The Rise of Suicide and Trauma in Adolescents

How “13 Reasons Why” Missed the Mark

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13 Reasons Why

• Synopsis

• Characters

• Pros and Cons
Synopsis and Characters

• Clay Jensen, a shy high school student, returns home from school one day to find that he has received a mysterious package in the mail. It contains seven double-sided cassette tapes used by Hannah Baker, a classmate who has recently committed suicide. Each tape details a reason why she killed herself.

• (13 reasons) Each tape (side A and B) has a story about how each person contributed to her death, and she provides a detailed account of each of these encounters.

• After listening to all of the tapes, the listener must provide the tapes to the person next on the list.

• Tapes also come with a map that listeners are to use when following her story.

Pros and Cons

**Pros**

• Promoting these types of conversations
• Highlighting teenage suicide
• Recognizing adult issues
• Recognizing the seriousness of adolescent relationships

**Cons**

• The lack of responsiveness from adults at times or rather the minimization of these concerns
• The importance of remaining vigilant
• Being more attentive to behaviors and actions
### Pros and Cons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Fantasy</td>
<td>• Promoting fearfulness (be nice to people or else!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Simplifying suicide</td>
<td>• Potentially triggering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Externalizing (bullying)</td>
<td>• Initially, no guidance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Blaming others</td>
<td>• Complicated trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No focus on mental health</td>
<td>• Encouraging for those contemplating suicide</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Glamourizing or romanticizing suicide</td>
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</tbody>
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### Mental Health and 13 Reasons Why
Mental Health and Suicide

Most individuals who have attempted and/or completed suicide have a diagnosable mental health disorder such as:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Psychosis
- Substance abuse

Adolescents and Suicide

- Suicide is the third-leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds.
- At least 25 attempts are made for every completed teen suicide.
- Nearly 60% of all suicides in the United States are committed with a gun, followed by drug overdose.
- Girls experience suicidal ideation and attempt suicide about twice as often as boys.

Females: suicide by overdosing or cutting
Males: suicide by firearms, hanging, or jumping from heights
Risk Factors

- Psychological disorder, especially depression, bipolar disorder, and alcohol and illicit/Rx drug use
- Previous suicide attempt
- Sexuality/gender identity concerns
- Hx of abuse
- Poor support network
- Disciplinary problems
- Extensive hx of bullying

Social Media sites used for bullying

- Yik Yak
- Whisper
- Secrets
- Ask.fm.com (can be linked to Instagram)
- ChatRoulette.com
- KIK (App for smartphone)
- KEEK (App for smartphone)
- Omegle
- Chat for Omegle (for smartphone)
Latest Trends

- Study released in May 2015
- Suicide rate among African American children (5-11) has nearly doubled since the early 1990s
- 1993-2012
  - Boys: Previously: 1.78  Current: 3.47 (per 1 million)
  - Girls: Previously: .68  Current: 1.23 (per 1 million)

- Between 2008-2012, suicide was the 9th leading cause of death among African American children
  - 78% hanging and suffocation
  - Shooting 2nd most common method (17.7%)

Hypotheses

- Underutilization of mental health services
- Impacted by risk factors and experiences that increase psychic stress, hopelessness and trauma
- Changes occurring in families which have affected resiliency

Resiliency:

1) Strong economic base  6) Pride
2) Achievement orientation  7) Respect and Love
3) Role adaptability  8) Resourcefulness
4) Spirituality  9) Community involvement
5) Extended family bonds  10) Family unity
Latest Trends

• Since 1999, suicide rates for females between 10-14 have increased

• Tripled in last 15 years

.5 per 100,000 to 1.4 per 100,000 people

Hypotheses

• Access to healthcare

• Increase in use of opiates for female adolescents

• Decreases in antidepressants being prescribed

• Earlier puberty

• More lethal methods
Trauma and Suicide

What is Trauma?
• Emotional response to horrific event
• Shock and denial are typical
• Unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, physiological symptoms
• Difficulty moving forward from the trauma
Trauma and Suicide

Hannah’s Trauma
Approximately one year period
11th grade year

- First Kiss: Lied, more than just a kiss. This began the deterioration of her reputation at her school
- Continued harassment by classmates
- Vicious rumors about her sexuality lead to other boys attempting to compromise her
- Ostracized by other students
- Betrayed by friends and others she trusted
- Witnessing the date rape of her friend
- Experiences the death of a classmate = guilt and shame
- Being raped by classmate
- Not being heard by the school counselor

Trauma and Suicide

Signs and Symptoms

**Behavioral Symptoms**
- Reenactment of trauma through play
- Loss of interest in previously-enjoyed activities
- Angry outbursts
- Irritability
- Behavioral inhibition
- Reckless behaviors
- Regression

**Physical Symptoms**
- Feeling as though the event is happening all over again (flashbacks)
- Sleep disturbances
- Complaints of headaches and stomach aches
- Difficulties with physical contact

**Cognitive Symptoms**
- Feeling as though the trauma is happening again
- Trouble concentrating in school
- Negative cognitive development
- Altered cognitive functioning
- Increased arousal and hyper-vigilance
- Jumbled, out of order recollection of the event
Trauma and Suicide

Signs and Symptoms

Psychosocial Symptoms

• Emotional numbing
• Sadness
• Guilt
• Low self-esteem
• Inability to trust others
• Avoidance of memories or situations that trigger memories of the event
• Flashbacks of the event
• Intrusive memories of the event
• Nightmares and night terrors
• Fears about death
• Excessive Worry

Trauma and Suicide

• Overwhelm the ability to cope, causing the feeling that the world is a dangerous out-of-control place.

• Normal responses to horrific experiences

• <30 days Acute Stress Disorder

• >30 days Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
# Trauma and Suicide

## Factors that ↑ suicide risk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Humiliation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despair</td>
<td>Lessened self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Loss of personal beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>Being distrustful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social isolation</td>
<td>Feeling ineffective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsiveness</td>
<td>Feeling threatened</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol or substance abuse</td>
<td>Self-destructive behavior</td>
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</tbody>
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## Trauma and Suicide Risk

- Anyone with PTSD is at a high risk for suicide.

- Some studies link suicide risk in those with PTSD to distressing trauma memories, anger, and poor control of impulses.
Trauma and Suicide Risk

- Comorbid Diagnoses (e.g. substance use disorder)
- **Criterion B: Re-experiencing highest correlated symptom to suicide attempts**
  - Limited social support network
  - Limited resources
  - May be untreated
  - Denial of symptoms

Suicide Prevention and Treatment
Suicide Prevention and 13 Reasons Why

- Negligent school counselor
- Help seeking behaviors
- Reaching out for help
- Coping/Resiliency
- Alternative Options

Suicide Prevention

- Initiating open and candid conversations
- Recognizing signs and symptoms
- Systemic approach
- Education of teachers and counselors
Suicide Prevention

• Peer education

• Training of ALL school personnel

• Support and openness

• Accessibility to mental health resources

• Acceptance of need for help