



Education (All Education and Tertiary)

Sector EAP analysis
and clinical insights


assure
PROGRAMS

COMMENTARY

Introduction

This report considers the psychosocial risks and insights derived from EAP (Employee Assistance Program) observations for customers in the Education Sector. It is intended to support Assure Programs' business partners in exploring trends at an industry level, and is best used in conjunction with each customer's individual EAP reporting and other data sources, to inform proactive mental health and wellbeing strategies.

Assure covers over one million Australians across all industry sectors including employees' family members, and in 2019 provided 65,000 hours of EAP counselling and 6,800 hours of support for critical incidents and significant events. 77% of all Assure's counselling sessions were face to face, and 95% of clients were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their counselling experience.

In the Education Sector, Assure provides EAP services to 27 organisations, totalling 39,000 employees plus their families. In 2019 Assure provided 5,800 counselling sessions and 640 hours of support for critical incidents and significant events in this sector.

Data in this report includes the Tertiary Sector, for which a separate report has also been published

Mental health issues are the most common reason people are accessing EAP at Assure, comprising 35% of all presenting concerns. Because we only use experienced psychologists (not provisionally registered psychologists, counsellors, social workers or chaplains) we are able to assess and treat these issues (particularly complex and trauma-related cases) using evidence-based interventions. Additionally, if appropriate, we offer continuity of care for longer term treatment in conjunction with a GP Mental Health Care Plan, where clients can receive rebates through the Medicare system when necessary and continue to use the same Assure psychologist if they choose.

Industry context and psychosocial risks: All Education

Working in the Education Sector can be a highly rewarding experience due to the capacity of work in this Sector to make a difference, with an immediate and profound impact on the learning and development of students and young people. Having noted this, the Education Sector exhibits a combination of psychosocial risk factors that continue to attract attention across the country. Mental health concerns for both staff and students continue to be one of the key concerns for this Sector, with claims for mental health injury through compensation systems continuing to rise.

The highly interpersonal nature of work within this Sector may have a particular impact on psychological health and wellbeing. Working extensively with students, parents, teachers and administrative staff typically entails a combination of ongoing emotional and social demands, particularly in the case of students who lack motivation or who are less engaged with classroom activities. Managing the competing needs of these stakeholders (e.g., children vs. their parents vs. departments) may cause some teachers to feel pulled in many directions and conflicted in terms of their role requirements, particularly when these demands are combined with ongoing requirements to prepare for lessons, grade assessments, complete administrative duties and so forth.

Technological changes also continue to challenge the Education Sector, and in particular the financial capacity of individual schools and central Departments to fund these new ways of delivering a contemporary learning experience. Rapid changes in economic and social circumstances often require a recasting of priorities at short notice, which may contribute to a sense of frustration and stress within this Sector.

In addition to this, both teaching and administrative personnel working within the Education sector may often be required to tolerate working hours that see staff devoting weekends, holiday and after-hours time to ensure the learning outcomes are successfully achieved. This may be exasperated by changes in curriculum and regulatory requirements, increasing class sizes, and more rigid expectations regarding the learning outcomes to be achieved within a given timeframe, requiring teaching staff to strike a balance between meeting the individualised needs of students whilst also ensuring that departmental milestones and goals are met.

Schools are impacted by their local community environments, and incidents and psychological stressors that affect students outside school typically find their way into the school community either through direct experience or exposure to the incident/stressor or through the reaction of students and parents to these events that translate into difficult behaviours in a school setting. Consequently, teachers may be exposed to disruptive, violent, aggressive or otherwise inappropriate behaviour from students or their families, necessitating well-developed skills in de-escalating emotionally charged interactions with tact, empathy and assertiveness. Further to this, the experience of working with vulnerable or at-risk students (e.g., those exposed to bullying or family hardship) could have emotional implications for personnel working in this sector, especially in situations when efforts to improve a vulnerable student's circumstances are not possible or successful.

Education: All Education & Tertiary

COMMENTARY

Although working in the Education Sector can be a highly rewarding experience due to the immediate and profound impact that work in this industry can have on the learning and development of students and young people, this line of work can also be emotionally and socially taxing.

Having noted this combination of stressors within and outside of the classroom, we should not be surprised that the Education Sector has significantly high levels of EAP utilisation. However, capitalising on identified strengths and taking proactive steps to manage or eliminate psychosocial risks can go a long way towards cultivating a psychologically safe and healthy workplace.

EAP Insights: All Education

The information on the following pages summarises EAP utilisation for Assure's customers in the Education Sector (non-tertiary) over the past two years, in comparison with all other sectors. We can make the following observations and insights:

- Overall utilisation increased from 7.77% in 2018 to 9.98% in 2019, compared to 8.15% for the all-sector average in 2019. This increasing degree of utilisation reflects growing levels of awareness and acceptance of mental health issues between 2018 and 2019. The observation that EAP usage is substantially higher in the Education Sector may relate to the diverse psychosocial risks associated with this sector and the emotionally and socially demanding nature of the work.
- The most common age of clients (29% aged 40-49) was somewhat higher in the Education Sector than in other sectors (24% aged 40-99), and reflected an overall skew towards older age groups. This may reflect the older average age of employees working in this sector, or alternatively suggest that there may be specific challenges in the workplace faced by older age groups (e.g., concerns about retirement planning).
- 29% of clients were in their first 2 years of tenure, and 16% were in their first 2 to 4 years. This was substantially less than the length of tenure observed in other sectors, whereby 37% of clients were in their first 2 years of tenure, and 19% were in their first 2 to 4 years. By way of contrast, 35% in the Education Sector (compared to 25% overall) had been employed for over 8 years. This suggests that employees in the Education Sector who are later in their tenure may be more likely to utilise Assure's EAP service than those with longer periods of tenure.
- Substantially more clients were female (76%) than for other sectors (63%). Although this may be consistent with the overall gender mix of employees in the Education Sector, it could also reflect an opportunity to normalise the value and importance of help-seeking for all gender groups in this sector.
- Access by family members was consistent between 2019 (15%) and 2018 (15%). This rate of utilisation was only marginally higher than the rate across all sectors during 2019 (13%).
- Employee awareness about their EAP service comes most commonly from HR or People & Culture (19%), which was lower than in other sectors (22%). This was followed by one's supervisor (16%), which was also lower than in other sectors (20%). This data suggests that equipping supervisors and HR personnel with the capabilities required to support vulnerable staff members and offer a referral to EAP when needed may be of particular importance in this sector, given that these personnel are the primary gateway to EAP for many employees.
- The mix of workplace concerns (35%) and personal concerns (65%) was consistent with other sectors and remained more or less stable. However, it should be noted that whilst relationships and mental health issues are classified as personal concerns, they often have their origin in workplace pressures. Furthermore, workplace issues can often be a factor underpinning stress in the home environment.
- Among personal concerns, symptoms of anxiety (including pre-existing anxiety) were the most commonly reported (25%), which is marginally higher than the all-sector average (also 23%). This was followed by relationship issues within couples and parenting (24%), which is consistent with the all-sector average (also 24%).
- Among workplace concerns, excessive workload pressures (16%), concerns about performance and reduced productivity (9%), work life balance (8%) and conflict with supervisors (7%) were the most common. These were largely stable between 2018 and 2019, and were also more or less consistent with other sectors.
- Access to Assure's Manager Support Program was primarily to help employees through change, critical incidents and other stressful situations (44%), which was substantially higher than the frequency of this concern in other industries (33%) and also higher than the frequency of this concern in 2018 (38%). This suggests that upskilling managers in the domain of navigating change and critical incidents may be of especial importance in the Education Sector, compared to other sectors. This was followed by managing a distressed employee (20%) and advice on referring an employee to the EAP (19%).

COMMENTARY

Introduction

This report considers the psychosocial risks and insights derived from EAP (Employee Assistance Program) observations for customers in the Tertiary Sector. It is intended to support Assure Programs' business partners in exploring trends at an industry level, and is best used in conjunction with each customer's individual EAP reporting and other data sources, to inform proactive mental health and wellbeing strategies.

Assure covers over one million Australians across all industry sectors including employees' family members, and in 2019 provided 65,000 hours of EAP counselling and 6,800 hours of support for critical incidents and significant events. 77% of all Assure's counselling sessions were face to face, and 95% of clients were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their counselling experience.

In the Tertiary Sector, Assure provides EAP services to 7 organisations, totalling 20,000 employees plus their families. In 2019 Assure provided 3,400 counselling sessions and 417 hours of support for critical incidents and significant events in this sector.

Mental health issues are the most common reason people are accessing EAP at Assure, comprising 35% of all presenting concerns. Because we only use experienced psychologists (not provisionally registered psychologists, counsellors, social workers or chaplains) we are able to assess and treat these issues (particularly complex and trauma-related cases) using evidence-based interventions. Additionally, if appropriate, we offer continuity of care for longer term treatment in conjunction with a GP Mental Health Care Plan, where clients can receive rebates through the Medicare system when necessary and continue to use the same Assure psychologist if they choose.

Industry context and psychosocial risks: Tertiary Education

This is the first year that Assure has provided a report on the EAP experience of the Tertiary Education Sector. Previously, the data has been comingled with the overall Education Sector. However, recognising the growing number of Assure customers in the Tertiary Sector and the specific psychosocial risks, stressors and pressures faced by personnel in this Sector makes this an essential new Sector Report to prepare.

Working in the Tertiary Education Sector can be a highly rewarding experience due to the intrinsically rewarding nature of furthering academic scholarship and shaping the education and development of the next generation. Having noted this, an especial challenge for the Tertiary Education Sector is the continued commoditisation of education, with an increased focus on securing regular and reliable income streams in a volatile marketplace. Competition from within and outside the traditional Tertiary Education Sector through technology-enabled learning and alternatives to the mainstream models of delivery has seen the sector at times leading in this challenge and at others catching up to significant shifts in competitor and student preferences.

Industry needs also continue to evolve and change over time. This, in turn, may place pressure on the Tertiary Education Sector to not just keep pace with the changes, but seek to be ahead of the change to ensure that graduates and research groups preserve a strong reputation and remain relevant to the needs of industry and the economy. A greater reliance on industry funding has also increased the pressure to perform and deliver employable and industry-ready graduates.

In addition to this, academic staff in the Tertiary Education Sector regularly face the need to balance a large number of competing demands, including conducting research, publishing in academic journals, applying for grants, supervising research students, delivering lectures and tutorials, coordinating academic subjects, marking assignments, attending to administrative tasks, attending academic conferences and nurturing relationships with industry partners. Balancing these significant demands may substantially detract from work-life balance and reduce the time available to conduct cutting-edge research in novel areas, particularly given the "publish or perish" nature of this competitive sector. This potential for an excessive workload and an imbalance between work and life can have significant implications for physical and psychological health if it is not managed appropriately.

The aforementioned stressors faced by academic personnel may be particularly exasperated for early career academic staff, who are often employed on fixed-term contracts and need to compete against a large number of international competitors in order to solidify their scholarly reputation, establish a robust research portfolio, publish their work, and secure a permanent academic role. Professional staff, as with research staff, are also likely to face a high workload and complex job demands that may have adverse implications for their mental health if they are not managed appropriately. The challenge is often that in some cases, professional staff may not receive comparable recognition for their contribution or comparable opportunities for development and career advancement in the same way that academic staff do.

COMMENTARY

Although there are many similarities between the trends observed in the Tertiary Education Sector and the rest of the Education Sector, it is worth noting that the uptake of Assure's EAP service is comparatively much lower in the Tertiary Education Sector compared to the rest of the Education Sector.

Taking steps to increase awareness and acceptance of mental health issues in the coming years could play a significant role in bridging this gap, particularly given the continued commoditisation of education and the competitive and rapidly evolving nature of this sector.

EAP Insights: Tertiary Education

The information on the following pages summarises EAP utilisation for Assure's customers in the Tertiary Education Sector over the past two years, in comparison with all other sectors. We can make the following observations and insights:

- Overall utilisation was substantially lower in the Tertiary Education Sector (5.05%), compared to the rest of the Education Sector (9.98%) and the all-sector average in 2019 (8.15%). This comparatively lower degree of utilisation reflects an opportunity to increase awareness and acceptance of mental health issues in the coming years within the Tertiary Education Sector, particularly given the high pressure and rapidly evolving nature of this industry.
- The most common age of clients (31% aged 30-39) was slightly higher than the rest of the Education Sector (27%), but less than in other sectors (33%). As with the rest of the Education Sector, there was also a skew towards older age groups; potentially reflecting the older average age of employees working in this sector, or alternatively that there may be specific challenges in the workplace faced by older age groups (e.g., concerns about retirement planning).
- 33% of clients were in their first 2 years of tenure, and 17% were in their first 2 to 4 years. As with the rest of the Education Sector, this was substantially less than the length of tenure observed in other sectors, whereby 37% of clients were in their first 2 years of tenure, and 19% were in their first 2 to 4 years. By way of contrast, 29% in the Tertiary Education Sector (compared to 25% overall) had been employed for over 8 years. This suggests that employees in the Tertiary Education Sector who are later in their tenure may be more likely to utilise Assure's EAP service than those with longer periods of tenure, as was also the case (but to a greater extent) in the rest of the Education Sector.
- Substantially more clients were female (72%) than for other sectors (63%), although this skew was less marked than for the rest of the Education Sector (76%). This could be consistent with the overall gender mix of employees in the Tertiary Education Sector.
- Access by family members was lower in the Tertiary Education Sector (10%) compared to the rest of the Education Sector (15%) and all other sectors (13%).
- Employee awareness about their EAP service comes most commonly from HR or People & Culture (21%), which was comparable to the rest of the Education Sector (19%) and other sectors (22%). This was followed by the Intranet (18%), which was higher than both the rest of the Education Sector and also other sectors (both 14%). This data suggests that equipping HR personnel with the capabilities required to support vulnerable staff members and offer a referral to EAP when needed may be of particular importance in this sector, given that these personnel are the primary gateway to EAP for many employees.
- The mix of workplace concerns (38%) and personal concerns (62%) was slightly skewed towards workplace concerns, compared to the rest of the Education Sector (35% and 65%) and all other sectors (34% and 66%).
- Among personal concerns, symptoms of anxiety (including pre-existing anxiety) were the most commonly reported (26%), which is marginally higher than the rest of the Education Sector (25%) and the all-sector average (23%). This was followed by relationship issues within couples (18%), which is comparable to the rest of the Education Sector (17%) and also the all-sector average (19%).
- Among workplace concerns, excessive workload pressures (16%), concerns about performance and reduced productivity (8%), work life balance (8%) and conflict with supervisors (6%) were the most common. These were more or less consistent with both the rest of the Education Sector and other sectors.
- Access to Assure's Manager Support Program was primarily to help employees through change, critical incidents and other stressful situations (33%), which was substantially lower than the frequency of this concern in the rest of the Education Sector (44%), but comparable to the frequency of this concern in other sectors (33%). This suggests that upskilling managers in the domain of navigating change and critical incidents may be of broad importance in the Education Sector, however less so for the Tertiary Education Sector than for the rest of the Education Sector. However, it is worth noting that advice about managing a distressed employee (25%) and advice on referring an employee to the EAP (24%) were both higher in the Tertiary Education Sector compared to the rest of the Education Sector (20% and 19% respectively).

Education: All Education & Tertiary

COMMENTARY



Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategies

Assure has been working with a number of its customers in the Education Sector (both Tertiary and non-Tertiary) to develop and deliver proactive mental health and wellbeing strategies. Every organisation has its own challenges and priorities so there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but common themes include:

- Mental health awareness (for leaders and employees), including how to support staff in need and refer them to EAP when required
- EAP awareness: Assure has an awareness video to allow much greater reach via customer Intranets and email
- Dealing with aggressive patients/clients and difficult patient/client conversations
- Change management
- Leading resilient teams
- Handling vicarious trauma, including the psychological risk associated with one-off or repeated exposure to confronting or emotionally distressing situations and cases
- Creating psychologically safe workplaces
- Wellbeing assessments and positive psychology programs have also been helpful for people who are already coping well ('surviving') but want to raise their performance to another level ('thriving').
- Electronic or virtual delivery of training and awareness programs allows employees to access them in geographically remote locations and at times that fit with operational requirements.

Resilience and self-care: Noting the increasingly complex and uncertain environment within the modern workplace, the need to build a resilient and agile workforce is critical. Research tells us that one-off resilience training simply does not cut it, so how can we create sustained behaviour change to help employees and leaders navigate our increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous work environment?

Assure has designed a program Thrive to address this, using an assessment tool based on the 6 key neuroscience pillars of resilience, that can be targeted to the specific needs of each organisation. Acknowledging the need to scale up across large, geographically dispersed workforces, this program incorporates virtual coaching via state-of-the-art technology and artificial intelligence, alongside face-to-face training and coaching programs. This approach provides an interactive and engaging way to build resilience through a comprehensive program tailored to different learning needs.

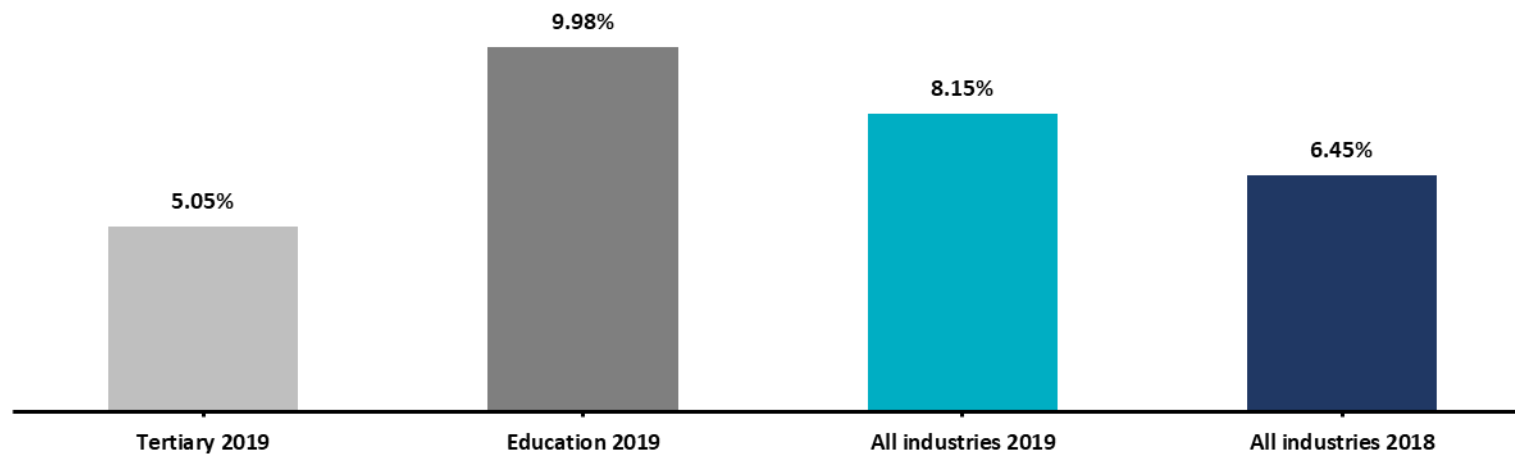
Psychosocial risk assessments: As a precursor to deciding on specific mental health and wellbeing initiatives, and to help target investment in the most cost effective way, we would recommend carrying out an assessment of psychosocial risks across your organisation. Assure has developed an online assessment tool the Backbone of Mental Health & Wellbeing in the Workplace which allows business leaders and employees to assess strengths, or areas to improve, within 8 key areas of clinical risk.

If you would like to discuss your strategy for proactively improving the mental health and wellbeing of your organisation, please talk to your Assure Programs Customer Care Manager or call (07) 3211 8919.

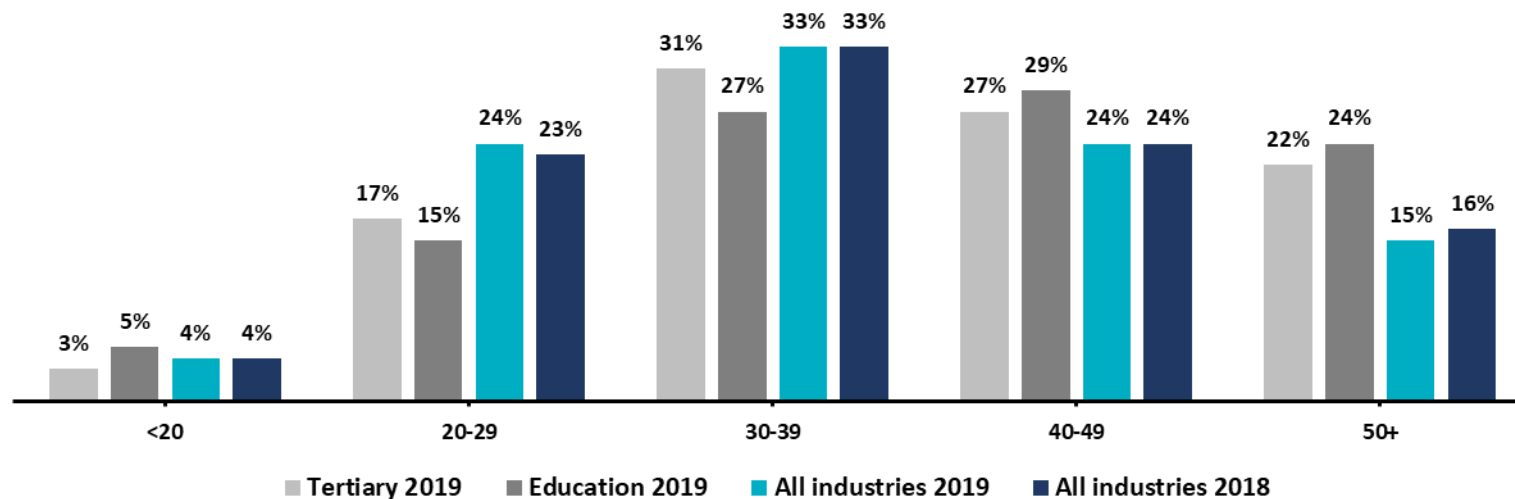
Education: All Education & Tertiary

WHO HAS BEEN ACCESSING EAP?

EAP Utilisation

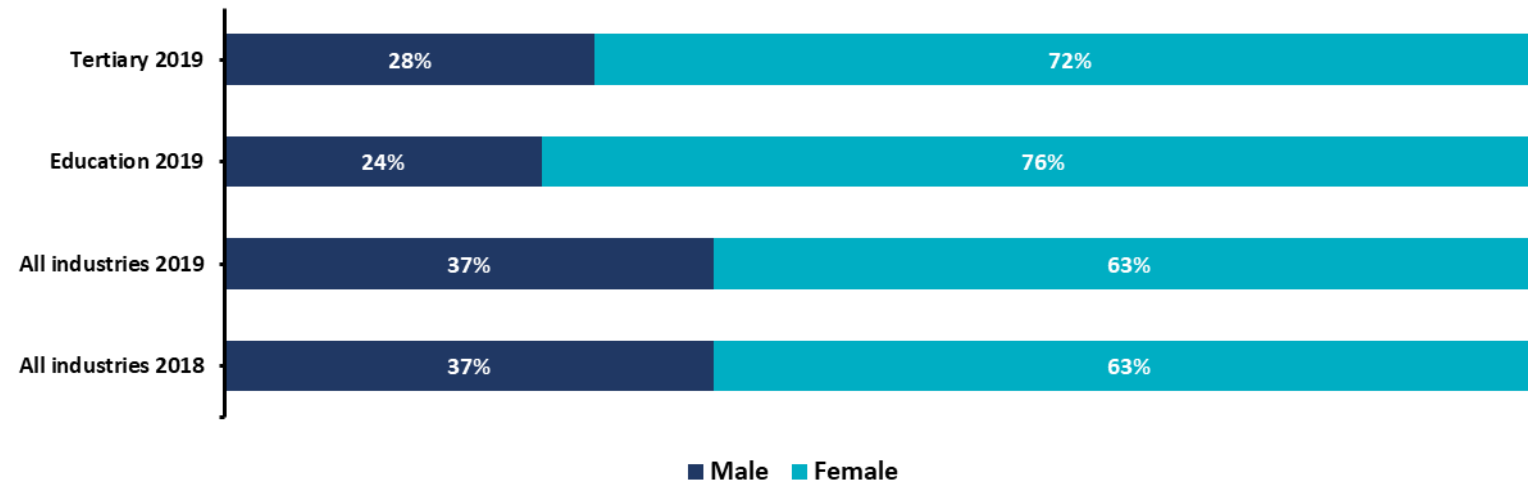


EAP client age (as % of all clients)

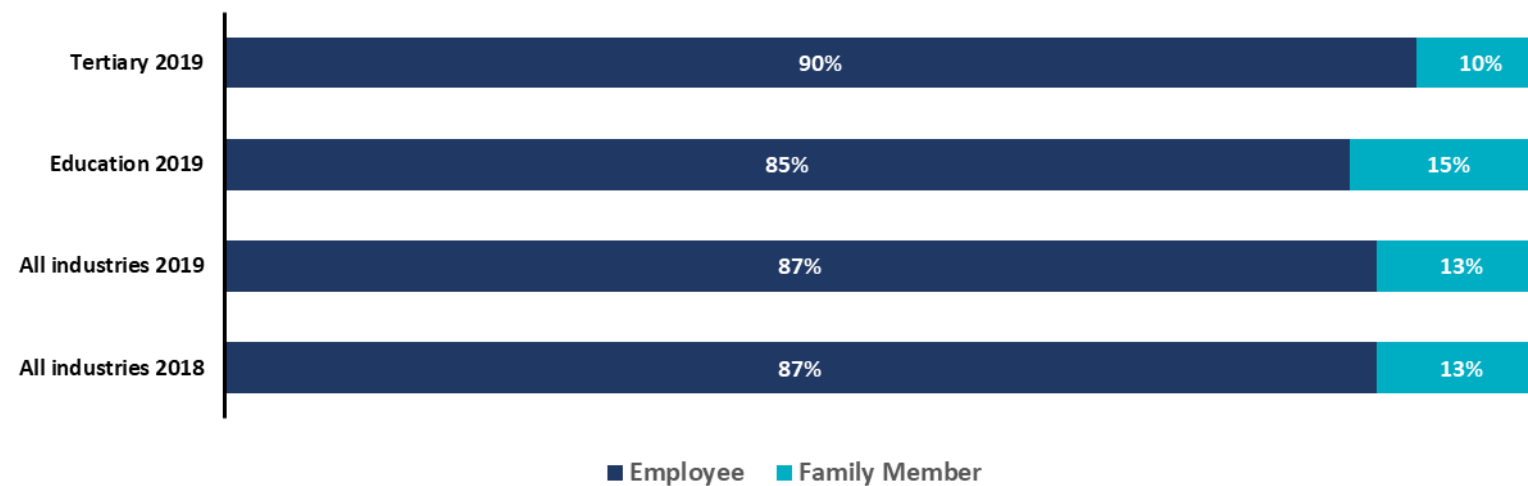


Education: All Education & Tertiary

EAP client gender (as % of all clients)

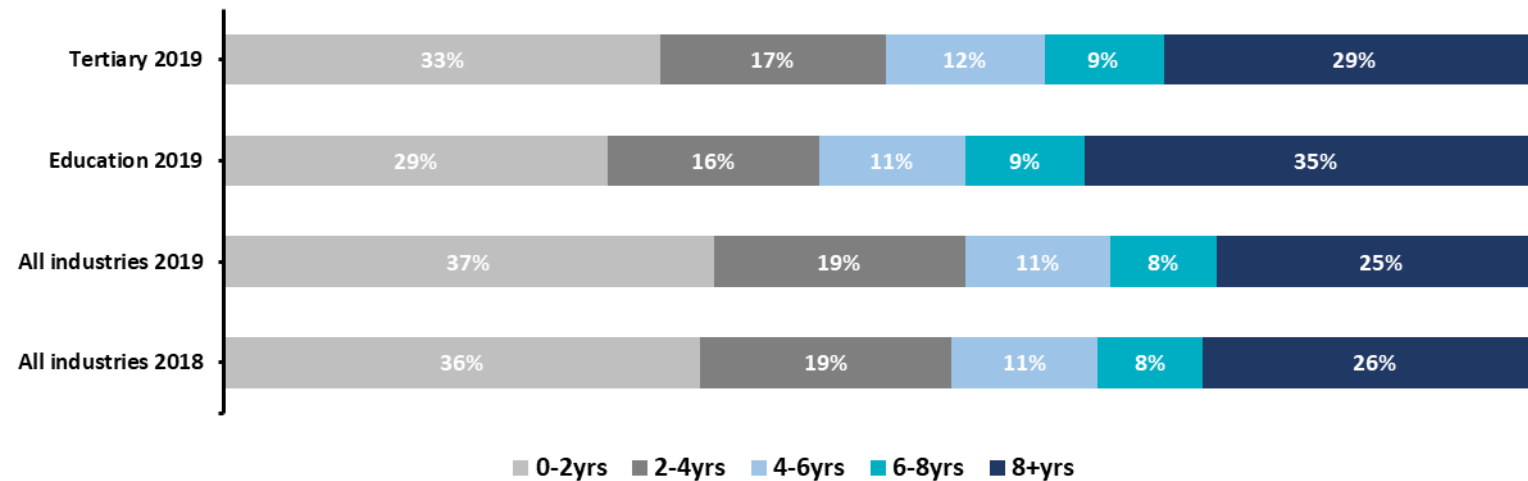


EAP client type (as % of all clients)

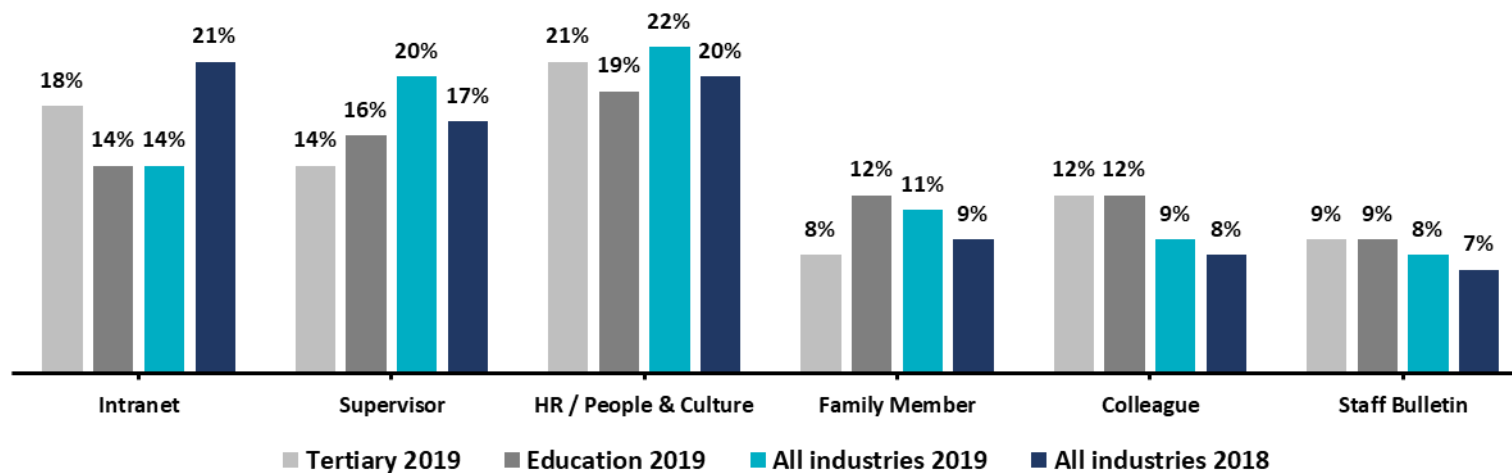


Education: All Education & Tertiary

EAP client length of employment (as % of all clients)



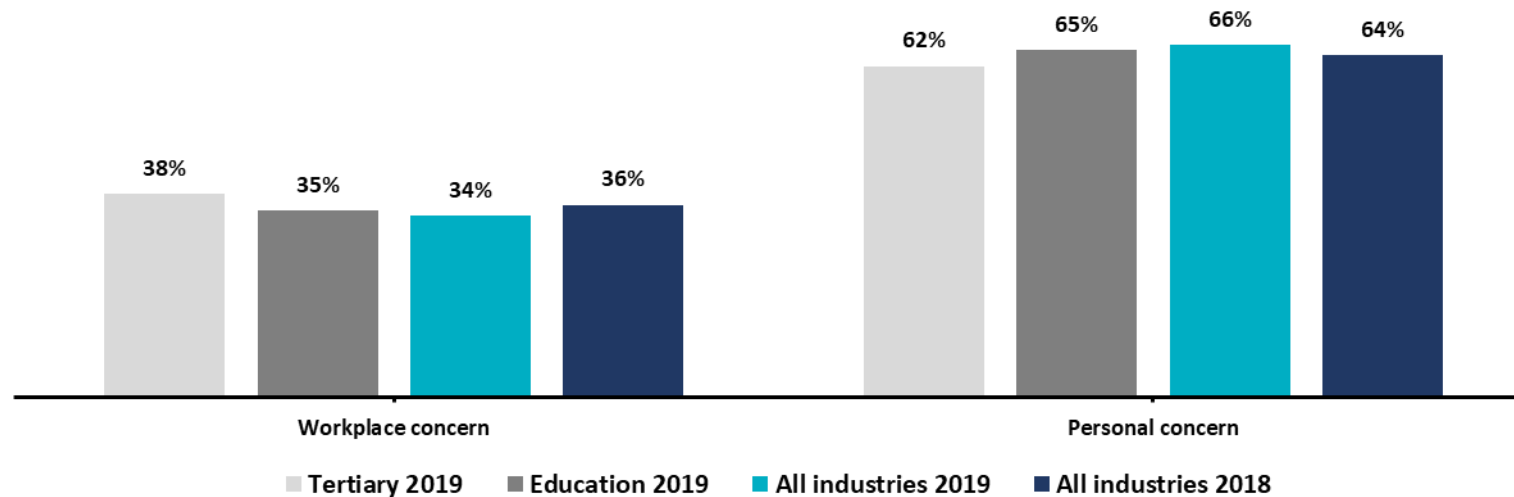
How learnt of EAP? (as % of all clients)



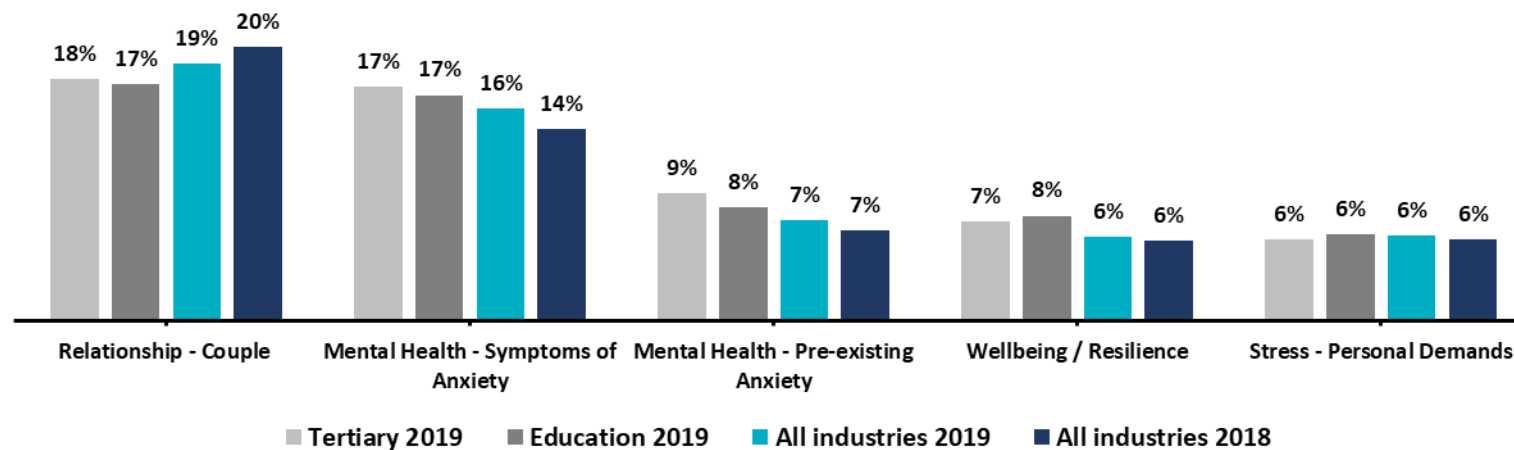
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WHY HAVE PEOPLE BEEN ACCESSING EAP?

Primary presenting concern (as % of all clients)

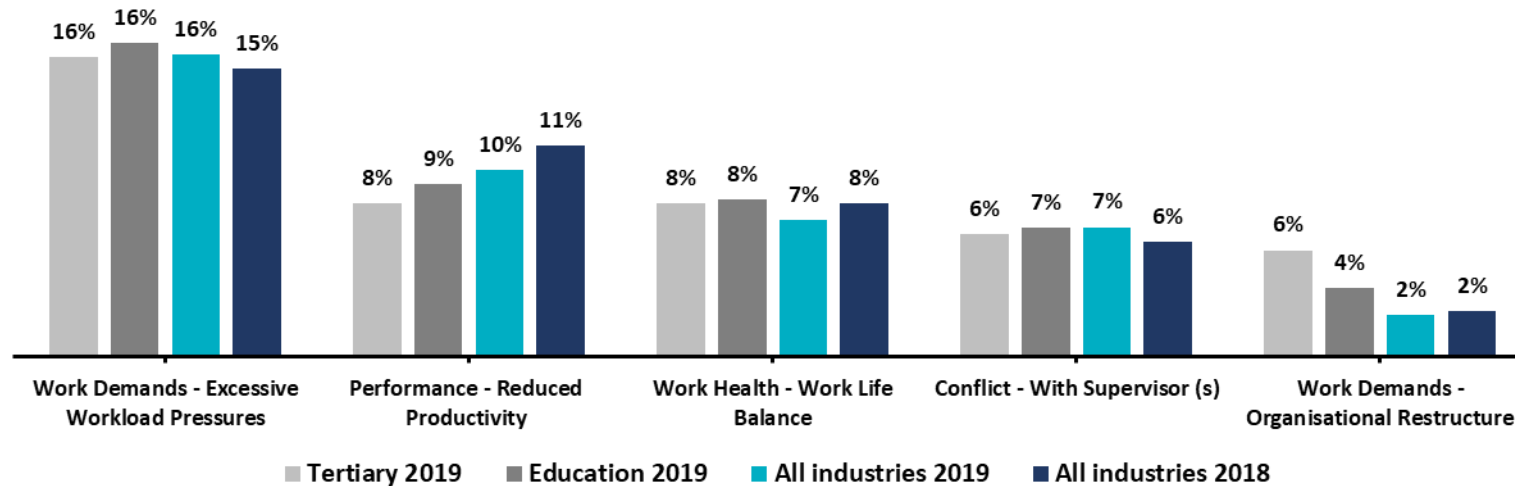


Top 5 primary presenting concerns - PERSONAL (as % of all clients)



Education: All Education & Tertiary

Top 5 primary presenting concerns - WORKPLACE (as % of all clients)



Reasons Managers accessed Manager Support Program (as % of all MSPs)

