‘Striving to negotiate...  
...dying to escape’

Suicidal expressions among young people in Cambodia

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Föreläsningssal A, Psykiatriska kliniken, Byggnad 23, NUS, fredagen den 16 maj, kl. 09:00.
Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Wolfgang Rutz, Coburg University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Tyskland.
Abstract

Background Suicide among young people is a global public health problem, but information on determinants and understanding of suicidal expressions are lacking in low and middle income countries (LMIC). Though school-based interventions are common in many parts of the world, evidence for efficacy is less reported, particularly from post-conflict countries.

Aim To explore suicidal expressions and their determinants with psychosocial and gender perspective in Cambodia and Nicaragua and to evaluate a school based intervention to promote mental health and prevent suicidal behavior among young people in Cambodia.

Method School students between the age of 15-19 from Cambodia and Nicaragua responded to Attitude Towards Suicide (ATTS) and Youth Self-Report (YSR) questionnaires. In addition, Life Skill Dimension Scale Adolescent Form (LSDS-AF) was used in schools in Cambodia, one experimental and the other control, to measure the impact of intervention. Six focus group discussions (FGDs), both gender-specific and mixed groups, were held to understand young people’s perception of gender, culture, religion and media and their impact on suicide among them.

Results Paper I. Revealed few gender differences in suicidal expressions, except girls reporting more attempts than boys. Girls exposed to suicide among friends and partners were likely to report own suicidal expressions and girls with internalizing syndrome were at risk for suicidal expressions.

Paper II. Cambodian teenagers reported more mental health problems but fewer suicidal expressions as compared to Nicaragua. The determinants varied between countries.

Paper III. Participants of FGDs mentioned “Plue Plun” male and “Kath Klei” female to describe gender difference in suicidal behavior among young people in Cambodia who found it a challenge to negotiate between traditional and modern values.

Paper IV. Suicide ambiguity in Buddhism, stigmatizing culture and double edged media were seen as suicide-provoking by the young people in Cambodia, who recommended peer-focused, school based program.

Paper V. School based Life Skills Intervention overall benefited girls. Boys with high risk behavior had shown improvement on many Life Skills dimensions, as well as in their mental health profile.

Conclusion The gender and cultural differences in suicidal expressions and their determinants among teenagers emphasize the importance of culturally sensitive and gender-specific suicide prevention programs. The influence of religion and media ought to be considered while planning intervention programs. School-based program may be a window of opportunity to promote mental health and prevent suicide among young people in Cambodia.

Keywords Suicidal expressions, Young people, Cambodia