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## Suicide Attempts by Teens Linked with Assault

By Reuters

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) – High school girls who have recently experienced dating violence and boys who have a history of being sexually assaulted are at increased risk of attempting suicide, a new study of New York City public school students shows.

The researchers also found that dating violence – being hit, slapped, or intentionally hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend – was common, with 10.6 percent of females and 9.5 percent of males having experienced it at least once in the past year.

While dating violence didn't increase boys' risk of attempting suicide, Dr. Elyse Olshen of Columbia University Medical Center in New York City and her colleagues found, boys who reported having been sexually assaulted at least once in their lives were nearly four times as likely to have attempted suicide.

Conversely, a history of sexual assault did not appear to influence the risk of suicide among girls, but girls who were recent victims of dating violence were 61 percent more likely to attempt suicide, the researchers report in the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine.

“The bottom line is clear: adolescents in this sample and in the United States are experiencing high rates of violence and depression, with a growing number of them committing suicide,” Drs. Amy E. Bonomi and Kelly Kelleher of Ohio State University in Columbus write in an accompanying editorial.

Olshen and her team analyzed results of a survey of 8,080 high school students 14 or older to better understand the relationship among suicide attempts, sexual assault and dating violence.

Suicide is a leading cause of death among teens, they note. Suicide attempts are common among high schoolers and put them at risk of engaging in other risky behaviors.

Overall, the researchers found that 11.7 percent of girls and 7.2 percent of boys reported having tried to kill themselves at least once in the previous year, while 9.6 percent of girls and 5.4 percent reported having been sexually assaulted during their lifetime.

The study did not address why dating violence is linked to suicide attempts, Olshen and her team note, although other research has found that depressed teens are more likely to become involved in violent relationships and that dating violence can lead to posttraumatic stress disorder and other mental health problems.

Although the study focused on public high school students in one urban area, the findings can probably be generalized to urban youth across the country, Olshen and her colleagues suggest. “Clinicians, educators and other professionals should be trained to routinely screen for violence victimization and should have a low threshold for referring these at-risk teenagers for mental health services.”

SOURCE: Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, June 2007.

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