

# Suicide related health risk behaviours among school learners in South Africa

Presenter:

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# Introduction and background

- Worldwide, suicide accounts for 6% of all deaths among young people.
- It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of mortality among female, and 3<sup>rd</sup> among males aged 10-24 years.
- Youth suicide is a major public health concern in low and middle income countries.
- Traditionally high among the elderly, recently young people.
- Suicide ideation- higher in females , suicide-attempt higher in men .



# Background cont...

- South Africa:
  - Suicide has become a significant public health problem.
  - Rate in males high, 1.7 times greater than global average.
  - Suicide rates among adolescents are high in rural areas.
  - Girls who reported being physically hurt by their male partners had a significantly increased likelihood of suicide attempts .
- Low/middle income countries- no prevention programs.

# Limpopo Province

- Northeast of SA
- 10.4% of total SA population
- 40% < 15 years
- High unemployment
- Highest rate of suicide attempt (24.5%)





# Study 1

- Objective
  - Examine the prevalence of suicide ideation and suicide attempts.
- Method:
  - 2002 and 2008 South African Youth Risk Behaviour Surveys (YRBS).
- Sample
  - Grades 8 -11 students (age 13-19 years).
  - Grade 12 excluded to allow them to focus on their end-of-school exams.
  - A two stage cluster sample design was used.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> stage – Schools were selected with a probability proportional to school learner enrolment size.

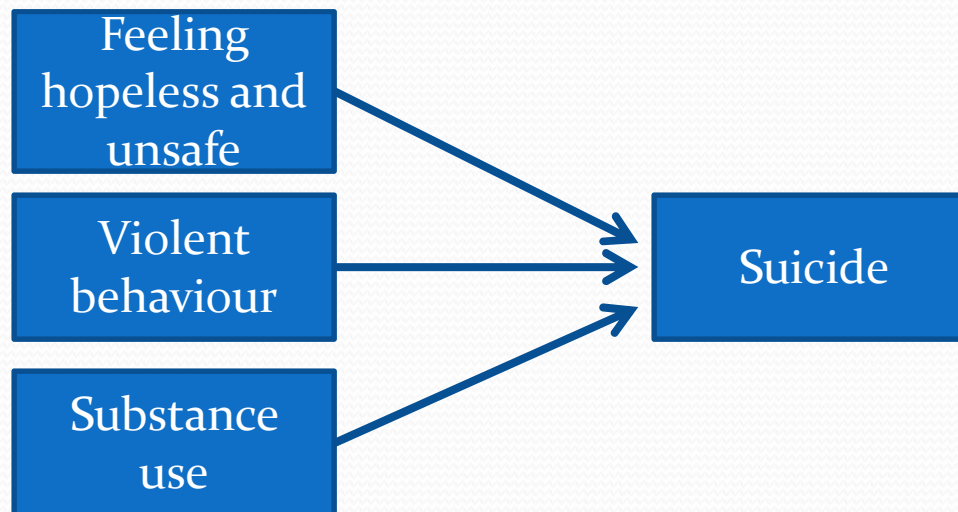


# Study 1 cont...

- 2<sup>nd</sup> stage-classes were selected systematically with equal probability sampling (with a random start)
  - On average 2 classes per school were randomly selected
- N = 10,699 (2002); N = 10,270 (2008)
- Measures
  - suicide ideation and suicide attempts
  - Risk behaviors

# Findings

	2002	2008
Suicide ideation	18%	19%
Suicide attempt	18.5%	21.8%
Feeling sad or hopeless	32.5%	32.5%
Feeling unsafe	36.1%	34.5%





# Study 2

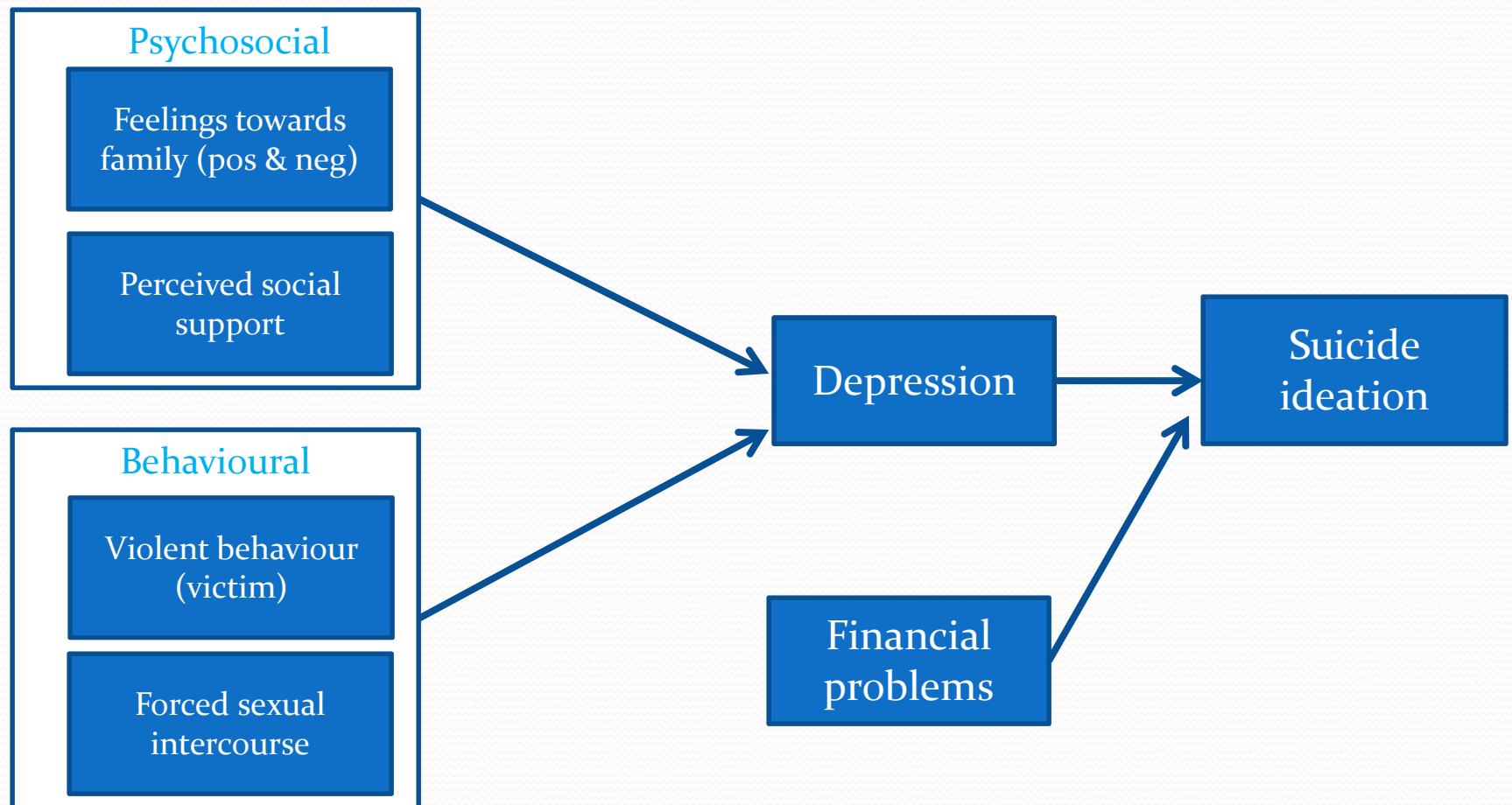
- Objective:
  - Identify the behavioural and psychosocial correlates of suicidal ideation among adolescents in Limpopo.
- Method:
  - Cross-sectional survey in school setting.
  - Ethical approval, permission and informed consent.
- Sample:
  - A two-stage cluster sample design was used to ensure the collection of provincially representative data.
  - 111 of the 702 sampled students did not participate-absence
  - 591 adolescents (age 13 - 19 years) participated.



# Study 2 cont...

- Measures
  - Psychosocial variables:
    - Self-esteem, feelings towards family, perceived social support, depression
  - Behavioral variables:
    - Substance use, violent behavior (actor/victim), bullying, sexual assault
  - Socio-demographic variables:
    - Age, gender, school performance, financial problems
  - Suicide ideation

# Results





# Study 3

- Objective:
  - Assess students' knowledge about suicide, perceived risk factors, resources and beliefs about prevention.
- Method:
  - Six focus group discussions conducted.
- Sample:
  - 56 adolescents (age 13-19 years).



# Study 3 cont...

- Sampling procedure:
  - Social worker contacted and requested to ask suicide attempters if willing to be contacted.
  - A list of attempters given to first author.
  - Four names were randomly picked from a bowl.
  - Suicide attempters contacted for permission to contact their peers/class mates.
- Interview guide:
  - Themes were based on previous qualitative and psychosocial correlates studies.



# Results

## Peers:

- Little knowledge of warning signs for suicidal behaviour.
- Identified several risk factors for their peers' suicide, such as,
  - teenage pregnancy, poor relationship issues, attention seeking behaviours, and punishment.
- Resources for students with mental health problems and survivors of the attempts were not available



# Conclusion

The following were found as determinants of suicide:

- Substance use.
- Depressed mood.
- Violent behaviour.
- Inadequate social support.
- Financial problems
- Conflicts in interpersonal relationships.



# Theoretical implications

- Theory development to explain suicidal behaviour.
- Longitudinal studies to examine gender differences in suicidal risk factors.
- Development of theory and evidence-based school-based interventions.

# Practical implications



- Counselling services essential.
- School-based suicide prevention programs needed.



# Future study

- Theory and evidence-based school-based suicide prevention interventions.
- \*\*Funding is a major challenge

# Thank you

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