

Should the Balcony Be The Final Choice? A Bidimensional Strategy to Prevent Teenager Suicide

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Abstract—The increasing suicide rate has drawn global attention. However, the society has not attach equal emphasis upon the witness as the ones who commit the suicide. The ignorance may lead to lack of protection of the potential ‘suiciders’. In this article, a logical chain is explored to answer the following questions in sequence: Why do adolescents take their own lives? What’s the impact on the witnesses of suicide? How to prevent teenager suicide? The writer myself organizes and reviews researches in this field to support the logical chain. And as a result, an adapted and systematic series of method is hammered out to protect both the suiciders and the witnesses, serving as a development to the traditional ways. The protection methodology highlight the philosophy that two groups dimension should be intersected and spontaneously promoted. Researchers could refine this framework into practical manual and conduct case studies to verify the accountability in this theory.

Index Terms—adolescence suicide, mental health, suicide witness, PTSD.

I. Introduction

A. The overall condition of suicide in modern society

In recent years, the suicide rate has surged. According to the public data of the U.S., the overall suicide rate came to 0.1348 per thousand. [AFSP, 2023] Among them, youngsters aged below 24 take up 16.15% in the suicides (15 24: 15.15% ; below 15:1%)

And the suicide rate climbs up year on year, increasing by 37% from 2007 to 2021. And the the suicide rate of youngsters below 24 reached 0.18% in total in 2021. [CDC, 2020] Therefore, our society is in severe situation in adolescence suicide prevention.

A few months ago in the high school of the writer, a Grade 10 girl jumped down from the sixth-floor balcony to end her life. And the further investigation into the event was forced terminated by the collusion of school and the public authority. This event pushed the writer to conduct this research. The title of this article also indicates that the society should devote joint effort to prevent the balcony from being anyone’s ‘final choice’, by giving them more meaningful options in their life.

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B. The former researches on teenager suicide

Among all the researches in the field of adolescence suicide, what is the most emphasized is the reasons for suicide. Around the turn of the century, a quantity of studies had been conducted. The result cover the direct reasons for suicide (event, accident, disorder...) and the statistical patterns of the suicide teenagers (habits, age, race...). The reasons researches are supported by abundant data and own accountability.

After the patterns of suicide were studied, psychologists, educationalist and NGO had established a series of systems and corresponding mechanisms to protect the potential suiciders from the “choice”. So far these systems make some differences to save part of the suiciders. [Wang et al., 2011]

And in these years, the psychology area show interest in research on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (i.e. PTSD), which often happens on the witnesses of suicide event. These studies started around 2005 and have been relatively mature [Yarnell, 2015].

C. The absence of witness-oriented system

Most of the researches on adolescence suicide are suicider-oriented, namely, they focus on the group who share similar characteristics with the suiciders. No attention has been attached to offering help to the witnesses of the suicide, who bear the direct impact of the event and are more likely to be the potential suiciders.

D. The logical chain of this research

This research aims to establish a practical and bidimensional (i.e. both suicider-oriented and witness-oriented) strategy to prevent adolescence suicide.

This strategy is based on the former studies mentioned in I-B. The motivation of suicide is the theoretical basis of corresponding prevention system.

So we imitate how the suicide-oriented system (I-B. Paragraph 1) is constructed based on the suicide-oriented motivation (I-B. Paragraph 2), to hammer out a strategy with the witness-oriented motivation (I-B. Paragraph 3).

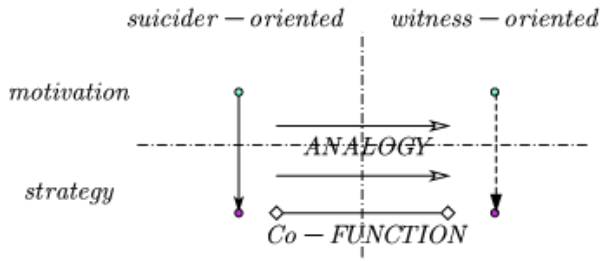


Fig. 1. The logical chain

This article will have brief review of the three foundations and put forward the strategy.

II. Method

The present article build the logic chain with the literature review in the first three parts, choosing authoritative (prestigious publisher, renowned institute, peer-reviewed), classic, most-cited (over 100) and comprehensive (mostly according to the reference sum (over 50)) journal articles. Then a original bidimensional system is constructed with the theoretical basis.

III. Basis I: suicider-oriented factors

According to [Hawton and Catalan, 1987], one third of the the adolescents in the cases commit a suicide to escape permanently from a specific painful situation.

This situation have a series of factors. [Bridge et al., 2006], [King et al., 2001]

- Mental disorder

Most of the mental disorder may significantly increase the crisis of suicide, including psychiatric disorder, mood disorder, substance abuse disorder, concuet disorder, antisocial behavior, anxiety disorder, psychosis, psychiatric comorbidities and so on.

- Personality

Some personality characteristics add unstable factors, including high implusivity level (hard to control temperary emotional impact), hopelessness, low self-esteem, neuroticism, perfectionism.

- Family

Family of origin have to with the experience of childhood of the suiciders and basically determine the personality of people. Crisis factors are below: family management practices, loss of parent(s), family constellation, psychopathology (history) of family members etc.

- Interpersonal Environment

Interpersonal environment affects the emotion situation of the youngsters. Mostly it can be divided into 2 typical problem, violence and loneliness. School bullying have direct impact on the dignity of the adolescents. And the loneliness always stems from the

deficit of social skills and Interpersonal effectiveness [Kienhorst et al., 1995].

- Accidental Events

Besides the long-term factors above, several accidental events contribute to suicide, including getting involved into crime, partner betrayal, natural hazard etc.

Compared with adults having full life experience, the adolescents do not have capabiltiy to cope with these unexpected situation, which may convert into negative emotions.

- Stress

In previous researches, stress was seldom discussed individually and always classified into other factors. The academic pressure plays an key role in the adolescence suicide, especially in Eastern Asian countries. This present article adds some more detailed analysis. In Eastern Asian countries, co-acting factors (cultural traditions, notion, population, social status) make the citizens (especially proletariat and urban middle class) regard the tertiary education as the only "promising" (even "acceptable") way to fulfill the career or realising personal values. High-quality education resources are limited, so that the competition of the college is fierce. Therefore, the over-preparation of the examination make most of the students reaching their ceilings. But the students still be stimulated to make progress and have superstition of miracle. This vicious spiral (unrewarding effort -> stimulation -> unrewarding effort) deprives the sense of meaning.

IV. Basis II: suicider-oriented prevention

Based on the motivation, factors, and reasons of suicide, some classic suicider prevention mechanism has been set up. [Gould et al., 2003], [Aini, 2017], [Mann et al., 2005] Several strategies are listed below with brief explanation.

A. School-based Programs

- skill training

This refers to some courses focusing on improve the problem-solving, coping and cogntive skills, which are commonly missing in suiciders.

- screening

This refers to having an individual investigation for every student in the school and assess their crisis to commit suicide. Have intervention if necessary.

- gatekeeper training

This refers to getting the staff and teachers of the school equiped with professional psychological consulting ability, to offer on-time assistance to student in a bad situation or in a crisis.

B. Community-based Programs

- crisis center/hotline

This is the most traditional way to prevent suicide of all the age. It could be regarded as the last defence of the suicide attempt with the help of professionals.

- firearm restriction

This way is only for countries with less gun control. It is a negative way to control suicide. Apart from confining guns, building fence on the high-floor window and edges of roof could be regarded as the same strategy, namely postpone the suicide to give some more time to self-rescue emotionally.

V. Basis III: Relevant studies on PTSD

Studies show that the adolescence witnesses of suicide are much more likely to suffer from PTSD [Mazza, 2000]. Further research shows that PTSD adolescent sufferers have a higher risk of committing suicide. [Ho et al., 2000]

The epistmology, diagnosis, prevention and therapies of PTSD are relatively mature. [Foa et al., 2010], [Lancaster et al., 2016], [Watson, 2019] And in recent year, scholars in this field have attach attention onto the adolescence group. [Hamblen and Barnett, 2016]

VI. A bidimensional strategy

According to the three parts of theoritical basis and the logical chain, the present article forges a bidimensional system to prevent adolescence suicide.

This system is divided into active part(pre-protection of suicide behavior) and passive part(response measures after a suicide happens).

As an emergency settlement system, it should not cost too much human and material resources in daily routine. Rather, the active part ought to serve as an extension of passive part in daily life.

A. Passive Part

1) Period 1: Around-the-corner Assist:

This period refers to the short time, ranging from 1-2 days to several hours, before the suicide attempt. In this period the potential suiciders' mood are in an extremely unstable state. They are immersed or overwhelmed by a certain suffering situation.

Studies show that in this period, most of the teenagers will reveal their suicide intention or ideation to some people they trust most. [Gould et al., 2003], [Aseltine Jr and DeMartino, 2004] It could be regarded as the final self-rescue of their hope.

Usually, these expressions are overlooked, for people may think there is no need to make a fuss. Their friends and family are always aware of their asking for help after it is too late(losing contact with the suicider or screening the delay-delivered suicide note on the social media).

Part of the teenagers may call the crisis hotline, the professionals should do their part, and better finish the post-tracking.

In the most cases, if they contact with the non-professional, their credible person. The person should try

their best to utilize their empathy to offer comfort. If he/she has a gap, he/she should refer to [WHO et al., 2021] or ask for professional assist.

After the contact with the potential suicider, the person should at once trigger the following part of this system.

The 24h operation of this system should be supported by a group of people in the school.(call them '**thehead**' hereinafter)

Then the head should give them overall direction according to the information provided by the trusted and try identify the background information of the potential suicider.

2) Period 2: On-the-spot Assist:

This period refers to when the suicider hesitate before they finish their final movement of suicide(eg. holding the knife, standing on the edge of balcony or roof). There still exists possibility to save the life in most scenes. However, people fail to do that due to bad organization.

If the teenager stick to commit the suicide after the contact in period 1 (or without Period 1, just be witnessed), the head should send people to find out their exact position and have some crisis intervention expert go to the spot. Meanwhile, ask for help to the police if necessary.

Once they confirm the position of the teenager, physical protection(falling, drowning, medicine etc.) should be prepared immediately.

The unrelated people should be cleared.(Some of them may give vicious comments which facilitate the suicide) It is highly recommended that strictly control the number of people on the spot, namely, only reserving several essential people in the face of the teenager. The head should carefully give permission to some people to get close to the teenager, according to the background information (even the family or friends), making sure that they will have positive influence. Some rabid parent may insult their child even in this situation and too many friends or peers may evoke the teenager's guilty or sense of shame.

Then the professionals should temper the teenager and try to hold back his/her suicide.

3) Period 3: On-the-scene Process:

If pitifully, the tragedy happens, this period refers to the short time after the event.

The first aid on the spot should offer help at once. Meanwhile, the head is supposed to direct staff to prevent the adolescent witnesses see any terrific scene directly.

One of the most essential point is that after the event the school should clearly tells the students what has happened. The blocking of message could not prevent the students from getting to know the event. Moreover, it will magnify the impact on the students for this behavior leaves an image of making light of the life of the suicider and avoiding the responsibility(Though it is actually how most schools are).

4) Period 4: Post-event Investigation:

to convert their memory into positive attitude to future life and motivation forward.

d) Environment Control:

Besides, the school has the duty to create a friendly environment for the witness. The school should contact the witnesses' parents individually to ensure them not give radical or offensive comment on the event (Actually, most parents with traditional thought will do that without dissuasion. Some even threaten the teenagers not to suicide).

Meanwhile, there could be contemptuous comment in the school that the suiciders take their own life in fear of examination. This comment have no difference from the catalyst of suicide and should be discouraged by the teacher.

Overall, it is better that the school bear a negative but frank attitude to suicide, not make it a taboo to have mild discussion on suicide.

e) Resolute medical intervention:

The school should get rid of oldfashioned ideas, and face up to their condition in a psychopathological way. Some witnesses are likely to get PTSD after the event. The closest friend or the partner even may get Survivor's Guilt (a branch of PTSD).

They're suffering from illness, not problem. So if necessary, medical intervention has to get involved with the guide of doctors.

B. Active Part

The active part devotes to avoid the suicide from the source and make enough preparation for potential suicide event.

1) the Head:

The head, namely the individual or group supporting the system should be a knowledgeable and experienced professional. Most importantly, they should have cool-headedness and resilience, so that they could control the situation when an accident happens.

2) Encourage diversity:

The school should create open and pluralistic atmosphere, which gives students more options of meaning and diverse aspects of life, to reduce the possibility of getting into a crisis.

3) Reduce "Wolf Culture":

Now many schools in Asian countries advocates "Wolf Culture", namely the law of the jungle. Weak academic ability is regarded as Original Sin and not worthy sympathizing. This misshapen culture is breaking the dignity and self-esteem of the students lagging in academic performance and even poisoning the top students(sense of insecurity).

The school should make the students know that they still deserve and can obtain the kindness, assistance and respect from everyone even they fail in their study, have specific deficit or so-called background.

4) Interpersonal relationship & peer assistance:

The school is obliged to encourage students to enhance their relationship can create bonds. In this way can most students obtain sense of belonging and therefore have more chance to cope with the situation when pessimistic emotion accumulates. The teacher should offer enough care and encouragement to the "marginal student" or the so-called "transparent student" in the class.

Meanwhile, due to the fact that it is the adolescence who understand the adolescence most, the school could offer courses voluntary students on psychological counseling and crisis intervention knowledge and technique. [Gould et al., 2003] The peer assistance provides the potential suiciders with timely help and give the volunteers sense of being needed.

VII. Conclusion

The present article build the logical chain with literature review and establish a bidimensional system to prevent adolescence suicide.

There still exists limitation in this research. The basis of the system (actually many of the studies in this field) use the data of teenager having suicide ideation. It is not rational to equate suicide ideation with suicide. Suicide ideation is not necessarily leading to suicide attempt. Most adolescence with suicide ideation never means to make suicide attempt. Most data from the interview of the suiciders' acquaintances and side investigation into their experience during their lifetime may have better accountability.

It is apparent that any school can not manage to set up such a system with the assistance and the grant of the government. The lack of system in most cases, stems from a dirty truth that the school and government are not willing to actively make a difference with time-consuming and money-consuming real exercise, having no regard of the urgency. And some culture-based notion should be altered step by step, year by year and generation by generation. The adolescence suicide is a systematic issue and requires immediate and joint effort.

Further studies could make additional details to the theoretical framework or have quantitative investigation to prove the theory.

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The Grade 10 girl R.I.P. Everyone stands with you.

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