

Self-harm, suicide attempts climb among US girls, study says

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Attempted suicides, drug overdoses, cutting and other types of self-injury have increased substantially in U.S. girls, a 15-year study of emergency room visits found.

It's unclear why, but some mental health experts think cyberbullying, substance abuse and economic stress from the recent recession might be contributing.

The rising rates "should be of concern to parents, teachers, and pediatricians. One important reason to focus on reducing self-harm is that it is key risk factor for suicide," said Dr. Mark Olfson, a Columbia University psychiatry professor who was not involved in the study.

The sharpest increase occurred among girls aged 10 to 14, nearly tripling from 2009 to 2015, from about 110 visits per 100,000 to almost 318 per 100,000.

Older teen girls had the highest rates—633 visits per 100,000 in 2015, but the increase after 2008 was less steep.

Drug overdoses and other self-poisonings were the most common method among girls and boys, followed by intentional cutting with sharp objects. The study doesn't include information on which methods were most common by age nor on how many injuries were severe or required hospitalization.

All the injuries were intentional, but not all were suicide attempts, said lead author Melissa Mercado, a behavioral scientist.

The study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was published Tuesday in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The trend parallels rising reports of teen depression and suicide, the researchers noted..

The researchers analyzed 2001-2015 data on nonfatal self-inflicted injuries treated in emergency rooms among ages 10 to 24. Nearly 29,000 girls with self-inflicted injuries and about 14,000 boys were treated in

emergency rooms during the study years.

Rates among boys didn't change much during those years. Rates in girls were also stable until around 2008. ER visits for self-injury among young women aged 20 to 24 also increased but at a slower pace, rising from 228 per 100,000 in 2001 to 346 per 100,000 in 2015.

The results underestimate the problem since they don't include self-injuries treated in doctors' offices or elsewhere, Mercado said.

Researchers said the findings underscore the need to beef up prevention efforts including finding ways to help at-risk kids feel less isolated and more connected to their peers, and teaching coping and problem-solving skills.

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