



REPs UAE

Working in fitness survey

2024

In partnership with

NCSFTM

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON
STRENGTH & FITNESS



REPs
UAE



EUROPEAN OBSERVATOIRE
OF SPORT AND EMPLOYMENT

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Forewords

Foreword from REPs UAE



REPs UAE has a vital role in the fitness industry as an independent, public register which recognises the qualifications and expertise of exercise professionals in the United Arab Emirates. We provide a system of regulation for instructors and trainers to ensure they meet agreed international standards.

REPs UAE provides assurance and confidence to the public and employers that all professionals on the Register are appropriately qualified and have the knowledge, competence and skills to perform their role effectively.

At REPs we constantly want to improve our services to members and develop the fitness industry. To do that we need to know more about the characteristics, views and opinions of the people who work in the industry.

We are proud to present the results of the second REPs UAE Working in Fitness survey where we report on trends in training and development, careers in fitness, and the types of clients that use the services of the fitness industry, as well as presenting data on hours and pay.

We would like to thank the European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE) who assisted with the creation of the survey, analysis of results and preparation of this report.

We are sure many stakeholders will find these results interesting and use them to develop new policies and initiatives.

REPs will continue to run the survey again in future years to map trends over time. We would love to hear your feedback on the survey results or if you think the survey can be improved.

Yours in health and fitness

**Naser Al Tamimi, CEO and Catherine Hanson
Farid, Director of Operations, REPs UAE**

Foreword from NCSF

(Survey Partner)

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The National Council on Strength & Fitness (NCSF) was established out of a desire to bring best-in-class education to empower exercise professionals with the tools for career success. Now, nearly 30 years later, we still live that mission and have expanded our reach to the entire Global Market. It is through cooperations with valued partners like REPs UAE, that our organisation is able to deliver what our world-wide professional audience needs most.

This report exemplifies the respected thoughts and opinions of fitness professionals in the UAE from 48 different nations and embodies consumer-centric attitudes and behaviours. Much like the USA, the UAE is a melting pot of cultures and unique characteristics that all have an important voice. For this reason, it is critical to pay attention to the data and build impactful resources that support the industry professionals for optimal performance and success.

Moreover, amid confusion over who is a qualified professional, it is vital that we—as a global industry—come together to assist in differentiating those who truly represent professionalism and engage in competent practice. The proliferation of unaccredited certifications requires us to be diligent to help consumers identify only high-quality individuals using the international registration systems. ICREPS registers like REPs UAE and USREPS demonstrate verification of those who have gone through the appropriate rigors to prove their good standing as exercise professionals in a given role. We should celebrate those in fitness registers around the world and impress upon our constituents that they are only hiring fitness and wellness professionals who have pursued the proper path to qualification.

Well-educated exercise professionals provide an important service in health, and as stewards of the profession, positively support the societal need for physical activity. NCSF is dedicated to this mission of continuing the advancement of quality education in support of professional registration in the United Arab Emirates and beyond. Thank you for asking us to be a part of this important collaboration as we are better together. Let's never stop learning!





Executive Summary

Executive summary

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The REPs UAE Working in Fitness Survey (2024 edition) has been designed to be a key source of information on the fitness industry in the United Arab Emirates. The survey provides a unique opportunity to gauge the characteristics and views of the fitness workforce currently working in the UAE.

It is hoped the results of the survey will be interesting and useful to a variety of stakeholders including Government entities, employers, training providers, and fitness professionals themselves.

● COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE

The survey was promoted to people working in the UAE fitness industry and the total number of respondents was 287. They were asked to state their main role in fitness; 81.2% are working as exercise professionals (personal trainers, group fitness instructors etc.) and 18.8% as fitness managers. The sample of fitness professionals who completed the survey had a majority of male respondents with 58.2% male and 41.8% female. The majority (73.5%) are located in Dubai, with a further 16.7% working mostly in Abu Dhabi. A total of 48 different nationalities are represented in the sample of showing the truly international nature of the UAE fitness industry.

● FITNESS TRENDS

We wanted to know how the fitness industry is adapting to the changing needs and priorities of the people who use our services. 86% of respondents believe that maintaining overall wellness (including health, fitness, nutrition, appearance) is a higher priority for consumers since the COVID pandemic. A further 74.3% of respondents believe the habits and demands of clients have changed since the COVID pandemic with a shift towards health consciousness and increased awareness and engagement.



Among the general population the number one fitness goal of clients reported by respondents to the survey is weight loss, followed by better health / wellbeing/ disease prevention.

The top five things respondents have implemented to support client wellness are :

- 1 Holistic approach to fitness
- 2 Personalised training
- 3 Education and empowerment
- 4 Adaptation to circumstances
- 5 Mind-body connection

The top five fitness trends among respondents were :

- 1 Personal training
- 2 Exercise for weight loss
- 3 Functional fitness training
- 4 Body weight exercise
- 5 Group exercise training

(Chosen from ACSM World-wide Fitness Trends Survey Options)



● EXERCISE PROFESSIONALS

The survey showed longevity of careers in fitness. Just over a third of respondents have been working as an exercise professional for 10 or more years, with further third of respondents working for 5 or more years in fitness. This shows the industry has the ability to retain staff.

89.5% of exercise professional respondents are a member of REPs showing their commitment to professional registration and personal development.

What have traditionally been termed “special” populations, now appear to be the norm for exercise professionals when looking at the clients they work with. A large majority of exercise professionals work with older clients and children, with almost half also working with clients with disabilities and pre- and post-natal clients. A large majority also work with people with lower back pain and people with obesity/ diabetes and those recovering from injury.

We wanted the survey results to inform future training provision in UAE. Key findings of interest to education providers include the fact that two thirds of respondents took their main fitness qualification in the UAE. It is encouraging to note that 82.6% of respondents have taken part in training and development in the last 12 months, including 57.4% reporting having done more than 3 days and 25.1% reporting having done more than 10 days. It is less encouraging to note that an overwhelming 86% of respondents reported that they alone pay for their training and development with no support from their employer.

● FITNESS MANAGERS

We also wanted to study training needs of fitness managers, and with that in mind it is interesting to note that 44.4% of fitness managers held the role of exercise professional before they became a manager and 42.2% of manager respondents came from managing in another sector – both of these groups of managers may require training, either in generic management competencies or the specificities of the fitness industry. The leading training need for managers is in strategy, followed by leadership, managing people, finance and project management.



The biggest areas of dissatisfaction for fitness managers are prospects for promotion and career development, and remuneration package, for those fitness managers who may leave the industry the most likely reason is low pay compared to other industries. However, a high proportion of respondents (79.5%) showed a strong commitment to the fitness industry and stated they expect to continue working in the industry for more than five years.

An interesting finding was that exercise professionals broadly felt they were competent to begin work following their initial qualification, while fitness managers overwhelmingly reported the need to provide additional training to fitness staff to ensure they are work ready.

For both fitness managers and exercise professionals, the most popular stated time period it is felt necessary to complete a personal trainer qualification is between 3 and 6 months.

CONCLUSION

The results of the REPs UAE Working in Fitness Survey 2024 show a diverse, hard-working and flexible workforce serving the fitness and wellness needs of the UAE. REPs UAE looks forward to working with partners to take any actions they feel relevant after considering these results and continuing to monitor trends in the UAE fitness industry through future research activities.





1

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the second REPs UAE Working in Fitness Survey, a confidential online survey conducted in the final months of the year 2023. The survey provides a unique opportunity to gauge the characteristics and views of the fitness workforce currently working in the United Arab Emirates.

The survey design and implementation was supported by our partners the European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE).

It is hoped the results of the survey will be interesting and useful to a variety of stakeholders including Government entities, employers, training providers, and fitness professionals themselves.

The Working in Fitness Survey was open to all those working in the fitness industry in the UAE as an exercise professional or a fitness manager, including those working on a full-time, part-time or self-employed basis. The survey was publicised through REPs UAE channels including direct e mail to REPs members. This report is based on 287 responses. We thank all those who took the time to participate in the survey.

The key objectives of the research were :

- To gather information on workforce characteristics
- To explore employment patterns
- To comment on issues of working hours and pay
- To explore training and development issues
- To discover more about motivations to join the fitness industry, how long fitness professionals plan to stay, and why they may leave the industry
- To look at future trends on key issues for the fitness industry

The questionnaire was based on examples of workforce surveys carried out in other countries, then tailored to meet the specific characteristics of the fitness industry in the UAE.

The results of the Working in Fitness survey are unweighted. The survey is a self-selecting sample and therefore it is not necessarily representative of the actual population. To interpret the results appropriately the profile of respondents is examined in the next section.





2

**About the
respondents**

KEY POINTS

- The first question in the survey asked respondents to state their main role in the fitness industry. 81.2% work as exercise professionals, and 18.8% as fitness managers
- In terms of home nation/ nationality 48 countries were represented in the survey sample showing the global nature of the UAE fitness industry
- More males than females completed the survey and the proportion of male to female was more pronounced for fitness managers than for exercise professionals
- The UAE appears to be an attractive place to reside for the long term for people working in fitness with 40% of respondents having been in the country for 10 or more years
- People work in the UAE fitness industry across all age groups, with the most prevalent age bands being 25-34 and 35-44

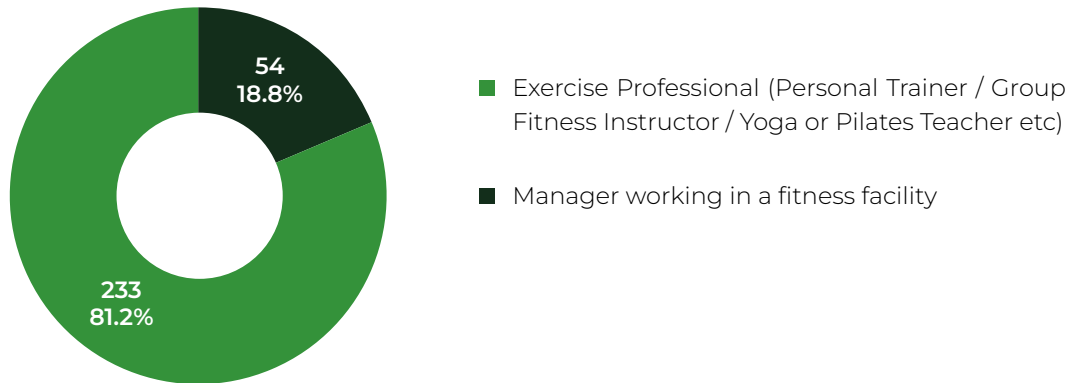
This section of the report looks at the characteristics of those who responded to the Working in Fitness Survey. Understanding the composition of the sample is important, as it can help us to interpret the answers given to subsequent questions.

2.1 - Fitness industry role

The first question in the survey was a filter question as we wanted to analyse and present the survey results for two main groups; **exercise professionals** and **fitness managers**. The results for exercise professionals are presented in Section 4 and the results for fitness managers are presented in Section 5. This section about the respondents and the next section on fitness trends includes the responses from both groups (all respondents).



• **Figure 1** - Respondents' role in the fitness industry (n=287)

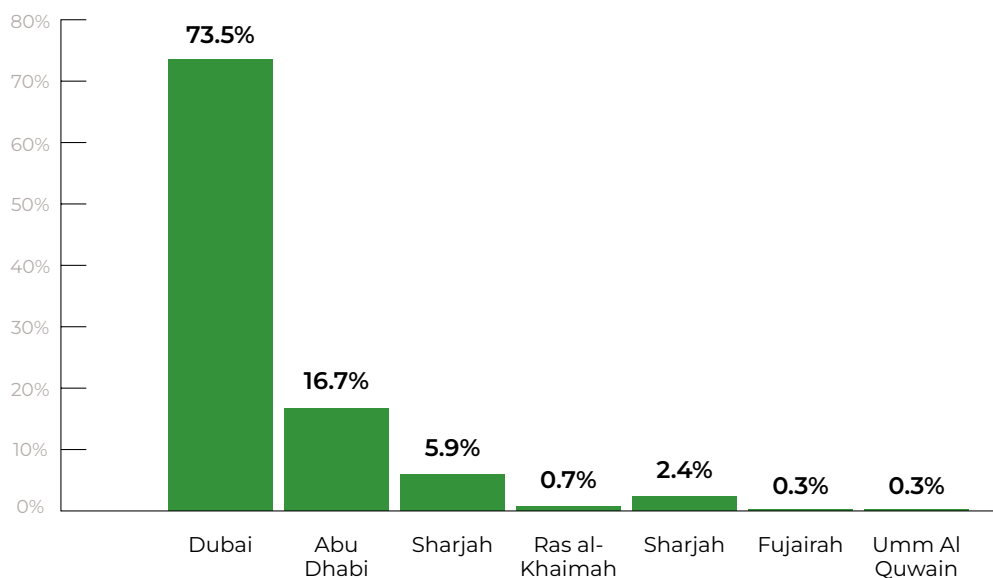


While the initial aim was to gather a greater number of responses, with 233 responses from exercise professionals (81.2% of the sample) and 54 responses from fitness managers (18.8% of the sample), the numbers are sufficient to gain a snapshot and general understanding of the situation and views of the fitness workforce in the UAE.

2.2 - Location in UAE

Dubai was the most represented Emirate within the survey sample (73.5%) followed by Abu Dhabi with 16.7% of the sample and Sharjah with 5.9%. All other Emirates were represented by less than 3% of the sample.

• **Figure 2** - Location in the UAE of respondents by Emirate (n=287)



2.3 - Nationality

The fitness industry in the UAE is truly international with fitness professionals coming to the UAE to work from all over the world. The 287 respondents to the survey come from 48 different countries, from Australia to Zimbabwe.

India was the most represented nation with 65 respondents, followed by the Philippines with 23 and Lebanon with 20. There were six responses from United Arab Emirates nationals. The top 10 countries represented in the survey sample can be seen in Table 1.

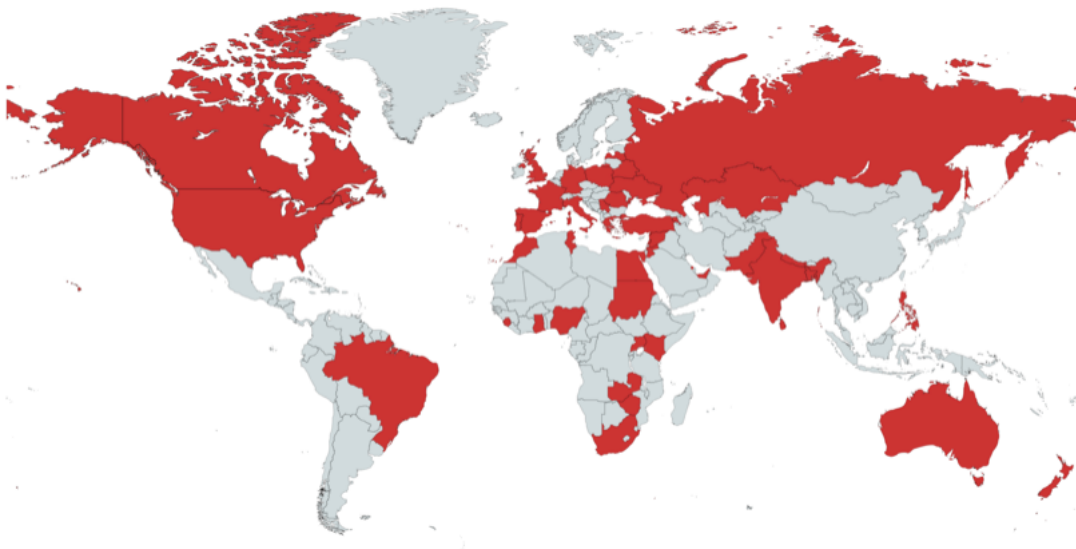
All of the countries represented in the sample can be seen in Figure 3 which shows the home nations of respondents in a word cloud and world map.

• **Table 1** - Top ten nations represented in the survey

1	India	65
2	Philippines	23
3	Lebanon	20
4	United Kingdom	16
5	Egypt	12
6	Pakistan	10
7	Serbia	10
8	Kenya	9
9	South Africa	8
10	Jordan	8

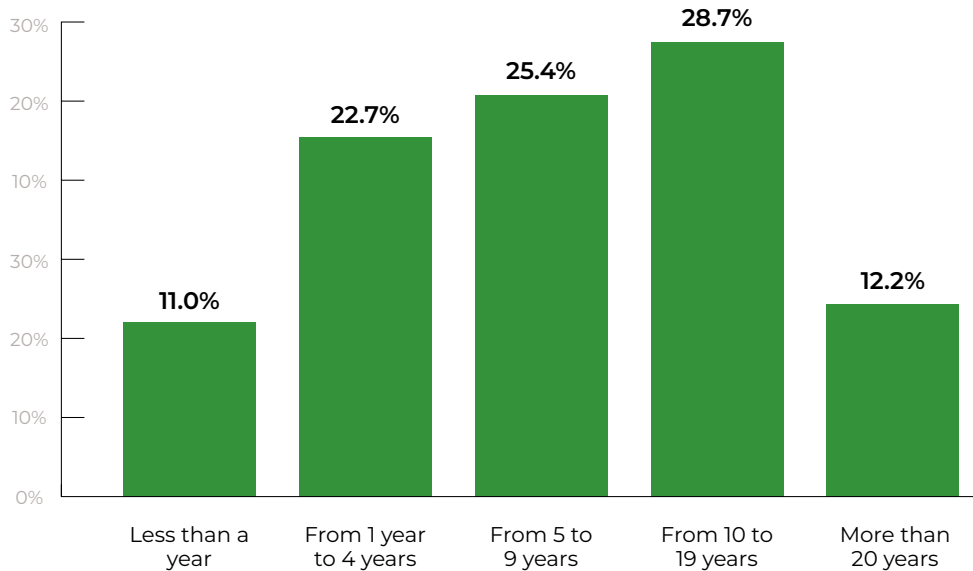


• **Figure 3** - Home nations of respondents



2.4 - Years resident in the UAE

• **Figure 4** - Number of years resident in the UAE (n=181)



This graph shows that many people working in the fitness industry in the UAE have chosen to make the UAE their country of residence for the long-term. With around 40% of respondents having been in the countries for 10 or more years. This demonstrates the UAE is an attractive place to live for people working in fitness.

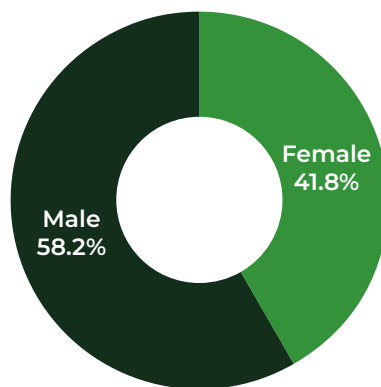


2.5 - Gender

Figure 5 shows a reasonable gender balance of respondents to the survey, especially when compared to other sectors or the overall national workforce, with 58.2% of respondents being male, and 41.8% female.

We can also study the gender balance for the two main occupational areas covered by the study. For exercise professionals the gender balance was 56.2% male/ 43.8% female. For fitness managers the gender balance was 66.7% male/ 33.3% female. Although the sample size for managers was smaller this could suggest work needs to be done to attract and retain female managers in the sector.

• **Figure 5** - Gender of respondents (n=287)



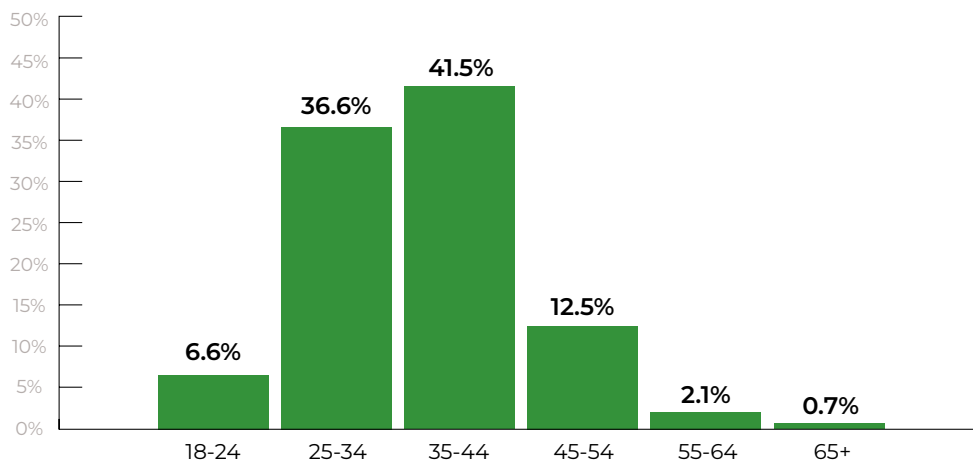
2.6 - Age

There is a broad spectrum of ages represented, with numbers peaking in the middle age group (35-44) and tailing off at the younger and older ends. However, the majority (78.1%) fall in the age bands from 25 – 44 perhaps reflecting the ages at which professionals from abroad are most likely to be working in the UAE.



If we look at the two main occupational groups, for exercise professionals the age profile is a little bit lower, with 8.2% being in the 18-24 age band which is still much lower than would be seen in other countries. As would be expected the age profile of managers was higher in terms of ages than the overall sample, with no managers in the 18-24 age band, and a larger percentage at the higher age bands including 51.9% at the 35-44 age band and 16.7% at the 45-54 age band.

• **Figure 6** - Age of respondents (n=287)





3

**Fitness
trends**

KEY POINTS

- Among the general population the number one fitness goal of clients reported by respondents to the survey is weight loss, followed by better health / wellbeing/ disease prevention
- 86% of respondents believe that maintaining overall wellness (including health, fitness, nutrition, appearance) is a higher priority for consumers since the COVID pandemic.

The top five things respondents have implemented to support client wellness are :

- 1 Holistic approach to fitness
 - 2 Personalised training
 - 3 Education and empowerment
 - 4 Adaptation to circumstances
 - 5 Mind-body connection
- A further 74.3% of respondents believe the habits and demands of clients have changed since the COVID pandemic with a shift towards health consciousness and increased awareness and engagement

The top five fitness trends among respondents were :

- 1 Personal training
- 2 Exercise for weight loss
- 3 Functional fitness training
- 4 Body weight exercise
- 5 Group exercise training

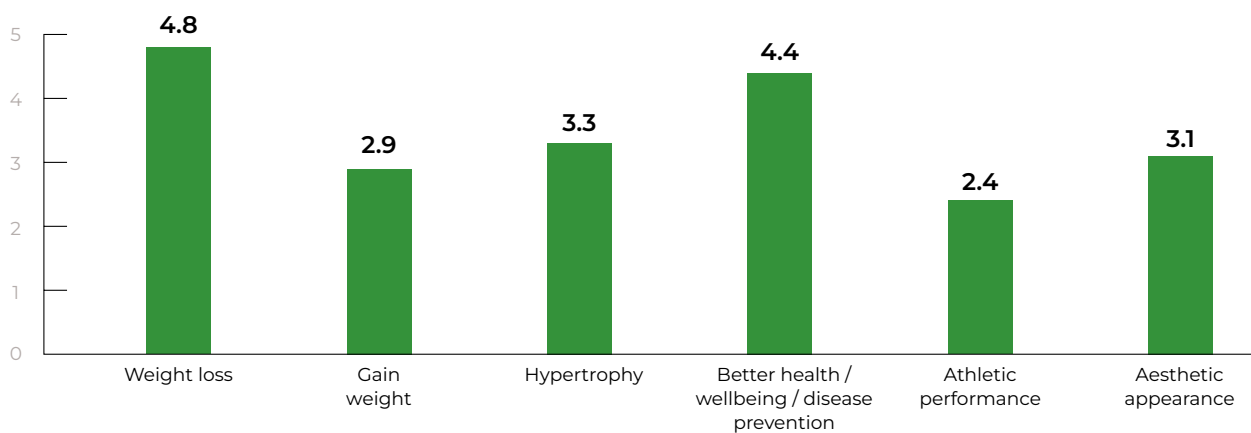
(Chosen from ACSM World-wide Fitness Trends Survey Options)



3.1 - Fitness goals

Figure 7 shows that among the general population the number one fitness goal of clients reported by respondents to the survey is weight loss, followed by better health / wellbeing/ disease prevention. This could be important for exercise professionals when choosing areas to develop their skills in to be best able to meet the needs of clients, and of interest to training providers when choosing topics for course design.

• **Figure 7** - Importance/ frequency of fitness goals for clients (Scale of 1 to 5) (n=173)

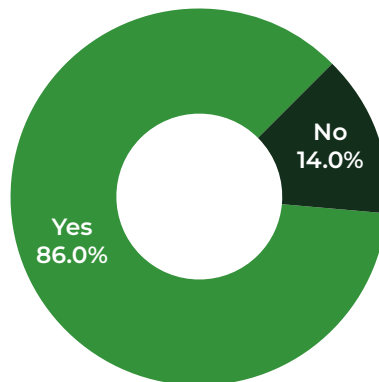


3.2 - Consumer priorities

Figure 8 shows that 86% of respondents believe that maintaining overall wellness (including health, fitness, nutrition, appearance) is a higher priority for consumers since the COVID pandemic. This can also have implications for the competencies and knowledge that a client could hope or expect fitness professionals to have. This shows they may be interested in much more than advice and guidance on exercise programming.



• **Figure 8** - Higher priority among consumers of maintaining overall wellness since COVID pandemic (n=134)



Those who answered yes were then asked to state one thing which they have done to support client wellness as well as meeting their fitness needs? The top five themes from the answers given are as follows :

- 1 **Holistic Approach to Fitness :** Many instructors emphasised the importance of not only physical training but also mental and emotional support, stress management, and lifestyle adjustments to achieve overall wellness.
- 2 **Personalised Training :** Instructors tailored fitness programmes to individual needs and preferences, promoting autonomy and enjoyment in exercise routines.
- 3 **Education and Empowerment :** Educating clients about the importance of health, wellness, and proper lifestyle choices was a recurring theme, with a focus on empowering individuals to take charge of their well-being.
- 4 **Adaptation to Circumstances :** Amidst challenges such as the COVID pandemic, instructors adapted by providing online training sessions, emphasising the significance of staying active and maintaining health during difficult times.
- 5 **Mind-Body Connection :** Recognising the interconnectedness of physical and mental health, many instructors incorporated mindfulness practices like meditation, yoga, and deep breathing exercises into their fitness programmes to promote holistic well-being.



Specific quotes from respondents who answered this question included :

« I get clients to look at their fitness goals from a holistic perspective and how it is connected to their mental health, lifestyle choices and nutrition choices »

« I educate clients about the importance of sleep and how they can create a good environment for a restful and peaceful deep sleep »

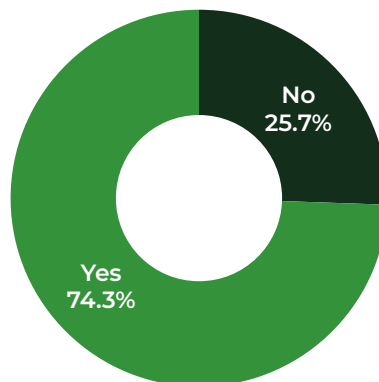
« I constantly discuss the importance of diet, optimal resting time and recreational activities to my clients »

« I have invested in my education. For me to be able to educate clients and share more knowledge about fitness, techniques, nutrition and life coaching in general. This has all made a big difference to support clients wellness as well as meeting their fitness needs »

3.3 - Client habits and demands

Figure 9 shows that 74.3% of respondents believe the habits and demands of clients have changed since the COVID pandemic.

• **Figure 9** - Change in the habits and demands of clients since the COVID pandemic (n=171)



Those who answered yes were then asked to state what in their experience has been the biggest change. The top five themes from the answers given are as follows :

- 1 Shift Towards Health Consciousness :** There is a noticeable trend of people prioritising their health and wellness over other aspects, such as physical appearance. This includes a focus on healthy eating habits, cleanliness, and hygiene standards, particularly in light of the COVID pandemic.
- 2 Increased Awareness and Engagement :** Individuals are becoming more engaged in fitness activities, recognising the importance of regular exercise in maintaining overall health. This heightened awareness is leading to a greater commitment to fitness routines, with some preferring to train at home or engaging in online training sessions.
- 3 Concerns About Health and Immunity :** There is a growing concern about immunity and overall health, especially in the wake of the pandemic. Many individuals are seeking ways to boost their immune systems through exercise, healthy eating, and lifestyle changes.
- 4 Changing Fitness Landscape :** The fitness industry is witnessing shifts in client preferences, with more demand for online training options and personalised fitness solutions. Additionally, there is a greater emphasis on holistic health, including mental well-being and stress management.
- 5 Challenges and Opportunities :** While there is a surge in interest in health and fitness, some challenges persist, such as maintaining motivation, adapting to new routines, and addressing the impact of the pandemic on mental health.



Specific quotes from respondents who answered this question included :

« People are more focused on health goals than on physical appearance, they care about themselves more »

« Most of the clients want to stay fit and lose weight for a healthy life. Nutrition-wise they eat healthy in order to build their immune system »

« People are now more conscious about their health - they are afraid if another pandemic might occur so they are ready to face it »

« Hygiene standards have increased substantially, members expect so much more now regarding this, which is a good thing »

3.4 - Top fitness trends for the UAE

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) conducts an annual world-wide survey of fitness trends.

We listed the 20 common trends as collated by ACSM for 2023¹ and asked respondents to tick the five most important to them. Table 2 shows the top ten trends in the UAE fitness industry from the choice of the ACSM worldwide fitness trends. The table also shows the world-wide ranking for the same item from the ACSM worldwide survey.

This study of trends shows wearable technology is perhaps not showing quite the same level of importance in the UAE fitness industry yet compared to other countries, while Functional Fitness Training, Exercise for Weight Loss and Personal Training top the rankings among respondents in the UAE.

1. https://journals.lww.com/acsm-healthfitness/fulltext/2023/01000/worldwide_survey_of_fitness_trends_for_2023.6.aspx?WT.mc_id=HPxADx20100319xMP



• **Table 2** - UAE Fitness Industry Trends as reported by survey respondents

UAE Ranking	Item	World-wide Ranking
1	Personal Training	10
2	Exercise for Weight Loss	8
3	Functional Fitness Training	5
4	Body Weight Training	3
5	Group Exercise Training	14
6	Circuit Training	12
7	Certified Fitness Professionals	19
8	Strength Training with Free Weights	2
9	High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT)	7
10	Wearable Technology	1





4

**Exercise
professionals**

KEY POINTS

- Just over a third of exercise professional respondents to the survey work more than 40 hours per week. 9.2% work 60 hours or more
- 89.5% of exercise professional respondents are a member of REPs showing their commitment to professional registration and personal development
- A large majority of exercise professionals work with older clients and children, with almost half also working with clients with disabilities and pre- and post-natal clients
- A large majority also work with people with lower back pain and people with obesity/ diabetes and those recovering from injury
- 79.6% of respondents would recommend their employer to a friend; however 20.4% would not two thirds of respondents took their main fitness qualification in the UAE
- 82.6% of respondents have taken part in training and development in the last 12 months, including 57.4% reporting having done more than 3 days and 25.1% reporting having done more than 10 days
- An overwhelming 86% of respondents reported that they alone pay for their training and development
- Overall respondents are quite experienced in the fitness industry with 75.4% having worked more than four years in the industry and 36% having worked 10 years or more
- For those who may leave the industry the most likely reason for fitness professionals potentially leaving the industry after personal reasons is low pay compared to other industries followed by poor working conditions, lack of work/ new clients and no perspective of career development



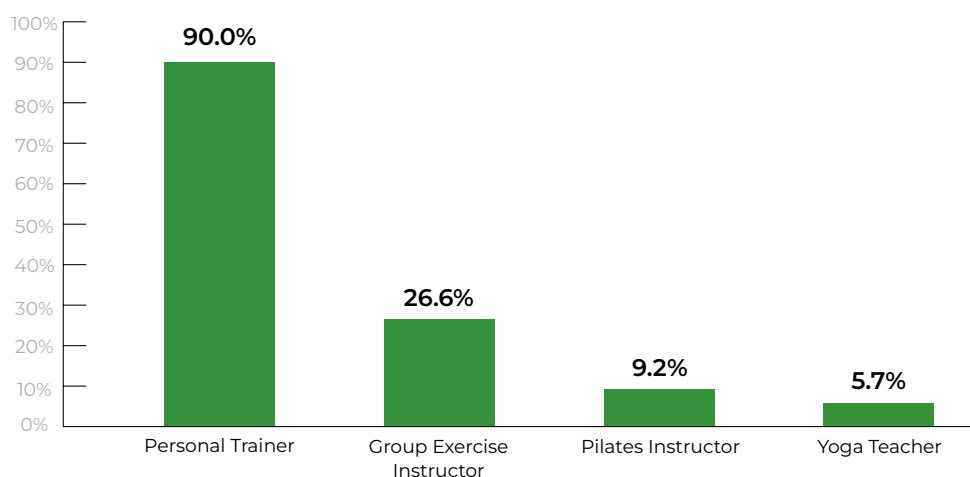
4.1 - Exercise professional roles

4.1.1 - Main roles

Figure 10 shows the main occupations represented in the survey. Some exercise professionals work in more than one role and this is reflected in the answers.

Personal trainers are the largest occupational group, with 90% of exercise professional respondents performing this role. 26.6% of respondents perform the role of group exercise instructor while less than 10% of respondents instruct Pilates classes or teach yoga classes.

• **Figure 10** - Role in the fitness industry of respondents (they could choose more than one)
(n=229)

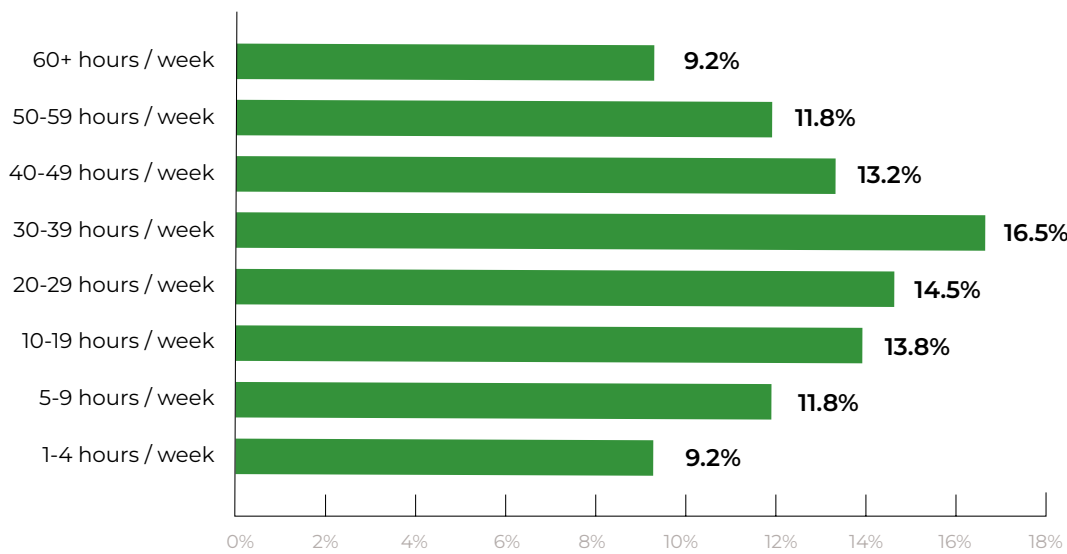


4.1.2 - Typical hours worked as an exercise professional

The fitness industry is well known as a hard-working sector and this is confirmed through the Working in Fitness survey. Just over a third of exercise professional respondents to the survey work more than 40 hours per week on average serving the wellness needs of the population of the UAE and generating revenue for themselves or their employer. 9.2% work 60 hours or more. At the same time a lower number of working hours for many professionals shows the fitness sector offers flexible working and the opportunity for part time work and working the number of hours to suit a variety of lifestyles, e.g. those who teach just a few classes per week around other work or personal commitments. Figure 11 shows the average number of hours per week across the survey sample.



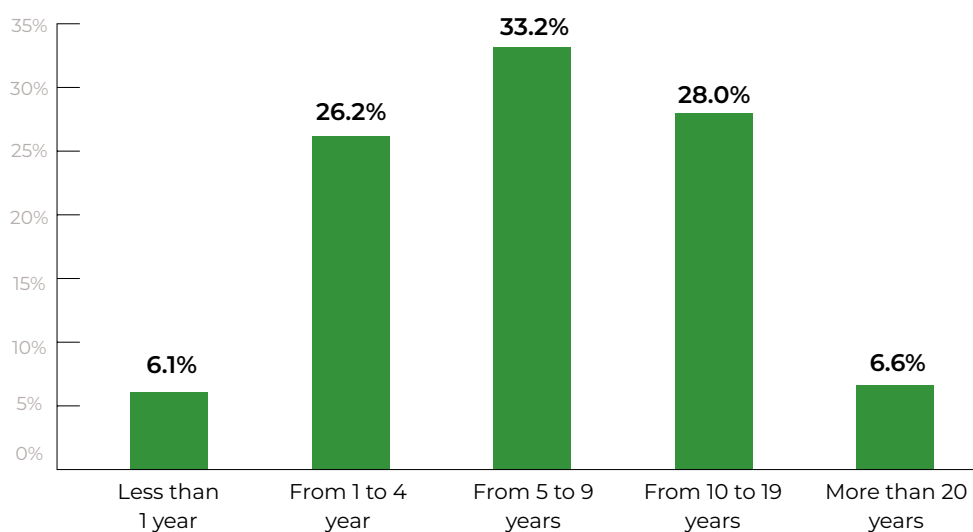
• **Figure 11** - Average number of hours worked in the fitness industry in a typical week (n=152)



4.1.3 - Length of time in current role

Figure 12 shows that working as an exercise professional can be an attractive career option for the long-term. Just over a third of respondents have been working as an exercise professional for 10 or more years, with further third of respondents working for 5 or more years in that role. This shows the industry has the ability to retain staff, and also highlights the need for continuing education for workers who may have gained their initial certification some time ago.

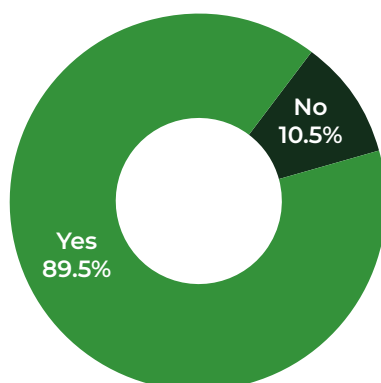
• **Figure 12** - Length of time in current role as an exercise professional (n=229)



4.1.4 - REPs membership

89.5% of exercise professional respondents are a member of REPs UAE showing their commitment to professional registration and personal development.

• **Figure 13** - Membership of REPs UAE (n=229)



4.1.5 - Special population clients

The fitness industry aims to attract all types of clients to be physically active, so it is interesting to explore the extent to which fitness professionals work with different client groups.

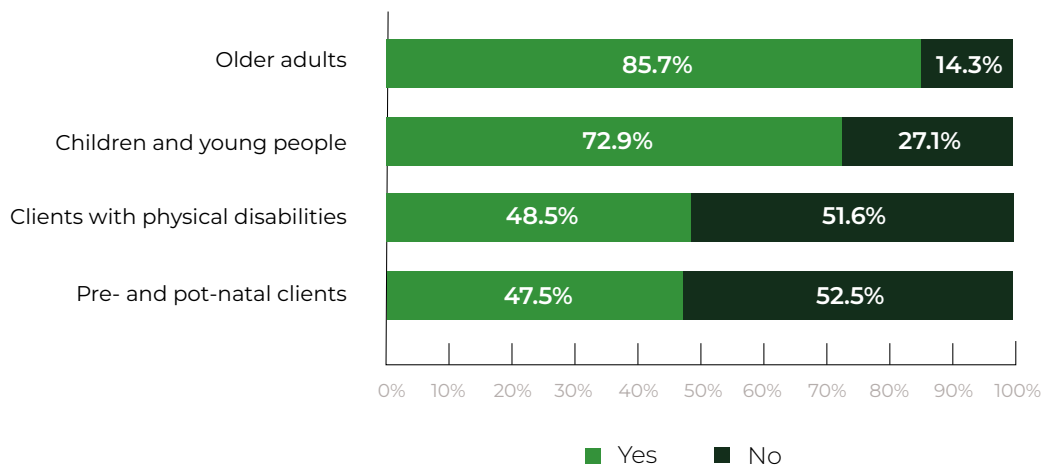
First, we asked respondents if they work with four different special population groups and the results can be seen in Figure 14. An overwhelming 85.7% reported working with older adults and 72.9% reported working with children and young people. These results raise questions whether these populations are “special” or just a normal and common part of the fitness clientele. Both of these percentages are greater than when the same question was asked in the first edition of the Working in Fitness Survey in 2019 (when the percentages were 81.8% working with older adults and 67.2% working with children and young people).

There are also implications for education and training, raising the question whether programming for special populations should be included in core fitness certifications if so many fitness professionals work with these groups.

Just under half of respondents reported working with disabled clients 48.5% and pre and post-natal clients (47.5%).



• **Figure 14** - Working with special population clients (n=176)



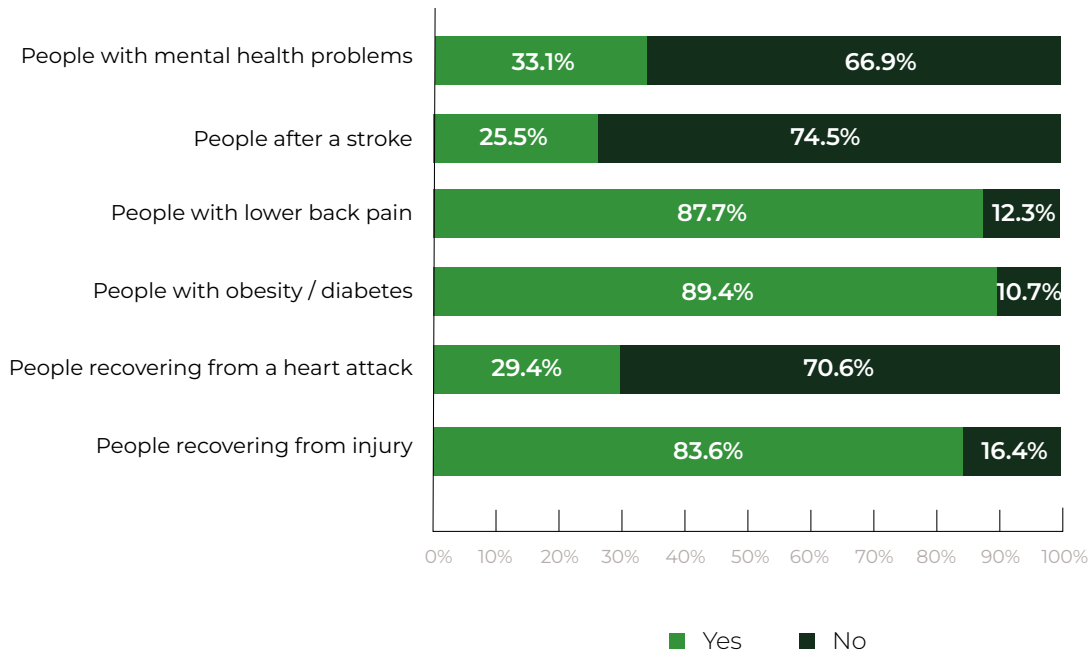
Respondents were also asked to state if they work with clients with certain medical conditions.

It can be seen in Figure 15 that a large majority work with people with lower back pain (87.7%), people with obesity/ diabetes (89.4%) and with people recovering from an injury (83.6%). This shows the prevalence of these conditions in UAE society and among fitness club members. It is also positive to note that specialist training courses for these conditions are available in the UAE. These percentages are trending upwards since the survey of 2019 when the corresponding percentages were 83% and 79.4%.

For the other medical conditions listed: mental health problems, people recovering from a stroke and people recovering from a heart attack – the percentages of exercise professionals working with these groups was respectively 33.1%, 25.5% and 29.4%. Although far fewer in number this does also raise a training issue where trainers need to feel suitably knowledgeable to work with clients with complex medical conditions. All these three percentages are also higher than for the same question in the 2019 survey.



• **Figure 15** - Working with clients with medical conditions (n=176)



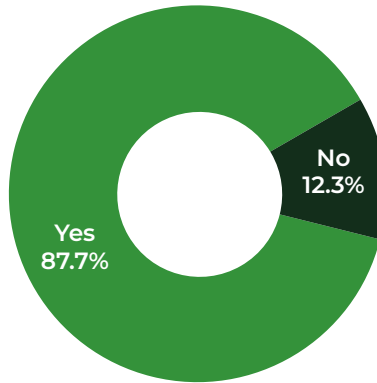
4.2 - Employment issues

4.2.1 - Main employment role

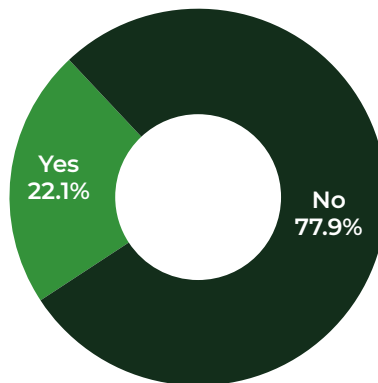
Figure 16 shows that most people working in the fitness industry, work in fitness as their main employment role (87.7% of respondents), however just over a fifth of workers (22.1%) have another job outside the fitness industry. This could be trainers with a main job outside fitness who work part time in the fitness industry, or fitness workers with a main job in fitness who want or need to supplement their income with work from outside the sector.



• **Figure 16** - Work in the fitness industry as main employment role (n=212)



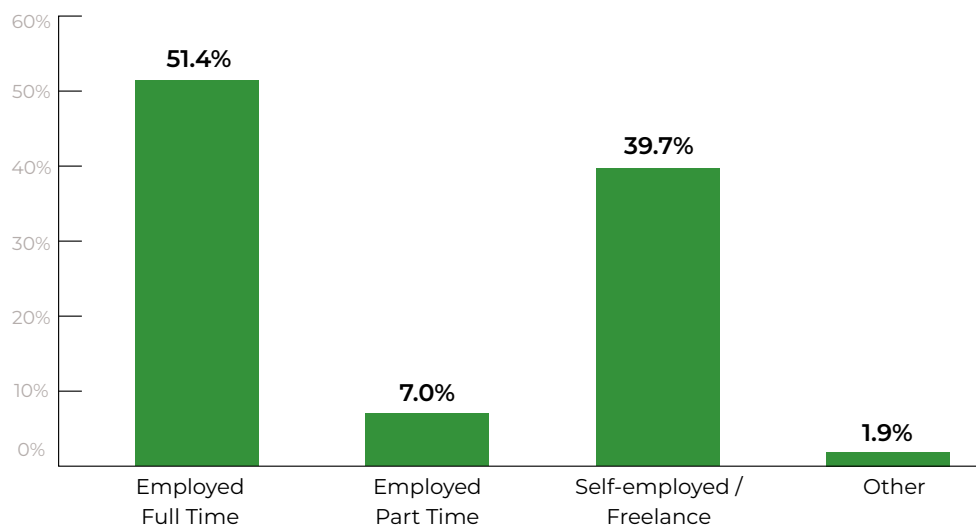
• **Figure 17** - Other employment roles outside the fitness industry (n=213)



4.2.2 - Employment status

Figure 18 shows that overall a majority of 51.4% of respondents are employed on a full time basis in the fitness industry, with 39.7% working on a self-employed/ freelance basis. The proportion of respondents employed full time has fallen slightly since the last survey in 2019.

• **Figure 18** - Type of employment in the fitness industry (n=214)

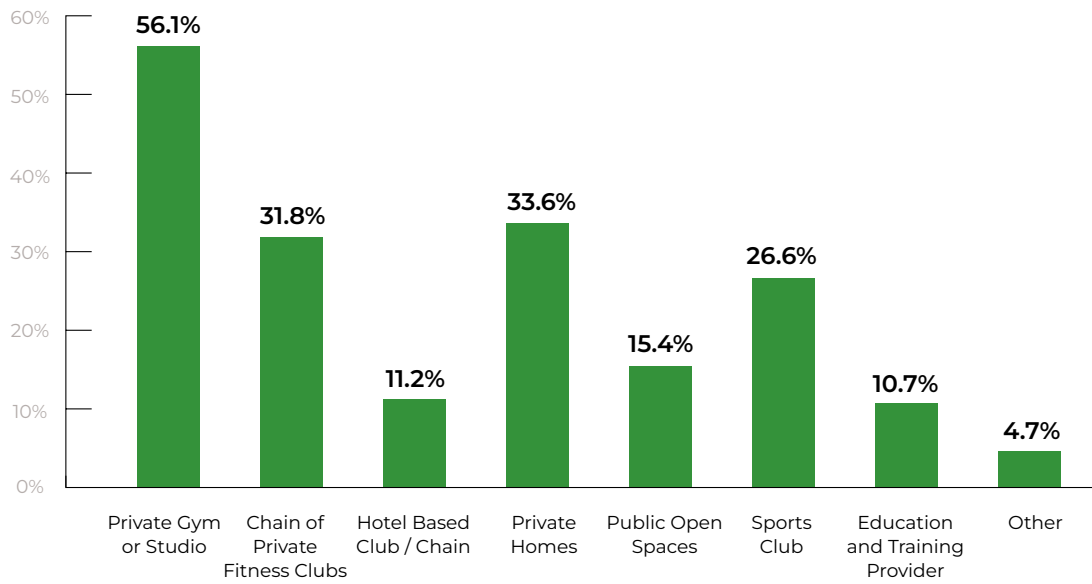


4.2.3 - Places of work

A variety of locations for fitness work are represented in the sample, with the most prevalent being a private gym or studio (56.1%) and a chain of private clubs also being highly represented. It is very interesting to note that 33.6% of fitness workers are now working some of their time in private homes, this is a large increase since the last survey in 2019 and can be attributed to the Covid pandemic and changing patterns of client exercise where it seems more are now inclined to work out, at least some of the time, at home.

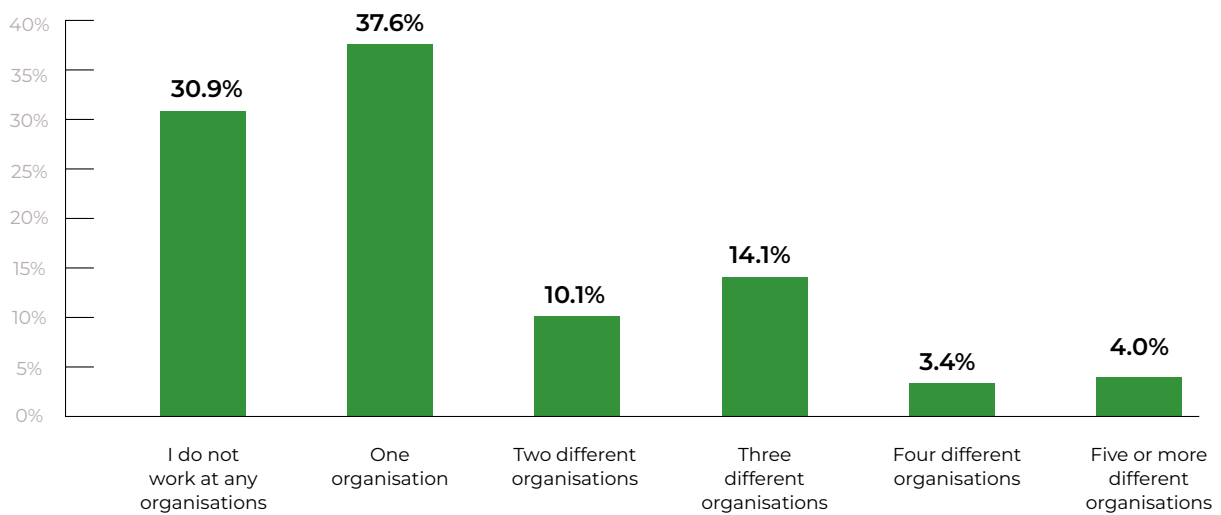


• **Figure 19** - Places of fitness work (could choose more than one) (n=214)



Respondents were also asked how many different fitness organisations they work at (Figure 20), with only 37.6% working at one organisation. With 31.6% working at two or more organisations. It is interesting to note that 30.9% of respondents do not work at any organisation, which is an increase from 20.7% in the 2019 survey.

• **Figure 20** - Number of places of fitness work (n=149)



4.2.4 - Job satisfaction

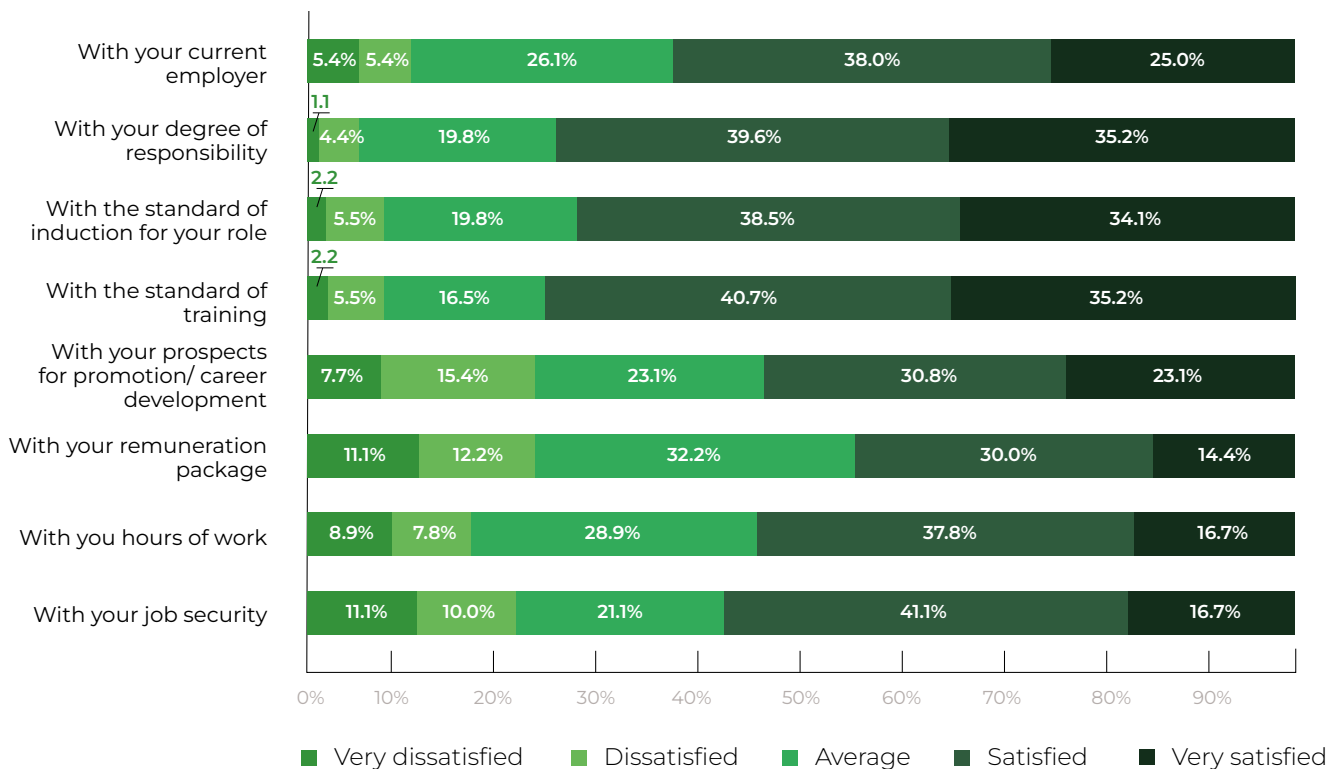
79.6% of respondents would recommend their employer to a friend; however 20.4% would not, suggesting some level of dissatisfaction for some respondents with their current employer.

Figure 21 shows trainer satisfaction with a range of aspects of their current role. The following noteworthy points can be drawn out from this data:

- The highest rating for being very dissatisfied was 11.1% of respondents and this applied to both items of job security and remuneration package.
- The lowest rating for an aspect where respondents are very satisfied is with their remuneration package.
- It is encouraging to note that 75.9% of respondents were satisfied with the standard of training they received as part of their role.
- Overall there was a higher level of satisfaction than dissatisfaction with respondents' current employer.

Employers can consider this data and develop policies to increase employee satisfaction to aid staff wellbeing and retention.

• **Figure 21** - Working with clients with medical conditions (n=176)



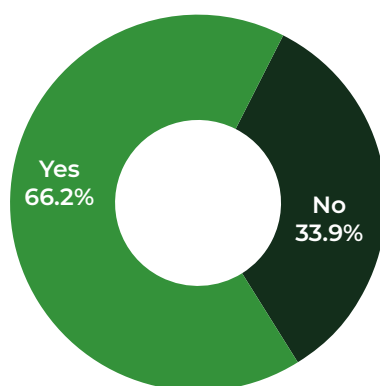
4.3 - Training and development

4.3.1 - Qualifications in the UAE

It is interesting to note in Figure 22 that two thirds of respondents took their main fitness qualification in the UAE (66.2%). This shows there is a continuing strong market for entry qualifications in the country.

To some extent the answer to this question is dictated by nationality and whether internationally recognised certifications are on offer in the fitness professionals' home country. It is also linked to requirements of employers and REPs to hold an internationally accredited certification.

• **Figure 22** - Main fitness qualification taken in the UAE (n=195)



4.3.2 - Number of training days

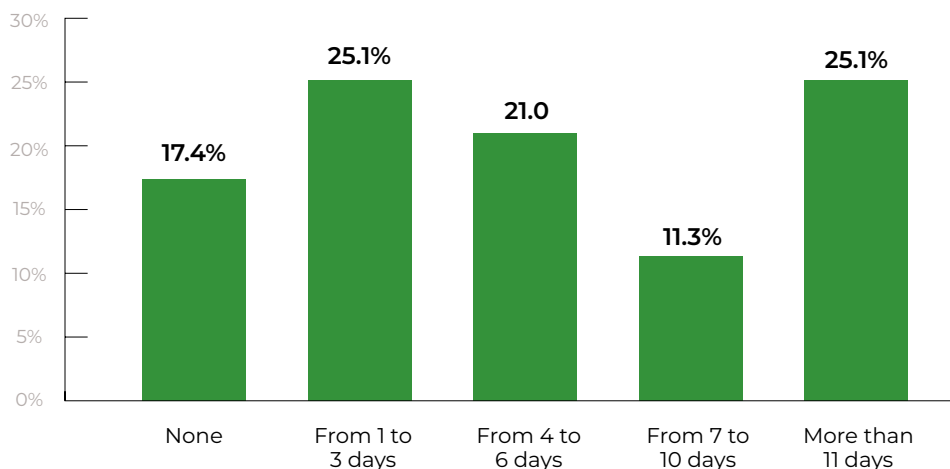
Figure 23 shows there is a large appetite for training and professional development in the UAE fitness industry.

82.6% of respondents have taken part in training and development in the last 12 months, including 57.4% reporting having done more than 3 days and 25.1% reporting having done more than 10 days.

This shows many trainers go beyond the REPs CPD requirement of 10 CPD points (hours) per year. These figures also show a demand and market for training and development in the industry.



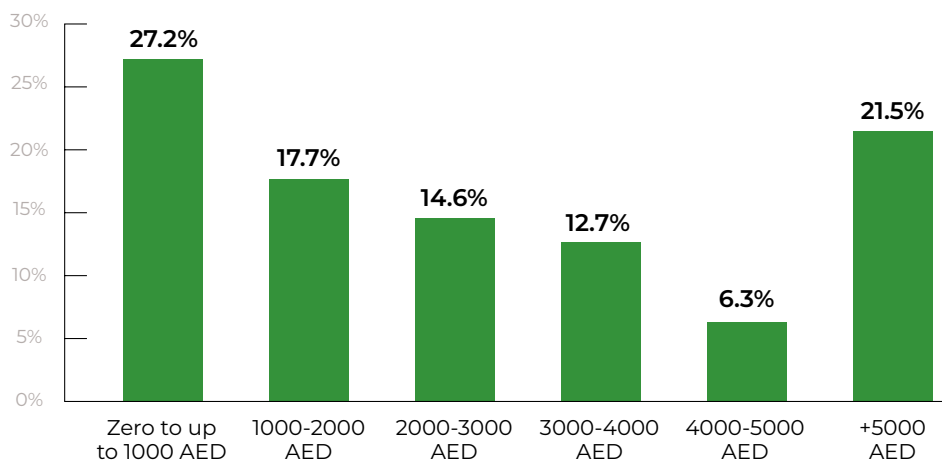
• **Figure 23** - Number of training and development days in the past year (n=195)



4.3.3 - Cost and funding of training

The cost of training and development activities was explored further and results can be seen in Figure 24. Responses ranged from under 1000 AED (27.2%) to 5000 AED or more (21.5%). Compared to the 2019 REPs survey the proportion spending less than 1000 has gone up and the proportion spending more than 5000 has gone down.

• **Figure 24** - Total spent on training in the past year (n=158)

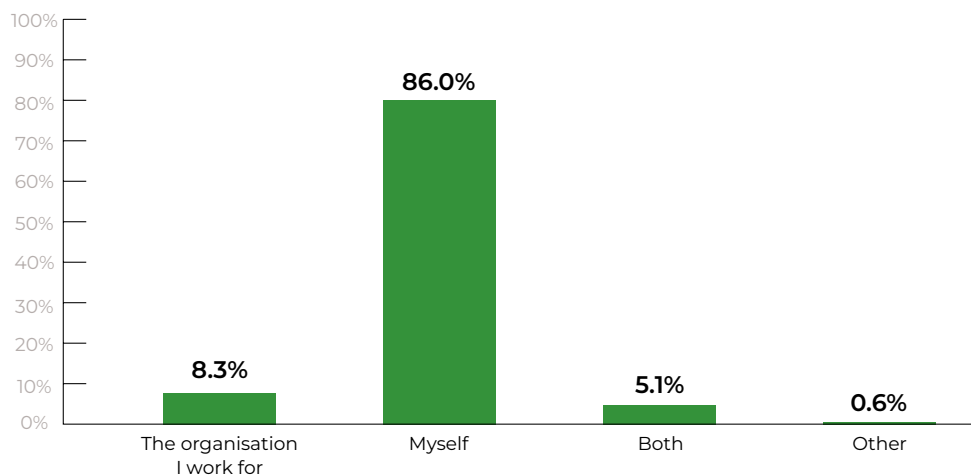


An overwhelming 86% of respondents reported that they alone pay for their training and development, with a further 5.1% paying jointly with their employer. Only 8.3% of respondents reported that their organisation will pay for their training and development. This is shown in figure 25.



It could be argued that, if these figures represent the real situation, then employers should consider increasing their training budget and supporting development needs of staff who contribute to their business success and not leaving them to pay for training by themselves.

• **Figure 25** - Who paid for your training? (n=157)



4.3.4 - CPD plans

Respondents were asked what professional development training or qualifications they are planning to do in the next year. A summary of the responses can be provided under several key themes :

- **Special populations training courses** – there was particular interest in pre- and post-natal training, with several also planning to study rehabilitation and injury management training courses.
- **Fitness certifications** – fitness training courses respondents plan to take include the topics of kettlebells, spinning, yoga and Les Mills.
- **Strength and conditioning** – this appears to be a popular topic many trainers plan to expand their knowledge in.
- **Nutrition** – many trainers also plan to take further courses and certifications in nutrition in the next year
- **Yoga and Pilates** – as well as taking initial yoga or Pilates certifications, a range of specialities were mentioned including for Pilates instructors reformer, chair, Cadillac.
- **Attendance at conferences** – several conferences and conventions were mentioned as a way that trainers plan to increase their knowledge



Respondents were also asked what continuous professional development courses (CPD) they would like to see that they don't think is currently available in UAE, the following answers were recorded :

- Fitness management
- Health coach
- Boxing
- Pre- and post- natal
- Micronutrition
- Holistic training
- Transformation course
- Business development
- CrossFit
- Corporate wellness
- Injury rehabilitation
- Mobility training
- Seniors
- Olympic weightlifting

4.3.5 - Sufficiency of training

When asked whether they considered that they have been given sufficient training to do their job, 25% said they had more training than needed, and 61.7% said they had sufficient training, only 10% said they did not feel they had enough training (Figure 26).

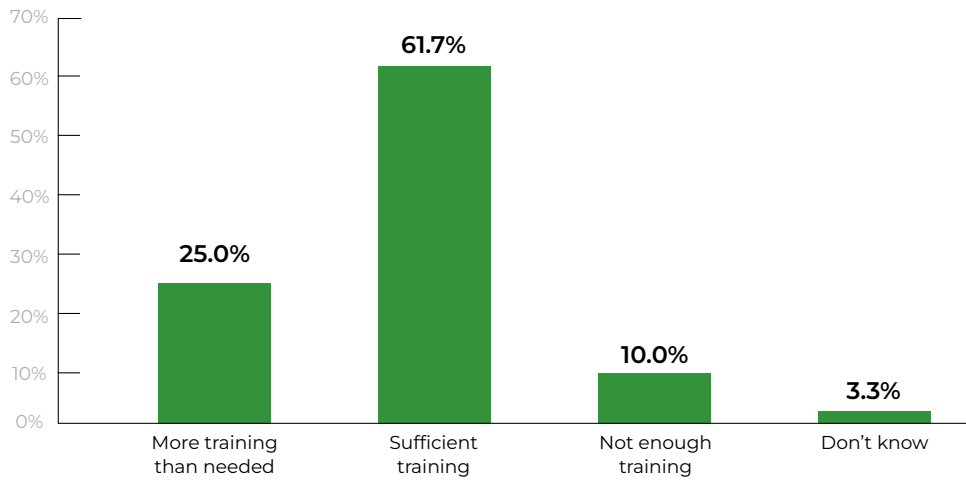
Trainers appear confident to work with a variety of special population clients, as 89.9% of respondents felt they have the right level of training to work with special population groups (Figure 27).

Respondents were also confident they could “hit the ground running” following their initial qualification, with 89.7% feeling their initial qualification gave them the confidence, skills and competence to immediately start work in the fitness industry (Figure 28).

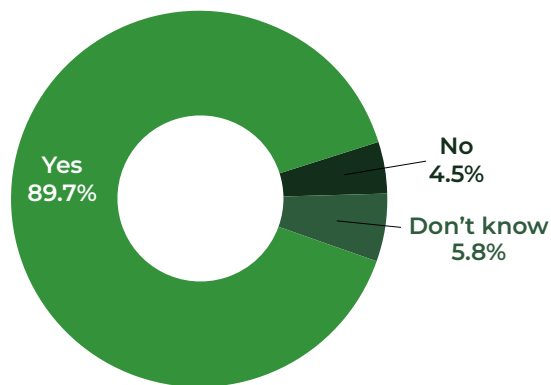
However these results should be compared with results from fitness managers who filled the survey where 90.4% answered “yes, always” or “yes, sometimes” to the question “do you have to provide additional training to fitness staff – exercise professionals – to ensure they are “work ready”?”. Therefore there appears to be a disconnect between the perception of competence to work as a trainer from fitness managers when compared to perceptions of trainers themselves.



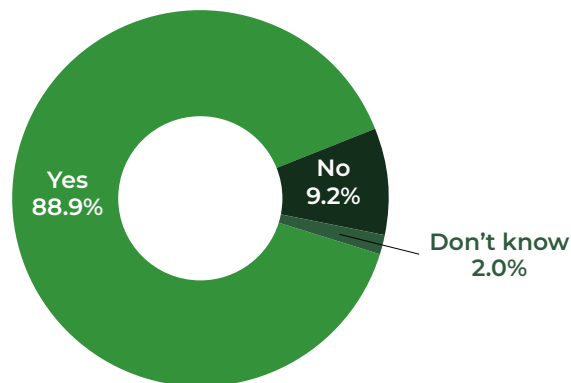
• **Figure 26** - Do you feel you have been given sufficient training to do your job? (n=180)



• **Figure 27** - Do you feel you have right level of training to work with special population groups? (n=195)



• **Figure 28** - Do you feel your initial qualification gave you the confidence, skills and competence to immediately start work in the fitness industry? (n=53)

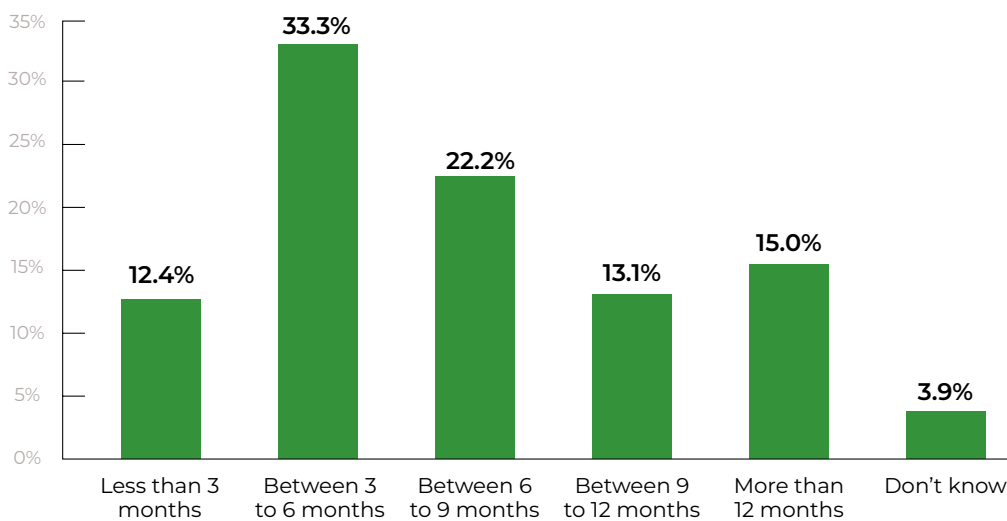


4.3.6 - Views on length of time for personal trainer qualification

Respondents were asked their view on the minimum length of time they feel it should take to complete a personal trainer qualification. Figure 29 shows there was a range of responses from less than 3 months to more than 12 months, with the largest band being 3 – 6 months.

Often the answer to this question will be linked to the certification taken by the respondent themselves.

• **Figure 29** - Views on minimum length of PT qualification (n=153)

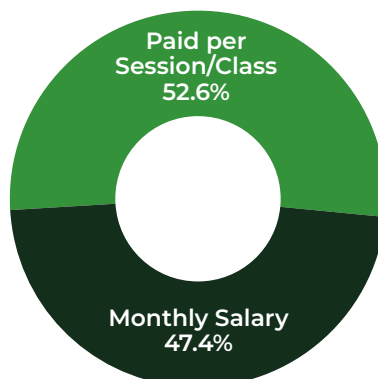


4.4 - Pay

4.4.1 - Method of payment

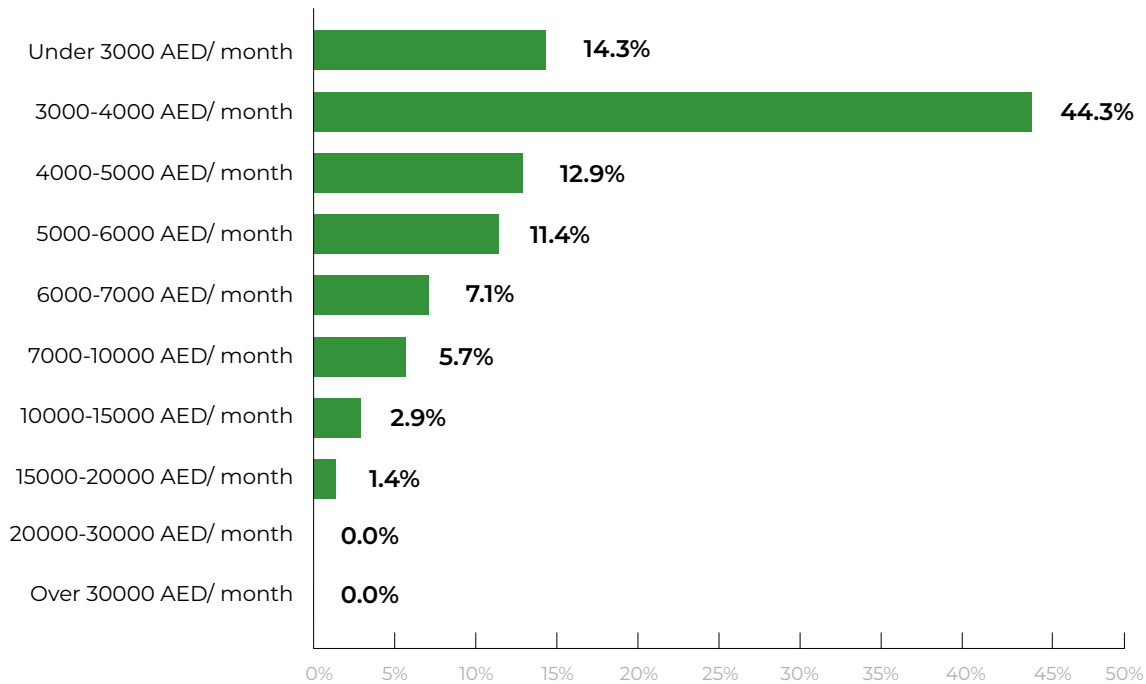
Figure 30 shows there is an almost equal split of exercise professionals who receive a monthly salary versus those who are paid per session or class.

• **Figure 30** - Method of payment for main role in fitness (n=152)



A wide spread of basic salaries was reported by respondents from under 3000 AED per month to between 15000 to 20000 AED. The most common salary reported was 3000 to 4000 AED per month at 44.3%.

• **Figure 31** - Average monthly salary (n=70)

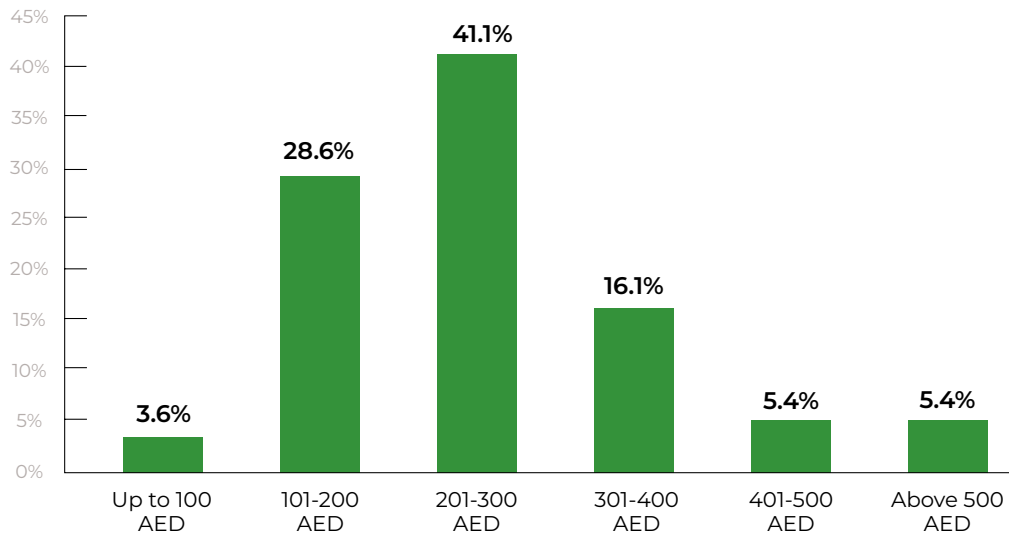


4.4.3 - Exercise professionals paid per hour (personal trainers)

A wide range of amounts charged per session/ class were reported by exercise professionals, with the range for personal trainers who answered this question ranging from under 100 AED to over 500 AED per session. 201 – 300 AED per personal training session is the most common amount charged among respondents.



• **Figure 32** - Amount charged per session (Personal Trainers) (n=56)



4.4.4 - Commission / bonus / perks

From the survey data it appears normal practice for employers to offer additional benefits on top of salary for many workers. 76% of those who responded to the question reported being eligible for commission, while 23% were eligible for airline tickets, 13% for a bonus, and 10% for housing allowance.

4.4.5 - Pay rises

The majority of respondents (67.6%) reported in the last year their pay had stayed the same, with 28.2% reporting a pay rise, and only 4.2% reporting a decrease in pay. This may suggest that employers need to consider increases in pay to retain their best staff.



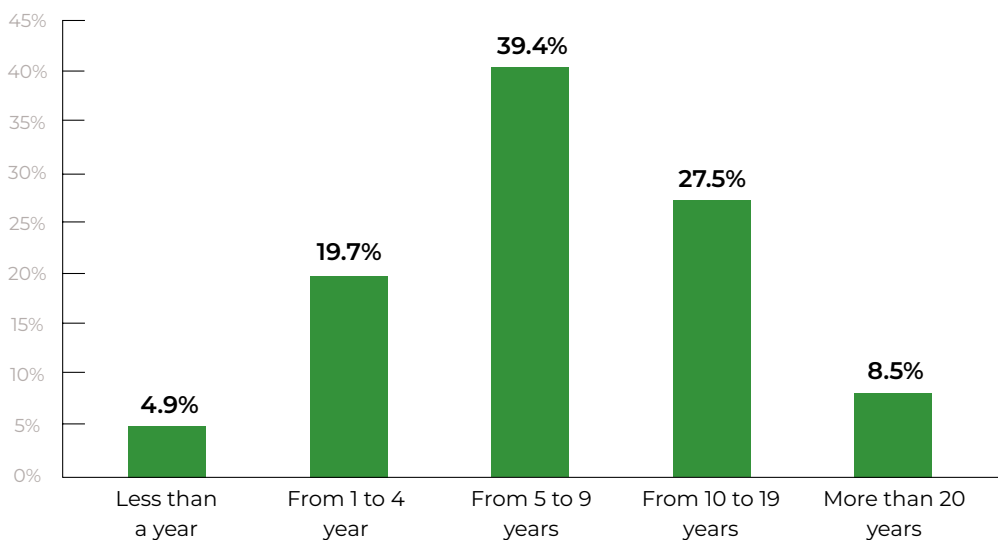
4.5 - Career in fitness

4.5.1 - Years in the fitness industry

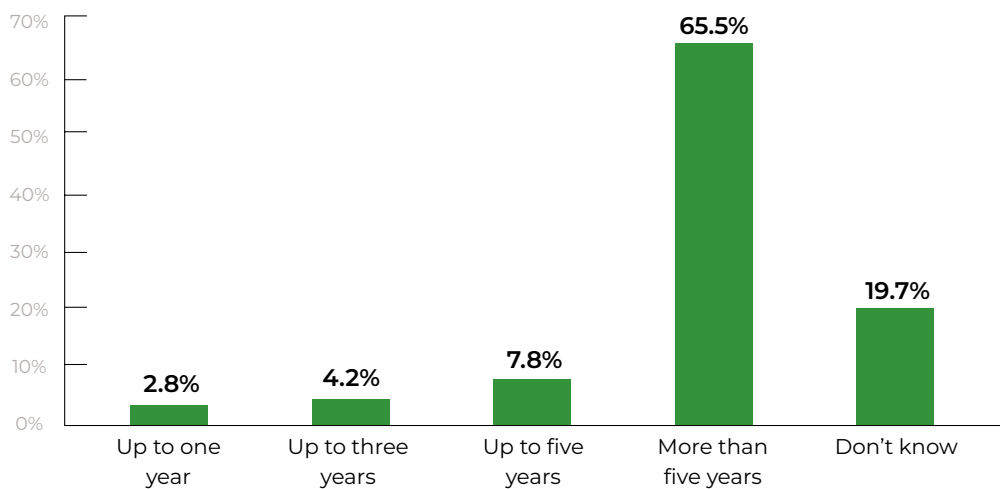
Overall respondents are quite experienced in the fitness industry with 75.4% having worked more than four years in the industry and 36% having worked 10 years or more. Only 4.9% of respondents are in their first year in the fitness industry (Figure 33). This is similar to the figures for 2019 and shows the fitness industry remains capable of retaining staff for the long-term.

This is also supported by the fact that a high proportion of respondents (85.2%) showed a strong commitment to the fitness industry and stated they expect to continue working in the industry for more than five years (Figure 34).

• **Figure 33** - Length of time in the fitness industry (n=142)



• **Figure 34** - How long expect to remain working in the fitness industry (n=142)



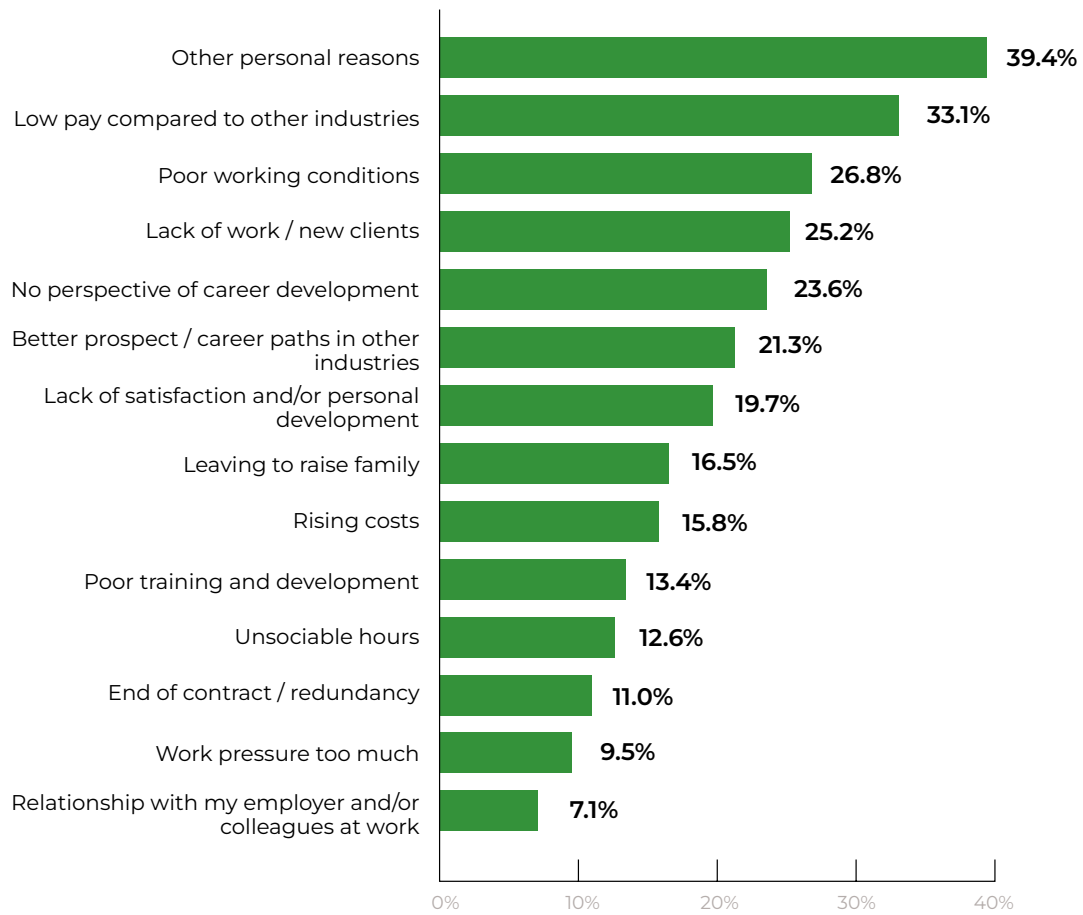
4.5.2 - Reasons for leaving the industry

For those who may leave the industry we explored their possible reasons for leaving, it can be seen in Figure 35 the most likely reason for fitness professionals potentially leaving the industry after personal reasons is low pay compared to other industries (33.1%). This was followed by poor working conditions (26.8%), lack of work/ new clients (25.2%) and no perspective of career development (23.6%).

Employers could consider the reasons in Figure 35 when developing a staff retention strategy.



• **Figure 35** - Potential factors in leaving the fitness industry (n=127)





5

**Fitness
managers**

KEY POINTS

- 44.4% of fitness managers held the role of exercise professional before they became a manager. 42.2% of manager respondents came from managing in another sector.
- 100% of fitness manager respondents said they would recommend their employer to a friend.
- The biggest areas of dissatisfaction for fitness managers is prospects for promotion and career development, and remuneration package.
- A majority of fitness manager respondents hold a management qualification (69.6%) with 45.7% having a generic management qualification and 23.9% a management qualification specific to sport and fitness.
- The leading training need for managers is in strategy, followed by leadership, managing people, finance and project management.
- 90% of fitness managers say they sometimes or always need to provide additional training to fitness staff to ensure they are work ready.
- The most popular stated time period to complete a personal trainer qualification is between 3 and 6 months .
- A high proportion of respondents (79.5%) showed a strong commitment to the fitness industry and stated they expect to continue working in the industry for more than five years.
- For those fitness managers who may leave the industry the most likely reason for fitness managers potentially leaving the industry is low pay compared to other industries.

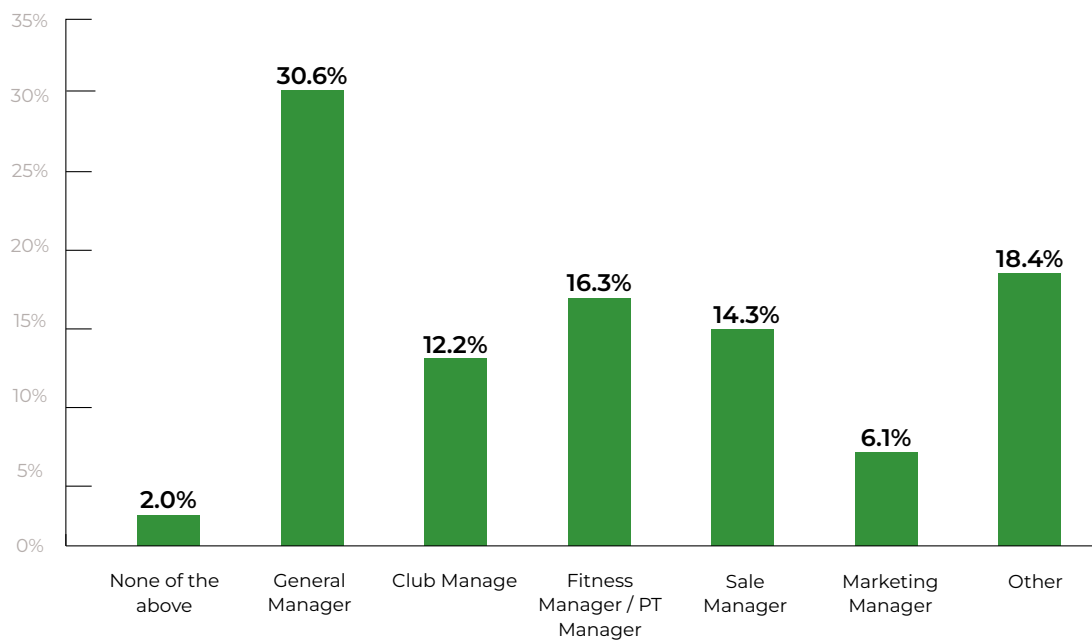


5.1 - Fitness manager roles

5.1.1 - Main role

A variety of management roles were represented by respondents to the management questions in the survey, including general managers (30.6%), and then between 12 and 16% for roles of club manager, fitness manager and sales manager.

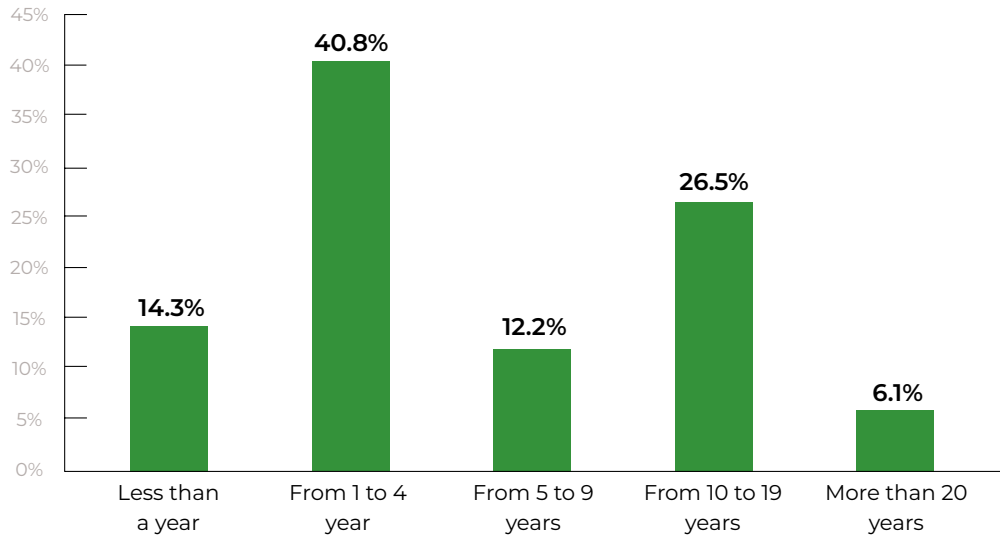
• **Figure 36** - Main fitness management role (n=49)



5.1.2 - Length of time in current role

While nearly a third of management respondents have been in their current role for 10 years or more, the largest percentage at 40.8% have been in their role for 1 to 4 years.

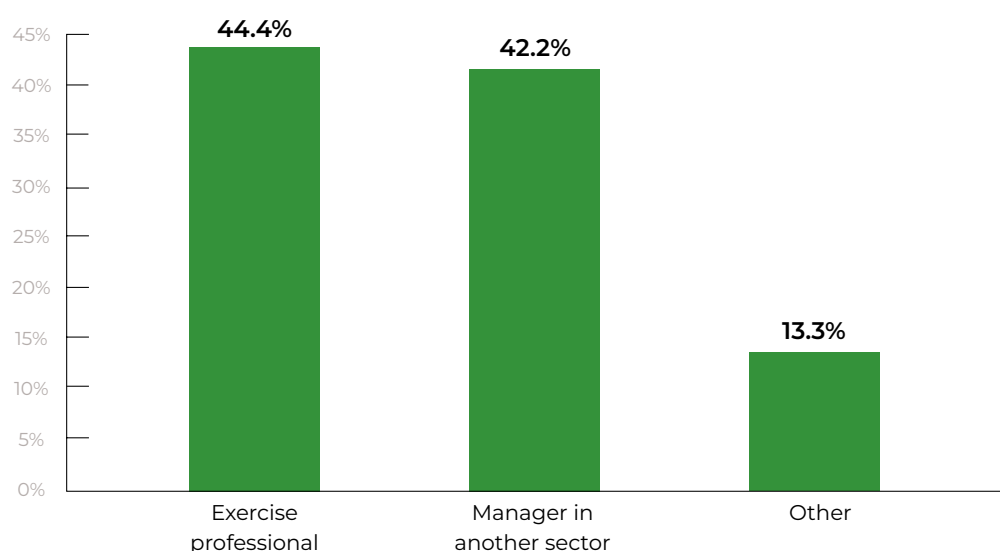
• **Figure 37** - Length of time in current role (n=49)



5.1.3 - Previous role

It is interesting to note the previous role of fitness managers as that can have implications for training, development and induction into the role of manager. As can be seen in Figure 38, 44.4% of the fitness managers held the role of exercise professional before they became a manager. To succeed in the role of manager they should be adequately inducted and trained in the role of manager. 42.2% of manager respondents came from managing in another sector – in this case it suggests a induction and training need to understand the specificities of the fitness industry even if they bring generic management competences to their role in fitness.

• **Figure 38** - Role before becoming a fitness manager (n=45)



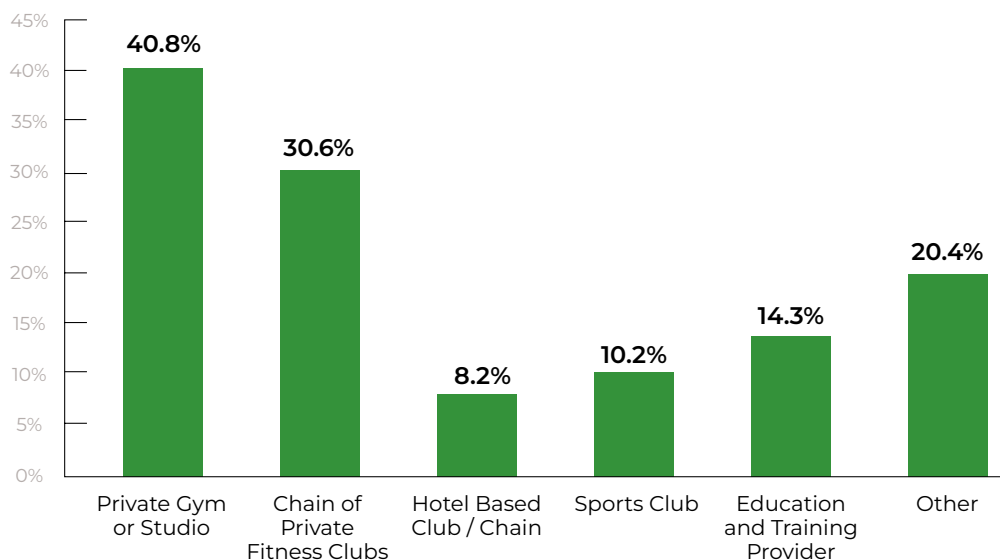
5.2 - Employment issues

5.2.1 - Place of work

Most fitness managers who responded to the survey work in a single site gym or studio, or a chain of private clubs. Hotels, sports clubs and education and training providers were also represented in the survey sample (Figure 39).



• **Figure 39** - Places of fitness work (n=49)



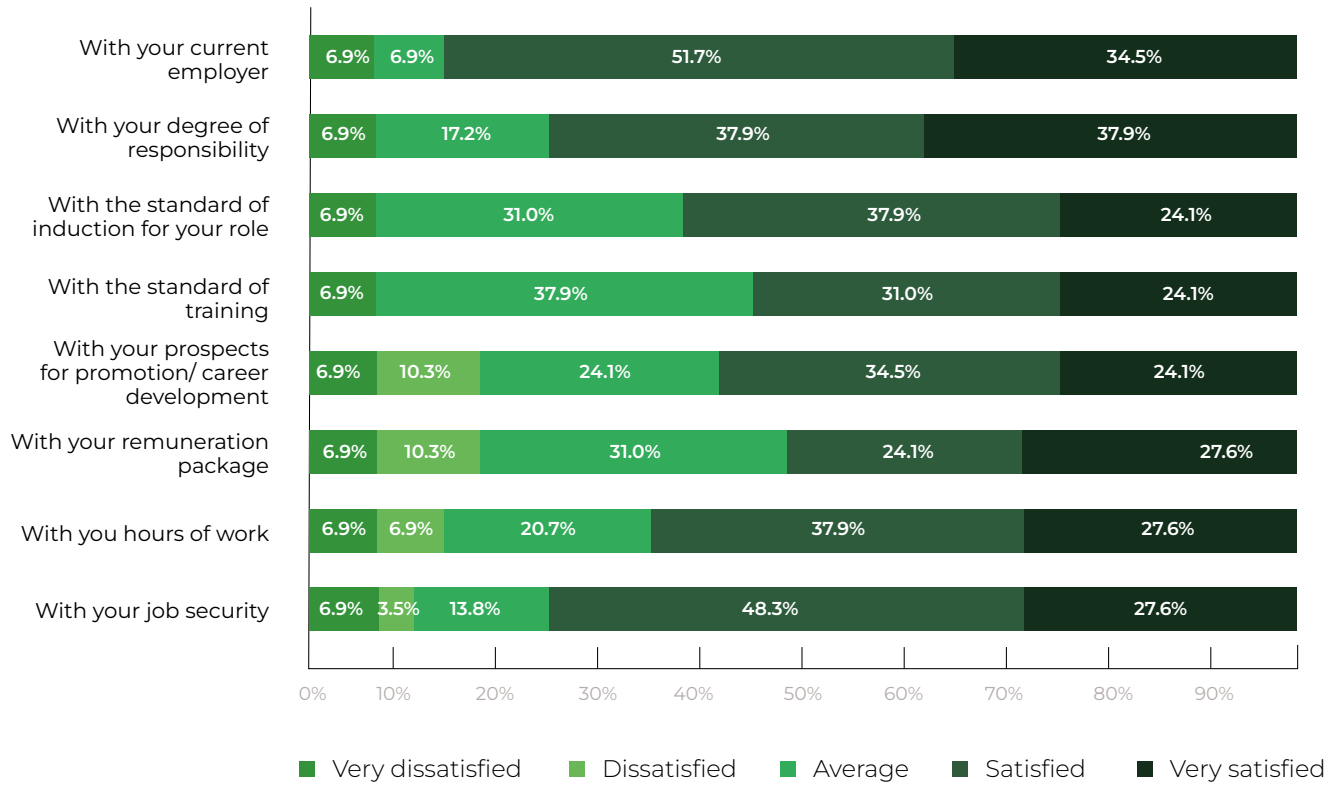
5.2.2 - Job satisfaction

The number of respondents among fitness managers to this section of questions was quite low (N = 29) however 100% of these respondents said they would recommend their employer to a friend.

Among these respondents overall satisfaction with most aspects of their jobs seems to be quite high (Figure 40). With the biggest areas of dissatisfaction being prospects for promotion and career development, and remuneration package.



• **Figure 40** - How satisfied are you with the current aspects of your current role? (n=29)

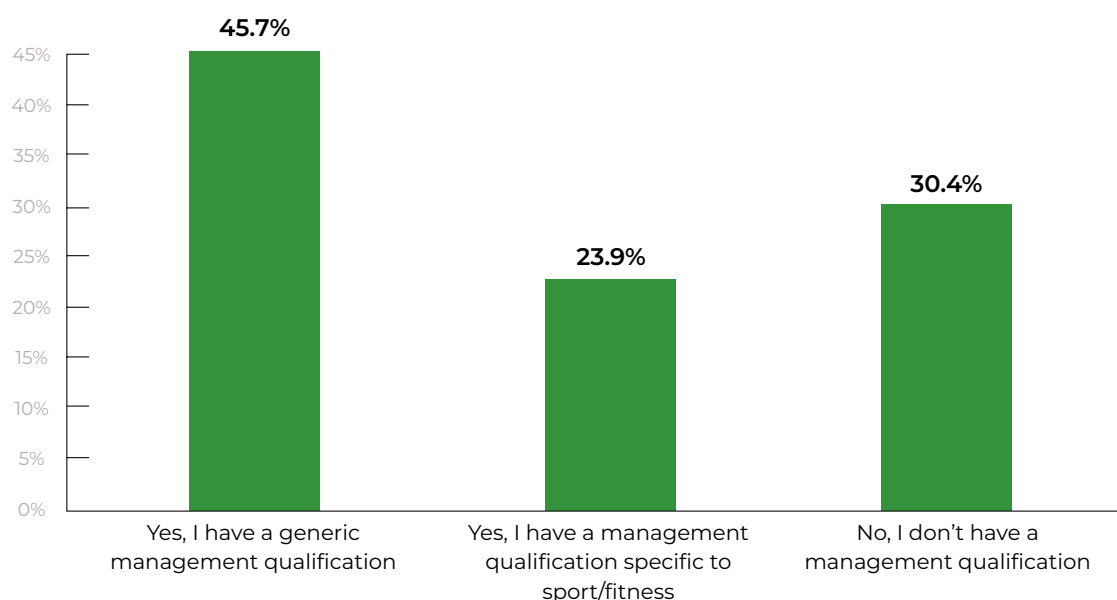


5.3 - Training and development

5.3.1 - Management qualification

A majority of fitness manager respondents hold a management qualification (69.6%) with 45.7% having a generic management qualification and 23.9% a management qualification specific to sport and fitness. The most interesting group in terms of training needs and provision of training is the 30.4% of respondents that do not have a management qualification. For them to succeed in their role employers should facilitate access to such education, and training providers should ensure such development of management competences exist in the education and training system.

• **Figure 41** - Do you have a management qualification? (n=46)

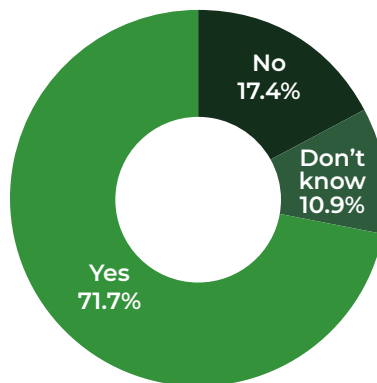


5.3.2 - Sufficiency and provision of training

The results in Figure 42 probably reflect the answer to the previous question. 17.4% of management respondents reported they do not feel they have received sufficient education and training to perform effectively in their role of manager in the fitness industry. This further strengthens the argument to ensure the provision of training in this area.

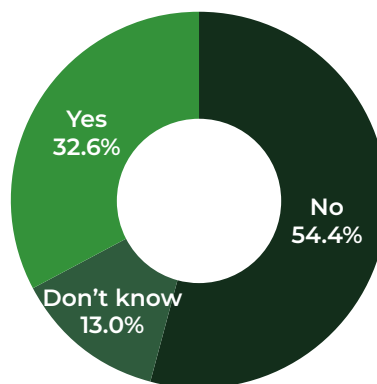


- **Figure 42** - Do you feel you have received sufficient education and training to perform effectively in your role of manager in the fitness industry? (n=46)



Further linked to the issue of education and training is the topic of continuing education for fitness managers. Over half of fitness manager respondents (54.4%) do not believe that there is enough ongoing education for fitness managers in the UAE (Figure 43). Education providers should also take account of this finding.

- **Figure 43** - Do you feel there is enough ongoing education for managers in the fitness industry in UAE? (n=46)

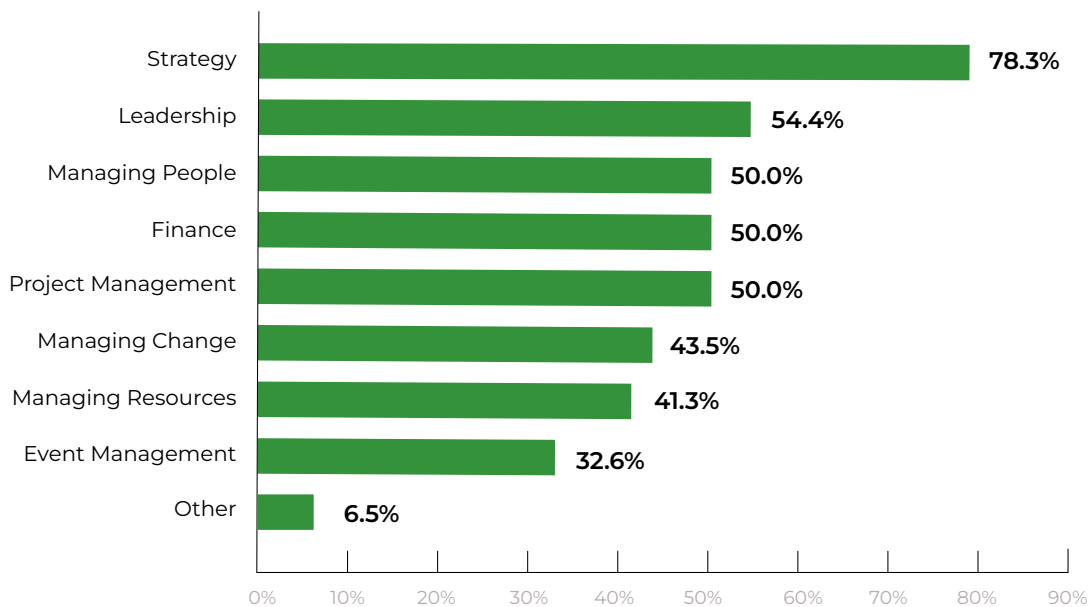


5.3.3 - Training needs

Finally on the issue of management training, respondents indicated what topics of management skills training they would most like to access. The leading item by far was strategy, followed by leadership, managing people, finance and project management. Again this should be taken account of by education providers if they choose to create or enhance a training offer for managers in the sector.



• **Figure 44** - What topics of management skills training would you like to access? (n=46)



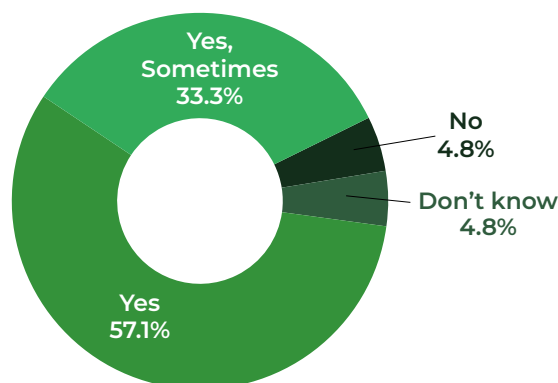
5.4 - Managing exercise professionals

5.4.1 - Provision of additional training for exercise professionals

As noted earlier an interesting finding is that 90% of fitness managers who responded to this question say they sometimes or always need to provide additional training to fitness staff to ensure they are work ready (figure 45).

Digging further into this issue, the topics where fitness managers most commonly do not agree that fitness staff have the right level of skills and knowledge are commercial and business skills, followed by behaviour change skills and skills related to technology. The views of fitness managers on the skills of exercise professionals entering the sector on fitness programming and fitness testing are not an issue as they believe their skills in these areas are at the right level.

• **Figure 45** - Do you have to provide additional training to fitness staff – exercise professionals – to ensure they are “work ready”? (n=42)

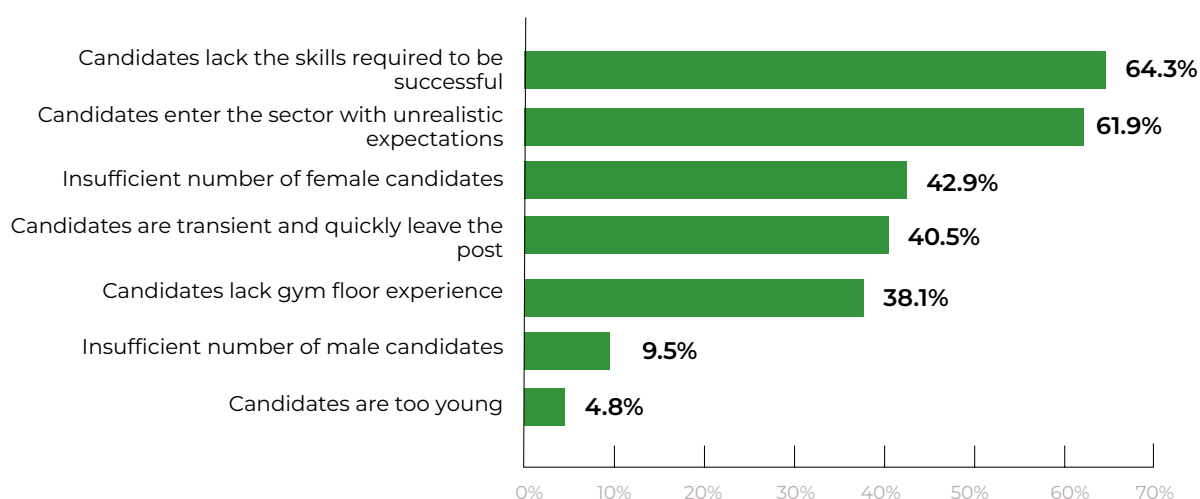


5.4.2 - Exercise professionals recruitment issues

Linked to the previous question, the most common issue encountered by managers when employing new fitness staff is candidates lack the skills to be successful, based on the previous question it can be surmised that this relates to the topics of business skills, behaviour change and technology.

Managers also felt to a large extent that exercise professional candidates enter the sector with unrealistic expectations. It should also be noted that 42.9% of respondents reported insufficient number of female candidates.

• **Figure 46** - Issues encountered when employing fitness staff (exercise professionals) (n=42)

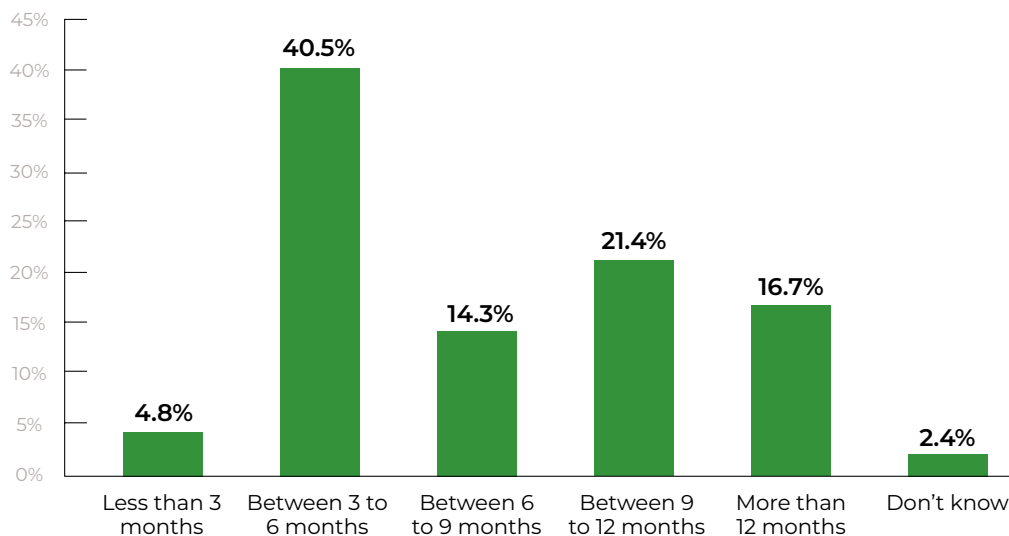


5.4.3 - Views on length of time for personal trainer qualification

This same question was asked of exercise professional and managers and the answers are broadly similar with the most popular band being between 3 to 6 months being the most appropriate time period to complete a personal training qualification.



• **Figure 47** - Views on length of time needed for personal trainer qualification (n=42)



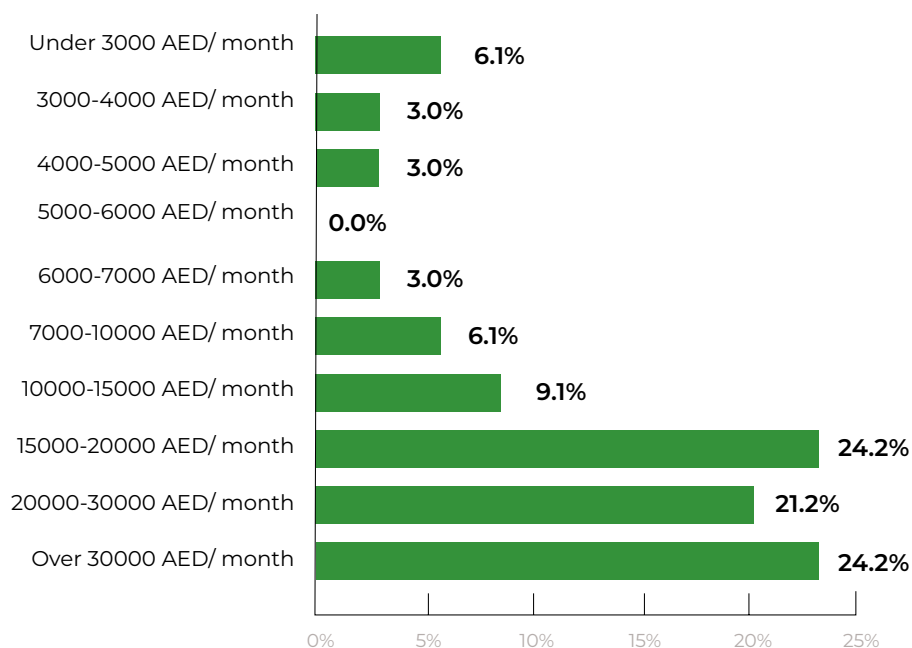
5.5 - Pay

5.5.1 - Fitness managers' pay

Reflecting the different levels of management represented in the survey and different types of employer, monthly salary of fitness manager respondents ranged from under 3000 AED per month to over 30000 per month.

Additional benefits were also common among this group with half being eligible for airline tickets, and around a third being part of a commission or bonus scheme.

• **Figure 48** - Salary per month (n=33)



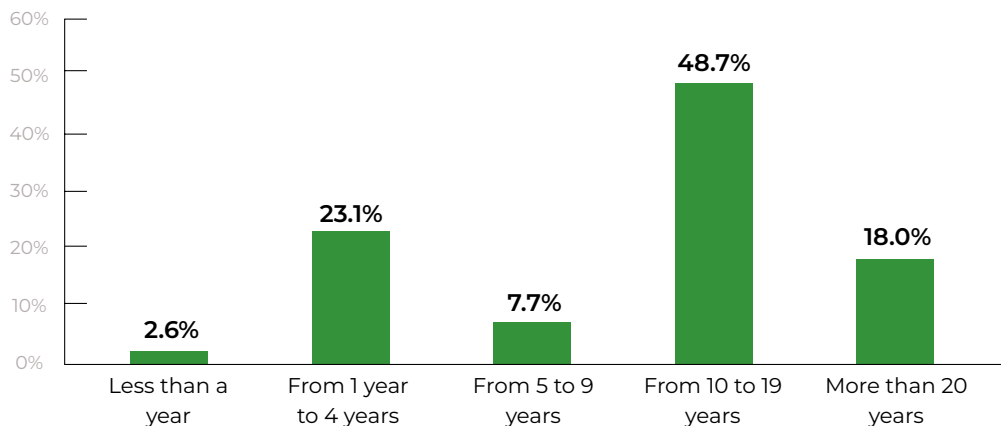
5.6 - Career in fitness

5.6.1 - Years in the fitness industry

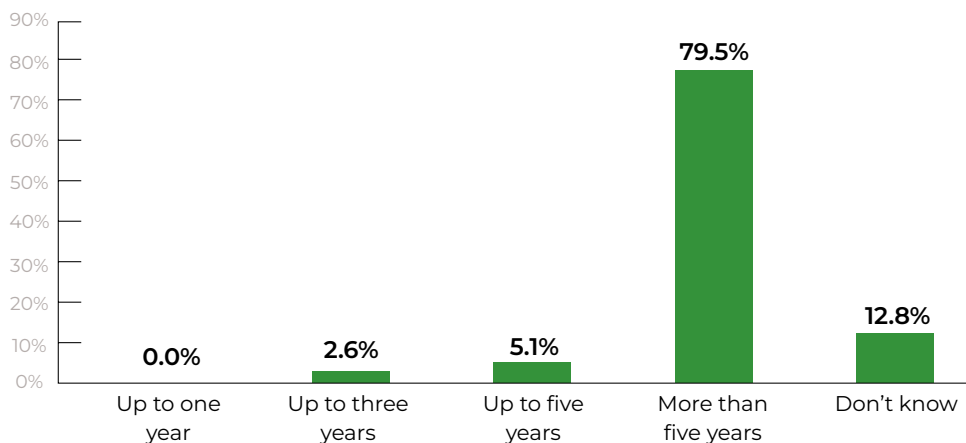
Overall, fitness manager respondents are quite experienced in the fitness industry with 74.4% having worked more than four years in the industry and two thirds having worked 10 years or more in fitness. Only 2.6% of respondents are in their first year in the fitness industry (Figure 49). As was the case for exercise professionals who answered the same question, this shows the fitness industry remains capable of retaining staff for the long-term.

This is also supported by the fact that a high proportion of respondents (79.5%) showed a strong commitment to the fitness industry and stated they expect to continue working in the industry for more than five years (Figure 50).

• **Figure 49** - Years in the fitness industry (n=39)



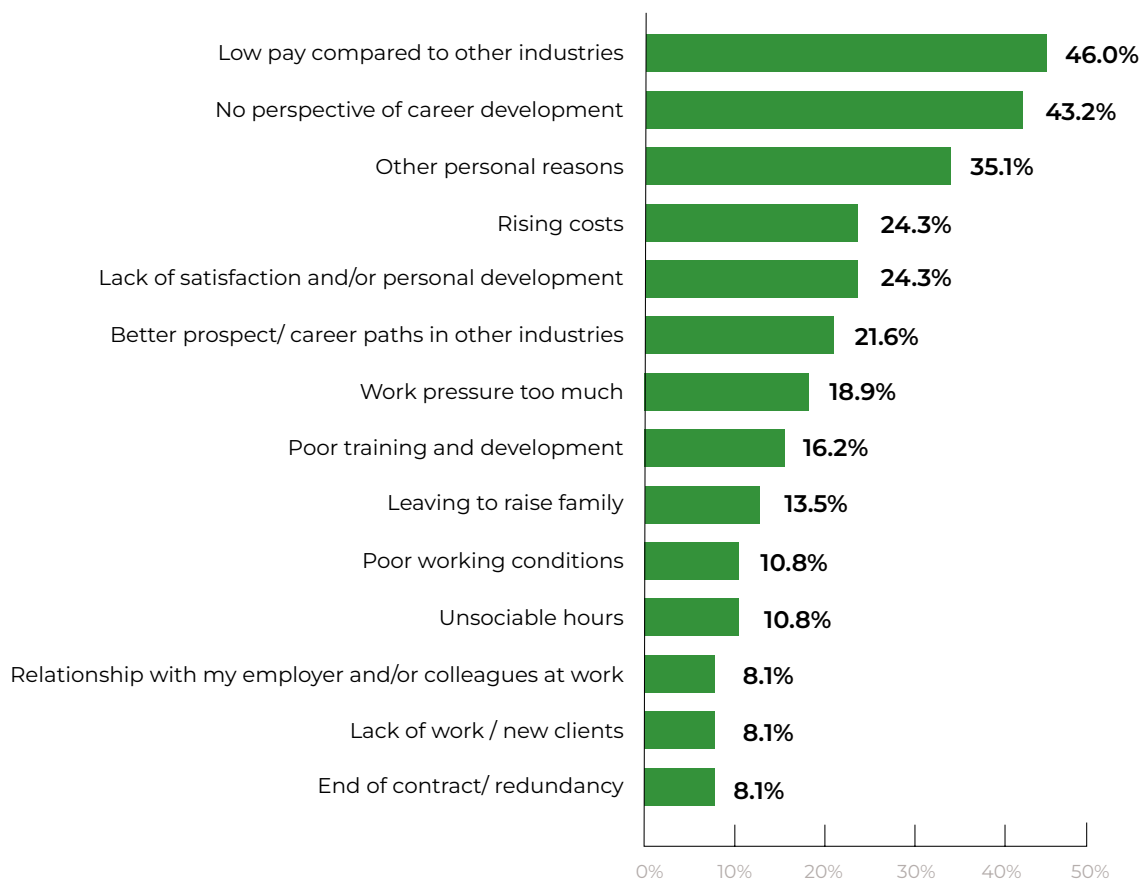
• **Figure 50** - Years expected to continue working in fitness industry (n=39)



5.6.2 - Reasons for leaving the industry

For those fitness managers who may leave the industry we explored their possible reasons for leaving, it can be seen in Figure 51. The most likely reason for fitness managers potentially leaving the industry is low pay compared to other industries (46%). This was followed by no perspective of career development (43.2%), other personal reasons (35.1%).

• **Figure 51** - Potential factors in leaving the fitness industry (n=37)





6

Conclusion

6 - Conclusion

The results of the REPs UAE Working in Fitness Survey 2024 show a diverse, hard-working and flexible workforce serving the fitness and wellness needs of the UAE. The objectives to explore characteristics and tendencies of the UAE fitness workforce were met.

The hours worked by fitness professionals shows a high level of commitment but also the flexibility in the sector for fitness work to fit in with a range of lifestyles. Respondents reported a significant amount of training and development mostly paid for by themselves.

Most fitness professionals appear to work with a broad range of clients including some who have traditionally been called “special populations” or people with medical conditions, but who now make up a mainstream part of the population who use the services of the fitness industry. The implications for education and training will need to be considered.

Exploring fitness industry trends will allow for the monitoring of new trends as they emerge in future years.

Overall it is felt that the Working in Fitness Survey 2024 was a success and something that can be built on in future years to understand and develop the UAE fitness workforce.



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