**Understanding Suicide Attempts in LGBT Teens**

Brian Mustanski, Ph.D.

The rates of suicide attempts among LGBT youth have been found to be higher than rates among youth in the general population, but the reasons have not been clearly identified. With his AFSP Young Investigator Grant, Dr. Brian Mustanski is one of the first to study a group of LGBT youth over time to learn about what contributes to their suicide attempts. In his study of 237 youths ages 16 to 20, published in Archives of Sexual Behavior, Dr. Mustanski considered both general and LGBT-specific factors that might contribute to suicide attempts.

Study participants were LGBT boys and girls recruited through flyers and word of mouth whose average age at the beginning of the study was just over 18. The group was ethnically diverse with the majority being African American. Most described themselves as gay/lesbian although one-third reported they were bisexual. The study included measures of symptoms of major depressive disorder and conduct disorder, suicide attempts, hopelessness, impulsiveness, perceived social support from family and peers, gender non-conformity, age of first sexual attraction and history of LGBT-related victimization. Participants were assessed twice: at baseline and one year later.

The rate of lifetime suicide attempts was over 30% which is much higher than in the general population of 16-20 year olds. Fourteen percent reported enough symptoms to meet the criteria for a major depressive disorder and slightly more met criteria for conduct disorder. About one third reported loneliness and more than a quarter of the sample reported that they felt little support from their family. The best combination of variables for explaining past attempts were depressive symptoms and hopelessness. As in the general population, five percent of the sample made an attempt during the follow-up year with ten of the 13 attempters having made a past attempt. A previous attempt was the single best predictor of future attempts. Dr. Mustanski’s study lays the groundwork for more comprehensive study of risk and protective factors for suicide attempts in LGBT youth. Understanding these factors is key for informing efforts towards assessment and intervention.

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