

Risk & Protective Factors for Suicide Behavior in Latino/a Individuals: Implications for Treatment & Prevention

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- III. Interpersonal Theory of Suicide & Its Applicability for Latino/a Individuals
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Previous Literature

- Immigrant Status & Suicide Rates (e.g., Trovato & Jarvis, 1986).
- Between Ethnic Group Comparisons (e.g., Roberts & Chen, 1995; Smith et al., 1985).
- Acculturative Stress Theory (e.g., Berry, 1974; Williams & Berry, 1991).

Suicide Risk in Mexican Americans

- Examined risk and protective factors for suicidal ideation in Mexican American adolescents (Hovey & King, 1996) and adult Mexican immigrants (Hovey, 2000a) in southern California.
- High prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation.
- For adolescents, greater acculturative stress and depression significantly predicted greater suicidal ideation.
- Positive family functioning and hopefulness for the future significantly predicted lower suicide ideation.

Suicide Risk in Mexican Americans

- To assess hopefulness towards the future, asked the adolescents what they thought their future would be like for them and their family and coded open-ended responses.
- Example of non-hopeful response:
 - “I don’t know how my future will be.... Rejection from those I love hurts. I feel as if I don’t matter. I think my future will worsen, each day a bit more.... Life for me is not worth anything now, nor will it ever....” (17-year old male)

Suicide Risk in Mexican Americans

- For adult Mexican immigrants (Hovey, 2000a), high prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation.
- Greater suicidal ideation was significantly associated with greater acculturative stress, greater depression, greater hopelessness, and low levels of agreement with the decision to migrate.
- Lower suicidal ideation was significantly associated with positive family functioning and perceived social support.

Suicide Risk in Mexican Americans

- Example of hopefulness:
 - In reality, it's a little difficult to achieve success today, but I feel sure about struggling against the tide. I came to this country to achieve success, which in my country was not possible. Today I'm forging ahead with my family, sure of myself without complexes nor obstacles. We know to go forward, and we will be the future of this grand country, the United States of American. (30-year old male)

Suicide Risk in Mexican Americans

- Examples of hopelessness:
 - I see my future as very disorganized. I feel confused. I see that I won't be able to organize the future. (21-year old female)
 - I think that everything gained is going backwards. (49-year old male)
 - I think that the future is going to be a disaster. (32-year old male)

Suicide Risk in Central Americans

- Examined risk and protective factors for suicidal ideation in adult Central American refugees in southern California (Hovey, 2000b) and Chicago/Cincinnati (Hovey et al., 2017).
- In CA study, suicidal ideation was associated with acculturative stress, depression, and ineffective social support.
- In Midwest study, suicidal ideation was associated with acculturative stress, depression, PTSD symptoms, lack of agreement with decision to migrate, and lack of coping competence.

Suicide Risk in Central Americans

- Narrative example of premigration trauma:
 - “I feel happy to be alive. I came from a country in war and I survived all the ugliness that went on there. I was held hostage for 12 days...and they killed my husband.... However, I got out with my two children. Thank you U.S.A. (64-year old female)

Summary of Studies

- Extended Berry's (1974) model to include possible *consequences* of severe acculturative stress.
- First studies to directly link acculturative stress to suicidality.
- Risk Factors: acculturative stress, depression, hopelessness, family dysfunction, ineffective social support, PTSD symptoms, lack of agreement with decision to migrate.
- Protective Factors: hopefulness (current & at time of migration), family support, perceived social support, coping competence.

Suicide Risk in Migrant Farmworkers

- Individuals who annually migrate from one location to another to earn a living in agriculture (approximately 3-5 million).
- Research findings from Michigan and Ohio indicated that suicide thoughts and behavior were associated with acculturative stress, anxiety, depression, family dysfunction, ineffective social support, low self-esteem, and lack of agreement with decision to do farmwork (Hovey & Magana, 2000, 2003).
- Acculturative stress scale did not fully capture the stress involved in being a migrant farmworker.

Stressors Identified by Migrant Farmworkers

- Being Away From Family Or Friends
- Hard Physical Labor / Physical Pain Related To Farmwork
- Rigid Work Demands
- Unpredictable Work Or Housing / Uprooting
- Poor Housing Conditions
- Low Family Socioeconomic Status / Poor Pay / Poverty
- Language Barriers
- Geographical And Social Isolation
- Emotional Isolation
- Lack Of Transportation / Unreliable Transportation
- Education Of Self Or Children
- Discrimination From Society
- Exploitation By Employer
- Lack Of Daycare And Supervision Of Children
- Socialization Of Children
- Limited Access To Health Care
- Loss Of Spouse
- Domestic Abuse / Poor Spousal Relations
- Undocumented Status
- Acculturating To New Environment
- Immigration Experience
- Paperwork For Social Services
- Responsibilities Specific To Being A Female

Exploitation

They are supposed to pay us weekly or every other week and sometimes they take a long time in paying us. They make excuses such as they have not gotten the checks or they may say to come another day. We usually need the money right away.... (26-year-old male)

Emotional Isolation

It's difficult coming here without my family. I cry because of the loneliness and because there is nobody to talk to. You can't just walk up to someone and carry on a conversation. It makes me feel like a stray vagrant. I get this hopeless feeling—a helpless feeling. You want to make friends with somebody and you can't because everybody knows that you are just temporary and just passing through, so they don't trust you. They don't want to take the responsibility of helping you. (36-year-old male)

Farmworkers with Suicide Behavior vs Farmworkers without Suicide Behavior

Suicidal Thoughts and/or Attempts

	Yes	No	F	Odds Ratio
MFW Stress	71.2 (31.8)	60.3 (28.7)	2.9*	1.5
Self Esteem	15.3 (3.5)	17.6 (3.4)	21.9**	2.0
Hopelessness	7.1 (5.4)	3.7 (3.2)	15.0**	2.2
Anxiety	64.7 (14.8)	54.4 (11.1)	14.8**	2.0
Depression	25.1 (13.3)	14.0 (9.9)	9.8**	2.3
Agree	2.97 (1.0)	3.32 (0.7)	3.8*	2.3
Marital Status				1.7

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (IPTS)

- Perceived Burdensomeness – perceived sense that one is a burden on others.
- Thwarted Belongingness – perceived sense of social disconnectedness.
- Acquired Capability for Suicide – reduced fear of death and increased physical pain tolerance, which occur through repeated exposure to fear-inducing and/or physically painful experiences that lead to habituation of the physically painful and fearful aspects of self-harm.

Interpersonal Theory in Latino/as

- Examined Interpersonal Theory in community samples of Mexican and Mexican American adolescents (Hurtado, Roley, & Hovey, 2013) and in a clinical sample of Mexican adults (Hurtado, Hovey, et al., 2019).
- In adolescents, we found that both burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness were associated with suicide behavior (as were depression, hopelessness, family conflict, and coping competence).
- In adults, we found that burdensomeness was significantly associated with suicide behavior (as were depression and hopelessness).
- Thwarted belongingness and acquired capability were not associated with suicide behavior in adults.

Cyberbullying & Suicide Risk

- Cyberbullying – aggression that is perpetrated through electronic communication technologies that is intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others.
- According to previous research (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014), up to 29% of college students have been victims of cyberbullying.
- Being cyberbullied is associated with suicide thoughts and attempts in youth (Kowalski et al., 2014).

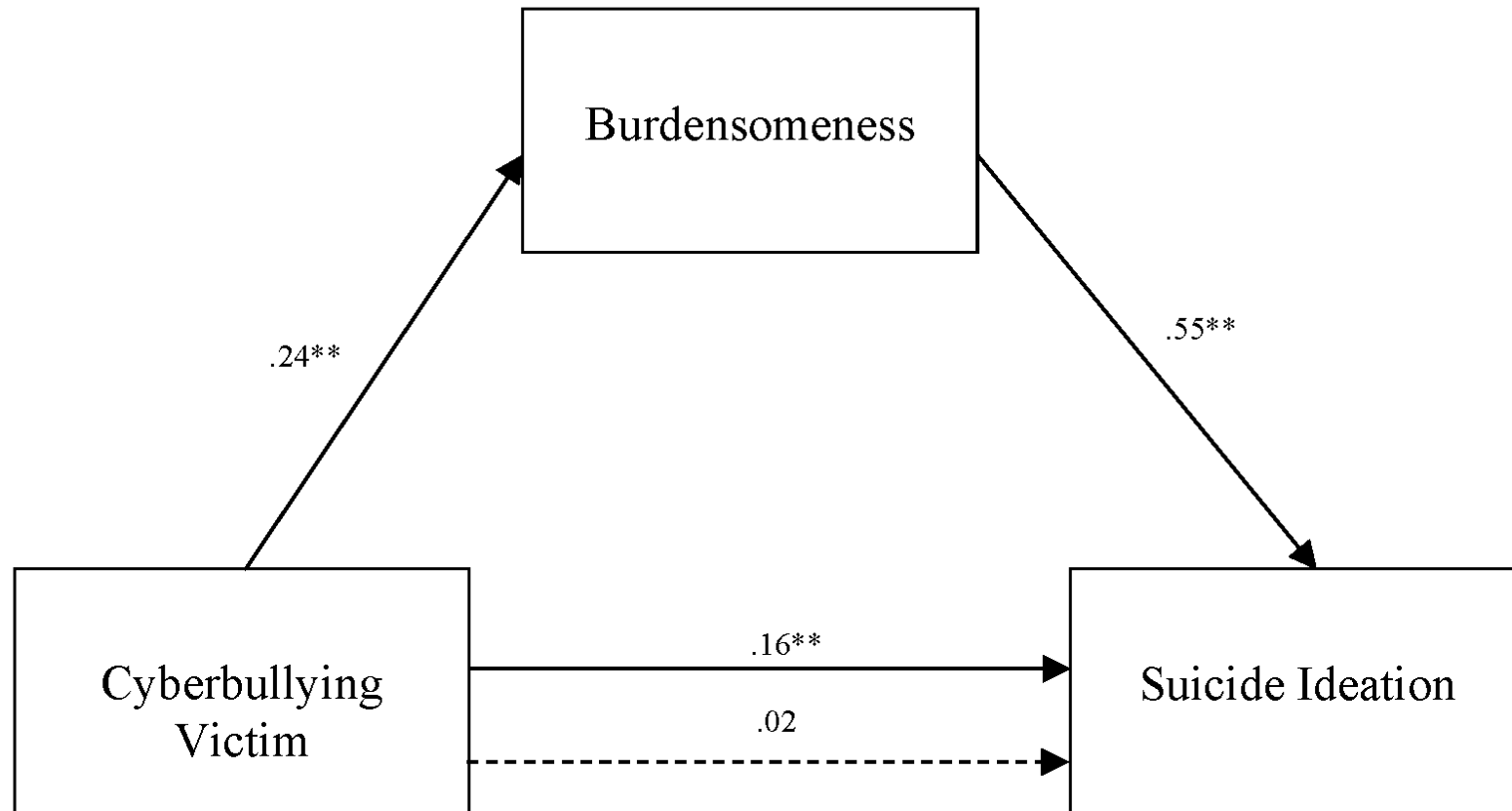
Cyberbullying & Suicide Risk

- Although it may be hypothesized that cyberbullying victimization can decrease belongingness and increase burdensomeness, scant research has examined cyberbullying through the IPTS.
- No published studies have examined cyberbullying through specific social media avenues.
- Thus developed new measure that assesses cyberbullying through texting, email, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and online gaming and assessed cyberbullying and suicide risk in undergraduate college students in south Texas and northern Ohio (Hovey et al., 2016).

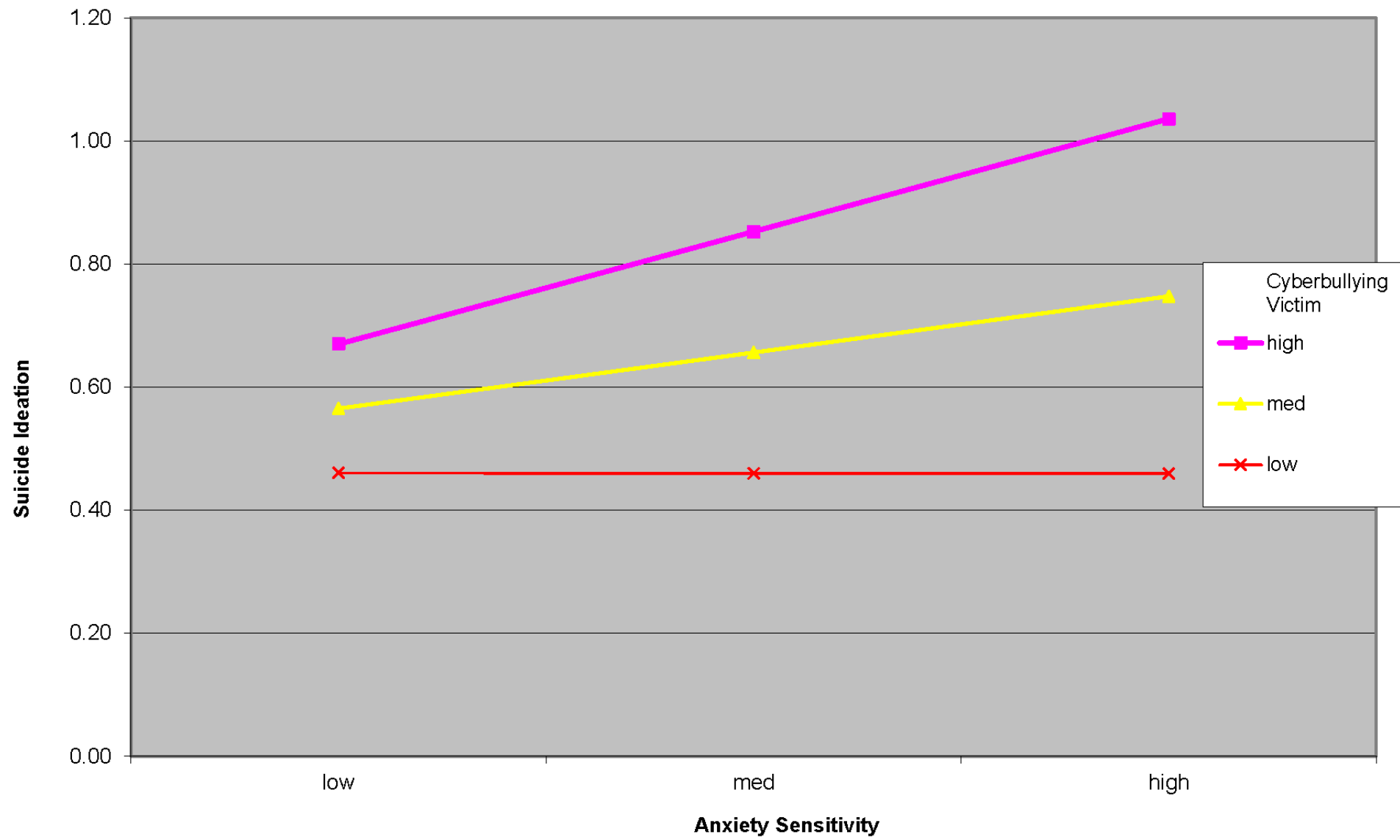
Cyberbullying & Suicide Risk

- Cyberbullying victimization was associated with suicidal ideation, burdensomeness, anxiety sensitivity, depression, hopelessness, and lack of social support. Severe cyberbullying ($+ 1.5 SD$) was associated with these variables plus increased fearlessness about death (Hovey et al., 2016).
- Cyberbullying significantly predicted ideation even after controlling for the influences of anxiety sensitivity, stress, depression, and hopelessness.
- 67% of participants reported *some* level of cyberbullying victimization.
- Participants reported being cyberbullied more often through texting (53.7%) and Facebook (27.6%).

Burdensomeness as a Mediator between Cyberbullying Victim Scores and Suicide Ideation



Notes. The above values are standardized beta coefficients. ** $p < .0001$. The indirect effect was significant according to a Sobel test ($Z = 5.02$) and bootstrapping procedures (10,000 samples) (Hayes, 2013).

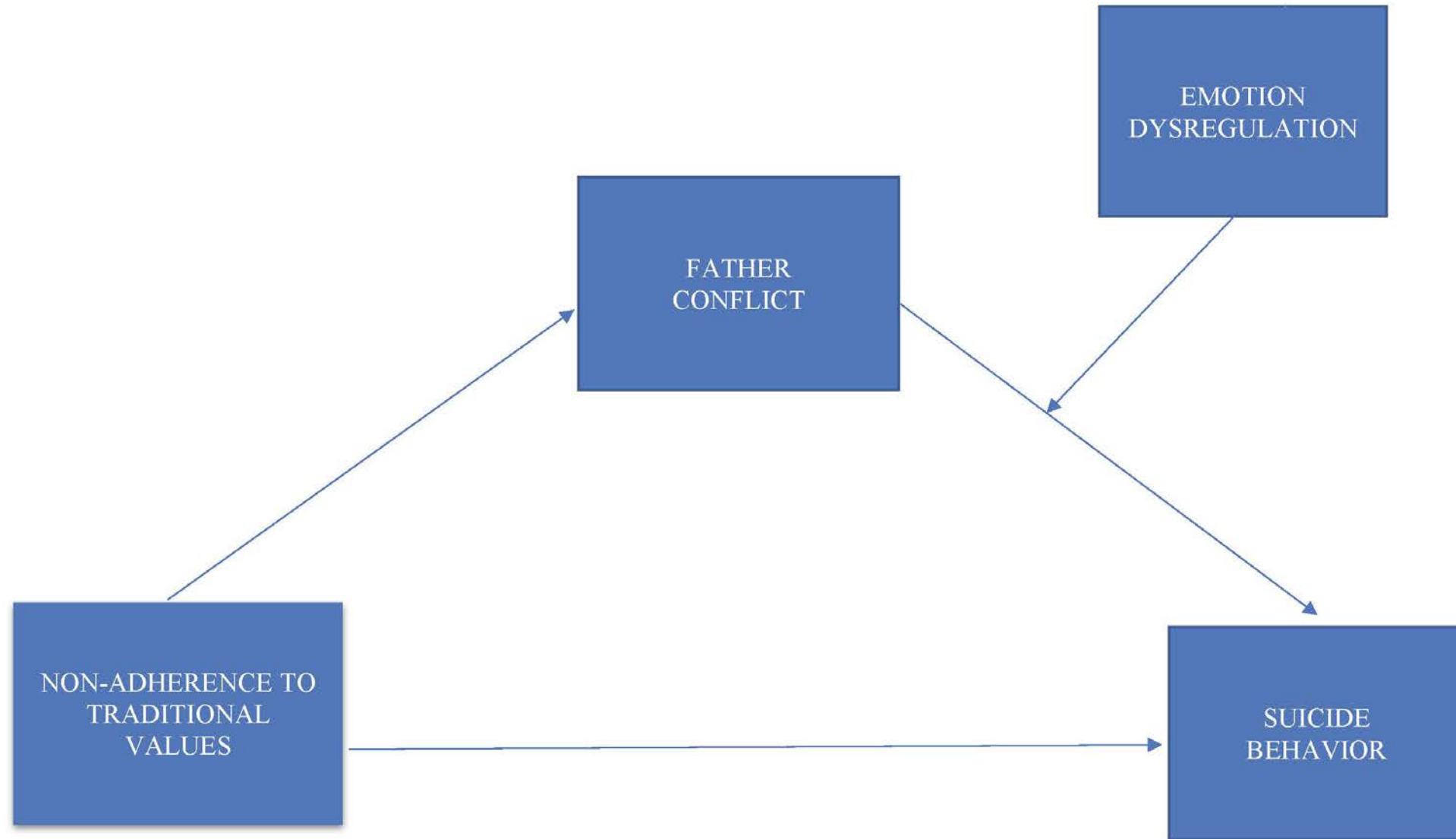


Cultural Values & Suicide Risk in Latina Adolescents

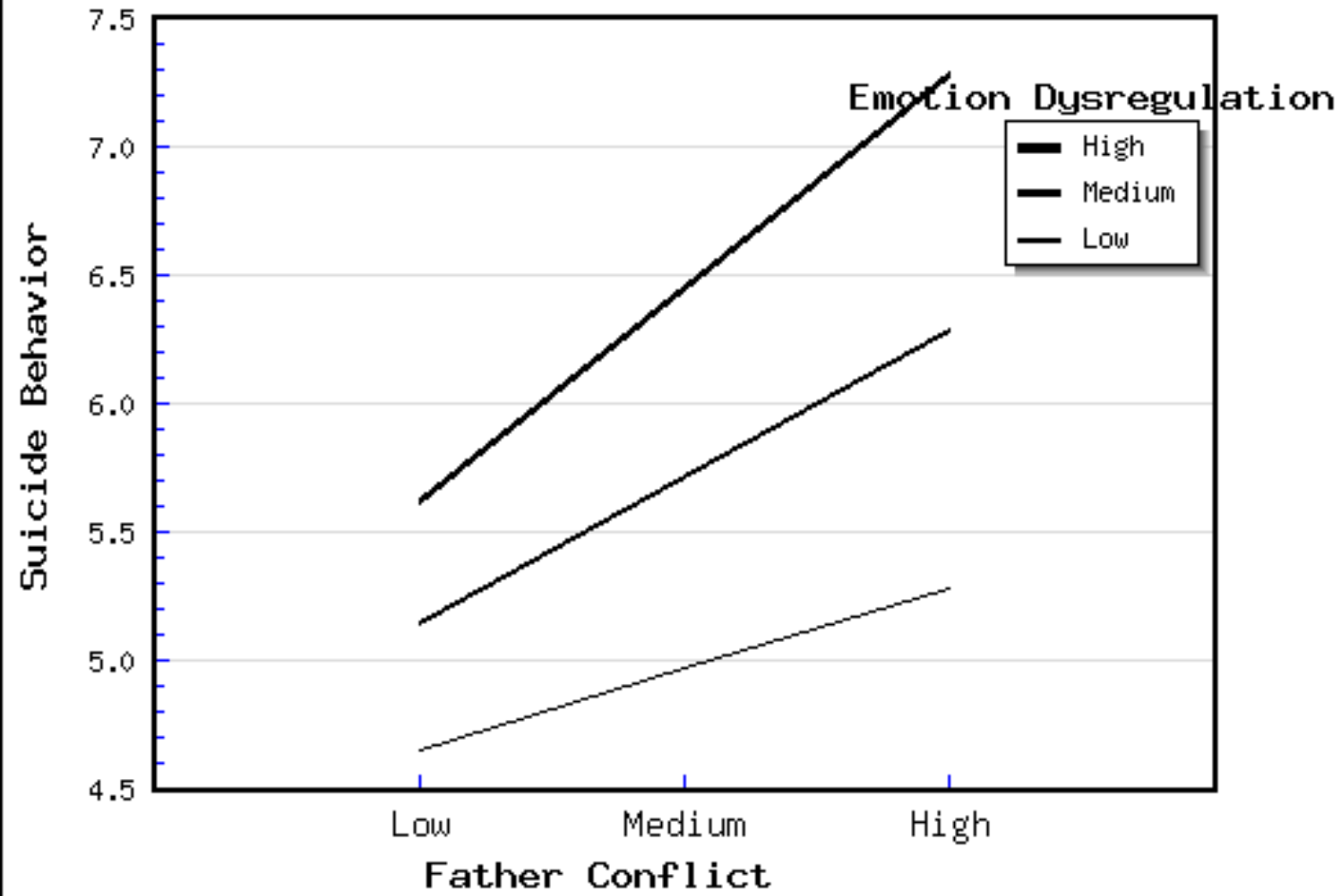
- According to the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey data over the last few decades, Latina adolescents have consistently reported greater suicide ideation, planning, and attempts compared to other ethnic groups.
- Zayas et al. (2005) posited that increased suicide behavior in Latina adolescents may be due to parent-adolescent differences in traditional values.
- In specific, in families that support cultural beliefs emphasizing deference to parents, restrictions on adolescent female autonomy, and family unity – family conflict may arise when Latina adolescents exert autonomy and adapt non-traditional values, with conflict surrounding dating being especially stressful.
- The consequent intense interpersonal stress then leads to increased suicide thoughts and behavior in Latina adolescents.

New Findings on Cultural Values & Suicide Risk

- Do cultural values influence Latina adolescent suicide behavior or is this behavior explained by universal factors such as emotion dysregulation?
- In sample of 368 Latina adolescents aged 18 and 19, utilized Marianismo Beliefs Scale (Castillo et al., 2010), which assesses the extent to which a Latina believes that she should practice cultural values related to the female gender in Hispanic cultures. Subscales include Virtuous and Chaste, Subordinate to Others, Self-Silencing to Maintain Harmony, Family Pillar, and Spiritual Pillar.
- Also measured family conflict, mother conflict, father conflict, coping competence, emotion dysregulation, depression, hopelessness, burdensomeness, and suicide behavior.
- Virtuous and father conflict were primary predictors. Lower adherence to virtuous was associated with greater levels of father conflict, emotion dysregulation, depression, hopelessness, and suicide behavior.
- Greater father conflict was associated with lower coping competence and greater emotion dysregulation, depression, hopelessness, burdensomeness, and suicide behavior.



Interaction of Emotion Regulation and Father Conflict



Obesity & Suicide Behavior in Young Latinas

- Although research has shown that obesity is related to suicide behavior (Wagner et al., 2013), especially in females (Branco et al., 2017), scant research has examined mediators of this relationship and no published research has examined obesity and suicide behavior in Latina adults.
- In National College Health Assessment data of south Texas Latina students, BMI was significantly associated with sleep problems, health problems, dissatisfaction with appearance, depression, hopelessness, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts (Hovey, Talavera-Garza et al., 2019).
- Association between obesity and suicidal ideation was significantly mediated by sleep problems, health problems, and dissatisfaction with appearance.
- Although previous research (Altabe, 1998; Lindberg & Stevens, 2011) has found that Latina women are more accepting of their body image and size compared to other ethnic groups, our findings strongly suggest that being overweight may indeed lead Latina women to feel dissatisfied with their body image and that this may be related to negative mental health.

Clinical Implications & Recommendations for Combating Suicide Risk

- Carefully assess for immediate risk factors (e.g., hopelessness, interpersonal stress, burdensomeness, cyberbullying, family conflict) to understand possible points for intervention (“What just happened to bring you to this point?”)
- Work closely with client to explore and identify possible protective factors (e.g., family support, social support, coping competence). (“How have you coped in similar situations in the past?” “What worked and what didn’t?”)
- Because of the cognitive constriction (Shneidman, 1985) typically seen in suicidal individuals, do not assume that your client has thoroughly examined her or his coping options.
- Don’t rely on suicide contracts and strongly consider the removal of possible means for suicide.

Clinical Implications & Recommendations

- Research findings indicate that short-term targeted interventions do decrease immediate suicide risk. Examples include a one-session treatment targeting anxiety sensitivity (Schmidt et al., 2017) and a smart phone app that enhances protective resources (Jaroszewski et al., 2019).
- On a larger scale, in the Rio Grande Valley, there is an urgent need for a greater implementation of empirically supported treatments to combat anxiety, depression, and suicide behavior.
- There is also the need for the implementation of realistic strategies to provide mental health services to rural and traditionally underserved individuals—for example, telemental health services.

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