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## CME Information

**CME Released: 11/06/2012; Valid for credit through 11/06/2013**

### Target Audience

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This article is intended for primary care clinicians, psychiatrists, and other specialists who care for children exposed to victimization.

### Goal

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The goal of this activity is to provide medical news to primary care clinicians and other healthcare professionals in order to enhance patient care.

### Learning Objectives

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Upon completion of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the association of different types of child victimization within the past year on suicidal ideation, based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of adolescents.
2. Describe the association of polyvictimization within the past year and of other factors on suicidal ideation, based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of adolescents.

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Disclosure: Pam Harrison has disclosed no relevant financial relationships.

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## Suicidal Ideation and Victimization in Adolescents CME

News Author: Pam Harrison

CME Author: Laurie Barclay, MD

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In the United States, suicide is the third leading cause of death for adolescents, accounting for 11% of all deaths among 12- to 19-year-olds from 1999-2006. Childhood exposure to violence and victimization appears to be important determinants of suicidal ideation, and several empiric studies have also found significant effects of peer bullying on suicidal ideation.

Previous studies have mostly considered the effect of only 1 form of child victimization on suicidal ideation, although victimized youth are often exposed to multiple forms of victimization, even within a 1-year period. The goals of this study by Turner and colleagues were to assess the independent and cumulative effects of past-year exposure to several different types of child victimization on suicidal ideation in a nationally representative sample of adolescents.

Suicidal ideation is significantly more common among adolescents who have experienced any form of victimization compared with those who have not, new research shows.

Heather Turner, PhD, from the University of New Hampshire, in Durham, and colleagues found that the risk for suicidal ideation was 2.4 times greater among youth who experienced peer victimization in the past year compared with youth who had not experienced bullying.

Thoughts of suicide were also 3.4 times greater among youth who were sexually assaulted and 4.4 times greater among youth who had been mistreated by parents or caregivers.

Youth who had been exposed to 7 or more types of victimization in the past year were almost 6 times as likely to report suicidal ideation as nonexposed youth.

"We know that many adolescents are exposed to several different types of victimization, often within a fairly short period of time, so one of the important advantages of our survey is that it is a more comprehensive assessment of victimization exposure than usual," Dr. Turner told *Medscape Medical News*.

"And I think the findings emphasize the need to include comprehensive victim assessment that takes in a wide array of different types of victimization when considering suicide intervention and prevention efforts in general."

The study was [published online](#) October 22 in *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

## All Types of Victimization

Because earlier studies investigating the effect of victimization on suicidal ideation have typically focused on only 1 form of victimization, researchers used 2 waves of longitudinal data to examine the effects of several forms of victimization on suicidal ideation.

The wave 1 survey was conducted between January and May 2008; the second wave was conducted approximately 2 years later.

An enhanced version of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire was used in both waves of the study, and 1 item from the Trauma Symptoms Checklist for Children was used to assess suicidal ideation.

Results showed that 4.3% of the total sample of 1186 children and adolescents between the ages of 10 to 17 years in wave 1 experienced suicidal ideation in the month preceding the interview, with females reporting ideation rates almost twice those of males.

The forms of victimization associated with the greatest percentage of youth reporting ideation included maltreatment, with over 16% of maltreated youth reporting suicidal ideation compared with 2.7% of adolescents who had not been maltreated.

Some 23% of sexually assaulted youth also reported suicidal ideation vs 3.7% of those who had not been sexually assaulted.

Almost 16% of adolescents who had been exposed to 7 or more individual types of victimization reported suicidal ideation in the past month, investigators add.

There was also a "substantial" association between suicidal ideation and living in a household with a stepparent or unmarried parent partner.

Victimization exposure did not fully explain this association, as investigators point out, and the particularly strong association between suicidal ideation and stepfamily households is both "worrisome" and warrants more attention, researchers suggest.

"I think it's important to recognize that we're talking about the kinds of victimization many adolescents experience," Dr. Turner said.

"So this is about the accumulation of different types of victimization episodes across multiple domains in adolescence, and this accumulation is what creates the greatest risk of suicidal ideation.

"Our findings show how important it is to take a more holistic youth-centered approach in promoting youth health and well-being and reducing suicidal risk."

## Beyond Mood Disorders

Peter A. Wyman, PhD, from the University of Rochester Medical Center in New York, told *Medscape Medical News* that what this study adds is the finding that multiple victimization episodes have an effect on suicidal ideation "above and beyond" a diagnosis of mood disorder.

"It also underscores the fact that some youth are vulnerable to multiple forms of victimization, particularly when from very adverse family environments," he added.

Dr. Wyman also noted that the suicide prevention field typically emphasizes the role of mood problems along with other psychiatric and substance use disorders in suicide risk.

This focus usually translates into strategies to identify youth with these specific disorders before making a referral for treatment.

"Far less attention has been given to clarifying the contributions of adolescents' social environment and experiences such as being victims of bullying," Dr. Wyman said.

"So this study draws attention to considering doing an assessment of at-risk youth by asking about peers and events that happen in families as well as exposure to violence, as they can have added risk beyond a single event."

*The authors and Dr. Wyman have disclosed no relevant financial relationships.*

*Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* Published online October 22, 2012. [Abstract](#)

- In the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, 1186 youth in the contiguous United States were telephoned in 2008 and 2010 to collect 2 waves of longitudinal data regarding recent exposure to violence.
- In wave 1 (2008), respondents were 10 to 17 years old.
- Data were collected on exposure to peer victimization, sexual assault, witnessing family violence, exposure to community violence, and maltreatment by a parent or caregiver.
- The primary study endpoint was self-reported suicidal ideation in the previous month.
- Except for community violence, suicidal ideation was significantly more common among adolescents who had experienced any form of victimization.
- After controlling for demographic factors, diagnoses of internalizing disorders, and suicidal ideation in wave 1, there were independent effects of peer victimization, sexual assault, and maltreatment by a parent/caregiver on suicidal ideation at wave 2.
- Among youth who experienced peer victimization in the past year, the risk for suicidal ideation was 2.4 times greater vs children without this history.
- Among youth who were sexually assaulted in the past year, the risk for suicidal ideation was 3.4 times greater vs children without this history.
- Among youth who experienced maltreatment by a parent or caregiver, including physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, neglect, and/or custodial interference in the past year, the risk for suicidal ideation was 4.4 times greater vs children without this history.
- Effects of polyvictimization, or exposure to 7 or more individual types of victimization in the past year, were substantial, with youth exposed to many different forms of victimization almost 6 times more likely to report suicidal ideation.
- Therefore, polyvictimization was the strongest predictor of suicidal ideation.
- There was also a substantial association between suicidal ideation and living in a household with a stepparent or unmarried parent partner, which was not fully explained by victimization.
- On the basis of these findings, the investigators concluded that recent victimization is important in increasing the risk for suicidal ideation in adolescents.
- The investigators also suggest that exposure to many different forms of victimization likely reflects significant adversity across multiple contexts of adolescents' lives, with victimization representing more of a life condition than a set of events for such youth.
- The investigators also recommended considering victimization assessments for all youth thought to be at risk for suicidal ideation.
- Limitations of this study include lower numbers of youth reporting suicidal ideation than in previous studies, resulting in less statistical power to detect associations and inability to conduct subgroup analyses.
  
- A survey of a nationally representative sample of adolescents suggests that different types of recent victimization may increase the risk for suicidal ideation in adolescents. Victimization assessments should be considered for all youth thought to be at risk for suicidal ideation.
- Polyvictimization within the past year is an even stronger predictor of suicidal ideation among adolescents than individual exposures. Exposure to many different forms of victimization likely reflects significant adversity across multiple contexts of adolescents' lives.

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According to the survey of a nationally representative sample of adolescents by Turner and colleagues, which of the following statements about the association of different types of child victimization within the past year on suicidal ideation is **correct**?

- Suicidal ideation was significantly more common among adolescents who had experienced community violence

- There were independent effects of peer victimization, sexual assault, and maltreatment by a parent/caregiver on suicidal ideation at wave 2
- After controlling for demographic factors, diagnoses of internalizing disorders, and suicidal ideation in wave 1, the effects of individual types of victimization were no longer significant
- Peer victimization was the strongest predictor of suicidal ideation

According to the survey of a nationally representative sample of adolescents by Turner and colleagues, which of the following statements about the association of polyvictimization within the past year and of other factors on suicidal ideation is **correct**?

- Children with exposure to 7 or more individual types of victimization in the past year were almost 6 times more likely to report suicidal ideation
- Maltreatment by a parent or caregiver was a stronger predictor of suicidal ideation than polyvictimization
- The association between suicidal ideation and living in a household with a stepparent or unmarried parent partner was fully explained by victimization
- Polyvictimization was a stronger predictor of suicidal ideation among white boys than among black girls

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