



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Stress in America

Mind/Body Health: For a Healthy Mind and Body, Talk to a Psychologist

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APA Poll Finds Women Bear Brunt of Nation's Stress, Financial Downturn *Annual Stress in America Survey Shows Increasing Stress Takes Toll on Physical and Emotional Health*

New York, October 7 – The declining state of the Nation's economy is taking a physical and emotional toll on people nationwide, yet it is women who are bearing the brunt of financial stress, according to data from the American Psychological Association's newly released 2008 Stress in America survey.

When asked about the recent financial crisis, almost half of Americans say that they are increasingly stressed about their ability to provide for their family's basic needs. Eight out of 10 say that the economy is a significant cause of stress, up from 66 percent in April. Women are most likely to report stress related to the economic climate. Compared with men, more women say they are stressed about money (83 percent vs. 78 percent), the economy (84 percent vs. 75 percent), job stability (57 percent vs. 55 percent), housing costs (66 percent vs. 58 percent) and health problems affecting their families (70 percent vs. 63 percent).

Financial Downturn Taking a Toll on Older Women, but All Are Affected

Women of the Boomer generation (aged 44 to 62) and Matures (aged 63+) are most likely to report the economy as a significant stressor, while women in general rank financial worries above personal health. Female Boomers report increases in stress associated with their job stability and health problems affecting their families. Mature women are reporting dramatic increases in stress associated with health problems affecting their families (up 17 points to 87 percent between April and September), the economy (up 18 points to 92 percent) and money (up 15 points to 77 percent).

Generation Xers (ages 30 to 43) and Millennials (ages 18 to 29) are not immune from financial worries. Generation Xers are the women most concerned about money (89 percent report money as a source of stress) and Millennials are most concerned about housing costs (75 percent report housing costs as a source of stress).

Stress Affects Health and Coping Behaviors

In June 2008, more people reported physical and emotional symptoms due to stress than they did in 2007, and nearly half (47 percent) of adults reported that their stress has increased in the past year. More people report fatigue (53 percent compared to 51 percent in 2007), feelings of irritability or anger (60 percent compared to 50 percent in 2007) and lying awake at night (52 percent compared to 48 percent in 2007) as a result of stress, in addition to other symptoms including lack of interest or motivation, feeling depressed or sad, headaches and muscular tension. Women were more likely than men to report physical symptoms of stress like fatigue (57 percent compared to 49 percent), irritability (65 percent compared to 55 percent), headaches (56 percent compared to 36 percent) and feeling depressed or sad (56 percent compared to 39 percent).

Almost half of Americans (48 percent) reported overeating or eating unhealthy foods to manage stress, while one in four (39 percent) skipped a meal in the last month because of stress. Women were more likely than men to report unhealthy behaviors to manage stress like eating poorly (56 versus 40 percent), shopping (25 versus 11 percent), or napping (43 versus 32 percent). Almost one-fifth of Americans report drinking alcohol to manage their stress (18 percent), and 16 percent report smoking.

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“With the deteriorating economy dominating the headlines, it’s easy to worry more about your finances than your health, but, stress over money and the economy is taking an emotional and physical toll on America, especially among women,” says psychologist Katherine Nordal, PhD, APA’s executive director for professional practice. “Many say they are handling their stress well. Yet, people report more physical and emotional symptoms. If Americans continue to experience these high levels of stress for prolonged periods of time, they are at risk for developing serious illnesses.”

What Can Americans Do?

According to APA, the health consequences of extreme stress are most severe when people ignore symptoms and fail to manage their stress well. Dr. Nordal advises people to be more mindful of their stress levels as well as the emotional and physical symptoms of stress. Symptoms include irritability, problems sleeping, changes in appetite, headaches, stomach aches, intestinal problems, nervousness, excessive worry, and feeling sad and depressed.

“People’s emotional and physical health is more vulnerable, given the high levels of stress in our country right now,” says Dr. Nordal. “Pay attention to what’s happening around you, but refrain from getting caught up in doom-and-gloom hype. Take stock of your particular situation and what causes you stress. Reach out to family, friends and trusted advisors. Research shows that receiving support from others is effective in managing stress. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by stress, then consider seeking professional help.”

The Stress in America survey is part of APA’s Mind/Body Health public education campaign. For information on the survey or managing stress, visit www.apahelpcenter.org.

Methodology

The 2008 Stress in America research was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Psychological Association between June 23, 2008 and August 13, 2008 among 1791 adults aged 18+ who reside in the U.S.

The April data was collected online within the United States between April 7 and April 15, 2008, among 2,529 U.S. residents aged 18 or older. The September data was collected online within the United States between September 19 and September 23, 2008, among 2,507 U.S. residents 18 or older. Data for the April and September polls were collected using an omnibus survey; the causes of stress question included a “not applicable” response. Data presented here were calculated excluding those who responded “not applicable.”

No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.

The American Psychological Association (APA), in Washington, DC, is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world’s largest association of psychologists. APA’s membership includes more than 148,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting human welfare.

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