Study: Blocking puberty in transgender teens linked to lower likelihood of suicidal thoughts

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Transgender teens who were able to receive treatments to suppress puberty were less likely to ever consider suicide, researchers found.

High levels of anxiety and depression are common among transgender youths, and studies have found as many as 40% of transgender adults have ever attempted suicide, according to "Pubertal Suppression for Transgender Youth and Risk of Suicidal Ideation," (Turban JL, et al. Pediatrics. Jan. 23, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1725).

The AAP, Endocrine Society and World Professional Association for Transgender Health support providing transgender adolescents gender-affirming care. This includes gonadotropin-releasing hormone analogs that temporarily block puberty by stopping the production of testosterone and estrogen.

Researchers analyzed data from the National Center for Transgender Equality's 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey to look more closely at the impact of such therapy on the mental health of people who are transgender.

Among 20,619 transgender adults, 17% reported wanting pubertal suppression. Of those, 2.5% received it, according to the study.

Those getting the treatment were more likely to be younger, assigned male sex at birth, heterosexual, have a higher household income and have greater family support compared to those who wanted it but did not receive it. They also were less likely to have suicidal ideation.

"Given that suicidal ideation alone is a known predictor of future suicide attempts and deaths from suicide, the current results warrant particular concern," authors wrote.

The study may not have had enough people to detect differences in suicide attempts and did not include data on suicides.

Authors said pubertal suppression therapy offers teens a course of action that is not permanent.

"Some have also theorized that gender-affirming medical care may have mental health benefits separate from their physical effects," they wrote, "because it provides implied affirmation for gender identity from clinicians, which may in turn buffer against minority stress."

Resources

- AAP policy "Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents"
- AAP Section on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health and Wellness
- Information for parents on transgender children
- Pediatrics article "Ethics Rounds: Long-term puberty suppression for a non-binary teen"