

US children's suicide-related hospital admissions double in last decade

George Gallanis
11 May 2017

New research indicates a devastating development amongst the most vulnerable section of society. The number of children and teens ages 5 to 17 hospitalized for suicidal thoughts or self-harm in the United States has doubled since 2008.

The finding are based on a study abstract titled, “Trends in Suicidality and Serious Self-Harm for Children 5-17 Years at 32 U.S. Children’s Hospitals, 2008-2015” prepared for presentation at the 2017 Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting in San Francisco May 7.

Researchers sifted through administrative data from 32 children’s hospitals from around the country. All discharge diagnoses for suicidality or serious self-harm from emergency department and inpatient intakes were indexed between the years 2008 and 2015 for children between ages 5 and 17.

The results are staggering. Researchers tallied a total of 118,363 diagnoses for suicidality or self-harm from the 32 hospitals. They concluded that a doubling of such diagnoses took place over the study period, an increase from 0.67 percent in 2008 of all intakes to 1.79 percent in 2015.

Over half of those tallied, 59,631 patients, were 15- to 17-year-olds, with 43,682 patients, or 36.9 percent, comprising 12- to 14-year-olds. Moreover, 15,050 patients, amounting to 12.7 percent of the total, were children between ages 5 and 11.

The study also noted that the time of year could also affect when children felt suicidal or inflicted self-harm. The lowest occurrences for both diagnoses occurred during the summer months of June through August, with the highest happening during the spring, March through May, and the fall, September through November.

Dr. Gregory Plemmons, a leading researcher of the

study and an associate professor of pediatrics at Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt, in Nashville, Tennessee, told CNN: “We noticed over the last two, three years that an increasing number of our hospital beds are not being used for kids with pneumonia or diabetes; they were being used for kids awaiting placement because they were suicidal. And it confirmed what we were feeling: that the rates have doubled over the last decade.”

As to why children commit or think about suicide, Plemmons said it was the “million-dollar question,” adding, “Family history of depression or suicide, family violence, child abuse, gay and lesbian youth, history of bullying—those are all risk factors that have been reported. We didn’t look at any of those specific factors in our study.”

While such factors undoubtedly play a significant role in the development of mental illness among America’s youth, they are further exacerbated by the capitalist system, which exploits the working class and savagely tears society apart into the haves and have-nots.

For today’s youth, having been born in the past two decades means being raised in a world in which war has been waged on a daily basis. The study shows that young people are among the most vulnerable to this social crisis—facing an uncertain educational future and bleak job prospects—and are increasingly expressing their despair through suicidal thoughts and actions.

A CDC report published last fall found that US children ages 10 to 14 are now more likely to die from suicide than from auto accidents.

The desperation felt by youth is pervasive throughout American society. Recent research reveals swaths of the US population are plagued by mental illness and psychological distress. One report from the

Psychiatrics Journal found that 3.4 percent of American adults, a total of 8.3 million people, suffer from “severe psychological distress” (SPD).

Another report from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed that 52,404 people in the US died from drug overdoses in 2015, stemming in part from psychological distress.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact