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SURVEY REVEALS WHAT'S STRESSING AMERICANS

Findings come as mental health leaders launch new era of wellness

Indianapolis, IN (EMBARGOED UNTIL November 16, 2006) — Mental Health America of Indiana, formerly known as the Mental Health Association of Indiana, today released national survey findings that detail the top life stressors facing United States residents and the most common coping activities people use when feeling overwhelmed or anxious. Mental Health America of Indiana joins the Mental Health America national office and all 320 Mental Health America affiliates, including over 50 Indiana local affiliates, nationwide in releasing these findings to coincide with the launch of a new vision and an era of wellness for all.

“In today’s busy society, most people struggle to manage the many challenges they face in daily life,” said Stephen C. McCaffrey, Mental Health America of Indiana President and CEO. “Most find ways to cope – whether it’s with positive measures, distracting activities or harmful vices. However, when stress and other mental health problems go unchecked, they pose risks for overall health and well-being – for the individual and for the entire community. Considering all the ways mental health affects each of us and our society, it truly is the largest public health concern facing our community.”

How a person deals with life’s challenges can positively or negatively impact their mental health, overall health and well-being. For example, stress is linked to the six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver and suicide.

Americans’ Stressors

Overall, the majority of people view their mental health and well-being as excellent or very good. Yet, they still feel besieged by financial, health and employment issues in their daily lives.

48 percent are stressed by finances. Native Americans and African Americans pointed to finances as a stressor at a significantly higher rate, 57 percent and 56 percent respectively, than Asians, 42 percent, Latinos, 49 percent, and non-Hispanic Whites, 47 percent.

Health issues are considered a stressor for more than 34 percent of Americans.

Employment issues are the third main source of stress for Americans (32 percent) – whether on-the-job or lack of work. Latinos, 41 percent, are most likely to be stressed by employment issues, followed by African Americans with 39 percent.

Stressed Americans

Parents are the most stressed of all demographic groups. Nearly 40 percent reported feeling stressed from at least three sources – from spouses, family, work, finances or other sources.

Native Americans, 37 percent, and African Americans, 38 percent, report significantly greater stress than non-Hispanic Whites, 30 percent, while Latinos, 34 percent, and Asians, 34 percent, reported no difference.

Americans with a college degree reported less stress overall. In addition, a college education made a difference in whether finances were a stressor. More than half of respondents with less than a college degree noted financial issues as stressors in their lives.

People living with mental illnesses are far more likely to feel stress than those without such personal experiences. This increase in stress is primarily connected to their relationships with their significant others and family, 72 percent. Increased stress was also found regarding work, 47 percent, and health, 48 percent.

How Americans Cope with Stress

| | Total | Native Americans | African Americans | Hispanics/ Latinos | Asians | Non-Hispanic Whites |
|---------------------------------|-------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------|---------------------|
| Watch TV, read, music | 82% | 84% | 84% | 86% | 88% | 81% |
| Talk to family / friends | 71% | 76% | 65% | 75% | 77% | 71% |
| Prayer | 62% | 64% | 82% | 60% | 51% | 59% |
| Exercise | 55% | 67% | 56% | 59% | 70% | 52% |
| Eat | 37% | 41% | 33% | 37% | 38% | 38% |
| Smoke, drink, drug | 26% | 30% | 24% | 23% | 17% | 28% |
| Take Rx medications | 12% | 13% | 8% | 10% | 7% | 13% |
| Hurt self | 1% | 1% | 1% | * | 4% | * |

Americans employ a variety of stress management tools when they feel overwhelmed or stressed.

- When faced with stress, a vast majority of people, 82 percent, turn on the television, listen to music or read.
- Family and friends serve as a solid support for 71 percent of those polled.
- Prayer or meditation is a recourse for 62 percent and exercise sustains 55 percent.

The survey found that Africans Americans, 82 percent, are far more likely than other groups to pray or meditate to deal with stress and anxiety. Native Americans and non-Hispanic Whites are more likely to engage in unhealthy coping skills – 30 percent of Native Americans and 28 percent of non-Hispanic Whites respondents noted they drink, smoke or do drugs when feeling stressed out. Asian Americans are least likely to smoke, drink or use drugs to cope and have the highest likelihood, 77 percent, of talking to a family member or friend to deal with challenges and have the highest likelihood, 70 percent, of using exercise to manage stress levels.

Women (42 percent) were significantly more likely than **men** (31 percent) to eat as a coping mechanism for stress.

People living with mental illnesses are more likely to drink, smoke or do drugs to relieve stress, 42 percent, or take prescribed medications, 37 percent, talk with family, 74 percent, eat, 45 percent – and to a much lesser degree cut or self-harm, 3 percent (fewer than one percent of other demographic groups pointed to self-injury).

Mental Health America of Indiana – Bringing Wellness Home

These findings were released with the launch of Mental Health America of Indiana and its new vision for mental wellness throughout the Hoosier state. Under its new name, Mental Health America of Indiana is re-dedicated to improving the health and well-being of all people – especially children and adults living with mental health and substance use problems – by helping them live mentally healthier lives.

“The majority of people see chronic stress as a personal weakness – yet, most do not view chest pains or physical pain as such,” said McCaffrey. “The stigma associated with mental health problems is formidable. Mental Health America of Indiana is committed to breaking down this stigma – for people who live with mental illnesses, for every person in our community and for our society as a whole. We are advancing this movement and heralding a new era of wellness.”

Over the coming year, Mental Health America of Indiana will engage the community in a dialogue about mental health and wellness, and the important role it plays in each person’s life and in the health and success of the community.

Mental Health America of Indiana advances its mission by:

- Educating the public about ways to preserve and strengthen its mental health;
- Fighting for access to effective care and an end to discrimination against people with mental and addictive disorders;

- Fostering innovation in research, practice, services and policy; and
- Providing support to individuals and families living with mental health and substance use problems.

About the Survey

The “Mental Health America Attitudinal Survey” was conducted by International Communications Research, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone and the Internet from October 10 to November 1, 2006 among a nationally representative sample of 3,040 respondents age 18 and older. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 1.75%.

“Part 1: Findings on Stress in America” is the first in a series of releases from the “Mental Health America Attitudinal Survey.” In the next few months Mental Health America will release additional survey findings addressing the stigma surrounding mental illness, veterans, holiday pressures and stress, perceptions of America’s health care systems, doctor-patient relationships and more.

Mental Health America of Indiana is the state’s leading nonprofit dedicated to helping ALL people live mentally healthier lives. Mental Health America represents a growing movement of Americans who promote mental wellness for the health and well-being of the nation – everyday and in times of crisis.

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