

Mental health disorders *permeate* adolescence

Giulia Scolari /
Media Team

Whether in a school, home or social setting, feelings of sadness and panic often play a role in teenage lives, according to the World Health Organization. WHO states one in seven individuals from ages 10-19 experience a mental disorder, accounting for 13% of the worldwide total.

Impact

NHS psychiatrist Britain Baker ('05) said while stress and sadness are normal reactions to difficult situations, mental disorders are long-lasting and all-consuming.

"If you do have anxiety and depression, it really permeates your entire life," Baker said. "People often have dissociative feelings of feeling like they're not connected with their body and struggle with that daily."

Baker also said the effects of anxiety and depression vary for each individual based on their prior experiences, cause of the disorder and coping mechanisms.

Counselor Kia Beguesse said many students are unaware that anxiety and depression are widespread among their peers, underscoring a regular need for support.

"I have students coming in feeling like they're the only ones in the world that feel this way, and it's just not true," Beguesse said. "It can be extremely common that during school or any kind of stressful period to need help managing these feelings."

Furthermore, Gracie Lamberton ('25) said when she experienced anxiety in the past, she distanced herself from those around her and lacked motivation surrounding academics.

"I withdraw myself from my friends and stop trying at school and eventually just end up living in a way that I'm barely doing anything other than what I need to do to stay alive," Lamberton said.

Panic attacks come on suddenly with symptoms of breathlessness, racing heartbeat and excessive sweating, according to WHO. However, anxiety attack symptoms follow a period of

immoderate worry which can escalate over a few minutes or hours, typically displaying symptoms of lower intensity than panic attacks.

ElSaddic Abd Saddic ('23) said he has assisted a friend during an anxiety attack. Abd Saddic said the experience was "eye-opening in a negative way" to the world of mental disorders.

"It's so important to see that there are people suffering from these conditions and be aware of the effects they have and just be aware that you might need to help in those situations or try to understand what they might be feeling," Abd Saddic said.

Moreover, Baker said people must understand the distinction between feeling stressed and experiencing an anxiety disorder. Typical anxiety is the body's response to stress and should reduce as the stressor is over. However, according to Healthline, removing the trigger oftentimes does not reduce the symptoms in anxiety disorders.

Contrarily, depression is a mood disorder marked by a degree of sadness and loneliness, according to John's Hopkin's All Children Hospital. Depression is typically accompanied by inactivity, guilt, loss of concentration, social withdrawal, sleep disturbances and sometimes suicidal tendencies.

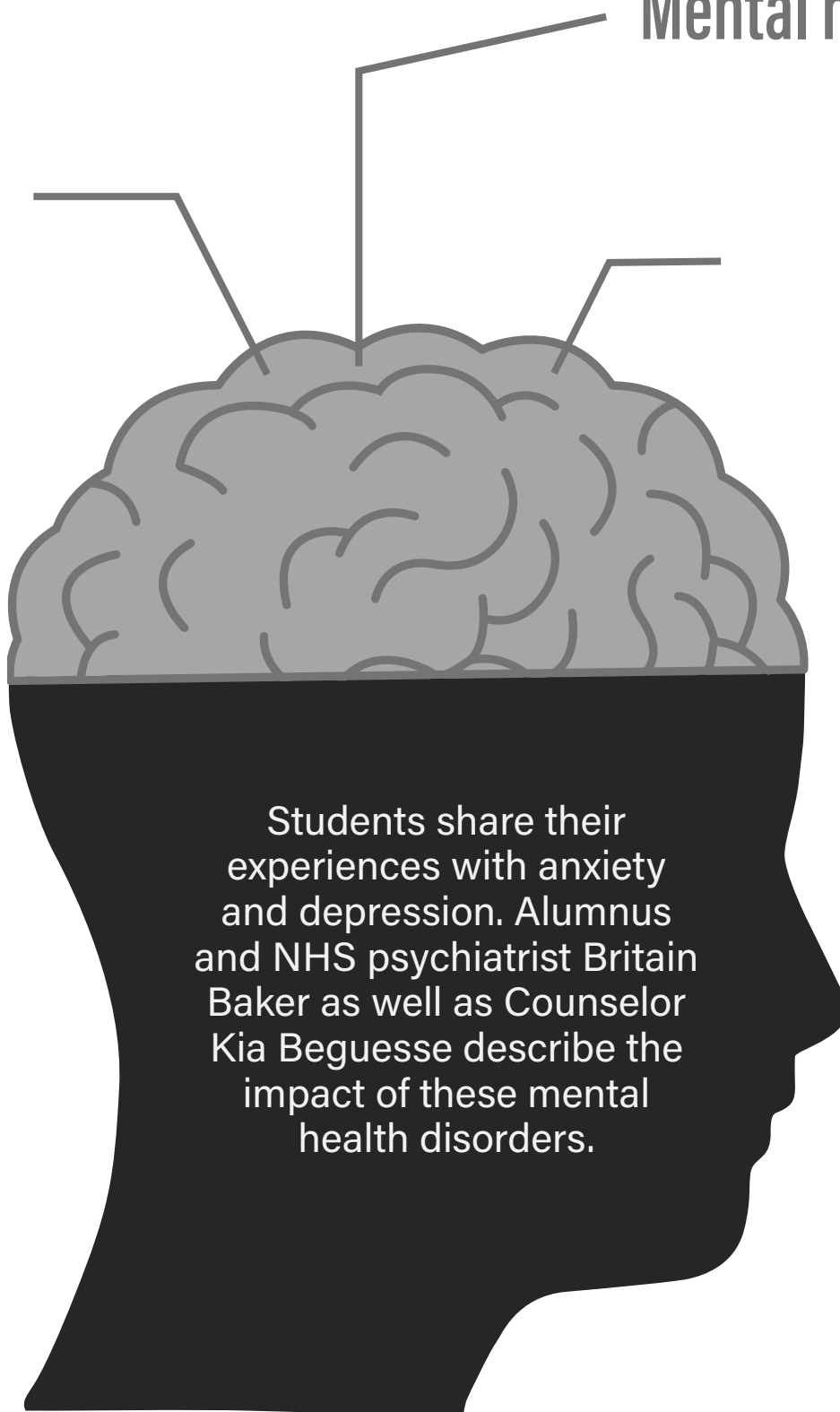
Beguesse said the most common age category suffering from anxiety and depression are those in their early teenage years, predominantly due to increased academic difficulty as well as developmental changes from puberty.

"I've had to help a lot of students in the past with issues with depression, but the age group I've noticed it hits the most is probably starting at the age of 13 or 14," Beguesse said. "That's the age, where of course, school starts getting harder and big emotional and physical changes take place."

According to an online survey conducted by The Standard Nov. 9 to Dec. 4 with 139 student responses, 71.2% of the population has either always or often felt overwhelmed since the start of the school year. Moreover, 117 respondents stated they experienced difficulty falling asleep due to stress-related causes.

Lamberton said despite one's best efforts to minimize the impact of anxiety or depression, challenges often ensue.

"It can be hard to deal with the impacts of



Students share their experiences with anxiety and depression. Alumnus and NHS psychiatrist Britain Baker as well as Counselor Kia Beguesse describe the impact of these mental health disorders.

Graphics by Eden Leavey

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- Gracie Lamberton ('25)

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Reactions

Uncontrollable Loneliness
Withdrawal
Stigma Ostracized Shaking Trigger
Hopelessness
Disassociate

Disorders as described by sources

**NHS Urgent Mental Health
Helpline: 0800 023 4650**
(Central and North West London area)

mental disorders, especially because there can be so many that infiltrate so many parts of our lives,” Lambertson said. “The feeling can overwhelm the effort to make it better.”

Media

Hannah Lindner (25) said the media can oftentimes serve as a “building awareness tool” to bring such disorders to light. She said media awareness is a crucial step to “help people feel less alone and isolated from everyone else.”

Lindner said various forms of mass media have helped normalize mental health disorders on a global scale.

“TV shows and movies have made such a difference in the world today, working to destigmatize depression and anxiety,” Lindner said.

In addition, Abd Saddic said the manner in which parents treat their children who suffer from these conditions has dramatically improved over recent years due to the media. He said mental health has had an “increasing value when considering the overall health of a person.”

Similarly, Beguesse said standardizing and removing stigma around disorders through celebrities coming forward and broadcasting the impact of certain conditions they may suffer from has been crucial.

“It’s really important that celebrities have come forward because when a regular person says they suffer, people don’t really give it a lot of merit,” Beguesse said. “But when it comes from a famous celebrity, people will start to pay attention and it gives that sympathy and also that normalcy to the conditions.”

Likewise, Baker said that the role of celebrities has been extremely significant in terms of initiating an ongoing movement promoting mental health awareness.

“Celebrities speaking about it at the very least, give people an opportunity to, to start to explore that within their own life as well,” Baker said.

Nonetheless, Lambertson said she feels all forms of media and press have had a duality

standpoint on mental health as a whole; on one hand, she said its influence has helped her understand the gravity of her emotions and her need to seek help.

“Knowing that what I was experiencing for myself wasn’t normal helped me be able to seek help,” Lambertson said. “As the disorders have recently become more un-stigmatized means I can try to talk to my friends and get help from them.”

However, Lambertson said the media can often be the cause for the development of disorders through inaccurate representations of certain

conditions or the constant act of comparing oneself to the exemplar.

“A lot of people were faking mental illnesses, and just saying horrible things and then blaming the mental illness itself,” Lambertson said. “That was quite bad for people truly suffering from these disorders.”

Similarly, Lindner said false mental health announcements in the media cause not only misinformation but create a standard dictating how those suffering from a disease should display their condition.

“All of these glamorized versions of anxiety and depression can be really harmful because they can change the way a person displays their disorder,” Lindner said.

Moreover, Lambertson said sensations of both helplessness and hopelessness can be amplified by mass media in terms of the display of graphic or troubling images and videos.

“Upsetting scenes on TV or in the news can trigger symptoms,” Lambertson said. “It can send me down a bad spiral of thinking that this feeling is going to be terrible forever, and there is very little I can do about it.”

COVID-19

COVID-19 had severe and far-reaching repercussions for both physical and mental health, according to the Centre for Mental Health. They predict up to 10 million people, including 1.5

million minors, may need neuropsychiatric health support in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Baker said he noticed a steep increase in patients who need support for poor mental health due to the effects of the pandemic.

“It was clear that lockdown was really affecting people and their mental health was suffering from it,” Baker said.

Additionally, a study published by Nature Aging displayed premature neurological aging of adolescent brains who lived through COVID-19 lockdowns.

Researchers compared MRI scans taken before the pandemic of 81 teens, between November 2016 and November 2019, with scans collected between October 2020 and March 2022 while COVID-19 was still in effect, but lockdown restrictions were lifted in the U.S.

Baker said the study found the post-lockdown group “experienced more mental health difficulties, including more severe symptoms of anxiety and depression.”

Lambertson said while she acknowledges the mental impacts of the pandemic have been felt drastically within the school community, the pandemic “really helped in terms of becoming a learning opportunity.”

Similarly, Abd Saddic said by being able to spend more time with close family, he was able to somewhat escape the complete feeling of isolation during lockdown.

“I missed my friends and those basic social interactions with people outside of your house, but I know I learned to appreciate my family more and also being on my own more, so not all parts of COVID were completely bad,” Abd Saddic said.

Coping strategies

Baker said due to the rise in anxiety cases, strategies to help cope with the symptoms of a panic or anxiety attack have become increasingly vital for the overall well-being of an adolescent.

“Skills for management and tolerance of an unhealthy or anxious mind have become defi-

nitely more pressing and prevalent,” Baker said.

In addition, Baker said practicing various coping mechanisms for anxiety in case one should experience an attack is a skill to which everyone should become accustomed.

“It is crucial to teach and demonstrate these mechanisms even when you don’t necessarily need to, just so you can be prepared to manage an anxiety attack whenever or if ever it happens,” Baker said.

Beguesse said strategies that work toward “controlling the speed, rate and even shallowness of the breath” are crucial in times of high anxiety. She said examples of these include the “five four three two one strategy” to slow the breath as well as deeply inhaling and exhaling for six seconds each way.

Baker recommends other strategies working beyond the control of the breath, such as distracting the mind with other tasks include counting backwards from 100 by increments of seven.

Baker said such techniques can be categorized into “grounding strategies” as they help reconnect the body and mind during an anxiety attack as a common symptom is a complete disconnection from one’s physical being.

Nonetheless, Beguesse said due to the large amounts of strategies students are exposed to, a “personalization process” is often necessary to find the most effective mechanism for each individual.

“The strategies don’t work for every single person,” Beguesse said. “Some people

have to mix the strategies or there’s one that really works and they just stick with that, but it may take experimenting to find which one or ones works.”

Ultimately, Beguesse said it is important to destigmatize mental health issues and bring them to light in order to normalize their presence in our world.

“It’s not just one in a million who suffer from this,” Beguesse said. “Even people that we put up on pedestals suffer from mental conditions. It’s normal and we should treat it as normal. It should not be ostracized.”

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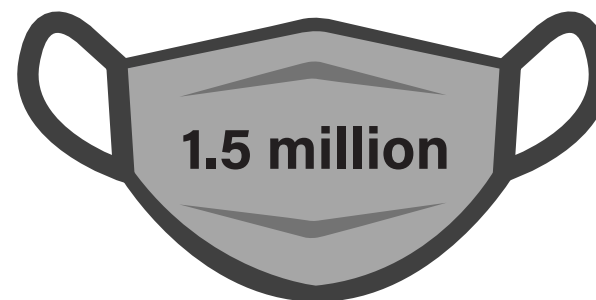
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Source: World Health Organization



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