Risks to victimised youth in alternative cultures exposed

April 4 2018, by Mike Addelman

Young people belonging to alternative subcultures, such as goths, emos or metal fans, are at a greater risk of self-harm and suicide than those who do not, according to a research review.

Dr. Peter Taylor, a clinical psychologist from The University of Manchester, says health, educational and social services need to be more aware of the risks to these young people.

"Victimisation, stigma and hate crime may explain the greater risk these individuals face. A prime example of that is the aggression faced by Sophie Lancaster in 2007," said Dr. Taylor.

"Sophie was tragically murdered by a group of young men purely because of her affiliation to Goth culture."

The systematic review of 12 English language papers published in the British Journal of Clinical Psychology was conducted by experts at The University of Manchester, University of Liverpool, the psychological services organisation Changing Minds UK, Leeds Beckett University and The University of Central Lancashire.

The findings reflect the growing concerns over the risks of young people: Suicide is a leading cause of death in adolescents and the second leading cause of death in 15-29 year olds according to a 2017 report by the WHO.

Dr. Taylor, from The University of Manchester, said: "The belief that alternative subcultures may be at an increased risk of self-harm and suicide is considered by some to be a myth.

"But the literature we reviewed does suggest that these individuals are indeed in greater danger.

"But this research requires interpretation within the wider context of public concern around alternative subcultures and their impact on the mental health of young people.

"The public and media have at times, unhelpfully, demonised alternative subcultures and music as a cause of problems including self-harm.

"That is why organisations such as the Sophie Lancaster Foundation have an important job of increasing awareness about victimisation of alternative subcultures.

"Getting the message to health, education and social services staff is also an important consideration."

Dr. Mairead Hughes, from The University of Liverpool said: "There is not enough evidence to tell us why it is that people belonging to these subcultures are at greater risk.

"Young people who have faced more adversity may be more likely to become part of a subculture, but this does not seem to fully explain the increased risk.

  More information: Mairead Ann Hughes et al. This corrosion: A systematic review of the association between alternative subcultures and the risk of self-harm and suicide, *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* (2018). DOI: 10.1111/bjc.12179