Half of Kids With Behavioral Health Issues Don’t Receive Help

Between 41% and 63% of high-risk children between ages 2 and 17 lack professional help for behavioral health troubles.

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Whether a child receives treatment for behavioral health problems is critical to their mental, physical and emotional well-being. But recent findings published in the journal JAMA Network Open reveal that more than half of high-risk kids aren’t receiving the behavioral health services they need, HealthDay reports.

For the study, researchers assessed results from three national surveys about children’s exposure to violence completed in 2008, 2011 and 2014. Overall, nearly 12,000 kids ages 10 to 17 and caregivers of children ages 2 to 9 were observed.

The inquiry showed that 57% of children ages 2 to 9 with a high incidence of adverse childhood experiences weren’t linked to any clinical behavioral health services. In addition, 53% of children in this age group exhibited excessive symptoms of distress, and 41% showed high levels of both indicators.

Among youngsters ages 10 to 17, 63% of those who experienced adverse childhood experiences, 52% of those with high distress symptoms and 62% of those who scored high on both indicators were not connected to mental health services.

In addition, scientists found that young Black children and older Latino youth had a significantly lower likelihood of contact with a behavioral health professional compared with white children—even if they faced a greater number of adverse childhood experiences or both excessive amounts of adverse childhood experiences and distressful symptoms. (Overall, Black kids were the least likely of any racial group to receive services.)

“We need to train more people to provide these kinds of services,” said David Finkelhor, PhD, director of the University of New Hampshire’s Crimes Against Children Research Center and one of the study’s authors. “We need to provide them in more convenient locations, like schools, and in conjunction with medical practices. We need to package them to make them a little bit less stigmatizing.”

Finkelhor also suggested that mental health providers be trained in the use of the newest, most effective evidence-based services available to youngsters.

In addition, he advised employing the arts and exercise to help young people deal with depression, anxiety and trauma.

For related coverage, read "Treatment of Children's Mental Health Issues Is Widely Inconsistent."

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