Suicide Attempts Versus Ideation in Youth: The Influence of Frequency and Versatility of Self-Damaging Behaviors

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BACKGROUND

• Identifying factors that differentiate youth who attempt suicide from youth who consider suicide but do not attempt, can illuminate mechanisms underlying the transition from suicidal ideation to attempt

• The Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicidal Behavior (IPTS) posits that suicide capability can be acquired through repeated exposure to events that habituate a person to pain, injury, and death (Joiner, 2005)

• This can include engaging in self-damaging behaviors such as nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) and illicit substance use (Joiner, 2005)

• No research has investigated whether the frequency and versatility (number of methods) of these self-damaging behaviors differentiate youth who have attempted suicide from youth with suicidal ideation

• The objective of this study was to address this research gap in a sample of youth

METHODS

• 239 college freshmen (74% female, M = 18) with a history of suicidal ideation and/or a suicide attempt completed self-report surveys

• Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviors Interview: Lifetime frequency and versatility (number of methods) of NSSI (Nock et al., 2007)

• Drug Use Disorders Identification Test: Lifetime frequency and versatility (number of types) of illicit substance use (Berman et al., 2005)

RESULTS

Logistic Regression Predicting Odds of a Suicide Attempt Relative to Suicidal Ideation from NSSI Frequency and Versatility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSSI Frequency</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.14, 1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSSI Versatility</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.01, 1.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logistic Regression Predicting Odds of a Suicide Attempt Relative to Suicidal Ideation from Illicit Substance Use Frequency and Versatility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illicit Substance Use Frequency</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.502</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.49, 1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit Substance Use Versatility</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.09, 3.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IMPLICATIONS

• Consistent with the IPTS, engaging in self-damaging behaviors was linked to a higher risk of acting on suicidal thoughts

• Both the versatility and frequency of NSSI, but only the versatility of illicit substance use, predicted increased odds of a suicide attempt relative to suicidal ideation only

• Previous research shows that intravenous illicit substance use leads to greater suicide capability than other modes of delivery (e.g., smoking, pills; Cheek et al., 2016)

• Thus, the frequency of illicit substance use may not have differentiated youth who attempted suicide from youth who experienced suicidal ideation because few participants reported using substances that are typically delivered intravenously

• Knowing that the number of ways that individuals engage in self-damaging behaviors confers risk for suicide attempts can inform mental health screening and risk assessment measures for youth who report suicidal ideation

REFERENCES


