

Investigating Teenage Suicide on a Global Scale

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Abstract

Teenage suicide is not a problem limited to the United States of America. In fact, there are countries in the world that have a higher teen suicide rate than the United States. Contrary to many people's beliefs, teen suicide is actually quite prevalent in other developed countries and has often been paired with Western civilization. However, when you take an in-depth look at the various aspects of suicide in these other nations, including the motive, means, and frequency, perhaps differences can be found – after all, different cultures and demographics would need to be taken into consideration. Research on teen suicide worldwide would open up several doors with exploring. For example, it would be interesting to compare the rates of teen suicide in countries that have gun control and those that do not. It would also be interesting to research the various factors that lead teens to suicide in the first place – surely, there must be some variation between factors in the United States and factors abroad. The topic is certainly one worth addressing. Death is never easy; however, it is especially difficult when parents are forced to bury their teens. Therefore, better knowledge of the subject throughout the world could ultimately save lives. My research paper will look at the issues at hand and attempt to answer this question: How do aspects of teenage suicide differ between various countries of the world?

Purpose Statement

It is true that I have a strong interest in this topic, looking at teen suicide in different parts of the world: both through personal experiences (a friend who considered suicide and another that actually did commit suicide) and a fascination with other cultures that I have had for some years now. However, the main purpose of writing this research paper is to fulfill the requirements of the course Honors 199C, Research and Writing, at St. John Fisher College. The assignment was to write a paper concerning some aspect of children and violence; I chose teen suicide. Since it is more than a mere requirement, I am likely to find researching the topic and writing the paper exciting in many ways. I look forward to tackling the assignment and dealing with the challenges ahead.

Statement of Qualification

The topic appealed to me for various reasons. For one, I have had personal experiences with suicide among teenagers. One of my good friends from high school took his life by hanging himself just last year. Not long after, only this past summer, another good friend of mine was close to committing suicide. I tried my best to help him through the difficult times, constantly reminding him to keep his head up. Ultimately, even after a close call one scary night where he said suicide crossed his mind, he was able to get out of this tough period of his life. Besides these personal connections to teen suicide, I have also had an interest in other cultures for several years now, since at least 1998 when I began researching my family history. This led me to blend the two ideas together for this research paper. I've seen teen suicide right before my eyes, both it actually happening and someone contemplating it. Also, for a while now, I've been looking at other cultures and studying them in depth, particularly countries in Europe. These reasons make me confident that I can take this topic up for research and write a paper on it. In addition, the information is out there, as I have already done preliminary searches for it on-line and at the school library. I turned up several websites, especially articles in the library's databases, dealing with the issue. Combined with my experiences in the past, and uncovering new information, I should be more than qualified to write such a paper.

Introduction

Certain cultures have a higher rate of teenage suicide because they are susceptible to more risk factors. The higher amount of risk factors, the increased likelihood that such an act would be considered in the first place. Risk factors can either be made up of beliefs (religion and morals) within the culture or the prevalence of pressures (competition and being put down) within the culture. Both can play a role in the contemplation of suicide, especially the latter. Of course these factors can differ from culture to culture and that is why the suicide rates also vary.

It is important for people to realize that the issue of teenage suicide is not just limited to the United States. It is a widespread problem affecting various parts of the globe and it has been this way for a number of years now. As written in a book about teen suicide, “Suicide – whether considered for the entire age range in the population or focused on adolescents [...] – is not a problem that is restricted to the United States. It is an international health issue” (Robbins 7). This cannot be understated.

Many Americans are simply unaware that teen suicide is so prevalent in the world. Most are conscious of the act, as it hits right here at home, but when it comes to other countries not much is known. The fact of the matter is that it does exist throughout the world and in some nations it even occurs more frequently than in the United States. Americans often attribute their ignorance to the fact that something doesn't directly affect them. However, any loss of human life should be a concern, especially based on our country's founding.

This study's objective is to reveal the prevalence and motives of teen suicide throughout different parts of the world, and to analyze this information to evaluate the seriousness of the issue.

General Causes of Suicide

Suicide, or the instance of someone taking his or her own life, is one of the most dramatic and tragic realities known to humanity. It is nothing new, as cases of it can be dated back to the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Of course it is most difficult for the friends and family of the victim, people who know the person that commits the act. Combine this with that victim being a teenager and it becomes so much harder to deal with. No parent wants to bury their child; it is not supposed to be this way. And no student wants to lose a classmate without having the opportunity to say goodbye one last time.

For teenagers that consider suicide, it is a means to an end. It is a way to end all of the misery and troubles that are part of life. Often times the thought doesn't come out of nowhere. Instead, there are underlying and recurrent motivations – usually depression, significant failures, or traumatic events. These are all risk factors, a term heard all too often when dealing with suicide. Risk factors are simply pressures or stress that may lead one to end his or her life. As will be explained later, in some cultures these are more dominant than others. Also, a risk factor to one country might not be as much a risk factor to another. When performing a cross-cultural study, all of this needs to be kept in mind. All sorts of variables need to be taken into consideration when examining one place to the next.

Teenagers can be particularly susceptible to the act. They are still growing and often times have a mindset of uncertainty as to what their future may hold. Their life may lack a sense of direction or may be full of disappointments. Teens do a lot of thinking and when the risk factors exist there is no surprise that suicide may enter their mind.

Different Perspectives about Suicide

A culture's perspective about the act of suicide can have a huge influence on teens. Whether it might encourage it in ways, or stand against it in others, will enter their mind. This instilling of beliefs will often begin in their youth. What they are taught by their society when young will come back to them, especially if they ever consider suicide. Obviously not all children grow up the same way, with the same thoughts about the act. It differs between cultures. These differences can be explained through various perspectives.

Societal Structure

Emile Durkheim's Theory of Suicide helps explain society's impact on the commonality of the act. The theory deals with associations between suicide rates and the structure of society. Durkheim says that suicide rates are highest among societies that have high social integration or low social integration, but societies of moderate integration have the lowest rates. Author David Lester explains this further in his book: "When the ties in a society are minimal, then suicide becomes more likely. At the other extreme, the individual can be too closely integrated and identified with a particular

group”. In the first type of society, an individual may feel isolated and helpless. In the latter, one may have too much pride in their society, and may take his or her life to be a “martyr” for religious or political reasons. (Lester 21)

Another portion of society that Durkheim says can have an effect on suicide rates is social regulation. Once again, Durkheim points out that high or low regulation is paired with the highest suicide rates, while moderate is consistent with the lowest. In highly regulated societies, everything has to be a certain way, so an individual may feel overwhelmed and want to end their life. In a low regulated society, an individual may feel no sense of direction, and no guidance to help them; they may feel lost and have a desire to die. (Lester 21)

Each of these societies explained by Durkheim leads to stress and suicide becomes an outlet to instantly end everything. The theory helps explain why industrialized nations tend to have high suicide rates. Such countries are very demanding, full of stress, and highly competitive: one can easily get lost in the crowd or feel no sense of belonging. It also helps explain society’s role in suicide in different parts of the world.

Influence of Religion

Trends in suicide are not limited to the structure of society. Noticeable links have also been established with a society’s culture. Particularly, religion has played a large role in shaping cultures and instilling ways of thinking about the act of suicide. The beliefs vary from one religion to the next but are explained at length by an online encyclopedia article (“Suicide”).

Buddhism, widely practiced in East Asia, has traditionally viewed suicide in a negative way. According to the encyclopedia article, this belief exists “since the first precept [of Buddhism] is to refrain from the destruction of life.” However, it goes on, “despite this view, an ancient Asian ideology [...] continues to influence oppressed Buddhists to choose the act of ‘honorable’ suicide.” So even though Buddhism objects to the act, some traditional Asian beliefs do give it merit under extreme circumstances. (“Suicide”)

Christianity’s view is not as straightforward. Early Christianity didn’t criticize the act – in fact, it was encouraged, as it was often seen interchangeable with martyrdom (an act at the time that was endorsed by the faith). Later on, the thinking evolved. Modern-day Catholicism is completely opposed to suicide, which to the faith (according to the article) “has been considered a grave and sometimes mortal sin.” Modern-day conservative Christians that encompass Evangelicals and Pentecostals go so far as saying “anyone who commits this sin [of suicide] goes to Hell.” Some liberal Christians today, even though admitting the act is wrong, believe that under certain circumstances the act may be appropriate, and God may still forgive. (“Suicide”)

Hinduism teaches that suicide is equivalent to murdering someone else. Even so, Hinduism also believes that “it is considered acceptable to end one’s life by fasting,” as long as it involves a period of reflection and has spiritual motives. (“Suicide”)

Islam believes that suicide is a serious sin that can be very damaging to a person’s spiritualism. Still, it says that Allah may forgive the individual if they were truly sorry in their intentions and the end results. Radical Muslims use this exception to justify terrorist

attacks against Western interests, including suicide bombings which will be discussed later. (“Suicide”)

Finally, Judaism prohibits suicide and views it as one of the worst sins possible. Again though, there may be exceptions. Suicide can be consistent with the Jewish faith if, and only if, it occurs as a means to avoid “being forced to commit an act of murder, idolatry, adultery, or incest.” (“Suicide”)

Certainly these religious beliefs can play a role in an adolescent’s thinking about suicide. If a child is raised under one of these faiths, or even if it observes the teachings in other ways, it may have an impact on their state of mind. While the strong stances against suicide may prevent an adolescent from committing the act, the exceptions and special circumstances mentioned may persuade a teen that it can be justifiable.

East vs. West

Different perspectives also exist between the Eastern and Western worlds. Eastern nations are generally rooted in Asian traditions, places like China. Western countries tend to live out European ideals and include the United States. Some countries, like Japan and Russia, have switched classification from an Eastern nation to a Western nation. Stephen Worchel and Wayne Shebilske explain that Western societies typically “[view] the individual as ‘independent, self-contained, and autonomous.’” On the other hand, Eastern cultures “tend to see individuals as interdependent with the surrounding society.” (Worchel 629)

Based on Durkheim’s theory, it may be argued that Western culture has low social integration. Individuals are in a fight for their own, competition is high, and one may feel lost or without a sense of direction. It could also be said that Eastern culture has high

social integration. In these places, society as a whole is stressed. As Durkheim said, the structure of both societies would make it more likely for suicide to occur. But, as the data will show, Western nations have tended to have higher teen suicide rates. As will be explained, the thinking is that Eastern cultures have more support groups, so even though the idea of suicide may surface, the likelihood of one committing the act diminishes. In Western society, many times an individual may feel hopeless, with nowhere to turn, and with no assistance in sight. They lose their desire to live because they begin to feel like there is nothing to live for, whereas in Eastern society an individual who commits suicide would be letting others down.

Third world nations are more difficult to categorize. Many may have had some Western and Eastern influences but are independent. They often live in poverty, under many problems, and exist in places like Africa. In these nations, each individual struggles for his or her own survival, but they also work together, entire villages for example, for the greater good of the whole. The mix makes them moderately integrated societies, and as explained by Durkheim it is in these societies where suicide is less prevalent. Since they have less, many psychologists argue that they appreciate what they have more, and have a greater respect for themselves and others in their community. Their simplicity is so much in contrast to the chaotic way of life in Western nations, where teen suicide is most prevalent.

All of these perspectives shed some light on the global issue of teen suicide. For a more complete understanding of the problem, it would be worthwhile taking an in-depth look at different parts of the world. Data and research available about the subject from various nations across the globe will now be discussed.

Teenage Suicide in North America

United States of America

Teenage suicide has been a growing problem in the United States. With the high-paced society, competition, and demands of the everyday American teen, maybe it shouldn't be so surprising either. More and more pressures have been thrown upon teens over the years. To try to get at the root of the issue at hand, first one should ponder the statistics.

According to the World Health Organization (referred to here-on-in as WHO), the suicide rate for Americans aged 15 to 24 has tripled between 1950 and 1994. In 1950, a rate of 4.5 per 100,000 existed, but in 1994 it had jumped to 13.7 per 100,000. In 1998, the United States government announced that "suicide was the 3rd commonest cause of death for young Americans, after accidents and murder" ("United States: Such a waste; Teeange suicide"). Author Jessica Portner provides more shocking statistics:

For every teenager who commits suicide, 100 more will try. Every year, one in thirteen high school students attempts suicide, a 1997 national survey found. Half of all high school students – or about 6 million kids – say that they have 'seriously considered' suicide by the time they graduate, the survey reports. (Portner 4)

The most recent data available suggests that the teen suicide rate is falling. The United States' most recent report to WHO in 2000 proved that the rate had subsided to 10.2, although was still made up of a troubling 3,988 total youth suicides for just that one year. This rate is still high enough to be a concern. So what is causing these thousands of deaths every year?

Journalist George Howe Colt, who has studied suicide in America, has claimed “that searching for a single cause for suicide is as futile as ‘trying to pinpoint what causes us to fall in love or what causes war’” (Portner 8). According to Colt, there are so many reasons American teenagers might want to commit suicide. Among the possible explanations for the huge rise in teen suicide, Colt suggests the degradation of morals, loss of tradition, peer pressure, child abuse, drugs, alcohol, mockery, lack of self-confidence, music, violence, racism, lack of religious beliefs, war, and the media, just to name a few. He follows his lengthy list with this: “While none of these factors have been proved to have more than an incidental correlation with the rising rate of adolescent suicide, all of them represent very real reasons why, as one psychiatrist says, ‘it may be more difficult to be a kid today than at any other time in history’” (Biskup 118). All of the mentioned possibilities for teen suicide are definitely risk factors, and many of them can also apply to other industrialized nations. They go hand-in-hand with the ever-changing world that developed countries currently exist in.

Journalist David Elkind believes that the increase over the last several decades is directly related to the amount of stress that kids face. He puts it nicely:

Today’s teenagers face problems that are different from those faced by teens of previous generations. They have more freedom – to engage in sexual activity and to abuse drugs. They experience more loss due to the soaring divorce rate. And on another level, young people today also have lost the sense of progress, that the world is getting better. (Elkind 111)

His arguments are well made. They provide an explanation for the rise in teen suicides in the United States that makes sense.

The boy-girl factor can also be taken into some consideration. Portner points out that girls attempt suicide three times more than boys, but boys are four times more likely to complete the act. She suggests that the reason behind this is boys' tendency to implement a more lethal means of death, like using a gun or hanging themselves, while girls prefer "more survivable methods," like overdosing on medication. (Portner 5)

As Colt said, it is difficult to pinpoint exact causes of suicide in the United States. It is such a complex culture and there are so many factors to be considered. This is one of the reasons it is so hard to fix. But as stated in the introduction, and this is important, teen suicide is not a problem exclusive to the United States. Other countries, specifically other Western nations, are experiencing similar circumstances. Like in the United States, stress on teenagers is becoming more prominent in these places as well. Of course they don't all have the exact same risk factors – it varies from place to place. However, it is true that all of these factors formulate pressures and encourage the idea of suicide to surface in the minds of teenagers.

Canada

Canada has long been influenced by the United States, both economically and of course culturally. There are so many similarities between the two countries. With geography in mind, the fact that they are so alike shouldn't be too surprising. But how frequent is teen suicide there?

Believe it or not, Canada has a higher rate of youth suicide, and it has been this way for a while now. In 1970, according to WHO, Canada had a 7.0 per 100,000 teen suicide rate (15 to 19 year olds) compared to 5.9 in the United States. Jump ahead two decades and in 1991 Canada's rate (for the same age group) had upped to 13.5, compared

to the United States' 11.1. In fact, in that year, Canada's teen suicide rate was 3rd highest in the world, only behind New Zealand and Finland. In 2000, Canada's most recent report to WHO, their youth suicide rate (ages 15 to 24) was determined to be 13.0, once again above the U.S. rate for that year, which stood at 10.2.

Experts have struggled with why Canada has consistently held the higher teen suicide rate. An article by Rae Corelli was appropriately titled: "Killing the pain; Canada has an alarming rate of teenage suicide – and nobody, including grieving parents, knows why." Along with other compelling statistics throughout the article, it notes, "while the overall national suicide rate [in Canada] increased by 78 percent between 1952 and 1992, the rate for 15- to 19-year-olds rose from two per 100,000 to 12.9-more than 600 percent" (Corelli 55). The figures are outrageous.

Dr. Diane Sacks, a sociologist and assistant professor at the University of Toronto, is quoted: "Canada has an abysmal record of providing mental health care for teenagers and it has gotten worse during the last 15 to 20 years." She says that part of the problem is getting help – psychiatrists have long waiting lists and sometimes don't accept new patients at all. (Corelli 56)

Several more experts are interviewed, but none can come up with a definitive reason why Canada's rate is higher than most countries. Dr. Isaac Sakinofsky, head of a suicide studies program in Toronto, spoke in more general terms: "The act of suicide tells one that the victims feel desperate, feel angry, feel betrayed, by life, by society" (Corelli 57). Like the United States, perhaps it is just a multitude of risk factors that have led to the high teen suicide rate in Canada. That's what Sakinofsky seems to believe.

The skyrocketing teen suicide rates in Canada are somewhat ironic. In 1977, a law was passed that cracked down immensely on gun control. Then in 1998 guns were banned in their entirety. While it has been proven that the 1977 crack down decreased general suicide rates in Canada (Leenars 791-810), apparently it wasn't enough. Even the 1998 ban, based on the 2000 teen suicide statistics, didn't correct the problem.

Furthermore, an article published in 2001, said the following of the accessibility of guns:

Guns matter. A study has compared suicide rates in Seattle, in Washington state, with those across the Canadian border in demographically similar but less well-armed Vancouver, British Columbia. [...] Among 15-to-24 year olds in Seattle, the total suicide rate was 40% higher, mainly because more youngsters kill themselves with guns. [...] The less lethal the weapon, the less likely death will follow. ("United States: Such a waste; Teenage suicide)

Apparently the article is forgetting about the rest of Canada. Even with the gun ban, Canada has a higher rate of youth suicide than the United States. Canadian teens are finding alternative ways to commit the act.

Of course there are many reasons for the high teen suicide rate in Canada. It is a complex issue, especially with all the risk factors. But there must be something more to it if Canada's rate is beating the United States time and time again. Maybe Sacks, the sociologist who mentioned Canada's lack of mental help, is on to something; support is so desperately needed when a teen is thinking about ending their life. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that it's an issue. The statistics speak for themselves.

Teenage Suicide in the British Isles

Republic of Ireland

The Irish way of life is somewhat distinct from other cultures. Misfortunes have been all-to-common for its people, from the infamous Potato Famine to the countless tragedies among individual families, as in former President John F. Kennedy's. It almost brings merit to their traditions – of joyous celebrations, jubilant dancing, and often times the consumption of alcohol –, perhaps an attempt to get their mind off of all their problems. This is not to say that Ireland is much unlike other Western nations, for that would be wrong. The island has long been following the footsteps of the rest of Western civilization, dating back to St. Patrick's arrival in the 5th century. As apparent in the Western culture in general, there should be little surprise that Ireland too has experienced problems with teenage suicide. However, due to their history and traditions mentioned earlier, it is also notable that these experiences are in ways different than other parts of the world.

Teen suicide rates in Ireland have been rapidly increasing in recent years, especially among males. In fact, as of 2004, suicide had become the leading cause of death for young men in Ireland (aged 15-24). According to a study by Fionnuala Lynch, et al, which surveyed 723 adolescent schoolchildren (aged 12-15), 19% expressed suicidal ideation. That means that one in five Irish adolescents admitted to having contemplated suicide. (Lynch 441-451)

Statistics from WHO shed further light on the issue. In 1970, Ireland's suicide rate for teenagers (ages 15-19) was just 0.4 per 100,000. Now compare that to Ireland's teen suicide rate twenty years later. In 1991, it had risen to 7.5. At the time, Ireland's

teen suicide rate was the 10th highest in the world, surpassing nations like Japan, Sweden, and Russia. By the year 2000, WHO reports the youth suicide rate for Ireland had jumped to 16.1 – 25.3 for males and 6.5 for females. This was higher than the United States, which in 2000 had a 10.2 youth suicide rate. Ireland's teen suicide rate has been gradually increasing over the last three decades, and if the trend continues, it should be a major concern.

As far as motives are concerned, Irish teenagers usually commit suicide under circumstances somewhat different from other nations. A study by researchers Paul Corcoran, et al, took an in-depth look at Irish suicides between 1990 and 1998, observing data from both WHO and the Irish Central Statistics Office. They found that alcohol consumption was linked to a shocking amount of teen suicides in Ireland. This is unusual, since in most countries, including the United States, the majority of teen suicides are not connected to alcohol intake. The researchers were not overly surprised by this, citing a Swedish study about alcoholism and drugs in Europe, which found that “the prevalence of alcohol intoxication/binge drinking in Irish teenagers (male and female) has increased and is among the highest in Europe.” Of course, the trend is frightening, especially should it continue. The study further found that during weekends and on holiday Mondays, which many teenagers consider prime-time for drinking, Irish teenage boys have experienced a higher rise in suicides than any other Irish group between 1990 and 1998. (Corcoran 429-438)

Although the study didn't release specific numbers to back up its claim, it did say that it found teenage boys (age 15-19) were committing suicide at a much higher rate during the month of May. The study suggests that this is due to stress in school, as it is a

time period full of examinations. Therefore, teenage suicide in Ireland isn't just limited to the effects of alcohol – there are other factors as well. In fact, the build up of stress as a reason for ending one's life is a much more noticeable trend that can apply to other countries throughout the world. (Corcoran 429-438)

Finally, it must be noted that although Irish teenage boys are the group primarily focused on in studies, it is only because suicide rates are much higher among them than Irish teenage girls. Teenage girls do commit suicide in Ireland, as indicated by data from WHO, but the rate is not nearly as alarming – in 2000, the rate for males was 25.3 per 100,000, but for females it was 6.5. However, when girls do commit suicide, the Corcoran study suggests it is for the same reasons as boys – with alcohol consumption usually connected and stress from school also being a factor at times. This would only make sense, since they are a part of the very same Irish culture.

United Kingdom

After looking at Ireland, one may find teen suicide in the United Kingdom (UK) surprising, as it is much in contrast. The “Kingdom,” which encompasses England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, has actually experienced much lower suicide rates in the past several decades. Specific reasons for this trend are hard to come by and can be somewhat up for debate.

Suicide rates in general in the UK, when taking all age groups into account, have been on the decline since 1965. The rate for that year was 10.4 per 100,000. It dropped to 7.9 in 1970 and 7.5 in 1975. It rose slightly to 8.8 in 1980 and 9.0 in 1985, but after that it again began to fall. By 1995 it was at 7.4 and in 1999 (the most recent statistics the UK has reported to WHO) it stood at 7.5. Turning to teen suicide rates, it has been

experiencing an increase over the years, but nowhere near significant compared to other Western nations. According to WHO, it stood at 2.3 in 1970 (15-19 year olds), 4.3 in 1991 (15-19 year olds), and only 6.7 in 1999 (15-24 year olds). These results are convincing that the problem has been far less of an issue, for whatever reason, in the UK.

One possible explanation of this is the gun control aspect. The UK has a strict ban on guns that it continuously enforces. The Republic of Ireland also has anti-gun legislation, but has been known to be more lenient in comparison. Since it is much more difficult to obtain guns in the UK, lives are very likely being saved.

One could also suggest that bans of certain medication in the UK are aiding to reduce the teen suicide rate. While few sources about teen suicide in the UK could be found, one particular article was located about the ban of a specific drug. According to the article, the Food & Drug Administration in the United States was reevaluating effects of the antidepressant Paxil, “[following] a British warning that called for doctors to stop prescribing the drug for children and teens because it may increase suicidal thoughts” (Harrar 175). The issue of antidepressants, and potential connections to suicide, continues to be looked at in the United States, and in part it has been a result of the strong stance the UK has taken.

Other than these theories, the reason for the UK’s low suicide rate remains in question. Its culture is comparative with the United States and other Western nations, even Ireland in some aspects. Certainly teen suicide still exists, but it remains much less of a problem.

Teenage Suicide in Eastern Europe

Russia

Since communism collapsed in 1991 Russia has been in rebuilding mode. The former Soviet Union, once a world superpower, had lost the Cold War and was basically forced to start from scratch. If ever a need for optimism, it would be now – in the post-Cold War era. But many Russians have shown little hope for the future. The country has been going backward in many ways, not forward. There probably couldn't be a better scenario for suicide than this.

Unfortunately, record of teen or youth suicide while the Soviet Union was in power seems to be nonexistent. The government did not report statistics to WHO until communism fell. So whether or not there has been a huge surge in suicides remains a question. What is clear, however, is that after communism was out of power, the youth suicide rate in Russia was (and is) extremely high. Between 1991 and 1993, according to WHO, Russia held a 24.8 per 100,000 youth suicide rate (ages 15 to 24) – 41.7 for males and 7.9 for females. In Russia's most recent report to WHO in 2002, the number has increased to a 33.4 rate – 56.9 for males and 9.2 for females. The 33.4 rate gave the Russian Federation that not so coveted title in 2002 – highest youth suicide rate in the world. In that year alone, Russia lost an incredible 7,721 young people to suicide. The numbers are staggering. Since these are the most recent numbers available from WHO, one may assume that Russia is still at the top of the list today in 2005 – something that, based on the trends, is probably true.

The motivations are obvious. Even if Soviets weren't in favor of communism, they had to at least admit that it provided them with a sense of comfort. There was

always that system of support for them. Once it fell, the nation transformed into a more capitalistic, individual all for him or herself, struggle-for-survival sort of place. “Russia faces a catastrophe,” The Economist wrote in October 2004. The article goes on to point out that there have been “around 10m more deaths than births since the end of communism.” It goes on with more devastating aspects of reality in Russia: “Male life expectancy is lower than it was 40 years ago. Fewer than half of 16-year-old Russian boys will reach 60.” Poverty is just part of the explanation according to the article, as there are even worse conditions of poverty in former Soviet states. One aspect, it writes, is a “disregard for their own health [...] especially their high regard for vodka.” It goes on about alcoholic, claiming that how they drink it – “mostly in binges” – as the reason for high rates of death, heart disease, murder, and, of course, suicide. Why not commit suicide in a nation so bleak, so hopeless? This is exactly how the thousands of young Russians feel right before they commit the act. The article ends with this statement: “Russia’s suicidal bent could eventually threaten its disintegration, if its vast, depopulated territory became ungovernable.” (“Death wish; Russian demography”)

Former Soviet States

After the fall of communism, former Soviet states have been in just as bad, if not worse, condition than Russia itself. Of course while under the rule of the Soviet Union, these nation states were in bad shape. They were often being held against their will and didn’t have the resources to fight back. However, immediately after they were freed of communism may have been the worse time of all. Immediately, any support or help they were getting from the Soviets – in any form at all – was lost; in a sense, they were

abandoned. They were left alone in rebuilding, with very little to begin with, a process that one could argue was far more complex than Russia's own.

The statistics tell the story. Between 1991 and 1993, according to WHO, the youth suicide rates for former Soviet states were as follows (per 100,000): Ukraine 11.3, Belarus 14.7, Estonia 20.2, Latvia 22.2, Slovenia 22.7, and Lithuania 25.8. Just to put this in perspective, the United States youth suicide rate for those years was 12.9. Ukraine's rate in 2000 was 17.5. The youth suicide rate for Belarus, in its most recent report to WHO in 2001, was 22.2. Kazakhstan's rate in 2002 was 28.0 and Lithuania's rate in 2002 was 33.1. Again, for perspective, the United States' most recent report in 2000 put their rate at 10.2. Eastern European nations have jumped into the limelight as far as youth suicide is concerned in recent years.

An article by Irena Maryniak captures what life was like in post-communist Eastern Europe. Maryniak writes that Soviet children, including those of the satellite states, would grow up without a care in the world. They felt they had everything and certainly the resources they needed. They were "young bearer[s] of the glorious communist future." But of course that all changed when communism collapsed. Once that had happened, "old bonds of stability [had] been broken. To survive, to get a grip, to be up to speed, you often [had] to move." (Maryniak)

Maryniak makes the point that it wasn't like this for all of Eastern Europe. Certainly in the bigger cities – Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest among them – there were opportunities and connections to the larger world. "But most of the youth of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union [was] not nearly so optimistic. Everywhere, social services [had] collapsed, life expectancy [was] down, and in parts [...] incomes [could

not] cover basic necessities.” She continues, “In rural areas throughout former communist Europe there [was] no access to information, training or employment, and often no cinema or railway station.” [Maryniak]

Maryniak says that there was no wonder that stress and psychological problems were a result. The conditions were terrible and the young had grim outlooks about the future. She mentions that “in Russia, Belarus and Lithuania, suicides of men aged 15 to 24 doubled between 1990 and 2000.” Then she offers an actual suicide note to contemplate, from a boy who jumped off a bridge in the former East Germany: “We had anticipated something better.” There is that theme again – hopelessness. The young in Eastern Europe didn’t have much to look forward to anyway.

Teenage Suicide in Northern Europe

For a period of time, the Big Three Scandinavian nations (Finland, Norway, and Sweden) had some of the highest teen suicide rates in the world. It was a classic example of the Western way of life taking over a traditional culture, which there dated back to Nordic and Viking traditions. In 1991, all three countries were in the Top 15 as far as teen suicide rates were concerned. But this was not long lived. As time went on, Eastern Europe took total control of the statistics, and Northern Europe began lagging behind.

Finland has historically been known for a high teen suicide rate. In 1970, according to WHO, its teen suicide rate (15 to 19 year olds) was 10.6 per 100,000 – compared to 7.8 in Japan, 5.9 in the United States, 5.5 in Australia. For that same year, nearby Sweden was at 7.6. However, believe it or not, Norway had a rate of only 1.3 (this would soon go up significantly). In 1991, Finland was ranked second in the world

in teen suicide rates with 15, only behind New Zealand's 15.7. Norway was ranked fourth in the world with 13.4, behind Canada's 13.5. Sweden made number fourteen on the list with a rate of 6.2. The most recent Scandinavian statistics to WHO were submitted in 2001 and 2002. In 2001, Norway's youth suicide rate (15 to 24 year olds) was 15.0 and Sweden's was 7.5. In 2002, Finland reported a rate of 18.4. Finland and Norway's rates were both high – higher than the United States, Canada, Australia, and Japan –, but were no match for the numbers out of Eastern Europe, discussed earlier. In contrast, Sweden's rate was extremely low, beat out by nations not so known for youth suicide like France (7.9) and Germany (7.7).

The Scandinavian numbers have been hard to explain. Even experts have had trouble locating significant differences between the Big Three. It seems like the suicides are caused by the normal risk factors of hopelessness, stress, and depression, but it also seems like, for whatever reason, these factors are magnified in Northern Europe.

A study out of Norway by Berit Groholt, et al, makes the comment: "Standing on one's own feet is considered a high virtue in Norway, and this also may contribute to the common attitude that professional help is an unwelcome intrusion." This likely derives from the strong tradition found in the Scandinavian countries, and therefore the same can probably be said for Finland and Sweden. The Groholt study takes a look at the 129 Norwegians, aged 19 years or younger, that committed suicide between 1990 and 1992. It was determined that psychiatric disorders were present in 74% of these youths. However, it was found that the acts "were influenced by a variety of factors, especially mental disorders, drunkenness, and lack of psychiatric help, even after suicide attempts

and communications.” The study proves that Norway is wrapped up in many of the same risk factors exposed to other Western nations. (Groholt 250-263)

The Lindqvist and Johansson study takes an extensive look at the deaths of fifteen adolescents in Northern Sweden, using legal documents, government records, and accounts from family members. It was found that “most of the subjects [...] were facing normal life crises like broken love affairs, unemployment, and discord with parents.” So, again, there were a multitude of risk factors, but all of them were quite in touch with the Western way of life. Some links could also be made to the communities the teens grew up in. The study notes that “the northern region of Sweden, and particularly the interior parts, [had], for decades, been drained of people, job opportunities, and community services.” Also, through interviews with community members, it could be seen that there was a pessimistic view about living in North Sweden. Finally, “the people of the region have traditionally been reluctant to seek advice for personal problems.” Like Norway, Sweden couldn’t find any real direct causes, only the common ones like stress and pressures. (Lindqvist 115-119)

The studies out of Sweden and Norway prove that the countries of Northern Europe seem to mirror that of other Western nations. Multiple risk factors attributed to the adolescent suicides. One would surmise that it is similar in Finland. With just the same old problems, there is no wonder that the rate has been relatively stable in recent years. It also helps explain why the Scandinavian nations have fallen down the ranks of the world’s nations that most commonly experience teen suicide. Each of the Big Three seems to be like any other Western country.

Teenage Suicide in the Far South

A decade can make a difference. In the early 1990s, the Far South region held the highest youth suicide rates in the world, led by New Zealand and Australia. Since then, several prevention programs have been implemented, and the rapid increase in youth suicide in these nations has been slowed considerably. Teen suicide remains a problem in this region – the most recent WHO data reports that their rates are still higher than the United States –, but it no longer leads the world in this category.

New Zealand

New Zealand lies off the coast of southeast Australia, literally surrounded on all sides by the Pacific Ocean. The country is similar in size to Great Britain and is known for being multicultural. Along with its inhabitants of European descent, it is populated by the Maori (its native people) and immigrants from various Pacific Islands and parts of southeastern Asia.

According to WHO, New Zealand's teen suicide rate (15 to 19 year olds) jumped from 5.8 per 100,000 in 1970 to 15.7 in 1991. Its 15.7 in 1991 ranked it number one in the world for teen suicides, ahead of number two Finland's 15.0 and number three Canada's 13.5. Not far behind, Norway (13.4), the United States (11.1), and Australia (10.5) followed. The rate continued to rise but slowed down thereafter and stood at 18.2 in 2000. It was still high, but it was no longer the world's highest, as Eastern European nations jumped out in front to start the new millennium.

It's not easy to provide an explanation for its brief reign as the highest teen suicide rate in the world, but possible reasons have been proposed. A study by

Wilhelmina Drummond precisely tries to address this. One such reason is “that historically in New Zealand, schools socialized the youth for adult roles and work,” which was often too much for them. Uncertainty in career paths, identity, and the future in general discouraged teens, and led to suicidal behavior. Drummond cites a 1988 study that suggested these other reasons for teen suicide in New Zealand: “having been born overseas, having parents who were separated, being a sickness beneficiary or inpatient, [and] having relationship problems.” A more recent study suggested that the rate was due to “high rates of depression, alcohol use, and drug use.” (Drummond 930)

When dealing with teen suicide in New Zealand, it is important not to omit the ethnic factor, as it certainly exists. As mentioned earlier, New Zealand is multicultural in a sense that it is made up of European immigrants, Asian immigrants, and its native people the Maori. Studies have shown that Maori, particularly young Maori, commit suicide at a higher rate than other New Zealanders.

Maori and non-Maori suicide rates, for the 15 to 24 age group, were observed from 1995 to 1999. It was found that “for both young males and females, Maori have had higher rates of suicide than non-Maori each year from 1996 to 1999.” The study further notes that in 1999 “young Maori males and females are approximately one and a half times more likely to die by suicide than non-Maori young people.” The connection between young Maori and higher suicide rates is clear. (Beautrais)

Reasons for the higher Maori rates were not made clear in the Beautrais study, but one might surmise that it is due to a sense of being left out. The Maori island had been intruded on by foreigners and is now overwhelmingly dominated by non-Maori. It is

likely that the Maori have lost their sense of tradition and belonging to the island and that may be linked to the higher youth suicide rate they exhibit.

A few more reasons for the nation's high youth suicide rate (as a whole) can be observed by looking at the state of the country in the early 1990s. The nation's Public Health Commission wrote in 1994, "During the last ten years there has been a major restructuring of the economy." The changes were happening in a variety of ways, but most were related to the government's attempt to reduce national debt, improve international competitiveness, and encourage foreign investment in hopes of securing a better future. It could certainly be true that the high teen suicide rate was a direct effect of these changes and that the nation's youth, as a result, were uncertain about their future. (Drummond 930-931)

Australia

Along with New Zealand, Australia was experiencing problems with teen suicide in the early 1990s. The similarity is most likely attributed to their proximity, as only a part of the Pacific Ocean separated them. Various statistics and studies are also available for Australia.

According to WHO, Australia's teen suicide rate (15 to 19 year olds) was 5.5 per 100,000 in 1970. In 1991, it had risen to 10.5, ranking it sixth in the world. The rate only continued to rise and in 1994 Australia had claimed the frightening title of highest youth suicide rate in the world. The magic number: 16.4. In just three years, the rate had increased by more than 150%. The rate has subsided in recent years, and Australia's last report to WHO in 2001 cited a 12.9 youth suicide rate.

The decrease has been substantial. In 2001, 343 youths had committed suicide in Australia, compared to 2,294 in 1992. It seems that Australians finally took control of the issue, first by recognizing it and then by initiating means of prevention. But how did the rate get so high in the early 1990s?

A study on suicide by Zinn, et al, gave a few thoughts about the issue. Brent Waters, a professor in Sydney, suggested that the high rate was related to several factors, including the media, “lack of confidence in the future” (which seems to come up time and time again), and “the growing incidence of broken families.” Waters noted, “Things are worse in the rural areas, where in New South Wales the rate of suicide among 15 to 19 year olds is almost twice that in the city.” Waters further said that the easy accessibility of guns in rural areas likely served as fuel to the act. (Zinn 7-11)

An article published in a British medical journal in 1998 provided a sense of hope, referring to the turnaround that was about to take place. First it began with these troubling statistics: “Each week, ten young Australians kill themselves and 1000 attempt to do so.” Similar to the Maori in New Zealand, it went on with this stat about Australian natives: “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youths are 40% more likely to commit suicide than the general community.” But then it began to switch gears, arguing why the future may be brighter. (Loff 633)

The article announced, “The Australian People’s Forum on Youth Suicide, the first of its kind in Australia, was launched in Parliament House, Canberra, on Aug 10.” (The article was published on August 22.) The forum was composed of people from all walks of life – “youth representatives, families of suicide victims, educationalists, counsellors, and community volunteers.” The forum questioned the mental health system

that existed in the nation at the time. It was a key development, as Aussies were beginning to recognize the seriousness of the issue. (Loff 633)

Obviously the 1998 forum helped, because three years later, when Australia's last youth suicide rate was reported to WHO, it had declined. While New Zealand's rate continues to rise slightly, Australia's is now going down, and its future appears to be promising with new prevention programs underway.

Other Countries in the Far South

Journalist Christopher Zinn wrote an article in 1995 that sheds some light on youth suicides in other Far South countries. The results were similar to New Zealand and Australia in that youth suicide rates were also high in these nearby countries. The title of the article said it all: "South Pacific leads the world in rates of youth suicide" (Zinn 830). Even though this is outdated, it certainly tells the story of the problem in the early 1990s.

It was found that in Micronesia, a tiny nation made up of islands, males aged 15 to 24 "kill[ed] themselves at a rate of 200 for every 100000 population—20 times the comparable rate in the United States." This outrageous figure of 200 deaths per 100,000 is unheard of elsewhere. It is believed by experts that the high rate was attributed to pressures caused by "the transition from traditional to modern society." (Zinn 830)

Western Samoa proved to have a youth suicide rate of 30 per 100,000, higher than Australia and New Zealand. Dr. Heather Booth explained the high rate, "The cash economy, the nuclear family, all these changes are breaking down traditional society. There are limited opportunities for upward mobility, for emigration, and there is a lot of frustration." (Zinn 830)

These smaller nations are generally not included in statistics by WHO, simply because they do not submit reports. Their figures of youth suicide were calculated independently, and presented to the public by journalists like Zinn. Nevertheless, it is clear that nations of the Far South were certainly experiencing a difficult period of change in the early 1990s. Although their rates of teen suicide fall short of the current highest rates, their time at the top of the list should not be forgotten.

Teenage Suicide in the Middle East

Generally-speaking, from the data available, the teen suicide rate in the Middle East is tremendously low – lower in this region than anywhere in the entire world. Part of this, however, may be due to underreporting. Few nations in the Middle East have actually submitted data to WHO as far as suicide rates are concerned, and those that have are characterized by incredibly low rates. Egypt's last report to WHO was in 1987: a 0.0 youth suicide rate (15 to 24 year olds), statistically-speaking, with only 3 total suicides (1 male, 2 females). Iran's last report to WHO came in 1991: a 0.3 youth suicide rate with only 34 total deaths (25 males, 9 females). Jordan reported to WHO in 1979: a 0.0 youth suicide rate, zero total suicides for those between 15 and 24 years old for that entire year. Kuwait's report is the most recent, as it came to WHO in 2001: a 0.6 youth suicide rate, with 2 total deaths (both males). It's so intriguing compared to the rest of the globe.

If the data that has been submitted is accurate and holds true across the region, it actually wouldn't be that surprising. The Middle East is one of those difficult-to-decipher regions as far as East or West is concerned. As far as its leaders are concerned, it seems to prefer neither, or at least somewhere in between. Going back to Durkheim,

this would be considered a moderate region. Its social integration and regulation are both moderate. Again, as Durkheim said, this would mean low suicide rates; the theory seems to be fit.

However, what about the center the Middle East is becoming for radicalism in recent years? It has become a base for religious fundamentalism, led by terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda and Hamas. These groups use violence to get their points across and it is beginning to catch the eyes' of the region's young people. The terrorists know that teenagers are easiest to recruit – they don't fully have their lives planned out and many of them become attracted to doing something for a greater cause. These teenagers have grown up learning about violence and how it can be glorified. They have been taught by radicals that being part of a suicide bombing is a noble deed that will gain them everlasting life and the adorned title of 'martyr.'

The textbooks that children currently use in Afghanistan are filled with violence. The books are "lavishly illustrated with bombs, landmines, guns, and soldiers and filled with [...] jihad and other militant Islamic teachings" (Sluzki 3). How ironic it is that these books were given to Afghan schools *from the United States*, in an attempt to increase children's interest in waging war against the Soviet Union. Now children read these books and become interested in *fighting the United States* after hearing the repeated call, often propaganda, from nearby terrorist groups. This is just one example of how "seeds of violence" as Sluzki put it are being instilled in children's minds (Sluzki 3).

For more instances of violence being portrayed to youth, one need not look further than Palestine. Journalist Kenneth Timmerman wrote a disturbing article about the Palestinian Authority under Yasser Arafat. It was producing music videos, meant to

appeal to children and teens, that encouraged the young to become martyrs and kill Israelis. The videos were made out of popular music and aired continuously on television. In one video in particular, a young boy is shown on his way to commit a suicide bombing. He says his goodbyes and sings, “Mother, do not cry for me.” That very line has appeared in at least three actual suicide notes between May 2001 and December 2002 – those who wrote the notes were between the ages of 14 and 17. This makes it clear that the videos were having an effect on teens. The worst part about the videos is that they glorify the act, make it seem painless, and in every way make it positive, an achievement, a holy and honorable act for the Palestinian people. (Timmerman 35)

Another article sheds further light on violence and children in Palestine. According to Eyad Serraj, a psychologist in Gaza, many older children and teenagers view martyrdom in a positive light. Serraj says “that a poll conducted in the summer of 2003 showed that 36% of 12-year-old boys questioned in Gaza said they believed sacrificing themselves for the Palestinian cause was the best thing they could do with their lives” (Blanche 24). Serraj is not surprised by the find:

In their minds, the only model of power and glory is the martyr. Palestinian society glorifies the martyr. They are elevated to the level of saints. In the hopeless and inhuman environment in which they live there is the promise that they will have a better life in heaven ... There’s a very big pool of potential martyrs. They’re queuing up, and that happens because hope is diminishing. (Blanche 24)

To be fair, not all Middle Easterners are in favor of this trend – using children and teenagers as suicide bombers. Even in Palestine, where the act is being most promoted, it is hearing stern criticism from some. An article elaborates on an incident in March 2004 in which a teen, who was about to commit a suicide bombing, was caught before the act. It has stirred a lot of concern and emotion in Palestine. The 16-year old surrendered at an Israeli checkpoint and was held briefly by Israeli forces. A day later, his mother Tamam Abdo issued a statement: “No one the age of my son should be used to commit such acts [...] Maybe if he was 20, perhaps I could understand. At that age, they know what they are doing.” She said he was nothing more than a misguided teenager. Following the incident, several other Palestinians were interviewed and voiced their anger about the young being used as suicide bombers. Mohammed Zeidal, a college student, said that “to use someone his age is very, very wrong.” Bassem Eid, head of the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, went on the record saying, “It is really shameful for the Palestinian reputation [...] to misuse our children and push them to their death.” This is not to say that all are opposed to such acts – as mentioned earlier, there is support for youth suicide bombings in Palestine –, but it should also be clear that there is some resistance to them as well. (“Teenagers in Suicide Bombings”)

This information about terrorism and suicide bombings is not at all meant to overshadow the earlier data, but it is certainly pertinent in a discussion about teen suicide in the Middle East. Again, it must be reiterated that teen suicide rates are indeed among the lowest in the Middle East of any region in the world – at least according to the data that is available (it is scare for the region). The region serves as a living testament to

Durkheim's theory; it fully supports his belief that more moderately structured societies will have lower suicide rates.

Teenage Suicide in East Asia

Japan

It is not uncommon for Americans to think of Japan as a whole different world. After all, it is on the other side of the globe. The similarities though are striking, thanks to the impact of the Western world. After much resistance, Japan finally opened its nation up for trade with the West in the 1850's, falling to pressure from the United States. Ever since, Japan has adapted to Western life in many forms. It has seen that for it to compete on the global scale it has little choice but to make changes to its traditional way of life. In the 20th century, Japan blossomed with technological advances and finally put itself on the map. It took up competition with the United States and countries in Europe. This history may not seem relevant, but it is important to understanding the development of teenage suicide in Japan.

Ever since being exposed to the West, Japan has felt extreme pressures from the outside world. These pressures have forced its people to fight in an ongoing struggle to be competitive. However, they have also done harm to its people. Japanese teenagers especially grow up being reminded of this need to be the best that they can. Sometimes it can be too much to bare. So why not suicide? Everything can end in one instant.

The teen suicide rate in Japan has fluctuated considerably over the course of the last 35 years. According to WHO, the Japanese suicide rate in 1970 for 15 to 19 year olds was 7.8 per 100,000. By 1991, WHO reports that the suicide rate for the very same

age group had been cut in half to just 3.8. A 1994 study by Zinn, et al, also alluded to a dropping rate, stating that “suicide is no longer an honorable act” in Japan (7-11). It adds that “teenagers (10-19 year olds) made up just over 2% of suicides” in Japan in 1992. However, the most recent reports point to Japan’s suicide rate being on the rise, and that includes teenagers. A BBC News article published in 1999 discounts Zinn’s earlier statement, explaining Japan’s increase in suicides in the mid-to-late 1990’s as a result of its “deeply ingrained culture that regards suicide as an honourable way to atone for failure and express remorse” (“World: Asia-Pacific Japan on suicide alert”). The article mentions that from 1997 to 1998 “junior high school student suicides increased by 40 to 102. At high schools, 220 students took their own lives in 1998, an increase of 51.” Japan’s most recent report to WHO in the year 2000 further supports an increase. The youth suicide rate was reported to have jumped to 11.5, higher than the United States rate of 10.2 for that year. While the most recent data encompasses 19-24 year olds in addition to those 15-19, the increase has been consistent with the rise in other industrialized nations.

One particular article of interest, as to explicate possible motives for teen suicide, is “Bullied to Death in Japan” by Lauren Freedman. The article takes a look at the pressures of teenage boys growing up in Japan in the early to mid 1990’s (recent statistics make it probable that these pressures still hold true today). Bullying is the central focus, something that has become a huge problem in the nation, strikingly similar to what bullying has become in the United States. “Bullying is an old and widespread problem in Japan,” Freedman writes. Katsuyuki Ogawa, a psychologist in Tokyo, went so far as to say just about everyone will undergo the experience of being bullied. According to

Freedman, and many Japanese experts who she refers to in her article, society is to blame. Professor Yaichi Wakai put it very bluntly: “Japan is a competitive society, and bullying is one distorted phenomenon of that severe competition.” (Freedman 25)

Taking this into account and looking again at the history explained earlier, hearing that bullying occurs in Japan is not much of a surprise. The fact that it results in suicide isn't that shocking either when everything is taken into consideration. So Japan, in fact, isn't a whole different world. Many Japanese parents are forced to bury their teenagers just as in the United States. Although on the other side of the globe, Japanese instances of teen suicide actually mirror that of America in the ways discussed.

China & Hong Kong

China is immensely different than nearby Japan. It isn't considered a Western nation. Instead, it is deeply rooted in a tradition and history of its own, which of course has included thinkers like Confucius. It strives for excellence and works together as a people. It has continued along these lines into the new millennium and is widely known for its communist government. In such a place, where the individual isn't strived for, but rather the collective whole, some may initially think suicide does not exist. But this thinking would be absurd.

It is absolutely true that, based on the data available, teenage suicide doesn't occur in rates as high in China as it does in Western nations, but teenage suicide in China does occur. One of the problems to investigating it is simple: it has not been well documented. The fact that it doesn't appear to be a widespread problem may attribute to the lack of documentation. It seems that teen suicide in China is sporadic and the cases

almost very isolated from each other. In China's 1999 report to WHO, the nation reported a low 6.9 youth suicide rate – 5.4 for males and 8.6 for females. This comprised 1,541 total deaths in that year, 626 males and 915 females. This is the first occurrence of the female rate being higher, possibly suggesting that the high male rate may be associated with Western nations. The reason for the high female rate in China has not been explained, but it could be due to the fact that males are seen so much more important in Chinese society. The “one-child” rule in China forces parents to give up their daughters, as they usually want sons. Perhaps, and it is only a theory, many of these girls grow up contemplating suicide and ultimately commit the act. If there was more data available, better sense could be made of these figures.

In an article about Chinese suicide ideation, the lack of information is mentioned. “We could find only one study specifically assessing suicide ideation in a community sample of Chinese young people,” it said. That study, conducted in 1996 by men named Zhang and Jin, compared suicidal thoughts between college students in the United States and China. It found that the idea of suicide between cultures differed in many ways, with religiosity ending up the only definitive reason that both cultures would take suicide into consideration. (Stewart 227-240)

This leads to the Hong Kong study, which was published in the article mentioned above. Interesting about Hong Kong is that it has been much more wrapped in Western culture than nearby China. After all, it had been ruled by the British for over a century. Once it began adopting Western ideals, teenage suicide occurred more frequently in Hong Kong. Again, the highest rates of suicide have long been associated with the Western way of life. However, as the study points out, it didn't experience teen suicides

rates quite as high as elsewhere. A probable reason for this is that it held onto at least some of its Asian roots, heavily based on Chinese culture. This makes Hong Kong quite a unique and interesting place when we look at suicide among teenagers. Here is a place that is being tugged by both Western culture and its traditional Eastern culture at the same time. Both influences have remained prevalent, at least to some extent. Even more interesting then – what if we took a look at teenagers in Hong Kong who were born in China, and had emigrated? This is precisely what the “Suicide Ideation” study addressed.

The study took a look at 996 Chinese adolescents living in Hong Kong: 500 male and 496 female. They were asked to complete a survey in school and then conclusions were drawn. A significant difference from the majority of suicides in Western nations was uncovered. It was found that those who were considering suicide were doing so not because of reasons like peer pressure or the media. Instead, and overwhelmingly, the Chinese teenagers said they were doing it because of pressure from their parents. This remained consistent between both males and females too. (Stewart 227-240)

Although there are many differences between Japan and China, similar to the former, China strives for excellence among its people. A major difference is Japan does it for the good of the individual where in China it occurs for the good of society as a whole. Nevertheless, this work ethic, deeply rooted in East Asian tradition, is once again creating pressures. But instead of blaming specific, isolated individuals (as in bullying) for their suicidal thoughts, these Chinese students are pointing to the closest collective item they know and constantly come into contact with – their parents. Their parents, mother and father, are pressuring them to do the best they can for society. They hear it over and over from them. They are not attributing the suicidal thoughts to peers or

pressures to be “cool” for instance, but instead to their elders who they are told to follow in every respect. The difference in their state of mind is significant. (Stewart 227-240)

Still, as proven by this study, the thoughts do exist, even among Chinese teenagers – that thought of putting an end to one’s life. Perhaps because they have that support group, that collective society, and are not being singled out by others, is why their actual rates of suicide are low. The thoughts exist among Chinese teens, but it seems fewer actually go through with the action.

Conclusion

Teenage suicide is not limited to the United States alone; it is in fact a global problem, and a very large one at that. According to WHO, as of 2000, the *global youth suicide rate* (15 to 24 year olds) was 22.0 per 100,000. This more than doubles the United States youth suicide rate for that year, which as mentioned earlier stood at 10.2.

This study found that even within general regions, like the British Isles or Southeast Asia, disparities within teen suicide were found to exist. It makes it hard to say definitively why teen suicide occurs where it does and at the rate it does. Still, researchers have shared some theories and studies that simply cannot be ignored. They appear to at least partially explain the problem at hand.

When you look at the world as a whole though, there is no denying the fact that risk factors play a dominant role in leading suicide to take place. This is just common knowledge, and it isn’t limited to youth suicide either. Stress, pressures, and other factors lead individuals to ultimately committing the act. One common risk factor, which became somewhat of a theme throughout this paper, was hopelessness. The lack of hope has played such a large role in teen suicides across the globe, and this of course goes back

to the grave state the world is currently in. It was almost scary how this held true across the board. Hope for the future needs to be reinstated in the world's youth.

It will be interesting to see what the future holds. Of course, this problem won't magically go away. If it's going to be corrected, further suicide prevention programs and support groups need to be implemented across the globe. Recognizing that the problem exists is the first step. If the world is going to have any hand in stopping these alarming trends from continuing, they need to understand the basis of the problem, as laid out in this paper, and then take action immediately. Otherwise, as experts point out, the problem will only worsen and it will only become more of an issue.

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