



AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

The Effectiveness of and Need for Professional Counseling Services

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THE NEED FOR COUNSELING SERVICES

- Mental disorders are common in the United States and internationally. An estimated 26.2 percent of Americans ages 18 and older — about one in four adults — suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. (1)
- An estimated 28 to 30 percent of the adult U.S. population will suffer from a mental or substance use disorder during the course of a year. In any given year, about five to seven percent of adults have a serious mental illness. (2)
- In 2004, there were an estimated 21.4 million adults aged 18 or older with serious psychological distress; less than half received treatment. (3)
- Major Depressive Disorder is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. for ages 15-44. (4) In the United States, 70 percent of people with severe disabilities are unemployed. (5) People with mental illnesses have one of the lowest rates of employment of any group with disabilities - only about 1 in 3 is employed. (6)
- Mental health and substance abuse spending dropped from 7.2 percent of total private insurance spending in 1992 to 5.1 percent in 1999. (7)
- A recent study found that roughly one in five service members surveyed 3-12 months post-deployment to Iraq met the screening criteria for PTSD, depression, or anxiety. (8)
- Today, there are over 54 million Americans with disabilities, a full 20 percent of the U.S. population. Almost half of these individuals have a severe disability, affecting their ability to see, hear, walk, or perform other basic functions of life. (9)
- According to a recent Harris Survey, conducted by the National Organization of Disability, 72 percent of Americans with disabilities want to work. (9)
- Total national expenditures for the treatment of MHA disorders were \$104 billion in 2001, up from \$60 billion in 1991, an average annual growth of 5.6 percent. This compared with all health care spending annual growth of 6.5 percent. As a result, MHA spending was down to 7.6 percent of the \$1,373 billion spent on all health services in 2001, compared with 8.2 percent in 1991. (10)
- 43 percent of young adults faced one of four serious labor market problems in March 2001, including: unemployment; part-time employment for economic reasons; joblessness not captured in the official unemployment count because the individual had stopped looking for work; and inadequate weekly earnings. (11)
- Only one student in three from a low-income family goes to college compared to four out of five students from upper-income families. Average inflation-adjusted tuition for post-secondary education doubled from 1981 to 1996. (12)

- Americans with disabilities have a lower level of educational attainment than those without disabilities. One out of five adults with disabilities has not graduated from high school, compared to less than one of ten adults without disabilities. National graduation rates for students who receive special education and related services have stagnated at 27% for the past three years, while rates are 75% for students who do not rely on special education. (9)
- Americans with disabilities are poorer and more likely to be unemployed than those without disabilities. In 1997, over 33% of adults with disabilities lived in a household with an annual income less than \$15,000, compared to only 12 percent of those without disabilities. Unemployment rates for working-age adults with disabilities have hovered at the 70% level for at least the past 12 years, while rates are significantly lower for working-age adults without disabilities. (9)
- As of September 1999, 87 percent of the 1669 designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSAs) in the United States were located in non-metropolitan areas. (13)
- Residents of metropolitan areas are 1.5 times more likely to receive mental health treatment than are those living in rural areas with a population of 2,500 residents or less. (14)
- In 2005, the number of persons aged 12 or older needing treatment for an illicit drug use problem was 7.6 million (3.1 percent of the total population). Of these, 1.3 million (0.5 percent of the total population and 17.0 percent of the people who needed treatment) received treatment at a specialty facility for an illicit drug use problem in the past year. Thus, there were 6.3 million persons (2.6 percent of the total population) who needed treatment but did not receive treatment at a specialty facility for an illicit drug use problem in 2005. (15)
- In January 2002, data from a survey of over 1500 employers showed 73% experienced very or somewhat severe conditions when trying to hire qualified workers, and 70% said that the workers had poor, wrong or no skills to meet the businesses' needs. (16)
- Employment growth in occupations requiring a vocational associate's degree is projected to be higher (30%) than overall employment growth (14%) through 2008. (17)
- With the retirement of the baby boomers, projections are that the nation will have a shortage of perhaps 12 million qualified workers in the next decade. (18)
- If the trends of the last decade continue, 80% of the jobs in the fastest growing employment sectors will require some postsecondary education or certification. (18)
- The funding available to the Public VR is adequate to meet the needs of only one in 20 individuals with disabilities who could benefit from services. (19)

Children

- A national survey of high-achieving high school students indicated that more than 50% report violence in their school, 29% have considered committing suicide, 81% report that it is easy to get alcohol, 77% say alcohol is very common at parties, 25% have engaged in sexual intercourse, and 11% have tried marijuana. More than 30% of these high-achieving students say their home life is less than "happy and close" most of the time. (20)
- In 2003, 5 percent of children ages 4–17 were reported by a parent to have definite or severe difficulties with emotions, concentration, behavior, or being able to get along with other people. Sixty-five percent of the parents of these children reported contacting a mental health professional or general doctor and/or that the child received special education for these difficulties. (21) In any given year, about 5% to 7% of adults have a serious mental illness,

according to several nationally representative studies. A similar percentage of children - about 5% to 9% - have a serious emotional disturbance. These figures mean that millions of adults and children are disabled by mental illnesses every year. (6)

- It is estimated that about 75% of children with emotional and behavioral disorders do not receive specialty mental health services. (22)
- Each year, more than 1 million youth come in contact with the juvenile justice system and more than 100,000 youths are placed in some type of correctional facility. An astounding 80% of children entering the juvenile justice system have mental disorders. Many juvenile detention facilities are not equipped to treat them. (23)
- An estimated 3 million youths were at risk for suicide in 2000. Teens who reported using alcohol or illicit substances were more likely to be at risk for suicide. However, only 36 percent of youths at risk for suicide received any kind of mental health treatment over the past year. (24)
- In 2005, there were 3.4 million youths aged 12 to 17 years (13.7 percent of the population aged 12 to 17 years old) who had at least one major depressive episode (MDE) in their lifetime and 2.2 million youths (8.8 percent) who had MDE during the past year. The occurrence of MDE in the past year among youths aged 12 to 17 was associated with a higher prevalence of illicit drug or alcohol dependence or abuse (19.8 percent). (25)
- In the United States today, one in 10 children and adolescents suffers from mental illness severe enough to result in significant functional impairment. Children and adolescents with mental disorders are at much greater risk for dropping out of school and suffering long-term impairments. Recent evidence compiled by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that by the year 2020, childhood neuropsychiatric disorders will rise by over 50 percent internationally to become one of the five most common causes of morbidity, mortality, and disability among children. (26)

Seniors

- Older Americans are disproportionately likely to die by suicide. Comprising only 13 percent of the U.S. population, individuals age 65 and older accounted for 18 percent of all suicide deaths in 2000. Among the highest rates (when categorized by gender and race) were white men age 85 and older: 59 deaths per 100,000 persons in 2000, more than five times the national U.S. rate of 10.6 per 100,000. (27) In 2001, 5,393 Americans over age 65 committed suicide. Of those, 85% (n=4,589) were men and 15% (n=804) were women (CDC 2004). (28) Of the nearly 35 million Americans age 65 and older, an estimated 2 million have a depressive illness (major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, or bipolar disorder) and another 5 million may have “subsyndromal depression,” or depressive symptoms that fall short of meeting full diagnostic criteria for a disorder. (29)
- Only one-third of seniors who live in the community who need mental health services actually receive them. Less than three percent receive outpatient mental health treatment by specialty mental health providers. (18) The National Council on Disability estimates that very few of the 15-25% of older adults with a mental illness receive treatment. (30)
- Less than 3% of older Americans report seeing mental health professionals for treatment, the smallest percentage of any age group. (31)
- Seven million people age 65 and older in the United States (20% of the older adult population) have a mental illness, and that number is expected to double to 15 million in the next three decades. (32)

- The suicide rate among elderly, white, males, 85 and older, is more than 5 times the rate of the general population. (33) Despite representing only 13% of the population, seniors account for 20% of all suicide deaths. (34)
- Of the elderly who commit suicide, more than 75% percent had visited a primary care physician within the month before their suicide. (33)
- Abuse of alcohol and drugs affects up to 8 million adults aged 60 or older. (35)
- Medicare spending on all mental health services in 2001 was \$7.2 billion, representing 3 percent of all Medicare spending (\$242 billion). In contrast, mental health as a proportion of all health care expenditures accounted for 12 percent of Medicaid funds and 4 percent of spending by private insurance in 2001. (36)
- The current number of health care practitioners, including physicians, who have training in geriatrics is inadequate. As the population ages, the number of older Americans experiencing mental problems will almost certainly increase. Since geriatric specialists are already in short supply, these demographic trends portend an intensifying shortage in the future. There must be a substantial public and private sector investment in geriatric education and training, with attention given to the importance of geriatric mental health needs. (37)

THE COSTS OF LACK OF ACCESS TO NEEDED SERVICES

- Mental illness causes more days of work loss and work impairment than many other chronic conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and arthritis. Approximately 217 million days of work are lost annually due to productivity decline related to mental illness and substance abuse disorders, costing United States employers \$17 billion each year. In total, estimates of the indirect costs associated with mental illness and substance abuse disorders range from a low of \$79 billion to a high of \$105 billion per year (both based on 1990 dollars). (38)
- Between 1992 and 2002 the overall economic cost of drug abuse to society increased at a rate of 5.9 percent annually. By 2002 the economic cost of drug abuse was \$180.8 billion. (39)
- According to the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, the combined costs of disability to the government reach nearly \$500 billion per year: \$72 billion in cash benefits; \$110 billion in Medicaid; and \$300 billion in other direct costs. Over \$300 billion could be saved each year if one million people with a disability returned to gainful employment: \$21.2 billion increase in earned income; \$1.2 billion decrease in means-tested cash income; \$1.8 billion decrease in social security expenditures; and \$286 million decrease in food stamp costs. (40)
- Prisons, juvenile detention facilities, nursing homes, and homeless shelters have become the largest providers of mental health services, often at a much higher cost to taxpayers than modest, preventive services and supports. Without adequate treatment, most individuals and families with mental illness have difficulty attaining economic self-sufficiency and become more dependent on welfare payments and expensive crisis-driven services. (30)
- Substance abuse, including smoking, illegal drugs, and alcohol, costs the United States more than \$484 billion per year. Illicit drug use alone costs the nation \$161 billion a year. (41) Each year approximately 40 million debilitating illnesses or injuries occur among Americans as a result of their substance abuse. (42)

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNSELING

- The efficacy of treatment for mental illness and substance abuse disorders is well documented and has improved dramatically over the past 50 years. (43)
- The National Institute of Mental Health has shown that the success rates of treatment for disorders such as depression (70-80%) and panic disorder (70-90%) surpass success rates for other medical conditions (heart disease, for example, has a success rate of 45-50%). (44)
- The evidence strongly favors letting clients select a psychological treatment that makes sense to them and permitting therapists to be consonant with the attitudes, values, and culture of the client, rather than having third-party payers or health maintenance organizations mandate a particular type of treatment. (45)
- Research summarizing counseling outcome studies shows that the effects of counseling at termination are positive and last long term for the majority of clients. Counselors effectively utilized different treatment modalities for different disorders. (46)
- According to *A Naturalistic Longitudinal Evaluation of Counseling in Primary Care*, after patients were provided counseling “there was a significant reduction in severity of symptoms” for anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and quality of life. (47)
- Providing access to counselors’ services is inexpensive. A study by the Texas Department of Insurance found that a state law requiring insurers to reimburse for the services of licensed professional counselors did not significantly increase coverage costs. Claims costs for services provided by licensed professional counselors accounted for less than 1/10th of 1% of total claims for the insurers surveyed. A similar survey conducted by the State of Virginia found that in 1996, claims for counselors’ services amounted to .26% of insurers’ total claims. (48)
- A study published in 2002 titled *Family-Based Prevention Counseling for High-Risk Young Adolescents: Immediate Outcomes* found that after family-based counseling was conducted study participants showed significant improvement in self-concept, drug use attitudes, and school anti-social behavior. (49)
- Length of stay in drug treatment is associated with decreases in drug use. Clients who stay in treatment the longest are more likely to reduce or eliminate their pre-treatment drug use. This finding is consistent for all drugs except crack cocaine. (50)
- Drug treatment has been shown to reduce drug use by 40%-60% and significantly reduces criminal activity during and after treatment. The reduction in arrest rate due to treatment is about 40%. (51)
- Every \$1 investment in addiction treatment programs yields \$4-\$7 return in reduced drug-related crime, criminal justice costs, and theft. When savings related to health care are taken into account, savings increase to a ratio of 12:1. (51)
- It is cost effective to attempt to prevent the initial onset of depression in high risk individuals, including those who have some symptoms but who do not meet full criteria for a diagnosis of major depression, because almost half of those individuals who have a first episode of depression will go on to have a second. (52)

- A review of the research literature published in the October 4, 2000, edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) concluded that the effectiveness of treatment for drug dependence was comparable to the effectiveness of treatment for other chronic illnesses, including diabetes, hypertension and asthma. Not only does substance abuse treatment reduce the costs associated with crime and other social and health costs, it increases individual responsibility and self sufficiency and supports the preservation of families. (53)
- Drug treatment during and after imprisonment not only increases the number of people who are drug-free, but also increases the number of people who are arrest-free. In one study, 57% of former prisoners who received treatment and aftercare remained arrest free after 42 months, in comparison with only 25% of the control group. (42)
- A Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor with a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation is able to obtain a higher number of employment outcomes at a lower cost to the State VR agency. The data also suggests that a master's level VR counselor has a higher production level for people with severe disabilities. (40)
- During their first few years of service, counselors with master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling had higher competitive closure rates for clients with severe disabilities than did counselors with unrelated bachelor's and master's degrees. Further, counselors with master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling performed significantly better than those with unrelated degrees after between 3 and 14 years service in state vocational rehabilitation programs. (40)
- In its 83 history, the public VR program has assisted over 14 million eligible individuals with disabilities in obtaining employment. In FY 2001 alone, the Public VR Program served more than 1.2 million eligible individuals with disabilities of which 233,000 entered or re-entered the world of work. These same employed individuals earned 3.4 billion in wages and paid \$977 million in federal, state, local, social security and Medicare taxes. (54)
- A 1998 survey of the median annual income of full-time workers 25 years old and over found that men with a 9th-12th grade education, but no high school diploma, earned an average of \$24,000, compared to an average of \$40,300 earned by men with an associate degree or \$56,500 earned by men with a bachelor's degree. For women, those with a 9th-12th grade education but no diploma earned an average of \$16,500, compared to \$29,000 earned by women with an associates degree and \$36,600 earned by those with a four-year degree. (18)

Effectiveness of School Counseling

- Based on its research, the Institute of Medicine has concluded that mental health and psychological services were essential for many students to achieve academically, and recommended that such services be considered mainstream, and not optional. (20)
- According to the Department of Education, the current student/counselor ratio is 476:1. (55) According to the American Counseling Association, the recommended student/counselor ratio is 250:1. (20) The ratio is more than 1,000:1 in some schools. (55)
- A 2006 study of an evidence-based program showed that lower student-to-counselor ratios decrease both the recurrence of student disciplinary problems and the number of students involved in a disciplinary incident. (56)
- School counselors, due to their training, experience and accessibility are considered to be the best equipped school-based professionals to develop and implement both prevention and intervention programs for youth at risk. (57)
- Several studies found that elementary guidance activities have a positive influence on elementary

students' academic achievement. (58)

- School counseling interventions have reported success for helping students reduce test anxiety. (59)
- School counselors in collaborative efforts can implement both systemic and programmatic changes in schools and communities to prevent students from dropping out of school. (60)
- Studies on high school attrition indicate that preventive counseling, occurring before students are in crisis, reduces the risk of these students dropping out later. (61)
- Counseling decreases classroom disturbances. Counseling services support teachers in the classroom and enable teachers to provide quality instruction designed to assist students in achieving high standards. Students in schools that provide counseling services indicated that their classes were less likely to be interrupted by other students, and that their peers behaved better in school. (62)
- A study of Missouri high schools shows that schools with more fully implemented model guidance programs had students who were more likely to report that (a) they had earned higher grades, (b) their education was better preparing them for the future, (c) their school made more career and college information available to them, and (d) their school had a more positive climate (greater feelings of belonging and safety at school, classes less likely to be interrupted, peers behaving better). After removing the variables of school enrollment size, socioeconomic status, and percentage of minority students in attendance, positive program effects were identifiable. Results highlight the important roles school counselors play in promoting the central educational goals of their schools and support a comprehensive guidance program focus for university counseling faculty who train school counselors. (63)
- One study found that high school counselors influenced their students' future plans by encouraging them to have high expectations. A high proportion of 10th and 12th grade students who were surveyed perceived that their counselor expected them to attend college, regardless of their racial background. High school students' own educational expectations for themselves increased over time. (64)
- In studies on the effects of a small group counseling approach for failing elementary school students, 83 percent of participating students showed improvement in grades. (65)
- A study done in Gwinnett County, Georgia shows that school counselors impact students' academic performance and can increase the on-task, productive behavior of students and reduce disruptive behaviors. The Behavior Rating Checklist indicated statistically significant decreases in disruptive behaviors and significant increases in productive, on-task behaviors for both the third grade and the fifth grade students tested. Language arts progress was statistically significant for both grade levels as well. (66)
- Children who are experiencing family problems report being helped by school counselors. (67)
- School counselors help connect the family as a whole to the educational process. (68)
- School counselors have proven effective in preventing students from committing suicide. The most effective prevention programs start with younger students and portray suicide as a mental health problem, not a dramatic way of ending a life. It is essential that counselors involve the parents of troubled students in the counseling process. (69)
- School counseling programs have significant influence on discipline problems. Baker and Gerler reported that students who participated in a school-counseling program had significantly fewer

inappropriate behaviors and more positive attitudes toward school than those students who did not participate in the program. (70)

- Health and mental health care services can play an important role in violence prevention at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary), including preventing problem behaviors from developing; identifying and serving specific, at-risk populations; and reducing the deleterious effects of violence on victims and witnesses. (71)
- Research indicates that school counselors are effective in teaching social skills. (72)
- Students who have access to counseling programs reported being more positive and having greater feelings of belonging and safety in their schools. (73)
- School counselors are very effective in assisting children in the area of career development. (74)
- Counselors are effective in assisting high school students with college choices. (75)

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