DOES ADOLESCENT DEPRESSION/SUICIDALITY PREDICT UNHEALTHY YOUNG ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES?

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Depressive and suicidal symptoms in adolescence have been linked to sexual and domestic violence, as well as difficulty establishing long-term, fulfilling romantic relationships.
Gap

- Lack of longitudinal data analysis
- Lack of research exploring unhealthy relationship outcome patterns for varying levels of depressive and suicidal symptoms
Goal of the Study

- Explore whether depressive and suicidal symptoms increase the likelihood of unhealthy relationship outcomes

- Explore whether more chronic levels of depressive and suicidal symptoms increase the likelihood of unhealthy relationship outcomes
Sample

- 6,763 young adults, who were ages 12 to 17 when data on depressive and suicidal symptoms were collected at Wave 1 (between 1994 and 1995)
Measures: Depressive Symptoms

- An 18-item version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)
- Used threshold established in prior research using the CES-D scale with adolescents (20 or more for males and 22 or more for females)
Measures: Suicidal Symptoms

- Items assessing suicidal ideation and/or suicide attempt were used to create a variable with three categories:
  - No suicidal symptoms at Wave I or II
  - Suicidal symptoms at either wave
  - Suicidal symptoms at both waves
Measures: Depression/Suicidality Symptomatology

- Moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms in the previous week and/or suicidal tendencies in the past year.
- A three-level ordinal variable was created, assessing whether depressive/suicidal symptoms were:
  - *Isolated* (reported at Wave I or Wave II),
  - *Recurring* (reported at both Waves I and II), or
  - *Mild or non-existent*
Unhealthy Relationship Outcomes

- Relationships were characterized as unhealthy if:
  - Committing or experiencing violence in their relationship, or
  - Either person in the relationship had been unfaithful
Relationship Violence

- Being violent was defined as doing any of the following once or more in the past year:
  - Hitting
  - Kicking
  - Shoving
  - Threatening
  - Insisting a partner have sexual intercourse
Sexual Infidelity

- Being unfaithful was defined as:
  - Either the respondent or the partner having sex or a relationship with someone outside of the identified partner.
Descriptive Findings

- 25% reported depressive and suicidal symptoms in adolescence (21% isolated and 4% recurring)
- 20% reported committing or experiencing violence in their relationships
- 21% reported sexual infidelity in their relationships
Bivariate Analyses

- Cross-tabulations were used to explore the relationship between adolescent depressive/suicidal symptoms and relationship violence and sexual infidelity.
Depressive/Suicidal Symptoms & Relationship Violence

- Asymptomatic or Mild Depressive Symptoms or Suicidality (Wave I and II)
- Isolated Symptoms (Wave I or Wave II, but not both)
- Recurring Symptoms (Waves I and II)
Depressive/Suicidal Symptoms & Sexual Infidelity

Asymptomatic or Mild Depressive Symptoms or Suicidality (Wave I and II)

Isolated Symptoms (Wave I or Wave II, but not both)

Recurring Symptoms (Waves I and II)
Multivariate Analyses

- Results of multivariate analyses conducted validated the associations, after controlling for age, gender, parental educational status, family structure, income, and race/ethnicity.
Conclusions

- Depressive/suicidal symptoms in adolescence are associated with relationship violence and sexual infidelity in young adulthood.
- However, more chronic levels of depressive and suicidal symptoms did not increase likelihood of relationship violence or sexual infidelity.
Discussion

- Examine the developmental pathways connecting depressive and suicidal symptoms in adolescence with poor relationship outcomes in young adulthood.
- It is important to identify and intervene with teens who have mental health problems, so that they are able to develop healthy romantic relationships at multiple stages of development.
Limitations of the Study

- The scale used to measure depressive symptoms (CES-D) is not a diagnostic tool.
- Depressive symptoms are only measured over a two-week period.
- Underlying reasons for the association are unknown.
Questions/Comments?
Thank you!