



# Australian Financial Advisers Wellbeing Report

# 2021



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# REPORT



# 2021

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The data presented here should be read in context to the research report.

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# Foreword

Good financial advice and insurance coverage for Australians is critical. Financial Advisers play a vitally important role in our society. Having worked with this industry for the last 15 years I have always found Financial Advisers incredibly committed to their clients and a group that finds great meaning and purpose in the work they do. However the narrative in the industry has been that all the change and disruption they are going through is taking its toll on advisers. Not only professionally but also personally. We did this research to accurately assess the state of wellbeing and mental health of Financial Advisers in Australia. As well as to uncover the strategies and behaviours of advisers who are thriving and evolving their businesses despite all the disruption and change. But most importantly we did it to help the people who invest so much time and energy into improving the financial security of Australians.

Dr Adam Fraser



I have appreciated the advice of several financial advisers through superannuation funds over the last twelve years – all of them have been helpful and committed to do their best for me. It is this attitude and commitment that I saw through the interviews Tanya and I conducted with volunteer advisers. However, as noted in this report, there are many advisers that are not doing so well. Due to major change and reform in the industry, many advisers are struggling and it is impacting their health and wellbeing, which I think should be a major concern to us all. Yet there is hope, as pathways for help are becoming available and many of the advisers we interviewed are learning, coping, adapting, recovering and moving away from stress reactions which can prevent us from taking positive action. So I would encourage any adviser who is struggling to seek help – help from other advisers who are doing well or ok, help from industry associations, help from counsellors and mentors.

Dr John Molineux



Financial advisers provide a crucial service to ensure that Australians are assisted in making positive financial decisions to safeguard their futures. Less recognised is the role that financial advisers play to support their clients in times of need such as following a job loss, a change in personal circumstances or the unfortunate diagnosis of injury or illness. These circumstances can be emotional and difficult to navigate, therefore financial advisers need to be resilient so that they can guide their clients to make informed choices during this time.

In recent years there has been significant change within the industry, which has placed additional pressure on financial advisers. In recognition of this changing environment, AIA Australia considered it was important to embark on this research with Dr Adam Fraser and Dr John Molineux. Although we have identified that there are several factors impacting the health and wellbeing of financial advisers, it is positive to note that there are many professionals in this field who are thriving. We hope that this research is informative and inspires positive change to improve the advice industry for the better.

Mr Damien Mu



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# About the **Researchers**

Dr Adam Fraser is a human performance researcher, consultant and speaker who studies how people and organisations adopt a high performance culture and the importance of wellbeing to thrive in this challenging and evolving world. He holds a PhD in Biomedical Science.



Adam has a true passion for the research behind his work and has long held partnerships with various Universities throughout Asia Pacific. He founded The e-lab in 2017. The e-lab collaborates with University partners to deeply research a specific industry, role or organisation, in order to understand what limits their performance and uncover the specific strategies that will make Advisers more successful. These research projects inform Dr Fraser's books, keynotes and programs.

**DR ADAM FRASER**

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# About the **Researchers**

Dr John Molineux, FCPHR, is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Management at Deakin Business School and Course Director of the Master of Human Resource Management program. John joined Deakin in 2010 after over 30 years in human resource management (HRM).



He is currently teaching HRM and leadership to postgraduate students, plus supervising PhD students. His research interests focus on industry-sponsored projects, with an emphasis on human performance and well-being. John is keenly interested in strategic HRM, organisation change and action research. In his previous career, he worked in HR roles in several organisations as a HR manager/director, HR strategist and other HR professional roles. He completed his PhD in 2005 which was an action research project that developed a systemic approach to Strategic HRM and resulted in organisational cultural change. He also serves in voluntary roles with the Australian HR Institute, where he is a Fellow Certified Practitioner in HR, plus is a board member and Honorary Treasurer of the Action Learning Action Research Association.

**DR JOHN MOLINEUX**

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# Executive Summary

This research study is the first of its kind to be conducted in Australia within the financial advisory industry. It was initiated when a group of advisers approached Dr Fraser following a keynote presentation he delivered at a dealer group conference. He mentioned the research his company The e-lab had done with school principals, home loan lenders, paramedics and partners in professional services firms. They said:

***“You need to do that for us, we are not coping with all the change and uncertainty in the role. It’s destroying our physical and mental health. Tragically, this year we have seen a number of suicides in the industry and we think things are only going to get worse.”***



Moved by their plea for help, Dr Fraser set up the research study which was a collaboration between the e-lab, Dr John Molineux from Deakin University and AIA Australia, a life and health insurer and wellbeing organisation, who sponsored the research.

The study set out to answer the following questions.

1. What is the current state of financial advisers in Australia in terms of their wellbeing, mental health, quality of life, work life balance and levels of stress? How do they compare to other occupations and the average person?
2. For the advisers that have good wellbeing, mental health, quality of life and work life balance, what are the behaviours and strategies they implement to flourish in these areas?
3. What are the mindsets, habits and strategic focuses of advisers who are evolving and innovating their businesses?

Two separate studies were set up. Study 1 had 43 advisers participate in it. They each filled out a survey (this measured a broad range of psychological and wellbeing constructs), completed a seven-day diary study and had an interview with a researcher. Study 2 had over seven hundred advisers fill out the survey that was used in Study 1.

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Dr Fraser used comparative data from existing studies completed by e-lab to evaluate the financial advisory industry in comparison to other industries, including mortgage lenders, the banking industry, HR, partners in professional services, executive leaders and school principals. The analysis revealed that advisers had the lowest scores in areas of wellbeing, mental and physical health and higher scores in terms of stress, burn out and work overload, than any industry we had previously studied.

As a result, there are real concerns about the sustainability of the profession. Specifically, 73% of advisers are experiencing high levels of burnout from work. 33% of advisers are seeking medical care to manage their health symptoms caused by the stress of the role. 61% have poor sleep due to the stress. 67% of advisers experience some level of depression – ranging from ‘a little of the time’ to ‘all the time’, of particular concern 17% of advisers said they were depressed most of the time or all of the time. When compared to the average Australian, financial advisers have a 64% higher chance of being in a moderate mental health risk group, a 51% higher chance of being in a high mental health risk group, and an 11% higher chance of being in a very high mental health risk group. As a result, 42% of the advisers we studied are considering leaving the profession due to the stress they experience and a further 17% are unsure if they will stay in the profession.

Delving deeper in this study to explore the reason for this huge decline in wellbeing and mental health, the picture became very clear. By far, the biggest stress they face in their day is the regulatory and compliance demands. 82% of advisers said they found it highly to very highly stressful. The constant change that they have experienced, the lack of input and consultation around the imposed changes and how they have been portrayed in the media has taken a heavy toll on this group and the profession.

The data also highlighted that the vast majority of advisers find very high levels of meaning and purpose in their role, they are still engaged in the role and find it challenging and rewarding. However, despite this, their level of enjoyment in the role is quite low and 77% of advisers feel high levels of frustration with their work. In addition, only 36% felt consistently happy in their role. If adviser’s wellbeing and mental health does not improve dramatically, the constant change and regulatory demands look to cannibalise and wipe out people’s desire and capacity to work in this profession.

The study also uncovered a cohort within the group who were growing their businesses, enjoying the work, had strong wellbeing, mental health and work life balance. This group has been referred to as the ‘Thrivers’. This group was not defined within a specific demographic and came from a diverse range of age, gender, location, experience and education. Some of their strongest characteristics that set them apart from the general group was their psychological flexibility, psychological capital, adaptive performance, prioritisation of their wellbeing in conjunction with the ability to engage in industry support. There was a lot to learn from the habits and behaviours of this standout group and many of them hold the key to having a sustained career as a financial adviser.

**Dr Adam Fraser & Dr John Molineux**

# Background

The research project was initiated by Dr Adam Fraser due to the frequent number of advisers seeking assistance regarding their mental health and wellbeing, after his speaking events. Dr Fraser in collaboration with Dr John Molineux from Deakin University approached AIA Australia to sponsor the research. AIA Australia is focused on helping people live healthier, longer, better lives and was keen to understand how it could help its adviser partners to thrive. The concerns of the researchers and AIA Australia were specifically relating to a high rate of financial advisers leaving the industry, plus worries that advisers were not being supported whilst facing considerable changes to their work responsibilities, relating to compliance and additional burden and stress to pass an ethics examination and to obtain further qualifications.

The summary of the background to the study in the box on the following page was submitted to Deakin University's Human Research Ethics Committee.



The financial advice industry has been in some turmoil over the last few years. The Banking Royal Commission uncovered unethical and illegal practices, which has resulted in significant reform of the industry. One of these key reforms was the creation of the Financial Adviser Standards and Ethics Authority (FASEA). FASEA has introduced new educational and professional standards for Financial Advisers. This has led to high turnover in the profession – a reduction of 5.2% was recorded in the period January to March 2020, plus high uptake of enrolments in tertiary financial planning courses (Peña McGough & Hoven, 2020). CPA Australia report that there is a potential risk of Australia not having sufficient Financial Advisers to meet ongoing demands (Efrat, 2020).

In this context, individual advisers are faced with major decisions about their future career options, and for those who want to stay in the industry, major challenges and expenses involved in tertiary study. These include the cost of tertiary study, opportunity cost to their business and loss of family time. This scenario has likely increased the stress of individual Financial Advisers and there may be risks to their ongoing wellbeing.

To have high wellbeing, individuals need to be flourishing in their work and home lives according to Keyes (2002), who describes flourishing as “to be filled with positive emotion and to be functioning well psychologically and socially” (p210). However, many workers suffer from role stress and a meta-analysis of 295 studies by Örtqvist and Wincent (2006) shows that role stress, including overload, role conflict and ambiguity were related to increased tension and emotional exhaustion. It is important that people in stressful situations experience some form of recovery where they can detach from the demands of the workday (Etzion, Eden & Lapidot, 1998), which could include relaxation experiences such as taking a break or mindfulness, or mastery experiences such as sport or hobbies.

In times of change, people respond in different ways. People with high psychological capital (Luthans & Youssef, 2004) tend to be able to function more effectively in society and be more optimistic and resilient than others. However, many people resist change and a range of factors have been described by Oreg (2003), including loss of control, cognitive rigidity, low resilience and deeply embedded habits.

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The research project was approved by the Deakin University's Human Research Ethics Committee, and consists of:

1. A survey of Financial Advisers
2. A seven-day diary study, followed by interview of volunteer Financial Advisers.

The research was conducted late in 2020.

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# Methodology

The research processes were negotiated between representatives of the research sponsor, AIA Australia, Dr Adam Fraser of e-lab, and Dr John Molineux of Deakin University. The development of research instruments was based on previous similar research undertaken by Dr Molineux and Dr Fraser, plus additional contextual factors associated with the Financial Advisory sector, recommended by AIA Australia and from industry research.

The agreed process consisted of two separate but related studies. The studies were conducted concurrently. The first study involved volunteer Financial Advisers participating in a mixed-methods study. The second study was quantitative in approach and involved a broader group of advisers completing an online survey.

The first study had four initial components: the first was a baseline survey, which included a range of constructs that would not show much variation over a short time period, including demographic information. The second was a seven-day diary study, also called an experience sampling survey method (Reis and Wheeler, 1991), with three short daily electronic surveys conducted during each day of one whole week. The third component involved Dr Molineux compiling the results of the diary study for each individual Financial Adviser and forwarding the results back to those individuals. The fourth component was a one-on-one interview, which was conducted by Dr Molineux and Tanya Heaney-Voogt from Deakin University, based around an in-depth discussion and understanding of the diary study results and baseline results for each Financial Adviser. Research Financial Advisers were volunteers responding to calls by AIA Australia, Dr Adam Fraser and XY Adviser (a peer-to-peer professional development platform for advisers) amongst other platforms for volunteers from the industry.

The second study consisted of an online survey. AIA Australia and XY Adviser amongst other platforms assisted in the distribution of the survey instrument to potential Financial Advisers in the financial advisory industry.

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# 1

## Study 1 Participants

A total of 88 people indicated they would potentially be willing to participate as volunteers. After Dr Fraser's research administration team had negotiated with individuals about availability, 45 were selected and gave formal consent to participate, given the short timeframe needed to complete the study. In total, 43 of these Financial Advisers completed all four components of Study 1.

The 43 Financial Advisers in the diary study completed a total of 855 diary study entries over a maximum period of seven calendar days at three times a day, with each Financial Adviser completing an average of 19.9 entries. The diary study entries were made at the beginning of the working day, which included work done after hours on the previous day, at lunch time, and at the end of the normal working day. Typically, the morning entries were completed between 6am and 8am, lunch time between 12 noon and 2pm, and the end of the workday between 5pm and 7pm. Electronic reminders for each time period were set up by Dr Fraser's research administration team. Demographic and other baseline data was collected on a baseline survey separately. All entries were made directly via the Qualtrics survey database.

Financial Advisers' experiences of flow were then matched against the categories of specific tasks that they were completing during various periods of work. A similar method was undertaken by Ceja and Navarro (2011), who conducted a longitudinal study using the experience sampling method with 6981 registers of data from a sample of 60 employees. They note that within-persons research is important because it takes into consideration the temporal factor (how it changes over time), bringing with it "the potential to capture intra-individual variability in well-being over time" (p.629). It also gives a better understanding of "how psychological processes change over time and how they relate to person and situation factors and their interaction". As Reis et al (2000) explain, processes that govern momentary experiences may not be the same as those operative at the between-person level of analysis.

Following the diary study, a total of 43 diary study Financial Advisers agreed to be interviewed about their experiences and proceeded to participate in a semi-structured phone interview conducted by Dr John Molineux or Tanya Heaney-Voogt of Deakin University. The interviews took place within a few days of the conclusion of the diary study. First, diary Financial Advisers were contacted for interview, prior to the study by Dr Fraser's staff and booked into available times of the interviewers. Second, the Financial Advisers who agreed to be interviewed were sent a summary of the results of their individual diary study results for discussion purposes. The summary of results consisted of a series of charts and tables which mapped out their responses to each diary study question, plus tables for the responses to questions which required a statement rather than a value. The interviews then took place within a few days and were between 25 and 60 minutes in length, with an average of 35 minutes. The interviews took the form of the general interview guide approach, recommended by Patton (2005) and Richards and Morse (2013), where the researcher is able to explore particular issues without asking identical questions of interviewees.

# 1

## Study 1 - Constructs measured

The Study 1 research took on a sequential mixed method design (Creswell et al., 2003; Castro, 2010), containing the diary study, followed by semi-structured explanatory interviews. The two-stage process of diary study and interviews was instituted to better understand and help explain the information recorded in the diary study (Molina-Azorín, 2011). The interviews were based on a retrospective understanding of the longitudinal data contained in the diary study (Plano Clark et al., 2015), plus contained complementary information that added to the understanding of the research topic (Tunarosa and Glynn, 2017).

In the diary study surveys, Financial Adviser volunteers were asked to categorise their work tasks in percentage terms for the morning, the afternoon, and after hours. The diary study was structured as follows:

- The categories of work tasks were developed in consultation with representatives within the AIA Australia group and were discussed with a number of Financial Advisers. These discussions were iterative over a period of several weeks and involved emails and phone calls. After agreement, the categories were included in both the baseline survey for both studies and the diary study questionnaires.
- The number of hours of work was recorded in each survey, referring to the quantity of hours of work undertaken in each time period.
- So as not to make the daily surveys too long, single item questions were used to measure energy level, stress, mood and recovery, in a structure recommended for diary studies by Ohly et al (2010).
- Energy level and stress level were recorded using a five-point Likert-type scale.
- A selection of words were used for the question relating to Mood Financial Advisers felt in the morning and afternoon. The words were adapted from those tested in the COPAS scale by Gilbert et al (2008) and from words assessed by Strauss and Allen (2008) as negative, neutral or positive. This process is similar to the procedure used by Bledow et al. (2011) and Sonnentag et al (2008).
- Recovery was measured by a frequency scale against a range of recovery activities.
- Flow was measured using an adaption of five questions used by Ceja and Navarro (2011) for the factors of challenge, skill used, interest level, enjoyment and time perception.
- Finally, as an option, the adviser volunteers were asked to write comments about the best thing and worst thing in relation to the particular period of work, which helped to identify any particular issues and factors relating to a work period.

The baseline survey is outlined in Study 2 below. The instrument questions were identical in both studies.

# 2

## Study 2 Participants

The Financial Advisers' Wellbeing Survey was attempted by 1108 Financial Advisers in November and December 2020. Of these attempts, 709 Financial Advisers (64%) completed the entire survey and their results are reported in this paper.

Demographics of the group are shown in Tables 1 and 2 below.

**Table 1: Demographics of Study 2 participants**

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	554	78.14
Female	155	21.86
Age	Number	Percentage
Up to 29 years	14	1.97
30-39 years	111	15.66
40-49 years	225	31.73
50-59 years	228	32.16
60+ years	131	18.48
Region	Number	Percentage
NSW/ACT	204	28.77
Qld	165	23.27
SA/NT	74	10.44
Vic/Tas	155	21.86
WA	111	15.66
Working hours	Number	Percentage
Under 20 week	15	2.12
20-34 hours	52	7.33
35-40 hours	148	20.87
41-49 hours	233	32.86
50+ hours	261	36.81
Capital or not	Number	Percentage
Capital city	487	68.69
Rural/regional	222	31.31
Experience	Number	Percentage
0-2 years	14	1.97
3-5 years	43	6.06
6-10 years	92	12.98
11-15 years	126	17.77
16-20 years	113	15.94
21+ years	321	45.28
Education	Number	Percentage
Secondary	25	3.53
Cert/Diploma	284	40.06
Degree	185	26.09
Post-graduate	215	30.32
FASEA status	Number	Percentage
Fully qualified	149	21.02
Exam passed	267	37.66
Not yet qualified	206	29.06
No intention	87	12.27
Intention	Number	Percentage
Continue as adviser	521	73.48
Continue but not adv.	61	8.60
Try other work	71	10.01
Retire or long break	56	7.90

**Table 2: Business demographics of Study 2 participants**

Role	Number	Percentage	Employed	Number	Percentage
Accountant	21	2.96	Aligned	158	22.28
Adviser	101	14.25	Institution	46	6.49
Holistic adviser	200	28.21	Private 1 adviser	164	23.13
Practice owner	98	13.82	Private 2-5 advisers	217	30.61
Risk specialist	87	12.27	Private 6-30 advisers	65	9.17
Self-employed	175	24.68	Private 31-99 advisers	17	2.40
Other	27	3.81	Private 100-199 advisers	15	2.12
			Private 200 + advisers	27	3.81
			Other	27	3.81
Business status	Number	Percentage	Client status	Number	Percentage
Exiting/transition	34	4.80	Mostly engaged	353	49.79
Declining	140	19.75	More engaged than not	181	25.53
Maintaining	271	38.22	Similar engaged and not	112	15.80
Growing	247	34.84	More not engaged	46	6.49

## 2

### Study 2 - Constructs measured

The survey examined five outcome variables, two independent variables, demographic factors and a range of other variables that were considered as possible factors that may impact the relationships between the independent variables and the outcome variables.

The **outcome variables** were:

**Wellbeing** was measured by a composite of seven items from the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) and Gallup's Wellbeing Scale (Rath & Harter, 2010).

**Mental health** was measured using the ten item K10 Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler et al, 2002). A sample question is 'In the past four weeks you were so nervous that nothing could calm you down', with responses ranging from 'none of the time' to 'all of the time'.

**Impact of stress** was measured with an indicator developed by a professional actuary for use in projects for Dr Adam Fraser. It measures the impact of work stress on health and attitude towards work.

**Flow at work** was measured with five items of the construct developed by Ceja and Navarro (2012). The items measure the Challenge of the work, the level of Skill used, the Enjoyment and Interest in the work, and the perception of Time. A ten-point scale from 1 to 10 was used.

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**Work-family balance** was measured with three items from the scale developed by Carlson, Grzywacz, and Zivnuska (2009). A sample item is ‘I am able to accomplish what is expected of me at work and in my family’.

The **independent variables** related to job demands were:

**Work overload** was measured with four items from the scale developed by Reilly (1982). A sample item is ‘I have to do things that I do not really have the time and energy’.

**Stressful issues** was a measure specifically designed for this study and consisted of a number of items brought forward as issues for advisers in consultation with industry representatives. The items were: conflict, managing people, overload, crises at work, compliance requirements, work-life balance, education requirements, revenue and developing new business. The items were measured on a five-point scale ranging from ‘not stressful’ to ‘very highly stressful’.

**Work stress** experienced by advisers was captured using a four-item scale from Behson (2005). A sample item is ‘how often do you feel emotionally drained from your work?’ Work stress was **considered a mediating** variable likely to influence the relationships between job demands and the outcome variables.

There are a range of factors that have been previously found or were considered likely to **moderate the relationship between job demands and mental health and wellbeing**, and some of these factors were included in the study. These variables were:

**Industry support** was a measure developed specifically for this research project. It consists of ratings on the value of six different forms of industry support, which are: industry associations, licensees, peers, community platforms, social media and product owners.

**Recovery at work** and **recovery after work** were measured by five statements about the frequency of exercise, meditation or deep reflection, debriefing issues with others, social interactions and other forms of recovery. It derives from recovery measures developed by Sonnentag and Fritz (2007).

**Psychological capital** is a composite construct that measures confidence/efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism. In this research, we used the 12 item measure developed by Luthans et al. (2007). A sample item is ‘I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job’.

**Adaptive performance** measures the ability to respond and adapt to change. It was measured using the 10 item general adaptive performance scale developed by Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012). A sample item is ‘I am able to achieve total focus on the situation to act quickly’.

**Boundary strength** was measured with five items from the measure developed by Hecht and Allen (2009). A sample item is ‘I often do work at home’. This construct reviews the individual’s level of integration/blurring of the separation of work and home.

Routine and change resistance examine the individual’s preference for routine and responses to change. It was measured by the resistance to change scale of 12 items (Oreg, 2003). An example item is ‘When things don’t go according to plan, it stresses me out’.

**Alcohol intake** was a single item frequency scale to measure alcohol use in response to work stress.

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We also measured a number of **demographic factors and business context factors**, which were:

**Business performance**, which was measured with a single item of four possible responses: growing, maintaining, declining and exiting/transitioning, plus an alternate response 'unsure'.

**Client engagement** status in their business was measured as a single item with a five point scale from 'mostly engaged' to 'mostly disengaged'.

Role, education, age, length of experience, state location, rural or capital city, normal weekly working hours and gender were measured in traditional forms.

**FASEA qualified status** was measured with a single item with four responses: 'fully FASEA qualified', 'partly qualified, exam passed', 'on the way to getting qualified, exam not yet passed' and 'not intending to get qualified'.

**Intention to remain a Financial Adviser**, was measured with four options: 'continue in the industry as an adviser, continue in the industry but in another role, leave the industry and do other work, retire or take a long break'.

**Industry Sector** was measured with three major categories: aligned, institution-based and private.

**Other variable:**

**Work tasks** were also measured in the same categories as mentioned in the diary study variables in Study 1.

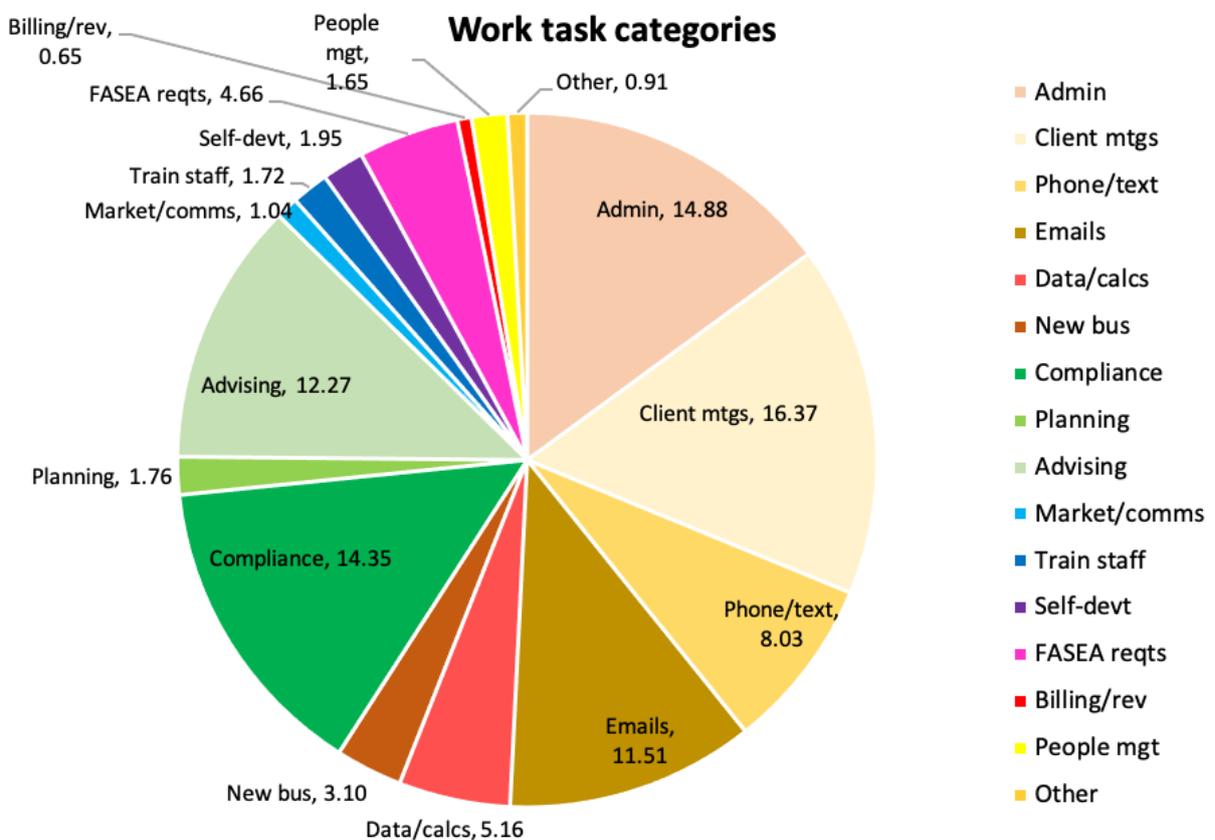
# Results - Study 2

## Current state of the wellbeing of Financial Advisers.

In this section, results from the survey in Study 2 (survey of 709 advisers) are discussed.

### Work Tasks

Figure 1: Work tasks undertaken by Financial Advisers



Financial Advisers were asked to split their work in a typical month into work task categories. The pie chart in Figure 1 shows the dominance of five tasks of the 16 options, with client meetings at 16.37%, administration at 14.88%, compliance at 14.35%, advising at 12.27% and emails at 11.51%. These five categories amount to 69.38% of the work tasks. Of note is that administration and compliance is nearly 30% of all work tasks. Very little time is spent in new business and strategy.

The extent of administration, compliance and FASEA requirements looks to be a barrier to the achievement of business growth and productivity within the industry.

## Outcome measures

### Mental Health

The mental health measure is the same K10 measure used by Beyond Blue and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in their measures of the risk of mental health issues. Higher scores represent poor mental health, whereas low scores represent good mental health. In the Table 3 below, the scale used is from 1 to 5.

**Table 3: Mental health risk scores of Financial Advisers**

Tired out for no reason	Nervous	So nervous nothing helps	Hopeless	Worthless	Restless	So restless nothing helps	Depressed	Everything is an effort	So bad nothing helps	Overall
3.13	2.55	1.67	2.07	1.85	2.42	1.83	2.28	2.77	1.93	2.25

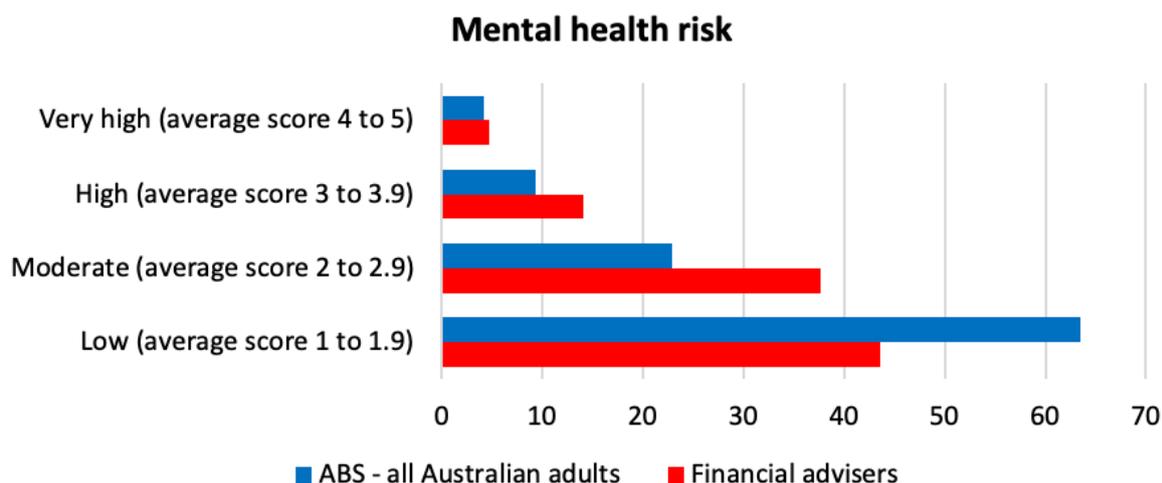
In relation to mental health risk, the following ratios in Table 4 were calculated from this data and then compared with the Australia adult average scores outlined in ABS data.

**Table 4: Comparison of distribution of mental health scores of Financial Advisers with Australian average (ABS)**

Mental health risk	Low (average score 1 to 1.9)	Moderate (average score 2 to 2.9)	High (average score 3 to 3.9)	Very high (average score 4 to 5)
Financial Advisers	43.56%	37.62%	14.14%	4.67%
ABS – all Australia	63.55%	22.90%	9.35%	4.20%

As can be seen in Table 4, and Figure 2 Financial Advisers are more likely than the average Australian adult to be at risk of mental health issues. This is particularly true for the moderate and high-risk categories with a 64% higher rate of moderate risk, a 51% higher rate of high risk and an 11% higher rate of very high risk, compared to the scores for the general Australian adult population.

**Figure 2: Mental health risk comparison of advisers to all Australian adults**



## Impact of work stress

This measure was developed by an actuary to obtain an overall sense of the impact of work stress on an individual's physiology and health.

**Table 5: Impact of work stress ratios**

Impact of work stress	Considering leaving job due to stress	Intention to take stress leave	Seeking medical care for stress	Stress impacting ability to sleep	Stress impact on weight	Doctor's advice on high risk of heart disease or stroke
% strongly agree	20.00%	8.31%	15.47%	28.13%	17.20%	13.47%
% somewhat agree	22.13%	14.34%	17.33%	33.33%	26.27%	12.00%
% neither agree nor disagree	16.93%	21.05%	14.27%	11.73%	13.87%	19.6%

As can be seen in Table 5 above, the impact of work stress on Financial Advisers' physiology and health is concerning. Around 33% are seeking or have sought medical care for stress, with a massive 61% believing stress is impacting their ability to have adequate sleep. A further 25% have indicated that their medical doctor has advised them that they are in a high-risk category for heart disease or stroke. In addition, 42% are considering leaving their job and 23% are or have taken leave because of work stress.

## Wellbeing

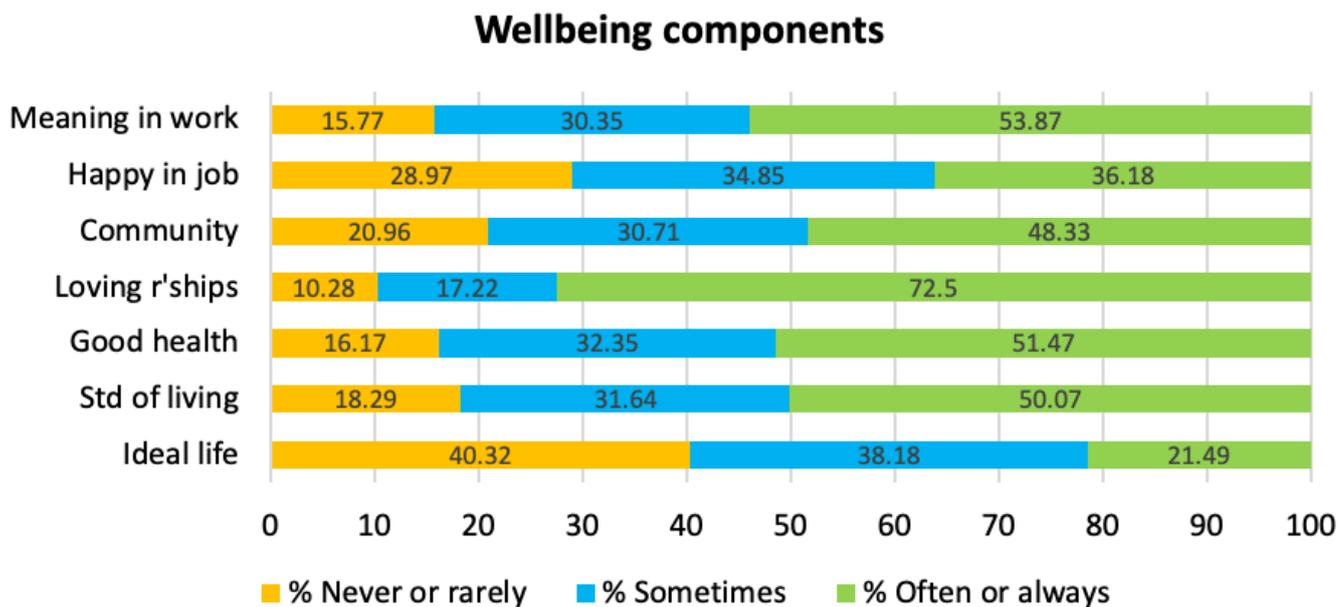
We used a holistic measure of wellbeing, used by Gallup and recommended by the United Nations, covering whole-of-life wellbeing.

**Table 6: Wellbeing ratios of Financial Advisers**

Category	Life is close to ideal	Good standard of living	Good health	Loving relationships	Good community relationships	Happy in job	Finds work meaningful
% never or rarely	40.32%	18.29%	16.17%	10.28%	20.96%	28.97%	15.77%
% some-times	38.18%	31.64%	32.35%	17.22%	30.71%	34.85%	30.35%
% often or always	21.49%	50.07%	51.47%	72.50%	48.33%	36.18%	53.87%

In Table 6 and Figure 3, it is clear that Financial Advisers have mixed wellbeing. Most of the Advisers have loving relationships in their lives and find their work meaningful. Around 50% have good health, good standard of living and have good community relationships. Of more concern is that only 36% are often or always happy in their job, with almost a third of advisers saying they are never or rarely happy at work. In addition, only 21% think that their life is close to ideal, with 40% saying their life is rarely or never ideal. It seems that the majority of Advisers are still finding their work meaningful but are not getting high levels of enjoyment from their work.

**Figure 3: Wellbeing components for Financial Advisers**



## Flow

Flow at work is the perception of ‘being in the zone’, of being fully absorbed and engaged by the work you are doing. We measure it using five elements: the challenge of work itself, the skills needed to do the work, the enjoyment in doing the work, the interest in the work and the perception of time (in a high flow state, time seems to go quickly, whereas in low flow, time drags on).

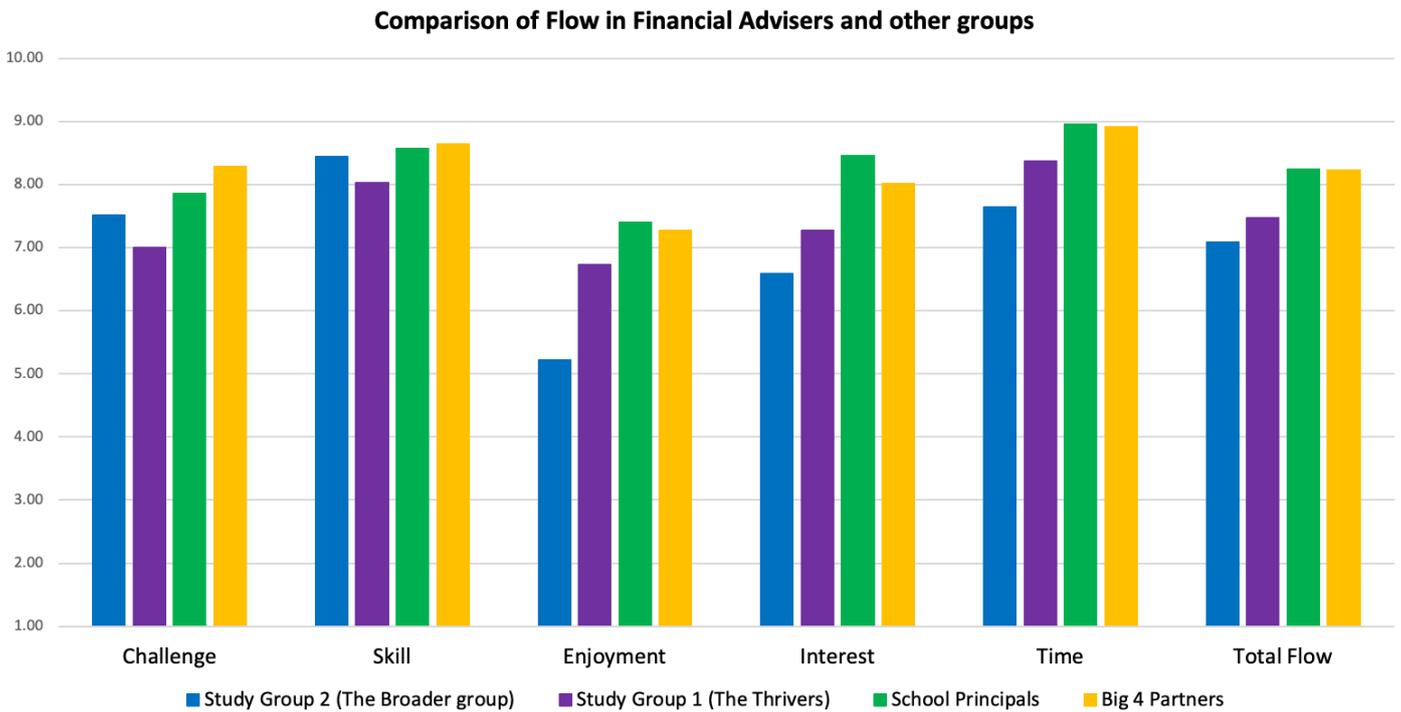
**Table 7: Financial Advisers’ scores on components of flow at work**

Flow factor	Challenge	Skill	Enjoyment	Interest	Time
Average rating 1 to 10	7.51	8.45	5.22	6.59	7.65

From Table 7, it can be seen that Financial Advisers saw the Challenge of their work as quite high with an average score of 7.51 and saw that the skill needed to do the job was even higher at 8.45, and when working, time seemed to go quickly with a score of 7.65. However, the interest in the work was not as high with a score of 6.59, but most concerning is the enjoyment of work which is quite low at only 5.22 on a scale of 1 to 10. This finding supports the low levels of happiness at work we saw in the measure of wellbeing.

A comparison of flow factors with other groups is shown in Figure 4. From this figure, it can be seen that the enjoyment of work for advisers is comparatively low and should be of concern.

**Figure 4: Comparison of flow at work components with other groups**



## Work-family balance

The final outcome measure we used was work-family balance, to see if the job was having any impact on home life.

**Table 8: Ratio of work-family balance responses of Financial Advisers**

Question	Able to achieve work and home expectations	People close to me say I do well in balancing work and family	Ability to achieve home and family goals
Often or mostly	53.92%	39.86%	47.92%
Sometimes	29.46%	35.45%	32.15%
Rarely or never	16.63%	24.69%	19.93%

Overall, the work-family balance construct reported in Table 8 has shown mixed outcomes. Around a half of Financial Advisers believe they are doing okay at balancing work and life, although many think that people close to Advisers would disagree.

## Comparison of outcomes with other groups

In looking at a comparison of these outcome measures with other groups of professionals, we start to understand where there are more substantial health and wellbeing issues with the Financial Adviser community.

**Table 9: Comparison of scores on outcome measures with other groups**

#	Mental health risk	Impact of stress	Wellbeing	Flow	Work-family balance
Financial advisers	2.25	2.78	3.37	7.08	3.46
School principals	NM	2.50	3.99	7.48	3.28
HR practitioners	2.02	NM	3.57	7.54	3.85
Hospital teams	NM	2.38	4.09	NM	NM
Big 4 firm partners	NM	NM	3.90	NM	3.56
Bank collections	NM	NM	4.11	7.47	4.22
Mortgage lenders	NM	NM	3.99	7.82	3.68

# Scale ranges are 1 to 5, except for Flow which is 1 to 10.

NM = not measured

As noted in Table 9, the average score of Financial Advisers in comparison to a range of other professionals is startling in many respects. The indicator of mental health risk relating to Financial Advisers is higher than that of HR practitioners (collected under COVID-19 lockdown pressures), and as previously mentioned, significantly higher than the Australian adult average reported by the ABS.

Also, the impact of stress, at 2.78 is significantly higher than the very stressful jobs of school principals and hospital teams.

In relation to wellbeing, Financial Advisers scored the lowest of all the groups we have measured.

With flow, the pattern is the same, with the lowest score of any of the groups we have measured.

Work-family balance is not quite so bad, with school principals much worse off than Financial Advisers, however their average score is still not close to bank collections staff who have the ability in their jobs to leave work at work.

## Job demands as independent variables

Following the job-demands resources theory, we investigated significant demands on Financial Advisers. The two we analysed were work overload and stressful issues at work.

### Work overload

The following table shows the extent of work overload as perceived by Financial Advisers.

**Table 10: Ratios of work overload questions**

Question	No time and energy	More hours in the day needed	Cannot ever seem to catch up	Never have time to myself
% agree or strongly agree	82.53%	81.91%	75.35%	50.55%
% neither agree nor disagree	11.28%	11.52%	14.25%	23.42%
% disagree or strongly disagree	6.19%	6.57%	10.41%	26.02%

As indicated in Table 10, the vast majority of Financial Advisers indicated that they had high levels of work overload. This puts Advisers at high risk of burn out. Also, around half agreed that they didn't seem to ever have time to themselves which significantly affects wellbeing and happiness.

### Stressful issues

The following Table 11 outlines the differences in perception of stress between various stressful factors faced by Financial Advisers.

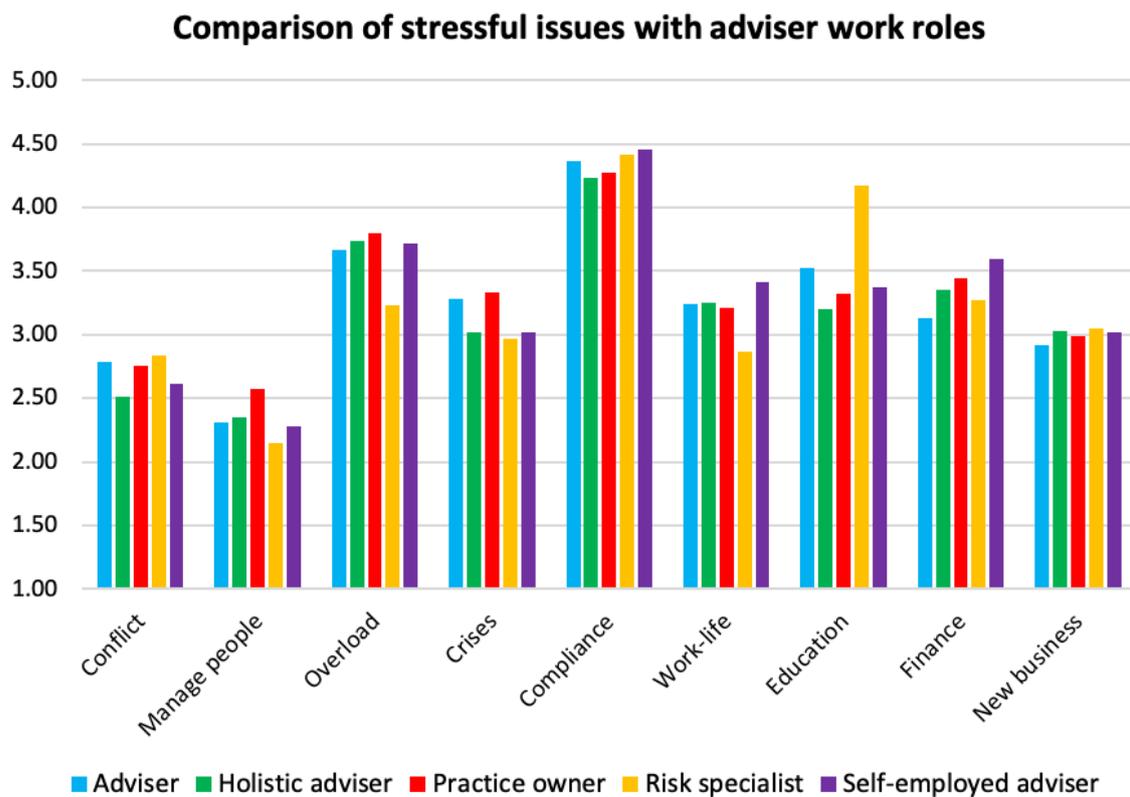
**Table 11: Ratios of responses to stressful issues questions**

Stressor	Minimally stressful or not stressful	Moderately stressful	Highly or very highly stressful
Compliance demands	7.70%	10.61%	81.70%
Overload	13.40%	29.84%	56.76%
Revenue & expenses	24.47%	27.53%	48.01%
Balance work & home	25.13%	37.10%	47.77%
Education requirements	27.89%	21.12%	51.00%
Work crisis	30.16%	34.32%	35.52%
Develop new business	34.00%	31.47%	34.53%
Conflict	44.36%	30.28%	25.36%
Manage people	54.59%	32.89%	12.51%

In Table 11, it is clear the most stressful issue faced by Financial Advisers are the regulatory and compliance requirements with a massive 82% finding it highly or very highly stressful. In fact, less than two in a hundred respondents found it not stressful. Work overload and FASEA education requirements were the next issues that were found by advisers to be highly or very highly stressful, closely followed by education requirements, revenue & expenses and balancing work & home.

Looking at the most stressful issues by work roles, we find that compliance is the most stressful issue across all roles. Next is work overload, with the exception of risk specialists, who find future education requirements as the next most stressful issues. This may be explained by the fact that the exam may cover aspects of advising that they don't deal with within their business. The comparison is evident in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Comparison of stressful issues with adviser work roles**



### Definition of adviser work roles:

**Adviser:** qualified financial adviser who provides personal financial advice on a limited range of topics. Eg: superannuation, estate planning and life insurance.

**Holistic adviser:** qualified financial adviser who provides personal financial advice on a broad range of topics from cashflow and debt management to insurance, superannuation, investments, lending, planning for retirement, aged care and estate planning.

**Practice owner:** qualified financial adviser who owns the financial advice business and usually employs other qualified Financial Advisers.

**Risk specialist:** qualified financial adviser who provides personal financial advice related to an individual or business owner's insurance needs.

**Self-employed adviser:** qualified financial adviser who works for themselves and is not an employee of a financial institution.

## Perceived work stress

We believed this variable played a mediating role between the job demand variables (work overload, stressful issues, work stress) and the outcome variables (wellbeing, mental health, impact of stress, flow at work, work-family balance) in that if actual stress occurred as a result of the job demands, then the outcome variables would be worse for the Financial Adviser. Table 12 outlines the extent of stress indicated in each question.

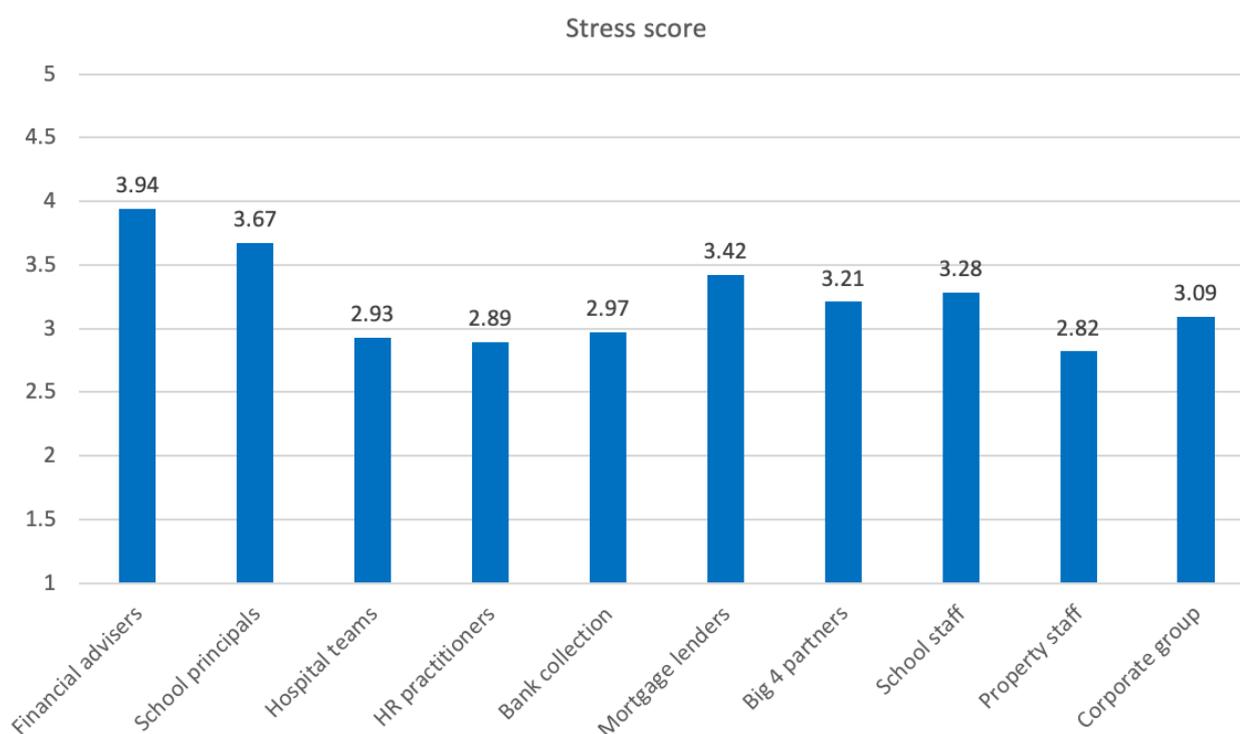
**Table 12: Responses to questions on stress**

Question	Felt emotionally drained	Felt burned out or stressed	Felt frustrated	Could not cope with work
Very often or quite often	74.24%	73.33%	77.26%	49.27%
Sometimes	18.79%	17.87%	16.56%	30.49%
Rarely or never	6.96%	8.80%	6.17%	20.23%

It is clear from Table 12 that advisers experienced very high and frequent levels of work stress. 77% feel high levels of frustration with their work and 73% are experiencing high levels of burn out due to work stress.

A comparison is made in Figure 6 of other groups we have surveyed and their levels of work stress, on a scale of 1 to 5.

**Figure 6: Comparison of stress scores with other groups**



As can be seen in figure 6, advisers have clearly had the highest level of stress as a result of their work when compared to other occupations.

## Job Resources – Moderating the impact of job demands and stressors

We measured a number of factors that we thought might reduce the impact of work stressors and work overload on the five outcome measures (wellbeing, mental health, impact of stress, flow at work, work-family balance). This section explores the results relating to these factors.

### Industry support

Industry support may help in the reduction of stress and anxiety for Financial Advisers, in addition to helping with the technical aspects of their work. The level of industry support is outlined in Table 13.

**Table 13: Ratios of responses to sources of industry support**

Type of support	High level of support	Moderate support	Minimal support	No support	Not applicable
Industry associations	1.74%	12.42%	40.25%	39.25%	6.34%
Licensees	8.93%	26.05%	39.45%	15.14%	10.42%
Industry peers	8.96%	34.08%	35.95%	16.29%	4.73%
Digital community platforms	1.86%	9.07%	33.42%	40.87%	14.78%
Social media & podcasts	2.36%	10.70%	29.98%	41.04%	15.92%
Product manufacturers	1.99%	26.05%	46.90%	19.23%	5.83%

As can be seen in Table 13, the level of support given is very low in most cases. Around 80% of Financial Advisers believe they receive either no support or minimal support from industry associations, with 14% receiving moderate to high support.

However, 35% are receiving moderate to high support from their licensee and an encouraging 43% are receiving moderate to high support from industry peers. Product manufacturers are a little lower than licensees with 28% of advisers receiving moderate or high support.

The community platforms and social media are not used as much for support, with 11% receiving moderate to high support from digital community platforms and 13% from social media & podcasts.

## Recovery at work and at home

Recovery is really important in relation to reducing the stresses of the job. In Tables 14 and 15, we report on the frequency of aspects of recovery in the work and home settings.

**Table 14: Responses to recovery at work questions**

Type of recovery during work hours	Often to very often	Sometimes	Rarely or never
Exercise	17.61%	23.26%	59.13%
Meditation or deep reflection	3.16%	14.47%	82.36%
Debrief issues with others	15.52%	40.26%	44.21%
Take a short break	32.77%	38.42%	28.82%
Social media & social interactions	22.34%	34.30%	43.37%

As can be seen in Table 14 above, short breaks and social media/interactions are the most common forms of recovery at work. Around 56% undertake debriefing at least sometimes. Meditation or deep reflection is rarely undertaken by advisers at work. Only a small percentage (18%) use exercise during work hours (this includes walking at lunch time) to recover from the psychological stress of work. Overall, this data shows that advisers could be much more effective at inserting regular moments of recovery into their workday in order to improve their wellbeing, effectiveness and mental health.

**Table 15: Responses to recovery at home questions**

Type of recovery after work hours	Often to very often	Sometimes	Rarely or never
Exercise	53.56%	29.82%	16.62%
Meditation or deep reflection	11.22%	24.27%	64.51%
Debrief issues with others	15.28%	40.05%	44.66%
Engage in hobby or other interest	45.32%	32.54%	22.13%
Social media & social interactions	33.81%	35.79%	30.40%

As can be seen in Table 15, the majority of advisers do undertake exercise often, but the majority also do not do regular meditation or reflection. One good outlet for stress is undertaking a hobby or other interest, but only 45% of advisers do this regularly. Also not nearly enough are debriefing with others about work issues. Once again, advisers have a lot of room for improvement in the area of using recovery in their personal lives to boost their mental health and wellbeing.

## Boundary strength

The ability to separate work from home life is referred to as boundary strength. People with strong boundaries tend to focus on work at work and focus on home at home.

Table 16 below shows the scores for work boundary strength. One of the questions relates to personal time, which is a strong indicator of the sense of separation.

**Table 16: Responses to boundary strength questions**

Question	Agree or strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
Work at home in non-work hours	68.82%	12.10%	19.07%
Receive work calls in non-work hours	68.22%	12.22%	19.56%
My personal time is my own	39.37%	24.69%	35.94%
Often work after hours	71.48%	15.30%	13.22%
Deal with work issues in non-work time	74.2%	12.35%	13.44%

As can be seen in Table 16, boundary strength is fairly low as most advisers do work after hours at home and only 39% think that their personal time is their own.

## Psychological capital

Psychological capital consists of four sub-scales of confidence/efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism. Our research shows that psychological capital is a very strong predictor of success at work. Figure 7 outlines Financial Advisers' average scores on a 1 to 6 scale and compares Advisers with other groups.

**Figure 7: Comparison of scores on psychological capital with other groups**



As can be seen in Figure 7, advisers had the lowest score of all of these groups. When looking at the adviser’s data, confidence was the highest score with 4.55, but hope and resilience were 4.31 and optimism was only 4.17. The latter three scores may be a direct result of the current regulatory environment for the industry.

## Adaptive performance

People who are adaptable with work situations can often respond better to work crises and other complex scenarios. Our research shows that adaptive performance is highly related to success and achievement. Table 17 below shows a comparison of adaptive performance scores on a 1 to 5 scale with other groups.

**Table 17: Comparison of scores on adaptive performance with other groups**

Group	Financial Advisers	Mortgage lenders	Utility company	Property staff	Retail staff
Score	3.78	4.39	4.24	4.34	4.17

The lowest score is for the adviser group, which shows a lower ability to be able to adapt to complex and difficult situations. This low score may be the result of the fact that they have to follow so many rules and second guess everything they do. The outcome is that their primary thought is to ensure they stay within the rules or compliance, rather than on how they can innovate and evolve.

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## Demographic differences

This section starts to explore the impact that demographics have on the different measures that we took. In reviewing the data, we have noticed some large differences in the scores of advisers in some demographic variables, but not in others. Overall, we were surprised at how little influence the majority of demographics had on the outcomes. This section reviews these differences. The appendix contains the detailed analysis for the demographics.

### Education

When we considered advisers' level of education (secondary school, diploma, degree, post grad) there are not many measurements that are significantly affected by a person's level of education. For those that do show an impact, the relationship is not very strong. The following are the trends that we observed:

- Advisers with a lower level of education are less involved in industry support, have higher levels of alcohol intake to relieve stress, are more impacted by stress.
- In contrast advisers with higher levels of education tend to experience higher flow at work, better at recovery at home, higher psychological capital, are less likely to resist change and are more likely to be innovative.

### Age

Our analysis showed that age has no significant impact on any of the factors that we measured. Often in this profession there is narrative about how older people are less embracing of change or are less innovative. This data shows there is no basis to this narrative.

### Gender

When we looked at gender there was very little variation between male and female advisers in most of the measures we took. However, we did note the following:

- Women are engaging in more industry support (13% higher than men).
- Women are in much higher flow at work (8% higher than men).
- Women are more accepting of change (8% higher than men).
- Women are pursuing more self-development opportunities (9% higher than men).

The result shows that greater gender diversity is important for the industry as women bring some proactive habits that help the industry improve.

### FASEA Status

The status of FASEA qualifications was a significant factor in the results. We found the following trends:

- Fully qualified advisers have higher work-family balance, have less stress and less stressful issues, higher wellbeing, less impact of stress and do much more self-development.
- Work overload is higher for advisers not yet qualified.

These results show that there are benefits to being proactive and taking early action to meet the education standards imposed on advisers.

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## Intention to continue as a Financial Adviser

One factor that did have an impact on many of the measurements was if they intended to continue in the industry as Financial Advisers. Those that were continuing saw the following benefits:

- Higher work-family balance.
- Higher industry support.
- Higher flow at work.
- Lower stress and a much lower impact of work stress.
- Higher Psychological capital.
- Lower indication of mental health problems.

These results may be due to the fact that people staying in the industry have purpose, a clear goal to work towards and have certainty about their future.

## Working hours

We did notice some relationship between working hours and some of the measurements in the study.

- As you would expect advisers with longer working hours have more stress, higher work overload, less work-family balance, less boundary strength, more stressful issues and less recovery at home and at work.
- However, advisers with longer working hours also have higher flow, are less likely to work to a rigid routine and resist change, are more innovative, have higher self-development and are more adaptive at work.
- Advisers with standard working hours have higher work-family balance, less stress, less reliance on alcohol, higher wellbeing, less impact of stress, higher psychological capital and lower indication of mental health issues.
- Advisers with very low working hours have lower flow, higher reliance on alcohol, low wellbeing, higher impact of stress, lower psychological capital, are more likely to resist change, have lower adaptive performance, lower innovation, lower self-development and a higher indication of mental health issues (as this group is a small sample, these observations should be viewed with caution).

Overall, findings suggest that from a wellbeing perspective, advisers should aim to work 35 – 40 hours per week.

## Length of experience

When it came to length of experience in the industry, it does not seem to have a significant impact on most of the measurements we took. However, the following trends were observed:

- Mental health indication shows that advisers with less experience are at higher risk of mental health issues than those with longer years of experience.
- Industry support is higher for those with less experience, suggesting that they are reaching out for help to counteract their lack of experience.
- Flow results are higher for those with less experience. This is probably due to the fact that the challenge is greater for them and they are having to bring a higher level of skill to meet that challenge.

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## State grouping

In terms of location regarding state, the following observations can be made:

- SA/NT have higher work-family balance, boundary strength, wellbeing and psychological capital.
- WA have higher overload, higher stress, higher stressful issues and higher impact of stress.
- WA have lower work-family balance, lower boundary strength and lower experience of flow.
- VIC/TAS have higher recovery at work and at home.
- QLD have lower recovery at work, higher alcohol use, lower wellbeing and higher indication of mental health issues.
- NSW/ACT has higher flow, lower use of alcohol and lower recovery at home.

Looking at the results, the significant trend is that stress for people in WA is significantly higher than the other states. There doesn't seem to be a readily available explanation for this. Further research needs to be done to understand this finding.

## Location – Capital city or regional/rural areas

In terms of location whether advisers are in a city or rural region has no bearing on any of the measurements.

## Work role

When we looked at work role (work role definitions can be found on page 23, we can see that there are some significant differences in many of the measurements. The following observations are made:

- Risk specialists have higher Work-Family Balance, higher Psychological Capital, lower Work Overload, lower Stress, lower Alcohol intake, lower Impact of stress and lower indication of Mental Health issues.
- Self-employed advisers have lower Boundary Strength but higher Innovation.
- Practice owners have higher Flow, higher Wellbeing and have less routine and more open to change.
- Holistic advisers have higher Boundary Strength, seek higher Industry Support and have higher self-development.
- Advisers have lower Work-Family Balance, lower Wellbeing, lower Psychological Capital, and lower Innovation.
- Advisers also have higher Work Overload, higher Stress and Impact of stress, higher Alcohol intake, higher indication of Mental Health issues and are more likely to resist change.

The overall trend is that advisers scored worse on most measures compared to other work roles.

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## Company Type

We divided company type into the following categories:

**Aligned (self-employed):** qualified Financial Adviser who works in an organisation that is partly owned by or tied exclusively to a parent institution but is not an employee of that organisation.

**Institution (e.g. Bank):** qualified Financial Adviser who works as an employee in an organisation that is partly owned by or tied exclusively to a parent institution.

**Private – 1 adviser:** qualified Financial Adviser who works in an organisation that is privately owned, is the only adviser in that organisation and is not an employee of that organisation.

**Private – 2 to 5 advisers:** qualified Financial Adviser who works in an organisation that is privately owned, is one of up to 5 advisers in that organisation and is not an employee of that organisation.

**Private – 6 to 30 advisers:** qualified Financial Adviser who works in an organisation that is privately owned, is one of between 6 and 30 advisers in that organisation and is not an employee of that organisation.

**Private – 31 to 100 advisers:** qualified Financial Adviser who works in an organisation that is privately owned, is one of between 31 and 100 advisers in that organisation and is not an employee of that organisation.

**Private – 101 to 200 advisers:** qualified Financial Adviser who works in an organisation that is privately owned, is one of between 101 and 200 advisers in that organisation and is not an employee of that organisation.

**Private - more than 200 advisers:** qualified Financial Adviser who works in an organisation that is privately owned, is one of over 200 advisers in that organisation and is not an employee of that organisation.

When we looked at company type, the following observations could be made:

- Aligned advisers have lower recovery at home and higher stressful issues.
- Institutional advisers have higher boundary strength, resistance to change and alcohol use, but lower wellbeing, psychological capital, innovation, self-development, work-family balance and mental health.
- Private with one adviser have lower boundary strength, but higher innovation.
- Private with two to four advisers have lower overload, lower stress, lower impact of stress and higher adaptive performance and psychological capital.
- Private with five to 30 advisers have higher work-family balance, Industry support, flow, recovery at work and home, wellbeing, psychological capital and self-development.
- Private with five to 30 advisers have lower Stressful issues, lower alcohol intake, lower indication of mental health issues, and lower resistance to change.
- Private with 31 plus advisers have lower Industry support, lower flow, lower recovery at work and lower adaptive performance, but higher overload and higher impact of stress.

The group that seems to be struggling the most are advisers within an institution.

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## Company performance

One factor that did have a significant impact on the measurements is the state of their business. Advisers in a growing business compared to a maintaining or declining business score much higher on just about every measure.

- Growing businesses have much higher work-family balance, higher industry support, much higher flow, much higher recovery at work and home, much higher wellbeing, higher psychological capital than declining businesses.
- Declining businesses have higher work overload, much higher stress, much more stressful issues, use more alcohol, much higher impact of stress, more likely to resist change and much higher indication of mental health issues.

This relationship maybe as a result of the positivity and sense of achievement and progress that people get from seeing that their business is evolving and growing. In contrast when the business is declining it leads to higher levels of stress and a sense of hopelessness.

## Client Engagement

Of all the demographics measured, the one that had the biggest influence on the constructs was how engaged the adviser's clients are.

- Advisers with less engaged clients have less work-family balance, psychological capital and recovery at home, with higher indication of mental health issues and impact of stress.
- Advisers with not engaged clients have less industry support, poorer wellbeing, less adaptive performance, engage in less self-development and innovation, plus have much lower flow, are more likely to resist change and have a higher use of alcohol.
- The only positive for advisers with non-engaged clients is that they have higher boundary strength.
- Advisers with mostly engaged clients have higher work-family balance, receive more industry support, have higher flow at work, higher wellbeing, higher psychological capital, higher innovation and adaptive behaviour, and undertake more self-development. They also have less work overload, less stress and stressful issues and less impact of stress, plus a lower indicator of mental health issues.

# Results - Study 1. Characteristics of the Thrivers.

In Study 1, we surveyed and had Advisers fill out a 7 day diary study and interviewed volunteer Advisers to discover what was working or not working for Advisers. A total of 44 people participated in the research although one of these was not interviewed. Out of 43 of these people interviewed, only four were really struggling, but the majority were really thriving, despite the circumstances in the industry.

As a whole group of 43, the scores on the survey constructs were much higher than in advisers who had completed the general survey and were often the best results we had seen in over ten years of research. Because of their high scores we called Advisers the 'Thrivers'. We will now explore the differences between the groups and then discover what made the volunteer group comparatively so positive. Tables 18 and 19 outline the demographics of this group.

**Table 18: Demographics of the Study 1 group (Thrivers)**

Gender	Number	Percentage	Experience	Number	Percentage
Male	32	70.45	0-2 years	0	0
Female	12	29.55	3-5 years	3	6.82
			6-10 years	5	11.36
			11-15 years	16	36.36
			16-20 years	8	18.18
			21+ years	12	27.27
Age	Number	Percentage	Education	Number	Percentage
Up to 29 years	2	4.55	Secondary	0	0
30-39 years	13	29.55	Cert/Diploma	6	13.64
40-49 years	17	38.64	Degree	13	29.55
50-59 years	9	20.45	Post-graduate	25	56.82
60+ years	3	6.82			
Region	Number	Percentage	FASEA status	Number	Percentage
NSW/ACT	19	43.18	Fully qualified	21	47.73
Qld	8	18.18	Exam passed	13	29.55
SA/NT	4	9.09	Not yet qualified	10	22.73
Vic/Tas	10	22.73	No intention	0	
WA	3	6.82			
Working hours	Number	Percentage	Intention	Number	Percentage
Under 20 week	0	0	Continue as adviser	43	97.73
20-34 hours	1	2.27	Continue but not adv.	1	2.27
35-40 hours	11	25.00	Try other work	0	0
41-49 hours	15	34.09	Retire or long break	0	0
50+ hours	17	38.64			
Capital or not	Number	Percentage			
Capital city	32	72.73			
Rural/regional	12	27.27			

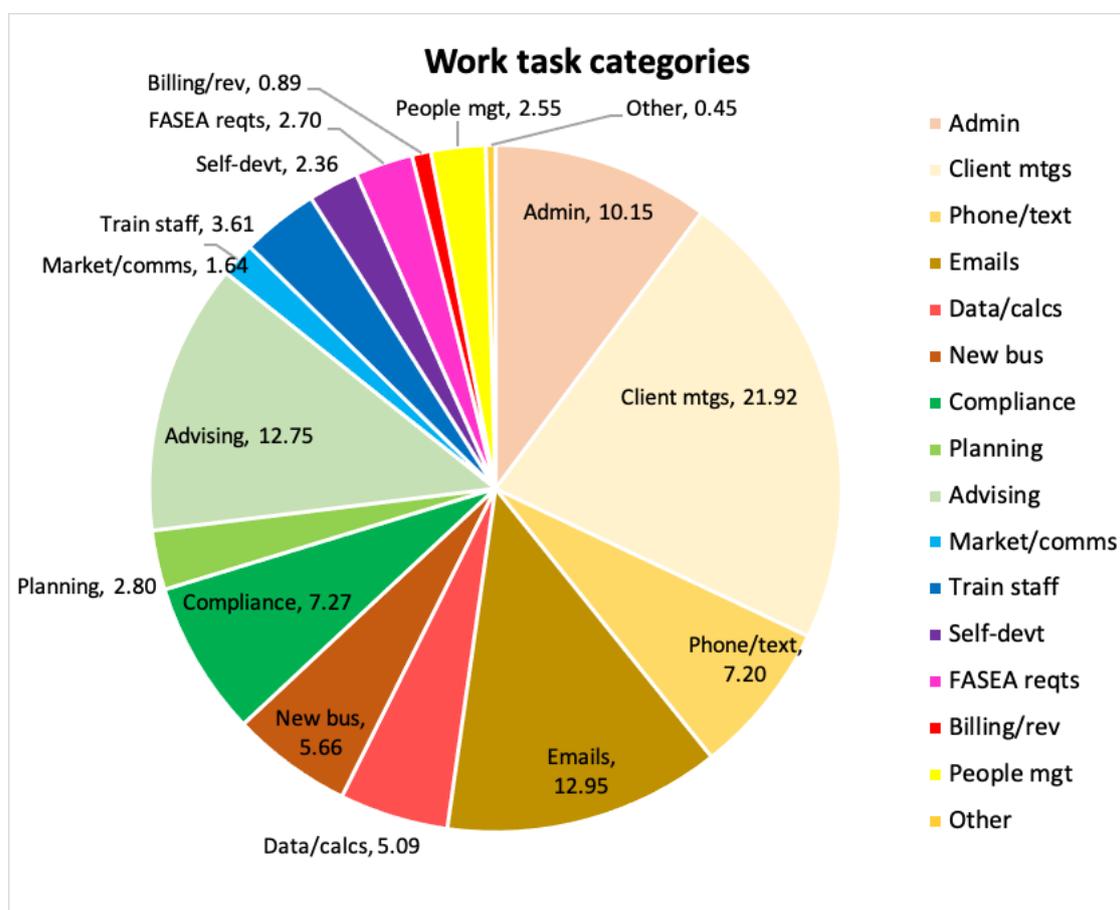
**Table 19: Business demographic of the Study 1 group (Thrivers)**

Role			Employed		
Role	Number	Percentage	Employed	Number	Percentage
Accountant	0	0	Aligned	11	25.00
Adviser	4	9.09	Institution	0	0
Holistic adviser	14	31.82	Private 1 adviser	12	27.27
Practice owner	6	13.64	Private 2-5 advisers	13	29.55
Risk specialist	8	18.18	Private 6-30 advisers	5	11.36
Self-employed	11	25.00	Private 31-99 advisers	1	2.27
Other	1	2.27	Private 100-199 advisers	1	2.27
			Private 200 + advisers	1	2.27
Business status			Client status		
Business status	Number	Percentage	Client status	Number	Percentage
Exiting/transition	1	2.27	Mostly engaged	27	61.36
Declining	4	9.09	More engaged than not	7	15.91
Maintaining	10	22.73	Similar engaged and not	9	20.45
Growing	29	65.91	More not engaged	1	2.27
Unsure	0	0	Mostly not engaged	0	0

## Work task breakup in Study 1 and comparison between Study 1 and Study 2

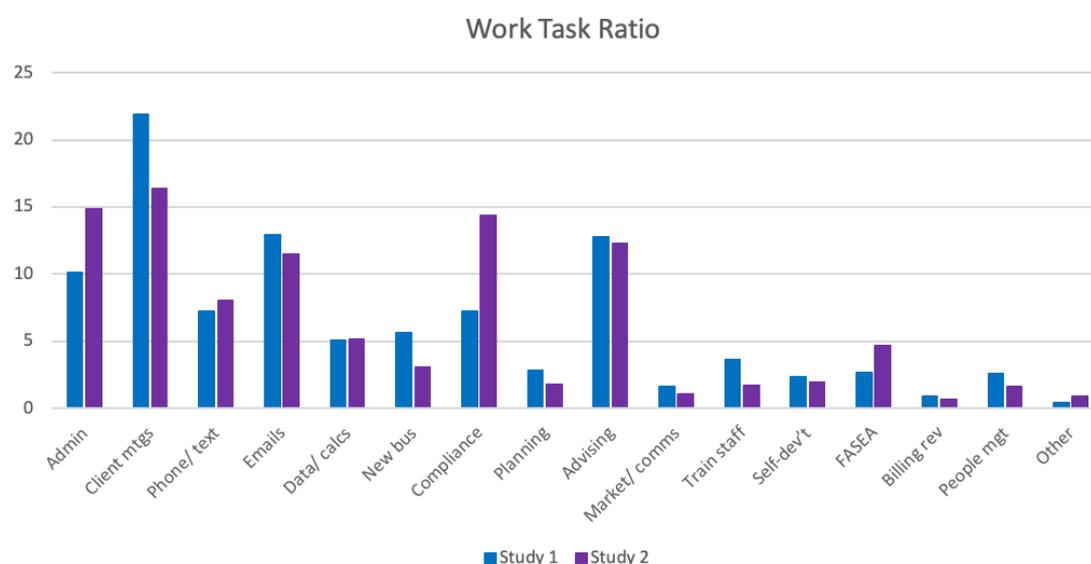
The work task breakup for the 44 Financial Advisers in Study 1 is shown in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Work task allocation for Study 1 participants**



A comparison between Study 1 (44 advisers) and Study 2 (709 advisers) is shown below in Figure 9. This data has come from the adviser's estimations of what percentage of their time is spent in each task. This was completed in the baseline survey. Although many of the task ratios are quite similar, the major difference is that the Study 1 participants were involved in less administration (43% less) and less compliance activity (97% less) and were able to devote more time to client meetings (34% more), new business (83% more), and developing themselves and others.

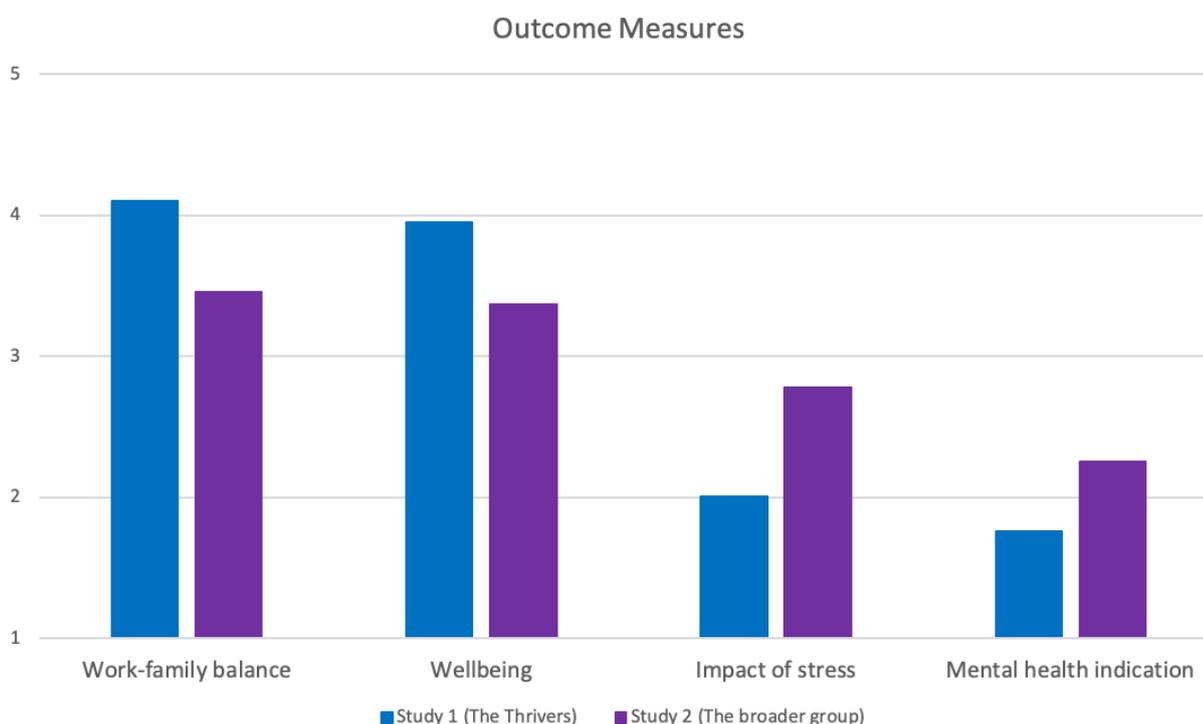
**Figure 9: Comparison of Study 1 and Study 2 work task ratios**



## Comparison of constructs between Study 1 and Study 2

The Study 1 group had significant differences in many constructs from the Study 2 general group. A comparison of outcome measures is shown in Figure 10, where it illustrates that the Study 1 participants had significantly higher scores on work-family balance and wellbeing and a moderately higher score of flow at work. Importantly, the impact of stress of work was considerably lower for Study 1 participants and their indication of potential Mental Health problems (a high score indicates worse mental health) was also much lower.

**Figure 10: Comparison of outcome measures**



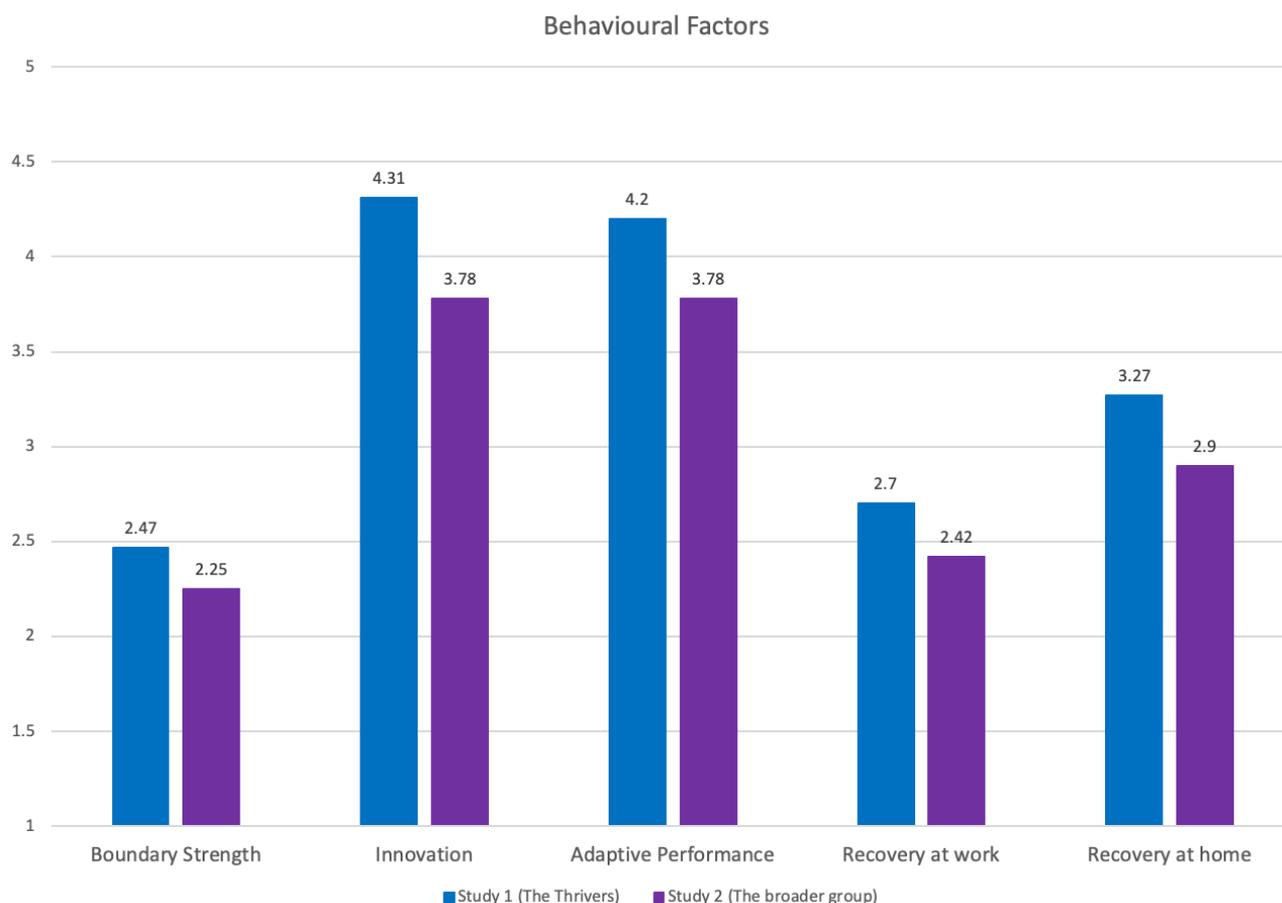
In relation to the stressors, stress itself and alcohol use in response to stress noted in Table 20, Study 1 participants (Thrivers) scored lower on all of these indicators, whilst the stressful issues of Study 1 participants was only 10.5% lower, their perceived stress had a significantly lower score by 17.1% than Study 2 participants.

**Table 20: Comparison of work stressors and stress**

	Stressful issues	Work overload	Alcohol use	Stress
Study 1	2.88	3.56	2.32	3.27
Study 2	3.22	4.08	2.64	3.94
% difference	-10.5%	-12.7%	-12.1%	-17.1%

Behavioural factors, i.e. things an adviser might do that will moderate the impact of stressors, showed a difference between Study 1 and Study 2. As noted in Figure 11, Study 1 participants scored higher on active recovery, adapting to work situations, being innovative at work and creating boundaries between work and home.

**Figure 11: Comparison of behavioural factors**



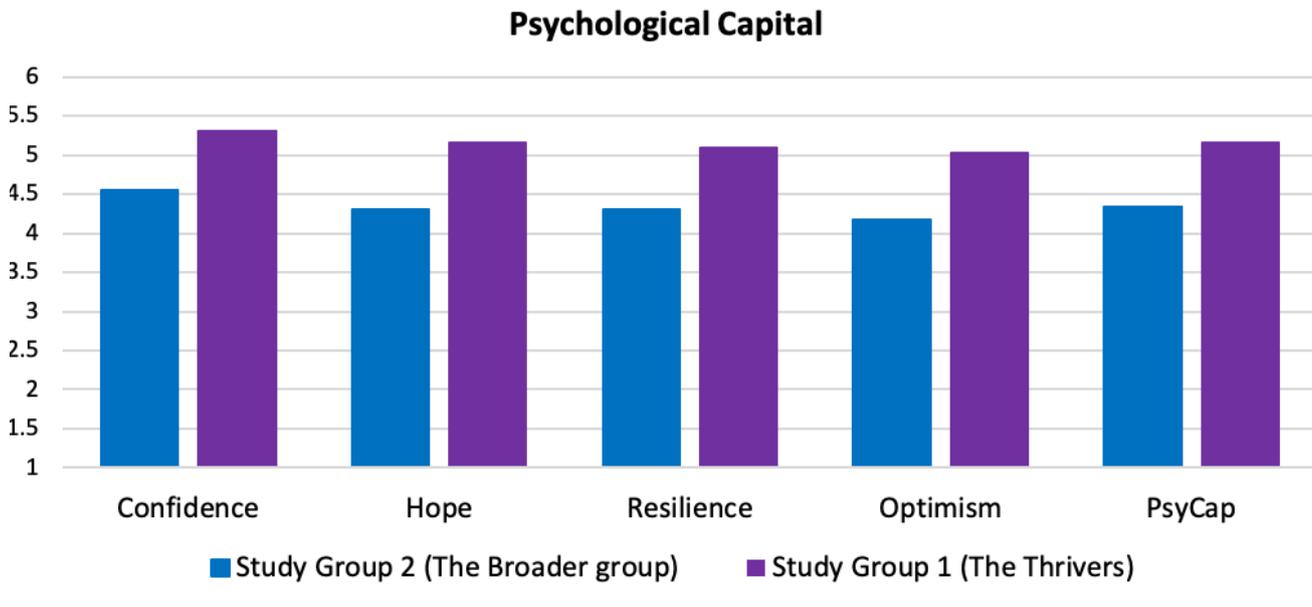
The final comparison is in relation to factors related to support and attitude towards work, including psychological factors. As can be seen in Table 21, Study 1 participants engaged in a much higher level of industry support, were more likely to engage in self-development, were less resistant and more accepting of change and possessed a higher level of psychological capital (confidence/efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism).

**Table 21: Comparison of attitude and support factors**

	Self-development	Industry support	Psychological capital	Change resistance
Study 1	4.05	2.26	5.15	2.60
Study 2	3.58	1.87	4.34	3.04
% difference	13.1%	21.2%	18.7%	-14.5%

As noted in the comments relating to the tables in this section, Study 1 participants had stronger scores in all constructs when compared to Study 2 participants. A breakdown in the psychological capital scores shown in Figure 12 (broken down into four components) shows that confidence at work is the highest scored component for both groups, with optimism the lowest scored component. As you can see the Thrivers scored higher than the broader group on all aspects of Psychological Capital.

**Figure 12: Comparison of psychological capital components**



In the interviews, we were able to uncover some of the factors involved in the gap between these scores.

## Study 2 - Interview outcomes and diary study results

We interviewed 43 advisers late in 2020. The interviewees had previously completed the baseline survey and participated in a 7 day diary study. A copy of their survey and diary study results was sent to each Financial Adviser for discussion at the interview.

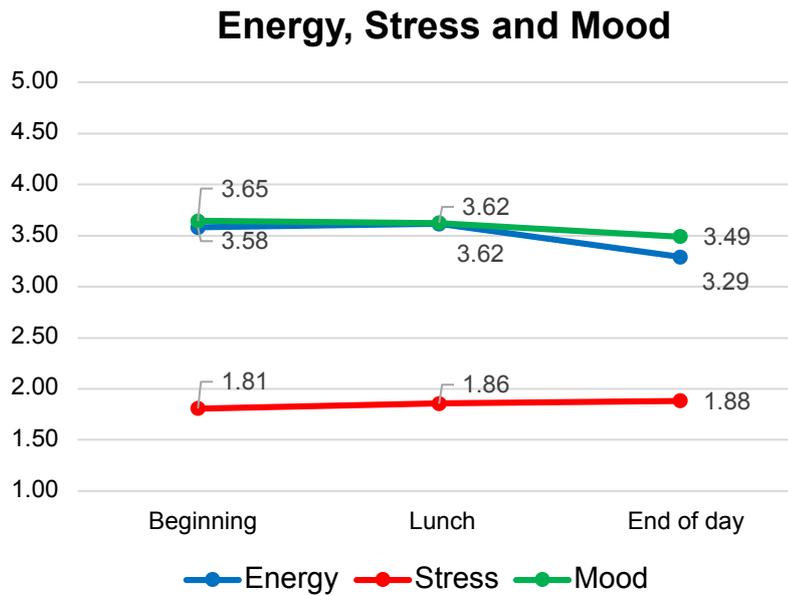
The diary study measured energy, stress and mood, plus flow experience, work tasks and recovery at three points in the day:

1. Beginning of the day
2. Lunch time
3. End of the normal workday

Financial Advisers completed up to a total of 21 diary entries over a seven calendar day timeframe. This was to make sure all out-of-hours work was recorded. Energy, stress and mood were time specific, but work tasks, recovery and flow were reflective of the preceding work hours.

In relation to energy, stress and mood, Figure 13 shows their distribution over the day.

Figure 13: Energy, Stress and Mood of diary study participants

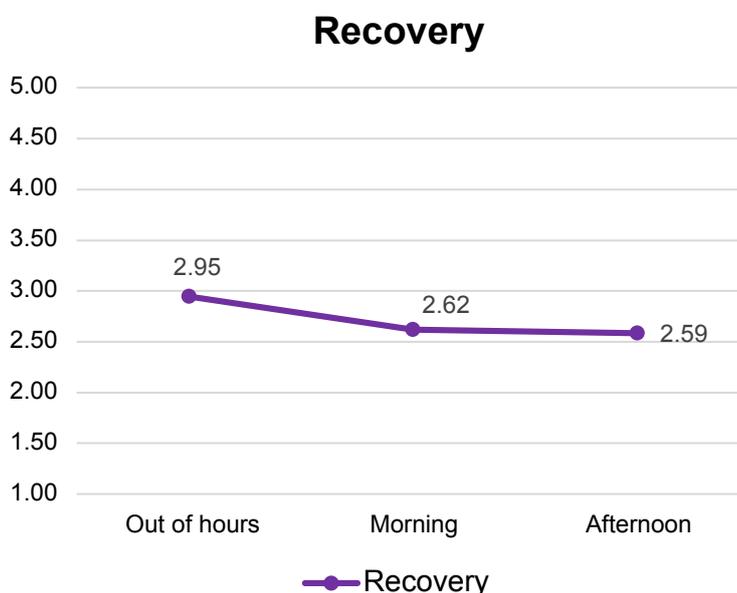


As is clear in Figure 13, energy starts reasonably high in the morning (3.56, which is between ‘moderate energy’ and ‘moderately high energy’) but declines by the end of the workday to 3.29. Meanwhile, mood only declined slightly during the day from 3.65 to 3.49 (a score of 3 is ‘mixed, but positive’, whereas a score of 4 is ‘calm or relaxed’ and 5 is ‘energetic or enthusiastic’). What is strongly noteworthy in Figure 13 is the low stress scores, where Financial Advisers recorded low stress on average throughout the day. A score of 2 is ‘low stress’ and 1 is ‘no stress’.

What we have seen in this and in previous research, is that the day-to-day experience of stress is often quite low, but the overall perception of stress at work is much higher when reflecting on overall work experience. This is because stress can be accumulative for many people unless they engage in effective recovery and prevention measures.

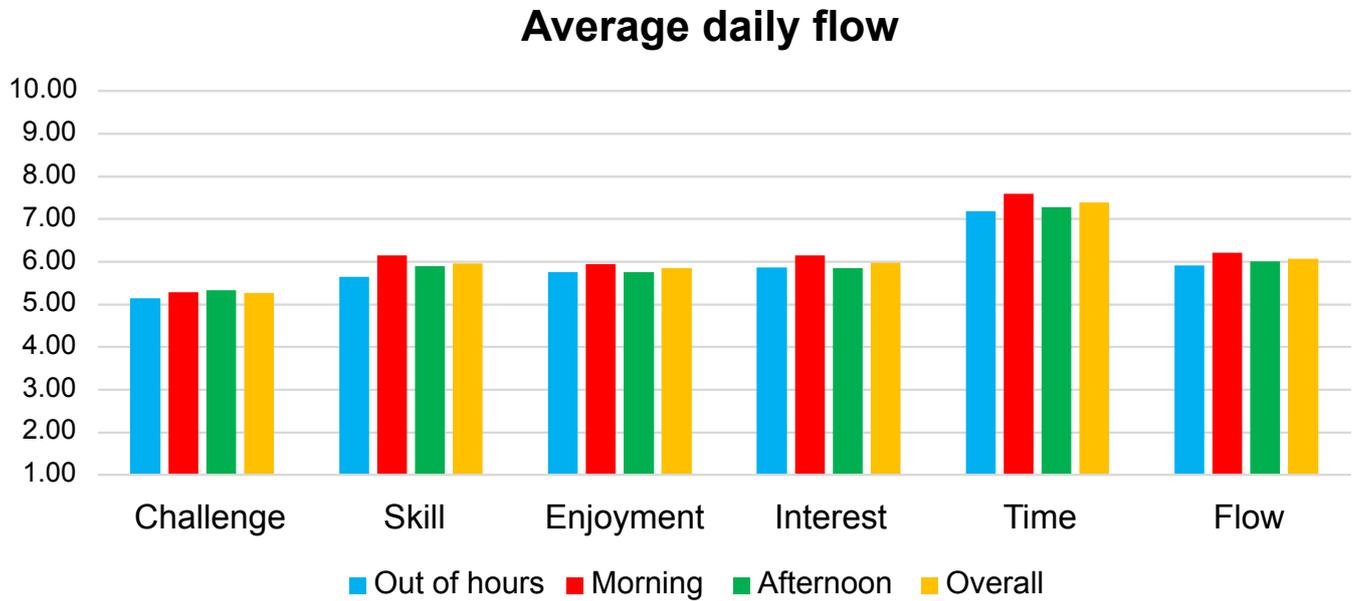
In Figure 14, we show the recovery experiences noted in the diary study. Recovery is fairly low at work (2.62 and 2.59), but higher out of normal work hours (2.95). A score of 2 relates to one low-grade recovery activity (e.g. debriefing or social media). A score of 3 relates to more than one low-grade activity. Anything higher than that involves some form of physical exercise or mindfulness/relaxation. What this means is that advisers were doing infrequent rather than regular recovery activities outside of work. Overall recovery for advisers is more of an ad hoc activity rather than something that is planned and strategic, even for this Thriving group.

Figure 14: Recovery at work and home of study participants



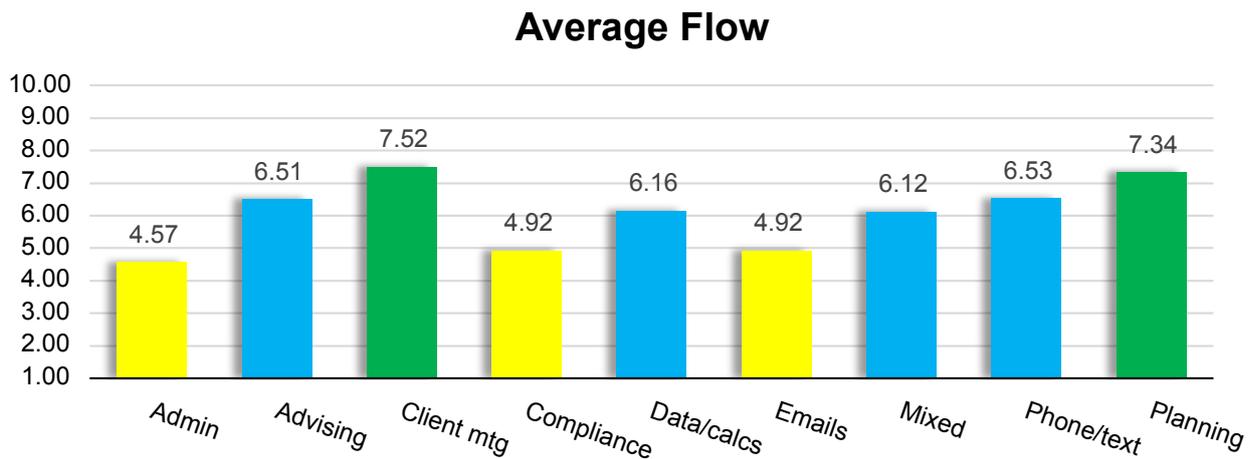
We also measured the flow experience of Financial Advisers and this is shown in Figure 15.

**Figure 15: Flow experience of Study 1 participants**



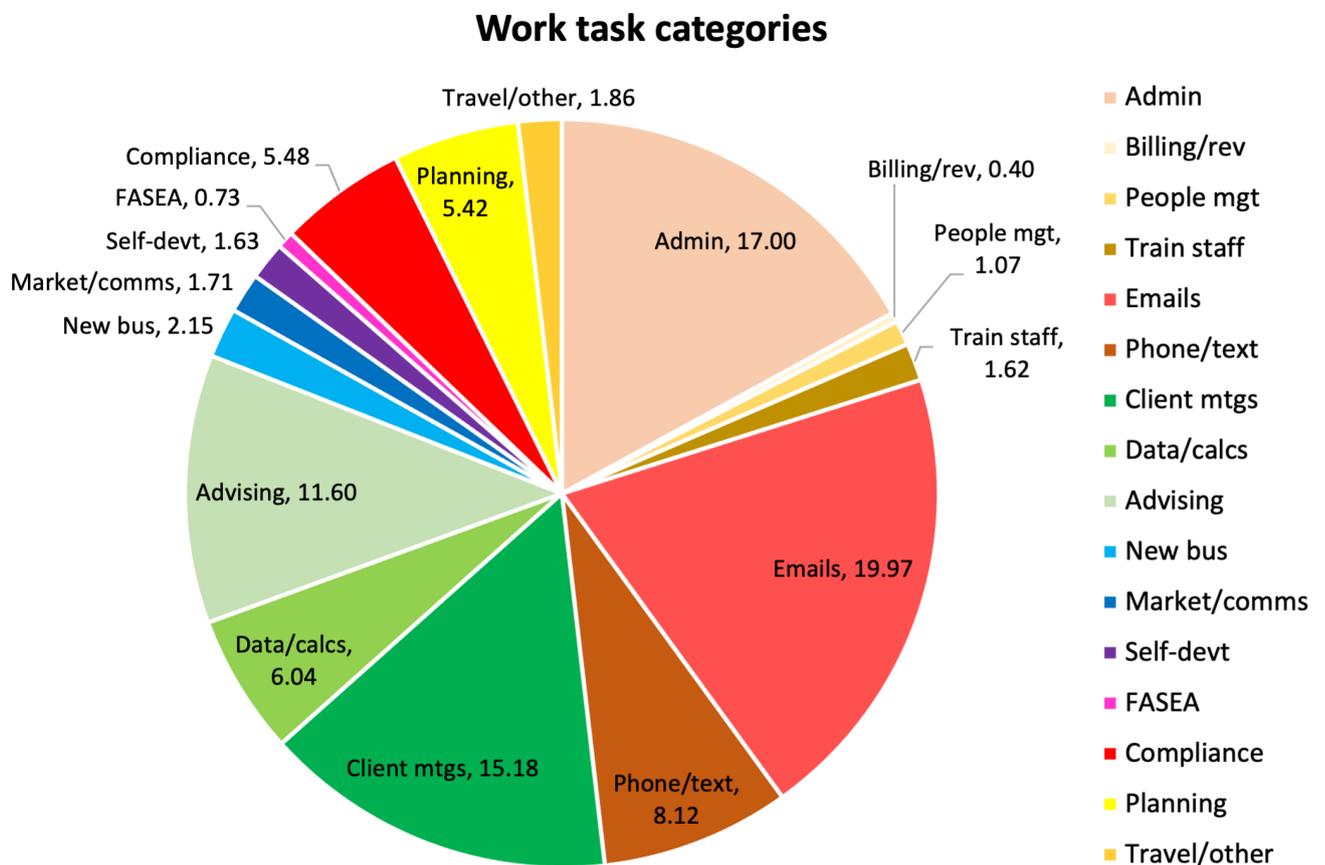
From Figure 15, we can see that the flow experience at work is not that high with Study 1 participants. Even though they rated flow 7.48 in the baseline survey, the average in the diary study, where they rate it in the moment, was only 6.08. To understand the reasons behind this, we calculated the flow experience against specific work tasks and found that flow varied significantly between work tasks. As can be seen in Figure 16, working with clients and planning/strategy was much higher than administration, compliance and email tasks. The low flow scores are due to the large amount of time they spend in tasks that drain their energy and disengage them. This is quite normal as we have discovered in other similar studies. Professional people, when they are asked about their overall job experience, rate this on the basis of the more important and engaging parts of their role. When they fill in the diary study, they consider each aspect of their role and that is where the rating tends to drop.

Figure 16: Average flow by task for Study 1 participants



Interestingly, Study 1 participants also underrated the time they spent in administration. The split of work tasks from the diary study is shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Diary study split of work for Study 1 participants



When comparing these Financial Advisers' perception of the ratios of their work tasks in the baseline survey to the actual tasks they recorded in the diary study, there is a significant difference. This is detailed in Table 22, where client meetings, new business, FASEA and compliance were considered to be higher than actually recorded in the diary study. Conversely, emails and administration tasks were perceived to be at a lower ratio than actually recorded in the diary study. We have noticed this trend in other professional groups as well, with both school principals and big 4 partners underestimating administration work and overestimating higher order work.

**Table 22: Comparison of Study 1 participant diary study and survey work task ratios**

	<b>Admin</b>	<b>Client mtgs</b>	<b>Phone/text</b>	<b>Emails</b>	<b>Data/calcs</b>	<b>New bus</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	<b>Planning</b>
Survey	10.15	21.92	7.20	12.95	5.09	5.66	7.27	2.80
Diary	17.00	15.18	8.12	19.97	6.04	2.15	5.48	5.42
	<b>Advising</b>	<b>Market/comms</b>	<b>Train staff</b>	<b>Self-dev't</b>	<b>FASEA</b>	<b>Billing rev</b>	<b>People mgt</b>	<b>Other</b>
Survey	12.75	1.64	3.61	2.36	2.70	0.89	2.55	0.45
Diary	11.60	1.71	1.62	1.63	0.73	0.40	5.48	1.86

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## Interview Comments.

Interviews were coded using NVivo software. The four main categories where significant time was recorded involved the time spent discussing the changes and new education requirements, followed by stress at work, what advisers were doing to recover and their experience of flow at work. This was followed by discussion on support sources, well-being, energy at work and work-family issues. Other areas noted in the chart include adaptability, workload issues, self-developed strategies and approaches, psychological capital, mood, plus their future intentions.

Some of the comments are included in the next few sections below to illustrate aspects of these discussions.

### Attitude about change

Although interviewees (Thrivers) had mixed views about change, most were unhappy with the change but they are accepting that it was their new reality and focused on constructive behaviours. The following statements are samples of advisers' comments about their attitude towards the change.

*"I try to have a positive outlook about it. Changes had to happen. The industry was not going in the direction it should have, and changes have to happen. Are all the changes right or correct, or do I agree with all of them? No. However, I can't change that as an individual, and focus on what I can control. All I do, as a manager, is go, "Okay. Well, how do I change the business?"*

*"There's no point fighting and becoming toxic and carrying on over all the things that aren't going to change. So, we best adapt and bring that into our lives and make them work for us."*

*"Personally, for me, the last three to four years have been nothing but changes. Really drastic changes. Look, to be honest with you, keeping on with the keeping on. What do you do, right? If you obsess about this thing, you'll do it. You can't discover anything, you have to accept the changes, I guess... Be a part of the change, rather than being the stickler, and not budging. You've got to accept new ideas, you've got to understand 'what is the purpose?' And obviously people with you move forward as well. It's not necessarily agreeing with it but determining the priority of things, with all these changes happening, especially exams and all those kinds. We know where the future of the industry's heading."*

*"There's been lots of change in the industry over the last 10 years, and so you've just got to embrace it. That's probably where I've looked at that, I guess."*

*"We don't complain because we're in that caring mode of just, all right, well, this is the new environment, we have to suck it up and just keep working because the alternative is you have to leave the profession, that's the alternative."*

*"I think my first reaction is normally that, "Oh no, what's changing now?" But then when you sort of think about it, change is inevitable and it's really a case of having to manage and cope with it. So you can kick and scream and that might help initially because it gets it out of your system, and then the reality sinks in that it's actually happening. So I think some of that, it helps, in a way, because it sort of gets it out of your system that, "This is what's happening. I have to deal with it." Then I think the initial reaction, it's maybe not anger, maybe that's a bit harsh, but then after that, it's really a case of, well, change is inevitable and just get on with managing."*

*"This adviser was unhappy about it, but got on with it."*

*"You asked me about those exams and study and I indicated that I didn't want to do it or resented doing it and I felt begrudged because it cost 1,000s of dollars. But also it was black and white, you do it or you don't. And while you're given five years to do it I went in early. I wrote the board exam on the second month it was available just to get it done. I recognized the fact that... And that's a sort of change management and adaptive attitude, but I wasn't happy about it."*

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In relation to the changes in the industry, one interviewee noted:

*“It just seems to be a relentless ... You get over one change there’s always another one coming around the corner. Certainly, as I look back this year with our annual advice agreements, each in their own is a pretty big exercise. But just to have one after the other and continue and the other stuff as well. Yeah. It does start to, yeah, play on you a little bit...”*

Another stated:

*“I know what has to be done for a compliance file, but because they keep changing it I just need to continuously follow-up and ensure that’s in the files and things like that. So that’s what I mean by that being stressful... they’ve made a few changes this current year, and I suppose that has added to the stress. So essentially, they’ve introduced the mandatory use of software, which previously wasn’t the case.”*

One specialist noted:

*“Now the superannuation guarantees have gone pretty much haywire. Less than 5,000 is the premium for like six, seven, eight, 9,000. How are they going to fund it? So in effect, what happens is this, those policies end up cancelling, I end up getting cancellations, which affects my renewal, because I don’t know what to plan, how to plan, when is the next cancellation coming? It obviously adds a lot of stress and the sense that private clients are not covered.”*

Another adviser reported on the switch away from new business plus study requirements:

*“Basically, without doing new business, that’s how I’ve previously got a lot of my bonuses and things, based on new business levels and so forth. So, with that dropping away, which there has been a change in how we need to get paid as well. So that’s stressful. And the future education requirements, so I still need to do six units of study.”*

Another adviser discussed the licence increases by some providers:

*“I really believe in income protection so much, so it’s really trying to get clients to keep it going, but these massive increases, which are disgusting, [name of company] especially... That’s all you’re doing now, for the last, really, couple of years, is just trying to reorganize what people have got and change it up more than being able to write new business and get new clients. So, it makes it really hard.”*

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## Adaptability

In one of the positive aspects of the interview, Financial Advisers relate to their ability to adapt to the changing circumstances of their work environment. The following comments reflect this, with one adviser noting:

*“I do understand everyone’s got to be adaptive and change. And from a business perspective, I’m happy to always look at different ways of doing things better. Providing though that it doesn’t, you could change one aspect of something to make it better, but it could stuff everything else up which is working fine. And that’s where I see doing somethings that worked really well, keeping that. And then even if you move them or adjust them slightly to bring in new things, I’m very open to.”*

Another adviser noted:

*“So for us, we’ve adapted and taken a proactive view on managing that using technology, making sure we’ve got the right people doing the right job at the right time, and that sort of stuff. So for me, you can’t expect to change an industry and not have some challenges along the way so everybody has to change accordingly. So whether that’s the way they manage their day, the roles that they’re doing or bringing other people in to specialize, you just got to keep adapting.”*

## Recovery

Many of the interview Financial Advisers were involved in regular recovery activities, which they found important to relieve some of the stresses of the job and to enable more energy and focus at work.

One adviser stated:

*“You just sometimes just need just to switch off just so you can refocus. Otherwise, I find that if I’m doing the same thing and I don’t have a break, that’s when you miss something. It’s sometimes nice to switch off and then come back to it and look at it with fresh eyes.”*

Another adviser mentions three different aspects of recovery – exercise, debriefing and hobby or alternate pleasurable activity:

*“Walking, exercise is really good, so having a bit of that me time. Cooking is really good for me as well, because I feel like it’s a creative outlet to just do something different than being in front of the computer. And I find that working from home, if I can work from home twice a week, it really helps reset me because then I can actually do those things. I can start with a longer walk in the morning and then in between my workday, I can actually start cooking something. So that helps me with breaking up how the week goes. Either that, or if I’m really feeling down emotionally with challenges that are happening at work, I will talk to one of my mentors or a peer that I’m close to and just have a bit of a debrief. And usually after that venting process, I feel better.”*

Another adviser finds exercise really important:

*“For me, is a massive thing. So, I have to like get out and go for a run in the morning. And if I don’t, worst-case scenario I’ll go for a walk. But if I don’t do that, it just, it sets up my day badly from the start. And I just, yeah... Yeah, exercise for me is a big thing. And sometimes I don’t really want to drag myself out of bed, but I’m like, I’ve just got to, because otherwise I’ll be stressed out for the day.”*

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One of the recommended recovery techniques is mindfulness, which one adviser finds important each evening:

*“I usually do it for about a 10, 15 minutes every night just before bed, just do a bit of a breathing exercise. At this stage just sort of doing it at night time, but I hope to bring it into the morning routine as well.”*

The regularity of recovery is important, as noted by another adviser:

*“It’s just a matter of just keep checking in with myself, go for a walk, breathe. And just reminding that I can only do so much, you know. Just bringing that back to the front of mind and just keep going. Just block out the noise and just focus on what is at hand and then move on.”*

## Support

An important aspect of enabling a sustainable career as an adviser is to seek and obtain support when required. One adviser noted:

*“I have a business coach I’ve used for a number of years now. They help me just bounce different ideas. Sometimes I’ve always run my business with the motto, “I don’t know what I don’t know.” And he’s had plenty of experience.”*

Others noted the importance of peers:

*“We had a group of us, we’re all similar age and all similar situation in our business, just caught up for a quick bite to eat and a beer on Friday and just have a chat about what’s happening and what’s going on and are you facing similar issues?”*

*“I can talk to peers easily, I find that I don’t have a lot of support within the office that I work at, I do have one or two advisers that I’m close to and my boss.”*

Another noted support through LinkedIn:

*“So, I meet a lot of people through LinkedIn because I post content that lets other people know the kind of advice I have. So, I find quite a lot of like-minded people within the industry, so it’s quite easy to get support.”*

Others have found mentoring helpful:

*“I have a mentor as well. Who’s a retired financial planner, who ran the financial planning division at an accounting firm, which is what I’m doing.”*

*“I’ve got colleagues. I’ve got a good mate of mine that I started financial planning with. He’s been a mentor. He’s the same age as me which is good. And we talk a bit, probably once a month on the phone and have a good chat about things that are coming up in the world of finance and also tipping on top of things. And I’ve been talking to him, because he’s a business owner as well. So, talking about, “Is this the right thing to do now?” And, “What am I going to find initially?” Yeah.”*

Some others didn’t seek industry support:

*“The industry, I don’t seek any support on any level. So as an independent, sole operating licensee, I have little contact with any in the industry, apart from the odd time going to conferences.”*

*“I don’t really get support from the industry.”*

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Others had mixed experiences:

*“So, I was in a group with one of the biggest licensers in Australia and you couldn’t talk to another adviser unless you knew them. If I knew you, I could ring you up and chat but when I first started in the industry, I thought, “Bloody hell. What do I do about John’s case?” and there was nobody you could ask. So, licensing where there’s XY Adviser, you can throw a question up and people will go, “this is how I do it.” That’s good support.”*

*“Even my new much improved licensee isn’t really that supportive. They’re there on a need’s basis, but really just for that technical and compliance support, not really for what I call more values-based conversations.”*

Online forums were supported:

*“The XY Adviser where I came by the offer to do this research, they’re very good, but that’s a bit more impersonal because it’s an online forum thing, so you can’t really meet the people. But again, it’s such a beautiful environment because it’s very non-judgemental and supportive, and what have you.”*

*“I do find that that XY Adviser has been an enormous benefit to the financial adviser community. It has brought together people. And has shown people that they’re not alone. Because a lot of financial advisory businesses are one-man bands.”*

There is some cynicism about support provided by the professional associations and licensees:

*“But there is some level of support, but in reality, if things are going shit, I’m not calling my professional association at all. I’m going to talk to my friends and family about it. Because you talk to people that you’re close to. Within the industry itself, I’ve certainly got colleagues within the industry that I chat to. And there’s a great deal of support that we provided each other. Yeah. But not professional associations.”*

*“The one I don’t get, I feel that there’s no level of support, is the licensee. And industry associations. There’s no level of support. I don’t know why people bother being a member of it. This whole Royal Commission and everything that happened around that. It was just so typical. They did nothing.”*

*“It makes you think some of the other licensees, are they really supporting the advisers when they just shut the doors? But, yeah, so now I’ve got a new licensee. Are they perfect? No. Could they be doing more? Yes. But it is what it is and, yeah, I’ll be reluctant to change.”*

## Correlations

Data constructs from the general survey were correlated using SPSS statistical package. The following tables show both effect size and statistical significance in relationships with construct pairs. Table 23 shows correlation between job demand variables and outcome variables. As expected, both work overload and stressful issues had a strong negative correlation with work-family balance and wellbeing (i.e. if work overload is high, work-family balance is low). Work overload and stressful issues had a strong positive correlation with impact of stress and mental health risk (i.e. if stressful issues are high, mental health risk is also high).

Stress itself is very strongly correlated with all outcome variables in the same direction as the job demand variables.

**Table 23: Correlation of job demand variables, stress and outcome variables**

	Work-family balance	Flow at work	Wellbeing	Impact of stress	Mental health risk indication
Work overload	-0.453***	-0.136***	-0.390***	0.439***	0.396***
Stressful issues	-0.450***	-0.154***	-0.422***	0.500***	0.503***
Stress	-0.528***	-0.255***	-0.534***	0.619***	0.657***

Note: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

In Table 24, we can see the correlations between job resource behaviour variables and the outcome variables. Recovery at work and recovery at home are both positively correlated with Wellbeing and Work-Family balance as well as flow at work. Recovery at work and at home are negatively correlated with Impact of stress, so those advisers who are engaged in higher rates of recovery have a lesser impact of stress and lesser mental health risk. Adaptive performance has a similar relationship with the outcome variables, meaning that people who are able to adapt to change and whatever work throws at them have a lower impact of stress and mental health risk. Also, Boundary Strength which is the ability to separate work and home is related to better Work-Family balance and Wellbeing, as well as reducing the impact of stress and improved Mental Health risk.

**Table 24: Correlation of job resource behaviour variables with outcome variables**

	Work-family balance	Flow at work	Wellbeing	Impact of stress	Mental health risk indication
Recovery at work	0.320***	0.091*	0.307***	-0.239***	-0.244***
Recovery at home	0.394***	0.158***	0.465***	-0.333***	-0.325***
Adaptive performance	0.265***	0.315***	0.388***	-0.149***	-0.282***
Boundary strength	0.391***	-0.071NS	0.227***	-0.307***	-0.281***

Note: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001; NS=Not significant

Table 25 shows the correlations between support and attitude variables and the outcome variables.

**Table 25: Correlation of support and attitude variables with outcome variables**

	Work-family balance	Flow at work	Wellbeing	Impact of stress	Mental health risk indication
Industry support	0.159***	0.247***	0.256***	-0.133***	-0.161***
Psychological capital	0.441***	0.426***	0.619***	-0.474***	-0.617***
Change resistance	-0.048NS	-0.198***	-0.168***	0.170***	0.189***

Note: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001; NS=Not significant

Overall, nearly all the correlations were significant and in the expected positive or negative direction. This indicates a consistent pattern of results for the 709 Financial Advisers. Specifically, advisers who engage heavily in industry support have better balance, flow at work and wellbeing. They also see a reduced impact of stress and reduced mental health risk. Of all the measures that we took, psychological capital seems to have the biggest impact. If advisers have high levels of confidence, hope, optimism and resilience they dramatically improve their work-family balance, flow at work and wellbeing, while dramatically reducing the impact of stress and risk of mental health challenges. Finally, being resistant to change reduces your wellbeing and increases the impact of stress and risk of mental health.

The correlations are important here because they point towards practices, behaviours and attitudes that are associated with lower work stress and are likely to improve the outcome measures. These factors, plus the findings from the interviews are built into our recommendations.

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## Discussion

Obviously, the findings of this research are very alarming and concerning for the industry. When we compared the adviser data to other groups who have stressful and demanding jobs (these included school principals, HR professionals, hospital emergency room staff, partners within professional services firms, collections departments of banks, mortgage lenders and executive leaders in various industries) advisers scored far worse on the majority of measures.

Specifically, they scored worst in the following areas:

- Worst mental health (this also included comparison to the average Australian).
- Worst wellbeing.
- Lowest levels of flow (a high-performance state where you are absorbed in your work).
- Highest stress levels.
- Highest feeling of overload.
- Highest impact of stress on them (in terms of considering leaving the profession, impact on their medical health, negative impact on sleep quality, chance of being overweight, risk of heart disease).
- Lowest rates of incorporating innovation into their work.
- Lowest in psychological capital (a psychological construct made up of resilience, hope, optimism, confidence).
- Lowest in adaptive performance (the ability to respond and adapt to change).
- 2nd lowest levels of work-life balance (school principals were the only group with lower scores).

## State of Adviser wellbeing

The findings of our research lead us to have huge concerns for the sustainability of the profession in Australia. If the wellbeing and mental health of this group doesn't change dramatically, we doubt that there will be a significant number of advisers to serve the financial needs of Australians. Our concerns are based on the following findings.

### Extremely high levels of burnout

73% of advisers were experiencing high levels of burn out from work. In addition, 74% of advisers felt high levels of emotional drain from work. The job is clearly taking a huge toll on them. 83% feel that they have no time and energy, while 51% believe they never have any time to themselves.

### Poor state of health

33% of advisers are seeking medical care to manage their health symptoms caused by the stress of the role. 26% have been told by their doctor they are at high risk of heart disease or stroke. 53% use alcohol to cope with the stress of the job. 61% have poor sleep due to the stress.

### Mental health

67% of advisers experience some level of depression – ranging from 'a little of the time' to 'all the time', (of particular concern 17% of advisers said they were depressed most of the time or all of the time). 60% feel hopeless - from 'a little of the time', to 'all the time'. Only 21% of advisers said their life was close to their ideal, with 93% of them saying they feel tired for no reason, which is often a precursor to more significant mental health issues.

When compared to the average Australian, advisers' mental health is significantly worse. Financial Advisers have a 64% higher chance of being in a moderate mental health risk group, a 51% higher chance of being in a high mental health risk group and an 11% higher chance of being in a very high mental health risk group.

### Staying in the industry

As a result, 42% of advisers are considering leaving the profession due to the stress they experience and a further 17% are unsure if they will stay in the profession.

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## What is causing these alarming results?

We then started to look at the world of Financial Advisers from a more holistic view in an effort to understand what factors are leading to such low levels of wellbeing and mental health. The following are some factors that we can rule out.

### **It's not due to their personal lives**

The vast majority of advisers said they have loving and supportive relationships, a high standard of living and good community relationships.

### **It is not a lack of engagement**

The majority of advisers who filled out the survey are still very engaged in the work and they find it meaningful. Specifically, 84% of advisers said they find meaning and purpose in their work. 72% are growing or maintaining their business. While 88% said they are currently completing or have already met the FASEA qualification.

### **It is not a lack of stimulation**

The data shows that they still find challenge in the job. They believe that they need to bring a high level of skill to successfully complete the job and they have high levels of interest in the job. Finally, they reported that time seems to go very quickly in their day, meaning they get absorbed in their work and they are not bored during their workday. This is not a group who is suffering on a personal level or one that is no longer interested or engaged in their work. However, something is happening that is stripping away their enthusiasm for the role because comparatively, enjoyment of the role is low and 77% of advisers said they felt high levels of frustration at work.

When we examined what was their greatest sources of stress the picture was very clear.

Here are the top four stressors for advisers.

#### 1. Government regulation and compliance demands

82% of advisers said it was highly to very highly stressful, further 11% said it was moderately stressful. Which means that 93% find the regulatory and compliance demands were moderately to very highly stressful.

#### 2. Coping with workload

57% of advisers said it was highly to very highly stressful (comments show this was a result of stressor #1).

#### 3. Trying to meet future education requirements

51% of advisers said it was highly to very highly stressful (once again related to stressor #1).

#### 4. Managing cashflow

48% of advisers said it was highly to very highly stressful (also related to stressor #1 as regulatory shifts affect how they are remunerated).

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The following are some additional factors that are having a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

### **The tank is empty**

Psychological capital is a construct that is made up of confidence/efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism. The measure is incredibly important for work performance, wellbeing and our ability to handle stress and setback. Advisers scored low in this area. This shows that all the change and pressure has worn them down and they have less cognitive resources to call on for future challenges and struggles.

### **Difficulty evolving to suit the environment**

The capacity to be adaptable is critical for any group that is going through a lot of change. Our research shows that adaptive performance is highly related to success and achievement. Once again, Advisers scored far lower on this measure compared to other groups. This low score may be the result of the fact that they have to follow so many rules and second guess everything they do. The outcome is their primary thought is to ensure they stay within the rules or compliance, rather than on how they can innovate and evolve.

### **Can no longer turn off**

There is no longer a barrier between work and home. 72% of advisers said that they do work in personal time and only 39% feel that their personal time is their own.

### **Not growing the business**

Very little time is spent in new business (only 3% of their time). With compliance and admin accounting for 30% of their time, it is incredibly hard for advisers to grow their business when they are being pulled in other directions.

## **Impact of demographics**

In terms of demographics, the majority of them had very little impact on most of the measures we took.

Factors such as level of education, age, length of experience, whether you live in metro or regional areas, had very little impact. We did notice some variation when it came to gender with women having more proactive habits than men. Also, in terms of work role, advisers scored worse than holistic advisers, risk specialists and practice owners. Work hours varied, with groups who are working more than 50 plus hours and those working less than 20 hours exhibiting the worst scores. It seems that working 35-40 hours per week is ideal. Location in terms of what state you were from had a small impact, with the stress levels of people in WA higher than other states.

The demographics that did have a significant impact were:

1. Intention to continue as an adviser. People who were continuing in the industry have far better mental health and stress scores.
2. Company performance, with companies that were growing having much higher wellbeing scores.
3. FASEA status also had an impact. Individuals who were very proactive around the FASEA requirements were far less stressed than those who were partially through or not intending to complete it.
4. The strongest demographic factor was how engaged their clients were. Advisers with highly engaged clients scored better than those with less engaged clients on just about every measurement we took.

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## The Thrivers – what made them tick

The good news is there are a group of advisers that are flourishing in their businesses. They are growing the business, enjoying the work, have excellent wellbeing, mental health and work-family balance. We referred to this group as the ‘Thrivers’.

When we compared the ‘Thrivers’ to other groups they scored the best on most measures.

- Best mental health.
- Best recovery.
- Best psychological capital.
- Best innovation.
- Lowest impact of stress.
- Highest work-family balance.
- Very low (2nd lowest) in terms of feeling overloaded by work. This means they are feeling in control of their work loads.

What is most interesting is that we cannot explain the ‘Thrivers’ by some sort of demographic. What this means is the ‘Thrivers’ did not have a common characteristic such as age, level of education, length of experience as an adviser, location or gender.

The Thrivers had the following characteristics that separated them from the broader group.

### 1. Psychological Flexibility

Whenever an individual is faced with any sort of challenge or discomfort, they create a story (their internal narrative, how they make sense of that situation) about that challenge and have an emotional reaction to it. The story and emotion can have a significant impact on their behaviour. Our initial hypothesis was that the ‘Thrivers’ would have a different (most likely more positive) story and emotional response to the challenge than the people who were struggling. Our expectation was that they would see all the changes in the industry as positive and needed. However, the story and emotional response the ‘Thrivers’ had was the same as the broader group. Consistently, people were frustrated and angry about all the change, the way it has been implemented, the impact it has had on their businesses and the lack of consultation. What we did show was the ‘Thrivers’ were able to separate themselves from those stories and emotions and focus on the constructive behaviour needed to achieve their goals and be aligned to their meaning and purpose. In other words, they think, ‘This is incredibly frustrating, I am mad that I have to do all this work, but I really want to achieve this specific goal, so I am going to take action toward that.’

The advisers that are really struggling, get completely lost in that story and emotion. Because of that, it overwhelms them and controls their behaviour. The result is a high level of inaction or dysfunctional behaviours.

### 2. Psychological capital

The psychological capital (confidence/efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism) scores were much higher for the ‘Thrivers’, which means they have a greater skill set when it comes to dealing with challenge and setbacks.

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### 3. Adaptive performance

The 'Thrivers' were much more adaptable than the broader group and as such can rapidly alter their behaviour to suit a rapidly changing environment. This also allowed them to score higher on innovation and acceptance of change.

### 4. Prioritise wellbeing

The 'Thrivers' were very good at prioritising and looking after their own wellbeing. The following are a list of the most common wellbeing behaviours they engaged in:

- Physical activity.
- Mindfulness and relaxation.
- Turning off at the end of the day to be present and relaxed in family/personal time.
- Debriefing and seeking support from others following stressful events.
- Practicing relaxation regularly through engaging in some sort of hobby or passion.
- In their workday they would take time to decompress and get over stressful situations.

In contrast, we found that the broader group of advisers were less proactive when it came to their wellbeing. 17% did no form of exercise, 44% don't do any formal type of relaxation such as meditation or mindfulness, while in their workday only 3% did some sort of relaxation to manage their stress or get over an upsetting event.

### 5. Leveraged their time

One thing that separated the 'Thrivers' was where they spent their time. 'Thrivers' spent less time in administration (43% less) and far less on compliance activities (97% less) and thus were able to devote more time to client meetings (34% more), new business (83% more) and developing themselves and others.

### 6. Engaged in industry support

The 'Thrivers' saw the value in being an active Financial Adviser in the adviser community. The benefits ranged from having someone to vent to, getting fresh insights into challenges they were facing and discussing ideas and different perspectives that drove innovation. In contrast, the broader group are not seeking support from others. During their workday 84% don't debrief with others to help them overcome a distressing or stressful situation. While outside of work, 45% of advisers don't debrief or talk to people about the challenges they face.

### Here is a list of where advisers find support.

- 43% of advisers said peers gave them moderate or high level of support.
- 35% of advisers said licensees gave them moderate or high level of support.
- 28% of advisers said product manufacturers gave them moderate or high level of support.
- 24% of advisers said digital platforms, podcasts, social media gave them moderate or high level of support.
- 14% of advisers said industry association gave them moderate or high level of support.

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## Recommendations

### For Financial Advisers

#### 1. Invest in your psychological flexibility, adaptive performance and psychological capital.

With the colossal challenges that advisers face you need to develop some very specific psychological skills that enable Advisers to not only cope, but also to improve and grow. Our research conclusively showed that advisers who have these skills have not only better wellbeing and mental health but also better business performance.

#### 2. Seek help and engage in industry support services.

Despite the mixed experience of industry support by interviewees, we recommend that advisers persist with seeking or even demanding that licensees, associations and industry companies provide the support that you need. We found that there were many support services provided to advisers you are simply not engaging with. It is also up to the advisers to utilise the assistance is available.

#### 3. Be an active member of an industry association.

Interviewees who were active in an association seemed to get a lot more out of these bodies than those who were passive members.

#### 4. Find a good mentor and/or coach.

Mentoring and coaching can make a big difference in taking constructive action to improve your situation. Sometimes advisers may get bogged down in the demands of the work and not realise that there are alternative approaches to coping with the workload or managing the business. This is where a mentor and/or coach (either industry, business or personal) can help an adviser to focus on what is possible and approach challenges with a different perspective.

#### 5. Engage in regular recovery activities, including physical exercise, relaxation, mindfulness, debriefing, passions and hobbies outside of work.

It is really important that advisers look after themselves. This was a common thread in what the 'Thriver's group' did well.

#### 6. Seek professional development / self-development.

To succeed in business and understand the changing context of work, professional development is essential.

#### 7. Where possible, employ staff to undertake administration activities.

We have seen in the data that a lot of administration and compliance work is undertaken by advisers. However, highly successful advisers had systems and staff in place to dramatically lighten their load. Where possible, employ an administration assistant to help with that burden. It may only be a few hours per week, but it can make a difference.

#### 8. Be clear about what's work and what's not.

For many people, work and home became integrated during COVID-19. However, for those who have higher work-family balance, they understand how to separate, rather than integrate these roles. Advisers who understand this role separation are more likely to be attentive to family needs and won't be distracted by work during that time. We recommend techniques outlined in Dr Fraser's (2012) book *The Third Space*, where the space between work and home is deliberate. Even when working from home, the psychological practice of Reflecting, Resting and Resetting is an important approach to be fully present and productive in each role in your life.

### Resources.

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>  
<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>  
<https://headtohealth.gov.au/>  
<https://www.aia.com.au/en/individual/onelife/think-well.html>

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## For the Financial Advice Community

### **1. Provide higher support for advisers in completing the exam and tertiary studies.**

It is clear from the interviews and surveys that the FASEA exam process is the major stressor impacting advisers. For a lot of the advisers, it has been many years since they sat an exam or did any formal study. As such it is very daunting for Advisers. Giving Advisers support and compassion would greatly improve the outcome for the entire industry. This requires urgent help and support from within the industry.

### **2. Provide an industry-wide mentoring program.**

An industry-wide mentoring program should be designed specifically to address some of the issues faced in the current FASEA context. Industry-wide mentoring is described by Wilson (2015) and has been used successfully by other industry bodies. Some examples are the Financial Executives Institute (FEI) for CFOs and the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) for HR practitioners. We note that mentoring programs are offered by the FPA and APA, so the advisory industry should encourage advisers to make full use of these programs.

FPA's mentoring program: <https://community.fpa.com.au/mentoring/mentoring538>

APA's mentoring program: <https://www.afa.asn.au/membership/afa-mentoring>

### **3. Provide access to targeted wellbeing support.**

The health and wellbeing of advisers is the major concern of this study. It is evident from the results that there is a lot of improvement needed in this area. A targeted and custom-built program needs to be developed, that takes into consideration the complexity and challenges that advisers face.

### **4. Provide industry counsellors.**

The survey showed that advisers were not actively seeking access to help. The interviews revealed that there were mixed views about this, with some indicating that they had previously sought help and it wasn't adequate for their needs, whereas others do seek support within and outside the industry. Having access to counsellors that are Industry based with understanding of the context for advisers would likely improve the nature and effect of the counselling service provided.

### **5. Provide access to training in psychological flexibility, psychological capital and adaptive performance .**

Some of the strongest findings of the study was that the advisers who were really flourishing were strong in three specific areas: Psychological flexibility, psychological capital and adaptive performance. One of the key problems we noticed in both studies is that advisers are often derailed by their psychology and emotions. Having a more flexible relationship with their thoughts and emotions will help Advisers to take more purposeful action to overcome the challenges they face. We found that advisers who were thriving were more adaptable and innovative. Skill development in these areas is critical for advisers.

### **6. Provide access to systems to enable efficiency of administration and compliance work.**

Compliance seems to be a burden that Financial Advisers face continually. One common characteristic of the 'Thrivers' was that they had excellent systems and support to help Advisers manage the compliance side of the business.

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## Feedback to regulatory bodies.

The regulatory bodies were not a part of the scope of this research study and as such no regulatory bodies were included in it. However, because they play such an important role and one that is deeply entwined in the financial advice community, there is no way to avoid considering them and their role in the prime goal of this research, which was the mental health and wellbeing of Financial Advisers in Australia. Decisions made by regulatory bodies have far reaching impacts on financial adviser's mental health and wellbeing. From the research data collected there are some clear and consistent findings that may serve as feedback from advisers to regulators for consideration.

### **1. Simplification of Compliance reporting system.**

Financial Advisers in this research reported they found inconsistencies and difficulties in the reporting system for compliance. Anything that could be done to simplify the compliance reporting system for licensees and Financial Advisers would improve effectiveness and ease of reporting. This would also mean that advisers wouldn't have to pass this cost on to their clients, making advice more affordable.

### **2. Respectful communication.**

Financial Advisers reported there were sweeping statements made about their vocation that were over simplified and too general. It is very important for regulators and financial advisers to have a functional relationship. When negative sweeping statements are made about financial advisers by regulatory bodies it erodes that relationship. Mindful use of language should be observed when talking about financial advisers and the industry.

### **3. Consultation and Collaboration**

Financial Advisers in this research reported that there seemed to be a lack of sufficient consultation and collaboration with financial advisers and industry bodies. This would be of great help to find practical and realistic changes that not only get better outcomes for consumers but also support the longevity and growth of the financial adviser profession.

### **4. Health and Wellbeing Support**

While the financial advice community will all agree that regulations are necessary to uphold standards, ethics and best business practices within the industry for principles, employees and clients, it is important to be mindful of the tremendous impact the recent regulatory actions have had on the mental health and the quality of life of advisers. In the process of achieving compliance and education standards the imposed negative cost to the advisers, their families and the industry is clearly illustrated in the research results. The inclusion of a health and wellbeing standard would be recommended as an ongoing requirement to ensure an increased level of positive mental health across the industry promoting a strong benchmark of mental health support as an exemplary industry standard.

# Appendix

## Appendix: Detailed breakdown of the demographic analysis of the Financial Adviser

### Education

Table 1: Adviser construct scores by education status

Education status	Secondary	Certificate/ Diploma	Degree	Post-grad
# of financial advisers	25	284	185	215
Work-family balance	3.15	3.41	3.53	3.49
Boundary Strength	2.96	2.22	2.35	2.11
Industry Support	1.38	1.79	1.97	1.93
Work Overload	3.91	4.11	4.10	4.05
Flow	6.27	6.99	7.07	7.31
Stress	3.72	4.00	3.99	3.86
Recovery at Work	2.40	2.39	2.46	2.45
Recovery at Home	2.66	2.85	2.95	2.97
Stressful Issues	2.94	3.30	3.21	3.16
Alcohol use	3.32	2.78	2.44	2.53
Wellbeing	2.85	3.34	3.43	3.41
Impact of stress	2.81	2.88	2.71	2.70
Psychological Capital	4.05	4.24	4.38	4.46
Change resistance	3.77	3.13	3.00	2.88
Innovation	2.67	3.68	3.85	3.97
Adaptive Performance	2.85	3.74	3.86	3.86
Self-development	2.54	3.47	3.62	3.82
Mental Health Indicator	2.42	2.29	2.29	2.15

From Table 1, there are not too many measurements that have a significant difference based on education and for those that do, it is not a very strong relationship. Also of note, the secondary group only had 25 people in it and due to the low number, the results cannot be used to make any significant conclusions.

## Age

**Table 2: Adviser construct scores by age grouping**

Age group	up to 29 years	30-30 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60 plus years
# of financial advisers	14	111	225	228	131
Work-family balance	3.83	3.38	3.45	3.35	3.67
Boundary Strength	2.54	2.14	2.18	2.26	2.40
Industry Support	1.99	2.10	1.89	1.83	1.68
Work Overload	3.70	4.20	4.14	4.19	3.74
Flow	7.37	7.45	6.97	7.00	7.13
Stress	3.39	4.05	4.02	4.04	3.62
Recovery at Work	2.34	2.49	2.46	2.34	2.46
Recovery at Home	3.26	3.05	2.97	2.79	2.84
Stressful Issues	2.82	3.25	3.23	3.27	3.14
Alcohol use	1.93	2.67	2.71	2.65	2.54
Wellbeing	3.60	3.48	3.33	3.29	3.44
Impact of stress	2.27	2.69	2.77	2.92	2.67
Psychological Capital	4.77	4.46	4.32	4.19	4.47
Change resistance	2.90	2.81	3.09	3.11	3.07
Innovation	4.06	3.95	3.76	3.73	3.73
Adaptive Performance	3.96	3.92	3.76	3.69	3.82
Self-development	3.77	3.77	3.52	3.52	3.62
Mental Health Indicator	2.33	2.40	2.24	2.33	2.00

Note that in Table 2, there are only 14 respondents to the survey in the up to 29 years age bracket, so comparing this group with others is not statistically viable. Disregarding that group, age grouping does not show significant variation. Often in this profession there is a narrative about how older people are less embracing of change or are less innovative. This data shows there is no basis to this narrative.

## Gender

**Table 3: Financial Adviser construct scores by gender**

Age group	Female	Male
# of financial advisers	155	554
Work-family balance	3.48	3.45
Boundary Strength	2.18	2.26
Industry Support	2.05	1.81
Work Overload	4.13	4.07
Flow	7.51	6.97
Stress	3.96	3.94
Recovery at Work	2.38	2.44
Recovery at Home	3.03	2.87
Stressful Issues	3.18	3.23
Alcohol use	2.54	2.66
Wellbeing	3.45	3.34
Impact of stress	2.78	2.78
Psychological Capital	4.44	4.31
Change resistance	2.86	3.10
Innovation	3.89	3.75
Adaptive Performance	3.90	3.74
Self-development	3.83	3.51
Mental Health Indicator	2.17	2.26

From Table 3, we note that there is not a lot of variation between male and female advisers in most of the constructs. However, we do note the following:

- Women are receiving higher industry support.
- Women are in much higher flow at work.
- Women are more accepting of change.
- Women are pursuing more self-development opportunities.

The status of FASEA qualifications was a significant factor in the results. Table 4 below shows this variation.

## FASEA Status

Table 4: Financial Adviser construct scores by FASEA status

FASEA status	Fully qualified	Partly qualified	Exam not passed	No intention
# of financial advisers	149	267	206	87
Work-family balance	3.61	3.43	3.42	3.34
Boundary Strength	2.17	2.18	2.33	2.39
Industry Support	1.91	1.96	1.86	1.52
Work Overload	3.94	4.15	4.14	3.95
Flow	7.36	7.24	6.87	6.65
Stress	3.80	3.97	4.02	3.94
Recovery at Work	2.40	2.41	2.46	2.45
Recovery at Home	2.92	2.94	2.91	2.79
Stressful Issues	3.07	3.28	3.26	3.20
Alcohol use	2.51	2.76	2.57	2.63
Wellbeing	3.47	3.44	3.30	3.12
Impact of stress	2.68	2.67	2.86	3.09
Psychological Capital	4.52	4.34	4.33	4.02
Change resistance	2.86	3.01	3.11	3.32
Innovation	3.98	3.83	3.69	3.49
Adaptive Performance	3.93	3.81	3.73	3.52
Self-development	3.90	3.53	3.55	3.27
Mental Health Indicator	2.20	2.21	2.26	2.45

From Table 4, we can note the following points:

- Fully qualified advisers have higher work-family balance, have less stress and less stressful issues, higher wellbeing, less impact of stress and do much more self-development.
- Work overload is higher for advisers not yet qualified.

## Intention to continue as a Financial Adviser

**Table 5: Financial Adviser construct scores by Intention to continue as an Adviser**

Intention to continue as an Adviser	Stay in an adviser role	Work in a different role	Look to work elsewhere	Retire or take long leave
# of financial advisers	521	61	71	56
Work-family balance	3.54	3.27	3.12	3.35
Boundary Strength	2.24	1.98	2.19	2.66
Industry Support	1.94	1.68	1.63	1.68
Work Overload	4.04	4.25	4.29	4.01
Flow	7.34	6.40	6.13	6.61
Stress	3.86	4.08	4.34	4.07
Recovery at Work	2.43	2.29	2.45	2.51
Recovery at Home	2.94	2.81	2.78	2.87
Stressful Issues	3.19	3.40	3.33	3.24
Alcohol use	2.58	2.48	2.72	3.27
Wellbeing	3.48	3.15	2.93	3.12
Impact of stress	2.60	3.18	3.38	3.23
Psychological Capital	4.45	4.18	3.83	4.09
Change resistance	2.99	3.03	3.10	3.50
Innovation	3.85	3.93	3.53	3.29
Adaptive Performance	3.84	3.86	3.57	3.39
Self-development	3.65	3.59	3.33	3.24
Mental Health Indicator	2.14	2.35	2.75	2.51

From Table 5, the following observations can be made about people who intend to stay in the industry as Financial Advisers:

- They have higher Work-family balance.
- They are receiving higher industry support.
- They have higher flow at work.
- They have lower stress and a much lower impact of work stress.
- They have higher psychological capital.
- They have a lower indication of mental health problems.

These results may be due to the fact that people staying in the industry have purpose, a clear goal to work towards and have certainty about their future.

## Working hours

**Table 6: Financial Adviser construct scores by weekly working hours**

Weekly working hours	1 to 19	20 to 34	35 to 40	41 to 49	50 plus
# of financial advisers	15	52	148	233	261
Work-family balance	3.33	3.72	4.02	3.44	3.11
Boundary Strength	3.01	2.71	2.73	2.30	1.79
Industry Support	1.48	1.71	1.90	1.92	1.85
Work Overload	3.78	3.68	3.73	4.12	4.34
Flow	6.04	6.56	6.91	6.97	7.45
Stress	3.98	3.67	3.60	3.99	4.15
Recovery at Work	2.77	2.75	2.56	2.43	2.26
Recovery at Home	2.80	3.07	3.06	2.98	2.72
Stressful Issues	2.98	2.92	3.02	3.27	3.37
Alcohol use	3.60	3.04	2.45	2.60	2.64
Wellbeing	2.78	3.39	3.55	3.37	3.29
Impact of stress	3.08	2.54	2.50	2.76	2.98
Psychological Capital	3.96	4.37	4.45	4.26	4.35
Change resistance	4.07	3.40	3.08	3.06	2.87
Innovation	2.57	3.38	3.76	3.71	4.01
Adaptive Performance	2.69	3.52	3.85	3.70	3.92
Self-development	2.58	3.33	3.53	3.52	3.78
Mental Health Indicator	2.57	2.24	2.02	2.24	2.38

Note that in Table 6, there is only a small sample of people who work less than 20 hours, so any results for this group may be coincidental. The best scores are shaded in green, whereas the worst scores are shaded in orange. The following observations can be made:

- Advisers with high working hours have more stress, higher work overload, less work-family balance, less boundary strength, more stressful issues and less recovery at home and at work
- However, advisers with high working hours also have higher flow, are less likely to work to routine and resist change, are more innovative, have higher self-development and are more adaptive at work
- Advisers with standard working hours have higher work-life balance, less stress, less reliance on alcohol, higher wellbeing, less impact of stress, higher psychological capital and lower indication of mental health issues
- Advisers with very low working hours have lower flow, higher reliance on alcohol, lower wellbeing, higher impact of stress, lower psychological capital, are more likely to resist change, have lower adaptive performance, lower innovation, lower self-development and a higher indication of mental health issues (as this group is a small sample, this observations should be viewed with caution).

Overall findings suggest that from a wellbeing perspective, advisers should aim to work 35 – 40 hours per week.

## Length of experience

Table 7: Financial Adviser construct scores by length of experience

Length of experience	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21 or more years
# of financial advisers	57	92	126	113	321
Work-family balance	3.46	3.46	3.39	3.42	3.49
Boundary Strength	2.38	2.18	2.15	2.34	2.25
Industry Support	2.01	1.97	1.90	1.83	1.81
Work Overload	3.97	4.15	4.21	4.09	4.03
Flow	7.36	7.22	7.11	7.04	7.04
Stress	3.85	4.02	4.08	3.94	3.89
Recovery at Work	2.47	2.60	2.50	2.29	2.39
Recovery at Home	2.98	3.05	2.99	2.89	2.82
Stressful Issues	3.16	3.16	3.21	3.20	3.26
Alcohol use	2.39	2.67	2.75	2.59	2.64
Wellbeing	3.42	3.37	3.40	3.35	3.35
Impact of stress	2.62	2.74	2.71	2.82	2.83
Psychological Capital	4.37	4.39	4.34	4.31	4.32
Change resistance	2.78	2.99	2.93	3.16	3.11
Innovation	3.85	3.83	3.78	3.77	3.75
Adaptive Performance	3.86	3.77	3.82	3.78	3.75
Self-development	3.74	3.70	3.57	3.45	3.57
Mental Health Indicator	2.42	2.36	2.27	2.24	2.19

From Table 7, most of the constructs do not show a lot of variation by length of experience. However, the following observations can be made:

- Mental health indication shows that advisers with less experience are at higher risk of mental health issues than those with longer years of experience.
- Industry support is higher for those with less experience.
- Flow results are higher for those with less experience.

## State grouping

**Table 8: Financial Adviser construct scores by State group**

State group	NSW/ACT	Qld	SA/NT	Vic/Tas	WA
# of financial advisers	204	165	74	155	111
Work-family balance	3.42	3.41	3.68	3.58	3.27
Boundary Strength	2.20	2.28	2.43	2.22	2.19
Industry Support	1.87	1.89	1.84	1.87	1.83
Work Overload	4.08	4.13	3.84	4.04	4.23
Flow	7.29	6.93	7.22	7.09	6.88
Stress	3.92	3.97	3.70	3.94	4.11
Recovery at Work	2.39	2.28	2.56	2.59	2.37
Recovery at Home	2.83	2.87	2.95	2.99	2.95
Stressful Issues	3.23	3.31	3.02	3.15	3.33
Alcohol use	2.52	2.81	2.62	2.63	2.60
Wellbeing	3.36	3.30	3.50	3.42	3.31
Impact of stress	2.82	2.80	2.56	2.71	2.93
Psychological Capital	4.32	4.32	4.41	4.37	4.30
Change resistance	3.00	3.05	3.12	3.05	3.07
Innovation	3.81	3.78	3.73	3.72	3.85
Adaptive Performance	3.80	3.77	3.75	3.73	3.83
Self-development	3.60	3.56	3.49	3.65	3.55
Mental Health Indicator	2.24	2.38	2.06	2.22	2.26

Note that in Table 8, the best scores are shaded in green, whereas the worst scores are shaded in orange. The following observations can be made:

- SA/NT have higher WFB, Boundary strength, Wellbeing and PsyCap
- WA have higher Overload, higher Stress, higher stressful issues, and higher impact of stress
- WA have lower WFB, lower Boundary strength, and lower experience of Flow
- Vic/Tas have higher Recovery at work and at home
- Qld have lower Recovery at work, higher Alcohol use, lower wellbeing and higher indication of mental health issues
- NSW/ACT have higher Flow, lower use of Alcohol and lower Recovery at home

Looking at the results the significant trend is that stress for people in WA is significantly higher than the other states. There doesn't seem to be a readily available explanation for this. Further research needs to be done to understand

## Location – Capital City or Regional/Rural

Table 9: Financial Adviser construct scores by location

Location	Capital city	Regional or rural
# of financial advisers	487	222
Work-family balance	3.48	3.41
Boundary Strength	2.21	2.32
Industry Support	1.86	1.88
Work Overload	4.09	4.06
Flow	7.09	7.10
Stress	3.94	3.95
Recovery at Work	2.46	2.34
Recovery at Home	2.92	2.88
Stressful Issues	3.24	3.19
Alcohol use	2.59	2.74
Wellbeing	3.34	3.45
Impact of stress	2.77	2.80
Psychological Capital	4.37	4.26
Change resistance	3.07	2.99
Innovation	3.79	3.77
Adaptive Performance	3.76	3.82
Self-development	3.56	3.63
Mental Health Indicator	2.25	2.26

From Table 9, there is not major significant differences between metro and rural advisers.

## Work role

**Table 10: Financial Adviser construct scores by work role**

Work role	Adviser	Holistic adviser	Practice owner	Risk specialist	Self employed adviser
# of financial advisers	101	200	98	87	175
Work-family balance	3.36	3.49	3.51	3.71	3.37
Boundary Strength	2.23	2.32	2.18	2.31	2.06
Industry Support	1.87	1.97	1.85	1.80	1.89
Work Overload	4.15	4.06	4.12	3.89	4.11
Flow	6.95	7.21	7.28	6.76	7.12
Stress	4.06	3.97	3.95	3.71	3.97
Recovery at Work	2.35	2.48	2.42	2.47	2.35
Recovery at Home	2.88	2.95	2.88	2.93	2.86
Stressful Issues	3.25	3.19	3.30	3.22	3.28
Alcohol use	2.85	2.47	2.71	2.41	2.65
Wellbeing	3.28	3.38	3.50	3.44	3.39
Impact of stress	2.93	2.79	2.69	2.64	2.74
Psychological Capital	4.06	4.39	4.42	4.44	4.32
Change resistance	3.08	3.00	2.86	3.04	3.05
Innovation	3.62	3.86	3.85	3.72	3.95
Adaptive Performance	3.75	3.86	3.84	3.87	3.81
Self-development	3.55	3.68	3.62	3.45	3.66
Mental Health Indicator	2.42	2.23	2.15	2.06	2.29

From Table 10, we can see that there are significant differences in some of the construct scores depending on work role. The following observations are made:

- Risk specialists have higher WFB, higher PsyCap, lower work Overload, lower Stress, lower Alcohol intake, lower Impact of stress and lower indication of mental health issues.
- Self-employed advisers have lower boundary strength but higher innovation.
- Practice owners have higher Flow, higher Wellbeing and have less routine and more open to change.
- Holistic advisers have higher boundary strength, seek higher industry support and have higher self-development.
- Advisers have lower WFB, lower Wellbeing, lower PsyCap, and lower Innovation.
- Advisers also have higher work Overload, higher Stress and Impact of stress, higher Alcohol intake, higher indication of mental health issues and are more likely to resist change.

## Company Type

Table 11: Financial Adviser construct scores by company type

Company type	Aligned	Institution	Private 1	Private 2-4	Private 5-30	Private 31 plus
# of financial advisers	158	46	164	217	65	59
Work-family balance	3.34	3.27	3.39	3.58	3.70	3.38
Boundary Strength	2.17	2.42	2.17	2.35	2.18	2.21
Industry Support	1.91	1.76	1.84	1.87	2.01	1.74
Work Overload	4.18	4.09	4.05	4.00	4.05	4.23
Flow	6.95	7.01	7.03	7.22	7.54	6.74
Stress	4.07	4.24	3.99	3.76	3.80	4.08
Recovery at Work	2.40	2.53	2.38	2.44	2.57	2.33
Recovery at Home	2.82	2.87	2.85	2.95	3.17	2.86
Stressful Issues	3.31	3.17	3.29	3.14	3.12	3.25
Alcohol use	2.69	3.00	2.56	2.60	2.48	2.71
Wellbeing	3.30	3.20	3.31	3.48	3.54	3.23
Impact of stress	2.94	2.91	2.83	2.59	2.62	2.95
Psychological Capital	4.15	4.02	4.43	4.47	4.47	4.17
Change resistance	3.14	3.22	3.03	2.96	2.89	3.17
Innovation	3.77	3.20	3.91	3.87	3.86	3.47
Adaptive Performance	3.75	3.48	3.85	3.88	3.86	3.44
Self-development	3.62	3.27	3.63	3.60	3.75	3.34
Mental Health Indicator	2.34	2.51	2.30	2.13	2.02	2.41

When we looked at company type, the following observations can be made from Table 11:

(Note that the categories of staff numbers from 31-100, 101-200 and 201plus asked in the questionnaire were too small individually, so have been grouped together for this analysis. They all sit in the column of 30+)

- Aligned people have lower recovery at home and higher stressful issues.
- Institutional people have higher boundary strength, but lower wellbeing, psychological capital, innovation and self-development.
- Private with one adviser have lower boundary strength, but higher innovation.
- Private with two to four advisers have lower overload, lower stress, lower impact of stress and higher adaptive performance and psychological capital.
- Private with five to 30 advisers have higher work-life balance, industry support, flow, recovery at work and home, wellbeing, psychological safety and self-development.
- Private with five to 30 advisers have lower stressful issues, lower alcohol intake, lower indication of mental health issues and lower resistance to change.
- Private with 31 plus advisers have lower industry support, lower flow, lower recovery at work and lower adaptive performance, but higher overload and higher Impact of stress.

The group that seems to be struggling the most are advisers within an institution, while private advisers with 5 – 30 advisers working for them are doing the best.

## Company performance

**Table 12: Financial Adviser construct scores by company performance**

Company performance	Exiting/ transitioning	Declining	Maintaining	Growing
# of financial advisers	34	140	271	247
Work-family balance	3.20	3.09	3.47	3.70
Boundary Strength	2.52	2.18	2.29	2.17
Industry Support	1.62	1.70	1.91	1.97
Work Overload	4.20	4.40	4.08	3.87
Flow	6.61	6.44	6.97	7.68
Stress	4.20	4.35	3.95	3.67
Recovery at Work	2.54	2.25	2.42	2.49
Recovery at Home	2.70	2.69	2.94	3.02
Stressful Issues	3.39	3.52	3.23	3.05
Alcohol use	2.71	2.88	2.60	2.48
Wellbeing	2.97	3.04	3.39	3.63
Impact of stress	3.25	3.22	2.74	2.50
Psychological Capital	4.09	3.81	4.31	4.70
Change resistance	3.32	3.21	3.05	2.87
Innovation	3.59	3.59	3.74	3.98
Adaptive Performance	3.46	3.46	3.82	3.93
Self-development	3.46	3.45	3.54	3.77
Mental Health Indicator	2.61	2.62	2.23	2.00

The following comments are made from the data outlined in Table 12:

One factor that did have a significant impact on the measurements is the state of their business. Advisers in a growing business compared to a maintaining or declining business score much higher on just about every measure.

- Growing businesses have much higher work-family balance, higher industry support, much higher flow, much higher recovery at work and home, much higher wellbeing, higher psychological capital than declining businesses.
- Declining businesses have higher work overload, much higher stress, much more stressful issues, use more alcohol, much higher impact of stress, more likely to resist change, much higher indication of mental health issues.

## Client Engagement

**Table 13: Financial Adviser construct scores by level of client engagement**

Client engagement	Not engaged*	Less engaged	Similar	More engaged	Mostly engaged
# of financial advisers	17	46	112	181	353
Work-family balance	3.16	2.91	3.27	3.51	3.57
Boundary Strength	2.95	2.38	2.23	2.25	2.20
Industry Support	1.34	1.52	1.79	1.92	1.93
Work Overload	4.53	4.11	4.25	4.13	3.98
Flow	4.39	5.50	6.53	6.90	7.47
Stress	3.88	4.17	4.12	3.97	3.85
Recovery at Work	2.54	2.43	2.44	2.39	2.43
Recovery at Home	2.85	2.64	2.83	2.98	2.93
Stressful Issues	2.99	3.49	3.29	3.26	3.16
Alcohol use	3.41	2.80	2.77	2.55	2.56
Wellbeing	2.82	2.87	3.16	3.35	3.53
Impact of stress	2.88	3.29	2.79	2.84	2.67
Psychological Capital	4.15	3.73	4.17	4.24	4.52
Change resistance	3.60	3.36	3.11	3.05	2.95
Innovation	3.14	3.37	3.60	3.73	3.95
Adaptive Performance	3.02	3.32	3.61	3.79	3.91
Self-development	3.09	3.23	3.38	3.62	3.69
Mental Health Indicator	2.49	2.71	2.40	2.25	2.12

\* insufficient responses to include in high/low comparisons

Of all the demographics measured, the one that had the biggest influence on the constructs was how engaged the adviser's clients are.

The following observations can be made from Table 13, although note that the not engaged group is quite small:

- Advisers with less engaged clients have less work-family balance, Psychological Capital and recovery at home, with higher indication of mental health issues and impact of stress
- Advisers with not engaged clients have less Industry support, poorer Wellbeing, less Adaptive performance, engage in less self-development and innovation, plus have much lower flow, are more likely to resist change and have a higher use of alcohol
- The only positive for advisers with non-engaged clients is that they have higher boundary strength
- Advisers with mostly engaged clients have higher work-family balance, receive more industry support, have higher flow at work, higher wellbeing, higher psychological capital, higher innovation and adaptive behaviour, and undertake more self-development. They also have less work overload, less stress and stressful issues, and less impact of stress, plus a lower indicator of mental health issues

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## Clarifications or questions

Please contact one of the following authors if there are any questions relating to the data, or additional information is required prior to the focus group phase of the project:

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