
Teenage Suicide In Malaysia

Introduction

Almost all Malaysians and the rest of the world were stunned when a girl from Sarawak committed suicide after 69% of the respondents from her Instagram followers asked her to do so. The victim posted an Instagram poll stating: "Really Important, help me to choose D/L" whereby D stood for death while L stood for live. This incident clearly highlighted the severity of teen suicide problems because even social media can act as a tool that endangers human's life. Hence, there is a need for the public to have a more in-depth knowledge about teen suicide, risk factors affecting the teen suicide and the solutions to minimize the suicide rate among teens.

First and foremost, we need to know what is actually teen suicide? Teens are a group of people whose aged from 13 to 19 years old and undergoing a transition stage from childhood to adulthood. During this stage, teens will undergo various major changes from different perspectives including psychology, biology, social, cultural and so on. The definition of suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. There were 828000 global deaths resulted from suicide in 2015. It was a huge increment from 712000 deaths in 1990. This situation makes suicide the 10th leading cause of death worldwide. The next thing that comes to our mind must be how teens commit suicide? In fact, the methods of suicide vary among countries all over the world and depend on the availability of effective means. Hanging, firearms, jumping from high building, pesticide poisoning, carbon monoxide poisoning are the common methods of teen suicide. Based on the research done by Queensland Suicide Registry, the most common method of suicide used by three age groups and both genders are hanging.

Risk Factors affecting teen suicide

As we all know, before solving a problem, we must figure out the roots of the problem. Therefore, the next thing we need to understand is none other than the causes of teen suicide. Basically, the causes of teen suicide can be classified into three main causes which are emotional causes, environmental causes and mental illnesses. We will look into it one by one.

Teens who are in adolescence stage will usually undergo lot of emotional changes due to hormone changes, they will always exaggerate their problem and see no solution out of it. For instance, they will treat a small setback as a huge failure in life. The feelings of hopelessness and helplessness often hit them especially when they face obstacles in life. They always think that they have no way to change the terrible situation. Teens may feel like the feelings will never end and the only way to escape from the problem is through ending their own lives. Furthermore, they are afraid of disappointing others or being a burden to others, especially their beloved parents.

Let's look into a case which happened in 2015 when a SPM student decided to take his own life just after finishing his first paper of additional mathematics. Due to the frustrations of not being able to answer the questions in first paper of additional mathematics, he didn't show up in the examination hall for the second paper and then later the boy was found in his bedroom

hung with a necktie tightly around his neck. Another teen suicide case that happened due to emotional causes was a student from Seremban jumping from 14th floor of a building in 2018 because she could not deal with stress and pressure in excelling her studies despite scoring straight As in her SPM. In her last note, she mentioned that she was afraid of disappointing her parents and was under heavy pressure because she could not catch up with her studies in tertiary education institution. Both of the cases have shown that teens nowadays are facing with great pressure in their academic due to high expectation from parents and teachers and their unstable emotional state has made this situation worse which then later contributed to the increasing suicide rate among teens.

Not only emotional causes, environmental causes such as bullying, cyber-bullying, abuse, loss of family member can cause suicidal thoughts and behaviors of teens. According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), bullying is an unwanted and aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance, such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and boycotting someone from a group on purpose. The bullying scenarios become even worse with the rapid development of technology because with the advancement of technology, bullying can happen via technology, which can be done through social media and this is known as cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying sometimes brings more damage to the victims compared to bullying in-person because cyber-bullying can be done anonymous. Everybody can post anything offensive since it is anonymous and the victim don't even know who is attacking him or her. According to a study carried out by Yale University, the victims of bullying are 7 to 9% more likely to have suicidal thoughts than those who are not bullied before.

There was a case of Malaysian PHD student in Utah State University took her own life of acute carbon monoxide poisoning after months of racist abuse from white bullies. The victim who was a Chinese and Indian heritage kept receiving racist and cultural discrimination from her course mates over eight months and eventually she could not endure it anymore and decided to end her own life. The victims had sought help by lodging a report on this issue to her school faculty and also counselling center but in vain. The school's counselling center dismissed her concerns and the school faculty treated this issue as a conflict between students. The bullies targeted on her culture by saying "Asians only want to please their parents", 'Asian names are weird', 'Asians are stupid and second best'. They also mentioned that she smelled like Indian foods and dark skin was a sign of inferiority. It has clearly shown that environmental causes can lead to the happenings of teen suicide cases because teens think that since they are not accepted by the surrounding people and the world, so what is the meaning for them to keep alive in this world and eventually the tragedy happens.

The above-mentioned reasons are the driving factors of teen suicide, but often the common underlying issue for the teen suicide is none other than mental health issue. According to American Psychiatric Association, mental health is a state involving effective functioning in daily activities which can result in productive activities at work or school, healthy relationships and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. Generally, someone who is lack of mental health will be considered as a person with mental illness. Mental illness which is also known as mental disorder or psychiatric disorder refers to a health condition involving changes in emotion, behavior or thinking such as depression, anxiety disorder, eating disorder, and addictive behaviors. The public will only know the severity of mental illness when tragedy happened. This scenario was clearly presented when Kim Jong-hyun, the lead singer of top South Korean boy

band SHINee, was found dead in a hotel room with a coal briquette burning on a frying pan in 2017. In his suicide note, he stated that he was broken from inside and engulfed by depression. His death sent a shockwave to the rest of the world and the awareness towards mental illness started to raise among the public but with a great price to pay which is the loss of a K-pop Star. However, when the world starts to concern about mental health issue, there is still tragedy after 2 years which is in 2019, another K-pop star Sulli was found dead at home. Sulli who was once a member of a girl group f(x), suffered from mental illnesses which were severe depression, panic disorder and social phobia since young. The additional factor that caused her to commit suicide was cyber-bullying. She was mentally and physically exhausted after suffering from malicious comments and false rumors online. Although everyone knew that she was the mental illness patient since she had spoken it out a year before she died but nobody put concerns on it instead, they just criticize her online and that had worsened her mental health conditions and eventually lead to the tragedy. Through these cases, we can clearly understand that mental health issue is one of the main factors of teen suicide.

Solutions

After understanding the causes of the teen suicide, we should go into the solutions to solve this problem. Who should be the one which have the most understanding about the emotions of the teens? The answer is obvious, they are none other than the closest people surrounding the teens since young which are their parents. Parents should have the initiative to take the protective and preventive measures in this context. They should instill moral values, cultural or religious beliefs that discourage suicide but support self-preservation among teens since young. Strong connections between family members must be made for the teens to know that they always have a strong backbone behind them when they face any problem. The parents should spend more time with the children and teens for them to have a platform to share their views, opinions, and the most importantly problems in life. With all these measures, the teens will definitely speak out their problems and seek help from the family rather than to have suicidal thoughts when they face obstacles in life. All these protective measures should be carried out since young but what to do when your teens are not grown up under such environment and they are not close with the parents? Not to worry much because the parents can still do something to prevent the teen suicide cases. For instance, the parents can start to interact with teens positively and regularly although probably they have never done it like this before. Parents could also walk into the social environment of teens to know more about who the teens are mixing with and get around with them, for sure parents could know more about their teens from his friends. Since teens spend the longest time in school except for the time at home, parents should communicate with teens' teachers also to ensure teens' behaviors in school. It is believed that with a good relationship and strong connection between family members, the teen suicide rate can be reduced to minimum.

In fact, not only parents, teachers and peers also play important role in preventing teen suicide cases from happening. Teachers should always pay attention to every student and try their best to build a good relationship among them because according to a research done by National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, youth who feels connected to school are less likely to have suicidal thoughts and attempts. Teens with disabilities, learning differences or cultural differences always become the victims of bullying, hence teaching teens to learn to accept differences is one of the role played by the teachers in school in order to stop bullying cases in school and hence decrease the suicide rate among teens. School counselors should be expert

at recognizing the students who are at risk of taking their own lives. They offer professional advices to the teens but sometimes the duty of the counselors is just listen to them because what the teens actually need is simple, just a person to provide a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. A counselor can suggest a person in despair to have a “suicide prevention contract” which is when a person feeling suicidal, he or she can come and see the counselor, call the suicide prevention hotline, or speak to someone trustable. The role played by the peers is also vital because generally we will only speak out our real feelings among peers not to the elders. When you have noticed or ever heard about your friends having suicidal thoughts, treat it seriously and don't ignore it as those are the given clues that they tried to seek help from us. Unfortunately, people nowadays will just treat those who are seeking for help and under depression as “attention seeker” and “fake”. As a true friend, when we notice our friends are at risk of committing suicide, we should always be open and listen to them without judgement, then offer help by encouraging them to seek help from the professionals. Therefore, clearly teachers and [image: Image result for suicide rate in malaysia]peers are very significant roles in preventing teen suicide cases.

Last but not least, government cannot deny its role in reducing the suicide rate among teens. Due to increasing teen suicide rate, the government should train more counselors and psychologists and make sure there is enough number of counselors in every school, college and university. Based on a national survey conducted by Health Ministry Malaysia, Malaysians teens are critically suffering from mental health issue. Hence, it is obvious that not only in educational institutions, the government should also set up clinics and counselling centers in community to offer psychological assistance and improve mental health condition of the public. Furthermore, government should set up a professional group in researching the amendment of the laws to tackle cyber-bullying, particularly the Communication and Multimedia Act (CMA) since social media nowadays can be a tool that trigger the suicidal thoughts of teens. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission should also build up an alert system to identify suicidal posts. The government should also set up a 24hours operating national suicide prevention lifeline for the helpless teens to get help anytime. In overall, it can be said that the role of government in minimizing teen suicide cases is very vital.

Self-reflection

After researching for teen suicide issue, I realize that this issue is not only a current issue in Malaysia but a global issue which needs the concerns of the public. The issue needs the concerns from all walks of life since it will bring a lot of bad consequences to the society and country, for example the loss of intellectual assets. Previously, my opinion on the teens who killed themselves is why they have the courage to jump from a high building, to hurt themselves by using various methods, but they don't have the courage to keep living in this world. However after doing the research, I have understood that as a bystander, we are not in the shoes of the victim and could not imagine their feeling such as feeling of being bullied by the others. Hence, we are not qualified to give any comments on their decisions to end their lives. The responsibility of reducing teen suicide cases is not only lie on parents, teachers and government but it is the responsibility of everyone of us to have an awareness of mental health. I have also learnt that the teens nowadays are facing bigger and greater stress due to higher expectation from parents and teachers because they relate the outstanding academic performance with a bright future and great career. It cannot be denied that the academic qualification is important in job seeking but it is not the only factor considered by the employer in the present generation.

Therefore, teens are advised to distribute their time wisely and not to put all the time and energy in studies. They should also involve themselves in hobbies or clubs to enjoy themselves and also to release stress through their preferred method. With the involvement in the activities, they will have the opportunities to polish up soft skills such as leadership skills, event management skills, communication skills as well as widen their social circles. Last but not least, teens should always remember that there are various ways to solve a problem but suicide is not a choice to solve problem, even suicide seems to be the “best” choice or “last” choice that they can resort to.

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