

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Economic Downturn Taking Toll on Americans' Mental Health

New National Survey Finds Jobless Individuals Four Times as Likely To Report Serious Problems

Columbus, OH - A new national survey shows the economic downturn is taking a toll on the mental health of Americans. Individuals who are unemployed are four times as likely as those with jobs to report symptoms consistent with severe mental illness.

Americans who experienced involuntary changes in their employment status, such as pay cuts or reduced hours, also are twice as likely to have these symptoms, even though they are employed full time.

The survey was conducted for Mental Health America and the National Alliance on Mental Illness in collaboration with the Depression is Real Coalition. The results come from telephone interviews of 1,002 adults nationwide from September 17-20.

The release of the findings coincides with Mental Illness Awareness Week (from October 4 to 10) and National Depression Screening Day, which takes place this Thursday, October 8.

"This survey clearly shows that economic difficulties are placing the public's mental health at serious risk, and we need affirmative action to address these medical problems," said Laura Moskow Sigal, CEO of Mental Health America of Franklin County. "Individuals confronting these problems should seek help for their problems – talk to their doctor, trusted friend or advisor or mental health professional."

Unemployment today stands at almost 10 percent. Nationwide, we face a mental health crisis as well as an economic crisis. "There is no shame in seeking help to overcome unemployment or a medical illness. For the sake of all our loved ones, it's important to learn to recognize symptoms of depression and other mental illnesses. Screening helps. Talk with a doctor about any concerns," said Laura Moskow Sigal.

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Other key findings of the survey:

- Thirteen percent of unemployed individuals report that they have thought of harming themselves which is four times more than reported by persons with full time work.
- People who are unemployed are approximately six times as likely to have difficulty meeting household expenses – 22 percent report great difficulty paying their utilities and almost half have significant difficulty in obtaining healthcare further compounding their situation.
- People who are unemployed are also twice as likely to report concern with their mental health or use of alcohol or drugs within the last six months than individuals working full time.
- Of those who have not spoken to a health professional about these concerns, 42 percent cited cost or lack of insurance coverage as the main reason.
- Nearly 20 percent of the sample reported that they had experienced a forced change (e.g. pay cuts, reduced hours) in their employment during the last year.
- Although most of these individuals are employed, individuals with a forced change in employment are twice as likely to report symptoms consistent with severe mental illness than would be expected. They are also five times more likely to report feeling hopeless most or all of the time than individuals who hadn't experienced a forced change.

Major depression is a serious medical illness affecting 15 million American adults, or approximately 5 to 8 percent of the adult population in a given year, whether they are unemployed or not. Depression is also very treatable. In fact, treatment such as antidepressants and talk therapy is effective over 80 percent of the time.

But fewer than half of people confronting this medical illness seek treatment, regardless of economic or employment status.

Individuals can take an anonymous screening online at www.mhafc.org or attend the FREE in-person screening, sponsored by MHAFC at the YWCA, located at 65 South Fourth Street, downtown Columbus, OH from noon-4 on October 8! TOMORROW!

About the Survey

The survey was conducted via telephone among a national probability sample of 1,002 adults, comprising 500 men and 502 women 18 years of age and older, living in private households in the continental United States. Fieldwork for this study was conducted using Opinion Research Corporation's CARAVAN(R) Survey during the period September 17-20, 2009. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points for results based on the total sample.

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