RESEARCH BRIEF

SUICIDAL PLANNING IN AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS
An assessment of the role of parental incarceration and substance misuse in suicidal planning of African American youth and young adults

KEY FINDINGS

- 11.1% of the sample (N=190) reported having made a plan to die by suicide in the last 12 months were significantly distinguished from those who did not devise a plan.
- Males were significantly more likely than females to have devised a plan to die by suicide, especially if their mothers were incarcerated or their fathers had an alcohol problem.

About this Study

African American youth have the highest suicide death rate increase among any other racial/ethnic minority group, from 2.55 per 100,000 in 2007 to 4.82 per 100,000 in 2017, and are becoming the group most likely to die by suicide in the United States. Guided by ecodevelopmental theory, we investigated the relationship between parental incarceration and substance misuse and their association with suicidal planning in a sample of African American youth and young adults. Participants consisted of 190 African American youth and young adults living in public housing in a mid-Atlantic city in the US who completed a youth health-risk behavior measure, and parental incarceration and substance misuse measures. Findings indicate 11.1% of the participants endorsed making a plan to die by suicide. Males were significantly more likely than females to have devised a plan to die by suicide, especially if their mothers were incarcerated or their fathers had an alcohol problem.

The study findings suggest several implications for future research, especially for youth who may also be involved with the juvenile justice system and their suicide risk. Health prevention efforts to reduce their suicide-related risks need to promote family-centered interventions. The study findings promote the understanding of how individual characteristics and the family context of African American youth and young adults contribute to or prevent suicidal planning.

About the Research

This study is part of a larger effort exploring the correlates of mental health disparities of Black/African American youth and young adults, including psychological distress in youth (suicidal behavior) and their parents (substance misuse and incarceration) and the structural factors (public housing) where they live. Larger studies are underway to investigate the structural and systemic barriers associated with trauma, suicidal behavior, and crime desistance to inform a nonrandomized trial of an intervention with justice-involved Black/African American girls and their parents/caregivers who suffer from PTSD.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

This study was conducted by an interdisciplinary team of researchers from across the nation and was led by Dr. Camille R. Quinn, assistant professor of social work at The Ohio State University. Dr. Quinn's research focuses on the individual and structural factors for Black/African American girls and young women involved with or at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system to develop and culturally tailor interventions that will enhance their health, mental health, well-being, and crime desistance. The team also included Mr. Oliver W.J. Beer, Dr. Donte T. Boyd, Dr. Taqi Tirmazi, Dr. Von Nebbitt, and Dr. Sean Joe.

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