

Suicide Risk & Protective Factors in Latino/a Youth from the Rio Grande Valley

Presentation given for Suicide Prevention Month, sponsored by the Psi Chi Honor Society, UTRGV, 9/25/25

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The University of Texas
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Definitions

I. Suicide

II. Suicide Attempt

III. Suicide Ideation

The above form the continuum of suicide

Suicide Statistics

- Suicide is second leading cause of death in ages 25-34 and third leading cause of death in ages 15-24.
- During past decade, suicide rates have increased in Latinos by 39% (5.7 to 7.9).
- According to CDC data, for past 3 decades, Latina adolescents have consistently reported greater suicide *behavior* compared to non-Hispanic White and African American adolescents.
- In 2021, 29% seriously considered suicide, 25% made suicide plan, 14% attempted suicide.

Risk & Protective Factors

- Depression
- Hopelessness
- Isolation
- Burdensomeness
- Alcohol Use
- History of Suicide / Suicide Contagion

Risk & Protective Factors

- Pain History
- Acculturative Stress
- Inadequate Coping Skills
- Impulsivity & Agitation
- History of Trauma
- Means
- Acute Stress

Case Narrative

I feel so lonely and unheard. I love my family, but we are so different in our values and goals. My parents expect me to stay here, start a family, and help take care of my siblings. However, I don't want to spend the rest of my life here stuck in a career I don't want and resenting my family. I argue with my parents about going away to college. This would be my ticket out. I want to study engineering because it makes me happy, but my parents don't care about my happiness. They only care about what I bring to the table and how I can help them. Nobody understands me. Things would be better if I were just gone.... (17-year-old Mexican-American female)

Behavioral Health Lab Studies Examining Risk Factors in Latino/a Youth

- Traditional Cultural Values and Suicide Behavior in Latina Adolescents.
- Body Image/Body Esteem, Cyberbullying, and Suicide Behavior in Young Latina Adults.
- Predictors of Attitudes Towards Mental Health Treatment in Young Latino Adults.

Cultural Values & Suicide Behavior

- How does adherence or lack of adherence to traditional cultural values and expectations impact mental health in Latina adolescents?

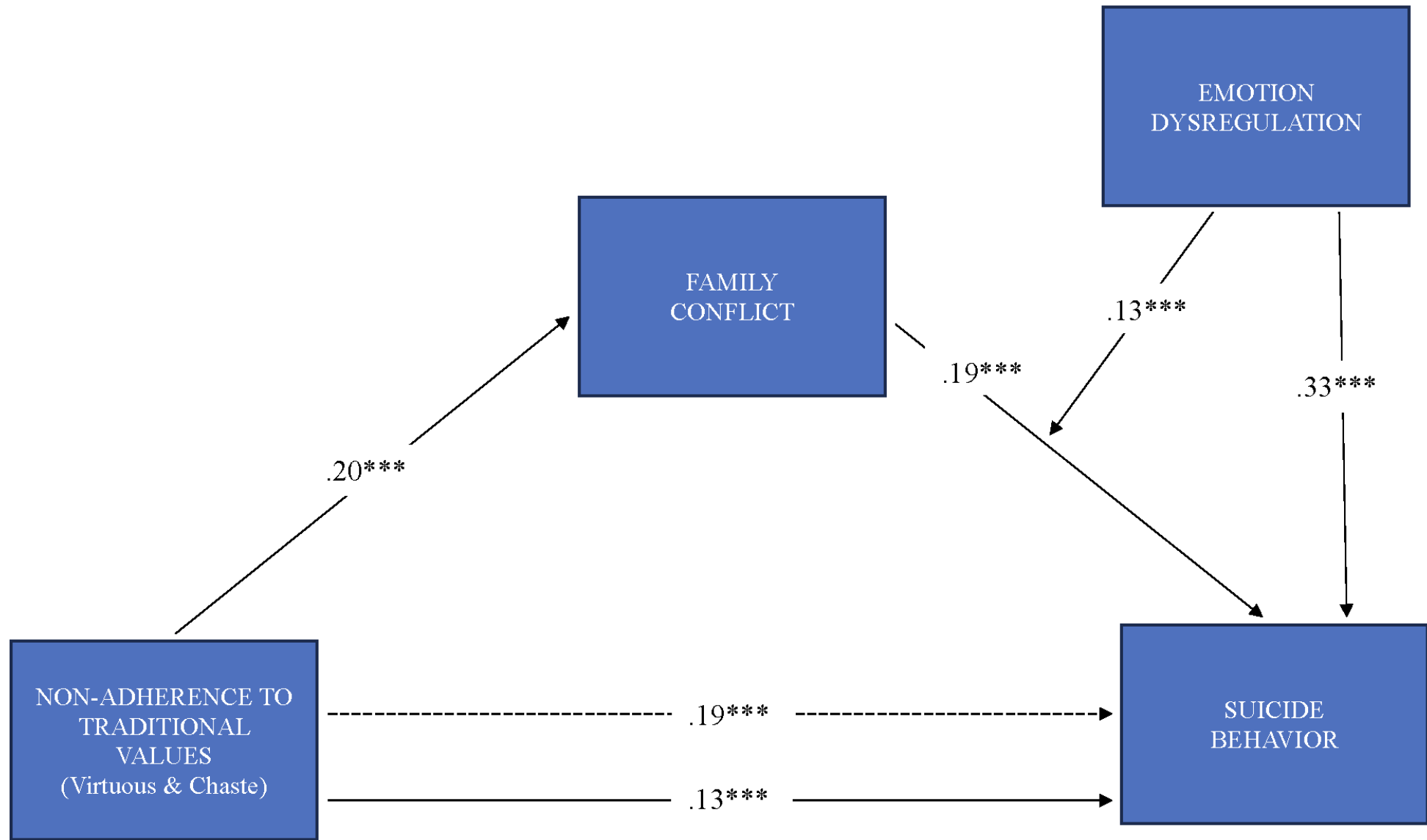
Cultural Values & Suicide Behavior

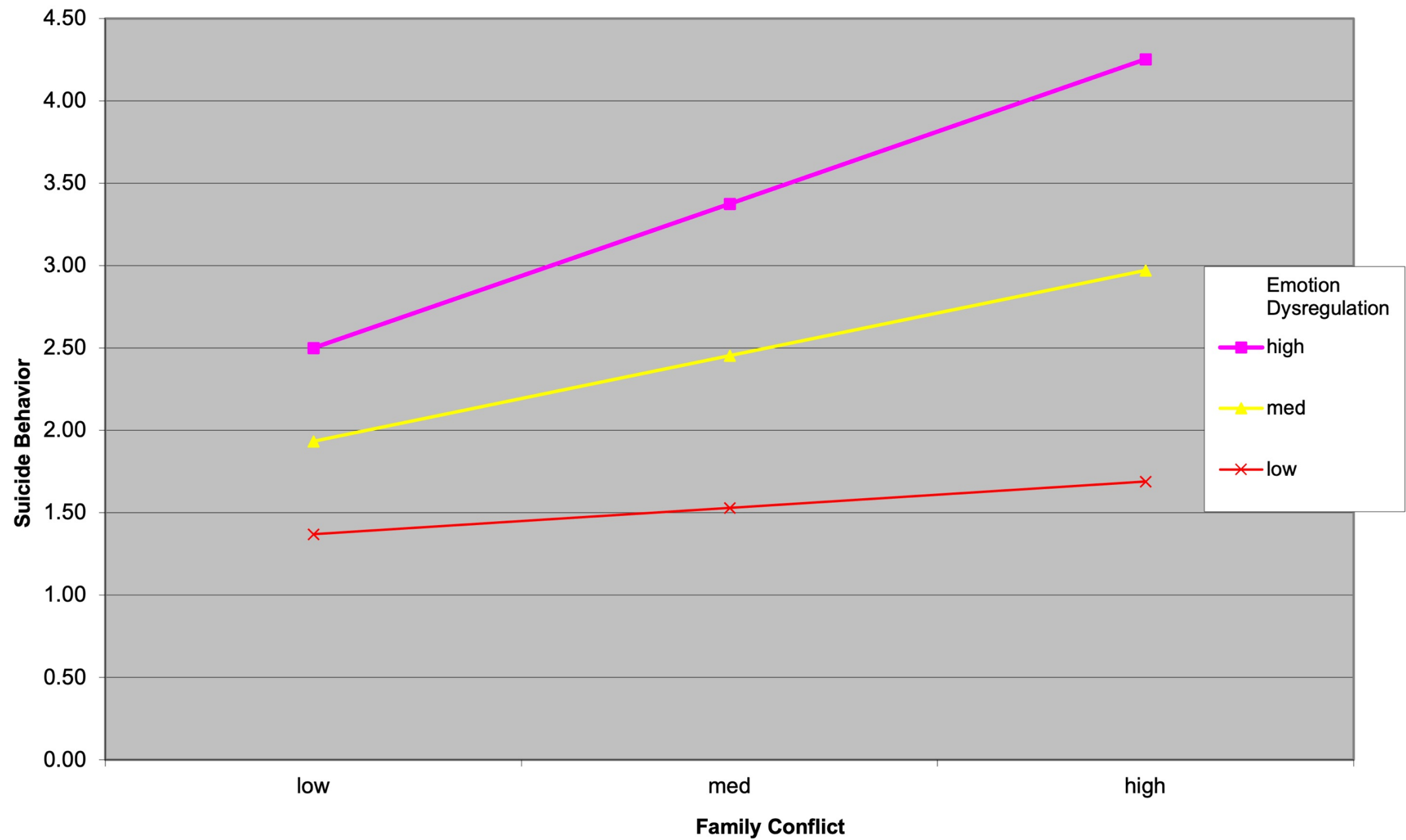
- Zayas et al. (2005, 2008) posited that in Latino/a families that support cultural beliefs emphasizing deference to parents, restrictions on adolescent female autonomy, and family unity – family conflict may arise when Latina adolescents exert autonomy and adapt non-traditional values, with conflict surrounding dating being especially stressful.
- The consequent intense interpersonal stress may then lead to increased suicide thoughts and behavior in Latina adolescents.

	Virtuous & Chaste	Family Conflict	Mother Conflict	Father Conflict	Emotion Dysregulation	Hopelessness	Depression
Virtuous & Chaste	--	.18***	.12**	.19***	.08*	.15***	.14***
Family Conflict	.18***	--	.50***	.43***	.30***	.31***	.34***
Mother Conflict	.12**	.50***	--	.31***	.28***	.30***	.36***
Father Conflict	.19***	.43***	.31***	--	.25***	.31***	.31***
Emotion Dysregul.	.08*	.30***	.28***	.25***	--	.55***	.65***
Hopelessness	.15***	.31***	.30***	.31***	.55***	--	.64***
Depression	.14***	.34***	.36***	.31***	.65***	.64***	--
Suicide Behavior	.19***	.30***	.27***	.26***	.42***	.44***	.59***

Notes: $N = 574$ 18- & 19-year adolescents of Mexican heritage. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Virtuous & Chaste = non-adherence to traditional virtuous and chaste cultural values.





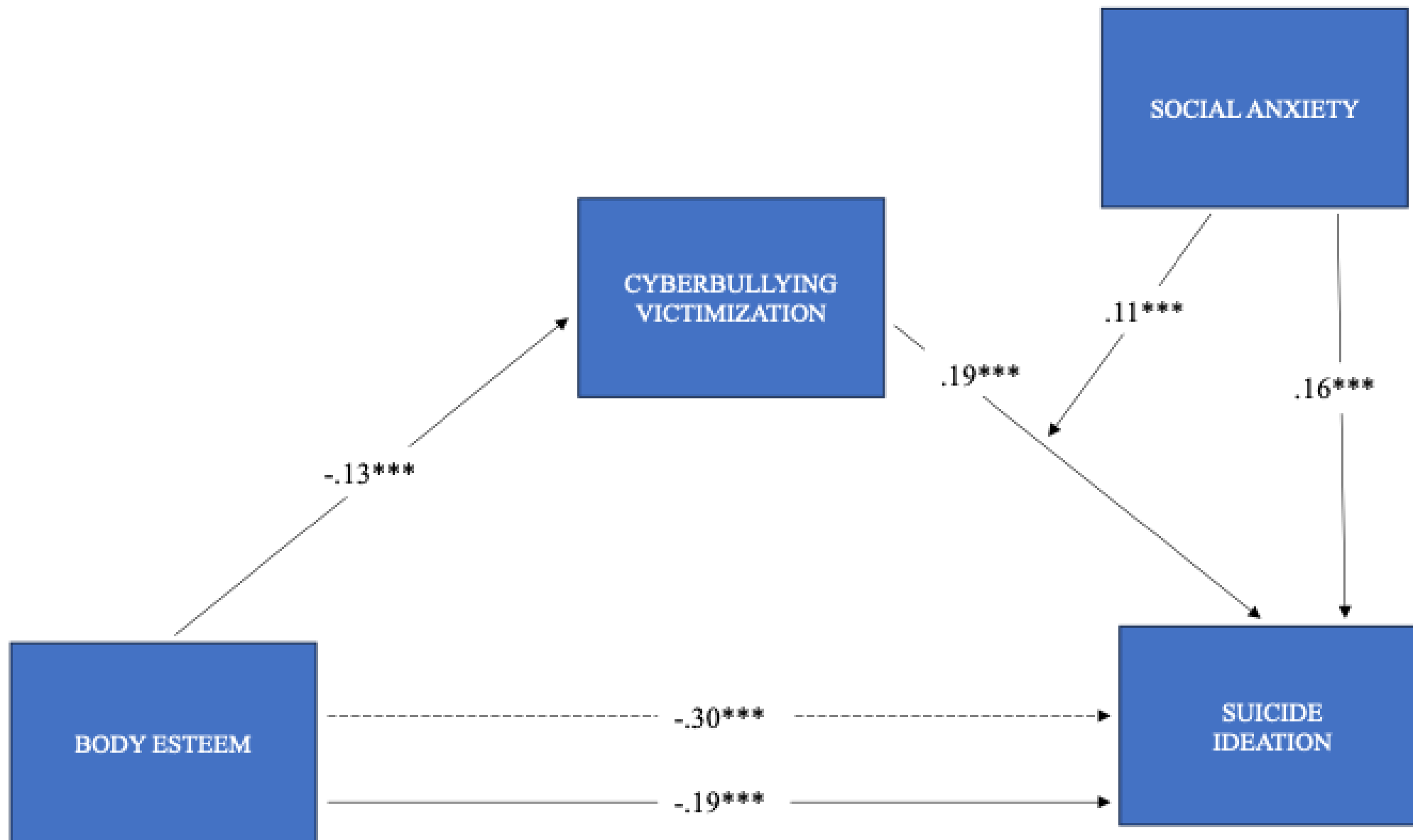
Body Esteem, Cyberbullying & Suicide Behavior

- Female adolescents and young adults with body dissatisfaction are more likely to report depression and suicidal ideation (Fan et al., 2023).
- Low body esteem is associated with being cyberbullied (Olenik-Shemesh & Heiman, 2016).
- Cyberbullying is associated with suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Cenat et al., 2019; Selkie et al., 2015).
- Cyberbullying is associated with social anxiety (Lam et al., 2022).
- Are Latina women susceptible to body image concerns and related mental health challenges?

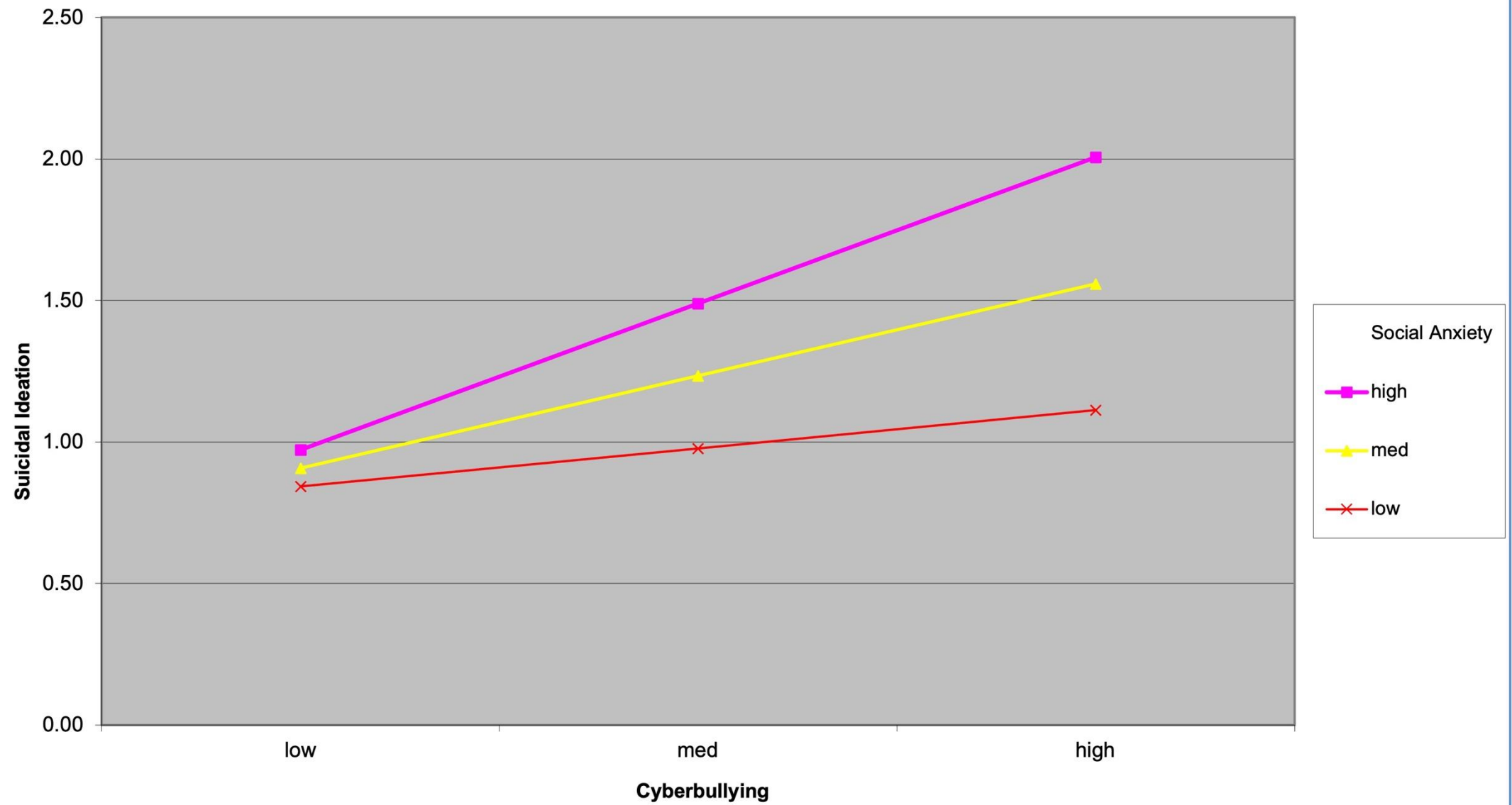
Correlations Between Variables

	Cyberbullying	Social Anxiety	Depression	Suicidal Ideation
Body Esteem	-.13*	-.50*	-.57*	-.30*
Cyberbullying	--	.14*	.34*	.33*
Social Anxiety	.14*	--	.55*	.29*
Depression	.34*	.55*	--	.57*
Suicidal Ideation	.33*	.29*	.57*	--

Notes: $N = 1,021$. * $p \leq .0001$.



Cyberbullying X Social Anxiety



Case Narrative

I don't know how my future will be because sometimes I feel as if the world was standing on its head and as if day to day I become sick and my head hurts. Rejection from those I love hurts. I feel as if I don't matter. I think my future will worsen, each day a bit more.... I don't know if it will be better. I don't know and I am not interested in knowing. Life for me is not worth anything now, nor will it ever.... (17-year-old male immigrant of Mexican heritage)

Predictors of Mental Health Treatment Attitudes in Young Latino Adults

- Although 20% of Latino men meet criteria for a DSM-V disorder, less than 1 in 4 will see mental health care services (SAMHSA, 2019, 2021).
- Compared to Latina women, Latino men experience greater distress that results in completed suicides (Office of Minority Health, 2019).
- Lack of research examining relationships between attitudes towards mental health treatment, stigma, and machismo.
- Participants were 158 men of Mexican heritage (M age = 22 years).

Correlations between Variables

	Social Stigma	Self-Stigma	Machismo	Barriers	Benefits	Treatment History
Social Stigma	--	.41**	.38**	.43**	-.11	-.03
Self-Stigma	.41**	--	.46**	.25**	-.26**	-.23**
Machismo	.38**	.46**	--	.30**	-.07	-.11
Barriers	.43**	.25**	.30**	--	.13	.03
Benefits	-.11	-.26**	-.07	.13	--	.12
Treatment History	-.03	-.23**	-.11	.03	.12	--

Note: * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

Attitudes Toward Mental Health Treatment

	Treatment Barriers	Treatment Benefits	Social Stigma	Self Stigma	Machismo	Treatment History
Telemental Health	-.20**	.26**	-.31**	-.55**	-.32**	.29**
In Person	-.35**	.27**	-.36**	-.56**	-.38**	.31**

Note: ** $p \leq .001$

Suicide Myths

- Talking about it will increase the risk
- People really won't attempt / seeking attention
- Can't be prevented
- Person is weak, selfish, and/or coward
- Teenagers most at risk
- Barriers don't work (e.g., taking away methods)
- Always occurs without warning

Warning Signs

- Giving away prized possessions
- Looking for ways to end life, such as searching online
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Isolating from family and friends
- Being a burden and talking about no reason to live
- Relief / Sudden Improvement
- Hopelessness
- Increased use of substances

What to do?

- Use your knowledge of suicide risk to sensitively and directly deal with the situation.
- Refer individual to National Suicide & Crisis lifeline: 988, Spanish Speaking Suicide Hotline: 1-800-SUICIDA (1-800-784-2432), IMALive chat (imalive.org), crisistextline.org.

Thank You

- Questions?