

Suicide and First Episode Psychosis in the College Age Population

As September highlights Suicide Awareness Prevention Month, we wanted to share some information as it relates to college students and psychosis:

- Psychosis often begins in young adulthood when a person is in their late teens to mid-20s (NIH, 2023)
- Suicide is a leading cause of death among individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia spectrum disorders, with suicide rates that are approximately 13–20 times greater than the general population (Zaheer et al., 2020)
- A recent large population study demonstrated that one in 58 individuals with schizophrenia spectrum disorders died by suicide within the first 4 years after their initial diagnosis (Zaheer et al., 2020)
- There is an increased risk of suicide in the first several weeks following discharge from a psychiatric hospital (Miller & Black, 2020)
- Suicide attempts in participants with bipolar disorder are more lethal, with a ratio of attempts to death by suicide of 3:1 (compared to 35:1 in the general population) (Miller & Black, 2020)
- Suicide is a well-known risk for people diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder. However, when psychosis co-occurs with depression, the risk of suicide attempts and self-harm are considerably higher (Gournellis et al., 2018; Heslin et al., 2016)

Early intervention in early onset psychosis (EIP) is associated with a reduction in deaths by suicide and suicide attempts (Chan, 2018; Tahmazov, 2025). EIP consists of a multi-disciplinary team that will assess the young person's needs and will help them identify key protective factors. Protective factors include but are not limited to cultural and religious beliefs that encourage connection, extended family support, and community assets such as recreation spaces, safe housing options, and stable income. These factors can increase a student's active classroom participation and help them develop healthy relationships with their peers (Ackerman, J.P., & Horowitz, L. (Eds., 2022).

This information highlights the importance of early identification and treatment for college students experiencing psychosis. The [Best Practices in Schizophrenia Treatment \(BeST\) Center](#) offers education, training and consultation for Early Intervention in Psychosis programming, which is called FIRST. Looking for additional training or other resources about psychosis? Contact the BeST Center at 330-325-6776 or bestcenter@neomed.edu to discuss opportunities.

References

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