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Social environment factors associated with suicide attempt among low-income African Americans: the protective role of family relationships and social support.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Suicide and suicide attempts are important public health concerns, and recent decades have witnessed a rising rate of **suicide** among **African Americans**. A history of prior attempts is a leading risk factor for completed **suicide**. Further research is needed into the **social environment** risk factors for **suicide attempt** among **African Americans**. This study focused on two important dimensions of the **social environment**, **family relationships** and **social support**, as well as an important person-level risk factor--depressive symptoms.

METHOD: Data were obtained from a case-control study of 200 **African** American men and women aged 18-64 years, who sought services at a large, urban, public hospital. Odds ratios adjusted for significant sociodemographic differences between groups (aORs) were calculated for **environment** risk factors for **suicide attempt** among the cases and controls. The **role** of depressive symptoms was also studied.

RESULTS: Lower levels of **family** adaptability and **family** cohesion increased the relative rate of **suicide attempt** in the sample. The aOR **associated** with the lowest quartile of **family** adaptability was 3.90, and the aORs **associated** with the first and second quartiles of **family** cohesion were 8.91 and 5.51, respectively. Lower levels of **social** embeddedness and **social support** increased the relative rate of **suicide attempt** in our sample. The aOR **associated** with the first and second quartiles of **social** embeddedness were 5.67 and 4.93, respectively, and the aOR **associated** with the lowest quartile of **social support** was 6.29. A mediating **role** of depression was discovered when depressive symptoms were entered into the logistic regression models.

CONCLUSIONS: Our findings indicate that **social environment factors** including deficits in **family** functioning and **social support** are **associated** strongly with **suicide** attempts among **low-income African** American men and women seeking treatment in a large, urban hospital. Thus, better **family** functioning and **social** supports can be considered **protective factors** in this population. The presence of depressive symptoms, a well-known risk factor for **suicide** attempts and **suicide**, appears to mediate the association between **social environment factors** and **suicide attempt**.

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