

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

# **Varying Vulnerabilities, Common Strengths**

Demographic Disparities in  
Suicidal Ideation Among Young  
Crisis Text Line Texters

# Context

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people (ages 10-24) in the US according to the [CDC](#). Young people account for 15% of all suicides, and suicide rates for this age group have increased by more than 52% over the past two decades. Some groups of young people are especially at risk. For example, non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Natives are at higher risk than individuals from other racial groups, and students identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual reported attempting suicide in the past 12 months at a rate five times higher than that of heterosexual students.

Disparities in rates of suicidality in different demographic groups may occur for many reasons, including structural factors and exposure to experiences of discrimination and social marginalization. At Crisis Text Line, Crisis Counselors indicated that over 1 in 5 conversations involved suicidal ideation in 2022. This issue was highest among texters who self-identified as 17 or younger, where Crisis Counselors indicated nearly 1 in 3 conversations discussed suicide.

In early 2023, Crisis Text Line Research & Impact conducted a study to examine which young people may be at risk of suicidal ideation within our texter pool, and consider how race and ethnicity, sexual identity, gender identity, and age may be associated with higher levels of suicidal ideation for some groups. Following consultations with experts of some of the affected communities, in June 2023 we added results related to strengths and coping resources shared by these same youth. The strengths and resources from conversations with youth texters who mentioned suicidal ideation were identified through our collaborations with Common Good Labs. This brief shares findings that emerged.

# Key Findings

## Gender

- Among young people, trans texters were most likely to discuss suicidal ideation, and youth who identified as agender, genderfluid, genderqueer, or trans were more likely to discuss suicidal ideation than those who identified as girls/women only or boys/men only.
- Over 37% of young trans texters discussed suicidal ideation—compared to 27% of texters who identified only as girls/women, and 29% of texters who identified only as boys/men.
- Conversations with agender texters were more likely to mention suicide compared to girls/women, boys/men, or genderfluid texters.

## Sexuality

- Texters who self-identified with an LGBTQ+ sexual identity (gay or lesbian, bisexual or pansexual, questioning or unsure, asexual, self-described) were significantly more likely to mention suicide than heterosexual texters; for example, for example, 33% of gay or lesbian texters mentioned suicide while 25% of heterosexual texters mentioned suicide.

## Age

- The youngest texters (13 years or younger) were more likely to mention suicide than the slightly older 14-17 age group.

## Race & Ethnicity

- Conversations with youth texters of some historically minoritized racial/ethnic identities (including several multi-racial/ethnic identities) were more likely to discuss suicide compared to conversations with Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, and white texters. These included: Black texters; Native American texters; Black and Hispanic/Latinx texters; Black and white texters; and Native American and white texters.
- Conversations with Native American youth texters were more likely to mention suicidal ideation compared to conversations with: Asian; Hispanic/Latinx; Hispanic/Latinx and white; Asian and Self-described race/ethnicity; and white youth texters.

## Strength & Coping Resources

Analysis of the strengths and coping resources identified as potentially helpful by youth experiencing suicidal ideation revealed a common set among them:

- Listening to music was the most common way to cope. Nearly 1 in 3 conversations with youth expressing suicidal ideation that shared at least one coping resource mentioned listening to music.
- Family and community represent important strengths for these youth demographics with higher rates of suicidal ideation.
- Many of the remaining resources require community investment, including support for arts education, counseling, exercise, and reading/libraries.

Strength/Coping Resource	% of Conversations with Suicidal Youth
Listening to music	30%
Rest and going to bed	23%
Community (friends, volunteering, neighbors)	17%
Making visual art	13%
Family	12%
Mental health support and medications	11%
Entertainment (tv, video, social media)	9%
Exercise	9%
Reading and audiobooks	6%

# Actionable Insights

Young people are not a monolith, and decision makers should consider their differences and listen to their voices when making efforts to fortify youth mental health. This research sheds light on nuanced disparities in rates of suicidal ideation by race and ethnicity, sexual identity, gender identity, and age among young texters ages 17 and younger who reach out to Crisis Text Line.

It also surfaces strengths and coping resources suggested by these youth themselves to help them navigate and find resilience in their moments of crisis. Some of these strengths may be more readily accessible and already within reach for young people in pain - such as listening to music, rest, or spending time with family and friends - while others require community investment - such as arts education, safe places to exercise or hang out, and libraries/ reading materials.

## Notes on Scope

We analyzed 386,253 Crisis Text Line conversations in the U.S. between January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2022, where texters filled out the texter survey and reported being ages 17 and younger. Conversations that the volunteer Crisis Counselor indicated were related to suicidal ideation are included in this analysis. For the analysis of strengths and coping mechanisms, we analyzed 26,498 conversations

during the same time period where the texter reported being 17 years old or younger; where the Crisis Counselor indicated that suicidality was discussed; and where there was at least one coping strategy mentioned during the conversation. This involved a qualitative analysis of approximately 25% of the data to categorize them using a set of keywords for each category. These keywords were then used to categorize freeform responses in the rest of the dataset.

## Key Limitations

This study examines associations only and is unable to identify reasons why some demographic groups have higher rates of suicidal ideation in our sample. We also did not evaluate group differences in strengths or coping resources within the sample. For all demographic analyses, we relied on our optional post-conversation texter survey, which has been completed by approximately 20% of texters to date. Throughout this report, when we mention that texters discussed or mentioned suicidal ideation, we base that on Crisis Counselors' indicating that this occurred when the Counselor completed a post-conversation form. The conversation text itself was not analyzed. Errors in coding may occur: it is possible that some texters mention suicidal ideation without being tagged for it, and that Crisis Counselors may tag conversations for suicide when it was not mentioned.

## Acknowledgments

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## About Crisis Text Line

Crisis Text Line is a nonprofit organization that provides free, confidential, 24/7 text-based mental health support and crisis intervention in both English and Spanish for anyone in the United States, including Puerto Rico. To learn more about Crisis Text Line and to support additional research efforts like this, go to [crisistextline.org/donate](https://crisistextline.org/donate).

## About Crisis Text Line Research & Impact

Crisis Text Line Research and Impact is dedicated to evidencing and amplifying Crisis Text Line’s impact on texters, volunteers, and society at large. With questions or comments, please contact Chief Impact Officer Margaret Meagher at [research@crisistextline.org](mailto:research@crisistextline.org).