Mental Health Service Use by Suicidal Adolescents

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The authors of a study on people 13-18 years of age report that “adolescent suicidality often is untreated in the United States.” They recommended increased outreach to identify and treat young people with suicidal ideation or who have made suicide plans or attempts. Their research revealed that “approximately two-thirds of adolescents with suicidal ideation (67.3 percent) and half of those with a plan (54.4 percent) or an attempt (56.9 percent) did not have any contact with a mental health specialist in the past year.”

The research confirmed that ideation, plans, and attempts were often associated with other psychological problems. But it also found that young people who reported suicidal ideation, plans, or attempts were less likely to receive treatment than young people who reported both suicidal behaviors and mood disorders, substance abuse, or behavioral disorders. Young people who were treated by mental health specialists after reporting suicidal behaviors received fewer mental health treatment visits than their peers who reported suicidal behavior and a psychological disorder.

The authors suggest that these findings imply that (1) a substantial percentage of young people who are at high risk for suicide are not being properly assessed and treated because of the absence of an obvious co-occurring psychological problem, and (2) many young people who are treated for suicidal behavior in the absence of an obvious co-occurring psychological problem are not receiving enough treatment (as measured by visits to a mental health provider).

This research used data from more than 10,000 computer-assisted face-to-face interviews done for the National Comorbidity Survey Adolescent Supplement.


Populations: Youth, Adolescents
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