

EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES HINDER MILLENNIAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Millennials are struggling to develop positive, lasting relationships—and these relational difficulties are likely tied to increasing levels of emotional and mental health issues young Americans report experiencing on a regular basis.

These deep struggles may be combining into a generational “perfect storm,” in which Millennials are bringing about a virtual revolution as they delay (and even reject) marriage and starting families of their own.

These are among the staggering conclusions from [Millennials in America: New Insights into the Generation of Growing Influence](#), a report produced by George Barna and the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.

This second in-depth report from Millennials in America looks at how the nation’s youngest generation of adults is struggling with relationships, as well as with skyrocketing rates of emotional and mental health issues.

According to the nationwide study of Millennials (adults ages 18 to 37), most in the generation say they are dissatisfied with their intimate and peer relationships. In fact, when it comes to relationships, they avoid conflict and have a hard time trusting others.

At the same time, a majority (54%) admits to frequently feeling anxiety, depression or fear. They are plagued with self-doubt and deeply desire to be part of a community that “knows, appreciates, and respects” them.

When it comes to how they view others, Millennials are less likely than other adults to believe they should respect other people or to see human life as valuable, according to the study.

Relational Dissatisfaction

The report notes that today’s young adults are more likely than their predecessors to struggle in their quest for lasting and meaningful relationships. Among the obstacles evident in that journey are their bouts of self-doubt, the influence of their dysfunctional family of origin, unrealistic relational standards,

inadequate communication skills and efforts, and identity issues.

The research also pointed out that the loss of effective communication skills (partly attributable to their reliance on technology as an intermediary) and an array of financial challenges are also at play.

Combined, these transitions in thought and behavior have led to a virtual revolution in how young Americans view marriage and having a family of their own. The study found that Millennials are ambivalent when it comes to marriage. Fewer Millennials are getting married and those who do, increasingly insist on having a prenuptial agreement. More Millennials choose cohabitation over marriage.

And marriage, when it occurs, is happening later in life. There are fewer faith-based weddings, fewer young couples having children, and more women in the generation are having children outside of marriage.

The impact of such pressures on friendships has also been breathtaking. Young adults claim to experience fewer good friends and fewer long-term friendships. They have limited trust in their friends and lack people with whom they can freely share their most pressing concerns and most significant experiences. They also have a general dissatisfaction with the quality of their existing relationships, whether those are friendships or intimate relationships.

Looking at these findings, it is unsurprising that among the types of life changes most desired by Millennials are those associated with improving their relationships. Close to six out of 10 Millennials viewed significant changes in their relationships as being “extremely desirable”—and that does not include those who listed their personal relationship with God (mentioned by 14%). Only financial comfort exceeds the importance of better relationships among Millennials.

Why are Millennials having such difficulty with interpersonal connections? They say one factor is their experience with prejudice. One out of eight (13%) noted experiencing bias associated with their race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. The same number (13%) are lacking a community that “knows, appreciates, and respects” them. One out of every five Millennials see having better relationships with family members as an extremely desirable change.

Yet another roadblock to meaningful relationships is the lack of trust that young adults have in other people. Trust is a vital element in any healthy relationship. However, the survey discovered that there is no group of influencers in their life who they trust to tell the truth or to do what is right either always or almost always.

Parents earned the highest level of trust, yet just 46% said they trusted their parents to that degree. Notably fewer—only one-third (36%)—trusted their friends to that extent. Lower on the trust scale for Millennials were college professors, Christian pastors, elected government officials, popular social media personalities and entertainment celebrities.

Millennials also struggle with relational conflict. Almost two-thirds (64%) admitted that within the past month they had “avoided interacting with someone because it was likely to produce conflict.”

Their inability to comfortably converse with those who hold different opinions is a significant hindrance to building meaningful relationships.

Certainly, relational issues are common among every generation. However, this unique combination of troubles in their relationships may stem from their attitudes human life and how they view other people. For instance:

- The research indicates that young adults are less likely to believe they should respect other people.
- Half of all Millennials say they attach no absolute value to human life. In fact, they are almost twice as likely as other adults to dismiss the inherent value of human beings.
- Millennials are less than half as likely as other adults to say that human life is sacred. They are twice as likely to minimize the value and dignity of human life by describing human beings as either “material substance only” or to describe their very existence as “an illusion.”
- A minority of Millennials (48%) embraces the Golden Rule (i.e., treat others as you want them to treat you). In comparison, two-thirds of other adults (65%) say that guideline is how they try to live.
- Millennials have been described as a generation with a “victim mentality.” The survey showed that they are three times more likely than older adults to say they try to get even with those who wrong them.
- Their ability to create the level of trust required to build relationships is lacking.
- Millennials are less likely than any of the other adult generations to claim that they keep the promises they make or to repay a loan. They are also more likely than those from other generations to lie to protect their reputation or best interests.

How Much Millennials Trust Influencers to Tell the Truth or Do What is Right					
	How often you trust them				
	Always or almost always	Sometimes	Not too often	Never	Don't Know
Your parents	46%	32%	12%	6%	4%
Your friends	36	40	16	4	4
College professors	27	39	18	6	10
Pastors of Christian churches	26	28	23	14	9
Authors of non-fiction books	18	39	22	8	12
Journalists	17	36	28	11	9
Elected government officials	15	28	32	17	8
Popular social media personalities	15	27	31	19	8
Entertainment celebrities	13	27	34	18	8

Source: *Millennials in America: New Insights into the Generation of Growing Influence*, by George Barna and the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University; national sample of 600 adults, ages 18 to 37, conducted August 2021.

Emotional and Mental Health

One of the most startling results from Millennials in America is the staggering need for better mental and emotional health among young adults.

A majority of young adults (54%) admitted to “often feeling anxious, depressed, or unsafe.” In fact, the need to address their mental and emotional health issues was among the highest rated desired changes identified by Millennials.

Along the same lines, the National Institute of Mental Health reports that 21% of U.S. adults have some form of mental illness. The condition is even more widespread among the younger half of the Millennial generation (i.e., ages 18 through 25). The NIMH found that 29% are counted as having some type of mental disorder, with nearly 9% having a severe mental illness. Perhaps even more startling is the diagnosis that 49% of American adolescents (ages 13-18) have one or more types of mental illness.

This situation is a hidden but serious condition that is confronting and, ultimately, reshaping American society.

Worldview and Lifestyle

According to George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, the study’s findings about Millennials’ relational struggles are troubling and ultimately reflect the generation’s worldview.

“So much of a person’s life experience and fulfillment is wrapped up in our relationships. Millennials desperately want to be in community, but they are having a hard time developing those deeper, positive connections largely due to their ideas about life and humanity,” Barna explained.

“Millennials do not see people the way God does,” the veteran researcher and author continued. “Most of them do not consider human life to have intrinsic value. They feel no obligation to respect people because they do not even believe they were created by God, much less made in His likeness or for His purposes. They are less tolerant of beliefs and behaviors that differ from their own than are older adults.”

Barna noted, “They often seek relationships on their unyielding terms, but that strategy is untenable.”

Those same worldview issues have produced the mental and emotional challenges confronting young adults.

“Having dismissed the existence and authority of God it’s only natural that young adults are plagued by anxiety and fear,” Barna stated. “The result is they perceive the world to be random, unpredictable and beyond their influence. They have is no realistic reason for hope.”

Barna continued, “In such a world they do not understand of how to address the future. When you remove the presence of an omnipotent but loving Creator, as well as His guidelines and standards

designed to facilitate our ability to thrive, there are no anchors for truth, emotions, decision-making, relationships, or purpose and meaning. All that's left is confusion, chaos, emptiness and aloneness.”

The most rational response, according to Barna, is to adopt a biblical worldview. “The alternative philosophies of life such as Marxism, Postmodernism, Secular Humanism, and Eastern Mysticism—are not just wrong, but dangerous. Why embrace any of those worldviews? They lead to despair and even to suicide,” he commented.

“The evidence of the existence of a living, powerful designer, creator and ruler of the universe is overwhelming. There is reason to maintain hope through the God of the Bible, not the popular but indefensible ideologies of humans.”

As Barna explained, “Based on more than 2,000 years of testimonies we know the adoption of the biblical worldview enables us to experience the power, authority and wisdom to live life to the fullest.”

About the Research:

The data referred to in this report are taken from the American Worldview Inventory (AWVI), an annual survey that evaluates the worldview of the U.S. adult population (age 18 and over). Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the assessment is based on several dozen worldview-related questions that fall within eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior.

The American Worldview Inventory 2021 is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews. It was undertaken in February 2021 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, providing an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling activity.

About the Cultural Research Center:

The Cultural Research Center (CRC) at Arizona Christian University is located on the school's campus in Glendale, Arizona, in the Phoenix metropolitan area. In addition to conducting the annual American Worldview Inventory, CRC also introduced the ACU Student Worldview Inventory (SWVI) in 2020. That survey is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final administration is undertaken among students just prior to their graduation. The ACU SWVI enables the University to track the worldview development of its student body and to make changes to that process as recommended by the research. The Cultural Research Center also conducts nationwide research studies to understand the intersection of faith and culture and shares that information with organizations dedicated to facilitating the positive transformation of American culture with biblical truth.

CRC is guided by George Barna, Director of Research, and Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. The Center works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Access to the results from past surveys conducted by CRC, as well as additional information about the Cultural Research Center, is accessible at www.culturalresearchcenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.arizonachristian.edu.