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Chicago-area residents continue to report high levels of stress

Job stability worries, work stress on the rise for Chicago-area, APA survey finds

Chicago-area, Nov. 3, 2009 — More Chicago-area residents are stressed about work and job stability this year according to the American Psychological Association's (APA) Stress in America survey, while the number of Chicagoans reporting money or the economy as significant stressors in 2009 has dropped. More than 60 percent of city residents continue to report money, work and the economy are significant sources of stress — a cause of concern for psychologists who worry about the effects of long-term stress and how it can contribute to chronic health disorders

The survey released today reports that the number of Chicago-area residents who cited work as a significant cause of stress grew from 66 percent in 2008 to 72 percent in 2009 and those reporting job stability concerns increased from 42 percent in 2008 to 52 percent in 2009. Less than a third of employed Chicago-area residents (28 percent) said they typically feel tense or stressed out during the work day, compared to 35 percent in 2008. One-in-4 residents rated their average stress levels as an 8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale.

These high and long-lasting levels of stress can contribute to serious physical health problems. Diabetes, heart disease, obesity and high blood pressure are just a few of the diseases linked to chronic stress. In the APA survey, more than 50 percent of Chicago-area residents said they have been told by a health provider that they have a chronic health concern. Conditions reported by Chicagoans include overweight or obesity (23 percent), high cholesterol (24 percent) and high blood pressure (19 percent).

On a positive note, in 2009 fewer Chicagoans reported that their stress level increased over the past year (41 percent in 2009 vs. 50 percent in 2008). And fewer Chicago-area residents reported symptoms commonly associated with stress such as fatigue, irritability or anger, headaches and upset stomachs. In addition, more Chicago-area residents reported using healthier ways to manage their stress: walking or exercising and reading increased while fewer reported drinking alcohol or smoking to relieve stress.

“The good news for the region is that fewer people this year are reporting money, family responsibilities, and relationships, among other things, as significant stressors. But with nearly half of us still so stressed—that’s alarming,” said psychologist Dr. Nancy Molitor, the public education coordinator for the Illinois Psychological Association. “When stress is ignored or managed in unhealthy ways, it will most likely lead to further health problems. This is why it’s crucial for people to pay attention to their stress levels and take action.”

APA's annual survey reveals that nationally nearly a quarter (24 percent) of adults reported experiencing high levels of stress, and half (51 percent) reported moderate stress levels in 2009. Many Americans continued to report that they rely on sedentary activities and unhealthy behaviors to manage their stress (49 percent listen to music, 41 percent read and 36 percent watch television or movies).

Among Americans who received lifestyle change recommendations from a health care provider, few reported that their health care provider offered support to help them make lasting changes — only 46 percent were given an explanation for the lifestyle change recommendation; only 35 percent were

offered advice or shown techniques to help make changes; and only 5-10 percent were referred to another health care provider to support the adoption of lifestyle changes. In general, people cited a number of barriers in their efforts to make lasting lifestyle and behavior changes — lack of willpower (33 percent); not enough time (20 percent); and lack of confidence (14 percent). More than one in ten people cited stress as the barrier preventing them from making lifestyle and behavior changes (14 percent of adults reported they are too stressed to make these changes).

More than half (54 percent) of Chicagoans have been told by a health care provider that they have a chronic condition. And nearly half of Chicago-area residents (46 percent) reported they were prevented from following through with lifestyle change recommendations due to a lack of willpower (compared to one-third of the nation).

The Illinois Psychological Association offers these tips to help manage chronic stress:

- **Set limits.** List all of the projects and commitments that are making you feel overwhelmed. Identify those things that you absolutely must do in order to survive. Cut back on anything non-essential.
- **Tap into your support system.** Reach out to a close friend and/or relative. Let them know you are having a tough time and accept their support and guidance. There is no need to face challenging life circumstances alone.
- **Make one health-related commitment.** One small step like cutting back on your caffeine consumption can have a positive effect. Studies show that without caffeine, people report feeling more relaxed, sleeping better and having more energy. Regular aerobic exercise, such as taking a brisk walk can lessen your anxiety and reduce your stress.
- **Strive for a positive outlook.** Looking at situations more positively, seeing problems as opportunities, having realistic expectations, and refuting negative thoughts are all important aspects of staying positive and trying to minimize your stress.
- **Seek additional help.** If feelings of chronic stress persist, or you are experiencing hopelessness or trouble getting through your daily routine, seek consultation with a licensed mental health professional, such as a psychologist. Psychologists are trained to help you develop strategies to manage stress effectively and make behavioral changes to help improve your overall health. For additional information on managing stress, visit www.apahelpcenter.org.

Methodology

The 2009 *Stress in America* research was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Psychological Association between July 20, 2009 and August 4, 2009 among 1,568 adults aged 18+ who reside in the U.S. and an oversample of 208 adults aged 18+ who reside in Chicago-area. In the 2008 research, 231 Chicago-area residents were included in the oversample. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 150,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance

psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.

The Illinois Psychological Association (IPA) is the largest professional association in the State with approximately 1400 members. The purpose of the IPA is to advance psychology as a science and a profession. It promotes human welfare by the encouragement of psychology in all its branches; by the continual improvement of the qualifications of psychologists through high standards of ethics, conduct, education and achievement; and by the increase and dissemination of psychological knowledge through meetings, professional contacts, reports, papers, discussion and publications.

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