

New survey reveals concerns about impact of migraine on work productivity

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Credit: Sasha Wolff/Wikipedia

A significant percentage of migraine sufferers as well as those without the disease are concerned that migraine affects work productivity,

quality of life, family/relationships and employment, according to a new national public opinion survey commissioned by Research!America. Respondents also say the condition is likely to have a long-term and substantial effect on sufferers' ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Employers should make reasonable workplace accommodations for [migraine sufferers](#), according to respondents—76% of [migraine](#) sufferers and 58% of non-sufferers agree. One study has found that a worksite migraine education program has the potential to significantly impact lost productivity and absenteeism for sufferers. Almost half (45%) of migraine sufferers and nearly one-in-five non-sufferers say they know someone with the condition who has left the workforce or reduced their work hours due to the progression of their disease. Significant majorities of all respondents agree that insurers should cover prevention or alternative migraine treatments - 79% of migraine sufferers and 64% of non-sufferers.

Not surprisingly, given their personal familiarity with the disease, more than half of migraine sufferers (53%) say individuals with migraine are stigmatized because of their condition, compared to less than one-third (31%) of non-sufferers. The most common social stigma associated with individuals with migraine reflects lack of awareness of the seriousness of the condition. Both those who suffer from migraines and those who do not link stigma to 'overreaction' (just a headache) and that it is not a 'real' disease. Stigma also stems from the belief that sufferers are lazy, or fail to manage the condition and refuse to work, according to many respondents.

"The survey findings indicate that the health and economic impact of migraine is broad and must be addressed in order to overcome stigma and aid those suffering from this disabling condition," said Mary Woolley, president and CEO of Research!America. "More research is

necessary to understand the biological and environmental factors associated with migraine in order to reduce the prevalence of this disease." A majority of both those who suffer from migraines, and those who do not, say it is important that our nation supports research that focuses on the prevention and treatment of migraine - 77% of sufferers and 68% of non-sufferers.

About 12% of the U.S. population experience migraines, with women three times more likely to have the condition than men. Respondents who suffer themselves are more aware of this gender difference than those who do not—migraine sufferers (66%), non-sufferers (48%). More than half of migraine sufferers (52%) say veterans are disproportionately affected by the disease, compared to 32% of non-sufferers. In one study of approximately 3,600 U.S. soldiers screened within 90 days of returning from a one-year combat tour in Iraq, soldiers were shown to have two-to-four times the incidence rate of migraine as compared to the general population.

There is general agreement that migraine sufferers are at risk of overusing medications - 61% of migraine sufferers and 49% of non-sufferers agree. When asked if migraine sufferers have access to effective treatments, two thirds (66%) of migraine sufferers agreed compared to less than half (47%) of non-sufferers. Nearly 40% of non-sufferers say they are not sure compared to a much lower 17% of those who suffer from the disease.

More migraine sufferers (70%) than non-sufferers (53%) agree that the condition is a disability. Migraine headaches are covered under the American Disability Act which defines a person with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Over 20% of chronic migraine sufferers are disabled, and the likelihood of disability increases sharply with the number of comorbid conditions. Allergies, anxiety and

depression are often other health [conditions](#) associated with migraine sufferers, according to those with the condition (81%) and non-sufferers (58%).

A majority of migraine sufferers and non-sufferers alike say they would be likely to have an examination for the condition if suggested by a primary care provider; similarly, they would seek an examination if recommended by family members or a pharmacist. Of those who suffer from migraine, 43% say they are seeking or have received treatment from a health care provider for chronic migraine, followed by cluster migraine (37%) and episodic migraine (29%).

Among other findings:

- Migraine sufferers (85%) and non-sufferers (61%) agree that exposure to excessive light is associated with greater risk of migraine. This is consistent with scientific evidence that people with migraine tend to have recurring attacks triggered by a number of different factors, including stress, anxiety, hormonal changes, bright or flashing lights, lack of food or sleep, and dietary substances. Sudden changes in weather or environment also increases the risk of migraine.
- Half of migraine sufferers (50%) and plurality of non-sufferers (38%) say migraines are most likely caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors, and stress. The National Institute of Neurological Disorders cites evidence that migraines are genetic, with most migraine sufferers having a family history of the disorder.
- When asked if migraine tracking tools such as apps and online diaries can be helpful in managing the condition, 74% of migraine sufferers agreed compared to 48% of non-sufferers.

The nationwide survey of 1,003 U.S. adults was conducted by Zogby

Analytics for Research!America in September 2017. The margin of error ranges from +/- 3.1 to +/- 6.3 percentage points. To view survey results click [here](#).

Provided by Research!America

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