

Frequent headaches in teenagers linked to bullying, suicidal thoughts: Study

The study, published in the online issue of the medical journal *Neurology*, does not prove that bullying or thoughts of suicide cause headaches, but shows an association between the two instances



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Teenagers who have been bullied by their peers, or who have considered or attempted suicide, may be more likely to have more frequent headaches than teenagers who have not experienced any of these problems, according to a study.

The study, published in the online issue of the medical journal *Neurology*, does not prove that bullying or thoughts of suicide cause headaches, but shows an association.

“Headaches are a common problem for teenagers, but our study looked beyond the biological factors to also consider the psychological and social factors that are associated with headaches,” said Serena L. Orr, from the University of Calgary in Canada.

“Our findings suggest that bullying and attempting or considering suicide may be linked to frequent headaches in teenagers, independent of mood and anxiety disorders.”

Study involved 2.2 million teenagers

The study involved more than 2.2 million teenagers with an average age of 14 years. Of the total participants, 0.5 per cent self-reported being gender diverse, meaning being transgender or self-reporting as being gender diverse including being gender nonbinary.

Of the participants, 11 per cent reported having frequent, recurring headaches, defined as headaches occurring more than once a week.

A total of 25 per cent of the participants reported being victims of frequent overt bullying, including physical and verbal aggression, being called names or insulted, and being threatened virtually; and 17 per cent reported being victims of frequent relational bullying, including having rumours spread about them, being excluded, and having harmful information posted about them on the internet. Also, 17 per cent of participants reported considering or attempting suicide in their lifetime.

Researchers found that those who had frequent headaches were nearly three times more likely to experience bullying than their peers.

Teenagers who had been bullied or had suicidal tendencies were nearly twice as likely to have frequent headaches as their peers, while those with mood and anxiety disorders were 50 per cent and 74 per cent more likely, respectively, to have frequent headaches than their peers.

Victims of relational bullying

Researchers also found that 34 per cent of teenagers with frequent headaches reported being victims of relational bullying at least once a month compared to 14 per cent of teenagers who had headaches less than once a week.

They found that 34 per cent of teenagers with frequent headaches had made one or more suicide attempts or had suicidal thoughts compared to 14 per cent of teenagers with headaches less than once a week.

"These results should compel future research into interventions for bullying and a better understanding of how gender diverse youth are at a higher risk of headache disorders," Orr said.

"These findings should urge policymakers to increase efforts towards bullying prevention and should encourage doctors to screen children and teenagers with headache disorders for bullying and suicidal tendencies."

A limitation of the study was that participants self-reported their headaches and other information and they may not have remembered all the information accurately. -mid-day.com, August 6, 2023

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