

ABSTRACT

Suicide is a significant public health issue that has been steadily increasing, especially among young adults. Some of the most prominent risk factors for suicide include a lack of support and depressed mood or symptoms. The present study aimed to examine differences in suicidal ideation and depressive symptoms among adult children in conventional and unconventional families (same-sex, cohabitating, and adoptive). The study was a secondary data analysis of the New Family Structures Study and was comprised of a sample size of 2,988 participants between the ages of 18-39. Data was collected through participant self-reports via a survey. The findings indicated that there is a higher prevalence of suicidal ideation among adult children raised in unconventional families. Significant relationships were found in family relationships and suicidal ideation and depressive symptoms. The presence of positive family relationships was correlated with fewer rates of suicidal ideation and depressive symptoms. Parental involvement was not a significant predictor of suicidal ideation. The findings of the study emphasized a need for cultural awareness among behavioral health professionals for individuals raised in unconventional families as well as more ongoing screening for suicidal ideation.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

- Limited research that explores how conventional and unconventional families impact the mental health of their adult children.

Purpose of the Research

- To explore differences in suicide ideation and depressive symptoms between adult children of conventional families (traditional) and those of unconventional families (same sex, adoptive, cohabitating)
- To analyze the effect that parental involvement and family relationships has on suicide ideation among young adults
- To identify the effect of parental involvement and family relationships on depressive symptoms among young adults.

Research Questions

- Is there difference in suicide ideation and depressive symptoms between adult children of conventional family (other) and those of unconventional families (same sex, adoptive, cohabitating)?
- What is the effect of parental involvement and family relationship on suicide ideation among young adults?
- What is the effect of parental involvement and family relationship on depressive symptoms among young adults?

Research Hypotheses

- Adult children of unconventional families are more likely to have suicide ideation and higher levels of depressive symptoms.
- Higher levels of parental involvement and positive family relationship will decrease likelihood of having suicide ideation.
- Higher levels of parental involvement and positive family relationship will decrease levels of depressive symptoms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Research demonstrates a negative correlation between the quality of family relationships and suicidal ideation.
- Negative correlation between positive parent-child relationships and depressive symptoms among female youth (Kaman et al., 2021).
- Negative parental care strategies and family struggles lead to suicidal behavior in youth and young adults (Beautrais et al., 1996)
- Certain parenting styles are found to be correlated with suicide ideation and suicidal behavior in youth (Lai & McBride-Chang, 2001; Boyd et al., 2021).
- Research and Knowledge Gap:** Limited research exploring family type's impact on adult children's mental health.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from the New Family Structures Study (NFSS). The NFSS utilized a cross-sectional design as self-report survey data was collected from participants only once (Regnerus, 2012).

Sample and Sampling Method

- The NFSS utilized address-based sampling (ABS) and random digit dialing (RDD) to randomly select 31,368 non-institutionalized young adult children raised in both conventional and unconventional families.
- Participants were contacted via telephone and mail. Participants were only excluded if they were not between the ages of 18-39.
- A subsample that consisted of young adult children raised in both conventional and unconventional families ($N = 2,988$) including same-sex parents ($n = 236$), adoptive parents ($n = 197$), and cohabitating parents ($n = 657$).
- A comparison group was established, consisting of young adults not raised in unconventional families ($n = 1,898$).

Measures

- Family Type:** individuals who were raised in families with same sex parents = 1, individuals who were raised by adoptive parents = 2, individuals who were raised by co-habiting parents = 3, and conventional family comparison group = 4.
- Suicidal Ideation:** Self-report on experiencing suicidal ideation in the last 12 months (0 = "No" and 1 = "Yes")
- Depressive Symptoms:** Mean scores of 11 self-report items, 4-point Likert Scale; Cronbach's alpha = .899.
- Parental Involvement:** Mean scores of 10 self-report items, 5-point Likert Scale; Cronbach's alpha = .925; averaged the responses from Parent 1 and Parent 2.
- Family Relationships:** Mean scores of 8 self-report items, 5-point Likert Scale; Cronbach's alpha = .895

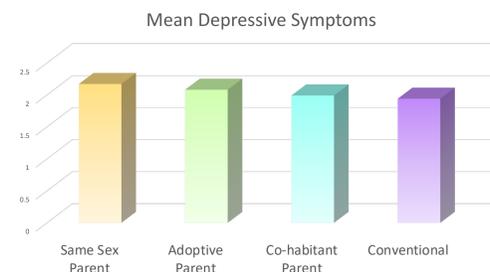
Statistical Analysis

- Data analyses were conducted using the predictive analysis software, IBM Statistics Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Version 28.0).
- Sample demographics and study variables were encapsulated by descriptive analyses.
- Inferential statistics were utilized to test the hypothesized relationships between study variables.



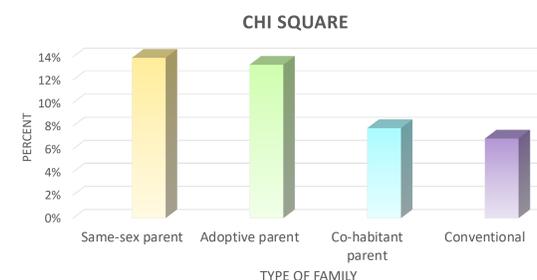
RESULTS: FAMILY TYPE AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

- A one-way ANOVA was executed to compare depressive symptoms among study participants from different family types
- Participants who were raised by same-sex parents had **significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms** than participants raised by conventional and co-habiting parents.
- Participants who were raised by adoptive parents demonstrated **significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms** than participants raised in conventional families.



RESULTS: UNCONVENTIONAL FAMILIES AND SUICIDAL IDEATION

- A chi-square test was calculated to examine whether frequencies of suicide ideation differ between types of unconventional families.
- Children from unconventional families were **significantly more likely to report higher levels of suicide ideation** compared to conventional families: children from same-sex parents (13.9%) and children from adoptive parents (13.3%) demonstrated more suicide ideation within the past 12 months versus children from co-habiting parents (7.8%) and children from conventional families (6.9%).



RESULTS: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIP EFFECT ON SUICIDE IDEATION

- A **binary logistic regression** analysis predicting suicide ideation was performed to identify the effect of parental involvement, family relationship, and control variables, such as age, gender, income, and family type, on suicide ideation among study participants.
- Family relationship** significantly and negatively predicted suicide ideation ($exp(b) = .416, p < .001$).
- Parental involvement did not significantly predict suicide ideation ($p = .234$) and neither did the family type (unconventional or conventional) ($p = .130$).

RESULTS: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

- A **multiple linear regression** was performed to predict a study participant's depressive symptoms based on their parent involvement, family relationship, age, gender, income, and family type. The regression model was **significant** ($F(6, 2780) = 126.97, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .22.
- Participants raised in **unconventional families** were less likely to report depressive symptoms ($b = -.07, p < .01$) and participants with positive **family relationships** displayed significantly lower levels of depressive symptoms ($b = -.26, p < .001$).

Variable	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	3.32	.07	--	46.08	.00
Parent Involvement	-.01	.02	-.01	-.48	.63
Family Relationship	-.26	.01	-.38	-18.42	<.001
Age	-.01	.00	-.05	-2.58	.01
Gender	-.09	.02	-.07	-4.14	<.001
Household Income	-.02	.00	-.17	-9.14	<.001
Unconventional (=1) vs Conventional (=0)	-.07	.02	-.01	-3.21	<.01

CONCLUSION

Interpretation of Findings

- Adult children raised in unconventional families demonstrated a higher prevalence in suicidal ideation compared to those raised in conventional families.
- Adult children who had more positive family relationships experienced fewer depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation compared to individuals who lacked positive family relationships.
- Parental involvement was not a strong predictor of suicidal ideation.

Strengths and Limitations

- Strengths include the following: large sample size and focusing on the impact conventional and unconventional families have on adult children.
- Limitations include the following: secondary data analysis, not including other types of unconventional families (e.g., single parents, etc.), data was collected through self-report surveys, and the study was unable to determine a causal relationship between the variables studied.

Implications for Integrated Behavioral Health

- Behavioral health professionals must have strong foundations in cultural competence to adequately serve individuals from unconventional families and screen for suicide ideation more frequently with this population.

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