

National survey measures mental health impact of COVID-19 pandemic

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More than 90% of people who responded to a new nationwide survey reported feeling increased worry, frustration, boredom or anxiety during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The survey, which has been [published online](#), was a collaboration between researchers at Harvard Medical School and the University of North Carolina School of Medicine.

The researchers said they organized the project quickly to gain an understanding of how individuals are responding to the stressors of isolation and quarantine, record unemployment levels and the virus' threat to their health as well as to gain insight into how best to address the nation's unmet mental health needs in the face of the pandemic.

The [survey results](#) also provide data for the researchers' ongoing attempts to understand whether there are identifiable factors that might put certain individuals at risk of greater emotional impact from a range of crises.

"The pandemic reached across all groups," said study co-author Sarah Gray, HMS instructor of psychology at Massachusetts General Hospital. "Our concern is that many of the mental health impacts will not be addressed quickly and could lead to longer term damage."

The study consisted of an [internet survey](#) of 1,500 people conducted during the second half of May, when the pandemic was just beyond its first peak in the nation.

The researchers asked respondents about a broad range of specific emotional effects related to the pandemic. They found that some stressors seemed to affect a majority of the population. Nearly 80% of respondents said they were frustrated on some level with not being able to do what they normally enjoy doing. Around the same number said they were worried about their own health, and nearly 90% said they were more worried about the health of loved ones than before the pandemic.

People who stated that they knew someone who had died from

COVID-19 had higher average distress scores overall, said Gray, who is also director of outpatient rehabilitation psychology with the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital.

The researchers said that since the emotional and mental impact of the pandemic could have long-term implications on wellbeing and since the study could aid in addressing what could be a growing mental health crisis, they wanted to release the results as quickly as possible. They noted that challenges could be magnified for underserved and vulnerable populations.

"While we have provided support clinically for high-risk populations, there does seem to be a need to also support the mental health of their families and care takers," Gray said.

A list of [coping resources](#) is included on the study website.

"The mental health effects of this [pandemic](#) have taken a back seat to the urgent response; however, there is great concern with allowing that to continue," Gray said.

"Our survey findings indicate that the anxiety and depression related to the emotional impact of these events are pushing more and more people into the clinical category of what is diagnosable as a mental [health](#) condition," she said. "Our team urges people to not wait and to reach out for the care and help they need."

More information: U.S. National Pandemic Emotional Impact Report: pandemicimpactreport.com

Provided by Harvard Medical School

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