

Teenage suicides: Study advocates greater family support

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Teenage suicide is often perceived as the result of rejection of family, significant others and of society. Families affected by teenage suicide often look back for warning signs and clues in order to make sense of the tragedy. With the recent teenage suicides in Bridgend, South Wales, there have been demands for improved suicide prevention strategies. However little attention is paid to those families who have already lost their teenage sons or daughters.

Research published in the open access journal, *BMC Psychiatry*, has highlighted a key role for general practitioners in organising long-term, individually formulated support schemes for those affected.

A research team from Umeå University has already identified the phenomenon of cluster suicides where one suicide appears to have a 'contagious' effect triggering further suicidal activities and even suicide among other teenagers in a community. General practitioners were identified as having a key role in providing support for the family and close contacts of victims to potentially prevent further suicides.

Following this initial study, the same group has attempted to investigate in more depth the aftermath of suicide on families.

Based on data from a large project on unnatural teenage deaths in northern Sweden (1981-2000), the team led by Per Lindqvist retrospectively analysed 10 cases. The researchers examined the qualitative aspects of losing a teenage family member due to suicide,

including post-suicidal reactions, impacts on daily living, and the families' need for support after the event.

At the time of the research, the participants were still struggling to explain why the suicide had occurred. Although most had returned to an ostensibly normal life, they were still profoundly affected by their loss. They highlighted that post-suicide support was often badly timed and insufficient, especially for younger siblings and said they would welcome earlier assistance from friends, family and the clergy.

Lindqvist comments "There is a need for better understanding and treatment schemes for families who have lost a teenage family member in suicide, and especially for the younger siblings who often are forgotten".

The general practitioner was again identified as a key person in organising a support strategy for the families of suicide victims. This support would not only prevent emotional contagion, but would actively help families in the aftermath of a teenage suicide.

Source: BioMed Central

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