Adolescents Who Felt Sad or Hopeless

In 2013, nearly one third (30 percent) of students in grades nine through 12 reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for an extended period (two or more weeks in a row) in the last year.

Importance

Persistent sadness and hopelessness are criteria for and predictors of clinical depression, though by themselves they are insufficient for a diagnosis of depression.[1][2] Youth who are depressed are at a higher risk for poor health outcomes as adults.[3]

In addition, depression in early adolescence is linked with increased risks for negative effects on growth and development, school performance, and peer/family relationships in later adolescence. Depressed youth are also much more likely to use drugs or alcohol, drop out of school, or engage in promiscuous sex than a young person who is not depressed.[4] Feelings of sadness or loneliness not only affect teens but those around them, often causing problems in relationships with peers and family members.[5]

Although they likely underestimate the actual prevalence of depression, the available data indicate that about nine percent of youth ages 12-17 in 2012 had a major depressive episode during the past year. Only a minority (37 percent) of these youth received treatment.[6]

Trends

Figure 1: Percentage of Students in Grades 9 to 12 Who Felt Sad or Hopeless, by Gender, Selected Years, 1999-2013

The prevalence of sadness...
or hopeless feelings as defined here remained steady between 1999 and 2007, staying between 28 and 29 percent. However, between 2007 and 2009, the proportion decreased, from 29 to 26 percent. Most of this decrease reflected a decrease in sad or hopeless feelings among males. Then, between 2009 and 2013, the incidence of these feelings increased, from 26 to 30 percent. This rise was driven mainly by an increase among female teens. (Figure 1)

Differences by Gender

Girls are more likely than boys to report feeling sad or hopeless. In 2013, nearly two-fifths of girls reported having been sad or hopeless (39 percent), while closer to one-fifth of boys reported having felt the same way (21 percent). (Figure 1) Rates were highest among Hispanic female students (48 percent). (Figure 2)

Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin[7]

Hispanic youth are more likely than white or black Hispanic youth are more likely than white or black youth to report feeling sad or hopeless for extended periods of time (37, versus 27 and 28 percent, respectively, in 2013. (Figure 2)

Differences by Grade
In 2013, Twelfth-grade boys were significantly more likely to report having felt sad or hopeless than ninth-grade boys (18 versus 22 percent), while ninth-grade girls were more likely to report having felt sad or hopeless than twelfth-grade girls (41 versus 36 percent). There were no significant difference by grade level overall. (Appendix 1)

State and Local Estimates

2013 estimates of feeling sad or hopeless among high school students (Grades 9-12) are available for select states and cities from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS): see Table 24.

2011-2012 state-level data on major depressive episodes are available from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health: see Table 26.

International Estimates

International estimates (1997-1998) are available from the World Health Organization. (See Figure 3.1)

National Goals

Through its Healthy People 2020 initiative, the Federal government has set a goal to reduce the proportion of adolescents who experience a major depressive episode from 8.3 percent in 2008 to 7.4 percent in 2020. They have also set a goal to increase depression screening by primary care providers for adolescents from 2.1 percent of office visits in 2005-07 to 2.3 percent in 2020.

More information is available here. (MHMD 4.1 and 11.2)

Additionally, Report of the Surgeon General's Conference on Children's Mental Health: A National Action Agenda lays out a number of national goals related to improving children's mental health. One goal, for example, is to improve the assessment and recognition of mental health needs in children.

Additional information is available here.

What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator

See Child Trendsâ€™ LINKS database (â€œLifecourse Interventions to Nurture Kids Successfullyâ€), for reviews of many rigorously evaluated programs, including the following which have been shown to be effective:

- Adolescent Coping With Stress
- Cognitive Behavior Therapy
- Cognitive-Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools
- Cognitive Relaxation Coping Skills (CRCS)
- Coping With Depression (CWD-A)
- Coping and Support Training (CAST)
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Processing (EMDR)
- Problem Solving for Life

Also, see Child Trends' review, *What Works to Prevent or Reduce Internalizing Problems or Social-Emotional Difficulties in Adolescents: Lessons From Experimental Evaluations of Social Interventions*.


**Related Indicators**

- Young Adult Depression
- Suicidal Teens
- Disordered Eating: Symptoms of Bulimia
- Parental Depression
- Teen Homicide, Suicide, and Firearm Deaths
- Adverse Experiences

**Definition**

Survey participants were asked to respond to the following question:

â€œDuring the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?â€

Students from California, Oregon, Washington, and Minnesota were not included in the survey in any year. Additionally, students from Colorado, Iowa, Indiana, and Pennsylvania were not included in the 2013 survey.

**Data Source**


**Raw Data Source**
Appendix 1Â - Percentage of High School Studentsâ€”Who Report They Have Felt Sad or Hopelessâ€”Selected Years, 1999-2013

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Estimates do not include youth who dropped out of school and therefore may not reflect total national values. Students from California, Oregon, Washington, and Minnesota were not included in the survey in any year. Additionally, students from Colorado, Iowa, Indiana, and Pennsylvania were not included in the 2013 survey.


### Endnotes


[6] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2013). Results from the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Mental Health Findings. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality: Rockville, MD. Chapter 4. Available at:
Hispanics may be any race. Estimates for whites and blacks in this report do not include Hispanics.

Suggested Citation:


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