

High short-term risk of attempted suicide in teenagers following parents' suicide attempt

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The risk that young people attempt to commit suicide is highest within two years after a parent has received inpatient care due to a mental disorder or suicide attempt, according to a study of over 15,000 teenagers and young adults. The risk is much higher for teenagers than for young adults. This is reported by a collaborative study between Karolinska Institutet in Sweden and Copenhagen University in Denmark, which is published in the online journal *PLOS ONE*.

Although the incidence of suicide has decreased in Sweden in recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of attempted suicides by young adults in Sweden and other European countries. It has long been known that mental illness and suicidal behaviour in parents is a risk factor for attempted suicide in their children.

The present study looked at the temporal relationship between the inpatient care due to mental disorders and [suicide attempt](#), suicide and death in parents and the risk of attempted suicide in their children with respect to the children's age at the time of the attempted suicide, knowledge of which has hitherto been limited. The result shows that young people ran the highest risk of attempted suicide relatively soon (within two years) after a parent, particularly the mother, had done the same. Daughters in particular also ran a high risk of attempted suicide relatively soon after the mother's admission to a [psychiatric hospital](#). The risk of attempted suicide related to such a parental event was greatest amongst teenagers of both sexes, and then declined with age.

The study included a total of 15,193 teenagers and [young adults](#) born between 1973 and 1983 who tried to take their own lives between the ages of 15 and 31. These people were compared with peers of the same sex and born in the same area who had not tried to commit suicide.

"We show that young people, particularly teenagers, need support during a period immediately following the admission of a parent into care for mental disorders or [suicidal behaviour](#) if their own attempted suicide is to be prevented," says principal investigator Dr Ellenor Mittendorfer-Rutz, researcher at Karolinska Institutet's Department of Clinical Neuroscience. "What's required, therefore, is effective cooperation between all actors, particularly the adult and child-and adolescent psychiatric services."

More information: 'A Life-course Study on Effects of Parental Markers of Morbidity and Mortality on Offspring's Suicide Attempt', Ellenor Mittendorfer-Rutz, Finn Rasmussen & Theis Lange, PLOS ONE, online open access 12 December 2012.

Provided by Karolinska Institutet

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