

## School-based Protective Factors related to Suicide for LGB Adolescents

Kelly Whitaker, MPA Education, Training, & Research Associates (ETR) & UC Berkeley

John Shields, MSW, PhD ETR Associates

Jill Glassman, MSW, PhD ETR Associates

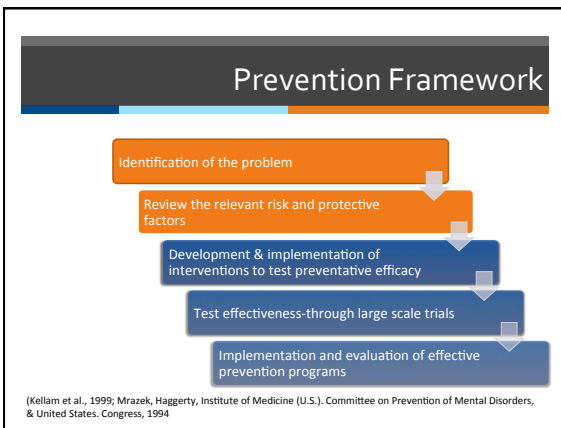
Heather Franks, MA ETR Associates

Kevin Gogin, MFT San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD)

Helliana Ramirez, MSW UC Berkeley

## Presenter Disclosures

- The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:
  - No relationships to disclose



## Prevalence

### Adolescent Suicidality by Sexual Identity 2001-2009 (CDC, 2011)

Suicidal behaviors	Sexual identity			
	Heterosexual	Gay/Lesbian	Bisexual	Unsure
	Median %	Median %	Median %	Median %
Considered suicide	11.7	29.6	40.3	23.7
Made a suicide plan	10.0	21.2	35.7	20.9
Attempted suicide	6.4	25.8	28.0	11.3
Attempted suicide w/ medical treatment	2.2	12.6	11.3	8.4

## Risk Factors

- Discrimination & Homophobia
  - Discrimination due to sexual orientation significantly related to self-harm and suicidal ideation (Almeida et al., 2009)
- Mental Health Issues
  - Higher rates of mental health and substance abuse associated with higher rates of suicidal ideation and attempts (Robin et al., 2001, Russell & Joyner, 2002)

## Risk Factors

- Violence, Bullying, & Harassment
  - Verbal harassment LGB youth was positively associated with suicide attempts in LGB youth (D'Augelli et al., 2005)
  - Higher levels of verbal harassment, physical & sexual threats, and violence associated with suicide attempts (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003)
- Parental Rejection & Family Conflict
  - Parental rejection during adolescence led to increased suicide attempts by LGB young adults (Ryan et al., 2009)

## Protective Factors

- ◆ Few studies have focused on protective factors for suicide among LGB youth.
- ◆ In a study of over 20,000 adolescents in Minnesota, researchers found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents possessed significantly lower levels of protective factors than their heterosexual peers (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006).
- ◆ Further, they found that protective factors including *family connectedness, adult caring relationships, and school safety* were significantly protective against suicidal ideation and attempts (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006).

## Protective Factors

- ◆ Family Support
  - ◆ LGB youth with strong family connectedness were half as likely to experience suicidal ideation as youth with low family connectedness (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006).
  - ◆ Family acceptance was related to reduced depression, substance abuse and, suicidal ideation and attempts (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2010).
- ◆ Social Support
  - ◆ Social support was negatively related to suicide risk for homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, and questioning adolescents (Rutter & Soucar, 2002)

## School-based Protective Factors

- ◆ School Policies
  - ◆ School anti-bullying policies were negatively associated with rates of suicide attempts for LGBQ youth (Goodenow et al., 2006)
- ◆ Gay/Straight Alliances
  - ◆ Sexual minority adolescents in schools with LGB support groups, GSAs, or other peer support groups reported lower rates of victimization and suicide attempts (Goodenow et al., 2006; Poteat et al., 2012)
- ◆ School Support
  - ◆ LGB adolescents who believed that there was a school staff member they could talk to about a problem were only about one third as likely to report victimization at school or suicide attempts (Goodenow et al., 2006)

## Current Study

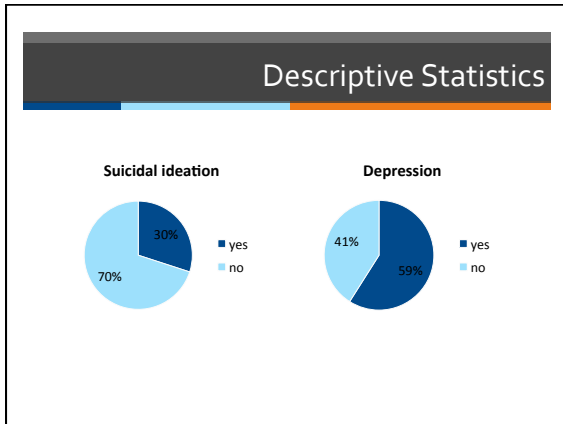
- ◆ Secondary analysis of the 2011 California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS)
- ◆ CHKS is the largest statewide survey of risk and protective factors

## Sample

- ◆ All 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade SFUSD students (n=5,670)
- ◆ Analyses were focused on students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (n=300)
- ◆ Ethnically diverse: Asian (33%), Latino (30%), Other races (22%), white (11%), African American (4%)
- ◆ 45% female, 55% male
- ◆ 46% 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 49% 11<sup>th</sup> grade

## Measures

- ◆ Dependent variable: binary suicidal ideation
  - ◆ Did you ever seriously consider suicide in the past 12 months?
- ◆ Independent variable: School connectedness scale
  - ◆ 5 questions (1-5)  $\alpha = .83$
- ◆ Control variables: sex and depression
  - ◆ Sex (male or female)
  - ◆ Depression: During the past 12 months did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost everyday for two weeks that you stopped doing some usual activities? (yes or no)



### Results

MODEL	PAR.	EST.	SE	OR	P-VALUE	95% CI
	a	-0.89	0.527	--	--	--
log(p/1-p) = a+ School_connect X+ gender W+ depression Z	Sch_connect	-0.37	0.151	<b>0.69</b>	<b>0.014**</b>	<b>(-0.67,-0.07)</b>
	gender	0.89	0.288	<b>2.44</b>	<b>0.002**</b>	<b>(0.32,1.45)</b>
	depression	1.42	0.527	<b>4.14</b>	<b>&lt;0.001**</b>	<b>(0.88, 1.96)</b>

- ### What Can Schools Do?
- ◆ School Policies
  - ◆ Gay/Straight Alliances
  - ◆ School Support

- ### Limitations
- ◆ Limitations
    - ◆ Cross-sectional design
    - ◆ Challenges in operationalizing LGB identity

- ### Directions for Future Research
- ◆ Directions for Future Research
    - ◆ Additional research on school-based protective factors for suicide among LGB adolescents.
    - ◆ Large scale epidemiological studies that focus on discrimination and social stressors (Meyer, 2003)
    - ◆ Including variables to measure sexual identity and gender identity on large-scale surveys such as the CHKS and the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
    - ◆ Although the CDC permits the inclusion of items on sexual orientation and/or gender identity on the YRBS, to date, only 17 of 76 high school sites nationally have chosen to do so.

### References

Almeida, J., Johnson, R. M., Corliss, H. L., Molnar, B. E., & Azrael, D. (2009). Emotional distress among LGBT youth: The influence of perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*, 1001-1014. doi:10.1007/s10964-009-9397-9

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). *Sexual identity, sex of sexual contacts, and health risk behaviors among students in grades 9-12 - youth risk behavior surveillance, selected sites, united states, 2005-2009* (No. 60). MMWR Early Release 2011 (pp. 1-133). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>

DiGiugli, A. R., Grossman, A. H., Salter, N. P., Vasey, J. J., Starke, M. T., & Sincalair, K. O. (2005). Predicting the suicide attempts of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior, 35*, 646-660.

Eisenberg, M. E., & Resnick, M. D. (2006). Suicidality among gay, lesbian and bisexual youth: The role of protective factors. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 39*, 662-668. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2006.04.024

Goodenow, C., Szalacha, L., & Westheimer, K. (2006). School support groups, other school factors and the safety of sexual minority adolescents. *Psychology in the schools, 43*.

Kellam, S. G., Kooz, D., & Molicki, E. K. (1999). Core elements of developmental epidemiologically based prevention research. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 27*(4), 463-482. doi:10.1023/A:1022129127296

Meyer, I. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*(5), 674-697.

Mrazek, P. B., Haggerty, R. J., Institute of Medicine (U.S.) Committee on Prevention of Mental Disorders, & United States Congress. (1994). *Reducing risks for mental disorders: Frontiers for preventive intervention research*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Potocz, V. P., Sinclair, K. O., DiGiuglianni, C. D., Koenig, B. W., & Russell, S. T. (2012). Gay-Straight Alliances Are Associated With Student Health: A Multischool Comparison of LGBTQ and Heterosexual Youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, n/a-n/a*. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2012.00832.x

Robin, L., Brenner, N., Shaun, D., Hack, T., Hale, K., & Goodenow, C. (2002). Association between health risk behaviors and opposite, same and both sex sexual partners in representative samples of Vermont and Massachusetts high school students. *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine, 156*, 349-355.

Russell, S. T., & Joyner, K. (2001). Adolescent sexual orientation and suicide risk: Evidence from a national study. *American Journal of Public Health, 91*, 1276-1281.

Rutter, P., & Sourcar, E. (2002). Youth suicide risk and sexual orientation. *Adolescence, 37* (146), 289-299.

Ryan, C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R. M., & Sanchez, J. (2009). Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics, 123*, 349-352. doi:10.1542/peds.2007-3824

Savin-Williams, R. C., & Ream, G. L. (2003). Suicide attempts among sexual minority male youth. *Journal of Clinical Adolescent Psychology, 32*(4), 509-522.