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Poor youth likelier to try suicide

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Older teens living in poor neighbourhoods are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers in more affluent environments, according to a national study published in the journal *Psychological Medicine*.

The study, conducted by researchers from Universite de Montreal, Montreal's Sainte-Justine Hospital Centre and Tufts University in the United States, found that youth in poor neighbourhoods were also more sensitive to upheavals in life, which caused them to be twice as likely to have suicidal thoughts.

"Difficult events, such as personally knowing someone who has committed suicide or experiencing a painful breakup with a romantic partner, apparently led to increased suicidal thoughts or attempts," said Veronique Dupere, lead author and a post-doctoral fellow at Tufts University in Medford, Mass. "Difficult events seemed to have a more dramatic impact on these teenagers."

These teens also exhibited higher levels of symptoms of depression, but were less likely to enjoy support systems, the researchers found. But even those factors did not fully explain the prevalence of suicidal thoughts and actual attempts to take their own lives.

Dupere said that the neighbourhood in which the youths lived often has a disproportionate impact.

"The neighbourhood had an impact over and above individual family income," Dupere said in an interview. "Living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood increased the impact of (other) factors."

"If they experienced a difficult life, the results suggest they were more likely to respond with suicidal thoughts and attempts," said Dupere.

The researchers crunched data from 2,779 youth, aged 18 and 19, surveyed as part of a federal government study that has tracked their development since 1995.

The income levels of the neighbourhoods were culled from 2001 census data.

Youth surveyed in the study were asked if they had seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months. If they said yes, they were asked how many times they had attempted suicide.

The study also found that hyperactivity, impulsivity, depression, substance use, low social support and exposure to cases of suicide all made young people more vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and attempts. Again, the impact of these factors was magnified in poor neighbourhoods.

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