Ten Year Trends in Suicidality, Bullying and Gun Carrying Among Latina/o Youth in the United States

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Abstract

Background: Latina/o adolescents report the highest rates of suicide attempts and depressive symptoms compared to White and African American youth for over 40 years. The purpose of the current study was to investigate trends in bullying, gun carrying, and suicidality over 10 years in a nationally representative sample of Latina/o youth.


Findings: Overall, suicide attempts for females declined slightly; there was no significant change over time for males. Females, compared to males, reported significantly higher rates of suicide attempts, victimization by bullying, and victimization by cyberbullying, and lower rates of gun carrying. Gun carrying was significantly associated with greater likelihood of suicide attempts for both boys and girls.

Discussion: Suicidality varies by gender; Latina females reported higher rates of suicide attempts, depressive symptoms, and bullying than Latino males. Latino young men who reported being cyberbullied were also more likely to carry a gun than young women. Implications for gun carrying as a risk factor for suicidality are discussed for Latino males, and in relation to cyberbullying. There is a continued need for innovative methods to address bullying through widespread and effective campaigns that consider the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender of youth.

Background

Suicide is the leading cause of death among all young people ages 15-34 years in the U.S. (CDC, 2013); however this varies by age, gender, and ethnicity/race (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2013). Latina females have reported the highest rates of suicide attempts compared to other ethnic and gender groups for over 40 years (Romero et al., 2014; Zayas & Pilat, 2008). One study found that gun carrying had the second strongest association with suicide among uninvolved teens (Romero et al., 2016; Stein et al., 2007); one study found that 30 day frequency of gun carrying (0-6 or more days).

Overall, suicide attempts for females declined slightly; there was no significant change over time for males. Females, compared to males, reported significantly higher rates of suicide attempts, victimization by bullying, and victimization by cyberbullying, and lower rates of gun carrying. Gun carrying was significantly associated with greater likelihood of suicide attempts for both boys and girls.

Methods

• The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System was analyzed over 6 time points from 2005 to 2015.
• Measures included: suicidal behavior in the past 12 months (yes/no), number of suicide attempts (0-6 times or more), depressive symptoms in past 12 months (yes/no), 30 day frequency of gun carrying (0-6 or more days).

• Bullying items, added to the survey in 2011, included questions about being asked to stop a fight or being a victim of a bullying incident.

Discussion: Suicidality varies by gender; Latina females reported higher rates of suicide attempts, depressive symptoms, and bullying than Latino males. Latino young men who reported being cyberbullied were also more likely to carry a gun than young women. There is a need for innovative suicide prevention strategies that consider the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender of youth.

Table 1. Tables of percentage of participants endorsing item over 10 years

Table 2. Bivariate relationships among various risk factors

Table 3. Regression analysis: Attempted Suicide At Least Once

Conclusions

Being a victim of bullying or a cybervictim were both significantly associated with a greater likelihood of making a suicide attempt in the last year for both males (2.9/2.1) and females (2.8/2.3). Our results demonstrate that suicidality varies by gender. Latina females report higher rates of suicide attempts, depressive symptoms, and bullying than males. Latino young men who reported being cyberbullied were also more likely to carry a gun than young women. There is a need for innovative suicide prevention strategies that consider the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender of youth.