

Alabama researchers observing Children's Mental Health Awareness Week

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(WIAT) - Last year, 31,000 children in Alabama were treated for mental, behavioral, or developmental disorders, and the Alabama Department of Mental Health considers those numbers to be concerning.

Though the numbers seem high, they have been a problem throughout the country, according to Alabama Mental Health Commissioner Lynn Beshear.

"It's a problem everywhere, I don't think Alabama is unique in that way" Beshear said.

Beshear tells CBS 42 News that children living in poverty are often at a higher risk when it comes to battling a mental illness.

"What we know is that children born into poverty have an extra layer of issues around them," Beshear said.

However, the commissioner emphasized that the problem doesn't just stop with children in poverty. The department also see mental illnesses from higher income families as well.

"Stress and mental illness is an equal opportunity situation if you will, Beshear said.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) says that one in five children ages 13 to 18, have or will have a serious mental illness. Of those children, 90 percent who die by suicide had an underlying mental illness.

Beshear says it is important for parents and schools to work together when identifying mental illness problems

"They should certainly get in touch with the school and say, 'What are you seeing?'" Beshear said. "If the teacher notices that, they need to get in touch with the parent and say, 'I want to make you aware of something I'm seeing at school'."