

## Newsletter June 2024

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**Here we explore some of the other symptoms or conditions** that persist in the American population in addition to those characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) discussed in the May newsletter.

**Economic consequences of the pandemic.** It appears largely unappreciated now, but the pandemic caused huge economic disruption. At first, people were not sure how the virus was spread, nor the likely consequences of infection, and for many people the only recourse was to stay at home and shelter in place. Many small businesses went under in consequence.

Soon after being elected, President Biden, in part in an attempt to counteract the worst economic effects of the pandemic, got congress to pass a 1.9 trillion COVID relief bill and a 1 trillion infrastructure bill. This huge injection of money, though clearly needed, was bound to cause inflation. **(The only alternative was a catastrophic recession.)** Inflation did occur, but luckily it appears that strong monetary action taken by the Fed has been effective at trending the inflation down without causing a crash. Unfortunately, the net effects of inflation remain, even as the rate becomes manageable.

**Depression and anxiety.** Prior to the pandemic, about 6 or 8 per cent of American adults reported feeling depressed or anxious, respectively (1). At the peak of the pandemic, the numbers rose sharply, as one might expect, to reach 30% and 36%, respectively. However, even when the pandemic was over, these numbers have remained high. Currently, over 17% of Americans remain anxious enough to be diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). This fraction is stable, and has remained at this level all this year. **This means that 9% of American adults, about 23 million people,**

**suffer from debilitating anxiety that has persisted and is solely a consequence of a pandemic that is now officially over.** Lehrer, et al., in the New York Times article, “How a Pandemic Malaise is Shaping American Politics” (March 24, 2024), suggest that confusion about the source of these symptoms is one cause of major political problems for President Biden.

**Loneliness or Isolation.** Feelings of loneliness among adult Americans were at a baseline of 27% in 2018 (2). This more than **doubled** to 56% in 2019, the first full year of the pandemic. This level remained high, over 44%, during the next two years of the pandemic. In early 2024, even after the pandemic was officially over, the number remained high, at 40%! This means that 13% of adult Americans remained lonely or isolated entirely due to changes in their lifestyle which had originally been necessitated by adaptation to the social needs of the pandemic, changes that unfortunately had remained in place even though the pandemic was over. Note that such behavior - maintaining a defense that is no longer actually needed – is an aspect of PTSD.

**In sum, we are facing a perfect triple impact of symptoms or conditions mostly residual from the pandemic, and all mutually reinforcing: Over 17% of American adults suffer from clinical levels of anxiety, combined with 40% feeling isolated, all of us also coping with the added burden of significant inflation.**

(1 Data from “Anxiety, Depression Rates Stay High as COVID Emergencies End,” Alyson Clary and Elizabeth Gawthrop, MPRnews.org, May 12, 2023; and National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, 2020-2024.

(2 This total is the sum of those who reported feeling lonely “once a week” plus those reporting that this occurred “daily.”