Welcome to the webinar on:

Understanding the rise in suicide attempts in Latina teens

About the Webinar
This webinar examines the high rate of suicide attempts by adolescent Latinas in the United States and what explains it. The presenter will review research findings, theoretical explanations, and approaches to intervention with the teenagers and their families.

Presentation prepared by: Luis Zayas, PhD

Learning Objectives
- To understand the epidemiology and research on suicide attempts by adolescent Latinas in comparison to other ethnic and racial youth.
- To acquire knowledge about the multiple factors (individual psychology, family, social, culture, gender, etc.) that come together in Latina teenagers’ suicide attempts and examine preventive interventions that can be undertaken in schools and the importance of family-centered interventions.
Center for Latino Family Research

George Warren Brown School of Social Work

Washington University in St. Louis
Understanding the Rise in Suicide Attempts in Latina Teens

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Webinar for Center for Health and Health Care in Schools and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
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I. A Brief History of Latina Suicide Attempts
II. U.S. Adolescent Suicidal Behavior
III. Cultural Psychology
IV. Theoretical Perspectives
V. Our Research Project
VI. Preliminary Findings
VII. Other Theoretical Perspectives & Research
Edgar Trautman and the “suicidal fit”

Lincoln Hospital psychiatrist studying Puerto Rican women in late 1950s:
✓ impulsive escapes from stressful situations
✓ often ingesting pills or household cleansers
✓ disturbances in family relations, usually spouse or mother
✓ no thought of death
✓ not aware of their thoughts
✓ no psychotic symptomatology

(Trautman, 1961a, b)
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

A nationally representative sample of students in grades 9-12 surveyed biennially with the Youth Risk Behavior Survey
U.S. Rates of Adolescent Suicide Attempts 1995-2005
Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide YRBSS, 2007

![Bar chart showing the percentage of females and males who seriously considered attempting suicide by race in 2007. The chart indicates that more females than males seriously considered suicide, and there are differences between white, black, and Hispanic populations.](chart.png)
Made a Suicide Plan YRBSS, 2007

- Female:
  - White: 16
  - Black: 12
  - Hispanic: 14

- Male:
  - White: 8
  - Black: 6
  - Hispanic: 10

Legend:
- White
- Black
- Hispanic
Attempted Suicide YRBSS, 2007

- Female: White, Black, Hispanic
- Male: White, Black, Hispanic
Suicide Attempt Needing Medical Attention  YRBSS, 2007

Source: CDC, 2006
Cultural Psychology
Kirmayer, 2001

- Influences psychological representations & affects
- Sets tolerance for emotions (some are salient, others hard to express)
- Provides categories & lexicons for emotional expressions ("idioms of distress")
- Provides context and rules for interactional processes
- Sets variations in family structure, composition, interactions, & child-rearing, *family interactions prime and shape affects*
Culture shapes

- beliefs about etiology and explanatory models
- forms that illness experience take
- symptomatology & interpretation of symptoms
- modes of coping with distress
- help-seeking
- social responses to distress and disability

Kirmayer, 2001
Research Questions

➢ **What** are the characteristics of Latina teens who attempt suicide and of Latina teens who don’t?

➢ **How** do the parent-daughter relationships differ between Latina attempters and non-attempters?

➢ **How** do girls who attempted describe the experience of the suicide attempt?
Conceptual Model for Research on Suicide Attempts by Adolescent Hispanic Females (Zayas et al., 2005)

Family Sociocultural Environment

- Adolescent Development
- Culture and Cultural Traditions
- Family Functioning

Emotional Vulnerability

Psychosocial Functioning

Subjective Experience of Family Crisis

Suicide Attempt
Well-functioning families show

**cohesiveness** (familism)

**adaptability** (acculturation & adolescent development)

Families of suicidal teens in general population

- Restrictiveness without flexibility
- Marital discord & separations
- Negative parenting & poor communication
- Other (violence & abuse; substance use)
Familism

- Individual’s identity, sense of obligation to family
- Family needs before individual needs
- Enforced by
  - Traditions
  - Beliefs
  - Child-rearing
  - Family interactions
Emotional Vulnerability

Latina attempters share similar psychopathology as non-Latinas

- Low self-esteem
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Emotional dysregulation/anger
- Depression/anxiety

Coping by
- social withdrawal
- wishful thinking
- blaming others
- passive coping
Subjective Experience

- Subjective distress within context of emotional vulnerability
- Threat to integrity of family unity
- Felt to be caused by her behavior
The Crisis Event

- Prolonged tension between girl and parents
- Often about a boyfriend, dating, sexuality
- Boyfriend/dating represent autonomy-relatedness struggle
- Intense argument with parents just prior
What we’re learning

- All girls and moms of non-attempters are bicultural; attempters’ mothers are not, more Hispanic-oriented ($p<.05$)
- Attempters more acculturated than non-attempters ($p<.05$)
- All girls more acculturated than all mothers ($p<.05$)
- Attempters’ moms lower in affection ($p<.01$) and support ($p<.05$) than mom’s of non-attempters (girls’ ratings)
- Attempters’ moms report higher family cohesion, expressiveness, and organization, and less conflict than their daughters ($p<.05$)
• Attempters and non-attempters do not differ significantly on acculturation and familism

• Attempters reported significantly lower mutuality in their relationships with their mothers than non-attempters with their mothers

• Attempters rated their mothers significantly lower in their capacity for communication, support, and affection than non-attempters

(Zayas et al., 2009)
• Both groups are significantly more acculturated than their mothers.
• Both place significantly lower value on familism than their mothers.
• Both attempters and non-attempters consider their mothers to be less communicative, supportive, and affectionate than their mothers describe themselves.

(Zayas et al., 2009)
Mothers’ Perspectives

- Mothers of attempters rated themselves significantly lower than mothers of non-attempters in communication with their daughters.

- Mothers of attempters rated mutuality with their daughters significantly lower than mothers of non-attempters.

(Zayas et al., 2009)
The importance of mutuality between girls and mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Odds Ratio (S.E.)</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent’s perceived mutuality with mother</td>
<td>.54 (.13)</td>
<td>.35 to .87</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s perceived mutuality with daughter</td>
<td>.48 (.14)</td>
<td>.27 to .84</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For every point increase in girl’s perceived mutuality with mother, her odds of attempting suicide decrease by 46%

For every point increase in mother’s perceived mutuality with daughter, the odds of daughter attempting suicide decrease by 52%
• Girls eager to tell their “story”
• Dating is salient issue (reflects developmental issues)
• Low lethality, multiple attempts (range from to)
• “Don’t know what I was thinking, feeling” at time of event
Parents’ response to dating and sexuality

• Parents must approve of boy
• Mother’s provide information and advise about sex
• Inconsistent messages about dating and sexuality
• Value placed on virginity and sexual modesty
• Attempters’ and non-attempters’ do not differ demonstrably

(Kyriakakis et al., 2007)
Communication better between non-attempters and parents

• Non-Attempeters communicate more openly with parents
• Non-attempters trust parent’s wisdom and value their opinion
• Non-attempters more able to take parents’ perspectives
• Groups differ in the meaning they attach to parent’s rules and expectations

(Kyriakakis et al., 2007)
Phenomenology of suicide attempts

- Precipitating events included fights with family members, break up with boyfriends, and problems at school.
- Most attempts occurred in close proximity to other people.
- Self-injurious behaviors were a common strategy for many girls to cope with life stressors.

(Zayas & Cabassa, 2008)
• Pre-attempt: some girls’ emotions accompanied by physical sensations of feeling numb, weak, tired, nervous, or empty

• Attempt described as an impulsive gesture to escape from the emotional pain they were feeling at the moment or period in their lives

(Zayas & Cabassa, 2008)
• Some girls reported no intent of harming themselves or dying.

• Attempted suicide out of anger and frustration and expressed an explicit intention of harming themselves but not to die.

• Others verbalized a clear intent to die

(Zayas & Cabassa, 2008)
Overall

- Family functioning (adaptability and cohesiveness)
- Adolescent autonomy & relatedness
- Mentoring: Attempters say parents are not reliable, supportive, inspiring
- Mutuality: Attempters perceive low mutuality with parents (bidirectional feelings of warmth and care)
Clinical Interventions

• Assessment
  – Depression
  – Past suicidality

• Individual therapy
  – In context of family-centered care

• Family Therapy
  – Expectation by teen and parents for involvement
  – Structural/systemic changes needed: development and perspective-taking

• Schools’ roles
  – Identification
  – Start prevention in middle school

• Physicians’ roles

• Parenting interventions
  – Where streams meet

• Psychoeducation for girls and parents
  – Understanding development and cultural differences
Thank you for participating in our webinar: Understanding the rise in suicide attempts in Latina teens

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Additional immigrant and refugee mental health resources including our blog please use the following link:


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