



Suicide among Children and Early Adolescents

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A study comparing children (aged 5 to 11) and early adolescents (aged 12 to 14) who died by suicide found that most were male and died at home. The authors suggested that (1) children with attention-deficit disorder/attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD) should be targeted for prevention, since ADD/ADHD was the most common condition among children with known mental health problems who died by suicide; (2) health care providers, families, peers, and school personnel should be taught to recognize and respond to the warning signs of suicide, given that 29 percent of both children and early adolescents who died by suicide had disclosed their intent to another person; and (3) programs that improve interpersonal problem-solving skills should be implemented in early childhood, since relationship problems were the most common circumstance precipitating suicide in both age groups.

This research analyzed data from the 17 states that contributed to the National Violent Death Reporting System between 2003 and 2012. It found that the proportion of suicides among black young people was larger in the 5-to-11-year age group (36.8 percent) compared to the 12-to-14-year age group (11.6 percent), while the proportion of deaths among Hispanic young people remained fairly constant across the age ranges. Results also indicated that 80.5 percent of the suicides of children, and 64.1 percent of the suicides of early adolescents, were associated with hanging, strangulation, or suffocation. In addition, 13.8 percent of the suicides of children, and 29.5 percent of the suicides of early adolescents, were associated with firearms.

While the most common condition among children with known mental health problems was ADD/ADHD, the most common condition among early adolescents was depression. Although relationship problems were the most common triggers for suicide in both age groups, children were more apt to have relationship problems with family members and friends, while early adolescents were more likely to have problems with boyfriends or girlfriends. The study also found that 1.2 percent of both children and early adolescents were in public custody at the time of their deaths.

Sheftall, A. H., Asti, L., Horowitz, L. M., Felts, A., Fontanella, C. A., Campo, J. V., & Bridge, J. A. (2016). Suicide in elementary school-aged children and early adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 138(4). doi: 10.1542/peds.2016-0436

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