



Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

BACKGROUND

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Parents Report Estimated 2.7 Million Children with Emotional and Behavioral Problems

A special feature in the report, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2005* shows that nearly 5 percent—or an estimated 2.7 million children—are reported by their parents to suffer from definite or severe emotional or behavioral difficulties, problems that may interfere with their family life, their ability to learn, and their formation of friendships. These difficulties may persist throughout a child's development and lead to lifelong disability, including more serious illness, more difficult to treat illness, and co-occurring mental illnesses.

This special child mental health indicator is based on responses from a sample of parents of children ages 4 - 17. They were asked to rate their child's difficulty with emotions, concentration, behavior, and ability to get along with other people.

"Parents are usually the first to notice emotional and behavioral difficulties in their children," said Thomas R. Insel, M.D., Director of the National Institute of Mental Health of the National Institutes of Health. "We encourage them to talk to a health care or mental health professional if they are concerned about their child's mental, behavioral or emotional health."

This indicator reports that 65 percent of parents of children with definite or severe difficulties had contacted a mental health professional or general doctor, or that their child had received special education services, for emotional or behavioral problems. Nine percent of parents of these children said that they wanted mental health services for their child but were unable to afford them.

Parents also reported:

- Boys were more likely than girls to have definite or severe emotional and behavioral difficulties.
- Children ages 8 and over were more likely than younger children to have emotional or behavioral difficulties.
- Children from poor families were more likely to have emotional or behavioral difficulties than other children.

The information for this special feature, Parental Reports of Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties, was contributed by experts from the National Institute of Mental Health, the Center

for Mental Health Services in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the National Center for Health Statistics, the National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, and an international panel. It was compiled from responses to an item in a child behavioral assessment instrument administered as part of the National Health Interview Survey, conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics. The survey does not predict or provide information on specific disorders.