Mental illness surge among Swiss girls, young women: statistics

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Switzerland. Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Young Swiss women and girls were hospitalized at an "unprecedented" rate last year for mental health issues, the national statistics office said Monday, indicating the pandemic took a particularly heavy toll on this

group.

For the first time, mental disorders rose in 2021 to become the main cause of hospitalization among young people aged 10 to 24 in Switzerland, ahead of injuries, the country's Federal Statistical Office (FSO) said.

Mental health woes among young people in Switzerland, as elsewhere, have been growing for a while, with mental health-related hospitalizations in that age group rising on average 3.4 percent each year between 2012 and 2019.

But last year, FSO's analysis pointed to a spectacular 26-percent rise in hospital admissions of girls and young women for mental and behavioral issues.

"This increase is really unprecedented," Tania Andreani of FSO's health section told AFP.

"It is extraordinary."

For males of the same age, such admissions increased by 6 percent, FSO said.

The youngest girls, aged between 10 and 14, saw the most dramatic increase, with mental-health-related hospitalizations for this groups surging 52 percent, FSO said.

In 2021, 2,015 girls—one out of every 100 girls in this age group in Switzerland—were hospitalized with psychiatric issues, it found.

Surging depression

The statistics agency did not provide an explanation for the swelling admission numbers, but Andreani acknowledged that "the pandemic surely played a role."

When comparing the monthly hospital admission numbers to the COVID pandemic measures being taken there were clear parallels, she said, pointing the "enormous changes in the functioning of society."

But she stressed that more in-depth analysis of broader datasets would be needed before a direct link could be established.

The World Health Organization earlier this year found that the pandemic had taken a dire toll on mental health, with anxiety and depression cases estimated to have swelled by over 25 percent globally in 2020 alone.

FSO's analysis also clearly showed surging depression levels among especially young women in Switzerland, with a 14-percent rise in 2020, before swelling by 42 percent last year.

Depression among young men also rose 14 percent in 2021, FSO said.

The statistics agency said that in total, nearly 13,000 10- to 24-year-olds were hospitalized last year on mental health grounds in Switzerland—a country of nearly 8.7 million people.

Nearly half had never before been admitted to hospital over psychiatric issues, marking a 29-percent rise in first-time hospitalizations compared to 2020, FSO said.

By comparison, the average annual increase in first time admissions between 2016 and 2020 stood at 6 percent.

Particularly concerning perhaps was that finding that a full 3,124 young

people of both sexes were hospitalized for [self harm](#) and attempted suicide last year, marking a 26-percent jump from 2020.

Young women and [girls](#) accounted for a full 70 percent of those cases, it said.

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