



SUICIDE RISK IN ADOLESCENTS:WARNING SIGNS AND PREVENTION

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20027473>

Introduction

Adolescent suicide refers to the intentional act of self-inflicted death in individuals aged 10–19 years and is a major global public health concern. It is one of the leading causes of death in this age group and is usually caused by a series of bio-psycho-social issues rather than one definitive cause.

Keywords

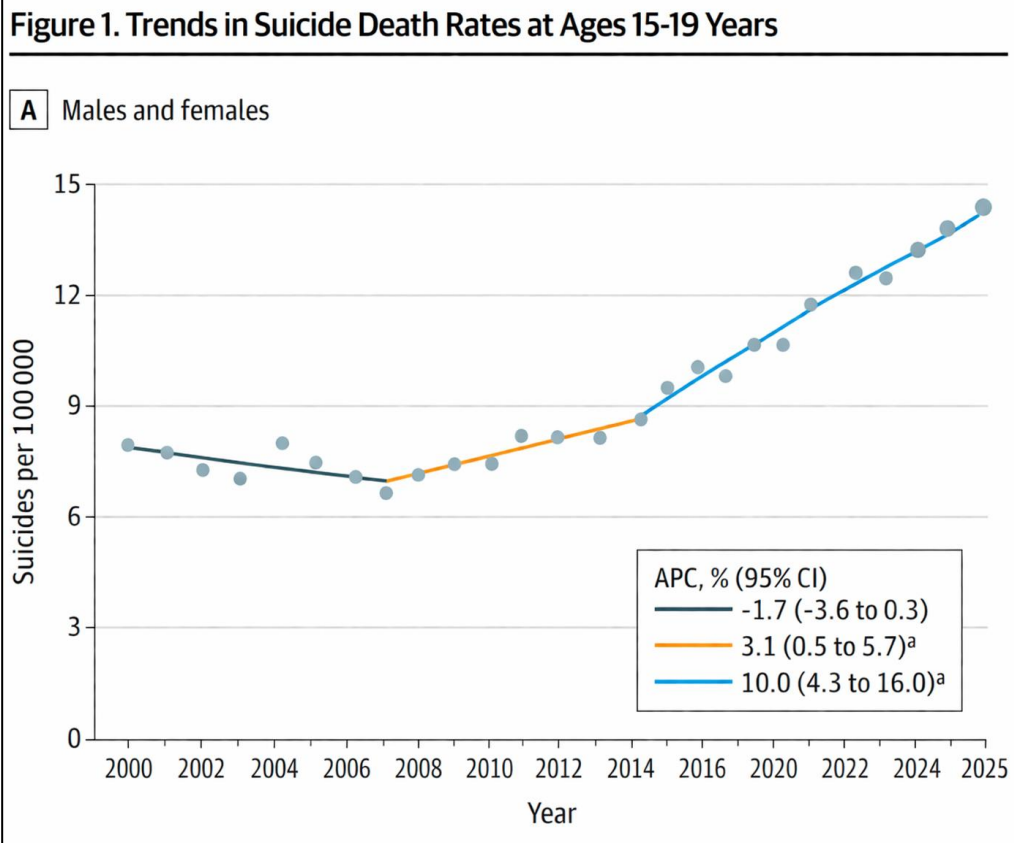
Suicide prevention strategies, Early intervention, Mental health awareness, School-based programs, Crisis intervention, Counseling and therapy, Coping mechanisms, Emotional resilience, adolescent, Stigma.

Adolescence is a crucial stage of growth and development, during which mental health disorders are prevalent, impacting up to 20% of adolescents globally. The most common mental health problems are depression, anxiety, and behavioural disorders. These problems are closely linked to problems with functioning, school, social withdrawal, and a higher risk of self-harm. Many cases remain unrecognized or untreated, particularly in low-resource settings.

Globally, suicide is the third leading cause of death in people ages 15 - 19. Mental illness, substance abuse, impulsivity, bullying, academic pressure, family problems, violence, and/or abuse are factors that influence suicidal behavior and a past suicide attempt is the strongest predictor for later suicide attempts

Suicide in adolescents is a serious public health issue but it is often preventable with early identification, intervention and access to mental health services

Tend Analysis of Suicide Mortality in Adolescents



This analysis shows that the number of suicides among teenagers aged 15 to 19 has changed a lot. The number of suicides went from a small drop in the early 2000s to a big and steady rise after 2014. The rapid increase in recent years signifies growing and pressing public health issues rather than a transient variation.

These findings underscore the necessity for enhanced mental health screening, prompt intervention, and improved accessibility to care for adolescents. To stop suicide rates from going up even more, clinical, educational, and public health systems need to work together to address the underlying risk factors.

Understanding Adolescent Suicide

Adolescence is an at-risk period because of the maturation processes that are occurring in the brain. The brain systems responsible for emotions and reward mature earlier than the decision-making and impulse-control systems. Therefore, adolescents may engage in increased risk-taking behavior and express strong emotions. This stage is also marked by identity formation, peer influence, and rapid physical and social changes. All these factors can produce stress and create mental health issues.

It is important to know that there is a difference between suicide ideation, self-harm, and suicide attempts. Suicide ideation involves thoughts of suicide. Self-harm usually involves the voluntary inflicting of physical damage to oneself as an attempt to cope with emotional distress



and dying does not occur. Suicide attempts involve acting to end one's own life with the intent of death.

A common misconception is that mentioning suicide will encourage it, but the opposite is actually true. Opening the dialogue can break down stigma and get victims seeking help. Suicidal behavior can be an outcome of emotional distress and multiple life stressors, rather than one cause, and a suicide attempt can predict later suicidal behavior, however the suicidal ideation is usually temporary and will improve with help and intervention.

Risk Factors for Suicide

Suicide usually arises as a result of multiple interacting factors rather than a single cause. These risk factors can be classified into psychological, social/environmental, and biological/genetic factors.

1. Psychological risk factors

- Mental health disorders such as depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, and borderline personality disorder
- Cognitive factors like hopelessness, impulsivity, and poor emotional regulation
- Emotional difficulties including loneliness and feeling like a burden
- History of trauma or adverse childhood experiences such as abuse or neglect

2. Social and environmental risk factors

- Bullying, including cyberbullying, leading to emotional distress and depression
- Family problems such as conflict, neglect, or abuse
- Academic stress and pressure to perform
- Social isolation and lack of support systems

3. Biological and genetic risk factors

- Family history of suicide or mental illness
- Inherited traits like impulsivity or aggression
- Brain chemistry changes, especially involving serotonin
- Genetic differences affecting stress response

Warning signs of Adolescent Suicide

Adolescent suicide prevention requires more than awareness. Young people often experience intense emotions that they may not fully understand and confuse how to deal with it. An effective approach involves creating strategies and techniques to identify the warning signs. Adolescents rarely say directly that they intend to harm or end their life, but they often show **emotional, behavioral and verbal clues**. These include:

1. Emotional signs:

- Persistent sadness, hopelessness, feelings of worthlessness.
- Increased anxiety, irritability or anger.
- Sudden mood swings, especially from very low to unusually calm (which can be signal a decision to attempt suicide)

2. Behavioral signs:

- Withdrawal from friends, family or activities they once enjoyed.
- Loss of interest in academics.



- Changes in sleep (too much or too little) or eating habits .
- Risk - taking behaviors (substance use , reckless actions) .
- Giving away personal or saying goodbye in subtle ways .

3. Verbal signs :

- Talking about feeling like a burden or having no reason to live .
- Expressing thoughts about death , dying or suicide (even jokingly)
- Statements like “You’d be better off without me “ or “I wish I could just disappear”.

4. Situational risk factors

- Bullying or cyber bullying .
- Loss of loved one or significant relationship.
- Academic pressure or major life transitions.

Protective factors :

Circumstances that protect against suicide risk

Individual Protective Factors

These personal factors protect against suicide risk:

- Effective coping and problem-solving skills
- Reasons for living (for example, family, friends, pets, etc.)
- Strong sense of cultural identity

Relationship Protective Factors

These healthy relationship experiences protect against suicide risk:

1. Support from partners, friends, and family
2. Feeling connected to others

Community Protective Factors

These supportive community experiences protect against suicide risk:

- Feeling connected to school, community, and other social institutions
- Availability of consistent and high quality physical and behavioral healthcare

Societal Protective Factors:

These cultural and environmental factors within the larger society protect against suicide risk:

- Reduced access to lethal means of suicide among people at risk
- Cultural, religious, or moral objections to suicide

Prevention Strategies for Adolescent Suicide

Prevention of suicide is not the responsibility of a single sector- it is a shared effort that must extend across individuals, families, schools, communities, and even digital spaces. Because stigma and silence still surround mental health, many individuals having suicidal thoughts suppress their emotions and struggle alone , hesitant to seek help . This makes it essential to create strategies for the prevention of suicide at multiple levels.This includes:



At Individual Level ,

Teenagers play an important role in protecting their own mental well being. One of the most important steps involves learning to deal with their emotions in a constructive way rather than suppressing or ignoring them. Talking to someone they trust, writing down their thoughts and using calming exercises like breathing, meditation or taking a break can help to reduce stress. Building problem solving skills is also essential. So when they are faced with any challenges they can break it into small, manageable steps so it can prevent feeling overwhelmed and make situations more controllable. These approaches help teens to handle the situations more thoughtfully rather than impulsively.

Reaching out for help from others is an important key protective factor. Teenagers should be encouraged to seek help from their trusted friends, parents, teachers or counselors. Staying connected socially also reduces the feeling of loneliness and makes them feel like they are not alone. It's also important to recognize early warning signs in themselves like persistent sadness, hopelessness, or losing interest in activities and these signs should be taken seriously rather than dismissing them

Teenagers when they maintain healthy habits daily like sleeping regularly, physical activity and limiting excessive screen time can contribute to better mental health. Avoiding substances like alcohol and drugs is especially crucial as they can affect judgment, worsen the mood, and can also make people act impulsively. Finally focusing on personal strengths like establishing small achievable goals and practicing self compassion can boost their confidence and resilience over time. Overall, when teenagers learn how to cope with the stress, stay connected with people they trust, and seek early help they can greatly improve their mental health and lower the risk of emotional struggles.

At Family level,

Recognizing early warning signs of youth suicide is a crucial step in prevention and parents play a central process in this process. One of the most effective way in supporting them is by maintaining an open and consistent communication. When children feels more safe to express their thoughts without fearing judgement they are more likely to share their struggles. Simple, empathetic conversations and active listening can make a significant difference. It is also important for parents to pay attention to their children's behavioral and emotional changes.

Persistent sadness; withdrawal from friends or activities; changes in sleep or appetite; or a sudden drop in academic performance can be signs of underlying stress. Expressions of hopelessness, talking about feeling like a burden, or indirectly mentioning about death should be taken seriously.

Another important factor is creating a safe and supportive home environment. This includes providing emotional safety and taking practical steps like locking up potentially dangerous items securely. Good habits like getting enough sleep, eating healthy foods and exercising regularly can help a child's overall health as well. It helps build trust and connection when parents show an interest in a child's everyday activities – what they do, who their friends are, what worries them. It is equally important to reinforce the idea that asking someone for help is a sign of strength, not



weakness. If you do notice any warning signs, it is best to intervene as early as possible and seek out counselling or mental health professionals before the situation gets worse.

Overall being aware, communicating openly with them, providing them with emotional support, and taking timely action can greatly help reduce risk of suicidal thoughts and ensure young people feel supported and understood.

At School Level,

Schools play a critical role in preventing youth suicide as they are one of the few places where teenagers and children can be reached early and consistently. Teachers and school staff interact with the students daily, often making them the first ones to notice small changes in behavior, mood or academic performances which may indicate that the student is struggling. Sometimes, they notice these signs before the parents do.

A key advantage of school based prevention is the early identification. It is both safe and important to ask the students about their mental health. This approach does not increase the risk but instead it helps them to seek help, identify those in need and connect with them with timely support. Many young people suffering do not receive any form of proper mental health care, so schools can act as a crucial first point of contact.

Schools should focus on structured strategies like mental health awareness programs, anti-bullying policies, and accessible counseling services for prevention. These initiatives address immediate concerns and build long-term resilience. They help students to develop coping skills and emotional awareness that will help them to protect them later in life.

Another advantage of school based prevention is accessibility. School based programs lowers common barriers like stigma, lack of awareness, delayed identification. This ensures that the support reaches larger and more diverse groups of students. Combined with trained staffs who can identify early warning signs, school becomes a supportive place where students feels acknowledged and understood

Overall, by the integration of early identification, awareness and accessible support systems, schools serve as a strong platform for reducing the risk of youth suicide and promoting their mental well-being.

At Community and digital level,

Community and digital environments play an important role in preventing suicidal thoughts among teenagers by shaping how supported, connected and informed young people feel in their daily lives.

At the community level, creating safe, inclusive, and supportive spaces such as youth groups, local programs, and peer support networks can help reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen a sense of belonging. When communities openly discuss mental health it helps reduce stigma and makes it easier for individuals to talk openly without the fear of judgment.

Online environments also need to be safe and constructive. Social media, TV programs and films, as well as news media should communicate messages of hope, recovery and realistic understanding of coping with mental health problems. Suicide must be accurately portrayed as a complex behavior determined by a number of different factors.



Digital spaces should also be safe and prevent the transmission of content that could cause harm as well as promote positive interactions. Providing young people with access to helplines and counseling services online where they can talk to trained professionals in confidence, as well as stories of hope and recovery from young people who have coped with mental illness, can help young people understand they are not alone.

When community based support systems and digital platforms are working safely and supportively together to provide informed support and guidance, they can promote help-seeking behaviour and play an important role in suicide prevention.

Supporting At-Risk Adolescents

To assist an at-risk teen requires an understanding of what they're going through and how we can help them promptly. The most important thing is how adults respond to the teen's distress. When a teen is struggling, feeling genuinely heard, accepted and supported can greatly reduce feelings of emotional isolation and build trust. The first key step is taking all emotional expressions seriously. Don't dismiss or minimize a teen's feelings even if the problem seems small from an adult's perspective it may feel overwhelming to them. By listening carefully to them, being empathetic toward them, and validating their feelings of emotion helps them feel understood. Additionally, along with emotional support, gently encourage the teen to use some healthy coping techniques—some examples include journaling, relaxation exercises, structured schedules or problem-solving—to help them regain a sense of control over their life. The foundation of being able to effectively communicate with one another in an open, honest way is through compassion and understanding.

Social connection is a highly protective factor for teenagers at risk of attempting suicide. By encouraging and fostering supportive relationships with family, friends, teachers, or other positive role models such as mentors can help teenagers feel less alone and more valued. Social connection is a major factor in stabilizing and healing emotions.

Self harm warning signs are critical to pay attention to when attempting to connect with someone who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts. If there is concern about self-harm or suicidal thoughts, asking clear and direct questions in a calm and non-judgmental way is necessary. Talking about suicide does not increase risk instead it often opens the door for honest conversation and support. Any indication of self-harm thoughts should always be taken seriously.

Having access to a mental health professional is important to assess risk of the student harming himself or others, provide therapy, and guide both the teen and family through appropriate coping strategies and treatment options when needed.

Finally – Patience is crucial when working with an at-risk teen. Be consistent and compassionate as you go about working with them to bring them to safety. The combination of being emotional supportive, having open communication, solid connections with other socially supportive people, and the necessary professional support will help to create a safe and supportive recovery environment for the at-risk teen.



Where and When to get help.

Availability of appropriate and timely support is important in mitigating suicide risk among adolescents. Distressed youths should be encouraged to seek help because even though their feelings may be temporary or even unpredictable. Structured assessment, emotional stabilization, and long-term coping mechanisms may be offered to clients by professional support.

Mental health workers, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and licensed counselors are educated to recognize risk factors and to provide evidence-based treatment including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), crisis intervention and, in some cases, medication management. Such care can be conveniently accessed through schools and community health centers.

Crisis hotlines are direct and confidential and are available in most countries around the globe. They tend to be free, 24/7, and the adolescent can speak to trained listeners when they are in a state of acute distress. The directories of helplines in various geographical areas are available in such international organizations as Befrienders Worldwide and International Association to Suicide Prevention (IASP).

Trusted adults are essential in addition to the professional services. Parents, teachers, school counselors, and community leaders can provide emotional reassurance, warning signs identification, as well as facilitation of access to formal care. Encouraging free communication both in family and school will help reduce stigma and encourage early intervention.

Responsible and Ethical Messaging.

The communication surrounding adolescent suicide has to be approached with caution, care and accountability to the laid down ethical standards. The health authorities, like World Health Organization and media houses, have stressed the need not to be sensational or descriptive about suicidal behavior because this may lead to increased chances of imitation, especially in the young and vulnerable segment of the population.

Messages which portray that suicide is an escape out of the problem or an escape out of the difficulty that the problem is causing. Instead, the communication should be centered on the message that suicidal ideation is most often temporary, and that it can be treated, and that recovery and support is possible with the appropriate assistance.

Responsible messaging also involves use of non-stigmatizing words. The use of words that are likely to blame or assign moral judgment is avoided. Instead, a neutral and caring language use promotes normalization of help-seeking behavior and aids the reduction of barriers to care.

One can particularly be successful in emphasizing tales of survival and healing. Hope may be supported through communication and adolescents are encouraged to seek help through providing examples of people who have faced crises and how they have managed to overcome the crisis with the help of communication. The information provided in the educational materials should also include clear information on where and how to seek help.

Conclusion

Prevention is mostly possible through concerted efforts of families, schools, healthcare systems and communities to prevent adolescent suicide which is one of the



major global public health issues. The timely intervention and reduction of the risks of the escalation would be possible with the help of early detection of the tell-tale signs of withdrawal, mood fluctuations, and hopelessness expressions.

The prevention strategies are to be concerned with the awareness, education as well as accessibility of the mental health services. Some of the most important components of a successful prevention model are mental health literacy awareness campaigns in schools, the provision of conducive environments and minimizing stigmas.

Empathy and embracing is still at the heart of everything. Emotionally distressed adolescents feel listened to, appreciated, and assisted. The societies would be able to build protective nets that would be in a position to safeguard the children during times of weakness.

And, lastly, through long term commitment to awareness measures, early intervention measures and compassionate care of the adolescents, the reduction of adolescent suicide can be significantly effected and a great many more lives will be saved and be helped towards recovery.

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