Cultural beliefs about suicide in a close-knit community following the suicide deaths of popular youth may facilitate the spread of suicide risk and contribute to clusters of suicide deaths.

Researchers conducted an in-depth case study of the cultural beliefs about suicide in Poplar Grove, a small, suburban, wealthy, mostly White community with a high youth suicide rate. In focus groups with people who grew up in the community and interviews with members bereaved by suicide, the researchers asked broad questions about suicide and mental illness. They also asked how residents have coped with and explained suicide to themselves and others.

They found that Poplar Grove residents had formed a “youth under pressure” narrative to explain why suicide occurred in their community. Because academic and social pressure was a common experience among community youth, this belief contributed to some youths’ vulnerability to suicide, allowing them to think suicide was a reasonable solution to their own experiences of pressure.

Communities may collectively construct a widely shared cultural belief system about suicide that may contribute to suicide clusters. More information is needed to understand how communities can reduce the spread of suicide risk by creating cultural stories that contain messages about resilience and positive coping.
