Precipitants of Youth Suicide

September 20, 2013
News Type: Weekly Spark Research

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report revealed that the two most common circumstances precipitating suicides by young people were problems with non-intimate-partner relationships (i.e., parents or friends) or a life stress crisis. More than 51 percent of the young people in this study who died by suicide had problems with a family member or friend, and more than 42 percent had experienced a crisis, in the two weeks preceding their deaths.

Of the young people who died by suicide, 37 percent were currently experiencing depression or a mental health problem, 25 percent were victims of intimate partner violence, and 25 percent had problems in school. Thirty percent of these problems in school involved a drop in grades; 12 percent involved bullying.

Young males had a higher rate of problems with alcohol or substance abuse and criminality than young females. A greater proportion of young females had “current mental health problems, a history of mental health treatment, non-intimate-partner relationship problems, experienced the death of a family member or friend within the past 5 years, been a victim of violence within the past month, and a history of suicide attempts.”

Eighteen percent of the young people who died by suicide had a history of suicide attempts. Twenty-nine percent had disclosed their intent to attempt suicide to others. Ten percent of those who were tested for alcohol after their death tested positive. Three-quarters of those who died by suicide were male. Nearly 70 percent were non-Hispanic whites. About half died by hanging/strangulation/suffocation. In contrast, only about 20 percent of adults who die by suicide die by hanging/strangulation/suffocation. A higher proportion of young females (63 percent) than young males (46 percent) died by hanging/strangulation/suffocation. A higher proportion of suicides by young males involved firearms (45 percent, opposed to 21 percent for young females).

The authors suggested that their findings imply that “increasing youths’ ability to cope with school-related problems and conflict, and helping youth build positive relationships with parents, other family members, teachers, classmates, and intimate partners” may be useful strategies for youth suicide prevention.

This study analyzed 2005-2008 National Violent Death Reporting System data for 1,046 youth aged 10-17 from 16 states.


This is the first of four summaries of articles that appeared in a special supplement to the Journal of Adolescent Health on the issue of bullying and suicide, published in July 2013. The supplement can be downloaded at no cost from the ScienceDirect website [1].

Populations: Youth
About Suicide: Data and Statistics, Behavioral Health Disorders, Risk and Protective Factors

Links within this resource