

Teen Girls Mental Health: Sounding the Alarm

In a startling development the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that 1 in 3 teenage girls seriously considered suicide in 2021 an increase of nearly 60% from the previous decade. 15% of teen girls said they were forced to have sex which was up 27% over 2 years and was the first increase since this category has been tracked. CDC officials are “really alarmed.” We are seeing record highs in sadness and suicide rates. These findings are the results of an anonymous survey of 17,000 school aged teens which was administered in classrooms nationwide.

The Washington Post Weekly recently reported “Forced sex and thoughts of suicide have exploded in recent years”. Teen girls across the United State are engulfed in a growing wave of violence and trauma according to federal researchers who released data showing increases in rape and sexual violence as well as record levels of feeling sad or hopeless. “The rise of sexual violence almost certainly contributed to the glaring spike of depressive symptoms.” and it is important to determine who is perpetrating this and to stop it.

Education Week the independent news organization shared results from another survey and found some additional concerning results:

Over the last 2 weeks for those in the Gen Z category (15-25 years old)

- 1- Had thoughts of being better off dead or of hurting self = 21%
- 2- Felt Depressed or hopeless = 44%
- 3- Feeling nervous anxious or on edge 66% of respondents
- 4- Number of female high school students who reported experiencing poor mental health in the last 30 days = 41%
- 5- Seriously considered suicide in the past year = 30% of all females and 45 % overall for those from the LGBTQ community

Clearly the isolation associated with COVID-19 has been a contributing factor yet there were growing concerns about the mental health of young people prior to the onset of the pandemic.

Kathleen Ethier Director of Division of Adolescent and school health at the CDC describes these findings as “frightening” and shared that the young people may not be sharing these thoughts and feelings with their parents or any other adult who could help.

Other researchers point out that it is not clear if the data was influenced by other factors such as if girls were more aware of depressive symptoms than boys or more inclined to report them or if in fact girls were simply just worse off. Even when adjusting for those variables the data is still rather alarming. The fact that 14% of teen girls said they were raped (between 2019 and 2021) is extremely concerning. To put it in context more than one of every 10 teen girls you know has been raped. Teens who identify as part of the LGBTQ community are significantly more likely to experience violence including rape than their hetero-sexual peers.

Ethier recommends that parents talk to their children about their mental health and help teach them the language to be able to talk about what is going on internally including difficult to identify (and manage) emotions and thoughts and she suggests watching for changes in behavior, sleeping and eating habits which could be indicators that something is amiss.

Know where your children are at all times and who they are with. Stay connected to the parents of your children's friends and work together to be more vigilant in the interest of overall safety. Make sure everyone knows the new national suicide prevention and crisis lifeline number **988**

The CDC researchers believe that schools could be a lifeline citing studies that show better mental health outcomes for students who felt connected to their schools. "These data make it clear that young people in the US are collectively experiencing a level of distress that calls on us to act" Families, schools, faith-based institutions and the entire community need to do more to help keep teenaged girls and all young people safe.

For immediate assistance with a mental health crisis go to your nearest hospital emergency room or to the **DASH** 24/7-hour crisis center located at **90 Adams Ave Hauppauge NY**. The center is open 24 hours a day 7 days a week all year round.

Some teenagers prefer to talk to their peers so some teens contact trained teen counselors by texting *teen2teen* to **839863** a service of **teenline.org**

For help with a mental health issue call:

LECSA EAP/MAP

631-851-1295

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