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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 Manufacturing 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 Manufacturing Sector, Assure provides EAP services to 37 organisations, totalling 33,000 employees plus their families. In 2019 Assure provided 3,300 counselling sessions and 300 hours of support for critical incidents and significant events in this sector.

Data in this report includes the Fast Moving Consumer Goods 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

Traditionally, the Manufacturing Sector has largely focused on the management of environmental and physical risks with links to industrial accidents, errors and unsafe workplace behaviour, such as manual handling, repetitive movement, and exposure to chemical or other physical hazards. However, substantial evidence now suggests that the management of psychosocial risks is equally important, given the capacity for efforts in this area to predict positive employee engagement and productivity.

In the context of the Manufacturing Sector, employees often have limited 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.

A further risk to take into account is the frequent requirement to handle completing or even conflicting responsibilities. For example, depending on a person's role, employees may be requirement to balance competing demands such as maintaining a production schedule, overseeing inventory management, ensuring that products are of a high quality standard, and maintaining constant vigilance regarding work, health and safety risks. These tasks can be a significant source of cognitive demands, particularly when tasks conflict with one another or pose a threat to role clarity.

In more recent times, change within the industry may also pose specific psychosocial risks. For example, the automation of some roles and technological advancement within the industry (e.g., the introduction of artificial intelligence) may trigger fears or concerns about job security and the rapid need for adaptation to new ways of working. Similarly, the outsourcing of some functions to overseas sites or organisations to minimise production costs may also trigger fears or concerns about the continuity of employment. Identifying effective ways to manage the complex emotions associated with these fears and concerns is a critical component of promoting a psychologically safe and healthy workplace.

Relatedly, individuals with significantly redefined role responsibilities may find change in processes challenging if the change is not paired with sufficient additional training, instruction and supervision during the transition to new ways of working. For example, the aforementioned automation of roles and pace of technological advancement within the industry may increase the need for employees who are highly skilled at leveraging contemporary technology in innovative ways and aggregating and analysing the data captured through artificial intelligence. Increasing the proficiency of employees in areas of strategic importance can go along way towards making the implementation of such changes as smooth as possible.

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Substantial evidence now suggests that the management of psychosocial risks is as important as the management of physical risks in the Manufacturing Sector, particularly given the increasing automation of roles, technological advancement within the industry, and the limited control that some employees may have over how their day-to-day work is carried out.

Given this diverse combination of stressors, promoting the value and importance of EAP is of critical importance in this sector. Doing so may subsequently increase the uptake of Assure's EAP service as a result.

EAP Insights

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

- Overall utilisation increased marginally from 5.80% in 2018 to 5.98% in 2019, compared to 8.15% for the all-sector average in 2019. This stable degree of utilisation reflects consistent levels of awareness and acceptance of mental health issues between 2018 and 2019. It is notable that overall utilisation in the Manufacturing 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 (30% aged 30-39) is consistent with other sectors, and was more or less consistent between 2018 and 2019 (33%).
- 30% of clients were in their first 2 years of tenure, which was more or less consistent with the previous year (32%) but lower than in other sectors during 2019 (37%). By way of contrast, 41% of clients had been employed for over 6 years, which was both higher than in the previous year (38%) and higher than other sectors during 2019 (33%). This may reflect some of the challenges associated with working in the evolving Manufacturing Sector for an extended period and needing to adapt to new ways of working over the course of one's tenure.
- Substantially more clients were male (51%) 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 Manufacturing Sector.
- Access by family members was consistent between 2018 (17%) and 2019 (15%), and overall was slightly greater than the rate of utilisation across all sectors (13%).
- Employee awareness about their EAP service comes most commonly from HR or People & Culture (25%), which was slightly higher than in other sectors (22%). This was followed by their supervisor (22%), which again was higher 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 consistent with other sectors, with the ratio shifting slightly towards personal concerns in the last year (from 36% and 64% respectively). 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 (31%), which was higher than the all-sector average (26%). This was followed by symptoms of anxiety (14%), which was slightly lower than the all-sector average (16%).
- Among workplace concerns, excessive workload pressures (15%), concerns about performance and reduced productivity (8%), conflict with supervisors (8%) and concerns about role redundancy (6%) were the most common. Most of these concerns were reported with similar frequently in other sectors – with the exception of concerns about role redundancy, which was reported less frequently in other sectors (3%) and also in 2018 (3%). This latter observation may reflect the increased psychological risks and uncertainty associated with role redefinition and/or automation in the Manufacturing Sector.
- Access to Assure's Manager Support Program was primarily to help employees through change, critical incidents and other stressful situations (35%), which was higher than in 2018 (31%). This was followed by advice on referring employees to EAP (28%, up from 24%) and managing a distressed employee or colleague (23%, down from 30%).

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Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategies

Assure has been working with a number of its customers in the Manufacturing 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), 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 customers and difficult customer conversations
- Change management, including in the context of the automation of roles, technological advancement within the industry
- Leading resilient teams
- Handling vicarious trauma
- 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 geographical 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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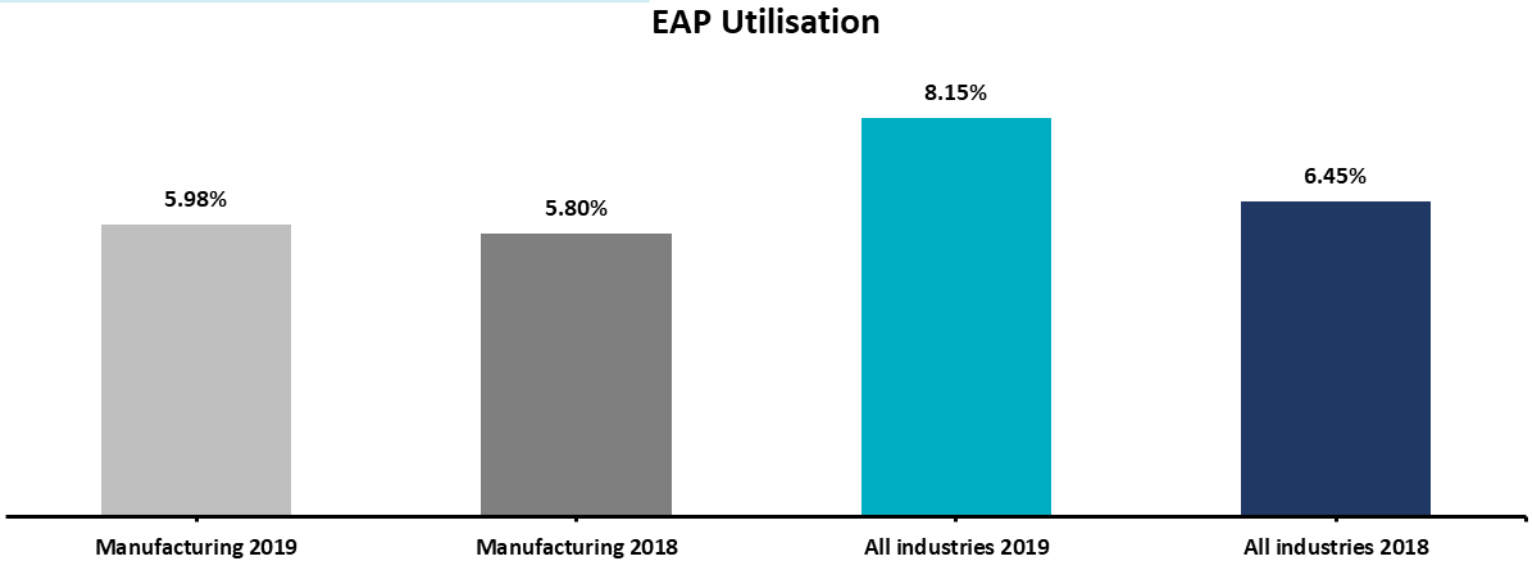
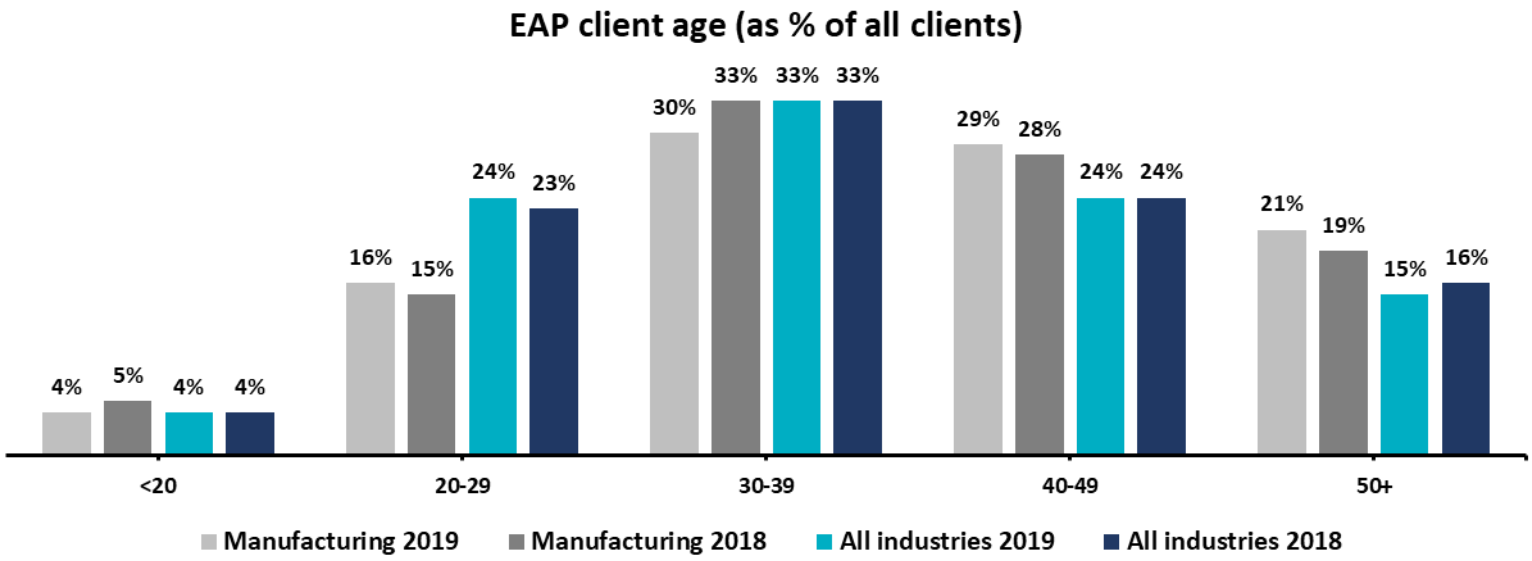
WHO HAS BEEN ACCESSING EAP?





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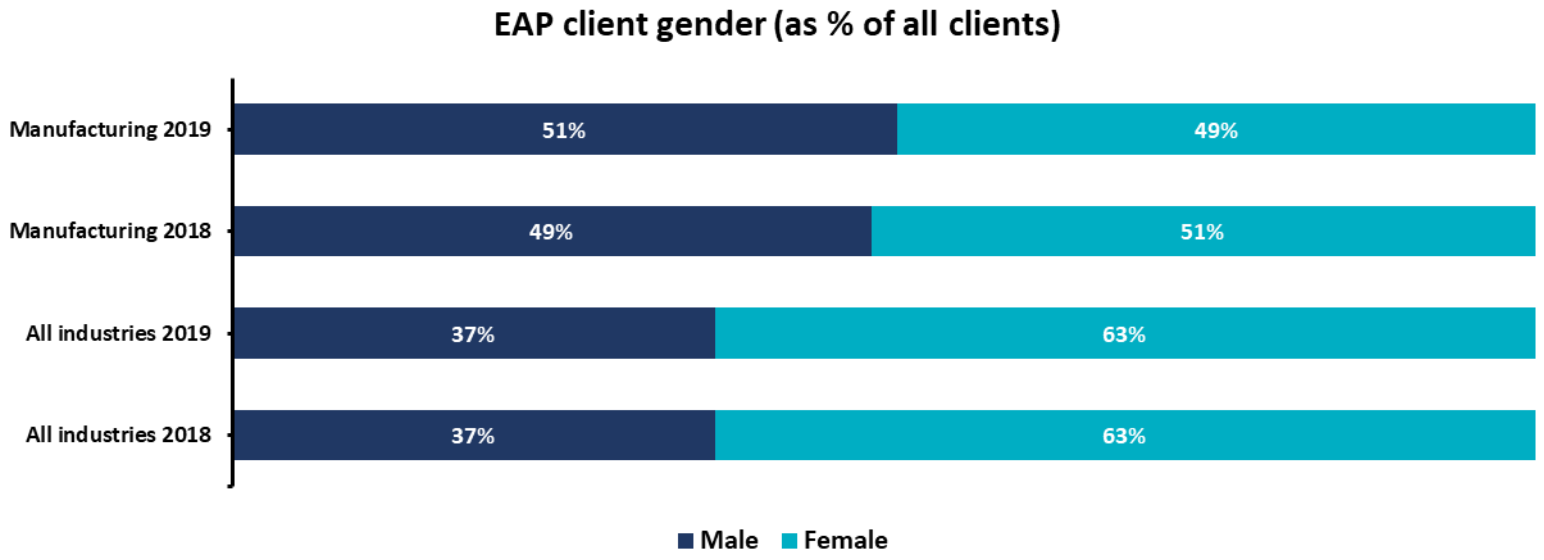

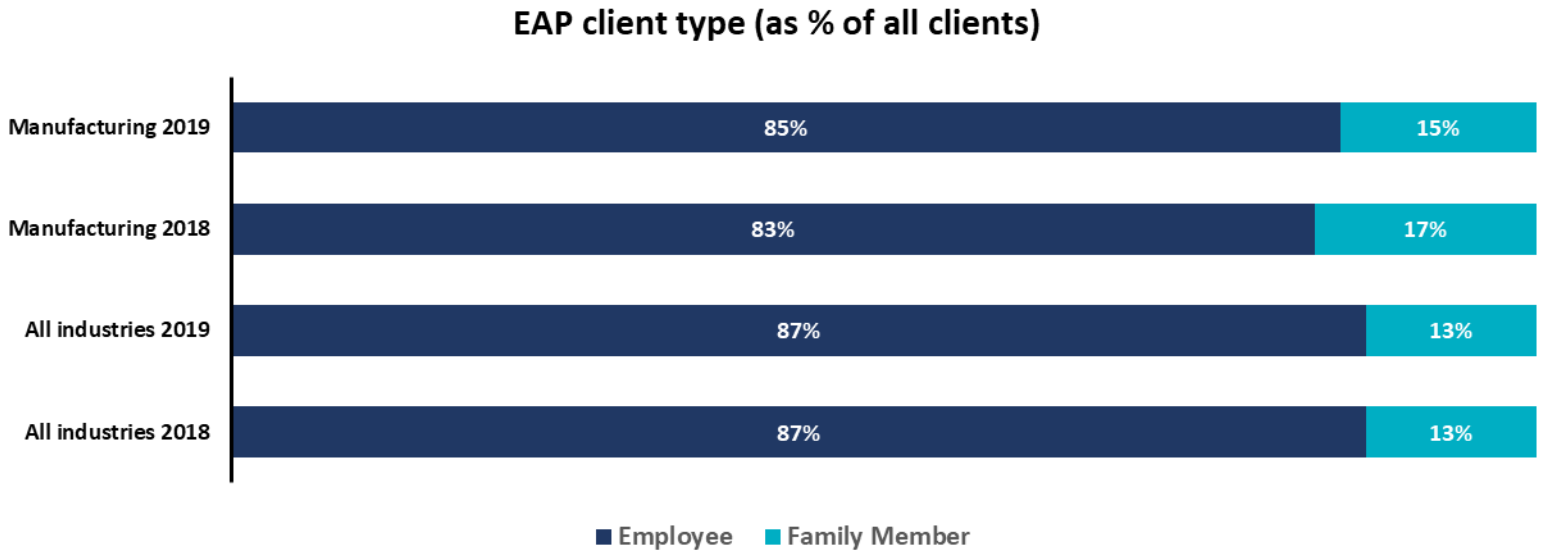

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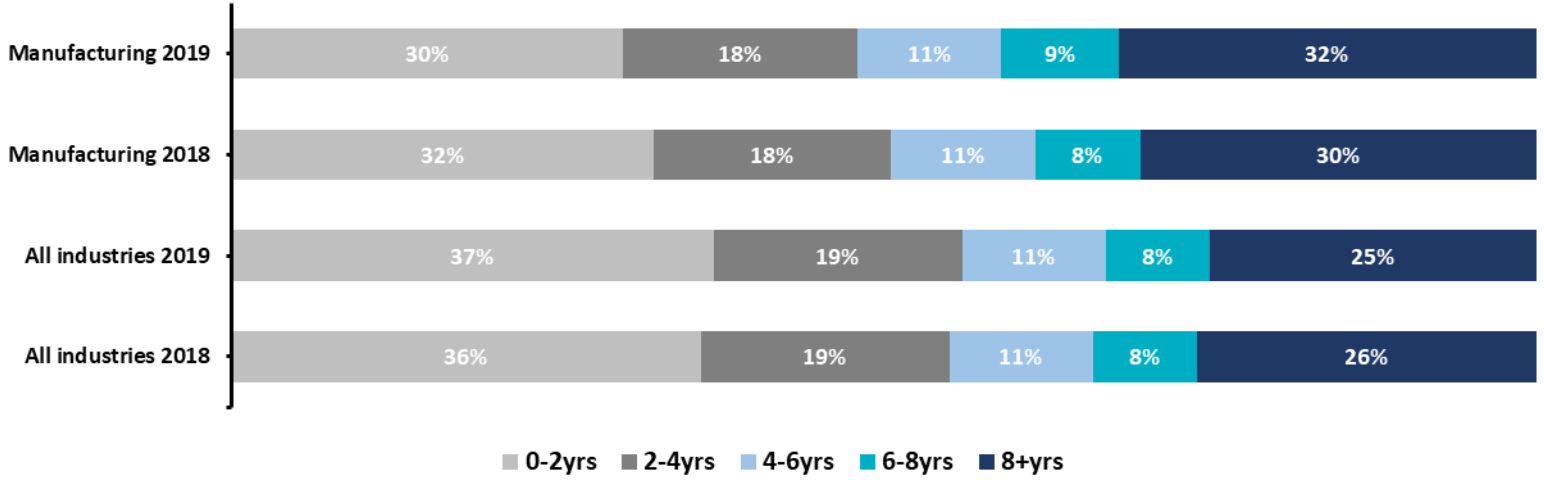
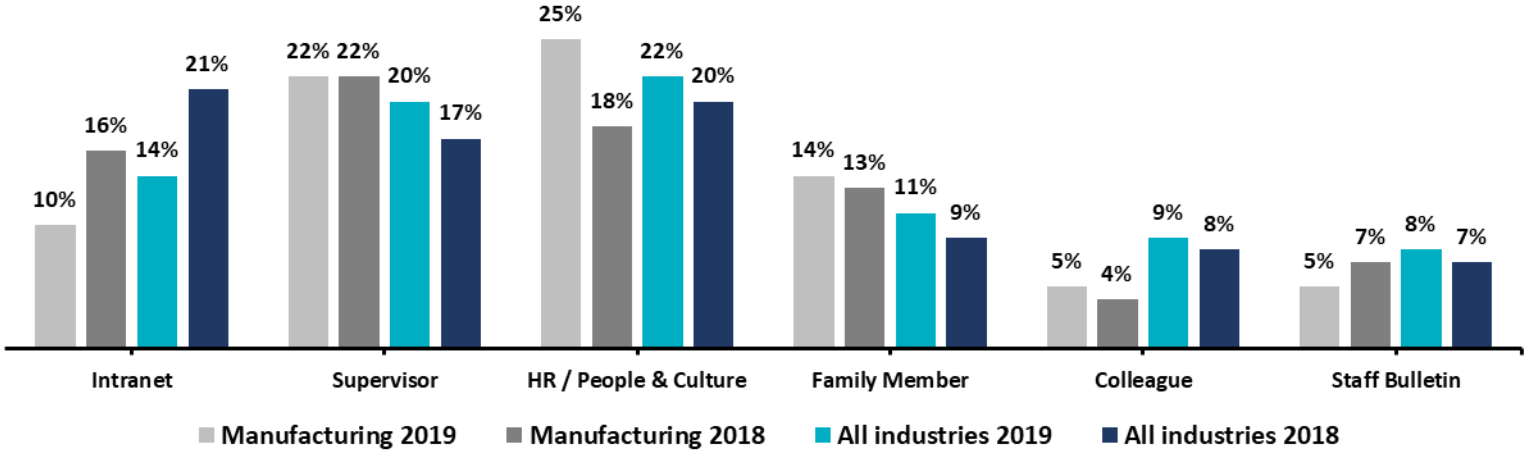
EAP client length of employment (as % of all clients)



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



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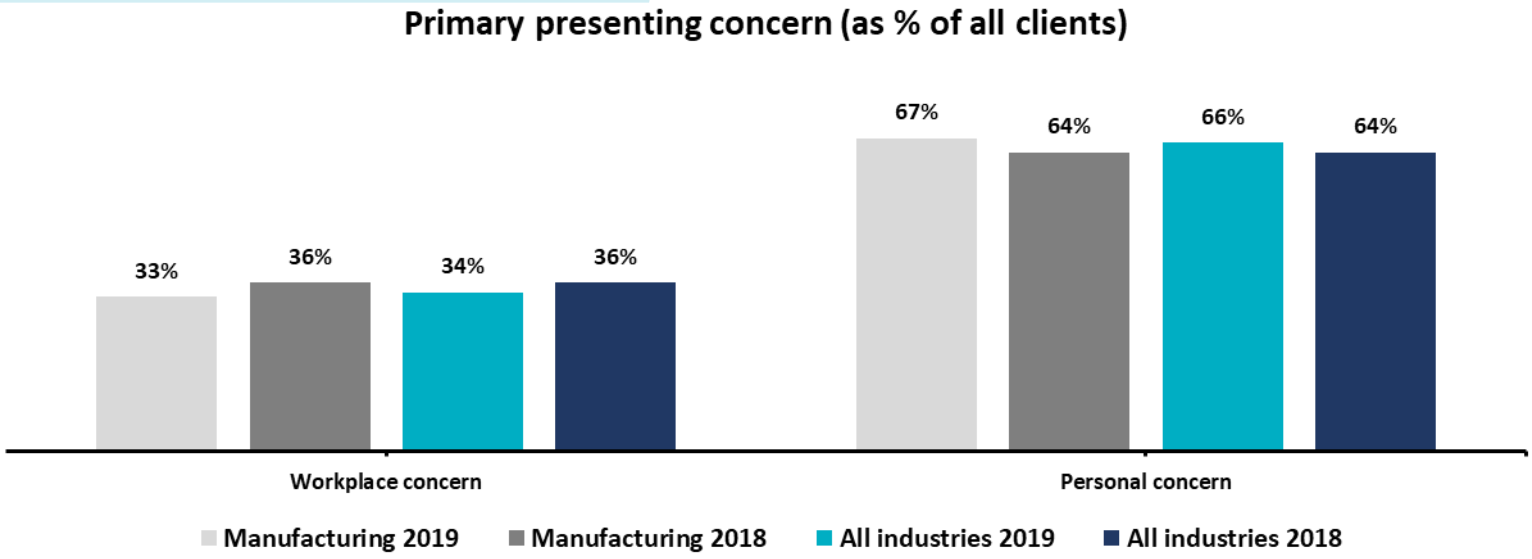
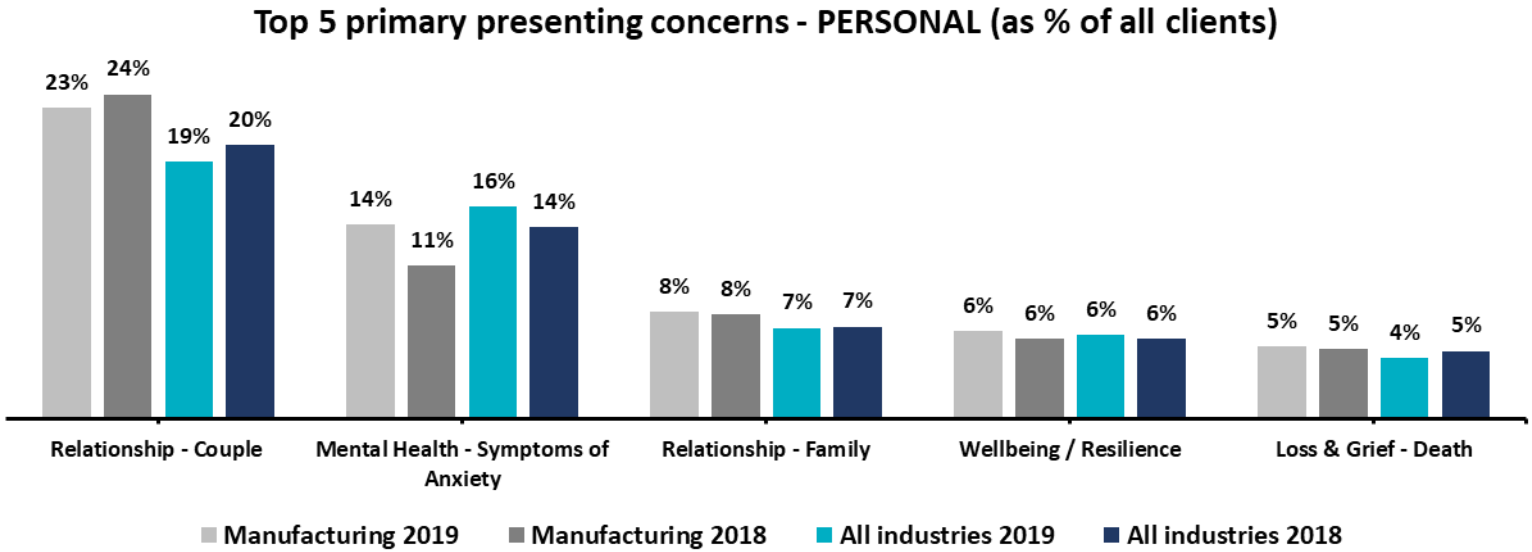
WHY HAVE PEOPLE BEEN ACCESSING EAP?





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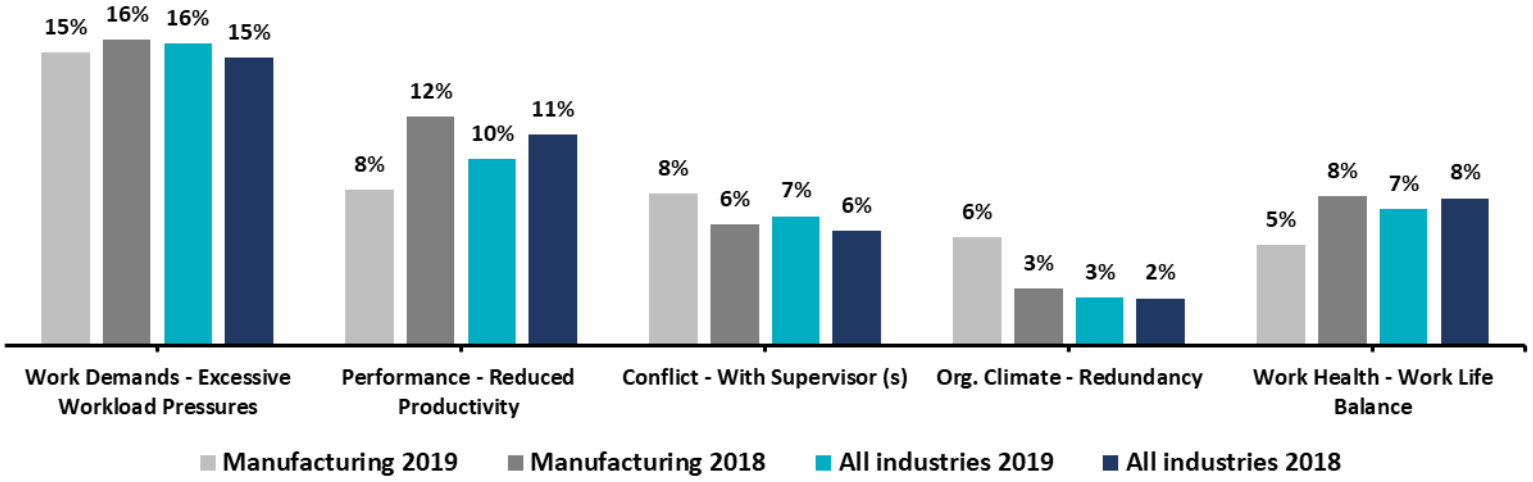
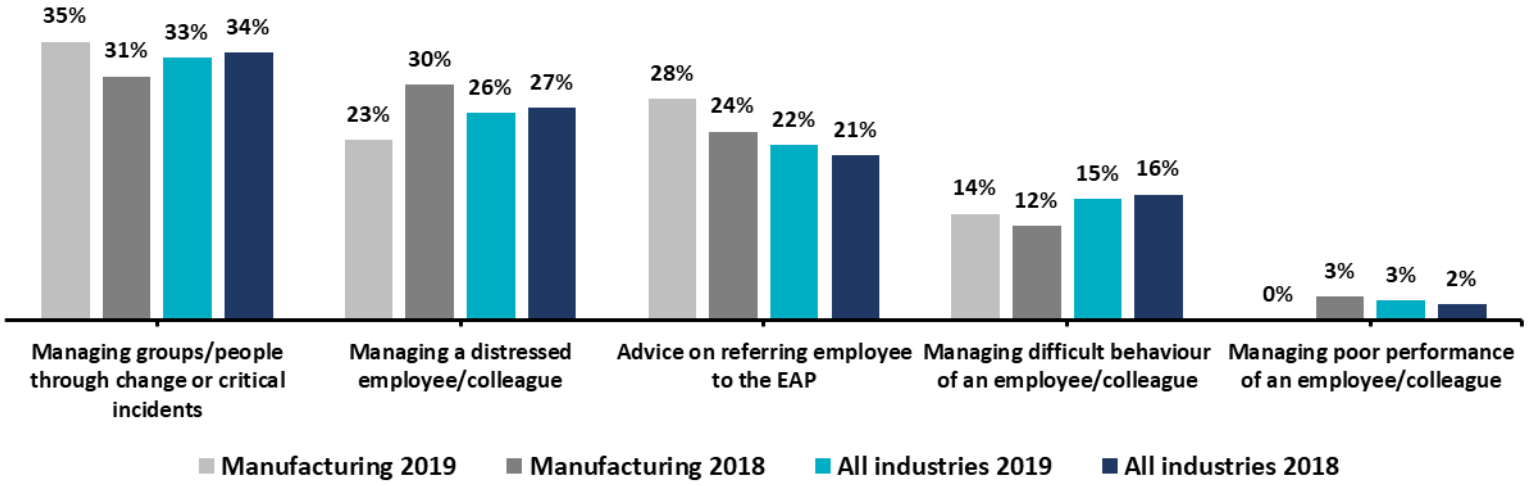
Top 5 primary presenting concerns - WORKPLACE (as % of all clients)



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