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Adolescent Suicide Attempts: Risks and Protectors

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## Adolescent suicide attempts: risks and protectors.

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### Abstract

**OBJECTIVE:** In 1997, **suicide** was the third leading cause of death among 10- to 19-year-olds in the United States, with the greatest increases in **suicide** rates in the previous decade experienced by black and other minority youth. The purpose of this study was to identify risk and protective factors for **suicide attempts** among black, Hispanic, and white male and female adolescents.

**METHODS:** We used data from the National Longitudinal Study of **Adolescent Health**, conducted in 1995 and 1996. A nationally representative sample of 13 110 students in grades 7 through 12 completed 2 in-home interviews, an average of 11 months apart. We examined Time 1 factors at the individual, family, and community level that predicted or protected against Time 2 **suicide attempts**.

**RESULTS:** Perceived parent and family connectedness was protective against **suicide attempts** for black, Hispanic, and white girls and boys, with odds ratios ranging from 0.06 to 0.32. For girls, emotional well-being was also protective for all of the racial/ethnic groups studied, while a high grade point average was an additional protective factor for all of the boys. Cross-cutting risk factors included previous **suicide** attempt, violence victimization, violence perpetration, alcohol use, marijuana use, and school problems. Additionally, somatic symptoms, friend **suicide** attempt or completion, other illicit drug use, and a history of mental health treatment predicted **suicide attempts** among black, Hispanic, and white females. Weapon-carrying at school and same-sex romantic attraction were predictive for all groups of boys. Calculating the estimated probabilities of attempting **suicide** for adolescents with increasing numbers of risk and protective factors revealed that the presence of 3 protective factors reduced the risk of a **suicide** attempt by 70% to 85% for each of the gender and racial/ethnic groups, including those with and without identified risk factors.

**CONCLUSIONS:** In these national samples of black, Hispanic, and white youth, unique and cross-cutting factors derived from a resiliency framework predicted or protected against attempting **suicide**. In addition to risk reduction, promotion of protective factors may offer an effective approach to primary as well as secondary prevention of **adolescent** suicidal behavior.

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