Mental Stress: A COVID Crisis

Simple strategies to build resilience during times of great change and crisis

Adam Chancellor Alexander
Assistant Professor
Calculating the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States

- As of April 2021, the United States has 30.4 million cases and 551,000 deaths.
- Minorities have been the hardest hit by COVID-19.
  - Death and hospitalization rates for all minorities are at least 2 times higher than whites.

20% of Americans have lost someone to Covid-19

About 1 in 5 Americans are close with someone who has died of COVID-19

A new AP-NORC poll finds that Black and Hispanic Americans and Americans in low-income households are especially likely to say they have a close friend or relative who has died of COVID-19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Under $30K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>$30K+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results based on interviews with 1,434 U.S. adults conducted Feb. 25–Mar. 1. The margin of error is ±3.4 percentage points for the full sample.

Source: AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research / Graphic: Kati Perry

Mental health issues are surging

Figure 1
Average Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder and/or Depressive Disorder, January-June 2019 vs. January 2021

Pandemic Causes Spike in Anxiety & Depression

% of U.S. adults showing symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms of anxiety disorder</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms of depressive disorder</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on self-reported frequency of anxiety and depression symptoms. They are derived from responses to the first two questions of the eight-item Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2) and the seven-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-2) scale.

Sources: CDC, NCHS, U.S. Census Bureau

NOTES: Percentages are based on responses to the GAD-2 and PHQ-2 scales. Pulse findings (shown here for January 6 – 18, 2021) have been stable since data collection began in April 2020.

Among Essential and Nonessential Workers, Share of Adults Reporting Mental Distress and Substance Use, June 2020

- **Symptoms of Anxiety or Depressive Disorder**
  - Essential Worker: 42%
  - Nonessential Worker: 30%

- **Started or Increased Substance Use to Cope with Stress or Emotions Related to COVID-19**
  - Essential Worker: 25%
  - Nonessential Worker: 11%

- **Seriously Considered Suicide in Past 30 Days**
  - Essential Worker: 22%
  - Nonessential Worker: 8%

**NOTES:** Data is among adults ages 18 and above. Essential worker status was self-reported.  
**SOURCE:** Czeisler ME, Lane RI, Petrosky E, et al. Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:1049–1057. DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6932a1](http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6932a1)
Among Adults Who Worked in the Past Seven Days, Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety and/or Depressive Disorder, by Gender

47% for Women
34% for Men

NOTE: Reflects self-report of adults (ages 18+) who indicated they did any work for pay or profit in the last seven days when surveyed between November 11 and 23, 2020.
Younger Adults are More Likely to Report Symptoms of Anxiety and/or Depressive Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18-24</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 25-49</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 50-64</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 65+</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The utilization of BH services has decreased

Although BH needs are estimated to be increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a decline in the utilization of BH services.

The number of individuals with a BH need is expected to have increased by ~50% compared to pre-COVID-19 levels...⁴

... however, total utilization of BH services has decreased by ~8% in 2020, compared to 2019⁵

The decrease in BH-related healthcare visits was most pronounced in the early stages of the pandemic, but we have seen a persistent reduction in in-person visits.

I'm Fine
Trapped in a Prison of Negativity

Figure 1: Media Negativity and New COVID-19 Cases Over Time

Notes: Negativity is estimated using supervised machine learning on article phrases coupled with a training data set. Articles are manually downloaded from LexisNexis for the period January 1st, 2020 to July 31st, 2020. The red line shows the weekly average of daily confirmed new COVID-19 cases and is accessed from the New York Times website.

Source: https://www.nber.org/papers/w28110; https://www.pnas.org/content/116/38/18888
Save Yourself By Serving Others

Interconnectivity: Diet, Exercise, and Sleep

“We all fall down. It's fine; get back up again. Everything will be ok.”

— Someone on the Internet