

Katie

Is it Teenagers or the Parents for the rise of Mental Health issues?

In the Winter of 2021 suicides rates had increased to 39.1 % (Yard). Mental health has been in the hot seat for quite a few years as teenagers and adolescents have been talking increasingly about how they are feeling. Though on the other hand the older generations are constantly wondering why teenagers are so messed up mentally. Many of them wonder why all these teenagers are saying that some things are wrong when back when they were growing up there were not so many mental health problems in our society. So, are the teenagers of today, more specifically generation Z, making up their mental health problems or is it a fundamental problem that is being blatantly ignored and misunderstood by the older generations?

Mental health views of the older generations have a lot of varying stigmas that surround it. You may ask yourself, why is that? Back even just a few decades ago mental health was treated and viewed in a completely different manner. It was viewed as a deficiency in the person, something for the family to be ashamed of. What I mean by this is that people would be sent away to a mental asylum¹ to deal with their problems because the caregiver or friends did not want to deal with them, so this was thought to be the better place for them to be. I once drafted a satirical essay about sending people to mental asylum back in middle school blaming the mentally ill saying that we just need to send them to their “Hotel California.” Mental Asylums were kept in horrible conditions. If you look up mental asylum they come up as a lunatic asylum. Once entering a mental asylum your chance of ever leaving was slim to none. Now imagine trying to send a Gen Z to an “lunatic asylum” mind that there are no active ones in the United

¹ Mental Asylum- Formally known as Lunatic Asylums for where those who were mental ill could get help.

States anymore. There were a generous portion of patients that died in the mental asylums due to overdosing or going insane because they were not being treated for their mental illness but being experimented on or just isolated and locked away to be forgotten. They were drugged to the point where they did not know who they were anymore or even care. All to possible understand if it was something they were making up or if it was a serious problem with the wiring of their brain.

Today there are still a lot of people who still have the mindset that everyone who has mental illness need to be sent away for treatment at facility since it is a “disease.” that could affect their happy lives. When the truth really is that mental health is not a spreadable disease. It never has been and never will be. Teenagers are looking for support and people that they can go to when they are in times of trouble. The most beneficial thing a person can do for them is to just listen. One of the most powerful things anyone can do and one of the simplest things but also one of the hardest things to do. When a friend or family member is in a lot of emotional and mental pain just be there to listen to them and not judge them. Why has this now just started to become known now when it has been going on for decades.

Mental health in teenagers stems from their childhood, whether they realized it then or later in life. A reason that contributes to some of these problems has to do with self-stigmatization² and the affects that has on the person who is dealing with it. Which in this is the youth and self-stigma is extremely detrimental to youth as this is a crucial part of life where they are figuring out how to interact with society but also the development process of their own body (Moses). “Adolescent mental health consumers' self-stigma: associations with parents' and

² Self-Stigmatization- a person encounters public stigma against them and begins to stigmatize themselves as a result

adolescents' illness perceptions and parental stigma” is a study correlated with parental views on mental health with comparison to their child’s views on mental health.

This study considered many different facts as to why teenagers are struggling so much with their mental health and broke it down into a few simple questions to the participants aged between 12 and 18 years old. One of the questions was “How often do you feel embarrassed about your behavioral or emotional issues?” As well as breaking down what internal or external factors played a part with their mental health. Not only that but they were asked if they think they will have these emotions and issues for the rest of their life. All questions were asked to all the participants during the 60-minute interviews they participated in. In this study 70% (55 out of seventy-eight participants) had an affecting disorder ³and 71% (56 out of seventy-eight participants) had a disruptive behavior disorder ⁴. Many of the teenagers that were included in this study had already been diagnosed with a disorder but were still experiencing self-stigmatization from parents or peers.

The other half of the study was to interview the parents on their stigma experiences. Some of those questions included, “How often are you worried about what people would think of you if they knew about your son/ daughter’s MH⁵ problems?” This then led to a few of the same scales that were used to measure the causality of teenagers thinking if this were something that they could control in the future. The differences between teens to adults is worrisome. As some of the parents believe that their children could control their behaviors and emotions if they really wanted to or saying that they will need to get over it to be able to live a normal life. An amazing

³ Affecting Disorder- mental disorder characterized by dramatic changes or extremes of mood.

⁴ Disruptive behavior disorder-Disruptive, impulse-control and conduct disorders affect an individual’s ability to control their emotions and behaviors

⁵ MH- Abbreviation for Mental Health

30% of the parents agreed that they would conceal their children's mental health problems from those that are outside of the family.

At the end of this study, they were able to see that parents who tried to conceal their children's mental health increased the chance of a teenager's self-stigmatization only making the situation worse. Making them think that their peers will make fun of them, not want to be friends with them and the fear of being rejected if they did say anything about their own mental health. They were led to believe that there was something fundamentally wrong with them that needed to be hidden from the world, that they were somehow damaged and inferior. There was also a discovery that was made between parents who concealed their child's mental health to the high self-stigmatization from the teenagers. It was shown that parents who believed that their child had control over the negative behavior had negative parental attitudes towards their own child (Moses).

Stigma is a huge part of the mental health world. It is what shuts people down into thinking that their problems are not worth talking about. It is what isolates those who do not know how to talk about their feelings or emotions. Showing them that it is easier to hide away in their room and become glued to the bed, making it hard to even change their clothes. Even if they do talk about it there is that fear of being treated differently because there is something wrong with them mentally that everyone around them must be on edge to not set them off. Whether it is self-stigma or just stigma, in general it affects the way a teenager will think about the way that their emotions affect them. Not only that but how they should go about their day-to-day life by suppressing any kind of emotion. Showing everyone that they are fine when they really are suffering on the inside. To help with subduing the stigma, what must happen is talking about what it is and how it effects those around them with "Interventions that are effective in

reducing stigma would facilitate the integration of children with mental health problems with their peers, thereby promoting and supporting the development of healthy peer relationships and the important learning that results from those relationships,” (Heary). That is one of the most overlooked problems with mental health. Majority of parents and adults in general like to say that for their child to get better they just need to get over it or suck it up. Which is the complete opposite from the development of healthy peer relationships. Since peer relationships are not just friends or relationships with a significant other; it also includes family and those adults that are closest to the child. Peer relationships are an important part of a child’s development. They learn to act and react in certain situations based on how their peers react to them and those around them.

There are so many different things that factor into a person’s mental state. This can change as the world and social factors change. In 2020 COVID struck and changed the world forever. People were forced to isolate and keep themselves at home away from everyone. For a teen this is extremely detrimental. These are the years where they are growing, learning to interact with others and find where they fit in society. Studies have shown that there was a significant increase in the rate of “suspected suicide attempts.” Ellen Yard, a PhD investigated the statistics around the pandemic years and found that as early as May of 2020 these attempts began to increase. The statistics show that adolescents between 12 -17 years of age, especially girls, rose 26.2%. A novel approach was needed for the new time, “a comprehensive approach, which is adapted during times of infrastructure disruption, involving multisectoral partnerships (e.g., public health, mental health, schools, and families),” (Yard). It is during this time of isolation that the older generation was forced to see what was happening with the adolescents of this generation. Parents and children were forced to stay together in the house with no outside

recreation or escape. As the pandemic continued the rate of “suspected suicide attempts” continued to increase to a staggering 39.1% and out of that they were higher among females. While the pandemic was horrible on outcome of it was “by spending more time at home together with young persons, adults might have become more aware of suicidal thoughts and behaviors” this brought new awareness to the older generations and started to have them look at mental illness in an unusual way (Yard).

Mental health in teenagers has been overlooked to the point where to understand it they are forced to use adult literature for mental health information. Meaning that “Lessons from the adult literature on the stigma of mental health problems demonstrates that stereotypes and prejudices held by others may become internalized by those with mental health problems, and self-stigmatization may occur (Corrigan and Shapiro 2010),” (Heary). Even with using the literature that is provided researchers as saying that it still will produce prejudices and stereotypes that would increase self-stigmatization. It is the lack of resources and information that are hurting the children that are desperately crying out for help. When the information out in the world is flawed it can only hurt those who are looking for answers, “Chandra and Minkovitz (2007) found that students who had limited or inaccurate mental health information had more stigmatizing attitudes about individuals with mental health disorders; therefore, promoting mental health by providing accurate, age-app,” (Bulanda). The children need information in a way that makes sense to them and that they can relate too. Not only that but when creating this literature, it could help many other people who are not just children. The more research that is produced from this, the more the chances are of figuring out how to help adolescents more.

When you are a child, your behavior is not fixed from the moment you are born. They are learned from those that are closest to you, those being your parents, siblings, and friends. A lot of

that is how they have been perceived from the get-go, “Successfully addressing negative stigma surrounding those with SMI⁶ in adolescents is critical and can alleviate the perception of dangerousness, social distancing, and improve understanding” (Dillinger). Those who do suffer from mental illness are not always dangerous. But the key to all of this is understanding that yes, they are different from a normal person but that does not mean they should be treated differently from you.

⁶ SMI- abbreviation for Serious Mental Illness

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