

Sleep troubles tied to suicidal thoughts in teens

June 19 2023, by Cara Murez



It is already known that getting enough sleep is vital to good health, but

now new research suggests that having a sleep disorder is linked to suicidal thoughts in children, teens and young adults.

Treating these sleep issues could be an inroad to improving their mental health, the study authors suggested.

"People so often think of [sleep disorders](#) as being a symptom of other mental health problems like depression or anxiety," said Melynda Casement, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Oregon, in Eugene. "But sleep problems can also contribute to anxiety, [mood disorders](#) and suicide risk," she explained in a university news release.

The researchers, which included collaborator Jason Carbone of Wayne State University in Detroit, looked at emergency department records for a nationally representative sample of children, adolescents and young adults aged 6 to 24.

The investigators found that youth who had a sleep disorder were three times more likely to be seen in an [emergency department](#) with [suicidal thoughts](#) than those who did not have a sleep disorder.

Yet, the prevalence of sleep disorders diagnosed in the emergency room was much lower, at just 0.38%, than what would be expected in the general population, Casement said.

This suggests that these disorders are underdiagnosed in emergency medicine, he added.

Screening youth for sleep disorders in the ER could provide an indication of suicide risk, the researchers said.

"Being aware of the impact of sleep disruption gives us an avenue to try

to address sleep issues, as well as downstream consequences," Casement explained.

While suicide is still stigmatized, sleep disorders do not carry that same stigma. So, identifying and treating these could improve mental health and reduce [suicide risk](#) even when people aren't comfortable talking about their mental health challenges, the study authors said.

"It gives us a wider range of inroads to tackle suicidal ideation and mental health—you can address the sleep problem and have good effects on mood and anxiety," Casement said.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for teenagers and young adults. About one in five U.S. [high school students](#) has seriously considered suicide, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

A new sleep lab on the University of Oregon campus will study whether improving sleep quality can boost [mental health](#) in teens and young adults.

The findings were published online June 16 in the journal *Sleep Health*.

More information: Jason T. Carbone et al, Sleep disorders and relative risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in youth presenting to emergency departments, *Sleep Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.sleh.2023.05.014](#)

The Sleep Foundation has more on [teenagers and sleep](#).

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