

Youth from poor neighborhoods 4 times more likely to attempt suicide

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Youth in their late teens who live in poor neighbourhoods are four times more likely to attempt suicide than peers who live in more affluent neighbourhoods, according to a new study from Canada's Université de Montréal and Sainte-Justine Hospital Research Center, as well as Tufts University in the U.S. The researchers also found youth from poor neighbourhoods are twice as likely to report suicidal thoughts.

The study showed that late teens from disadvantaged neighbourhoods had higher levels of depressive symptoms along with lower levels of social support, but these factors could not fully explain why these youth were at an increased risk to consider ending their own lives. "Rather, they were more vulnerable because difficult events, such as personally knowing someone who has committed suicide or experiencing a painful breakup with a romantic partner, apparently led to increased suicidal thoughts or attempts," says Véronique Dupéré, lead author and a post-doctoral fellow at Tufts University who completed the research at the Université de Montréal. "In other words, difficult events seemed to have a more dramatic impact on these teenagers."

For this study, 2779 teens were surveyed as part of Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. Poverty levels in the neighbourhood were measured in early and mid adolescence based on Census data. Suicidal thoughts and attempts were assessed later, when participants were 18 or 19 years old. Participants were asked, "During the past 12 months, did you seriously consider attempting suicide?" Those who responded yes were then asked, "During the past 12 months

how many times did you attempt suicide?"

Among teenagers from across all socioeconomic backgrounds, the research team found that hyperactivity and impulsivity, depression, substance use, low social support, exposure to suicide and negative life events increased vulnerability to suicide thoughts and attempts. "But among youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, hyperactivity and impulsivity was even more strongly associated with suicidal behaviours," says Éric Lacourse, senior author of the study and a Université de Montréal sociology professor. "We observed that community adversity could amplify a young person's vulnerability to consider suicide."

Dr. Lacourse, who is also a scientist at the Sainte-Justine Hospital Research Center, says bolstering access to health or community services in disadvantaged neighbourhoods may help reduce suicidal behaviour among youth. "This is the first study to examine the independent role of neighbourhood disadvantage as a risk factor in adolescent suicidal behaviours," added Dr. Dupéré. "Our study suggests that to be effective, intervention and prevention efforts must reach vulnerable adolescents living in disadvantaged communities."

Source: University of Montreal

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