

HAVE WE SUFFERED FROM THE PANDEMIC AS IT HAS EXTENDED?

BY AGGIE JORDAN

“Our fate is contingent upon which element— that of hope or that of fear— emerges triumphant.”

~ Jon Meacham, *The Soul of America*

In the September issue of *The View*, we reported on the ways people were affected by the first three months of the pandemic. Anxiety was high, along with the fear of getting COVID-19, and relationships caused frustration. Survey respondents, both those employed and those retired, seemed to adapt with creativity and attention to long-delayed projects. They were satisfied with their financial situations and, in general, they found ways to cope.

We have now been living with the COVID-19 pandemic for over nine months. We have had a seismic shift in our world with businesses being shut down, places of worship unable to offer solace, and attendance at live concerts or sports events no longer possible. We have had to shrink our own world to accommodate this shift.

What effect has this shrinking of our individual world had on each of us? What damage has it done to our lives?

The Survey Process

We sent 100 follow-up surveys to original respondents and 52 people replied. As with the previous survey, we were able to group responses into those who were employed,

WORKERS (18), and those not working, RETIRED (32). The results are from about one-third of the original group, but the responses are especially meaningful.

Ten items specifically focused on the most significant responses in our first survey: anxiety; fear of getting COVID-19; relationships with a partner, children, and friends; physical and mental health; the ability to focus on primary tasks; financial security; and boredom. We asked each respondent to answer on a sliding scale of 0 – 10 with 0 being the most negative, 0 being the most positive, and 5 being the same.



Results of the Survey

Anxiety, Fear, and the Ability to Focus on Primary Tasks

- The fear of contracting COVID-19 and the anxiety level of the respondents was strong during the first four months of the pandemic. In the latter three months, 56% of the WORKERS

and 50% of those RETIRED noted that their fear of catching the virus had decreased. But for the remaining half, this fear remained the same or got worse.

- Over 75% of both populations agreed that the amount of anxiety they experienced in the last three months was the same or got worse.
- The ability of the WORKERS to focus on their primary tasks improved for 50% of them, while 60% in the RETIRED group found that, for them, it was the same or worse for them.

Relationships

- In the original survey ending in June, respondents were considerably frustrated by their isolation from their friends and family. In the latter three months, relationships with friends got substantially better for WORKERS (61%) in contrast to those RETIRED (46%). So 54% of the RETIRED felt that relationships with friends did not improve or got worse.
- With their children (for those who had children), the relationships grew much to very much better. In the previous survey, RETIRED folks were much more frustrated with their relationship with their children. But, by the end of September, the RETIRED (76%) indicated the relationship with their children had improved substantially. WORKERS (56%)

indicated their relationship with their children had improved, but this improvement was far less than for the RETIRED group.

- For WORKERS, 100% indicated their relationships had improved. This is somewhat surprising because, for the younger WORKERS who had school-age children who were at home because of school closures, they had the balancing act of working at home, home schooling, or providing care for their children at home if they were working outside the home.
- Both groups of respondents said their relationship with their partner (significant other) had greatly improved. Of the RETIRED, 81% were very positive and 63% of WORKERS agreed.

Happiness and Boredom

The respondents were asked, “How happy are you today, compared to the early days of the pandemic?”

- A very large percentage of the WORKERS (67%) indicated they were much to very much happier than in the early days of the pandemic. This was not the case with the RETIRED population in this survey. Only 48% indicated they were much happier, while 34% said there was no change from the earlier period.
- Was boredom part of the reason for this result? Perhaps – 53% of those RETIRED said their boredom remained the same or was worse, while 68% of the WORKERS marked that they were very busy. Were the latter disregarding the shelter-in-place order? Certainly, by the end of September, more people under



the age of 60 were contracting the virus. Was it because those RETIRED saw no break in their isolation from their friends?

Physical and Mental Health

- A substantial difference existed between the two groups when asked about their physical health. Of the WORKERS 61% felt their physical health got better, while only 41% of the RETIRED agreed. This may be explained by the age difference of the two groups, since, as we get older, our health deteriorates.
- When asked about their mental health, 52% of the RETIRED indicated it was the same or worse while 44% of the WORKERS felt their mental health had slipped.

Was there anything in the study that could enlighten us about the deterioration of the RETIRED respondents' physical and mental health? Is it possible that the RETIRED, those over 60 years of age, are more vulnerable physically and mentally to the stress that the pandemic caused?

Summary and Conclusions

Approximately half the RETIRED population seemed to have been able to adapt to even a lengthy pandemic with all of its restraints. For the remaining half of the RETIRED folks, life has not gotten much better in the extended period. Anxiety levels remained high for both populations. As the number of months of isolation got worse, the stress became stronger. We know that stress greatly affects physical and mental well-being. For many it was difficult to keep a stiff upper lip and a gracious acceptance of what is reality.

Perhaps we can be aware of the effects on our neighbors and friends and find some ways to lift the burden on us all while keeping safe. Phone calls can help. For those comfortable with Zoom and similar technology, we can create more interaction.

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