

# Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health & Daily Life of Adults with Behavioral Health Disorders

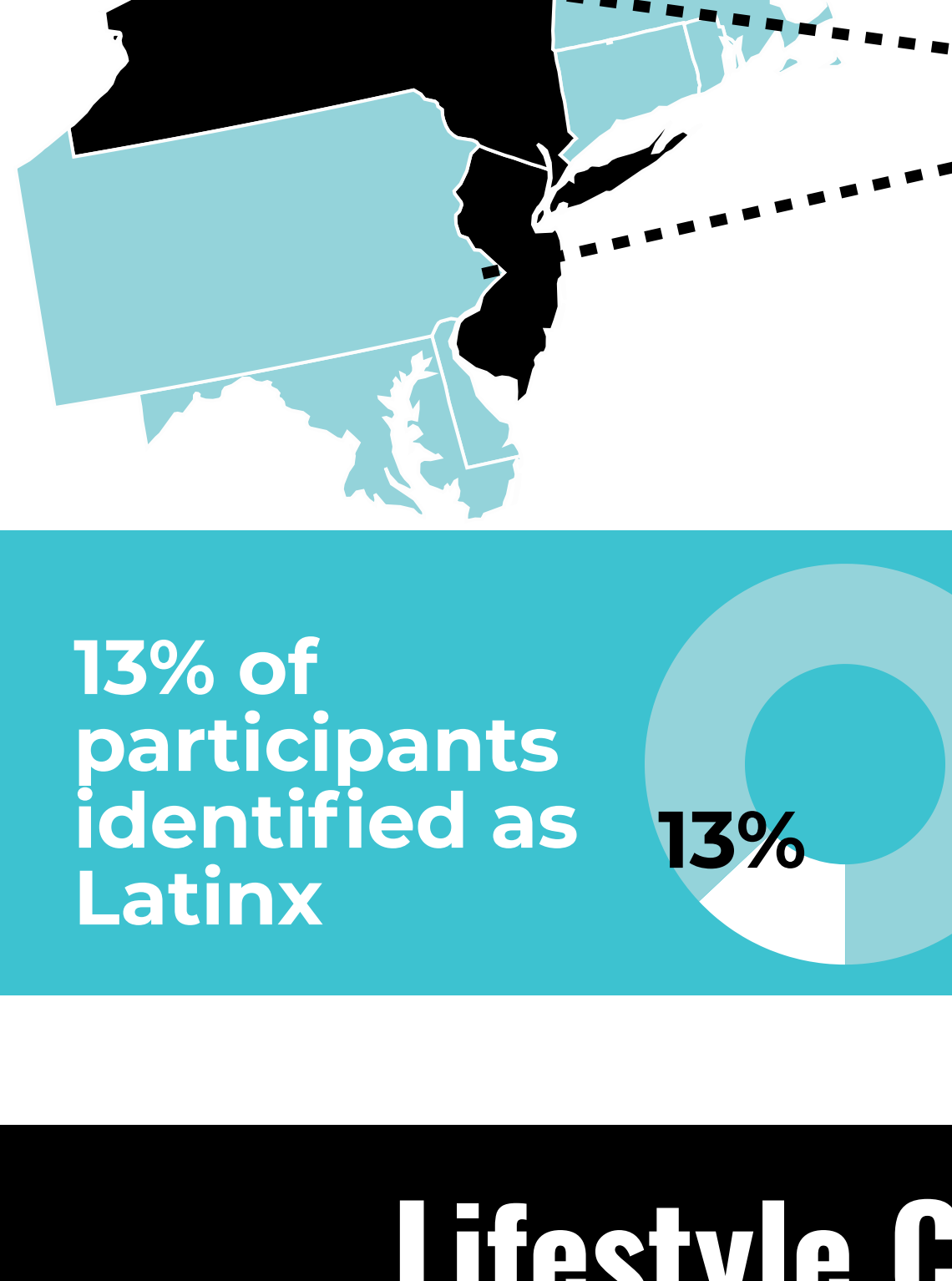
The prevalence of anxiety and depression increased more than threefold in the U.S. during COVID-19 compared to prior to the pandemic. Symptoms disproportionately affected young adults, individuals who are Latinx and Black/African American, health care workers, and unpaid caregivers.



In this study, a **mixed methods needs assessment** was conducted to better understand changes in the lives of adults with mental health and substance use disorders since the pandemic onset.

## Respondent Demographics

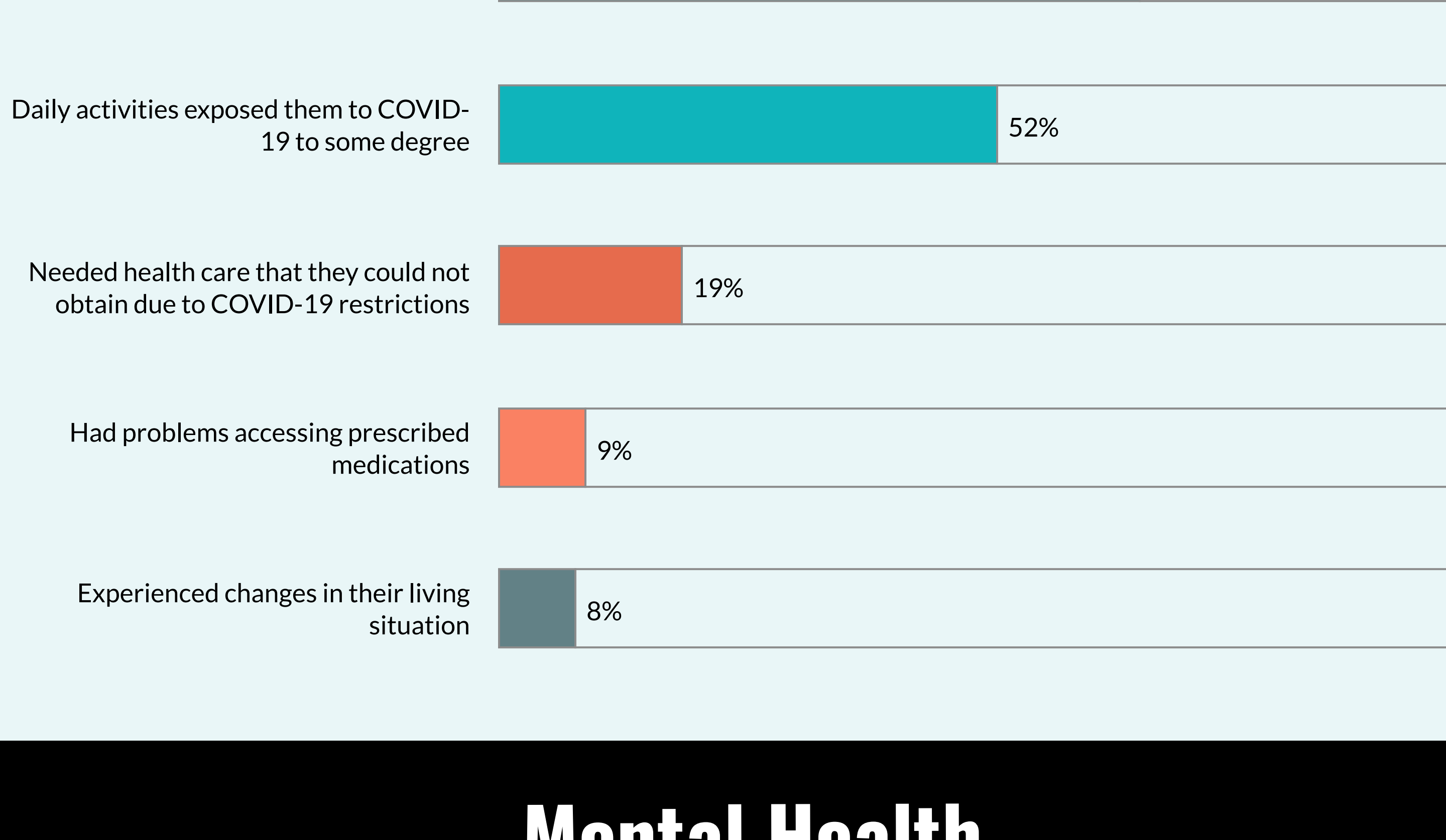
Survey completers (N=272) reported current behavioral health disorders. Their median age was 50 years, ranging from 21 to 80. 57% of the sample identified as female.



Participants resided in New Jersey (70%) and New York State (30%).

## Lifestyle Changes Due to COVID

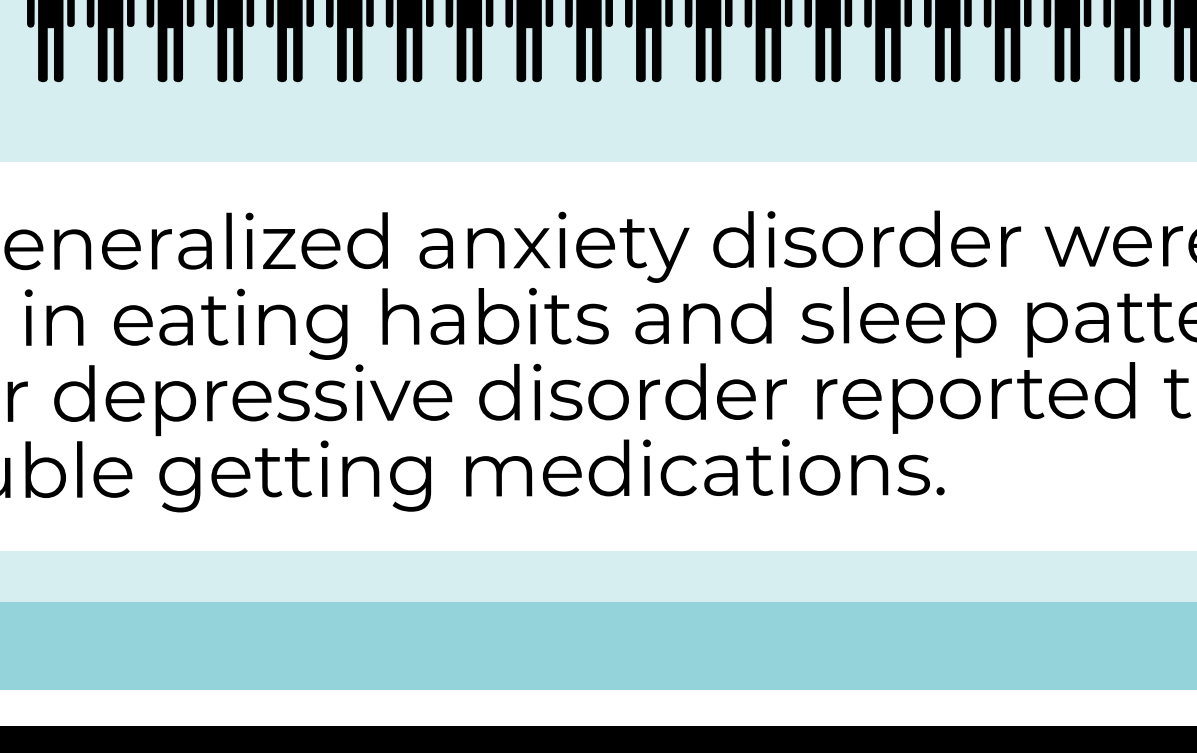
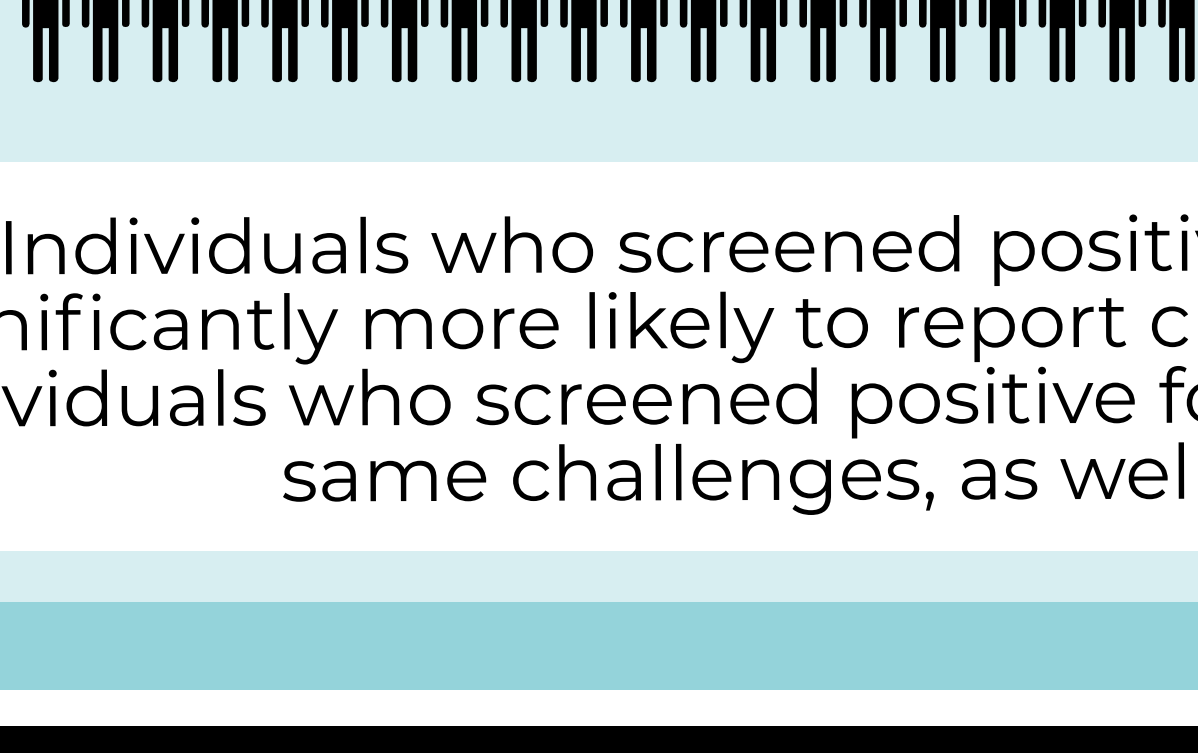
Respondents reported considerable disruptions in their daily routines and activities.



## Mental Health

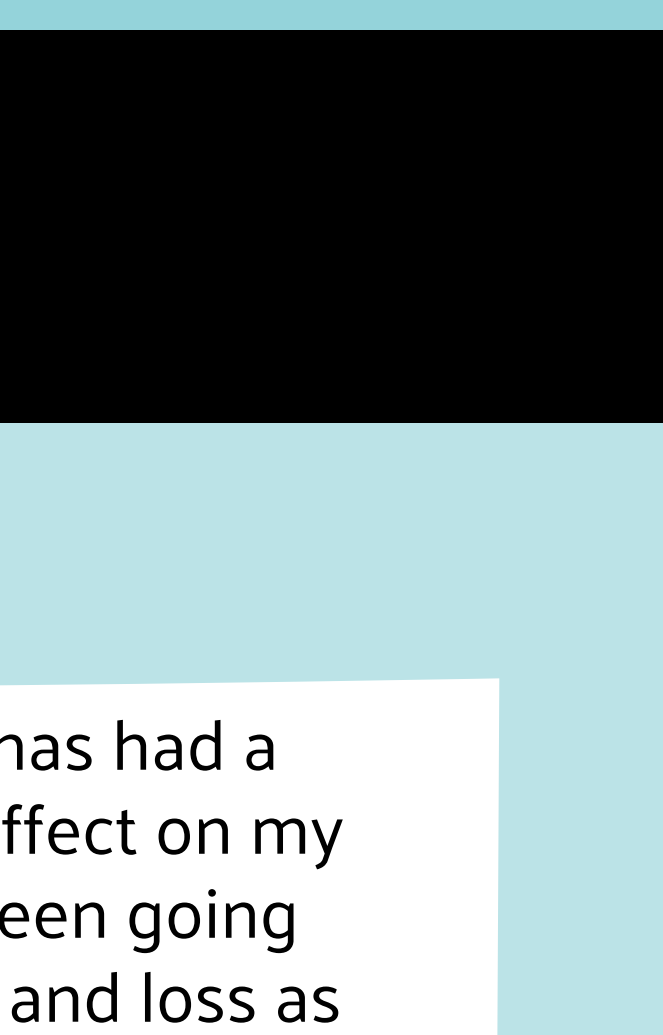
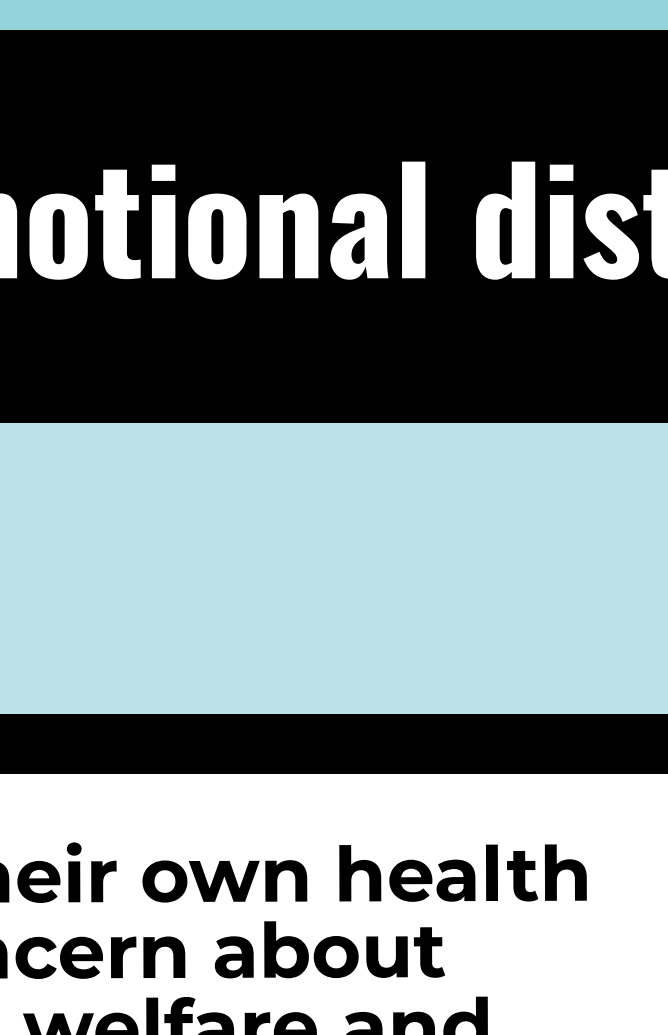
35.1% of study participants screened positive for **generalized anxiety disorder**

29.6% of study participants screened positive for **major depressive disorder**



Individuals who screened positive for generalized anxiety disorder were significantly more likely to report changes in eating habits and sleep patterns. Individuals who screened positive for major depressive disorder reported these same challenges, as well as trouble getting medications.

Survey respondents were asked to describe how their lives had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their responses revealed four major themes:



## Sources of emotional distress

**Threat to their own health and concern about relatives' welfare and potential mortality**

"COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on my life. I have been going through grief and loss as well as fear and anxiety because I have many friends and some family that [tested] positive [for COVID]. I have been worried about my wife because she is a[n] essential worker."

"Incredibly stressful working [from home] with 4 children as a single Mom. Had to get a [prescription] for anxiety. I am overwhelmed most of the time. Work was my break from kids; now we are all together all day every day."

**Financial worries, children being home, and health worries**

## Social disconnection and loneliness

"I miss my family, miss going to Church. I miss seeing my recovery family [at work]. I can no longer facilitate groups and I truly miss seeing and speaking with the clients."

**Physical distancing and lockdown affected people both socially and emotionally**

## Disruption of daily routines

**Respondents described many ways that their sleep was disrupted, eating habits changed, and work routines altered, causing stress and emotional discomfort**

"Every day is more stressful because my routine and the routine of everyone around me has been disrupted... I enjoy being home, however, there's a difference between choosing to stay home and being forced to stay home."

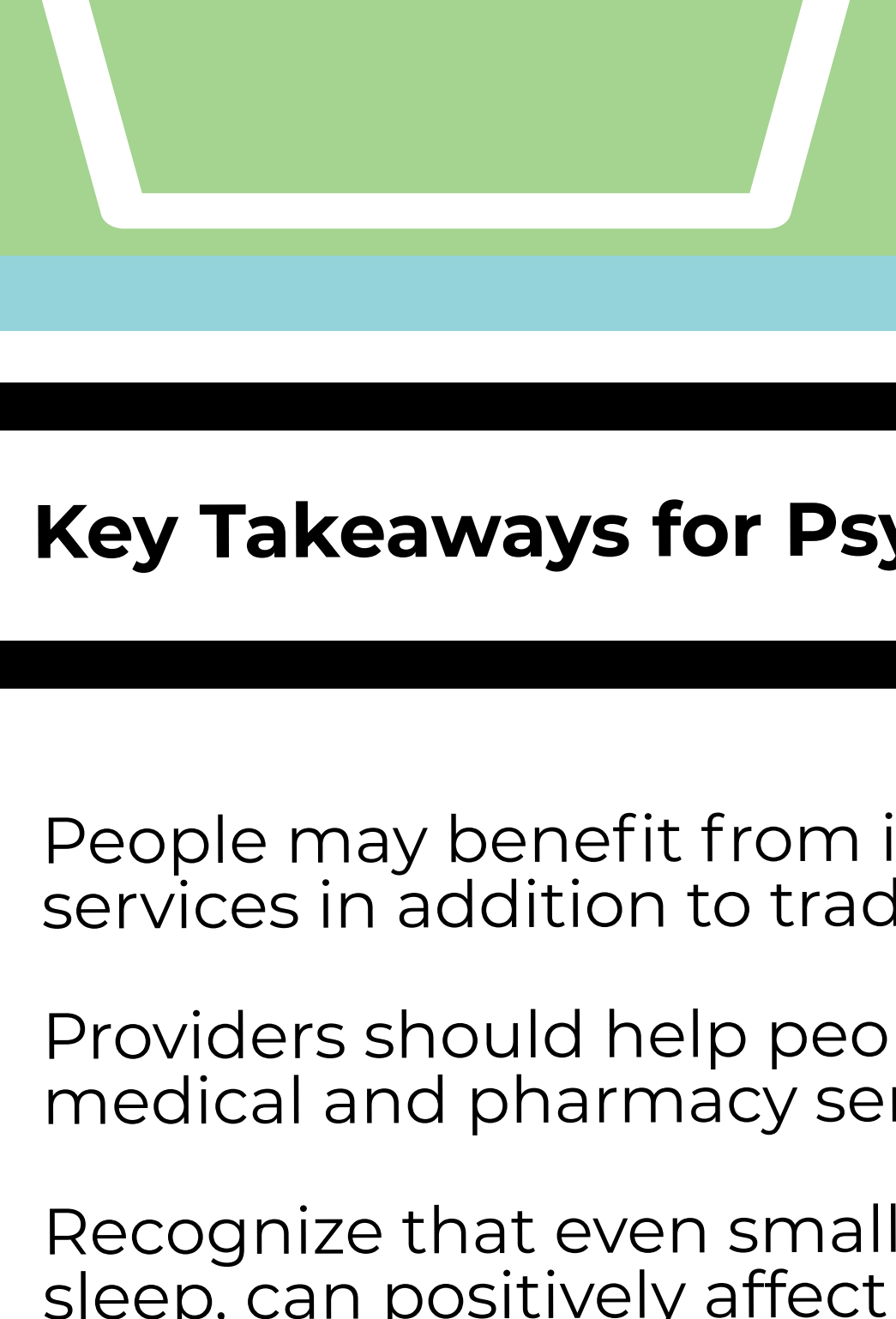
## Discovering resilience

**Some respondents described feeling resilient in the face of worldwide adversity. Others described ways their lives had improved during the pandemic.**

"I have increased my levels of daily journaling & meditation, and ... thought of innovative ways to cut back on things that are not priority or essential which has helped me in the financial area."

"I was able to tap into my strengths and use mindfulness skills to be present and provide support to my family and myself, while still be effective at work."

"As someone riddled with great anxiety over the years, especially over my identity, I have found this time to be a good time to live more authentically, as I don't worry as much what others will think, considering the bigger world concerns at hand."



## Key Takeaways for Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioners

- People may benefit from increased access to peer support and wellness services in addition to traditional mental health services.
- Providers should help people develop strategies to maintain access to medical and pharmacy services, including when physical distancing.
- Recognize that even small changes in daily habits, such as improved sleep, can positively affect people's mental health.
- Support people in focusing on strengths and resources in addition to any obstacles they have faced during the pandemic.
- The pandemic is likely to have a continuing impact on the social determinants of health and mental health.

## SOURCE:

Jonikas, J.A., Cook, J.A., Swarbrick, M., Nemec, P., Steigman, P.J., Boss, K.A., & Brice, G.H. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and daily life of adults with behavioral health disorders. Translational Behavioral Medicine, [ibab013/https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/obab013](https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/obab013).

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