



ALLEVIATE THE PAIN

**VISHVA
VENKATARAMAN '23
SPEAKS OUT ABOUT
MENTAL HEALTH
STRUGGLES**

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Hearth-wrenching loneliness. Emptiness. These feelings may be foreign. Odd. Wrong. Scary.

For Vishva Venkataraman '23, those feelings were all too real. However, the compassion and understanding of his peers and family was his lifeline; it's what kept him alive during the darkest time of his life.

Growing up, Venkataraman had an unproblematic childhood. Nonetheless, he wasn't as carefree or happy as many others may reminisce. Rather, anxiety and social isolation consumed his days.

"I was very scared of everything," he said. "I didn't really make many friends."

He always felt different, isolated from his peers. He just felt off. It wasn't until middle school when Venkataraman was able to find out why.

"In eighth grade, I learned that there was a term for that feeling," Venkataraman said.

Although he knew how deep his feelings were, there were still friends and acquaintances who did nothing but dismiss his condition as if it was just a bad case of teenage angst.

"I've gotten a lot of comments like, 'Oh, you're depressed? Just be happier.' But that's a lot harder than it seems," Venkataraman said.

When he finally reached out for help, his parents were shocked. "We were in denial at first," Venkataraman's mom, Sujatha, said. "We thought we knew everything about him."

"The last thing you want your child to say is that they don't want to live anymore. That's not something you want to hear from someone who's in seventh or eighth grade, or even in high school," Sujatha said.

COVID was a time of isolation and change for everyone, but for Venkataraman, it completely shut him off from the outside world, sending him on a downward spiral.

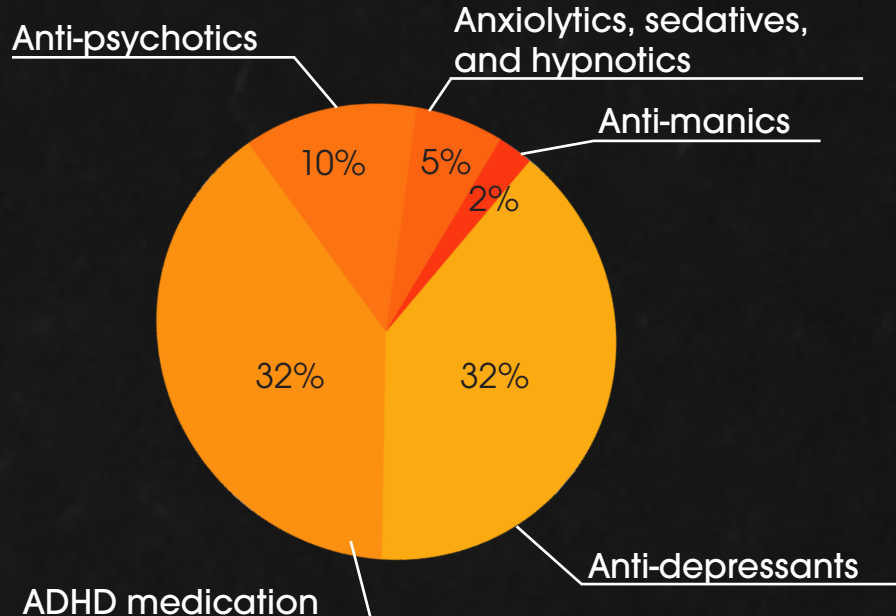
"I didn't want to do anything," Venkataraman said. "I didn't want to do homework, I didn't want to play video games. I just wanted to sit there and do nothing."

Although his parents had known about their son's struggles, nothing could've prepared them for the changes COVID quarantine brought upon him.

"He was lonely, very irritated, and wanted to be left alone," Sujatha said. They knew that he was not the same Vishva that they had always known.

"We were scared to death," Sujatha said. "We'd take turns waking up in the

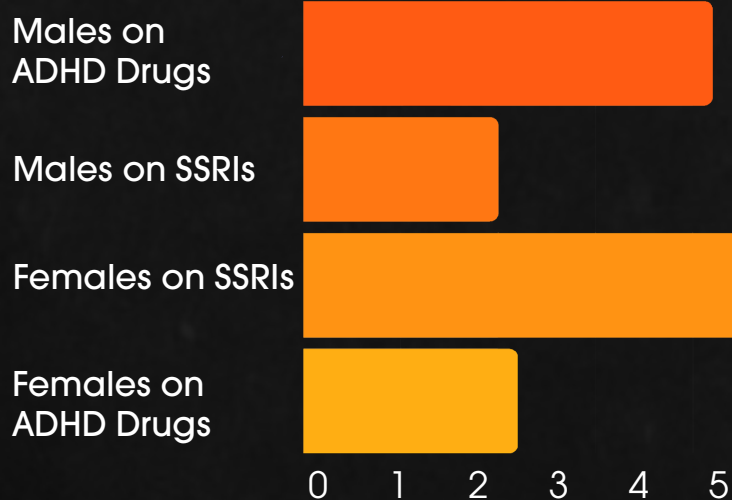
Psychotropic medication used by U.S. adolescents



1 in 12 adolescents take psychotropic medications



Percentage of people on SSRIs and ADHD medications



According to the Centers for Disease Control



middle of the night to go and check on him."

Sophomore year was the lowest he had ever felt, trapped in a place unimaginable to many. And with that low place came hopelessness and emptiness.

"There's this feeling where you feel like you're empty in your core," Venkataraman said. "It feels like you're hollow."

What can be done when nothing matters? When there's nothing to live for? The only thing that gave him momentary relief from these intrusive thoughts was harming himself.

"It was really hard to not want to hurt myself," Venkataraman said. "There were some nights where I was trying to stop myself, but I just had this urge to do it."

Venkataraman took a huge step in his journey to recovery in January of 2022, when he was able to meet with a psychiatrist.

"I started on Lexapro, and every month or so, we would keep increasing the dose," Venkataraman said.

Along with taking medication, Venkataraman started seeing a therapist. This enabled him to begin the slow ascent out of the seemingly bottomless pit of depression he had been living in for so many years.

"It took me a while to get help," Venkataraman said. "I knew that I needed help, but at the same time, therapy's a little hard"

Over time, Venkataraman has slowly been able to heal using strategies he's learned that help him with managing his mental health.

"Distracting yourself is one of the best things to do," Venkataraman said. "Doing nothing will only make it worse."

His parents and close friends have been the biggest support that has helped him

climb out of his loneliness.

"Getting through depression by yourself is one of the hardest, if not the hardest thing to do," Venkataraman said.

"Even if you have one or two people to support you, that is huge. The only thing that's gotten me through, is my friends and the people around me."

Although his journey with mental health is far from over, it has given him a new outlook on the world, including embracing the struggles he still deals with daily.

"I think of life as a roller coaster," Venkataraman said. "You know, it has its ups and downs throughout, but eventually it has to go up."

His struggles have provided him with hope for himself and for others.

"You're not alone," Venkataraman said. "There's so many people out there like you."