



## SOPHE FOCUS AREA: MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

### **Understanding the Problem:**

Mental health conditions represent a significant public health crisis worldwide among young people that continues to worsen. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), an estimated 10% of children and adolescents under the age of 18 experience a mental health disorder, yet the majority do not seek or receive care. The gap in healthcare is urgent, as suicide remains the fourth leading cause of death for 15- to 19-year-olds. Additionally, between 2009 and 2019, 40% more U.S. adolescents reported persistent sadness and hopelessness, a trend worsened by COVID-19 isolation (Charney DS et al. 2013). Among the most serious and undertreated conditions is PTSD. PTSD affects approximately 10% of individuals following trauma exposure and is characterized by flashbacks, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and hyperarousal (Egan, 2013). PTSD disproportionately burdens women, veterans, first responders, and communities with high rates of adversity. Addressing mental health broadly and PTSD specifically demands upstream, equity-informed strategies that reduce stigma and build resilience before conditions escalate.

### **Looking into the Literature:**

Research into mental health can help to determine the best treatments and preventative strategies to aid in slowing down the public health crisis. Campaigns that followed research-based practice produced proximal impacts (reduced stigma, improved attitudes, increased resource awareness) and intermediate impacts (decreased depressive symptoms, increased help-seeking and care visits), and overall helped to improve the quality of care being received.

From SOPHE's Journals: [Mental Health Promotion in the Health Care Setting: Collaboration and Engagement in the Development of a Mental Health Promotion Capacity-Building Initiative](#)

### **Summary of SOPHE's Recommendations**

SOPHE calls on health educators and practitioners to take a comprehensive approach to mental health from broad awareness to clinical treatment. Media campaigns should be culturally responsive, co-designed with intended audiences, and framed around resilience and coping. Access to evidence-based PTSD treatments must be expanded, with attention to reducing stigma, cost, and cultural barriers. Early interventions grounded in Positive Youth Development (PYD) should target children and adolescents in high-adversity settings. May, Mental Health Awareness Month, is a key opportunity to amplify these efforts and connect communities to specialized care.

### **Key Takeaways**

- 10% of youth worldwide experience a mental disorder; 40% more U.S. adolescents reported persistent sadness between 2009–2019, worsened by COVID-19.
- PTSD affects ~10% of trauma-exposed individuals; up to 84% of people will experience at least one traumatic event in their lifetime.
- Media campaigns for youth mental health are broadly effective, helping to reduce stigma and increase help-seeking behaviors.
- PTSD is shaped by biological and psychosocial factors; effective treatments exist but remain inaccessible for many. Therefore, equitable access is a public health imperative.
- Early developmental interventions and community co-designed programming are essential upstream strategies for reducing the long-term mental health burden.

### **Sources:**

- Egan, Donald. “What Is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?” *American Psychiatric Association*, American Psychiatric Association, Mar. 2025, [www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd](http://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd).
- Charney DS, et al. “Understanding Resilience: New Approaches for Preventing and Treating PTSD.” *Cdc.gov*, vol. 284, Oct. 2016, [stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/211057](https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/211057).
- Horn, Michelle A., et al. “Mental Health Promotion in the Health Care Setting.” *Health Promotion Practice*, vol. 15, no. 1, 14 Mar. 2013, pp. 118–124, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839913480179>.