



COMMUNITY HEALTH DATA BASE

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Data findings

HIGH STRESS LEVELS AMONG ADULTS IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

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As the holiday season is upon us, this time of the year can be filled with joy and excitement as we spend time with family, attend holiday parties or entertain guests, participate in religious observations, bake, shop, and decorate. However, the holiday season can also bring unwanted and increased demands on our time. Some of us may become stressed because of our inability to meet those demands.

Several studies have shown an increase in health conditions due to stress. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) report that stress can affect the body in many ways such as raising blood pressure, suppressing the immune system, and increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke. High levels of stress can also cause anxiety and depression.

Using the 2010 Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA) Household Health Survey, this article provides a closer look at perceptions of stress levels experienced within the past year among SEPA residents. The Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey is administered by telephone in more than 10,000 households in the SEPA region, including Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties. This survey is used to collect timely and important health information on SEPA residents.

In the SEPA region, more than one-third of adults ages 18 years and older (37.6%) have experienced high levels of stress within the past year*, representing approximately 1,112,700 adults. Some of the demographic, socioeconomic, and health differences are detailed below.

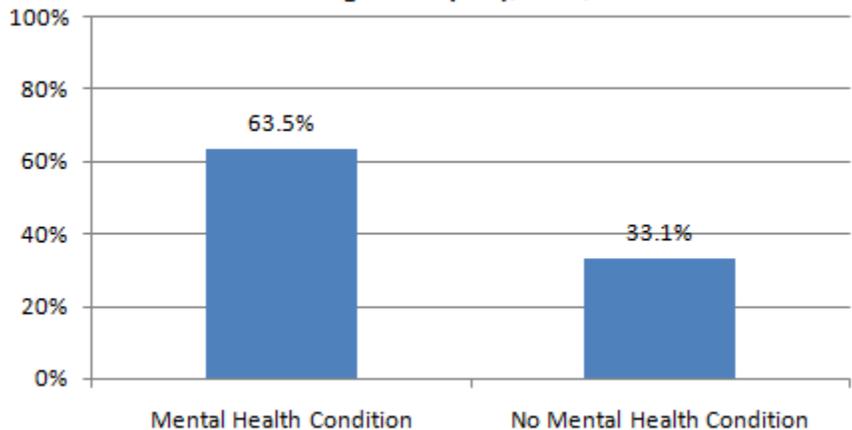
Stress and Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics in the Region

- Women (41.3%) are more likely than men (33.3%) to have experienced high levels of stress within the past year.
- More than four in 10 Latino adults (42.3%) have high levels of stress compared with 37.7% of Black adults, 37.3% of White adults, and 33.3% of Asian adults.
- Adults under 60 years of age are more likely to have experienced high levels of stress within the past year compared with adults ages 60 and over: 40.9% (ages 18-39 yrs), 46.2% (ages 40-49 yrs), 43.9% (ages 50-59 yrs), 24.7% (ages 60-74 yrs), and 17.1% (ages 75+ yrs).



- Nearly one-half of adults living below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (48.3%) have high stress levels than adults living at or above that poverty level (36.2%).
- Adults who have had difficulty paying their housing costs over the past year (49.1%) are more likely to have high stress levels than adults who have not had such housing cost difficulties (28.6%).

Figure 1. High Stress in Past Year by Mental Health Status among Adults (18+), SEPA, 2010

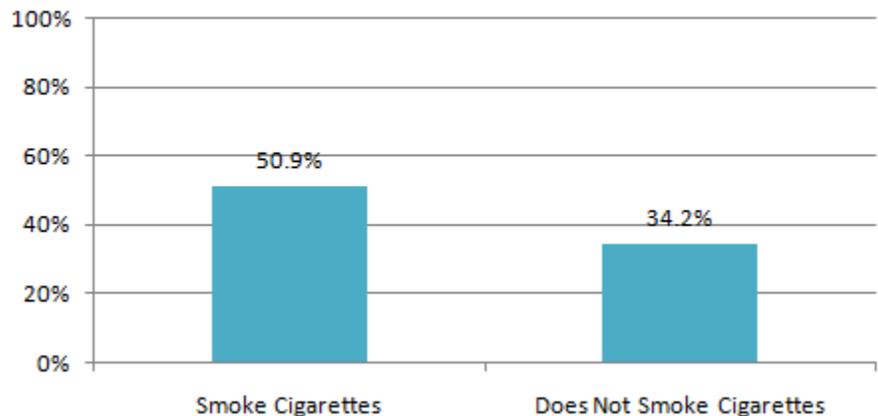


Source: PHMC's 2010 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey.

Stress and Health in the Region

- Adults with a diagnosed mental health condition (63.5%) are twice as likely as adults without a mental health condition (33.1%) to have high levels of stress (Figure 1).
- More than one-half of adults who are in fair or poor health (54.2%) have high stress levels compared with more than one-third of adults in excellent, very good, or good health (34.4%).
- A little over one-half of adults who smoke cigarettes (50.9%) have high stress levels compared with more than one-third of adults who do not smoke cigarettes (34.2%) (Figure 2).
- Over two-fifths of adults who exercise less than three days per week (40.4%) have high stress levels than 35.8% of adults who exercise three or more days per week.
- More than one-half of adults who once had an alcohol or drug problem (51.6%) have high stress levels compared with 36.3% of adults who did not.
- Adults who have a physical or emotional disability or condition (58.3%) are more likely to have high stress levels than adults who do not have such a disability or condition (34.3%).

Figure 2. High Stress in Past Year by Smoking Status among Adults (18+), SEPA, 2010



Source: PHMC's 2010 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey.

Conclusion

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend taking steps every day to live a safe and healthy life. A few holiday tips offered by the CDC to manage stress are: keep a check on over-commitment and over-spending; balance work, home, and play; get support from family and friends; get enough sleep; and get help or counseling, if needed.

For more information about these findings, please contact Nicole Dreisbach at nicoled@phmc.org.

*Note: 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 were categorized as high levels of stress for this analysis.

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