Rise in teenage girls intentionally self-poisoning fuels mental health concerns

* [Telegraph Reporters](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/authors/telegraph-reporters/)

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Growing numbers of girls are poisoning themselves with alcohol and contributing to a rise in teenage toxic incidents, research suggests.

There were 17,862 cases of poisoning among UK teenagers between 1992 and 2012, showed data published in the journal [Injury Prevention.](http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/)

Girls were significantly more likely to suffer from poisoning, the study found, with the rate of poisoning in boys and young men less than half of that in girls and young women. Intentional poisonings were 80 per cent lower in boys and young men than girls. While alcohol-related poisonings were 10 per cent lower in boys and young men.

Poisoning is one of the most common causes of death among teenagers worldwide, with much of it related to [self-harm.](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/health/self-harm-the-7-myths-that-need-busting/)

The figures were released to coincide with [Mental Health Awareness Week](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/the-duchess-of-cambridge-why-we-all-need-to-open-up-about-mental/).

Nick Harrop, campaigns manager for the charity[YoungMinds,](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/) said: “The steep rise in self-poisoning is deeply concerning, with this study indicating that young women are the most affected.

“We know that young people who are struggling with mental health problems are more likely to abuse alcohol, drugs and prescription medication in an attempt to switch off from distressing feelings.”

The research, from the University of Nottingham, also found that young people living in the most economically deprived regions were two to three times more likely to poison themselves than those in the least deprived.

Experts analysed GP records and found a 27 per cent rise in cases of teenage toxic incidents - including accidental, deliberate self-harming and alcohol poisoning - between 1992 and 2012.

The largest increases were for intentional poisonings among 16- to 17-year-old-girls and for alcohol-related poisonings among 15- to 16-year-old girls, both of which roughly doubled.

Between 2007 and 2012 almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of poisonings were recorded as intentional, and 16 per cent were related to alcohol.

The authors said: "One potential explanation for the increase in alcohol poisonings over time is increased availability, with the relative affordability of alcohol in the UK increasing steadily between 1980 and 2012, licensing hours having increased since 2003, and numbers of outlets increasing alongside alcohol harm."

But they urged caution over the interpretation of their findings too, adding: "We must consider whether this (the increasing rates seen among young women) reflects real changes, increased health-seeking behaviour or changes in GP coding practices, or popular trends, such as clinicians perceiving intentional poisonings as more frequent and therefore recording events as such."

A second study published in the[Archives of Disease in Childhood](http://adc.bmj.com/)found that more than half of UK toddler deaths from unintentional drug poisoning are due to methadone.

Experts looked at data on childhood poisonings and admissions to intensive care for unintentional poisoning between 2001 and 2013.

During this period, 28 children under the age of four died in England and Wales as a result of unintentional poisoning with a prescribed drug. Methadone, which is used by heroin addicts to help kick their drug habit, was responsible in 57 per cent of these cases.

Between 2002 and 2012, 201 toddlers were admitted to intensive care as a result of unintentional poisoning with prescribed drugs.

Sedatives accounted for nearly one in five (19 cent or 22 cases), while methadone accounted for 17 per cent or 20 cases.