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Independent Study Mentorship

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Bullying Awareness

Assessment 8- Research

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Subject: Bullying and Suicide in Children

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Assessment:

In the most recent years, suicide rates have spiked especially in young people. According to the CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention), in 2016, suicide was the second leading cause of death among people from ages 10-34. These results are staggering, it's hard to believe that the majority of death in our population is self-inflicted; this indicates a serious issue in our society. The question is what plays into these statistics? The CDC has also researched trends of change in suicide rates over time and concluded that since 1999 to 2017, suicide rates increased by 28 percent. Again, this comes back to the question of why these rates are increasing drastically. It is without a question that since 1999, there has been a dramatic advancement in technology since the introduction of smartphones and tablets. Additionally, the emergence of

different types of social media platforms and the percentage of users has increased as well. This has been the result of a society that is highly active and involved in social media. The drawbacks of this, however, have resulted in an increase in online harassment and cyberbullying, especially because on social media, it can be done anonymously.

The article “Bullying and Suicide,” analyzed a new link between bullying and suicide. This is an important matter for pediatricians; it is crucial for them to know the warning signs of a child who might be suffering and provide help immediately. While numerous studies have been done to find possible links of why young teens decide to take their own lives, not many people believe there is a definitive link between bullying and suicide. However, recent researchers have found that there is indeed a link between the two, they have coined the term “Bullycide.” It is interesting that it took so long for researchers to study the effects and potential dangers of suicide; it is a topic that is crucial, especially now to be addressed by healthcare workers. However, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, teens who already suffer from mental illness and substance abuse, are further at risk for suicide. When bullying, violence, and sexual harassment become additional stressors, they consider suicide as an escape from their lives. Therefore, it is extremely important as any pediatrician, psychiatrist, and psychologist who work with children and teenagers, that they pay notice to evident signs of bullying. They must be able to get through to these kids who suffer already from an immense amount of stress from their illnesses, to open up about potential harassment and violence occurring in their lives.

The link of bullying and suicide came to light after the Columbine Highschool shooting in Colorado in 1999. The two teens who opened fire at their school, killing dozens of people, were reported to have suffered from being bullied at their school by their peers. The discussion

about this incident sparked a nationwide concern for bullying and suicide. Documentaries, campaigns, and even laws have been passed regarding this matter. However, another form of bullying emerged, cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is potentially even more dangerous than the regular form of bullying. It allows the attacker to ridicule the victim in an often anonymous form. Whether it is through public shaming, or sharing intimate photos online, it can be extremely damaging to the victim's self-esteem and sense of worth. With the continuing trend of social media developing and more users becoming involved, this issue will persist. It is therefore up to the parents of victims to be attentive to their children and seek professional help if they express thoughts of suicide. For the professionals, such as pediatricians or psychiatrists, it is important to analyze the symptoms of their patients and be very attentive to the way they express their feelings. There is still much to study about the reason behind why bullying triggers suicide in many teens, but with small steps such as listening and being aware, can help significantly to stop this trend.

## Full Text:

[Suicide](#) is a difficult and complex topic, in large part because those left behind are left to wonder why a person would commit such a drastic act. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1,537 males and 524 females between the ages of fifteen and nineteen killed themselves in 2015. About 8 percent of school students in grades nine to twelve have reported that they attempted suicide, and approximately 16 percent have reported that they thought about it. In 2016, the CDC reported suicide replaced homicide as the second-leading cause of [death](#) among those aged ten to twenty-four.

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## Critical Thinking Questions

- What are some common warning signs someone is thinking about committing suicide?
- How many states have laws against [bullying](#)? How many states also have laws against [cyberbullying](#) or electronic harassment?
- What incident of bullying is believed to have led to the 2006 suicide of Megan Meier?

## Risk Factors

The reasons behind suicide are varied and complicated. Although not everyone agrees that bullying is a factor, some research does link bullying to teen suicides. Some of those who study the connection have coined the term *bullycide*.

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the reasons why people take their own lives and establish suicidal idealization, which means thinking about or planning suicide. Studies have

shown that many factors in addition to bullying seem to influence teens. The single greatest risk factor for suicide among young people and adults is mental illness. Many who take their own lives also have substance abuse disorders, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Young people are often ill-prepared to handle stresses; those already at risk for suicide may feel overpowered by the emotions associated with stressors such as violence, bullying, and sexual abuse, and may consider suicide as a way to escape.

## Background

The connection between bullying and suicide first came to widespread attention in the wake of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. Two teens killed a dozen classmates and a teacher and wounded many others at their Colorado high school before ending their own lives. Some reports after the incident indicated that the shooters had felt bullied by their peers. Although the investigation revealed that deep-seated anger in the shooters was a primary factor in the attack, the national discussion about the impact of bullying continued.

The 2011 documentary *Bully* drew more attention to the issue. Several of the families featured in the work blamed bullies for pushing their children to suicide. Kirk and Laura Smalley describe how their eleven-year-old son, Ty, killed himself after being bullied. They formed the organization Stand for the Silent to aid and encourage other children to fight bullying. Throughout the documentary, silent bystanders observe the actions of the perpetrators and victims. The filmmakers, like the families of bullied children, have encouraged witnesses to speak up against bullying.

## Cyberbullying

While face-to-face confrontations can be damaging to victims, online bullying, or cyberbullying, behavior has become a devastating trend. Cyberbullying allows an aggressive attacker to publicly

ridicule a victim and disseminate rumors quickly. Many online forums provide convenient anonymity to the bullies. The sharing of intimate images, such as nude photos, can humiliate and degrade a victim. Such emotions and experiences can further affect depressed individuals, increasing their feelings of worthlessness. Although experts shun such easy explanations, the families of many young suicide victims point to online bullying activity as a tipping point.

In several well-publicized cases, the bullies targeting teens online have been adults. In Missouri, Lori Drew, mother of a classmate of thirteen-year-old Megan Meier, was prosecuted after Meier committed suicide. In 2006 Drew helped her daughter trick Meier with a fake [MySpace](#) profile, on which the Drews courted the teen by pretending to be a boy named Josh. The fictional teen later turned on Meier and told her the world would be better without her. Other members of the online community joined in targeting Meier. Meier, who had previously been prescribed antidepressants, killed herself that day. Drew was charged and convicted of computer fraud and abuse rather than cyberbullying, although the conviction was later overturned.

Such widespread attention to suicides believed to be linked to bullying has encouraged states to pass laws against bullying, and many have enacted cyber harassment legislation. In 2009, the US House of Representatives proposed the Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act, which would have made it a federal crime to use electronic means to bully and harass another person. As of 2018, the measure had not been passed, but according to the Cyberbullying Research Center, all fifty states and the District of Columbia had some laws against bullying on the books. Forty-eight states included cyberbullying or electronic harassment in their legislation.

## **Developments and Trends**

Some experts say the high interest in cases linking bullying to suicide sparks interest in depressed young people. They believe media attention encourages other young people to commit suicide in a bid for sympathy. They advise news outlets to cover such cases with care.

According to the American Psychological Association, the best way to prevent suicide is through screening. Mental health experts encourage schools and others to look for suicide warning signs. These signs include discussion of dying, hurting oneself, or disappearing; changes in personality such as becoming anxious, tired, or withdrawn; a recent traumatic loss such as divorce, broken friendship, or a death; changes in behavior, eating habits, or sleep patterns; expressions of shame, guilt, or worthlessness; and a belief that things will not get better in time. By recognizing distressed teens, adults can help young people get the assistance they need to cope with [mental disorders](#) and stressors, including bullies.

In addition, the CDC has reported that LGBT (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) students in grades seven through twelve were at increased risk for suicide, including suicidal idealization. The CDC reported that LGBT youth were four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers were. Endeavors such as the It Gets Better Project and the Trevor Project have formed to educate people about suicide and to provide crisis intervention and [suicide prevention](#) services to LGBT individuals.

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## Ways to Help

- If someone says they are thinking about suicide, take the threat seriously and get them medical help immediately.
- Keep weapons and medications away from anyone who is thinking about suicide or who has attempted suicide in the past.

- Parents should talk to their children and encourage them to speak up about bullying. If the bullying is serious, parents should get their children counseling or other professional medical help.
- Parents should be aware of their children's online and [social media](#) contacts to be able to spot bullying.
- If a bullying incident is serious, parents should talk to their children's school about the problem.