



A Literature Review of Suicide Research and Practices in Taiwan

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INTRODUCTION

- Suicide is influenced by and reflects social values of the local culture (Farberow, 1975)
- In Taiwan, suicide is traditionally viewed as an awful, dangerous, and weak behavior (Xu, 1987)
- The general Westernized approach to address suicide through the scope of mental health care is not generalizable to many other parts of the world
- Some researchers in non-Western societies adopt an indigenous psychology approach (Yang, 2000), explicitly incorporating:
 - Content (i.e. meaning, values, and beliefs)
 - Context (i.e. family, social, cultural, and ecological)

AIMS

- An overview of current suicide-related research and practices in Taiwan, and assess the extent to which it is influenced by the indigenous psychology movement
- Explore the relationship between fundamental cultural values and their influences on suicide in Taiwan
- Examine current research in suicide methods, trends, and intervention strategies to this unique ecological context, and its commitment to the indigenous psychology approach
- Recommendations for future directions in suicide research and practices in Taiwan

METHODS

- Databases: Google Scholar and PsycInfo
- Suicide related websites and research in Chinese
- Key search terms: Indigenous psychology, suicide, Taiwan

CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

Indigenous Psychology Approach

- Bottom-up approach to build theoretical models
- Qualitative and ethnographic methods (Hwang, 2013)
- The indigenous psychology movement began in mid-1970s, gained momentum in the 1980s, and flourished in the 1990s

Confucianism

- Suicide is associated with two Confucius values (Tzeng, 2001)
 - *hsiao* (filial piety)
 - *mientze* (face)
- Meaning of suicide in Taiwan
 - A sign of weakness
 - An attempt to abandon parents
 - A behavior that brings shame, disgrace, and dishonor to family

Help-Seeking Behavior

- Medical centers are the primary source for seeking help
- 59.4% rejected case management services
- Great worries about social stigma (Wang, Wu, & Chen, 2015)

CURRENT RESEARCH AND PRACTICES

Trends and Risk Factors

- Economic and unemployment trends are highly associated with suicide death rates (Agoramoorthy & Hsu, 2011)
- Seasonality of suicide rates (Tsai & Cho, 2011)
 - Peak in spring months and lower in winter months
- Mean monthly suicide rates are 42% higher among those highly exposed to earthquake in 26 months follow up (Yang et al., 2005)

Charcoal Burning as a Method of Suicide

- Most popular method since 2006 (Chen et al., 2012)
- Media plays significant roles in broadcasting and shaping suicide

Case Management and Intervention Strategies

- Based on Western practices (Wang et al., 2015)
 - Psychological support
 - Development of coping strategies
 - Follow-ups / postcards
 - Mixed outcomes
- Risks of suicide attempts are not significantly decreased among those receiving case management services (Wang et al., 2015)

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Research Implications

- Move beyond Westernized psychology
- Apply qualitative and ethnographic methods and inform practices
- Actively incorporate the interplay between Confucian values and suicide into research and practice
- Address the gap between disclosure in medical settings and the acceptance of mental health services
- Explore familial shame (Wong et al., 2014)
 - Risk vs. potential protective factor for suicidal behavior
- Case management services
 - Assess current components
 - Develop local strategies
 - E.g. include psychoeducation

Clinical Implications

- Transition of the medical system from a barrier to disclosure and assessment to an initial gatekeeper of mental health
 - Physician education and training
 - Target populations
- Target charcoal burning
 - Encourage responsible media portrayal
 - E.g. deemphasize peacefulness and emphasize process of choking
- Sponsor preparedness to develop plans for mobilization of mental health professionals
 - High risk periods
 - At risk populations
- Promote conversations about
 - Suicide
 - Indigenous thinking