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Suicide among minors in Ukraine: Manifestations and ways to prevent

Суїцид серед неповнолітніх в Україні: прояви та шляхи попередження

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Abstract

The article aims to find out the essentiality of such a concept as “juvenile suicide” and the search for ways to prevent it. The object of the study is social relations in the field of combating suicide among minors. During the research, the authors used a particular set of general scientific and unique scientific methods, which ensured the objectivity of the display of the research subject: the comparative legal method, the method of formal logic, the comparison method, and the hypothetical-deductive method. There is much work to improve suicide prevention methods among minors in Ukraine but using foreign experience and the help of other countries, our state can create a reliable and effective program, which the authors are sure, will reduce the risk of suicide among people under the age of 18. It should also be noted that preventing suicides among minors needs attention from both: the state and society because it is possible to overcome manifestations of suicidal behaviour

Анотація

Метою статті є з'ясування сутності такого поняття як «суїцид неповнолітніх» та пошук шляхів запобігання йому. Об'єктом дослідження є суспільні відносини у сфері протидії суїциду серед неповнолітніх. Під час дослідження автори використовували певну сукупність загальнонаукових та спеціальних методів, які забезпечували об'єктивність відображення предмета дослідження: порівняльно-правовий метод, метод формальної логіки, метод порівняння, гіпотетико-дедуктивний метод. В Україні ведеться велика робота з удосконалення методів профілактики суїцидів серед неповнолітніх, але використовуючи зарубіжний досвід та допомогу інших країн, наша держава може створити надійну та ефективну програму, яка, на переконання авторів, знизить ризик суїциду серед осіб, які є повнолітніми. Слід також зазначити, що запобігання суїцидам серед неповнолітніх

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and, in the future, to save many young lives only. The main areas of improvement of legislation aimed at combating suicide of minors have been formed. In addition, developing a criminological program to combat suicides of minors is socially determined.

Keywords: minors, suicide, racism, child abuse, prevention.

Introduction

Suicide is a global public health problem, accounting for more than 700,000 deaths annually (Favril, Yu, Uyar, Sharpe, Fazel, 2022). The topic of suicide has always been complex and urgent for the world community, and the suicide of minors is generally considered almost a tragedy for the population of any country. Unfortunately, the number of juvenile suicides and attempts on them is constantly increasing every day. Various tragic cases are discussed in different parts of the world, and it is not easy to understand the root causes of such a phenomenon. Every day, more and more minors die of suicide due to various reasons: bullying, cyberbullying, racism, domestic violence, or dangerous online games that make them commit suicide.

The authors decided that minors are more likely to think about suicide during the statistical analysis. Almost 85% think about suicide at least once, but almost none realise the outcome. Juveniles generally feel they can express their position and show others what they deserve because of suicide or at least an attempt.

In addition, in the conditions of war, the issue of violence against children by the occupiers is particularly acute. In the future, such violence becomes a determinant of suicidal behaviour.

Unfortunately, the preventive actions of teachers or parents often do not affect them at all. However, many parents and teachers do not try to explain to their children or students that suicide is a tragedy, first, for family and friends, as well as sad statistics of the impairment of the demographic situation of any country.

Between 2001 and 2021, suicide statistics among juveniles in Ukraine can be considered relatively high – 3,569 people. At the same time, from 2001 to 2004, the number of juvenile suicides

потребує уваги як з боку держави, так і суспільства, оскільки подолати прояви суїцидальної поведінки і в майбутньому врятувати чимало молодих життів можна лише так. Сформовано основні напрями удосконалення законодавства, спрямованого на протидію самогубствам неповнолітніх. Крім того, розроблено кримінологічну програму протидії самогубствам неповнолітніх.

Ключові слова: неповнолітні, самогубства, расизм, жорстоке поводження з дітьми, профілактика.

constantly exceeded 200 people. At the same time, the authors can find that such suicides are committed mainly in Odesa, Donetsk, and Dnipropetrovsk regions. Moreover, the tendency to suicide among juveniles is still growing. That is why the choice of this topic is relevant.

The article aims to find out the essentiality of such a concept as “juvenile suicide” and the search for ways to prevent it. The object of the study is social relations in the field of combating suicide among minors.

Theoretical framework

Suicide and self-harm tend to be under-reported, and underappreciated, and affect every country and society worldwide (Oyesanya, Lopez-Morinigo, & Dutta, 2015). Suicide is the leading cause of death worldwide (Clyde & Corpuz, 2021)

Suicide is an extraordinarily complex and multifaceted phenomenon involving many contributing and contributing variables. Interaction between various factors such as neurobiology, personal and family history, stressful events, and sociocultural environment may determine this (Turecki, 2016).

Modern scientific criminological literature defines suicide as a deliberate forcible deprivation of one's life, committed on its own accord and not caused by irresistible external factors (for example, hunger) or mental disorders. And although suicide, unlike other forms of violent death, is not recognised as an unlawful act and, according to current legislation, does not entail any negative criminal consequences for the person who committed it (Ostropilska, 2015).

In the genesis of such behaviour, the leading role is played by value deformations of the individual, immortality of socially adapted behaviour, defects of volitional self-regulation, and moral consciousness of the individual. Suicidal behaviour may be conditioned by the level of moral culture of society and the significance of the consequences of social processes (urbanisation, decrease of living standards in transitional periods, weakening of state power, expansion of opportunities for criminal activity) (Tohobytska, 2013).

So how did juvenile suicide develop? Maybe, they started to imitate the actions of adults. Or, in the era of modern technology and the prevalence of suicide topics, is it the only way out of any situation?

It is impossible to determine precisely when children and teens started committing suicide attempts. In some countries, such cases could quickly have been silenced because they were not massive and could have caused a great resonance. In other countries, due to the high mortality of minors, nobody paid attention to this.

Consequently, the authors want to define juvenile suicide as a deliberate deprivation of his life by a person under the age of 18 against the background of one or several factors that provoked a negative attitude to life and were able to put the person's psychological health in a hopeless state for solving specific situations. Suicides of minors have several characteristics that are usual for the behaviour of a child or adolescent during the period of exacerbation of suicidal behaviour and may be manifested in various forms and methods.

Suicide is one of the most common causes of death among minors in Ukraine, the prerequisites of which are negative psychosocial factors (Bilsen, 2018).

Methodology

During the research, the authors used a particular set of general scientific and unique scientific methods, which ensured the objectivity of the display of the research subject. Thus, the comparative legal method allowed for studying foreign experience on the researched issue. The method of formal logic made it possible to study the peculiarities of the determinants of suicidal behaviour among minors. Moreover, the hypothetical-deductive method is to study the essence and consequences of suicide and outline

countermeasures (part Types of Juvenile Suicide Prevention).

Also, we used media Analysis (in part Racial Issue as a Motivating Factor for Suicide and Suicide as Part of the Game). The analysis method was used during the analysis of the concept of "suicide" and "suicide of minors (part of the Theoretical framework). The article contains references to 23 sources, including articles indexed on the scientometric databases Scopus and Web of Science, 1 normative source.

Results and discussion

Suicide as Part of the Game

Teenagers who deliberately harm themselves are less likely to resort to lethal methods. We must consider factors that may be associated with suicidal behaviour, which has increased in recent years (McClure, 2001).

Unfortunately, Ukraine has a relatively high percentage of suicides among minors. According to official statistics of 2012 in Ukraine, there were 34.5 suicides per 100,000 people per year. At the same time, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates the figure of more than 20 people as critical (Tocka.net, 2012). If the authors refer to the statistics of 2021, then 123 suicides were committed by minors. One child committed suicide every third day (Blyskavka Media, 2018).

Nevertheless, why is everything going on like this? Why do children commit suicide more and more? Many parents accuse Internet space, and there are appropriate grounds for this. During 2015-2021, so-called coordinated suicidal games began to spread in social networks, the finale of which was to commit suicide by a player. The most popular games are "Blue Whale" and "Red Owl". A game for a participant begins with the fact that he or she published hashtags on the page that define the subtext of interest in the topic of suicide and help to find new players (#явивгре, #тихийдом, #синий, #f57, #синийкит, #морекитов, #ждуинструкцию – blue whale). After these actions, the moderator contacted the participant, who initially interviewed the fresher about the problems and attitude to suicide in the course of the dialogue, and later gave a link to a site that helps to track the geolocation of the person who went through this link and defined the rules of the game: during 50 days (12 days in red owl) the player must do different tasks and film it on a video or make a photo.

Furthermore, at the end of the game, after 50 days, the player must commit suicide. In case of refusal of the participant from the game, the moderators began to blackmail him or her by knowing about the location and the physical abuse with the child or its family and friends. Quite often, participants were forced to take intimate photos and send them and were later threatened to make them public. Blackmail often demoralises teenagers, and after all these things, they often commit suicide.

Especially the game "Blue Whale" has received great resonance not only in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries but also all around the world (Poland, Moldova, Bulgaria, Turkey, Israel, and others). Media workers have noticed the rapid popularity of the English hashtag #bluewhale and the Italian one. This game began to spread even in the countries of Africa, Asia, Europe, and America. For example, in the United Kingdom in April 2017, the police sent special warnings to schools about the game "Blue Whale". Both games (Blue Whale and Red Owl) were designed mainly for minors (13–17 years old) (News. Infomercial, 2017).

During all these things that happened to juveniles in Ukraine on February 8, 2018, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a law that introduced amendments to the Criminal Code of Ukraine on Article 120 "Bringing to suicide". Now, the first part of this article says: "Bringing a person to suicide or attempt of suicide, resulting from cruel treatment, blackmail, systematic humiliation of human dignity or systematic unlawful coercion against actions that contradict her will, self-inclination, as well as other acts contributing to suicide – shall be punishable by restraint of liberty for a term up to three years or imprisonment for the same term" (Law № 2341-III, 2001).

Racial Issue as a Motivating Factor for Suicide

Another global cause that can lead to the suicide of minors is the racial issue. Now the topic of racism is very relevant and is constantly attracting attention. Perhaps no one has heard of suicide cases due to racism, but this does not mean they do not exist. The number of such situations is gradually increasing, but unfortunately, not all of them are made public. The authors can bring an example that has happened in the UK. Dagmar Przybic, a 16-year-old girl of Polish origin, committed suicide by hanging herself in a school closet on May 17, 2016. As it turned out, the girl was often insulted by her Polish roots and was repeatedly called "a

dumb Polish", sayings that Dagmar should return to her country. Furthermore, the girl often told her parents and boyfriend that she was abused, but in what way she did not specify (Independent, 2016).

Ukraine also hosts many different minorities with their cultures, religions, and views on life. Moreover, it is imperative to defend absolutely everyone who can be exposed to racist images. Because of their unformed psyche and point of view, children can go for radical actions to end bullying.

Thus, in 2017 in Cherkasy, there was a situation in the children's playground when children insulted a 4-year-old boy because of the dark colour of his skin. Older children and some coevals who offended Danny McGuowan said they would not play with him because he was black, dirty, and not like them. The boy's mother timely noticed what was happening because who knows how it could end. Even children resort to racism and are ready to offend others (The Jason Foundation, 2018).

As the authors see, suicide based on a racist image is possible. It is impossible to predict how this topic will evolve accurately, but, in our opinion, this problem should be solved before it is too late.

Thus, minors have and even can find many reasons to commit suicide. It can be family and domestic problems or conflicts with peers which make the minor question their significance in the lives of loved ones. An important reason for this is bullying in all its manifestations, which strongly affects children. The issue of racism and Internet influence can also be seen in the mortality statistics of minors because of suicide in recent years.

Having analysed the situation, the authors can say that America and Europe are very concerned about juvenile suicides. Given the ever-increasing number of children and adolescents as suicide victims, psychologists and educators are paying more and more attention.

If the authors analyse the statistics of child suicides worldwide, one of the highest percentages is in highly developed countries (Japan, USA, and others).

For example, the government of Japan 2017 published data indicating that the percentage of deaths from suicide has increased significantly over the past three decades. Although the trend

of suicidal deaths is gradually falling, it remains one of Japan's significant problems.

From April 2016 to March 2017, 250 children in primary, secondary and senior schools committed suicide, the most significant number since 1986, according to data published by the Ministry of Education. Moreover, almost none of the children left any explanation of why they decided to do this. Nevertheless, those who still could explain to him remembered the reason for caring about who they will be after graduation and what they will achieve in life. Other reasons include family problems and bullying at school (New York Times, 2018).

The USA, having conducted a series of experiments, also concluded that suicidal ideation among minors is growing and continue to gain popularity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that between 1999 and 2015, at the age of 5 to 12 years, 1,309 children committed suicide. Thus, during these 17 years, one child under 13 died of suicide almost every five days. Nevertheless, from 2013 to 2015, the frequency of child suicide and the ages of 11 and 12 increased significantly (one child every 3.4 days) (Hanna, 2017).

As for the European countries, Great Britain recognised the significant increase in juvenile suicide. As was noted, between 2010 and 2017, the number of such suicides increased by 67%. The Office of National Statistics of the United Kingdom notes that only in 2017, 187 juveniles under the age of 19 committed suicide, up 15% from 2016 (162 people). In July 2018, it was announced that the number of suicides among adolescents in London, the state's capital, also significantly increased, even more than 4 times the average. The growth rate was 107% over 3 years (2013-2016) – from 14 to 29 people (Khan, & Bulman, 2018).

Everyone knows that suicidal children or teens are often subjected to physical violence by parents or others around them. Therefore, for example, Lithuania, 2014, passed a law prohibiting any physical punishment of minors in any situation. Now, in Ukraine, such a ban mainly concerns exclusively parents, guardians, or relatives (UN news, 2018).

Types of Juvenile Suicide Prevention

Behind each suicide and attempt is the long struggle of these people, as well as the experience of trauma and suffering of their relatives and

friends. Together, suicide prevention is a global priority (Levi-Belz, Gvion, & Apter, 2019).

When studying the issue of suicide prevention among minors, it is important to analyse a person through the prism of relationships, where a suicidal act can be a response to internal and external stresses (McClure, 1984). For this reason, prevention strategies must be a comprehensive approach that addresses the population's diverse needs rather than an intervention aimed solely at those perceived to be in crisis (Chiang, Paynter, Edlin, & Exeter, 2021). However, each age group needs an individual suicide intervention program (Kim, Kim, Oh, & Cha, 2020).

Of course, one of the most popular types of juvenile suicide prevention is the creation of a hotline.

Such assistance for people with suicidal thoughts has been introduced in the US, Canada, the UK, France, and many other countries. Ukraine is not an exception. The authors also have a hotline that is not massive and widespread among children and teens. The essence of such a hotline is that a child or a teenager can call the number and get psychological help or tell the unknown interlocutor their problems, why he wants to commit suicide, and whether it is possible to help it somehow (Vycherpno, 2017).

The method of meeting with the victim of a suicide attempt is also quite popular. In such cases, the invited person shares his experience, and often such guests publicly admit that committing suicide was a mistake. Everyone tells his story, which can have particular importance for an individual child or teenager and help to solve problems of their own.

As to ways to improve preventive measures to avert juvenile suicide in our country, then, in our opinion, the primary right in this area should belong to the state because its internal state policy should be oriented towards the development and introduction of effective measures against as a phenomenon of suicide in general, as its manifestations. This main direction of preventive action can be the most complicated because an effective system of suicide prevention has not been created yet.

Thus, the problems of the manifestation of suicidal behaviour of minors are institutions of health care, rehabilitation centres, and social protection institutions. Also, public organisations play a vital role in this sphere. Today there is an

International Association for the Prevention of Suicide, and, according to its recommendation, suicide prevention services have been opened in many Ukrainian cities. However, considering the socio-economic situation in the state, the low level of social protection, the psycho-emotional level of citizens, and other problems of our society require more effective measures for the prevention of minors, and, in our opinion, it is necessary to start precisely from educational institutions.

Our second proposal is to introduce a systematic survey monitored by specially appointed individual civil servants who will cooperate with psychologists and maintain statistics that will help the state coordinate its activities in minors' health.

Also, it would be advisable for the Ministry of Healthcare of Ukraine to take control of the issue of popularising the hotline for suicidal minors and may even expand this resource, which could save many juveniles' lives. Sometimes it is enough for a minor to be heard with his problems, so such a proposal can be the key to reducing the number of suicides of minors.

Conclusions

Juvenile suicide refers to the act of a person under the age of 18 taking their own life. It is a tragic and complex phenomenon that can be influenced by a range of biological, psychological, and environmental factors. The reasons for juvenile suicide can vary, but often include mental health issues, family or relationship problems, school-related stressors, substance abuse, and social isolation or bullying. It should be noted that the legislator should more accurately determine the circumstances of suicide incrimination in social networks and the Internet in general. Thus, crimes involving suicide and are committed on the Internet can be completed in the form of punishing the perpetrator for his wrongful acts.

Nowadays, juveniles get more and more pressure directly through their pages on social networks, so such changes would be as actual and effective as possible for investigating crimes. After all, officers only sometimes focus on pressure over the Internet and its detrimental effect.

Thus, there is much work to improve suicide prevention methods among minors in Ukraine but using foreign experience and the help of other countries, our state can create a reliable and effective program, which the authors are sure,

will reduce the risk of suicide among people under the age of 18. It should also be noted that preventing suicides among minors needs attention from both: the state and society because it is possible to overcome manifestations of suicidal behaviour and, in the future, to save many young lives only by uniting both sides.

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