

Levels of anxiety, addiction, suicidal thoughts are soaring in the pandemic

August 13 2020, by E.j. Mundell, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—The pandemic is taking a big toll on Americans' psyches:

A new government report found that about 41% of adults surveyed in late June "reported an adverse mental or behavioral health condition."

That's a big rise from 2019. For example, the data shows that the number of Americans suffering from an anxiety disorder had tripled by late June compared to the same time last year, and the number of those with depression had jumped fourfold.

The findings, based on surveys conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from June 24-30, also show that "one quarter of [survey] respondents reported symptoms of trauma- and stressor-related disorder."

About 1 in every 10 survey respondents also said they'd started or increased their use of alcohol or [illicit drugs](#) during the pandemic, said a team led by Rashon Lane, of the CDC's COVID-19 Response Team.

Suicidal thoughts are on the rise, too: Compared to data from 2018, "approximately twice as many respondents reported serious consideration of suicide in the previous 30 days," the report stated.

"Mental [health](#) practitioners and organizations had predicted an increase in [mental health problems](#) associated with the pandemic, and this study provides important data to support the public health concerns that have been raised," said psychiatrist Dr. Timothy Sullivan.

He believes there's particular strain on Americans who've been entrusted with the care of others.

In the new report, "over 30% of caregivers reported [suicidal thoughts](#), as did more than 21% of essential workers," said Sullivan, who directs psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Staten Island University Hospital in New York City.

The study was based on confidential online surveys conducted among more than 5,400 Americans over the age of 17. Some had already participated in similar surveys conducted in April and May.

The strain on unpaid caregivers for adults—people taking care of disabled loved ones at home—seems particularly troublesome. According to the study, the rate of substance abuse and/or suicidal thoughts among unpaid caregivers more than tripled between May and the end of June, Lane's group reported.

Older Americans appear to be more resilient to the strain of the pandemic compared to the young: The study found rates of anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts were most prevalent among those aged 18 to 24, and the prevalence of these issues "decreased progressively with age."

Black and Hispanic Americans tended to have higher rates of mental health issues tied to the pandemic than did whites, the study also found.

Of course, unemployment or the threat of it is a major source of anxiety for millions in 2020. So, efforts aimed at "strengthening economic supports to reduce financial strain" should be part of an effort to boost mental health, the researchers said.

For his part, Sullivan said more must be done to help those already in need to access [mental health services](#). That includes "regulatory and insurance support for telepsychiatry services to reach individuals in traditionally underserved communities and those who are reluctant to seek care because of fear of infection," he said.

Dr. Soteri Polydorou directs addiction services at Northwell Health in Glen Oaks, N.Y. People stressed into substance abuse by the pandemic need to know "that help and support is available even during

COVID-19," he said.

"Many addiction treatment providers offer rapid access to counseling and physician services now remotely, as well as medication-assisted treatment options such as buprenorphine [the anti-addiction drug]," Polydorou said.

The new study was published in the Aug. 14 CDC journal *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

More information: There's more about mental health during COVID-19 at the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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