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Study: Self-Reported Suicide Attempts Rising In Black Teens As Other Groups Decline

Paper published in Pediatrics also notes self-reported suicide attempt rate is accelerating in Black female teens

NEW YORK (October 14, 2019) — Adding to what is known about the growing crisis of suicide among American teens, a team led by researchers at the [McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research](#) at New York University have uncovered several troubling trends during the period of 1991-2017, among Black high school students, in particular. Their findings were published in the November 2019 issue of *Pediatrics*, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

- Self-reported suicide attempts rose in Black teenagers, even as they fell or saw no significant trend in white, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native teenagers.
- Self-reported suicide attempts increased at an accelerating rate in Black female teenagers, even as overall female suicide attempts declined.
- There was a significant increase in injuries from self-reported suicide attempts in Black male teenagers.
- A surprising dynamic in the relationship between self-reported suicide thoughts (ideation), plans and attempts was revealed: ideation and plans *decreased* while actual attempts *increased*.

“It is urgent that we get to the bottom of why the rate of suicide attempts among Black female adolescents is accelerating,” says lead researcher [Michael A. Lindsey, PhD, MSW, MPH](#), who is executive director of the McSilver Institute and the Constance and Martin Silver Professor of Poverty Studies at NYU Silver School of Social Work. “We also need to understand why Black males are increasingly injured in suicide attempts. As well, further research must be done into why traditional precursors to suicide attempts, such as thinking about it or making plans, are decreasing while actual attempts are going up. It’s important that we identify the signs before young people attempt to end their lives.” According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide was the [third-leading cause of death in 2017](#) among Black youth ages 15-19.

“The rising rates of suicide among African American children and teenagers are both tragic and alarming,” says **U.S. Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman** of New Jersey’s 12th Congressional District. “It can be seen not only in the research of groups like the McSilver Institute, but in conversations with families across the country. This crisis is especially devastating because the victims of suicides are not only the promising young people we lose but also the families, friends and communities left behind. That’s why I started the Congressional Black Caucus Emergency Taskforce on Black Youth Suicide and Mental Health and I am infinitely grateful for the leadership of Dr. Lindsey as chair of our working group.”

"Youth suicide is very real and must be addressed," says **New York State Senator David Carlucci**, Chair of the NYS Senate's Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Committee. "The numbers are staggering

among Black youth, and just one life lost is one too many. We need a task force to specifically investigate the causes of Black youth suicide. I thank the McSilver Institute for their partnership and unwavering commitment to bring attention to this once silent crisis."

"The number of Black youth who are tragically taking their own lives is rising at an alarming rate, and that is why I sponsored [legislation](#) to establish a Black Youth Suicide taskforce here in New York State," says **New York State Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre** of the 11th Assembly District. "It's vital for us to take action now to improve mental health and suicide prevention services to save these precious lives, and I applaud Dr. Lindsey and his research team at the McSilver Institute for shedding light on this very real issue."

"The McSilver Institute's findings of increased suicide attempts and self-injury among Black young adults are important and tremendously concerning, particularly for those of us who work in New York's child welfare community where Black families are chronically, disproportionately overrepresented," says **Judge Ronald E. Richter**, CEO and Executive Director of JCCA and former Commissioner, NYC Administration for Children's Services. "We must address Dr. Lindsey's alarming data with urgency. Further research is critically necessary to determine best practices for our work with the young people who will shape our city's future."

"These findings should also push us to expand how we frame suicide prevention from mostly looking at individual-focused efforts and explanations, to societal based changes," says **Gary Belkin**, former NYC Deputy Health Commissioner and Founder of the Billion Minds Institute. "Rising suicidality is the tip of an iceberg that should compel us to ask not only what are these children doing to themselves, but ask about the structural and racist violence of our society — what is society doing to them?"

The McSilver Institute researchers conducted logistic regression analyses on data from the nationally representative school-based Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from the years 1991 to 2017. In addition to Dr. Lindsey, the research team included **Arielle H. Sheftall, PhD** of the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research, Center for Innovation in Pediatric Practice, The Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Department of Pediatrics, College of Medicine, Ohio State University; **Yunyu Xiao, M.Phil** of the McSilver Institute and Silver School at NYU; and **Sean Joe, PhD**, MSW at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University in Saint Louis.

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The McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research at New York University is committed to creating new knowledge about the root causes of poverty, developing evidence-based interventions to address its consequences, and rapidly translating research findings into action through policy and best practices. Each year it holds the McSilver Awards, recognizing extraordinary leaders transforming systems to tackle structural poverty and oppression. Learn more at mcsilver.nyu.edu and [sign up](#) for updates.

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