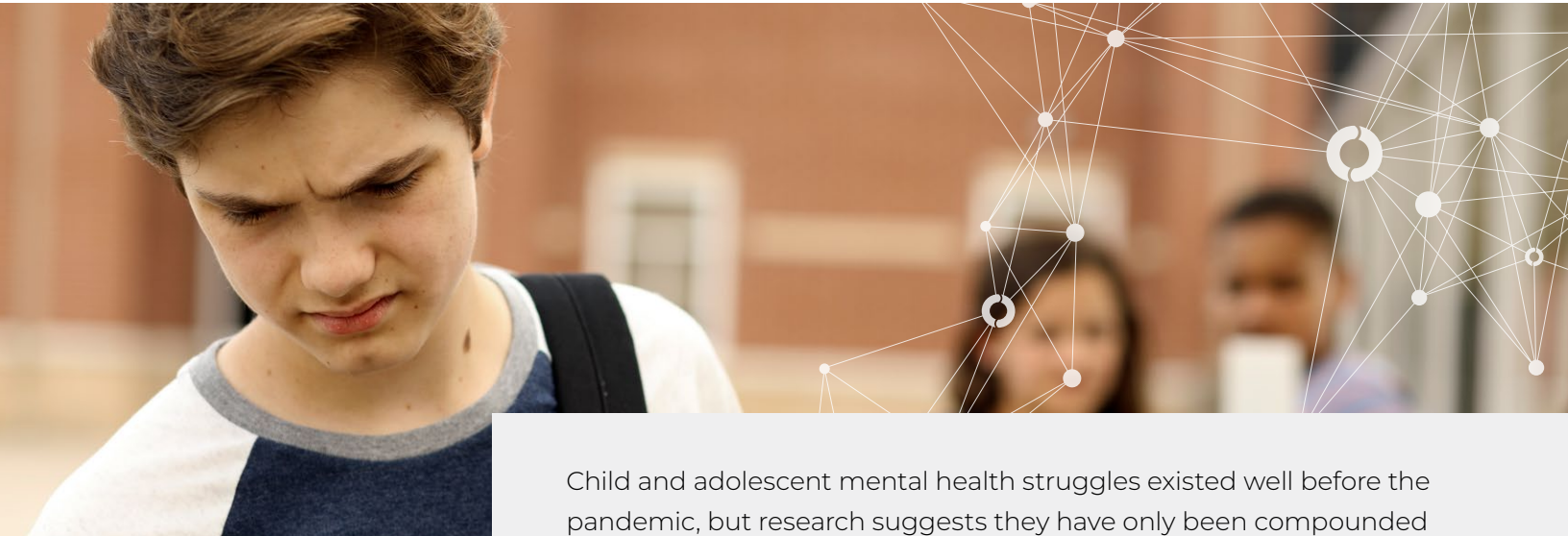




# Addressing the Adolescent Mental Health Crisis in America

Highlights from our interview with Dr. Ujjwal Ramtekkar,  
Senior Medical Director of Clinical Operations



Child and adolescent mental health struggles existed well before the pandemic, but research suggests they have only been compounded by it. **In fact, one in five children/adolescents experience a mental health disorder in a given year.<sup>1</sup>** We recently asked Teladoc Health's Dr. Ujjwal Ramtekkar to help us understand what's contributing to this adolescent mental health crisis in America and how virtual mental health solutions might play a key role in overcoming the challenge.



## Ujjwal Ramtekkar, MD, MPE

Senior Medical Director  
Teladoc Health

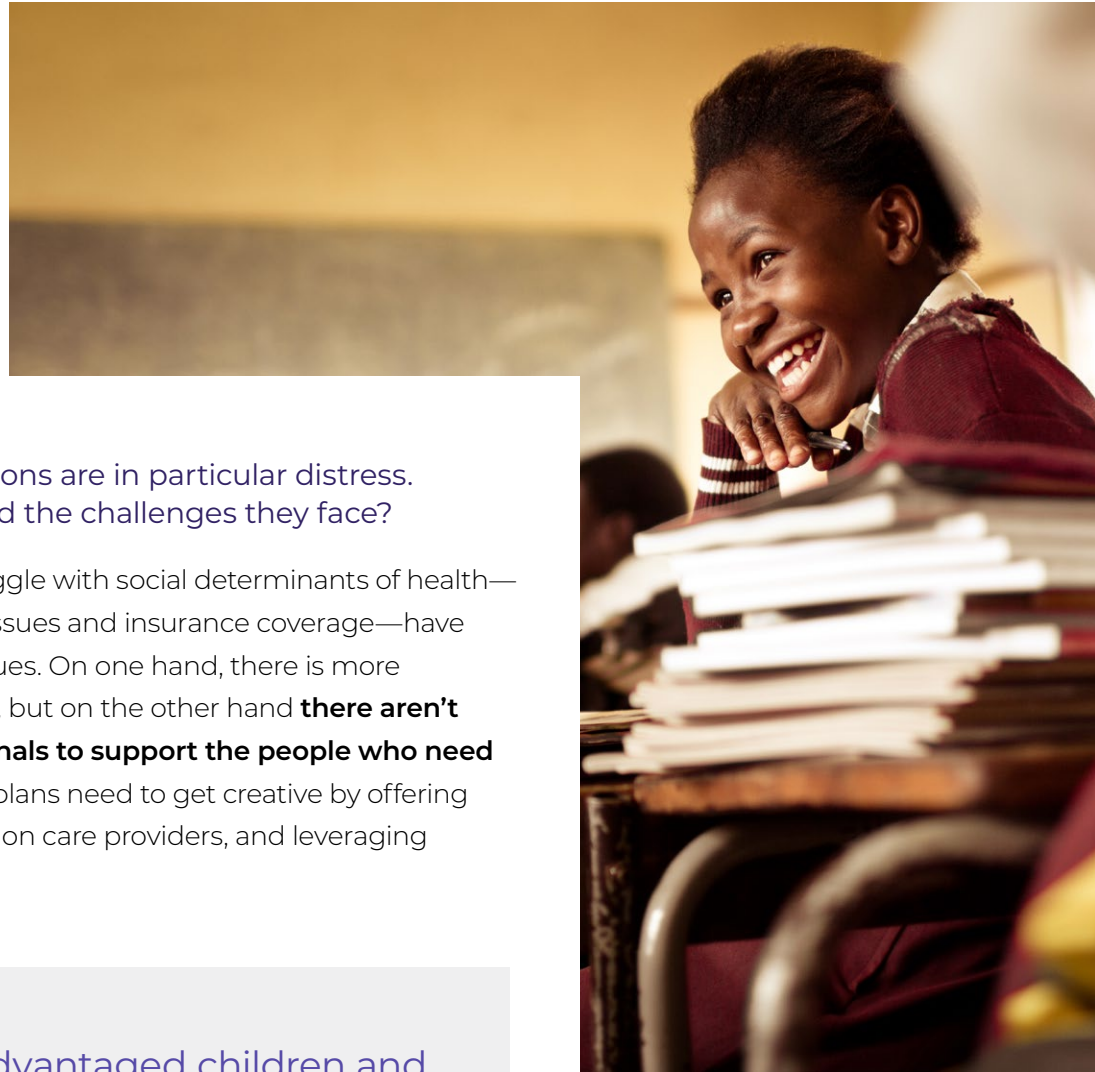
Dr. Ujjwal Ramtekkar is a board-certified psychiatrist who completed his medical education at Government Medical College and Super Specialty Hospital in Nagpur, India, completed his Master of Psychiatric Epidemiology (MPE) at Washington University, and a clinical fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry at Boston Children's Hospital. In his role at Teladoc Health, Dr. Ramtekkar serves as the Senior Medical Director, working to create patient-centered solutions to improve population health and business outcomes.

### Q. What has caused the mental health crisis being experienced by adolescents in the United States?

There are some hereditary influences on youth mental illness, but there are also many non-genetic reasons. For example, rapid changes in social norms have contributed significantly to what the psychology field refers to as toxic stress. Stress is inevitable in life, but too much of the wrong kind of stress can become toxic over time, affecting the way the brains and bodies of children grow. There has been a continued surge in anxiety, depression and suicide attempts because this stress can go untreated for many years. **About 5,000 youths are lost to suicide every year.**

Toxic stress is amplified by:

- Increased negative influence from social media
- Lack of support systems
- Increased academic and social pressure



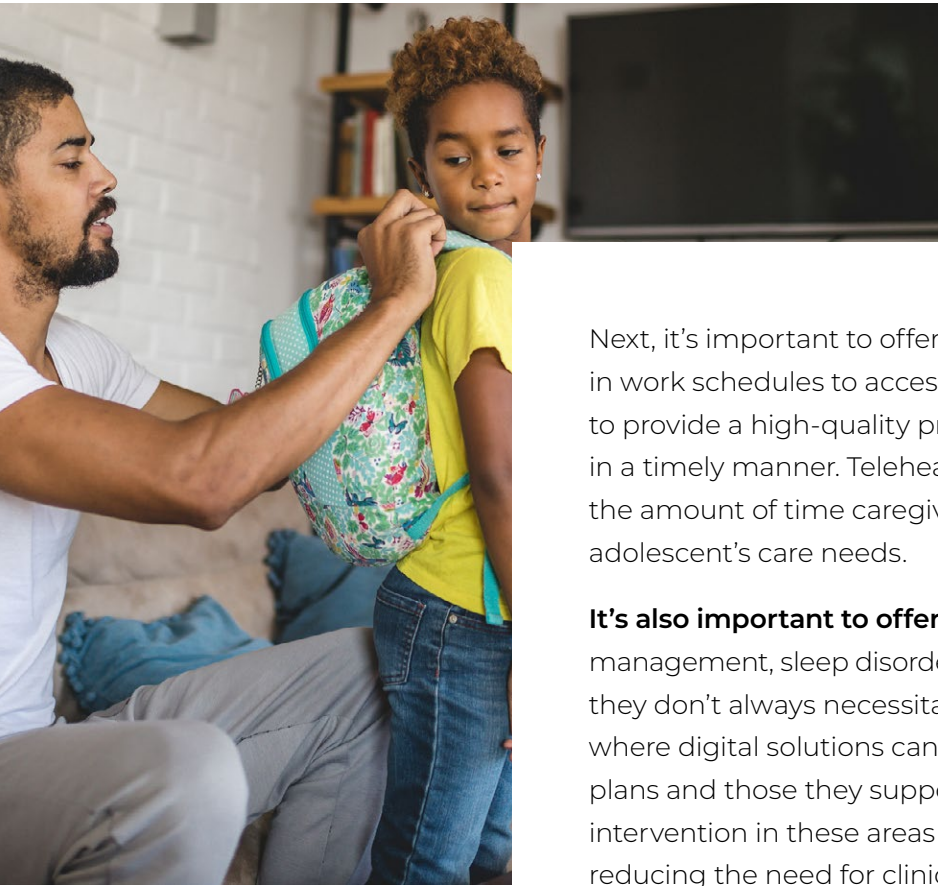
Q. Certain adolescent populations are in particular distress. How can we better understand the challenges they face?

Populations that traditionally struggle with social determinants of health—poverty, food insecurity, housing issues and insurance coverage—have more untreated mental health issues. On one hand, there is more awareness about these disparities, but on the other hand **there aren't enough mental health professionals to support the people who need their help**. Employers and health plans need to get creative by offering solutions that don't depend solely on care providers, and leveraging technology to meet the demand.

Socioeconomically disadvantaged children and adolescents are **two to three times more likely to develop mental health conditions** than peers with higher socioeconomic status.<sup>2</sup>

Q. What are some practical ways to promote and provide mental health resources to adolescents and their families?

First, an intentional and concerted effort must be made to bring mental health services, at different levels, to workplaces. Employers can set a good example by promoting conversations about mental well-being, not just for employees but also for their families.



Next, it's important to offer both mental health resources and flexibility in work schedules to access these resources. It's particularly critical to provide a high-quality provider network that is able to see youth in a timely manner. Telehealth can help increase access by reducing the amount of time caregivers take away from work to support an adolescent's care needs.

**It's also important to offer sub-clinical services** for issues like stress management, sleep disorders and social relationship challenges because they don't always necessitate clinical therapy. These are specific areas where digital solutions can bring a lot of value to employers, health plans and those they support. Upstream engagement and early intervention in these areas can have a significant downstream benefit, reducing the need for clinical services.



Employers play a major role in pushing back on the adolescent mental health crisis by creating a safe space, encouraging good conversation and providing a full continuum of services for employees and their dependents.

A full continuum of mental health services calibrated to meet the needs of adolescents can and should be a part of an employer's or health plan's strategy to support mental well-being in the workplace.

[Listen to the entire discussion](#) with Dr. Ramtekkar to learn more about the mental health crisis facing today's youth and how Teladoc Health is helping provide solutions that make a positive impact.

<sup>1</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Key Findings: Children's Mental Health Report," March 22, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/features/kf-childrens-mental-health-report.html>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

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