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## Collection of Analyzed Data from Health and Human Services Professionals: Stressors and Self-Care Practices

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Collection of Analyzed Data from Health and Human Services Professionals:

Stressors and Self-Care Practices

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### **Abstract**

Alliance on Aging is a nonprofit agency in Salinas, California. It was established in 1970, and they help serve the needs of the senior citizen community by offering multiple services. Working professionals experience high levels of stress in the workplace. Although there are many contributing factors for high stress in the workplace, the main factors at play are the lack of self-care and lack of support Zastrow (pg. 332, 2015). Because working professionally in the human services field experience high stress the consequences they may face are burnout, high turnover rates, and poor overall health. The capstone project will assess high stress in health and human service professionals working at Alliance On Aging. The implementation of this project will be to conduct a 10-question online survey, and the participants will be staff members at Alliance On Aging. The purpose of the project will help determine the stress level and self-care practices from staff. My expected outcome in the survey is to show high levels of stress and a lack of self-care practices among survey participants. The most important findings noted after analyzing surveys was the stress levels among staff was minimal. Most respondents reported moderate stress levels rather than severe stress levels. Many survey participants already practiced some form of self-care making the stress levels minimal. Since most participants show some level of stress while practicing self-care, the next steps I would like to recommend a few ideas which can help reduce stress. Stress relief recommended ideas are group walks, tools to release stress, offering healthy snacks, and staff acknowledgment, praise, or incentives.

*Keywords:* Stress, self-care, health, working professionals, human, and services

### **Agency & Communities Served**

The Alliance on Aging established in 1970 and since then has been helping residents in the Central Coast. According to the United States Census (2010), the senior population in Monterey County total at 29% for seniors over the age of 50. Natalia Molina (personal communication, 2018) stated that Keith Merrill founded the organization. Keith Merrill was a Monterey resident who had worked in the community for many years. One day as Merrill was heading home from work, he noticed a female senior citizen struggling to carry groceries while crossing the street. Merrill watching the senior carrying grocery bags gave her a ride home (N. Molina, 2018). Once home, she began to unbag her groceries, yet Merrill noticed all she was unbagging were boxes of corn flakes cereal. Merrill was surprised about a large number of cereal boxes and asked why she had only purchased cereal. The senior citizen told him that cereal was all she was able to afford and carry, and she did not have anyone to help her out (N. Molina, 2018). Merrill noticed the need to help seniors, so he began a private nonprofit agency along with other community members and priests. They hoped to begin an organization that can help address the needs of the senior citizen community.

The Alliance on Aging is a nonprofit agency located in downtown Salinas, California. Alliance on Aging helps serve the needs of the senior citizen community by offering multiple services. Alliance on Aging has many programs it offers the senior community, and I am interning in for the “Strengthening Wellness” Program or also known as “Fortaleciendo el Bienestar” in Spanish. The “Strengthening Wellness” program will be helping implement my capstone project. The program falls under the Health Education umbrella. The Alliance on Aging mission is, “As a community leader and advocate, the Alliance on Aging provides services and

resources that address the challenges and opportunities of aging” (Alliance on Aging, 2018). Many of the programs and services provided include benefits checkup, transportation coordination, information and referral, Medicare counseling, peer group support, and income tax preparation. The United States Census Bureau (2017) stated that the population of people 65 and older on July 1, 2015, was 47.8 million. The senior citizen population is estimated to account for 14.9% of the total population in the U.S, and by 2060. It has predicted that the population will rise to approximately 19.7 million senior citizens (U.S Census Bureau, 2017). As the population of senior citizens increases, the demand for services also increases.

### **Problem Description**

Working professionals experience high levels of stress in the workplace, especially in nonprofit organizations. The World Health Organization (2019) defines work-related stress as “the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.” Having little to no support creates pressures that can cause stress (WHO, 2019). Kiser (2015) also notes, “stress can be experienced as an emotional response and/or a physiological response to a given situation. An emotional response to stress would be feeling anxiety, fear, or dread, and a physiological response would be an increase in blood pressure, heart, and breath rate (Kiser, 2015). Working with the senior population can also become stressful. One can see the challenges seniors must endure while aging. For example, some seniors might be suffering from mental and physical abuse. Also, others have limited income, disabilities (physical and/or mental), and chronic illnesses or pains. There is only so much one person can do to help seniors in need with

the resources or programs provided, yet not being able to support all their needs can become stressful.

### **Contributing Factors**

Although there are many contributing factors for high stress in the workplace, the main factors at play are the lack of self-care and lack of support. Zastrow (pg. 332, 2015) explains the importance of self-care for social workers and how its set at its highest priority. “If social workers do not care for themselves, their ability to care for others will be sharply diminished or even depleted” (Zastrow, Pg. 332, 2015). The individuals in the helping professions must take care of themselves before taking care of their clients so that social workers can maximize their work performance. Next, The World Health Organization (n.d) notes work-related stress, “is often made worse when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues, as well as little control over work processes.” The lack of support creates a loss sense of direction or guidance from a supervisor. Employees can not know the expectations of their supervisors if they do not collaborate and support one another.

### **Consequences**

Because working professionally in the human services field experience high stress, some of the consequences they may face are burn-out and high turnover rates, and poor overall health. Kiser (2015) explains that many professionals who enter the human service career face significant challenges, so they must learn to maintain their energy to avoid “exhaustion” and “burn-out”. Zastrow (Pg. 341, 2015) acknowledges:

Burn-out involves the loss of concern for people with whom one working. Besides, to physical exhaustion (and sometimes even illness), burn-out is characterized by

emotional exhaustion in which the professional no longer has any positive feelings, sympathy, or respect for clients or patients.

Also, the professional who suffers through burn-out is unable to deal with stress successfully, causing a trickle effect, making them impaired to execute their work professionally.

Furthermore, the inability to deal with burn-out can cause professionals to deal with stress by using alcohol and drugs (Zastrow, Pg. 341, 2015). Many individuals who work in health and human services professions face a tough situation where one can get overwhelmed, causing them to feel burnt out. Secondly, health and human service professionals also have a higher risk of experiencing turnover. The Merriam Webster Dictionary (2019) explains turnover is, “the number of persons hired within a period to replace those leaving or dropped from a workforce.” Carayon and Gurses (2019) have noted the high turnover rates among hospital nurses due to increased workload and intensive patient care. Also, job dissatisfaction due to heavy workload increases turnover rates. Unfortunately, a heavy workload, in turn, affects patient safety. Due to a lack of job satisfaction, there is a lack of nurses, so the lack of nurses causes a heavy workload for a current nurse in the job field, which eventually leads to burn-out and turnover.

### **Problem Model**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Lack of self-care	Health and human services professionals experience high levels of stress in the workplace.	Burnout
Lack of support		Turnover

## **Capstone Project**

The capstone project will evaluate high stress and self-care practices among health and human service professionals working at Alliance on Aging. I will work accordingly with my mentor, Delna, and Teresa, the executive director, to create a survey to determine the stress levels among staff members at Alliance on Aging. We will work accordingly to create a consent form if necessary. The questions will ask whether they practice self-care, stress levels, support from other staff, among other questions. In preparation, I will notify staff members of the survey, and also, I will work with the executive director, Teresa, to review survey questions. Based on the survey results, I will then make the final recommendations, which can help staff can relieve their stress.

### **Capstone Project Description and Justification**

#### **Project Implementation**

The implementation of the project will be to conduct a 10-question online survey, and the participants will be staff members at the Alliance on Aging whose profession is working in the health and human services area. There are an estimated 15-20 staff members at Alliance on Aging. Staff members are always busy, and they can be meeting with clients, conducting outreach, and making phone calls. Because many staff members are busy during their workweek, we will use an online survey such as Survey Monkey or Google Forms. They can respond to the survey on their own time using a computer or a smartphone. However, before conducting surveys staff members will need to review a consent form, and by participating in the survey, they are giving their consent. The survey will also be anonymous. A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.



**Project Purpose**

The purpose of the project will help evaluate stress and self-care practices from the staff at the Alliance On Aging. I will analyze surveys to determine if staff are indeed stressed as working professionals in the health and human services area. There is a need to practice self-care for the overall well-being of one's self. As health and human service professionals, we must practice self-care to best help our clients. We cannot help serve our clients if we are not caring for our own selves.

**Project Justification**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) emphasize the careful considerations to note when designing surveys, which include the target employees, goal of survey by questions asked length, and format. For example, the capstone's surveying goal is to assess Alliance On Aging employees' self-care practices and stress levels by using a 10-question online survey. CDC (2015) notes the purpose of designing surveys is to, "Assessing current health status and health behaviors may point to the need for particular health education programs." By implementing a survey on staff stress levels and self-care practices, there will be a chance to determine the health problem, which in turn helps to increase awareness and the ability to help address the issue. Since "some organizations may find web-based surveys convenient" (CDC, 2015), the format used to design a survey will be Google Form, which is an online format. The pros of using online surveys are the order of questions, only accepted answers, required an answer, and participant anonymity and, the cons are reliable internet, and respondents must be "online" (CDC, 2015).

**Expected Outcomes**

I think my project will bring more awareness of the issue of self-care and how it can affect one's health.

### **Assessment Plan**

By determining the stress levels among the staff, I will conclude with recommendations that will be beneficial to staff members.

## **Project Results**

### **Project Activities**

The program activities conducted were to research the survey types of questions to ask participants. For example, there are open-ended, closed-ended, Likert scale, and multiple-choice questions. To make the survey easy, straightforward, and concise, I will use the Likert scale, rating, and multiple-choice were used to create a survey. Also, there had been extra research done to formulate a consent form. After creating survey questions, many drafts had been done before finalizing the survey with the help of the executive director. After gaining approval to begin implementation, a Google Forms survey was created. All staff was emailed the consent form along with the survey link. Furthermore, an email reminder of the closing date for the survey to make everyone had a chance to submit before the deadline. Some of the survey questions were used to determine the stress levels, self-care practices, healthy-work balance, support during demanding work times, etc. The complete survey titled "Self-Care at Alliance On Aging Survey" is available in Appendix A.

### **Project Outcomes and Findings**

The expected project outcomes determined by my mentor was that staff would show mild levels of stress. My expectations were for staff to show moderate to severe levels of stress.

Figure 4, found in Appendix A, demonstrates most staff showed a moderate level of stress percentage of 71% and mild stress levels at 14%. Also, the other percentage was for severe stress at 14%. In addition, my expected outcome was to receive full staff participation. I received 14 out of 23 surveys. Also, 71% of participants have the respondent to have mild stress levels, as shown in Figure 4. Based on my time interning at Alliance on Aging and seeing some of the challenges staff members face while helping the senior population, I would have assumed the staff to show higher levels of moderate to severe stress. Nevertheless, lack of self-care is not a big concern because 64% of respondents agreed to practice some form self-care already (Figure 6), yet 43% of respondents (Figure 7) do not practice self-care daily. Also, Figure 3 shows that 57% of participants do experience stress. Moreover, Figure 10 demonstrates the level of agreement of staff feeling supported during the hard times at work, and 57% of participants “agreed” to feeling supported.

Moreover, the respondents were asked how they practice self-care by answering in the following ways: practicing yoga, meditation, exercise, walking/running, journaling, do not practice self-care, and others. Figure 8 shows 64% of respondents answered that they practice self-care by exercising while 21% of respondents had answered “other.”

After conducting an analysis of the surveys, I can determine my project expected outcome was not as expected. Nevertheless, it was successful in analyzing and assessing the stress levels and self-care practices among participants. An in-depth survey analysis can be found in Appendix A from Figures 1-10.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Since most participants show some level of stress while practicing self-care, I would like to recommend a few ideas which can help reduce stress.

1. Group walks
2. Tools to release stress
3. Offer healthy snacks
4. Staff acknowledgment, praise, or incentives

The first recommendation would be to allow staff to have group walks during work hours. According to Mayo Clinic (2019), any form of exercise can act as a stress reliever. “Exercise increases your overall health and your sense of well-being” (Mayo Clinic, 2019). Not only can exercise help relieve stress, but it can improve one’s overall health.

Next, the ability to provide staff the necessary tools to release stress. For example, gifting staff tools such as essential oils, scalp massagers, fidget spinners, liquid motion timing bubbler, buildable magnets, and squeeze balls. Mills, Reiss, and Dombeck (n.d) noted, “One of the simplest psychological techniques for rapid stress relief involves finding ways to distract yourself from whatever it is that is bothering you.” The use of such tools will help staff distract themselves at the moment from what is causing them stress.

Another way to help staff reduce stress is by offering staff healthy snacks such as bananas, oranges, apples, peaches, dried fruit, nuts, and vegetables. The UCLA Center for East-West Medicine (2019) emphasizes the importance of Vitamin C, Complex Carbohydrates, and Omega-3 Fatty Acids. Vitamin C can be found in “oranges and other citrus fruits, can reduce stress and boost the immune system” (UCLA Center for East-West Medicine, 2019). Also, Complex Carbohydrates can be foods, “such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, can induce

the brain to increase serotonin production and stabilizing blood pressure as a way to reduce stress” (UCLA Center for East-West Medicine, 2019). Next, Omega-3 fatty acids can be found in nuts, “which have been shown to reduce surges of stress hormones” (UCLA Center for East-West Medicine, 2019).

The Harvard Business Review (2019) describes how staff acknowledgment and appreciation also helps reduce stress, “Publicly recognizing the hard work and contributions of team members decreases feelings of stress and increases feelings of connection and belonging. Staff appreciation can be shown by gifting staff agency swag. For example, a jacket with the agency logo, a certificate of appreciation, a personally written thank you note. Not only will staff recognition help relieve stress, but it can also make “your employees are more likely to stay happy and satisfied in their roles” (Harvard Business Review, 2019).

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**Appendix A****Scope of Work**

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeline/Deadlines</b>
1.	Discuss capstone ideas with my mentor	Final capstone project idea approved	Dec 2018-March 2019
2.	Discuss survey briefly with staff	Aware of survey	June 2019-July
3.	Develop consent form	Final consent form approved	September/October 2019
4.	Develop survey questions	10 question survey	September 2019
5.	Revision of questions	Final 10 question survey approved	October 2019
6.	Send consent forms to staff	Email consent and survey link	October 2019
7.	Gather consent form staff	Conduct a survey	October 14-28, 2019
8.	Analyze survey	Write a report/recommendations	November 2019
9.	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	The final presentation for Capstone Festival	December 2019



**Self-Care at Alliance On Aging Survey**

1. I have a healthy work balance.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
2. Stress can have a positive impact.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
3. I do experience stress at times.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
4. How would you rate your stress levels?
  - Mild
  - Moderate
  - Severe
  - Extreme
  - I have no stress.
  
5. I have enough time during the day to complete my work.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
6. The World Health Organization (2019) defines, "self-care as the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote, maintain health, prevent disease and cope with illness with or without the support of a healthcare provider." I practice self-care.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree

7. I practice self-care on a daily basis.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

8. I practice self-care by:

Practicing Yoga

Meditation

Exercise

Walking/Running

Journaling

Do not practice self-care.

Other

9. I feel recognized for the work I do.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

10. I feel supported during the demanding times at work.

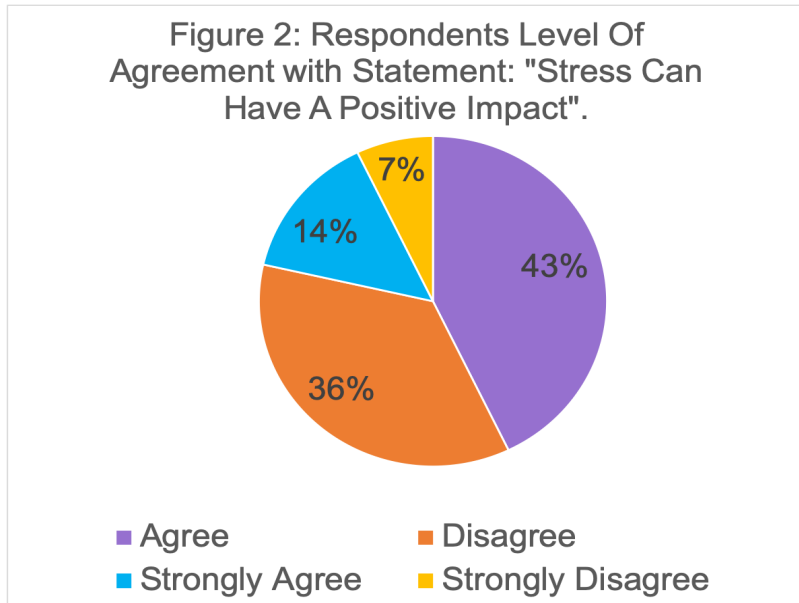
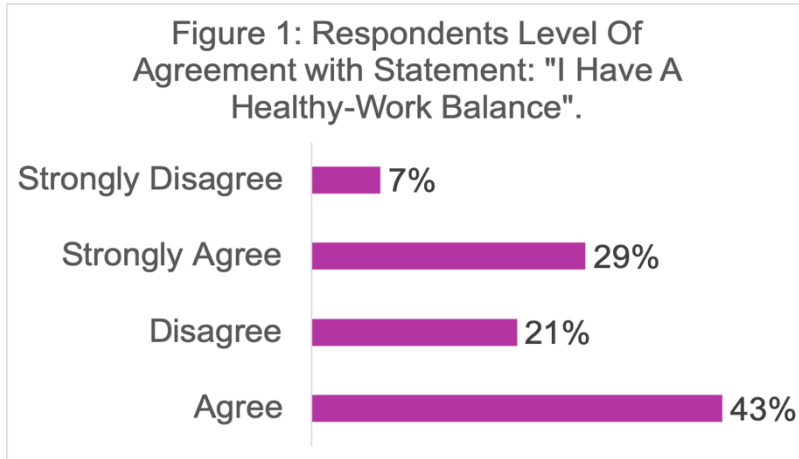
Strongly disagree

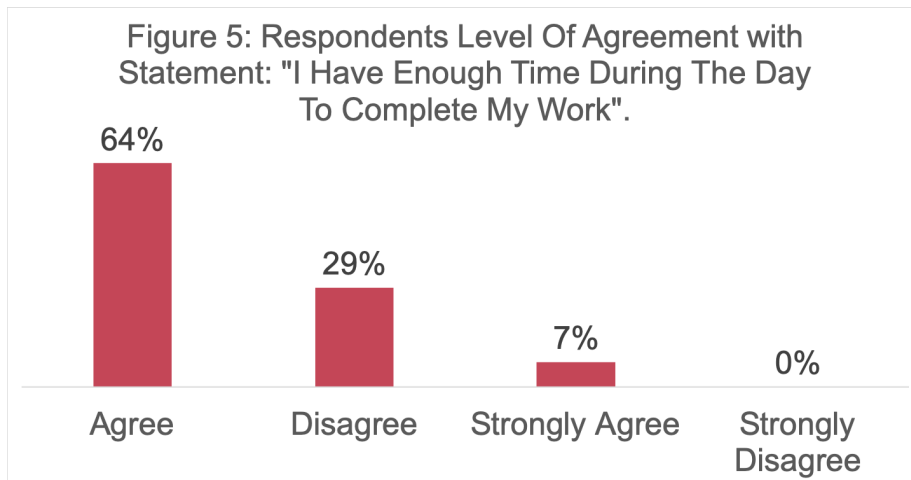
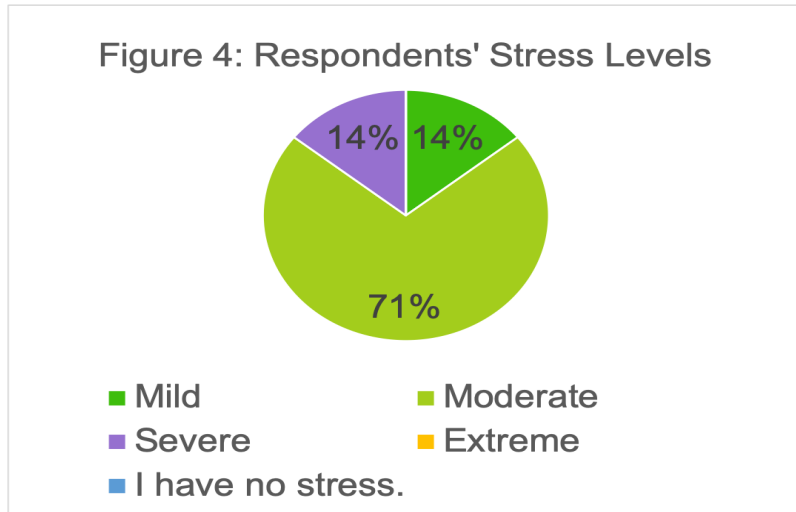
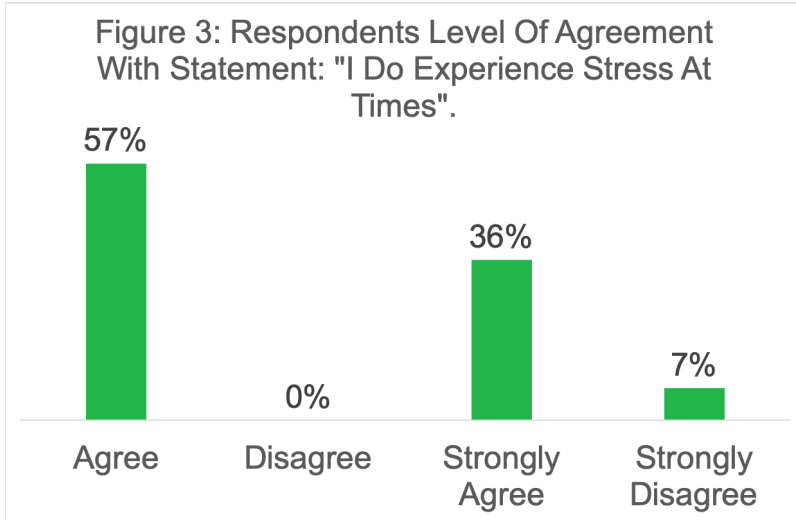
Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

## Self-Care at Alliance On Aging Survey Results





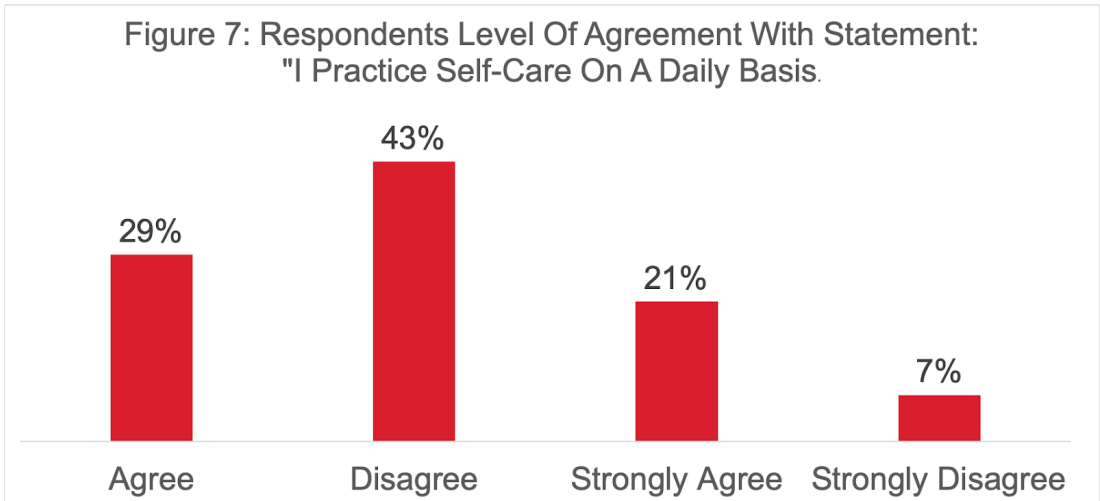
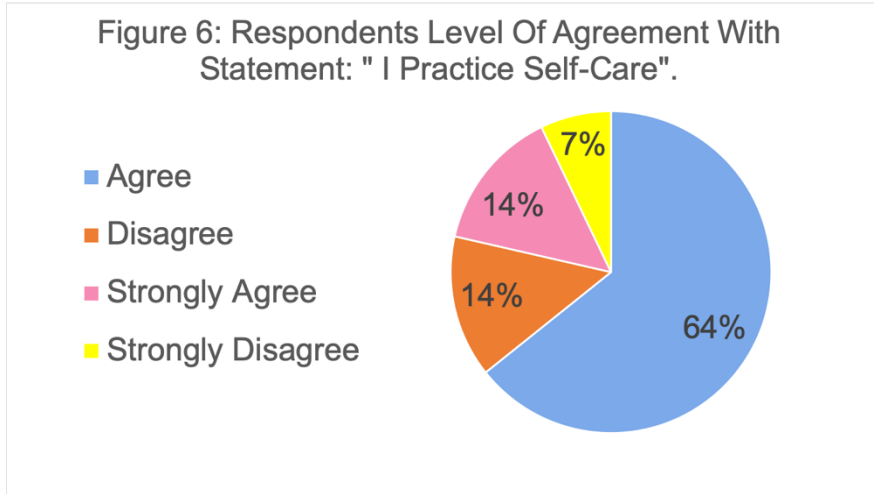


Figure 8: Respondents Who Practice Self-Care By:

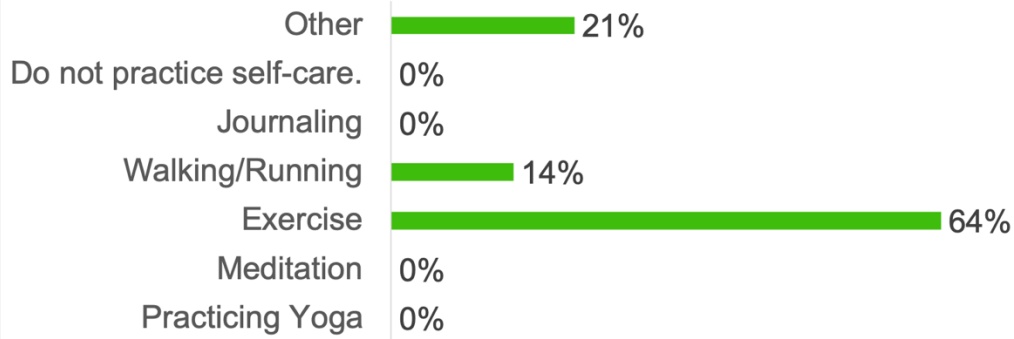


Figure 9: Respondents Level Of Agreement With Statement: "I Feel Recognized For The Work I Do".

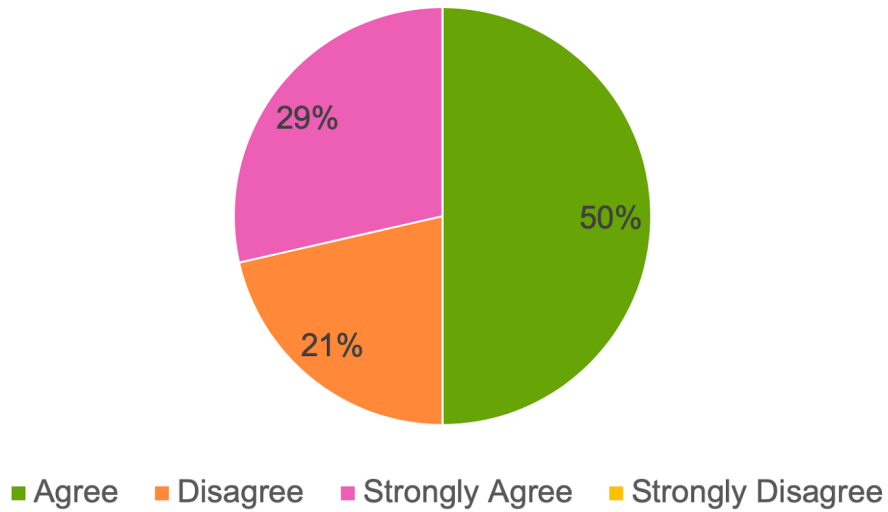


Figure 10: Respondents Level Of Agreement With Statement: "I Feel Supported During The Demanding Times At Work".

