Teen Girl Suicides Doubled Since 2007, Hitting a 40-Year High

By Alex Berezow, PhD — August 3, 2017

It's not easy being a teenager. Since time immemorial, teens have had to grapple with the raging hormones and quest for self-identity that are hallmarks of this stage of life. However, coming of age in an era of social media -- in which every moment of a person's life can be live-tweeted and publicly scrutinized -- makes an already difficult situation that much worse.

New data released by the CDC highlights the hardship of modern teenage life. Since 2007, the suicide rate among boys aged 15 to 19 has increased by 31% (from 10.8 to 14.2 per 100,000), while the suicide rate among girls has more than doubled (from 2.4 to 5.1 per 100,000). In fact, the suicide rate for teenage girls is at a 40-year high*. 

The authors do not explain the reasons behind this increase, but it is tempting to speculate that social media may be playing a role. Facebook was founded in 2004, Twitter in 2006. Over the past several years, multiple anecdotes have linked teenage suicides to social media bullying.

Of course, anecdotes are not data. A closer examination into the cause of this recent surge in teen suicides is needed. However, linking them to social media is certainly a tempting hypothesis.

Suicide Is Not Just a Problem for Teens

Complicating the picture is the fact that, according to other data from the CDC[2], suicide rates have increased for all age groups in the United States, with the lone exception of those aged 75 and older. The surge in suicides for people in their 60s, for instance, is not likely attributable to social media.
Additionally, rural Americans have been hit hardest by the suicide epidemic, witnessing an increase of 40% in 16 years [3]. Once again, this would argue against social media as an explanation.

What Is Causing the Surge in Suicides?

Obviously, people commit suicide for various reasons: Depression, loneliness, mental illness, drug addiction, relationship trouble, financial hardship, and bullying have all been implicated. Determining the predominant causes of suicide in each age and ethnic demographic would be a major step toward reversing this troubling trend.

Note: The data in this study only goes back 40 years. The current 40-year high could actually stretch back further in time.


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[4] https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6630a6.htm