Half of Kids With Mental Health Problems Don’t Receive Treatment

Stigma, lack of access to care and parental issues can stop children in the United States from getting therapy for mental disorders.

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In the United States, about 7.7 million youngsters are battling mental health troubles. But almost half of these kids aren’t receiving the necessary treatment or counseling for these disorders, reveal new findings published in JAMA Pediatrics, reports Healio.

For the study, researchers evaluated data from the 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health. The information gathered included answers from parents about the health of their offspring ages 0 to 17 years. Scientists specifically asked parents whether a doctor ever told them that their child had a mental health disorder and, if so, whether the condition still present.

Researchers defined depression, anxiety and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as mental health disorders. Parents also disclosed whether their child received any treatment or counseling from a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric nurse or clinical social worker.

Results showed that 16.5 percent of the 46.6 million kids included in the study experienced at least one mental health problem. In addition, investigators noted that 49.4 percent of those children did not receive treatment for their disorders, which could worsen such conditions and lead to other health disparities in adulthood.

According to Daniel G. Whitney, PhD, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Michigan’s Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation in Ann Arbor, several factors can combine to trigger mental health disorders in children that go untreated. These include the stigma around mental health issues and seeking treatment, environmental barriers (e.g., accessibility and affordability), genetic or behavioral predisposition and parental factors.

“For pediatricians, recognizing the importance of mental health in overall health may help to improve their own practice,” Whitney said. “Based on these findings, some recommendations [to doctors] could be to incorporate mental health disorder screening, referral and monitoring for their child and adolescent patients.”

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