APA: Decision-making a struggle for young adults during COVID

In the 18 months since COVID-19 commenced, more than one-third of adults, particularly young adults, say they are struggling with making day-to-day decisions and major life decisions compared with before the pandemic, according to a national survey released late last month by the American Psychological Association (APA).

The annual survey, “Stress in America 2021: Pandemic Impedes Basic Decision-Making Ability,” was conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of the APA. The survey found that stress levels are holding steady from recent years, and despite many struggles, U.S. adults retain a positive outlook.

Most (70%) were confident that everything will work out after the coronavirus pandemic ends, and more than three-quarters (77%) said, all in all, they are faring well during the coronavirus pandemic.

However, prolonged effects of stress and unhealthy behavior changes are common, according to the APA. Daily tasks and decision-making have become more difficult during the pandemic, particularly for younger adults and parents. As each day can bring a new set of decisions about safety, security, growth, travel, work and other life requirements, people in the United States seem to be increasingly wracked with uncertainty, the survey stated.

“The pandemic has imposed a regimen of constant risk assessment upon many,” Arthur C. Evans Jr., Ph.D., APA CEO, said in a news release. “Each day brings an onslaught of choices with an ever-changing context as routines are upended and once trivial daily tasks are recast in light of the pandemic life. Sustaining a heightened degree of vigilance inevitably wears one’s mental health.”

Struggling with decisions

Nearly one-third of adults (32%) said sometimes they are so stressed about the coronavirus pandemic that they struggle to make basic decisions, such as what to wear or what to eat, according to the survey. Millennials (48%) were particularly likely to struggle with this when compared with other groups (Gen Z adults: 37%, Gen Xers: 32%, Baby Boomers: 14% and older adults: 3%).

More than one-third of survey respondents said it has been more stressful to make day-to-day decisions (36%) and major life decisions (35%) compared with before the coronavirus pandemic.

Younger adults were more likely to feel these decisions are more stressful now (daily decisions: 40% of Gen Z adults, 46% of millennials and 39% of Gen Xers versus 24% of Baby Boomers and 14% of older adults; major decisions: 50% of Gen Z adults and 45% of millennials versus 33% of Gen Xers, 24% of Baby Boomers and 6% of older adults). And slightly more than three in five (61%) agreed the coronavirus pandemic has made them rethink how they were living their life.

The survey also found that more than three in five (63%) agreed that uncertainty about what the next few months will be like causes them stress, and around half (49%) said the coronavirus pandemic has

Continues on next page
People of color

Hispanic and Black adults were less likely to say they are faring well during the coronavirus pandemic than non-Hispanic white adults, though the levels still speak to an overall positive outlook (81% of non-Hispanic white adults versus 68% of Hispanic adults and 72% of Black adults). Still, in line with the overall survey findings, this optimistic finding stands in contrast to the reality of compounding pandemic-related stressors bearing down on marginalized communities, especially Hispanic adults, the survey indicated.

Hispanic adults were most likely to say they are struggling with the ups and downs of the coronavirus pandemic (61% versus 51% of non-Hispanic white adults and 51% of Black adults) and that they don’t know how to manage the stress they feel due to the pandemic (43% versus 33% and 34%, respectively).

According to the survey, this unequal burden of stress on Hispanic adults was not surprising, considering findings from the survey that shine a light on racial and ethnic disparities in relation to the impact of the pandemic. Specifically, Hispanic adults were more likely than non-Hispanic white adults to know someone who had been sick with or died of COVID-19 (sick: 64% versus 46%, died: 42% versus 25%).

The August/COVID Resilience Survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of the APA between Aug. 11 and Aug. 23, among 3,035 adults age 18+ who reside in the United States. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

In case you haven’t heard...

Genetic risk of mental health conditions may influence where people live, according to new research, Science Daily reported Oct. 27. Research on around 386,000 U.K. adults has found that a high genetic risk for schizophrenia and other mental health conditions, including bipolar disorder, anorexia and autism, is associated with living in and moving to urban areas. In contrast, people with low genetic risk of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder preferentially moved from rural/suburban environments to cities. Published in JAMA Psychiatry, the research challenges the proposals that city living is a simple environmental risk factor for schizophrenia and that those with diagnosed mental health conditions move to cities seeking better access to health care services. Instead, the research suggests that genetic liability to a variety of mental health conditions may affect an individual’s choice of residence. First author Jessye Maxwell, a Ph.D. candidate from the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King’s College London, said: “Our research shows that at some level an individual’s genes select their environment and that the relationship between environmental and genetic influences on mental health is interrelated. This overlap needs to be considered when developing models to predict the risk of people developing mental health conditions in the future.”

Coming up …

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing will host NatCon22, “Redefined,” April 11–13, 2022, at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland. Visit https://eventscribe.net/2022/NatCon22 for more information.

Ohio lawmaker introduces bill to address MH, COVID connection

Ohio Rep. Anthony Gonzalez last month introduced legislation, “The Brycen Gray and Ben Price COVID-19 Neurological Impact Act,” that would authorize the National Science Foundation, in consultation with the National Institutes of Health, to award grants to support research on neurological and psychiatric illnesses associated with COVID-19 infection, Cleveland.com reported Nov. 1. The bill, to promote research on COVID-19’s effects on the brain, was named after Brycen Gray, a 17-year-old Ohioan who exhibited neurological problems associated with COVID-19 before taking his own life in April. It also is named for Ben Price, an Illinois man who exhibited mental health problems after a prolonged stay in the hospital for COVID-19 and died by suicide. Gonzalez says neither of them had a history of mental illness before their COVID-19 diagnosis. Gonzalez said he’s seeking U.S. Senate co-sponsors for the bill and believes it has a good chance of incorporation into more significant legislation if it doesn’t pass on its own. It has support from the Children’s Hospital Association and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.