

INCREASING SUICIDES AMONGST ASIAN TEENS -A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY-

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Abstract

Youth are the treasure of a nation. A nation looks up to youth as its future leaders. The increasing tendency of suicides poses to the threat of the future of humanity as such. The problem of suicide amongst youth is taking unprecedented dimensions in modern times especially in Asian countries. It has been brought to light through various sources of information that approximately one million commit suicide every year and the one precious life is lost every forty seconds. Asian countries shares 60% of the world data in these cases.

Present study attempts to analyze the increasing numbers of suicides by youth in Asian countries. The risk factors of suicides amongst youth vary but these can be traced to school/college pressure, examination pressure, or to the fear of failure in competition. Modern competitive world offers multiple opportunities to youth but at the same time there is a cut throat competition amongst peers that causes frustration resulting in suicides. Family and its safe and affectionate environment may provide courage to youth to bear shocks of outside world. But usually youth live outside their homes and find no succor in times of tension and frustration. Love relationships, poverty, discord amongst members of family add up to the dilemma of youth and they end their life. Psychological studies show that the mental setup of youth is emotional, idealistic, and vulnerable to various temptations. Whenever their ideology shatters or they find themselves rejected by one they love they find no meaning in life. Their emotional needs, beliefs, attitudes, values, patterns and problems are in a state of formation and they need experienced mentors to guide them and to bear shocks and failure in life.

In this study, I attempted to go deep into the socio-psychological problems of these youth to find out major risk factors behind youth suicide and dominant methods adopted by youth to commit suicide in Asian countries.

Keywords: Suicide, Asia, Teenagers, Suicidal Tendency.

1. INTRODUCTION

It may be very common for teens to think about death or dying. May be it is because they are now thinking in much different fashion; their maturity has allowed them to think more philosophically about their place in the world, the meaning of life, and other important and vital issues of life.

The highs and lows of the teenage years permeate the mindset of the young person. Thinking about death, the toils of life, the meaning of life, feelings of helplessness, and the absence of power even over one's daily life all appears to be consequences of being a teenager. But a suicide act becomes most serious when a plan is made and put into action.

Increasing suicides amongst Asian teens are often attributed to school and exam pressure as more and more students strive to compete and enter the workforce. Asian countries had lower male to female gender ratios (<2.0) compared to their western counterparts. These countries includes Bahrain, China, Hong Kong, India, South Korea, Philippines, Singapore, and Turkey. It has been argued that youngsters commit suicides more frequently. They are driven to it when families fight, or they fail in exams, or they cannot fulfill their love life, or sometimes when they are unable to fulfill their financial needs and other anxieties.

According to the latest official statistics Pakistan has lowest estimated prevalence of less than 3 per 100,000 followed by the Thailand at 7.3 per 100,000. Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore have low to medium rates between 9.9 and 13.1 per 100,000. Highest rates of above 15 per 100,000 are seen in China, Hong Kong (SAR), and India and still higher rates of above 20 per 100,000 are seen in China, Japan, The Republic of Korea and Sri Lanka.

It appears that in China, southern India and Singapore, the sex differences for suicide are reversed and that young women are more at risk for suicide than men. In these young women, the suicide appears to be related to impulsive attempts using pesticides as the mode of attempt. The high fatality may be related to the lack of emergency medical facilities. Undoubtedly, the restriction in the use of pesticides is a very important measure in these areas. It is interesting to note that female youth suicide rates have remained fairly constant in the West, while it is increasing in the Asian countries where there were no pesticide restrictions.

2. RISK FACTORS OF SUICIDE IN ASIAN TEENAGERS

It has been found that suicide attempt rates in youth are elevated in the families of suicide completers and the members of suicide attempters. Social risks factors include parental separation, divorce and family discord as well as child abuse. Other risk factors for suicide behavior in Asian teens are bullying and peer victimization. There are many features of family life that impact on suicidal behavior. Abuse of teenagers, both physically and sexually, appears to result in an increase in later suicidal behavior as well as other psychiatric disorders and symptoms.

Two recent studies focused on binge drinking. A most common pattern of alcohol consumption among high school and college youth, found it to be strongly associated with suicide ideation and behavior. A study on cognitive characteristics in suicidal adolescents found that poor decision making is present in suicidal adolescents who currently self harm but not in those with previous history. Aggression and impulsivity are traits highly related to suicidal behavior in teenagers. Higher levels of impulsive aggressiveness play a greater role in suicide among younger teenagers. Pre-cursors of early-onset suicidal behavior in offspring of parents with mood disorders include impulsive aggression as well as parental history of suicide attempt, sexual abuse, and self reported depression. Eating disorders are wide spread among teenagers and these individuals have high rates of suicidal behavior. This appears to be related primarily to depression and aggression, which are also common in these Asian teenagers. Another important risk factor for suicide is insight, which has mostly been investigated in psychotic disorders.

3. PRINCIPAL METHODS OF SUICIDE IN ASIAN TEENAGERS

The current review indicates that the principal methods of suicide in Asia as a whole are hanging and solid/liquid poisoning (generally with pesticides). There are unique patterns of suicide method in Asian countries that distinctly differ from those of the West. For Example, jumping from high rise buildings is the most common method in Hong Kong and Singapore. This method accounts for a large portion of suicides in many populous cities in Asia, such as Taipei, Seoul, and Tokyo. Charcoal burning suicide has become a trendy method in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan, while self immolation is a common method in India, Iran, Pakistan and Sri

Lanka. Drowning and railway suicide were also used in India (9-16%), Pakistan (11%), Malaysia (10.9%) and Japan (6-8%).

The agents used in poisoning suicide in Asian teenagers are yellow oleander seeds used in Sri Lanka and Aluminium phosphide poisoning in some parts of India and Pakistan. Suicide through fire arms are also used as a common method in Philippines, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The unique patterns reflect differences in acceptability and availability of the suicide method according to different socio-cultural, economic, and religious factors in these countries.

In addition to traditional culture that influence method choice, the mass media as a powerful cultural channel has played a significant role in the dissemination of suicide and suicide methods. For example in the case of charcoal burning suicide, there is a peculiar yet possible hidden generalized pattern of transfer of knowledge and technology of suicide through mass media. Internet becomes a catalyst, and provides vulnerable group of people an interactive, privacy- protected and self initiated medium to acquire the information they need and to reconfirm the correctness of their suicidal thought.

CONCLUSION

The youth of the country are of special interest to all those who are concerned with the growth and the development of the country. The adolescents grew up in a rapidly changing social milieu which has had no parallels in the past. Their emotional needs, beliefs, attitudes, values, patterns and problems are equally complex and changing as the society in which they grew up. With increases in the youth suicide rates in Asia, there is an immediate need to address academic, emotional and psychological attributing factors faced by the youth. Solid prevention efforts which includes intervention such as screening from depression and suicide risk in schools and clinical settings, suicide awareness and education programs, gatekeepers training for school staff, means restrictions, pharmacological treatment, family support, proper strategies and specific programs are required to prevent increasing tendency of suicide in Asian teens.

Considering the limitation of resources and large population in many Asian countries, it is more advisable to adopt public health approaches to suicide prevention with sensitivity to socio-cultural, economic, and religious factors in different countries. There are many challenges ahead and ample opportunities to make suicide prevention work well in Asia.

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