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Abstract

Despite increased awareness of the prevalence and seriousness of mental health problems in early childhood, there have been few empirical studies of suicidal thoughts and behaviors in this age group. This study examined suicidal thoughts and behaviors in 360 preschool-aged children (ages 3 to 7 years) presenting to a psychiatric day treatment program. A semi-structured diagnostic interview (conducted with primary caregivers) was used to assess for child suicidal thoughts and behaviors and psychiatric disorders. Participating mothers also reported on their own psychological distress and family psychiatric history. Forty-eight children (13%) were reported to have suicidal thoughts and behaviors, with suicidal plans or attempts endorsed for 2 – 3% of the sample. Suicidal thinking and behavior was associated with older child age and with higher rates of concurrent depression, oppositional defiant disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder in univariate analyses, with age and depression remaining as significant predictors in a multivariate logistic regression model. Findings suggest that suicidal thoughts and behaviors are a significant clinical concern for young children presenting with early

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