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The COVID-19 Pandemic and its Effects on Teen Depression

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every student around the world in one way or another, but the most drastic effect have been the increased thoughts of self-harm and depression. Teenagers today are already under the pressure of external sources outside of school and family, such as social media, sports, drugs and alcohol, sexual activity, all of which can lead to extreme depression. The stress of all of this on their shoulders, as they attempt to learn who they are as a person was already a lot to bear, but now, teenagers are spiraling down with the looming effects of the global pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the youth today mentally and physically, causing suicide rates to skyrocket and leaving the public with little means of prevention.

The mental impact of the global pandemic has most dramatically affected the youth of the world. According to a study by Emily Seymore from Stanford University, Generation Z is much more prone to depression, as she stated in her article: “Generation Z, which is predicted to overtake all previous generations in size as they age and older generations die out, has been beset by mental health issues such as depression and suicide more than previous generations at this age.” With all the responsibility and overwhelming pressure teenagers must succumb to today, the COVID-19 pandemic has become the icing on the cake. The pandemic has been especially hard on high school and college seniors, robbing them of the few events and memories that they have left in school, making their hard-work feel all for naught. Students have been forced to take online classes, distancing them from their friend support system, which for many students, is their only support system. This physical distancing, coupled with the stress of school has at

times become overwhelming. Students feel forgotten and robbed, trudging through their days of school feeling tired and lacking motivation. This, of course, results in much higher suicide rates. The 2020 nationwide suicide rates have not yet been released to the public, but according to many doctors, hospitals have been overrun with suicide attempts and they have noted that teenagers are being admitted with much worse mental health issues than in the previous year (2019). According to the article, “Child Psychiatrists Warn That the Pandemic May Be Driving Up Kids’ Suicide Risks,” by Rhitu Chatterjee, published by NPR, “Psychiatrists and other doctors who work with children say the pandemic has created a perfect storm of stressors for kids, increasing the risk of suicide for many. It has exacerbated an ongoing children's mental health crisis — suicide rates had already been going up for almost a decade among children and youth.” Teenagers struggle more today than they ever have before and it is very important to know the signs of depression and what we can do to help.

With this being noted, it is important to recognize what the signs of depression are, how we recognize them, and what can we do to help. Although many times, teens try to hide their feelings and thoughts of depression, sometimes, signs of depression can be easy to spot and are more common than you think. These signs include loss of interest or motivation, drowsiness and sleep loss, anxiety, mood swings or irritability, and the easiest sign to spot, is self-harm. Many teenagers are prone to these signs and may be going through them right now. It is important to know the difference between a hormonal teenager and a teenager with depression. Many adults today confuse these two and blame depression on puberty or technology, which leaves teens with the mindset that their problems are not important. This makes it difficult to talk to parents and, although friends can be more understanding, it is often talked about humorously or as a joke “that we’re all experiencing the same things”. This is very much not true, as everyone

experiences and processes these issues and hardships differently. And, although teenagers possess access to the Self-Help line, most students don't take advantage of that service as they may be scared their parents or others will find out.

So, how can we help? An article by Melinda Smith, published on HelpGuide, provides some helpful insight. Smith tells us that one of the best ways to provide help to those with depression is to simply listen to them. An easy way is to ask questions, such as "Are you doing okay?" or to constantly reassure them that their life matters to you. Especially try to refrain from using trigger phrases, such as "What do you have to be depressed about?" or "Everyone goes through hard times." It's so important to let teenagers know that they are listened to and that they are important. Another way to help prevent suicide is to encourage the act of getting help. Mentioning therapy or seeing a doctor can go a long way, especially since it lets teens know that others care and see their problems. It is so important to be able to recognize signs of a distorted mental health and to have the capability to provide good help, especially during this pandemic.

Depression and anxiety affects teenagers today in more ways than it ever has before. Not only has COVID-19 taken many lives through the virus, but it has also taken too many lives without the effect of the virus at all. We need to do our part to stop suicide in its tracks and try and recognize the signs of depression before it's too late. It is very important to be aware of your loved one's health, as well as your own, during this pandemic and to remember that it will get better.

Works Cited

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