

Study: 2016 election negatively affected mental health of Muslim college students

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The 2016 presidential election was linked to considerable mental health declines among Muslim college students, with religious Muslims seeing the largest declines in mental health, according to a University of

Michigan researcher.

Sara Renee Abelson, a [doctoral candidate](#) at the U-M School of Public Health, and colleagues found that the proportion of Muslim students experiencing clinically significant [mental health](#) symptoms rose 7 percentage points over the changes experienced by all other students when comparing data from the 14 months post-election to the 14 months prior.

Before the election, 22% of Muslim students screened positive for depression, anxiety or an eating disorder, compared to 34% after. For non-Muslims, the portion of students who screened positive for a mental health disorder rose from 21% before the election to 26% after the election.

The findings highlight the links between sociopolitical events and mental health, with potential negative consequences for educational and social outcomes among affected groups, according to the study published this month in *JAMA Pediatrics*.

"Schools and other communities need to consider these concerns in their efforts to support [young adults](#), and researchers should improve understanding of causal mechanisms and potential prevention and intervention strategies," said Abelson, the study's lead author.

"Our results suggest that the election of a politician who uses racist rhetoric and advances exclusionary policies may harm the mental health of young people in the targeted group."

Abelson and colleagues used survey data from a random sample of students 18 years and older from 90 colleges and universities participating in the Healthy Minds Study in the 14 months before and after the election. The biggest declines in mental health were:

- Religious Muslims: 11 percentage points
- Non-religious Muslims: 8 percentage points
- Religious non-Muslims: 3.5 percentage points
- Non-religious non-Muslims: 2.8 percentage points

Abelson said mental health is an important part of overall health and well-being.

"Mental health is also linked to salient outcomes such as [academic success](#), career success, lifetime earnings and more," she said.

"Untreated symptoms have many downstream effects."

Abelson said she hopes the study encourages anyone serving young people to consider the potential mental [health](#) consequences of the 2020 [election](#) and to be proactive in providing support to the students most targeted by hateful rhetoric and exclusionary policies.

Provided by University of Michigan

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