



# A history of abuse increases the risk of suicide attempts in youth

By Dr. Jessica Edwards

Researchers in Belgium and the USA have conducted one of the first investigations into whether a history of various forms of abuse and the presence of mood disorders and psychotic symptoms can predict suicide attempts in psychiatrically hospitalized children.

In their retrospective approach, Baptiste Barbot and co-workers analyzed archival inpatient chart data from 101 hospitalized children and adolescents predominantly with bipolar disorder and other mood disorders with and without psychotic symptoms. They found that a history of sexual abuse associated with bipolar disorder, was indirectly related to a history of suicide attempts. A history of emotional abuse was also indirectly related to suicide attempts in boys (mediated by mood disorders) and in girls (mediated by psychotic symptoms). “Put simply, a history of abuse increases the odds of suicide attempts in youth”, explains Barbot. “However, abuse history often has an indirect influence through the increased psychopathology commonly associated with abuse.”

Barbot points out that uniquely, the data used in this study were retrieved and analyzed in the format that they were originally recorded in, in the hospital setting (i.e., not directly designed for research). As such, “real life” data might be valuable for similar research purposes.

Overall, these study findings point to the importance of abuse and sexual harassment prevention programs in schools and the critical need for family support and intervention programs for at-risk, vulnerable children and families. The researchers hope that having access to empirically based studies on suicide risk, as well as detailed patient medical, developmental, biological family and trauma histories will help identify those at risk of engaging in suicidal behaviours and guide subsequent treatment planning.

## Referring to:

Barbot, B., Eff, H., Weiss, S.R. & McCarthy, J.B. (2020), *The role of psychopathology in the relationship between history of maltreatment and suicide attempts among children and adolescent inpatients*. *Child Adolesc. Ment. Health*. doi: 10.1111/camh.12393.