# Majorities of the Public Believe Several Mental Health Conditions Are More Common Among Children

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Majorities of the Public Believe Several Mental Health Conditions Are More Common Among Children and Adolescents Today than They Were10 Years Ago

ROCHESTER, N.Y. â€“ May 11, 2005 â€“ Majorities of U.S. adults believe that mental health conditions such as depression (71%), attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (63%), anxiety disorders (63%) and eating disorders (62%) are more common among children and teens today than they were 10 years ago. Nearly half (47%) believe that learning disabilities are more common and more than one-third (36%) believe autism is more common among children and teens today.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive? online survey of 2,102 U.S. adults conducted between April 26 and 28, 2005 for The Wall Street Journal Onlineâ€™s Health Industry Edition. While many believe these conditions are more prevalent today in young people, they are less clear about why this is. For example, the study shows:

- A majority (54%) of adults who think ADHD is more common today also believe the number of children and teens with this condition has increased because doctors are more likely to diagnose the condition. More than one in five (22%) believe this increase is primarily due to people being more likely to talk to their doctors while 19 percent believe it has to do with children being more likely to suffer from the condition.
- More than two in five (42%) adults who believe autism is more prevalent today believe the number with this condition has increased because doctors are more likely to diagnose the condition, compared to one-third (33%) who believe the increase is primarily due to children being more likely to suffer from the condition or 16 percent thinking it is because people are more likely to talk to their doctor.
- Forty-one percent (41%) of adults who think eating disorders are more common today think so because they believe children are more likely to suffer from the condition, compared to 26 percent who think it is because doctors are more likely to diagnose the condition and 23 percent who think it is because people are more likely to talk to their doctors.
- More than one-third (36%) of those who believe depression is more common today believe the number of children and teens with this condition has increased because doctors are more likely to diagnose depression. However one-quarter (25%) believes it is because children are more likely to suffer from the condition, and 31 percent think itâ€™s because people are more likely to talk to their doctors.

Many adults believe that prescription drugs used to treat many of these conditions are prescribed too often, while smaller percentages think they are not prescribed often enough or are prescribed as often as they should be. And, significant numbers responded that they "donâ€™t know" about the use of prescribed drugs for these conditions, particularly for learning disabilities, eating disorders and autism.

TABLE 1

PERCEIVED CHANGES IN PREVALENCE OF CONDITIONS

"Based on what you know or have heard, compared to ten years ago, do you think that the following types of health problems are more common or less

common among children and teenagers?"
Base: All Adults

More Common
Less Common
About the Same
Donâ€™t Know
Depression
%
71
2
20
7
Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (also known as ADHD)
%
63
4
25
8
Anxiety disorders (such as obsessive compulsive disorder, generalized, panic or separation anxiety)
%
63
3
23
11
Eating disorders (such as bulimia or anorexia)
%
62
6
25
8
Learning disabilities
%
47
5
38
9
Autism
%
36
7
36
21
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
TABLE 2
REASONS WHY CONDITIONS ARE MORE COMMON TODAY
"Do
you think the number of children and teenagers with each of these
medical conditions has increased primarily because they are more likely to suffer from the condition, because doctors are more likely to diagnose the condition, or because people are more likely to talk to their doctors about the condition?"
Base: Condition(s) More Common Today
Bases are those who say particular condition is more common

Children Are More Likely to Suffer from the Condition
Doctors Are More Likely to Diagnose the Condition
People Are More Likely to Talk to Their Doctors
Donâ€™t Know
Eating disorders (such as bulimia or anorexia) (n=1,304)
%
41
26
23
10
Autism (n=751)

%
33
42
16
9
Learning disabilities (n=989)
%
30
37
24
9
Anxiety disorders (such as obsessive compulsive disorder, generalized, panic or separation anxiety) (n=1,316)
%
24
37
32
7
Depression (n=1,482)
%
25
36
31
8
Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (also known as ADHD) (n=1,329)
%
19
54
22
5
TABLE 3
APPROPRIATE USE OF DRUG TREATMENT
"Based
on what you know or have heard, do you believe that prescription drugs
used to treat these conditions are prescribed too often, not often
enough or as often as they should be?"
Base: All Adults

Too Often
Not Often Enough
About Right
Donâ€™t Know
Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (also known as ADHD)
%
63
8
11
18
Depression
%
47
17
18
17
Anxiety disorders (such as obsessive compulsive disorder, generalized, panic or separation anxiety)
%
43
14
20
23
Learning disabilities
%
35
12
17

35
Eating disorders (such as bulimia or anorexia)
%
22
21
17
40
Autism
%
17
10
21
52
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp.

MethodologyThis poll was conducted online in the United States between April 26 and 28, 2005 among a nationwide cross section of 2,102 adults aged 18 and over. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondentsâ€™ propensity to be online.
In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Sampling error for sub-sample result of adults who think the following conditions are more common today than 10 years ago: depression (1,548), attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (1,373), anxiety disorders (1,384), eating disorders (1,315), learning disabilities (984) and autism (772) is higher and varies.
Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. This includes refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.
About the SurveyThe Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the award-winning Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/health.
About The Wall Street Journal OnlineThe Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; www.dowjones.com), offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top industry journalists. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web, with more than 689,000 subscribers world-wide. The Online Journal provides in-depth business news and financial information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with insight and analysis, including breaking business and technology news and analysis from around the world. It draws on the Dow Jones network of more than 1,500 reporters and editors -- the largest staff of business and financial journalists in the world. For the second consecutive year in 2003, the Online Journal received a WebAward for the "Best Newspaper Web Site" and was also cited by Yahoo! Internet Life magazine as the "Best Business News" site (2002 & 2001).
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