

# ROGERS | Research Center

## 2023 WI Fire and EMS Mental Health Survey - Analysis

Prepared for Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin Charitable Foundation

### OVERVIEW

In consultation with Rogers Behavioral Health, the Professional Firefighters of Wisconsin Charitable Foundation developed a mental health survey made accessible to all professional and volunteer Fire and EMS professionals across the state of Wisconsin from October 11, 2023, to January 01, 2024. Full-time, part-time, volunteer, and retired firefighters and EMS responders completed the 43-item survey designed to provide insights on job-related critical stress and associated behavioral health needs. The survey included limited demographic information (race, ethnicity, sex\*, years of service, county served) and inquired about critical incidents or traumatic events on the job, thoughts of self-harm, sleep issues, substance use, engagement with department or municipal support services, and perception of mental health stigma in the field. A brief psychological screening tool for depression, anxiety, and general psychological distress— the PHQ-4—was also included.

This was the fourth year distributing the survey, and the second year the survey included an optional, validated self-reported, measure of professional quality of life, the Pro-QoL. This instrument was utilized to gather insight into work satisfaction, secondary trauma, and burnout in “helping” professionals.

In 2023, 1640 individuals responded to the survey, and 854 completed the optional Pro-QoL assessment (an increase from 1515 and 777 respondents in 2022 for the total number of respondents and Pro-QoL respondents, respectively). Further respondent delineation follows:

#### Employment Status:

	All (%)	Males	Females
Full-time	795 (48.5)	642 (80.7)	153 (19.3)
Part-time	179 (10.9)	96 (53.6)	83 (46.4)
Retired	216 (13.2)	188 (87.0)	28 (23.0)
Volunteer	450 (27.4)	236 (52.4)	214 (47.6)

#### Primary Department Type:

	All (%)	Males	Females
Municipal	1379 (84.1)	1019 (73.9)	360 (26.1)
Private	261 (15.9)	143 (54.8)	118 (45.2)

#### Services Provided:

	All (%)	Males	Females
EMS	534 (32.6)	230 (43.1)	304 (56.9)
Fire	50 (3.0)	43 (86.0)	7 (14.0)
Fire and EMS	1056 (64.39)	889 (84.2)	167 (15.8)

\*Only sex at birth was recorded for this survey

Fire Rank:

	All (%)	Males	Females
Chief officer	164 (14.8)	152 (92.7)	12 (7.3)
Driver	174 (15.7)	158 (90.8)	16 (9.2)
Firefighter	467 (42.2)	353 (75.6)	114 (24.4)
Line officer	301 (27.2)	269 (89.4)	32 (10.6)

*\* Out of 1106 who responded to this question*

EMS Level:

	All (%)	Males	Females
Critical care paramedic	153 (11.0)	116 (75.8)	37 (24.2)
EMT advanced	197 (14.1)	123 (62.4)	74 (37.6)
EMT basic	535 (38.3)	329 (61.5)	206 (38.5)
First responder	194 (13.9)	116 (59.8)	78 (40.2)
Paramedic	511 (36.6)	435 (85.1)	76 (14.9)

*\* Out of 1590 who responded to this question*

Years of Service:

	All (%)	Males	Females
2 years or less	166 (10.12)	62 (37.3)	104 (62.7)
2-5 years	201 (12.3)	110 (54.7)	91 (45.3)
5-10 years	221 (13.5)	134 (60.6)	87 (39.4)
10-15 years	219 (13.4)	167 (76.3)	52 (23.7)
15-20 years	207 (12.6)	164 (79.2)	43 (20.8)
20-25 years	232 (14.1)	177 (76.3)	55 (23.7)
More than 25 years	394 (24.0)	348 (88.3)	46 (11.7)

Race and Ethnicity: (%)

American Indian or Alaskan Native	9 (0.5)
Asian	9 (0.5)
Black or African American	16 (1.0)
Hispanic, LatinX, or Spanish	21 (1.28)
Multiracial	32 (1.95)
White	1543 (94.1)
Other	0 (0.0)
Unknown	9 (0.5)

Responses by county with 20 responses or more: (%)

Brown	61 (3.7)	Marathon	49 (3.0)	Sheboygan	28 (1.7)
Chippewa	25 (1.5)	Milwaukee	190 (11.6)	Washington	40 (2.4)
Dane	124 (7.6)	Outagamie	39 (2.4)	Waukesha	84 (5.1)
Dodge	20 (1.2)	Ozaukee	22 (1.3)	Winnebago	110 (6.7)
Eau Claire	31 (1.9)	Portage	24 (1.5)	Wood	25 (1.5)
Fond du Lac	76 (4.6)	Racine	34 (2.1)		
Kenosha	43 (2.6)	Rock	48 (2.9)		
La Crosse	33 (2.0)	Sauke	24 (1.5)		

County Type:

	All	Males	Females
Urban	1152	891	261
Rural	488	271	217

### Job-Related Critical Stress:

When asked “Have you experienced a critical incident or a traumatic event on the job?”, of the 1640 respondents, 1477 (90.1%) indicated they had experienced a job-related critical incident or traumatic event. In previous years, 726 out of 777 (93.4%), 935 out of 1022 (91.5%), and 1412 out of 1513 (93.3%) respondents answered ‘yes’ to this question in 2020, 2021, and 2022, respectively.

Of the 1477 respondents in 2023 who indicated they had experienced job-related critical stress, 155 (10.5%) reported having nightmares about the events or unwanted thoughts about the events within the last *month*- 103 (66.4%) of whom reported trying to not think about the event(s) or going out of their way to avoid situations that reminded them of the event(s). Likewise, 337 respondents (22.8%) reported having nightmares or unwanted thoughts of the events within the last *year*, and of those, 216 (64.1%) reported trying to not think about the event(s) or going out of their way to avoid situations that reminded them of the event(s).

When comparing the employment status to those who indicated they have experienced job-related critical stress, those who worked full time had significantly higher percentages than another employment status when looking at change in view of job or future (51.6%), sleep problems(61.1%), family or relationship problems(45.1%), thoughts of suicide or self-harm(14.6%), substance abuse(17.9%), and being easily angered or withdrawn (59.1%). Furthermore, the respondents who indicated working in Fire and EMS had higher percentages reporting sleep problems (54.0%), family or relationship problems (38.4%), substance abuse (15.1%), and being easily angered or withdrawn (49.0%) when compared to all responses (51.3%, 34.2%, 13.2%, and 45.6%, respectively).

Of the 1477 respondents in 2023 who indicated they had experienced a traumatic or critical event, 176 (11.9%) reported thoughts of suicide or self-harm with the largest percentage,

14.6%, seen in respondents who work full-time. Males were observed to report a 2% increase in thoughts of suicide or self-harm when compared to female respondents (12.5% and 10.5%, respectively). 13.0% of respondents who reported working in at a private department reported thoughts of suicide or self-harm compared to the 11.7% working at a municipal department. likelihood of suicidal ideations and thoughts of self-harm were observed to be most prominent in respondents with 5-20 years of service (15.9%).

In 2023, 195 (13.2%) respondents reported substance abuse following experiencing a critical or traumatic event. The likelihood of substance abuse rises and peaks between 15-25 years of service with approximately 17.6% of respondents reporting substance abuse during these years. The following tables and graphs further delineate the complications experienced as the result of job-related critical stress:

### By Employment Status

	All	Full-time	Part-time	Retired	Volunteer
Total Respondents	1640 (%)	795	179	216	450
Respondents that experienced a critical or traumatic event	1477 (90.1)	728 (91.6)	156 (87.2)	207 (95.8)	386 (85.8)
Change in view of job or future	589 (39.9)	376 (51.6)	49 (31.4)	61 (29.5)	103 (26.7)
Sleep problems	757 (51.3)	445 (61.1)	66 (42.3)	100 (48.3)	146 (37.8)
Family or relationship problems	505 (34.2)	328 (45.1)	33 (21.2)	72 (34.8)	72 (18.7)
Thoughts of suicide or self-harm	176 (11.9)	106 (14.6)	19 (12.2)	27 (13.0)	24 (6.2)
Substance abuse	195 (13.2)	130 (17.9)	11 (7.1)	31 (15.0)	23 (6.0)
Easily angered or withdrawn	673 (45.6)	430 (59.1)	56 (35.9)	76 (36.7)	111 (28.8)
None of the above	404 (27.4)	121 (16.6)	58 (37.2)	60 (29.0)	165 (42.7)

*Percentages reported with a shaded background are based on all responses; percentages reported with a white background are based on only the respondents who indicated they had experienced job-related critical stress.*

## By Department Type

	All	Municipal	Private
Total Respondents	1640 (%)	1379	261
Respondents that experienced a critical or traumatic event	1477 (90.1)	1253 (90.9)	224 (85.8)
Change in view of job or future	589 (39.9)	495 (39.5)	94 (42.0)
Sleep problems	757 (51.3)	652 (52.0)	105 (46.9)
Family or relationship problems	505 (34.2)	434 (34.6)	71 (31.7)
Thoughts of suicide or self-harm	176 (11.9)	147 (11.7)	29 (13.0)
Substance abuse	195 (13.2)	171 (13.6)	24 (10.7)
Easily angered or withdrawn	673 (45.6)	576 (46.0)	97 (43.3)
None of the above	404 (27.4)	335 (26.7)	69 (30.8)

Percentages reported with a shaded background are based on all responses; percentages reported with a white background are based on only the respondents who indicated they had experienced job-related critical stress.

## By Sex

	All	Male	Female
Total Respondents	1640 (%)	1162	478
Respondents that experienced a critical or traumatic event	1477 (90.1)	1076 (92.6)	401 (83.9)
Change in view of job or future	589 (39.9)	448 (41.6)	141 (35.2)
Sleep problems	757 (51.3)	572 (53.2)	185 (46.1)
Family or relationship problems	505 (34.2)	404 (37.5)	101 (25.2)
Thoughts of suicide or self-harm	176 (11.9)	134 (12.5)	42 (10.5)
Substance abuse	195 (13.2)	160 (14.9)	35 (8.7)
Easily angered or withdrawn	673 (45.6)	534 (49.6)	139 (34.7)
None of the above	404 (27.4)	263 (24.4)	141 (35.2)

Percentages reported with a shaded background are based on all responses; percentages reported with a white background are based on only the respondents who indicated they had experienced job-related critical stress.

## By Services Provided

	All	EMS	Fire	Fire and EMS
Total Respondents	1640 (%)	534	50	1056
Respondents that experienced a critical or traumatic event	1477 (90.1)	452 (84.6)	42 (84.0)	983 (93.1)
Change in view of job or future	589 (39.9)	170 (37.6)	13 (31.0)	406 (41.3)
Sleep problems	757 (51.3)	201 (44.5)	25 (59.5)	531 (54.0)
Family or relationship problems	505 (34.2)	113 (25.0)	15 (35.7)	377 (38.4)
Thoughts of suicide or self-harm	176 (11.9)	46 (10.2)	4 (9.5)	126 (12.8)
Substance abuse	195 (13.2)	43 (9.5)	4 (9.5)	148 (15.1)
Easily angered or withdrawn	673 (45.6)	173 (38.3)	18 (42.9)	482 (49.0)
None of the above	404 (27.4)	160 (35.4)	11 (26.2)	233 (23.7)

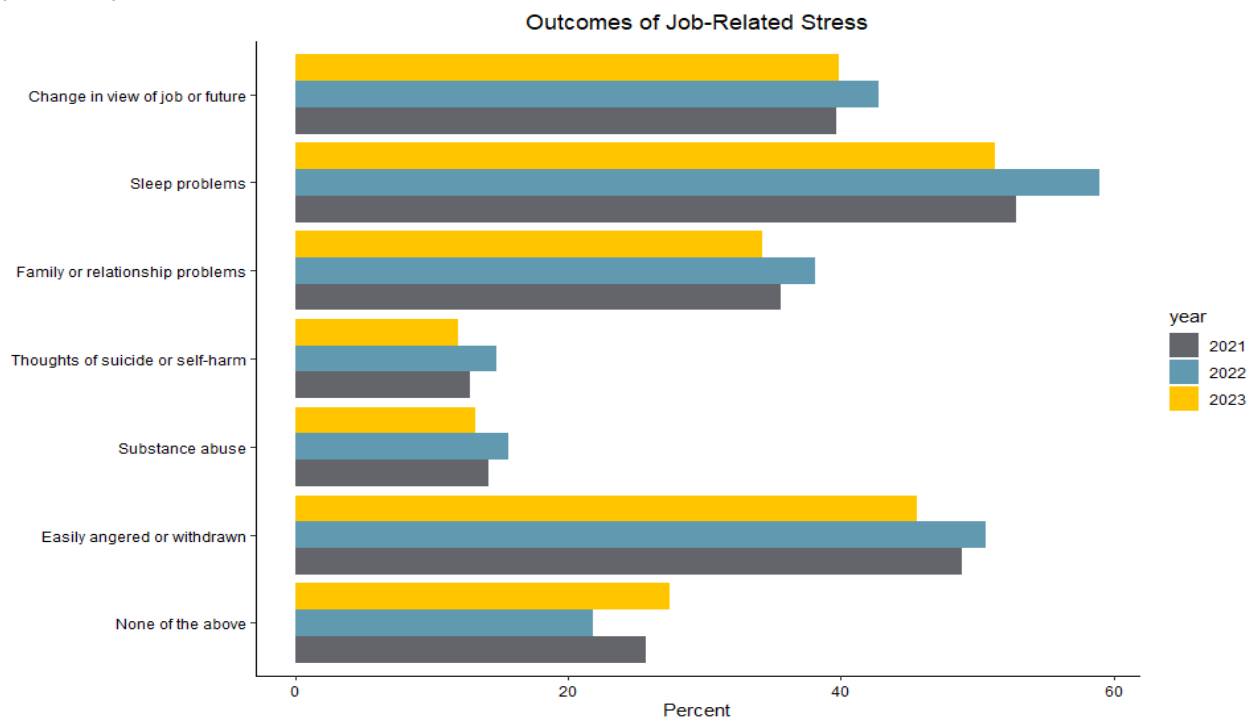
Percentages reported with a shaded background are based on all responses; percentages reported with a white background are based on only the respondents who indicated they had experienced job-related critical stress.

## By Years of Service

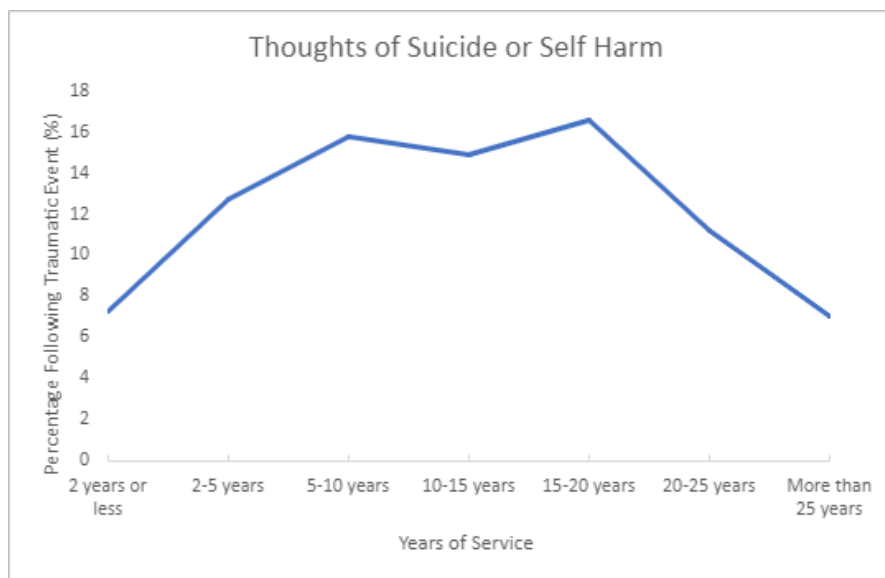
	All	2 years or less	2-5 years	5-10 years	10-15 years	15-20 years	20-25 years	More than 25 years
Total Respondents	1640 (%)	166	201	221	219	207	232	394
Respondents that experienced a critical or traumatic event	1477 (90.1)	110 (66.3)	180 (89.6)	195 (88.2)	207 (94.5)	186 (89.9)	221 (95.3)	378 (95.9)
Change in view of job or future	589 (39.9)	31 (28.2)	57 (31.7)	86 (44.1)	104 (50.2)	99 (53.2)	99 (44.8)	113 (29.9)
Sleep problems	757 (51.3)	39 (35.5)	82 (45.6)	105 (53.8)	121 (58.5)	114 (61.3)	128 (57.9)	168 (44.4)
Family or relationship problems	505 (34.2)	16 (14.5)	49 (27.2)	71 (36.4)	87 (42.0)	77 (41.4)	95 (43.0)	110 (29.1)
Thoughts of suicide or self-harm	176 (11.9)	8 (7.3)	23 (12.8)	31 (15.9)	31 (15.0)	31 (16.7)	25 (11.3)	27 (7.1)
Substance abuse	195 (13.2)	3 (2.7)	20 (11.1)	25 (12.8)	34 (16.4)	34 (18.3)	41 (18.6)	38 (10.1)
Easily angered or withdrawn	673 (45.6)	32 (29.1)	82 (45.6)	94 (48.2)	116 (56.0)	107 (57.5)	102 (46.2)	140 (37.0)
None of the above	404 (27.4)	48 (43.6)	57 (31.7)	49 (25.1)	42 (20.3)	36 (19.4)	52 (23.5)	120 (31.7)

Percentages reported with a shaded background are based on all responses; percentages reported with a white background are based on only the respondents who indicated they had experienced job-related critical stress.

## By Survey Year



## Thoughts of Suicide or Self-harm: By Years of Service

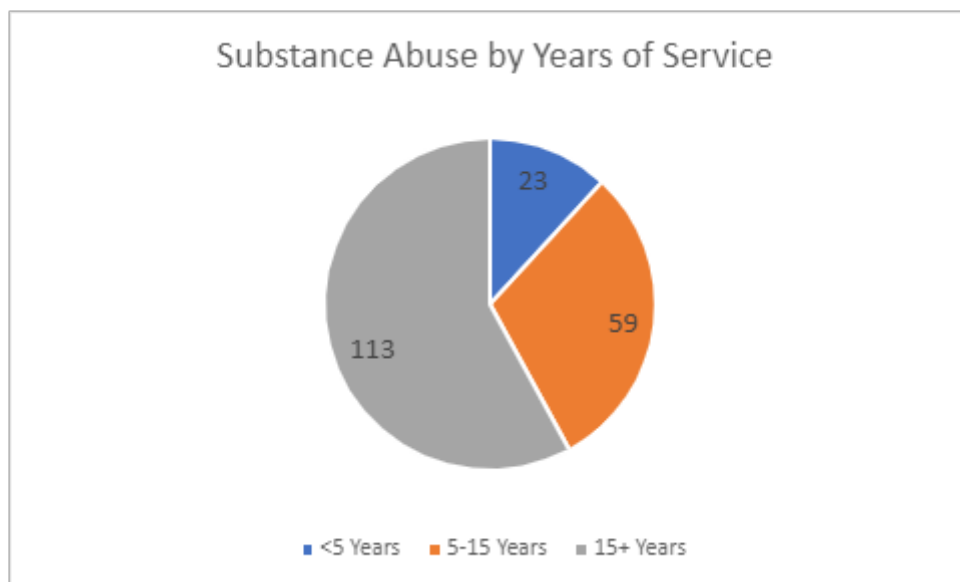


Percentages reported are based on only the respondents who indicated they had experienced job-related critical stress.

## By County Type

		County Type	
		Rural	Urban
Total Respondents	1477	427 (%)	1050
Thoughts of Suicide or Self-harm	Yes	40 (9.4)	136 (13.0)
	No	387 (90.6)	914 (87.0)

## Substance Abuse: by Years of Service



Numbers reported are based on only the respondents who indicated they had experienced job-related critical stress and have experienced substance abuse.

## Sleep Problems

Respondents were asked to describe any sleep problems as a result of their work. In 2023, 1278 out of 1640 (77.9%) respondents reported at least one sleep problem. When looking at full-time respondents, respondents reported statistically significant higher percentages for difficulty falling asleep (41.1%), not feeling fully rested (61.8%), waking up frequently at night (46.1%), use of alcohol or illegal substances to fall asleep (10.7%), use of over-the-counter medications or energy drinks to stay awake (14.3%), and multiple sleep problems (58.5%) when compared to the total respondents. Compared to last year, the percentage of respondents with multiple sleep disorders has decreased from 62.5% in 2022 to 58.5% in 2023.

Furthermore, respondents reported fewer sleep problems in all areas except “use of over-the-counter or prescription medication, or energy drinks to stay awake” in comparison to previous years (Percentage of respondents who reported use of substances to stay awake remained relatively similar to previous years). Details are provided in the charts that follow:

### By the Years of Service

Years of Service								
	All (%)	2 years or less	2-5 years	5-10 years	10-15 years	15-20 years	20-25 years	More than 25 years
Total Respondents	1640(%)	166	201	221	219	207	232	394
Sleep Problem	1278 (77.9)	123 (74.1)	158 (78.6)	184 (83.3)	183 (83.6)	171 (82.6)	182 (78.4)	277 (70.3)

### By Employment Status

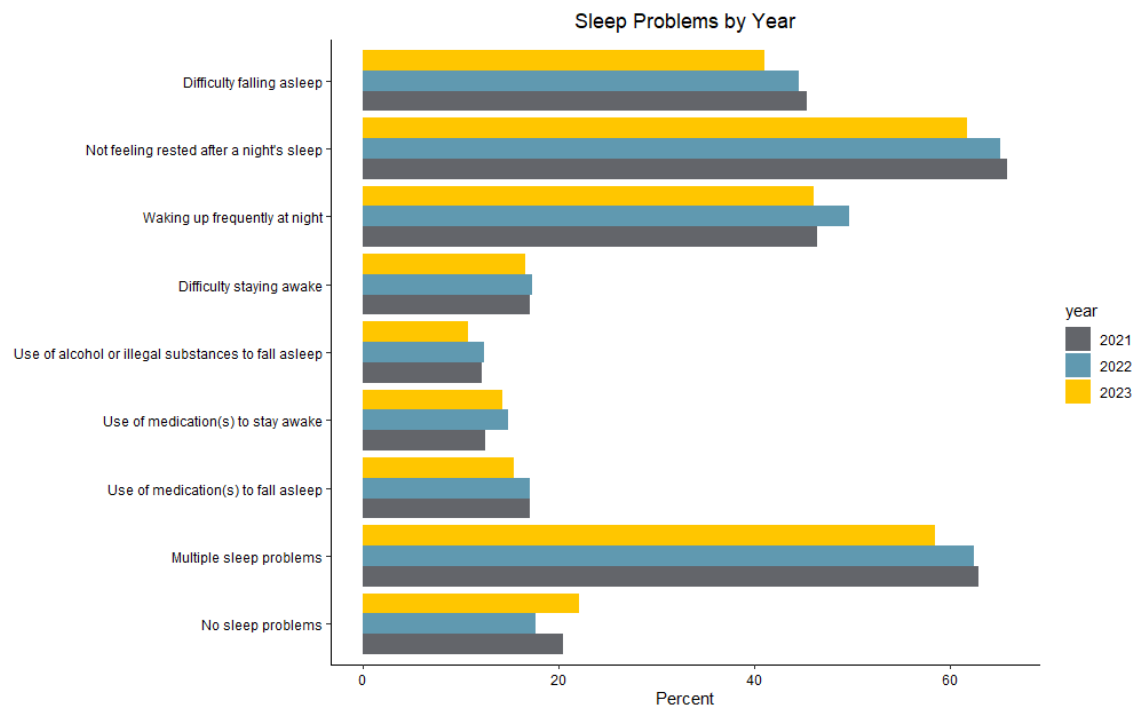
	All (%)	Full-time	Part-time	Retired	Volunteer
Total Respondents	1640	795	179	216	450
Difficulty falling asleep	674 (41.1)	376 (47.3)	79 (44.1)	72 (33.3)	147 (32.7)
Not feeling rested	1013 (61.8)	579 (72.8)	101 (56.4)	112 (51.9)	221 (49.1)
Waking up frequently at night	756 (46.1)	412 (51.8)	74 (41.3)	98 (45.4)	172 (38.2)
Difficulty staying awake	272 (16.6)	152 (19.1)	33 (18.4)	26 (12.0)	61 (13.6)
Use of substances to fall asleep	176 (10.7)	113 (14.2)	15 (8.4)	31 (14.4)	17 (3.8)
Use of medication to stay awake	235 (14.3)	153 (19.2)	36 (20.1)	14 (6.5)	32 (7.1)
Use of medication to fall asleep	252 (15.4)	119 (15.0)	35 (19.6)	46 (21.3)	52 (11.6)
Multiple sleep problems	960 (58.5)	551 (69.3)	100 (55.9)	108 (50.0)	201 (44.7)
No sleep problems	362 (22.1)	118 (14.8)	43 (24.0)	62 (28.7)	139 (30.9)



## By Service

	Total (%)	EMS	Fire	Fire and EMS
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>1640</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>1056</b>
Difficulty falling asleep	674 (41.1)	214 (40.1)	18 (36.0)	442 (41.9)
Not feeling rested	1013 (61.8)	293 (54.9)	25 (50.0)	695 (65.8)
Waking up frequently at night	756 (46.1)	243 (45.5)	18 (36.0)	495 (46.9)
Difficulty staying awake	272 (16.6)	89 (16.7)	5 (10.0)	178 (16.9)
Use of substances to fall asleep	176 (10.7)	34 (6.4)	5 (10.0)	137 (13.0)
Use of medication to stay awake	235 (14.3)	81 (15.2)	3 (6.0)	151 (14.3)
Use of medication to fall asleep	252 (15.4)	89 (16.7)	8 (16.0)	155 (14.7)
Multiple sleep problems	960 (58.5)	287 (53.7)	25 (50.0)	648 (61.4)
No sleep problems	362 (22.1)	132 (24.7)	15 (30.0)	215 (20.4)

## By the Year



Numbers reported are based on total respondents for each year the survey was conducted. Total number of respondents in 2021, 2022, and 2023 were 1022, 1513, 1640, respectively.

By Type of Schedule

In addition to analyzing the data by participant demographics, respondents were also asked to describe their work schedule. Scheduling options were broken down as follows:

California: 24 hours on, 24 hours for 2 cycles, then 24 hours on, 96 hours off

Chicago: 24 hours on, 48 hours off

48/96: 48 hours on, 96 hours off

*\*Modified California and Chicago schedules were included in "Other" category.*

	40 hours per week				
	40 hours per week	48/96	California	Chicago	Other
Total Respondents	107 (13.5%)	68 (8.6)	373 (46.9)	153 (19.2)	94 (11.8)
Difficulty falling asleep	48 (44.9)	36 (52.9)	176 (47.2)	76 (49.7)	40 (42.6)
Not feeling rested	68 (63.6)	52 (76.5)	279 (74.8)	113 (73.9)	67 (71.3)
Waking up frequently at night	48 (44.9)	40 (58.8)	207 (55.5)	70 (45.8)	47 (50.0)
Difficulty staying awake	17 (15.9)	15 (22.1)	71 (19.0)	29 (19.0)	20 (21.3)
Use of alcohol or illegal substances to fall asleep	15 (14.0)	12 (17.6)	57 (15.3)	25 (16.3)	4 (4.3)
Use of medication, or energy drinks to stay awake	18 (16.8)	13 (19.1)	67 (18.0)	35 (22.9)	20 (21.3)
Use of medication to fall asleep	17 (15.9)	13 (19.1)	52 (13.9)	25 (16.3)	12 (12.8)
Multiple sleep problems	67 (62.6)	53 (77.9)	266 (71.3)	103 (67.3)	62 (66.0)
No sleep problems	21 (19.6)	4 (5.9)	53 (14.2)	23 (15.0)	17 (18.1)

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## Anxiety, Depression and Psychological Stress Screening (PHQ-4)

The PHQ-4 is a 4-question screening that assesses respondents for anxiety and depression symptoms as well as approximate degree of psychological stress.

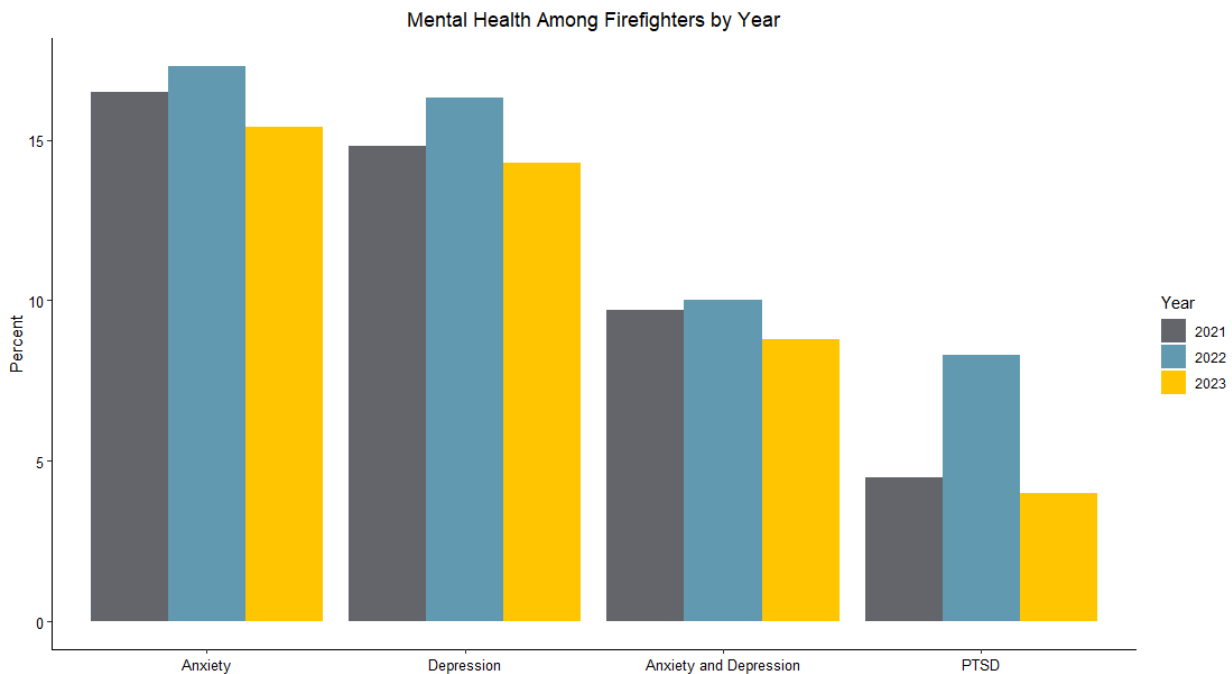
Of the total 1640 responses, 253 (15.4%) screened positive for anxiety symptoms, and 234 (14.3%) screened positive for depression symptoms. Of the 795 full-time firefighters, 145 (18.2%) screened positive for anxiety symptoms, and 126 (15.8%) screened positive for depression symptoms. The results were notably higher for female respondents. Between private and municipal departments, more respondents who worked for private companies reported screening positive for anxiety and/or depression. Further breakdown and analysis are provided below:

	Total Respondents	Anxiety	Depression	Anxiety and Depression
All	1640(%)	253 (15.4)	234 (14.3)	145 (8.8)
<b>Employment Type</b>				
Full-time	795 (48.5)	145 (18.2)	126 (15.8)	78 (9.8)
Part-time	179 (10.9)	29 (16.2)	36 (20.1)	19 (10.6)
Retired	216 (13.2)	28 (13.0)	28 (13.0)	20 (9.3)
Volunteer	450 (27.4)	51 (11.3)	44 (9.8)	28 (6.2)
<b>Primary Department</b>				
Municipal	1379 (84.1)	205 (14.9)	190 (13.8)	120 (8.7)
Private	261 (15.9)	48 (18.4)	44 (16.9)	25 (9.6)
<b>Services Provided</b>				
EMS	534 (32.6)	83 (15.5)	74 (13.9)	45 (8.4)
Fire	50 (3.0)	9 (18.0)	11 (22.0)	7 (14.0)
Fire and EMS	1056 (64.4)	161 (15.2)	149 (14.1)	93 (8.8)
<b>Fire Rank</b>				
Chief officer	164 (10.0)	16 (9.8)	21 (12.8)	12 (7.3)
Driver	174 (10.6)	24 (13.8)	26 (14.9)	14 (8.0)
Firefighter	467 (28.5)	89 (19.1)	82 (17.6)	55 (11.8)
Line officer	301 (18.4)	41 (13.6)	31 (10.3)	19 (6.3)
<b>EMS Level</b>				
Critical care paramedic	153 (9.3)	35 (22.9)	24 (15.7)	20 (13.1)
EMT advanced	197 (12.0)	33 (16.8)	32 (16.2)	17 (8.6)
EMT basic	535 (32.6)	75 (14.0)	70 (13.1)	40 (7.5)
First responder	194 (11.8)	18 (9.3)	16 (8.2)	12 (6.2)
Paramedic	511 (21.2)	83 (16.2)	81 (15.9)	49 (9.6)
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	1162 (70.9)	154 (13.3)	151 (13.0)	86 (7.4)
Female	478 (29.1)	99 (20.7)	83 (17.4)	59 (12.3)

	Total Respondents	Anxiety	Depression	Anxiety and Depression
All (includes EMS)	1640(%)	253 (15.4)	234 (14.3)	145 (8.8)
Full-time firefighters	795 (48.5)	145 (18.2)	126 (15.8)	78 (9.8)
Men	642 (80.8)	103 (16.0)	90 (14.0)	52 (8.1)
Women	153 (19.2)	42 (27.5)	36 (23.5)	26 (17.0)

*\*The Anxiety and Depression Association of America estimates 18.1% of adults in the U.S. have anxiety and 6.7% of adults in the U.S. have depression at some point every year. Consistently, research shows that women exhibit depression at a rate 2-3 times higher than men through age 45.*

### Mental Health from the last 3 survey years.



Overall psychological stress is measured by the PHQ-4 with ranges of distress: “None” (0-2), “Mild” (3-5), “Moderate” (6-8), and “Severe” (9-12), where a higher score denotes a greater degree of psychological stress.

	Total Respondents	Degree of Psychological Distress			
		None (0-2)	Mild (3-5)	Moderate (6-8)	Severe (9-12)
All (includes EMS)	1640 (%)	997 (60.8)	414 (25.2)	154 (9.4)	75 (4.6)
Full-time firefighters	795	429 (54.0)	246 (30.9)	80 (10.1)	40 (5.0)
Men	642	368 (57.3)	139 (21.7)	59 (9.2)	26 (4.0)
Women	153	61 (39.9)	57 (37.3)	21 (13.7)	14 (9.2)

## Trauma Screening (PC-PTSD-5)

The Primary Care PTSD Screen for DSM-5 (PC-PTSD-5) is a 5-item assessment designed to identify individuals with probable PTSD. Those who screen positive are recommended for further, formal assessment.

Of the total 1640 responses, 266 (16.2%) screened positive for probable PTSD within the last *year*, and 66 (4.0%) screened positive in the last *month* prior to the survey. Full-time firefighters screened more probable to have PTSD within the last year and within the last month when compared to all respondents. In addition, men were more likely to have PTSD within the last *year* (19%), whereas both sexes were similar in probability of PTSD within the last *month* (4.4% for men, 4.6% for women).

Of the 795 full-time firefighters, 144 (18.1%) screened positive within the last *year*, and 35 (8.3%) screened positive within the last *month*. Further delineation by sex and co-occurring anxiety and depression is below. To be noted, there is a correlation between anxiety and depression and the potential for post-traumatic stress.

	Possible PTSD within last year ** (%)	Probable PTSD within the last month
All respondents	266 (16.2)	66 (4.0)
Full-time firefighters	144 (18.1)	35 (8.3)
Men	122 (19.0)	28 (4.4)
Women	22 (14.4)	7 (4.6)

	Co-occurring <b>anxiety</b> and probable PTSD symptoms within the last Month (%)	Co-occurring <b>depression</b> and probable PTSD symptoms within the last month
All respondents	39 (2.4)	33 (2.0)
Full-time firefighters	19 (2.4)	17 (2.1)
Men	16 (2.5)	13 (2.0)
Women	3 (2.0)	4 (2.6)

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## Stigma

Respondents were asked to respond to questions about potential stigma associated with seeking treatment or support for behavioral health needs. Consistent with reports from previous years, over 98% of respondents would encourage their peers to seek support- a rate much higher than they would seek support for themselves. In 2023, the rate of those agreeing with the statement: “I would feel comfortable asking for my own behavioral health support” was 64.8%.

All Respondents (includes EMS)				
	Firefighters think treatment for behavioral health is a sign of personal weakness (%)	I would encourage a firefighter coworker to get behavioral health treatment	I would ask for my own behavioral health treatment	I would know where to go for my own behavioral health treatment
Strongly agree	175 (10.7)	1238 (75.5)	408 (24.9)	443 (27.0)
Agree	576 (35.1)	369 (22.5)	655 (39.9)	775 (47.3)
Neither agree/disagree	412 (25.1)	24 (1.5)	317 (19.3)	207 (12.6)
Disagree	340 (20.7)	3 (0.2)	208 (12.7)	177 (10.8)
Strongly disagree	137 (8.4)	6 (0.4)	52 (3.2)	38 (2.3)

Full-time Firefighters				
	Firefighters think treatment for behavioral health is a sign of personal weakness (%)	I would encourage a firefighter coworker to get behavioral health treatment	I would ask for my own behavioral health treatment	I would know where to go for my own behavioral health treatment
Strongly agree	82 (10.3)	614 (77.2)	191 (24.0)	230 (28.9)
Agree	273 (34.3)	168 (21.1)	320 (40.3)	387 (48.7)
Neither agree/disagree	187 (23.5)	10 (1.3)	155 (19.5)	88 (11.1)
Disagree	185 (23.3)	1 (0.1)	102 (12.8)	72 (9.1)
Strongly disagree	68 (8.6)	2 (0.3)	27 (3.4)	18 (2.3)

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## Resources

When asked which people or entities they would be comfortable asking for behavioral health assistance, respondents were most likely to turn to a treatment provider (54.8%), a family member or friend (50.2%), or peer/co-worker (45.2%). 7.9% indicated they would not be comfortable seeking support in comparison to the 6.8% reported last year.

For full-time firefighters, the rates were similar- treatment provider (51.7%), family/friend (51.8%), or peer/coworker (52.5%). 6.2% indicated they would not be comfortable seeking support.

All Respondents (includes EMS)		
	I would ask the following for behavioral health assistance (%)	I have previously received help from the following resources
City/county/district employee assistance program	463 (28.2)	139 (8.5)
Treatment provider	899 (54.8)	347 (21.2)
Family member or friend	823 (50.2)	282 (17.2)
Peer or co-worker	741 (45.2)	242 (14.8)
Department employee assistance program	534 (32.6)	165 (10.1)
PFFW member assistance program	310 (18.9)	22 (1.3)
Other	133 (8.1)	66 (4.0)
None of the above	129 (7.9)	946 (57.7)

Full-time Firefighters (%)		
	I would ask the following for behavioral health assistance	I have previously received help from the following resources
City/county/district employee assistance program	249 (31.3)	90 (11.3)
Treatment provider	411 (51.7)	163 (20.5)
Family member or friend	412 (51.8)	142 (17.9)
Peer or co-worker	417 (52.5)	136 (17.1)
Department employee assistance program	334 (42.0)	110 (13.8)
PFFW member assistance program	219 (27.5)	15 (1.9)
Other	62 (7.8)	34 (4.3)
None of the above	49 (6.2)	426 (53.6)

## Satisfaction with Resources

Of the 1640 total responses, 165 people (10.1%) reported utilizing their department Employee Assistance Program- 57.8% of whom found satisfaction in the services. (Up from 56%). 139 (8.5%) indicated that they sought help from an EAP provided by their city, county, or district- 48.2% of whom found

satisfaction in the services (down from 57%). Of the full-time respondents, 15 (1.9%) reported seeking help from the PFFW member assistance program, and 79% were satisfied with the services.

All Respondents (%)			
	City/County/District EAP	Department EAP	PFFW MAP
Total	139 (8.5)	165 (10.1)	22 (1.3)
Strongly agree	23 (16.5)	35 (21.2)	10 (45.5)
Agree	44 (31.7)	61 (37.0)	8 (36.4)
Neither agree / disagree	32 (23.0)	34 (20.6)	2 (9.1)
Disagree	21 (15.1)	16 (9.7)	1 (4.5)
Strongly disagree	19 (13.7)	19 (11.5)	1 (4.5)

Full-time Firefighters (%)			
	City/County/District EAP	Department EAP	PFFW MAP
Total	90 (11.3)	110 (13.8)	15 (1.9)
Strongly agree	17 (18.9)	19 (17.3)	9 (60.0)
Agree	27 (30.0)	43 (39.1)	4 (26.7)
Neither agree / disagree	21 (23.3)	24 (21.8)	1 (6.7)
Disagree	13 (14.4)	12 (10.9)	0 (0.0)
Strongly disagree	12 (13.3)	12 (10.9)	1 (6.7)

### Interest in Behavioral Health Training

Over half of the total respondents (51.1%) expressed interest in training to assist other firefighters with behavioral health needs. Of those, the level of experience most likely to show interest in peer-support training were individuals with 10 years or less of work experience.

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## Professional Quality of Life

The Professional Quality of Life (Pro-QoL) instrument was offered to participants as an optional, validated 30-question self-report questionnaire to measure work satisfaction, secondary trauma, and potential burnout in “helping” professionals. The tool was developed as a measure of both the negative and positive effects of working with those who have experienced traumatic stress. Of the 1640 participants that completed the survey, 854 (51%) participants opted to take the additional Professional Quality of Life survey. Of the 854 participants that responded, 117 were retirees and were included in the following analysis. To our knowledge, this is the largest sample of firefighters to have been assessed using the Pro-QoL.

Initial results are as follows:

Scoring for the Pro-QoL is categorical, and scores are assigned a level based on these ranges:

High: 42-50

Moderate: 23-41

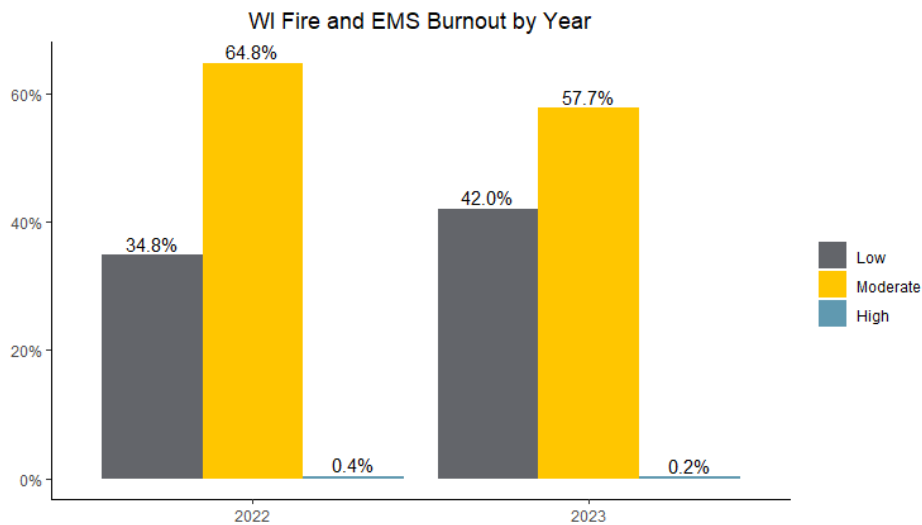
Low: 0-22

Pro-QoL Category	Mean (sd)	n (%)
<b>Compassion Satisfaction</b>	<b>37.84 (6.98)</b>	
High		279 (32.7)
Moderate		556 (65.1)
Low		19 (2.2)
<b>Burnout</b>	<b>24.9 (6.63)</b>	
High		2 (0.2)
Moderate		493 (57.7)
Low		359 (42.0)
<b>Secondary Traumatic Stress</b>	<b>23.5 (7.03)</b>	
High		9 (1.1)
Moderate		424 (49.6)
Low		421 (49.3)

After determining the degree of each category within the Pro-QoL assessment for each respondent, we analyzed the changes between the 2023 and 2022 survey responses for each category and separated by sex. The total number of respondents for the Pro-QoL assessment in 2022 was 775.

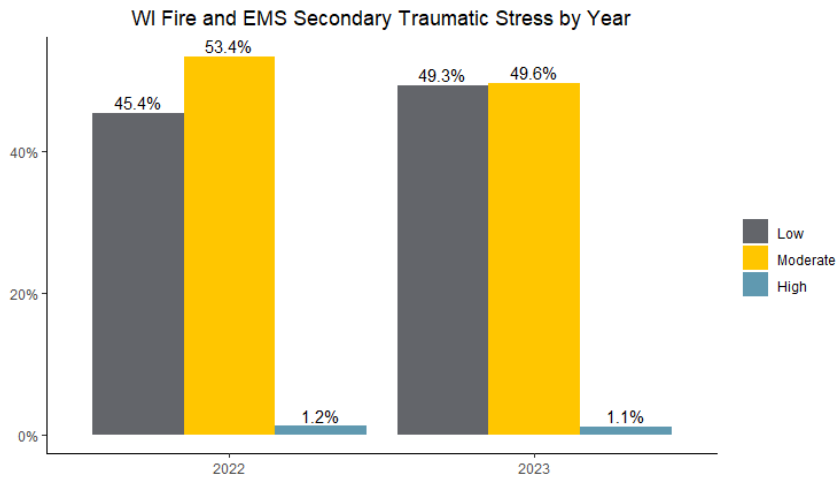
Pro-QoL Category	2022		2023	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Total Respondents	603 (%)	172	590	264
Compassion Satisfaction				
High	169 (28.0)	48 (27.9)	180 (30.5)	99 (37.5)
Moderate	412 (68.3)	124 (72.1)	395 (66.9)	161 (61.0)
Low	22 (3.6)	0 (0.0)	15 (2.5)	4 (1.5)
Burnout				
High	2 (0.33)	1 (0.6)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.4)
Moderate	390 (64.7)	112 (65.1)	350 (59.3)	143 (54.2)
Low	211 (35.0)	59 (34.3)	239 (40.5)	120 (45.5)
Secondary Traumatic Stress				
High	8 (1.3)	1 (0.6)	5 (0.8)	4 (1.5)
Moderate	307 (50.9)	107 (62.2)	286 (48.5)	138 (52.3)
Low	288 (47.8)	64 (37.2)	299 (50.7)	122 (46.2)

## Burnout by Year



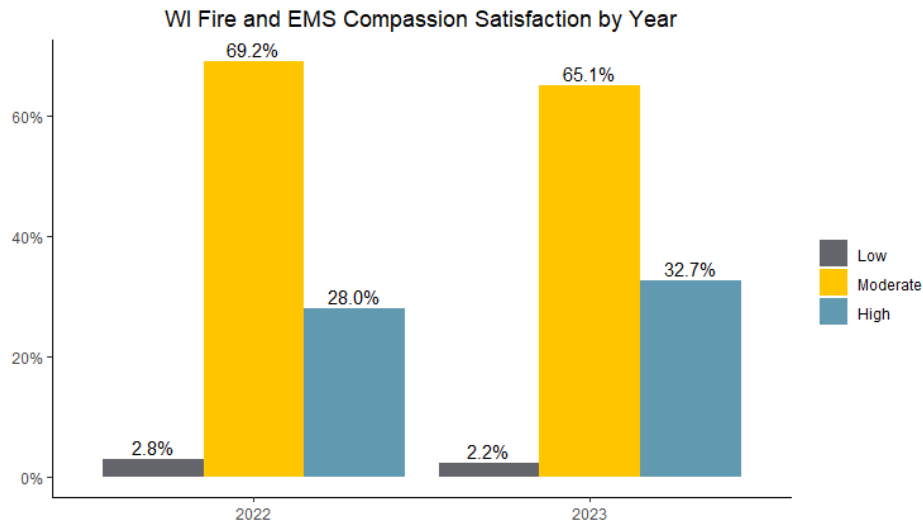
Percentages are calculated based on the 854 respondents that completed the Pro-QoL assessment

## Secondary Traumatic Stress by Year



Percentages are calculated based on the 854 respondents that completed the Pro-QoL assessment

## Compassion Satisfaction by Year



Percentages are calculated based on the 854 respondents that completed the Pro-QoL assessment

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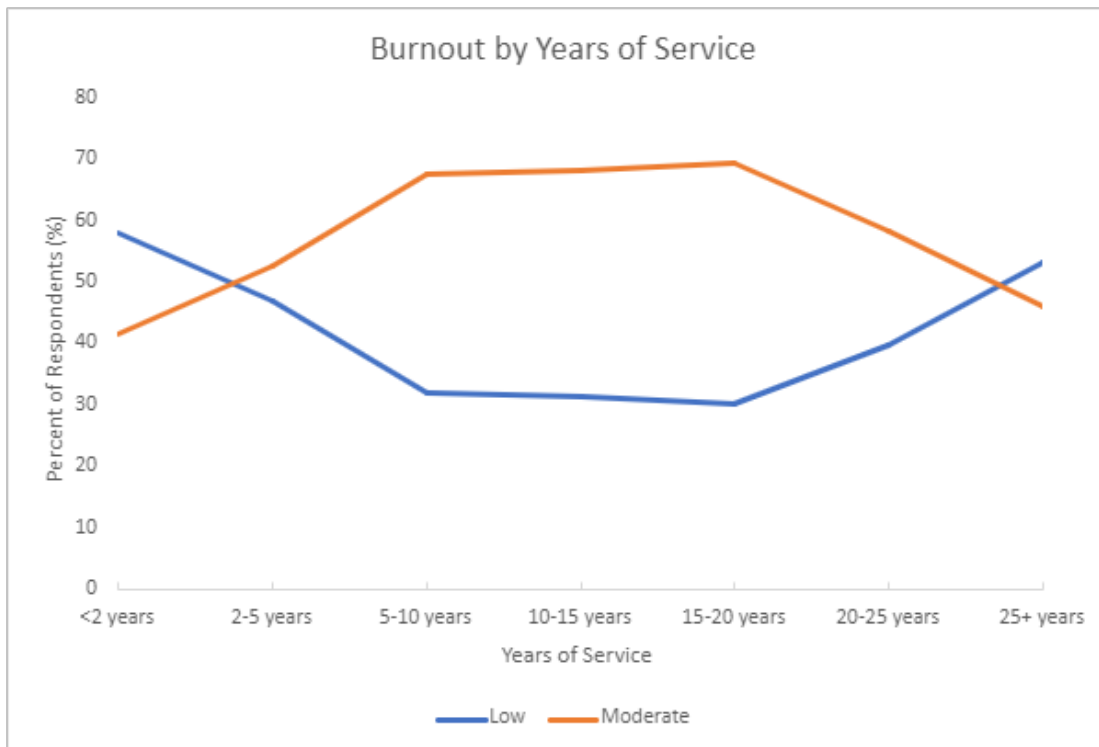
## Burnout

After determining the degree of each category within the Pro-QoL assessment for each respondent, we analyzed the degree of burnout and secondary traumatic stress by years of service provided and by schedule. Low levels of burnout were observed at the beginning and end of respondents' careers with higher percentages of moderate burnout between 5-20 years of service while schedules did not appear to impact burnout level.

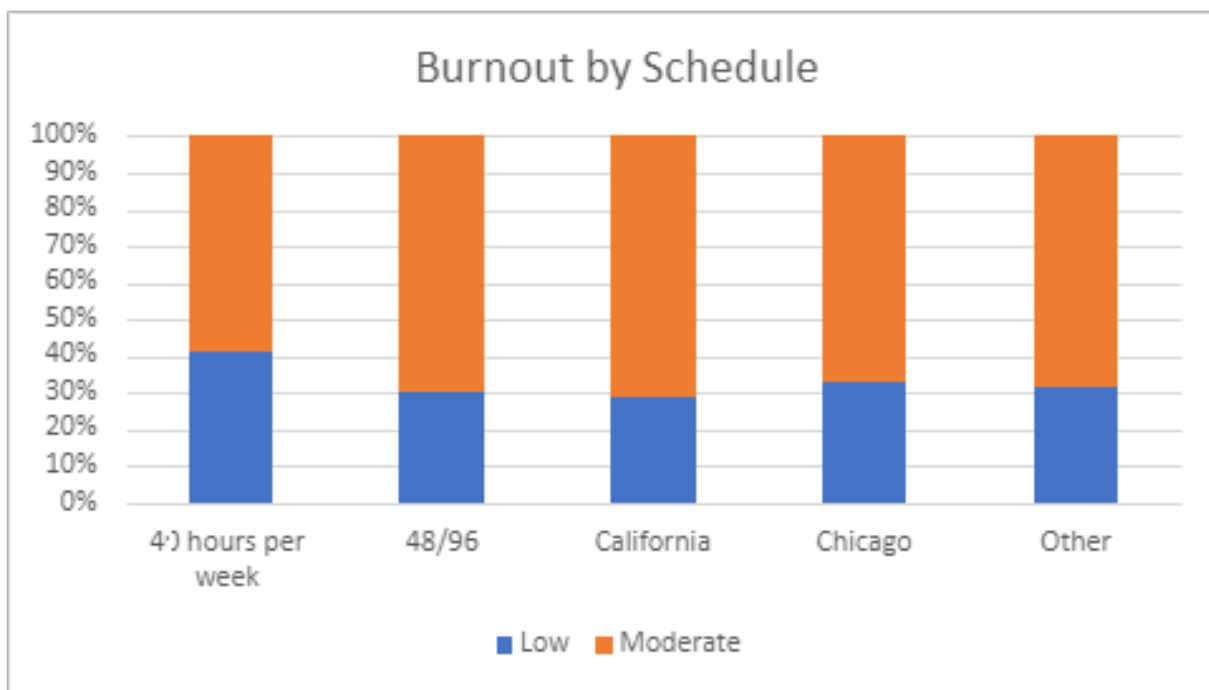
### Level of Burnout by Years of Service

	Low (%)	Moderate
2 years or less	42 (58.3)	30 (41.7)
2-5 years	49 (47.1)	55 (52.9)
5-10 years	35 (32.1)	74 (67.9)
10-15 years	35 (31.5)	76 (68.5)
15-20 years	36 (30.3)	83 (69.7)
20-25 years	57 (39.9)	84 (58.7)
25 years or more	105 (53.6)	91 (46.4)

Percentages are calculated based on the 854 respondents that completed the Pro-QoL assessment.



### Level of Burnout by Schedule



Percentages are calculated based on the 854 respondents that completed the Pro-QoL assessment.

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## Summary

From October 11, 2023, to January 01, 2024, 1640 Fire and EMS professionals and volunteers across the state of Wisconsin completed a 43-question electronic survey designed to evaluate behavioral health needs and supportive opportunities. Data was gathered anonymously, inquiring about critical/traumatic incidents, thoughts related to anxiety and depression, psychological distress, mental health stigma and engagement with support services. Below is a summary of each category gathered from the survey: job-related critical stress, anxiety and depression, sleep problems, distress and stigma, peer training and behavioral health resources. Each category was further broken down by subcategories such as sex at birth, department type, work schedule, and employment type.

Of the 1640 respondents, 1477 (90.0%) indicated they had experienced a job-related critical incident or traumatic event. Of those respondents, 155 (10.5%) reported having nightmares about the events or unwanted thoughts about the events within the last month, and 337 respondents (22.8%) reported having nightmares or unwanted thoughts of an event within the last year; 204 respondents (40.3%) reported they tried hard not to think about the event or avoided situations that would remind them of the event within the last month.

When respondents were asked if they had any sleep problems, almost three out of four respondents reported at least one sleep disorder (77.9%). 960 respondents (58.5%) of all respondents reported multiple sleep problems. Within full-time firefighters, only 14.8% (118 firefighters) reported no sleep problems. The most common sleep problem reported was “Not feeling fully rested” after a night’s sleep (61.8%). In comparison to previous years, the percentage of respondents reporting sleep problems decreased in all areas except for the use of medication(s) to stay awake. Use of medication or energy drinks to stay awake has increased from 12.5% to 14.8% of respondents from 2021 to 2022 and decreased from 14.8% to 14.3% of respondents in 2023.

In 2023, 253 (15.4%) screened positive for anxiety symptoms, and 234 (14.3%) screened positive for depression symptoms. Of the 795 full-time firefighters, 145 (18.2%) screened positive for anxiety symptoms, and 126 (15.8%) screened positive for depression symptoms. 176 (11.9%) respondents reported thoughts of suicide or self-harm. The highest percentage of respondents reporting thoughts of suicide or self-harm was seen between respondents with 5-20 years of service. Of the 176 of respondents who reported thoughts of suicide or self-harm, 27 (15.3%) reported being bothered by thoughts more than half the days or nearly every day within the last 2 weeks.

While 64.8% of all respondents agreed with the statement “I would feel comfortable asking for my own behavioral health support,” only 45.4% of the respondents who reported thoughts of suicide or self-harm agreed. In addition, 50 respondents (28.4%) replied “disagree” or “strongly disagree” to the statement “If I needed behavioral health assistance, I would know where to go for it.”

On the contrary, 98% of respondents would encourage their peers to seek support at a rate higher than they would seek support for themselves. For both full-time firefighters and the total

respondents, respondents would be most comfortable asking treatment providers or family/friends for behavioral health support or assistance. In 2023, 165 participants reported using their department EAP program. Out of these 165 participants, 57.8% found satisfaction in these services. Of the participants that used the PFFW MAP services, 90.9% reported satisfaction with their services.

Of the 1640 respondents, just over half (52.1%) opted to respond to the optional Professional Quality of Life questionnaire. Results from the Pro-QoL revealed that 97.8% of the respondents reported a moderate-to-high degree of compassion satisfaction toward their job (similar to 2022 at 97.2%). 57.9% experienced a moderate-to-high degree of burnout, and 50.7% experienced a moderate-to-high degree of secondary traumatic stress. Both moderate-to-high degrees of burnout and secondary traumatic stress are down from 65% and 53% in 2022, respectively. When looking at burnout specifically, respondents are most likely to experience moderate levels of burnout between 5 and 20 years, which is also the period with the highest percentage of respondents reporting thoughts of suicide or self-harm (15.9%). Burnout did not appear to be influenced significantly by work schedule.