

The NSDUH Report

May 11, 2009

Major Depressive Episode and Treatment among Adolescents

In Brief

- In 2007, 8.2 percent of adolescents (an estimated 2.0 million youths aged 12 to 17) experienced at least one major depressive episode (MDE) in the past year, and about two fifths (38.9 percent) of those received treatment for depression in the past year
- Among adolescents with past year MDE, those with no health insurance coverage were much less likely than those with Medicaid/Children's Health Insurance Program or private health insurance to have received treatment (17.2 vs. 42.9 and 40.6 percent, respectively)
- Among those adolescents who saw or talked to a medical doctor or other professional about depression, 58.8 percent saw or talked to a counselor, 36.8 percent saw or talked to a psychologist, 27.3 percent saw or talked to a psychiatrist or psychotherapist, and 26.6 percent saw or talked to a general practitioner or family doctor

Depression involves persistent sadness, discouragement, loss of feelings of self-worth, and loss of interest in usual activities, and each year it affects millions of adolescents. Although many treatment options are available for depression—including psychotherapeutic approaches and medications—many adolescents who need these services may not access them. Increasing parental, caregiver, and teacher awareness of the signs of adolescent depression and ensuring that effective mental health treatment services are easily accessible may help to increase service utilization and improve the current and future well-being of America's adolescents.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) includes questions about major depressive episode (MDE) and treatment for depression. MDE is defined using the diagnostic criteria set forth in the 4th edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), which specifies a period of 2 weeks or longer in which there is either depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure and at least four other symptoms that reflect a change in functioning, such as problems with

sleep, eating, energy, concentration, and self-image. Treatment for depression is defined as seeing or talking to a medical doctor or other professional about depression or using prescription medication in the past year for depression. This issue of *The NSDUH Report*, which focuses on MDE and treatment for depression among adolescents (i.e., youths aged 12 to 17), uses findings based on 2007 NSDUH data.

Prevalence of MDE

An estimated 2.0 million adolescents (8.2 percent) experienced at least one MDE in the past year (Table 1). Females were more likely than males to have experienced past year MDE (11.9 vs. 4.6 percent). Rates were similar across the four geographic regions and did not vary by health insurance coverage. However, the prevalence of MDE was related to the perception of overall health; 15.0 percent of those adolescents who reported that their overall health was fair or poor experienced MDE compared with 5.4 percent of those who reported that their overall health was excellent.

Treatment for MDE

About two fifths (38.9 percent) of adolescents who experienced past year MDE received treatment for depression in the past year (Table 1); this is equivalent to an estimated 781,000 adolescents. Females with past year MDE were more likely than their male counterparts to have received treatment (39.9 vs. 36.7 percent). Adolescents with MDE who lived in the Northeast were more likely to have received treatment than their counterparts in other geographic regions.

Among adolescents with past year MDE, those with no health insurance were much less likely than those with Medicaid/Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) coverage or private health insurance to have received treatment (17.2 vs. 42.9 and 40.6 percent, respectively).¹ About half (50.9

Table 1. Had at Least One Major Depressive Episode (MDE) in the Past Year among Adolescents and Received Treatment for Depression in the Past Year among Adolescents with MDE, by Demographic, Geographic, and Health Characteristics*: 2007

Characteristic	Adolescents with Past Year MDE (%)	Received Treatment for Depression in the Past Year among Adolescents with Past Year MDE (%)
Total	8.2	38.9
Gender		
Male	4.6	36.7
Female	11.9	39.9
Geographic Region		
Northeast	7.9	46.2
Midwest	8.5	37.9
South	8.0	37.4
West	8.3	37.0
Health Insurance		
Private	8.1	40.6
Medicaid/Children's Health Insurance Program	8.2	42.9
Other	9.5	**
No Coverage	7.5	17.2
Overall Health		
Excellent	5.4	31.7
Very Good	8.2	38.3
Good	11.3	42.1
Fair/Poor	15.0	50.9

* Respondents with unknown past year MDE data and treatment data were excluded.

**Data are suppressed because of low precision

Source: 2007 SAMHSA National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

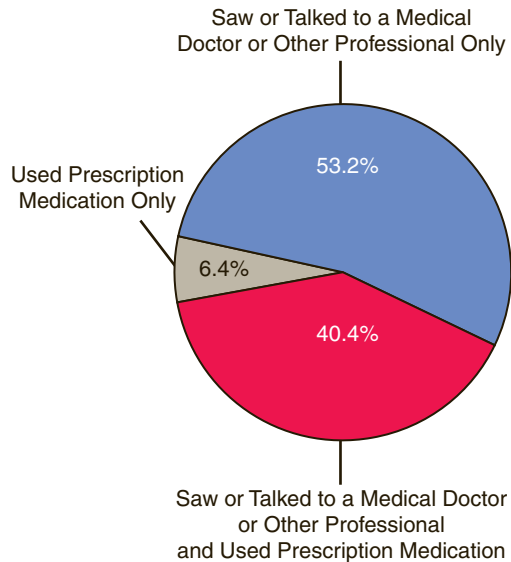
percent) of the adolescents with past year MDE who reported that their overall health was fair or poor received treatment for depression compared with 31.7 percent of their counterparts who indicated that their health was excellent.

Type of Treatment Received for MDE

Among those who received treatment for depression in the past year,

53.2 percent saw or talked to a medical doctor or other professional about depression, but did not take prescription medication for depression (Figure 1). In addition, 40.4 percent saw or talked to a medical doctor or other professional about depression and used prescription medication for depression. The remainder (6.4 percent) took prescription medication for depression, but did not see or talk to a medical doctor or other professional about depression.²

Figure 1. Type of Treatment Received for Depression in the Past Year among Adolescents Who Experienced Past Year Major Depressive Episode (MDE) and Received Treatment for Depression in the Past Year*: 2007



* Respondents with unknown past year MDE data and treatment data were excluded.

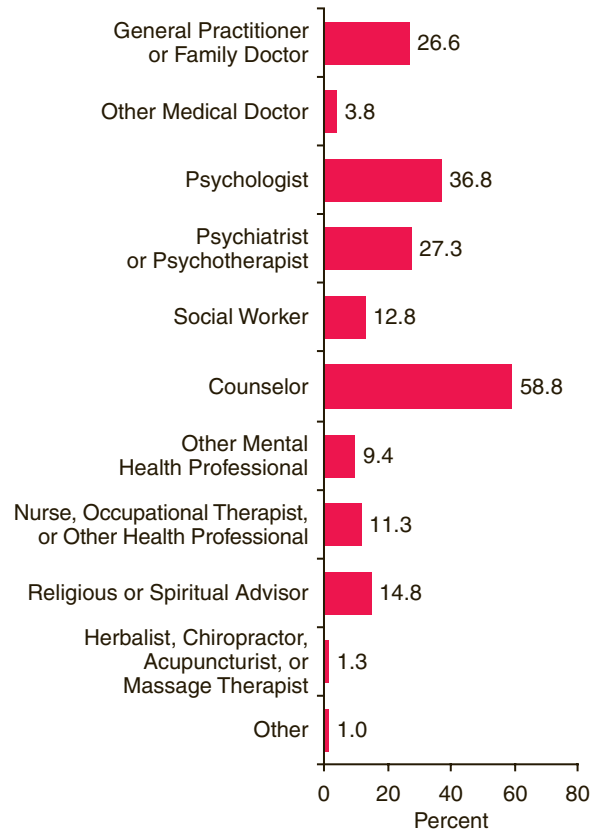
Source: 2007 SAMHSA National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

Among those adolescents who saw or talked to a medical doctor or other professional about depression, nearly three fifths (58.8 percent) saw or talked to a counselor (Figure 2). Over one third (36.8 percent) saw or talked to a psychologist, 27.3 percent saw or talked to a psychiatrist or psychotherapist, and 26.6 percent saw or talked to a general practitioner or family doctor.

Discussion

About 1 in 12 American adolescents experienced MDE in the past year. About two fifths of those with MDE received treatment for their depression in the past year, and rates of treatment were particularly low among adolescents who did not have health insurance coverage—with only about 17 percent of these adolescents receiving treatment. These findings highlight the need for increased efforts to raise parental, caregiver, and teacher awareness of the signs of adolescent depression and the availability of treatment options, as well as the need for improving access to treatment among adolescents without health insurance.

Figure 2. Type of Professional Seen among Adolescents with Past Year Major Depressive Episode (MDE) Who Saw or Talked to a Medical Doctor or Other Professional about Depression in the Past Year,**: 2007**



* Respondents with unknown past year MDE data and treatment data were excluded.

** Respondents could have indicated seeing or talking to multiple professionals; thus, response categories are not mutually exclusive and do not add to 100 percent. Respondents with unknown or invalid responses were excluded.

Source: 2007 SAMHSA National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

End Notes

- Individuals aged 19 or younger are eligible for CHIP.
- Information to determine how these individuals could have taken prescription medication without seeing or talking to a medical doctor or other health professional was not collected. This group may include persons who last saw or talked to a doctor or other professional about depression more than a year ago yet took prescription medication for MDE during the past year.

Suggested Citation

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Research findings from the SAMHSA 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)

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The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 2007 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 22,433 adolescents. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

The NSDUH Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI International in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. (RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.)

Information on the most recent NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2008). *Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 08-4343, NSDUH Series H-34). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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