What does it mean to have a peer who self harms? Examining risk taking behaviors in high school students

Julia Noel, BSNc
M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing

Purpose
To examine the risk taking behaviors of high school students who reported knowing someone who self-harms or cuts.

Background
- Among adolescents it is estimated that 17.2% engaging in self-harm behaviors.
- Girls report higher rates of self-harm than boys (Monto, McRee, & Deryck, 2018).
- It is not uncommon for adolescents’ to become friends with those who are similar to them, suggesting that troubled teens with risk factors for self-injury may form a friendship or bond over their issues.
- Adolescents who report engaging in self-harm have more friends who self-harm than those that do not participate in this behavior (2010).

Method
A secondary analysis from a 2012 data set containing quantitative data from 5,411 high school students found that 72% (n=3,895) reported knowing someone who has cut themselves or tried to harm themselves. The sample contained 80.3% of girls and 61.2% of boys and descriptive statistics were used in analysis.

Findings
High school students who knew someone who self-harms had significantly higher rates of:
- Bullying
- Substance abuse
- Risky use of technology

Conclusion & Implications
Findings support:
- Screening all high school students for self-harm behaviors and identification of students who have peers that self-harm.
- Screening all high school students for health risk behaviors and Internet risk behaviors.
- Teaching nurses who work with an adolescent population how to recognize emotional distress, increased anxiety, stress, as well as health risk and Internet risk behaviors.
- The education of teachers, parents, and students on what to do and how to act when faced with a situation of self-harm.
- The development of programs and identification of resources for students who self-harm and for those who have peers that self-harm.
- The encouragement of nurses, educators, and other healthcare providers to act as a liaison for students who self-harm or have a peer who self-harms and their parents.
- Approaching all vulnerable adolescents in a calm and non-judgmental manner to help them feel more comfortable and safe.
- Referring all adolescents who self-harm to a mental health practitioner.

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