

Deaf Students & Suicide: The Peculiar Relationship of Gender, Reading & Suicide

Vincent J Samar, PhD, Robert Q Pollard, PhD, Amanda O'Hearn, PhD, Peter Lalley, PhD, Erika Sutter, MPH, Steven Barnett, MD, Jonathan Klein, MD, MPH, Elizabeth G Finigan, MD, Anne Steider, PhD, Matthew Starr, MPH, Caryn Havens, MPH, MBA, Robyn Dean, MS, Tamala David, MPA, MS, APRN, FNP, Brianne Testa-Wojteczko, BA, Thomas Fogg, MS

METHOD

HBS Survey Construction

•**Survey Scope:** 71 items about physical/mental health, demographics, and communication traits.

•**Item Selection:** From national health surveys; some newly created items.

•**English Version:** The HBS was translated into English by a bilingual research assistant who is fluent in both English and American Sign Language (ASL). The translation process involved a back-translation check to ensure accuracy and readability for the deaf and hard-of-hearing population.

INTRODUCTION

Previous survey data suggests that deaf and hard-of-hearing college students have a relatively high previous-year suicide attempt rate (6% - 18%; Turner et al., 2006). However, those surveys did not control the English language difficulty of their items or their respondents' reading skills. Deaf and hard-of-hearing respondents could have misunderstood survey items due to weak reading skills and reported falsely elevated suicide attempt rates.

The National Center for Deaf Health Research developed the *Health Behavior Survey - Modified English Version* (HBS) to survey a broad range of health risk behaviors while minimizing English language comprehension demands on deaf and hard-of-hearing college respondents. The suicide-related survey items from a recent HBS administration and respondents' reading test scores were used to determine if deaf and hard-of-hearing college entering young adults report a higher rate of suicide ideation or suicide attempts than college-entering hearing young adults. Additional items from the HBS were used to explore relationships of reported suicidality with known risk factors such as depression, substance use and suicide mediating factors (e.g., life-long reading difficulty, depression, other mental health factors). Understanding these interactions, and the roles of gender and reading skill as suicide