Engineering & Construction

Sector EAP analysis and clinical insights

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Introduction

This report considers the psychosocial risks and insights derived from EAP (Employee Assistance Program) observations for customers in the Engineering & Construction 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 Engineering & Construction Sector, Assure provides EAP services to 53 organisations, totalling 93,000 employees plus their families. In 2019 Assure provided 8,400 counselling sessions and 1,010 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

Traditionally, the Engineering & Construction Sector has largely focused on the management of environmental and physical risks with links to industrial accidents and unsafe workplace behaviour, such as working at heights or in confined spaces, lifting heavy materials, incurring damage to hearing due to operating heavy machinery, working with electrical sources, and exposure to other physical hazards. However, substantial evidence now suggests that the management of psychosocial risks is equally as important, given the capacity for efforts in this area to predict positive employee engagement and productivity.

The high-risk nature of work in the Engineering & Construction Sector often requires workers to demonstrate continuous vigilance regarding issues of safety and compliance. This may include the need to continuously concentrate and remain focussed for extended periods in order to keep oneself and others safe. A related consideration to take into account is the fact that work in the Engineering & Construction Sector is often deadline-driven and may require employees to work long hours in order to complete key projects. In combination or isolation, these factors may invariably lead to a reduction in cognitive ability and an increased risk of fatigue (physically and psychologically) and safety incidents, particularly if there are insufficient opportunities for rest and recovery.

The nature of projects in the Engineering & Construction Sector may also pose limitations to employee autonomy and task variety. For example, employees may need to engage in monotonous or repetitious tasks in some roles, with minimal control over how their day-to-day work is carried out and over the specific tasks they undertake over the course of their work day. Although this is important from the perspective of regulation and standardisation, restrictions to a person's degree of personal autonomy and decision-making latitude can also have a detrimental effect on job satisfaction, employee engagement, and wellbeing.

Factors outside of one's control could also affect the progression of key projects or the activities an employee is required to undertake. For example, delays in the shipment of key building materials, delays in the progress made by other teams or inclement weather could have an adverse effect on project timeframes and deadlines. Alternatively, the remote location of a construction site or the need to commute regularly between multiple sites could mean that employees are required to travel great distances in order to complete projects, either in the same city or in the form of fly-in-fly-out work. These working conditions may increase an employee's risk of loneliness, social isolation, anxiety, stress and suicidal thoughts, especially for workers whose work frequently separates them from family and loved ones. Providing employees with the support needed to manage these demands effectively is an important component of creating a psychologically safe and healthy workplace.

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COMMENTARY

The nature of projects in the Engineering & Construction Sector may pose specific psychosocial risks pertaining to safety, compliance, autonomy and task variety. These have the potential to have a detrimental effect on job satisfaction, employee engagement, and wellbeing if they are not managed appropriately.

With these stressors in mind, providing employees with the support needed to manage these demands effectively and seek support when needed is an important component of creating a psychologically safe and healthy workplace.

EAP Insights

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

- Overall utilisation increased from 4.49% in 2018 to 6.06% 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. It is notable that overall utilisation in the Engineering & Construction Sector is low compared to other sectors. Although this may suggest that the proactive management of psychosocial risks in this sector has been effective so far, it also presents an opportunity in 2020 and beyond to further increase the awareness and acceptance of mental health issues. Doing so may subsequently increase the uptake of Assure's EAP service in this sector.

- The most common age of clients (33% aged 30-39) is consistent with other sectors, and was more or less consistent between 2018 and 2019 (35%).

- 64% of clients were in their first 4 years of tenure, which was somewhat higher than the previous year (60%) and higher than in other sectors (56%). By way of contrast, 19% of clients had been employed for over 8 years, which was lower than in other sectors during 2019 (25%). This potentially suggests that the initial years of working at a new organisation my be particularly demanding for those working in the Engineering & Construction Sector.

- Substantially more clients were male (52%) than for other sectors (37%). This may be consistent with the overall gender mix of employees in this sector, and also highlights the importance of addressing mental health stigma in male-dominated workplaces within the Engineering & Construction Sector.

- Access by family members was higher in 2019 (16%) than in 2018 (13%), and overall was slightly greater than the rate of utilisation across all sectors (13%). Ensuring that the families of these workers are aware about the availability of Assure's EAP service for them is of critical importance, particularly in the case of employees undertaking FIFO work.

- Employee awareness about their EAP service comes most commonly from HR or People & Culture (21%), which was more or less consistent with other sectors (22%). This was followed by their supervisor (17%), which was somewhat lower than in other sectors (20%). This data suggests that equipping HR personnel and supervisors 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 (33%) and personal concerns (67%) was more or less consistent with other sectors and remained 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, relationship issues within couples and families were the most commonly reported concern (30%), which was higher than the all-sector average (26%). This was followed by symptoms of anxiety, including pre-existing anxiety (22%), which was similar to the all-sector average (23%).

- Among workplace concerns, excessive workload pressures (17%), concerns about performance and reduced productivity (9%), conflict with supervisors (7%) and work life balance (6%) were the most common. Most of these concerns were reported with similar frequently in other sectors (16%, 10%, 7% and 7% respectively)

- Access to Assure's Manager Support Program was primarily to help employees through change, critical incidents and other stressful situations (32%), which was less common than in 2018 (37%), but similar to the frequency observed in other industries (33%). This was followed by managing a distressed employee or colleague (29%, down from 31%) and advice about on referring employees to EAP (23%, up from 18%).

Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategies

Assure has been working with a number of its customers in the Engineering & Construction Sector 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)

- EAP awareness: Assure has an awareness video to allow much greater reach via customer Intranets and email

- Dealing with aggressive customers and difficult customer conversations

- Change management

- Leading resilient teams, including helping leaders to promote resilience in workers operating in a fly-in-fly-out context

- Handling direct or vicarious trauma, such as a major safety incident or an accident involving fatality

- 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 rosters.

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.

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EAP Utilisation

6.06%	4.49%	8.15%	6.45%
Engineering & Construction 2019	Engineering & Construction 2018	All industries 2019	All industries 2018
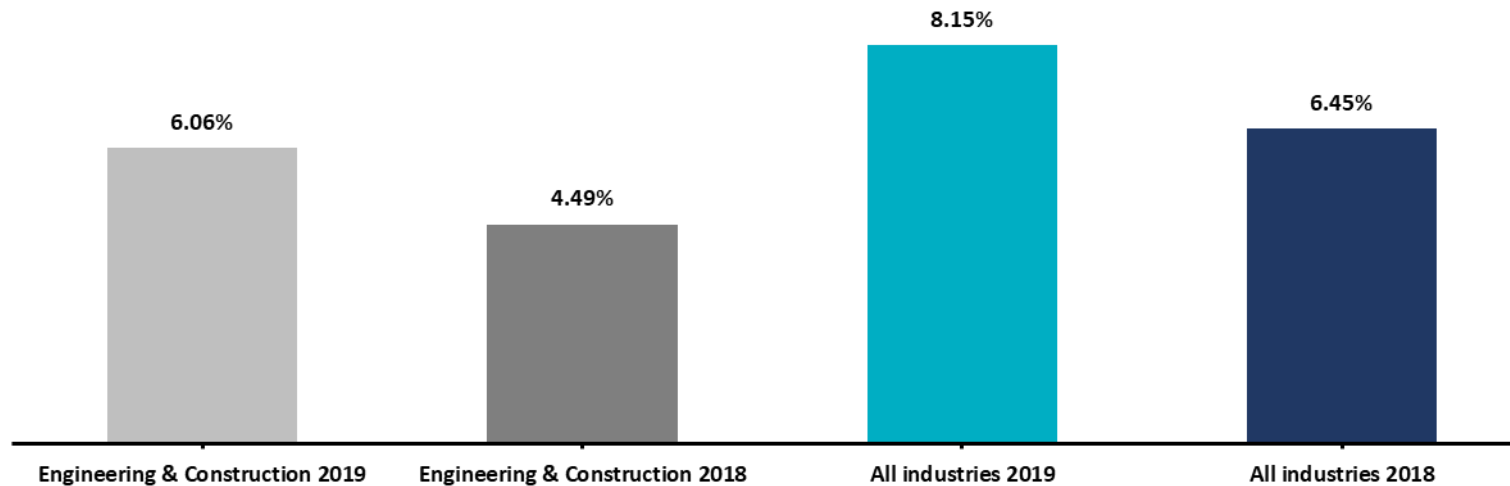
EAP client age (as % of all clients)

Age	<20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+
Engineering & Construction 2019	4%	21%	33%	25%	16%
Engineering & Construction 2018	3%	19%	35%	27%	16%
All industries 2019	4%	24%	33%	24%	15%
All industries 2018	4%	23%	33%	24%	16%

■ Engineering & Construction 2019 ■ Engineering & Construction 2018 ■ All industries 2019 ■ All industries 2018
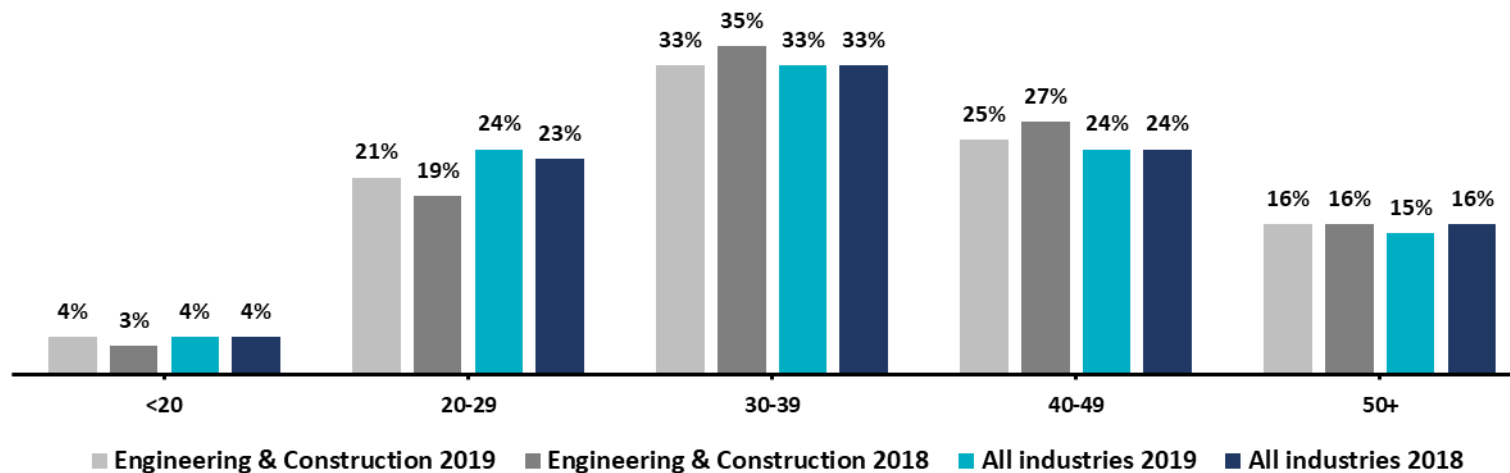
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EAP client gender (as % of all clients)

	Male	Female
Engineering & Construction 2019	52%	48%
Engineering & Construction 2018	51%	49%
All industries 2019	37%	63%
All industries 2018	37%	63%

■ Male ■ Female
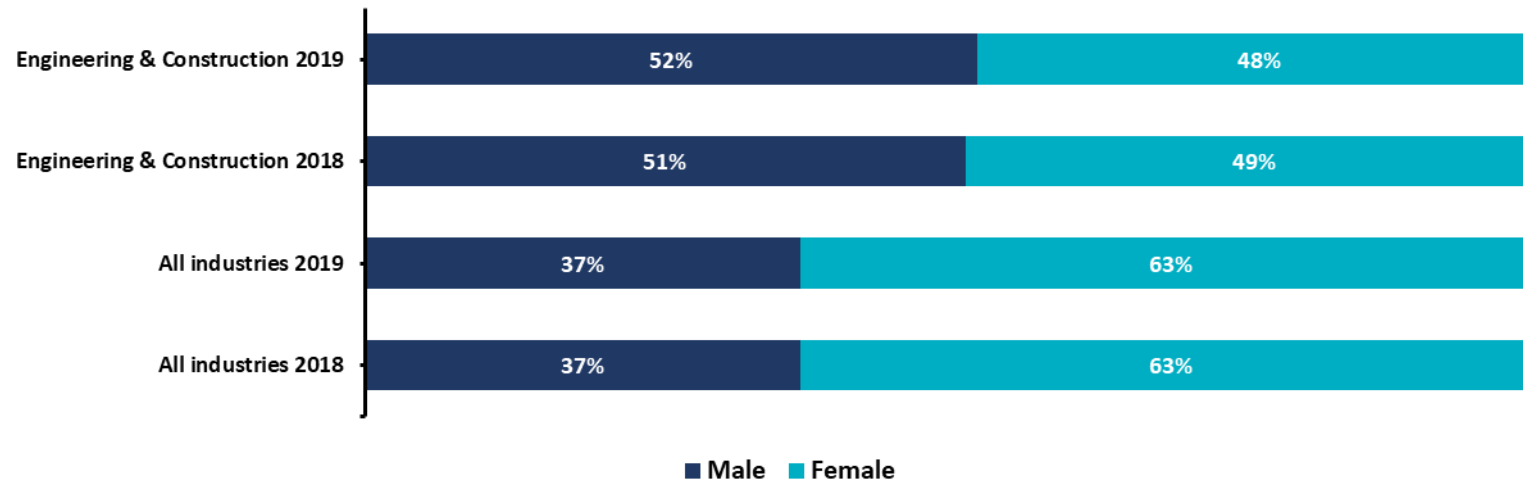
EAP client type (as % of all clients)

	Employee	Family Member
Engineering & Construction 2019	84%	16%
Engineering & Construction 2018	87%	13%
All industries 2019	87%	13%
All industries 2018	87%	13%

■ Employee ■ Family Member

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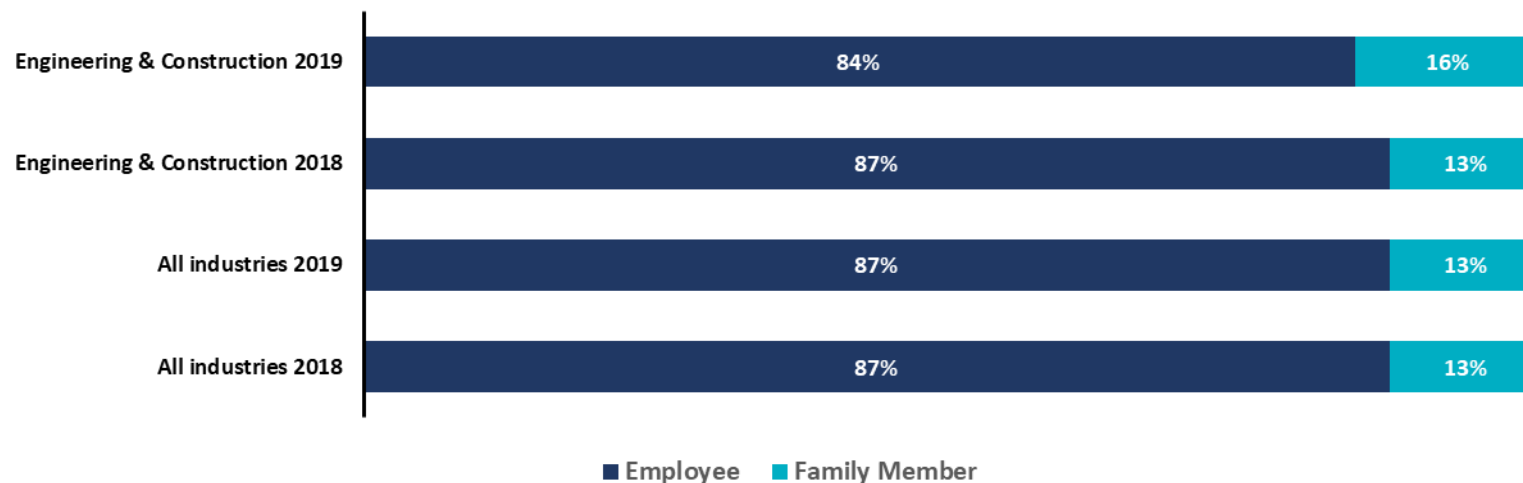
EAP client length of employment (as % of all clients)

	0-2yrs	2-4yrs	4-6yrs	6-8yrs	8+yrs
Engineering & Construction 2019	42%	22%	10%	8%	19%
Engineering & Construction 2018	41%	19%	10%	9%	22%
All industries 2019	37%	19%	11%	8%	25%
All industries 2018	36%	19%	11%	8%	26%

Legend: ■ 0-2yrs ■ 2-4yrs ■ 4-6yrs ■ 6-8yrs ■ 8+yrs
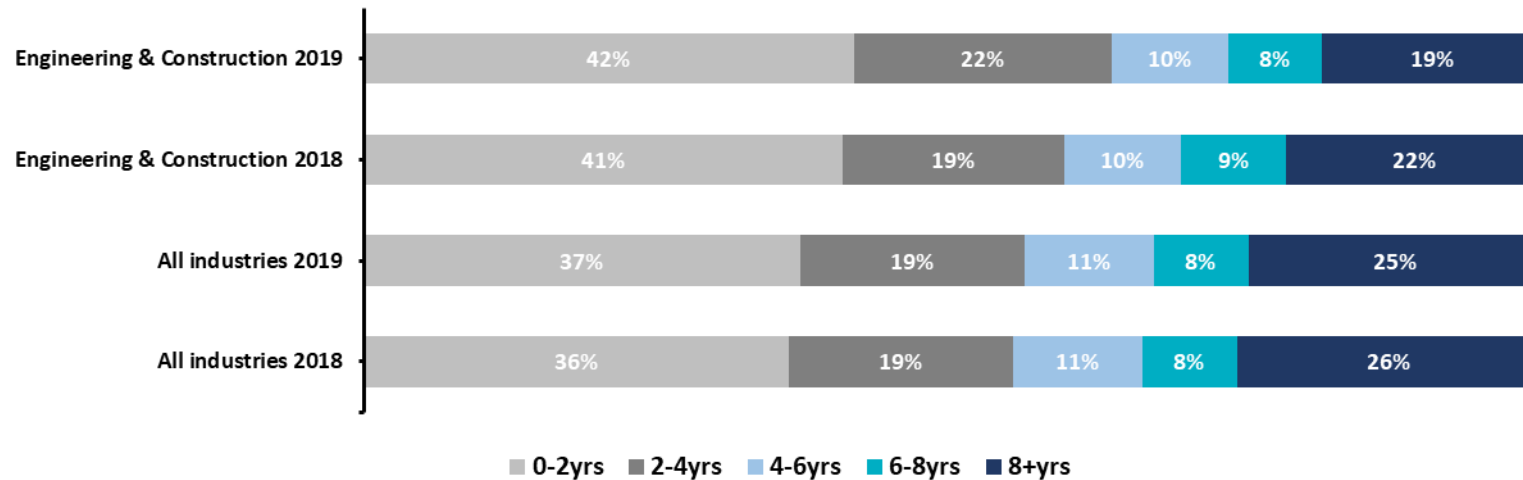
How learnt of EAP? (as % of all clients)

	Intranet	Supervisor	HR / People & Culture	Family Member	Colleague	Staff Bulletin
Engineering & Construction 2019	13%	17%	21%	14%	6%	10%
Engineering & Construction 2018	20%	15%	22%	9%	8%	9%
All industries 2019	14%	20%	22%	11%	9%	8%
All industries 2018	21%	17%	20%	9%	8%	7%

Legend: ■ Engineering & Construction 2019 ■ Engineering & Construction 2018 ■ All industries 2019 ■ All industries 2018
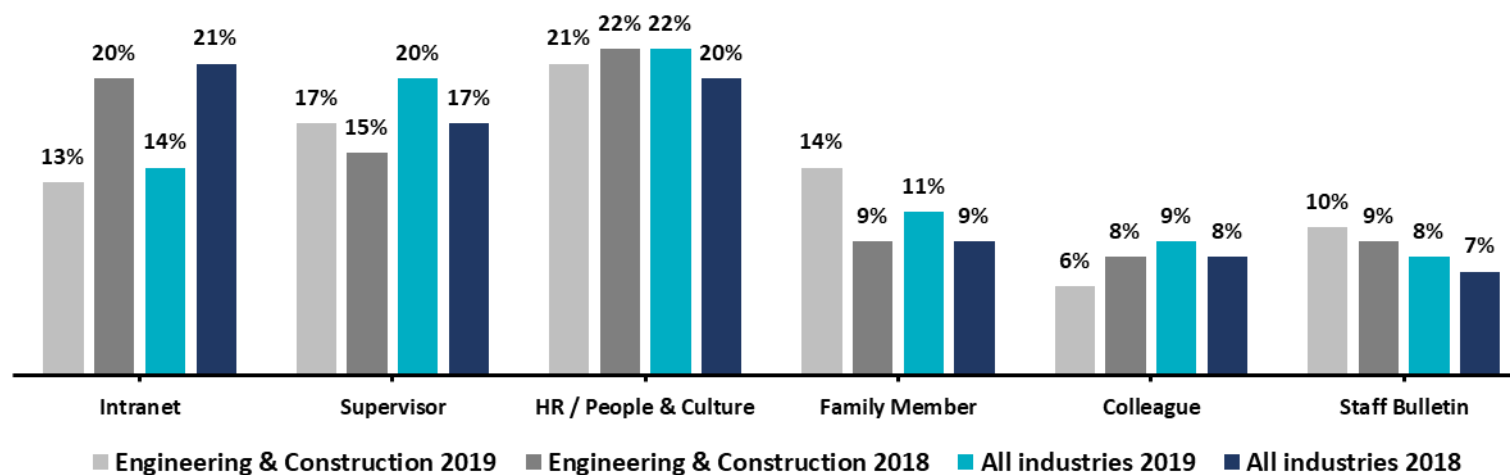
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WHY HAVE PEOPLE BEEN ACCESSING EAP?

Primary presenting concern (as % of all clients)

Workplace concern: 33%, 36%, 34%, 36%
Personal concern: 67%, 64%, 66%, 64%

■ Engineering & Construction 2019 ■ Engineering & Construction 2018 ■ All industries 2019 ■ All industries 2018
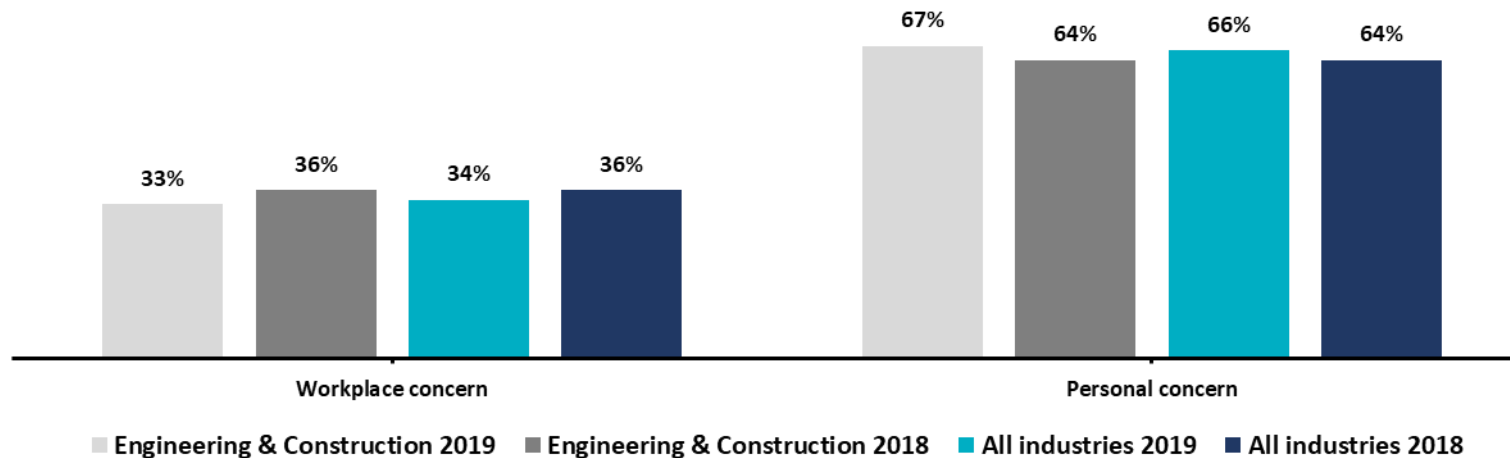
Top 5 primary presenting concerns - PERSONAL (as % of all clients)

Relationship - Couple: 22%, 25%, 19%, 20%
Mental Health - Symptoms of Anxiety: 16%, 13%, 16%, 14%
Relationship - Family: 8%, 7%, 7%, 7%
Mental Health - Pre-existing Anxiety: 6%, 6%, 7%, 7%
Wellbeing / Resilience: 6%, 6%, 6%, 6%

■ Engineering & Construction 2019 ■ Engineering & Construction 2018 ■ All industries 2019 ■ All industries 2018

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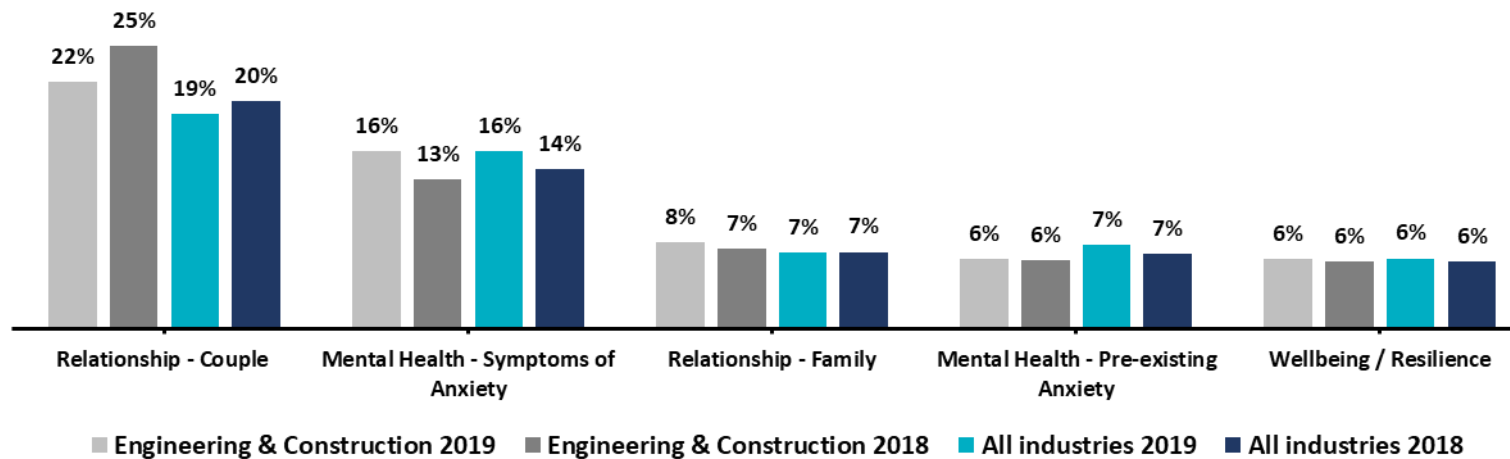
Top 5 primary presenting concerns - WORKPLACE (as % of all clients)

	Work Demands - Excessive Workload Pressures	Performance - Reduced Productivity	Conflict - With Supervisor (s)	Work Health - Work Life Balance	Workplace Justice - Target of Alleged W/place Harassment (Bullying)
Engineering & Construction 2019	17%	9%	7%	6%	5%
Engineering & Construction 2018	20%	9%	6%	9%	4%
All industries 2019	16%	10%	7%	7%	5%
All industries 2018	15%	11%	6%	8%	6%

■ Engineering & Construction 2019 ■ Engineering & Construction 2018 ■ All industries 2019 ■ All industries 2018

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

	Managing groups/people through change or critical incidents	Managing a distressed employee/colleague	Advice on referring employee to the EAP	Managing difficult behaviour of an employee/colleague	Managing poor performance of an employee/colleague
Engineering & Construction 2019	32%	29%	23%	12%	4%
Engineering & Construction 2018	37%	31%	18%	14%	1%
All industries 2019	33%	26%	22%	15%	3%
All industries 2018	34%	27%	21%	16%	2%

■ Engineering & Construction 2019 ■ Engineering & Construction 2018 ■ All industries 2019 ■ All industries 2018