Young People Born With HIV Are Facing Higher Suicide Risk

A new study is the first to look at suicide risk among HIV-positive youth.

November 14, 2022 By Shane Burke

Adolescents and young adults who acquired HIV at birth are more likely to attempt suicide than their HIV-negative peers, according to the first study dedicated to evaluating suicide risk among youth living with HIV. Those facing stigma and other hardships are even more likely to try to take their lives.

The circumstances for young people with HIV are part of a larger problem of youth suicide, which has ballooned in recent decades. Suicide is now the second most common killer of adolescents and young adults, claiming the lives of more than 1 in 10,000 each year.

Though suicide can affect anyone, certain experiences can heighten the risk. Among young people with HIV, feeling stigmatized about their status can be associated with suicide attempts. Other hardships, like dealing with mental illness, pregnancy, a history of arrest, city stress and other negative life experiences, are also associated with higher rates of suicide attempts in this group.

The systemic racism that leads Black and Latino youth to disproportionately face discrimination, income inequality, traumatic life events, city stress and racial disparities can also lead to higher suicide rates for young people of color living with HIV.

LGBTQ youth who acquired HIV at birth also have higher rates of suicide than straight and cisgender peers their age. This is in line with heightened suicide risk among queer young adults who do not have HIV. Almost half of LGBTQ youth seriously considered suicide during the past year, according to a national survey by The Trevor Project.

On the other hand, young people living with HIV are less likely to attempt suicide if they feel a strong sense of family and self-esteem, the research shows. Developing such support could be a key area to focus on in future interventions.

Led by Philip Kreniske, PhD, of the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University, the research is the first of its kind and shows the need for further investigation into mental health among young people living with HIV.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/facing-higher-suicide-risk