HEALTH REPORT

THE IMPACT OF
COVID-19
ON MENTAL HEALTH

By Libby Pellegrini MMS, PA-C

With the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus and the cascade of economic and social consequences associated with it, mental health concerns in America have become simultaneously more important and harder to address. Recent research conducted by RxSaver by RetailMeNot™, in partnership with Kelton Research, has helped shed light on the current state of mental health in our nation.

Mental Health in America

Nearly half of Americans surveyed in February 2020 reported that they are dealing with a mental health condition that significantly impacts their daily life.[1] In fact, the majority of those who reported struggling with a mental health condition also endorsed having missed social events or work due to the condition.[1]

NEARLY
1/2
OF AMERICANS REPORTED A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION THAT SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTS DAILY LIFE, including missed social events or work.
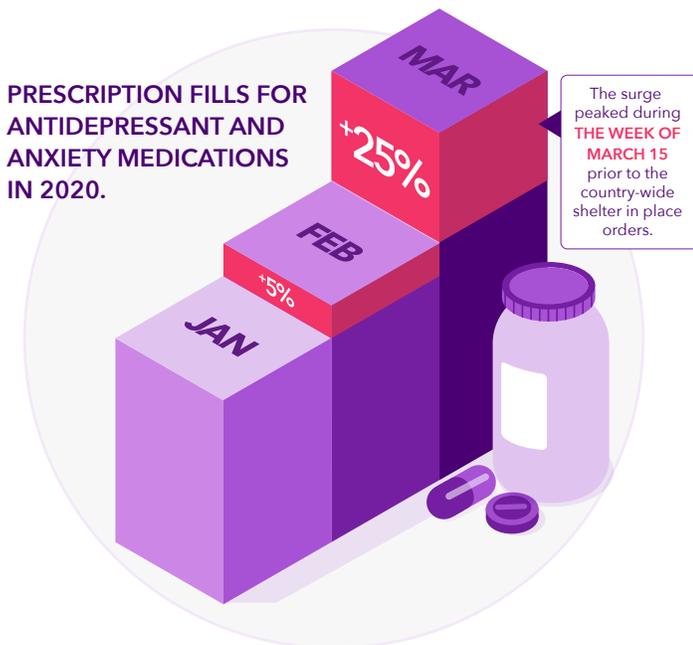Surveyed February, 2020.

Millennials and members of Generation Z were twice as likely to report that they had declined participation in an activity due to a mental health condition compared to older generations.[1]

The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the COVID-19 pandemic may trigger strong emotions, and the ensuing stress may worsen underlying mental health conditions.[2] More than half of Americans have reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health.[3]

From February to March, 2020, RxSaver saw a 25% increase in prescription fills for antidepressant and anxiety medications compared to only a 5% increase from January to February.

PRESCRIPTION FILLS FOR ANTIDEPRESSANT AND ANXIETY MEDICATIONS IN 2020.

MAR

+25%

FEB

+5%

JAN

The surge peaked during **THE WEEK OF MARCH 15** prior to the country-wide shelter in place orders.

The 25% surge in these medication fills peaked during the week of March 15, prior to the mandatory shelter in place orders across the country.

However, more than three-quarters of Americans have found ways to manage mental health and ease emotional burdens during these uncertain times.

Commonly cited outlets include talking to friends and family (54%), exercising (43%), and meditating (21%).[3]

Many Americans have also reported that restricting their intake of caffeine and alcohol has been helpful in improving mental health during this challenging time.[3]

3/4 OF AMERICANS HAVE FOUND WAYS TO MANAGE MENTAL HEALTH AND EASE EMOTIONAL BURDENS DURING THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES.
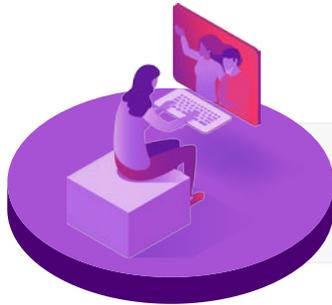
54%
TALKING TO FRIENDS & FAMILY

43%
EXERCISING

21%
MEDITATING

Treatment For Mental Health Conditions

Although nearly all Americans surveyed reported that they are comfortable discussing mental health issues, actively seeing a mental health professional is still far less common. About half of Americans surveyed (53%) reported having never received treatment from a mental health professional.[1]

In the nearly half of Americans who had pursued treatment for mental health conditions, the nature of the interaction with a mental health professional varied. Survey results showed that roughly 20% of Americans had seen a mental health professional at some point in the past, but were not receiving treatment when surveyed.[1] Another 20% saw a mental health professional at least once every six months, and about 10% received mental health treatment at least monthly.[1]

Challenges Accessing Mental Health Care

Accessing treatment for mental health conditions is not always easy. Of the Americans surveyed in February 2020, 43% had encountered difficulties getting help for a mental health condition.

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Certain areas of the country seem to have more barriers to treatment access. Americans living in urban areas encountered more difficulties getting mental health care, and those living in the western and southern regions of the United States reported more problems accessing care than those living in the Midwest.[1]

The COVID-19 pandemic has, unsurprisingly, made it even more challenging to get mental health care. More than one-third of Americans surveyed in April 2020 reported having missed a health appointment due to a COVID-19–related difficulty.[3] Only 12% of Americans surveyed had been able to have a virtual appointment with their physician, and nearly three in ten people reported that management of their mental health condition has been disrupted by the pandemic.[3]

Treating Mental Health Conditions with Prescription Medications

Once Americans managed to gain access to a mental health professional, about half reported being prescribed a medication, usually from a psychiatrist or primary care physician.[1] Pre-COVID-19, prescription adherence for mental health conditions was a bright spot in the research. Nearly two-thirds of people surveyed in February 2020 reported taking their prescription medication daily, and even more reported taking it at regular intervals.[1]

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on prescription medication adherence. Twelve percent of those surveyed in April 2020 reported having missed doses of a medication, based in part on concerns about the prescription running out or being unable to get a refill.[3] Younger generations (those aged 18 to 55) were more than twice as likely to report having skipped a medication dose compared to baby boomers.[3]

Cost of Prescription Medications for Mental Health Conditions

Consultation and treatment with a mental health professional can be quite costly for many Americans.

Among those who have sought mental health treatment, as many as 60% paid out of pocket for at least some of the expense, and 46% had to shoulder the entire cost of treatment themselves.[1]

One part of the large expenditures involved with mental health treatment is the considerable cost of prescribed medications. Americans reported average monthly costs of $77 for prescription medications for mental health care in 2020.[1]

AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS OF MENTAL HEALTH MEDICATIONS IN 2020.

Unfortunately, approximately 12% of Americans reported that their prescribed medications were not affordable since they were not covered by their prescription plan.[1]

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly created additional financial strain for many Americans, and this is especially true for those who need to take prescription medications regularly. RxSaver by RetailMeNot has the latest information available regarding the cost of mental health prescriptions, with a medication-by-medication breakdown summary for those without insurance.

References

1. Kelton. Q1 RxSaver 2020 Survey Pitch Guide was conducted between February 21, 2020, and February 24, 2020, among a sample of 1,068 nationally representative Americans aged 18+.

2. CDC. Coronavirus Disease 2019: Stress and Coping. Retrieved from: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fmanaging-stress-anxiety.html. Retrieved on: 4/23/2020.

3. Kelton. COVID-19 RxSaver 2020 Survey Pitch Guide was conducted between April 1, 2020, and April 3, 2020, among a sample of 1,004 nationally representative Americans ages 18+.

Libby Pellegrini is a nationally certified physician assistant. She currently works in emergency medicine where she sees and treats a broad spectrum of illnesses across all age ranges. She holds a journalism degree from Northwestern University.

About RxSaver by RetailMeNot: RxSaver by RetailMeNot™ improves health through the power of savings. RxSaver's free-to-use prescription coupon website/app gathers drug prices from every major pharmacy to help consumers compare medication prices and save. As part of leading savings destination RetailMeNot, RxSaver coupons bridge the gap between prescription medication costs and affordability, to help individuals afford the health care they need.

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