Teens' Suicidality Risk Differs by Ethnicity

BY SHERRY BOSCHERT

SAN FRANCISCO — There may be ethnic-specific risk factors in youth suicidality that could inform the design of culturally influenced suicide prevention, a study of 648 Mexican and European American adolescents suggests.

The study found high rates of suicidality (ideation and behavior) and associations between friendship problems and suicidality. However, the associations were found to differ by ethnicity, Erin Winterrowd reported in a poster presentation at the annual conference of the American Society of Suicidology.

For Mexican American girls, having friends who were disconnected from school was associated with suicidal ideation. For European American girls and boys, friends' delinquency was related to suicidal behavior, said Ms. Winterrowd of Colorado State University, Fort Collins, and her associates.

The cohort of youths aged 14-20 years came from two midsized, urban Southwestern communities and was 52% Mexican American and 51% female. The subgroups of Mexican American and European American youths were matched by sex, age, and grade.

Overall, 32% reported suicidal ideation, and 11% reported nonfatal suicidal behavior. Suicidality rates were higher among Mexican Americans (32%) than among the European Americans (12%).

For both ethnic subgroups, other risk factors for suicidality included youth, depression, and low family support. Physical abuse or low self-esteem were risk factors for Mexican American teens, delinquency or sexual abuse were risk factors for suicidality in European Americans. ■