



### 129 **What Happens When a Dream Is Deferred and the Village Erodes: Application of a Diathesis-Stress Model to Risk and Protective Factors for Suicidality in Racial/Ethnic Minority Youth**

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The goal of this presentation is to facilitate an understanding of how a stress diathesis model may be applied to risk and protective factors regarding suicidality for minority youth. After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand how this model applies to conceptualizing the literature's findings regarding societal, community and individual contributions to suicidality in minority youth age 10 to 24.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by facilitating an understanding of the risk and protective factors of suicidality in minority youth. Specifically, this paper will explore potential individual, relational, community, and society-based factors relevant to suicidal behavior in this population. Recommendations for applying the diathesis-stress model to suicide prevention and intervention will also be provided.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institute of Mental Health, suicide is a major public health concern for youth; specifically, it is the third leading cause of death for individuals ages 15 to 24. Research indicates clearly that all demographic groups are susceptible to this public health problem. Over the last several decades, suicidality has become increasingly problematic for racial/ethnic minority youth, such that more are attempting and completing suicide; however, suicide within this vulnerable group is poorly understood. As a consequence of this, many warning signs and potential points of intervention are missed, resulting in preventable suffering and death for a notable segment of the population.

Currently, in majority and minority group studies, suicidality is approached as an issue arising from the individual alone or in relationship to others. Occasionally, certain cultural factors such as vulnerability to academic problems, disproportionate incarceration rates, and health disparities are discussed; however, the effects of community and broader societal changes on mental health functioning for minority youth, particularly suicidality, are rarely considered. The diathesis-stress model may more comprehensively conceptualize the complex interactions between these various factors and suicide-related risk and protective factors for minority youth. According to this model, subsequent to exposure to negative life events, vulnerable persons are more likely to develop psychopathology. This may be due to actual or perceived disparity between contextual demands and resources. For example, an educational environment's demand for appropriate academic performance requires the individual have particular resources, such as sufficient cognitive ability and access to technologies and materials. Perceived disparity between demands and resources, meaning where one's resources seem deficient compared to the environment's demands, generates psychological distress. The greater the perceived disparity, the greater one's distress. Such distress varies widely in intensity and may range from mere irritation to complete hopelessness.

Factors such as age, gender, sexual orientation, and perceived social support are generally related to suicidality within youth populations. Risk and protective factors for suicide; however, may vary among groups of racial/ethnic minority youth. Under the diathesis-stress model, such group-specific factors may indicate changes in individual, relational, community, and societal demands and/or resources that have generated increasing and maintaining high levels of distress for minority youth. Added to increased exposure to suicide, these changes in contextual demands and/or resources, and the distress generated by the perceived discrepancy between the demands placed upon minority youth and their access to necessary resources may result in increased vulnerability to suicide.

This paper will review the public health and social science literature from 1990 to the present for trends in suicidality among minority youth. Empirically supported risk and protective factors among this population will also be reviewed. These trends and factors will be examined for their application to the diathesis-stress model of psychological functioning and distress.

**Minority Mental Health, Stress, Suicide**