

What drives  
teenagers to commit  
suicide?



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Suicide can be defined as an act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally. Suicide is not a choice to survive or a choice to escape. Instead, successful suicide is inevitably mortal. Suicide is the third leading cause of death and injury among adolescents and young adults in the worldwide. Suicide is a serious public health problem. According to the World Health Organisation (2004) an estimate approximately one million people die from suicide worldwide annually, and 10 to 20 times more people attempts suicide. A study by Lee. M. B & Lung. W (2008) showed that suicide and psychiatric disorders have a strong connection; 16. 3% of the general population and 25% of general medical patients outside of psychiatric departments have had suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts. There are many causes for youths wanting to commit suicide. Thus, we must be aware of the symptoms for suicide in order to prevent suicide from happening.

What drive teens towards suicide?

Stress

Caruso (2007) believes that stress is not intrinsically appalling. Every human living in this world has stress that may cause them to take action to events and to improve themselves to be better and rise to the challenge. However, he mentioned that if overly exposed to stress, stress can be catastrophic. Too much pressure can cause or exacerbate suicidal feelings.

Level of stress is seems to be playing a vital role in affecting people especially the youths towards committing suicide. Many researchers have discovered that stressful life events increases the risk of youths choosing suicide as the only solution. Stressful events such as family and romance

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conflicts or the presence of disciplinary problems frequently predate suicidal behaviour. (Brent, 1993; Vijayakumar & Rajkumar, 1999; Yen et al., 2005)

From Engar's research (2004), he found that suicide is the second-leading cause of death in college students. It is believed that high anxiety levels and tensions cause them to attempt suicide.

Take South Korea as an example, approximately six in every 10 South Korean youths have thought of suicide at least once, showing to the seriousness of the teen suicide issue. (Yonhap, 2008; Yein Jee, 2008) This is further proven from the survey, carried out by the state-run Korea Youth Counseling Institute, of 4, 700 secondary school students in South Korea, 50-60 percent of the respondents had thought of suicide whereas 10-20 percent of them attempted suicide. (Yonhap, 2008) Youths there felt suicide urges when experiencing conflicts with family members, utterly lacking of hope, had problems with friends, or if friends took their own lives, having to do much more at school than expected, striving for a higher standards of education in this globalised era in order to get a better job etc.

### Depression

Lickerman (2010) believes that depression is unquestionably the most common reason why people take their life. Depression is a severe dejection that is accompanied by feelings of hopelessness and meagerness typically felt over a periods of time. In another words, it is an illness where people's thoughts, moods, behaviour and feelings are "infected".

Since depression can affect thinking, things will seem to get even harder when one is feeling down and he or she may not be able to look at the possibility of a good outcome. They will never be happy nor think that things could go right for them again. The person does not envisage when a problem can be overcome. (Eveleth, 2008; Lyness & Nock, 2010)

Suicide is the permanent solution for depressed people as they think there are no other solutions to the temporary problems they are experiencing. A depressed youth may feel that there is no other way out from issues, no other getaway from emotional pain, or no way out of a desperate sorrow. (Lyness & Nock, 2010)

According to American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, more than 19 million Americans which aged 18 and above are severely affected by depression every year. Another analysis of the result is that one out of ten men and one out of four women will experience depression in their life. Kyle Eveleth, a Prudenville junior and psychology major believes the loss of support from family and friends could lead to this illness, which is one of the risk factors towards suicide attempts.

### Substance Abuse

Teens under the influence of alcohol and drugs are also more at risk for suicidal behaviours and suicidal thoughts. They may become over-sentimental and impulsive and may result in attempts to end their own lives. (Lickerman, 2010)

Alcohol is a depressant that slows the function of the central nervous system. This alters a person's five senses as the brain is blocked from getting the right information. (Dowsen & Shatz, 2009) Under the right amount, alcohol can aid a person to feel relax and less worried. However, if one overused, alcohol may cause wobble, lose their coordination, blurred vision, and slur speech. They will be confused and disoriented. (Dowsen & Shatz, 2009)

Drugs on the other hand are chemicals that change the way our bodies function. A drug may be helpful or harmful. Drugs dull our senses, alter our sense of consciousness, and reduce physical pain in the brain. (Dowsen & Vranken, 2008) Misuse of these substances can mean serious misery and danger. Situations is worse for teens with propensity to illness due to their biologic, or family history, or other life stresses. Suicide attempts occur especially when both substances are consumed together. (Lyness & Nock, 2010)

According to National Statistical Office (NSO) in South Korea, there were about 12, 000 suicides representing 5 percent of all deaths in 2007, a shocking increase of 14% compared to previous year. A poll taken by NSO shows that girls and teens who drink alcohol are more likely to feel the suicidal urge compared with non-drinkers and boys. (Yonhap, 2008)

Several studies (Miller, Mahler & Gold, 1991; Way et al, 2005) have found that teenagers with alcohol or drug abuse contributes up to 70% of alcohol-drug related suicides. Therefore, it is undoubted that substance abuse significantly influence teens towards suicide.

## Family risk factors

Under family risk factors, inherited biological factors may also contribute towards suicide and suicidal behaviour. From the family, twin and adoption studies, this factor has been proven to lead to the increase of risk of attempted and completed suicide. (Nock, Borges, Bromet, Cha, Kessler & Lee, 2008) There is evidence to suggest biologic factors may give rise to suicidal behaviour via gene-environmental interactions. This is said to be disruptions in the functioning of the inhibitory neurotransmitter serotonin. (Pandey, 1997) When it is disrupted, human's mood and emotion will be affected. Dr. Boeree (2009) says that inadequate serotonin may be associated to increase in aggressive behaviour, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorders and suicide.

As for twins, some studies had been conducted to prove the relationship between suicide. Researchers Roy, Segal and Sarchiapone (1995) ascertained suicide is more prevalent in monozygotic co-twins than dizygotic co-twins where this tendency is very rare. These results strongly shows that genetic factor do play a role in suicidal behaviour in twins.

Furthermore, teens who has family history involving depression or substance abuse are most likely associated with suicide, as are those who have been abused sexually. (Fritz, 2010)

Another factor that is included in family risk factor is the frequent change of residence. Most families that often move their place of residence may bring a considerable effect on their children. Children that experience this frequently may be distressed or psychologically disturbed and, therefore, affect his or

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hers physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being. They may feel instable and insecure in their living conditions.

The frequent breakdown of connection with peers, discontinuation of group activities, distress, and worries due to the new environment can be distressing and confusing. Those children's psychosocial well-being may be largely affected, and hence, rise suicidal thoughts and behaviours if they are not capable to handle.

Parents may be unable to provide sufficient love and care which include neglecting their children's psychosocial needs. To get more attention from their parents, a suicide attempt may be carried out to express them. (Ping, Mortensen, Pedersen, 2009)

How does teens with suicidal tendencies behave or react ?

Depression

Depressive symptoms is a significant indicator.

Depressive symptoms includes crying a lot, lost of interest, weight changes, sleep disturbances, restlessness, and feeling a low energy. An epidemiological study shown that hopelessness and low self-esteem were the most predictive symptoms for suicidal behaviour. In this analysis, almost 56% of the patients attempted suicide. (Yaldizli. O, Kohl. H. C, Graf. M, Wiesbeck. AG, Wurst. M. F (2010)

Anxiety

The suicidator will feel fear, worry, and hopelessness. In this situation, symptoms of anxiety will be shown physically and mentally. For instance, sweating, stomach aches, muscle weakness. Someone who has anxiety might experience a sense of panic. A study examined the rates of anxiety, mood and substance abuse disorder among teenagers. The result of the study showed that the level of anxiety will have a higher risk of suicide. (Galera C, Bouvard MP, Encrenaz G, Messiah A, Fombonne. E 2008)

In conclusion, suicide does not solve the problem but brings more sorrow and hardship to the victim's family members and friends. We can help potential suicide victims by watching out for early suicidal symptoms or signs. These can be highly unsociable and introverted behaviour and frequent mentioning about ending one's life. We should bring the victim immediately to a psychiatrist or counsellor to set the victim's life back on the right path again. The most effective way of preventing suicide is to find the main reason or reasons why the victim is contemplating suicide. This will help to reduce the number of suicide cases in the world.