



COMMUNITY HEALTH DATA BASE

An Information Service of Public Health Management Corporation

Data findings

THE EXPERIENCE OF STRESS AMONG RESIDENTS IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

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While the holidays bring joy and relaxation to some, others may find themselves dealing with more stress than usual. Pressure to pull off a perfect celebration, the demands of family gatherings, and the financial strain of gift-giving may cause more anxiety than delight. Symptoms of stress, including headaches, trouble sleeping, fatigue, constipation or diarrhea, and back pain, can be annoying, especially during the busy holiday season.

While the holidays last just a few weeks a year, the effects of stress may be longer lasting. Increasing evidence suggests that ongoing stress has negative effects on health. Some stress can be a benefit to individuals, allowing them to quickly react to a threatening situation or increase concentration and focus for an upcoming work deadline. In times of stress, the body's stress system releases hormones which interact with other body systems to increase a person's capacity to respond to a stressful situation.

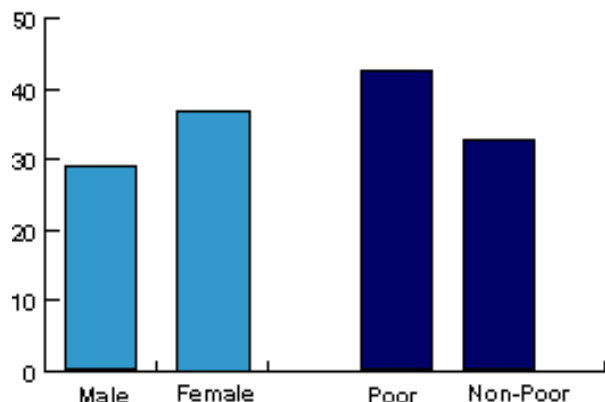
Over time, however, sustained exposure to these hormones can be harmful to the body's other systems. The National Institutes of Health report that ongoing stress may increase a person's risk for heart disease, immune disorders, digestive problems, reproductive health problems, and mental illness. Furthermore, the interaction between stress and health may go both ways. The challenges of managing chronic conditions or living with poor health may be a source of stress for some.

The 2006 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey provides a look at the experience of stress* among residents of Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA). In SEPA, one-third of all adults aged 18 and older have high levels of stress (33.3%); this percentage represents an estimated 962,600 adults in the region. An estimated 216,500 adults in the region have extreme stress.

Stress and Population Groups in Southeastern Pennsylvania

- Females in SEPA are more likely than males to have high levels of stress (37% versus 28.8%, respectively). More than 10% of women have

Figure 1: Percentage of Adults (18+) who have High Stress Levels by Sex and Poverty Status, SEPA, 2006.



Source: PHMC's Community Health Data Base 2006 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey



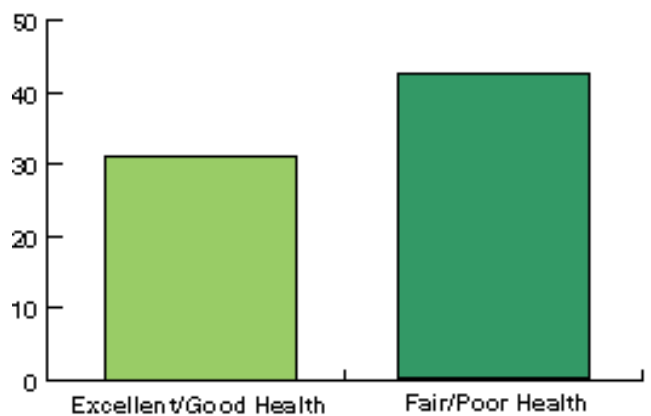
extreme stress compared to 4.4% of men.

- Latino residents of Southeastern Pennsylvania are more likely to have high levels of stress (37.1%) compared to their White (33.1%), Black (32.5%), and Asian (32%) counterparts. Latino and Black residents (12.4% and 11.7%, respectively) are notably more likely to have extreme stress than their White (5.7%) and Asian (5.1%) counterparts.
- Poor adults (42.4%) are more likely to have high stress than non-poor adults (32.3%) Almost 20% of poor residents (19.6%) have extreme stress compared to 6.1% of non-poor residents.
- Younger adults in SEPA are more likely to have high levels of stress than their older counterparts. More than 40% of adults aged 18 to 39 have high levels of stress (40.5%) compared to 35.4% of adults aged 40 to 59 and 19.1% of adults 60 or older.

Stress and Health in Southeastern Pennsylvania

- SEPA residents who have fair or poor health are more likely to have high levels of stress (42.4%) than residents who report having excellent or good health (31.1%). Almost 16% of adults who have fair or poor health have extreme stress compared to 5.5% of adults who have excellent or good health.
- Over 38% of adults with a chronic condition have high levels of stress compared to 31.6% of adults without a chronic condition. Among adults with a chronic condition, 11.3% have extreme stress while 6.1% of adults without a chronic condition have extreme stress.
- Among SEPA residents who have had a heart problem, 10.1% have extreme stress compared to 7.2% of residents who have not had a heart problem. Similar proportions exist among residents who have had diabetes: 11.1% of adults who have had diabetes have extreme stress compared to 7.1% of adults who have not had diabetes.
- Among adults who have a diagnosed mental health condition, 57.3% have high levels of stress compared to 29.4% of adults without a mental health condition. Nearly 19% of residents with a mental health condition have extreme stress compared to 5.7% of residents without a mental health condition.

Figure 2: Percentage of Adults (18+) who have High Stress Levels by Health Status, SEPA, 2006.



Source: PHMC's Community Health Data Base 2006
Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey

While much stress derives from situations outside of individual control, stress management can be a learned skill. The American Academy of Family Physicians suggests ways to reduce the harmful impact of stress and better cope with stressful situations, including adopting relaxation techniques, preparing for important events, thinking positively, resolving conflict with others, seeking the support of trusted friends or loved ones, eating and sleeping well, making time for exercise, and reaching out to a healthcare provider for help. The Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research offers methods to reduce stress during the holiday season, such as abiding by a holiday budget, seeking help for holiday celebrations, sticking to healthy habits, planning ahead, rethinking resolutions, and taking alone time.

For information regarding PHMC’s Community Health Data Base 2006 Household Health Survey, or to learn more about the experience of stress among residents of Southeastern Pennsylvania, contact Amanda Innes, at (267) 350-7695 or ainnes@phmc.org.

* Survey respondents were asked to rate their level of stress on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 signifying no stress and 10 signifying extreme stress. Responses of 7 or higher are categorized as high levels of stress.