

Survey finds one in eight of five-to-19-year-olds had mental disorder in 2017

November 26 2018



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The University of Exeter has played a key role in a national survey which found that one in eight (12.8 percent) of children and young people aged between five and 19, surveyed in England in 2017, had a

mental disorder.

The finding is according to a major new report which provides England's best source of data on trends in child mental health, with significant input from academics at Exeter.

"[Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017](#)", published today by NHS Digital, collected information from 9,117 children and [young people](#) and combines information—depending on their age—from children and young people or their parents and teachers.

For the first time, the survey has covered children aged two to 19, whereas previous surveys have focused only on the five to 15-year-old age group.

Tamsin Ford, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Exeter Medical School, said: "The team of doctors from the University of Exeter Medical School made a significant contribution to this important [national survey](#) of mental health in children and young people. This is the first national survey since 2004 and the findings are essential to the planning and improvement of [child](#) and adolescent [mental health](#) services locally and nationally."

Looking at the five to 15-year-old age group over time, the report reveals a slight increase in the overall prevalence of [mental disorder](#). For this age group, this has risen from 9.7 percent in 1999 and 10.1 percent in 2004 to 11.2 percent in 2017. When including five to 19-year-olds, the 2017 prevalence is 12.8 percent, but this cannot be compared to earlier years.

Mental [disorders](#) were grouped into four broad categories—emotional, behavioural, hyperactivity and other less common disorders.

Emotional disorders have become more common in five to 15-year-olds – going from 4.3 percent in 1999, to 3.9 percent in 2004 to 5.8 percent in 2017.

All other types of disorder, have remained similar in prevalence for this age group since 1999.

Different disorders were found to be more or less common at different stages of childhood, with rates of mental disorder higher in older age groups.

Preschool children (two to four-year-olds)

One in eighteen (5.5 percent) preschool children were identified as having at least one mental disorder at the time they were surveyed.

Behavioural disorders were evident in one in 40 (2.5 percent) of preschool children, consisting mainly of oppositional defiant disorder⁴ (1.9 percent).

The prevalence of [mental disorders](#) in two to four-year-olds in England has been surveyed for the first time so these figures are experimental statistics.

Young people (17 to 19-year-olds)

One in six (16.9 percent) 17 to 19-year-olds were found to have a mental disorder with one in 16 (6.4 percent) experiencing more than one mental disorder at the time of the interview. This age group had the highest rate of emotional disorder (14.9 percent).

Young women (17 to 19-year-olds)

Females aged 17 to 19 were more than twice as likely as males of the same age to have a mental disorder.

Young women in this age group were also identified as having higher rates of emotional disorder and [self-harm](#) than other demographic groups—22.4 percent had an emotional disorder.

5.6 percent of young women were identified as having body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), an anxiety disorder characterised by the obsessive idea that some aspect of their body or appearance is severely flawed and warrants exceptional measures to hide or fix.

Sexual identity and its association with mental disorder

A third (34.9 percent) of the young people aged 14 to 19-years-old who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or with another sexual identity had a mental disorder, as opposed to 13.2 percent of those who identified as heterosexual.

Self-harm and suicide

A quarter (25.5 percent) of 11 to 16-year-olds with a mental disorder had self-harmed or attempted suicide at some point, compared to 3.0 percent of those who were not diagnosed as having a mental disorder. In 17 to 19-year-olds with a mental disorder, nearly half (46.8 percent) had self harmed or made a suicide attempt.

The report also looked at other aspects of the lives of the [children](#) and young people surveyed, including – for the first time – social media, bullying and cyberbullying.

The [survey](#) was carried out for NHS Digital by NatCen Social Research,

the Office for National Statistics and YouthinMind5.

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Survey finds one in eight of five-to-19-year-olds had mental disorder in 2017 (2018, November 26) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-11-survey-five-to-year-olds-mental-disorder.html>

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