A presidential election looms, and though the political climate is often described as divisive, stress about the election exists on both sides of the aisle. Around two-thirds of adults say that the current election has increased their stress level, according to a new national survey released by the American Psychological Association (APA). The survey, conducted by The Gallup Organization, is based on interviews with 3,409 adults age 18+ who reside in the U.S. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Data were collected on behalf of the American Psychological Association between Aug. 4 and Aug. 26, 2020, among a national sample designed to reflect the demographic composition of the general U.S. population.

The survey, which included a question about the sources of stress in the lives of U.S. adults, found that stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the race for the U.S. presidency are having a significant impact on the mental health of Americans.

Discrimination Rises as Source of Stress, Particularly for People of Color

While more intense for Gen Z, stress and declining employment have been pervasive sources of stress for many Americans, according to the survey. Discrimination was included among the list of sources of stress in the survey. While rates of discrimination and stress vary by demographics, the survey found that discrimination was a significant source of stress for adults of color.

“Discrimination serves as a significant source of stress in the lives of all Americans, but most especially for people of color,” said Dr. Jennifer Angotti-Prater, APA chief education officer. “We need to act right now to help those who need it, and to prevent a much more serious and damaging public health crisis.”

A National Mental Health Crisis

The survey also found that the majority of adults (76%) were at least somewhat worried about what the 2020-21 school year will be like, with 66% worried about their children’s school experiences. About half of adults (53%) reported that the lack of access to in-person instruction was a significant source of stress in their lives. In addition, 38% of adults stated that the stress they were experiencing was due to the pandemic.

The survey also found that 59% of adults were at least somewhat worried about their own future job and employment situation, with 42% worrying about the future job situation of their children. A little more than half of adults (52%) reported that the loss of jobs was a significant source of stress in their lives.

Future

While many Americans are worried about the future, the majority (65%) said that the future looks uncertain. This may be driving key differences in reported stress as stressors that have been pervasive in previous years. Compared with 2019, the majority of adults still report that their relationships have been negatively impacted by the stressors of the pandemic, with 81% of adults reporting that their relationships have been negatively impacted. In addition, 75% of adults report that their mental health has been negatively impacted since the coronavirus pandemic began.

Stressors That Persist

Stressors that have been pervasive in previous years remain present and problematic. These compounding stressors are having real consequences on our minds and bodies. While the majority of adults still report that their relationships have been negatively impacted by the stressors of the pandemic, 75% of adults report that their mental health has been negatively impacted since the coronavirus pandemic began. These symptoms may stem from stress caused by the pandemic, which is compounded by societal upheaval spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite several months of acclimating to a new reality and societal upheaval spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to act right now to help those who need it, and to prevent a much more serious and damaging public health crisis. APA is committed to helping people emerge from this crisis with strategies to help us recover from this crisis. APA is committed to helping people emerge from this crisis with strategies to help us recover from this crisis.