



Suicidal Ideation in African American 9th and 10th Graders

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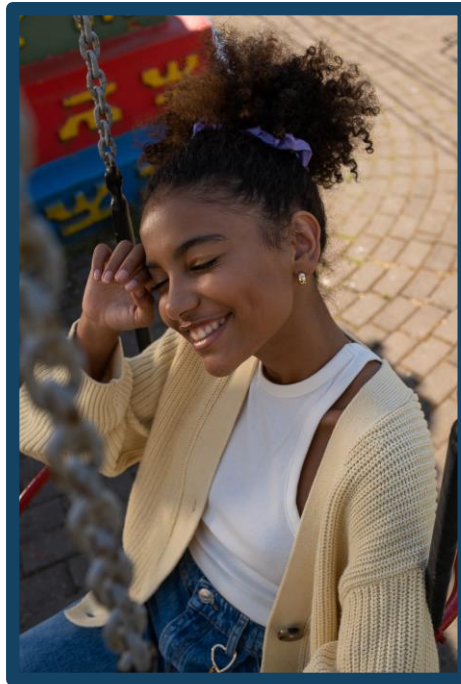
African American adolescent suicide is a growing public health crisis. Yet, patterns and predictors of suicidal ideation among African American adolescents are understudied. We examined suicidal ideation among African American adolescents living in urban, low-resourced neighborhoods.

Methods

Ninety-nine African American adolescents reported on their level of suicidal ideation, as well as their depression, hopelessness and community violence exposure, a total of four times between ninth and tenth grade. We used statistical analyses to examine adolescents' patterns of suicidal ideation over time and the relation between ideation and depression, hopelessness, and community violence exposure.

Our analyses allowed us to identify groups of adolescents with differing levels of suicidal ideation at each of the four study time points and how their levels of suicidal ideation changed over time.

“Most African American adolescents experience suicide ideation at some point in time. A concerning proportion of African American adolescents may experience high ideation. High ideation is often time-limited and depression and hopelessness predict high ideation.”



*Photograph by Ron Lach:
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/cute-black-teenage-girl-sitting-in-carousel-seat-with-eyes-closed-and-smiling-9653763/>. Public Domain.*

Highlights

African-American adolescent suicide is a public health issue that stems from systemic racial inequities.

A better understanding of how suicidal ideation manifests and the associated risk factors in African American youth helps inform more responsive and effective suicide prevention efforts.

Results

- There were two suicidal ideation groups at each of the four study time points: a low ideation group and a high ideation group.
- The percentage of adolescents in the low ideation group was between 87-90% across the four study time points.
- The percentage of adolescents in the high ideation group was approximately 10% at each of the four study time points.
- Almost 30% of adolescents reported high ideation at some point during ninth or tenth grade (i.e., at one or more of the four study time points).
- Adolescents who reported greater depression and hopelessness were more likely to be in the high suicidal ideation group. Adolescents' report of exposure to community violence was not related to their suicidal ideation group.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Our emphasis on equity and community partnership is grounded in Community Psychology. We aim to help prevent suicide and promote health equity for African American youth. Strong community partnerships with urban schools are key to our work. We collaborated with students, families, school-based health centers, school administrators, and other school personnel, including security guards, throughout the research process to ensure our work was meaningful and relevant to the communities we serve

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: We built on previous research by studying patterns and predictors of suicidal ideation in African American adolescents. Our work augments the research literature and provides broader understanding of African American adolescent suicidal ideation over time.

Practice: Our findings suggest that some level of suicide risk is common for African American adolescents during ninth and tenth grade. Thus, to advance suicide prevention for these youth, early screening and intervention that employ culturally sensitive and evidence-based tools are paramount.

Social Action: Our work highlights a path to social action for promoting local, state, and federal policies that prevent African American adolescent suicide. For example, it is important to advocate for policies that provide funding for and access to effective suicide prevention programs in schools that serve African American youth.

Similar Settings: Our work means that school personnel, such as school psychologists, social workers, and counselors, should be aware of African American adolescents' potential risk for suicidal ideation and trained in culturally relevant suicide prevention programming for these youth.

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