



**AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION**

APA 2023 Practitioner Pulse Survey Methodology

Survey History

The 2023 Practitioner Pulse Survey is the latest survey cycle of a series of annual, online surveys conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA) that explores the nature of psychologists' practice patterns. First launched in 2020, the survey has different names, including the 2020 COVID-19 Telehealth Practitioner Survey, 2021 COVID-19 Telehealth Practitioner Survey, and 2022 COVID-19 Practitioner Impact Survey. Earlier survey cycles focused primarily on the shift from in-person practice to telehealth and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2023 Practitioner Pulse survey focused more broadly on psychological practice, including which populations psychologists treated, what settings psychologists worked in, how psychologists specialized their practices, and additional topics. The survey was conducted on the Qualtrics survey platform in 2020-2022. In 2023, the survey platform was switched to Alchemer (formerly SurveyGizmo).

Participants and Sampling Procedures

The target population was doctoral-level psychologists who held a license to practice in at least one U.S. state. The population was identified by state licensing board lists obtained from the National Center for the Analysis of Healthcare Data. Psychologists were invited to respond to the survey if they had an active license and were further screened for eligibility within the survey. Eligibility criteria included all the following: holding a doctoral degree, actively working, and actively treating patients. The APA included both members and non-members in its sample selection.

2023 Sample

The 2023 Practitioner Pulse survey sample was a probability-based random sample, meaning any licensed psychologist that could be contacted had an equal likelihood of being invited to participate in the survey. A list of doctoral-level licensed psychologists with contact emails was generated and de-duplicated. A total of 118,365 psychologists were identified, and 60,384 had email addresses. Contact email addresses were generated from APA membership records and state licensing lists. To select the sample, each psychologist was assigned a random value between zero and one, and then these random values were sorted from lowest to highest. Two samples of psychologists having the lowest 8,058 and 8,499 random values were then selected.

An initial survey invitation was sent to a random sample of 8,058 licensed psychologists on August 30, 2023, and an additional sample of 8,499 licensed psychologists on September 5, 2023, resulting in a total sample of 16,557 licensed U.S. psychologists. Up to two reminder emails were sent September 13, 2023, and September 25, 2023. A final email extending the deadline was sent on September 27, 2023. The survey closed on September 29, 2023.

Of the 16,557 licensed psychologists invited to participate in the 2023 Practitioner Pulse Survey, 1,896 did not receive the

invitation due to bounced emails and 60 unsubscribed from survey email messages. Of the remaining invited sample of 14,601 licensed psychologists, 693 accepted the invitation and opened the survey. Of those, 132 either did not complete the consent statement at the beginning of the survey, did not meet the eligibility criteria, or did not sufficiently complete the survey. Ultimately, 561 licensed psychologists completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 3.8%.

Changes to the 2023 Reference Frame

The 2023 Practitioner Pulse Survey originally began in September 2020 as a survey to measure how the COVID-19 pandemic affected psychologists’ practices. Many questions asked about changes since the beginning of the pandemic. As the pandemic continued, subsequent surveys shifted the reference frame. This change of reference frame served two purposes. First, it shortened the length of recall time to one year. Recall bias is more likely to occur with longer recall periods. Second, the national public health emergency expired in May 2023, resulting in rollbacks in COVID-19 safety measures.

The 2022 survey tested two reference frames. Half of respondents were randomly presented questions with the reference frame of “changes since the beginning of the pandemic,” while the other half were randomly presented questions with the reference frame of “changes in the last 12 months.” In 2023, the reference frame shifted entirely to “changes in the last 12 months.” Although this shift discontinued some trend data established from 2020 to 2022, the shift to the one-year reference frame allows the annual Practitioner Pulse Survey to build year-to-year trends and better monitor ongoing shifts in the workforce.

Sample Comparisons Over Time

Four years of data have been collected with the Practitioner Pulse Survey in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023. Below, we present descriptive statistics for selected demographic and work characteristics. In general, patterns were similar over time; there were small fluctuations between survey cycles but, overall, no major shifts. The implementation of a random sample in 2023 improved the generalizability of the findings.

RESPONSE RATE

While the overall number of responses was lower in 2023, the response rate was similar to previous surveys (Table 1). The decline in sample size observed in 2023 is not unprecedented. In 2021, two surveys were planned to be distributed to the same target population of licensed psychologists. The sample was randomly assigned to two subsamples, one for each survey, to reduce the burden on individual licensed psychologists. The sample size was reduced in half from around 50,000 to 26,400. Similarly, in 2022, certain questions were asked with a different reference frame (“compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic” and “in the last 12 months”), with respondents randomly assigned to one of the two sections, effectively reducing the sample by half for these questions.

TABLE 1
SURVEY RESPONSE RATES, 2020-2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Sample	26,602	26,400	70,034	16,557
Delivered Invitations	22,802	*	62,877	14,601
Completions	1,787	1,141	2,295	561
Response Rate	7.8%	4.3%	3.6%	3.8%

*This value was not tracked in survey year 2021. Response rate = completions/delivered invitations, except in 2021 where response rate = completions/total sample.

The lowest response rate was the 2022 sample at 3.6%, despite that year’s record-high total sample of 62,900 licensed psychologists.

Select Sample Demographics

Race/ethnicity (Table 2) and gender (Table 3) of the 2023 sample were in keeping with previous years' samples. While the 2023 sample had slightly smaller percentages of white respondents and women than previous years, these deviations were marginal. Of note, 2020's survey instrument did not include Arab American, Middle Eastern, North African, or Bi/Multi-racial options in its demographics section.

TABLE 2

SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS, RACE AND ETHNICITY, 2020-2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
American Indian, Alaska Native, and/or Indigenous	1%	1%	0%	0%
Arab American, Middle Eastern, or North African	-	0%	0%	0%
Asian or Asian American	3%	3%	2%	3%
Bi/Multi-racial	-	1%	2%	2%
Black or African American	3%	4%	3%	3%
Latino/a/x or Spanish Origin	5%	5%	3%	3%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast Asian	0%	0%	0%	1%
White/ European American	88%	87%	84%	82%
Another race or ethnicity not listed	2%	1%	1%	1%
Prefer not to answer	3%	3%	3%	3%

The 2020 survey instrument also did not include a "Prefer not to answer" option for gender. This category and the added racial categories mentioned above could account for some of the differences notes between the 2023 sample and other historical samples.

TABLE 3

SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS, GENDER, 2020-2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Female/Woman	68%	70%	69%	64%
Male/Man	32%	30%	28%	33%
Nonbinary	0%	0%	1%	0%
Prefer not to answer	-	0%	2%	2%
Prefer to self-describe	0%	0%	0%	1%
Two-spirit	0%	0%	0%	0%

Respondents were assigned to career stage categories based on year of highest degree:

- Early Career: Psychologists who are practicing 10 or fewer years after receiving their doctorate
- Mid-Career: Psychologists who are practicing 11 to 20 years after receiving their doctorate
- Senior Career: Psychologists who are practicing 21 to 30 years after receiving their doctorate
- Late Senior Career: Psychologists who are practicing 31 or more years after receiving their doctorate

Career stage was relatively consistent across survey years.

TABLE 4
SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS, CAREER STAGE, 2020-2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Early Career	14%	12%	14%	16%
Mid-Career	21%	24%	26%	27%
Late Career	26%	26%	26%	26%
Senior Late Career	37%	38%	34%	31%

Practice Characteristics

Employment status remained consistent in 2023 compared to previous years (Table 5). The 2023 sample displayed slightly fewer psychologists working part-time compared to previous samples, and slightly more reporting they were retired and not working. The latter group of respondents were screened out from completing the rest of the survey per the inclusion criteria.

TABLE 5
SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS, WORK STATUS, 2020-2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Working full-time, including self-employed, consulting and practice (at least 35 hours per week or at least 31 client hours per week)	55%	54%	52%	53%
Working part-time (less than 35 hours per week or less than 31 client hours per week)	40%	41%	39%	33%
Postdoctoral study	0%	0%	0%	0%
Not working and seeking work	0%	0%	0%	1%
Not working and NOT seeking work	0%	1%	0%	1%
Retired and NOT working	1%	1%	3%	4%
Retired and STILL working	4%	3%	5%	5%
Not applicable	0%	0%	0%	4%

Primary work setting for the 2023 sample did deviate somewhat from previous samples, with a higher proportion of respondents working in hospitals, medical schools, and academic health centers, and a lower proportion of respondents working in private practices (Table 6).

TABLE 6

SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS, PRIMARY WORK SETTING, 2020-2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Private Practice	77%	79%	76%	65%
Hospital (includes VA Medical Centers)	6%	6%	9%	11%
Organized Human Service Settings	5%	4%	4%	5%
University	3%	2%	2%	4%
Medical School/Academic Health Center	3%	2%	4%	6%
Government Settings	2%	1%	1%	3%
K-12 School	1%	1%	1%	1%
Business & Other Settings	1%	1%	0%	1%
Other Educational Settings (includes Independent Professional Schools of Psychology)	0%	0%	0%	0%
Four-year College	0%	0%	0%	1%
None of these	2%	1%	1%	2%

Self-reported primary areas of specialty of the 2023 sample were similar to previous years', except for a decrease in the percentage of psychologists specializing in clinical psychology (Table 7).

TABLE 7

SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS, PRIMARY AREA OF SPECIALTY, 2020-2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology	15%	12%	12%	15%
Clinical Health Psychology	6%	5%	6%	6%
Clinical Neuropsychology	4%	4%	5%	6%
Clinical Psychology	48%	55%	57%	48%
Clinical Psychopharmacology	-	-	-	0%
Cognitive Behavioral Psychology	8%	7%	5%	3%
Counseling Psychology	8%	8%	8%	8%
Couple & Family Psychology	4%	2%	1%	1%
Forensic Psychology	1%	1%	1%	3%
Group Psychology	1%	0%	0%	0%
Organizational and Business Psychology	0%	0%	0%	1%
Police & Public Safety Psychology	0%	0%	0%	1%
Professional Geropsychology	1%	1%	1%	1%
Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Psychology	3%	4%	4%	4%
Rehabilitation Psychology	1%	0%	1%	1%
School Psychology	1%	1%	1%	1%
Serious Mental Illness Psychology	-	-	-	1%

References

American Psychological Association. (2020). 2020 COVID-19 Telehealth Practitioner Survey.

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American Psychological Association. (2021). Worsening mental health crisis pressures psychologist workforce: 2021 COVID-19 Practitioner survey. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/covid-19-2021>

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