

THE SOCIAL ROOTS OF ADOLESCENT SUICIDE

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Abstract

Though many scholars acknowledge that the causes of suicide are complex, suicidology and suicide prevention focus disproportionately (1) on individual risk and protective factors rather than social-contextual factors and (2) on crisis intervention rather than up-stream prevention strategies. This presentation will illustrate why neglecting social-contextual risk factors and up-stream solutions is problematic by presenting empirical evidence from an in-depth qualitative case study of a community with a significant adolescent suicide problem (including youth suicide clusters). While adolescence can be a challenging developmental stage known for its heightened vulnerability to suicide, youth in this community have to contend with additional social-contextual stressors. For example, the community is highly connected with cohesive social networks that facilitate gossip, the monitoring of behaviors, and the sanctioning of deviations from expectations. Additionally, the community is home to a broadly shared set of narrow cultural beliefs about what ideal kids (and parents) should be: namely, academically and athletically excellent. The presentation also outlines how these contextual conditions matter to youth mental health and offers suggestions for additional intervention points for suicide prevention. After this presentation attendees will have a better understanding of (1) why social-contextual and upstream factors matter to suicide and (2) how neglecting them can undermine prevention efforts. Finally, attendees will be able to discuss (3) the social-contextual issues that schools, communities, parents, and mental health workers must consider when managing a context with a disproportionate number of youth suicides or suicide attempts and (4) articulate why youth must be included as partners in suicide prevention.

References

Most of my research articles and essays are available for free on my website: www.annasmueller.com
If a particular article is not yet available for free, please email me and I will send you a copy.

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Bio

Anna S. Mueller, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Comparative Human Development at the University of Chicago. She is also a member of the American Association of Suicidology. She received her BA from Wellesley College in 2002 and her PhD in sociology in 2011 from the University of Texas at Austin. Using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, Mueller's research examines (1) the social roots of adolescent suicide; (2) the mechanisms that undergird suicide contagion; and (3) the experience of suicide bereavement in adolescence. Her research on suicide in adolescence has won numerous awards for its contribution to knowledge, including the Eliot Friedson Outstanding Publication Award from the American Sociological Association. Her research can be read in the *American Sociological Review*, *Social Science & Medicine*, the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, the *American Journal of Public Health*, among others. For more information on Mueller, visit her website: www.annasmueller.com