

Research Article

The Role of Societal Change toward Adolescent Suicide in Japan: Phenomenological Analysis on 12 Suicidal Teens Film by Yukihiro Tsutsumi

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Abstract

Suicide cases are still a big challenge for Japan, even though in the 21st century, the government began to pay attention to and follow up on this phenomenon. While Japan's suicide rate among adults is declining, the rate in minors increased, and suicide is the highest cause of death for those under 20. This research reveals the problems and factors around suicidal teens in Japan through twelve character's stories in 12 Suicidal Teens Film. To understand this film, what meaning that brought to discussion requires interpretation. Paul Ricoeur said that text or work is a dialogue to reveal the dimensions of reality in the phenomenological approach. The suicide motives expressed by 12 teenagers in the film 12 Suicidal Teens could be common. However, there are several factors such as religion, culture, social, even economic trends that could influence teenagers to commit suicide. The result shows that the social changes in Japan put pressure not only on adults but also on the lives of the youth. Also, information that is increasingly easy to obtain by anyone can become a boomerang for society because people can learn from what this information says..

Keywords: Suicide in Japan; Adolescent Suicide; Societal Change

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1. Introduction

Suicide has been a part of popular culture in Japan. Several films portrayed suicide as a heroic act which was inspired by the Kamikaze military story in *Hotaru (Firefly)* in 2001, *For Those We Love* (2007), and *The Eternal Zero* (2013). Another heroic story is the story of 47 ronin who took revenge for the death of their master and took *seppuku* action after protesting against the government. The act of *seppuku* itself is seen as an honourable suicide in Japan (Suratno, 2017).

There is also called love suicide or double suicide or *shinjū*, made famous by the playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Love suicide narrates the story of lovers who die together either voluntarily or unilaterally. Through the kabuki theatre of *The Love Suicide at Sonezaki* and *The Love Suicide at Amijima*, the act of suicide is shown as the end of the love story that finally reached even though the character commits an affair first. The characters featured in the drama Chikamatsu Monzaemon also came from the lower classes, not heroes and heroines like in

Romeo and Juliet. Love suicide is a part of the protagonists' tragic and dramatic story that Chikamatsu can become heroes (Shimazaki, 2020; Sowa, 2013). It shows that self-sacrifice and self-destruction suicide has also become a social phenomenon even through popular cultures. Those suicides are presented as heroic, aesthetic, and romantic stories.

Suicide in Japan is part of the heroes' story and their loyalty to the lord or country that has been justified politically and culturally. The sanction of voluntary death in the form of *harakiri* or *seppuku* was strengthened by the legalisation of the Tokugawa regime in power in the Edo period (1603 AD-1868 AD). Here, suicide was a punishment aimed at the samurai to save them from shame for the actions or mistakes. That is, *seppuku* was associated with the honour of the ruling class and feudal elite of Japan. Even during World War II, self-sacrificed suicide for the country's sake was instilled in the military. Self-sacrificed and self-destruction suicide is then understandable for specific reasons and considered as an action that upholding morals. However, when someone commits suicide, family members often do cover-up to fear being caught and viewed as shameful. This feeling of shame shows that Japanese society realises that suicide is a deviant act (Lebra, 1976:190-191).

In the early 21st century, the Japanese government began to pay attention to and follow up on this phenomenon by establishing a Suicide Prevention Council by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare in three phases until 2006 (Takeshima et al., 2015). Japanese society still saw that suicide is taboo to be discussed in public. Behind the patriotic impression displayed in popular culture, people view suicide as an act of selfishness and are afraid to talk about it. The suicide prevention efforts by the government in collaboration with various non-profit organisations are Japanese concrete steps in following up the phenomenon of suicide,

which is said to be an epidemic. Nonetheless, suicide cases are still a big challenge for Japan. While the rates among middle-aged men and the elderly are declining, suicide cases among young people are still considered high (World Health Organization, 2015). Here, the dilemma regarding suicide is challenged since the act has already spread among the young Japanese generation and becomes a difficult task for society soon.

According to the Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, in 2020, Japan's suicide rate, in general, continues to fall for ten consecutive years until 2019. Still, the suicide rate in minors increased ten per cent, and suicide is the highest cause of death for those under 20 (nippon.com, 2020). In 2019, Yukihiro Tsutsumi responded to the teenage's high rate of suicide by releasing *12 Suicidal Teen* film, based on the novel with the same title by Tow Ubukata in 2016. The teenage characters in these *12 Suicidal Teens* each have characters representing the Japanese teenagers' conditions with social pressures that befall them through their motives of committing suicide together.

In previous research, Suratno (2017) explained one of Japan's popular stories of *47 Ronin* made into a film version in 2013 through intrinsic analysis. He discovered that as the film's protagonists, the ronin have dedication and loyalty to their former master. Ronin's death illustrated a self-honour and heavy responsibility that most people would find difficult to understand in normal conditions. Another research by Picone (2012) describes suicide narrated in Japanese horror films related to popular religion in Japan. He discovered that the ghost of the suicide victim that appears in the world is not a punishment over a sin or a consequence of religious prohibition but a continuation of "protest suicide." The ghost would reveal the case that caused him/her to suffer while still alive until they took his/her own life.

Both the studies show that culture and religion have influenced the justification of suicide in Japan. Meanwhile, this research uses the film *12 Suicidal Teens* that narrates suicide as a concern and must be prevented soon, particularly when suicidal acts begin to spread among youth. The 12 characters in this film also reveal their suicide motives before they decide to commit suicide. It is different from the narratives found by Picone (2012) that the suicide victim would settle the suicide case after his/her death.

Suppose previous suicide together appeared as a romantic tragedy as Sowa (2013) found in double suicide stories. In that case, it raises public concerns because of the increasingly widespread method used by the younger generation. With the increasing popularity of internet suicide pacts, (Ozawa-De Silva, 2010) mentioned that the casual nature of internet group suicide has been challenging to explain. The wish to die easily and comfortably with other people and the wish to disappear puzzled Japanese media and popular accounts at the beginning of the 21st century.

This research reveals the social problems and factors around suicidal teens in Japan through twelve character's stories in *12 Suicidal Teens*. External factors such as the environment they live in or the internal factors they could not discuss challenge society's suicide phenomenon happens in adolescents. Even though suicide seems to be normal in Japan, there is a changing view about suicide through the *12 Suicidal Teens* film. The government's efforts to pressure the suicide rate since the beginning of the 21st century, as Takeshima et al. (2015) mentioned, and how this film tries to depict the other side of the suicide story should increase awareness about suicide prevention society.

2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative design to find problems and factors in suicide among teenagers in Japan in the film *12 Suicidal*

Teens, directed by Yukihiko Tsutsumi and released on Nippon TV on January 25, 2019. The primary data is the conversations of characters in the *12 Suicidal Teens* film, revealing their motives and goals to commit suicide. The supporting data relevant to Japanese teen suicide cases are obtained through books, news articles, journals, and webpages.

To understand this film, what meaning that brought to discussion requires interpretation. Paul Ricoeur said that text or work is a dialogue to reveal the dimensions of reality in the phenomenological approach. It can be seen as an independent world or has autonomy, then the audiences would see or read it at a "distance". However, a completely objective study kills the text or work itself. Therefore, appropriation is needed, namely understanding the text or work by bringing it into the world of the subject (the interpreter) to be familiar (Philip & Waugh, 1996, pp. 90-92).

As an independent object, the characters' conversations in the film *12 Suicidal Teens* are explored to determine the motives of the teenagers' suicidality. Then, appropriation of meaning is carried out by correlating teenage suicide with societal conditions in Japan. Therefore, the analysis results are descriptive, explaining the correlation between the storytelling of the *12 Suicidal Teens* film with the societal conditions that influence the taking of extreme suicides among teenagers in Japan.

3. Result and Discussion

Suicide is one of the leading causes of Japanese child and adolescent mortality besides unintentional injury such as transport accidents, drowning, and suffocation (Shinsugi, Stickley, Konishi, Ng, & Watanabe, 2015). Individuals with suicidal ideation are also less likely to consult with others and are less likely to use the crisis hotline. Psychological barriers are believed to cause individuals with a high risk for suicide not to use a support hotline

(Ohtaki et al., 2017). In most cases, people do not report when mental health-related symptoms appear. It could be due to the community's stigma against this issue. "Pull yourself together" is a stereotype that often seems when people experience depression (Wood, Birtel, Alsayw, Pyle, & Morrison, 2014). Thus, people with suicidal behaviour are hard to detect due to a lack of clear signs or communication about their difficulties.

Hawton and James (2005) found the common characteristic of adolescents who die by suicide. They are adolescents with broken homes (separation, divorce, or death of parents), family psychiatric disorder or suicidal behaviour, psychiatric disorder or behavioural disturbance, substance misuse (alcohol, drugs), and previous self-harm. They also explain that physical or sexual abuse and intercultural stresses may also be the factors, but this could differ depending on the country or environment's condition.

Another research conducted by Hidaka et al. (2008) proved four general factors identified as Japanese youth potential contributors to attempted suicide. They consisted of individual characteristics (age, sexual orientation), interpersonal factors (school bullying, family closeness), risk behaviours (sexual activity, drug use, alcohol use, smoking), and psychological factors (self-esteem). The causes can vary between males and females. However, this research found that experiencing school bullying and a history of drug use are more associated with attempted suicide than living with the family concerning protective factors.

Through the telephone crisis hotline or *Inochi no Denwa*, the relationship between suicidal ideation and family problems among young callers was also significantly lower than other callers (Ohtaki et al., 2019). Meanwhile, based on the 2018 MEXT Survey on problematic behaviour and non-attendance of school children, the possible reasons for suicide caused by family disagreements and reprimanded by their parents were

particularly high. Mental disorders and despair were also relatively high, while bullying and despair caused by illness remained low (nippon.com, 2019).

Based on the data and research above, the results vary regarding which motives are more likely to influence adolescents to commit suicide. However, psychological conditions, family, and school life influenced suicidal behaviour in adolescents the most. In the *12 Suicidal Teens* film, these motives are also seen to have influenced the teenage characters significantly. Furthermore, other reasons such as the internet, media, changes in the social structure, and family's financial problems in Japan could motivate vulnerable youngsters to commit suicide.

3.1 Suicidal Motives of 12 Teenage Characters in *12 Suicidal Teens* Films

Through dialogue, the twelve teenage characters in the film *12 Suicidal Teens* each reveal the problems that drive them to commit suicide. They met via internet suicide pacts to carry out a suicide procession in an abandoned hospital's basement. Suicide internet or net suicide is nothing new in Japan. It is a notorious phrase in the Japanese language since the early 2000s that refers to the process of recruiting, staging, and committing suicide through the internet. The media broadcast these unusual suicides repeatedly so that more people can access information about the suicide website. This case then triggered chain reactions that cause vulnerable Japanese youngsters to imitate suicide victims via internet suicide (Naito, 2007). The teenagers in the film who got information about the internet suicide pact indicate that various groups can access the suicide pact whether they are adult or young, male or female.

This internet suicide phenomenon indicates that dying together is an option when someone is desperate but unable to commit suicide alone. The courage in taking the action of suicide will appear

when someone accompanies him/her to commit suicide. Japanese society is intolerant of internet suicide pacts because they view it as irresponsible and careless, and the victim has a weak will to die alone. Although suicide is one way of emphasising that individuals have autonomy or decisions against themselves in collectivist societies, internet suicide pacts include individual despair that subordinates their independence to collective decisions (Ozawa-de Silva, 2008). Accordingly, suicide together via the internet itself is hard to say as personal autonomy. While at the same time, society sees suicide as a normal phenomenon and comments about it whether it is a proper way or not.

3.1.1 Broken Family and Difficulties with Parents

Satoshi is the character who took the initiative to make the suicide pact in this film. He only opened the arrangement for 12 people. The abandoned hospital where he carried out the suicide procession with other teenagers is a hospital his father used to run, while his father had died of suicide.

Satoshi "If you mean as the manager of this hospital, yes, you're right. He committed suicide, so you can call it quits. "

.....
Satoshi "He suffered from a long depression because of my mother and brother's suicide attempt. My brother failed to enter medical school. Even though their lives were saved, but then they separated, and I stayed with my father. "

.....
Shinjirō "Is that what gave you the idea of setting up this meeting?"

Satoshi "Right. Death had infected many people around me in such a short time, and it is becoming a kind of

obsession for me. I am then very curious, what is the feeling of wanting to die actually. "

(Tsutsumi, 2019)

Satoshi comes from a broken family. At a young age, he had to experience separation in his family. Also, he was exposed to attempted suicide by his brother and mother and suicide by his father. Creating the internet suicide pact is a reaction that arises from a series of tragedies that have befallen his family.

Other characters who experienced broken families are Seigo and Meiko. Seigo felt threatened by his mother, who was in a relationship with a man he thought could influence his mother to get rid of him for money. Meanwhile, Meiko felt that suicide was a noble act contributing to her father's bankrupt business. Meiko's father married and divorced many times, and Meiko referred to him as the father who "got rid of the evil women" who became her mother. Seigo saw Meiko as a child whom his father used to feel the decision she made was her decision, even though it was the decision his father wanted.

What Seigo and Meiko have in common is that they hoped suicide could affect their insurance policy. Seigo hoped that his less than a year of insurance would result in his policy not being issued so that his mother would regret having a relationship with the man. Meanwhile, Meiko, whose insurance had been running for a year, hoped that her policy would be issued as she hoped to be a child who contributed to helping her father's bankrupt business.

In Japan, the suicidal motive to pass an insurance policy on to the family was usually carried out by people in the 40-60 age range when they were in debt or in a bad economic condition. Insurance company regulations in Japan then stipulated that customers could take the policy after several years of signing the contract. In the

early time insurance was introduced, Japanese people registered in droves, and after signing the contract, some of them committed suicide to immediately get a policy (Kodama, Fujimoto, Tamura, & Kataoka, 2017). Seeing that insurance policies are used, the family's financial condition also influences the child to commit suicide.

Another character, Anri, wants to convey a message to the public that her decision to commit suicide was to protest against adults who were not responsible for their children. Anri's parents were rarely at home, whereas a fire broke out when his mother left again after smoking for a while. Her younger brother, less than a year old, died, and Anri got burns that almost covered half of her left leg.

Anri *"I have a younger brother. He was burned to death by the age of one. At that time, I was four years old. I watched it, everything burned to the ground, the ceiling collapsed. I heard him scream, knocked me out. He was struggling to survive, whereas my mother was often away for days. On that day, she came home while we were asleep. She smoked for a while, then left again. Why did my brother have to be born? And my mom? What right have it to give us such pain? Someone has to stop this. There must be no other child like us. It's our right to oppose selfish adults for our worthy lives! We shouldn't be born! "*

(Tsutsumi, 2019)

Lebra quoted Kambe as he claimed that the Japanese young tend to blame others for the burdens they receive and want to tell them that their suicide is a form of punishment and responsibility for the other person. Suicide committed by adolescents is the most effective way to make other

people feel sad or ashamed, and it is a form of revenge (1976, p. 194). Anri and Seigo have the same motives regarding the behaviour of adults in their families. Suicide became a protest which they hoped would be punishment and muse for the adults. Unlike Meiko, she learned from her father that "getting out of the way" or "getting rid of" yields benefits. It is also illustrated by Meiko pushing Nobuo off the stairs, thinking that Nobuo will get in the way of the suicide procession.

3.1.2 Bullying

Bullying also has the potential to cause Japanese teenagers to commit suicide. Several studies mention that bullying contributes to the phenomenon of absent children (futōkō) and cases of suicide in adolescents. Spring is the season where adolescent suicide is rampant in Japan. It is likely related to school events in spring, such as the new academic year where bully victims will meet again and "exam hell," which shows that students are depressed by demands for high academic scores (Shinsugi et al., 2015; Tajan, 2015). There was a case of suicide of a 13-year-old student in February 1986 caused by bullying, which causing the Minister of Education to hold an emergency meeting in March 1986 for the first time to discuss this issue (Goodman, Imoto, & Toivonen, 2012).

Ken'ich is the character that shows a victim of bullying since middle school. He said the bullying was started by his homeroom teacher and then spread to his friends.

Seigo *"How long have you been bullied?"*

Ken'ichi *"It's about two years. Even longer if it's counted since junior high school. "*

Mai *"By classmates? Extracurricular friends? "*

- Ken'ichi *"Originally by the homeroom teacher. Then it spreads out of control."* *really want to confess. The feeling is killing me.*
" (Tsutsumi, 2019)
- Mai *"Did you tell it to your parents?"*
- Ken'ichi *"My parents want me to change schools. And I got scolded all out."*
(Tsutsumi, 2019)

Instead of resolving his bullying case with related parties, his parents told him to change schools. He felt that he did not receive the support he expected from his parents. The family itself should act as a place that provides children with comfort when they are depressed. This lack of support from teachers, friends, and parents has made him depressed until he intends to commit suicide.

On the other hand, Nobuo wanted to commit suicide because he regretted his revenge on the person who bullied him. Nobuo pushed the bully down the stairs and was later pronounced dead. Although his school did not know it, he was then depressed and unable to tell the truth.

- Nobuo *"One year ago, I killed my schoolmate."*
- Mitsue *"Not on purpose, right?"*
- Nobuo *"No, I planned it. He treated me very badly. He's the leader. "*
-
- Nobuo *"Usually, I rarely have a hard time dealing with things. But, this time, I was wrong. "*
- Mitsue *"But that bad guy is gone. Why are you here? "*
- Nobuo *"Nobody knows. The incident was considered as an accident. My disturbances ended, but since then, hell began. I*

Conformity is believed to be a vicious circle in bullying cases in Japanese society. The differences in an individual are constantly being pointed out. Individuals then lose their group membership, and it makes them ask about their identity and self-worth. Victims also rarely receive support from their surrounding friends because they are afraid of being bullied too. This strive towards conformity makes bullying victims cornered even more until they took their own life (Peaslee, 2011). This film also depicts victims of bullying losing any social ties because they do not get help properly from family or school. Even worse, when other incidents as Nobuo did, revenged on the bully may have occurred.

3.1.3 Suicide-Related to Public Figures

Exposure of public figure's suicide by media may affect copycats or imitation for vulnerable youngsters. Even though it may not be suicide, suicide thought or attempted suicide can occur, especially among fans. The parasocial phenomenon in which fans feel emotionally close to specific public figures can encourage vulnerable fans to self-harm and commit suicide (Hoffner & Cohen, 2018; Lutter, Roex, & Tisch, 2020). It also shows how the role of the media in reporting a public figure. The news of the loss of a famous public figure would bring various feelings to the public.

Mitsue came to the procession with a gothic lolita-style appearance. She was inspired by a celebrity she liked, who also wore dark gothic-style fashion. Her fanatic towards this celebrity made her want to commit suicide because it turned out that this celebrity had died by suicide. On the other hand, there is a character named Ryoko as a famous teenage celebrity with the pseudonym Riko. Her fame only gave

her the burden due to the pressure from the work environment. She said that her life as a celebrity was just fake and used by people in her work environment. Death by suicide was a decision that she thought was not interfered with by the will of others. The two figures also caught smoking as a reaction to the pressure they experienced.

Through suicide, Ryoko hoped that her actions could arouse feelings of guilt towards people in her work environment, who only used her fame for products and money. Knowing Ryoko's decision, Mitsue forbade her from committing suicide because it would reproduce another 'Mitsue'.

Ryoko : "I'm no different from all of you. I have to be honest with myself. I want to bury this fake person named Riko forever. "

.....
Mitsue : "You can't be like us! You have been chosen! "

Ryoko : "It's all fake! It's all about products and money! If you sacrifice your life for that, you fool!

.....
Ryoko : "All my life, I've been surrounded by people who took advantage of me. I don't want other people to interfere with my death. "

(Tsutsumi, 2019)

The deaths of high-profile public figures exposed by media may have contributed to the increase in the suicide rate in the general population. People exposed to this information may also feel sadness even though they do not know the public figure well (Bingaman, 2020; Ueda, Mori, & Matsubayashi, 2014). However, the following suicide chains are not always attributable to the public figure. Suicide can occur when high-risk people for suicide

access this information. The problem is more about how it affects vulnerable people (Fink, Santaella-Tenorio, & Keyes, 2018). Celebrities also rarely discuss mental health issues in front of the media. Wood et al. (2014) mentioned that the stigma in society about mental health issues might also be why people do not report depression symptoms.

3.1.4 Sexual Abuse and Despair Caused by Chronic Illness Led to Suicide

Several teenage characters in *12 Suicidal Teens* films suffered from incurable diseases. Takahiro's illness since childhood gave him the effect of stuttering. Medicines were unable to cure him and caused him depressed instead. He decided to commit suicide because he felt himself and his illness were a burden to his mother. Meanwhile, Shinjirō life span remained a little because of his illness. He was hospitalised for a long time and needed to use a wheelchair. Shinjirō's illness is not described in the film but is shown through him wearing a wig and hat to cover his bald head due to hair loss. He was depressed because he could not do much in his life, so he decided to end it with suicide.

Another character, Mai, was forced to engage in intercourse by a man she encountered over the internet, which resulted in her contracting genital herpes. She said it could not be cured, which made her decide to commit suicide. It also shows the use of the internet to put teenagers in danger when not supervised by adults. Teens can easily be exposed to harmful things on the internet and not aware of the risks that wait in front of them.

Different story, Yuki had an accident with her brother and caused her hands unable to lift heavy objects. However, what made her decide to commit suicide was his brother's condition in a wheelchair due to being paralysed. She brought the 13th character, her older brother, to the meeting that Satoshi planned. Her brother was

already lying in one of the beds that used for the procession. All the characters thought he had preceded the procession. Yuki felt guilty for her brother's condition and felt that her brother should be "released". It also points out that an idea or culture influences adolescents' view of death as a "liberation" from misery in the world.

Patients with chronic illness or conditions can be susceptible to psychological disorders and affecting their psychosocial development. Suris, Michaud, and Viner (2004) mentioned that the process of individualisation and socialisation is important in managing chronic conditions during the rapid growth and physiological changes in adolescents. They cited several studies on the psychological problems that are more likely to arise in adolescents with chronic illness than their healthy counterparts. As cited from Lavigne and Gaier-Routman, adolescents with chronic conditions tend to show internalisation symptoms, or from Suris, Parera, and Puig that said chronically ill girls are more likely to have emotional problems. They also cited Canning's research for discovering that adolescents with chronic illness may have a higher prevalence of at least one psychiatric diagnosis. Another was cited from Siegel, Golden, Gough, et al. that suggest depression or low self-esteem is more likely to develop in adolescents with chronic conditions.

These teenage characters' chronic conditions and uneasy experiences arose internal difficulties that are profound and difficult to be spoken out. Suicide becomes the last choice to end their suffering that others may not see but is difficult to deal with for themselves.

3.2 The Role of Societal Change in Increasing Teen Suicide in Japan

Suicide is difficult to prevent, partly because of lack of communication. Meanwhile, several studies have found that social media or SNS is a platform where

individuals express their emotions freely. Suicidal ideation trends can be found among young internet users. When they cannot tell on wanting to commit suicide in daily communication, they write it on social media platforms such as Twitter (Fahey, Boo, & Ueda, 2020; Sueki, 2015). This case raises the positive and negative effects of social media use related to suicidal youngsters. On the positive side, the public health field can use social media to prevent suicide among youngsters. On the negative side, the exposure to information related to suicide on social media can also have a copycat effect on vulnerable youngsters.

The motives and goals expressed by 12 teenagers in the film *12 Suicidal Teens* could be the things that usually become the reasons why teenagers decide to commit suicide. The interesting part is, the ending of this film tells that the teenagers cancelled to commit suicide. This decision was influenced by the uninvited character — Yuki's brother — who was still alive and found sleeping throughout the meeting because he was given a high dose of sleeping pills. The twelve characters realised that if he was included in the procession, the case might turn into murder, and their suicidal goals would fail. Satoshi agreed to cancel as Shinjirō requested after all the characters also agreed to the decision. Shinjirō realised that the wish for the uninvited character to stay alive also applied to everyone. He wanted everyone at the meeting to stay alive, although, in the end, Anri would still like to come if Satoshi held it again. It turns out that Satoshi himself has not only once led this suicide pact. It shows good communication and approaches as a way to prevent suicide in adolescents, whether through professionals, adults, or peers. The suicide pact here seems to be turning into a means of speaking out of despair and making them realise that there will still be people who want them to continue to choose life rather than death.

Religion could be one of the important reasons for the suicide

phenomenon in Japan. There is no religious prohibition against suicide, especially in Buddhism and Shinto as popular religions in Japan. It is different from Christian teaching, which regulates to refrain from committing self-destruction. Even though Japanese people later claimed to be atheists, the phenomenon of suicide was still high and was said to be malaise or disease in society (Picone, 2012). Suicidal behaviour also used to be regarded as a criminal act from a religious perspective. People would see individuals who commit suicide as having only a moral crisis. However, most countries have already decriminalised the suicide act, including Japan (Yamamura, Kinoshita, Nishiguchi, & Hishida, 2006). There is no association shown of the twelve youths with any religion in the *12 Suicidal Teens*. Nonetheless, the decision of these characters to commit suicide seems to have become a normal thing in their social life.

Besides religion, the suicide rate in Japan is said to be responsive to economic conditions. People consider that the 1990s' economic chaos is highly related to the sudden malfunction of the "Japanese system." Not only politics and economy, but the malfunction also disrupts the social and cultural organisations of the nation (Chen, Choi, & Sawada, 2009; Yoda, 2000). New social phenomena then influenced by postmodernism have emerged among the younger generation. Conservatives see them as an antisocial generation, having no achievements, showing moral degradation, and symbolising a national crisis. Miyadai Shinji, a Japanese sociologist, responds to this as an adaptation of the *owarinaki nichijō* or the endless every day. Japanese young people feel bored with their daily lives. It also contributed to shaping subcultures such as otaku, who try to get out of the boring reality by entering the virtual world. These changes are seen as a symptom of de socialisation in the younger generation. They can no longer distinguish between reality and the virtual, so it will become a time bomb where violence

(murder and terrorism) appears and the inability to empathise with others increases (Yoda, 2000).

The journal *AERA* in 2003 published the issue of suicide based on interviews with a hundred Japanese teenagers aged 15 to 19. On the question of why they had suicidal thoughts, some respondents answered feeling bored (*nan to naku*), tired of living and feeling elements about who they are. Such statements are found a parallel with the comments made by individuals who visit suicide websites. From this survey, there are records that death has become a kind of lottery in attempted suicide. Dying or not dying, either would be all right. There is no sense of the desperation of really wanting to die anymore. They just want to pause from living (Ozawa-De Silva, 2010). In the film *12 Suicidal Teens*, Satoshi himself did not care whether he would die or not through the suicide pact he made. Moreover, when Nobuo finally felt his burden was gone, he no longer cared how death would come to him. Death becomes something trivial for the young generation.

When poverty in Japan began to emerge as an issue, there is also significant inequality among Japanese children associated with family conditions. Public social protection schemes are usually based on the assumption that everyone is supported by family first. Therefore, the family is considered the biggest provider of safety nets. However, there is a changing family structure in Japan which might be the root of the problem. In the past, the family structure consisting of three generations could still be relied on to support children's needs both psychologically and materially. However, the family structure is now reduced to being father, mother, child, or just a lone parent and child (*ren*). This family consisting of a lone parent and unmarried child (*ren*) suffers from a high poverty rate among the working-age population.

Consequently, children lack basic amenities, are vulnerable to health problems, and could be problematic in understanding classes. It indicates that not following the traditional path would likely risk a family into poverty, although the causal relationship could be reversed. These problems could affect children and adolescents in taking high-risk actions directly and indirectly (Abe, 2018).

Kumagai (1983) said that the change in family structure in Japan from stem family to nuclear family and traditional values to modern values are the impacts of industrialisation, bringing society more urban. This change began to contribute to a high rate of divorce in the 1980s. However, divorce was common among Japanese society in general — whose livelihoods were farmers, fishermen, and merchants —, while 80 per cent of Japan's population before industrialisation was dominated by these.

While economic factors as macro variables might explain the suicide epidemic in Japan at the national level, problems in day-to-day lives that adults often do not see or people considered mundane could also contribute to the risk of committing suicide for adolescents (Hidaka et al., 2008). Changes or developments in social life that may arise the micro variables might explain the reasons of Japanese adolescents for choosing to commit suicide.

4. Conclusion

The social changes that occurred in Japan put pressure not only on adult but also on the lives of the youth. Information that is increasingly easy to obtain by anyone can become a boomerang for society because people can learn from what this information says. Suicide itself is multifaceted, which can be seen from psychological, social, religious, cultural, and even economic perspectives. Nevertheless, issues that people, particularly adults, considered ordinary that youth might experience in their everyday lives can potentially be a

reason for adolescents to decide to commit suicide.

Tsutsumi himself considers that this social phenomenon is a problem that must be faced by Japanese society in the future. With this film, he hopes that cases of suicide, especially by teenagers whose motives and what may still escape goals from adult supervision, will be able to open our eyes and be addressed more deeply by Japanese society. Thus, the suicide rate in Japan hopefully can be suppressed in various circles, especially among adolescents (Cheung, 2019).

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