

BRIEF REPORT OF INITIAL KEY FINDINGS:

NATIONAL WORK FROM HOME SURVEY

THE IMPACTS OF WORKING FROM HOME ON
PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF CANADIANS

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Hackney, A., Du, B., Yung, M., Yazdani, A. (2020). Brief Report on Initial Key Findings of National Survey on the Impact of Working from Home on Physical and Mental health of Canadians. Canadian Institute for Safety, Wellness, & Performance (CISWP). Kitchener, ON

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Report and Infographic design by Hannah Bryan

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The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Conestoga College. We would like to acknowledge our research participants and industry partners who generously shared their time and experience for the purposes of this project.

On March 11th, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Since this announcement, working from home (WFH) has become a necessary measure to mitigate the potential transmission of COVID-19. Millions of Canadians have had the way they live, work, and interact with their communities suddenly and significantly change. With a peak of 5.4 million Canadians in a WFH arrangement during the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2021a), a national survey aimed to capture how Canadians are faring, and how WFH has impacted their mental and physical wellbeing.

Led by Conestoga College's Canadian Institute for Safety, Wellness & Performance (CISWP) and in collaboration with La Trobe University in Australia, we surveyed Canadians across the country between October 27th and December 21st, 2020. During this time frame, there was an average of 5,270 new cases of COVID-19 per day in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2021b). Questions focused on respondents' mental and physical health, and work-life conflict associated with their WFH experience. At the time of survey completion, over 90% of respondents were working full time hours in a WFH setting.

In the next few sections, we present a preliminary descriptive summary of the initial results. We begin with a demographic overview of our respondents, outline major findings associated with stress and mental health, and highlight the results surrounding physical health. We then present results focused on work-life conflicts and conclude with additional key takeaways. This report includes several infographics to present detailed descriptive analysis of key findings



Demographics

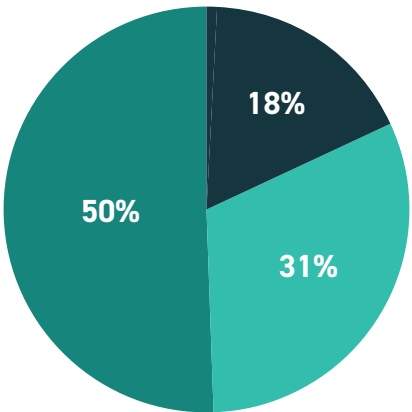
Of the 1,617 people who completed the survey fully, the majority resided in Ontario (79%). Nearly 70% of our respondents identified as female (31% male), and over half (53%) were between 26 and 55 years of age (18-35 years: 26%, 55 years and over: 21%). Respondents represented a range of industries, sectors, and main roles (Table 1; Figure 1a and b).

Additionally, nearly 40% of respondents had children and of those individuals, over 70% had children at home with them during working hours. Furthermore, 12% of people lived alone and 15% had caring responsibilities for dependents other than children (either living in the home or outside the home).

Percentage of Respondents by Industry

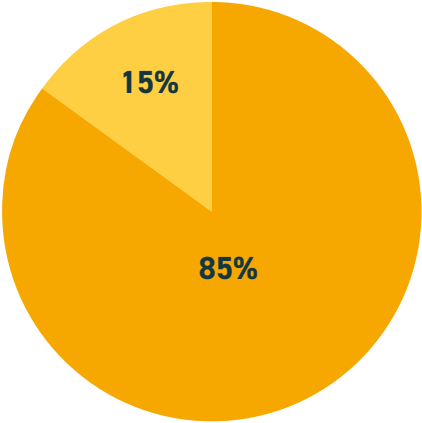
🎓	Education & Training	17%
🔬	Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	15%
👥	Public Administration	14%
💻	Information, Media & Telecommunication	13%
🏥	Healthcare & Social Assistance	11%
🏦	Financial & Insurance Services	9%
💼	Other	21%

Sector



Public Self Employed Private

Main Role



Non-Manager Manager

Figure 1) Percentage of respondents working in a) each industry and b) sector, as well as those in c) management and non-management roles.

Stress & Mental Health

Roughly 30% of Canadians rated their current overall mental health state as being poor or fair. Over 75% of respondents reported that they often or always felt a sense of community with their colleagues and were supported by both their supervisor and colleagues. Less than 20% of people are worried about becoming unemployed or a possible decrease in salary.

Despite the seemingly high mental health rating, most respondents reported experiencing burnout and stress. Particularly noteworthy is that 31% of people reported being more stressed and frustrated with work compared to pre-pandemic, and 40% of individuals were more tired and exhausted (Figure 2c).

Over 80% of people reported being worn out or tired at the end of the working day, indicative of burnout, and roughly 70% of individuals felt tense or irritated while at work, suggestive of stress (Figure 2a).

Managers reported being more stressed and more burnt out than non-managers, and females more than males (Figure 2b). Those with caring responsibilities were more stressed and burnt out compared to individuals who lived alone or with other adults (not dependents). Individuals working in the Education and Training industry were more stressed and burnt out than their counterparts in other industries.

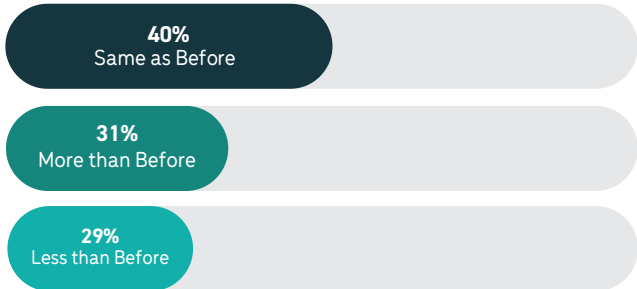


Figure 2c) Percentage of respondents who reported experiencing symptoms of stress and frustration more, the same or less now compared to pre-pandemic.

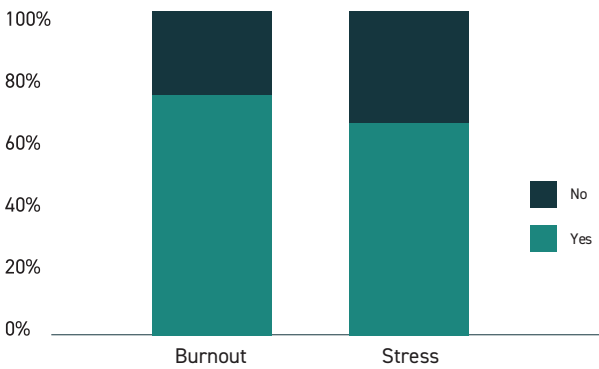


Figure 2a) Percentage of respondents who reported symptoms of burnout and stress.

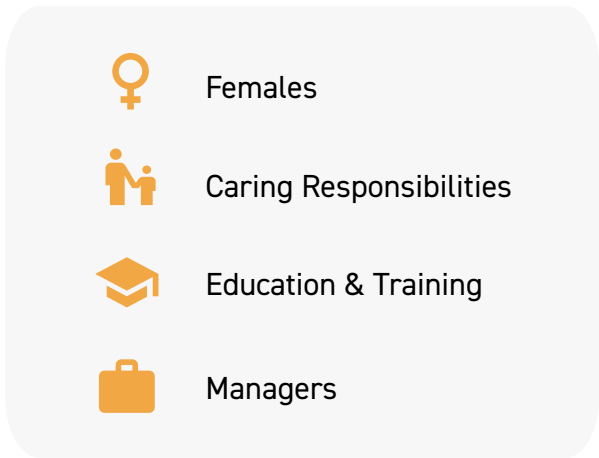


Figure 2b) Demographic groups who reported higher levels of burnout and stress compared to males, respondents with no caring responsibilities, other sectors and non-managers.

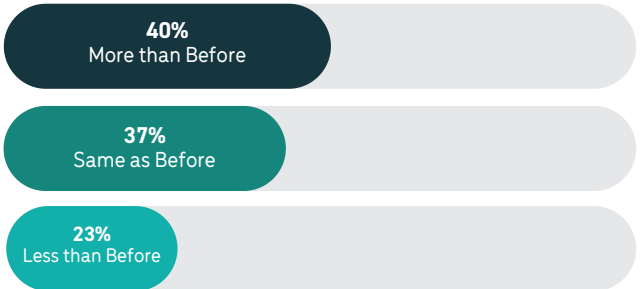


Figure 2d) Percentage of respondents who reported being tired or exhausted more, the same or less now compared to pre-pandemic.

Pain & Physical Health

Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they have a separate space in their home to work. During working hours, individuals reported that they spend an average of 83% of their time sitting, and only 30% of respondents do not use an adjustable chair while working. Further, over 35% of people were working solely with a laptop with no secondary screens, a mouse, or keyboard.

Nearly 70% of respondents reported experiencing pain or discomfort at the end of their working day. Reported pain was most often experienced in the neck/shoulders and middle/low back regions of the body compared to hands/fingers, arms, or legs/feet. The severity of this pain was often considered mild or moderate in nature (Figure 3).

Individuals working in the Education and Training as well as the Healthcare and Social Assistance industries experienced more frequent and severe pain than those in other industries. Further, females reported more frequent and more severe neck/shoulder pain compared to their male counterparts. **Females with childcare responsibilities had more pain in the neck/shoulder region compared to males with childcare responsibilities or respondents without children.** There were no differences in reported pain across age groups.

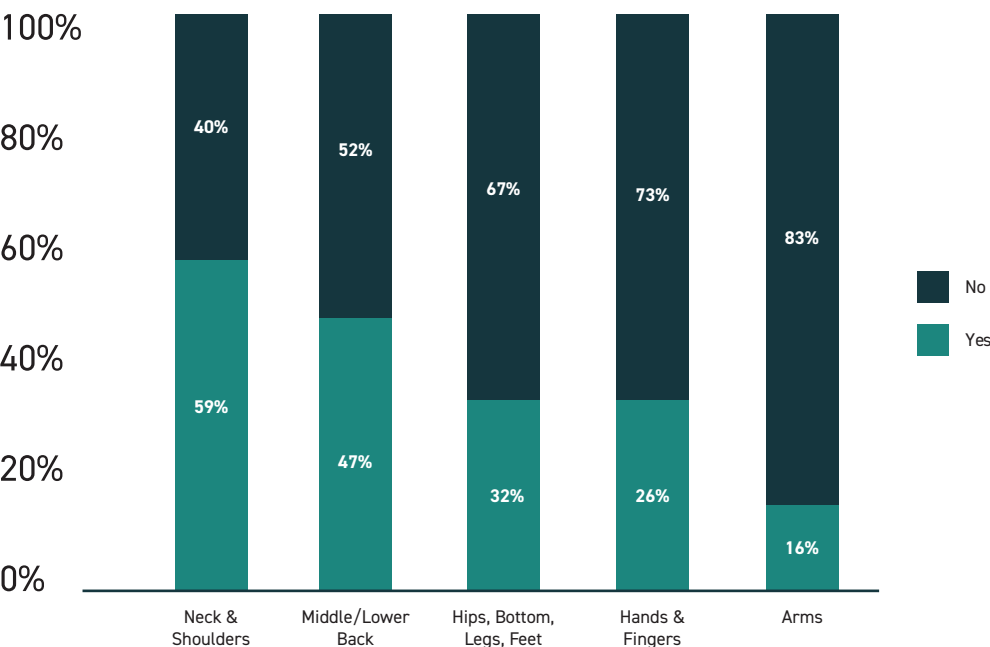


Figure 3. Percentage of respondents who reported sometimes, often, or always experiencing pain in the major areas of the body at the end of their working day.

One quarter of individuals considered themselves to be physically unhealthy, rating their health as poor or fair. Respondents 55 years of age or older reported the poorest health ratings, while those 18-35 years of age reported the best physical health. There were no other differences in physical health ratings across our other demographic comparisons.

Work-Life Conflict

When asked a series of questions about whether work demands interfere with home responsibilities (work-home conflict), and whether home responsibilities interfere with work demands (home-work conflict), respondents indicated more work-life conflict than home-work conflict (Figure 4). Thirty-six percent of people agreed that the demands of their work interfered with their home and family life, and over a quarter of individuals indicated that due to work-related duties, they must make changes to home and family plans.

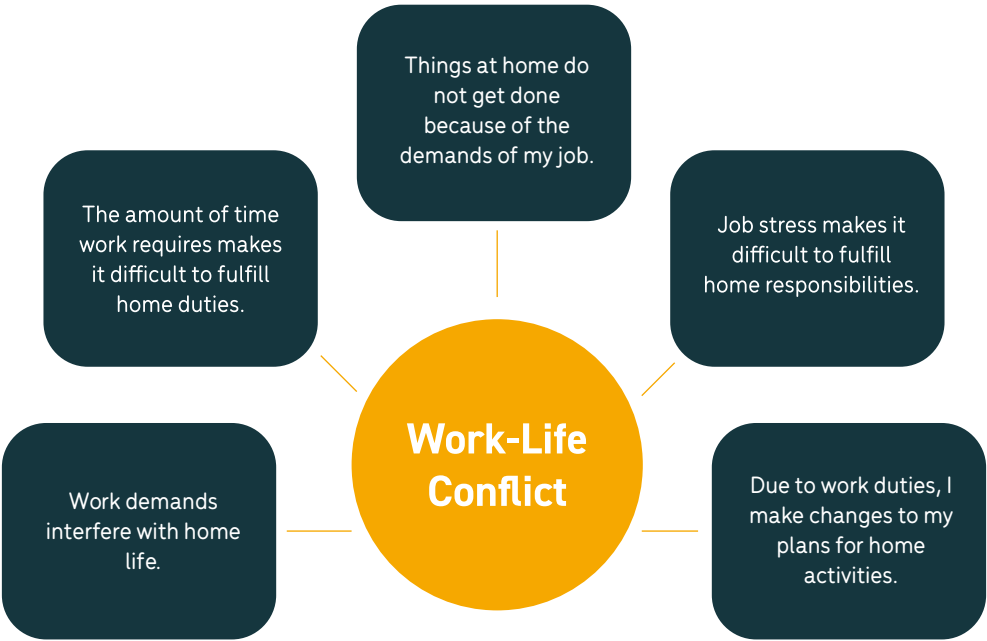


Figure 4. Main statements that respondents indicated contributed to greater work-life conflicts while WFH.

Interestingly, although individuals noted experiencing work-life conflict during WFH, only 24% of respondents rated these conflicts as being worse than prior to the pandemic.

People with caring responsibilities (i.e., children and other dependents) reported more work-home conflicts and more home-work conflicts compared to individuals without caring responsibilities. Managers reported greater home-family conflict than non-managers, and individuals 55 years and older reported the least conflicts compared to their younger counterparts.

Section Five

Other Key Takeaways and Next Steps

Despite indications that some Canadians are experiencing feelings of burnout and stress, pain and discomfort, and work-life conflicts while in WFH arrangements, if given the option to WFH after the threat of COVID-19 subsides, over 70% preferred to continue to WFH three or more days a week.

As we surpass the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many Canadians have been working from home for over 12 months, CISWP will distribute a follow-up survey in May 2021. Individuals who agreed to be contacted after completing the first survey will be contacted for the follow-up. The follow-up survey will aim to determine if and how their experiences have changed over time. Information gathered from both surveys will be used to help organizations develop suggestions and guidelines for supporting their WFH employees in the future.

It is important to note that the results presented in this report are preliminary findings and further analysis will be conducted on the data in the weeks to come.

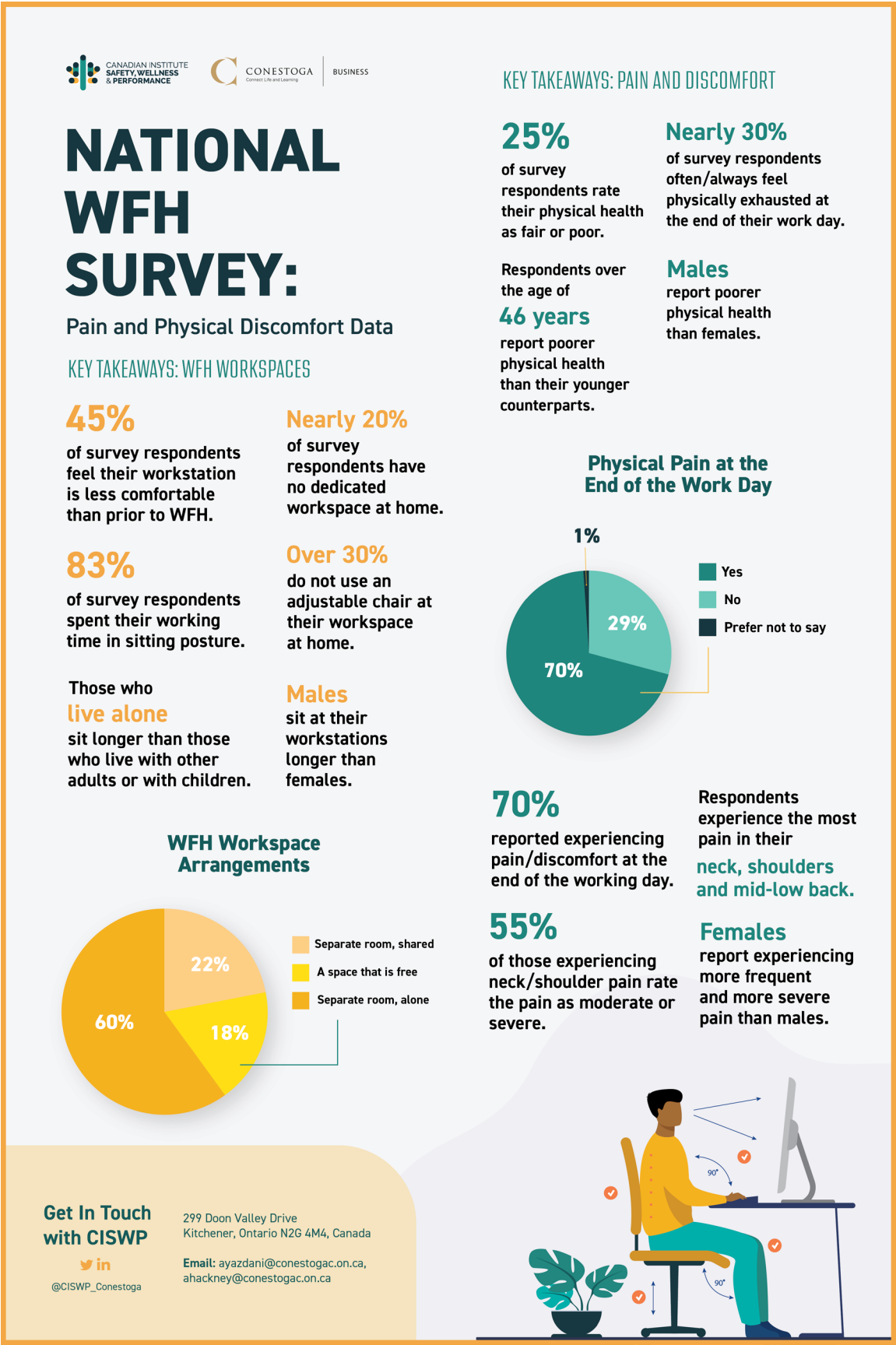
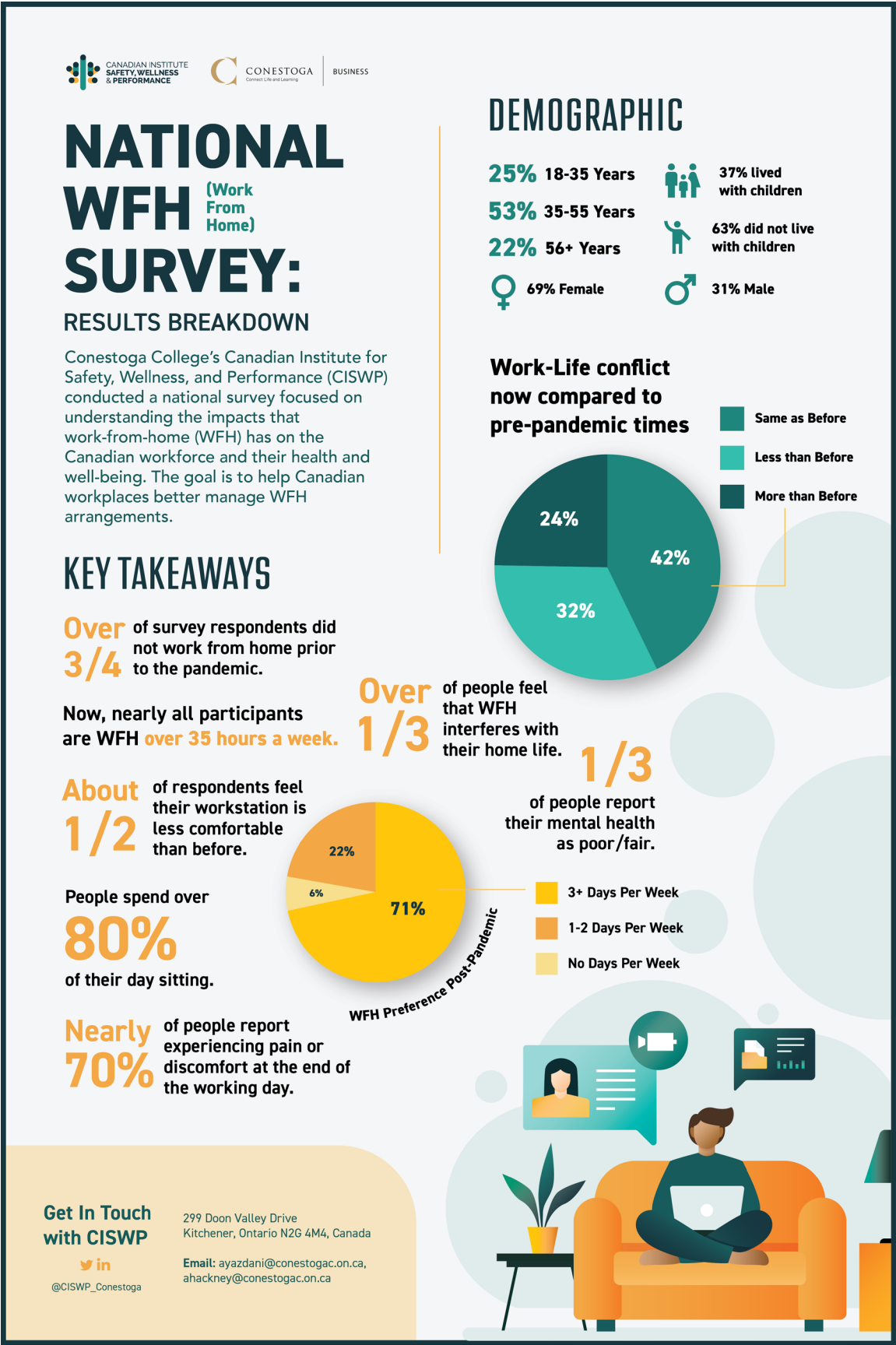


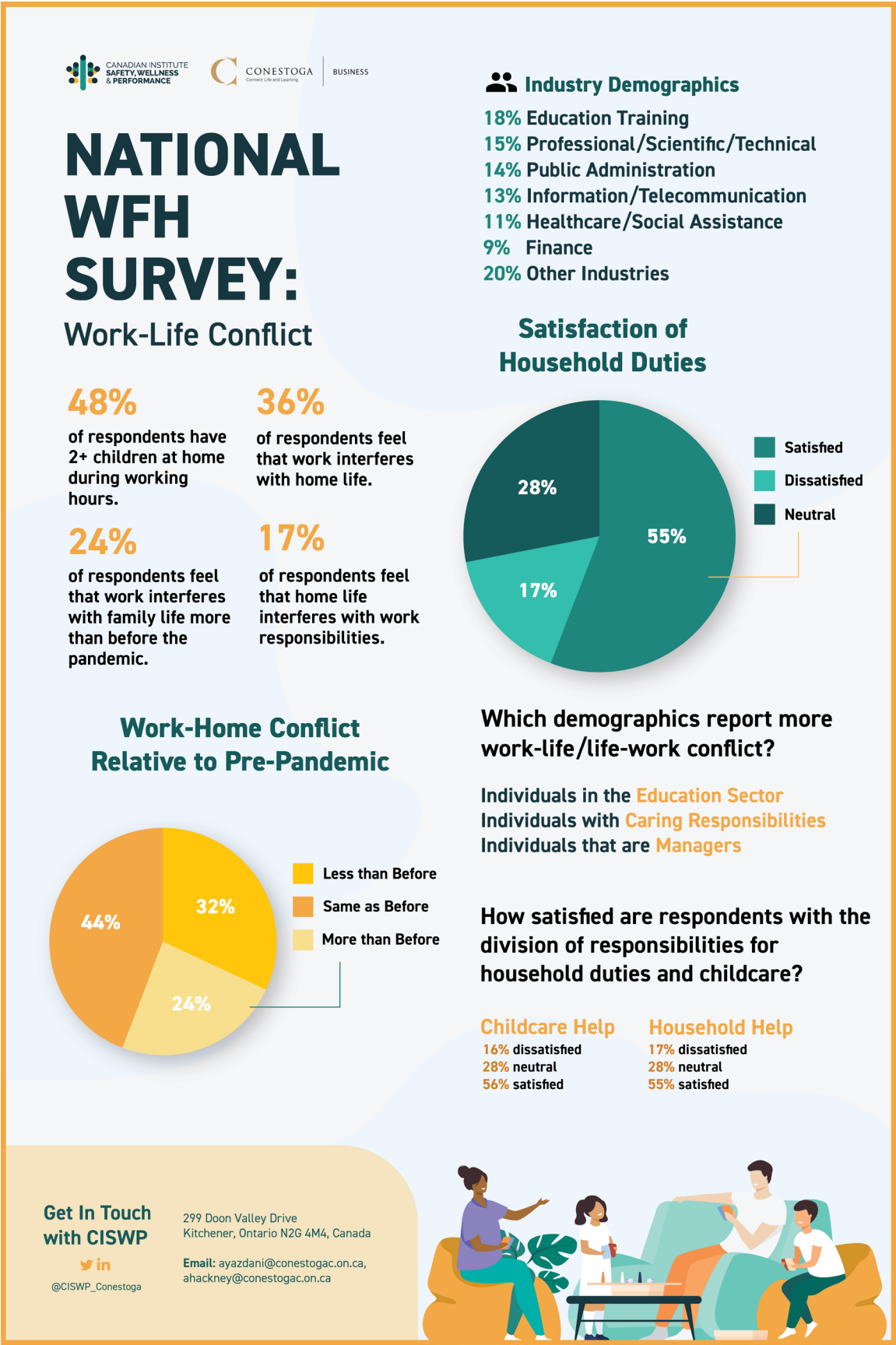
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