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CURRENT PATTERN OF PARASUICIDE IN OUR SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Parasuicide and suicide have been a notable subject in the realm of public health. Though parasuicide history is considered to strongly predict completed suicide, the patterns of method, location and period of suicide attempt are not well-known, especially in upper middle-income country such Malaysia. Thus far, no complete count is kept on parasuicide by several agencies involved. The aim of this study is to report the current pattern and prevalence of parasuicide in Malaysia. The data were collected from the online media from 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2018 (15 months). In total, 21 incidences met the inclusion criteria. Across all cases, the leading method of parasuicide in our society pick out by the subjects is jumping from high structured building, more specifically residential area such as condominium and flats, at daylight, compared to hours of darkness. There is a cross-national variability in the current pattern of parasuicide manners, with strong uniformity in the method and period preferences for these behaviours. These findings have significant implications for the prevention and prognostication of parasuicidal actions.

KEYWORDS: parasuicide, pattern, method

INTRODUCTION

Suicide is one of the major cause of deaths in the world. Nearly one million people commit suicide each year, about one life lost every 40 seconds (WHO, 2008). People who feel hopelessness, helplessness or isolation are more likely to consider or attempt suicide. They may feel that turning to suicide is a trouble free escape from problems. Suicide has been an important subject in public health matters. As the largest region in the world, Asia accounts for about 60% of world suicides, with China, India and Japan making up for about 40% of the world's suicides (Beautrais, 2006). In Malaysia, the suicide rate is on the rise with more than 1,000 people taking their own lives over a three-year period (Sipalan, 2012). The Malaysian Health Minister said that the ratio of suicides from 2007 to 2010 was 1.3 for every 100,000 people, but it could be greater (Sipalan, 2012). With the estimated Malaysian population of 27.8 million for 2009, suicide rate for the whole country was 1.18 per 100,000 populations (NSRM,2011).

There has been much debate surrounding the definition and conceptualisation of parasuicide, suicide and other suicide scopes. Complete suicide is the act of taking one's own life. However, parasuicide or suicide attempt is an attempt where a person tries to commit suicide but survives (Wasserman, 2016). Nonfatal suicide attempts can result in serious injury. O' Connor and Pirkis (2016) categorised self-harm as part of parasuicide where there is no actual intention of killing oneself. Undoubtedly defining parasuicidal behaviour is no easy task.

Suicide methods differ substantially in Western and Asian countries. For instance, the use of weapons such as handguns is the preferential suicide technique in many Western countries, but not in Asia (Ajdacic-Gross et al., 2008). In contrast, pesticide ingestion, jumping, charcoal burning and self-immolation are all exclusive leading suicide methods in certain Asian territories. On the other hand, hanging can be found to be a leading suicide method both in the East and the West. The rating of collective suicide methods does change in every region.

To this point, loads of studies conducted in the world focussed on complete suicide. However, not many accounts are kept for parasuicide incidents with few research done. This may be of minimal concern but it is important for those involved in rescuing the subjects. The present research features an initial step towards understanding the existing pattern of parasuicide in Malaysia.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this study is to report the current pattern and incidence of parasuicide in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

According to the data for the last 15 months, suicide attempts varies by month. Variation in by methods, time of suicide attempts have never before been satisfactorily examined. Data were abstracted from online media reports. The data were gathered from Malaysian online newspapers from 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2018 (15 months). Using five phrases which are; parasuicide, suicide attempt, method, BOMBA@Fire Rescue Department of Malaysia (FRDM) and Malaysia as the search key words, literature related to suicide attempts in Malaysia were gathered from Malaysian Online Newspapers (Online Newspaper.com., 2018). Only articles from 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2018 were included. Articles without involving BOMBA and complete suicide were excluded from the analysis. The search resulted in 21 articles.

There is a scarcity of evidence in parasuicide surveillance system in Malaysia causing depletion of data reported by national articles. The most updated parasuicide common methods, preferable time, age and gender particular patterns of parasuicide were presented. Whenever available, the changing patterns of parasuicide developments in relation to methods used were also presented. The hunt intended to classify relevant articles published in the major daily Malaysian national newspapers and their Sunday equivalents. Based on figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia the newsprints for the most printed and readable newspapers were published by Utusan Melayu Sdn. Bhd. (Kosmo and Utusan Malaysia) as well as New Straits Times Press (Berita Harian and Harian Metro) (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2013). To be eligible for inclusion, articles had to contain at least three out of five key words on this issue. Decisions about the inclusion of articles were made by two researchers and checked by another, with recourse to a third where required.

RESULTS

Study Context

In this study, researchers did not concentrate on reasons why the subjects took such action. Nevertheless, several of the articles reported that the subjects that attempted parasuicide suffered from depression because lost of a child, misunderstanding with their employer, pressure of health problem, failure in love and pressures of life.

Background

There were 21 cases of suicide attempts for the 15 months reported in the media. The number of cases between urban and rural areas were about the same. The frequencies of suicide attempts occur almost every month. Gender differences for attempted suicides were not substantial. The entire demographic description of the subject is presented in Table 1. There were 11 males and 10 females who attempted suicide. Twenty of them were normal and one subject was categorised as mentally ill. Malaysians accounted and four were non-residents. Out of the four non-residents; two of them were females (Indonesian & non-reported) and two were males (Indonesian & Libyan). The majority who attempted suicide were matured between the age of 30 to 40 years. The youngest male was aged 17 whilst the youngest female was aged 15. The oldest male was more than 50 years old and female less than 50 years old.

A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted on the selected online media articles published by Utusan Melayu Sdn. Bhd. and New Straits Times Press. There are four subject matter that have been obtained by the researcher on the circumstances of parasuicide in Malaysian society. Four subject matter were extracted from the analysis: 1) Method and *hot spot* location of parasuicide, 2) Method and location of parasuicide vs. gender 3) Method and location of parasuicide vs. age and 4) Preferable time for parasuicide.

Method and *hot spot* location of parasuicide

Presently, there are four focal methods of suicide captured by the data which are; to jump from high rise buildings, to jump from a bridge, to drown oneself in the sea or a river and self-immolation. Location and method of suicide attempt interconnected and planned by the subject. The leading method of suicide is to jump from high rise buildings either residential or workplace with residential areas such as condominium, flats and hostels being the most popular locations. Habitually, the subject's own place of residence will be the main location for a suicide attempt. On top of that, one of the teacher attempted suicide within a school compound. Another case involved self-immolation by setting oneself ablaze

causing 60% of the subject body reportedly scalded. This method is slightly infrequent and consumes a long time and causes much pain and suffering to the subject. However, it still occurs in our society. Another distinctive method is to jump from an archway construct. Considered as an iconic place (Lukas et al., 1981) for suicide, four of the subjects in this study preferred jumping from a bridge. Others preferred drowning in the sea or a river.

Method and location of parasuicide vs. gender

Variation in methods and location of suicide attempts showed that male subjects were more creative and brave. Seven out of 11 male subjects tried to jump from high rise buildings and two opted to drown themselves in the sea. Two other cases involved trying to burn himself and to jump from an archway construct. For females, there was not much different from males in terms of jumping from high rise buildings. Six out of 10 female subjects selected this method. As reported, females were more likely to pick out bridges as a suicide location. Four of the cases involved females and one chose to drown herself in a river.

Method and location of parasuicide vs. age

Jumping from high rise buildings was the most preferable suicide method. Thirteen male and female subjects opted for this method. Their age group was between 30's to 40's. Two subjects were under 20's and the two under 30's used the same method of parasuicide. For the four bridge situations, the subjects were; 38 years old, 40 years old and one each aged in the 20's and 30's. Those who tried drowning were in the 30's and 50's. For the river, the subject was in the 40's and for self-immolation the subject was in the 30's

Preferable time for parasuicide

Various time periods were chosen by the subjects to attempt their suicides. The study classified the times into two categories; daytime and night time. Daytime is between 6.00 am to 6.59 pm and night-time 7.00 pm to 5.59 am. Across the 24-hour day in this study, and accounting for the proportion of the population likely to be awake, parasuicide attempts are far more likely to occur in daytime (between 7.00 am and 6.59pm) Minority of the subjects tried late at night. Three subjects made their attempts between 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm. Two out of three tried to jump from a bridge and another subject attempted to jump from a building. Just two attempted suicide by jumping off a building between 3.00 am and 5.00 am. Suicide attempts were more likely during the day. Eight out of 16 subjects attempted suicide between 7.00 am and 11.59 am. The rest of the subjects attempted suicide around noon, 12.00 pm to nightfall at 6.59 pm.

DISCUSSION

The number of parasuicide fluctuated for the past 15 months as reported. Due to reliable data for non-fatal suicide attempts were less available, comparable cases in the discussion are based from complete suicide incidents. The study initially focus on the method of parasuicide. With many methods of suicide, the most popular among Malaysians are jumping from high rise buildings, jumping of a bridge and drowning at sea or a river followed by self-immolation. Jumping from tall structures is the most effective method (HKJ Centre for Suicide Research Prevention, 2006) in addition to the most popular classification (Chen et al., 2009; Asirdizer, Yavuz, Demirag & Dizdar, 2010) to end up their life. In Hong Kong, jumping is the most common method of committing suicide and it may be due to the great quantity and easily accessible high rise buildings in Hong Kong (HKJ Centre for Suicide Research Prevention, 2006). Jumping to one's death is common in both Singapore (Yip et al., 2012) and Japan (Yoshioka, Hanley, Kawanishi & Saijo, 2016). Trend in leading suicide methods has changed not only in the Asia as well as in Malaysia. Between 1995 and 1998, hanging was the preferred method in Malaysia (Nadesan, 1999). However, the trend changed in 1999 when poison became the preferred method (Hayati, Salina, Abdullah, Eusni, & Mansar, 2004). Hanging again became the preferred method between 2000 and 2004 (Murti et al., 2008). However, between 2007 and 2009 jumping from high places become prominent (Bhupinder & Kumara, 2010). The cases for Malaysia between 1995 and 2009 were based on autopsy reports. Jumping from high places had become a steady trend over the 15 months of the study period.

The locations for parasuicide attempts have revolved mainly around high rise buildings or bridges. The locations used for suicide attempts may result in these places becoming more familiar for suicides. In the case of parasuicide attempt via jumping from high places, most studies have been unable to control for a potential shift of these locations especially if they are public places such as condominium or offices. Besides, specific locations like bridges (Beautrais, 2007; Draper, 2008) have become iconic for suicides like the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco (Lukas et al., 1981). Particular care should be taken not to further publicise these locations as suicide hotspots where possible. However, for certain parasuicide hotspots, restricting access and installation of safety barriers can be done as a suicide prevention strategy (Law, Sveticic & De Leo, 2014).

Presently, less dependable prevalent data are available on specific times subjects attempt suicide or complete suicide. Most Malaysian subjects preferred

daylight to attempt suicide. Other findings support this trend example the trend in Italy from 1986 to 1996 showed that suicide was more likely occur during the day (Guaiana, D'Avanzo & Barbui, 2002). Preti and Miotto (2001) showed that the majority of suicide deaths occurred during the late morning as compared to very early morning according to Maldonado and Kraus (1991). Erazo (2004) and his team showed that the incidence of suicide was lowest at night and contradicted Perlis and his teammates (2016) who reported that suicides were more prevalent three to six times greater during the night.

CONCLUSION

The study examined current methods and trends in parasuicide cases covered by the media in Malaysia. It also explored alternative explanations like location and preferable times for attempted suicides. However, the absence of certain information in newspaper reports impeded crucial understanding of the subject matter in detail. The proportion of suicide attempts by jumping have increased and stabilised over the period of study. Further understanding into this is a way to understand the method and potential locations. The findings also shed some light on the time preferences of these attempts. Considering the present method, location and time preferences highlighted by the study, restricting access, installation of safety barriers and preventive interventions are warranted.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Parasuicide cases from January 2017- March 2018

Media reported	States	Parasuicide Location	Age & Gender	Reason	Nationality	Time of Parasuicide
January 2017	Terengganu	Multi-layer building	32 Female	Depression and loss of a child	Malaysian	12.50 pm
January 2017	Kelantan	River	40's Female	Misunderstanding with employer	Non-Malaysia	8.52 am
February 2017	Kuala Lumpur	Multi-layer building	40's Female	Unreported	Malaysian	3.30 pm
February 2017	Selangor	Multi-layer building	30's Male	Unreported	Non-Malaysia	4.15 pm
February 2017	Kuala Lumpur	Multi-layer building	30's Female	Unreported	Non-Malaysia	1.31 pm
March 2017	Kuala Lumpur	Multi-layer building	32 Male	Heath problem and depression	Malaysian	10.19 am
March 2017	Perak	Bridge	18 Female	Unreported	Malaysian	7.35 pm
March 2017	Sabah	Bridge	38 Female	Unreported	Malaysian	6.30 pm
March 2017	Perak	Bridge	21 Female	Personal problem	Malaysian	8.43 pm
March 2017	Kuala Lumpur	Multi-layer building	No Information Female	Unreported	No Information	3.00 pm
April 2017	N. Sembilan	Multi-layer building	17 Male	Life pressure	Malaysian	3.23 am
June 2017	Perak	Self-immolation (Home)	30'sn Male	Unreported	Malaysian	10.56 am
July 2017	Sabah	Multi-layer building	26 Male	Unreported	Malaysian	5.10 am
July 2017	Melaka	Ocean	30's Male	Unreported	Non-Malaysia	11.11 am
August 2017	Perak	Multi-layer building	15 Female	Unreported	Malaysian	10.55 am
September 2017	Selangor	Ocean	50's	Unreported	Malaysian	

			Male			6.58 pm
September 2017	Kuala Lumpur	Multi-layer building	39	Unreported	Malaysian	6.50 am
			Male			
January 2018	Perak	Multi-layer building	32	Failed in love	Malaysian	7.20 am
			Male			
January 2018	Sarawak	Gateway/Arch	30-40	Unreported	Malaysian	2.59 pm
			Male			
March 2018	Sarawak	Multi-layer building	26	Unreported	Malaysian	9.30 pm
			Female			
March 2018	Sarawak	Bridge	40's	Unreported	Malaysian	7.05 am
			Female			