

PTSD, anxiety is rising among college students

May 30 2024, by Ernie Mundell



America's college students seem to be more stressed than ever, with a new report finding a sharp rise in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and acute stress disorder (ASD) on campuses across the country.

In a "national sample of U.S. [college students](#), we found a notable increase in the prevalence of PTSD and ASD," concluded a team led by

Yusan Zhai, of the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Rates of PTSD rose by 4.1 percentage points between 2017 and 2022, and stress disorder diagnoses rose by 0.5 percentage points, the data showed.

Their findings were [published](#) in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

As Zhai's group explained, any number of events—campus shootings, [sexual assault](#), [physical violence](#) and [natural disasters](#), for example—can trigger either PTSD or ASD. PTSD can lead to more persistent symptoms, while ASD's impact may be more transient—anywhere from a few days to a month.

In their study, the Birmingham researchers focused on 2017 through 2022, "a period marked by escalated societal stressors and global health crises," including, of course, the pandemic.

They looked at data from the ongoing Healthy Minds study, which tracks the mental health of over 392,000 people attending 332 different colleges and universities across the United States. About 58% of the students were female.

The data showed that during the study period, 19,349 (4.9%) of the college students had been diagnosed with PTSD, while 1,814 (0.5%) had been given a diagnosis of ASD.

"We observed upward trends in the prevalence of PTSD and ASD from 2017 to 2022," Zhai and colleagues wrote.

PTSD rates rose from 3.4% of participants in 2017-2018 to 7.5% by 2021-2022, and acute stress disorders rose from 0.2% to 0.7% over the same period.

The study wasn't designed to detect the main drivers of these trends. However, they "highlight the escalating mental health challenges among college students, which is consistent with recent research reporting a surge in psychiatric diagnoses," the researchers said.

Still, they speculated that pandemic-related losses (for example, the deaths of loved ones), campus shootings and racial trauma on and off campus might be contributing factors.

Whatever the reasons, the findings "suggest the need for targeted, trauma-informed prevention and intervention strategies by [mental health professionals](#) and [policy makers](#) to support the affected student population," Zhai and colleagues wrote.

More information: There's more on stress among college students, and how to cope, at [Harvard Health](#).

Yusen Zhai et al, Trends in Diagnosed Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Acute Stress Disorder in US College Students, 2017-2022, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.13874](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.13874)

2024 HealthDay. All rights reserved.

Citation: PTSD, anxiety is rising among college students (2024, May 30) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-05-ptsd-anxiety-college-students.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--