

Survey: Area Women Stress More Over Recession

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The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has released the findings of a survey on the impact of the recession on women's mental health. The survey compared results collected nationwide with those in Clinton County, and found that women here encounter greater levels of stress than seen in women nationally.

APA is a national medical specialty society whose more than 38,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders.

The national telephone survey of 1,000 women ages 30 to 54 was conducted by StrategyOne for APA. The survey was conducted between March 13 and 23 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. The Clinton County sample of 617 interviews has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Dan Page, vice president for national health media relations for Edelman, a public relations agency that serves APA, said APA wanted to build on its national survey by conducting a second survey focusing on a community that has been especially hard-hit by the recession, but which doesn't experience cyclic recessions, such as Detroit. APA chose Clinton County for that second survey, due to the job losses stemming from DHL's departure from the air park, and its impact on the local economy.

The APA conducted the survey as part of its "Healthy Minds. Healthy Lives." campaign, which is designed to improve understanding of mental illnesses, psychiatry and successful treatment options, as well as to reduce the stigma sometimes associated with seeking mental health care.

More than two-thirds of American women interviewed for the survey say that the nation's sagging economy has negatively affected their lives or the lives of their loved ones. The findings also indicate women may be neglecting their own needs while focusing on other concerns.

Women report sharp increases in stress, anxiety, frustration and other negative mental health indicators since the recession took hold last fall, with job loss pushing these increases even higher. And while more than three-quarters of these women report engaging in one or more positive coping strategies, most tend to prioritize family and other financial responsibilities ahead of their own needs - a tendency that can backfire despite the best of intentions.

"Women will take care of their families before making sure they have what they need to stay healthy. If at all possible, they should avoid spending cuts on activities and resources that can help maintain their own health," said APA President Nada L. Stotland, M.D., M.P.H. "For instance, keep up the gym membership, even if it means you can't give your kids the latest electronics. Take time to exercise and eat right. The bottom line is that taking care of your mental health is necessary to your ability to care for your family."

In this national telephone survey, women rank the ability to provide food, clothing and education for their families, relationships with family and friends, and personal finances such as mortgages and retirement savings, as more important than their own mental and physical health.

“Losing a job or taking a wage cut creates an ongoing source of anxiety for families. Women are particularly affected because they are often juggling the stress of their workplace demands with those of running a household and keeping their families healthy,” Dr. Stotland said. “While this survey focused on women, the answers we found can be indicative of the health and well-being of the entire family. The challenge for each of us is to find effective ways to cope with the stress caused by the economic crisis. Reaching out to a support network can help.”

In comparing the national and Clinton County surveys, APA found women here are under greater levels of stress. More than half of women in Clinton County say they are worried that they or a family member will lose a job in the near future, compared with 40 percent nationally. And nearly two-thirds of women in Clinton County say the economy has had “a negative impact” on their mental health, versus just over half of women polled nationwide. Moreover, when compared with women nationally, the women of Clinton County are much more likely to be experiencing greater levels of stress (45 percent for Clinton County vs. 33 percent nationally), frustration (38 percent vs. 27 percent), anxiety (34 percent vs. 24 percent), irritability (35 percent vs. 23 percent) and insomnia or oversleeping (29 percent vs. 20 percent).

More than one-third (40 percent) nationally and more than half in Clinton County (53 percent), cited worry about whether they or a significant other may lose a job in the near future.

Nearly a quarter of Clinton County women surveyed (24 percent) say someone in their household has lost a job in the past six months because of downsizing or employment cuts - this is 9 percentage points higher than the national average.

Pay cuts affect Clinton County women disproportionately, with 30 percent of women there saying they or a family member has had to take a wage cut in the past six months to keep their jobs, vs. 21 percent nationally.

Almost half of women nationally (48 percent), and even more in Clinton County (52 percent), believe that seeing a mental health professional could help them cope with their economic situation. More than 80 percent of women surveyed nationally and in Clinton County believe seeing a mental health professional for mental health concerns is a sign of strength. More than a third nationally (34 percent) and in Clinton County (37 percent) say they or a family member has received mental health services in the past.

Women are participating in more positive activities than they were six months ago: spending time with family and friends (29 percent nationally vs. 38 percent in Clinton County); praying or going to religious services (25 percent vs. 31 percent); watching television or going to the movies (25 percent vs. 32 percent); reading or listening to music (37 percent vs. 47 percent); exercising, playing sports or relaxing outdoors (21 percent vs. 27 percent); talking to family/friends about emotions or mental health (17 percent vs. 25 percent).

“Even if people are working, it’s emotionally draining to live with a constant fear of losing a job,” said Ohio Psychiatric Physicians Association President, Joseph Locala, M.D. “To help get through these uncertain

times, it's important to find positive ways to cope - whether it's spending time with friends and family, engaging in hobbies, exercising, or talking with a clergy member or mental health professional.”

Amid the increased stress, most women prioritize others' needs over their own mental health. Both nationally and in Clinton County, women rank mental health — such as effectively managing stress levels and achieving a balance among their life activities — as less important than relationships with family, friends and colleagues; family responsibilities, such as providing food, clothing and education; personal finances, such as the mortgage, rent or retirement savings.

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