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Why It Matters

Teen suicides: Watch out for those on the edge

Janice Tai

✉ (mailto:jantai@sph.com.sg)

🕒 PUBLISHED JUL 27, 2016, 5:00 AM SGT

More than two young people aged 10 to 19 killed themselves every month last year.

Teen suicides here hit a 15-year high last year, reaching a total of 27. This is on a par with other fast-paced cities like Hong Kong, with an average of 23 student suicides annually in recent years.

The latest statistics show that more Singaporeans are choosing to die at a younger age, in their teens, though young adults aged 20 to 29 were at the highest risk of suicide last year.

Apart from commonly known sources of stress such as academic pressure and relationship issues, there are other emerging factors that increase suicide risk among teens, such as cyber bullying or spending too much time on the Internet.

Social media sites accentuate social comparison and fuel the need for a person to show that he has it all together, even when he may be struggling.



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Another aspect is adolescent mental illness. The top conditions for which children and teens aged six to 19 receive outpatient treatment at the Institute of Mental Health are anxiety, stress and depression, apart from special-needs conditions such as autism.

Experts have observed a reluctance in young people to seek familial help and support in a crisis.

Community support options must be beefed up but Singapore, unlike countries such as Britain, does not have a national suicide prevention strategy. Reducing suicide requires varied initiatives that involve all segments of society. Teachers and counsellors need to be trained to recognise mental illness and suicidal tendencies.

People cannot be afraid to broach the topic so that the suicidal person knows that he is being watched by people who are concerned about him.

Even Facebook has decided that it has a role. Users can flag posts with suicidal or self-harming thoughts and the social media site will contact their authors to see if they are all right.

It is not just about the 27 young lives lost last year. According to the Samaritans of Singapore, at least six survivors are directly affected by every life lost to suicide. Some of them may turn suicidal themselves.

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