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Research Paper: Age of Anxiety

According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 13 people suffer from anxiety around the world. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health disorders worldwide and at times it comes with a handful of other mental health problems. About 50 percent of people that are diagnosed with depression are also diagnosed with anxiety. Frequently, these issues go hand in hand and can be hard to control. Even with these shocking statistics only one in three people actually get help for their anxiety. Most tend to think dealing with it themselves is the best option, which can increasingly impact their day to day life depending on the severity. Symptoms of anxiety have risen worldwide in the past ten years but, how do we fix a problem without knowing the specific cause? Anxiety is caused by a handful of different factors including genetics. When you consider the list of causes the problem and solution can vary depending on the individual in question. This age of anxiety appeals to our sense of zeitgeist in today's society when it comes to our ever growing and more competitive school, work, and social media systems.

Between 2007 and 2012 anxiety disorders in children and teens have increased by 20 percent. Why is anxiety the highest it's ever been and still on the rise? In addition to genetics, life events, and personality, society around us has been putting an ever growing amount of pressure on teens. We are currently in a culture of achievement, which causes teenagers and college students to fall into a stressful cycle of trying to meet the standards that society has set

for them. It also tends to put high levels of stress onto everyday workers struggling to meet and surpass the expectations of their jobs. It has been increasingly difficult to obtain a good job even with a college degree and more and more people every year struggle financially. The younger generation have been introduced to the possibility of failure earlier and earlier in their lives as a result of increased systematic educational testing. This carries on into their adult life. A survey conducted by 'Higher Education Research' showed that 41% of incoming college freshman felt overwhelmed and anxious by the tasks set out before them. Only 28% of incoming freshmen felt that way in 2000 and 18% in 1985 (McCarthy, 2019). Anxiety can be a major barrier to learning and functioning during school. America puts an unhealthy amount of pressure on the importance of high marks and going to college. Many students feel the only way to be successful is to follow the path that most take. Being 18-20 years old and having to pick out a major for college that will impact your career for the rest of your life can cause panic and disorder that affects other aspects of life. After speaking with a third year college student herself I was able to get more information first hand. She stated, "After going into college I began to put more pressure on myself than ever before. I felt as if my entire life depended on the choices I made for my career path right now. I fell into a cycle of worrying that everything I was doing was not good enough. Sometimes I felt as if I wasn't even doing the right thing to begin with. I felt a lot of pressure from myself and others that I had to be better than the best to get anywhere in life. It did start a cycle of anxiety that was hard to get out of until I figured out a plan for myself and what I wanted to do." (Pennstate Brandywine Student).

Factors that play into anxiety are also on the rise. Loneliness is increasing because relationship factors such as divorce are growing. Research shows that 41% of first marriages end

in divorce, 60% of second marriages and 73% of third marriages (ADAA, 2018). The United States has the sixth highest divorce rate in the world. (Luckily Pennsylvania is the state with the lowest divorce rate at 2.8%). Many people have a goal of finding someone they want to spend the rest of their life with as the 'American Dream' includes building a family. When people cannot fulfill those goals they find themselves falling into a depression and feeling a heightened sense of anxiety thinking they are running out of time. A form of anxiety known as social anxiety causes people to isolate from others as they feel like others will not be able to understand their thoughts and feelings. Loneliness and isolation tend to go hand and hand with this type of anxiety.

Increased working hours and more stressful work procedures also give people growing feelings of anxiety. Americans work 7.8% more hours a year than they did in 1979. One in three people in America work 45 hours or more a week and 9.7 million work more than 60 (Covert, 2018). Workplace anxiety is a real thing and can be caused by increased workload, performance in the workplace and conflict with other coworkers. One in six workers are dealing with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, or stress. These conditions can impact a person's performance rate and cause their output of work to decrease or become less efficient. With all this time being eaten up by work it's hard to spend time with family or friends and do things that are enjoyable and decrease stress. Society today is all about constantly pushing yourself to be greater and achieve more but, when time is not given for people to recoup it's easy for anxiety to become an overwhelming factor in many people's lives.

With more work comes less sleep, in a 2013 poll about sleep the United States came in fifth of six developed countries, with American respondents saying they slept only six and a half

hours a night (Covert, 2018). This is a very sharp decrease since the 1940s. Not getting enough sleep plays a big role in how your body and brain deal with anxiety and stress. One of the leading reasons for anxiety is sleep deprivation. Not getting enough sleep disrupts hormones, affects mood and behavior, changes your ability to focus, causes lack of motivation, and limits memory (Harper, 2019). Americans are busy people and more often than not people tend to lose sleep in order to catch up on school and work related things, spend time with family and friends, and do just simply relax and binge on a TV show. With almost not enough time in one day it's become harder and harder for people to develop healthy sleeping habits. Without having a steady sleeping schedule people increase their chances of feeling worse and more anxiety-stricken in their waking lives.

Violence and abuse are also growing, or at least the media makes it look like that. Even though 25% of couples that divorce say the reasoning was domestic violence or abuse, violent crime has declined by more than 50% since the high point in the 1990s. The way news is presented has increasingly changed in the past 10 to 15 years. Today news is increasingly visual and shocking and many point to the new inclusion of smartphone videos and audio clips as examples. The human brain is attracted to troubling information because it's programmed to detect threats and the negative sensationalism in news has been slowly increasing over the past 30 years (Heid, 2018). Now that 24-hour news coverage and satellite TV is an everyday thing, people feel that bad incidents are increasing and happening everywhere around them. Many think the world is becoming such a bad place because they constantly are hearing breaking news stories about murders and robberies. This increases anxiety in people and also tends to lead to them overthinking their own problems as well.

Social media and the new era of technology also play a huge factor in growing anxiety. The more time spent on social media, the more likely it is that anxiety and depression follow. Teens who spend 30 minutes to three hours a day on social media had twice the risk of internalizing problems compared with kids who didn't use. Research has shown that social media causes an increase in anxiety due to feelings of inadequacy, worry, and stress. One study found that 48 percent of teens who spent five hours a day or more on an electronic device have at least one suicide risk factor (Shafer, 2017). Recent studies have noted a significant increase in depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts over the past several years for teens, especially those who spend multiple hours a day on devices, and especially girls. Social media's constant updates lead to many individuals to frequently compare themselves to others, which makes them feel worth less.

Many people disagree with the fact that mental health problems are on the rise. People argue that anxiety is not growing, the human race is just becoming more sensitive and increasing their usage of mental health slang. For example, instead of getting 'butterflies in our stomachs' one is having a 'panic attack' or being nervous to go to an outing is now called crippling social anxiety. It is said that people have begun to exaggerate their everyday experiences and turn it into something that would be appropriate for a therapist visit. In reality, anxiety in itself is a normal experience but abnormal anxiety begins when experiences of nervousness and worry start to take over your daily life. Worrying about simple things, things that people can usually push out of their minds start to consume who they are and eat away at their mind. The overuse of anxiety terminology may be because some people want attention or just have a general lack of

understanding about how anxiety works. Either way it hits home for many people that face aspects of anxiety daily and makes it hard to for anxiety to be taken seriously for others.

The age of anxiety is here and currently we are all experiencing it, brought by the age of achievement and the age of technology. As aspects of the world begin to get more complicated, competitive, and busy people will continue to increase their risks for mental health problems. In the future, I predict the overall mental health epidemic will only rise. Every aspect of life seems to be growing more and more difficult for people to achieve. The feelings of success and overall contentment seem to be getting harder to reach for Americans as a whole. I feel as if America will not find a solution to everyone's internal struggles anytime soon. Medicines and methods of help are not a great method of help and rehabilitation for many and it can be very timely and costly. Many people are anxious because of money and time they do not have. No one wants to be left behind in this fast changing world and we will all lose aspects of our inner selves to become better than the rest on the outside. Overall, Anxiety is brought on by almost everything around us including schooling, family, technology, and news as we have become a very fast paced society that never slows down.

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