Black Youth and Suicide Risk

A Tale of Disparities in Suicide Care and Treatment

Tami Benton, MD
STAR Center Conference
May 14, 2021

Objectives

- Recognize the shifting trends for suicide among minority populations, specifically for Black youth
- Recognize risk factors for suicide among Black youth
- Discuss existing evidence about suicide risks and interventions for Black Youth
Black male students had the lowest prevalence of suicidal ideation.
Black adolescent boys experienced increased rates of injury resulting from suicide attempts.
Black adolescents had increased rates of suicide attempts, while rates declined for other race/ethnicities’
Black adolescent girls experienced a significant increase in suicide attempts, while girls from other races/ethnicities’ rates declined.
Black students had the highest prevalence of attempts.
Comparing black males method to black female method-adolescents 13-19


Black Children

Ages 5-11 years
Rates of Suicide for Youth ages 5-18 years

Figure 2. Suicide Rates of Children Ages 5 to 18 Years, Stratified by Age Group, United States, 1999-2017

---

Comparison of Trends between Black and White Boys

---

From: Suicide Trends Among Elementary School–Aged Children in the United States From 1993 to 2012

---


Comparison of Rates of Suicide for Black and White Youth

Comparison of Children (5-11 years) with Early Adolescents (12-14 years) between 2003-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More Likely to:</th>
<th>Less Likely to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Exhibit Depressed Mood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Leave a note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die by hanging/strangulation/suffocation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience relationship problems with family members and friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 29% of Early Adolescents and Children disclosed suicide intent to another person prior to death.

### Table 1: Rising Trends in Black Youth Suicide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Age, y</th>
<th>Suicide rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998</td>
<td>1980–1995</td>
<td>10–19</td>
<td>Increased by 144% for Black youths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge et al., 2015; Bridge et al., 2018</td>
<td>1993–1997, 2008–2012</td>
<td>5–11</td>
<td>Increased in Black children; decreased in White children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price and Khubchandani, 2019</td>
<td>2001–2017</td>
<td>13–19</td>
<td>Increased in Black youths by 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheftall et al., 2016</td>
<td>1991–2017</td>
<td>10–19</td>
<td>Positive trend in Black adolescent boys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

**Suicidal thoughts and behaviors trends by race and ethnicity: YRBS 1991–2017.**

Michael A. Lindsey et al. Pediatrics 2019;144:e20191187

©2019 by American Academy of Pediatrics
“Despite the recent increase in suicidal behaviors in Black children and adolescents, there is a lack of research on both risk and protective factors associated with suicidal thoughts and attempts in this population.”

Risk and Protective Factors Specific For Black Children and Adolescents
Risk Factors

- Neighborhood violence
- Economic insecurity
- Adverse Childhood Experience
- Historical trauma
- Trauma is disproportionately experienced in Black communities when compared with other communities, and the traumas experienced are more likely to be severe

Specific for Black adolescents
- Depression
- Externalizing behavior*
- Poor familial support
- Substance abuse
- Diagnosed mental health disorder

- Mental Health Conditions
- Bully victimization
- Racism and discrimination
- Sexual and gender minority status

(Ring the Alarm, https://watsoncoleman.house.gov/uploadedfiles/full_taskforce_report.pdf; Opara et al., 2020)
Racism and Discrimination

- Perceived discrimination increased suicidal ideation in Black adolescents and jeopardized their psychological health (Assari et al., 2017; Barzilay et al. in press)
- Black adolescents average over 5 racial discrimination experiences per day (English et al., 2020)
- Exposure to traumatic videos online associated with depression and PTS symptoms in Black and Latinx adolescents (Tynes et al., 2019)

Sexual and Gender Minority Black Youth

At the Intersection: Racism-related Stress

- 67% have been verbally abused because of their LGBT identity
- 82% physically abused
- 61% have been verbally abused because of their LGBT identity
- 30% physically abused
- 41% have been physically abused
- 25% have been propositioned
- 90% have experienced racial discrimination


Courtesy of Rhonda Boyd PhD
Community Violence and Suicidality for Black Boys

(Lambert et al., 2008)

Community Violence and Suicidality for Black Girls

(Lambert et al., 2008)
Depression Symptoms in African American Adolescents

Lu et al., 2017

Interviews from Urban Black Youth with Depression

“For the adolescents, being depressed means experiencing high levels of violent crimes in neighborhoods. It is losing neighborhood trust and a sense of connectedness to the physical environment. It is living under stress, without support, and resources. It is not being able to go outside and play, visit friends, and enjoy activities of interest. It is feeling unsafe and without protection where protection is expected.”

Ofondu et al., 2013
Review of Family Factors associated with Depression and Anxiety in Black Children

Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs)

- Economic hardship (37%) *
- Parental divorce or separation (36%) *
- Parental incarceration (16%)
- Family violence in home (9%)

(Sacks & Murphy, 2018; www.childtrends.org/publications/prevalence-adverse-childhood-experiences-nationally-state-race-ethnicity)

Courtesy of Rhonda Boyd PhD
Children Of Mothers with History of Suicidal Behavior

- Those with history
  - life events
  - Negative affect
    - discomfort
    - sadness
    - less able to soothe self

(Sheftall et al., 2020)

Multiple Attempters Vs. Single

- Matched sample of Black and White adolescents hospitalized for SA
- Black Youth Multiple Attempters
  - Higher interpersonal orientation
    - Social comparison
    - Positive stimulation

(Merchant et al., 2009)
Protective Factors

- Strong familial support/relationships
- High Level of ethnic identification
- Religious and spiritual engagement
- Community/social support
- Personal factors:
  - positive self-esteem,
  - emotional well-being
  - strong academic performance
- Financial factors: stable family housing, income and employment


Family Factors: Parenting Practices and Black Youth Depression and Anxiety

- Positive Parenting (-)
- Parental Monitoring (-) ~
- Psychological and Behavioral Control (NS)

(Washington et al., 2017)
“Multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic–racial group memberships, as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time.”

(Umana-Taylor et al., 2014; Ethnic and Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group)

Ethnic/Racial Identity

Racial Identity as Protective Factor

Tynes et al. 2012
Is higher income protective for depression?

• Assari & Caldwell (2018)-National Survey of American Life
  • Higher income is protective factor for Caribbean Blacks.
  • Higher income is associated with greater depression for African American boys.
• Assari et al. (2018)- Family and Community Health Study
  • Higher income associated with greater depression for Black youth living in predominantly White areas.
  • Higher income associated with less depression for Black youth living in areas with more Blacks.

What’s Happening on the Ground?
Examined 6-24 year old's nationwide from 2011-2015 using National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey Data
-28% overall increase in psychiatric ED visits
-Largest increase among AA and Latinx youth while white youth remained flat
-Suicide related visits increased 2.5 fold among adolescents
-Although psychiatric visits were >3 hours long, only 16% were seen by a mental health professional
-AA youth were more likely to have a visit that was deemed “not urgent”, to have public insurance, and to be diagnosed with a behavior disorder

Kalb et al 2019

Recent studies of Acute Psychiatric Treatment for Youth

Fontanella and colleagues studied 139,694 youth with Medicaid insurance aged 10 to 18 years who experienced psychiatric hospitalization.

- Attendance at a follow-up mental health appointment within 1 week of discharge was associated with half the risk for suicide within the subsequent 6 months
- Only 74,632 psychiatrically hospitalized youths (56.5%) in the study attended a follow-up mental health appointment within 7 days of discharge.
- Black youth, individuals receiving Medicaid because of low income, and individuals with histories of chronic medical illness, self-harm, or substance abuse were less likely to have attended a mental health appointment within 1 week of discharge.
- Access to care impacting suicide risk for black youth

Fontanella et al 2020
ED Stars studied a sample of 1,609 adolescents (AA 24%; 22% LX; MTR 7.1%) to determine latent class profiles of adolescents with elevated risk for suicide and to examine the association with mental health services utilization.

Characteristics of the 5 risk profiles obtained by latent class analysis

King CA et al 2020
ED Stars LCA Findings

- Higher proportion of black youth profiles were characterized by hx of suicidal thoughts+behaviors + aggression 15% (HxSTB+Agg) and 49% hx of suicidal thoughts and behaviors (HxSTB)

- Adolescents with HxSTB and Hx STB+AGG were least likely to present to ED with MH chief complaint although they all had reported a previous suicide attempt

- Differences in MHSU by race/ethnicity paralleled distribution of latent class profiles, with AA youth with lower MHSU.

- Risk profile for AA youth increase risk for under-identification of suicidality due to absence of current suicidality, especially in go-no go triage algorithm
Interventions for African American Youth

- Few studies have focused upon AA youth and no studies of black youth shown to reduce risk for suicide.
- Two studies reported on suicidal behavior reduction (Gibbons et al. 2006; Huey et al. 2004).
- Four studies mentioned an effect on suicidal ideations reduction (Yael et al., 2014; Huey et al. 2004; Diamond 2002).
- Not all patients at risk for suicide receive necessary resources in the ED or after discharge following a psychiatric crisis, which especially true for minority youth.
- Minority youth are often less engaged in traditional mental health services.
- Proactive approach to treatment engagement and retention:
  - Motivational interviewing principles and attention to family stress, coping
  - Care navigators to facilitate connections
  - Matching race and ethnicity of clinical providers and families.

Multisystemic Therapy Effects on Attempted Suicide by Youths presenting to the ED

- Study designed to determine whether an intensive family and community focused intervention could serve as a safe and effective alternative to inpatient hospitalization for youths presenting with psychiatric emergencies. Studied 156 youths ages 10-17 years of age. Sample consisted of a predominantly lower SES group of which 66% were AA.
- Youths received either MST or inpatient treatment with community outpatient follow up.
- Results:
  - MST significantly more effective than psychiatric hospitalization in reducing suicide attempts over 16 months.
  - Increased parental control reported by both youth and parents for one year before return to baseline.
  - No long-term effects on hopelessness, suicidal ideation, depression or parental control.

Huey et al. 2004
Components of Effective Suicide Care and Management for all Youth

1. Screening for everyone to identify those who might be at elevated risk and to reduce disparities in care; proceeding with suicide risk assessment and risk formulation when indicated by a positive screen
2. Collaborative safety planning with the patient and family for those who will be treated in the outpatient setting
   - Inpatient or emergency psychiatric care if indicated, if not-
   - Increase the frequency of outpatient visits
   - Review safety plan regularly and update it
   - Maintain contact between visits and follow up when visits are missed
   - Ongoing safety assessment at all future visits is essential
3. Targeting individual treatment to specifically address suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviors for that individual recognizing that one size does not fit all; Evidence suggests benefits of ethnic matching; Minimally, culturally competent care is essential
4. Identifying other risk factors or stressors that might be amenable to additional modalities of treatment (family therapy, school interventions, substance use therapy) including asking about racism and perceived experience of racism and address them!
5. Providing continuity of care between the patient, family, other treatment providers, and the school/community. For AA youth, this will require a proactive strategy for assuring transition of care such as care navigation, motivational interviewing, partnerships with community supports. It will be essential for the clinician to understand what is acceptable care for AA patients if continuity is to be established.

Suicidality in Black and Minoritized Youth Summary

- Suicidality in minoritized youths has been steadily increasing but there is limited evidence of why or how to best intervene
- Few studies have focused upon suicide risk factors for minoritized youth and for Black youth, no studies have been shown to reduce risk for suicide
- Few studies have examined, racism, discrimination and historical trauma and their relationship to suicidality among affected youth
- Currently, screening, assessments and interventions used for majority population are used for minoritized populations with limited data to support effectiveness. However, screening is recommended for all patients to reduce disparities in identification of those at risk
- Not all patients at risk for suicide receive necessary resources in the ED or after discharge following a psychiatric crisis, which is especially true for minoritized youth
- Minority youth are often less engaged in traditional mental health services
- Proactive approach to treatment engagement and retention are suggested by emerging literature but much more research is needed
  - Motivational interviewing principles and attention to family stress, coping
  - Care navigators (culturally competent) to facilitate connections and follow through
  - Matching race and ethnicity of clinical providers and families
  - Culturally appropriate interventions for Black and LGBTQ+ youth
Suicidality in Black and Minoritized Youth Summary

Research is needed to understand suicidality among minoritized youth populations, risk and protective factors, and prevention/interventions that are effective for this population in order to reverse trends for suicide among our young people. In order to accomplish this, we will need to:

- Recognize, understand and reflect upon the impact of structural racism and discrimination upon research and how our own personal biases impact our assessment and conceptualization of risk.
- Develop research protocols that are inclusive for risk assessment, screening and intervention.
- Collaborate with Black and other minoritized communities as partners to develop screening and assessment tools or to adapt existing tools.
- Prioritize recruitment of Black and other minoritized youth into suicide screening, risk assessment and treatment studies.
- Development of a diverse research and clinical workforce that includes more research and other minoritized investigators who are reflective of the at-risk populations will be required to address disparities in suicide prevention.
- Recognize that Black youth who also identify as LGBTQ+ (Intersectionality) are at increased risk for suicide attempts.