

Childcare professionals endured higher rates of depression, stress, and asthma during the pandemic, U.S. study reveals ^[1]

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Excerpts

U.S. childcare professionals had increased rates of potentially diagnosable depression, stress, and moderate to severe asthma following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a recent study by the Yale CARES team, an interdisciplinary group based at the Yale Child Study Center. In fact, rates of these health issues were greater among childcare professionals than among U.S. adults overall during the pandemic. Researchers also found disparities in chronic disease rates by race, ethnicity, and sex/gender.

The findings, which are part of a first-of-its kind large national study including 81,682 childcare providers, were published as a feature paper by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in their peer-reviewed journal, Preventing Chronic Disease (PCD). This is the largest occupational wellbeing study of early childhood care and education professionals ever conducted. Prior to this study, no national research had been published on the physical or mental health of childcare professionals during the pandemic.

According to researchers, 46% of childcare providers screened positive for potentially diagnosable levels of major depression two to three months into the pandemic, with 67% reporting moderate to high stress. Additionally, 14% reported moderate to severe asthma, which is an approximately 20% higher asthma rate compared to the general public.

“Early childhood care and education professionals have been experiencing severe stress throughout the pandemic,” said senior author Walter Gilliam, the Elizabeth Mears and House Jameson Professor in the Child Study Center and professor of psychology. “Their 2020 COVID-related death rate was among the highest for essential workers and about twice that of K-12 teachers who mostly stayed home during the beginning of the pandemic. Massive job loss and pay insecurity were major drivers of mental health decline in this essential workforce.”

These findings are highly concerning, both in terms of the wellbeing of childcare professionals and their ability to provide consistent and appropriate care to the young children they serve.

- Jad Elharake

Added Yale’s Jad Elharake, lead author of the study: “These findings are highly concerning, both in terms of the wellbeing of childcare professionals and their ability to provide consistent and appropriate care to the young children they serve.”

Childcare professionals are disproportionately women of color, Gilliam said, and “findings from our studies have shown that a large proportion experienced racialized aggression, and that too was a major driver of mental health deterioration. More recent data suggest that as of a year ago, the 46% depression rate rose to a staggering 56%.”

The findings suggest an urgent need to provide more support for U.S. childcare providers, Gilliam said. “Efforts should be directed toward developing effective and scalable interventions for improving the physical and mental health of childcare professionals and addressing stressors that undermine their well-being, both for their sake and for the young children in their care,” he added.

Yale CARES consists of an interdisciplinary and cross-departmental research team studying the health, mental health, and wellbeing of young children and adults in early care and education settings. The team was created in May 2020 in response to pressing needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The team conducts research in partnership with early educators across the United States. Studies focus on COVID-19 transmission in childcare programs, vaccination rates and hesitancy in early educators, effective methods for mitigating COVID-19 transmission, health and mental health of children and adults in early childhood settings, risk factors for severe COVID-19 outcomes, and others.

Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: workforce ^[4]

wellbeing ^[5]

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