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The concerns and challenges of being a U.S. teen: What the data show

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Students at a Chicago high school.

American teens have a lot on their minds. Substantial shares point to anxiety and depression, bullying, and drug and alcohol use (and abuse) as major problems among people their age, according to [a new Pew Research Center survey](#) of youth ages 13 to 17.

How common are these and other experiences among U.S. teens? We reviewed the most recent available data from government and academic researchers to find out:

Anxiety and depression

Serious mental stress is a fact of life for many American teens. In the new survey, seven-in-ten teens say anxiety and depression are major problems among their peers – a concern that’s shared by mental health [researchers](#) and [clinicians](#).

Data on the prevalence of anxiety disorders is hard to come by among teens specifically. But [7% of youths ages 3 to 17](#) had such a condition in 2016-17

Serious depression, meanwhile, has been on the rise among teens for the past several years. In 2016, 12.8% of youths ages 12 to 17 had experienced a major depressive episode in the past year, up from 8% as recently as 2010. Fewer than half of youths with major depression said they'd been treated for it in the past year.

Alcohol and drugs

Fewer teens these days are drinking alcohol. Last year, 30.2% of 12th-graders and 18.6% of 10th-graders had consumed alcohol in the past 30 days. Two decades earlier, those figures were 52% and 38.8%, respectively. (In the Center's new survey, 16% of teens said they felt "a lot" or "some" pressure to drink alcohol.)

But the Michigan survey also found that, despite some ups and downs, use of marijuana (or its derivative, hashish) among 12th-graders is nearly as high as it was two decades ago. Last year, 22.2% reported using marijuana in the past 30 days, versus 22.8% in 1998.

Bullying and cyberbullying

Issues of personal safety also are on U.S. teens' minds. The Center's survey found that 55% of teens said bullying was a major problem among their peers, while a third called gangs a major problem.

About a fifth of high school students (19% in 2017) reported being bullied on school property in the past 12 months, and 14.9% said they'd experienced cyberbullying (via texts, social media or other digital means) in the previous year. In both cases, girls, younger students, and students who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual were more likely to say they'd been bullied.

Gangs

As for gangs, the share of students ages 12 to 18 who said gangs were present at their school fell from 20.1% in 2001 to 10.7% in 2015. Black and Hispanic students, as well as students in urban schools, were most likely to report the presence of gangs at school.

Poverty

Four-in-ten teens say poverty is a major problem among their peers. In 2017, about 2.2 million 15- to 17-year-olds (17.6%) were living in households with incomes below the poverty level. Black teens were more than twice as likely as white teens to live in households below the poverty level (30.4% versus 14%)

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