This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

Title	What are driving Hong Kong students to suicide? Critical review of social currents: the socioemotional foundation of fatalistic-egoistic suicide
Author(s)	Ng, Hung Yu Samson (吳鴻裕)
Citation	Ng, H. Y. S. (2018). What are driving Hong Kong students to suicide? Critical review of social currents: the socioemotional foundation of fatalistic-egoistic suicide (Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), City University of Hong Kong).
Issue Date	2018
URL	http://dspace.cityu.edu.hk/handle/2031/9106
Rights	This work is protected by copyright. Reproduction or distribution of the work in any format is prohibited without written permission of the copyright owner. Access is unrestricted.

What Are Driving Hong Kong Students to Suicide? Critical Review of Social Currents: The Socioemotional Foundation of Fatalistic-Egoistic Suicide

NG Hung Yu Samson

2018

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

Abstract

Drawing on a recent wave of student suicides in Hong Kong, this paper offers a critical account of the social currents of Hong Kong by focusing on the socioemotional foundation of fatalistic-egotism suicide and individual concerns. Meanwhile, using the case study of Hong Kong, this paper also discovers the loopholes of Durkheim's model and argues that the study of psychology or psychopathy should incorporate into the context of the social currents.

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

What Are Driving Hong Kong Students to Suicide?

Critical Review of Social Currents: The Socioemotional Foundation of Fatalistic-Egoistic Suicide

Samson Ng Hung Yu

Introduction

It is generally accepted that social facts are influencing the behavior of the students. The individualistic and the traditional values are correlated to suicidal ideation in Hong Kong among students. (Lam et al., 2004:487) Moreover, depression is an essential factor related to suicidal ideation. (Stewart et al., 1999:227; Lee et al., 2006:82) However, these studies have failed to recognize social psychology or sociology of emotion. Additional studies of the socioemotional foundation of fatalistic-egoistic suicide are needed. The purpose of this article is to (1) critical review the Durkheim's model, (2) analyze the socioemotional foundation of fatalistic-egotism suicide about Hong Kong student suicides, and (3) further analyze the individual concerns in the case study.

Durkheim's Social currents and its Critical Review

Durkheim regarded that social facts are the distinctive subject matter of sociology. They are the social norms, institution, social structure and value that are external constraints throughout entire society, and not reducible to individual consciousness. Accordingly, allowing social facts to incorporate reference to individuals would blur the distinction of sociology. As to the theme of this paper, Durkheim also suggested that the change of social current or collective mood through social integration and regulations, is related to suicide, categorizing it into four types as shown in figure 1.

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

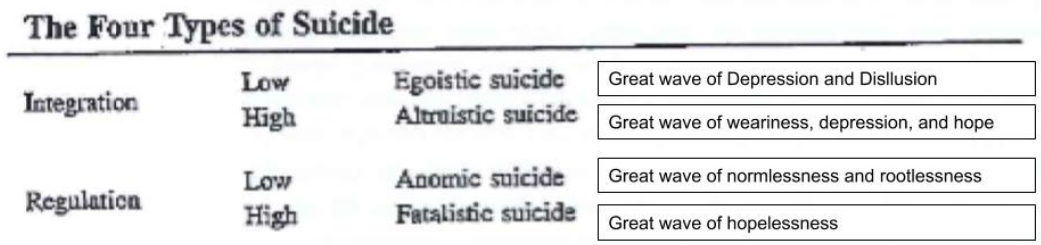

Figure 1. The Four Types of Suicide (Ritzer, 2008:92)

However, this paper argued that Durkheim's model has four loopholes. Firstly, this paper endorses the story about a delinquent boy proposed by Shaw (1966:3). That is, strongly emphasizing on social facts would downplay the particularity of individuals, where sociologists tend to concern the induction of abstract theory and underestimate the detailed understanding of specific organizations.

Secondly, this paper also finds a practical problem of objective manner Durkheim suggested because suicide rate seemingly is an accumulation of interpretation depending upon ascertaining the intention of the person or dead person. (Ritzer, 2008:109) It tends to involve systematic bias to exclude some people for example warrior.

Thirdly, Durkheim also tended to underestimate some suicides. Most of the suicidal literature in Hong Kong focused on suicidal ideation. However, student suicide attempts or ideation would be omitted by Durkheim due to "short of actual death", although they satisfy the definition. (Kushner & Sterk 2005:1141)

Finally, Durkheim was overgeneralizing the issue of suicide into merely four types, explaining assigned primary emotional forces and emotional competency of human nature insufficiently. Abrutyn and Mueller (2014:329) argued that it could be a mixed continuum. Meanwhile, recognizing social currents or outbreaks driven by a "passionate impulse" caused by common pressure, Abrutyn and Mueller (2014:329) regarded that Durkheim's suicidal theory can seize structural factors and cultural

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

factors that shape emotional dynamics and social psychological concepts reacted by individuals. That is, the structure of social relationship generates socioemotional foundations that affect the suicides. The case of Hong Kong student suicides falls into fatalistic-egoistic suicide. The finding of this paper suggests an overgeneralization of emotional dynamics (i.e. Shameful …) in their research because their case studies of fatalistic-egoistic suicide especially focused on prisoner and people with mental illness.

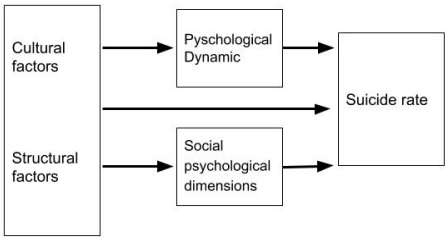

Figure 2. Socioemotional Foundation of Suicide

Case Study: Hong Kong Students

Fatalistic Suicide

After Education Reform, the 3-3-4 scheme provides students a shorter time for the university entrance exam (Shek & Li, 2014:922), the Territory-wide System Assessment brings endless work, and Direct Subsidy Scheme strengthens the elitism. (Tsang, 2002:21) Under the Hong Kong education system, students' academic pressure is heavy. The number of youth suicides has also increased.

Rather than anomic suicide, in which there are ideation shift and an unlimited desire for success, this paper finds that despite the modernization bringing individual value, the tradition-induced regulation is prevailing.

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

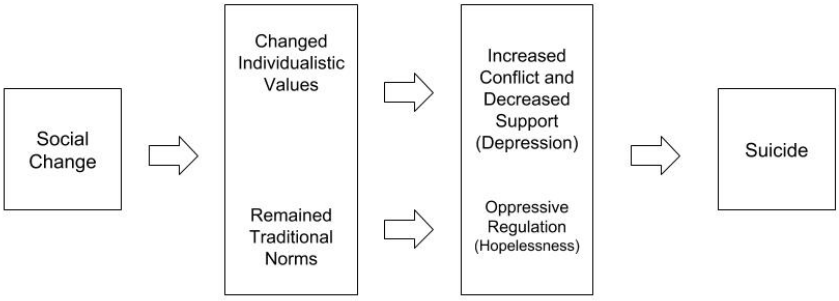

Figure 3. Hypothesis of Hong Kong Social Change

Bharadwaj and Peck (1980:23) argued that hyper-regulation sets in when "ideal" value system is undermined, society provide them with goals that they are not able to achieve and financial success became an indicator of self-worth; students feel hopeless when they are not arbiters of their own destiny. In Hong Kong, hyper-regulation violently choked the students' passion and blocked students' perception of the future.

Kwan (2010:392) stated that driven by "to be a scholar is to be the top of society" (學而優則仕), there is a highly selective and competitive education system, starting from early childhood education to university. When almost the sole indicator for predicting future achievement is school performance, perceived school performance is of importance for the students and those surrounding. (Huang 2014:103). With the altered family structure, like fewer siblings, students receive the strong responsibility to offer support to the family and stronger pressure to succeed in the future.

In fact, structural factor and cultural factor shape groups' emotional dynamics, namely the great wave of hopelessness, anxiety, depression, and fear of not meeting the expectation. Researcher found that drop-out students have significantly higher hopelessness ($t = 5.248$, $p < .001$) and lower perception of school performance ($t = -7.104$, $p < .001$), because of the culture of strong emphasis on academic

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

achievement. (Li & Shek, 2014:925) According to CPSS of HKSAR (2016:22), perceived school performance is related to psychological problems and suicides. Moreover, as shown in figure 4, the levels of perceived parental dissatisfaction for academic performance ($r = .166/ p < .01$), and test anxiety ($r = .407/ p < .01$), are significantly and positively related to depression-inducing suicidal ideation. (Chow et al., 2006:87) It is because, under an examination-oriented educational system, students consider results of examination as *primus inter pares* that determine the future success. (Chow et al., 2006:87) The examination pressure is then highly related to psychological problems. (Hu, 1994:153) Or else, academic achievement and competence are highly emphasized by Hong Kong parents. (Ho & Kang, 1984:1010; Chan & Shek, 1999:291) Students are highly concerned about and expected to fulfill the expectation of parents. (Chen & Lan, 1998:239) Overall, students, who cannot escape the result-oriented and social expectation, feel hopeless to be arbiters of their own destiny, seeing no possibility to break through the status-quo.

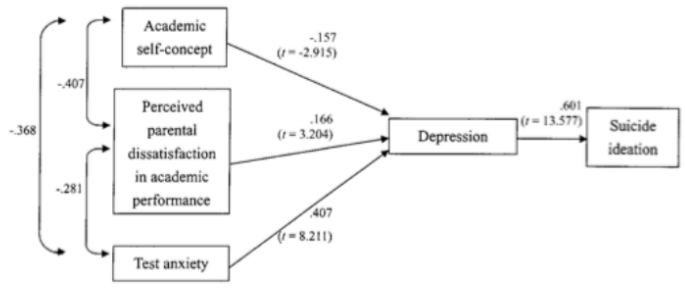

Figure 1. Standardized path coefficients and *t* values of the path model of relationships among suicide ideation, depression, academic self-concept, test anxiety, and perceived parental dissatisfaction in academic performance.
Note. all paths are significant ($p < .01$). $N = 327$

Figure 4. The finding of Chow et al., (2006:87)

Egoistic Suicide

Two different angles to social integration are available, but they are not contradictory. The former focuses on the child-parent relationship with support, while the latter focuses on the collectivism with obligation.

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

Beginning individualistic values (Feldman & Rosenthal, 1991:2) are negative to students' mental health because the increased conflict and the decreased support in the child-parent relationship. (Arnett, 1999:319) The brief research about Chinese students also found that thwarted belongingness is positively related to suicide ideation ($r = .41$/ $p < 0.001$). (Zhang et al., 2013:239) More than that, Chinese parenting has been featured as relatively controlling and even hostile. (Chao, 1994:1111) The particular short of warmth has been a feature of Hong Kong parenting style *vis-à-vis* to their Mainland Chinese counterparts. (Berndt et al., 1993:156) In figure 5, suicide ideation is positively and significantly related to perceived authoritarian parenting style. (Lai & Chang, 2001:84) Chow et al. (2006:92) suggested that family support is negatively and significantly related to the social current of depression. ($r = -.258$ / $p < .01$) It is even negatively related to the psychological distress of students. (Chiu, Feldman, & Rosenthal, 1992:235).

Suicide ideator and parenting style: Subscale means (*SD* in parens)

Parenting style	*Suicide ideator*	*Non-suicide ideator*	*t(118)*
Authoritarian			
Mother	30.11 (5.53)	27.40 (5.60)	2.67*
Father	30.11 (5.89)	26.31 (5.00)	3.80*
Authoritative			
Mother	32.06 (5.54)	33.09 (4.78)	−1.08
Father	30.61 (5.63)	31.84 (5.38)	−1.22
Care			
Mother	19.92 (5.89)	23.09 (5.15)	−3.13*
Father	17.19 (6.54)	20.64 (6.60)	−2.87*

Figure 5. The finding of Lai & Chang (2001:84)

However, Lam et al. (2004:488) optimistically argued that the traditional collectivism of Chinese culture is postulated as protective factors to prevent depression. However, the article neglects the potential risk of fatalistic suicide, where "excessive regulation" comes from "very strong social integration". (Kushner & Sterk, 2005:1141) With the modernization and sociopolitical change, there are an

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

erosion of traditional values and an evolvement of individuality. Nevertheless, obligation towards the family, mutuality of family members, and reverence for parents (Feldman & Rosenthal, 1991:2) have been salient. It then seems to suggest that there is still a social integration. However, similar to like Durkheim, they never questioned the hypothesis that those strongly integrated into the family would be most immune to suicide. (Kushner & Sterk, 2005:1141) They are failed to recognize its association with fatalistic suicide when there is a responsibility for students to offer support to parents for life and strong stress to succeed.

Individual Concern

Ritzer (2008:109) suggested that Durkheim has been failed to recognize the consciousness and mental processes as the independent variables. That is, the individual mental state could also be considered to intervene action. (Ritzer, 1992: 105) Durkheim may not have sufficiently provided an analysis of mental states.

According to CPSS of HKSAR (2016:22), 87% of cases are about social integration, and 63% of cases are about social psychology. But 82% of cases are related to adjustment difficulties, in which they face a changing in life, and 18% cases are related psychopathy. Meanwhile, Ho et al. (2005:595) found that a stressful life event and exposure to relevant information is significantly related to suicide. Hence, UNESCO's calculation of life-changing unit did a great job in understanding stimuli disrupting mental wellness.

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

Table 2: Distribution of 38 Cases in Primary and Secondary Schools by Areas of Concern

(A) Percentage of Cases by Areas of Concern	
1. Mental Health	18%
2. Psychological Concerns	63%
Self-harm and suicidal ideation	34%
Negative thinking	45%
3. Relationship Problems	87%
Family relationship	74%
Peer relationship	42%
4. Adjustment Difficulties	82%
Study-related adjustment	58%
Family-related adjustment	53%
(B) Percentage of Cases by Number of Areas of Concern	
1. One area of concern	3%
2. Two areas of concern	52%
3. Three areas of concern	37%
4. Four areas of concern	8%

Figure 6. The finding of CPSS of HKSAR (2016:22)

Table 3
Unique contribution of characteristics predicting suicidal behaviors in the previous 12 months.

	OR (95% CI) for risk factor[a]	OR (95% CI) for sex difference[b]
Age	1.27 (1.07–1.52)**	—
Sex	2.26 (1.35–3.77)**	—
Single-parent family	0.65 (0.36–1.17)	—
Anxiety symptoms	1.01 (0.98–1.03)	1.01 (0.97–1.06)
Depressive symptoms	1.03 (1.00–1.06)*	1.04 (0.10–1.09)
Life stress[c]	1.30 (1.14–1.48)***	1.02 (0.81–1.28)
Family relationships[d]	0.81 (0.56–1.18)	0.72 (0.37–1.42)
Substance use	1.77 (0.48–6.51)	0.30 (0.03–3.72)
Suicidal ideation	1.96 (1.12–3.45)*	0.72 (0.25–2.13)
Exposure to suicide attempt	1.98 (1.04–3.79)*	0.60 (0.17–2.15)
Exposure to completed suicide	0.92 (0.36–2.34)	0.17 (0.03–1.01)

*$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$; ***$p<0.001$.
[a]The ORs for risk factors are all adjusted for each other (and for other variables: age, sex, single-parent family, anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, life stress, family relationships, substance use, suicidal ideation, exposure to suicide attempt and exposure to completed suicide) in the logistic regression model.
[b]Each interaction term was separately tested.
[c]Higher scores indicate higher level of stress.
[d]Higher scores indicate better family relationship.

Figure 7. The finding of Ho et al. (2005:595)

Life Changing Unit (LCU) - Thomas Holmes, Richard Rahe, 1967
LCU < 150 (35%) LCU = 150-300 (51%) LCU > 300 (85%)

配偶死亡	100	家人生病	44	子女離開家庭	29	轉校	20
離婚	73	懷孕	40	與配偶的家人關係有問題	29	娛樂有所改變	19
分居	65	性方面困難	39	出色的個人成就	28	教堂活動改變	19
入獄	63	家中增添新成員	39	配偶開始或停止工作	26	社會活動改變	18
家人死亡	63	生意或工作上適應	39	學年開始或結束	26	睡眠習慣改變	16
受傷或生病	53	經濟改變	38	居住環境改變	25	家庭聚會次數改變	15
結婚	50	好友死亡	37	個人習慣改變	24	飲食習慣改變	15
被解僱	47	轉工	36	與上司關係有問題	23	放假	13
與配偶復合	45	抵押被取消贖取權	30	工作時間或環境改變	20	聖誕	12
退休	45	工作責任改變	29	住宅搬遷	20	違犯了輕微法例	11

Figure 8. The UNESCO's Calculation of life-changing unit

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

Concluding Remarks

This paper finds that in Hong Kong case the structural and cultural factors are significantly associated with social psychological factor inducing suicide. This approach is conducive to social reform.

For Durkheim, the social facts are controlling individuals; they do not actively control these forces. However, the study of psychology or psychopathy is of importance in understanding individual motives and the mental states which lead to an individual deciding to suicide. Hence, it should incorporate into the context of the social currents to which that individual is restricted.

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

References

Arnett, J. (1999). Adolescent storm and stress, reconsidered. American Psychologist, 54, 317–326.

Berndt, T.J., Cheung, P.C., Lau, S., Hau, K.T., & Lew, W. (1993). Perceptions of parenting in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong: Sex differences and societal differences. *Developmental Psychology*, *29*, 156–164.

Chiu, M. L., Feldman, S. S., & Rosenthal, D. (1992). The influence of immigration on parental behavior and adolescent distress in Chinese families residing in two Western nations. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 2,* 205–240.

Chao, R. (1994). Beyond parental control and authoritarian par- enting style: Understanding Chinese parenting through the cultural notion of training. *Child Development*, *65*, 1111– 1119.

Chan, L. K., & Shek, D.T.L. (1999). Hong Kong Chinese parents' perceptions of the ideal child. *The Journal of Psychology, 133*, 291– 302.

Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides. (2016) Final Report November 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/student-parents /crisis- management/about-crisis-management/CPSS_final_report_en.pdf

de Man, A. F. (1999). Correlates of suicide ideation in high school students: The importance of depression. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology, 160,* 105–114.

Feldman, S. S., & Rosenthal, D. A. (1991). Age expectations of behavioral autonomy in Hong Kong, Australian and American youth: The influence of family variables and adolescents' values. International Journal of Psychology, 26, 1–23.

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

Ho, D.Y.F., & Kang, T. K. (1984). Intergenerational comparisons of childrearing attitudes and practices in Hong Kong. *Developmental Psychology, 20*, 1004–1016.

Hu, S. L. (1994). A study on the mental health level and its influencing factors of senior middle school students [in Chinese]. *Acta Psychologica Sinica, 26*, 153–160.

Kushner, H.I. & Sterk, C.E. (2005) "The Limits of Social Capital: Durkheim, Suicide, and Social Cohesion",American Journal of Public Health,vol. 95, no. 7, pp. 1139-43.

Kwan, Y. (2010). Life satisfaction and self-assessed health among adolescents in Hong Kong. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 11(3), 383–393.

Lam, T. H., Stewart, S. M., Yip, P. S., Leung, G. M., Ho, L. M., Ho, S. Y., & Lee, P. W. (2004). Suicidality and cultural values among Hong Kong adolescents. *Social Science & Medicine*, *58*(3), 487-498.

Lee, M. T., Wong, B. P., Chow, B. W. Y., & McBride-Chang, C. (2006). Predictors of suicide ideation and depression in Hong Kong adolescents: Perceptions of academic and family climates. *Suicide and life-threatening behavior*, *36*(1), 82-96.

Peck, D. L., & Bharadwaj, L. K. (1980). Personal stress and fatalism as factors in college suicide. *Social science*, 19-24.

Ritzer, G. (2008). Chapter 3 Emile Durkheim. *In Sociological Theory*. Boston: McGraw-Hill. 74-111.

Ritzer, G. (1992). *Sociological Theory*, third edition, New York, McGraw-Hill. 105

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.

Shaw, C. R. (1966). *The jack-roller: A delinquent boy's own story*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Stewart, S. M., Lam, T. H., Betson, C., & Chung, S. F. (1999). Suicide ideation and its relationship to depressed mood in a community sample of adolescents in Hong Kong. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior, 29*, 227–240.

Shek, D. T., & Li, X. (2016). Perceived school performance, life satisfaction, and hopelessness: a 4-year longitudinal study of adolescents in Hong Kong. *Social indicators research*, *126*(2), 921-934.

Tsang, W. K. (2002). New elitism and new direct subsidy scheme: Critique on the erosion of education capital. *Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong*.

Wong, J. P., Stewart, S. M., Ho, S. Y., Rao, U., & Lam, T. H. (2005). Exposure to suicide and suicidal behaviors among Hong Kong adolescents. *Social Science & Medicine*, *61*(3), 591-599.

Zhang, J., Lester, D., Zhao, S., & Zhou, C. (2013). Suicidal ideation and its correlates: Testing the interpersonal theory of suicide in Chinese students. *Archives of Suicide Research*, *17*(3), 236-241.

This document is downloaded from Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS), Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong.