

Reducing suicide attempts among high school students



Results from a US study showed that schools where students tended to have fewer friends had higher numbers of suicide attempts than others.

A RECENT study shows that maintaining relationships with peers and adult personnel at school leads to fewer suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts among high school students.

Those who are familiar with the American series *13 Reasons Why* will probably remember the scene where Hannah Baker visits her school counsellor as she seriously considers suicide. The counsellor proves not to be up to the task and fails to fully grasp the young woman's distress, who ends her life not long after.

The scene illustrates the role, in this case negative, that a relationship between young people and the adult personnel of a high school can play in the prevention of suicide attempts in adolescents. A recent study published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* confirms the importance of these bonds.

Participants of the study were invited to name seven people whom they considered

their closest friends at school. They were then asked to mention seven adults there (teachers, counselors, etc.) whom they trusted most to discuss their problems with. The gap between the students who declared being able to confide in at least one adult at their high school and those who couldn't proved to be large: 8.3 per cent for the high school which was scored the lowest, 53.4 per cent for that scoring highest.

FEWER SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

The results showed that the students who had few friends and were not part of a group were more susceptible to suicidal thoughts and were more likely to attempt suicide than others. While these initial conclusions seem unsurprising, they are actually similar to those made when relationships between students and adults were taken into account.

An increase of 20 per cent in suicide attempts was observed in high schools,

where 10 per cent of the students felt isolated from adults. Inversely, there were fewer suicide attempts in schools, where students and their close friends share close relationships with the same adult, and where a smaller number of "trustworthy" adults were named by a larger proportion of students.

In light of these results, the researchers encourage the development of student groups at school institutions aimed at promoting positive social behaviours and the inclusion of trained adults in these groups to interact with and help students in case of need.

In the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death in young people aged from 10 to 18. On the occasion of International Suicide Prevention Day on Sept 10, associations call to break the silence around the subject of suicide and to dedicate more resources to helping young people in distress. **AFP Relaxnews**