

New research links teen alcohol use with suicide

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Pre-teens who drink alcohol are substantially more likely to be involved in violent behavior as adolescents and young adults, according to new research from Georgia State University's Institute of Public Health.

"While there have been several studies examining the link between alcohol and violence behavior broadly, few studies have focused specifically on early alcohol use initiation and its impact on either violent or suicidal behaviors," associate professor Monica Swahn said of her research, which appears in the February issue of the journal *Pediatrics*.

Researchers have long suspected a link between underage drinking and risky behavior, but Swahn's new findings show conclusively that those who begin drinking at such a young age are three times more likely than non-drinking peers to attempt suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among teens and young adults 15 to 24 years of age. Those who begin drinking before 13 also are more likely to be victims of dating and peer violence.

The study also revealed that 35 percent of 7th graders had started using alcohol before age 13. Swahn conducted her research by administering a survey to public school students in grades 7, 9, 11 and 12 in a community defined as "high-risk" because of high levels of poverty, unemployment, serious crimes and single-parent households.

Establishing early alcohol use as a risk factor for violent behaviors

enables policy makers and community leaders to more effectively reduce the risk of suicide attempts and other acts of violence, Swahn said.

"Since early alcohol use was strongly associated with both dating violence victimization and suicide attempts, prevention efforts that delay or reduce adolescents' alcohol use may prevent these forms of violence as well," she said. "A number of evidence-based strategies, such as enforcing minimum legal drinking age laws and increasing excise taxes on alcohol, are available but not fully implemented to prevent and reduce alcohol use among minors. Increased support of these strategies will be necessary to prevent alcohol abuse and the many health problems associated with its use among young people."

Source: Georgia State University

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