



EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION
HEALTH PRIORITY ISSUES: FACTS AND RESOURCES
JUNE 1, 2019

EBCI HEALTH PRIORITY – STRESS



In the 2017 EBCI Community Health Survey, 35% of participants selected stress as one of their biggest health concerns. Stress is related to a wide array of negative health outcomes, including preterm birth, being overweight and obese, tobacco use, and cardiovascular illnesses. Particularly damaging is chronic stress, which occurs when a person exposed to stress for long periods of time. Chronic stress may affect the body's ability to turn off the stress response, even when no longer in a stressful situation. This increases the wear and tear on an individual's body as it

consistently tries to address potential dangers. Socioeconomic status affects the stressors individuals face and their response to those stressors. Individuals in low-income families are more likely to face financial stress and are exposed to more physical hardships.

In addition to these stressors, Native American families may also face racism and historical trauma relating to forced removal from their homes, boarding schools, and colonization.

Historical trauma describes the way in which traumatic events that happened in the past, such as forced migration and colonization, affect individuals, communities, and cultures throughout generations. Historical trauma is linked to poor physical and behavioral health, such as increased rates of cardiovascular disease, substance use disorder, depression and suicide, and self-destructive behaviors. Historical trauma is also associated with a weakening of the family unit and damage to cultural identity.

Data Highlights

Health Indicators

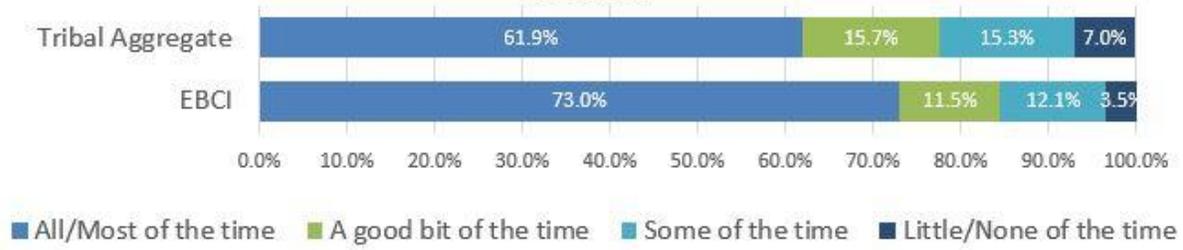
2017 EBCI Community Health Survey

- 33% of respondents identified stress a concern impacting their future health.
- 21% of respondents identified stress as a concern impacting their family's health.
- 37% of respondents identified "financial stress, work stress, and/or employment struggles" among the top 3 things negatively impacting their quality of life.

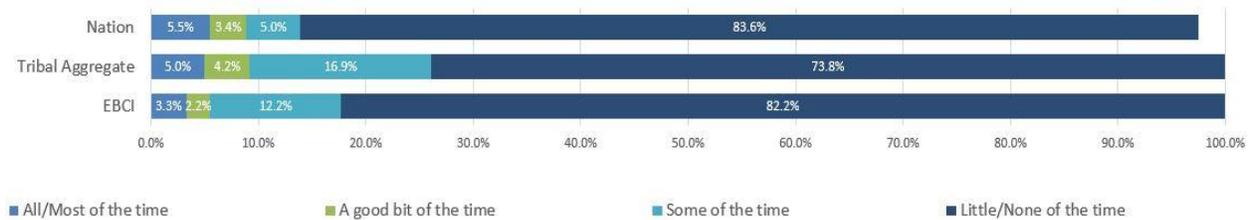
Identifying Our Needs: A Survey of Elders VI – EBCI Respondents

- EBCI elders were more likely than the tribal aggregate to report feeling calm and peaceful “all/most of the time.”
- EBCI elders were more likely than the tribal aggregate to report that they were rarely a nervous person.

During the past month, how much of the time have you felt calm and peaceful?



During the past month, how much of the time have you been a very nervous person?



2018 EBCI PHHS Employee Work-Related Stress Survey

PHHS conducted an employee work-related stress survey in 2018 with 86 respondents. The top 3 issues that caused the most stress, weighted average from highest to lowest, were:

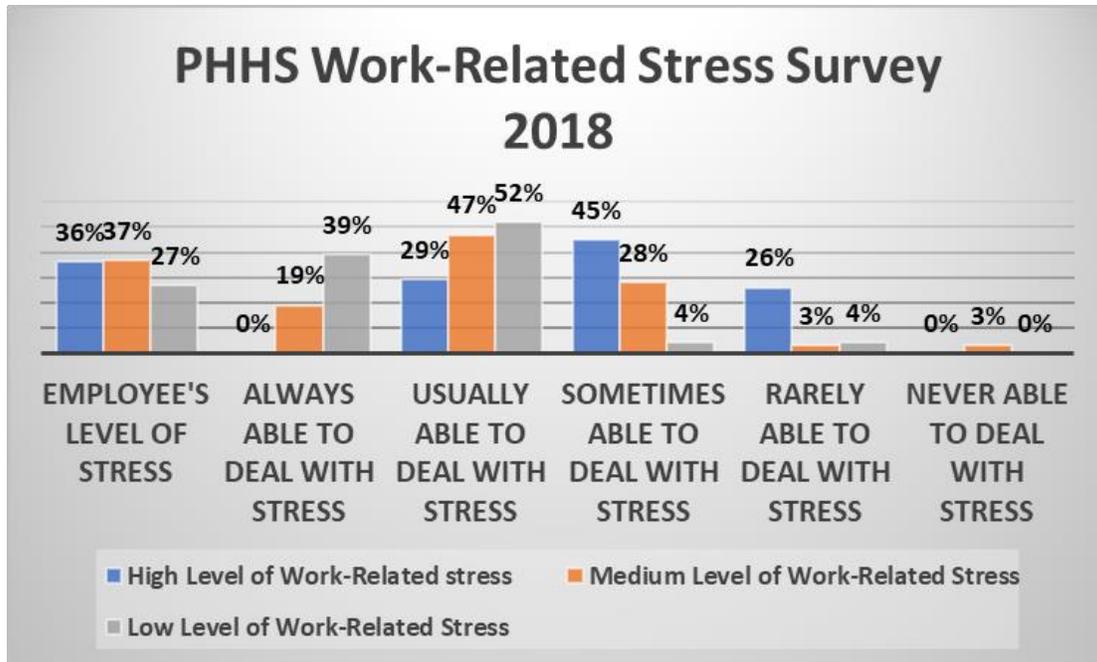
- Workload
- Connectivity issues – Internet, phone, email issues
- Tied for #3: Coworker behavior
- Tied for #3: Work hours

Unhealthy ways employees cope with work-related stress included:

- “Close myself off from co-workers”
- “Keep everything inside”
- “Take the stress home to my loved ones and lash out on the ones whom didn’t create the stress”
- “Worry about the stress and in some cases lose sleep”
- “Be unproductive”
- “Eat snacks”

Healthy ways employees cope with work-related stress included:

- “Walk outside”
- “Utilize Cherokee Fitness Center to exercise.”
- “Talk to co-workers.”
- “Find time to relax.”
- “Remove myself from the negative talk/gossip.”
- “Organization”



Understanding the Issue

American Psychological Association Stress in America™ Survey

The American Psychological Association conducts the Stress in America™ Survey each year. In 2017, 75% of adults reported experiencing at least one symptom of stress in the past month. The number of Americans reporting stress has risen over the past 2 years, although the levels of stress that individuals face has remained the same. The future of the nation is the most common source of stress for individuals, followed closely by money and work.

Income and Inequality

Income and inequality are linked to stress; studies show that poor people experience more stress than rich people do. Further, greater income inequality is associated with greater levels of stress in a community. On the Qualla Boundary, the GINI Index, a measurement of inequality on a scale from 0 (no inequality) to 1 (one person has all the wealth), is 0.4589, which is lower than the NC score of 0.4748 but higher than the national average of 0.4150 (Finder). In 2015, Tribal unemployment rates were low, less

than 1/3 that of North Carolina and less than ¼ that of the PRCSDA average. Despite this, the median income on the Eastern Cherokee Reservation was nearly \$6000 less than that of North Carolina.

This may be related to education levels. In 2016, the high school graduation rate in EBCI was 79.90%, 3 percentage points lower than the PRCSDA average and 6 points lower than the state average. The graduation rate has fluctuated since 2012, with 2012 having the lowest graduation rate of 75.9%.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

ACEs impact an individual’s future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunities. According to the CDC, ACEs have been linked to risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death. As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for these outcomes.



Other Stressors

Other stressors include the burgeoning opioid epidemic and its perceived relation to violence and crime, experiences of racism, intratribal conflict, healthcare, and family. Certain populations such as veterans and survivors of violence may face additional stressors or deal with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Health Resources available/needed

Cherokee Choices

Cherokee Choices offers a variety of services to the community. Tribal members can attend free, daily lunchtime yoga classes, which is one of a variety of methods that address stress. In addition to yoga, Cherokee Choices holds a yearly Stress and Healing Arts Retreat. At the retreat, participants learn “what stress is, how to identify it, and healthy ways to manage it.” These include acupuncture, healing touch, yoga, and talking circles.

Natural Environment

Trails

Cherokee, NC is the gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The park contains over 800 miles of trails. Beyond these trails, the Oconaluftee River Trail is a 1.5-mile trail on the Qualla Boundary. Mingo Falls is a slightly more difficult trail located around 5 miles from Saunooke Village. The newest trails in Cherokee, Fire Mountain Trails, opened in 2017 and provide 10.5 miles of multi-use trails. There are many more trails in the area surrounding Cherokee, making it an ideal place to clear one’s head.

Water

Cherokee is home to multiple rivers and waterfalls. Mingo Falls is, according to the EBCI Visitors’ Site, “arguably the most stunning cascade in the region.” Soco Falls is another well-known Cherokee waterfall, located on Soco Mountain. The Oconaluftee Islands Park offers “shady picnic spots, swimming, tubing, trout fishing, or the pleasant option of simply basking and splashing around with friends and family” on the Oconaluftee River. In addition to the Oconaluftee, there are nearly 30 miles of tribal waters with many opportunities for rest, relaxation, and stress reduction.

References:

1. <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2011/03/how-social-factors-shape-health.html>
2. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/trauma-toolkit/trauma-concept>
3. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/trauma-toolkit/trauma-concept>