



# COMMUNITY HEALTH DATA BASE

An Information Service of Public Health Management Corporation

*Data findings*

## THE EXPERIENCE OF STRESS AMONG RESIDENTS OF SOUTHEAST PENNSYLVANIA

December 2010

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. 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.

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.

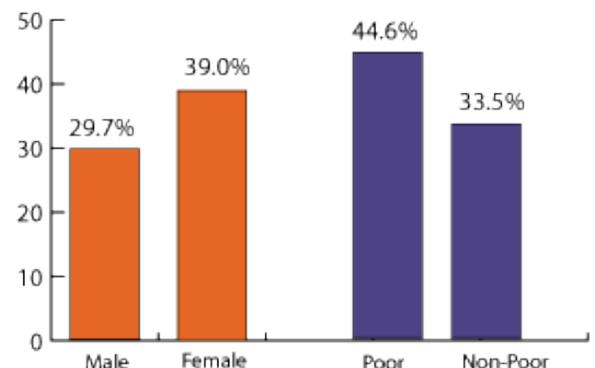
The 2008 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey provides a look at the experience of stress among residents of Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA).

- One-third of all adults aged 18 and older in SEPA have high levels of stress (34.7%) which corresponds to an estimated 1,011,500 adults in the region; nearly one in ten 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 (39% versus 29.7%, respectively). More than 15% of women have extreme stress compared to about 10% of men.
- Latino residents of Southeastern Pennsylvania are more likely to have high levels of stress (36.8%) compared to their White (34.5%), Black (34.6%), and Asian (25.7%) counterparts. Latino and Black residents are notably more likely to have extreme stress than their White and Asian counterparts.
- Poor adults (44.6%) are more likely to have high stress than non-poor adults (33.5%). More than one quarter (26.7%) of poor residents have extreme stress compared to about 10% of non-poor adults.

Figure 1: Percentage of Adults (18+) who have High Stress Levels by Sex and Poverty Status, SEPA, 2008.



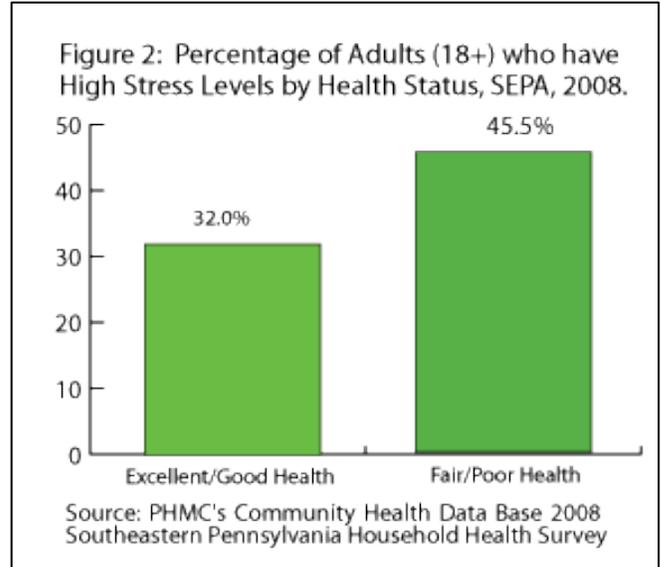
Source: PHMC's Community Health Data Base 2008 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey



- 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 (40.2%) compared to 36.3% of adults aged 50-59 and 25% 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 (45.5%) than residents who report having excellent or good health (32%).
- Over 40% of adults with a chronic condition (44.4%) have high levels of stress compared to 31.5% of adults without a chronic condition. One in five adults with a chronic health condition have extreme stress compared to 10% of adults without a chronic condition.
- Among adults who have a diagnosed mental health condition, 59.8% have high levels of stress compared to 30.9% of adults without a mental health condition. More than three in ten residents with a mental health condition have extreme stress compared to 10% of residents without a mental health condition.



### Conclusion

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 Francine Axler at [Francine@phmc.org](mailto:Francine@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.