

2010

## The Relationship Between Race and Suicide Ideation in Delinquent Females in the Texas Juvenile Justice System

Scott H. Belshaw  
*University of North Texas*

John Rodriquez  
*University of Texas at Arlington*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pvamu.edu/cojpp-contemporaryissues>



Part of the [Child Psychology Commons](#), [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#), [Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Belshaw, Scott H. and Rodriquez, John (2010) "The Relationship Between Race and Suicide Ideation in Delinquent Females in the Texas Juvenile Justice System," *Contemporary Issues in Juvenile Justice*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pvamu.edu/cojpp-contemporaryissues/vol4/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @PVAMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Contemporary Issues in Juvenile Justice by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @PVAMU. For more information, please contact [hvkoshy@pvamu.edu](mailto:hvkoshy@pvamu.edu).

---

# The Relationship Between Race and Suicide Ideation in Delinquent Females in the Texas Juvenile Justice System

## Cover Page Footnote

Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Scott H. Belshaw, Department of Criminal Justice, University of North Texas, 273E Chilton Hall, 1155 Union Circle #305130, Denton, TX 76203-5017

## The Relationship Between Race and Suicide Ideation in Delinquent Females in the Texas Juvenile Justice System

Scott H. Belshaw  
*University of North Texas*

John Rodriguez  
*University of Texas at Arlington*

### *Abstract*

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2002) reported that suicide is the second leading cause of death among people between the ages of 14 to 25 in the United States. This research examined the effect race has on suicidal ideation among a cohort of delinquent girls in Texas. This study examined 2004 data provided by the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission on referrals to the juvenile justice system in Texas (N = 6850). Other variables such as age, family structure, and sexual abuse were also examined to determine the strength and effect that sexual abuse has on a juvenile becoming suicidal. The results revealed that race has a minor effect on suicidal thoughts among females in the juvenile justice system when controlling for sexual abuse, age, and family structure. Implications for practice are further explained.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2002) reported that suicide is the second leading cause of death among juveniles between the ages of 14 and 25 years. Nearly 30% of high school adolescents claimed to have thought seriously about attempting suicide during the previous year. Eight percent of students said they had attempted to kill themselves (CDC, 2002). With the issue of suicide at the forefront, it is clear that children who are abused by a caregiver or a trusted individual suffer long-lasting damage. It is also becoming clearer that adolescent suicide and abuse might be interrelated. This study examined the influence that a child's race might have on her thoughts of suicide. Would an abused girl, from a minority group, be more likely to think of suicide than a Caucasian girl? This research strives to determine how much of an impact an abused girl's environment would have on her suicide ideation.

In the life of a juvenile, adolescence is often referred to as a chaotic time with sudden biological and social changes (Barber, 1994). Conflict is part of normal development during adolescence (Tubman & Lerner, 1994). This conflict usually pertains to developmental experiences such as chores, finances, dissatisfaction with physical appearance and even experimentation with substance abuse (Galambos & Almeida, 1992). However, these juveniles also have to deal with conflicts involving family relations, school difficulties, curfews, dating issues, friends, and sexual behavior topics, which typically cause disagreements between parents and their teenagers (Barber, 1994). For most juveniles, these conflicts are a natural part of growing up and learning to become an adult. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Scahill, 2000), a young person who was between the ages of 7 and 17

years old was more likely to be a victim of suicide than a victim of homicide. Since the 1980s, for every one juvenile female suicide there were four male suicides (OJJDP).

As females commit fewer suicides than their male counterparts, the research is clear that females are victimized at a much higher rate than males (OJJDP, 2000). Experiences with abuse are alarmingly high among adolescent females involved with the criminal justice system. The statistics showed that up to 92% were a victim of some form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, while 56% reported sexual abuse (Acoca, 1998; see also Holsinger, Belknap, & Sutherland, 1999). Research on suicide for adolescents between 15 and 19 years old revealed that during the 1950s to 1990s, the rate of suicides went up by 300% and between 1990 and 2003, that rate went down by 35% (CDC, 2002). The possible effect of this abuse can manifest itself in problems in the future.

This research will, therefore, attempt to address the question of how much of an effect race has on delinquent females in the juvenile justice system are becoming suicidal. Furthermore, it will fill in the gap in the literature by focusing on a sample of delinquent children rather than exploring the entire population of youth. This will allow administrators in the juvenile justice system to formulate programs that will focus on these abused children and prevention of entrance into the justice system.

Numerous research studies have examined the risk factors and suicide attempts by age, race, educational level, family history, religion, socioeconomic level, sexual orientation, and other demographic variables (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1996). These studies focused on the person who may be at risk, but did not specify why a specific adolescent might be more prone to suicide. Adolescents who had an increased risk of suicide were those that had substance abuse issues, psychiatric and medical problems, stress, and antisocial

---

Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Scott H. Belshaw, Department of Criminal Justice, University of North Texas, 273E Chilton Hall, 1155 Union Circle #305130, Denton, TX 76203-5017

behavior (D'Augelli et al., 1996; Levy, Jurkovic, & Spirito, 1995).

### **Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Suicide**

Gould, Greenberg, Velting, and Shaffer (2003) argued that there was very little relationship between race, socioeconomic status and suicide. Suicidal behaviors often cross the lines of class and even race. Goldsmith, Pellmar, Kleinman, and Bunney (2002) have developed various protective factors that would be likely to decrease a juvenile's chances of becoming suicidal. The protective factors are family cohesion, religious affiliation and participation, self-esteem, direction, resiliency, determination, optimism, and empathy (Gould et al., 2003; Goldsmith et al., 2002). Goldsmith et al. (2002) noted that coping skills were a large problem the juveniles had failed to learn. These adolescents have not learned how to solve problems effectively. Moreover, these at-risk juveniles needed an effective caregiver that could assist them with problems. Coping skills become hindered because the caregiver probably abused the child and the healthy lessons were not reinforced or taught. Researchers have studied the relationship between social strain, race, and suicidal behavior.

In finding a way to measure this strain, many studies have included race as a control variable in regression models of suicide and suicidal behavior (Watt & Sharp, 2002). Scientists have stated that there were theoretical and empirical causes to believe that the variables of suicidal behavior may differ between Black and White adolescents (Watt & Sharp, 2002). Most of the previous research on juvenile suicide has centered on psychological variables, however, it has been suggested that external strains are important in suicidal decision making. Few studies have compared African-American and Anglo suicide attempts; hence, a weakness to this research is that they do not identify predictors between attempters and non-suicidal populations (Watt & Sharp, 2002). Several researchers have argued that Blacks are not as likely as Whites to respond to social strain with suicide or that they are more likely to respond to strains and less likely to respond to status strains than Whites (Watt & Sharp, 2002). Even more alarming is the effect of strain on Hispanic female juveniles' suicidal ideations.

The fastest-growing group of minority females in the nation is Hispanic females who are between the ages 12 to 17 years; they are also at a higher risk of attempting suicide than their counterparts of any other racial or ethnic group. CDC (2002) reported that approximately 25% of young Hispanic females thought of committing suicide, while 15% of these girls attempted suicide. This is 1.5 times the 10% each of Anglo and Black adolescent females who attempt suicide. Approximately two million young Hispanic females in the United States attempted suicide in recent years (Fletcher, 2009). In basic terminology, Hispanic adolescent females in this

country are at more risk of attempting suicide than any other group of adolescents.

The research indicates that Hispanic female adolescents experience severe strain due to the cultural conflicts they experience in the United States (Fletcher, 2009). Studies also indicated that this population of girls was often caught between popular U.S. culture, which encouraged adolescent girls to be powerful and flirtatious, and the more traditional cultures of their parents' Latino home countries, which valued modesty, conformity and female deference to male figures (Fletcher, 2009). In public, these girls are pressured to fit the societal norms of the United States. At home, the girls' families pressure them to fit the societal norms of their home countries, even though the families are not living in an area where their cultural norms are practiced or even understood. This same population of girls experience intense emotions without having the proper inner tools to process these strong emotions, which may lead to self-injurious behaviors such as cutting and performing actions that may lead to suicide, whether or not suicide was intended.

### **Non-race-related Predictors of Suicide Attempts**

In Joiner's (2005) research, the utilization of variables such as individual medical history, family psychiatric history and problems, family of origin issues, childhood abuse, and parental history of suicide attempts were better predictors of suicidal attempts than race. Suicidal behaviors often cross the lines of class and even race. The literature indicates that race does play a significant factor in the juvenile justice system and suicide, but offers little significant influence within the confines of the research (Watt & Sharp, 2002).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A large diverse sample of delinquents was utilized in this research. This study examined 2004 data collected by the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) from referrals to local juvenile probation departments. The sample was then limited to only females that were referred to the juvenile justice system in Harris County, Texas, between the ages of 10 and 17 years ( $n = 6,850$ ). No juvenile in our sample was or exceeded the age of 18 years because Texas law does not consider these young people to be juveniles for the purpose of referral to the juvenile justice system. The mean age of the entire sample of juvenile females is 15.24 years with a standard deviation of 1.27 years.

### **Materials**

**Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument Version 2 (MAYSI-2).** The MAYSI-2 is a screening tool used to assist in the identification of various types of mental/emotional disturbance, distress, or patterns of

problem behavior (Grisso & Barnum, 2000). The primary goal of this assessment tool is to alert the administrator to potential needs and triage for high-priority immediate response. According to its authors, the MAYSI-2 is not intended to render diagnoses but merely to identify youths who may have special mental health needs including suicidal thoughts. Like any other screening instrument, the MAYSI-2 is a first look at the child's possibility of mental health needs. This instrument does not seek to diagnose mental disorders or to provide information to the practitioner concerning important and long-term interventions (Grisso & Barnum, 2000). In Texas, the MAYSI-2 was mandated by state law in 2001 to be administered to all juveniles referred to local juvenile probation departments at formal intake by certified juvenile probation officers who have been trained to administer the instrument (Espinoza, Schwank, & Tolbert, 2003). The level of suicide ideation is based upon scores on the MAYSI-2. These responses were given to the juvenile probation department within Harris County, Texas. The variables being measured were the relationship sexual abuse has on suicide ideation. Suicide ideation is extracted from reported responses to the MAYSI-2 standardized instrument.

### Design and Procedure

**Independent variables.** The data were coded to account for the independent and dependant variables, respectively. These variables were race, age, sexual abuse and family structure. These codes included race, with White/Caucasian being 0 and 1 for minority (non-Whites). Hispanic, African -Americans, and Asians were included in the non-White category. The rationale for this variable's use was to understand the impact minorities had on the thesis. Additionally, the use of this variable was due to the over-representation of minorities in the juvenile justice system, according to the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (Sickmund, 2004).

This sample included only children 10 through 17 years of age. Children under the age of 10 and over the age of 17 (over age of initial entry into system) were excluded, as in the State of Texas these ages would not be included in the juvenile justice system. The next variable was sexual abuse. Sexual abuse (SuspectE) was converted from a Yes, No, Suspected, and Unknown to Yes and No, with No including the unknown responses. Children suspected as being victims of child abuse were converted to Yes, as the abuse was, although not officially reported, likely did occur based upon the decision of the certified juvenile probation officer conducting the assessment interview. All abuse was self-reported to the assessment officer and the MAYSI-2 questionnaire. The next variable was the child's family structure (Child-LIV). The code included if the child lived in a two parent household or in an extended or blended family

arrangement. Our goal was to see how much of an influence living arrangements in a nuclear family or extended family had on our dependant variable.

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable consisted of the suicide ideation score on the MAYSI-2. This variable was coded the MAYSI-2 suicide ideation score (SI: 0 = No, 1 = Yes). The MAYSI -2 classifies suicide ideation on a scale from 0 to 5 (0 = no suicide ideation to 5 = severe ideation). Juveniles that scored 0 were classified as no suicidal ideation and all other scores were considered suicide ideation. This was to include all degrees of severity within suicide ideation. We considered all reports of suicidal thoughts to be relevant, not just varying degrees. The SI scale of the MAYSI- 2 has five questions. Three of the questions specifically addressed a juvenile's thoughts about harm and two of the questions involve depressive symptoms that may present increased risk for suicide. One of the items, question 5, is shared with the depressed- anxious scale. The following were the questions asked within the SI scale section:

1. Have you wished you were dead?
2. Have you felt like life was not worth living?
3. Have you felt like hurting yourself?
4. Have you felt like killing yourself?
5. Have you given up hope for your life?

**Data analyses.** Due to the dependent variable (suicide ideation) being measured as a dichotomy, logistic regression was chosen as the appropriate statistical method of estimation for the multivariate analysis (Fox, 2008). The multivariate regression equation was as follows:

$$Si \text{ (Suicide Ideation)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ (Race)} + \beta_2 \text{ (SUSPECE)} + \beta_3 \text{ (ChildLIV)} + \beta_4 \text{ (Age)} + e$$

### Results

This analysis utilized a data set that consisted of all female juveniles who have been referred to the juvenile justice system in Harris County, Texas. To accurately predict the affect that race has on sexual abused suicidal females, logistic regression was utilized. As previously noted, for the purposes of this research the race variable was dichotomized into White/Caucasian and non-White minorities, respectively. This was to allow for a clearer analysis of minorities versus the non-minority. In examining the descriptive analysis of the sample, the results indicate that Whites (n = 1,790) made up 26.1% of the entire sample, while minorities or non-Whites (n = 5,060) made up 73.9% of the sample (see Table 1). It is clear that non-Whites made up more of the population of juvenile females in the sample. This is not unusual because the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission reported that there were more minority females in the Texas juvenile justice system than their non-White counterparts (Espinoza et al., 2003).

Table 1.  
*Frequency Distribution of Juvenile Females in Sample. (N = 6850)*

Variables	%	Frequency
Race		
White	26.1	26.1
Non-White (Minority)	73.9	73.9
ChildLiv (Child Lives with)		
Both Parents (Mother/Father)	10.8	740
Other	89.2	6110
SuspectE (Sexual abuse)		
No Reported Sexual Abuse	90.7	6214
Reported Sexual Abuse	9.3	636
SISSCORE (MAYSI Suicide Ideation Score)		
No Suicide Ideation	82.3	5636
Suicide Ideation	17.7	1214

## Race

Minority or non-White offenders represented a larger portion of offenders in the juvenile justice system in Texas; however, they reported a lower rate of suicidal ideation than their White counterparts. The difference between each White and minority being suicidal and sexually abused was 4.2 age points. Therefore, in this representative sample of juvenile females, minorities outnumbered the White juveniles 73.9 to 26.1 percent respectively (see Table 1). Nevertheless, more minorities than Whites had indicated on the MAYSI-2 screen-ing instrument that they had exhibited some degree of suicidal tendencies. Minorities were only 75% as likely to report suicidal ideation to their White counterparts (Odds Ratio = .757). Table 4 breaks down the raw numbers of juveniles in the sample by race that reported sexual abuse and suicidal thoughts to those that were not sexually abused or reported any suicidal thoughts.

The results also indicated that 1,404 Whites reported no history of suicidal ideation and 386 White juvenile females reported having suicidal ideation. The data indicated that 22% of the White population of juveniles in the sample was suicidal compared to the 16.3% of minority population of juvenile females. Again, for the purposes of the study's explanation of race of juvenile females, the variables were converted to a dichotomous format. This research utilized 0 as White and 1 as non-White minority. After an examination of the regression coefficients, in regards to race of the juvenile female, this research found that for minorities, suicidal ideation decreased (Odds Ratio: -.279, sig.). In other

words, minority females were only 75 percent as likely in comparison to whites to report suicide ideation. Thus, this research may conclude that race may have a minor effect (Odds Ratio = .757) on juvenile suicide ideation, but not a very significant one.

Table 1 also indicates that children reported sexual abuse at a much lower rate than being suicidal. Table 1 also indicates that non-White minorities made up almost three-fourths of the entire sample. In Harris County, Texas, Whites did not make up the majority racial composition. The findings indicated that female juveniles that lived in two parent households consisted of only one-tenth of the entire population. Suicidal delinquent females were also more likely to live with their mother and father than other blended family situations. However, accounting for sexual abuse, over 90 percent of the population reported having no history of sexual abuse. Juvenile female delinquents who were involved in the juvenile justice system in Harris County exhibited a rating of suicidal ideation 18% of the time (See Table 1). Of the 636 reported incidents of sexual abuse of juveniles that were referred into the juvenile justice system, almost 20% of those have reported some form of suicide ideation. The percent of each White and minority being suicidal and being sexually abused was a 4.2% difference. In evaluating the sexual abuse variable, children were more likely to become suicidal when they had reported to youth authorities that they had been sexually abused. According to the data included in Table 2, 15.5% of females that had reported being suicidal lived in an extended or blended family arrangement rather than with a two parent household consisting of their mother and father only.

Table 2.  
*Relationship between Predictor Variables and Suicidal Ideation*

Variables	% No Suicide	% Suicide Ideation	Chi-Square
Race			24.525***
White	78.4	21.6	
Non-White (Minority)	83.6	16.4	
ChildLiv (Child Lives with)			200.317***
Both Parents (Mother/Father)	84.5	15.5	
Other	63.5	36.5	
SuspectE (Sexual abuse)			7.01**
No Reported Sexual Abuse	82.7	17.3	
Reported Sexual Abuse	78.5	21.5	

\*p < .05 \*\*p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

### Family Structure

A two-parent, mother and father, living arrangement accounted for more than twice the percentage of suicide ideation in comparison to an extended or blended family. This proposes that there may be a strong negative influence that a two-parent living relationship may have on suicidal females in the juvenile justice system. In Table 3, the variables that were examined in this study were significant and showed little sign of multi-

collinearity. Nonetheless, the largest correlation, negatively speaking, existed between the suicidal score and who the child lives with variables (-.171). As indicated in Table 3, the age column indicates a weak negative correlation with the other predictor variables. An explanation could be that the age range of the juveniles was modified to include juveniles that only ranged in age from 10 through 17 years. Due to a low correlation of these variables, confidence was high that these variables would not produce collinearity when running a regression model.

Table 3.  
*Variable Correlation Analysis*

Variables	RACE	CHILDLIV	SUSPECTE	AGE	SISCORE
RACE		.057***	.005	-.099***	-.060***
CHILDLIV			.022	-.034**	-.171***
SUSPECTE				-.032**	.032**
AGE					-.050
SISCORE					

\*p < .05 \*\*p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

Table 4.  
*Logistic Regression Estimates for the Determinants of Suicide Ideation (N = 6850)*

Variables	B	SE	Wald	Exp (B)
Race	-.279	.071	15.613	.757*
Child Lives With	-1.128	.085	177.615	.324*
Suspect Sexual Abuse	.321	.104	9.595	1.379*
Age	.062	.026	5.762	1.064*
Constant	-1.352	.413	10.708	.259*

\*p < .05 \*\*p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> = .048

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF): 1.007

Outcome variable: Suicidal Ideation (SI)

### **Sexual abuse**

In examining the child sexual abuse variables, the research indicated that children that were sexually abused were significantly more likely to report suicidal ideations (Odds Ratio: 1.37). In other words, if a child was sexually abused they were more likely to become suicidal. For every yearly increase in age a juvenile female was 6 percent more likely to report suicidal ideations (Odds Ratio: 1.064). The strongest regression relationship was the child's living arrangement variable. In our research, a child that lived with both of her parents was 32% as likely to report suicidal ideations (-1.126, sig.). Minorities were only 75% as likely to report suicidal ideation as their White counterparts. Our data indicated that sexually abused juveniles and non-sexually abused juveniles reported a close rate of suicidal ideation. These variables had a difference of only 4.2%.

In understanding the effect that race has on suicidal delinquent girls, this research indicated that race had a minor effect on a child's suicidal ideation. We also may conclude that sexual abuse and age could increase a female's likelihood of becoming suicidal. Prevention programs that focus on family relationships to address sexual abused children are needed to combat this epidemic. Race does not need to be a strong consideration when developing these types of programs.

### **Discussion**

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among juveniles and young people between the ages of 14 and 25 years (CDC, 2002). More attention needs to be paid to the biological and social changes that a juvenile goes through during the puberty years. Juveniles must have a place to be able to express their concerns and a healthy adult who can offer sound advice and guidance to this adolescent.

### **Increased caregiver involvement**

For the juvenile to have a greater chance at successfully avoiding further involvement with the justice system, or subsequent suicide ideation and/or attempts, the treatment for sexual abuse issues cannot stop when the juvenile's involvement with the justice system stops. Parents and primary caregivers of these juveniles must be educated to recognize signs and symptoms of sexual abuse, related issues and suicidal behavior. Educating parents and caregivers in these areas will decrease their feelings of helplessness and hopelessness should the juveniles begin displaying harmful or depressive behaviors. This will empower the caregivers to become involved with the juveniles when the behaviors reappear. When a juvenile becomes involved with the justice system, the juvenile's entire family also becomes involved by proxy. In that, parents must appear in court

with the juveniles, are often forced to pay fines and court or supervision costs, and can be held responsible by the courts if the juvenile's delinquent behavior does not cease. Training parents and caregivers to be involved with the juvenile justice system, including not only practices and procedures but also continuous involvement in the juveniles' recovery, may encourage the juveniles to succeed. This could also make navigating the entire juvenile justice process smoother and less traumatic for the juvenile and the family.

One possible means of educating parents on their juveniles' probation would be to hold monthly or quarterly workshops, perhaps at a local probation office. These workshops could become a meeting place for parents and probation officers or other professionals to learn about topics that would teach them how to be the parent of a youth in the probation system. Such topics could include: parenting skills; non-physical, proactive discipline of youths in the foster care system; probation requirements, including school attendance, fees and completion of community service; and signs of depression, stress, sexual abuse and suicidal ideation. While youths who are in the juvenile justice system are exposed to any number of helping professionals, the parents and/or caregivers of these at-risk youths are still the frontline experts who deal with their children on a regular and ongoing basis. Equipping these caregivers and parents with better tools with which to address their juveniles' issues will in turn give these youths a more effective support system. Eventually, this may help at-risk juveniles become more successful at making smart choices- and completing probation requirements.

Another method to decrease the likelihood of prior sexual abuse would be educating young children of the need to tell their parents, or a teacher or trusted friend after an adult has abused them. This would entail educating the student in the schools on abuse and what is not acceptable touching. This education may give a child an avenue of a safe place to go when they are being abused.

### **Hispanic population**

Given that research demonstrates that there is additional concern about the suicidal ideation, and attempts, of the adolescent Hispanic female population, this group should be treated as a special population within the juvenile justice system. Hispanic female juveniles have been shown to have 1.5 times the suicidal ideation of their Black and Anglo counterparts. This higher percentage is more concerning given that Hispanic female adolescents are also the fastest-growing adolescent group in the United States today. It is critical that parents of Hispanic juvenile females become educated about and involved in their daughters' experience with the juvenile justice system. This population struggles with reconciliation of the cultural duality it experiences every day-the modernization and industrialism that is valued in Amer-



ica-and the centuries-old traditionalism valued in Latino nations. Hispanic parents may stress the importance of following societal rules and norms without actually understanding the rules and norms. Parents of Hispanic adolescent girls, who are involved in the juvenile justice system, must be educated on the integration of their family values into the values of American society. This integration would help to reduce the strain that their daughters experience on a daily basis; as such a strain could lead to suicidal ideation and delinquent behavior. Hence, this inclusion would hopefully lead to decreased suicidal ideation, self-destructive tendencies, depression and delinquent behavior in this population.

### Research Limitations

This research study examines the influence of race among juvenile females between the ages of 10 and 17 years in the Texas juvenile justice system. All juveniles under the age of 10 years were considered in this research. This was so as juveniles under the age of 10 years were more likely not to be charged in juvenile court with a criminal charge. Juveniles who were over the age of 17 years were generally sent to adult court for processing in lieu of juvenile court. This research also included only females and not males. These females were from the largest county in the state of Texas, Harris. The sample of females in Harris County served as a good representative sample for all the counties in Texas, as Harris County encompassed rural and city populations. Furthermore, this county was chosen as it was also the third most populous county in the United States and it consisted of 29 percent of the total population under the age of 18 years old, according to the United States Census (United States Census, 2008).

The problem with utilizing a population of females in Harris County, Texas was that it may not be representative of other juveniles in other states, such as upstate New York. This research solely focused on a population of juvenile females who were in the juvenile justice system in Texas. Harris County was singled out in this research for two reasons. First, this was primarily due to the inaccuracy of the data that other counties in Texas reported. Harris County had the most complete data out of any county in Texas. Second, the county's, as the most populous county in Texas, offender demographics were consistent with the rest of the state. Hence, further research may be needed to include studies that would consider the above geographic limitations.

Moreover, this research utilized only four control variables within this analysis. In order to increase the statistical significance of the regression outcomes more control variables were needed. However, this research was commissioned to examine these five variables only. These variables were selected because some of the data that were collected from the TJPC were missing. In collecting the data from all 254 counties, not all the variables were accurately reported.

This research was also limited to the MAYSI-2 screening instrument. This research was built on the foundation of this instrument. The self-reporting nature of the data also presented some limitations. Self-report data faced the following issues such as the use of inconsistent instruments, inaccurate reporting, response set, deficient research designs, and poor choice of settings or subjects. Other limitations of self-reported data included telescoping, untruthfulness, and social desirability. The juveniles who took this exam upon intake may have been just telling the facility staff what they wanted to hear. Another limitation in utilizing the MAYSI-2 exam was the nature of the way it was given to juveniles who are incarcerated. This exam was given to juveniles within a few days upon intake into a juvenile justice institutional setting. Administering this test so early in the incarceration period may not have given an accurate reading of juveniles' thoughts about suicide. It is clear from the research that a juvenile was most likely to be suicidal early in the stage of her incarceration due to the uncertainty and fear of being incarcerated (Espinosa et al., 2003).

### Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the race factor, and to see if it explained why juveniles in the juvenile justice system may become suicidal. This research further examined the effects family structure and age had on the suicidal ideation variable. This study utilized the MAYSI-2, a brief screening tool utilized by criminal justice professionals, to identify problems with juveniles who have been placed into the juvenile justice system. The results revealed that there was a moderate positive relationship between sexual abuse of juveniles and their suicidal thoughts. Race only had a minor effect on a suicidal juvenile in the juvenile justice system. The findings also indicated that females who were sexually abused may be more likely to report and exhibit suicidal thoughts than non-sexually abused females. The research would indicate that the 9.3 percent of known sexually abused juveniles is probably a lot higher due to failure to report prior abuse history to criminal justice personnel. It was further indicated that an overwhelming majority of these delinquent girls came from blended and extended families. In further analysis also indicated that 17.7 percent of the population of juveniles reported having some form of suicidal tendency prior to entrance into the juvenile justice system. At first glance, 17.7 percent does not seem to be a lot, however when examining this with the overall population, the study found that 1,214 juvenile females in the juvenile justice system report having suicidal tendencies. This is a lot of suicidal at-risk females in only one county in Texas. Suicide is becoming a serious problem, especially with females who have histories of physical, mental and emotional abuse in their pasts.



## References

- Acoca, L. (1998). Outside/inside: The violation of American girls at home, on the streets, and in the juvenile justice system. *Crime & Delinquency*, 44, 561-589.
- Barber, B. K. (1994). Cultural, family, and personal contexts of parent-adolescent conflict. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 56, 375-386.
- Brent, D. A., Baugher, M., & Bridge, J. (1999). Age- and sex-related risk factors for adolescent suicide. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 38(12), 1497-1505.
- Brent, D.A., Perper, J.A., Moritz, G. (1994). Familial risk factors for adolescent suicide: A case-control study, *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 10, 52-58.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2002). *Health, United States, table 60*. Retrieved from [www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/health\\_data/2002/02hus060.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/health_data/2002/02hus060.pdf)
- Chatterji, P., Kaestner, P., & Markowitz, S. (2003). Alcohol abuse and suicide attempts among youth-correlation or causation? Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc. (NBER Working Papers No. 9638).
- D'Augelli, A., Hershberger, S., & Pilkington, N. (1996). *Predictors of suicide attempts among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- D'Augelli, A., & Hershberger, S. (1995). *Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and their families: Disclosure of sexual orientation and its consequences*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Delisi, M. (2003). Criminal careers behind bars. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 21, 653-669.
- Dinwiddie, S., Heath A., Dunne, M., Bucholz, K., Slutske, W., Bierut, L., et al. (2000). Early sexual abuse and lifetime psychopathology: A co-twin control study. *Psychological Medicine*, 30, 41-52.
- Espinosa, E., Schwank, J., & Tolbert, V. (2003). *Mental health and juvenile justice in Texas*. Austin, TX: Texas Juvenile Probation Commission.
- Fletcher, M. (2009, June 8). CDC: Suicide problem escalates for Latinas. *Houston Chronicle*, p. B4.
- Fox, J. (2008). *Applied regression analysis and generalized linear models*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Galambos, N. L., & Almeida, D. M. (1992). Does parent-adolescent conflict increase in early adolescence? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, 112-117.
- Glowinski, A.L., Bucholz, K.K., & Nelson, E. (2000). Suicide attempts in an adolescent female twin sample. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 40, 1300-1307.
- Goldsmith, S. K., Pellmar, T. C., Kleinman, A. M., & Bunney, W. E. (2002). *Reducing suicide: A national imperative*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Goodkind M., Ng, I., & Sarri, R., (2006). Impact of sexual abuse in the lives of young women involved or at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system. *Violence Against Women*, 12(5), 456-477.
- Gould, M. S., Greenberg, T., Velting, D. M., & Shaffer, D. (2003). Youth suicide risk and preventive interventions: A review of the past 10 years. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 4, 386-405.
- Grholt, B., Ekeberg, L., & Wichstrom, L. (2000). Young suicide attempters: A comparison between a clinical and an epidemiological sample. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 39, 868-875.
- Grisso, T., & Barnum, R. (2000). *Massachusetts youth screening instrument version 2 (MAYSI- 2)*. Worcester, MA: University of Massachusetts Medical School.
- Holsinger, K., Belknap, J., & Sutherland, J. (1999). *Assessing the gender specific program and service needs for adolescent females in the juvenile justice system*. Columbus, OH: Office of Criminal Justice Services.
- Joiner, T. (2005). *Why people die by suicide*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kaufman, J. G., & Widom, C. S. (1999). Childhood victimization, running away, and delinquency. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 36, 347-370.
- Kendall-Tackett, K. (2002). The health effects of childhood abuse: Four pathways by which abuse can influence health. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26, 715-729.
- Kendler, K., Bulik, C., Silberg, J., Hettema, J., Meyers, J., & Prescott, C. (2000). Childhood sexual abuse and adult psychiatric and substance use disorders in women. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 57, 953-959.
- Levy, S., Jurkovic, G., & Spirito, A. (1995). A multi-systems analysis of adolescent suicide attempters. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 23, 221-234.
- Macmillan, H., Fleming, J., Trocme, N., Boyle, M., Wong, M., Racine, Y., et al. (1997). Prevalence of child physical and sexual abuse in the community. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278, 131-135.
- Odem, M. E., & Schlossman, S. (1991). Guardians of virtue: The juvenile court and female delinquency in early 20th century Los Angeles. *Crime & Delinquency*, 37, 186-203.
- Roy, A. (2004). Relationship of childhood trauma to age of first suicide attempt and number of attempts in substance dependent patients. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 109, 121-2
- Santa Mina, E., & Gallop, R. (1998). Childhood sexual and physical abuse and adult self-harm and suicidal behavior: A literature review. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 43, 793-800.
- Scahill, M. (2000). *Female Delinquency Cases, 1997*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice.
- Sickmund, M. (2004). *Juveniles in corrections*. Washington, DC: Office of Justice Progress.
- Tubman, J. G., & Lerner, R. M. (1994). Affective experiences of parents and their children from adolescence to young adulthood: Stability of affective experiences. *Journal of Adolescence*, 17, 81-98.
- U. S. Census Bureau. (2008). *American FactFinder fact sheet: Harris County, TX*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48201.html>

Watt, T., & Sharp, S. (2002). Race differences in strains asso-ciated with suicidal behavior among adolescents. *Youth and Society*, 34, 232-256.