

Pandemic putting Americans under great mental strain, poll finds

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(HealthDay)—COVID-19, health care, the economy, systemic racism

and the presidential election are a threat to the nation's mental health, according to an American Psychological Association (APA) poll.

Seventy-eight percent of adults polled said the pandemic is causing major stress and 60% called the array of issues facing the country overwhelming.

And younger adults are really struggling, the poll revealed.

Respondents from Generation Z (those born since 1996), pegged their stress level in the past month at a 6 on 10-point scale in which 1 represented "little to no stress" and 10 was "a great deal of stress." That compared with an average stress level of 5 among all adults.

Nineteen percent of adults said their [mental health](#) is worse than it was a year ago.

That included 34% of Gen Z adults; 19% of millennials (born 1977-1995); 21% of Gen Xers (born 1965-1976); 12% of baby boomers (born 1946-1964); and 8% of those born before 1946.

Gen Z adults were the most likely to report common signs of depression.

More than 7 in 10 said that in the last two weeks they were so tired that they sat around and did nothing, felt very restless, found it hard to think or concentrate, felt lonely, or felt miserable or unhappy.

"This survey confirms what many mental health experts have been saying since the start of the pandemic: Our mental health is suffering from the compounding stressors in our lives," said Arthur Evans Jr., chief executive officer of the APA.

"This compounding stress will have serious health and social consequences if we don't act now to reduce it," he said in an association news release.

Evans noted that the youngest Americans are showing signs of serious mental health issues, including depression and anxiety.

The poll found that changes to school are a big stressor for Gen Zers. More than 8 of 10 teens said they have had negative impacts of school closures, and 51% said planning for the future seems impossible.

Among college students, 67% feel the same way about planning for the future. And 87% of Gen Z members in college said school is a significant source of stress.

"Loneliness and uncertainty about the future are major stressors for adolescents and young adults, who are striving to find their places in the world, both socially, and in terms of education and work. The pandemic and its economic consequences are upending youths' social lives and their visions for their futures," said survey researcher Emma Adam, a professor of education and [social policy](#) at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.

Adam said public policy must address this generation's need for social, emotional and mental health supports as well as financial assistance and educational and work opportunities. "Both comfort now and hope for the future are essential for the long-term well-being of this generation," she said.

But most Americans aren't getting the support they need. Among adults, 61% said they could use more [emotional support](#) than they've gotten over the last year, with more than 82% of Gen Z adults saying the same.

"As a society, we must galvanize our resources to support teens and young adults," Evans said. "We need to stand with them to fight systemic injustices, which can be a source of stress relief while supporting them in building their resilience. The pandemics of racism and COVID will not be overcome quickly. We all need to learn skills to help us manage our [stress](#) while we fight for a society that is more equitable, resilient and innovative."

The nationwide poll of more than 3,400 adults was conducted Aug. 4-26 in English and Spanish. It also included a sample of more than 1,000 13- to 17-year-olds.

More information: For more on stress, see the [U.S. National Institute of Mental Health](#).

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