

Study examines suicides publicized on social media and teens' ER visits

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New research questions whether there is a link between adolescent suicide highly publicized on social media with an increase in emergency departments visits by teens for suicidal thoughts and attempts.

An abstract of the Canadian study, "The Association of Publicized Suicides on Social Media and Emergency Department Visits for Suicidal Behavior in Children: A Population-Based Time Series Analysis," will be presented at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) 2016 National Conference & Exhibition in San Francisco on October 21. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teens and young adults in Canada and the United States.

The research looked at the role that adolescents' increasing use of [social media](#) use might play in ER visits for [suicidal behavior](#). In his study, Naveen Poonai, MD, MSc, examined the widespread media reports about the suicide death of 15-year-old Amanda Todd and whether there was a resulting effect on suicide-related visits by youths to Ontario's emergency departments. Amanda Todd committed suicide on Oct. 10, 2012, after years of cyberbullying that she described in a YouTube video that went viral after her death.

Using 2002-2013 data from Canada's National Ambulatory Care Reporting System, researchers used an interrupted time-series analysis to examine monthly rates of emergency department visits related to suicidal behavior such as intentional self-poisoning before and after Todd's suicide. They found a no significant change in ER visits for suicidal

behavior after her death. Importantly however, the authors found a significant increase in ER visits in teenagers for suicidal behavior that began in June 2011. No such increase was found among the younger children studied.

"Our results suggest that despite provincial funding initiatives and anti-bullying campaigns, ER visits for suicidal behavior in Ontario, Canada have been increasing among adolescents for the last five years. However, this increase should not necessarily be attributed to social media and future research should focus on elucidating other reasons for this worrisome trend," said Dr. Poonai, an associate professor of pediatrics and emergency medicine at Western University in London, Ontario. Dr. Poonai said the findings also support the development of a national suicide prevention strategy in Canada."

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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