

Violence Victimization and Suicide Risk Among Emerging Adults in the U.S.

What is Known About Violence and Suicide Risk

Experiences of violence and abuse have been linked to increased suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Young people who are victims of bullying, dating violence, and sexual assault are all more likely than their peers to contemplate and attempt suicide in adolescence and young adulthood. Understanding common patterns of victimization and their relation to suicide risk may establish which group or groups of young adults are most at risk for suicidal behavior, which can guide prevention and intervention strategies needed for certain subgroups of young adults. This information is especially needed for understudied racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual minority populations of young people.

Study Findings

- We administered an online, cross-sectional survey in January 2021 to nationally representative sample of 1,077 young adults in the U.S. ages 18 – 29.
- Certain subgroups of young adults were at greater risk for reporting a past-year suicide attempt including those who identified as **transgender or non-binary**, **LGBQ+**, **multiracial**, and living in **rural** areas. Attempts were also more common among young people reporting **financial hardships** including not having enough money for food, prescriptions, and medical care.



Emerging adults experienced four distinct patterns of victimization

- **Interpersonal violence: 22%** experienced caregiver abuse, youth violence, and intimate partner violence, but low or no structural violence.
- **Interpersonal + structural violence: 7%** experienced high levels of caregiver abuse, youth violence, and intimate partner violence in addition to police violence and hate crimes.
- **Emotional victimization: 28%** experienced emotional abuse from caregivers and youth/peers, but low or no physical violence.
- **Low/no victimization: 43%** of youth had no or very few exposures to violence.



Youth who experienced both interpersonal and structural violence were at substantially greater risk for suicide-related outcomes

- **42x** more likely to be at high suicide risk than those without any victimization.
- **5x** more than likely to be at high suicide risk than those with interpersonal violence only.
- **8x** more likely to be a high suicide risk than those with emotional victimization only.
- **3-4x** more likely to report past-year non-suicidal self-injury and 6x more likely to report suicide attempt than those with other victimization profiles.

Key Takeaways



Comprehensive assessments that examine structural violence can capture critical information about young adult mental health

Assessments that capture structural violence (hate crimes, police violence) and suicide outcomes significantly add to existing research on youth mental health. Person-centered approaches to violence and suicide risk can uncover important differences not previously established in the literature.



Structural violence is a major risk factor for suicide-related outcomes

Among emerging young adults, police violence and hate crimes on the basis of religion, race, and origin posed substantial risk for suicide attempts and behavior.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Clinical and public health interventions accounting for full history of victimization

- Strengths-based, culturally relevant approaches with attention to structural violence

Suicide prevention screening among emerging adults with victimization history

- Screening must attend to differential risks for suicide (e.g., high vs. moderate or low risk) and to multiple relationship contexts (peers, caregivers, partners, etc.).

Research to explore ongoing violence exposure during transition to adulthood

- Examine differences by race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation to guide tailored intervention approaches.

Cross-cutting policy approaches to jointly prevent violence and suicide

- Policies should implement both behavioral health and systems-level interventions, with attention to the substantial suicide risk posed by exposure to both interpersonal and structural violence.

References

1. Fedina, L., King, C., DeVlyder, J., & Herrenkohl, T. I. (2023, March 27). *Distinct Profiles of Violence Victimization and Suicide Risk: Findings from a National Survey of Emerging Adults*. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Advance online publication. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort0000675>

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