Mental Health Problems and Awareness on the Rise

By Mal Butcher, Aiden Grishaber, Luke Heineking, and Avery Miller

Mental health and substance use disorders spiked by 13% from 2007 to 2017, according to the World Health Organization. The COVID-19 pandemic also increased anxiety and depression by 25% globally. The sudden influx due to technological and societal changes has had consequences worldwide.

Social Media Impact

Social media can be a valuable tool for communication if used correctly, but some risks come with its use, especially among teenagers. Using different social platforms can bring people closer together. Everyone can see what's going on in other people's lives, and while that can be a positive thing, there can be negative mental health impacts that can come along with it. Body image is a significant struggle amongst teenagers, and a direct correlation can be made between social media and body image issues. Seeing other people's lives can cause FOMO (fear of missing out), which causes more stress and anxiety. Social media is linked to the rise of mental illnesses in young teens and adults. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok can cause teens to compare themselves to others in an unhealthy manner.

Victim Mentality with Rising Mental Health Awareness

Social media has made common symptoms of mental health distress well-known. The more awareness surrounding mental health, the more reported cases there are of struggling with mental health. This can be for a multitude of reasons, but a possible one is the 'prevalence inflation hypothesis.' This suggests that the more aware students are of common symptoms suggesting mental health problems, the more students will be on the lookout for those symptoms in their own lives. This can cause students to report distress and struggling mental health even when they experience these symptoms in only small amounts, amounts that are common in everyday difficulties of life. This can cause higher reports and what appear to be sky-rocketing statistics. Furthermore, if an individual sees these symptoms in themselves and, in turn, believes themselves to be struggling, they'll take what seems to be the next logical step and seek out help. This can overwhelm mental health professionals and make it more difficult for those who do need these services to get to them, which can have dire consequences.

How Mental Health Is Publicly Addressed

With the rise in mental health problems, public opinions affect more people. A 2017 study by the British Journal of Psychiatry surveying 21 countries found that only 16.5% of those experiencing Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) receive any treatment. The fear of facing stigma was a frequent reason individuals avoided seeking help.

Negative stereotypes associated with mental health can be seen in nearly a third of the population, according to a study published by the Journal of Clinical Medicine Research in 2018. The stigmatizing belief suggested that a weak personality causes depression. About three of every five participants trusted pharmacotherapy to treat depression.

The study concluded, "An educational intervention or campaign to reduce stigma toward depression and improve knowledge about treatment of depression is needed."

Good Coping Mechanisms to Help
In the face of life's challenges, it is essential to have effective coping mechanisms to manage stress and emotions. Positive coping mechanisms promote emotional well-being, resilience, and personal growth. They enable individuals to effectively manage stress, learn from difficult situations, and adapt to new circumstances. On the other hand, negative coping mechanisms hinder emotional well-being and impede personal growth. They prevent individuals from effectively managing stress and developing adaptive skills.

Choosing positive coping mechanisms over negative ones is crucial for maintaining good mental health and building resilience. Positive reframing, physical activity, and practicing stress management techniques are valuable tools for managing stress. Positive coping strategies foster healthy relationships, improve overall well-being, and empower individuals to face challenges head-on. By consciously selecting healthy ways to deal with stress, individuals can cultivate emotional strength, enhance problem-solving skills, and navigate life's difficulties with grace and resilience.

New Calls To Change How Suicide Is Taught In Schools
By Mal Butcher

Suicide was the second leading cause of death in age groups 10-14 and 20-34; it also ranks in the top nine causes of death for people 10-64. Some students want schools to change the ways they address suicide.

"Suicide is a topic that I think most schools are too afraid to truly address. Suicidal thoughts, harmful actions, and other mental health issues are not often talked about school-wide. Before [junior] year, I don't think we've ever had such an in-depth discussion on how mental health issues can affect people's life, schoolwork, and physical well-being," said Morgan Whiteman, a junior at Bio-Med Science Academy.

Mental health problems are experienced by over one in five adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). One of the most common mental illnesses is Major Depressive Disorder (MDD).

A 2017 study by the British Journal of Psychiatry surveying 21 countries found that only 16.5% of those experiencing MDD receive any sort of treatment. With so many people left untreated, suicide has been a prevalent topic.

Schools, however, may be able to provide support to students in need. Three-quarters of parents in the U.S. think counseling would help their child, according to a poll by the CDC in April 2022. According to Whiteman, he requested counseling from Bio-Med in sixth grade following an incident with a classmate, but no counselors were brought in.

"I ended up being okay, however, I feel like the school should have had more care involving that situation. Situations such as that can be, and often are, very traumatizing and very scary," he said.

Nancy Butcher, a mathematics teacher at Maplewood Career Center, detailed her school's policy for how the staff is taught to handle students expressing suicidal thoughts. Butcher believes that other Northeast Ohio schools have a similar approach.

"[Teachers] notify the administration and counselors, and they would pull the student out of class to assess the risk," she said. "The training [Maplewood teachers] got [to help students with suicidal tendencies was] to identify risk factors and then, to make referrals, not to do any of the counseling ourselves — not that we can't talk to students and build rapport with them. We use that to identify the risk factors, but if there's a question, we make a referral because it's better to air on the side of caution."

Risk factors are signs of any problems that put a student's health in danger, according to Butcher. They may include: depression, missing or being tardy to school, sleeping in class, mentions of harming themselves or peers, and any other actions outside of the student's usual behaviors.

Because teachers have new students every year and don't have access to previous records, they may miss risk factors or make redundant reports. To avoid this, Butcher approaches the student before making a report.

"I ask them, 'Hey, what's going on? Why're you so tired?' and sometimes, they'll be like, 'My girlfriend broke up with me,' or 'I worked really late last night.' I do ask them questions and try," she said. "A lot of times, the counselors and the nurses have information they don't share

with [teachers] because of students' privacy, so if I see anything, I call the counselor… or the nurse," Butcher said.

To help prevent suicide, Whiteman wants schools to address mental health earlier.

"Talking about [suicide and harmful thoughts] and informing students on what to do if they need [help] is the first step in making all students feel comfortable to go to the counselors and seek help."

Ohio's 133rd General Assembly supported teaching students about suicide and mental health from a younger age. It passed House Bill 123, the "Safety and Violence Education Students (SAVE Students) Act" March 24, 2021. School districts must provide grades six-12 with at least one hour of education about suicide awareness and prevention, violence prevention, and social inclusion beginning July 1, 2023.

Whiteman also wants to encourage students needing help to talk to school counselors by providing them with more privacy.

"I believe that another beneficial way to address suicide is to let students know that unless they talk about hurting themselves in the future, the counselors won't inform parents or guardians. The fear of parents finding out about their issues holds many people back from getting the help they need."

Positive Coping Mechanisms vs. Negative Coping Mechanisms

By Luke Heineking

Life can be filled with various challenges, and it's essential to have good coping mechanisms when it gets too tough. Coping mechanisms are strategies that are used to manage and cope with stress and other emotions in difficult situations. However, not all coping mechanisms are created equal. Some can be beneficial and constructive, while others can be detrimental and counterproductive.

Positive coping mechanisms promote emotional well-being, resilience, and personal growth. They are healthy strategies that allow individuals to manage stress and build adaptive skills effectively.

Negative coping mechanisms hinder emotional well-being, resilience, and personal growth. They are unhealthy strategies that impede individuals from effectively managing stress and developing adaptive skills.

Choosing positive coping mechanisms over negative ones is crucial for maintaining good mental health and building resilience. Positive coping strategies promote personal growth, improve overall well-being, and foster healthy relationships. It empowers individuals to face challenges head-on, learn from them, and adapt to new circumstances. By developing and practicing positive coping mechanisms, individuals can cultivate emotional strength, improve their problem-solving skills, and navigate life's difficulties with grace and resilience. It is important to be mindful of our coping strategies and consciously choose healthy ways to deal with stress, ultimately leading to a more fulfilling and balanced life.