

Many U.S. households include someone with failing memory

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About half of those with recall issues say they interfere with daily life.

(HealthDay)—As many as one in eight U.S. households may have an adult with worsening memory loss or confusion, a new survey shows.

These symptoms suggest a potential risk of developing more serious memory and thinking problems, such as Alzheimer's disease, the survey authors said.

Further, a second study found that almost half of [adults](#) aged 45 and older who have experienced increasing [memory loss](#) or confusion reported that these problems have interfered with their daily life. And the youngest in this age group were the most likely to report these thinking declines.

"Memory problems are typically one of the first warning signs of [thinking] decline," said Lynda Anderson, a co-author of the first study and lead author of the second study. She is director of the Healthy Aging Program at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Noticing that others in the home are having memory problems is important because diagnoses of dementia and Alzheimer's disease are often missed or delayed, she added.

"Declines in [thinking] vary among people and can include changes in attention, memory, learning, planning, organizing, paying attention, activities of daily living and language capabilities," said Anderson. She added that these problems can "negatively affect the quality of life, personal relationships, and the capacity for making informed decisions about health care and other matters."

Both studies were conducted by the CDC and published March 5 in the journal *Preventing Chronic Disease*.

The first study involved telephone surveys in more than 81,000 households in 13 states. The researchers asked an adult in the household whether anyone in the home had experienced confusion or memory loss that was happening more often or getting worse within the past 12 months.

The surveyor made it clear that the question referred to "difficulties in thinking or remembering that can make a big difference in everyday activities," not simply "forgetting your keys occasionally or the name of someone you recently met," Anderson noted.

Overall, nearly 13 percent of the households surveyed had an adult experiencing these problems. The researchers estimated that 4 million households in these states contained a member with worsening memory

loss or confusion, possibly affecting more than 10 million people in total.

In addition, 10 percent of households containing children under 18 had an adult experiencing these memory problems, and in 3 percent of households with children, all adults were having these memory problems.

Anderson emphasized that the data could not be interpreted as an actual diagnosis or medical condition and only applies to the 13 states surveyed, so it's not possible to determine whether these numbers represent how many people experience diagnosed thinking decline across the entire United States. The survey also only included adults living in a household, not those in nursing homes, group homes or other facilities.

The findings revealed a significant gap in how these memory problems affect homes in different income brackets. Only 7 percent of homes with household incomes of at least \$75,000 had an adult experiencing memory loss or confusion, compared to the 22 percent of households with an annual income below \$15,000.

There are two possible reasons for the income difference, said Dr. Anton Porsteinsson, director of Alzheimer's Disease Care at the University of Rochester School of Medicine, in New York.

"One is that you fall in socioeconomic status because you have this memory loss and you can't be gainfully employed," he said. "The other is that those with higher incomes can afford to place a family member into some sort of setting where they're being cared for."

He said the high proportion of low-income [households](#) with an adult experiencing memory loss or confusion seen in the study is concerning, but even more surprising was how many middle-aged adults in the second study experienced both memory problems and some kind of

disability.

In that second study, conducted in 21 states, a phone survey of more than 10,000 adults aged 45 and older revealed that 43 percent of them had worsening memory loss or [confusion](#) as well as some kind of functional difficulty.

Those with both worsening memory loss and difficulties doing [everyday activities](#) were more likely to be black or Hispanic, single, disabled, living alone or unable to work. They were also more likely to have at least one [chronic health condition](#).

The highest proportion of those with both worsening [memory problems](#) and disability were aged 45 to 54. While 43 percent of these individuals had both problems, 32 percent of those aged 55 to 64 and 12 percent of those aged 65 to 74 had both problems.

"There are destined to be very few resources for those individuals, much more limited resources than those for older people," said Porsteinsson, who said the high numbers of younger adults with both memory loss and disability surprised him the most in these studies.

"We need to understand better the specifics of what we're dealing with here and how we can address their medical needs and their care needs, and maybe mitigate their disability to some degree," he said.

More information: To learn more about normal memory loss, as well as changes that might signal developing Alzheimer's disease, visit the [Alzheimer's Foundation](#).

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