

REVIEWS/RECENZJE

Naito A. (2007).

Internet suicide in Japan: Implications for child and adolescent mental health. "Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry", 12 (4): 583–597, doi:10.1177/1359104507080990.

Reviewed by: Mia Micevska

In this article pediatrician and author Ayumi Naito turns our attention towards a bone-chilling truth about the internet that its creators could not even imagine. The words "internet" and "suicide" are not such that can be easily paired up in one's mind, nevertheless they seem to be commonly related in today's Japan. "«Net suicide» refers to suicide pacts that are prearranged between strangers who meet over the internet" (Naito 2007: 583). Throughout the article, the author nearly treats the 'net suicide' trend as a contagious new-age virus with epidemic proportions which is, for now, mostly contained in Japan. He studies suicide as a problem with many layers reaching into the depths of economic, social, cultural and religious dimensions, with a special accent on the mass media as a catalyst for this unearthly trend (Naito 2007).

For the purpose of giving us a clear vision of how alarming the situation really is, Ayumi Naito thoroughly examines the epidemiology of suicide in Japan starting with a disturbing statistical overview as an attention grabber. According to official statistics (National Police Agency 2004) 34,427 people (24,963 male and 9464 female) committed suicide in the year of 2003. What is especially troubling is the fact that suicide was accounted to be the primary cause of death for twenty to twenty-four year olds according to demographic statistical analyses by the Ministry of Welfare and Labor (1997–2005). Moreover, relying on well-established studies in the UK, Naito indicates a strong link between suicide and mental health problems, as well as self-harm tendencies.

If we, again, take a medical model to grasp the idea of suicide, we might hypothesize that finding the initial cause of the problem will help us find an effective antidote and terminate the deadly "virus" once and for all. As previously stated, we need to uncover many layers and the author started by looking into the social and economic pressure that an individual might undergo. After the Second World War, in the 1950s, Japan

experienced massive growth that later made people really sensitive to the reoccurring economic slumps. From the article we can roughly conclude that most of the suicides were committed by working-age males, often after a bankruptcy of a large corporation or another massive bump in to road to financial stability. However, in 2003 the suicide risk group shifted to people between twenty and forty years of age and even the number of primary school children that committed suicide increased. It seemed like the economic recession had a morbid secondary impact in terms of creating an unstable and stressful family environment leaving children/adolescents vulnerable and at risk of depression and suicide (Naito 2007: 591).

Therefore, when things get difficult at home one might intuitively think that a child can always seek the help of a counselor, yet the author brings to attention the stigma surrounding depression and suicide in Japan. He further points out the lack of Japanese mental health professionals, and ironically, the lack of Japanese culture-orientated models to deal with such common problems burning through the society.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned stigma, five-year old children that according to Kobayashi (2003; Naito 2007) just barely grasp the idea of death or nine-year olds that just came to terms with its irreversibility get to learn about dying from TV, videogames and the internet, as family units are getting smaller. Consequently, a survey in Nagasaki country conducted on primary and secondary school children showed that a large number of them believe a person can be brought back to life after death or “reset” like a video game character (Nagasaki Prefecture Board of Education 2005; Naito 2007).

Nevertheless, we cannot be so quick to judge the knowledge acquired through different media, as what the “non-Japanese” folk knows about traditional Japanese suicides that consist mostly of movies starring a noble samurai performing “Hara-kiri”. In the article the author wants to put a really clean line between the traditional suicide pacts and the newly emerged ‘net suicides’. Naito even presents four case studies enabling us, the readers, to form a haunting mental image of what actually goes on during these horrific acts. What is specific about these suicides is that an individual reaches out to strangers via internet; they meet for the first time at the day of the suicide and usually commit the act through carbon monoxide poisoning. Naturally, a story like this is golden for the media, but what they take for granted, as pointed out many times in the article, is the fact that this behavior becomes contagious. It is not only the chain-suicides inspired by the headlines in the news that are getting out of hand, but also the method for committing suicide is getting largely advertised. Sadly, “[a]s a result of its use by Japanese net suicide victims, charcoal burning is now associated more with ‘net suicide’ than with barbecue parties” (Naito 2007: 593).

Furthermore, adolescents and young adults are examined in this article as groups that have the highest risk of being influenced by the uncensored contents of the internet. Even though some individuals that have problems communicating and sharing their concerns do find help on the internet through some legitimate mental health services (Naito 2007: 595), others, however, slip right through the cracks. Those unfortunate souls use the internet as a refuge, escaping from their demons of loneliness and depression

through forming virtual “bonds” with strangers in complete anonymity. The author writes about the internet as playground without limits where anyone can “google” anything and receive advice, information, pictures, videos and can even fulfill idol fantasies about their own death.

At the end of the article Naito writes about something more powerful than the antidote itself and that is prevention. Starting from raising the awareness about mental health disorders, education of the hospital staff and school personnel, restricting the access to means of suicide, establishing more suicide prevention centers and controlling the media reporting, he ends up with something really humane and basic: offering post suicide interventions to families which lost a loved one due to suicide.

Taking a step back, the article is thought provoking and disturbing at the least. The common language in which the author expressed himself makes it perfect for raising awareness, which in my opinion is crucial in this era. Although the presented information and the literature that the author referred to is at least ten years old, everything he wrote is still considered to be a major risk today. As stated before, Japan is a fast growing country with a distinct cultural background, however there is no guarantee that this terrible trend will not spread with the speed of light. The world is becoming a global village and the internet is erasing all borders visible on the map.

The high-risk adolescents and young adults as described by Hawton and James (Naito 2007: 590) usually come from broken homes, have predispositions for a psychiatric disorder, misuse alcohol/drugs, have a history of suicide or self-harm. Almost thirteen years later this is quite relatable, and what scares me the most it that new trending issues such as difficulties with gender or sexual identification have piled up on the pre-existing problems. Kids matching this description are literally everywhere, sitting with their smartphones with unlimited internet access.

I would dearly recommend this article to all social workers, mental health professionals and parents. There is this old saying that it takes a village to raise a child, and after reading the article I finally understood the wisdom lying beneath these words. The villagers are the cashiers, the teachers, the custodians, the neighbors, the separated parents, the adoptive guardians, the IT specialists, the news reporters, the nurses, the boss who fired your mom, the counselors and the gentle social workers.

Lam Ching Man, Liang Jianqiang, Ng Guat Tin, Tsui Ming-sum, Yan Miu Chung (2017).

Youth unemployment: Implications for social work practice.

“Journal of Social Work”, 17 (5): 560–578.

Reviewed by: Eva Wachtler

“What if I can’t find a job after my studies?”. A lot of young people I know are dealing with this question: thoughts about finding or not finding an employment are more topical than ever. In fact, it is well known that youth unemployment is a challenge for young people and for the whole society. But how does this phenomenon affect social work? This is what the authors tried to point out in their paper.

In this article youth unemployment is seen from a social work perspective and the authors argue that social work can contribute in reducing it. But before going into detail, at the very beginning, they define their understanding of a young person. In doing so, they rely on the definition of the United Nations which names people aged 15 to 24. In addition they clarify also their understanding of unemployment: “In this article, youth unemployment is defined as young people in an involuntary status of being unemployed but with the capacity, desire and eligibility to work” (Lam Ching Man et al. 2017: 561).

Pointing out the definitions of the key words of the article at the introduction is excellent, because like this the reader quickly gets a clear mindset. Speaking about this I see that the structure of the article is well organized. In fact the introduction is well written, because beside the definitions, the authors expound the problem statement. They list a few case studies which underline the fact, that joblessness of young people is an international problem. In spite of some investments in the past, the number of young people without a job remained high.

In the second section of the article the authors focus more specific on this problem statement. As you can see, the awareness of this issue by the public, policy makers and professionals exist, but what about social work and youth unemployment? Indeed, the writers had a look on previous literature and they found out that the knowledge base about it is limited. A lot of studies spotlighted unemployment, but just a few researched on especially youth joblessness. So more expertise in this field is needed, but how can social workers contribute in reducing youth joblessness?

There is an admirable argument of the authors, because they argue that before giving an answer on this question, the circumstances/ the barriers that prevent employment have to be identified. With this in mind, in the third part they describe two types of barriers: transitional and structural ones. Transitional barriers are seen in a personal sense, like for example the lack of work experience or a low level of education. Meanwhile the structural barriers can be seen as a social-economical point, for example the employment discrimination based on gender. Indeed, while the composers represent these two different types of barriers, they make some examples and refer to some studies, but for the reader it is not comprehensible due to which reasons this two types were chosen.

In the subsequent section of the article the writers finally represent their theoretical views on social workers behavior with young unemployed. In this context they refer to the idea of the “4Es” framework, four strategies against joblessness (employability, equal opportunities, employment creation and entrepreneurship), developed by the Youth Employment Network (YEN) in 2001. The authors argue that in this idea and in many other programs there is the assumption that investment in education and job training will increase the chance of a better life, so the thoughts are characterized on a human capital approach. But the authors argue, that the solution should be rather seen from an ecological context and therefore, they add a fifth “E”, called the ecological connections, which tries to understand youth behavior in an environmental context (micro-, macro- and mesosystem): “In working with unemployed young people, the context is not just the microsystem of the school or the workplace, but also the mesosystem of school–social worker interactions, family–school interactions; the exosystem of a school’s interactions with the business community and the macrosystem of a rising or declining economy or a macrosystem in which the interests of employers are of higher political importance than workers” (Lam Ching Man et al. 2017: 568). Regarding this part, I think that the writers succeeded in representing their argument about introducing the fifth “E”. It is clear for what reason they add it and they define it well. Nevertheless, the explanation on the “4Es” is mentioned briefly, therefore it is difficult to understand this idea from an outsider perspective. But luckily this concept is described in detail in the next section.

The final part tries to give advices on how the “5Es” model can be used by social workers in the work with jobless young people. In this section the five “Es” are described in detail with various examples, primary examples from Hong Kong. Because of the limited scope of this article review, I will not illustrate those. However, there are list a lot of suggestions what social workers have to do, but after reading it, I was still searching for the “how”. In fact, it was the same case by reading the last chapter on “recommendations for social work practice and education”. Indeed, the authors are offering a lot of advice without giving an explanation why.

After reading this article I was kind of disappointed, because I expected more, more practical inputs as you may can expect from the title “Youth unemployment: Implications on social work”. However, the authors give a very good overview about the circumstances of youth unemployment, but a clear research question, where the goal of the article gets explained, is missing. Due to my opinion, further research on this topic is needed, the lack of empirical background knowledge, mentioned by the authors, is a big problem for the professionals. So further studies should focus on youth joblessness people, doing empirical research on which professional can focus on in their professional work.

Lubińska-Bogacka M. (2017).

System of institutional support for single mothers in Poland. "Zeszyty Pracy Socjalnej", 22 (1): 39–54.

Reviewed by: Sylwia Łosiowska

The article analyses and discusses the social and legal problems of the single women. The main issue is the social welfare system for mothers and their situation on the labour market.

First of all, it is necessary to notice that the article is very well-organized and logically divided into chapters. Each chapter contains a separate topic, and together it is combined into a coherent whole. In the introduction the author explains why she took up the subject. She emphasizes that this topic is current and important in the perspective of the whole society. This article contains the analysis of the problem of the single parenthood, with special regard to the forms of assistance and its sufficiency. Lone parenthood is not a new phenomenon, however, its level has increased in recent times. Along with this growth had to be reorganized the labour market, social institutions, and the same meaning of parenthood. These changes have been taking place since 1980. The state is trying to activate citizens, so it creates a new active social policy. One of the groups of clients of the social welfare system are single mothers. The state offers them legal, financial and social support from the social institutions. According to the law, a single mother is: an unmarried woman, a divorced woman, a widow, a woman after separation pronounced by court, or a married woman whose husband is imprisoned or his parental rights have been terminated. The material presented in the article is only a part of research related to assistance for single mother families.

As for the description of the methodology used in the thesis, it is not enough elaborated. Lubińska-Bogacka carries out to analyze the situation of the single women as the beneficiaries of the social services institutional support system. The author finds that it is a group that is constantly changing and dynamically growing, so research must be reliable and precise. Firstly, the author describes data from Central Statistical Office, reports from surveys for the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy and documents collected in 2016 from Centres for single women, Centres for victims of violence and a Crisis Intervention Centre. Due to the fact that the problem of the lone parenthood is presented by the quantitative research, based on the data which are sometimes scattered, fragmentary, not always up-to-date, and the results are inconsistent. In order to situation the credibility of the presented thesis the researcher added her own observations and interviews with single women and social workers. Combination of these methods allowed her to describe cultural and social reality in detail (subjective interviews with women and objective data analysis) and predict the development of various social phenomena. These methods and comments are appropriate and adequate to the task. Data was collected in the reliable sources, and individual interviews enrich

the study significantly. Nevertheless, the researcher presents the characteristics of the research sample to a very small extent. Lubińska-Bogacka only remarks that they are “single mothers” or social workers, and she determines the number, without the age range, with an estimate of the average age, financial situation, education and number of children. Moreover, the researcher does not provide information about the method of recruiting the subjects for the study.

By and large, the researcher managed to get to relevant data. These data are presented very clearly and accurately. In addition, the results are taken from different time intervals; what is more, the reader can check what changes take place overtime. However, the text lacks the tables or diagrams that could better illustrate it. The whole article contains a lot of numbers, dates and percentages on each page that might disturb its reception. It can be stated that the author gave too many numerical information; that amount makes it redundant. Even though, it makes the article much more reliable and based on the facts. The main advantage is that each “research topic” has been described separately, and the reader has no problem with mixing up various pieces of information. The results of these studies are interesting and raise the reader’s level of knowledge. Initially, everything is described in general, then the author proceeds to detailed topics. An important element of the research results is also the fact that the author does not assess the collected data. It presents facts that may be helpful to the reader but does not provide an opinion.

The state offers many forms of help to single mothers. Most of the single mothers benefit from family allowance, family allowance bonuses and care allowances. Sometimes, however, women do not know what forms of help they can get from the state. An important element is also the description of “pressing” of women on the labor market. They often work too many hours, without the possibility of promotion and support from the employer. They allow it because they do not know their rights. Therefore, a social worker must make them aware of it.

Overall, this is a very well organized and well-written article. However, as a student of social work, and a person vividly interested in the problem of lonely mothers I have to add that the thesis does not meet my expectations. The article describes the assistance which beneficiaries can receive from social institutions. It is social, cognitive and emotional help. The most important thing is the fact that this support reaches the most needy people. Relating to the fact that the problem of “pressing” single mothers is very common, it is very good that the article is also dedicated to this topic. If somebody wants to expand his knowledge in this area, the article is very helpful. The author precisely described what she wants to achieve by the presented thesis, first of all she wanted to carefully analyze the situation of single mothers and she succeeded. She pointed to institutional and non-institutional support. However, due to the fact that the article is mainly addressed to social workers, the research methodology should be more precisely described. The research sample is too briefly described giving more information would be helpful in better understanding the structure of the study. This text mainly presents

'dry facts'. It has the potential to be the textbook for social workers, unfortunately some valuable aspects of presented problem have been missed. It lacks a wider description of the biographies of mothers who took part in the interview. Regrettably, real stories could be more interesting to read.