

## **Mental Health Struggles are Worse for Minoritized Youth Populations**

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### ***Introduction***

In 2019, nearly 20% of people in the U.S. were facing some type of mental health struggle. These mental health struggles are more severe for minority groups in the United States such as women, lower income, or disabled people who are more likely than average to be dealing with mental health issues (Mental Health America (MHA), 2022). That 20% figure for mental health issues remains consistent for youth populations as well. This brief article highlights some of the mental health impacts we see in teenage girls, disabled youth populations, and youth living below the poverty line within the United States.

### ***How mental health impacts women in the U.S.***

Mental disorders are very serious and have a major disproportionate impact on women all throughout the U.S. More than 1 in 5 women in the United States experienced a mental health struggle in the past year, such as depression or anxiety (Office on Women's Health (OASH), 2021). Some conditions, like depression and bipolar disorder often have different effects on women than men (OASH, 2021). For example, women are more likely to focus on negative emotions instead of problem-solving (American Psychological Association (APA), 2011). These emotions lead to women struggling with disorders like depression in different ways than men (APA, 2011). Because of the distinct conditions women face, they oftentimes need alternative approaches to treatment than men (Regis College, 2022). These rates also worsen among younger women in comparison to older women (American Psychological Association (APA), 2019). In fact, approximately 41% of American teenagers felt sad or hopeless between 2016 and 2017 (American Association of University Women (AAUW), n.d.). This has been on the rise since 2005. Girls also make up 90% of hospitalizations for eating disorders (Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), 2018).

One of the primary reasons why mental health conditions are so disparate is due to accessing proper mental health treatment. For those using state healthcare, like the one in California, it is nearly impossible for women to get aid because of numerous socioeconomic factors (Torralba, 2021). This includes race, citizenship, and language barriers (Torralba, 2021). Women should not feel ashamed to get help and remember their issues are equally as valid as anyone else's. Mental health services for women should encourage help-seeking behaviors.

### ***Living with a Disability in America***

1 in 4 Americans deals with a disability or impairment (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2020). And they estimate that more than 30% of those adults have frequent mental distress. The impairments can be physical, cognitive, and sensory (NAMI, n.d.). Disabilities can impact many things including a person's vision, movement, thinking, learning,

communication, hearing, mental health, and social relationships (California Department of Social Services (CDSS), n.d.). These students are also more prone to chronic absenteeism, meaning repeatedly missing school. On average, people living with disabilities have more severe mental health struggles than their non-disabled peer counterparts (Honey et al., 2011). Some of these mental health struggles include symptoms affiliated with autism spectrum disorder and ADHD (Munir, 2016). For youth living with disabilities, oftentimes multiple disorders can be present, also known as comorbidity (Munir, 2016).

While there are many factors that play a part in a person's mental health, the more adversity they face likely leads to these issues being exacerbated. For those living with disabilities and impairments, there are more barriers to gaining access to mental health coverage. Check local and national government websites for more information on ways to help struggling youth or to seek personal aid for more responsive services.

### ***Impacts on Children Living Below the Poverty Line***

Impacts from poverty also present disproportionate rates of mental health struggles among youth. According to some evidence, children are affected by poverty by a disproportionate amount. In fact, 33% of all impoverished people are under the age of 18 (SAMHSA, 2016). The amount of stress caused by living below the poverty line is known to lead to long-term health problems, which includes mental health struggles. These struggles include anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2022). On top of that, clinics often do not accommodate people with those who do not have flexible schedules. Mental health clinics usually have long wait times to meet with a professional and can require multiple sessions to get the treatment they may need (Hodgkinson et al. 2017). Getting treatment and help for mental health struggles early on can make a large impact on quality of life for many children (CDC, 2022). But it is often inaccessible for people living below the poverty line, due to their lack of expendable time.

For many youth and minority populations, mental health issues impact them at a disproportionate rate. Neighborhood interventions and improving the social environment in these lower-income communities can be a way to deal with the emotional issues the young people deal with (Kim et al., 2020). Early treatment is another way to combat these issues (CDC, 2022). Neighborhood interventions and the earliest possible treatments is a step forward for youth living below the poverty line to combat their mental health struggles.

### ***Conclusion***

For those who are struggling, there are many locally provided resources that can provide aid. Reach out and find what is available in your area. Counties, states, and other government websites will have mental health related resources, so do not feel pressured to suffer alone. Keep in mind, mental health struggles are everywhere, and look different depending on the



person. Staying informed about minority populations and the disproportionate rates that mental health struggles impact them is useful to being both sympathetic and knowledgeable. Try reaching out to those around you because understanding is the first step to progress in breaking the stigma around mental health struggles.

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