The background of the slide features a close-up photograph of several smooth, dark grey or black stones stacked in a spiral pattern. The stones are covered in numerous small, glistening water droplets. A single, vibrant green chrysanthemum flower is positioned in the upper right corner, and a smaller, pale yellow flower is visible in the lower left. The overall aesthetic is clean, serene, and minimalist.

# **Loneliness, Isolation and Suicide: Recognizing & Responding to Social Withdrawal**

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# Social Support and the Perception of Geographical Slant

*Journal of Experimental  
Social Psychology*

# Social support and the perception of geographical slant

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## Abstract

The visual perception of geographical slant is influenced by *physiological resources*, such as physical fitness, age, and being physically refreshed. In two studies we tested whether a *psychosocial resource*, social support, can also affect the visual perception of slants.

Participants accompanied by a friend estimated a hill to be less steep when compared to participants who were alone (Study 1). Similarly, participants who thought of a



- 
- Humans are naturally social
  - Yet, the modern way of life in industrialized countries is greatly reducing the quantity and quality of social relationships
  - Many people no longer live in extended families or even near other family members

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# Growing concern

- Over the past two decades there has been a **three-fold increase** in the number of Americans who say they have no close confidants

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# Increasingly feeling isolated and alone...

- According to a recent large national survey by Cigna, loneliness levels have reached an all-time high, with nearly half of 20,000 U.S. adults reporting they often or always feel alone.
- **Forty percent** of survey participants: often or always feel that **their relationships are not meaningful and that they feel isolated.**

# Isolation and Health

- Extensive research indicates that people with fewer social relationships die earlier on average than those with more social relationships
- Despite this evidence, the idea that a lack of social relationships is a risk factor for death is still not widely recognized by health organizations and the public

Lunstad et al, 2010

# Social Isolation and Health

- lack of social connection heightens health risks as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day or having alcohol use disorder.
- loneliness and social isolation are twice as harmful to physical and mental health as obesity

*(Perspectives on Psychological Science, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2015)*

# Social Isolation and Health

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- Data across 308,849 individuals, followed for an average of 7.5 years, indicate that individuals with adequate social relationships have a 50% greater likelihood of survival compared to those with poor or insufficient social relationships
- A major study by scientists at Brigham Young University in the US found that **long-term social isolation can increase a person's risk of premature death by 33%**

*Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review*

# Isolation and Health

- Researchers at the Florida State University College of Medicine also found that **loneliness** is associated with a **40 percent increase in a person's risk of dementia**
- N > 12,000 U.S. adults ages 50 years and older.
- Participants rated their levels of loneliness and social isolation and completed a cognitive battery every two years for up to 10 years.

Every race,  
every cause

2019 study

N= 580,000

social isolation increases the risk of  
premature death from every cause, for every  
race

*(American Journal of Epidemiology, Vol. 188, No. 1, 2019).*

# How loneliness harms health

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White blood cells of lonely participants showed an increased expression of genes involved in inflammation and a decreased expression of genes involved in antiviral responses.

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(NAS, 2015)

# How loneliness harms health

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Loneliness, it seems, can lead to long-term "fight-or-flight" stress signaling, which negatively affects immune system functioning.

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# How loneliness harms health

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Loneliness, it seems, can lead to long-term "fight-or-flight" stress signaling, which negatively affects immune system functioning.

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Simply put, people who feel lonely have less immunity and more inflammation than people who don't.

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(NAS, 2015)

# Social Connection & Health

Social connection strengthens our immune system, reduces inflammation, helps us recover from disease faster, and may even lengthen our life

Prior research has shown that **lack of social connection** is a **greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure**

# Isolation and Health

- Careful biological studies have shown that cancer cells are less aggressive, and duplicate and metastasize less rapidly, in the blood of people who are less lonely

## Effects of isolation on your health (UCLA Health)

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), the health effects associated with loneliness include:

- **Dementia & cognitive decline:** Researchers find that loneliness is associated with a 40% increased risk for dementia.
- **Depression:** Feeling lonely can raise your stress level and interrupt healthy sleep, making you prone to depression.
- **Heart disease:** Loneliness is linked to a 30% increase in risk of stroke or coronary artery disease.
- **Impaired immunity:** Studies show that lonely people have more inflammation and a decreased antiviral response than people who aren't lonely.
- **Obesity:** Many people turn to food and slide into unhealthy habits to combat loneliness.
- **Premature death:** Social isolation increases the risk of premature death from any cause by more than 50%.



# Implications for Suicide Prevention

- 
- The most consistent protective factor found in suicide research is:  
**social support and connectedness**

(Kleiman, Riskind, Schafer, 2014; Goldfarb et al., 2014; Donaldson et. al, 2006)

- 
- Understanding of protective factors is important in selecting prevention interventions.

# Creating A Foundation of Resilience



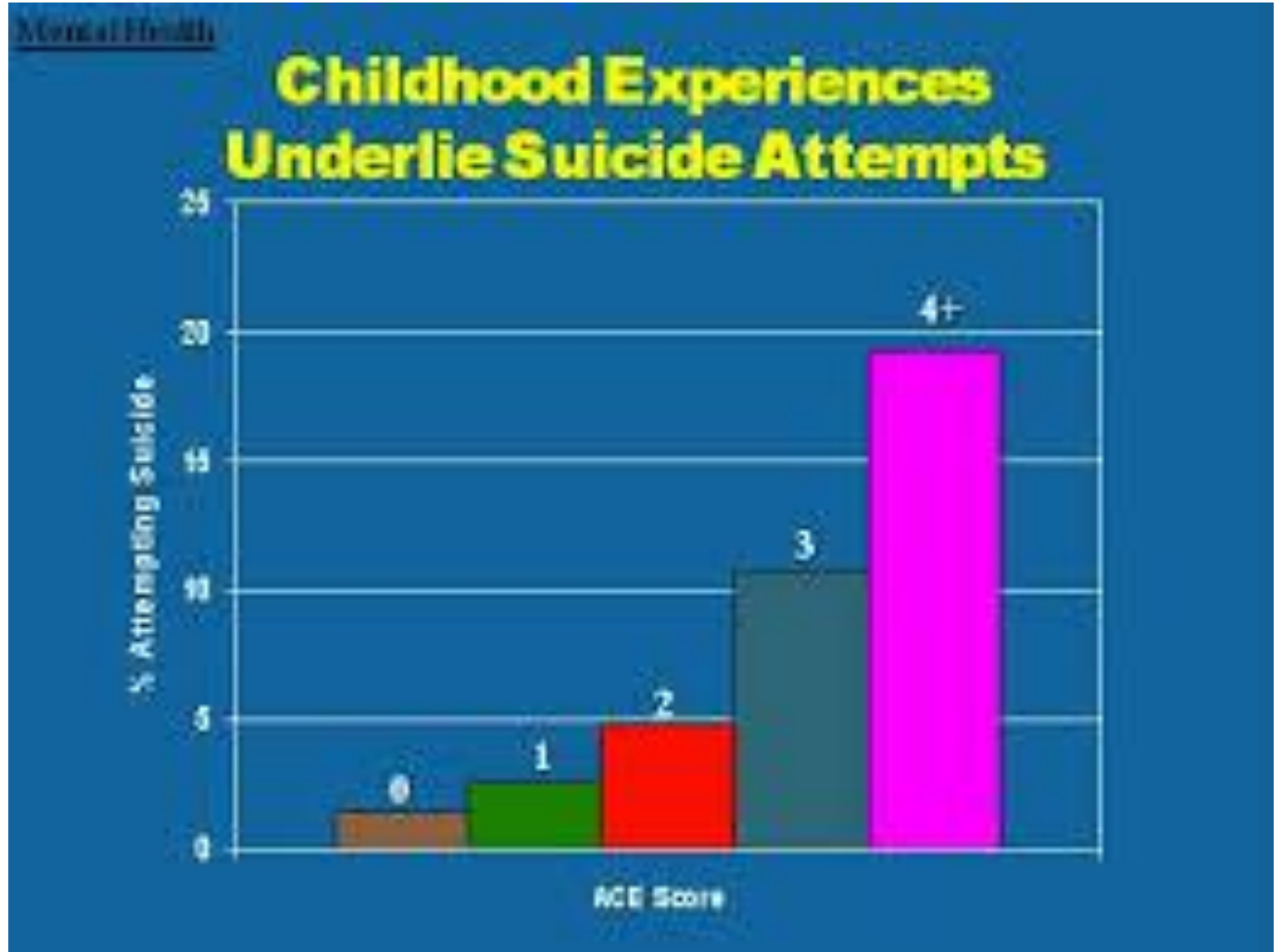
# Looking at Protective Factors

- In looking at protective factors, it is interesting to consider why suicide rates may be particularly low among some groups, such as African American women.
- CDC: suicide rate among black women aged 20–59 years was 2.77 per 100,000, the *lowest rate among adults in this age range*
- Evidence suggests **protective factors**, such as greater social support, larger extended families, and deeper religious/spiritual views among this population helps explain this lower suicide rate

(Center for Disease Control & Prevention)

# Trauma & Suicide

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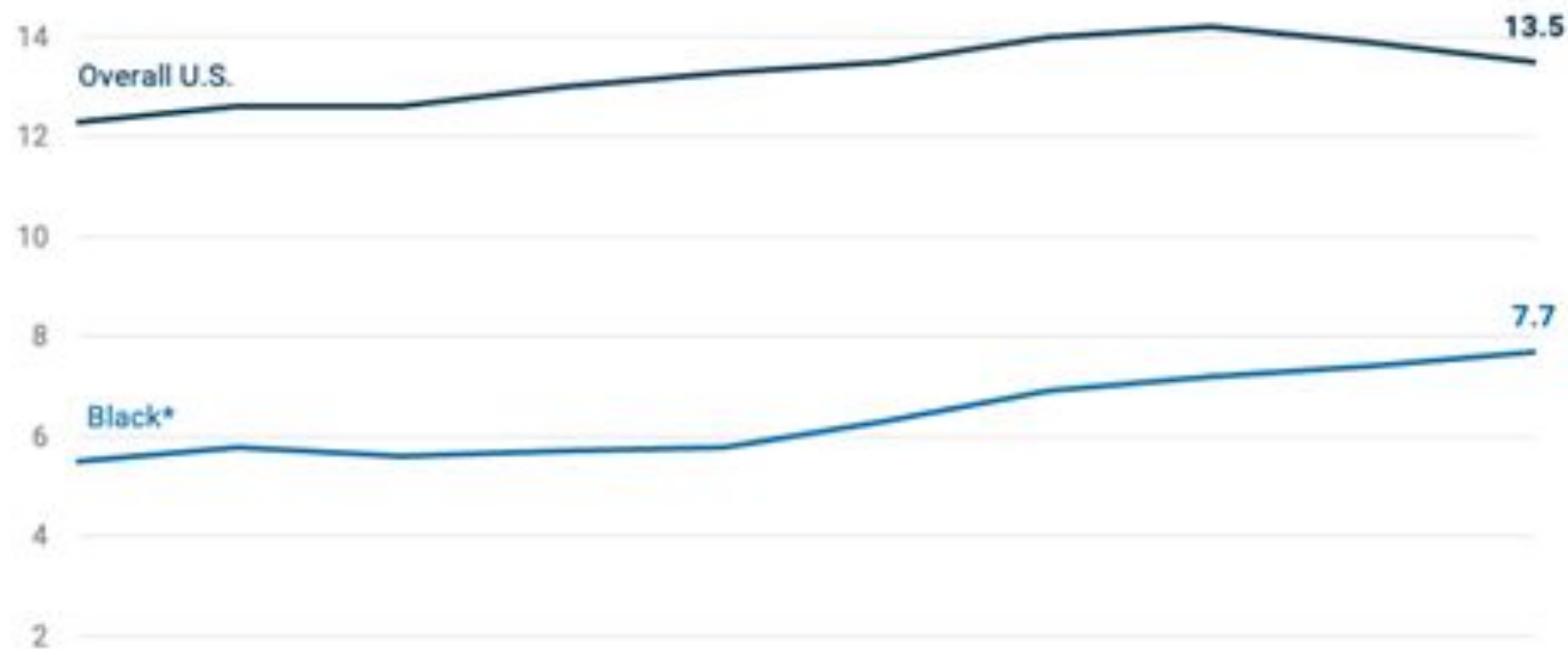
# Suicide Within the BIPOC Community: Call for Hope Conference Presenters

[Distribution of suicides by race/ethnicity and gender U.S. 2021 |  
Suicide Deaths and Rate by Race/Ethnicity |](#)

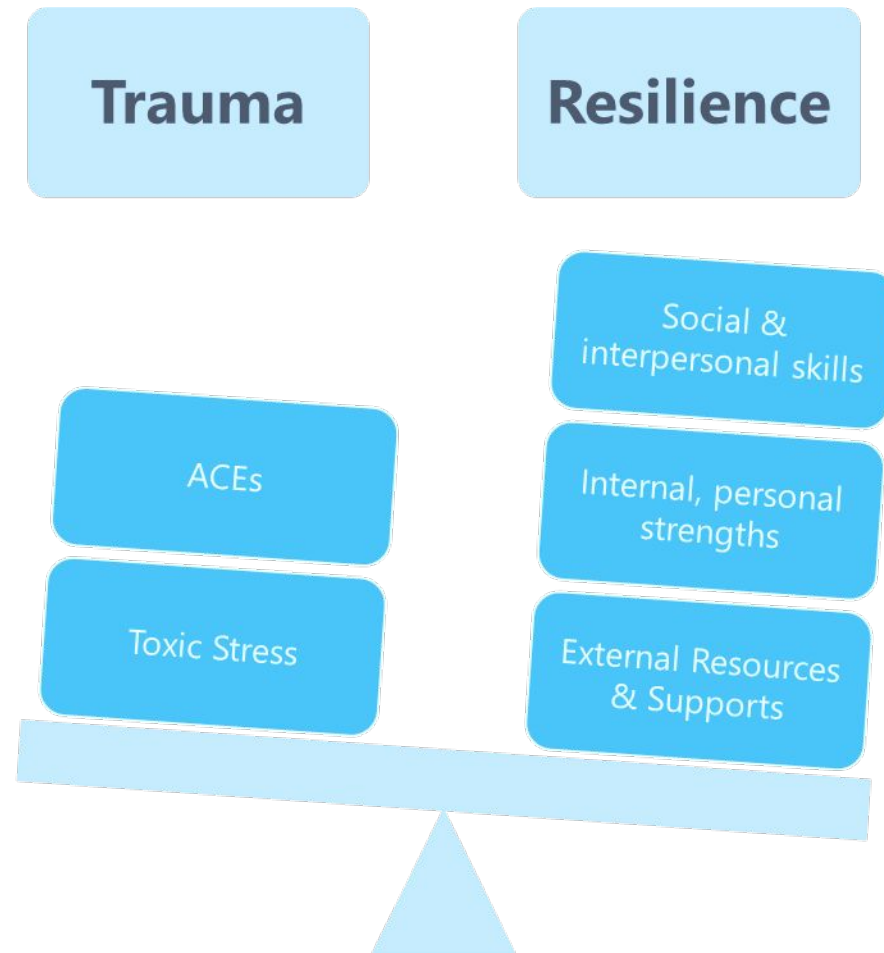
[Asian Populations](#)

[Latino Populations](#)

## Suicide Rates Among Black or African American Populations in the U.S., 2011-2020



# Creating A Foundation of Resilience



- **There is a strong relationship** between social isolation and suicide, and conversely, a protective effect of social support against suicide
- The association between suicide and social isolation is however complex, and subject to variations related to age, gender, psychopathology, and specific circumstances.

- Why does the suicidal person push others away?

# Google

🔍 why do depressed people p



🔄 AI Mode

🔍 why do depressed people **push people away**

🔍 why do depressed people **push loved ones away**



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## E. Ringel's "pre-suicide syndrome"

- Erwin Ringel's "pre-suicide syndrome" describes the specific psychological state that precedes a suicide attempt, acting as a critical warning sign for clinicians and loved ones.
- Based on a 1949 study of 745 suicide attempts, Ringel identified three key components that reinforce one another in a downward spiral toward the suicidal act.

# The “Presuicidal Syndrome”

Three components that reinforce one another in a downward spiral toward the suicidal act.

1. Constriction
2. **Inhibited or auto-aggression (aggression turned inward):** Drawing on Freudian theory, Ringel observed that the suicidal person's aggressive impulses, which are often built up from intense frustration, are turned against the self.
3. **Suicidal fantasies:** The emergence of thoughts and fantasies where death is perceived as a desirable solution to the person's problems.
  - These fantasies reinforce the constricted worldview, as the individual begins to focus on the details of carrying out the act.

# E. Ringel's "pre-suicide syndrome": **Constriction**

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- **Constriction:** A profound narrowing of an individual's thoughts, emotions, interests, and relationships, which manifests in several ways.

# Recognizing “Constriction”

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- **Situational constriction:** A person becomes overwhelmed by their problems, feeling helpless and powerless to influence their circumstances. They feel trapped in a steadily tightening space, with no way out.

# Recognizing “Constriction”

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- **Situational constriction:** A person becomes overwhelmed by their problems, feeling helpless and powerless to influence their circumstances. They feel trapped in a steadily tightening space, with no way out.
- **Dynamic constriction:** The individual's personality and thoughts become rigid and inflexible, focused almost entirely on their suffering. Other aspects of their life, such as their goals and aspirations, are stunted.

# Recognizing “Constriction”

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- **Situational constriction:** A person becomes overwhelmed by their problems, feeling helpless and powerless to influence their circumstances. They feel trapped in a steadily tightening space, with no way out.
- **Dynamic constriction:** The individual's personality and thoughts become rigid and inflexible, focused almost entirely on their suffering. Other aspects of their life, such as their goals and aspirations, are stunted.
- **Interpersonal constriction:** A progressive social withdrawal that leads to isolation and alienation from others. This can include devaluing existing relationships or becoming overly dependent on a single person.

# Interpersonal theory of suicide

- According to T. Joiner's interpersonal theory of suicide, social connection is also a key element in the suicidal process.
- He posits that simultaneous thwarted belongingness, that is, **a feeling of no longer being an integral part of a group**, and **perceived burdensomeness**, that is, a feeling of being a burden to others, are at the root of the emergence of suicidal ideation.

# Interpersonal theory of suicide

- The Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire (INQ), a self-administered questionnaire derived from the Interpersonal Suicide Theory
- Includes 15 self-reported items measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored with 1 (Not at all true for me) to 7 (Very true for me).
- The first six items of the INQ correspond to perceived burdensomeness and the remaining nine to thwarted belongingness.

# Some Complexity Here

- There is no consensus on the definition of social isolation, but it can be described as a state in which interpersonal contacts and relationships are disrupted or non-existent
- Several factors further characterize the relationship between suicide and social isolation, notably age and gender, as well as psychopathology and specific circumstances.

# Some Complexity Here

- Depending on these demographic factors, there are differences in the relationship between suicidality and social isolation
- Two age groups require special attention: individuals aged 70 and older, who have the highest suicide rates, and younger individuals, aged 15–29, in whom suicide is the second leading cause of death. In addition to the high suicide rates in the elderly, suicide attempts in this population are more often fatal, with a ratio of suicide attempts to the suicide of 4:1

- Social isolation seems to play a central role in suicidality for both seniors and adolescents, but the social contexts inherent to age are different.
- On the one hand, aging is inevitably accompanied by the loss of interpersonal relationships, the most impactful being the loss of a spouse.
- On the other hand, adolescence is a period of life marked by disruptions in social bonds, which can substantially impact mental health

- Review of the literature suggests that, in these two age categories, the family circle is a powerful vector of social support.
- Informal relationships, especially with children, are even more protective of suicidal thoughts in older adults living alone than formal relationships created officially by society like paid caregivers  
*(Kwon et al. 2018, Social relationships and suicidal ideation among the elderly)*

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## ***Connectedness to School and Adolescent Suicide Prevention***

- The school context has been offered as a setting that may serve as an effective prevention and intervention point for buffering suicidality.
- Given that adolescents spend a significant amount of time at school, school connectedness, or the sense of belonging to a school community, may be a significant and positive protective factor against social isolation.

# Suicidal ideation in young males living in rural communities: Distance from school as a risk factor, youth engagement as a protective factor

Laura Lynne Armstrong & Ian G. Manion

Pages 102-113 | Published online: 18 Feb 2007

 Cite this article  <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450120600659010>

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## Abstract

Adolescent males living in rural communities are at particular risk for completed suicides. The objective of the present study was to examine geographic isolation and living distance from school as risk factors, and youth engagement in meaningful extracurricular activities and social support as protective factors, for suicidality. These relationships were examined in rural youth ( $n = 242$ ; 128 females, 113 males, 1 missing data on gender). Distance from school was found to be a significant risk factor for males only, whereby living further away from school was associated with higher suicidal ideation. Youth engagement in extracurricular activities was significantly associated with lower levels of suicidality. The further a rural adolescent male lives from school was predictive of significantly lower rates of youth engagement. Policy implications concerning the initiation of structured activity programmes for at-risk youth are discussed.

## Related

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Laura Lynne Armstrong  
Vulnerable  
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## ***Suicidal ideation, friendships with delinquents, social and parental connectedness, and differential associations by sex***

- This study examined among high-risk youths: (1) the association between suicidal ideation and having delinquent friends, school connectedness, social support, and different parenting styles (i.e., caring only, supervision only, caring with supervision); and, (2) the differential associations by sex.
- After adjusting for demographic factors and mental distress, suicidal ideation was positively associated with having delinquent friends; however, after factoring in illicit substance use and violence victimization, this association was negative for males.

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## ***Suicidal ideation, friendships with delinquents, social and parental connectedness, and differential associations by sex***

- After adjusting for all factors, suicidal ideation was negatively associated with school connectedness and all parenting styles; however, the association between suicidal ideation and having parental caring with supervision was stronger for females
- **Conclusions:** The results suggest the potential benefits of increasing school connectedness and improving parent-child interactions, particularly among females, and the potential benefits of violence and substance-abuse prevention strategies for youths, particularly males, connected with delinquent peers.

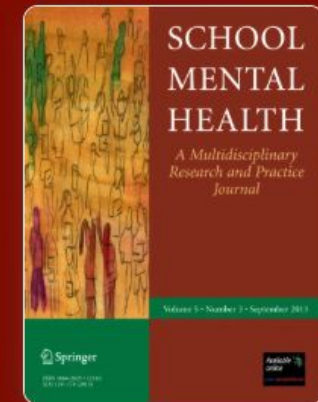
# Intersectionality

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## Suicidality in Black American Youth Living in Impoverished Neighborhoods: Is School Connectedness a Protective Factor?

Original Paper | Published: 06 January 2018

Volume 10, pages 1–11, (2018) [Cite this article](#)



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# Intersectionality

- **Study:** Based on “interpersonal theory of suicide, the current investigation explores the relation between suicidality (i.e., suicide ideations and attempts) and school connectedness. Using a large longitudinal data set ( $N = 2335$ )
- **Results:** school connectedness serves as a strong protective factor for suicidality among Black American adolescents living in impoverished neighborhoods.
- **Results** showed that school connectedness reduced the probability of suicide ideations and attempts over time and for both females and males

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## ***Connectedness to School and Adolescent Suicide Prevention***

- To date, suicide prevention has focused primarily on individual-level psychiatric risk factors and on strategies to refer and treat high-risk youth
- Yet researchers and policymakers (CDC) recommend strengthening positive social bonds because social integration can reduce suicidal behavior in youth (King & Merchant, 2008) and adults (Tsai et al., 2015)

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# Adults can play a big role too (2019)

- This study examined relationship networks in 38 high schools (10,291 students) in primarily rural, micropolitan communities, which have higher youth suicide rates
- Examined networks that incorporated students' friendships **and** relationships with supportive adults.
- *“To our knowledge, this is the first study of any adolescent health problem, including suicidal behavior, that integrates adult connections into friendship networks at a school population level”*

---

# Adults can play a big role too (2019)

- Schools with friendship networks reflecting greater integration and cohesion had lower rates of SI and SA.
- Student isolation from adults specifically increased vulnerability to SA
- Student isolation from adults specifically increased vulnerability to SA. A difference of 10% fewer students isolated from adults (1 SD) was associated with 1.41 fewer attempts per 100 students, a 20.1% reduction in the average rate of attempts

---

# Adults can play a big role too (2019)

- The present study is the first empirical evidence linking more integrated youth–adult networks (i.e., students sharing trusted adults with friends) to lower SA.
- Their findings regarding cohesive youth–adult networks aligns with a sociological perspective positing that vulnerability to suicide increases when social changes erode **adolescents' intergenerational cohesion**
- Cohesive youth–adult networks may promote more help-seeking for students and for their friends with whom they share a common bond to a supportive adult.

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# Purpose and Belonging

- Purpose and Belonging are mutually reinforcing
- We want to feel supported, yet, but being a person who “matters” in the social world also reinforces our sense of belonging
- This helps explain why research examining a wide range of formal programs aimed at nurturing a sense of purpose has revealed positive effects on health

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# Purpose and Belonging – Adolescent Application

- Study examined whether teenagers randomly assigned to participate in a volunteer program in which they helped the needy would demonstrate health benefits
- Inflammatory markers assayed from blood samples, including cholesterol & interleukin-6, were substantially lower for these teens than to others who had been assigned to a wait-list for the program.

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# Purpose and Belonging – Elderly

## Application

- [Researcher Steve Cole \(UCLA\)](#) & colleagues performed a similar study with retired elderly people, assigning some to participate in a mentoring program for children, and they found that their level of CTRA gene expression **substantially decreased**

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# **Gender, Social Isolation and Suicide**

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# Gender, Social Isolation and Suicide


- According to 2022 literature review: "Our review reveals that **social isolation and suicidality appear to be more strongly associated with men** than women. This result should be accounted for when considering that men have higher rates of suicide mortality
- "Men represent a population at higher risk of suicide partly because of social isolation, to which they are probably more exposed or vulnerable".
- [Social isolation and suicide risk: Literature review and perspectives - PMC](#)

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# **Men & Loneliness : An unspoken struggle**



- 
- Growing numbers of men are standing at the bottom of that hill, alone and overwhelmed, as surveys point to a recession of social connection among this population
  - Men are twice as likely to report they *have no close friends* as women

- 
- The number of men say they have *no* close friends at all is up an astounding 500% since 1990.
  - According to the APA, 1 in 10 men in the US have depression *every day*
  - Male depression routinely is misdiagnosed or underdiagnosed

- 
- A YouGov poll in 2019 concluded that **one in five men** have no close friends, twice as many as women.
  - Loneliness shows a harmful effect for all-cause mortality **and this effect is stronger in men than in women.**

---

## Association of loneliness with all-cause mortality: A meta-analysis (2018)

- 35 articles with 43 studies in systematic review
- $n = 77,220$
- lonely men are more likely to suffer lower life satisfaction and higher depression than lonely women

A row of wooden chess pawns is shown on a light blue surface. The pawns are arranged in a line, with the one in the foreground being in sharp focus and the others becoming increasingly blurred as they recede into the background. The lighting is soft and even. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text "Tips for lonely men (UCLA Health)" in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

# Tips for lonely men (UCLA Health)



# Evaluate your loneliness


Take note of when you feel the loneliest and what you are doing at the time. If those feelings set in each night after work, consider doing something that feels social a couple of nights a week. If weekends feel long and lonely, join a club that meets every Saturday or Sunday. Having a regular plan that involves other people can quickly foster or reignite friendships.



# Identify what you enjoy

If you participate in an activity you enjoy, you'll immediately have something in common with the people you meet. Consider:

- **Adopting a pet:** Pets can be a source of comfort and may open up new avenues for meeting other pet owners in the area.
- **Staying physically active with group exercise:** Join a walking club, train for a 5k or marathon with a group, or work out with a friend you haven't seen in a while.
- **Taking a class:** Learning something new can benefit your brain health and introduce you to people with similar interests.
- **Volunteering:** By joining a community cause or coaching your kids, you'll meet new people and feel good about how you are spending your time.



## Schedule social time for existing relationships

If work and family take a lot of your time, you may need to schedule time to connect with extended family and friends. You can reach out in whichever way makes you the most comfortable – whether in-person, by email, social media, a phone call or text.

Begin by keeping the social time short and simple. That way it won't feel like a chore. Once you regularly reconnect with people you trust, you'll be able to share your feelings and strengthen those relationships.

# How do you spell love?



Dunbar is more cautious about dismantling the way boys and men socialise, arguing that you see the same behaviours in monkeys and apes that you see at nurseries, schools and workplaces. He pictures two Mediterranean men sitting outside a cafe in the sunshine. They smoke cigarettes, drink coffee and stay there for hours saying almost nothing to one another.

“Don’t knock it!” he says. “This is boys bonding. Girls would never do that because they would want to talk to each other, but for boys you can sit down in complete silence and still build a relationship, providing there’s an activity or some kind of focus.”

For Dunbar, finding a shared activity is key, and his advice to lonely men is to start there, by finding a club or something you’re interested in. “Dancing, singing, playing rugby or tennis, climbing hills – you name it. They all trigger endorphins. And when you do it with other people, you end up bonding. It’s a very powerful mechanism,” he says.

- 
- In a 2020, Dunbar and his colleagues found that your future risk of depression is lower if you take part in three voluntary activities.

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# side-by-side versus face-to-face relationships

- “For men, what makes the difference is investing time in doing something together. It might be meeting up for a pint or arranging to climb Ben Nevis. The activity is irrelevant as long as it’s a group activity – and that often doesn’t involve a lot of conversation. There’s a bit of banter but really, the content is close to zero.”

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# In closing

- Our social connections can alter our perceptions of (physical) obstacles.
- We can even carry them with us....