GENDER MINORITY YOUTH MORE LIKELY TO KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS ATTEMPTED SUICIDE, SUICIDAL FRIENDS MAY TAKE TOLL ON MENTAL HEALTH

The study, “Exposure to Suicidal Behavior and Social Support among Sexual and Gender Minority Youth,” in the April 2021 Pediatrics (published online March 15) found that sexual minority and gender minority adolescents were more likely to know someone close to them who attempted suicide, and that rates of depressed mood were higher among teens who had this exposure. Researchers examined data from the Growing up with Media study which surveyed 3,979 adolescents ages 14-15 between October 2018 and August 2019. They examined reports of exposure to suicidal behavior by someone close to them, as well as recent depressed mood among teens of varying sexual and gender identities. The study found that teens who reported having friends who have attempted or died by suicide ranged from 31.5% for cisgender heterosexual males to 66.1% for gender minority teens assigned female at birth. The group most likely to report depressed mood were gender minority teens assigned female at birth, with 85.7% of these teens reporting depressed mood. While cisgender heterosexual adolescents seemed buffered from depressed mood by their support networks when exposed to suicidal behavior, for sexual and gender minority male and female adolescents, exposure to suicidal behavior was related to depressed mood regardless of their support system. In fact, gender minority teens assigned female at birth and exposed to suicidal behavior were more likely to indicate recent depressed mood if they had stronger support networks. Study authors highlight the complexity of social support and raises questions about its potential to magnify stress rather than serve as a buffer in some circumstances. Researchers concluded that suicide prevention efforts need to pay particular attention to the challenges faced by gender minority youth, not only to prevent suicide but to help cultivate resilience among those exposed to suicidal behavior.

[Embargoed until 12:01 a.m. ET on Monday, March 15. For an embargoed copy of the study, contact the AAP Public Affairs. For an interview with the lead author, contact Kimberly J. Mitchell, PhD, 603-862-4533, Kimberly.Mitchell@unh.edu.]