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M E N T A L H E A L T H

2024 REPORT

A DEEPER LOOK

In 2024, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) East Central District (ECD) conducted a pilot study that delved into the mental health and wellness of leaders and members within a six-state radius. These results and subsequent work from its Advocacy Committee correlate to existing research in the PR industry and beyond. The goal is to take action to help PR practitioners lead from a holistically healthy, sustainable, and authentic place.

[PRSAECD.ORG](https://prsaecd.org)

ABOUT PRSA ECD

One of the 10 PRSA districts, [PRSA East Central District](#) represents 15 PRSA chapters concentrated in Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, and Northwestern Pennsylvania. PRSA ECD's mission is to build stronger chapters throughout the district by facilitating chapter leadership development, professional development and communication between all components of the organization.

ABOUT PRSA

The [Public Relations Society of America](#), headquartered in New York City, is the world's largest professional organization for public relations professionals. With nearly 20,000 members, organized into 110 Chapters nationwide, it represents business and industry, counseling firms, government, associations, hospitals, schools, professional services firms, and nonprofit organizations.



Some of PRSA ECD's Board Members in 2024.



THE STATE OF PR PROFESSIONALS' MENTAL HEALTH

The public relations industry is an always-on industry. Depending on the role and sector, PR professionals may find themselves consistently working long hours, meeting increasing demands from executive leadership, learning about emerging trends and technologies for their toolkits, and finding it difficult to balance projects and everyday life.

The American Psychological Association (APA)'s [2024 Work in America Study](#), delved into psychological safety in the workplace, among other factors. The APA defines psychological safety as "a workplace climate in which workers are comfortable expressing themselves and believe they can take appropriate interpersonal risks." This refers to being able to speak up about concerns and mistakes without feeling embarrassed or threatened with retribution. Speaking up about challenging topics can lead to increased creativity, innovation, and collaboration. Employees who feel more psychologically safe experience more job satisfaction, non-monetary rewards for their efforts, meaning and potential, and general positive mental health.

The study gleaned that most employed Americans are generally satisfied with their jobs and contrive some type of meaning from them, especially when they feel psychologically safe. Many respondents, however, reported differences based on job type and level, relationships with supervisors, mental health support on the job, age, preferred location (remote, hybrid, in-person), or disability. Those who reported lower psychological safety reported feeling tense or stressed in a typical workday, emotionally exhausted, ineffective in their job roles, irritable or angry, and a desire to just keep to themselves at work. 44% stated that they believe their employer thinks the workplace environment and culture are healthier than they actually are.

For many, especially in the public relations and communications fields, stress and burnout are defining factors of their work days and lives. In 2022, PRSA-NY and the Honan Strategy Group released the [State of Mental Health in PR Report](#). This study aimed to uncover members' mental health and provide tangible resources. Members believe that public relations is 63% somewhat more or significantly more stressful than other industries. Fear, anxiety, and other factors also greatly impact a PR practitioner's everyday work and life.

Muck Rack's 2024 study, [The State of Work-Life Balance in PR](#), analyzed how stress, salaries, burnout, and other factors influence more than 2,000 PR practitioners. On a Likert scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most stressful, PR pros ranked their stress at a consistent 7. Half of the respondents (from entry-level to director levels) admitted to leaving a job within the last year due to burnout due to heavy workloads, increasing deadlines, and the nature of "always-on" expectations. Nearly everyone surveyed (96%) said they had difficulty relaxing and switching off from work after their work day was done. More than half (58%) reported that they work more than 40 hours per week, including meetings, responding to messages, researching, planning, implementing, evaluating, writing, outreaching, et al.

PRSA'S ECD SURVEY RESULTS

In April 2024, PRSA ECD released its own pilot study to assess stress and burnout within our six-state radius. As a District, we committed to mental health and wellness advocacy in 2024 and beyond, adding it as a primary focus to our Advocacy Committee's work. We asked about [burnout](#) in our survey, which seems to be a cornerstone of stress within the PR/communications profession and in our PRSA volunteer roles. These results enhance our current 2024-2027 strategic plan, as well as formal and informal conversations and events. Ultimately, we aim to continue to serve members in our six-state radius and ignite further conversations that will have ripple effects throughout PRSA National and other Chapters and Districts.

Key Insights

PRSA ROLE

54.8%

of respondents were leaders or members within ECD's service area (Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, and Northwestern Pennsylvania).

MENTAL HEALTH VIEWS

48.4%

of respondents stated that they mostly prioritize their mental health. The majority of leaders/members works 40-50 hours per week in their PR roles and 10-20 hours per week in PRSA roles.

PR/STRESS CONNECTION

51.9%

of PRSA chapter leaders and members within PRSA ECD feel stressed in their PR positions, with 38.8% feeling stressed due to their PRSA leadership and/or membership commitments.

HUSTLE CULTURE EFFECTS

64.5%

of those replying to the survey attribute at least some contribution of hustle culture and burnout to their overall stress levels. This shows a slight-to-significant effect.

BURNOUT

80.6%

of PRSA ECD's leaders and members surveyed are feeling the direct burnout effect of frustration. Lack of enthusiasm, stagnation, and apathy are also at play but are not as high.

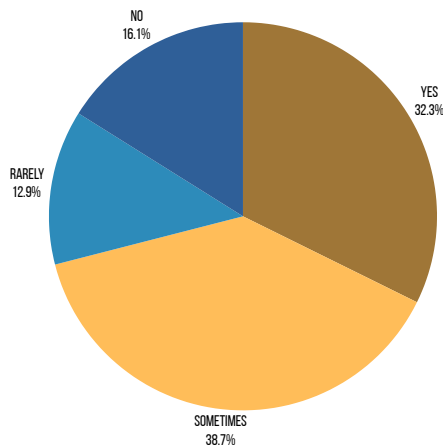
SOURCES OF BURNOUT

51.6%

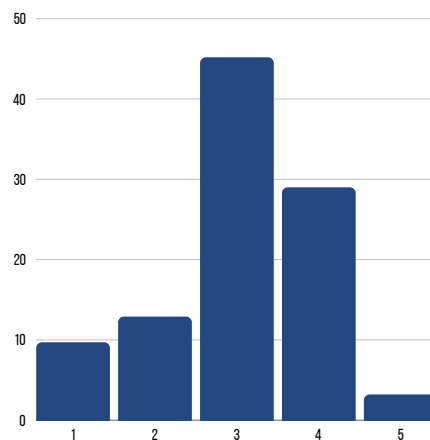
contribute their workloads to the main source of burnout and stress. Others include personal stress (41.9%) and feeling uninspired, unmotivated, or unproductive (41.9%).

While this survey did not glean the representative sample we aimed for, it allowed us to gain valuable insights into the lives and work of our PRSA Chapter leaders and members. Thirty-one members and leaders in 12 Chapters participated in this pilot study. The results corroborate other studies, including Muck Rack, APA, etc. Learn more about our survey [here](#).

DO YOU FEEL YOUR SENSE OF SELF IS IMPACTED BY YOUR PR ROLE?



HOW OFTEN DO YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO COMPARTMENTALIZE YOUR EMOTIONS IN YOUR PR/ PRSA ROLES? (Likert Scale, with 1 being "never" and 5 being "always.")



WHAT'S NEXT?

"THIS SURVEY IS A GREAT START. LET'S MOVE FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION."
- A MEMBER WHO TOOK OUR MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY.

In 2025, PRSA ECD will continue mental health and wellness advocacy through programming, resources, conversations, coffee chats, and more. While PR roles will likely always be stressful depending on the role, sector, and other factors, you take action to help manage stress and burnout.

BE SELF-AWARE.

Know what contributes to your stress and burnout and what alleviates those pressures. When do you feel the most and least productive? Which components of your job stress you out the most? What inspires and motivates you, and how can you add more of that to your day?

PROTECT YOUR TIME.

Although it can be challenging to say "no" to colleagues and requests, taking on more than you can handle is not sustainable. Block your calendar for project work that requires more dedicated focus, say "no" to nonessential requests, and use tools that allow you to "work smarter and not harder." Adhere to your consistent work schedule as much as possible.

ASK FOR SUPPORT.

[Muck Rack's study](#) stated that most PR pros believe their workplaces would support them during burnout and other mental health struggles. 72% said they would receive support from coworkers, with 60% stating they believed they'd receive support from their company's leadership. See which resources are available to you and what you would need to externally seek.

KNOW WHEN TO STEP AWAY.

Your mental health is your most precious resource. When you are in a state of constant burnout and stress – despite your best efforts to manage it – know when to step away from a position that is just too much. Many PR practitioners have several items on their plates, from family obligations, other passion projects, professional development, hobbies, etc. Everyone has a unique threshold. Take time to assess your own values and desires, take vacation days, set manageable expectations, and create an exit strategy (if it comes to that).

MORE INFORMATION

PRSA ECD HAS A [ROBUST MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT](#) ON OUR WEBSITE.

WE CONSISTENTLY ADD MORE RESOURCES TO IT, AND IF YOU SEE SOMETHING THAT NEEDS ADDED,
PLEASE CONTACT US AT PRSAECDSOCIAL@GMAIL.COM.