

New data examine the effects of the pandemic on mental health based on age

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The poll revealed that younger age groups are more often reporting that the worry and stress related to COVID-19 is having a negative impact on their mental health. Credit: Penn State Harrisburg

Continuing its analysis on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on

Pennsylvania, the Institute of State and Regional Affairs (ISRA) at Penn State Harrisburg has released new data [examining the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic, physical and mental health of Pennsylvanians by age](#).

Institute Director Philip Sirinides explained, "While older Pennsylvanians had relatively higher levels of concern about [physical health](#), the poll revealed that younger age groups are experiencing greater job loss, feeling more concern about [personal finances](#), and more often reporting that the worry and stress related to COVID-19 are having a [negative impact](#) on their mental health."

The data brief is the fourth in an [ISRA series on COVID-19](#) related topics, and the second which uses data from the spring 2020 Lion Poll, an omnibus survey that is representative of Pennsylvania's population.

According to the [poll](#), loss of employment is highest among younger age groups. Nearly half of respondents ages 18 to 34 were recently laid off or had work hours reduced, compared to one-third ages 35 to 64. Differences by age group in work status were consistent with differences in concern about personal finances. Belief that COVID-19 is a major threat to personal finances was comparatively lower in older age groups.

Belief that COVID-19 represented a major threat to personal health was highest in older age groups. Over half of respondents 45 and older considered COVID-19 a major threat to physical health, while only a quarter of people 18 to 24 said the same.

To investigate effects on social-emotional well-being, Pennsylvania respondents were asked whether they feel that worry and stress related to COVID-19 are having a negative impact on their mental health. Sixty-nine percent of people age 18 to 24 reported negative impacts on their mental health. Among the many age-related trends, findings reveal

generational differences in how mental health is perceived and/or experienced during the pandemic. Across all age groups, individuals who lost work were 64.7% more likely to worry about their mental health, a statistically significant increase.

"We are well aware of the negative impact COVID-19 has had on the economy. This data suggests that we should be just as focused, or more so, on the impact COVID-19 has had on mental health," said Dr. Kelly Holder, assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health at the College of Medicine and director of the Office for Professional Mental Health at Penn State Health and Penn State College of Medicine. "Mental health and wellness is impacted by multiple dimensions (employment, finances, health, and spirituality, among others). COVID-19 has impacted several of these domains, and therefore our mental health is in jeopardy. Support and solutions are needed for individuals throughout the Commonwealth."

ISRA explored this and other COVID-19 related topics in the latest fielding of the Lion Poll. The survey questions explored Pennsylvanians' concerns about and attitudes toward the coronavirus, perceptions of and trust in government leaders, sources of coronavirus information, changes to daily life, impact on mental health, and testing.

The ISRA study is part of a broader collaboration with College of Medicine faculty members, Holder and Dr. Sanjay Yadav, assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health. The collaboration will explore the extent and means through which COVID-19 has impacted the mental [health](#) of adults. The study also examines the relationships between [mental health](#) and a range of factors that were measured by the Lion Poll related to economic hardship, stress, and social isolation.

About the Lion Poll

The Lion Poll is an omnibus survey conducted by the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at Penn State Harrisburg's Institute of State and Regional Affairs (ISRA). A total of 1,047 self-administered web surveys were completed by adult Pennsylvanians between April 6 and April 16. The Lion Poll used a quota-based invitation system to produce a final dataset that is representative of Pennsylvania's population by region and, separately, by age/sex combined categories. The Lion Poll's margin of sampling error is +/- 3.0% at a 95% confidence level.

The purpose of the Lion Poll is to provide timely and accurate data to agencies, organizations, and researchers with statewide interests and responsibilities. Sponsors of CSR's omnibus polls have used their results to track public policy issues; measure general attitudes, awareness, and knowledge of their organizations; and measure satisfaction with organizational services and performance.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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