A Sociological Perspective on Suicide in Rural China: A Case Study of G Village in Gansu Province between 1956 and 2009

Shenghai He

Department of Ethnology and Sociology, Inner Mongolia University, China

Abstract This essay, taking G village in the northwest minority regions of China as an example, analyzes the quotas quo, types, characteristics, major causes, effects and the trend of suicide cases from sociological perspectives. Based on the data collected from 1956 to 2009, it is hoped to articulate various reasons of suicide that happened in the rural villages of China. And, more importantly, via these suicide cases, a great epic of social change in rural areas of China can be depicted to represent the experience of modernization in minority regions of China. It is found that suicide is significantly related with social characteristics (such as the degree of social liberal, economic model, power structure). The means, causes, quantity and characteristic of suicide vary at different historical stages.

Keywords Suicide, Society, Social Change, China

1. Introduction

Suicide has not only caused a serious of social problems in China, but also composed a major threat to the practice of society all over the world. It is a gunfire-free war claiming human lives. For example, the total number of suicide worldwide has exceeded those killed within armed conflicts or traffic accidents. Each year, approximately 287,000 people in China kill themselves while at least 2,000,000 attempt to do so. Suicide has become the top killer for the age group between 15 and 34 [1]. Annually, about 170,000 of rural women commit suicide while 510,000 are hence thrown into poverty with as many as 1,500,000 suffering from the consequent mental trauma [2].

So suicide in China has become a focus of study in recent years. Since 1987, the Chinese Ministry of Public Health (CMPH) has reported vital statistics, including those for suicide, to the World Health Organization (WHO) on an annual basis. However, few researchers outside of China have obtained suicide data from various local governments in China; due to all kinds of reasons, details of suicides go unreported. Therefore, the world’s knowledge of Chinese suicide is generally based on what is provided by WHO Statistical Annuals, which are limited to the rates by age, gender, causes and different historical characteristic provided by the Chinese government.

We focus on the issue of the relationship between suicide and society; how suicide is related to social characteristics of different periods; how social changes affect suicide rate. It is worthwhile to review the relevant theory in order to shed light on these issues. The theoretical foundations of suicide as a sociological phenomenon were established by Durkheim in 1987. He viewed suicide as not just an individual phenomenon but also a “collective phenomenon”, which flows from “collective consciousness” of society. Durkheim argued that fast economic and social transformation would be related to variations in the suicide rate of a population. His fundamental explanation of this relationship was that social changes produced a disruption in protective relationships and values (e.g., employment stability, religion, families, etc.), which in turn increased the risk of suicide. The effect of social changes on suicide has been an ongoing area of interest to researchers throughout the past century (Stack, 2000)[3]. But contrary to Durkheim’s prediction, some scholars believe that social integration and changes are not related to suicide, [4]. Besides, there has been limited empirical research on this possible relationship. Further, there has been no research on whether the relationship between social changes and suicide differs at the regional level, for example on the basis of social, economic, and cultural factors.

This essay, by analyzing the data in a random G village in Gansu Province of China, attempts to explore relationship between social changes and suicide in Chinese rural areas from a microcosmical perspective. G village, a traditional agricultural village, with over 400 people in G village in 2013, belongs to Zhangjiachuan Hui Autonomous County.
2. Materials and Methods

The related suicidal cases within this paper were all collected in G village for statistical analysis. The author conducted the survey for three consecutive years since 2011 in G village, Zhangjiachuan Hui Autonomous County. Participant observation, anthropological in-depth interviews and sociological statistical methods are used in the field work. All the elderly, a total of 158 people, some of whom are descendants, relatives of suicide, have been interviewed one by one so that the author gets more real materials in order to find out suicide causes. That lays a solid foundation for further studying social factors effecting suicide behaviors.

2.1. The Status Quo of the G Village Suicide

G village, like most of China's rural villages, experienced the Agricultural Cooperative Period (1956-1980) and the period of Household Contract System (1980); the second from 1981 to the present. During the Agricultural Cooperative Period (1956-1980), there were five suicide cases within G village: one male who attempted to commit suicide but failed; two women and two men with the average age of 43.4. As shown in the data, the average frequency of suicide per year was 0.19 during this period. Based on the total population in 1969, the middle year of the Agricultural Cooperative Period, the suicide rate was 99 per 100,000.

In addition, during the Household Contract System Period (1981-2009), there were seven cases with four male and two female dead. It was still a conservative figure since some rural areas in China [5]. In all, the middle year of the Household Contract System Period, suicide rate was 93 per 100,000, 3.43 times more than the average number among all rural areas in China [5]. In all suicidal cases, including those failed suicide attempts, the age group between 20 and 49 composes the largest amount, accounting for 67% of total, followed by the group of more than 50 years old(25%), then, the smallest percentage is the category of under the age of 20 (8%). Overall, the statistics shown from two historical periods in China demonstrated high suicide rate in G village of Gansu Province.

2.2. Types of Suicide

2.2.1. The Agricultural Cooperative Period (1956-1980)

There were mainly three suicide types in this period, according to the result of the attributive analysis: Resistance Suicide, Poverty Suicide, and Altruism Suicide.

(1) Resistance Suicide. Suicide of this kind usually occurred in hierarchical relationships, the subordinates defending for their dignity by sacrificing their lives. It embodied a silent protest. This was usually treated as a reaction of their powerlessness and happened most frequently to young women [6]. Suicide is "the ultimate strategy available to powerless people for influencing the behavior of others" [7], or at least a way for powerless individuals "to revenge themselves on those who have made their lives intolerable" [8]. In particular, in rural places where Confucian culture occupied a dominating ideology, strict cultural rules always required women to obey their husband or mother-in-law. In this context, those who observed Confucian ethic of female subordination were more likely to commit suicide [9]. It seems to correspond to Durkheim’s concept of fatalistic suicide resulting from excessive regulation. According to Durkheim [10], high degrees of regulation by society lead to fatalistic suicide which takes place when individuals (e.g., slaves or prisoners) are violently choked by oppressive discipline, with opportunities and passions being pitilessly blocked. For example:

Case 1. In 1964, a team leader scolded a woman named HSB for being late for work. Instead of listening to her explanation (baby breast-feeding), he slapped her in the face and humiliated her. Feeling terribly wronged, after work, HSB found a bowl of toxic raw almond, mashed and poured it into her mouth. Her husband and children did not feel anything wrong till the evening. They tried everything they knew to save her life, but HSB still died at the end.

This is not something rare. A woman from another group committed suicide by jumping into a well not far from the village and drowned herself for almost the same reason.

(2) Poverty Suicide. This kind of suicide refers to suicide victims who were tortured by pessimistic psychology due to the lack of basic life necessities, such as food, water and so on. Suicide victims deemed that it was better to be dead than alive. This kind of suicide reflects characteristics of the special era. Poverty is not a crime, but it affects and even breaks people. For example:

Case 2. A man named GMD led a miserable life with his two children after his wife died from starvation in 1958, the notorious famine year. In 1975, another disaster year, due to the drought, villagers had a bad harvest and many of them had to leave their hometown for life - GMD kept going to the team leader’s house and imploring for some food in vain. After being rejected for several times, he collapsed on the thought of his starving children and hanged himself on the walnut tree in the backyard at midnight.

(3) Altruism Suicide. Altruistic Suicide was caused by self-belittling. Victims were usually those who suffered from chronic or incurable illness. Believing that they were worthless, due to their inability to support the family, and
would be a big burden for the whole family, they opted for suicide to relieve family burden. This type typically reflected the Chinese culture that the elders concern about their offspring and ignore themselves. Therefore, the vast numbers of sick senior suicides were found in northwestern rural areas in China. For instance:

**Case 3.** 1977 was a year when food was in great shortage. FCX, a paralyzed man by stroke lived a starving life with his wife and three children. One day, when FCX asked his wife for some food, he was scoffed by her with “you could do nothing other than eating all the food we have.” The wife did not give him anything to eat and went out. Feeling ashamed and guilty, FCX managed to move his numb body to reach a blade on chopping board and cut his throat. He ended his life in such a brutal way.


There were five types of suicide after the establishment of the Household Contract System: Passion Suicide, Psychosis Suicide, Property Suicide, "Face" Suicide (the suicide for dignity), Family Conflict Suicide, and Altruism Suicide.

(1) Passion Suicide. Victims usually took the irrational and irresponsible action out of spite with an attempt to make others angry or regretful. As shown in HJY’s case of HJY:

**Case 4.** HJY was a grade-two student in junior high school with excellent academic performance in class. In the autumn of 2003, his mother found that 100 Yuan (ten pounds) of the money she borrowed from her relatives was gone, when she panicked because this 100 Yuan was vital for the poor family. When she did affirm that her daughter did not steal the money, she went to the school in a hurry to interrogate the resident son. Under his mother's stern questioning, HJY admitted that he took the money and had spent 20 Yuan already. After being reprimanded severely by his mother, HJY felt wronged and rashly went out of school... At one o'clock in the afternoon, some students found HYJ lying on the south shore of the river with a lot of vomiting beside him. This news spread quickly. He was sent to hospital as soon as possible, but because he drank too much lethal dose of pesticide, the treatment had to be of no avail. Although, with the help of their relatives, the family adopted a stuttering boy after HJY's death, the family is still under the spell of grief.

(2) Family Conflict Suicide. This kind suicide is often caused by intricate family relationships or conflicts. As HBT’s case illustrated:

**Case 5.** In 2001, HBT’s much-admired new house was built up, something to be proud of. However, the construction of this house caused HBT much sorrow and spite. Log was in great shortage at that time, so HBT’s wife managed to get all that needed with the help of some contact. After that, she became extremely haughty and domineering in the family and even developed some affairs. Besides, she was rough with and disrespectful to her parents-in-law, who always aired their grievance in her presence. All these afflicted HBT deeply. He did not want to endure the humiliation his wife brought to him. Nevertheless, the cost of a divorce and the concern for his children kept him enduring all agony.

In 2001, after a fierce dispute with his wife, he drank a bottle of dimethoate and ended his young life in such a shameful way, just like his mother who killed herself by drinking almond soup in 1964, manifesting that suicide has genetic correlation [11]. Later on, his wife left with the younger son and got remarried soon. His father passed away due to excessive grief. His eldest son, who was fostered by another family, wandered on streets all day for lack of custody. A family was thus ruined.

(3) Property Suicide. This kind of suicide was caused by resource-induced conflicts. Both sides involved have huge differences on property distribution, leading to intense disputes, which, possibly, end up with some suicide. As case 6 below shows:

**Case 6.** FJC was the eldest son in his family. In 2000, they decided to divide up their family properties and live apart. His wife was really dissatisfied with the division since she felt the younger son got more land, cattle and other properties. She voiced out her proposal on a redivision, but what she received in return was to be rebuffed by her father-in-law. She blamed all these on his husband’s weakness and incompetence. Seeing no hope for a good life, she sneaked out at night to the riverside and drank pesticide fluid after a hard cry, leaving her husband and two kids, who dropped out from school after FJC’s death. They are grown-ups now but still cannot afford to get married.

(4) “Face” Suicide, which is related to one’s dignity. In Chinese culture, face is the metaphor for one’s dignity and honor. Such face-culture strongly affects people’s behavior. If somebody loses his “face”, he loses his dignity and self-esteem and will be looked down upon. Thus, some people would take suicide as a weapon to defend their face. As the cases of FDH and HSM below represent:

**Case 7.** Being greatly annoyed with the awkward relationship between his son and his daughter-in-law, FDH decided to punish her by practicing witchcraft in 1996 with full conviction that her poor behavior was instigated by her mother and the neighbor villagers. But the witchcraft knots were discovered by other villagers. Coincidently, one neighbor’s son passed away due to disease. The dead son’s father attributed the death to the witchcraft. Unable to stand the stern reproach by villagers and the incessant harassment by the dead boy’s family, FDH left home and his aging father, feeling all the humiliation and loss of face, hanged himself on his house beam. It is said that his father’s death was also related to his wife’s maltreatment.

HSM was caught stealing pears and got beaten heavily in 1974. Since then, he sank into profound depression because he was derided constantly by villagers. Feeling exceedingly shameful for the reputation as a “thief”, he jumped down from the deep cliff. It was very lucky for him to be rescued.
In addition to these cases mentioned above, of course, there are other kinds of suicides, such as mental illness and paranoid schizophrenia. However, the above suicides are classified based on the attributions analysis, which, as a matter of fact, involves various, complicated and even intertwined factors. For example, the Family Conflict could mix with ‘Face’ and spite. Thus the classification above only represents one dimension of this complicated issue.

2.3. Main Features of Suicide in Different Periods

In different periods, suicide had various ways, characteristics and effects. If we compare the Agricultural Cooperative Period with the Family Contract System Period, the characteristics of suicide can be generally summarized as follows:

2.3.1. Different Suicidal Means

In the Agricultural Cooperative Period, the suicidal means are miscellaneous. The five cases mentioned above involve very different means, like hanging, cutting throat, throwing oneself to well, jumping off clips and drinking poison. All of these means are remarkably violent. Since 1980, 62.5% of the total suicides choose poison drinking, which could be partly explained by the handiness of the pesticide fluid. Generally, the use of suicide methods was believed to be related to the accessibility and acceptability of the methods. In this study, over 80% of families kept pesticides in their homes. In general, during this period, the means of suicide are homogeneous and less violent.

2.3.2. The Trend toward Rise in Suicide Rate and Fall in Suicide Age

There is a substantial growth in female suicide from 1956 to 2009. In the Agricultural Cooperatives Period, female suicide accounted for 40% of the total. Since 1980, female suicide, including attempted suicide, have been accounting for 57%, which is twice the figure than that in the Agriculture Cooperative Period. Another notable feature is the decreasing of the suicide age, which has been 6.4 years younger than that of the Agricultural Cooperative Period with the youngest only 14 years old.

2.3.3. Difference in Conflict Nature

During the Agricultural Cooperative Period, the suicidal behavior was in essence a kind of discourse and interaction between subordinates and political power. Since 1980, conflicts have occurred within family and most suicide cases stem from these. Simultaneously, variance in family structure has led to different contradictory dimensions. In the Agricultural Cooperatives Period, most families were expanded and joint ones with more children. Parents did not pay much attention to their children’s education. They were all regarded equally as members of the commune and, therefore, the conflicts between fathers and their children were not obvious.

Since 1980, parents of most families with only one child eagerly expected their child to be a successful person. To some extent, the child is the future of the family. Instead of encouraging, parents always exert too much pressure to the child. So tension and conflict between parents and their child becomes salient. Under great pressure, many kids rebel with truancy, alcoholism, self-esteem loss, even committing suicide. Although some children know what their parents expect, their ability is far away from enough to meet their parents’ expectations. The disparity brings them so much psychical pressure that some of them choose suicide to escape from the damn world.

2.3.4. Difference in Impacts of Suicide on Family

In the Agriculture Cooperative Period, families were greatly affiliated with so-called “People's Communes”. All productions, distributions, and other work arrangements were decided by the cooperative. Family has no more function than reproduction. Once suicide occurred, the impacts could be cushioned since the rest of the family members were under the care of the cooperative. While today, suicide is no doubt a disaster for the family, not just financially, education and upbringing of children could also become acute problems as well. In this vein, the impact of suicide becomes magnified and then devastating. Just as the basic principle in physics, constant pressure may be greatly intensified per unit upon a narrower area.

3. Discussion

Social Factors in Different Periods That Caused Suicide

There are many factors to trigger suicide, varying from social changes to victims’ mentality, education background, living environment, and life attitude. In order to contrast and interpret suicidal causes in the two periods mentioned above, common factors and the characteristics of times are distinguished. The common factors are what played a role in eliciting the occurrence of suicide in the two historical stages while the characteristics of times are what played a decisive role in causing suicide in a particular period of history.

3.1. Common Factors

(1) Suicide is a Product of Society

Suicides, except for those committed by patients of paranoid schizophrenia, intend to fulfill themselves with the influence of their death imposed on surrounding people, which echoes the mirror theory of Cooley [12], the American sociologist, by surmising others’ evaluation after taking actions. And that is probably why Robinson Crusoe did not choose to kill himself in the deserted island since he was isolated and could not find anyone to be the “mirror”.

Durkheim [10, p. 26] also believes suicide is not human nature, but rather caused by exterior factors dictating human behaviors. Later on, Esquirol confirms the point that suicide is only privilege of mental illness in his *Sur la monomanie suicide* and it arises from our social interaction. Thus, it is
unscientific to divorce suicide from social environments and interpret it as a sorely individual behavior from physiological and pathobiological perspective.

(2) Tolerance to Suicide in the Local Culture

Culture plays an important role in the causes and correlates of suicidal behavior. For example, Lester [13] showed that suicide rates in Chinese populations differ in various geographic locations where Chinese people live (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan), so do the methods used for suicide. Suicidal behavior also differs in various racial and ethnic minority groups, as Leong and Leach [14] documented that there are differences in suicidal behavior in the United States among African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans. Suicide is also involved with local weather. For example, in Japan, suicide rate among people over 60 is very high: 131.5 per 100,000 in 1969. Among these suicides, the rate is higher in winter, when heavy snow hampers old people’s ability to work in the fields and hinders their social interaction, which indicates the importance of “social integration”[15] stressed by Durkheim.

The G village is a pure Han village observing Buddhism cultures in which death represents the escapement of secular fret and means rebirth. The soul-never-die concept, in some way, encourages suicide, which is taken as a mean for happiness in another world. Simultaneously, Confucianism and Taoism affect people’s behavior profoundly. For Chinese women, Confucianism, unlike Christianity and Islam, does not issue strong prohibitions against suicide. Quite to the contrary, Chinese women tightly bound by the moral codes of Confucianism barely have freedom to the point that it is even considered better to remain as a widow or to commit suicide after their husbands’ death [16].

And once a suicide happens, villagers usually seek for mental comfort with fatalism, which interprets the death as predestined. They show sympathy, sorrow and grief. They would never blame the dead, no matter what he/she once did. In Chinese culture, it is immoral to accuse someone who has passed way. Stillion (etc) [17] found that young women received more empathy even for their nonfatal suicidal behavior than older women and men of any age. All these create a very lenient atmosphere for the dead and this is exactly what the suicides expect after their death and of course is very encouraging for the next suicide.

However, this does not mean that the suicide could be free from any judgment. For example, if the suicide occurs off the village, it’s not allowed to move their corpse into the village; if it occurs at home, the corpse should be put on an altar set up out of the village; if suicide victim hangs on a tree, the tree will be cut down and burnt with all the victim’s stuff in time to expel bad luck; suicides can not be neither buried into their ancestral grave nor any place nearby nor the entrance of the village because they are believed to be wronged ghosts, not dead in the natural way.

3.2. The Characteristics of Suicide in Different Times

(1) Different Periods Had Their Own Social Backgrounds

Essentially, a suicide has very close relationship with social background, especially with economic relationship. After all, factors associated with suicidal behavior cannot be divorced from one’s life context [18].

The Agricultural Cooperatives Period, which began in Chinese rural villages from 1957, consisted of three stages: the period of mutual aid groups, primary cooperatives and advanced cooperatives. Villagers handed in all production materials, such as their lands, farm animals and large tools to the cooperatives and were engaged in collective laboring.

However, in the agricultural cooperative period, due to the heavy tasks, some cooperatives team leaders forced team members to stay up late and keep working without rest. They even threatened, tied and beat members to make them finish the harsh task. Those who wanted to quit the community were ravaged cruelly by political criticism and suffered from relentless persecution. Later on, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, as it came to be known, began in 1966 and continued until 1976. During this period, people were all involved in political campaigns, so agricultural production was neglected and, as a result, many people died of starvation. Many people could not bear hunger and political movements, so they chose to commit suicide.

Since the advent of household contract system (1980), family became the primary unit of production and people’s enthusiasm for work has been greatly boosted. During this period, family conflict was the main reason for suicide, which could be caused by the following factors:

Firstly, the greater disparity existing in individual capacity, with the advance of technology, information channels and other production capital, the gap between the rich and the poor in rural society became widened and competition among families was intensified.

In the village community, families get less support from local government. The strong independence of every single family tightens the bond between every family member. Thus, if one spouse does not share the sense of responsibility or one family member fails to see his/her value being recognized, like what happens between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, suicide might happen to vent the suppressed emotions. On the other hand, the loss of any member would prove to be a huge shock and even cause the break of certain family functions. That is the reason why suicide is employed as a weapon in village to avenge the other family members.

When villagers decide to commit suicide, they imagine they will get sympathy after their death and their grudge targets will be condemned and thus feel remorse. But in cities, the economic dependence of the family is greatly reduced due to better welfare and security system. Therefore, the impact of suicide in cities is much less than expected.

Secondly, the land is the lifeblood for farmers. Thus uneven distribution of land and other properties among families may lead to conflicts and disputes.
Thirdly, the relationship between the couple is the main factor affecting family stability. As migrant workers flow to cities to find jobs, most married couples have to be separated, which gives rise to sexual misconduct easily and consequently leads to family conflicts.

Fourthly, conflicts in supporting elderly. With the development of society, the traditional patriarchal system gradually declines; the new generation has less filial piety than their ancestors. Supporting the elderly becomes a huge problem in the family. If not solved properly, it could cause suicide.

3.3. Some New Affecting Factors

(1) Social Changes Concerning Suicide

To begin with, China is nowadays facing a critical transition from a traditional society to a modern one, which underlines the conflict between old and new concepts in terms of marriage and family: the old concept and ethics are being abandoned while the new ones have not been established yet. As a consequence, marriage and family is no longer stable; divorce rate rises sharply and extra marital affairs begin to be popular. As a result, suicide cases soar substantially. Meanwhile, people's attitude toward suicide has changed as well. It is no longer a taboo and disgrace to the family as it was a few decades ago. Due to the frequent media coverage, it has become a common phenomenon within society, which might also contribute to the rise of suicide.

Secondly, changes in Chinese education system make students become suicide victims currently. The contemporary exam-oriented education, severe competition in job market, and the obstinately high house price all exert such a tremendous pressure on them. As a result, some of them may attempt to end their young lives in order to pursue for relief. On the other hand, the youth suicides have great bearing on family changes. Traditional families usually have more than one child, thus parents would not impose all their expectations on either single one, while most families today have only one child, on whom they place all their care, hope and unfulfilled aspiration, resulting an extremely self-centered and fragile child, who, once confronted with setbacks and hardship, may behave as irrationally as committing suicide.

Thirdly, influence of the media. In the past, a suicide might be known only among relatives and nearby villagers due to lack of communication tools. In contrast, today, people could hear, see or read suicide cases almost everywhere, from Internet, newspapers, to magazines. It seems we are living in a time of suicide and, therefore, it is not surprising if someone resorts to it as a solution to despair.

Fourthly, the unsoundness of the legal system and other social institutions. After a whole year’s toil, many migrant workers cannot even get their wages and have nowhere to seek help and protection, which also causes many suicides.

(2) Deficiency of Social Supporting System

Although the rural cooperative medical system has been greatly improved, poverty is still a hard nut to crack with the lagging economy and social security system. The elderly with chronic or fatal illness fail to see their values in supporting the family, thus, more often than not, they choose to relieve the family burden by committing suicide, which, according to villagers, is a token of the "being considerate" [19].

The elderly suicide naturally becomes a "village ritual" since it is a universally acknowledged idea in village communities that it might be a better fortune for the elderly to die because they could suffer less. Besides, there is no system established in rural villages to support the elderly. Once they get chronic sickness, the financial and living expenses may exceed what their family could afford. Therefore, when their descendants complain about the heavy burden brought to the family by the elderly, a thwarted belongingness may strike their hearts and makes them believe that it would be better if they were dead. They believe their death could allow their families to be relieved from the economic burden. It is from this thought that tragedies happen at the end [20].

(3) The Suicides' Misconception

Suicide is no doubt closely connected to victims' knowledge structure, life experience, and the ability in dealing with emergency and personality…etc. As revealed in the data, all victims in the village, including attempted suicides, are illiterate or semi-literate with lower knowledge level, impulse, and simple-mindedness, which explain why most women villagers follow the 3-step formula: crying, making a scene, hanging themselves. As Rasmussen's [21] survey shows, those with lower knowledge level usually fail to handle life crisis. Some scholars argue that women suicide is typically described as having a personality disorder [22] or hysteria [23], which is thought to be associated with femininity.

Three kinds of misconception can lead to suicide. First, some women tend to threaten or warn their husbands with a feigned suicide by drinking fluid pesticide, which is really lethal and tricky to control. Thus, sometimes, the intended feigned suicide becomes a real one, which conforms to the presumption that women’s suicidal behavior is driven by interpersonal motives (such as the wish to reengage and influence) rather than by a wish to die [24]. Secondly, in the surroundings of the northwest rural areas, suicide is nothing novel or unacceptable since predecessors, peers or even younger people have set numerous examples that it is a direct way for relief for good and all. Thirdly, as Seligman's [25] theory of learned helplessness has confirmed, if living in long-term anxiety, fear, and pain, people may develop excessive depression and despair. As a result, they may lose the urge to live if they see no hope to control the surroundings. As a result, they finally give up themselves and commit suicide in instinct.
Reasons for rise in suicide cases among villagers also partly lie in the geographical conditions since most villages are located out of the way. Delay in transportation seriously encumbers their rescue. What is more, poor medical facilities and staffing may play a part. Based on the research data of the subject village, 76% of the suicides get emergency treatment while none of them survive.

4. Outlook on the Suicide Issue in Northwest Minority Regions

4.1. Suicide Issue Would Become Extraordinarily Grim with the rising World Suicide Rate

For the past 45 years, the rate of suicide has risen by 60% worldwide, which means there is one suicide every 40 seconds [26]. It is estimated that one million lives will be lost in 2020 as a result of suicide. By 2030, the number of suicide worldwide is estimated to be 1.5 times higher than now [27]. In 2006, 33,300 people died from suicide in the United States, an average of 91.2 suicides per day [28]. As for Hungary, factors contributing to suicide increased sharply since 1980s. What is worse is the rise of suicide among the unemployed [29]. Scottish government attempted to lower its suicide rate by 20% in some high-risk regions, defined geographically, from 2003 to 2013 [30].

With the intervention of modernization, people in rural villages will face many mental confusions they never expected. Loose organizations, complex relationships, deteriorating credit crisis, fierce social competition, and aggravated unemployment, all deprive the original harmony within the village. Therefore, the village, as a community, is no longer the secluded Shangri-la; numbers of people are suffering from depression and psycho problems as well as the increasing rate of suicide. The northwest minority regions still remain the high-risk zones due to the backward of economy and education as well as the marginalization of the older-care and social support system.

4.2. Suicide of the Elder Could Not Afford to Be Ignored

The problem of supporting the aged becomes exceedingly acute since China has marched into an aging society while the security system fitting in the village communities still has a long way to go. People are undergoing an increasingly faded sense of history and localization with more weakened traditional values like reverence for ancestors and filial piety, which were supposed to help the physical and mental settlement but replaced by other values focusing on money and ‘face’. Profit becomes the priority goal to pursue, for which villagers may despise their parents. Thus the extremely intense competition on face no doubt exacerbates the elder’s life, especially those from a poor family or those afflicted by chronic diseases would be “high-risk groups”.

4.3. Suicide May Happen at an Earlier Age

A lesson could be drawn from the situation in Scotland. Based on the researches of Boyle [31] on suicide in Scotland, the suicide rate among people over 45 years old declined from 22.99 per 100,000 people in February 1980 to 16.73 between 1999 to 2001; among which, the suicide rate of younger groups between 15 to 44 increased substantially from 15.38 to 24.32, which means the suicide gap is widening.

As the only child, these younger people have been given too much care and attention to be properly equipped mentally to deal with emergencies arising in their life, which, in addition to other factors such as pressure of school, entrance exams, employment, marriage and house purchasing, may help explain the rise of student suicide, and fall on suicide out of poverty, as shown in the case where a wife committed suicide for fear of being reprimanded by her husband for a sheer freezing crack on the jar.

4.4. The Impact of Adult Suicide on Family is Even Huge

As a mature aging society, China finds supporting the aged has become more burdensome due to the need of one couple to look after at least four elders (parents and grandparents) to eight (parents and grandparents from the spouse’s side). In other words, supporting the aged is increasingly difficult. The report on social security on the website of China Youth on 16th December 2010 was ranked, for the first time, the most concerned social problem in 10 years. China would experience a high-speed aging from 2000 to 2030 with the ratio of the aged ascending from 9.84% to 21.93%, which is 2.5 times than the world average [32]. It’s not hard to imagine the severity of the problem. Family has been plummeted into a helplessly isolated situation with the broken bonds between deepening market economy and privatization of farmland. Part of its functions, like education, gets degenerated; while others, like economic decision making and supporting the aged, get firmed up. Thus, a family would be confronted with enormous shock and deprived of ability to support the aged once a suicide occurs, which, if not appropriately handled, may even trigger more suicides in the family.

To sum up, suicide is the top killer of human life. However, it could be lowered to a certain degree as long as we should face it positively, take proactive precautions, endeavor to create a healthy political and cultural environment to encourage optimism, faith, passion to life and hope, and fight against misery, ignorance, superstition and extol of afterlife.

REFERENCES


