

The Broken Promises Effect and Suicide

WHAT IS THE BROKEN PROMISES EFFECT?

After a long, dreary winter, the arrival of spring brings a sense of relief, excitement, and hope to many people. Long associated with “new beginnings”, the months of May and June bring songbirds, sunshine, and social events. For people suffering with depression, however, this collective joy and optimism may contrast sharply with their internal pain and unhappiness, leading to a sense of increased despair. Spring may indeed not turn out to be the panacea for depression one had been counting on, and this “broken promises effect” has been linked to a dramatic 15% rise in suicide rates throughout May and June.

EXPLAINING INCREASED SUICIDE RATES

Theories abound as to why suicides increase in the spring. Perhaps a biological drop in sleep-inducing melatonin production – the body’s way of adapting to the longer days – generates dangerous agitation in already susceptible people with depressive disorders, bipolar disease, and schizophrenia. Another possibility concerns a long observed link between inflammation and depression. Winter illnesses, vitamin D deficiencies from reduced sun exposure during the colder months, or even allergic reactions to pollen can all cause inflammatory processes in the body, potentially increasing suicidal ideation.

Preliminary studies have also shown a slight rise in suicide rates after some mass public gatherings – sporting events, concerts, religious revivals – all of which become more frequent in the spring. These events, charged with energy and positive excitement at the time, may leave people feeling let down in the proceeding days.

THE STATISTICS

Whatever the cause, there is no doubt that suicide rates increase in the spring months. From a national average weekly rate of 700 suicides, statistics have long shown rates averaging 800 per week as the weather warms. The “broken promise effect” has also been linked to higher suicide rates on Mondays and on New Years Day.

PREVENTING SUICIDE

Treating depression before these riskier times can prevent tragic consequences. Learning not to attach unrealistic expectations to springtime, the New Year or any other event associated with “new beginnings” may help. Depression is a serious condition that cannot be wished away, and it is important not to expect that it will magically abate due to external factors.

If you are having suicidal thoughts, call the National Suicide Prevention hotline at 1-800-273-8255.

Whether you are concerned about your own wellbeing or that of a loved one, you may also call Carrier Clinic’s 24/7 access center at 1-800-933-3579.

For more information, visit www.EastMountainHospital.com