

Youth Suicide Psychological Problems and Psychological Hotline Intervention

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Abstract

Due to their immaturity, relatively narrow personal living space, lack of mental health knowledge and psychological assistance channels along with other reasons, adolescents are more prone to suicidal behavior due to the accumulation of negative emotions and psychological problems. Relevant studies show that most of the adolescents with suicide psychological phenomenon actually have strong desire to survive, and their suicide psychology is closer to impulsiveness. Through listening, advising, and emotional relief, the suicide psychology and behavior can be effectively alleviated or even avoided. Therefore, the psychological hotline intervention actually plays an important role in helping adolescents with mental health issues. Through questionnaires and interviews, this paper conducts both quantitative and qualitative studies on adolescent students and hotline operators, finds out the common causes and demands of adolescent suicidal psychology, and tries to give the solutions to improve and develop psychological hotlines and other organizations.

Keywords

Mental health, Suicide, Psychological, Hotline, Intervention.

1. Introduction

Currently, academic research on adolescent suicide focuses on two aspects: factors affecting suicide and how to intervene and prevent it. In terms of factors, the existing research results involve distress, tiredness perception, compulsive thinking, fearlessness of death, history of exposure to suicidal behaviors, genetic type, home environment, parental psychological control, peer aggression, etc.; in terms of how to intervene and prevent, it is generally accepted that telephone counseling is a significant way to deal with psychological stress problems, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the advantages of timeliness, anonymity, self-directedness, affordability, and convenience.

2. Literature Review

Domestic academic research on psychological hotline interventions began in the mid-1990s, but remained relatively aloof for a long time. It was not until 2020 that the heat of related research surged to an all-time high, followed by a downward trend. Apparently, this apparent fluctuation is related to the widespread psychosocial problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine and lockdown.

Ji Jianlin et al.(1994) are the earliest scholars in China to pay attention to the issue of psychological hotline intervention, and believe that the psychological hotline in the 1990s practicing 4-5 hours of free counseling services were limited in length; for the problem of suicide, the hotline could play a role in helping, but there was no empirical research to confirm that it can reduce the suicide rate or even prevent it. Suicide cases were mainly in the 16-25 age group, with secondary school education, accompanied by a high degree of despair and emotional depression, and are mostly due to factors such as family and interpersonal conflicts.

Tao Fangbiao et al. (1999) study the prevalence of suicidal ideation, suicide planning, and suicide attempts among adolescents, as well as their influencing factors, by means of a questionnaire survey of students in three high schools. Compared with junior high school students, high school students were more likely to change their suicidal ideation into a suicide plan; females, depression and anxiety were important influences on suicidal behaviors. Father's educational level had a significant effect on high school students' suicidal behavior. In addition, mental disorders such as depression and anxiety could not be ignored.

Tian Qi et al. (2012) use stratified whole-cluster random sampling to select 7335 school students to investigate suicidal problems and related factors in 12 months. It was found that the sample had a detection rate of 14.3% for suicidal ideation, 6.9% for suicidal planning, 2.1% for suicidal behavior, and 1.0% for multiple suicidal behavior. This study shows that the detection rate of adolescent suicidal problems is high, and that adolescent suicidal problems may be related to loneliness, insecurity, depression and other negative emotions, as well as pressure from school and family, along with lack of social support.

Ye Caiping et al. (2021) analyze the data information of incoming calls during the COVID-19 pandemic in Longgang District, Shenzhen, to explore the positive role played by psychological hotlines in major public health emergencies. The authors found that, excluding mental problems, emotional problems accounted for a large proportion of the 407 consultants, with fear of infection, worry due to symptoms that were similar to those of COVID-19, and anxiety and depression due to the inability to resume work and normal life being prominent.

Adolescence is an extremely important developmental stage in life. Academics are currently focusing on researching the types of suicidal behaviors of adolescents and the factors that influence them, and adopting comprehensive interventions based on the characteristics of adolescents' age, gender, home environment, mental health status, and other unhealthy behaviors, with a view to lowering suicidal behaviors among adolescents and thus improving the health of the whole population in China. However, most of the studies focus on factors such as depression and anxiety, with the tendency to targeting college students rather than junior high and high school students.

3. Questionnaires and Interpretation of Result

This study used online-sampling method, with a total of 211 questionnaires distributed, and 211 valid questionnaires recovered. Among them, 103 (48.82%) were females and 108 (51.18%) were males; 93.36% were enrolled students, and the distribution of educational levels was 32 (15.17%) for junior high school students, 107 (50.71%) for high school students, and 58 (27.49%) for college students; the ages of the interviewees were all in the range of 12 to 22 years old. The questionnaires were answered anonymously and the subjects gave informed consent.

3.1. Result of Questionnaires

Since the global public health crisis of COVID-19, which has triggered unprecedented medical, social, and economic upheaval worldwide, the widespread adoption of restrictive measures, while helpful in controlling the spread of the virus, has inevitably caused psychological panic among the masses. The consequences of these reactions include: stress, depression, anxiety, panic, despair, and in severe cases, suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Among them, the suicide mortality rate among the adolescent community (15-19 years old) reached a 24-year all-time high in 2019 and the highest increase from the previous year. There were 6.2 adolescent deaths due to suicide per 100,000 population, i.e., a 40% increase compared to 4.4 in 2018. It is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously exacerbated mental health problems in the adolescent community and should be taken seriously.

Regarding the degree of psychological anxiety, 89.09% of the survey respondents chose "greater and above", and only 10.90% of the survey respondents chose "less pressure or no pressure". It can be seen that as a great part of the current society, young people live in a high-pressure environment. Among them, 16.59% of the anxiety is mainly concentrated in the academic work, 33.65% concentrated in family conflicts, 54.50% concentrated in economic difficulties, 53.08% concentrated in psychological loneliness, 30.33% concentrated in domestic calamity. Almost all of the respondents recognized that psychological problems of adolescents have a very negative impact on their health. The number of suicidal thoughts induced by psychological problems was as high as 69.67%, and the number of those who developed from suicidal thoughts to actual behavior was even more astonishing at 76.19%. Suicide, which is considered very rare by the general public, has actually penetrated into daily life. Reassuringly, most of those who had committed suicide still chose to keep their lives because of factors such as reluctance to give up their existing lives, affection for their families, medication-assisted interventions, help from friends and teachers, guidance from counselors, and assistance from psychological hotlines.

Among the survey respondents suffering from psychological problems, 64.63% said they would like to receive psychoanalysis and reassurance from strangers, 60.54% would like to receive companionship from strangers, and 51.02% said they would like to receive guiding advice on positive life-planning.

3.2. Interpretation of Result

Through the questionnaire survey, it can be found that the probability of adolescents' suicidal ideation is increasing day by day, the main reasons for which are centered around academic pressure, economic pressure, family and school interpersonal relationships, and the tragedy of suicides often occur due to the fact that the majority of people do not have access to professional mitigation treatments. Although many people today are aware of the dangers of mental illness, they are still not aware enough of the need to get the right treatment and relief in time. In most cases, suicidal behavior stems from the accumulation of long-term psychological pressure: the lack of understanding, indifference and pressure from people around them breaks down the psychological defenses of young people; the lack of access to psychological guidance and problem solving exacerbates the symptoms of those suffering from mental illness, and makes it difficult for society to implement efforts to prevent suicides. Under such circumstances, it is necessary to take positive actions and measures to reduce the possibility of youth suicide. Firstly, strengthen the participation of the whole society in publicizing and popularizing the awareness of youth mental health; secondly, strengthen youth mental health education and improve their ability to resist stress; thirdly, increase the public's alertness to suicidal tendency and tolerance towards people with mental illnesses; and lastly, increase the channels for the public to contact professional psychological counseling and treatment services. Not letting suicidal ideation develop freely and reducing the chances of youth suicide requires a number of aspects, such as mental health education, social support network building, and suicide prevention, all working together to maintain social stability and health.

4. Field Research and Interviews

The psychological assistance hotline is a form of telephone service that provides psychological intervention for people in emotional crisis. Its role is, first, to help relieve emotional stress; second, to help callers learn to face reality; and third, to help callers learn to solve problems constructively. This is precisely in line with the psychological needs of nowadays adolescents.

4.1. The Surge in Youth Suicide Rates and Local Psychological Hotline Interventions

As a frontline psychiatric hotline worker, interviewee A has taken calls from people with a wide range of mental illnesses. She stated that since 2019, there has been a surge in suicidal behavior among adolescents and for a variety of reasons. Most of the young callers have suicidal ideation but also have a strong desire to survive. They were all agitated at the beginning of the phone call, and even had self-harming behaviors, but after pouring out their woes, their emotions were cathartic to a large extent, and they could usually calm down. With the hotline workers' patient listening and persuasion, the callers were basically able to obtain sufficient psychological support and stress relief. After gaining a basic understanding of the work content and training methods of psychological hotline operators, it is certain that they have received professional training and possess rich psychological knowledge.

It can be seen that at present, psychological counseling workers in qualified institutions in China have sufficient professional knowledge and a rigorous attitude. If people with mental illnesses seek the help of professional workers in a timely manner, they can, to a large extent, obtain stress relief and effectively reduce the frequency of suicides. Reducing the public's skepticism about the professional ability of counseling and treatment agencies to do their job, strengthening the public's attention to mental health, and increasing the communication channels of professional psychological counseling and treatment services play a crucial role in alleviating mental health problems at the social level.

4.2. Adolescents' Need is to Talk When They Have Psychological Problems

When interviewee B was in school, his parents restricted or even did damage to his friendships and other social relationships, leaving him on the verge of psychological collapse. Under the constant pressure from his parents, he first thought of suicide two months after he broke up with his friends. However, due to fear and attachment to life, he gave up the first attempt. He then heard about a specific radio and decided to call the radio hotline. For the first time, he told other people about his experience, and while he received rational analysis of his difficulties from others, he also gained relief from his psychological pressure. He is now a normal college student. The case of interviewee B, to a certain extent, reflects the important role of proper guidance and persuasion in relieving teenage anxiety—effectively preventing negative psychological states such as anxiety, depression and helplessness from further evolving into suicidal behavior.

5. Reflection and Conclusions

In today's society, people are generally aware of the importance of mental health and their impact on daily life, but there is still a lack of professional understanding of the specific mitigation and treatment of mental illness, resulting in a significant number of suicides that cannot be prevented immediately and effectively. For patients and their families with mental illness, acceptance, tolerance, understanding and active treatment are essential. Whether it is seeking medical treatment, psychological counseling, or contacting a psychological hotline, any method that can help alleviate anxiety needs to be increased in public awareness to avoid the emergence and development of extreme behaviors to the greatest extent possible, rather than let negative behaviors drifting.

5.1. Psychological Hotlines and Other Counseling Agencies Should Enhance Public Awareness

The questionnaire survey shows that 83.82% of the people have had suicidal ideation, but have not received formal psychological counseling and treatment. On the one hand, the public attaches considerable importance to mental health, but on the other hand, they lack knowledge

and trust in the various ways of treating and alleviating mental illness. This may be due to the relatively expensive cost of counseling and treatment, as well as the lack of trust in professional groups such as counselors and psychiatrists. Strengthening the visibility and social acceptance of psychological counseling institutions will make it possible to provide targeted help to suicidal patients more effectively, and to ensure that people with mental illnesses can lead a normal social life and no longer have to endure psychological suffering on their own.

5.2. Schools Should Strengthen Mental Health Education for Adolescents

Most adolescents live in a high-pressure environment caused by peer pressure and constraints of family, and some of them may easily emerge suicidal ideation just because of trifles. External pressure is unavoidable, but schools should take the obligation of popularizing and educating mental health knowledge, and teach students as early as possible how to face negative emotions, so that they can establish a self-regulation mechanism for their emotions and reduce the emergence of extreme emotions and behaviors.

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