

A STUDY BY
MUCK RACK

THE STATE OF
WORK-LIFE
BALANCE
IN JOURNALISM

A study on stress, salaries, burnout and more



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How do journalists balance a demanding job and a happy life?

To better understand how work-life balance impacts journalism professionals, we surveyed nearly 1,800 journalists on topics like stress, burnout, vacation days, and salary.

Executive Summary

- Journalists have high stress levels. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most stressful, most journalists rate themselves as a 7. While **20%** say their stress levels are below the midpoint, **67%** rate themselves higher.
- **More than half** of journalists considered quitting due to burn out this year, and **40%** report having left a previous job due to burnout. They cite workload, salary and being “always on” as their main stressors.
- Fewer than **25%** of journalists report having access to mental health services through their workplace. While about half of journalists think they’d receive support from their coworkers, **42%** expect the same from workplace leadership.
- The typical salary for journalists is **\$67,000**. For freelancers, it is **\$60,000** and for non-freelancers it is **\$70,000**.

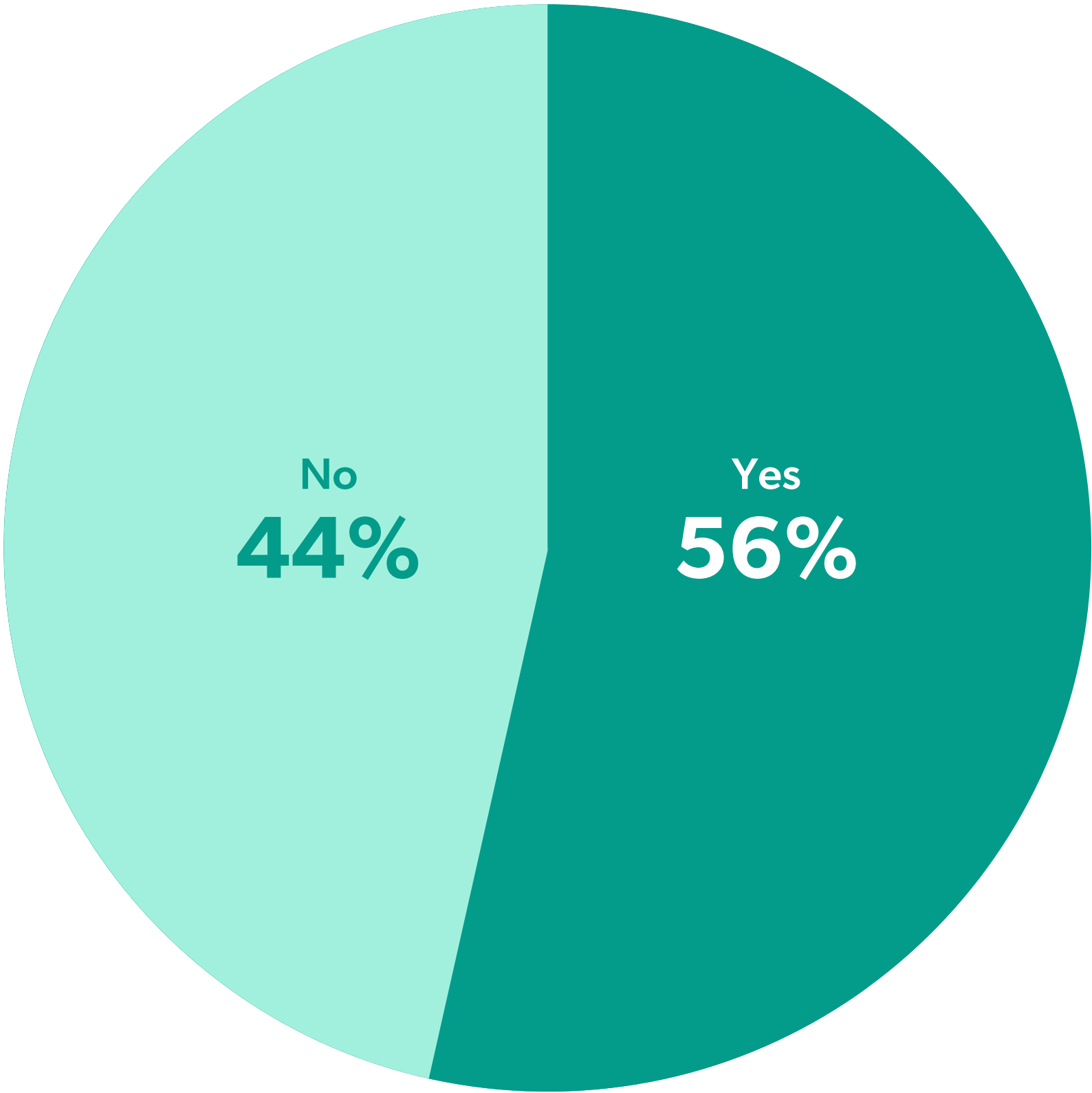
Stress & burnout

To find out what happens when journalists lack work-life balance, we asked them about their current stress levels, burnout and whether stress has led them to leave a job before.

This year, more than half of journalists considered quitting due to burnout

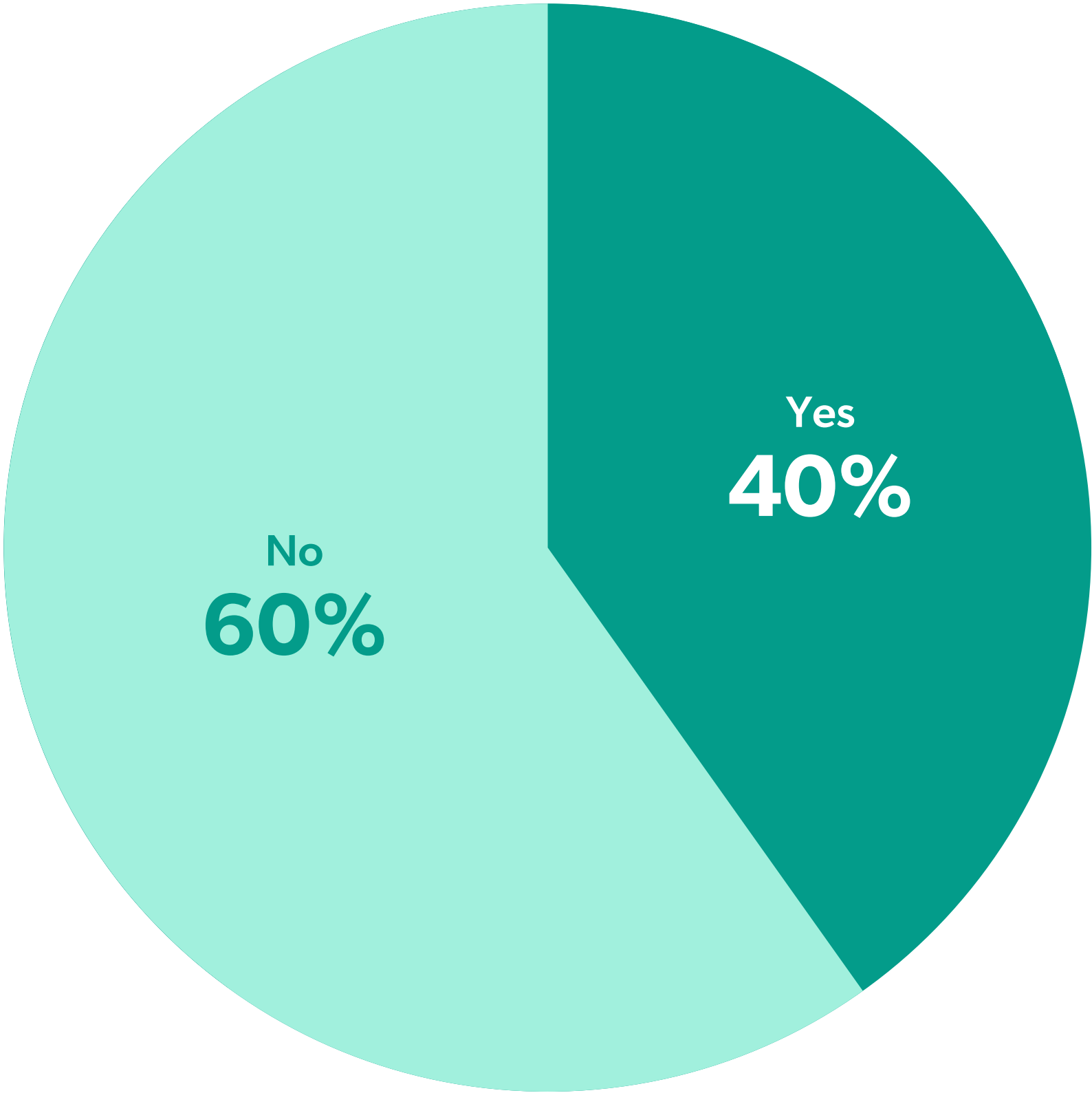
This trend is likely influenced by the election year, which is a notoriously difficult time in many newsrooms.

In the last year, have you thought about quitting your job because of exhaustion or burnout?



**2 out of 5 journalists
have quit a previous
job because of burnout**

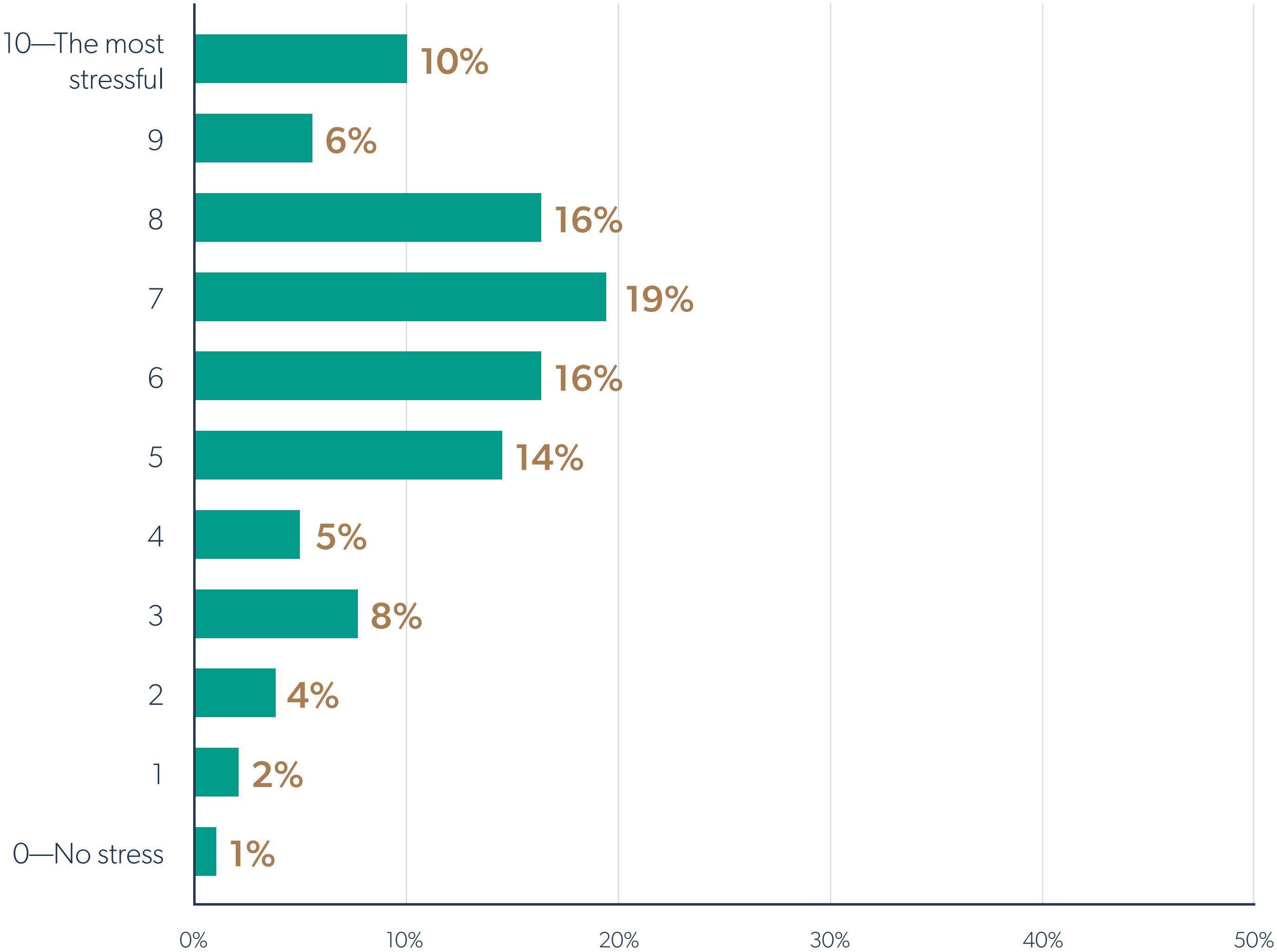
Have you previously left a job due to exhaustion or burnout?



Overall, journalists report high levels of stress

On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most stressful, journalists are most likely to rate their stress as a 7. Only **20%** of them put their stress levels below the midpoint, while **67%** are above.

Over the last two weeks, how would you describe your stress level about work?



Sources of stress

We explored the main contributors to stress by asking journalists about their vacation habits, work hours, and overall workload.

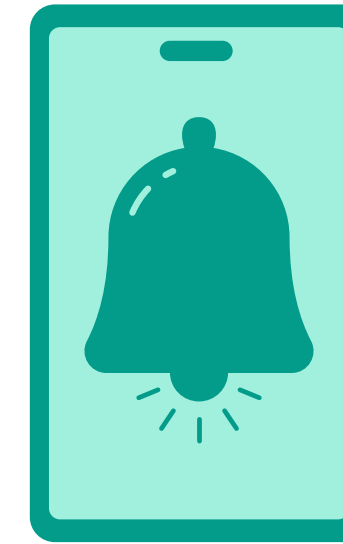
Top stressors



My workload



My salary

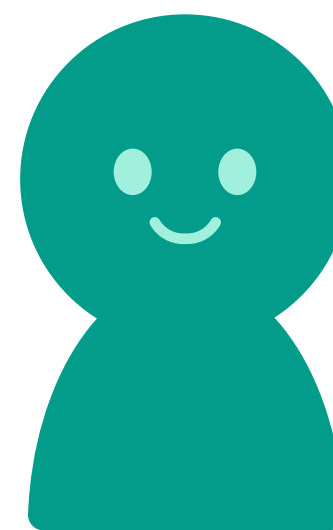


Being "always on"

Least impactful stressors



My commute



My colleagues

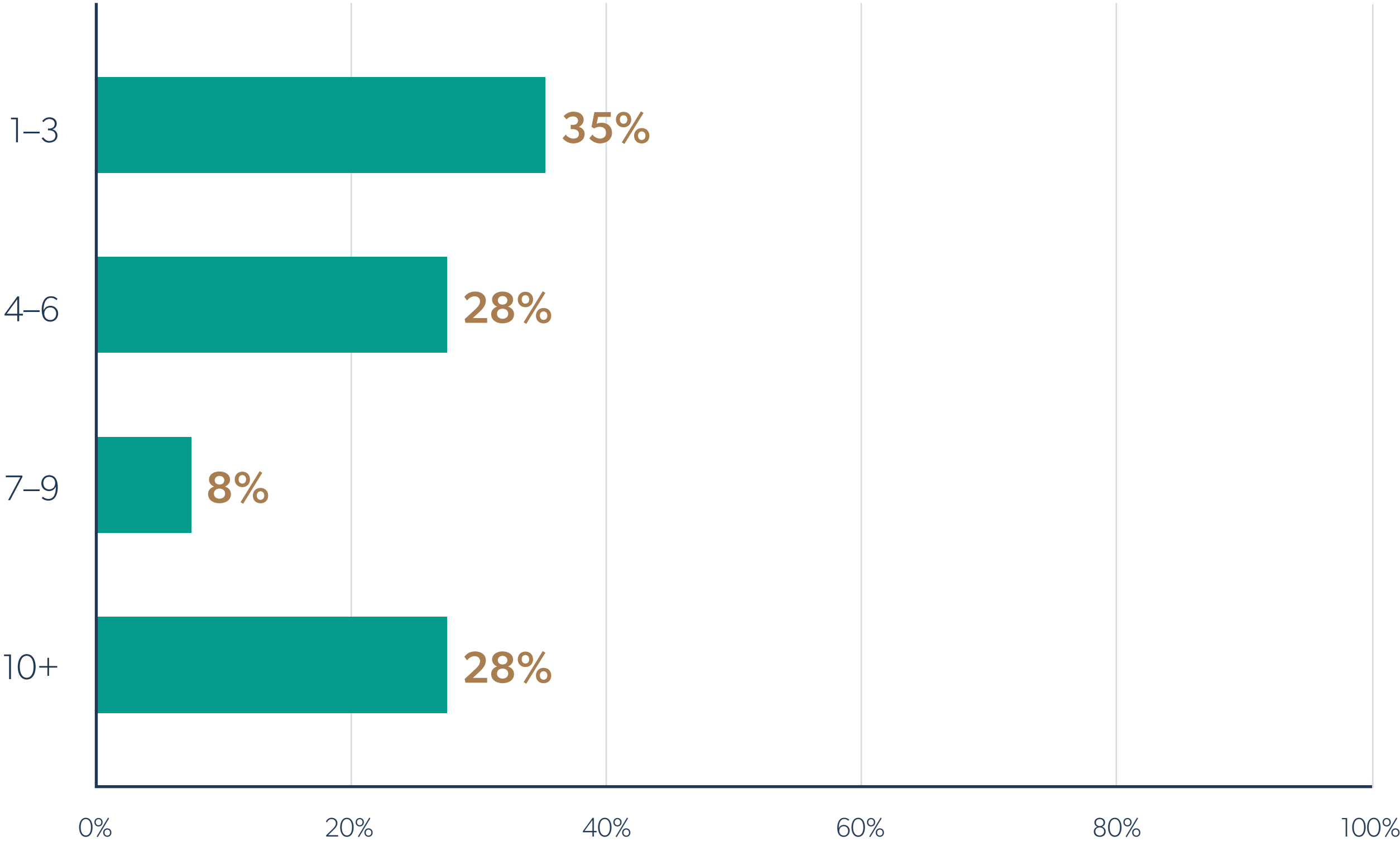


My sources

Most journalists work on more than 4 stories at once

Workloads are one of the most significant stressors for journalists. While its most common to work on 1–3 projects in a given week, a similar number of people are working on **7 or more**.

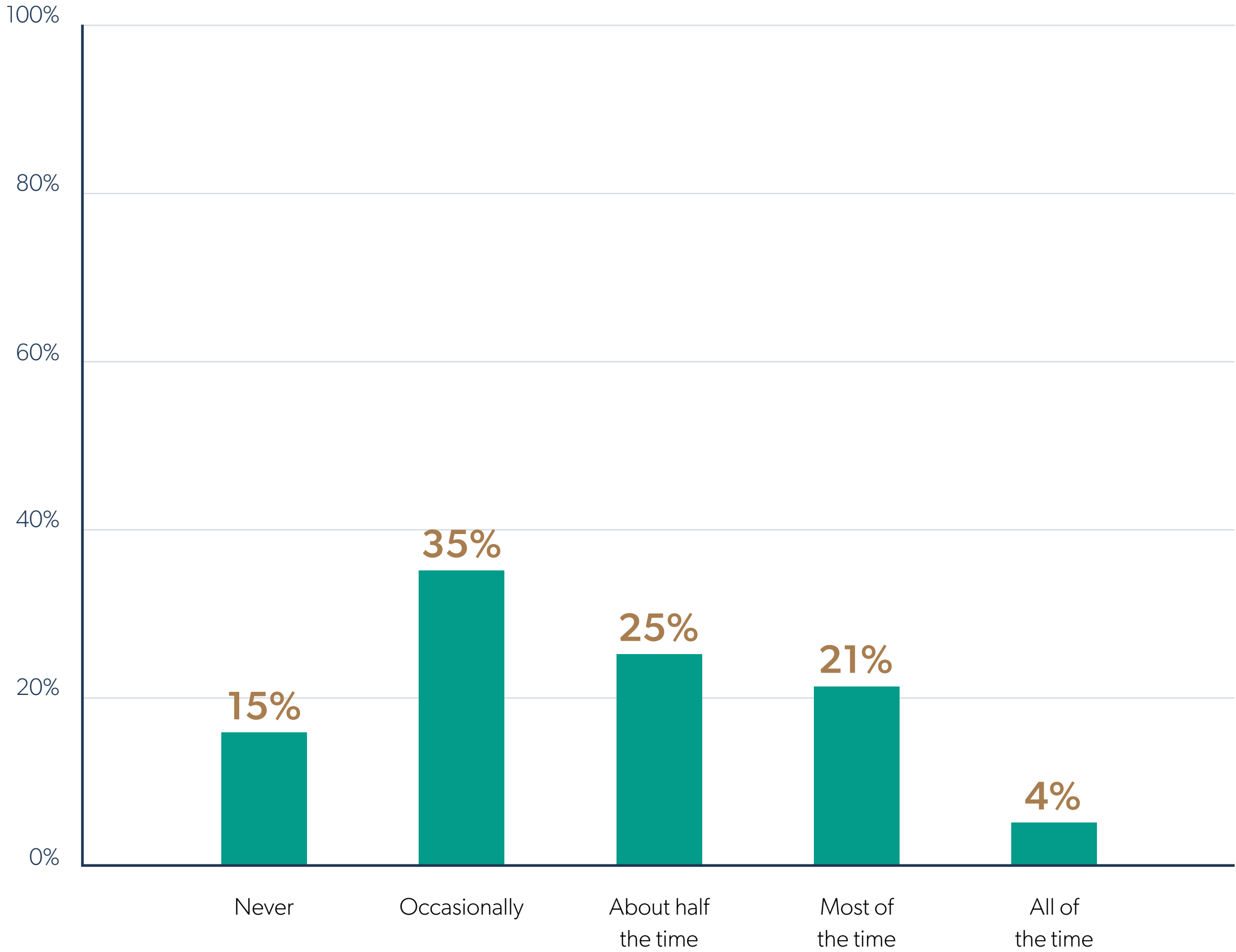
How many stories do you work on in a normal week?



96% of journalists report difficulty switching off after work

About a quarter of all journalists say “being always on” is one of the main contributors to their stress, but most (96%) have trouble “switching off” after work.

How often do you feel that you can “switch off” after work?

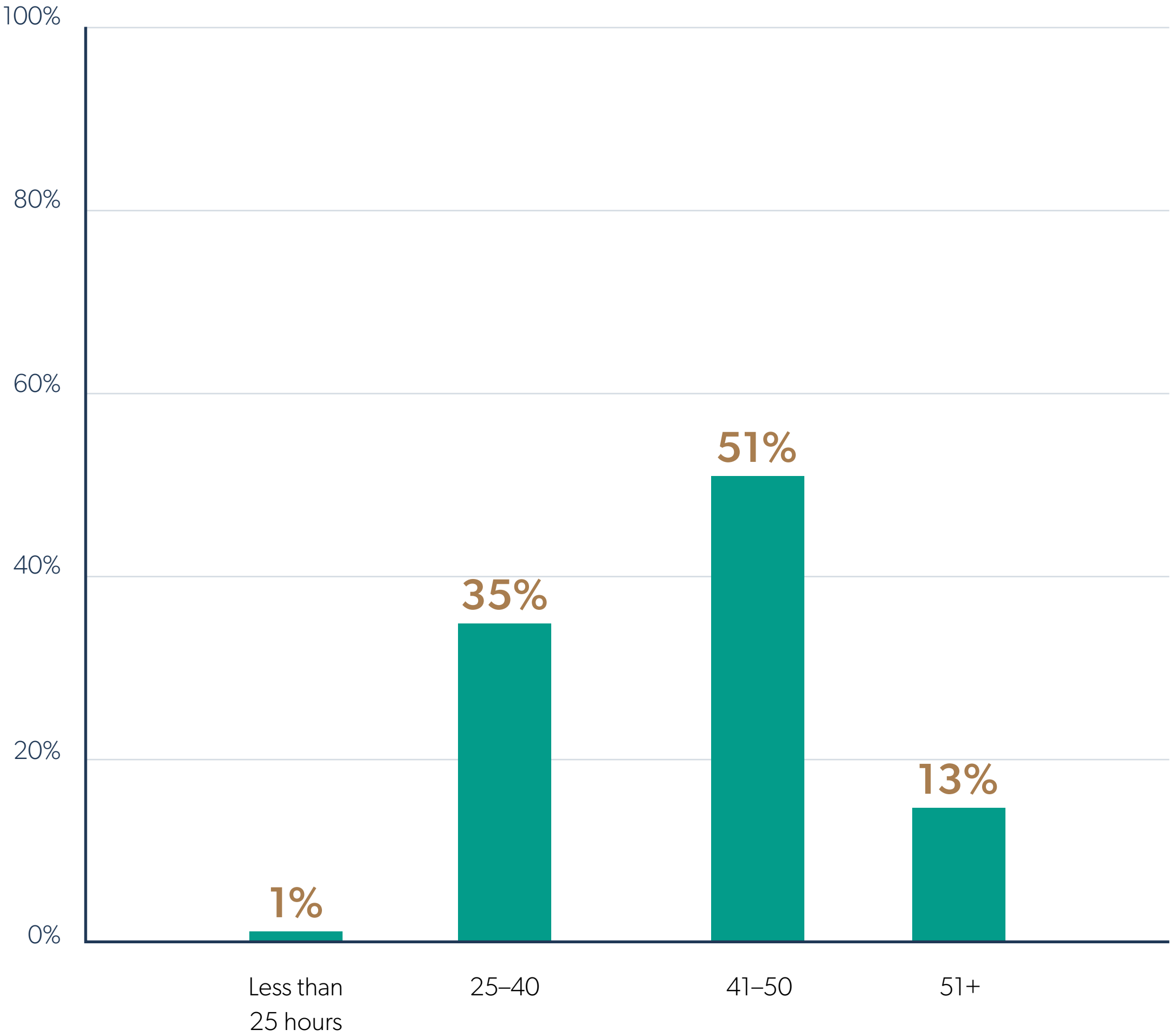


Most journalists work more than 40 hours a week

One reason why journalists have trouble switching off is because of their work hours. About **64%** say they work more than 40 hours per week, and **13%** say they work more than 51 hours per week.

Sources of stress

Over the last week, about how many hours did you work?

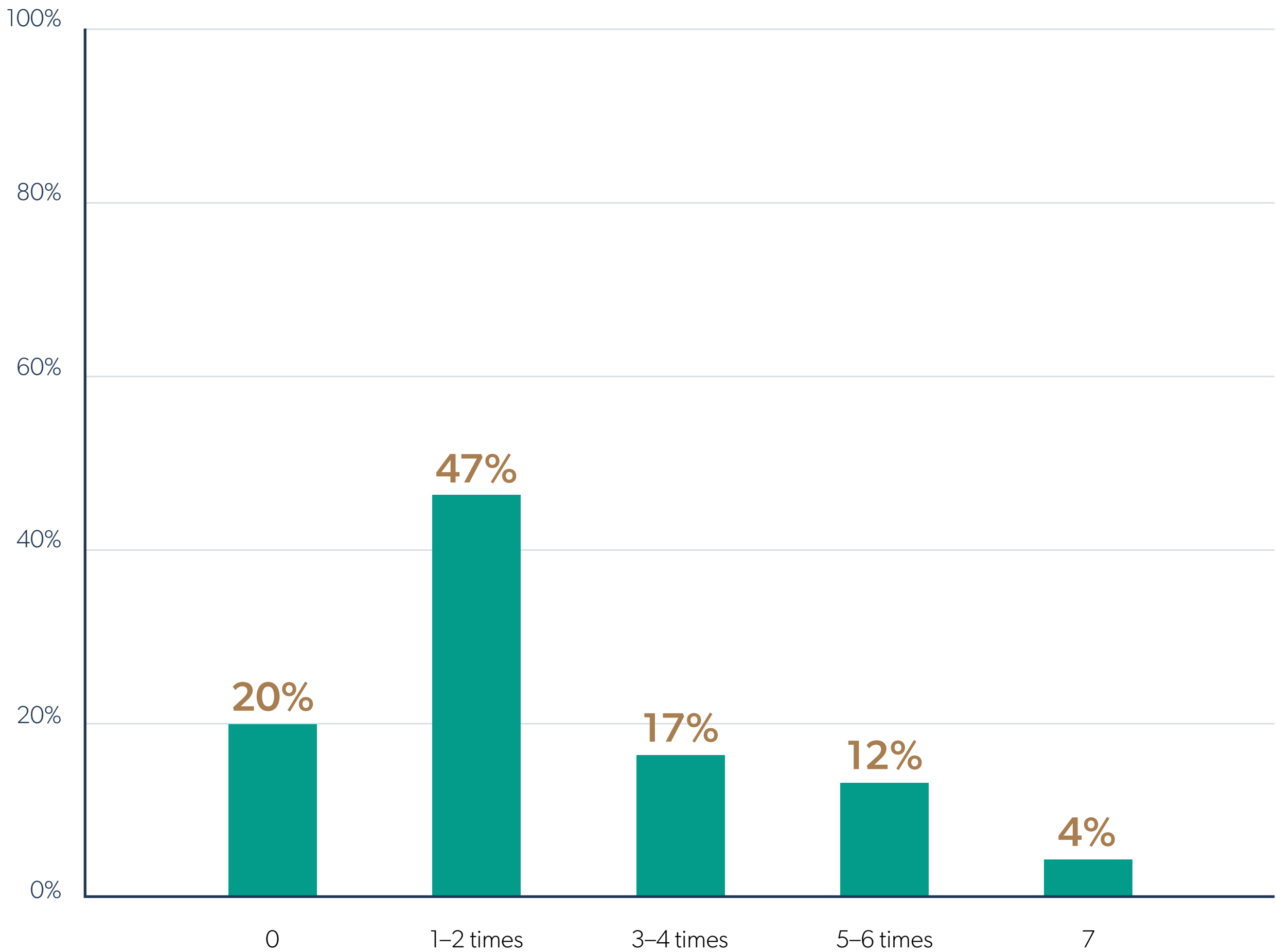


80% of journalists are working outside regular business hours at least once a week

About **one in five** say they keep work contained to the normal work hours, but the rest of journalists are working after hours at least **once a week**.

Sources of stress

Over the last week, how many times have you had to work after hours, like late nights, early mornings or on weekends?

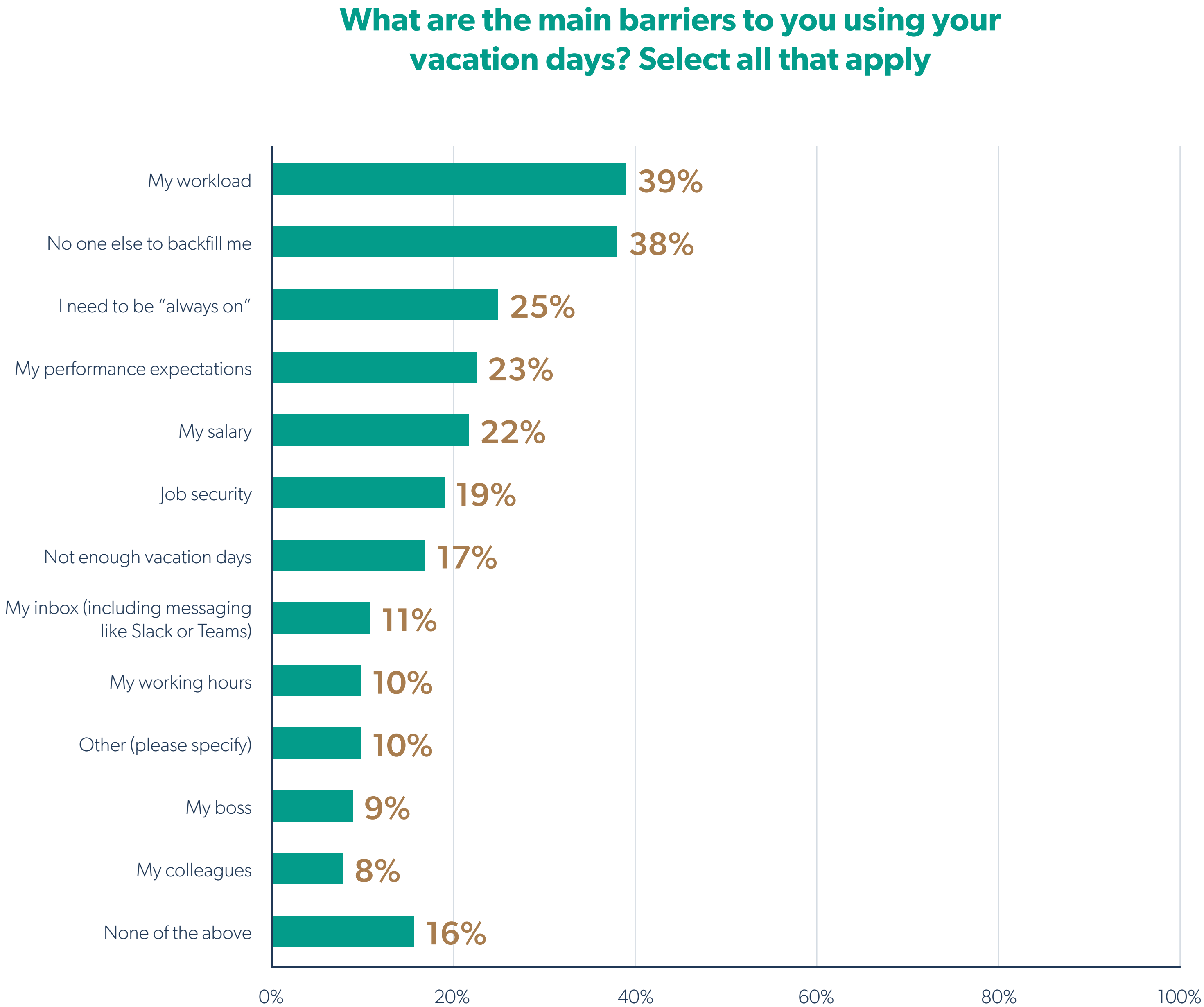


When journalists skip vacation it's often because of their workload

Journalists have a hard time stepping away from work for some R&R. The top three reasons they're skipping vacation are because of their workload, staffing issues and the need to always be "on."

Nearly **a quarter** of journalists mention their salary as a restriction.

Sources of stress

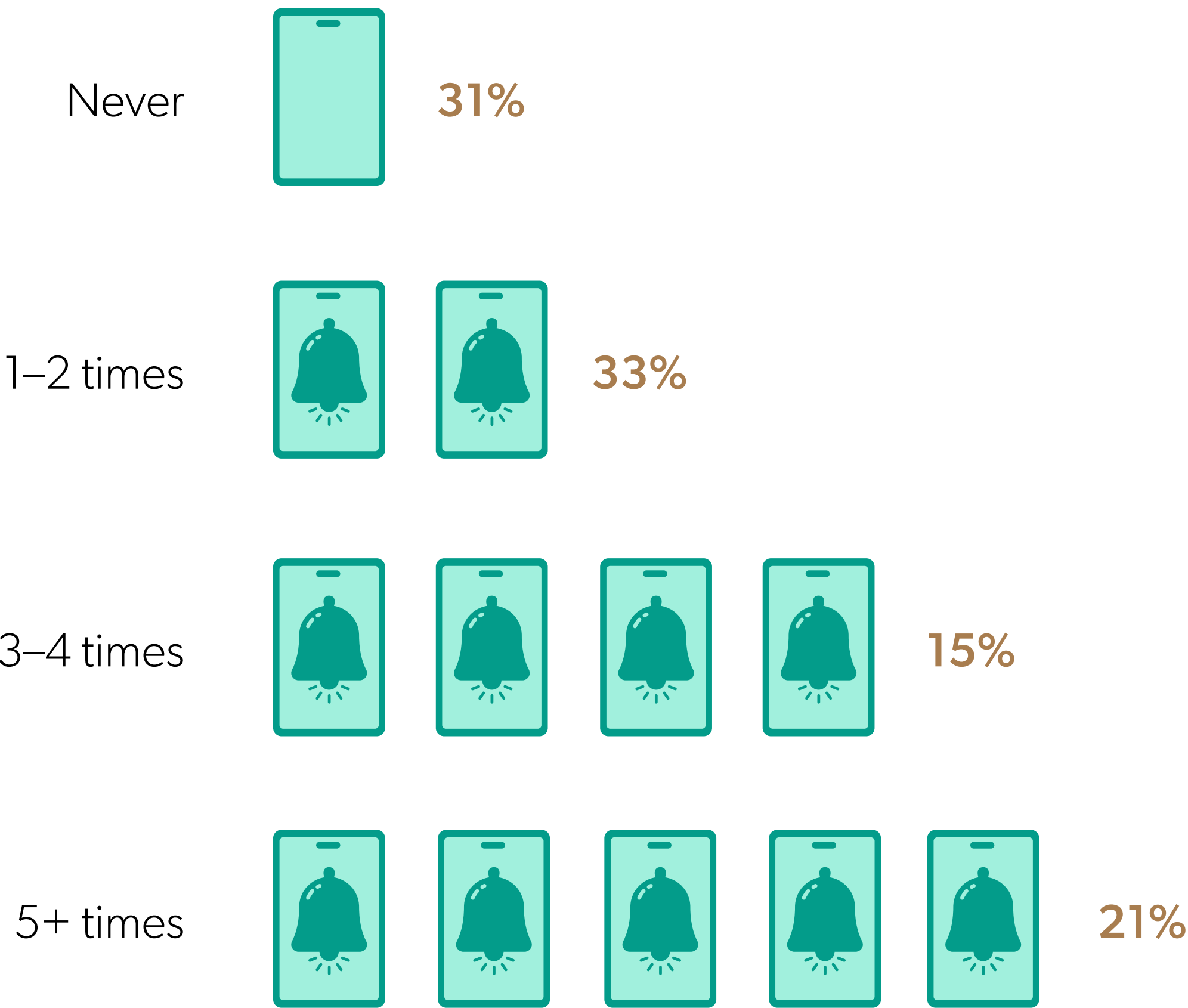


69% of journalists say their vacations are interrupted by work

While it happens less often to journalists than PR pros, about **seven out of ten** journalists had PTO interrupted by work.

Less than one out of every three journalists can keep work at bay doing vacation.

How many times over the last year has a vacation day been interrupted by work?



Work environment and support

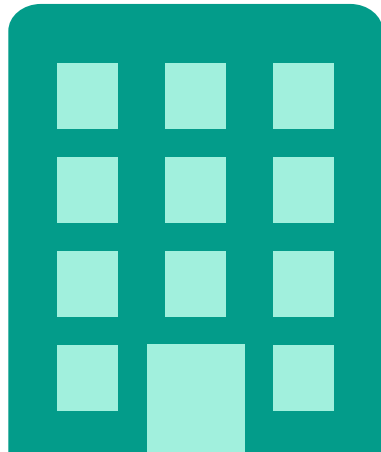
To understand how work environments shape journalists' experiences, we examine their working arrangements, the support available, and access to mental health services.

Journalists are split between wanting hybrid or fully-remote work arrangements

The proper working environment can have a big impact on stress. **More than half** of journalists said their current work arrangements contributes somewhat or very positively to their work-life balance. But many journalists don't have their ideal work arrangement.

According to journalists, the ideal situation would be fewer fully-remote and in-office positions and more hybrid opportunities.

What's your current work arrangement?



In office
17%

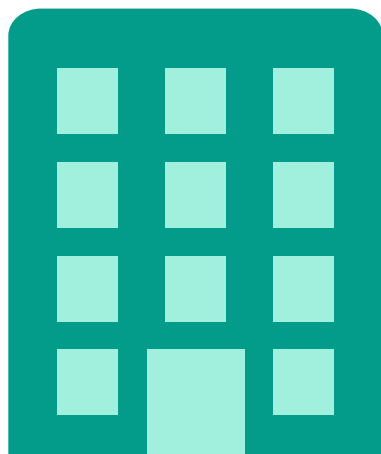


Hybrid
29%



Fully remote
54%

What's your ideal work arrangement?



In office
11%



Hybrid
45%

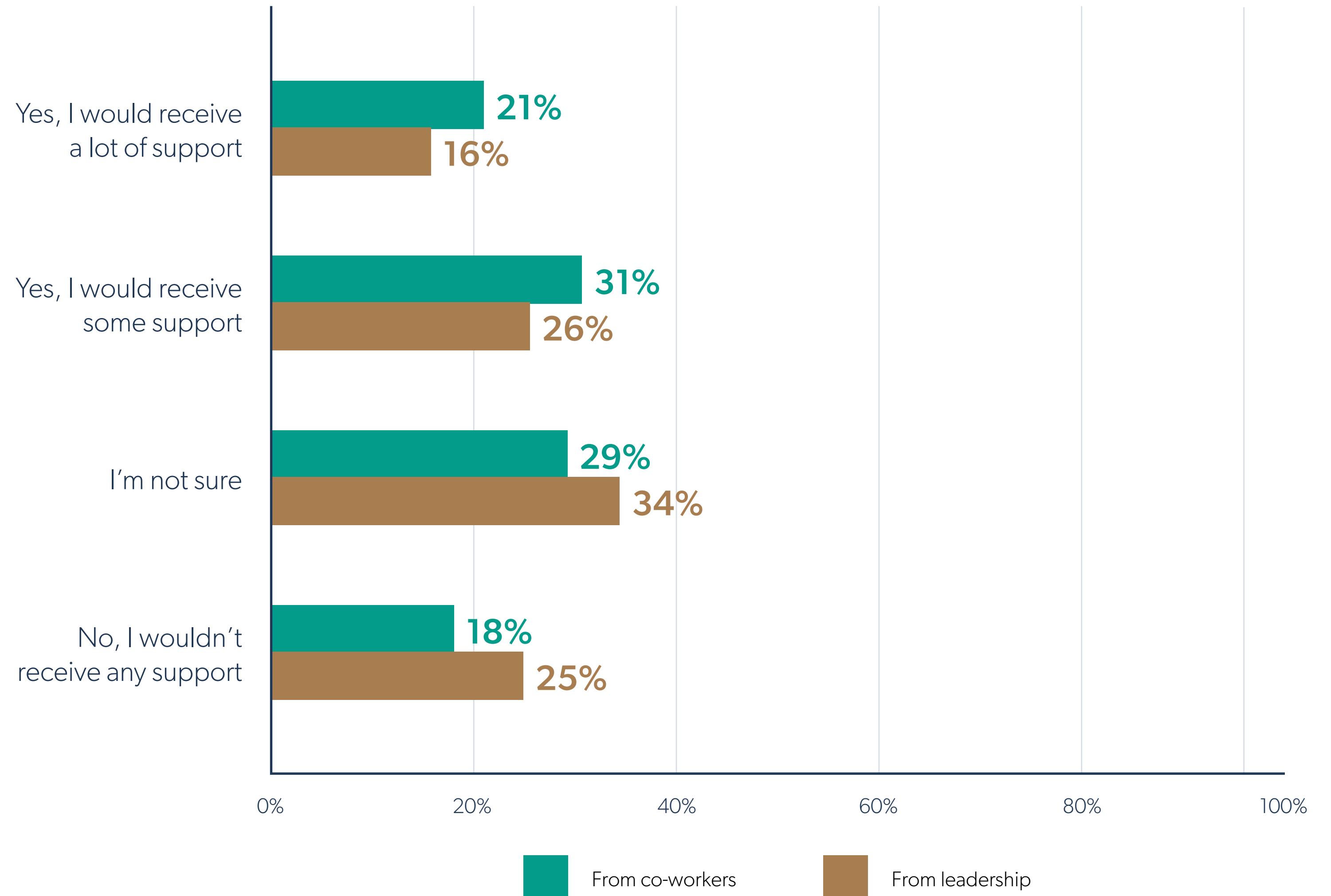


Fully remote
44%

Journalists split on whether colleagues would support them during mental health struggles

While there is close to a 50-50 split on whether they'd be supported by colleagues, journalists are less optimistic about the support they'd receive from leadership. **42%** would expect at least some support from leaders compared to **52%** from co-workers.

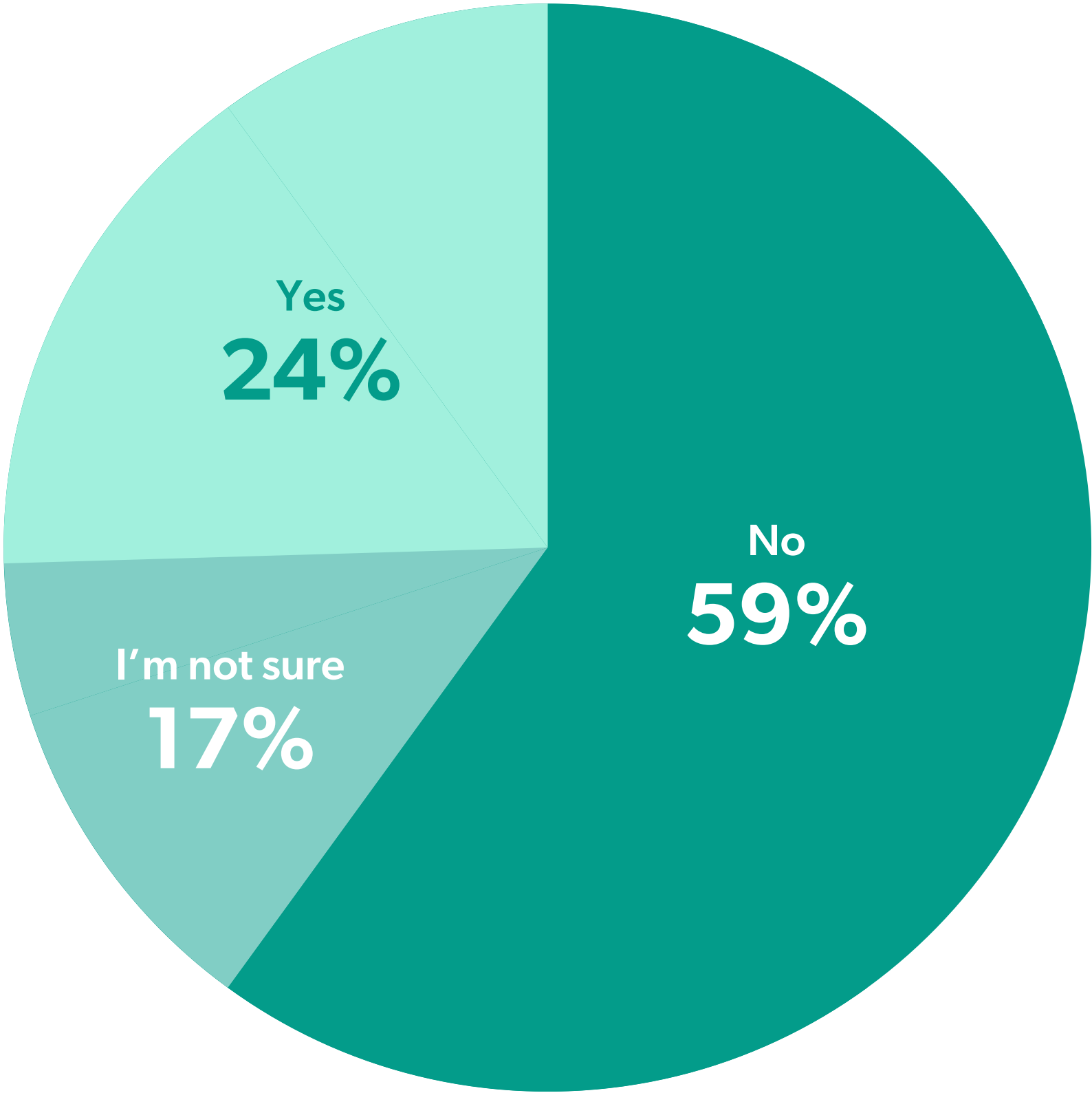
Do you feel your co-workers/your company's leadership would support you if you were struggling with your mental health?



Less than a quarter of journalists have access to mental health services at work

About **one in four** journalists say they have access to mental health services, and **17%** say they're not sure.

Does your workplace offer mental health services?



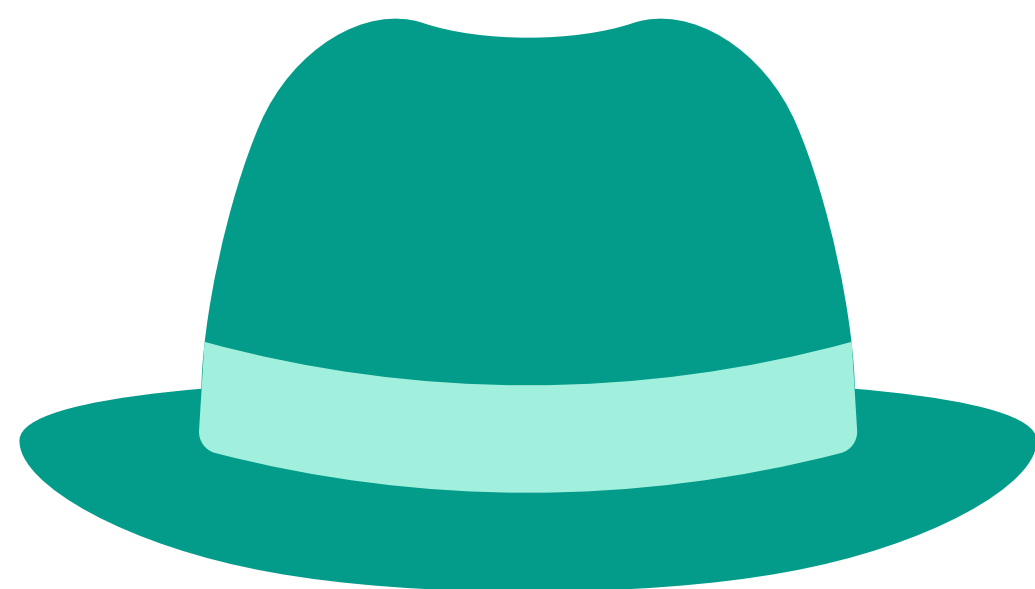
Salary overview and insights

We ask journalists about their salaries, comparing freelancers and non-freelancers compensation.

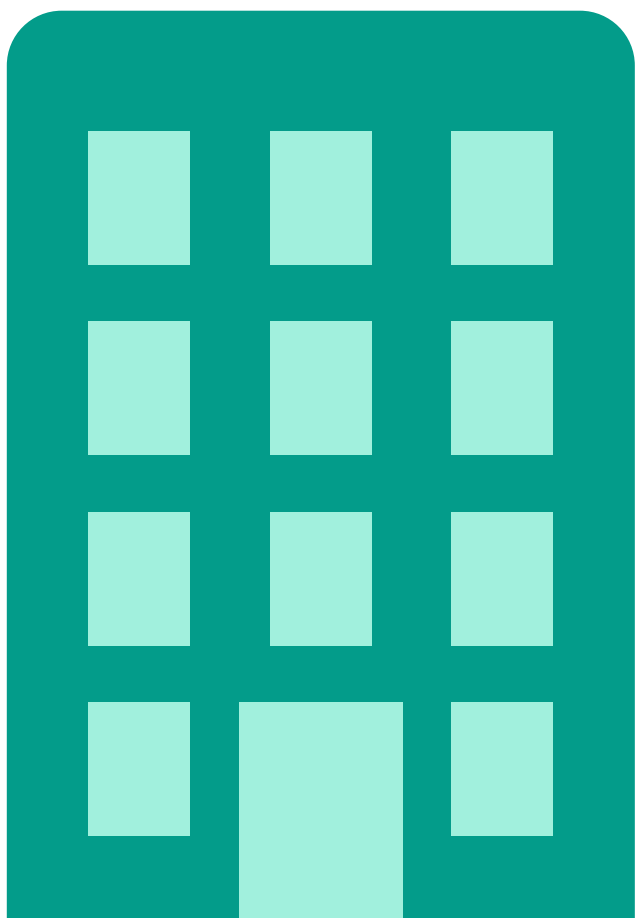
Journalism salaries

Journalists overall have an average salary of **\$67,000**.

Generally speaking, journalists who freelance earn less than those who do not—a difference of **\$10,000**. The salary distributions of each type of journalist differs as well, as we'll explore in a moment.

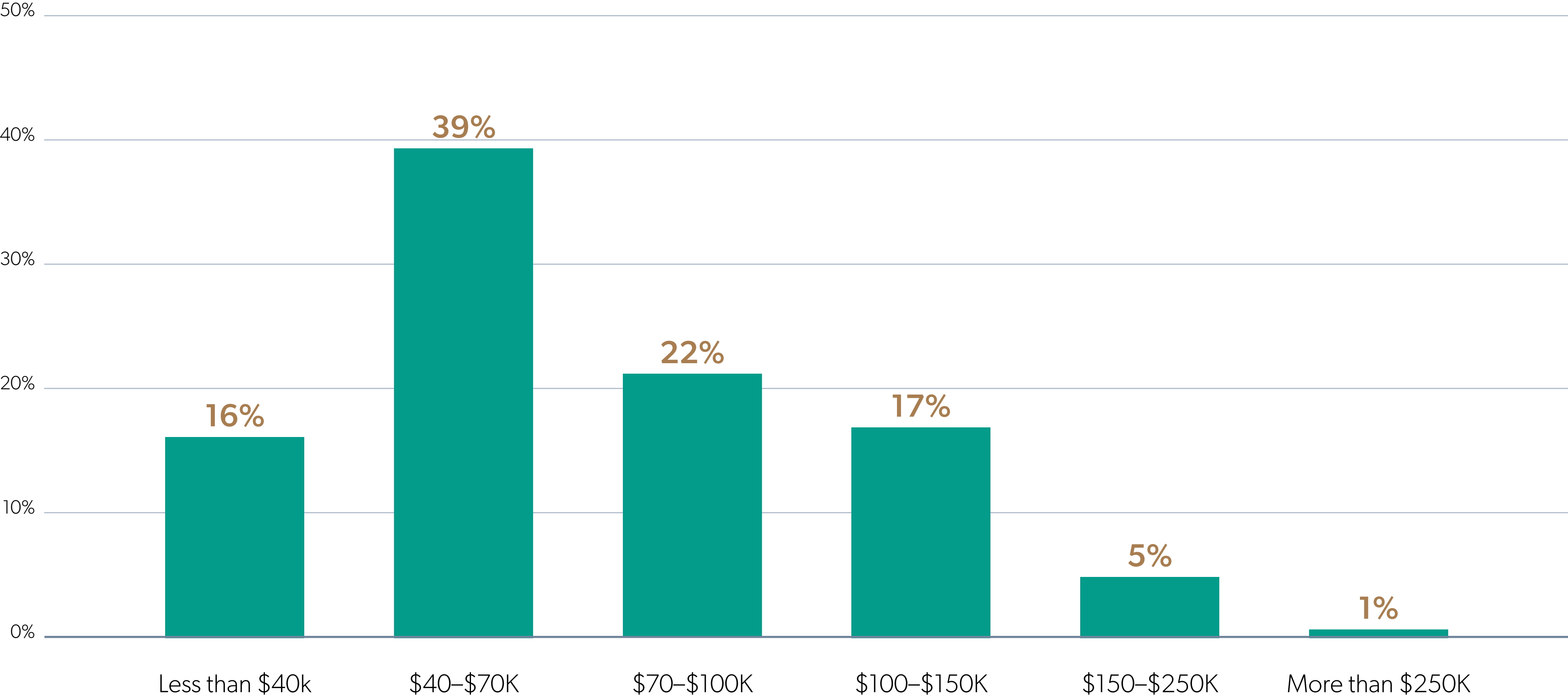


Freelancers
\$60,000



Non-freelancers
\$70,000

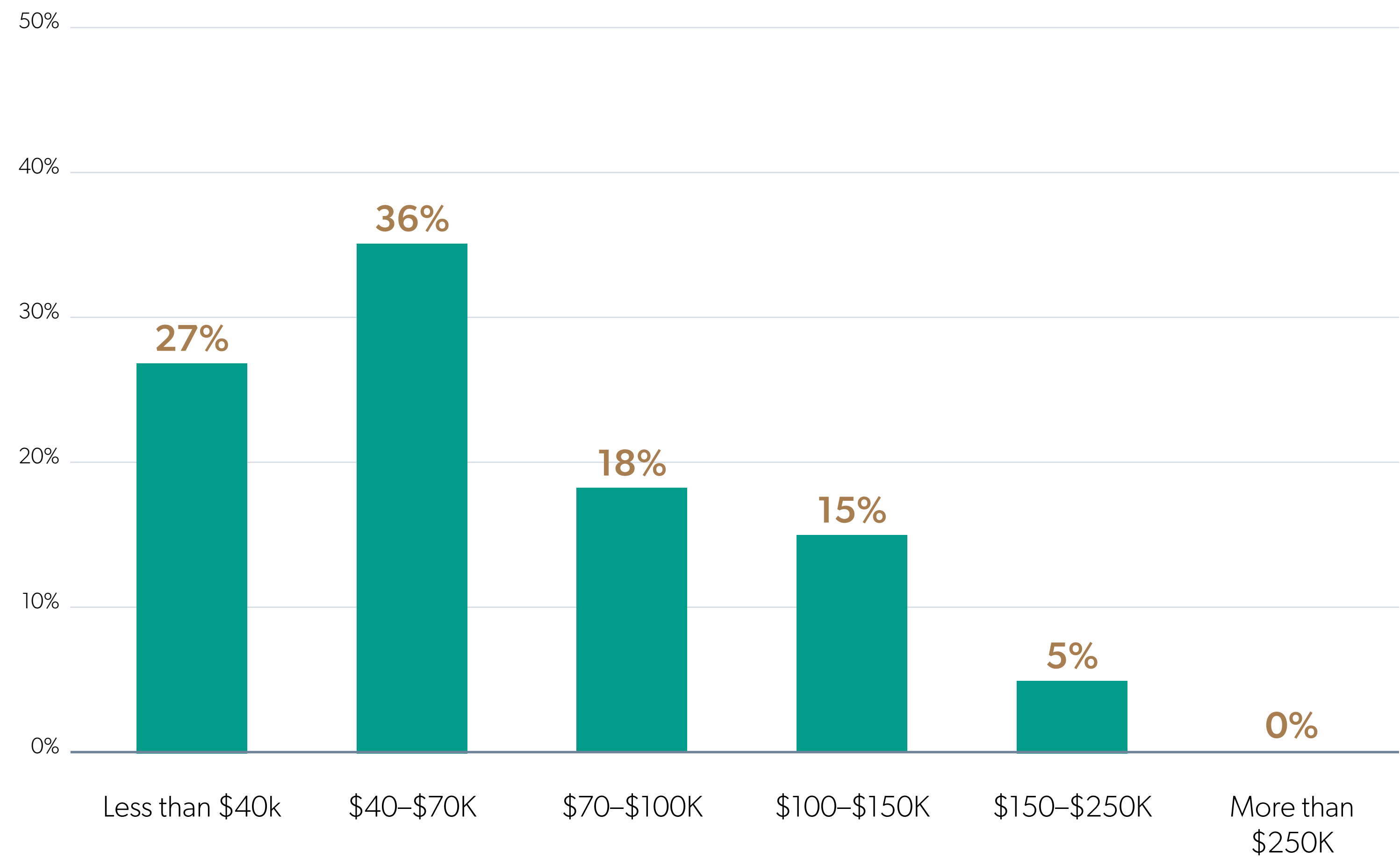
Overall journalist salaries



Freelancers

Over a quarter of freelancers earn **less than \$40,000** per year and **none** report earning more than \$250,000.

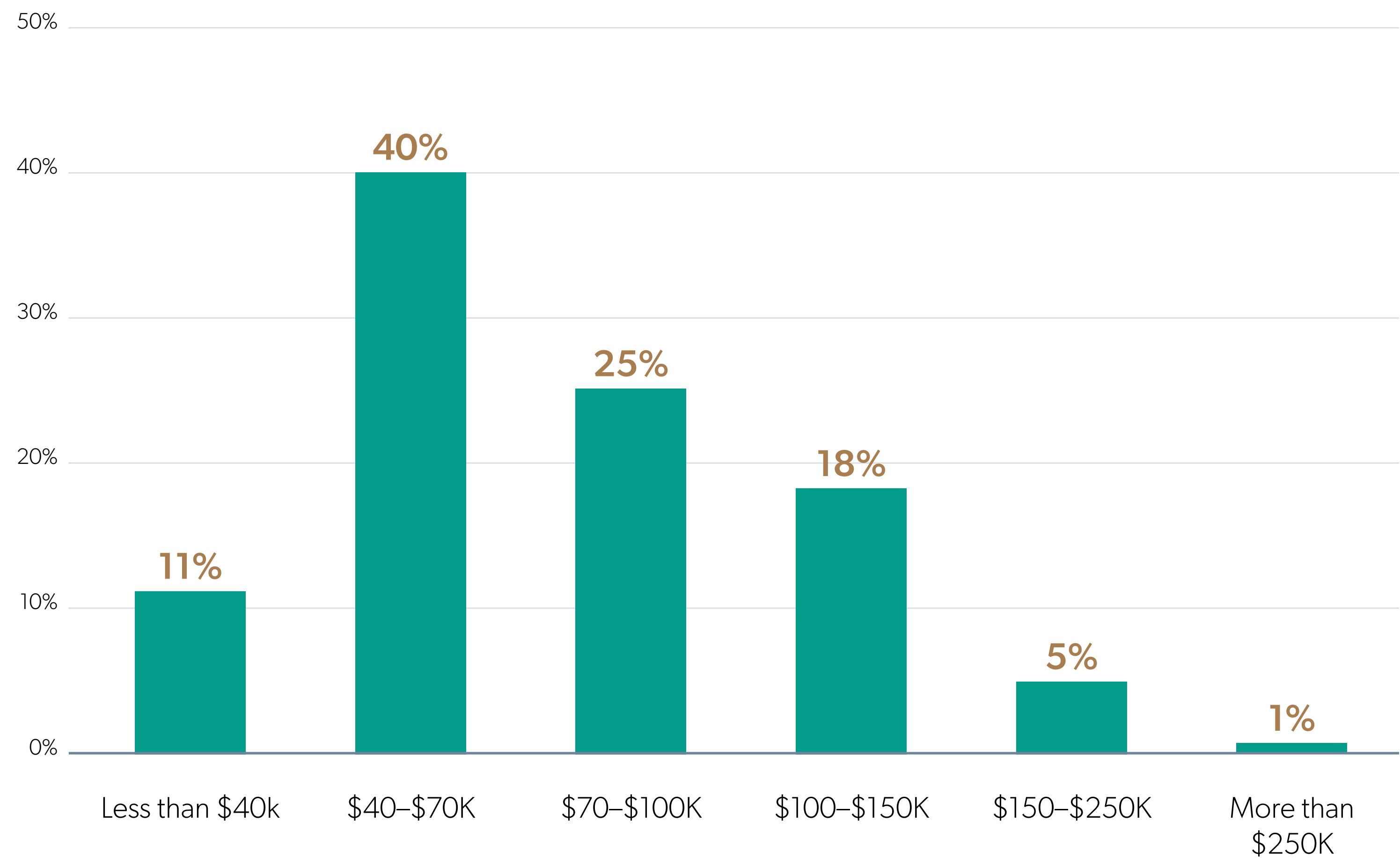
Salaries for freelancers



Non-freelancers

Non-freelancers are much more likely to earn **more than \$40,000** per year compared to those who freelance. They are also more likely than freelancers to earn **more than \$70,000**.

Salaries for non-freelancers



Takeaways

Balancing work and life is difficult for everyone. Muck Rack spoke to [Liz Weaver](#), a career and communication coach at [Light Up Leadership](#), for insights into how anyone can improve their work-life balance.

Here are some practical tips to help you manage stress. From time management strategies to mindfulness techniques, these suggestions can help you thrive in your fast-paced role.

- **Build self-awareness** around the activities that create the most stress for you and the times you feel most and least productive during the day.
- **Set priorities** for yourself and your team. Clearly define what you will tackle first and break things down into doable steps.
- **Protect your time** by blocking time on your calendar for work that requires focus and saying no to non-essential requests.
- **Optimize your performance** by making sure you are getting adequate sleep, eating healthy meals, exercising and staying hydrated.

Methodology

Data for this report came from two surveys. We surveyed 1,357 journalists from January 3 to February 9, 2024 for the [State of Journalism](#) report for questions about salary, working hours and after-hours work. We also surveyed 402 journalists from August 8 to August 30, 2024 for questions about access to mental health services, stress levels, sources and burnout. Survey responses were sought primarily through email and most respondents came from outreach to Muck Rack's database and email contacts.

Unless specifically mentioned, data only includes full-time workers in permanent positions and full-time freelancers. Median was used as the main measure of salary. Other methods were explored, but we found median gave the most reliable results and accounted for outliers in the data. Salary data is only for U.S.-based respondents. Data was cleaned to remove spam responses, major outliers, identifiable mistakes, and low-effort responses. This left a total of 1,106 journalists from the first survey and 253 for the second.

MUCK RACK

Thank you!

Muck Rack's Public Relations Management (PRM) platform enables PR teams to find the right journalists for their stories, send customized pitches, build meaningful relationships with the media, monitor news and quantify their impact.

Learn more

<https://muckrack.com>