

Study identifies roadblocks to mental health services for adolescents affected by bullying

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Nearly one in three U.S. adolescents are affected by bullying, placing them at risk for health problems including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, depression and self-harm. Unfortunately, fewer than a quarter of these teens receive help, and new research identifies some of the reasons why.

A study to be presented Oct. 24 at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference & Exhibition in Washington, DC, surveyed 440 students in high school and middle school in Cumberland County, North Carolina. Mirroring national trends, an average of 29 percent of the respondents reported being bullied in the past. Among 11- to 14-year-olds, 54 percent reported being bullied, compared with 46 percent of those 15 to 18 years old.

Researchers identified 28 barriers to mental health services in the study, 11 of which were specific to respondents who experienced prior bullying. Chief among these was a lack of adequate screening and counseling by medical providers, said Amira El Sherif, MD, FAAP, a private practitioner with Kidzcare Pediatrics in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Other obstacles included school system barriers such as inaction by educators and poor enforcement of investigation procedures, and inadequate school follow-up and communication with parents.

Findings from the study, funded by an AAP Community Access and Child Health planning grant, have major implications for improving access to mental health services for victims of bullying, Dr. El Sherif

said.

"As a pediatrician, this study reminded me that we can always do more for our patients," Dr. El Sherif said. "Bullying should become a part of the normal conversation in the office. Doctors, parents and school officials should also work together to address bullying when it occurs and to make sure mental health services are accessible when needed."

Schools also need training programs that include frequent evaluations to ensure quality standards are consistently met, Dr. El Sherif said. Overall, improving communication between medical providers, school officials and parents would allow for a team approach to [bullying](#), which would improve mental health screening and access to services, she said.

More information: The abstract, "Barriers to Mental Health Access for Students Affected by Bullying," will be presented at 3:39 pm on Saturday, Oct. 24 in room 102B of the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. To view the abstract, aap.confex.com/aap/2015/webpro...nary/Paper29292.html

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