Suicide and Prevention Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth

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Welcome and Rationale

- National Strategy for Suicide Prevention listed LGBT youth as a special population at risk
- Research shows more suicidal behavior in LGBT youth
- Research shows risk and protective factors
- Limited suicide prevention programs for LGBT youth
- Limited awareness of suicide prevention in some LGBT youth organizations and settings
- Opportunity to develop/adapt LGBT-culturally effective interventions for programs and practice
Workshop objectives

By lunchtime, you will be able to

1. Use terminology and research on risk for suicidal behavior among LGBT youth
2. Discuss LGBT youth risk and protective factors
3. Assess your school or agency for LGBT-cultural competence and plan next steps
4. Design suicide prevention program adaptations to address the needs of LGBT youth

Icebreaker
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

SEE HANDOUT

Important distinction -
gender identity and sexual orientation

SUICIDE TERMS

*Suicide deaths* - death from injury, poisoning, or suffocation where there is evidence that a self-inflicted act was intentional and led to the person’s death

*Attempted suicide* - a potentially self-injurious behavior with a nonfatal outcome, for which there is evidence that the person intended to kill himself or herself. A suicide attempt may or may not result in injuries.

*Suicide ideation* - thoughts and expressed thoughts of engaging in suicide-related behavior

*Suicidal behavior* – includes all three
Research Challenges

- Most hospital and vital records – no info on sexual orientation or gender identity
- Question of prevalence
- People willing to disclose sexual orientation may be more willing to disclose suicidal behavior
- Lack of consistent terminology
- Non-identification with terms
- Phases in identification process
- Selective sampling
- Lack of racial/ethnic minority representation
- Lack of comparison groups

SUICIDE IDEATION

- 31.2% of gay and bisexual male high school students reported suicidal ideation, as did 36.4% of lesbian and female bisexual students. The proportions for heterosexual students were 20.1% and 34.3% respectively. Remafedi et al, 1998

- 47.3% of GB adolescent boys and 72.9% of LB adolescent girls had suicidal ideation (vs. 34.7% non-GB adolescent boys and 53% non-LB adolescent girls). Eisenberg and Resnick, 2006

- Nearly half of LGB youths (42%) said they sometimes or often thought of killing themselves. Nearly half (48%) said suicidal thoughts were clearly or at least somewhat related to their sexual orientation. D’Augelli et al, 2001
SUICIDE IDEATION

LGB youth 1½ to 3 times more likely to report suicide ideation
- Suicide ideation troubling in itself
- Represents disruption and needs response
- Opportunity to intervene before suicidal behavior escalates

SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

Suicide attempts are highest among young adults (rather than adults or elderly), whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity
**SUICIDE ATTEMPTS FOR GLB YOUTH**

- GLB youth were 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth. D’Augelli and Hershberger, 1995
- Bisexual and homosexual male high school students were seven times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual counterparts. Remafedi et al, 1998
  - 30 percent of LGB youth versus 13 percent of heterosexual youth (median age of about 18) had attempted suicide at some point. Safren and Heimberg, 1999
- The risk of attempting suicide was twice as high among LGB youth as among heterosexual youth. Russell and Joyner, 2001
- LGB students in grades 9 and 12 were significantly more likely to have attempted suicide than their heterosexual peers. 52.4 percent of LB females and 29.0 percent of GB males had attempted suicide. The percentages of non-GLB females and males who had attempted suicide were 24.8 and 12.6 percent respectively. Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006

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**SUICIDE ATTEMPTS FOR LGB YOUTH**

LGB youth 1 ½ to 7 times more likely to report having attempted suicide

- Why there is a range
- Importance – disruptive and needs response
- Prior suicide attempts – one of the strongest predictors of suicide
- Seriousness of LGB youth suicide attempts – intent to die and lethality
1. LGB youth have higher rates of suicide ideation
2. LGB youth have higher rates of suicidal attempts
3. The higher number of suicide attempts, as well as the seriousness of attempts among LGB youth, make it probable that this group of youth has a higher rate of suicide deaths

Suicidal behavior and transgender youth

- Limited but increasing research
- How comparable is experience of being a transgender youth to being a homosexual or bisexual youth? Impact?
USING THE RESEARCH - EXERCISE

- You want to bring a gay straight alliance to your school, but the principal maintains that there is only one gay student at the school and no problem.
- You want to add information about LGBT suicide risk to your training, but your funder says they don’t need special attention.
- A journalist calls you because he has just read that research has not demonstrated that LGBT youth die by suicide at a higher rate. He wants to know why LGBT are a focus of your suicide prevention program.

Risk and protective factors

- Synergistic
- Dynamic
- Complex
- Protective factors more influential? More amenable to change?

Consider both
- Number of factors
- Severity or strength of factors
Ecological Model

Youth Risk and Protective Factors

**RISK**
- Mental illness
- Substance abuse
- Loss
- Previous attempt(s)
- Mentally ill parents
- Stress (rejection, feared punishment)
- Isolation
- Hopelessness
- Method availability

_Berman et al. Adolescent Suicide_

**PROTECTIVE**
- Adaptable temperament
- Internal locus of control
- High self esteem
- Good problem-solving skills
- Social support
- One emotionally close family member
- Positive school experience
- Spiritual faith

_Beautrais AJ Psychiatry 2003_
LGB Risk and Protective Factors

RISK
- Gender nonconformity
- Internal conflict re sexual orientation
- Loss
- Time of coming out
- Early coming out
- Not coming out to anyone
- Family rejection
- Low family connectedness
- Lack of adult caring
- Unsafe school
- Abuse within family
- Victimization
- Previous attempt(s)

PROTECTIVE
- Positive role models
- High self esteem
- Parental support of sexuality and gender
- Family connectedness
- Safe schools
- Caring adult
- Supportive peers, sense of community

The Seesaw Model

Social Norms and Conditions
- Heterosexism
- Social Isolation
- Ignorance

Individual Differences
- Bullied
- Disclosure problems
- Depression
- Internalized Homophobia
- Rejection/Loneliness

Coping Mechanisms
- Substance Abuse
- Social Withdrawal

Social Norms and Conditions
- Positive Social Acceptance
- Inclusive Providers & Services
- Support Groups

Individual Differences
- Family, Peer and School Support
- Availability of Role Models
- High Self-Esteem

Coping Mechanisms
- Role Model Identification
- Support Seeking

Reconciling one’s Bisexual/Gay/Trans Sexual Orientation/Gender identity

Suicide

Resilience

Adapted from Fenaughty & Harré, 2003
Risk and protective factors – Youth story

SEE HANDOUT

Family connectedness, support from other adults, and school safety are all characteristics that are amenable to change, and would be appropriate targets for interventions aimed at protecting young people from self-harm. Improving the ability of parents and other influential adults to connect with and support adolescents grappling with issues of sexual identity may be a critical component of mental health promotion and protection for these young people.

Eisenberg and Resnick, 2006
Access to programs that affirm all sexual orientations can decrease isolation and self-destructive behaviors, including suicide risk.

Morrison and L'Hereux, 2001

LGBT-cultural competence refers NOT to ethnic or linguistic minorities but sexual and gender minorities

- Make accurate information easily available
- Train staff, volunteers, and board
- Staff and board reflect diversity
- Include diverse clients in program decisions
- Agency environment and policies are inclusive
- Supervision reinforces cultural competence
- Ongoing self-assessments
See handout

- Identify one or two steps you could take.
- Identify one or two steps your agency could take.

Digestible Steps

- Suggest that sexual minority issues be added to diversity or cultural competence training. Check your school or agency anti-discrimination policies and see if they include both sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Read *Middlesex*, a novel by Jeffrey Eugenides.
- Review your school or agency confidentiality safeguards and how staff are trained to implement them.
- Attend a Gay Straight Alliance meeting at school.
- Interrupt a student who says “that’s so gay” and explain to them that using “gay” that way harms everyone.
- Review staff, school, or local library for holdings related to LGBT youth issues.
- Distribute the SPRC white paper on LGBT youth suicide risk and prevention and lead a discussion about it at a staff meeting.
What is “LGBT youth suicide prevention”???

What is youth suicide prevention?

• Case-finding w/ referral – gatekeeper training, screening, crisis lines
• Reduction of risk factors
• Programs not even considering suicide prevention can be suicide prevention, for example, programs to build self-esteem or manage anger

Who are LGB and/or T youth?

• Any youth could be, or could have been, or could become

Gatekeeper training, screening, crisis lines

• Staff need to know about LGBT youth risk and issues
• Need for safe and inclusive referrals
• Outreach – programs need to reach hard-to-reach youth
EXAMPLE - GATEKEEPER TRAINING

- Accurate information re LGBT risk
- Role plays in training that feature LGBT youth
- LGBT youth trained as gatekeepers
- Gatekeepers refer youth at risk to treatment, assessment, and support services that are inclusive
- Evaluate

Suicide Prevention: Reduction of Risk Factors

- Historical approach that still makes sense, but need to emphasize protective factors
- What factors are different for LGBT youth?
  - More in common but may have more risk factors and more severe risk factors
  - Missing protective factors
  - Factors related to coming out
### LGBT Youth Programs

- Many support suicide prevention by increasing protective factors
- More need awareness of suicide prevention
- Program staff and board training in LGBT youth suicide risk and risk and protective factors
- Leadership role in advocating for LGBT youth in suicide prevention programs
- Provide accurate information about LGBT youth suicide risk on web and in materials

### Suicide Prevention Programs and Practice

- Awareness of LGBT risk and protective factors, issues specific to LGBT youth
- Context of adolescent development
- LGBT-cultural competence throughout agency or program
- Include topic of LGBT youth as a risk group in awareness materials, conferences, state plans
- Evaluate – did you reach LGBT youth? Impact on risk and protective factors?
Process evaluation

Can include description of
• process used to design and implement the program
• program operations, including any changes
• Also, minutes, reports, memoranda, newsletters, and forms

Example – 30 students attended session on safe schools
http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/outcomes.htm#anchor29824

Outcome evaluation

• What is impact? Theory of change?
• Target knowledge, attitude, or behavior
• Outcome indicators – milestones, number, percent, increase

Example – after training, increase in knowledge of LGBT youth risk of suicidal behavior
http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/outcomes.htm#anchor29824
LGB youth programs evaluation

- Collection, analysis, and reporting of data – take care
- Respect for group and individual privacy
- Clearly define terms
- Make limitations of the findings explicit

From www.GayData.org

Sexual Orientation Questions

Identity (from testing at the National Center for Health Statistics):
“Do you consider yourself to be a) Heterosexual or straight; b) Gay or lesbian; or c) Bisexual?”

Behavior (from Vermont and Massachusetts BRFS, telephone):
“During the past 12 months, have you had sex with only males, only females, or both males and females?”

Attraction (from the National Survey of Family Growth, audio-CASI):
“People are different in their sexual attraction to other people. Which best describes your feelings? Are you...Only attracted to females, Mostly attracted to females, Equally attracted to females and males, Mostly attracted to males, Only attracted to males, Not sure.”

From www.GayData.org
Discussion

• How can we work to create supportive environments for all youth?
• How can we begin to address the barriers facing LGBTQ youth needing help?
• What can we do to raise awareness about the particular needs of transgender individuals?
• What will you do to help prevent suicide among LGBT youth?

Contact Info

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