

# Victimized adolescents more at risk of thinking about suicide or attempting suicide at 15

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A study to be published in the February 2016 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (JAACAP)* reports that adolescents chronically victimized during at least two school years, are about five times more at risk of thinking about suicide and 6 times more at risk of attempting suicide at 15 years compared to those who were never victimized.

This is the first study to show a predictive association between victimization, suicidal ideation and suicide attempt in mid-adolescence. It also takes into account a variety of factors, including previous suicidality, [mental health problems](#) (by the age of 12 years) such as depression, opposition/defiance and inattention/hyperactivity problems, as well as family adversity.

Using data from the Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development, which followed a general population sample of 1168 children born in 1997-98 in Quebec (Canada) until they were 15 years old, a group of researchers led by Dr. Marie-Claude Geoffroy of the CIUSSS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (Douglas Mental Health University Institute, McGill Group for Suicide Studies) and the Sainte-Justine Hospital Research Centre examined the relationship between victimization by peers, suicidal ideation and suicide attempt. The authors hypothesized that children victimized by their peers would be at higher risks of suicidal ideation and suicide attempt compared to non-victims.

Overall, approximately 20% of the study participants report being exposed to victimization by their peers. Peer victimization includes actions such as being called names, spreading rumours, excluding someone from a group on purpose, attacking someone physically or cyberbullying. According to the authors, victims reported higher rates of suicidal ideation at age 13 and 15 (respectively 11.6% and 14.7%) compared to those who had not been victimized (2.7% at 13 and 4.1% at 15). The authors also observed higher rates of suicide attempt for the victimized adolescents at age 13 and 15 (5.4 % and 6.8%) compared to non-victims (1.6% at 13 and 1.9% at 15). In particular, the data showed that 13 years old adolescents who had been victimized by their peers have two times more risk of having suicidal ideation two years later and three times more at risks of suicide attempt.

The authors point out that although victimization predicts suicidality it does not necessarily cause it, and this prediction does not apply to all individuals. Only a minority of victims will later develop [suicidal ideation](#) or make a [suicide attempt](#). Why these adverse experiences affect individuals remains to be investigated.

Adolescence is a crucial period for suicide prevention. As a result, the authors suggest that effective interventions may require a multidisciplinary effort involving parents, schoolteachers, principals, and mental health professionals. All adolescents, victimized or not, who think often and/or seriously about suicide should see a [mental health](#) professional such as a psychiatrist, a psychologist, or an accredited psychotherapist.

**More information:** Marie-Claude Geoffroy et al. Associations Between Peer Victimization and Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempt During Adolescence: Results From a Prospective Population-Based Birth Cohort, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jaac.2015.11.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2015.11.010)

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