



Suicidal Ideation in Young Males Living in Rural Communities

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Suicide, youth engagement, rural, adolescent mental health, gender differences

POPULATION GROUP

Rural youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health and Wellness; Education, Training and Apprenticeship

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario, Canada

SOURCE

Academic

“Youth in general report that they would turn to professionals first only 1% of the time if they had mental health concerns. Of utmost concern, almost 50% of adolescent males do not discuss these concerns with anyone. Therefore, particularly for rural male youth, primary prevention strategies that promote positive mental health and foster resiliency in at-risk youth are crucial to precluding suicide.”

1. What is the research about?

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in Canada. Very few mental health services are available in geographically isolated communities and youth generally do not seek professional help when they have concerns about their mental wellbeing. This research study focused on identifying risk and protective factors for addressing suicidal ideation and behaviors among rural male youth. Suicidal ideation can be defined as having thoughts and cognitions about taking one’s life. Suicidal ideation is an identified precursor to suicidal attempts and behaviours.

This research study found that long distances from school and lack of youth engagement in extracurricular activities were risk factors for suicidal behaviors among male rural youth. It found that engaging rural male youth in meaningful activities provided opportunities for positive identity formation, which was found to decrease suicide risk. It also found that students who lived further away from their schools had fewer opportunities for youth engagement. This research is important because very little research has explored how rural living status and gender intersect to contribute to suicidal ideation and behaviours.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research study took place in a rural community located in Eastern Ontario. This community was chosen because it met the criteria/definition outlined by Statistics Canada for rural demography.

3. Who is this research about?

Rural Youth: The sample for this study consisted of 242 students from two secondary schools in rural Eastern Ontario with the following demographic characteristics:

- 128 females, 113 males, 1 with gender missing
- Mean age was 16.3 years (range = 13 – 19 years)
- Students were from grades 9–12 with most students coming from grades 10, 11, 12 and the least from grade 9 due to limitations with parental consent for students under the age of 16.
- 237 students identified their race and the breakdown constituted of: 90% Caucasian, 2% Black and 4% Aboriginal. The remaining 4% identified as mixed descent.

4. How was the research done?

This research utilized quantitative research methodologies through the administration of various survey instruments. The following survey instruments were used:

- Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (SIQ) – A self-report questionnaire that evaluates suicidal thoughts and behaviors.
- Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II) – Suicide risk was assessed using a suicide item measure from the BDI-II inventory.
- Demographic Questionnaire – A self-report questionnaire that gathered general demographic information and also obtained information on students' geographic location and distance to school.
- Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement Matrix (CEYE) – A self-report questionnaire that assessed youth engagement in extracurricular activities.
- Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) – A six-item scale that measures the number of social support an individual has.

Data was analyzed using a standard multiple regression analysis to explore the predictive relationship between suicidal ideation, geographical location, distance from school, youth engagement and social supports.

5. What are the key findings?

In comparison to rural male youth, rural female youth did not significantly show more suicidal ideation when the Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire measure was used. However, when data from the clinically sensitive Beck Depression Inventory-II suicide item measure was analyzed, female rural youth showed significantly more suicidal ideation than rural male youth. The reason for this difference is unclear.

Suicidal ideation was not significantly impacted by geographic location or distance from school for females but for males, more distance from school significantly predicted an increase in suicidal ideation for both males and females. With further analysis, it was also found that youth engagement in meaningful extracurricular activities also contributed significantly to decreasing suicidal ideation among male rural youth. Social support from peers and geographic location did not predict suicidal ideation among male youth. 50% of males do not share their concerns with others.

These findings suggest that for male rural youth, the school plays an important role in providing protective factors for decreasing suicide risk. Additionally, providing outlets for male rural youth to be a part of a structured meaningful activity has been found to be beneficial for boosting self-esteem.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Although the suicide rate is generally higher for women, research studies conducted in Western contexts (in countries like the United States, Canada and Australia) have shown that there is a particular suicide risk evident for rural male youth. In some studies, the suicide rate for rural male youth was found to be higher than the suicide rate for female and male urban populations, as well as higher than suicide rates for rural female youth. **Given that 50% of males do not discuss their concerns with anyone, these findings demonstrate that there is a great need to integrate gender-based analysis when exploring the role of rural living on youth mental health.**

This research also highlights the importance of determining risk and protective factors that address suicidal behaviors specific to rural male youth.

From this research, we can make the following recommendations for youth work:

- Educational boards and policy makers should ensure that rural male youth do not have to travel long distances for school.
- Youth workers should more readily consider how distance from school can impact the mental health of rural male youth.
- There should be increased services in rural communities that provide meaningful, accessible and affordable extracurricular activities in schools or near schools in order to provide rural male youth with outlets that help build their self-concept and self-esteem.
- There should be increased transportation services that can provide access to community resources for rural youth.

We would also like to suggest the following considerations for future research:

- What is the impact of gender fluidity and gender non-conformity on the mental health of rural youth?

- Why did rural female youth in the study ideate on suicide less than rural male youth using the Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire but were found to ideate more on suicide than rural male youth with the Beck Depression Inventory II suicide item measure?
- How does race and ethnicity impact the mental health of rural male youth?
- What supports serve as a protective factor for rural female youth?
- What are the suicide risk and protective factors for suicide for rural youth under the age of 16?



Lynne Armstrong, L., & Manion, I. G. (2006). Suicidal ideation in young males living in rural communities: distance from school as a risk factor, youth engagement as a protective factor. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 1(1), 102-113.