

# Factors Associated with Suicidality among Texas College Students

Jessica Duncan Cance, MPH, PhD

Health Behavior and Health Education  
Department of Kinesiology and Health Education  
The University of Texas at Austin

## Background

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death on college campuses
- Little is known about the behavioral and contextual factors that lead to suicidality among college students
- **The purpose of this study is to determine the factors related to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among a statewide sample of college students**

## Methods

- 2013 *Texas Survey of Substance Use among College Students*
  - N=11,164; 60% female; 85% White
  - Undergraduates ages 18 to 26
  - Representative sample of public and private universities, colleges, and community colleges across the state
  - Data collected via online survey
- Outcome measures
  - Past year suicidal ideation
    - “During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?”
  - Past year suicide attempt
    - Only asked of students who answered yes to suicidal ideation
    - “During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?”
- Covariates
  - Sociodemographics
  - Academic variables
  - Behavioral variables
  - Mental health variables
  - Campus contextual factors
- Analytic Strategy
  - All analyses run using SAS 9.4
  - Two logistic regression models, one for each suicidality outcome
  - Multiple imputation procedures used to account for missing data

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Jessica Duncan Cance, MPH, PhD  
The University of Texas at Austin  
Email: [jessica.cance@gmail.com](mailto:jessica.cance@gmail.com)  
Phone: (512) 471-8184

## Key Findings

- **Over six percent of students had thought about suicide and a little over one percent had attempted suicide in the past year**
- All variables except for parent education and past month alcohol use were correlated with either suicidal ideation or suicide attempt

Variable	Suicidal Ideation	Suicide Attempt
<b>Sociodemographics</b>		
Gender		
Race/Ethnicity		
Parent marital status		
Parent education		
<b>Academics</b>		
Grade point average	-	
Skipping class	++	
Number of credit hours		
Part or full time employment		
<b>Risk behaviors</b>		
Past month alcohol use		
Past month tobacco use		
Past month illicit drug use	+++	
Number of sexual partners		
Time spent on internet		
<b>Mental Health</b>		
Depressive symptoms	+++	+++
Anxiety symptoms	+	
Ever prescribed psychotropic	+	
Seen a mental health practitioner in past year		
<b>Campus context</b>		
Problems on campus		
Suicide	+++	++
Underage drinking	++	
Heavy drinking	+++	
Drug use		
Physical assault		
Sexual assault		
Racial tension		
Mental health resources available on campus		
Campus type (4 vs. 2 year)		

- Significant negative association (- p<.05, -- p<.01, --- p<.001)  
+ Significant positive association (+ p<.05, ++ p<.01, +++ p<.001)



## Conclusions

- All factors associated with suicidal ideation were also associated with suicide attempt, but very few factors were associated with past year suicide attempts
- Beliefs about the campus environment played an important role for past year suicidal ideation
- Future efforts to reduce suicidality among college students should include campus-wide partnerships to identify those at highest risk

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The *Texas Survey of Substance Use among College Students* is conducted by the Public Policy Research Institute with support from the Texas Department of State Health Services (<https://texascollegesurvey.org>)
- This research was funded by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health (JRG-296)
- Dr. Cance is a Faculty Research Associate of the Population Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin, supported by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Grant 5-R24-HD042849