

Increased risk of suicidal thoughts among adolescents appears related to recent victimization

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An increased risk of suicidal ideation (thoughts of harming or killing oneself) in adolescents appears to be associated with recent victimization, such as by peers, sexual assault, and maltreatment, according to a report published Online First by *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, a JAMA Network publication.

Youth suicide is the third leading cause of death for adolescents in the United States, with 11 percent of all deaths among 12- to 19-year-olds from 1999 to 2006 due to suicide, representing more than 16,000 deaths every year, the authors write in the study background.

Heather A. Turner, Ph.D., of the University of New Hampshire, Durham, and colleagues conducted a study using data from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence. The study included a survey of a national sample of 1,186 young people between the ages of 10 to 17 years.

The authors report that 4.3 percent of the total sample reported having experienced suicidal ideation within the month preceding the interview.

"Peer-victimized youth had almost 2.4 times the risk of suicidal ideation, those sexually assaulted in the past year had about 3.4 times the risk and those who were maltreated had almost 4.4 times the risk of suicidal ideation," compared with children who were not exposed to these types of victimization, the authors note.

The study findings also indicate that children who were subject to polyvictimization (exposure to seven or more individual types of victimization in the past year) were almost six times more likely to report suicidal ideation.

Researchers suggest that the study findings

emphasize the need to include comprehensive victimization assessment in adolescent suicide prevention and intervention efforts, especially the significance of polyvictimization. Treatment responses to sexual assault, peer-perpetrated victimization and child maltreatment also must recognize the increased risk of suicidal behavior, the authors note.

"Although much research in this area has focused on neurological risks and psychopharmacologic interventions, these findings point to the importance of the environment and the value of victimization prevention in reducing suicidal behavior. A comprehensive approach to suicide prevention needs to address the safety of youth in their homes, schools and neighborhoods," the authors conclude.

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