

## Youth Suicide and Parasuicide in Singapore

E K Ung, \*FAMS, MBBS, MRCPsych

### Abstract

**Introduction:** Suicide and parasuicide rates are important markers of the health of a nation. Suicide is a common cause of mortality in youth and parasuicide has its peak prevalence in adolescence and early adulthood. Both pose a tremendous burden to individuals, families and society. Historical and current studies on suicide and parasuicide in Singapore are reviewed and discussed in the light of available worldwide research. **Methods:** Studies on suicide and parasuicide in Singapore were identified through a MEDLINE search (from 1979). Information from these studies were supplemented with relevant local monographs on suicide and parasuicide. **Results:** Suicide is extremely rare in children under 10 years of age. Rates rise in the 10 to 14 years age group and increase markedly in the 15 to 19 years age group. The male to female ratio is about 2:1 for youths 10 to 14 years old and 1:1 for the 15 to 19 years age group. The historical preponderance of female suicide is much less clearly seen in recent years. Jumping from a height is the commonest method used, and mental illness and recent life stress are common causative factors. A peak in suicides in the young was found for June and October, and a trough for November and December. Parasuicide is extremely rare in children under 10 years of age. There was a peak in the months of October and November in the student population, corresponding to the examination months. Youths of Indian ethnicity were over-represented. **Conclusions:** Preventing suicide and parasuicide is of paramount importance, given the severe burden of such acts on individuals, families and society. Current studies on youth suicide in Singapore and a national study on parasuicide are urgently needed to increase our understanding of these phenomena.

*Ann Acad Med Singapore* 2003; 32:12-8

**Key words:** Deliberate self-harm, Mental disorder, Parasuicide, Singapore, Suicide

---

\* Consultant & Head, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
Department of Psychological Medicine  
National University Hospital

Address for Reprints: Dr Ung Eng Khean, Department of Psychological Medicine, National University Hospital, 5 Lower Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 119074.