Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

How COVID-19 Highlighted the Need for Teen Mental Health Screening in 200 Words

Adolescent Health & Well-Being

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The COVID-19 pandemic—and school closures, disrupted routines, social isolation, family illness and financial hardships that accompanied it—placed significant stressors on teens. In some cases, these factors worsened already rising rates of mental health concerns, especially among adolescents from racial/ethnic minority groups and low-income communities.

To delve deeper into this issue, my colleagues and I explored changes in depression screenings, depressive symptoms and suicide risk among adolescents during the pandemic in a new study within Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's (CHOP) Primary Care Network.

Our findings aligned with emerging research we've seen around teen mental health from emergency departments during the pandemic: **positive screenings for depressive symptoms, like feeling down or hopeless, and suicide risk increased slightly among adolescents we studied.** This rise was most pronounced among female, non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black adolescents.

What could explain these differences? Factors like social isolation, loneliness and cyberbullying may have contributed to more mental health concerns among female teens. Disproportionate health and economic impacts of COVID-19 due to structural racism, as well as persistent school closures in urban areas, could explain higher rates of positive depression screenings and suicidality among Black teens.

Our results underscore the continued need for providers to screen adolescents for depression and suicidality. Primary care practices should advocate for screening and work to bridge the gap between identification of mental health concerns and treatment, especially among non-Hispanic Black adolescents, who face additional barriers to care. While more research is needed to continue to explore the full impact of the pandemic on teen mental health, it is our hope that these insights can begin to help us address these issues.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategic Operations & Communications Director ***Lauren Walens****.*

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