

MSPD

Occasionally landing on my desk are communications that focus on how well we are travelling in these modern times. Among these have been two reports focusing on persistent stress and its twin, procrastination.

The former was Lifeline's media release of its annual stress poll for 2010,* which estimated that 90% of Australians were experiencing stress. Indeed, 43% of Australians, just short of 9.5 million of us, were found to be very stressed! Surprisingly, despite our "She'll be right, mate" culture, we appear to be more stressed than Americans; a comparable poll in the United States revealed that 75% of its people were stressed, with 25% experiencing high levels of stress.

Significantly, the most important stressor for Australians is their work, with 74% of those employed finding work stressful and 23% finding it very stressful. It would seem we are all drowning in oceans of occupational stress.

Some time before this, my attention was drawn to a commentary that explored the phenomenon of chronic procrastination.† Evidently, this affliction is even more common than depression. Sadly, however, it can actually lower self-esteem, cause insomnia and, when intractable, bring on depression. According to a US academic who has studied the problem, the social and economic implications of procrastination are massive.

Why, you may well ask, are we so burdened and not able to cope? Is it the pervasive Protestant work ethic? Or is it the demands of an increasingly impatient and invasive society, wherein we are constantly exposed to the insistence of instant communication — emails, mobile phone calls and text messages — and an insatiable culture that expects everything to be done yesterday? Could procrastination simply be a refuge from the pressures of this instant way of life?

Modern medicine regales us with acronyms, such as PTSD, OCD, and others. Should we now add another: MSPD — modern stress and procrastination disorders? Or should we accept these phenomena as part of daily living and resist the temptation to medicalise normal human experiences and reactions?



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* Lifeline. Aussies more stressed this year [media release]. 1 Jul 2010.

† Smith R. Oh, I'll do it tomorrow. *J R Soc Med* 2008; 101: 478.

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