

# Wellbeing





Nation

2025



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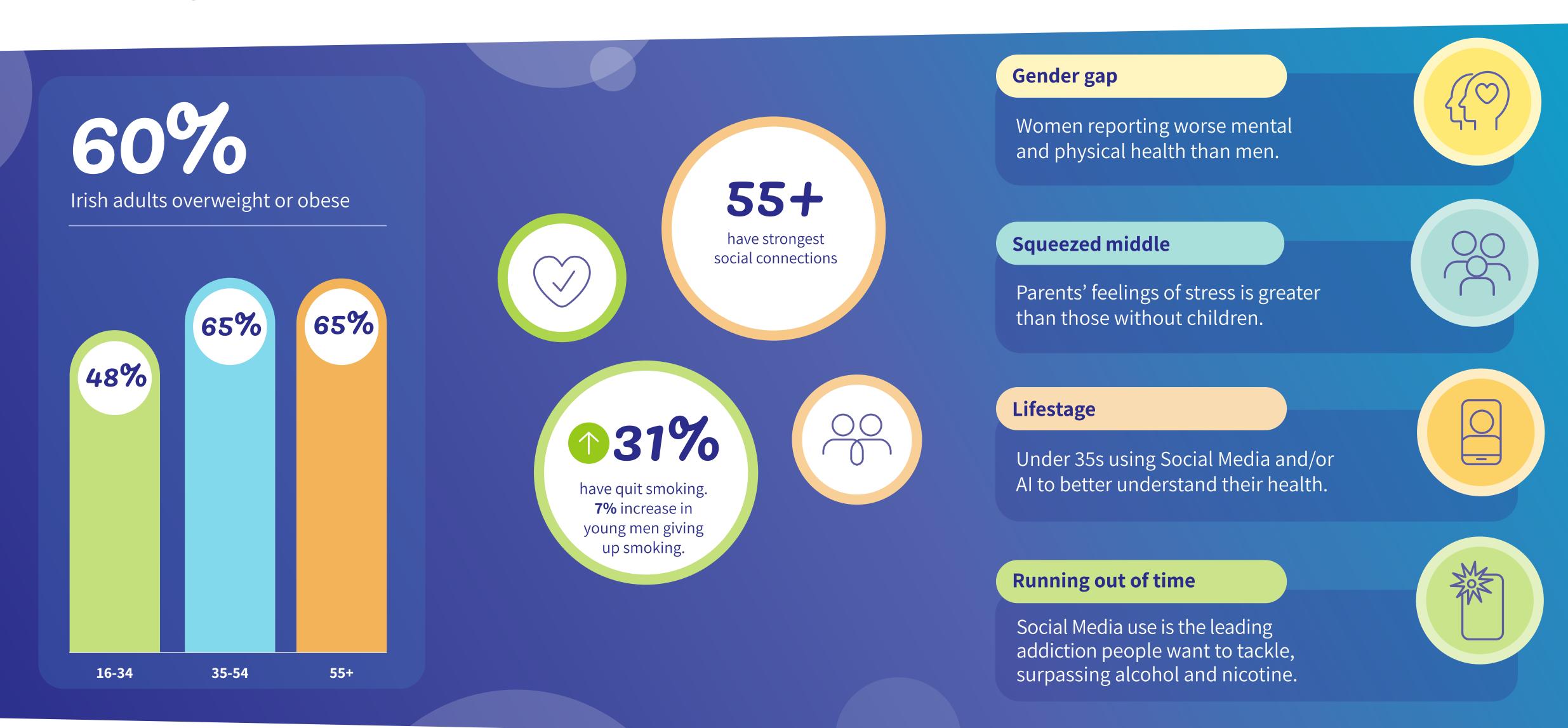
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# Findings at a Glance





## **Foreword**

Forewarned is forearmed: life stage gaps are affecting us all.



Stacey
Machesney
Head of Irish Life
Wellbeing

As an organisation that believes in the power of knowledge, we are proud to share our seventh Health of the Nation Report. The insights provided are designed to support you in adapting your Wellbeing Strategy to help meet the needs of your employees.

This year's report tells a story every employer needs to hear.

We are noticing defined trends - some positive and some thought provoking - depending on life stage and circumstances. The reality is: we are a nation divided.

The coming years will be a crucial time to make inroads with younger cohorts, address the stress of the squeezed middle, and innovate for those experiencing mental health difficulties.

There is urgency, too. How long can employees manage their rising stress levels before burning out?

Since 2021, anxiety and work-related stress have been on the rise each year. Right now, women are especially at risk, reporting higher stress levels than men. As the report shows, this is a clear reflection of the growing demands on their physical, emotional and time resources as they balance work, parenting, and general life. And the picture is no brighter for the under-35s as they struggle to manage their own unique set of pressures, including addiction, financial instability and loneliness.

The coming years will be a crucial time to make inroads with younger cohorts, address the stress of the squeezed middle, and innovate for those experiencing mental health difficulties.



# What we are seeing in our report is very much reflected in what our clients tell us across our business.

The pervasive, upward trend in chronic, unmanaged stress correlates directly to an ever increasing demand for our specialised programmes and a marked increase in employers seeking mental health supports. In addition, mental health difficulties are significantly higher in those claiming income protection. Work Related Stress and Anxiety have been the highest cause for claims rising each year, with Anxiety the highest received by Irish Life since 2023.

While it does seem like a very negative outlook, we at Irish Life are finding that change is happening for companies that are acting now. By putting the supports and training in place and creating a more open culture with good communication and a more positive work environment, companies are positively impacting the wellbeing and satisfaction of their staff. It might be a slow process, but the results are tangible and most importantly, long-lasting.

We are certainly not suggesting that employers can and will solve every problem we face in life. But what employees should be able to expect, in 2025, is a workplace that is willing to introduce new strategies to help everyone function at their best.

As the Department of Health continues to remind us, the health of the workforce is directly linked to the health of the economy. The ultimate aim of the 2025 Health of the Nation report is to inspire leaders and HR professionals to act on behalf of their employees and address what's really at the heart of a nation struggling to manage stress.

Not just because it's right for the individual, but because companies that proactively address stress and focus on prevention (through better work design and early manager interventions) see the strongest gains in resilience, innovation, and productivity. As we look to the future, this year's report gives us some clear points to consider:

- There is no "one size fits all" approach.
- Quick fixes won't work for nuanced issues
- Employees' needs can change quickly depending on their circumstances and in response to a backdrop of global challenges.

Thankfully, many employers across Ireland are embracing efforts to reduce stress and improve wellbeing, and that is truly great news.

The ultimate aim of the 2025 Health of the Nation report is to inspire leaders and HR professionals to act on behalf of their employees and address what's really at the heart of a nation struggling to manage stress.

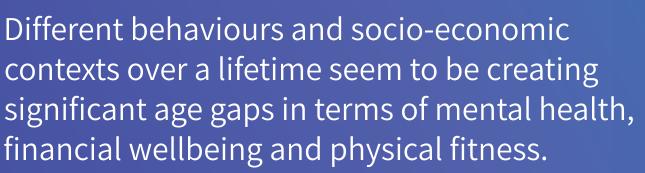


# Lifestage

This year's Health of the Nation Report is a story of vast differences across life stages.

Each life stage has its own definition of what it is to be a working adult in Ireland today; with stress, health and wellbeing varying widely according to age, gender and income. Different behaviours and socio-economic contexts over a lifetime seem to be creating financial wellbeing and physical fitness.

While some of this is to be expected (for example, earlier years in work may be more stressful as we climb the career ladder) other factors form a different backdrop to previous years including the use of technology, cost of living and remote working. The impact of some of these factors varies according to our age, influencing our behaviour, mental health and more.











# Under 35s

Mental health is still top concern in younger people



3 IN 5 want to reduce addiction to digital and social media

30%

getting more than 3.5 hrs of exercise per week



Awareness of the importance of physical health remains stronger than other life stages

47%

**feeling isolated or lonely** (more than any other age cohort)



1 IN 3 losing sleep worrying about finances

67%

reported poor mental health

(exceeding nat average)



## Being under thirty five in Ireland is challenging.

Everyone understands how exciting (and exhausting) it is at the start of your career. It's normal to work hard at this stage of life.

What should not be regarded as 'normal' however, at least comparatively so, is how young people are scoring lower than the national average for mental and physical health, as well as feeling more isolated than other age cohorts.

Year after year, the younger cohort are:

- Reporting significant levels of anxiety and depression
- More stressed with work environments
- Generally less healthy than their older peers

This is more than just burning the candle at both ends and climbing the career ladder.

While they have a lot of awareness of what they need to do to stay mentally, physically and even financially healthy, they say they lack time and struggle to take the positive action they need.

To understand the data better, let's look across three factors that are impacting stress levels and their ability to take healthy action:











The barrier to healthy eating isn't time, it's not thinking ahead and making nutrition a priority.

With a few go-to ingredients in your cupboard and the right mindset, you can put a balanced meal together in minutes. Fresh pesto pasta with prawns is my dinner tonight and it's ready in less than 10 minutes!

# **Daniel Davey**Performance Nutritionist and Founder of daveynutrition



69% under 35s put reducing time spent on social media and online, ahead of reducing alcohol intake, gambling habits, gaming or recreational drug use.

That's a staggering number who deem social media one of the unhealthiest 'habits' in their lives. They are overwhelmed.

In addition to using social media for health advice, young people are now increasingly using AI to check their health status. At the same time, they are reporting feeling overwhelmed with all the conflicting information available about lifestyle and nutrition.

With less time to cook a nutritious meal, less ability to implement physical activity plans, and feelings of social isolation - young people's overall health score is well below the national average.

So, it's hard not to see some correlation between hours spent online and a less healthy lifestyle.

However, what's most encouraging about this cohort's response is their awareness of themselves, their dependency, and their strong desire to make a change. They just need the right advice and support to get there.



think a healthy diet requires time for planning and cooking that they find difficult to prioritise



are overwhelmed by the amount of information available about healthy lifestyles and nutrition



Struggle the most to follow through on mental health advice



# Work environment and commuting are more stressful than for those in later life stages.

43% say changes in working from home policy makes them more likely to look

for a new job

Longer hours and a heavy workload are not the only stress factors for under 35s at work.

They also report an above average amount of stress due to commuting and the work environment itself.

Younger people have worked remotely more than any previous age cohort. So the cost of commuting (transport, food and time) may seem to them like a high price to pay in terms of their wallet and their wellbeing.

At the office, some younger workers experience less control of their time/productivity by being in a more open and exposing environment than they are used to.

For them, the social norms of the office have yet to catch up with the style of those who have spent so much of their working lives from home.

So it's no surprise, that when an employer mandates a return to the office, it's the under 35s who are the most likely to go job hunting.

32%
experience stress from work environment (vs 21% nat average)

83%
experience at least one major challenge in working from the office more frequently





Young people report the highest levels of loneliness and isolation.

While no age demographic is back to prepandemic levels of social health, the younger cohort are struggling more than most.

A wide social circle and plenty of adventure are often the hallmark of life before 'settling down'. But nearly half of the under 35s in the workforce we surveyed this year continue to feel that loneliness and isolation are taking precedence.

Feelings of isolation can erode a sense of wellbeing very quickly, increasing worry, anxiety and other symptoms of mental health distress.

Being under financial pressure doesn't help either with 45% considering themselves 'just getting by'. The link to a poor financial outlook and poor health scores is stark.

On a brighter note, whether they are in-person or remote, work is where under 35s experience the strongest social ties and connections. And workplace relationships are deemed the most important to this cohort.







## Under 35s: What to take away

# Connected but not Connecting

Under 35s need support to make the changes that matter most to them: reducing dependency on social media and stepping away from an 'always' online lifestyle.



**Dr. Carol Rogan**Psychologist,
Irish Life Wellbeing

Too much time online can be an exhausting and confusing stress that no one needs - a perfect storm of overwhelming advice, painful comparison and a resulting inertia. With a growing awareness of the impact of this habit, we need to go beyond just telling people to put down their phones.

Strategies that help us disconnect from our devices and reconnect with each other can, and should, be brought into the working day. They can include simple steps such as creating designated areas where phones are discouraged (lunch spaces, quiet rooms) or encouraging walking meetings and face-to-face check ins.

In addition, we are seeing more significant moves can be very beneficial, such as offering specific programmes designed to help us all reduce our device dependency.

Time away from our devices helps us do more helpful, healthful and hopeful activities. And importantly - to do those things together.

#### DDOCDAMMES WE DECOMMEND



Rethinking our Relationship with Digital Devices by Irish Life Wellbeing. Learn strategies and tools for purposeful connection and balance when it comes to digital devices.





# The Squeezed Middle: 35-54

Midlife Changes: High stress, Gender Gaps and Declining wellbeing.

57%

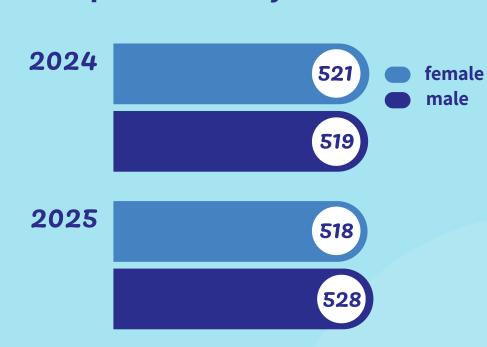
reporting at least some mental health challenges

(3% more than 2024)

1 in 3 feel non-work responsibilities are negatively impacted by working from the office



Health score improvement in men, but a decline in women compared to last year





of men and women are overweight or obese

(3% more than 2024) above the national average (60% in 2025)

Lowest score of any life stage in the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index







#### Women under pressure

For women, especially those in lower economic groups, pressures are acute. They continue to shoulder disproportionate responsibility for childcare and household management while also meeting financial demands, often with minimal support. Despite considerable progress in society, expectations appear to have grown heavier, not lighter. In clinical settings, women in their 30s and 40s frequently present with high levels of stress, caught between rising demands and inadequate support structures. Alleviating this stress isn't easy. It's a system problem. But workplaces can offer some support with flexibility, openness to conversations around stress and mental health and offering employee assistance programmes for counselling, parenting and other life management tools.

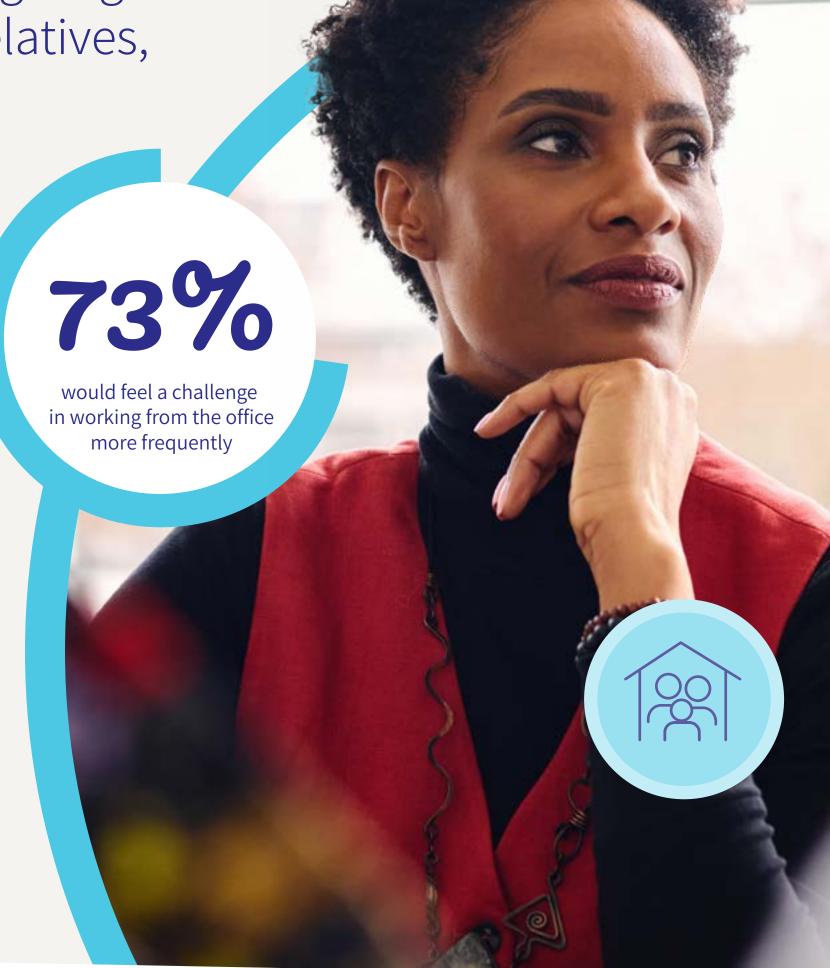
**Dr Maire Finn**GP and Female
Health Expert



This phase of life between 35 and 54 is stressful. Many working full-time jobs with heavy workloads, while also raising families and possibly taking on extra care-giving duties as they look after elderly relatives, or children with additional needs.

Put this against a backdrop of unstable global conditions and a rising cost of living, and it's understandable that this age cohort is dubbed **The Squeezed Middle.** 

Taking a closer look at the data for 2025, we are starting to see a gap emerge where women are experiencing more stress and are reportedly less healthy than men. Could this suggest that midlife stress and exhaustion are affecting some more than others?

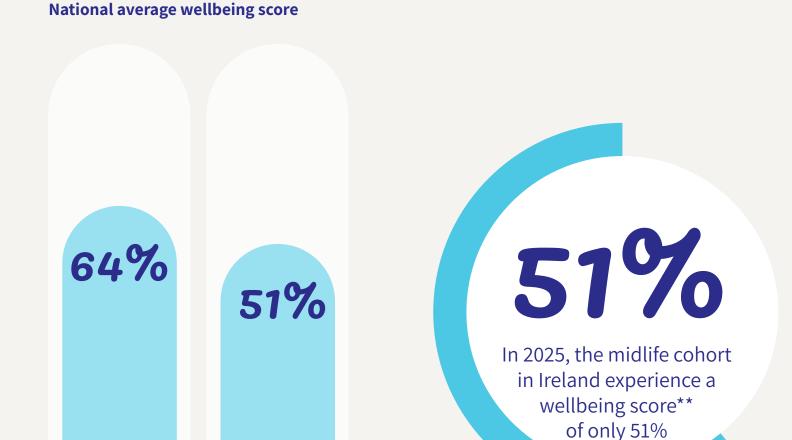


## Midlife Cohort have Lowest Wellbeing Score.

Since 2012, our quality of life has suffered a fall. From a national average in 2012 of 64%, to 56% in 2025.\*

#### **QUALITY OF LIFE SCORE 2012-2025**





Global, macro issues around climate change, geopolitical instability and economic uncertainty form part of the picture of increasing anxiety and unease. Particularly when it's so easy to feel powerless in the face of such large crises.

On a more personal level, people are not getting the time and space they need to look after themselves and fully engage with all aspects of their health. Nowhere is this more true than with the midlife cohort.

Looking at the past five years of data, we can see how this cohort struggled to regain their health score after the intense, sudden changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, not all the changes brought on by Covid were unwelcome. Remote working and flexible schedules that allow employees to manage their own time remain extremely popular. There is little appetite to return to the previous way of working, especially among those in midlife.

As pressure to return to the office mounts, few employees feel that these changes were made with them in mind. This top-down approach is likely to contribute to increased stress. As the data suggests, developing balanced work-from-home policies may require ongoing collaboration with the people most directly impacted.



Only 23% of all employees view current or newly implemented remote work policies as collaborative and transparent



Only 49% of all hybrid workers work from home 3 days a week



61% would prefer any amount of remote working to none at all

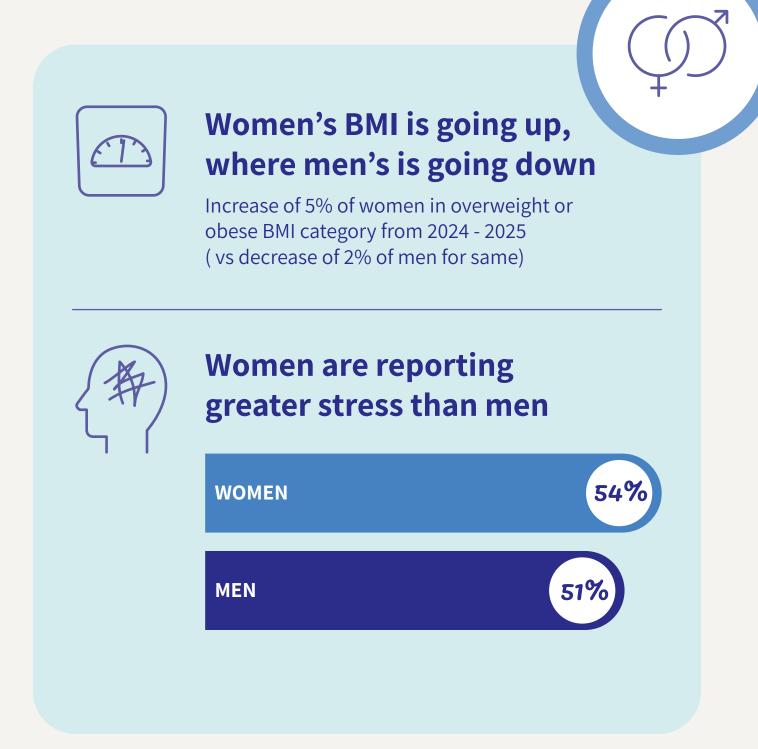
2025

2012



<sup>\*</sup> from European Quality of Life Survey 2012

<sup>\* \*</sup>WHO-5 Wellbeing Index



# Women take fewer breaks than men, regardless of working from home or in the office

(On average, women take less than 2 breaks, men take 2 or more)



# Women's health worse off compared to men.

Our research shows that women across all age cohorts are not seeing as many health improvements as men of the same age.

Gender and equality are still factors that impact this cohort: women are taking on more stress from home-life responsibilities like managing the household (including the family finances) and parenting. Whatever the psychological, social or systemic reasons behind this trend, added responsibilities are clearly leaving women with less time to care for themselves, which is having an impact on their overall health.

In addition, women in midlife often face a number of significant health issues that can impact their wellbeing including fertility, perimenopause and menopause. These health issues can require attention, support and treatment adding extra strain.

On the plus side, where men have strong social ties at work and online, women of all ages report a stronger sense of belonging than men, with a stronger social network of close friends and family.

Self care in midlife is especially important for women. In addition to pay equality and flexible working arrangements, workplaces can best focus on women's wellbeing through consultation and creating an environment where their health is understood and supported.









The report continues to highlight the gap in financial advice and the importance of good financial health to our overall wellbeing. There is a clear opportunity for independent financial brokers and advisers to support everyone at each lifestage with expert advice so they can be proactive about achieving and maintaining good financial health.

Patrick Ryan
MD, Advice Solutions,
Irish Life

#### Financial Strain

With expensive childcare and housing, stagnating wages and a rising cost of living many in midlife don't have enough spare money for additional saving or investing. They are less able to contribute to their financial future than previous age groups.

Financial advice and learning about our options relieves financial stress, **but only 1 in 3 have met a financial advisor**. Workplaces can help by offering expert-led programmes and seminars that offer practical advice on managing money, clearing debt, and how to save.

52%
concerned about the future as their money is not growing





35-54: What to take away

# Pressure from all sides

35-54 year olds really represent the squeezed middle. We can see the impact across physical, mental and financial health as they juggle a busy time in their careers, combined with increased responsibilities for elderly parents or children if they are parents themselves, and increased financial pressures as the cost of living bites.

At home, the midlife cohort are also most likely to be raising a family, care-giving, paying a mortgage and managing multiple household schedules. This makes them easily the cohort experiencing the most external demands on their mental, emotional and time resources. And it's no surprise that women are suffering more than men, as they take on the greater burden of family responsibilities.

There is a lot to contend with. Ways to ease the pressure and support them can include improved wellbeing and mental health awareness at work. This can be done through implementing specific wellbeing policies (for women in particular) and mental health training programmes that can help managers support their team, and themselves, through times of challenge and change.



Professor David Collings
Chair of Sustainable Business,
Trinity College Dublin

#### PROGRAMMES WE RECOMMEND



MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING FOR MANAGERS - LEVEL 1 & 2 BY IRISH LIFE WELLBEING (EMCC ACCREDITED)

Learn how to manage mental health concerns within the workplace and drive a culture of psychological safety.



## The Highs and Lows of Modern Parenting

Irish parents feel they are doing well raising their children, with 74% feeling fairly or very confident in their parenting.

#### Why is this something to celebrate?

As any parent will attest: growing, loving and raising a family can be one of the most satisfying, stressful, joyful and exhausting life experiences. Yes, there are humans who think their mums and/or dads are the best thing since sliced bread (for at least part of their lives). But they also get bored easily, bring home every virus from school, and need lots and lots of our loving attention. Parenting is a 24 hour job.

Feeling good about the mammoth task of raising children is central to our motivation, happiness and sense of meaning in family life, laying a strong foundation for the next generation. Very few regret choosing to become parents.

But there is also another story to tell. While no two families are the same, working parents in Ireland all have one thing in common: their stress is higher than ever.

Parents in Ireland score higher across all stress indicators than adults without children.



Household chores



Parenting



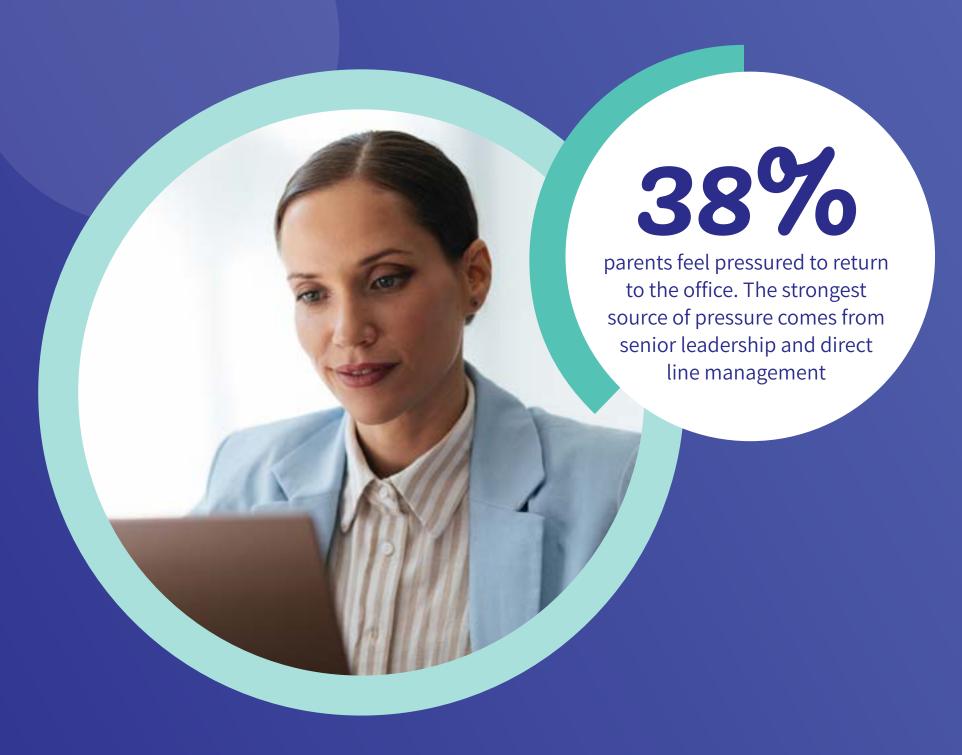
Care-giving for another family member

These activities are part of the tolerable humdrum of family life. And how much stress parents experience from these factors is influenced by the social supports available to them as well as their financial position.





**In Focus** 



Household chores, parenting and workload are causing stress higher than the national average for parents



Parents reporting higher levels of stress than those without children (76% vs 49%)



When it comes to work-related stress indicators, parents score higher than those without children too. These include:



Commuting



Workload



Working shifts



The working environment

With work life and family life so intertwined, stress is highest where the workplace is not offering parents the supports they need to manage the logistics of their lives.

So what steps can employers take to support parents and preventing them from burning out?

First and foremost, recognise when the 'normal' stress from being a working parent starts growing into something more problematic.

For example, one in three working parents are feeling pressured to return to the office. Employers need to understand that the feeling of pressure is one of the signs that stress levels are going in the wrong direction. Steps could be taken to offer more understanding and not a one size fits all approach when it comes to remote working policies. Taking individual circumstances into account might sound like a lot of work for management, but it would be a short term pain that goes a long way to helping some working parents feel less stressed, and ultimately perform better at their jobs.

However employers choose to support their employees, understanding the pain points of employees (parents or otherwise) should be a baked-in norm of every HR discussion. Creating an environment where everyone has a chance to thrive helps employees do their jobs even better.





# The Boom Lifestage: 55+

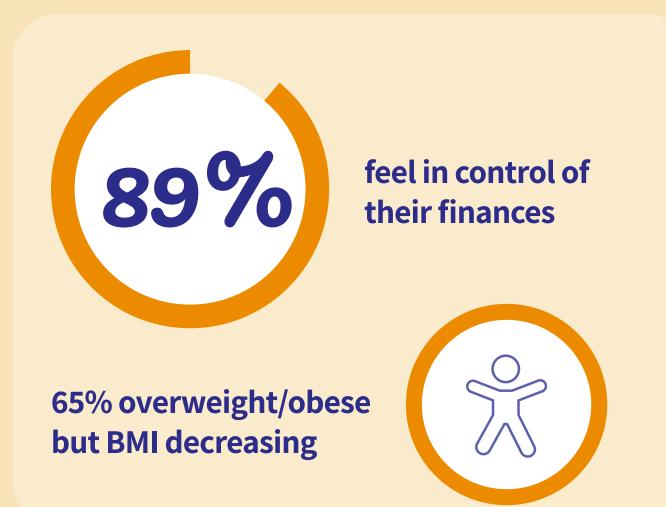
Happy, healthy and feeling good: the over 55s are thriving.

61% **Highest score on WHO Well-Being Index** 









549



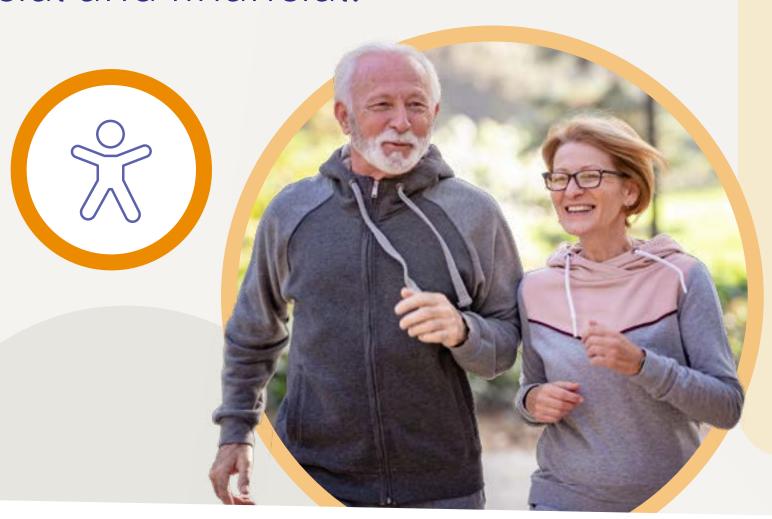
**Highest overall health score** 

(3% more than 2024)



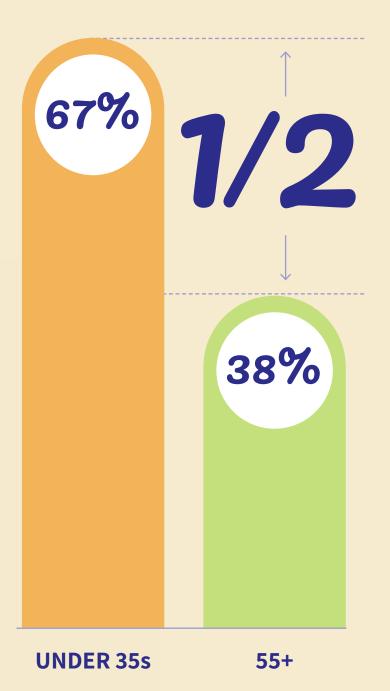
The Health Score is based a range of factors that make a broad contribution to our wellbeing, sense of vitality and happiness. And while there is no disputing that younger people are less at risk from disease and more physically healthy than older people, it would seem that if you want to be at your happiest in Ireland, you might have to wait until you're over 55.

Irish adults born before 1970 are out-performing the younger age cohorts in every area of wellbeing: physical, mental, social and financial.



#### **HOPEFUL AND HAPPY**

Half the number of over 55s experiencing mental health difficulties compared to under 35s



Lowest levels of anxiety

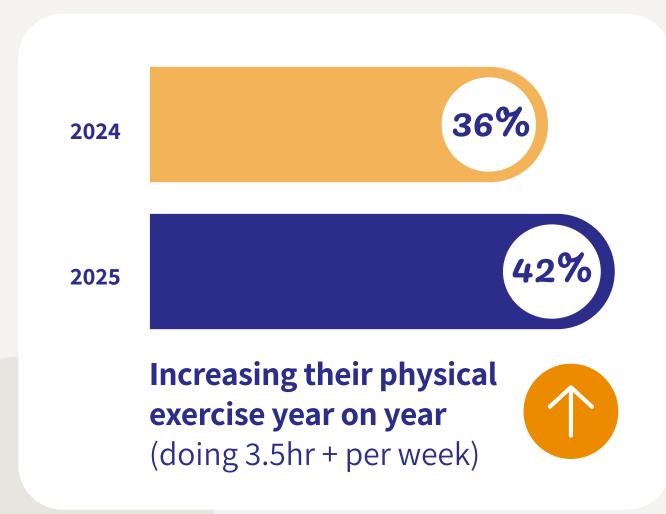




National average for weight, but increasing amount of exercise



Don't smoke, the least amount of smokers of any life stage





#### STRONGEST SOCIAL CONNECTIONS





81%
Have a close family relationship

74% Feel well integrated in society

20% reporting any feelings of loneliness



Most confident in financial health



prepared for a sudden loss of income (increase of 9% since 2024)

#### **MOST BALANCED DIET**



64%

Eating the most balanced diet and avoiding processed foods

#### **BALANCED IN WORK AND LIFE**



The over 55s are experiencing the least amount of challenge in working from home policy changes, and least amount of additional stress from activities including household chores, parenting, heavy workload and commuting



Feel they can enjoy life because of the way they are managing their money



# Lifestage Gap

## Why Are The Over 55s Such Outliers?

While a high health index score is great news for older people, and for the health of the nation, the real story here is the obvious gap in health between each age cohort.

And it raises lots of questions.

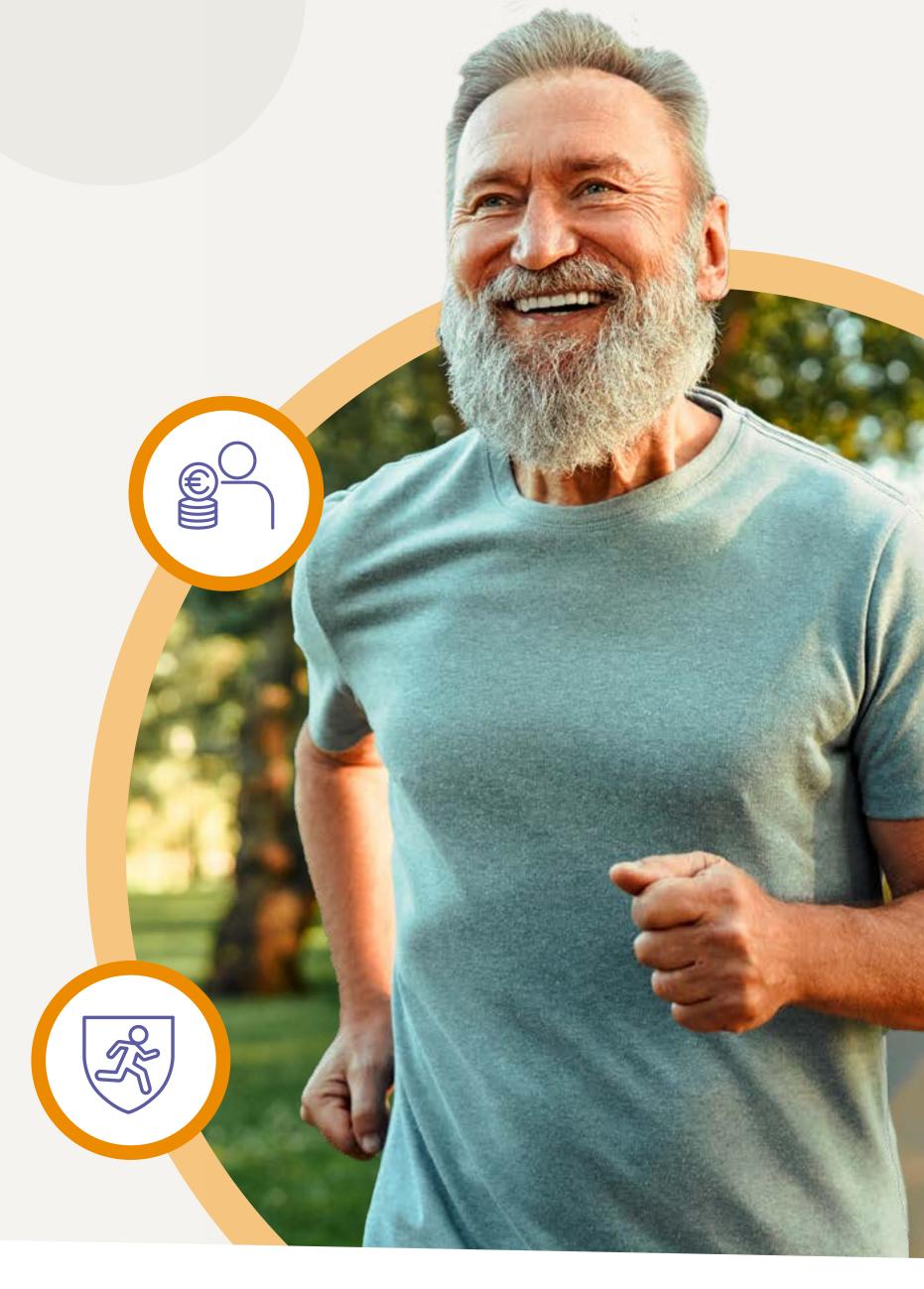
- Why are the older people so much healthier than those younger than them?
- What does this data signal for the overall health of Ireland?
- And what, if anything, can we predict for our younger cohorts as they age?

Behavioural differences do exist between the cohorts, but it would be overly simplistic to assume that the over 55 cohort were particularly savvy in health and finances, more mentally resilient and better able to deal with the pressures of life. The fact is that many people over 55 were born into very different times.

Over 55s often benefited from a more supportive financial and social system, had greater control over their careers, received more family support in raising children, and had access to cheaper housing. These advantages have had a massive positive impact. In fact, they might even be considered the building blocks for this age group's healthier later life, giving them a strong sense of social wellness and, crucially, the financial balance to weather through life's inevitable storms.

In general, the over 55s have been very lucky.

Comparing their experience to that of today's under 35s, is like comparing apples and oranges. Although inspiring, policy makers and employers must remember that the positive health scores for the over 55s may not be representative of what's in store for the younger cohorts as they age into that bracket.







55+: What to take away

# Resistance training and mobility for older people.

The health score of the over 55s is positive, but with 65% of them overweight or obese, improvements can always be made.



**Stacey Machesney**Head Irish Life
Wellbeing

Cardio fitness keeps your heart beating strong until your 60s, to maintain strength and your body moving freely, with resistance training helping you beyond this.

Resistance training is basically another way of saying lifting weights (they don't have to be very heavy) and as we age it becomes a more and more important part of our fitness routine.

As we practice resistance training, we not only support our muscles in becoming stronger, we also support our bone density. Because an increase in bone density offsets osteoporosis, it makes us less likely to fracture or break bones if we happen to fall - a leading cause of injury in older people and often the start of a decline due to ageing. Holding on to our mobility for as long as we can is a great predictor of life span and a high quality of life as we age.

#### PROGRAMMES WE RECOMMEND



#### **EVER ACTIVE - MOVEMENT FOR THE MIND BY IRISH LIFE WELLBEING**

An on demand digital programme to help manage day-to-day stress to support personal growth including improving fitness and cultivating healthy habits.



## **Neurodiversity and Work**





In any truly innovative environment, different ways of working are understood, valued and celebrated.

With 1 in 10 Irish adults self-reporting to be neurodiverse it's vital that employees feel safe to name and discuss this experience, and seek ways to work best for themselves and their teams.

This year, in a first for the Health of the Nation report, we have measured attitudes towards neurodiversity in the workplace.

Sadly, we found that only one in three of employees reported a positive view of neurodiversity at work.

In all cases of differing abilities, the onus should be on the organisation to support the individual. Autistic people, people with ADHD, dyslexia or dyscalculia need to be afforded the inclusion, respect, dignity and reasonable accommodations that support their work.

But there is a gap where managers don't feel equipped to talk about neurodiversity, or understand what supports are possible.

Giving managers expert-led training, and using policies to foster a culture of psychological safety is the best approach to creating the inclusive environment where differences are not hidden, but instead are understood, respected and valued.



33% believe their workplace does offer support for neurodiversity



## What Are We Learning?

Simply reading the Health of the Nation Report won't change anything. It's not enough to know the facts. The only thing that can change the reality of chronic stress in Ireland today is taking action.

Thankfully, while there are plenty of heavy hitting headlines in this year's report, there are also lots of tools available for employers to mitigate the problems raised. And the most important thing every employer can learn is that preventative action is vital.



Irish Life Wellbeing offers bespoke programmes with live or self-paced training from psychologists, nutritionists, doctors and other experts.

Training in areas like mental health, addiction, shift work, and neurodiversity will help staff and managers alike create an open and flexible environment of increased awareness and resilience - the cornerstone of any successful and innovative workforce. In addition, programmes designed to promote better physical health and movement, improved nutrition and even financial advice can greatly increase a sense of wellbeing.

These programmes are not only vital for employees wellbeing, but also for employers retaining their top talent. When today's youngest age cohort are the new senior managers they will bring their values around self care with them, and they will expect their organisations to be aligned. Recognising the shift in attitudes to health and wellbeing and evolving company policy with them will be a key marker of business success in the long-term.

The Health of the Nation report is a snapshot of what it's like to be an adult in Ireland today. But while the data gives us undeniable facts, it's important to remember, there is still much to learn and understand. With so much difference between the life stages, ongoing consultation and interest in employee wellbeing is going to be key to knowing which stressors are most affecting which employees, and designing solutions to support them.

Employers who understand that responsive health and wellbeing initiatives are an ongoing, long-term investment in their workplace culture will gain competitive advantage. One that will see them retain and attract talent, not just now... but well into the future.



## Methodology

#### **Completion Date**

The Health of the Nation Research was completed in July 2025.

#### Representation

We used a total sample of 1,033 adults aged 16+.

This included a nationally representative sample of adults aged 16+. The sample was quota controlled to be representative of the ROI population aged 16+ based on Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2022 figures for gender, age, region, and area. The sample also met the Association of Market Research Organisations (AIMRO) agreed figures for social class. National population norms are in line with CSO.

#### **List of contributors**

Prof. Niall Moyna
Prof. David Collings
Dr. Maire Finn
Dr. Carol Rogan
Stacey Machesney
Patrick Ryan

#### **Interview Panel**

Interviewing was completed by members of the IPSOS Behaviour & Attitudes Online Panel. This panel is regularly refreshed, while strict quality controls are in place on all surveys submitted.

#### **Research period**

The Health of the Nation research was completed in 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. Not all areas of interest were examined in each wave of research.







# Wellbeing

If you have any queries about the findings of this report or would like to find out more about Irish Life Wellbeing's services, please contact us at wellness@irishlife.ie