

Teen suicide in japan essay sample



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Recent statistics indicate that suicide in Japan has been on the rise and more so cutting across all demographic groups. A 2003 report indicated that over 100 suicides are reported daily. Most have been quick to blame this menace on the recent economic slump claiming that the economic changes introduced by Prime Minister Koizumi are yet to penetrate all some corners. Unemployment and desperation have been noted to be the key culprit behind these endemic suicides. Others say that the increased cases of bankruptcy and indebtedness have a role to play. Most alarming though is the rise in the cases of suicide amongst the young people. The media has been characterized by a high number of incidents this suicide. Almost daily there is a tragic case either of a child suicide or brutal murder. Whereas studies have been conducted to find out the cause of suicides in Japan, this paper will limit itself to suicides amongst the young people. It will look at the various likely causes but will maintain its position that the increase in suicide cases amongst the young people is due to the immense pressure to excel they face from their families and the society

According to the National Police Agency data released in 2003, detailing a research conducted on suicide cases and ratings world wide, young people slightly above 20 and those under twenty comprise of about 7% of all suicide case in Japan. Kanako Amano in his research titled: *An International Comparison and Analysis of Japans High Suicide Rate*, alludes to the fact that the recorded high incidences of suicide to people of 50-59 years of age can be attributed to financial strains. This however does not give a reason for the rise in the same for the young people even those of school going age (2005, 6)

A new phenomenon that brings a twist to a nation plunged into a culture of suicides is the Internet suicide, most rampant amongst teenagers and those slightly above twenty years wishing to take up their own lives. On October 12, 2004, Japanese police discovered seven bodies believed to have died as a result of group Internet suicides. Interesting to note is that and the victims were either in their teenage hood or barely in their 20s. This by then was the largest ever reported incident of interest deaths in the history of Japan but it was a pointer of things to come. Internet suicides have become a common place in Japan and consequently the country is leading in the world (Naito A. 2007)

A diagnosis of the suicide endemic in Japan would take a multifaceted approach to clearly put in to consideration all the possible contributing factors studies conducted in this growing phenomenon. Such studies into suicides tentatively point at various factors but key among these points towards the cultural institutions and societal expectations. Jerome young (2002) argues that teenage suicides or suicide in general in Japan stems from the Japanese culture, values and traditions. Japanese culture is an embodiment of Confucius philosophy that advocates key ideals such as self sacrifice, obedience and loyalty in place of pursuit of own desires. An individual is hence under intense pressure to conform to such societal expectations and where such efforts are not bearing fruits suicide is a recommended way out. A look at the Japanese culture indicates that it has a rather accommodating view towards suicides. There are no stringent prohibitions towards it. *Seppuku* for example, referring to a suicide ritual, has

been propagated historically as an honorable way to end ones life rather than face the unknown in an enemy's hand. (Christopher Ross, 2006)

Such a culture and positive view of suicide can have a lasting impression and inspiration to the youth in the modern day. Unlike in the western world where suicide is a taboo, suicide in Japan has traditionally been held as an honorable act of courage. This view, it has to be noted is fast eroding especially in the spate of mindless teenage suicides whose descriptions and motivations are nowhere close to *Seppuku* . The current phenomenon is filled with a connotation of stress and mental derangement that leans towards irrationality (Christopher Ross, 2006)

Another strange but rising cause of teenage suicides in Japan is the growing problem of bullying in schools. Take a specific case that occurred in Sakura Higashi Junior High School where a fifteen year old female student took her own life to escape bullying. This however is not an isolated case. Similar incidents have been reported and schools authorities have confirmed that they have been receiving anonymous notes from children contemplating suicide. The Ministry of Education in Japan has also supported such claims of bullying as being a lead cause to the wave of suicides among teenagers in schools. The ministry has in the recent past years been receiving anonymous notes purporting to be from bullied students. The greatest pointer that such letters are not a hoax emanates from the number of suicides that follow such suicide notes. Bullying in Japan schools has been on the rise in the recent years in line with the national trends of juvenile delinquency. This has left the education and political authorities searching for answers. The letters from the suicidal students only outlines the students intentions but do not go

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ahead to mention names making it hard for the authorities to narrow down on the bullying suspects. The publicity that these suicide victims receive has also been pointed out as a contributing factor to the suicide epidemic by prompting copy cat incidences of

Although not to diminish the role that bullying is playing in increasing the rate of teenage suicides, Japanese culture and practices are also to blame. As afore mentioned, the society and families lays upon huge demands and expectations on an individual especially in such a nation that espouses excellence, innovation and hard work above any other value. Honor is tied down to excellence (Young, Jerome, 2002).

Modern Japanese economy has been propelled by the advancement in education and huge investment in technology. Japanese education system and its quality has been hailed as being a great success even to a point of surpassing western systems. It is revealed by most studies conducted in the recent past, it has its downside. It has contributed greatly to the increase in the number of suicides amongst teenagers. These suicides may either stem from mere academic frustrations or be triggered by the violent and bullying that has become rampant in many Japanese schools.

Japanese students rank highly in the world in subjects such as math's and sciences. The school and other education institutions offer their students the best facilities in the world to ensure that they strike a level of academic excellence their families and the society expects them to. The pressure from the parents and academic competition facing students are so intense they may result to the cropping up of health and anti-social problems.

According to analysts and scholars, general incidences of suicide are found more in the developed world than in the developing world. Whitaker and Slimak in their work *College Student Suicide* (1990), emphasize this saying that “ adolescent suicide is especially prevalent in societies where achievement is a major goal and lower in societies where it is not as important to achieve” nations such as Japan and the United States are noted to have the highest number of teenage suicides more than other countries in the laves cadre of income. This reiterates the afore mentioned statement on the emphasis of excellence Japanese social-cultural system

Education in Japan is highly regarded. This is one thing that has remained constant even in the midst of major changes in Japans political and economic settings. Parents value education and this is an idea deeply indoctrinated in the children’s lives which usually revolves around education. Academic success is seen as the key to unlocking major hardships in life and important to the achievement of a desired socio- economic status (Rohlen, T. P., 1983).

Modernization in Japan was brought forth by the Meiji regime which also brought a strong emphasis in education by creating higher education institutions. Entrance to these universities is based on merit alone. For example Tokyo University is one such institution that has for the years admitted only the brightest students in the nation. Securing a place in Tokyo University was seen as a means to securing a good job and life. Parents expect their children to perform well and attend prestigious universities. Employers on the other hand source for employees from the best universities in the land conforming to this widely held notion in the public that only a place top university can lead to one landing the best jobs.

Those wishing to join public universities for example, the Joint First Stage Achievement Test is a make or break for them. This is in addition to having to perform well in the entrance test to secure a place in the universities.

Depending on which university a student wishes to attend; either private or public, students are under immense pressure to perform well and emerge top amongst their peers in a highly competitive environment.

Students employ various strategies to help them achieve this which may include enrolling in private classes. Pressure to perform is just but too much. Entrance to a top notch university is pegged on this one exam and every student is determined to succeed. This is in the safe knowledge that such an entry holds the key to social mobility, job opportunities as well as esteem in the public standing. Entrance to a high ranking university is considered to be key to a high quality of life and hence the insurmountable pressure to pass. Great emphasis is laid on this creating what most scholars refer to as the *examination hell*. This pressure is from both the family and the society at large. It is in the recognition of the far reaching implications that such a failure in the exam can have later in life. Students resort to suicide as a way out of the quagmire (Naito, A., 2007).

It is important to note that though Japan alludes to the widely held notion of a homogenous society, there are still long held prejudices that emanate from one social and economic status in life. Such a status, tradition was come to emphasize, is driven by education.

Both family and society have insurmountable expectations in all individuals. The spirit of competition is embraced and instilled at a tender age. Students

understand that they have to compete with their counterparts to access University and good life thereafter. Competition for the entrance to the Tokyo University is so high such that only one out of every five students that take the entrance examination makes it, this is the case for all national universities. In the other public and private universities only close to one out of ten students manage to secure such a position.

Though Japan is highly ranked economically, the unemployment rate has been high while students have become more qualified. Employers have more leeway in this choice and usually go for those in the best universities. A student hence wishing to secure a good job has to perform well as Rohlen (1983) notes “ entrance exams thus obviously serve as crucial screening devices for employers.”

This sort of an environment has created a tradition that all people conform to. Students must work hard to secure a place in the best universities in the knowledge that the best employers only source their employees from the top universities. The motivation behind this is largely recognized as to have a quality life and is also a way of pleasing their parents.

As mentioned before, the Confucian philosophy plays an insurmountable role in dictating upon human relations in the society. Children have been brought up to respect their family values and their parents. Parents place an important role in education and usually emphasize on its importance in life. They invest heavily in their education and in turn expect them to excel. A culture is deeply inculcated positing that good performance in school children should be out of a family obligation as they are supposed to hold the

reputations of their family high. This is in the understanding of the fame and honor that a good performance brings to a family.

The effort employed in school is hence for social and family obligation more than to fulfill individual desires. In a society and family where ideals of excellence and good performance are placed in education, students are in a dilemma when they fail to achieve this. As afore mentioned, culture and history has made suicide acceptable to the Japanese community and is considered an easy and honorable way out especially where the odds are insurmountable. Such is the case to students when faced with extreme pressures from the family and the society to excel in their academics. Students opt for suicide in the fear of dishonoring their parents by failing to achieve what was set out for them and putting the family into disrepute. Suicide is also a common way of easing of the pressures especially as some are unable to cope with the frustrations in their academics.

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College Student Suicide

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