



MT. HOPE FAMILY CENTER

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Background Information:

Teen suicide is a major public health problem. Suicide is currently the 2nd leading cause of death for youth aged 15-24, and rates are increasing. Also, suicide is increasing at a faster rate among Black youth compared to peers from other racial and ethnic groups. Teens who have experienced child abuse or neglect are even more likely to think about suicide or attempt suicide. Also, teenage girls are particularly vulnerable to depression which makes them at greater risk for thinking about suicide.

What is the IPT study?

Participants in the study were teen girls who were experiencing depression and socioeconomic stress. The majority of girls in the study were teens of color. Many of the girls also experienced child maltreatment.

The goal of this study was to learn how childhood experiences of abuse and neglect, and recent stressful life events might lead to teenage girls thinking about suicide. We also wanted to learn whether different ways of coping with difficult feelings may be helpful in preventing suicide.

Here's a quick summary of what we found:

- About 50% of the girls in this study said they recently thought about suicide.
- The girls who experienced maltreatment (for example, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect) were more likely to think about suicide than were those without a history of maltreatment.
- Girls who experienced the combination of early trauma from maltreatment and recent stressors (for example, having a parent hospitalized or a close friend arrested) had the most frequent thoughts of suicide.
- In terms of strengths, we found that girls who coped with their stress and trauma by changing the way they think about the situations had fewer thoughts of suicide. This was true even when the girls were experiencing incredible amounts of stress.

Why does this research matter??

1. This research points out the naturally occurring strengths among teen girls who have faced disproportionate amounts of stress. We can use this important information about emotion regulation strategies that promote resilience to help design better support services for those who are struggling.
2. The majority of youth who participated in this study were teens of color. It is important to recognize that systemic racism is an ongoing additional stressor for these youth which also increases risk. Research that highlights the role of systemic racism in contributing to physical and mental health challenges is critical.
3. Our findings that teen girls with histories of maltreatment had more thoughts of suicide than those without a history of abuse or neglect highlight the urgent need for widely available support services for youth in the child welfare system.
4. The fact that these girls were not seeking treatment underscores the necessity of community engagement and outreach.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? READ:

[Child maltreatment, recent stressful life events, and suicide ideation: A test of the stress sensitivity hypothesis](#) by Erinn Duprey, Liz Handley, Jody Todd Manly, Dante Cicchetti & Sheree Toth