

National Mental Health Survey



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S.A.D.

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M.A.D.

In May 2021, Sonography Canada conducted a *National Mental Health Survey* in conjunction with the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) and the Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists (CAMRT). The purpose of the survey was to assess the mental health of workers in the fields of medical imaging and laboratory science. This was the second edition of this research initiative which was last conducted in 2018. A total of 629 Sonography Canada members completed the online questionnaire in 2021.

Sonographers are S.A.D. — Stressed. Anxious. Depressed.

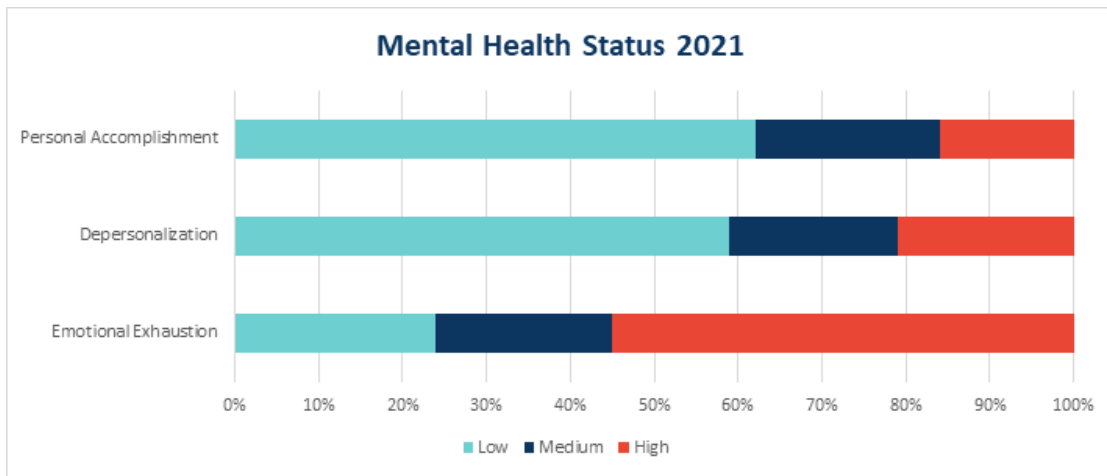
While 8 out of 10 sonographers indicated that they are somewhat or very satisfied with their job (5% lower than in 2018), the same number also reported feeling depressed (also down by 5%). With over half of respondents (55%) claiming that they have too much work to do everything well, it's not surprising that 7 out of 10 participants responded that they often or always find their work to be stressful (9% higher) and/or that they feel anxious (3% lower).



7 out of 10 sonographers often or always find their work to be stressful.

Of particular concern to Sonography Canada is the fact that more than half of survey respondents (63%) do not have access to, or are unsure about the availability of, stress management or stress reduction programs in their workplace. Yet, we have seen an increase from 12% to 20% of respondents showing signs of severe mental illness.

Sonographers typically feel a sense of personal accomplishment and competence in the work they do, and they care about the quality of the treatment they provide to their patients (personalization). However, the results show that a majority of ultrasound professionals feel emotionally exhausted and overextended by their work, which can lower the sense of personal accomplishment and lead to depersonalization, and burnout.



Sonographers are worried about the future

The survey demonstrates that a majority of sonographers in Canada are struggling to keep up with the demands of today, and the future doesn't appear to get brighter for them. While ultrasound professionals almost unanimously (95%) expressed positive views about job security in the Mental Health Survey, a member survey conducted by Sonography Canada in 2018 revealed that only 1 in 10 believe working conditions in the profession will get better over the next 5-10 years. Respondents identified higher demands for productivity within the workplace, increased repetitive strain injuries, as well as general stress and burnout as the top three issues facing sonography in the years to come.

These results echo some of the feedback obtained in the 2018 edition of the National Mental Health Survey. It also aligns with results of the 2018 Sonography Canada Member Survey where members said they felt increasing pressure to conduct more scans in limited time, with decreased funding, staff shortages, and longer patient wait lists. Not only that, but there also appeared to be a growing trend towards shift work, higher demands for more detailed and sometimes unnecessary scans, as well as a requirement for sonographers to work outside of the scope of practice for which they have the knowledge, skills and judgement to perform.

“What these results tell us is that sonographers love their jobs, but they are feeling the weight of the increased pressure to always be doing more, in less time and sometimes in less than desirable conditions,” stated Carolyn Trottier, CRGS, CRVS, Chair of the Sonography Canada Board of Directors. “This survey confirms the need for Sonography Canada to pursue its focus on improving both the mental and physical wellness of our members.”



Sonography Canada is M.A.D. — Making a Difference!

A strategic plan was developed in 2019 with a vision that would carry the association into 2022. This plan was conceived before the COVID-19 pandemic thrust sonographers into an unprecedented environment calling on an already overburdened profession to do even more, in a context involving higher health risks than ever.

The results of the Mental Health Survey confirm the need for the association to remain steadfast in its goal to support sonographers in their identified need for sustainable workloads and desire for opportunities to provide high-quality patient care.

In 2020, Sonography Canada launched the #SonographersSaveLives public awareness campaign designed to secure recognition and appreciation for sonographers as well-trained medical professionals with unique skills, competencies and challenges, who serve as essential frontline members of the healthcare team in Canada.

The results of the mental health survey have made it clear that Sonography Canada must not only promote sonography as a profession but must increase awareness and influence workplace standards to help reduce the health and safety risks associated with the work sonographers do.



Susan Clarke, Executive Director of Sonography Canada stated that “Through our advocacy and education efforts, we hope to influence and achieve more realistic employer and patient expectations. Only then will we be able to reduce the pressure and stress that are having such a significant impact on the health and job satisfaction of our members.”

Mental Health Kit



The Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Sciences has compiled a **Mental Health Toolkit** that empowers people to take charge and create positive change. With separate paths for individuals, students, managers, employees, organizations and educators, sonographers are invited to visit <https://mentalhealth.csmls.org> to help improve mental health in our profession.
