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# **A Survey about Mental Health and Suicide in the United States**

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### MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE SURVEY: Research Method and Note about the Report

#### **Research Method**

The Mental Health and Suicide Survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Poll on behalf of the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention between August 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015 among 2,020 adults ages 18,+ among which 198 are age 18-25. This summary includes responses filtered for college-aged adults-- defined as ages 18-25--compared with the responses of other adults who participated in the survey.

Results were weighted for age within gender, region, race/ethnicity, income, and education where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Poll avoids the phrase "margin of error" because it is misleading. All that can be calculated are various possible sampling errors with differing probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Poll surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the U.S. adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Poll panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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#### **A Note about Reading the Report**

The percentage of respondents has been included for each item.

- An asterisk (\*) signifies a value of less than one-half percent.
- A dash represents a value of zero.
- Percentages may not always add up to 100% because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses.

### **Opinions of Mental Health**

College-aged U.S. adults are more likely to have visited a mental health professional within the past 12 months, compared to older U.S. adults (18% vs. 11%). By contrast, more than two-thirds of older adults have seen a primary care physician within the past 12 months (67%), while only 53% of college-aged adults have seen a PCP within that time frame. These emerging adults overwhelmingly feel that mental health and physical health are equally important for their own health (87%) and 1 in 10 (10%) view mental health as more important than physical health.

College-aged adults are more likely to view seeing a mental health professional as a sign of strength compared to older adults (60% vs. 35%). Their responses, however, suggest a need to expand access for mental health care among young people: In all, 46% of the younger adults view mental health care as something most people can't afford and 33% view it as inaccessible for most people. Additionally, this age group is more likely to report that they have thought they may have had a mental disorder (65% vs. 45% of older adults), including anxiety/GAD (43% vs. 24% of older adults) and depression (50% vs. 26% of older adults).

### **Experience with Mental Health**

Overall, more than two in five (45%) college-aged adults have been formally diagnosed with a mental health condition by a doctor/health care professional, with common diagnoses being depression (33%) and anxiety disorder (27%). While two in five college-aged adults have been diagnosed, nearly two-thirds (65%) admit that they have thought they may have had a mental health condition at some point. Nearly two in five (43%) presumed they had anxiety/GAD disorder, while half (50%) believe that they may have had depression.

Among college-aged adults who have been employed in the past 12 months, nearly one-quarter have missed work days because they were too anxious (23%) and nearly one-third too depressed (31%) to go to work.

Interestingly, 65% of younger adults think they can tell when someone has a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression, compared to 45% of older adults, and 46% think they know when someone is suicidal, vs. 23% of older adults. College-aged adults are also more likely to disagree with the belief that there is nothing that can help someone who is suicidal, compared with older adults (88% vs. 80%).

### **Attitudes Toward, and Knowledge About, Suicide**

The vast majority of college-aged adults recognize that life situations and mental health conditions can increase a person's risk of suicide. This age group has an acute awareness of the impact that bullying and personal relationships can have on anyone (85% and 70%, respectively), however they may not fully grasp the risk associated with certain mental disorders such as anxiety.

- Only 52% recognize anxiety disorder as a risk factor for suicide, while 86% identify the risk associated with depression. These levels of awareness of risk factors among college-aged adults are higher than that of older adults -- 40% for anxiety and 78% for depression.

More than half (61%) of college-aged adults feel that suicide is a way to escape pain, compared to 46% of older adults, and nearly two in five (38%) feel it is an impulsive act, compared to less than one-third

(28%) of older adults. More than one-third (38%) of college-aged adults say that suicide is a selfish act, and a quarter feel it is a sign of weakness or cowardice (25%). However, more than one in five (21%) feel that suicide is a person's right.

Most college-aged adults think better access to psychotherapy and/or medication (72%) and public education (68%) could reduce the number of people who die by suicide, compared with 62% and 58% of older adults respectively.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the younger group think suicide can often or always be prevented, compared with only 40% of other adults, and nearly all (96%) would do something if someone close to them was thinking about suicide:

- 78% would encourage a loved one to seek help;
- 71% would stay with the potentially suicidal person, compared with 62% of older adults;
- 67% would tell the person they were worried about them, compared with 52% of older adults;
- 42% would tell them everything will be okay, compared to 19% of older adults.

However, a majority (57%) note that something might stop them from trying to help someone close to them who is suicidal compared to 43% of older adults because they were fearful that:

- They would make the suicidal person feel worse (39%);
- There may be nothing they could do to help (27%); and
- Talking about it might make the person attempt suicide (25%)

Demonstrating the utility of the internet as a resource for college-aged adults, nearly one in three (31%) would turn to the web as a key tool for navigating suicide-prevention resources compared with two in five (21%) older adults.

**MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE SURVEY: Topline Data of Adults 18-25**

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1005** Which of the following health care providers did you see in the past 12 months? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>variable bases</i>	18-25	26+
<b>ANY (NET)</b>		<b>78%</b>	<b>80%</b>
Primary care physician		53%	67%
Medical specialist (e.g., cardiologist, endocrinologist)		17%	27%
Nurse or nurse practitioner		29%	19%
OB/GYN <i>[shown to female respondents only]</i>		22%	18%
<b>MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR OR THERAPIST (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>18%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Psychiatrist		8%	7%
Psychologist		10%	4%
Other mental health counselor or therapist		5%	5%
Other health care provider		5%	14%
None		22%	20%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1010** Considering your own health, do you think that **mental** health or **physical** health is more important, or are they equally important?

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	18-25 <i>198</i>	26+ <i>1822</i>
Physical health is more important than mental health.		3%	7%
Mental health is more important than physical health.		10%	4%
They are equally important.		87%	90%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1015** Which of the following **best** describes how you think the importance of mental health and physical health are treated in our current health care system?

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	18-25 <i>198</i>	26+ <i>1822</i>
Physical health is treated as more important than mental health		56%	55%
Mental health is treated as more important than physical health		8%	3%
Physical and mental health are treated as equally important.		27%	28%
Not sure		9%	13%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1020** Which of the following best reflects your opinion? Please select **all** that apply.

Seeing a mental health professional is...

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
Something most people can't afford		46%	43%
A sign of strength		60%	35%
Not accessible for most people		33%	31%
Something people do not know where to find		33%	29%
A last resort		14%	10%
Ineffective		3%	5%
A sign of weakness		3%	5%
Not as good as seeing their minister, pastor, priest, or rabbi		3%	3%
Not necessary because people should stand on their own		4%	2%
None of these reflect my opinion		14%	20%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1025** Have you ever been diagnosed by a medical or mental health professional with any of the following? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>ANY (NET)</b>		<b>45%</b>	<b>31%</b>
Depression		33%	20%
<b>ANXIETY/PANIC (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>30%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>ANXIETY/GAD (SUB-SUB-NET)</b>		<b>27%</b>	<b>17%</b>
Anxiety		25%	16%
Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)		5%	4%
Social Anxiety Disorder		8%	4%
Panic Disorder		7%	4%
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)		2%	4%
<b>ALCOHOL/DRUG USE (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>1%</b>	<b>4%</b>
Alcohol Use Disorder		1%	3%
Drug Use Disorder		*	2%
Bipolar Disorder		4%	3%
Eating Disorder (e.g., anorexia, bulimia)		6%	3%
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)		4%	3%
Other mental health condition		7%	2%
None		50%	67%
Decline to answer		4%	2%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS****Q1030** Have you ever thought that you have any of the following? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>ANY (NET)</b>		<b>65%</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>ANXIETY/PANIC (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>49%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>ANXIETY/GAD (SUB-SUB-NET)</b>		<b>43%</b>	<b>24%</b>
Anxiety		40%	22%
Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)		13%	5%
Social Anxiety Disorder		25%	10%
Panic Disorder		8%	6%
Depression		50%	26%
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)		16%	6%
<b>ALCOHOL/DRUG USE (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>
Alcohol Use Disorder		4%	6%
Drug Use Disorder		4%	3%
Bipolar Disorder		18%	4%
Eating Disorder (e.g., anorexia, bulimia)		14%	4%
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)		4%	5%
Other mental health condition		5%	3%
None		30%	53%
Decline to answer		4%	2%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS****Q1035** Which of the following types of treatment have you ever received for a mental health condition? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>ANY (NET)</b>		<b>51%</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>TALK THERAPY (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>40%</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>PSYCHOTHERAPY (SUB-SUB-NET)</b>		<b>31%</b>	<b>23%</b>
In-person psychotherapy (e.g., talk therapy, counseling)		29%	22%
Online psychotherapy		3%	2%
Peer support (e.g., support group)		16%	8%
Coaching (e.g., personal life coaching)		8%	4%
Prescription medication		28%	25%
Complementary/Alternative treatments (e.g., acupuncture, meditation, yoga)		6%	4%
Other		3%	2%
I have never received treatment for a mental health condition.		49%	63%

**BASE: EMPLOYED IN PAST 12 MONTHS**

**Q1045** In the past 12 months, how many days of work have you missed because you were too anxious or too depressed to go to work?

***Too anxious to go to work***

	<i>n=</i> <i>1166</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>138</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1028</i>
0		77%	88%
<b>ANY (NET)</b>		<b>23%</b>	<b>12%</b>
1-5		16%	8%
6+		8%	4%
<b>MEAN</b>		<b>1.9</b>	<b>0.7</b>

***Too depressed to go to work***

	<i>n=</i> <b>1166</b>	<b>18-25</b> <b>138</b>	<b>26+</b> <b>1028</b>
0		69%	86%
<b>ANY (NET)</b>		<b>31%</b>	<b>14%</b>
1-5		25%	10%
6+		5%	5%
<b>MEAN</b>		<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.9</b>

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1050** Which of the following describe your opinion of suicide? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <b>2020</b>	<b>18-25</b> <b>198</b>	<b>26+</b> <b>1822</b>
A way to escape pain		61%	46%
A selfish act		38%	39%
An impulsive act		38%	28%
A sign of weakness or cowardice		25%	19%
A person's right		21%	18%
A selfless act		4%	4%
A sign of strength or courage		3%	1%
None of these		8%	15%
Decline to answer		6%	5%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1055** How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

*I can tell when someone is suicidal.*

	<i>n=</i> 2020	18-25 198	26+ 1822
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT AGREE (NET)</b>		<b>46%</b>	<b>23%</b>
Strongly agree		8%	4%
Somewhat agree		38%	19%
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (NET)</b>		<b>54%</b>	<b>77%</b>
Somewhat disagree		33%	46%
Strongly disagree		20%	31%

*If someone wants to die by suicide, there is nothing anyone can do to help them.*

	<i>n=</i> 2020	18-25 198	26+ 1822
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT AGREE (NET)</b>		<b>12%</b>	<b>20%</b>
Strongly agree		2%	5%
Somewhat agree		10%	14%
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (NET)</b>		<b>88%</b>	<b>80%</b>
Somewhat disagree		25%	37%
Strongly disagree		63%	44%

*Health services that address mental health, such as treatment for depression and suicide prevention, are fundamental to overall health and should be part of any basic health care plan.*

	<i>n=</i> 2020	18-25 198	26+ 1822
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT AGREE (NET)</b>		<b>91%</b>	<b>92%</b>
Strongly agree		56%	57%
Somewhat agree		35%	34%
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (NET)</b>		<b>9%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Somewhat disagree		7%	5%
Strongly disagree		2%	3%

*I can tell when someone has a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety.*

	<i>n=</i> 2020	18-25 198	26+ 1822
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT AGREE (NET)</b>		<b>65%</b>	<b>45%</b>
Strongly agree		19%	7%
Somewhat agree		46%	38%
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (NET)</b>		<b>35%</b>	<b>55%</b>
Somewhat disagree		23%	37%
Strongly disagree		12%	18%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1055** How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

[continued from previous page]

*Most people who die by suicide usually show some signs beforehand.*

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT AGREE (NET)</b>		<b>80%</b>	<b>74%</b>
Strongly agree		32%	21%
Somewhat agree		49%	53%
<b>STRONGLY/ SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (NET)</b>		<b>20%</b>	<b>26%</b>
Somewhat disagree		16%	22%
Strongly disagree		4%	5%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1060** Do you think suicide can be prevented...?

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>EVER (NET)</b>		<b>99%</b>	<b>98%</b>
<b>ALWAYS/OFTEN (SUBNET)</b>		<b>64%</b>	<b>40%</b>
Always		23%	7%
Often		41%	33%
Sometimes		34%	53%
Rarely		1%	4%
Never		1%	2%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1065** As far as you know, which of the following increases a person's risk of suicide? Please select all that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>ANY (NET)</b>		<b>94%</b>	<b>89%</b>
<b>LIFE SITUATIONS (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>91%</b>	<b>85%</b>
Feeling hopeless		79%	75%
Being bullied		85%	69%
Financial problems		69%	68%
Relationship problems		70%	61%
Losing a job		56%	56%
Going through a divorce		60%	50%

<b>MENTAL HEALTH (SUB-NET)</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>85%</b>
Depression	86%	78%
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	64%	61%
Bipolar Disorder	51%	47%
<b>ANXIETY/PANIC (SUB-SUB-NET)</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>45%</b>
Anxiety	52%	40%
Panic disorder	39%	31%
Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)	32%	27%
Social Anxiety Disorder	50%	35%
Eating disorder (e.g., anorexia, bulimia)	37%	28%
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	24%	22%
Other mental health condition	52%	41%
<b>DRUG/ALCOHOL USE (SUB-NET)</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>66%</b>
Drug use	69%	64%
Alcohol use	64%	57%
<b>CHRONIC CONDITION/PAIN (SUB-NET)</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>68%</b>
Chronic pain	44%	59%
Chronic health conditions	46%	58%
Other	10%	5%
None	1%	2%
Not at all sure	5%	9%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1070** What do you think are some of the barriers that prevent people who are thinking about suicide from seeking help? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>ANY (NET)</b>		<b>93%</b>	<b>93%</b>
Feeling like nothing will help		75%	73%
Not knowing how to get help		70%	67%
Embarrassment		75%	64%
Lack of hope		69%	63%
Can't afford treatment		62%	62%
Lack of access to treatment		56%	53%
Social stigma		53%	52%
Lack of social support		68%	50%
Fear of disappointing others		67%	45%
Fear of losing a job		27%	30%
Other		7%	5%
Not at all sure		7%	7%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1075** Which of the following do you think would help reduce the number of people who die by suicide? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>SOMETHING (NET)</b>		<b>94%</b>	<b>89%</b>
<b>BETTER ACCESS TO PSYCHOTHERAPY/MEDICATION (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>72%</b>	<b>62%</b>
Better access to psychotherapy		62%	55%
Better access to medication		47%	41%
Better training for health care providers on how to identify and help someone who is thinking about suicide		61%	63%
<b>MORE RESEARCH (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>64%</b>	<b>59%</b>
More research into how to help people who are thinking about suicide		54%	50%
More research into how to help people who have made a suicide attempt		51%	46%
More research into why people die by suicide		37%	34%
Educating the public about suicide prevention		68%	58%
Educating community leaders such as teachers and clergy (i.e., minister, pastor, priest, or rabbi) about how to identify and help people		55%	53%
Better education for first responders (e.g., police/law enforcement, fire fighters, emergency medical technicians) to identify and help people who are suicidal		54%	49%
Teaching problem-solving skills as a way to prevent suicide		54%	46%
Other		13%	6%
Nothing would help		-	2%
Not at all sure		6%	11%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1080** Which of the following describe what you would do if someone close to you was thinking about suicide? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>WOULD DO SOMETHING (NET)</b>		<b>96%</b>	<b>93%</b>
<b>ENCOURAGE THEM TO SEEK HELP (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>78%</b>	<b>78%</b>
Encourage them to seek help from a mental health professional		70%	69%
Encourage them to seek help from a doctor or primary care health professional		56%	57%
Encourage them to seek help from clergy (e.g., minister, priest, rabbi)		36%	39%
Stay with them until they could get help		71%	62%
<b>CALL/PROVIDE CRISIS HOTLINE (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>62%</b>	<b>61%</b>
Call a crisis hotline		40%	46%
Provide them with a phone number for a crisis hotline or other resource		46%	41%
Tell them I am worried about them		67%	52%
Talk with their friends or family about my concerns		53%	50%
<b>ER/POLICE/FIRE/EMT (SUB-NET)</b>		<b>27%</b>	<b>38%</b>
Seek help from police, fire department, or EMTs (emergency medical technicians)		17%	29%
Take them to the emergency room (ER)		16%	24%
Visit a website for information		31%	21%
Tell them everything will be okay		42%	19%
Leave them alone		*	1%
Other		12%	4%
I wouldn't know what to do.		3%	6%
Do nothing; it's none of my business.		*	1%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1085** Which of the following might stop you from trying to help someone close to you who was thinking about suicide? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>Any (NET)</b>		<b>57%</b>	<b>43%</b>
I would be afraid that I would make them feel worse		39%	23%
I wouldn't know what to say or do		29%	22%
I would be afraid that there may be nothing I could do to help.		27%	17%
I would be afraid that talking about it would make them attempt suicide.		25%	14%
I wouldn't want to get involved.		4%	3%
Other		9%	2%
Nothing would prevent me from trying to help.		43%	57%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1090** Which of the following are true for you? Please select **all** that apply.

Someone I know...

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>KNOW SOMEONE WHO TALKED ABOUT/ATTEMPTED/DIED BY SUICIDE (NET)</b>		<b>69%</b>	<b>54%</b>
Died by suicide		22%	34%
Has talked to me about thoughts of suicide		49%	23%
Has attempted suicide but didn't die		46%	22%
I don't know anyone who has thought about suicide or died by suicide.		27%	43%
Decline to answer		4%	4%

**BASE: U.S. RESPONDENTS**

**Q1095** If you were having thoughts of suicide, who would you tell? Please select **all** that apply.

	<i>n=</i> <i>2020</i>	<i>18-25</i> <i>198</i>	<i>26+</i> <i>1822</i>
<b>WOULD TELL SOMEONE (NET)</b>		<b>78%</b>	<b>66%</b>
<b>FRIEND/FAMILY/SPOUSE(SUB-NET)</b>		<b>65%</b>	<b>55%</b>
Spouse/Significant other/Partner		31%	38%
Family member (other than spouse)		43%	32%
Friend		46%	31%
<b>HEALTH CARE PROVIDER(SUB-NET)</b>		<b>40%</b>	<b>43%</b>
Mental health provider (e.g., psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist)		27%	33%
Primary care doctor		20%	29%
Hotline		19%	18%
Clergy/Faith leader (i.e., minister, pastor, priest, or rabbi)		9%	17%
Other		2%	1%
No one		11%	14%
Not sure		10%	18%
Decline to answer		2%	3%