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JAMA Psychiatry Study Highlights

Youth Suicide Attempts Associated with Mental Health Problems Later in Life

People who attempt suicide under age 24 appear to have an increased risk of developing mental health and social problems into midlife, according to a study by Sidra Goldman-Mellor, Ph.D., of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C., and colleagues.

Since the onset of the global recession, suicidal behavior has increased. Following up outcomes among young people who have attempted suicide is especially important because the suicide attempt rate among youths is three times higher than the rate among adults older than 30, and young people are more likely to survive an attempt, according to the study background.

Researchers analyzed 1,037 participants (91 young people who attempted and 946 who did not) in a behavior and health study in Dunedin, New Zealand. Participants were born between 1972 and 1973 and 95 percent were followed up with interviews and examinations up to age 38 years. Researchers assessed participants' mental and physical health, harm toward others, and need for support/quality of life.

Compared with people who did not attempt suicide, young people who attempted suicide were more likely to have persistent mental health problems such as depression, substance dependence and additional suicide attempts as adults approaching midlife. Young people who attempted were also more likely to have physical health problems, engage in violence, and require more social support (long-term welfare and unemployment).

“Our results suggest that young suicide attempters may warrant long-term follow-up and supportive care in the years after their attempt(s),” the authors conclude. “In an era of economic

stress and scarce financial resources, young suicide attempters may be an important target for intervention and secondary prevention services.”

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