Suicide Rates Climb Among Young Girls

The gap between male and female youth killing themselves is narrowing.

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Studies show that more young males than females take their own lives. But new findings published in JAMA Network Open reveal that suicide rates are disproportionately increasing among female youth compared with their male counterparts, reports Nationwide Children's Hospital.

For the study, researchers at this medical institution investigated suicide trends among young people ages 10 to 19 from 1976 to 2016. (Among this population, suicide is the second leading cause of death.)

Scientists found that although suicide rates reflected a downward trend for both female and male youth in the early 1990s, its frequency has risen among both sexes since 2007. But the data also showed that the rate of suicide among girls increased more.

Further evaluation of the information indicated that the rates of female youth suicides by hanging and suffocation were almost on par with that of boys. In addition, researchers noted that females exhibited higher rates of nonfatal suicidal behavior, such as having thoughts about and attempting suicide. More males, however, killed themselves.

"Parents need to be aware of the warning signs of suicide, which include a child making suicidal statements, being unhappy for an extended period, withdrawing from friends or school activities or being increasingly aggressive or irritable," said Jeff Bridge, PhD, the director of the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research at Nationwide Children's and a coauthor of the study.

Bridge said parents who observe these behaviors in their children should consider taking them to see a mental health professional. He also stressed that talking to kids directly about suicide will not set off suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

In conclusion, scientists urged that more research be undertaken to learn whether gender-specific risk factors for suicide may now be at work in order to help develop and implement future interventions.

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

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