

Assessing Adolescent Mental Health Through a Vulnerable Population Lens

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Disclosure

- Author: Holly R. Farley EdD, RN
- Objectives:
 - 1) Understand vulnerable adolescents populations specific to mental health
 - 2) Identify potential adolescents predisposed to mental health issues
 - 3) Describe assessment strategies to employ in all nursing settings
- Employer: Eastern Illinois University
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Introduction

- It is **EVERY** nurse's responsibility, in **EVERY** setting to understand and identify adolescents at risk.
- Adolescents make up **12%** of the people in the United States, with **30%** of adolescents reporting symptoms of depression each year.
- Nurses in **public health settings** have the ability to **engage** in formal and informal assessments that can identify adolescents at risk for mental health issues.

Vulnerable Populations in Adolescent Mental Health

- Vulnerable populations in this age group have an increase in risk for developing mental health issues that can continue into adulthood if not addressed.
- In addition, **suicidal behaviors** are **common** among US adolescents with **mental health disorders**.
- Often, nurses know that **low socioeconomic status** or being a **victim of abuse** can lead to **depression**, however it is often not known that the following are also vulnerable populations that predispose adolescents to **depression and suicide**

Lesser Known Vulnerable Populations

- Race/Ethnicity
- Sexual Orientation
- Early Menarche
- Nonconformity to Prescribed Gender Roles
- Exposure to School Violence
- Exposure to Family Violence

Association of Suicidal Behaviors and Mental Health Disorders

- The prevalence of **association between suicidal behaviors and mental health disorders** common in the adolescent population is **high**.
- Continuing to assess adolescents with the following mental health issues is imperative:
 - Fear and Anger Disorders (includes depression)
 - Generalized Anxiety Disorders
 - Disruptive Behavior Disorders
 - Eating Disorders
 - Substance Abuse
 - Bipolar Disorder.

Suicide

- The risk of suicide is especially high in the time **directly after** a non-fatal, self-harm event. This risk is particularly increased in instances of young people that used violent methods for self-harm such as hanging or firearms.
- Identification and ongoing assessment to assure safety should be a priority.
- **TEACH** family and friends the **Potential Warning Signs of an Impending Suicide.**

Assessment Strategies

- Early detection of mental health issues and suicide is **critical**
- Many families use the ER for primary care-Know what to assess for in this setting.
- This population is usually healthy so must do a deep and thorough assessment to identify risks.
- Utilize **informal conversations** to gain information.

Techniques

- Interview adolescents with family and alone to allow them to speak freely.
- Use open-ended questions and employ silence.
- Allow them plenty of time to completely answer the question.
- Utilize fewer questions that obtain the most information.
- Interview family members separately when possible.

Conclusion

- Awareness of depression and suicidal behaviors are **ALL** nurses' responsibility.
- **Every** opportunity to talk with an adolescent should be used as an opportunity to assess mental health.
- Nurses in public health settings have the ability to **engage** in formal and informal assessments that can identify adolescents at risk for mental health issues.
- Make changes to how you address and question adolescents.
- Be more cognizant of characteristics that predispose the adolescent to mental health issues.

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Questions

