

# Three factors exacerbate suicidal behavior in bullied teens

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James Cook University researchers have found three lifestyle factors that predispose bullied adolescents to plan or attempt suicide.

Dr. Yaqoot Fatima from James Cook University and the University of Queensland was part of a team that analyzed data from a survey of more than 280,000 students aged 13–17 from 90 countries.

She said suicide is the third leading cause of death among adolescents.

"Compared to adolescents who were not bullied, adolescents who experienced bullying have more than twice the odds of thinking about and planning suicide, and close to three times greater odds of attempting it," said lead author Mr Md. Mehedi Hasan from the University of Queensland.

Dr. Fatima said more than 30 percent of the students surveyed had been bullied and more than 10 percent of these had attempted suicide.

"Reducing adolescent suicide through bullying prevention strategies requires an understanding of the intermediate factors involved in this relationship, in particular the mechanisms and pathways through which bullying relates to suicidal behavior," she said.

The researchers said there were a number of factors linking bullying and suicide, but three were significant.

"The strongest links between bullying and suicidal behaviors were loneliness, [sleep disturbances](#) and [alcohol consumption](#).

"Nearly one-fifth of the total association between bullying and suicidal ideation was linked to loneliness. Sleep disturbances and alcohol consumption were the link between bullying and suicidal behaviors in 4 to 9 percent of cases," said Dr. Fatima.

She said the three factors may reinforce each other, with alcohol consumption linked to sleep disruption and loneliness, [bullies](#) targeting

lonely people, and loneliness a common end result of chronic peer bullying as victims become isolated.

"This study suggests targeted policies and early implementation of strategies focusing on addressing loneliness, sleep disturbance and alcohol consumption can reduce the risk of adverse suicidal behaviors among adolescents.

"It highlights the importance of screening adolescents for these intermediate factors and designing community-wide policies and programs that promote [social engagement](#), good sleep health and less alcohol consumption," said Dr. Fatima.

**More information:** Md. Mehedi Hasan et al, Pathways linking bullying victimization and suicidal behaviors among adolescents, *Psychiatry Research* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113992](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113992)

Provided by James Cook University

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