

Research shows boredom is on the rise for adolescents, especially girls

November 19 2019, by Seth Truscott



When comparing across grades, boredom appears to peak in 10th grade for boys and in 8th grade for girls. Credit: WSU

"I'm so bored!" It's a typical complaint by teens in every era, but one that's growing more common for U.S. adolescents, especially girls.

New research at Washington State University has found that [boredom](#) is rising year after year for teens in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades, with greater increases for girls than boys.

"We were surprised to see that boredom is increasing at a more rapid pace for girls than boys across all grades," said Elizabeth Weybright, WSU researcher of adolescent development, who shared the findings in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Collaborating with scientists John Schulenberg at the University of Michigan and Linda Caldwell at Pennsylvania State University, Weybright's project tracked a decade of adolescent responses to a question about boredom in the nationwide Monitoring the Future in-school survey.

Adolescents were asked to rate their response to the question "I am often bored," on a five-point scale. Weybright and her colleagues analyzed the results over time and across grades, between 2008, when the question was first asked, and 2017.

Detailed in "More bored today than yesterday? National trends in adolescent boredom from 2008-2017," the team's research revealed that boredom rose within and across grades for much of the last decade.

"Everybody experiences boredom from time to time, but many people don't realize it may be associated with [depressive symptoms](#) and risky behaviors, such as substance misuse," Weybright said. "I wanted to find out when adolescents are most likely to experience boredom."

Boredom rising since 2010

When comparing across grades, boredom appears to peak in 10th grade for boys and in 8th grade for girls.

However, looking across time with grade levels combined, boys' boredom levels rose 1.6 percent every year on average, while girls' boredom levels rose by 1.7 percent on average. In the 10th grade, girls' boredom level rose by about 2 percent every year. In every grade, girls' boredom levels showed steeper rises than boys.

"Historically, we saw a decline from 2008 to 2010 across all [grades](#), but it wasn't significant," said Weybright. "Then, we see a significant increase from 2010 to 2017. Around 2010, there's a divergence for boys and girls. We see that boredom increases for boys and girls, but it increases a bit steeper and earlier for [girls](#)."

While Weybright's study doesn't explore the causes of rising boredom, she notes that boredom may be associated with sensation-seeking and depression, which are rising among U.S. teens. At the same time, digital media use has also been increasing, doubling for 12th graders from 2006 to 2012.

Within this same timeframe, other researchers have seen decreases in adolescents going out with friends and spending more time alone.

"Perhaps boredom is simply one more indicator of adolescent dissatisfaction with how their time is spent," Weybright stated in the paper.

"Adolescence is a time of change and growth," she said. "Teens want more independence, but may not have as much autonomy as they'd like in their school and home life. That creates situations where they're prone to boredom, and may have a hard time coping with being bored."

Considered alongside trends in mental health, depression, and [social interaction](#), the team's boredom research provides a clearer picture about the changing world of adolescence.

"It also shows that we're going to need some kind of intervention," said Weybright, who called for more robust study of [adolescent](#) boredom.

"One of the challenges with this data set is that it includes different people every year," Weybright said. "This means I can't follow one person across time to find a causal link."

Future research should expand earlier into middle school, she suggested, and also take a closer, day-to-day look at how young people are experiencing boredom, and how it aligns with sleep, social interaction, and other factors in their lives.

More information: Elizabeth H. Weybright et al, More Bored Today Than Yesterday? National Trends in Adolescent Boredom From 2008 to 2017, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.09.021](#)

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