This literary review explores the relationship between the vastly growing world of technology, social networking, and other forms of media with the increase and prevalence of what is called “suicide contagion.” Between 1%-5% of all adolescents' suicides can be classified as a cluster suicide resulting from other youth suicide. The growth of this contagion brings cause for concern as awareness of the problem is growing and beginning to focus on methods of prevention. Prevention methods are looking to frame how suicide is presented through the media by possible glorification, presentation, and acceptability. The vastly growing access and ease of communication leads more than 50% of young people to be exposed to suicide related content via internet. Internet prevalence and ease of access to all kinds of devices and networks makes these communications achievable making it easier for at-risk youth to be exposed to suicidal influence. Peer groups with texting and social media are finding it to be easier to be able to carry out the acts of suicide with others that they would normally not be able to mentally do alone. Schools and media companies are encouraging the distribution of training about the dangers and prevalence of suicide contagion so awareness can be more fixated on the possibility of preventing these sorts of tragedies.

**INTRODUCTION**

Suicide remains a serious public health issue and is one of leading causes of death in the US of people aged 10-24. Studies find that not only is suicide on the rise amongst children and adolescents, there is a disturbing trend regarding the young age at which these suicide attempts are being made. Research presented to the Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting in San Francisco in 2017 showed these numbers had more than doubled since 2007. It is theorized that sleep deprivation due to increased time on phones and social media, cyberbullying, fear of missing out or being left out, are factors in the rise in suicides.

With the rise in suicide rates there is a growing concern that suicides are socially contagious. Suicide Contagion, also known as Cluster Suicides, is defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services as “the exposure to suicide or suicidal behaviors within one’s family, one’s peer group, or through media reports of suicide and can result in an increase in suicide and suicidal behaviors.” This literature review explores the effects of suicide contagion among adolescents and will look at what has been done, what is currently being done, and what can effectively be done in the future. Areas of specific focus will be the effects of media, prevention plans and postvention plans of schools and communities.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Bringing Awareness**

Suicide contagion is the term used to describe the exposure through the media of a direct relationship such as a family member or friend or indirect relationship shared through the media or social networking sites. “Approximately 1-5% of suicide occurs in a cluster after a youth dies by suicide. Contagion results in approximately 100-200 seemingly preventable deaths annually” (p. 1). In addition to peer-relationship suicide imitations, suicide contagion may also be present “when media coverage of a peer/celebrity suicide is detailed and uses sensational language” (p. 1). Studies that measured the effect of either an entertainment or political celebrity suicide showed 14.3 times more likely to find a copycat effect in comparison to studies that did not. “With more dramatic headlines and more prominently placed (i.e., front page) stories associated with greater increases in subsequent suicide rates” (p. 1). E. David Klonsky, PhD stated, “Hearing about someone you relate to dying by suicide may temporarily increase one’s sense that suicide is a viable option for them. Simple exposure is unlikely to prompt the entire process, but for some vulnerable individuals, it may temporarily increase one’s likelihood that they may act on already existing suicidal thoughts” (p. 2).

In the year of 2017, there were approximately 47,173 Americans who died by suicide. A research study found that 59% of individuals age 14 to 24 were exposed to suicide-related content through internet sources. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) determined that suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals ages 10-24 years. Studies suggest that exposure to the Risk Behavior reported that in the U.S., more than in every high school students reported having seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous 12 months. More than 8% of students, 1 in every 12, reported having attempted suicide in the past 12 months. Other studies have shown that within 6 months following a suicide contagion has occurred within a school, 30% of that given student’s classmates continue to show signs of PTSD, and 9.8% show a higher level of grief reactions. M. S. Gould stated “that emotions can be spread on social media just like real life, which further supports the concept of contagion via exposure to a suicidal peer via social media” (p. 3).

**Prevention Plan**

The World Health Organization instilled guidelines for media personnel and the reporting of suicide. “Refrain from using sensational language or normalizing suicide, avoid unnecessary repetition of the story, use neutral rather than emotionally charged photos, refrain from detailing the method of death, and take particular care when the suicide involves a celebrity” (p. 3).

Research has shown that effective postvention plans contribute to the overall preventive efforts in the school community. Utah recognizes this importance, therefore, it is required that all school personnel be trained in suicide prevention strategies, that parents or guardians be notified in any circumstance, and documentation of all threats are recorded. Utah laws also require all districts to offer free seminars to parents that educate on suicide awareness, prevention, depression, and mental health among others.

**CONCLUSION**

Suicide contagion means the increase likelihood of suicide from the exposure of a direct relationship such as a family member or friend, or indirect relationship such as media or social networking site. Adolescents are the most vulnerable population to be affected by this phenomenon, as data shows that 1 to 5% of adolescents’ suicides takes place after another person dies by suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals ages 10-24 years. In addition to peer-relationship suicide, research also shows that media has an influence in suicide contagion, especially when coverage of a celebrity’s death by suicide is extensive, detailed and sensational language is used.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Ways to prevent suicide contagion are minimization of media coverage, less glorification and less use of sensational language as well as providing training for school personal and community. Media coverage on suicide should instead focus on providing helpful information such as where to seek help, preventive tools and education about suicide. These steps have the potential possibility of reducing suicide contagion. Having a postvention plan in school and communities is just as important to prevent suicide contagion and save lives.

**REFERENCES**


