

Study: Teen suicide spike was no fluke

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A troubling study in the September 3rd *Journal of the American Medical Association* raises new concerns about kids committing suicide in this country. After a one year spike in the number of suicides, doctors were hoping to see more normal numbers in the latest study, but they didn't. The number of kids committing suicide in the U.S. remains higher than expected, and that has doctors and parents looking for answers.

For more than a decade the suicide rate among kids in this country had steadily and consistently declined, but that trend ended abruptly.

"Suddenly in 2004 we see the sharpest increase in the past 15 years and it appears that it's persisting into 2005," says Jeff Bridge, PhD, Nationwide Children's Hospital.

2005 is the most recent year that the numbers are available, and they don't look promising. Jeff Bridge is a researcher at Nationwide Children's Hospital who conducted the study. He says while the numbers dipped slightly between '04 and '05 overall they are still up significantly.

That's disturbing news to Rick Baumann. After his son, Gabe, first attempted suicide as a teenager, Rick devoted his life to suicide prevention and educating others. Like many parents, Rick knew little about warning signs.

"He just withdrew, wasn't answering phone calls to his friends and all of that, but I have four other children and he was a teenager, and I just assumed it was teenage behavior," says Rick.

But often it's much more than that, and now that researchers have identified what may be an emerging crisis, the next step is to figure out what's causing it. One answer may lie in the prescription of antidepressant medication. Because of concerns over side effects, the number of kids prescribed anti-depressants has dropped by as much as 20 percent** and that may be having a dire impact.

"The vast majority of young people who complete suicide have some sort of psychiatric disorder. Most commonly depression or some mood disorder," says John Campo, MD, Nationwide Children's Hospital.

So the kids who need the medicine most may not be getting it. Campo says there is no proven link between the drop in prescriptions and the rise in suicides, but the fact that they happened at the same time is worth looking into. Experts say they also want to look into the Internet and how that may be playing a role in the number of kids committing suicide.

*Suicide Trends Among Youths Aged 10 to 19 Years in the United States, 1996-2005, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Volume 300, No. 9, September 3, 2008

** John Campo, MD, Chief of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Nationwide Children's Hospital - interviewed August, 2008

Source: Nationwide Children's Hospital

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