: 8,179



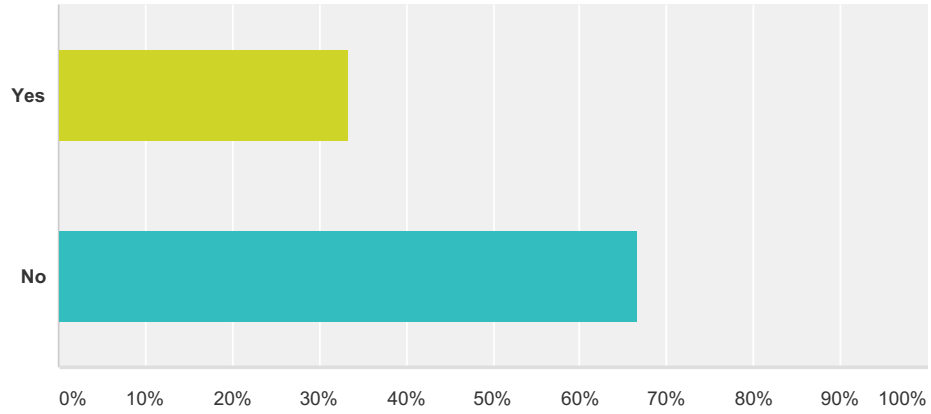
Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Yes	45.80%	829
No	20.39%	369
About the same	32.43%	587
Don't Know	1.38%	25
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,810</b>

**Q7 How have you felt under more pressure  
at work in the last 12 months?**

Answered: 757 Skipped: 9,232

### Q8 Have YOU been off work with work-related stress (including anxiety or depression) in the past 5 years?

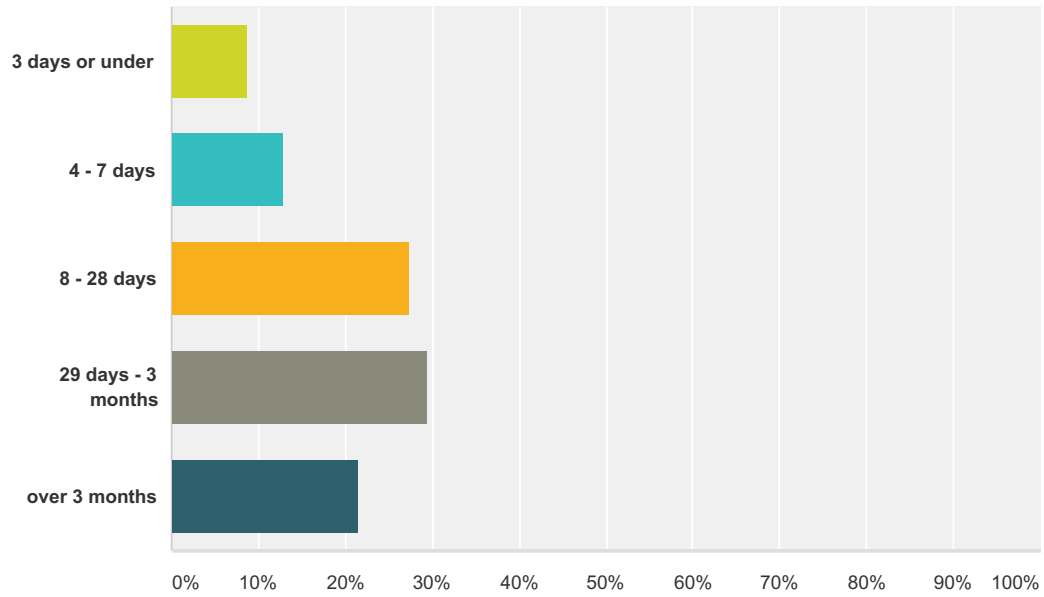
Answered: 1,785 Skipped: 8,204



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	33.39%	596
No	66.61%	1,189
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,785</b>

### Q9 If so, how long for?

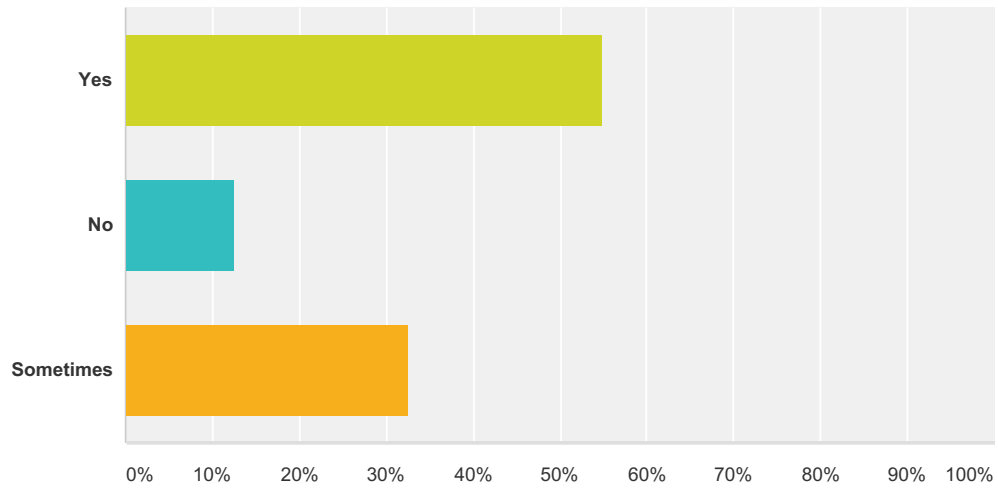
Answered: 598 Skipped: 9,391



Answer Choices	Responses
3 days or under	8.70% 52
4 - 7 days	13.04% 78
8 - 28 days	27.26% 163
29 days - 3 months	29.43% 176
over 3 months	21.57% 129
<b>Total</b>	<b>598</b>

**Q10 Do you feel the services your employer provides are suffering as employees try to cope with undue pressure at work?**

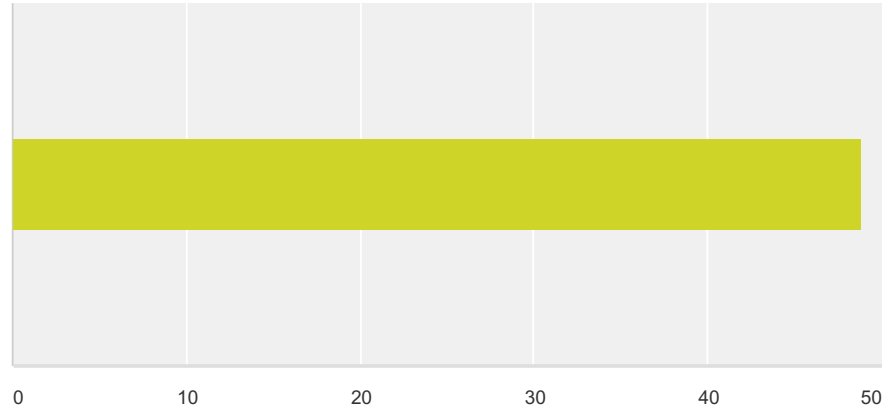
Answered: 9,050 Skipped: 939



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	54.82% 4,961
No	12.53% 1,134
Sometimes	32.65% 2,955
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,050</b>

**Q11 Please let us know how you feel about this statement - "I am easily able to deliver the level of service users and colleagues expect, in spite of the pressure I am under" (please use slider to say to what degree (%) you agree / disagree with this statement. 50% is neither agree nor disagree)**

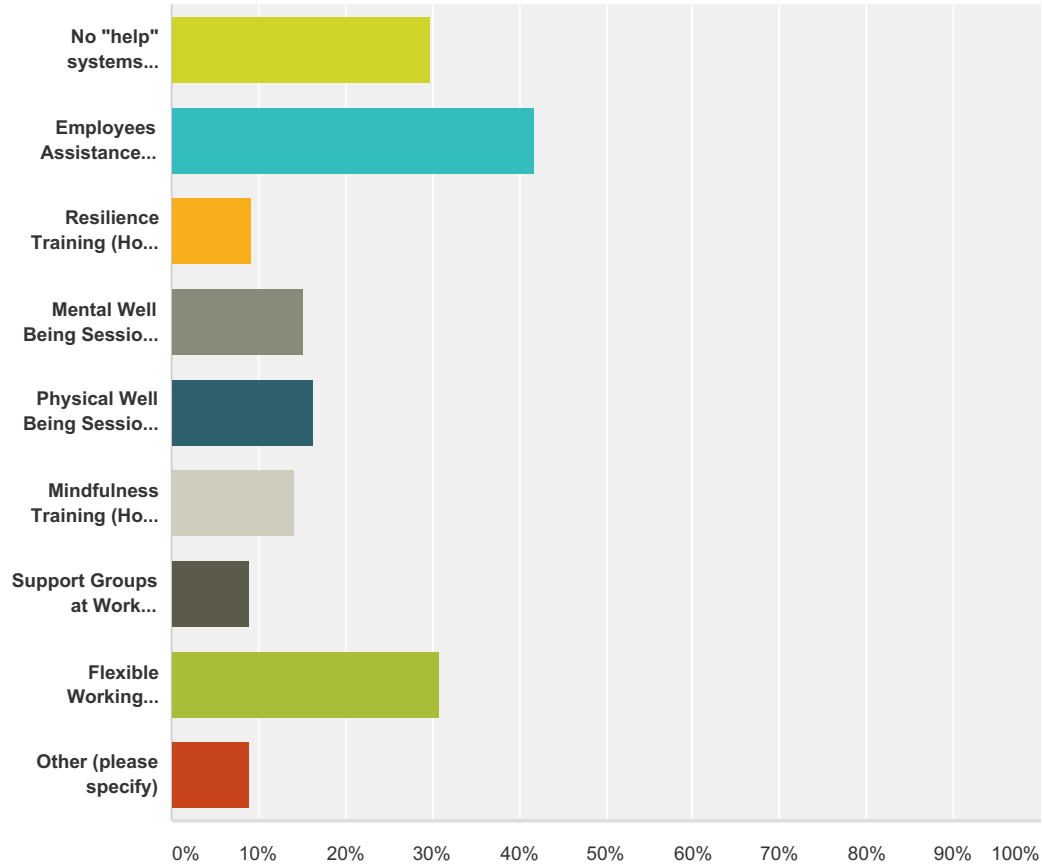
Answered: 8,831 Skipped: 1,158



Answer Choices	Average Number	Total Number	Responses
	49	431,264	8,831
<b>Total Respondents: 8,831</b>			

### Q12 Are you aware of any support your employer provides to "help" cope with stress? (Answer all that apply)

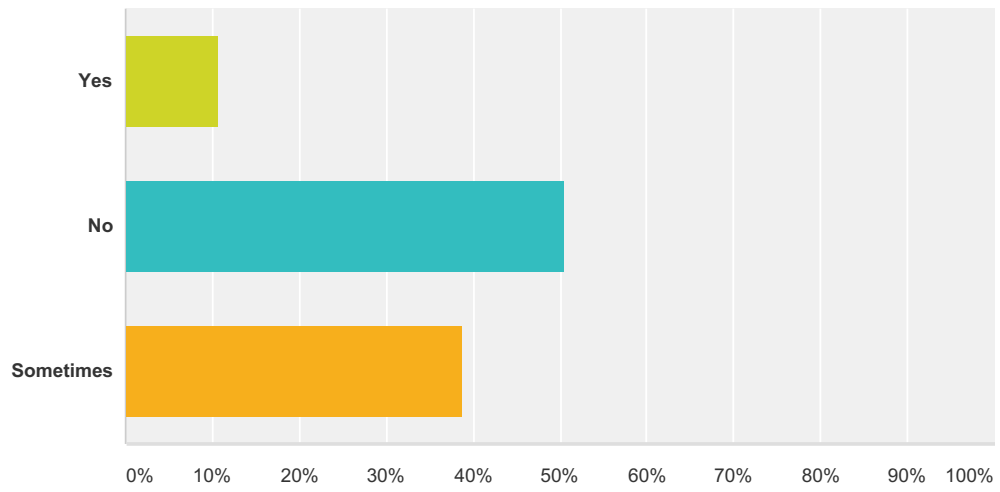
Answered: 8,285 Skipped: 1,704



Answer Choices	Responses
No "help" systems provided	29.86% 2,474
Employees Assistance Program (EAP) (Employer funded telephone or online support and/or counselling service)	41.80% 3,463
Resilience Training (How to "bounce back" from difficult experiences)	9.09% 753
Mental Well Being Sessions (Meditation / Yoga / Head / Neck massage etc)	15.30% 1,268
Physical Well Being Sessions (Healthy Eating / Weight Loss program / Stop Smoking etc)	16.21% 1,343
Mindfulness Training (How to be more aware your thoughts / feelings in order to manage them)	14.15% 1,172
Support Groups at Work (Walking / Time To Talk / Mentoring)	9.03% 748
Flexible Working arrangements (Compressed hours / Early or later start and end times)	30.95% 2,564
Other (please specify)	8.96% 742
<b>Total Respondents: 8,285</b>	

### Q13 Do you feel supported (with regards to stress) in the workplace?

Answered: 8,749 Skipped: 1,240

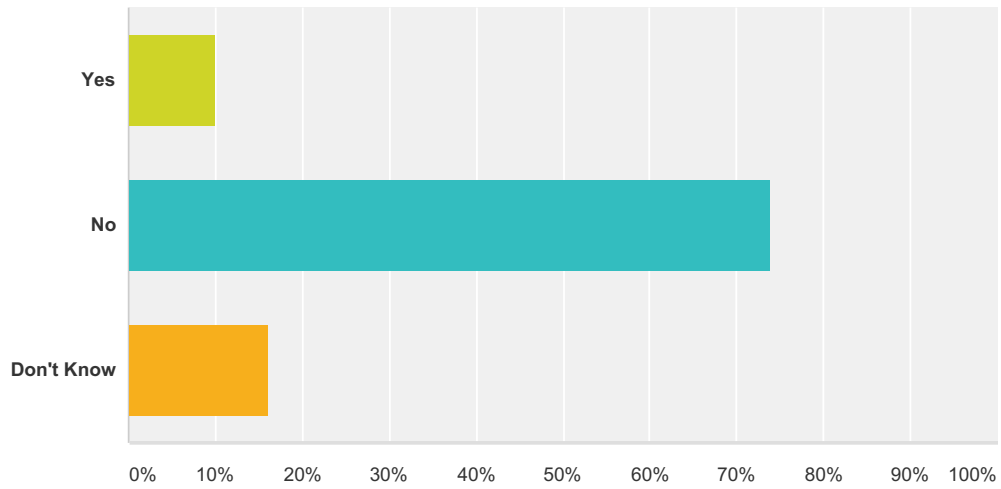


Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	10.68% 934
No	50.55% 4,423
Sometimes	38.77% 3,392
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,749</b>



### Q14 Has your employer surveyed you / your colleagues about the risk of stress at work on you?

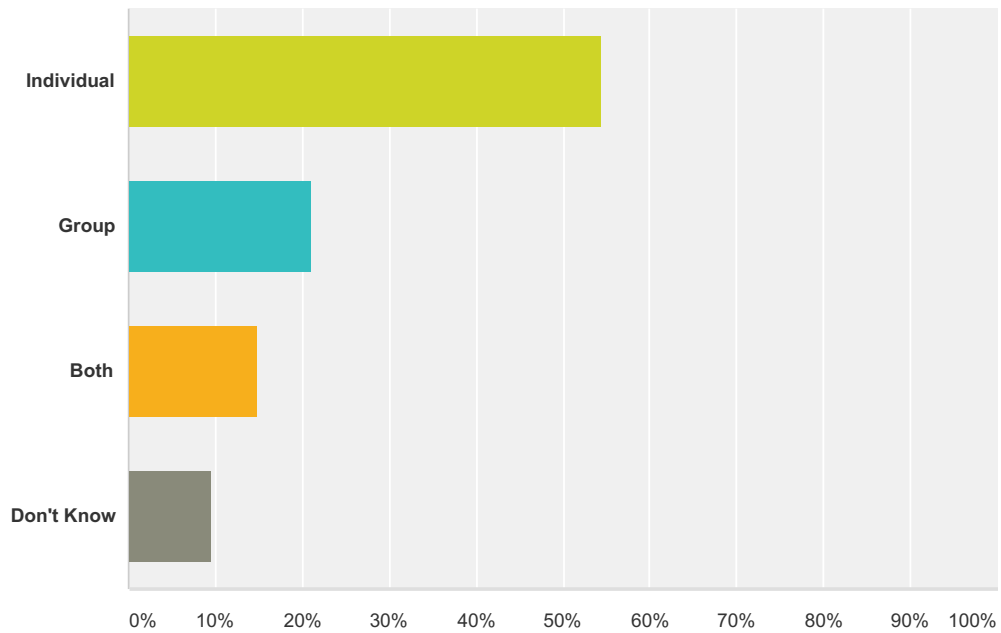
Answered: 8,766 Skipped: 1,223



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	9.92% 870
No	73.99% 6,486
Don't Know	16.08% 1,410
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,766</b>

### Q15 Was the survey on stress done on and Individual or Group basis?

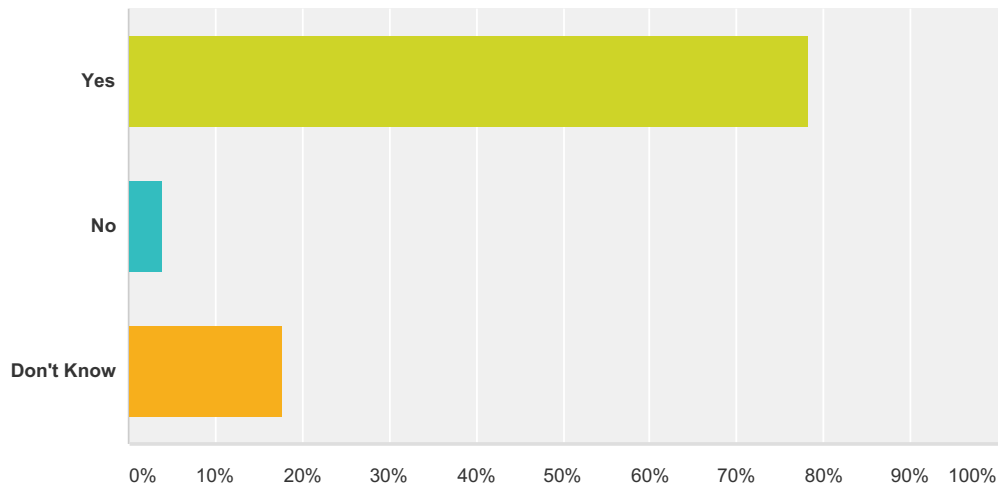
Answered: 885 Skipped: 9,104



Answer Choices	Responses
Individual	54.58% 483
Group	21.02% 186
Both	14.80% 131
Don't Know	9.60% 85
<b>Total</b>	<b>885</b>

### Q16 Do you think your employer could do more to manage stress at work?

Answered: 8,716 Skipped: 1,273



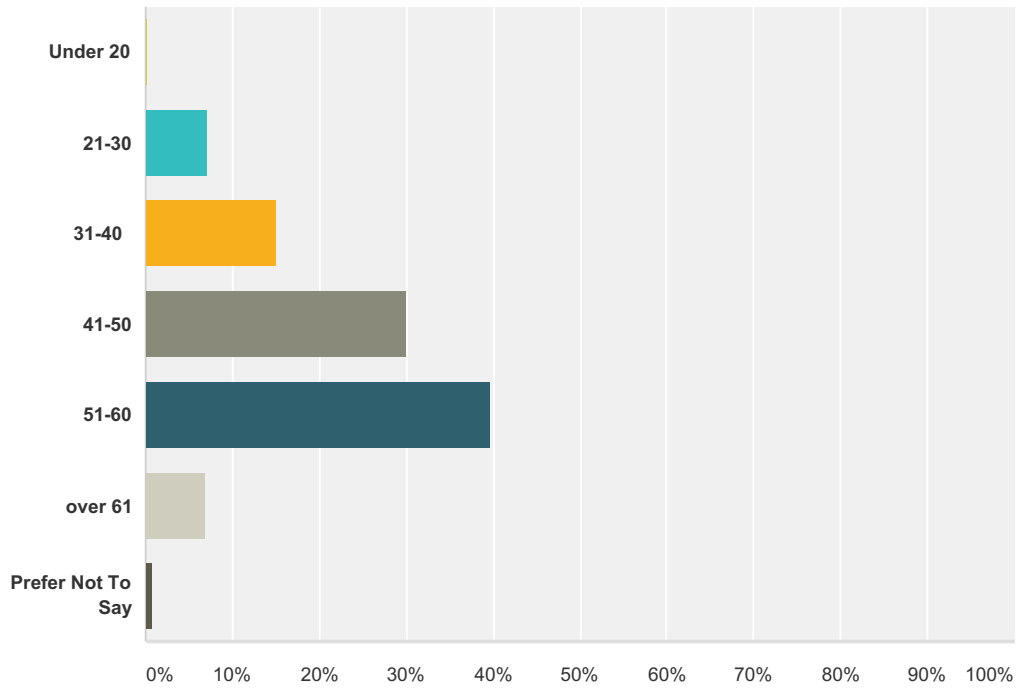
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	78.37% 6,831
No	3.90% 340
Don't Know	17.73% 1,545
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,716</b>

**Q17 What more could your employer do to manage stress in the workplace?**

Answered: 5,941 Skipped: 4,048

### Q18 Your Age

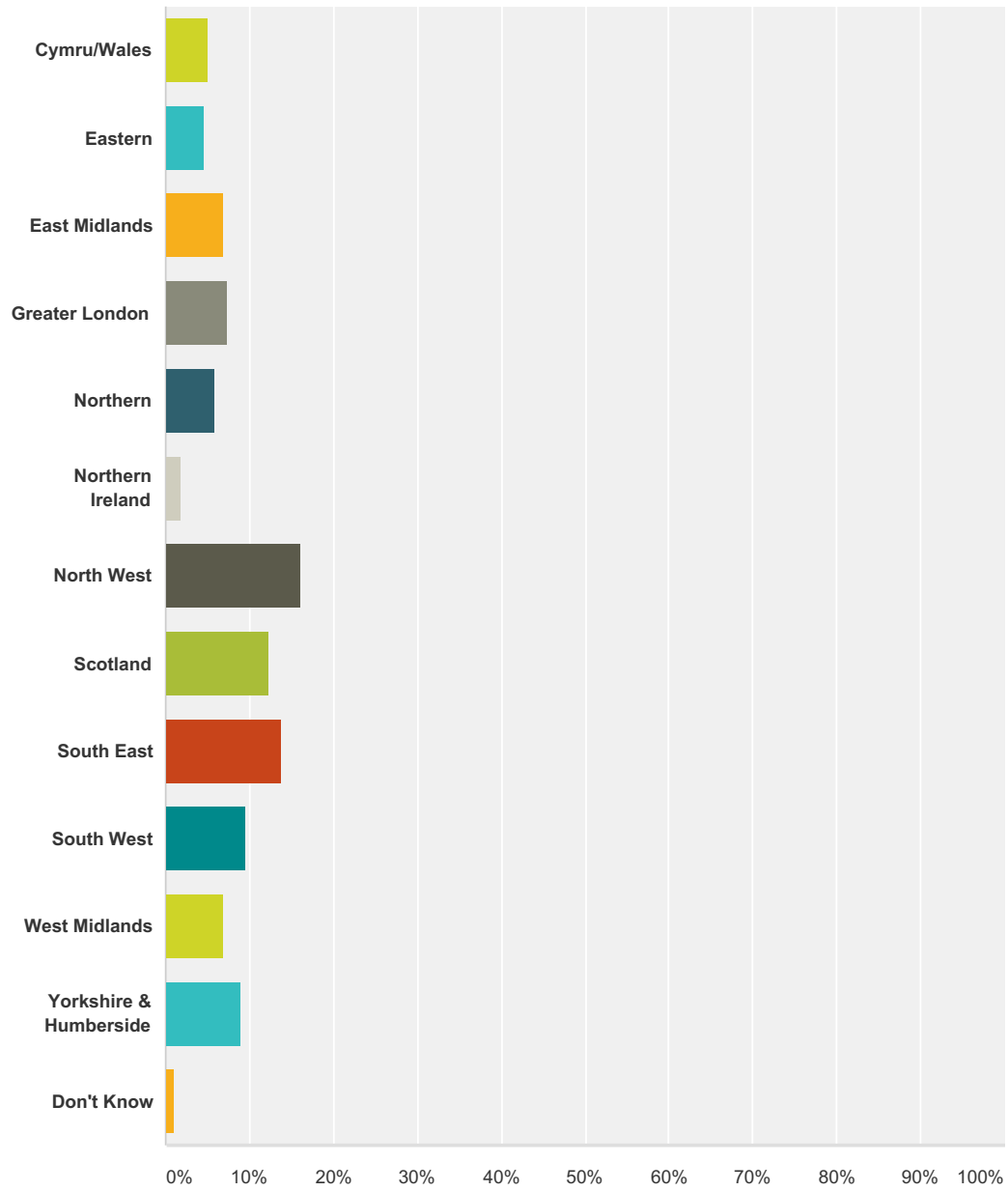
Answered: 8,516 Skipped: 1,473



Answer Choices	Responses
Under 20	0.27% 23
21-30	7.17% 611
31-40	14.96% 1,274
41-50	30.07% 2,561
51-60	39.61% 3,373
over 61	6.98% 594
Prefer Not To Say	0.94% 80
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,516</b>

### Q19 Your Region

Answered: 8,516 Skipped: 1,473



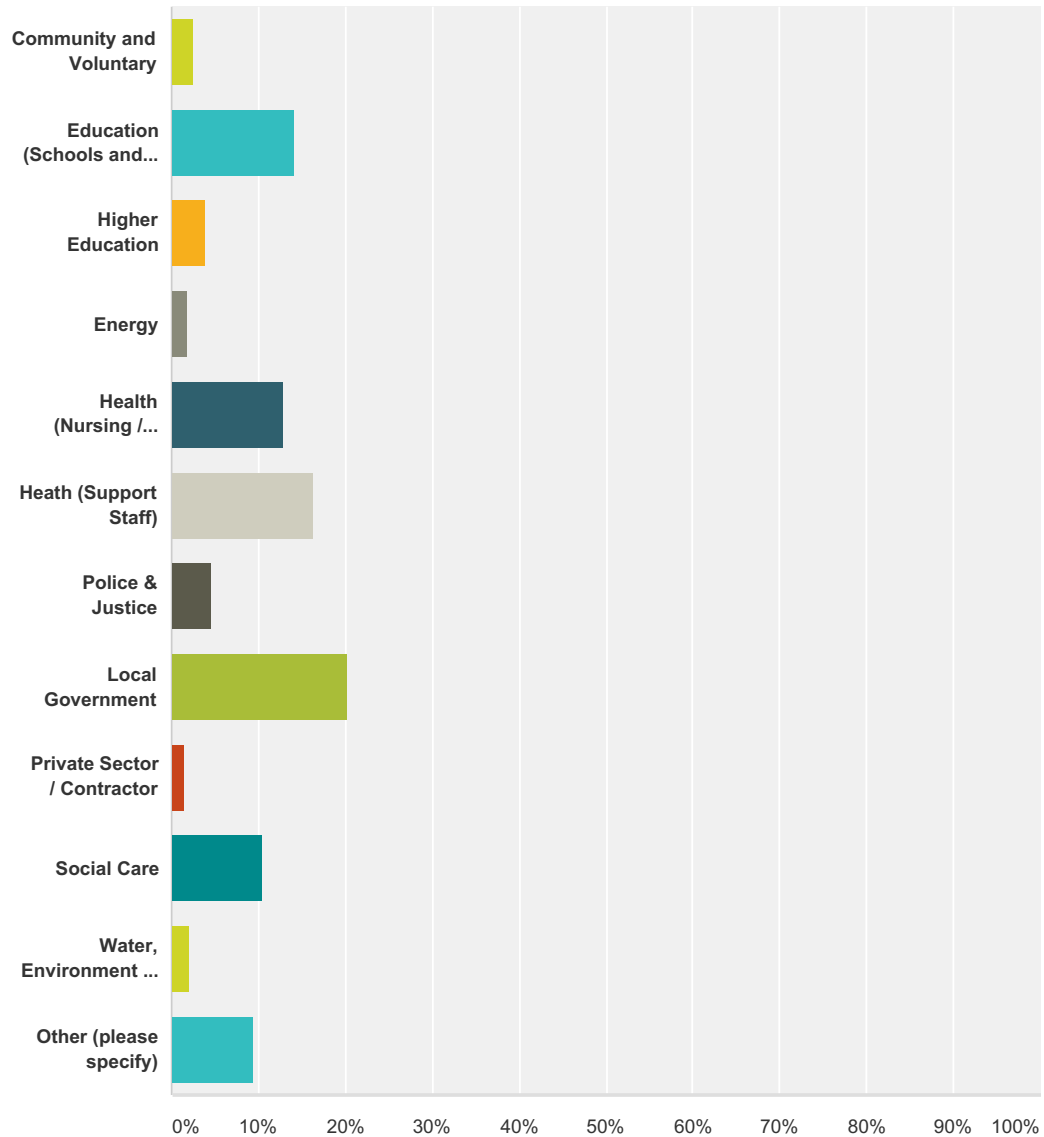
Answer Choices	Responses
Cymru/Wales	5.01% 427
Eastern	4.51% 384
East Midlands	6.90% 588
Greater London	7.30% 622
Northern	5.82% 496
Northern Ireland	1.80% 153

## "How Stressed Are You?" UNISON H&S Stress At Work Survey 2017

North West	16.08%	1,369
Scotland	12.26%	1,044
South East	13.83%	1,178
South West	9.55%	813
West Midlands	6.86%	584
Yorkshire & Humberside	8.94%	761
Don't Know	1.14%	97
<b>Total</b>		<b>8,516</b>

## Q20 Your Occupational Group

Answered: 8,516 Skipped: 1,473



Answer Choices	Responses
Community and Voluntary	2.48% 211
Education (Schools and Colleges)	14.27% 1,215
Higher Education	3.95% 336
Energy	1.90% 162
Health (Nursing / Paramedic)	12.96% 1,104
Health (Support Staff)	16.18% 1,378
Police & Justice	4.59% 391
Local Government	20.20% 1,720

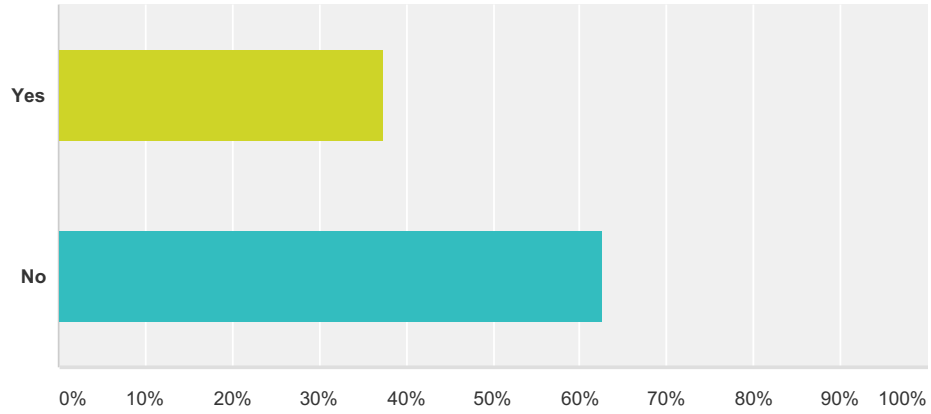


## "How Stressed Are You?" UNISON H&S Stress At Work Survey 2017

Private Sector / Contractor	1.42%	121
Social Care	10.44%	889
Water, Environment and Transport	2.14%	182
Other (please specify)	9.48%	807
<b>Total</b>		<b>8,516</b>

**Q21 UNISON often likes to hear about the experiences of it's members. Would we be able to contact you about this?**

Answered: 8,516 Skipped: 1,473



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	37.41%	3,186
No	62.59%	5,330
<b>Total</b>		<b>8,516</b>

**Q22 Your Name**

Answered: 2,895 Skipped: 7,094

**Q23 Please enter your email address below:**

Answered: 2,868 Skipped: 7,121