

Reducing Suicidal Risk in Sexual Minority Youth: A Study and Commentary That Call Us to Action

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Suicide is the [second leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults in the United States](#). Did you know about the increased risk of suicidal ideation and planning in sexual minority adolescents? Luk et al ([10.1542/peds.2020-034900](#)) in a new study explores this risk and the progress from suicidal ideation to plan to attempt in this population of youths.

The authors analyzed data from a population-based longitudinal cohort involving more than 1,700 adolescents from around the United States in which sexual minority status was asked about in 2010 and then suicidal behaviors were reported by youth 6 to 7 years later. The findings are troubling and demonstrate that even when you control for demographics and depressive symptoms, sexual minority youth had significantly earlier onset of suicidal ideation and faster progression from ideation to plan than heterosexual adolescents and young adults.

Why is this? We invited adolescent specialist Drs. Pamela Murray from Boston Children's Hospital and psychologist Brian Thoma from the University of Pittsburgh to share their thoughts about these findings in an accompanying commentary ([10.1542/peds.2021-051831](#)). They remind us of the AAP's Bright Futures recommendations for depression screening starting at age 12 and the need for screening for sexual and gender minority status, and if suicidal risk is a concern, suggesting additional evaluations might be needed for this high-risk population. They also stress the need for all pediatricians to receive the training needed to be able to provide culturally competent, compassionate supportive care to sexual and gender minority youth. The commentary authors also encourage all of us to seek out the additional mental health training needed to know how to strengthen the counseling and support services due to the shortage of mental and behavioral health care specialists. Doing so may allow us to better identify these at-risk youth as early as possible and help them develop the self-esteem and strength-building to avert a tragic outcome. This study and commentary will raise your awareness and provide you with action steps you can take to make a difference as early as possible in the lives of your patients who will hopefully share with you their identification as a sexual or gender minority youth.

Related Links:

- [Exposure to Suicidal Behavior and Social Support Among Sexual- and Gender-Minority Youth](#)
- [Suicidal Ideation and Behavior Among Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Youth: 1995–2017](#)
- [Cigarette Smoking Disparities Between Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Youth](#)

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