

## Suicidal Thoughts Linked to Acne Severity, Not Treatment!

Adolescents with severe acne report psychosocial problems, including suicidal thoughts, more often than those with little or no acne. Suicidal ideation in acne is probably linked to the disease and its appearance, and not to treatments such as isotretinoin.

Below is a summary of a recently published paper by Halvorsen et al. The reference for the whole article is the following: *Halvorsen JA, Stern RS, Dalgard F, Thoresen M, Bjertness E, Lien L. Suicidal ideation, mental health problems, and social impairment are increased in adolescents with acne: a population-based study. J Invest Dermatol 2010 Sep 16 [Epub ahead of print].*

Acne is a common skin disease that affects most adolescents to various degrees. Acne may affect self-esteem and social relations. An association between systemic treatment with isotretinoin and increased risk of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide has been claimed, but results from controlled studies are lacking.

Researchers at the University of Oslo performed a cross-sectional questionnaire study to explore the correlation of suicidal ideation, mental health problems, and social functioning with acne severity among adolescents aged 18–19 years in Oslo, Norway. A total of 4,744 young people were invited, of whom 80% participated.

Suicidal thoughts were significantly more common with increasingly more severe acne. Among those who reported having substantial acne, compared with those reporting little or no acne, suicidal thoughts were reported twice as frequently in girls (25.5% vs 11.9%) and three times more frequently among boys (22.6% vs 6.3%). In a multivariate model with adjustments for symptoms of depression, ethnicity, and family income, having suicidal thoughts was significantly associated with substantial acne, with an odds ratio of 1.80 (95% confidence interval (CI) 1.30–2.50). Mental health problems, as assessed by a validated questionnaire (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire), low

attachments to friends, not thriving at school, never having had a romantic relationship, and never having had sexual intercourse, were all associated with substantial acne.

Data from the Norwegian Prescription Database shows that very few persons in this age cohort in Oslo dispensed one or more prescriptions of isotretinoin during the study period, indicating that active acne is associated with suicidal thoughts and mental health problems. Suicidal ideation and depression during and after treatment with isotretinoin may thus reflect the burden of acne rather than being an adverse effect of the treatment.



The first author of the study, Jon Anders Halvorsen, a dermatologist at Oslo University Hospital, presented the results at the recent European Society of Dermatological Research meeting in Helsinki in September, and the study is now published in the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*

(1). The article is co-authored by Robert S. Stern at the Harvard Medical School in Boston, USA and epidemiologists in Oslo, Norway. The study is part of a larger health study among adolescents, called UNGDOM 2004 (Youth 2004).

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