

# Children who experience discrimination may have up to five times greater odds of suicidality

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Children who experience discrimination based on weight, race, or sexual orientation have significantly greater odds of being suicidal one year

later, according to a new study in the *Journal of Pediatrics* led by researchers at the Uniformed Services University.

There is extensive research demonstrating that experiences of stigma and discrimination in adults is harmful to one's health—specifically, discrimination may increase the risk for [suicidal thoughts](#) and behaviors. However, little research has studied the impacts of discrimination on suicidality in [children](#), particularly over time. Therefore, the researchers decided to embark on this study, "Longitudinal Associations between Perceived Discrimination and Suicidality in Youth."

The researchers analyzed data from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) Study, a multi-site, 10-year [longitudinal study](#) of more than 11,000 children who were enrolled between the ages of 9-10, and who will be assessed annually until they are 19-20 years old.

In a sample of more than 10,000 12-year-old children, researchers found that discrimination based on weight, race/ethnicity/color, and perceived [sexual orientation](#) were all associated with significantly greater odds of suicidality one year later.

They also found that, compared with youths who reported no discrimination, those who experienced at least two forms of discrimination had nearly five times greater odds of reporting suicidality one year later, suggesting a cumulative effect of discrimination and highlighting the potential impact of intersecting minoritized identities on [mental health](#).

Dr. Natasha Schvey, senior author and associate professor at USU in the Department of Medical and Clinical Psychology, explained that these findings also have important implications for the military, given that out of the more than 1.6 million military children, over two-thirds are 11 years old or younger.

Also, given other unique stressors facing the military family, such as frequent moves, military dependents may have heightened risk. Therefore, assessing experiences of discrimination and ensuring consistent mental health support is critical to ensuring a strong and healthy military family.

Arielle Pearlman, first author and doctoral candidate in the Department of Medical and Clinical Psychology at USU added "findings show that children who experience discrimination based on multiple attributes have elevated odds of both suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Robust steps are needed to address and prevent [discrimination](#) and victimization among youth."

**More information:** Arielle T. Pearlman et al, Longitudinal Associations between Perceived Discrimination and Suicidality in Youth, *The Journal of Pediatrics* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2023.113642](#)

Provided by Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU)

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