

Employment insecurity linked to anxiety and depression among young adults during COVID-19

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Young adults may be less susceptible to the serious adverse health effects of COVID-19, but they have not been absolved from economic and employment downturns—and there has been little research on how employment insecurity has affected them. New research now shows a strong association between employment insecurity and common symptoms of anxiety and depression among young adults in the U.S.

Among a sample of nearly 5,000 young American adults age 18 to 26, researchers found that since March 2020, [young adults](#) who lost their job or were part of a household that experienced [employment](#) loss were more likely than those with secure employment to experience four common symptoms of anxiety and depression. This was also true of young adults who expected an employment loss in the next four weeks.

"It is clear from this study that the COVID-19 pandemic has had wide ranging effects on young

adults," said Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., MSW, assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work and lead author on the study. "It is imperative that public policy address the economic downturns to ensure the employment security of young adults, which may subsequently address their mental [health](#)."

The study, published online in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, found that since the start of the pandemic on March 13th, nearly 60% of U.S. young adults experienced direct or household employment loss, while nearly 40% expected direct or household employment loss in the coming four weeks.

"Young adults are especially affected by employment loss since they are just starting their careers," said senior author Jason M. Nagata, MD, MSc, a specialist in adolescent and young adult medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. "Internships have been cancelled and employment offers have been rescinded during the pandemic."

The study also found that symptoms of anxiety and depression were common among the sample of young adults. In the seven days prior to the survey, 75% reported being nervous, anxious or on edge, 68% reported not being able to stop or control worrying, 67% reported having little interest or pleasure in doing things, and 64% reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless.

"Young adults experiencing depression or anxiety should seek professional help early on," said Dr. Nagata. "During the pandemic, there are more options to access telehealth and other [mental health resources](#) virtually."

The researchers argue that social workers and

[mental health professionals](#) should be screening for employment insecurity as the [pandemic](#) continues to ensure they are proving appropriate treatment and referrals to unemployment programs and resources.

"Policymakers need to consider the long-term scarring that may occur as a result of both employment losses and poor mental health," says Dr. Ganson. "We need to ensure that health insurance policies adequately cover [mental health](#) services for young adults."

More information: Kyle T. Ganson et al, Job Insecurity and Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression Among U.S. Young Adults During COVID-19, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2020).
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