Depression Has Skyrocketed During the COVID-1~9 Pandemic, Study Says

Almost as soon as coronavirus lockdowns went into effect in March, discussion turned to . It’s well-documented that , wars and other mass traumas can lead to significant increases in population-wide psychological distress. Weeks or months of anxiety, fear, sadness and can take their toll, leading many experts to fear the US~ would face a mental health epidemic at the same time it fought a viral pandemic.

Now, published in JAMA Network Open offers one of the first nationally representative estimates of how severe that epidemic may be: Three times as many American~s~ met criteria for a depression diagnosis during the pandemic than before it, according to the paper.

A pre-pandemic survey of about5000~ American~ adults found that 85~ of them showed strong enough (including feeling down or hopeless; loss of interest in things that normally bring joy; low energy; ; or thinking about self-harm) to warrant a probable diagnosis. When researchers surveyed almost1~500~ American~ adults about their mental health from March to April of this year, that number rose to almost28~. Even more people—almost an additional 25%—showed milder signs of depression. Logically, people were more likely to suffer symptoms of depression during the pandemic if they experienced “COVID1~9stressors~,” including losing a job, the death of a loved one or financial distress. People who said they had lessthan5000~ in savings were also about50~ more likely to suffer from depression than wealthier people, the researchers found. In keeping with usual demographic trends, women were more likely to experience depression than men, and single people were more likely to experience depression than married couples.

But trends only go so far. Anyone—regardless of race, gender, relationship status or income—can experience mental health issues during something as traumatic as a pandemic. Small lifestyle tweaks can help. Getting enough sleep and go a long way, and that meditation and yoga can have a positive effect on psychological well-being. Social support is also crucial, even if it happens virtually.

It’s also easier than ever to seek mental health care if you need it. is surging in popularity during the pandemic, making it easier to see a clinician from home. If you need more immediate help, there are also hotlines that can provide support. If you or someone you know may be contemplating suicide, call the NationalSuicidePreventionLifeline~ at 1~-800-273-8255 or text HOME to 741~741~ to reach the CrisisTextLine~. In emergencies, call 91~1~, or seek care from a local hospital.