



Hispanic Girls Suicide Study

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Teen Suicide Research

- Epidemiological data show high rates of suicide attempts among adolescent Hispanic girls.
- 21% attempt suicide, compared with about 11% of African-American and non-Hispanic white girls.
- Few empirical studies published to date explore this

Hypothesized Factors in Suicide Attempts

- Lack of mutuality in mother/daughter relationship
- Limited repertoire of positive coping skills.
- Dysfunctional family environment (low cohesiveness and rigidity)
- Depression and low self-esteem
- Poor impulse control

Pilot Study Sample

- 31 Hispanic girls between ages 12 and 20
- 14 girls attempted suicide and 17 did not
- All were receiving mental health services
- 77% born in U.S.
- 74% of mothers and 86% of fathers born in Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic or other parts of Latin America
- 94% of girls lived only with their mothers
- Most were from poor or working class families.

Measures

- Psychosocial demographic questionnaire
- Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire (Genero, Miller, Surrey, and Baldwin, 1992)
- Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al, 1979)
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

Measures

- KIDCOPE (Donaldson, Prenstein, Darcovsky, & Spirito, 2000).
- FACES II (Olson and Tiesel, 1991).
- Short Acculturation Scale (Marin et al, 1987).

Results

- Mother/daughter mutuality significantly related to suicide attempt

Non-attempters had higher mutuality with their mothers than the attempters

- Key elements of mutuality are empathy, engagement, authenticity, empowerment, zest, and responsiveness (Genero et al, 1992).
- Girls who felt their mothers were interested, involved, respectful, patient, receptive and understanding were less likely to make an attempt.

Results

- Non-attempters were twice as likely to use positive coping strategies
 - Positive coping strategies are problem solving, social support, emotional regulation, and cognitive restructuring
 - Negative strategies are withdrawal, wishful thinking, blaming others, and self-criticism

Results

- Strong relationships among many of the variables
 - Strong relationships between mutuality, and depression and self-esteem
 - Greater degree of mutuality related to higher self-esteem and less depression.
 - More balanced family type related to less depression and higher self-esteem.

Summary

- Girls who have a high level of mutuality with their mothers and thus feel that their mothers are understanding, interested and involved in their lives and who are also understanding, interested and involved in their mothers' lives, are significantly less likely to make a suicide attempt.
- Girls' ability to use positive coping skills, when under stress, greatly influence their potential for not making a suicide attempt.

Recommendations

- Use culturally competent parent education in schools and mental health clinics to teach parents how to establish more mutual relationships with their daughters.
- Teach positive, efficacious coping strategies like problem solving, cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation and social support in schools and mental health agencies.

Current Research

- We administered the same instruments to a community sample of adolescent Hispanic girls, who are not receiving mental health services. We are in the process of analyzing our data and comparing our results with our clinical sample