

Child Health Poll: More than 1-in-4 Tennessee parents worried their kids have undiagnosed depression, anxiety

The latest analysis of the 2023 Tennessee Child Health Poll, released during National Mental Health Awareness Month, has found that roughly 29% of Tennessee parents are concerned their child has undiagnosed anxiety or depression.

The poll, fielded in the fall of 2022 by researchers at the [Vanderbilt Center for Child Health Policy](#), also found more than 30% of parents polled said their child had been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety or depression, a 7% increase since the question was first asked in the annual poll in 2019.

“The mental health of kids in Tennessee is suffering, and parents are increasingly concerned,” said Heather Kreth, PsyD, associate professor of Pediatric Psychology and a member of the Center. “The number of children I treat who are suffering from severe depression, anxiety and thoughts of self-harm or suicide has been steadily increasing in recent years. Suicide remains the second leading cause of death for teens and young adults nationwide.”

In total, more than 20% of parents reported concerns their child had undiagnosed anxiety, nearly 14% said they were concerned their child had undiagnosed depression, and more than 11% were concerned their child had undiagnosed ADHD/ADD. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the lives of children and families across the state, 14% reported concerns about undiagnosed anxiety, and less than 7% reported concerns about ADHD/ADD.

The findings are the latest to be released from the annual poll that covered a wide range of issues impacting Tennessee parents and kids from online bullying, [school firearm violence](#), [food security](#) and [insurance status](#).

Of parents who reported mental health diagnoses for their children, many were diagnosed in the last year. Overall, 38% of diagnoses of depression were made within the last year compared to, 37% for anxiety, and 19% for ADHD.

More than 50% of parents of children who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition reported their children do not receive mental health services. Almost 30% of parents report their children get mental health care from their pediatrician or family doctor, versus a mental health provider.

“We need to equip our pediatricians with resources and brief focused-intervention tools to support patient mental health symptoms,” says Katherine Spencer, Psy.D., a pediatric psychologist who works at Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt. “And beyond that, we have a substantial need to increase treatment capacity for children in the state.”

The [Vanderbilt Child Health Poll](#) is conducted annually to gauge parents’ concerns about a wide range of topics. The data are collected from a representative sample of Tennessee parents across each of the three grand divisions of the state. The research was funded in part by a grant from the Boedecker Foundation.

May is [National Mental Health Awareness Month](#). If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health emergency, please call 988.