



# Mining & Resources

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 Mining & Resources 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 Mining & Resources Sector, Assure provides EAP services to 21 organisations, totalling 15,000 employees plus their families. In 2019 Assure provided 2,900 counselling sessions and 430 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 Mining & Resources Sector has largely focused on the management of environmental and physical risks with links to industrial accidents and unsafe workplace behaviour, such as coal dust inhalation, damage to hearing due to the noise in a mine, fluctuations in mine temperature, 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.

The high-risk nature of mining work 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. These demands may invariably lead to a reduction in cognitive ability and an increased risk of fatigue and safety incidents, particularly if there are insufficient opportunities for rest and recovery.

Operating in a dangerous or high-risk environment for an extended period may also have extensive implications for psychological wellbeing. Fears about one's physical safety may be exasperated in a safety-critical environment where explosions, cave-ins, floods and equipment failures can have serious and fatal consequences. Experiencing an incident of this nature, either directly or through another worker, has the potential to be highly traumatic, both for frontline managers and for those responsible for managing them.

Legal proceedings and inquiries into such incidents may also have ramifications for mental health, even in the absence of fault or negligence. Individuals involved in these investigations may feel personally responsible for what took place, potentially leading to feelings of powerlessness or anxiety as a result.

Workers in this sector are also commonly affected by extended rosters, shift work, fly-in-fly-out working arrangements, and requirements to relocate to temporary accommodation at remote worksites. 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. The partners and families of such workers may also experience strain related to the ongoing absence of a valued family member from the home environment.

Finally, the occurrence of "boom and bust" cycles in the Mining & Resources Sector due to demand, new ore discoveries, the reopening and closing of mines, and legal limitations regarding natural resource use may also pose challenges in terms of job continuity or lifestyle change. Contracts may be fixed in length, depending on the nature of the work, requiring workers in this sector to adapt their lifestyles and skill sets to the projects currently available. 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.



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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 Mining & Resources Sector, particularly given the safety-critical nature of this industry and the challenges involved with the use of extended rosters, shift work, fly-in-fly-out working arrangements, and requirements to relocate to remote worksites.

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 Mining & Resources Sector over the past two years, in comparison with all other sectors. We can make the following observations and insights:

- Overall utilisation increased substantially from 3.89% in 2017 to 6.18% in 2018, and again to 8.66% in 2019, compared to 8.15% for the all-sector average in 2019. This increasing degree of utilisation may reflect growing levels of awareness and acceptance of mental health issues between 2017 and 2019. It could also be reflective of year-to-year changes in the psychosocial risks and critical incidents faced by employees in this evolving sector.
- The most common age of clients (34% aged 30-39) is consistent with other sectors, and was consistent between 2018 and 2019 (also 34%).
- 32% of clients were in their first 2 years of tenure, which was more or less consistent with the previous year (30%), but lower than in other sectors during 2019 (37%). By way of contrast, 42% of clients had been employed for over 6 years, which was substantially higher than other sectors during 2019 (33%). This may reflect some of the challenges associated with working in the physically and psychologically demanding Mining & Resources Sector for an extended period, particularly later in one's career when one may need to balance family responsibilities with FIFO work.
- Substantially more clients were male (56%) 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 Mining & Resources Sector.
- Access by family members increased between 2018 (22%) and 2019 (25%), and overall was substantially higher than the rate of utilisation across all sectors (13%). This may reflect the strain experienced by partners and family members due to the ongoing absence of a valued family member from the home environment due to the nature of FIFO work. Ensuring that the families of these workers are aware about the availability of Assure's EAP service for them is thus of critical importance.
- Employee awareness about their EAP service comes most commonly from family members (24%), which was substantially higher than in other sectors (11%) and also higher than the previous year (19%). This suggests that efforts to ensure that the families of workers in this sector are aware about the availability of Assure's EAP service for them is of critical importance, given their important role in referring workers on to the service (and vice versa). This was followed by one's supervisor (21%) and HR or People & Culture (18%), which were more or less comparable to other sectors (20% and 22% respectively).
- The mix of workplace concerns (32%) and personal concerns (68%) was slightly different to other sectors, which reported a higher rate of workplace concerns (34%) and a lower rate of personal concerns (66%). 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 (15%), which was more or less comparable to the all-sector average (16%).
- Among workplace concerns, excessive workload pressures (10%), conflict with supervisors (8%) and concerns about performance and reduced productivity (7%) were the most common. Interestingly, concerns about excessive workload pressures and concerns about performance and reduced productivity were less frequently reported in the Mining & Resources Sector than in other sectors (16% and 10% respectively).
- Access to Assure's Manager Support Program was primarily to seek advice on referring employees to EAP (32%, up from 27%), followed by managing a distressed employee or colleague (29%, up from 15%). Interestingly, helping employees through change, critical incidents and other stressful situations was substantially lower in 2019 (27%) than in 2018 (42%).

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### Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategies

Assure has been working with a number of its customers in the Mining & Resources 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.

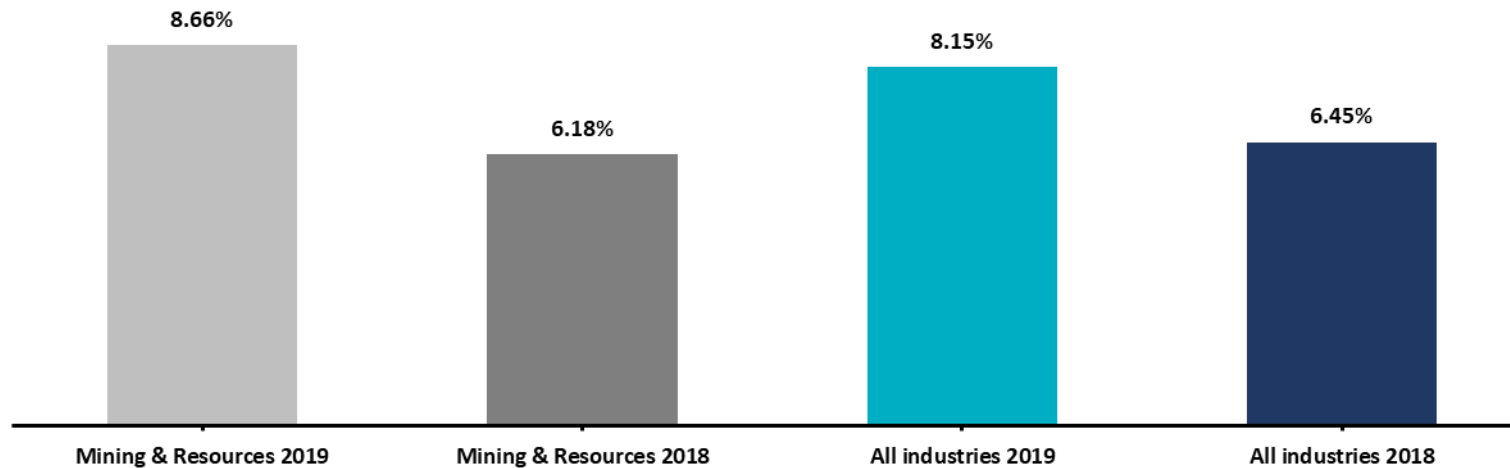
**Psychosocial risk assessments:** As a precursor to deciding on specific mental health and wellbeing initiatives, and to help target investment in the most cost effective way, we would recommend carrying out an assessment of psychosocial risks across your organisation. Assure has developed an online 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.

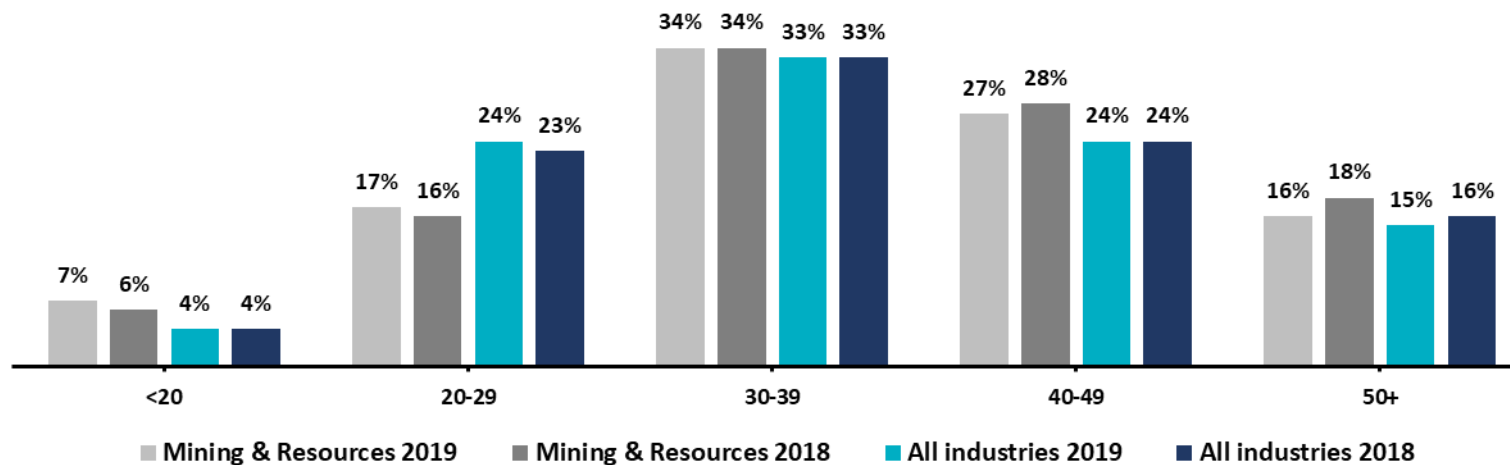
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## WHO HAS BEEN ACCESSING EAP?

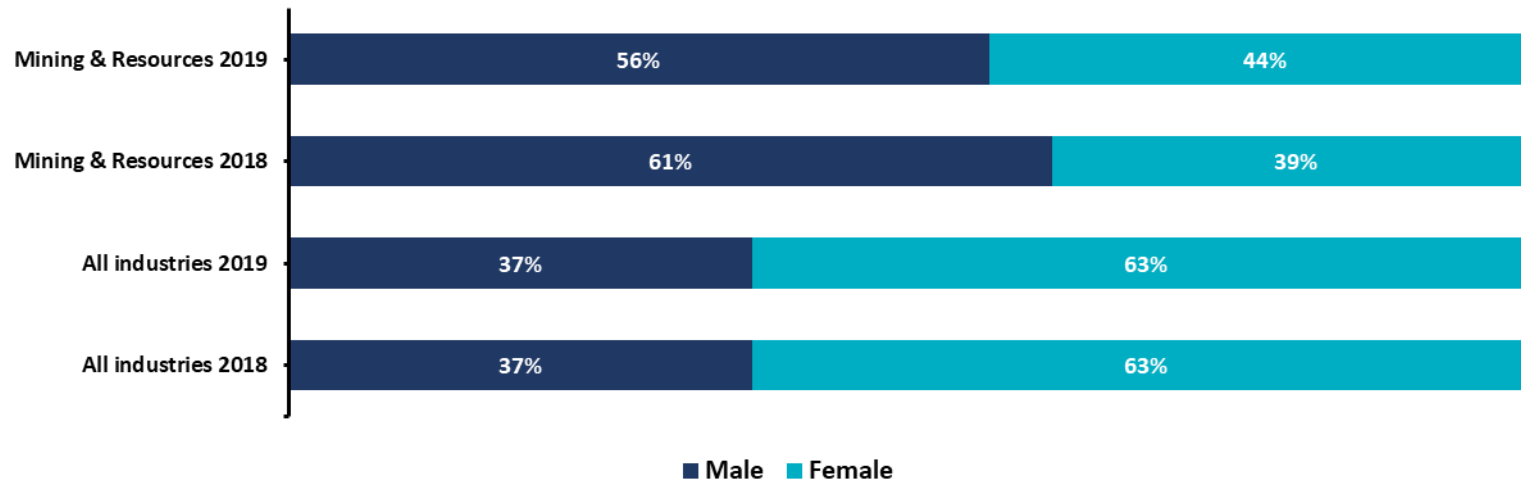
### EAP Utilisation



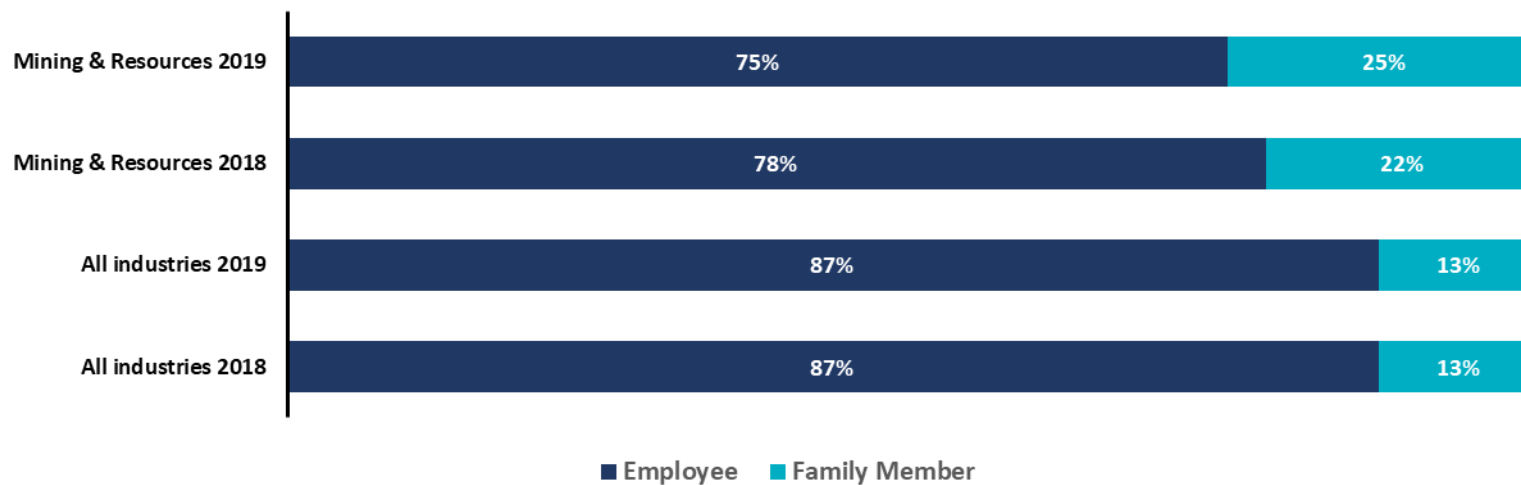
### EAP client age (as % of all clients)



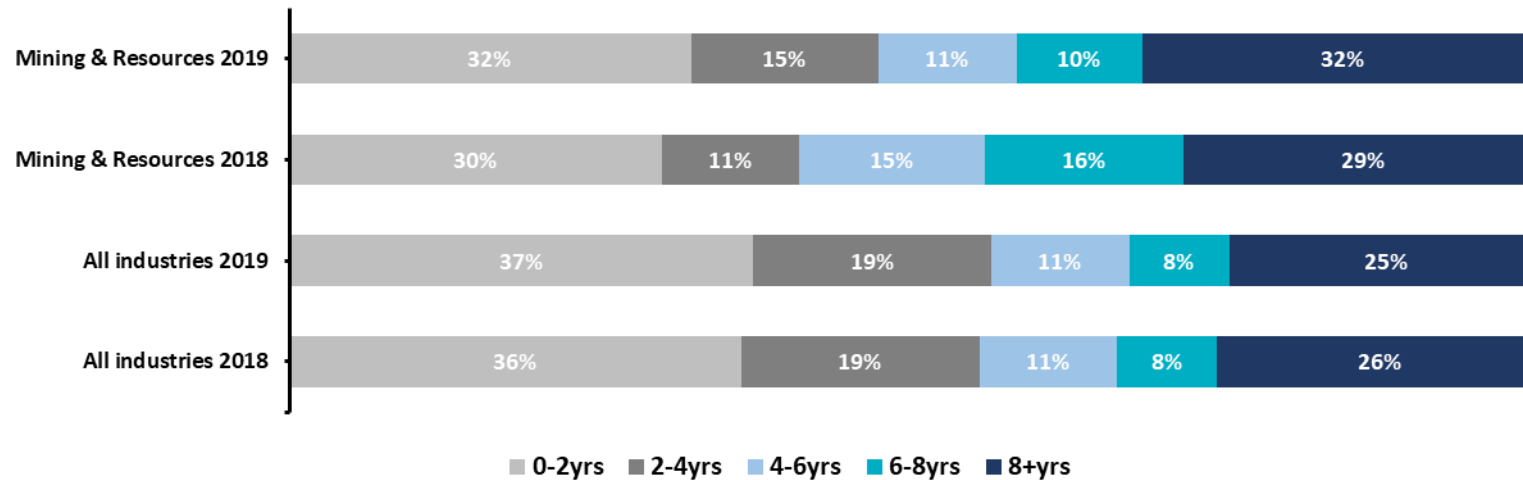
EAP client gender (as % of all clients)



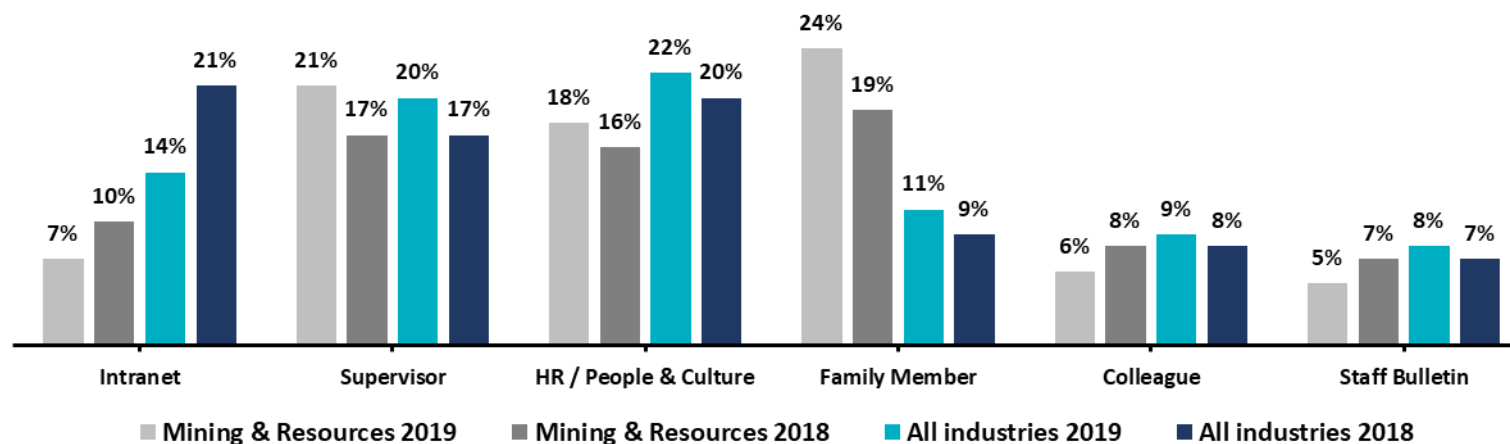
EAP client type (as % of all clients)



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



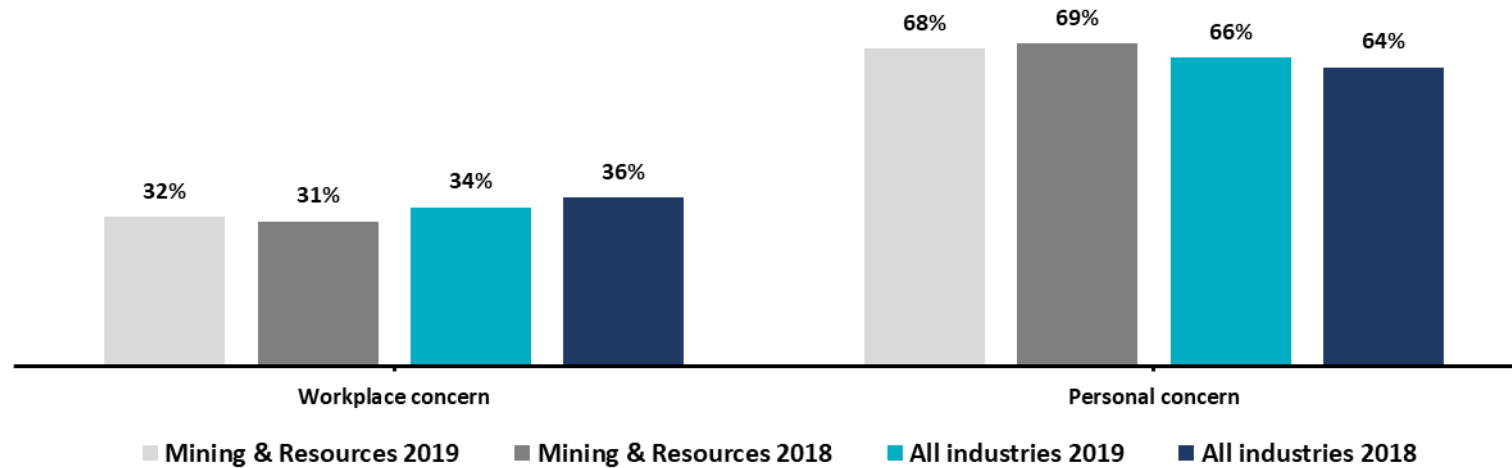
How learnt of EAP? (as % of all clients)



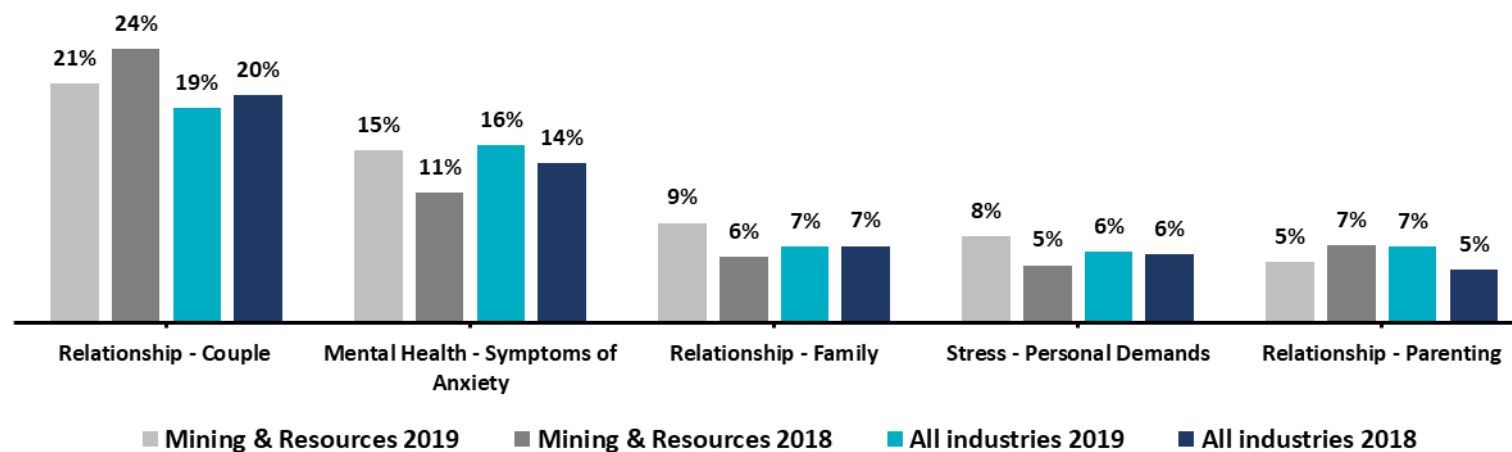
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## WHY HAVE PEOPLE BEEN ACCESSING EAP?

Primary presenting concern (as % of all clients)

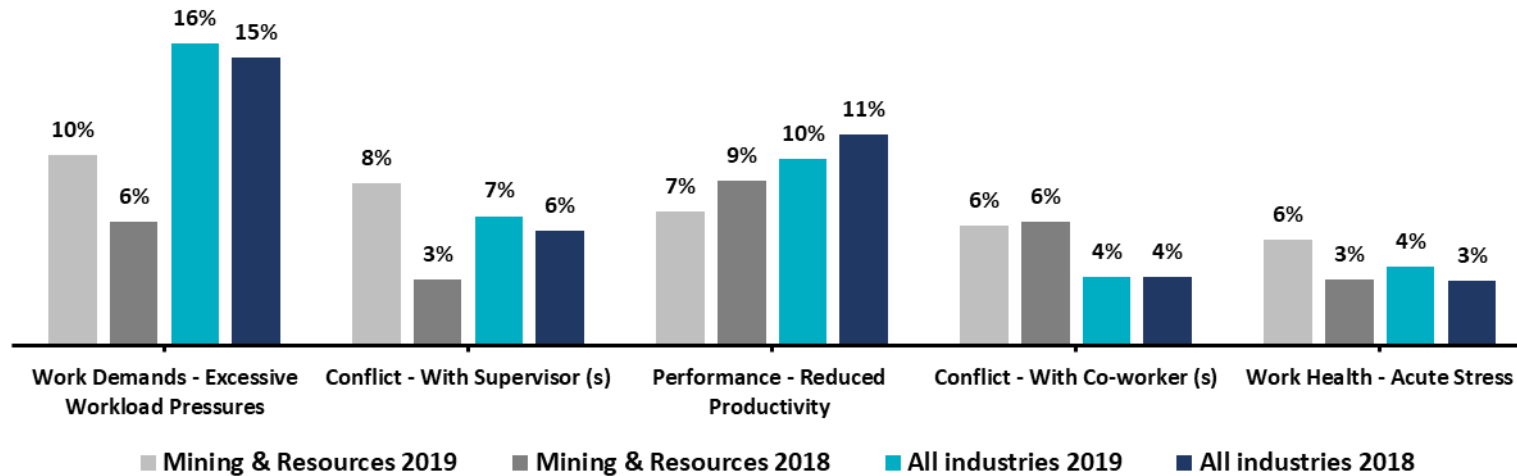


Top 5 primary presenting concerns - PERSONAL (as % of all clients)





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



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

