Suicide Risk among Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Multiracial Youth

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A national study found that Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (NHPI), American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), and multiracial adolescents have an increased risk of illicit substance use, depressed mood, and suicidality compared to their non-Hispanic White peers.

Small population sizes of NHPI, AI/AN, and multiracial adolescents make it difficult to measure their substance use and mental health needs in national surveys. To address this issue, researchers pooled 1991 to 2015 data from the nationally representative Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. They used these data to develop national prevalence estimates of depression, substance use, and suicidality among NHPI, AI/AN, and multiracial youth, and then compared the estimates to non-Hispanic Whites.

The analysis found that NHPI adolescents had rates of attempted suicide two times higher than non-Hispanic Whites, and that current cigarette use predicted greater odds of attempted suicide. Among AI/AN adolescents, rates of attempted suicide were three times higher than among non-Hispanic Whites, and current alcohol and cigarette use both predicted greater odds of attempted suicide. Rates of attempted suicide among multiracial adolescents were similar to those of AI/AN adolescents.

The authors suggested that higher risk for substance use, depressed mood, and suicide attempts among NHPI, AI/AN, and multiracial adolescents may stem from socioeconomic and health disparities. Culturally relevant screening, prevention approaches, and interventions are needed to address the substance use and mental health issues of NHPI, AI/AN, and multiracial adolescents.