

## KU Reacts to Worsening Mental Health Caused by Pandemic

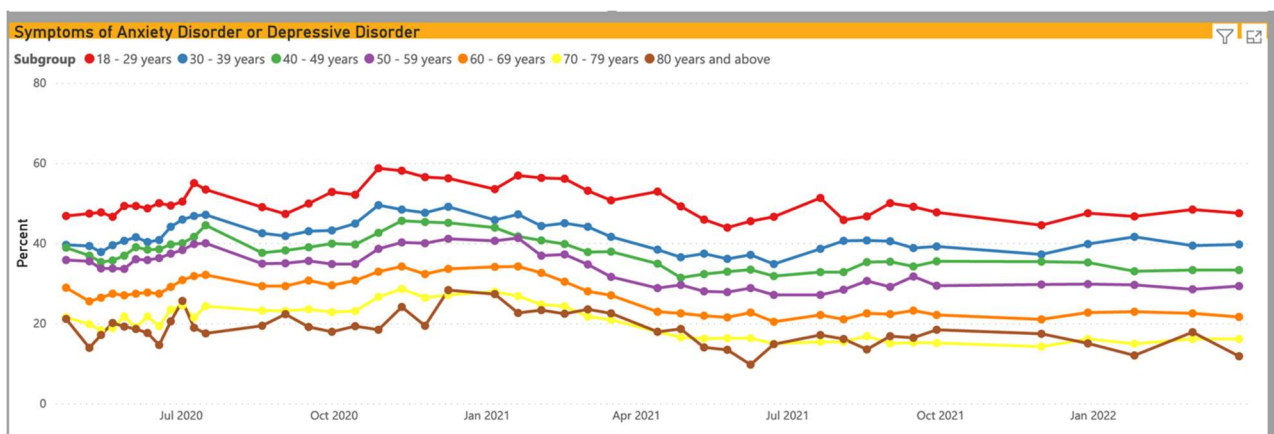
By IAN STRASMA

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LAWRENCE, Kan. — The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a less visible, but equally insidious, health crisis prevalent among young adults and college students. Psychological distress, though not new among students, has worsened due to the pandemic. At the University of Kansas, the Counseling and Psychological Services have been trying to keep up with increased demand while ensuring every person's physical safety.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have shown a spike in mental illness. This isn't only limited to college students – it is affecting everyone. [According to WHO](#), diagnoses of anxiety and depression have increased by 25% globally. But the WHO brief also says both young people and women are disproportionately suffering from mental illness, with young people specifically at a high risk of suicide and self-harm.

This data is corroborated by a CDC Survey that collected data on mental health from April 2020 to May 2022. [In the CDC's survey](#), there is a clear correlation between age and the percentage of individuals suffering from symptoms of anxiety and depression.



*This graph shows the prevalence of symptoms of anxiety and depression in 18-29 year-olds compared to other age groups in America (source: CDC)*

Joshua Gordon, the director of the National Institute of Mental Health, said in a [statement](#) that he believes that the pandemic's effects on mental health will outlive the pandemic itself.

At KU this trend is largely the same. "There has been an increase, as has been observed across the nation for all mental health services. The causes appear to be multiple, including uncertainty, grief, loss, economic stress, [and] life disruptions," said Michael Maestas, the director of the Counseling and Psychological Services at KU. "A notable trend we're seeing has been an increase in the number of students being affected by stress. Anxiety, depression, and eating concerns continue to be prevalent as was the case before the pandemic."

Junior Charles Roeder was able to seek help at the Counseling and Psychological Services before and during the pandemic, but his experience in the early stages of the pandemic illustrate how quickly services aiming to provide care for mental health issues had to adapt to the changing circumstances.

"Before the pandemic I had just started trying to get help to deal with stress and anxiety," said Roeder. "But I remember when lockdown started it just wasn't really possible to talk to someone at CAPS. The infrastructure just wasn't there yet."

In order to help accommodate students' needs, the Counseling and Psychological Services has started using Zoom and tele-health concurrently with in-person services to allow students to speak with counselors wherever they may be. "It also allows flexibility for students who may be experiencing symptoms of physical illness but well enough to receive services as well as another option for those who are appropriate for tele-health," said Maestas.

Another benefit is that students who don't live in the Lawrence area year-round, while still being in Kansas, will be able to access these remote services while at home. According to Maestas, the Counseling and Psychological Services has created these remote services as a permanent way for students to seek help.

But this might not be the best option for all students. “I think offering counseling services remotely is certainly a good thing, but it was just harder to connect with the person I was talking to over the internet compared to in-person,” said Roeder. “Maybe it is just me, but if I had to choose, I would probably just continue to go to CAPS in-person.”

The Center for Collegiate Mental Health’s findings says that in the short-term during the pandemic that colleges and universities need to become more proactive in their support of students and their mental health issues due to stress caused by the pandemic. A relevant example they provide is offering tele-health services to students. The recent development at the Counseling and Psychological Services shows the KU has dedicated time and effort to helping students, but since the changes are so recent time will only tell if students at KU will continue to find support from the university.

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**Sources:**

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KU Mental Health

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Mental health issues caused by stress from the pandemic have been plaguing young adults across the world. The University of Kansas aims to provide students with the support they need.

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Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in March 2020, mental health professionals have been cautioning that rates of mental illness and distress in young people has increased. Per a report from the C-D-C, as of April 2022 around 40 percent of Americans aged 18 to 29 suffer from symptoms of either anxiety or depression. Organizations dedicated to research and advocacy for mental health disorders, such as NIMH, have recommended that colleges and universities start focusing on providing students with support. At the University of Kansas, the Counseling and Psychological Services has begun to combat the drastic shift by offering remote services over Zoom to increase accessibility and ensure the physical safety of students. According to Michael Maestas, the director of CAPS, this new change aims to help the growing number of students who

seek help for issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders. These new remote services are planned to be offered permanently in the future, even after the pandemic has ended.