

Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study



Background & Purpose

Risk factors for suicide, attitudes toward mental illness, and practice-related stressors among US veterinarians

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Objective—To evaluate the prevalence of suicide risk factors, attitudes toward mental illness, and practice-related stressors among US veterinarians.

Design—Cross-sectional survey.

Recent publications suggest that veterinarians have a high level of mental distress and elevated suicide rate



Background & Purpose

- High levels of student debt combined with modest incomes have created serious enough concerns that AVMA conducted a major symposium on solutions
- Numerous reports of compassion fatigue and burnout exist in the profession



Goals



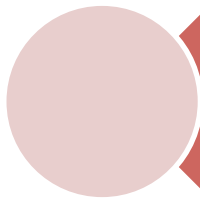
Definitively quantify the prevalence of mental illness and stress in the veterinary profession



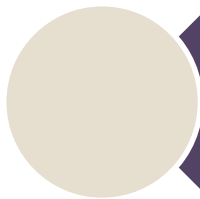
Compare to previous studies and general US population



Objectives



Determine levels of mental health and wellbeing using standardized tools with a representative sample of veterinarians



Identify at-risk segments and contributing factors



Suggest organizational and personal remedies and interventions if needed



Research Team



Ulrich Schimmack, PhD, University of Toronto

- Psychologist and wellbeing expert



Elizabeth Strand, PhD, LCSW, University of Tennessee CVM

- Licensed clinical social worker working in a veterinary setting



Linda Lord, DVM, PhD, Merck Animal Health (MAH)



Colin Siren, Kynetec Market Research



John Volk, Brakke Consulting



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Methodology

- ❖ AVMA:
 - 20,000 randomly selected email addresses
 - Email letter alerting sample to upcoming study
- ❖ Email invitation + 2 reminders
- ❖ Incentive: Drawing for 20 \$100 gift cards; contribution to AVMF
- ❖ Survey open Nov 2-16, 2017
- ❖ Average survey length 18.1 minutes.
- ❖ 3,540 usable, completed responses (17.7%)
- ❖ Data weighted based on age, gender and region of the US
- ❖ Margin of error +/- 1.62% at 95% confidence level



Two Key Measures

1. Serious psychological distress

- i.e., Mental Health
- Measured by standardized “Kessler 6” questions



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Two Key Measures

2. Wellbeing

- Wellbeing examines the way individuals think and feel about their lives compared to the best/worst possible lives they can imagine.
- Measured and indexed using standardized questions
 - *How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?*
 - *Suppose that the top of the ladder below represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. Where are you on the ladder?*
 - *Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.”*



Many Factors Explored

- Student debt
- Stage of career
- Overall financial health
- Work-life balance
- Unnecessary euthanasia
- Practicing v. non
- Personality

- Relationships
- Involvement in healthy activities
- Involvement in unhealthy activities
- Attitude towards profession



Results Benchmarked

- General population

- Mental Health and Wellbeing:
 - Panel Study of Income Dynamics, University of Michigan
- NESARC-III, NIH
 - Suicide ideation and attempts, US adult population
- Omnibus study
 - Questions regarding career recommendation



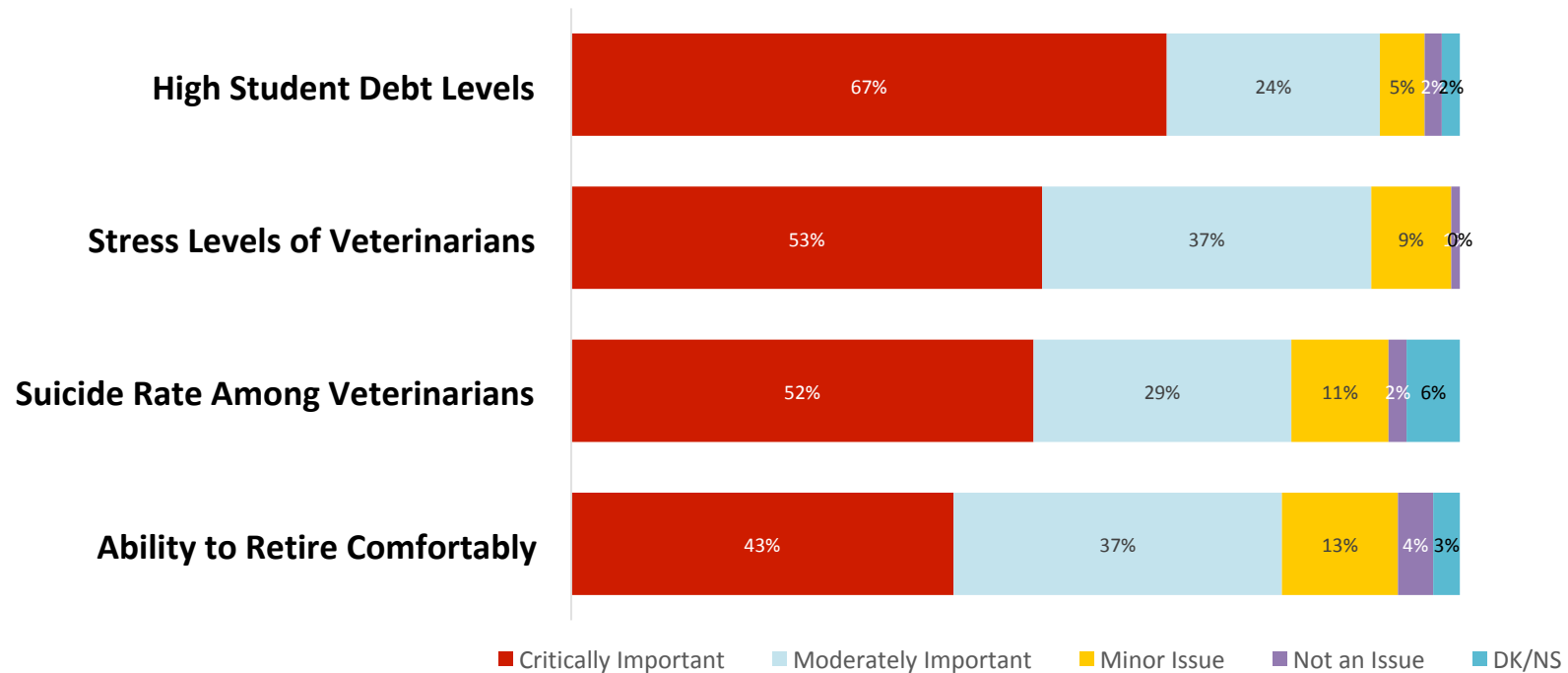
- Veterinarians

- Nett, R. J. *et al.* "Risk factors for suicide, attitudes toward mental illness, and practice-related stressors among US veterinarians," JAVMA 2015
- Others



Debt, Stress, Suicide Top Concerns

Among 11 tested



Below are several issues you may or may not consider to be significant challenges faced by the veterinary profession today.

Base: All Respondents: n=3,540

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Mental Health

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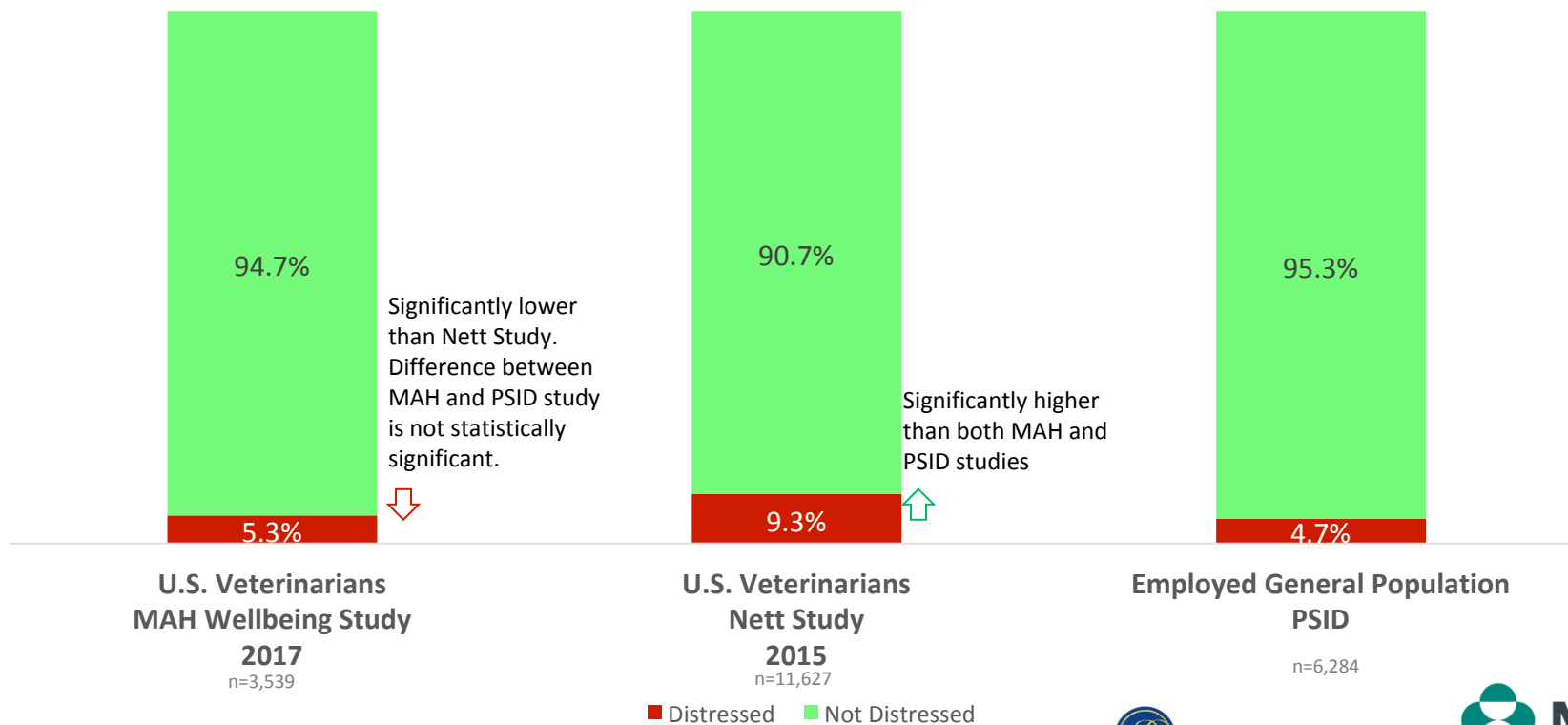


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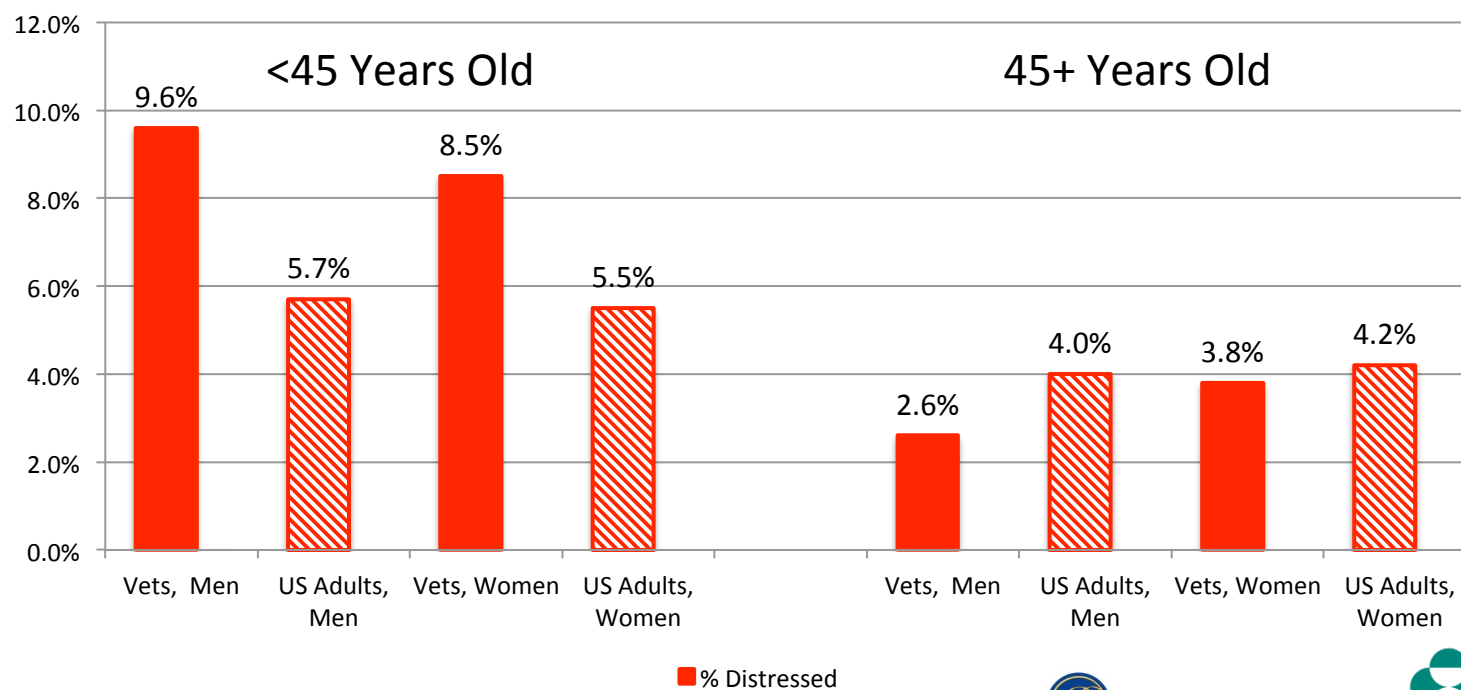


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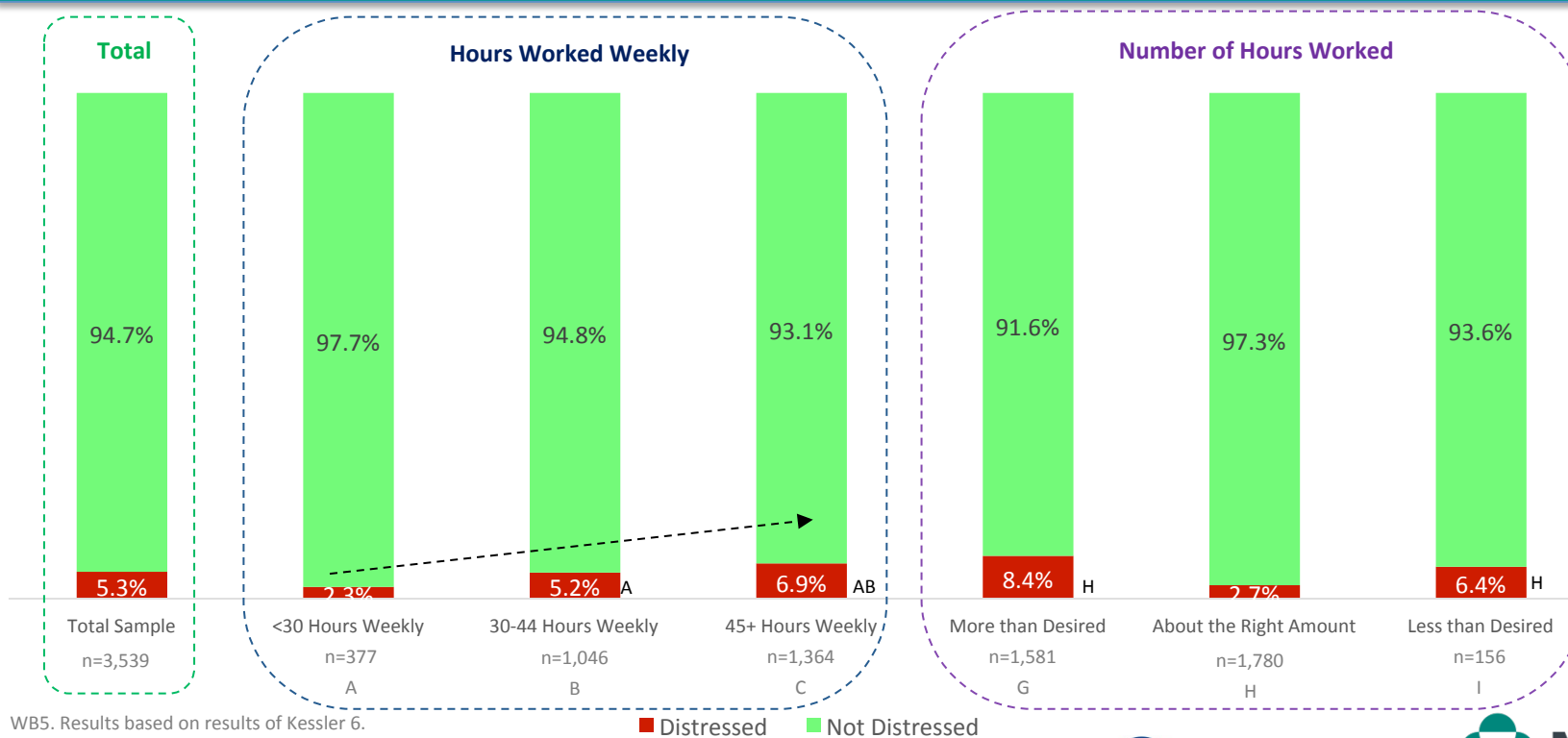
Psychological Distress Consistent With US; Lower than Nett



Distress Highest in Younger Vets



Psychological Distress Increases as Hours Worked Increases

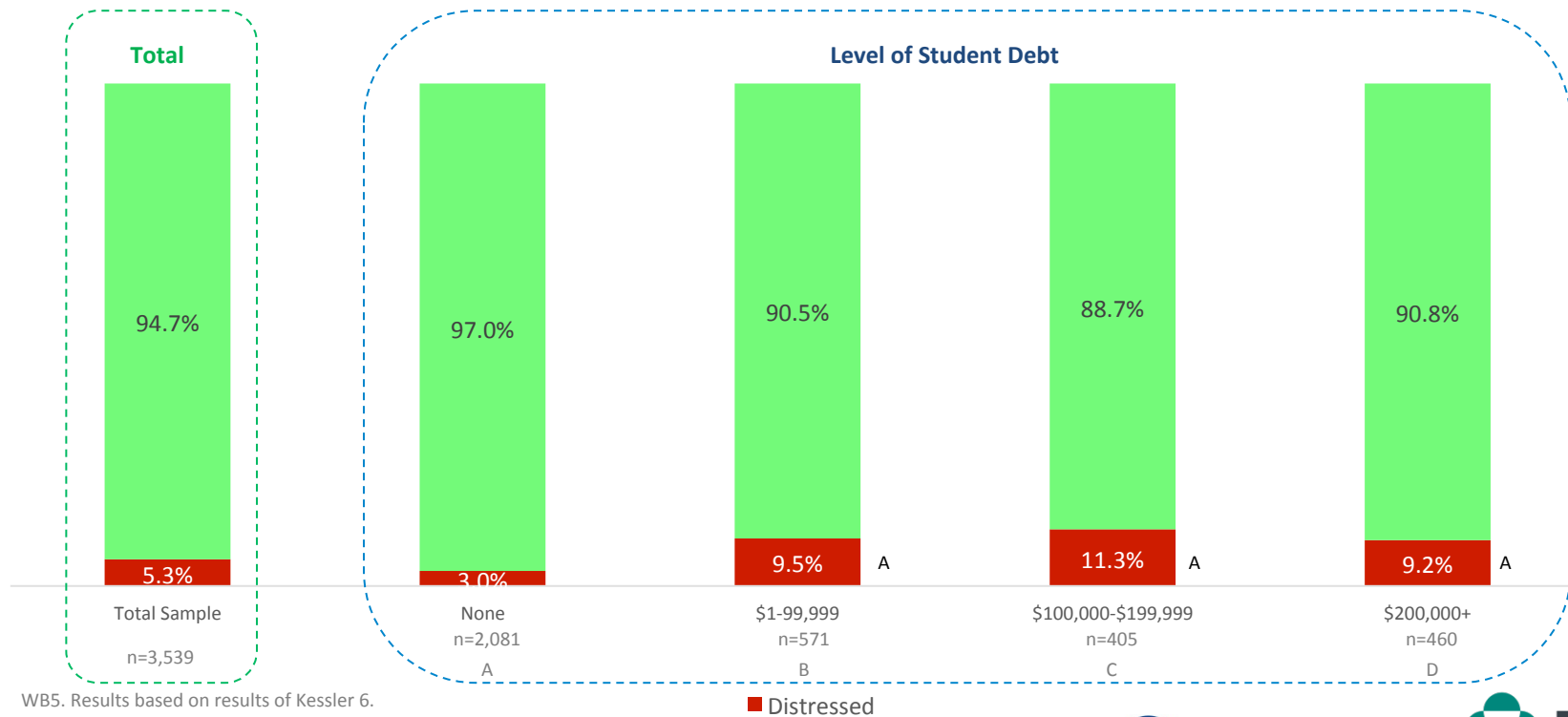


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Student Debt a Driver of Psychological Distress



WB5. Results based on results of Kessler 6.

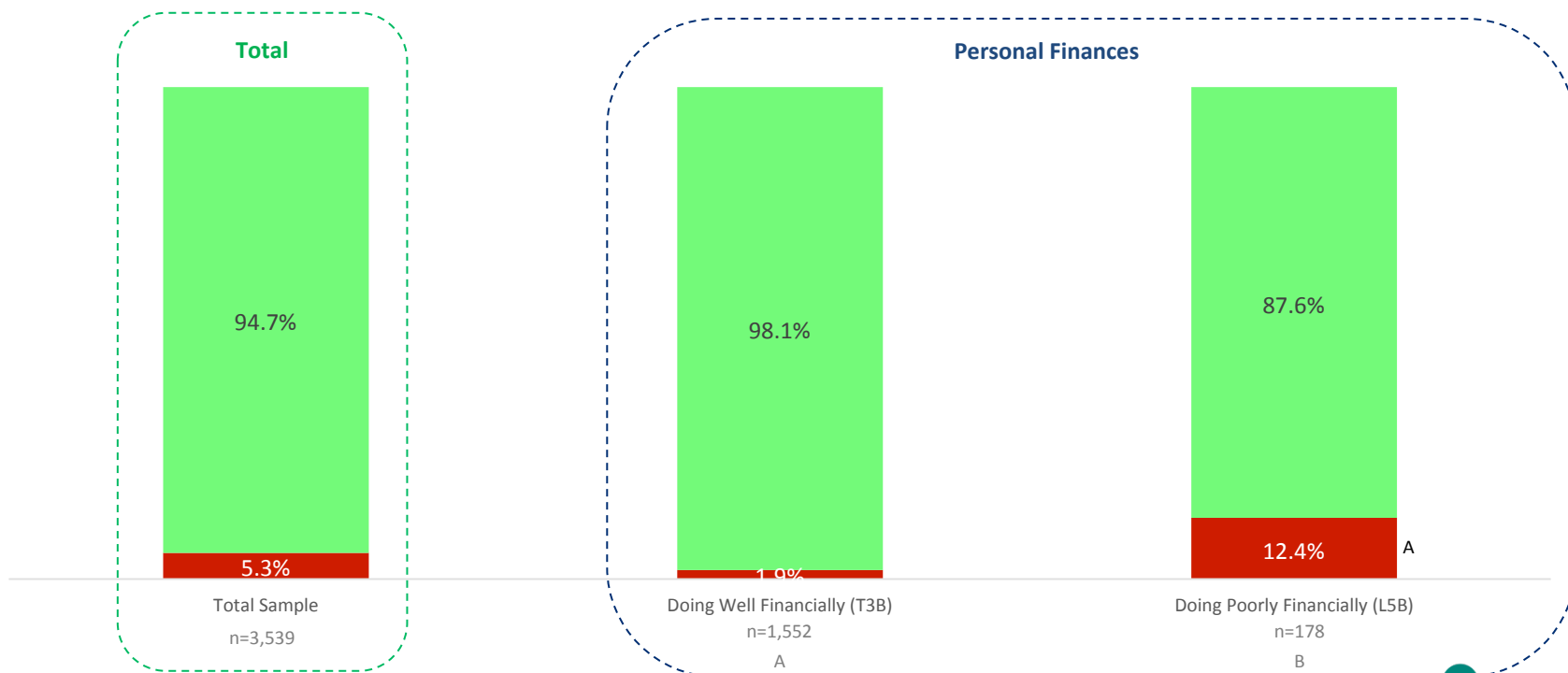


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Doing Poorly Financially Associated with Serious Psychological Distress



WB5. Results based on results of Kessler 6.

■ Distressed ■ Not Distressed



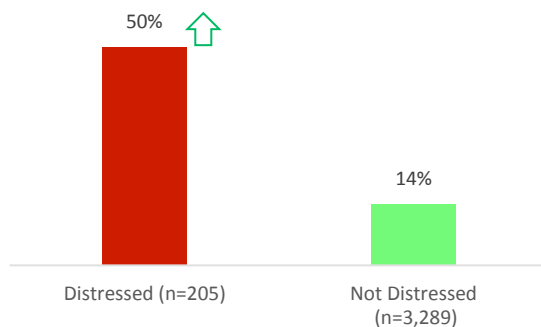
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Half Receiving Treatment

% Receiving Treatment or Medication for any Mental Health Condition



↑↓ Statistically Significant Difference

Major self-reported conditions of those distressed:

Depression	94%
Compassion fatigue/ burnout	88%
Anxiety, panic attacks	83%

MH1. Are you now taking medicine or receiving treatment from a doctor or other health professional for any type of mental health condition or emotional problem?

MH11. Does your practice or company offer an Employee Assistance Program (a program that helps assist employees with personal problems).



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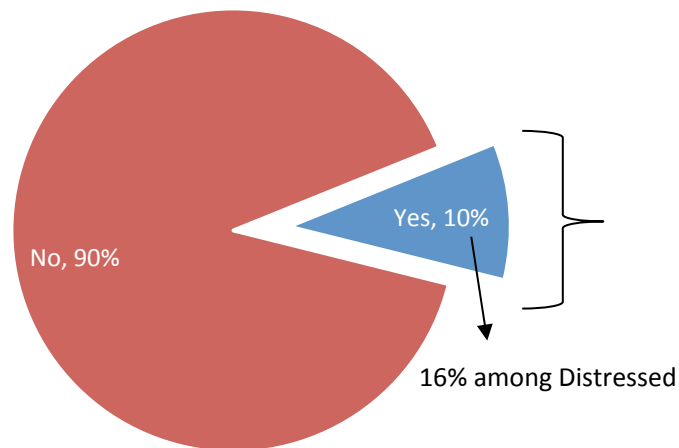


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Some Access Resources from Vet Organizations

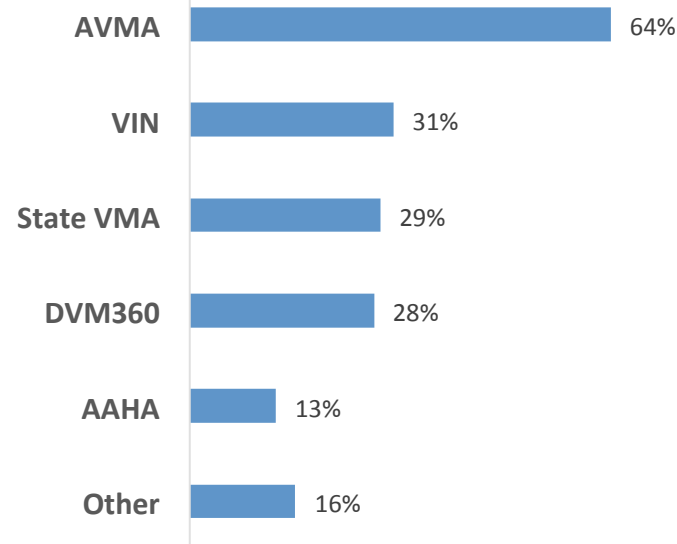
% Have Accessed National/State Literature, Websites and/or Resources

(n=3,543)



If Yes, Which Did You Access

(n=378)



MH12A. Some national and state veterinary organizations have literature, websites and other resources available regarding wellbeing and mental health. Have you ever accessed any of those resources?

MH12B. If yes, which ones?

MH13. How useful to you personally were the resources you used from each organization listed below?

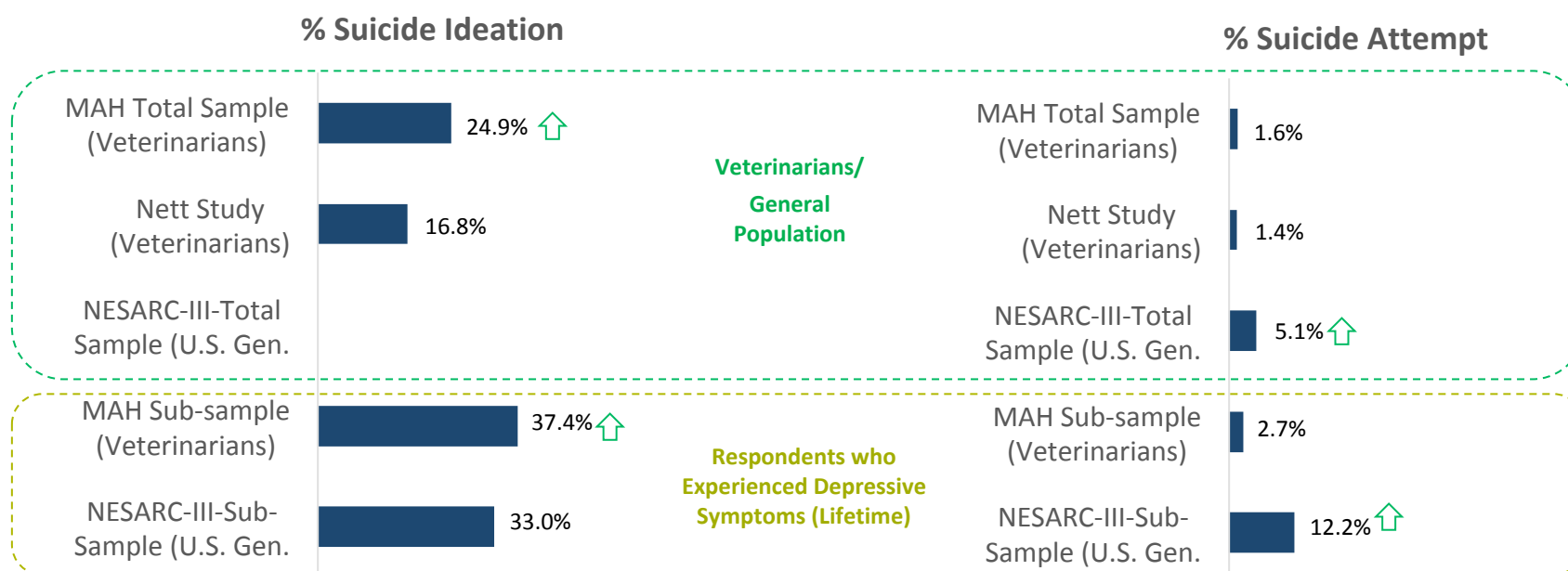


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Suicide Ideation and Attempts



MH4. During the time when your mood was at its lowest/you enjoyed or cared the least about things, did you think about committing suicide?

MH5. During the time when your mood was at its lowest/you enjoyed or cared the least about things, did you attempt suicide?

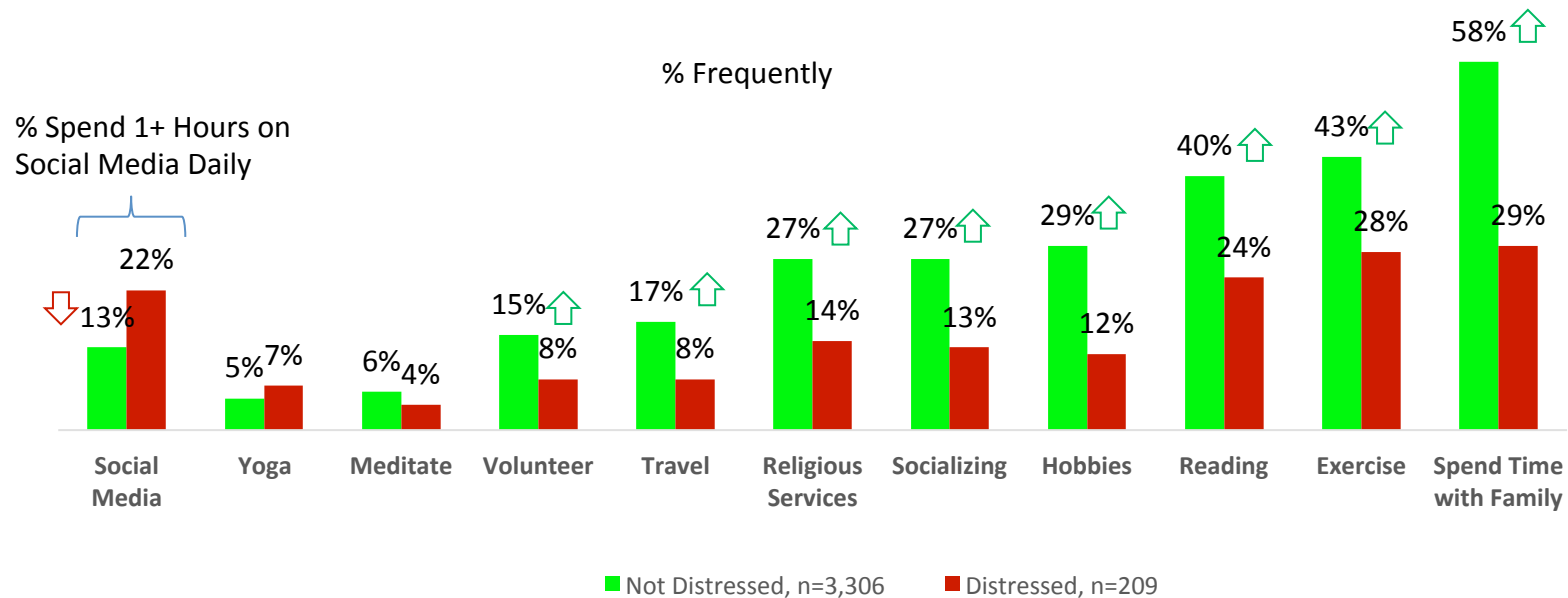


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Psychologically Distressed Vets Less Likely to Participate in Healthy Activities



↑ Statistically Significant Difference

DEM 9. Approximately how often do you do each of the following, if at all: Spend time with family



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Most Helpful Activities To Prevent Distress

- Spending time with family
- Socializing with friends
- Traveling for pleasure
- Reading for pleasure
- Limiting time on social media



Wellbeing

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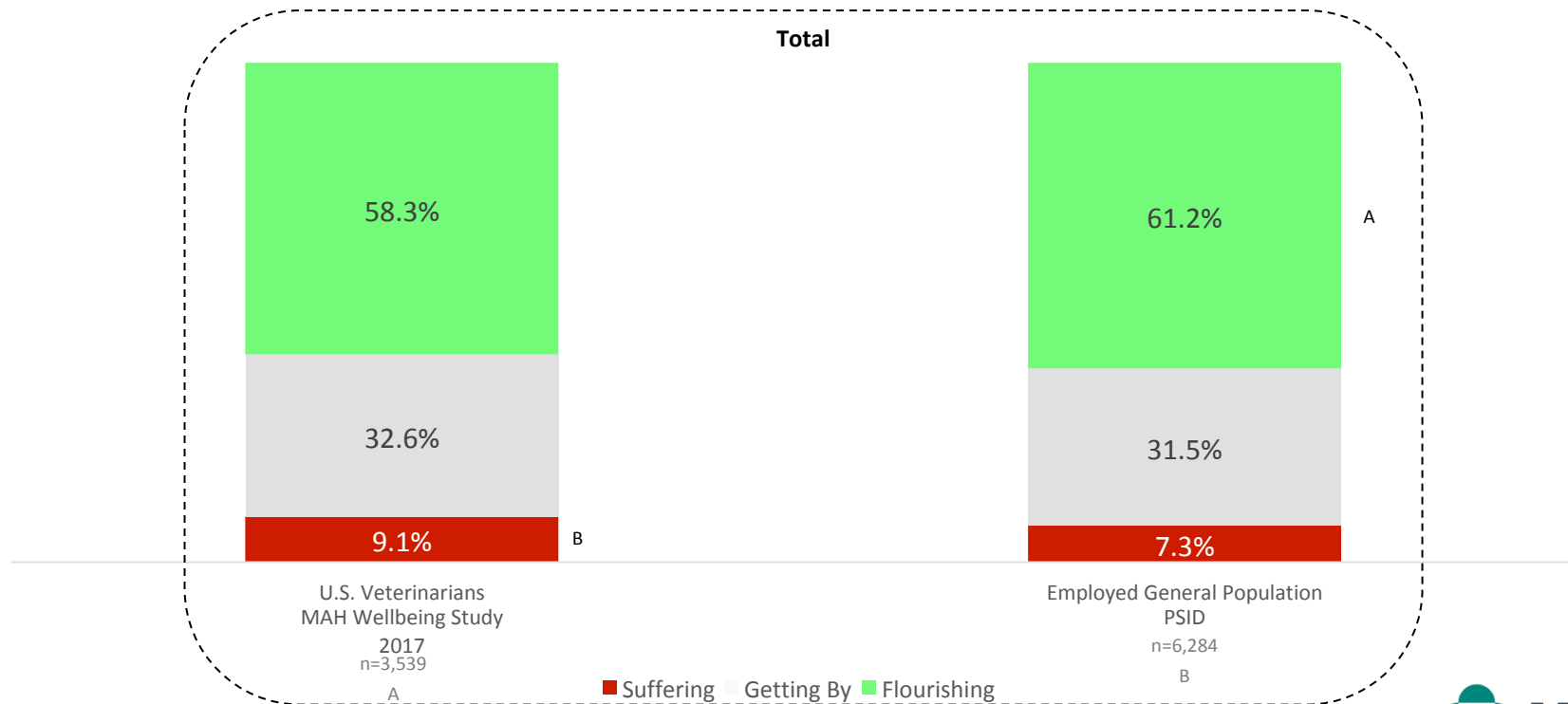


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Veterinarian Wellbeing Slightly Lower Than General Population



Segmentation Using MAH Wellbeing Index

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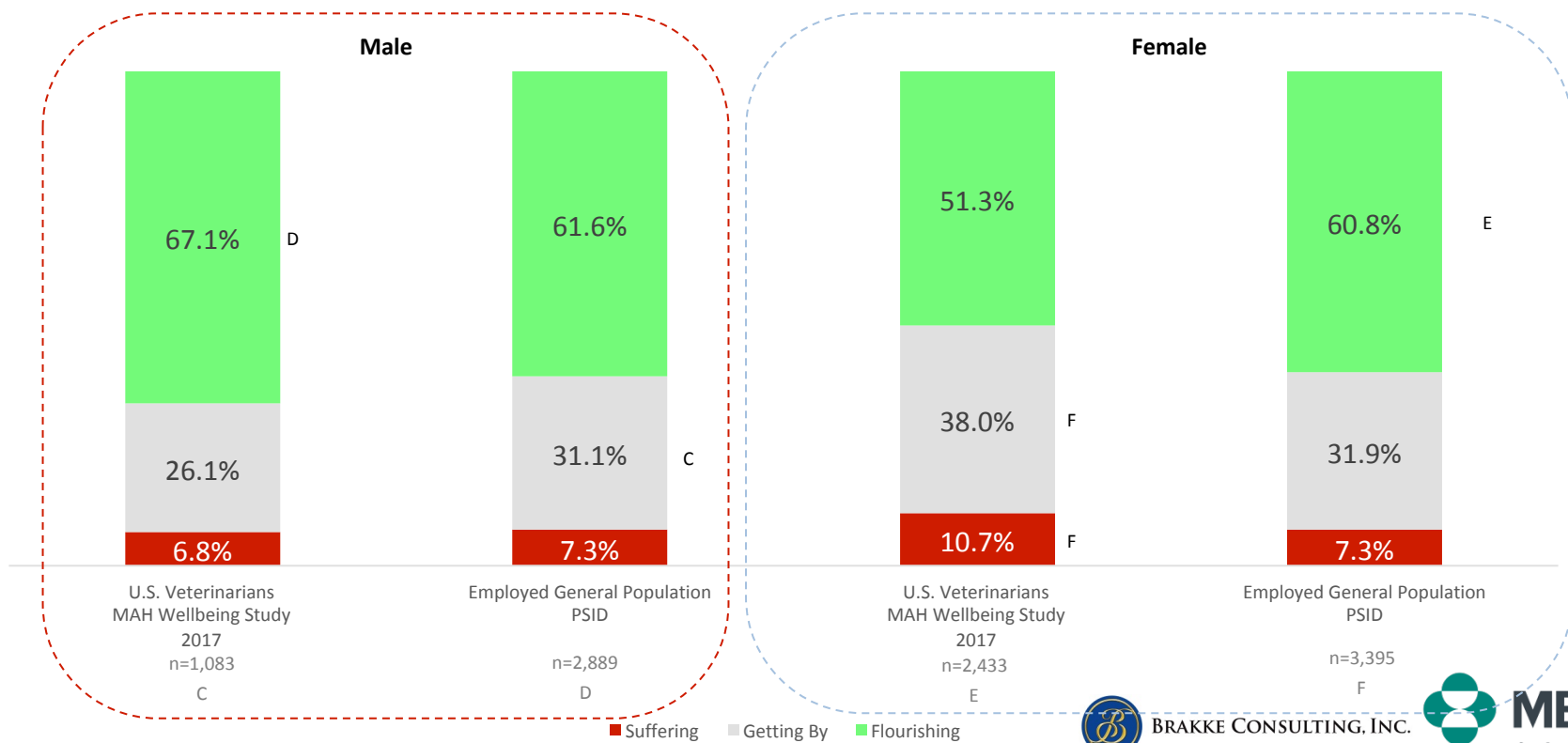


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Men Veterinarians Higher, Women Lower Than General Population

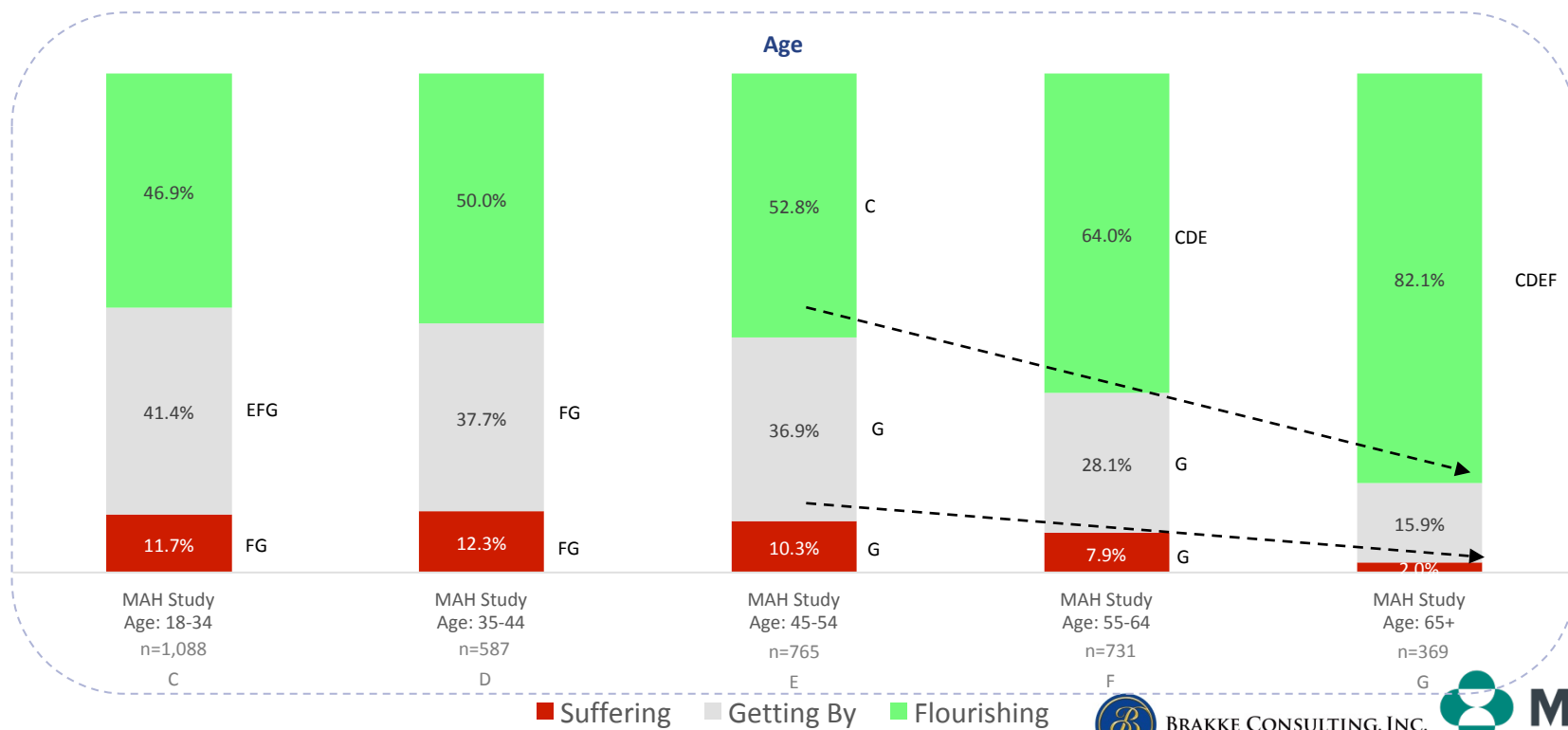


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Wellbeing Varies Significantly by Age



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Age v. Gender



Among veterinarians under 45 – and 65+ – differences in wellbeing of men and women not statistically significant



Among veterinarians age 45-64, men on average exhibit higher levels of wellbeing than women



Age v. Gender



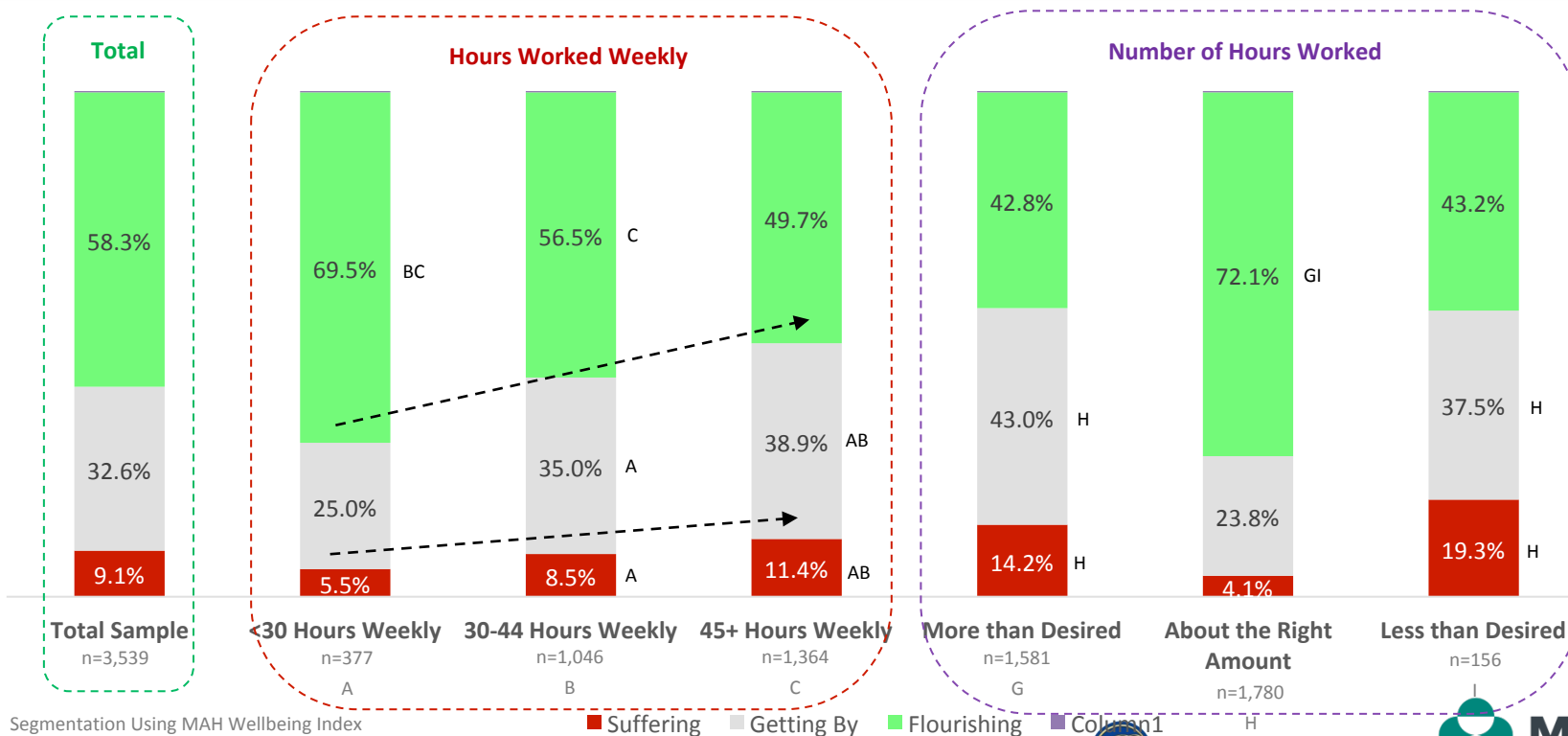
Among veterinarians under 45 – and 65+ – differences in wellbeing of men and women not statistically significant



Among veterinarians age 45-64, men on average exhibit higher levels of wellbeing than women



Hours Worked Dramatically Impacts Wellbeing

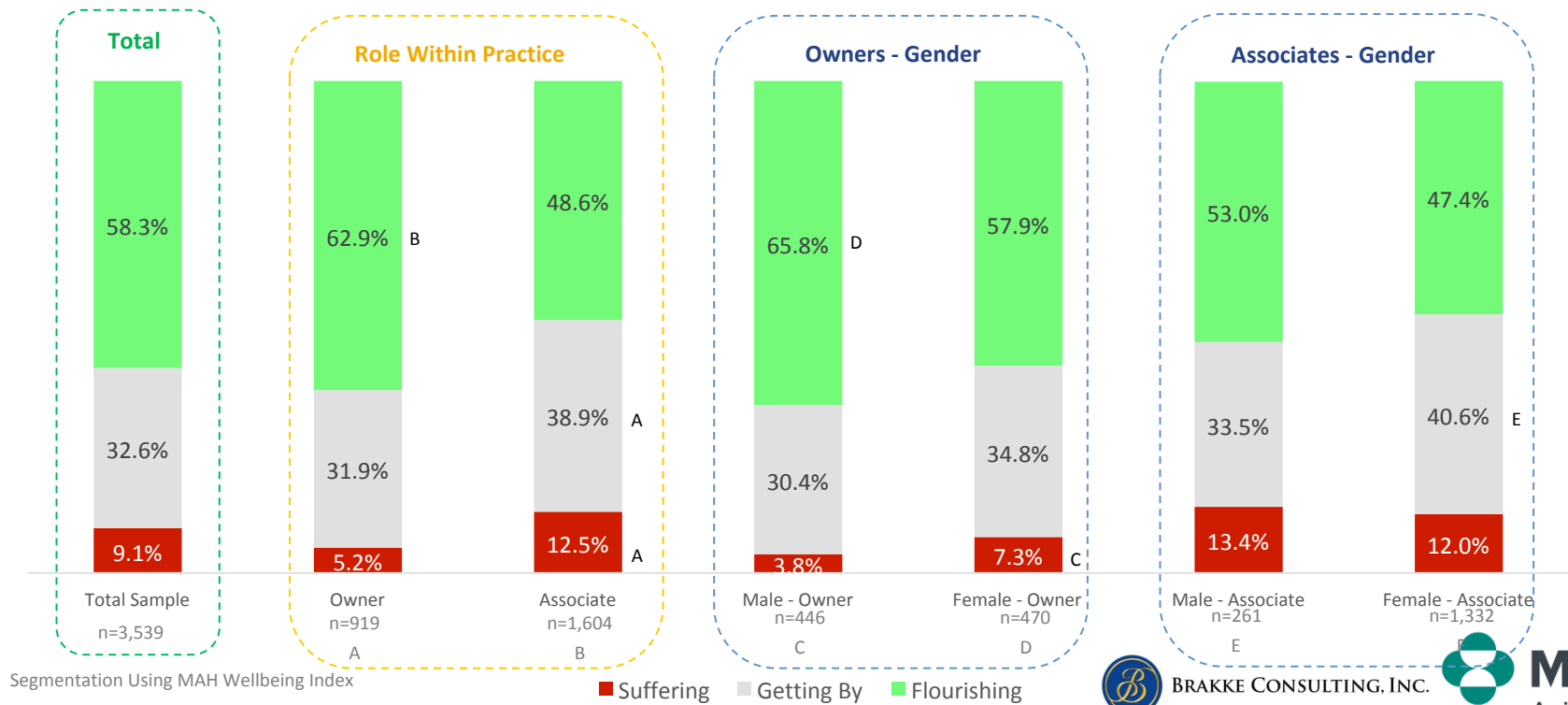


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Owners Report Higher Wellbeing than Associates



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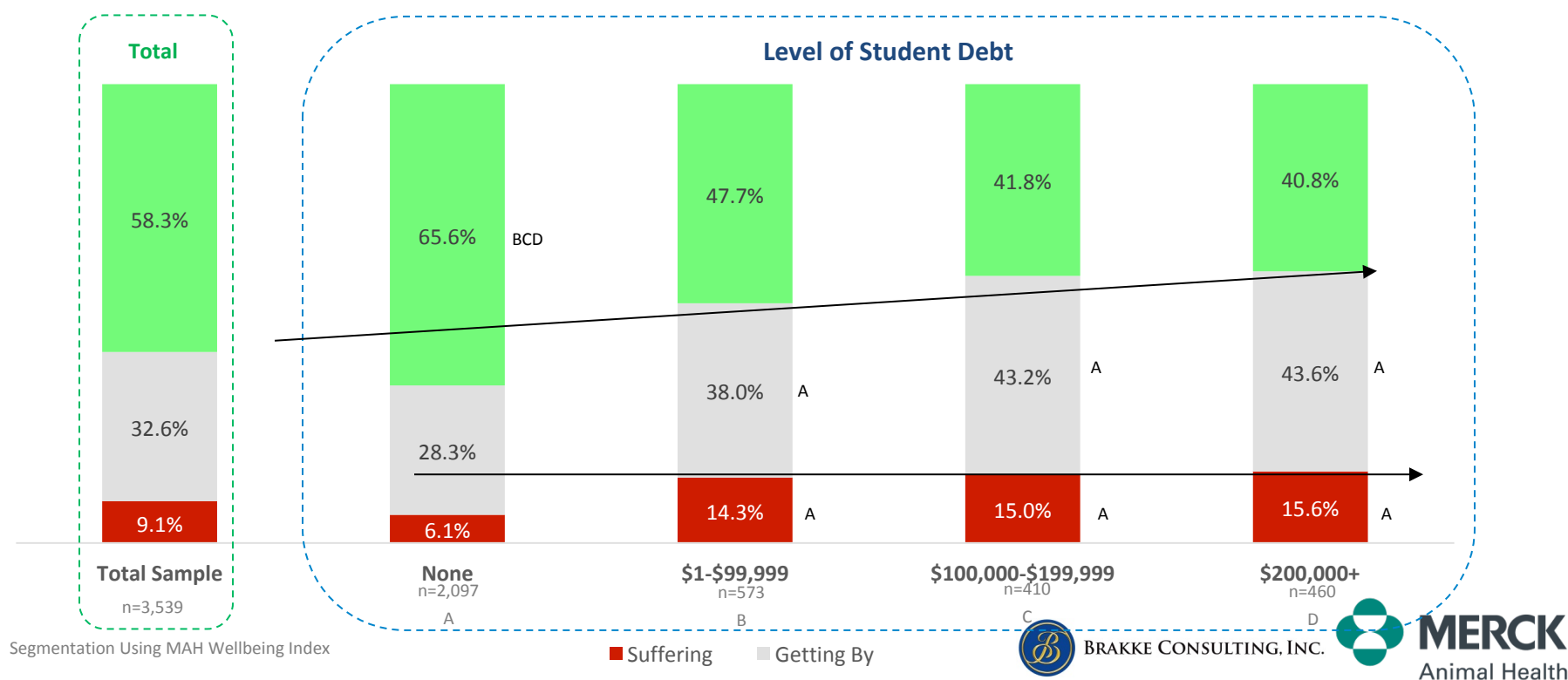


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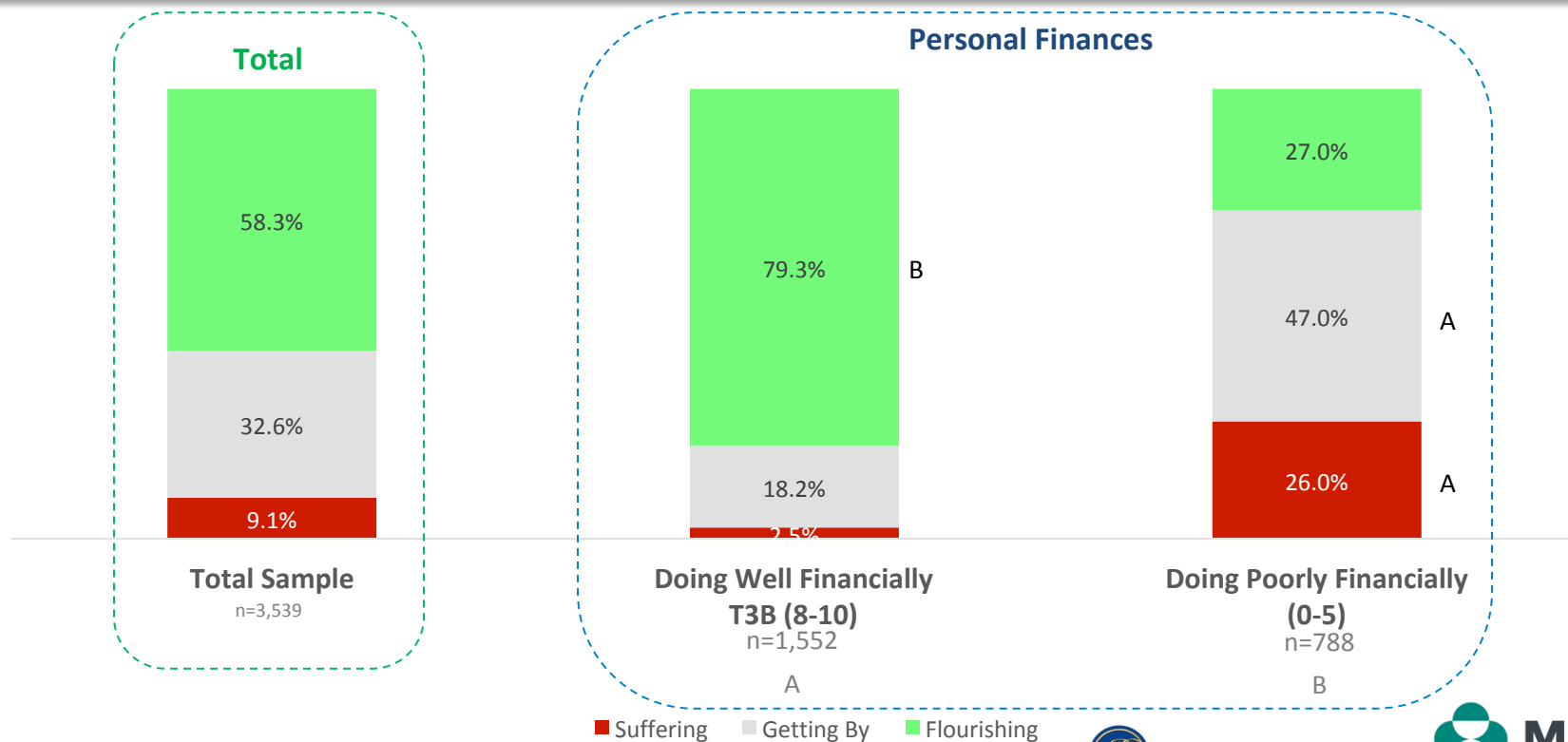


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Student Debt Impacts Wellbeing, Regardless of Amount



Doing Poorly Financially Has Major Impact on Wellbeing

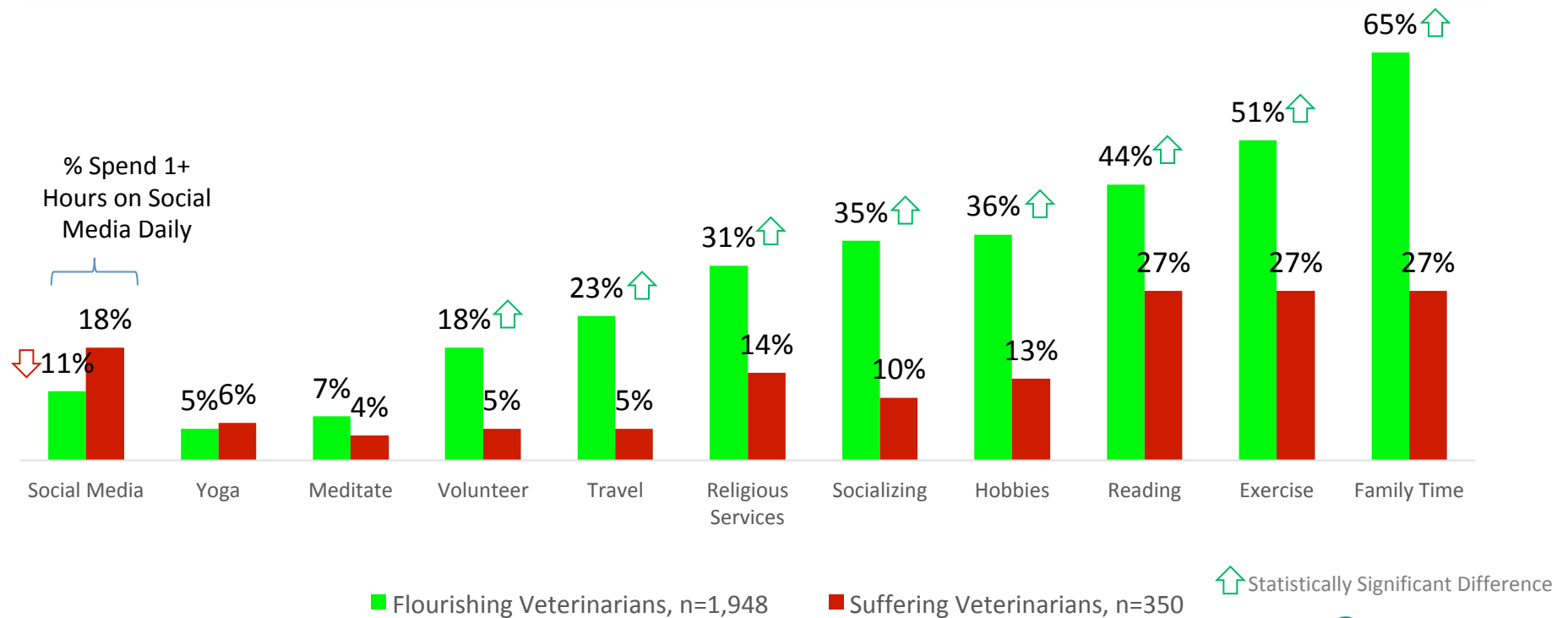


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“Flourishing” Veterinarians Much More Likely to Engage in Healthy Activities



DEM 9. Approximately how often do you do each of the following, if at all: Spend time with family



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Work Factors Associated Most with Wellbeing

- Higher income
- Working fewer hours
- Lower student debt
- Being an owner
- Not working evenings

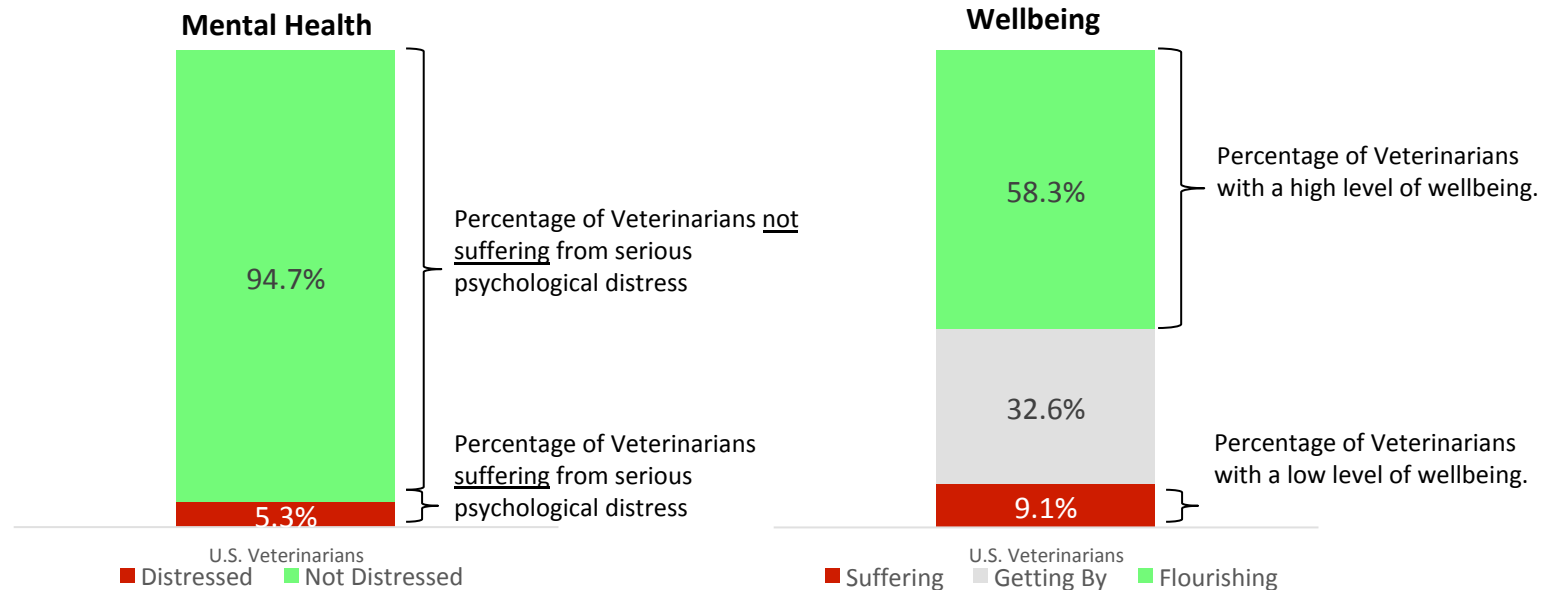


Non-Work Factors Associated Most with Wellbeing

- Traveling for pleasure
- Spending time with family
- Socializing with friends
- Having a hobby
- Exercising
- Being married/in relationship



Comparing Mental Health vs. Wellbeing Results



Interrelationship Between Mental Health and Wellbeing



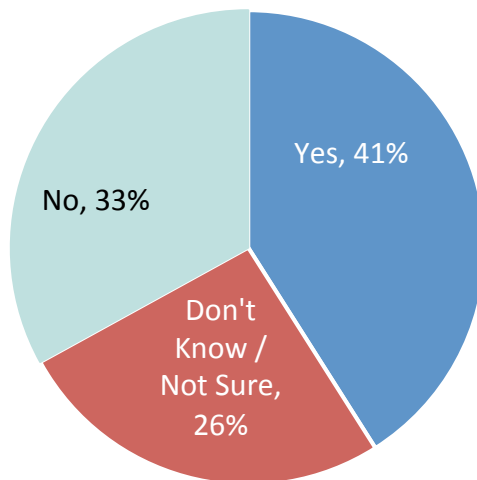
	Flourishing n=1,935 A	Getting By n=1,233 B	Suffering n=349 C
Distressed	0%	8% ^A	28% ^{AB}
Not Distressed	100% ^{BC}	92% ^C	72%

Only 28% of those with low wellbeing are identified as having serious psychological distress.

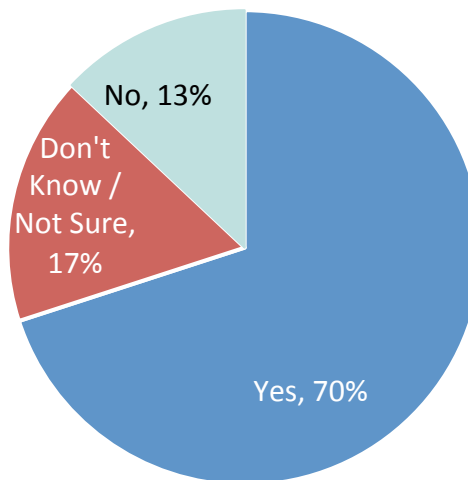
Recommend the Profession

Only 41% of veterinarians recommend a career in veterinary medicine

Veterinarians

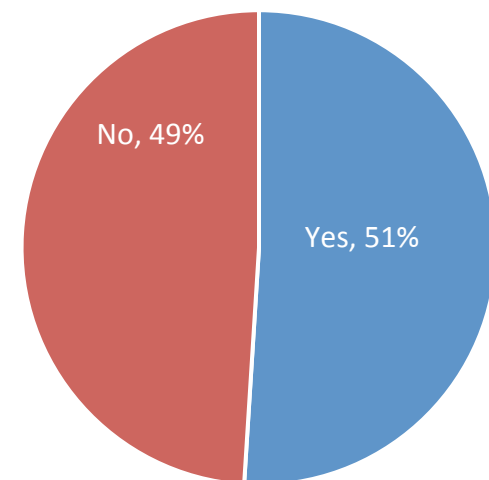


General Population



Source: Omnibus Study

Physicians - 2016



Source: Survey of America's Physicians, 2016

CLINIC 9a. Would you recommend a career in veterinary medicine to a friend or family member?



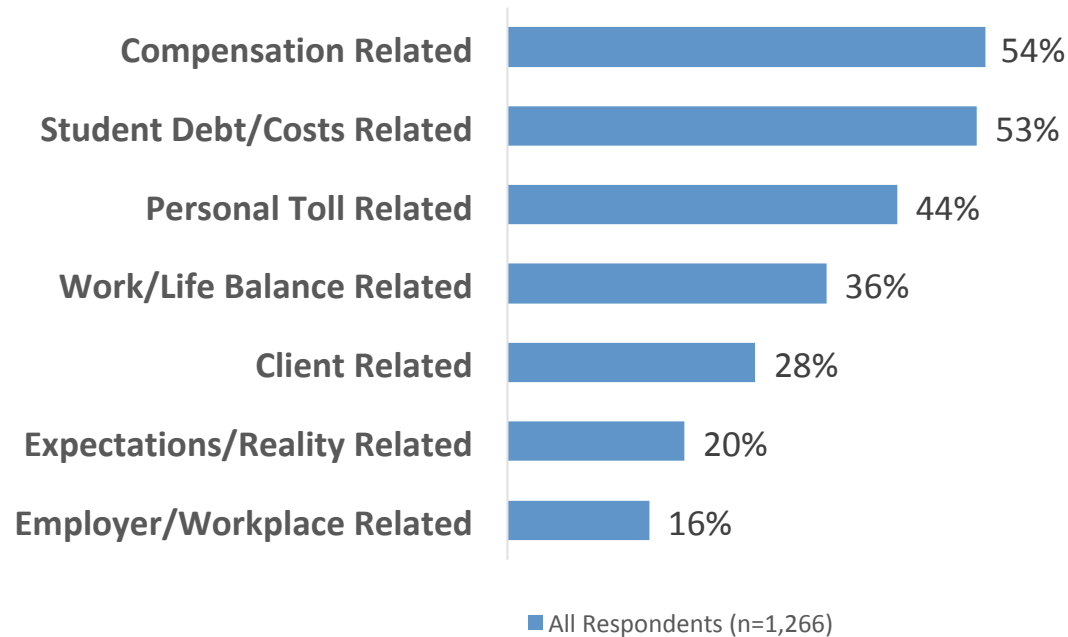
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Recommend the Profession

Why Career not recommended



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Conclusions & Recommendations



Conclusions

Veterinary Medicine is not in a state of crisis. About 1 in 20 veterinarians are suffering serious psychological distress, consistent with what is found in the general population.

Significant challenges exist, however, particularly with younger veterinarians



Conclusions

Some serious psychological distress is associated with non-work-related attributes. However, student debt, income and some work-related factors are strongly associated with psychological distress.



Conclusions

Those with serious psychological distress and poor wellbeing are far more likely to spend more time on social media and less time on healthy activities (e.g., time with family and friends, recreation, exercise).



Conclusions

There's a mental health treatment gap in veterinary medicine. While many veterinarians with serious psychological distress are getting treatment, a significant population is not. Few employers offer Employee Assistance Programs.



Conclusions

Veterinarians as a whole have slightly lower levels of wellbeing than the general population. Interestingly, older, more experienced veterinarians as a group experience higher levels of wellbeing than the general population.



Conclusions

Contributing to low wellbeing:

- Student debt
- Low income
- Working long hours
- Relief work



Conclusions

Contributing to high wellbeing:

- Marriage/relationship
- Socializing with friends
- Satisfactory family life
- Engaging in healthy activities
 - Exercise, travel, hobbies

Job satisfaction, where it exists, is a stronger predictor of wellbeing than in the general population



Conclusions

Veterinarian do not strongly endorse the profession, even many that score high in wellbeing and mental health.

Reasons:

- Low incomes,

- High student debt

- Personal toll the profession takes

- Poor work-life balance



Recommendations

More could be done to promote wellbeing, create awareness of mental health issues and help those at risk find acceptance and treatment.



Recommendations

Veterinary Organizations

- ▶ Educate constituents about signs, symptoms and rates of mental illness among veterinarians
- ▶ Reduce barriers to seeking help:
 - Develop a national hotline where those who are distressed can find counseling and other help.
 - Provide and require veterinary CE in the skills of emotional crises management and suicide prevention



Recommendations

Veterinary Organizations

- Reduce barriers to seeking help:
 - Establish peer to peer support networks for mental health
 - Engage innovative tele-behavioral health solutions to make access to mental health care more flexible, inexpensive, and time efficient.



Recommendations

Veterinary Organizations

- ▶ Evaluate, improve and more effectively publicize existing organizational wellness resources
- ▶ Continue to seek ways to reduce student debt and improve financial conditions in the profession, especially for young veterinarians.



Recommendations

Veterinary Colleges

- Require students to develop and engage stress management behaviors while in school.
- Continue to expand scholarship opportunities for students
- Extend services of veterinary mental health professionals to alumni



Recommendations

Employers

- Educate employees on the existence of mental health issues and provide time off for appointments with physicians and counselors
- Outwardly discuss and set healthy practice expectations for work/life balance



Recommendations

Employers

- Create mentoring programs for new employees to help them gain the skills and confidence needed to perform satisfactorily in their career
- Consider partnering with in-practice veterinary social work professionals



Recommendations

You

- ▶ With the help of a mental health professional or coach develop a stress management plan
- ▶ Budget time for healthy activities such as family time, socializing with friends, recreation and exercise
- ▶ Retain a certified financial planner to develop a plan to manage finances and student debt



Recommendations

You

- ▶ Limit social media time to an hour per day or less
 - Take periodic “sabbaticals” from social media
- ▶ Be vigilant for signs of psychological distress in yourself and others; seek help or encourage others to seek help
- ▶ Show support for others’ efforts towards wellness
 - (i.e. “Good job getting out of the clinic at 5:15 today!”)



For More Information

<http://www.vetwellbeing.com>



Thank you!

