

# Youth Suicide and the Affected Witnesses: Case Studies of Cebu City during the Year 2007-2011

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## Abstract

This study looked into the profile of youth suicide victims in Cebu City during the year 2007-2011 and the affected witnesses' views, emotion and intentions to commit suicide. The study utilized the descriptive survey methods of research using quantitative-qualitative approaches. Hanging is the most common method used in suicide. The suicide season was established and the researchers found out that suicide usually happened during the rainy or wet season. Suicide usually took place inside the house of the victim. It was discovered that majority of the victims were male only very few female commit suicide. Furthermore, victims usually have meager income. And moreover, the affected witnesses who condemned suicide were influenced by religion. This study investigated emotional horizons experienced by the affected witnesses. The researchers explored the affected witness intentions to commit suicide.

## Background

Suicide is considered by many as an unfair and selfish way to exit from this world. The victims do not considered the ones left behind. Parents, children, friends relatives bore the brunt of the agonizing shock and other consequences of suicide.

Today, suicide is becoming alarmingly high. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “in every forty seconds an individual commits suicide”. In 1998, suicide ranked 12th as the leading cause of death worldwide. In 2006, WHO estimated about a million of deaths every year caused by suicide. According to UNESCO, in the 1960s there was 0.5 cases of suicide death per 100,000 thousand population. In 1993 it increases to 1.7 deaths by suicide per 100,000 thousand population. Dr. Isagani Gonzales, the public relations officer of Philippine Psychiatric Association, also cited the occurrence of 107 suicide cases in the first two quarters in the year 2010 (Manongdo, 2011,Sept). This number might even be higher considering that some suicide attempts were not reported to proper authorities. Though suicide cases in the Philippines is low compared to other countries, but the fact is, it is increasing.

What is more alarming in the world today is that suicide victims are getting younger. This incident is commonly known as “teenage suicide” or “youth suicide”. Mooney, Knox and Schacht (2005) stated that suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15-24 years old. The study of van Heeringen (2001 cited by Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004) revealed that one in every four teenagers thought of committing suicide.

Recently in the Philippines, youth suicide slowly increases and has caught the attention of the public. A study entitled “Suicide in the Philippines: Time Trend Analysis (1974-2005) and Literature Review” (Renadiel, Maria, Gunnell, David. and Lebanan-Dalid 2011) cited an alarming increase of youth suicide cases in the country. In Cebu, the old and new Mactan Bridges became a hot spot for suicide. There were five (5) attempted suicide that took place on that bridge in a span of ten months alone in the year 2011. Cebu for a while earned the name as the “suicide capital” of the country.

This study primarily anchored on the perspective of social constructivism. Learning is viewed as social process which can be intensified through individual’s participation in the activity. This postulated that individuals are part of a “constructed environment” and this

“constructed environment” also framed the individuals. Therefore, knowledge can be attained by understanding the phenomenon in the society that occurs as a product of both culture and situations. Knowledge is “socially and culturally constructed” that individuals create meanings from these interactions. Reality then is created by people’s interaction with the society. The affected witnesses’ emotions, views and intentions represented the learning from the suicide incidence.

This study looks into how the affected witnesses may view suicide. They may view suicide as something which is good and therefore will commit the same acts when the situation warrants.

### **Research Objectives**

This study focused on the profile of the suicide victims in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics, when suicide was committed, place where suicide occurred, methods and materials used. This also dealt with the affected persons’ views and level of emotions and intentions of committing suicide.

### **Research Methodology**

The researchers employed descriptive survey method using the quantitative-qualitative approaches. A researcher-made interview guide was employed to obtain data about the suicide victims’ profile, when and how it was done and the materials used. An in-depth interview was done to the affected witnesses to gain insight about their view, emotions and intentions to commit suicide.

A non-probability sampling design was employed using the purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was used as the study focused on suicide cases from year 2007 until 2011 committed by individuals with age range from fifteen (15) to thirty (30) years old. The respondents were the affected witnesses of the corpse of the suicide victim, residents of Cebu City and were 30 years old and below during the incident. Convenience sampling was used in identifying the respondents who were available for interviews.

This was conducted in Cebu City which is one of the highly urbanized cities in the country. Due to its strategic location, it attracts workers, investors, students and migrants from other provinces in Visayas and Mindanao. Cebu City falls under Type III climate wherein from May to October is wet season (<http://kidlat.pagasa.dost.gov.ph>) The city is also comprised of 80 barangays with a total land area of 291.2 square kilometers. The 2007 Census of Population reveals that Cebu City has a population of 258,724 within the age group of 15-29 years old. Due to its rapid urbanization and modernization, Cebu faced societal pressures that lead to changes in the society. Despite of being the home of the most festive *Sinulog* celebration (in honor of the child Jesus), a number of suicide cases were recorded. As of year 2007-2011, a total of 156 suicide cases were reported in Cebu City Police Office (CCPO). Suicide cases included in this study were found in the following barangays of Cebu City: Tisa, Punta, Sambag 2, Careta, Mabolo, Capitol, Pardo, San Nicolas, Inayawan, Duljo Fatima, Mambaling, Lahug, Lorega, Calamba, Banilad, Talamban and Bulacao.

There were twenty-six (26) suicide cases utilized to understand the nature of suicide. This is composed of twenty-two (22) males and four (4) females as the suicide victims between 15-30 years old. The age range adopted in the study was patterned from Republic Act 8044 otherwise known as “The Youth in Nation Building Act” which defines youths falling between the aforementioned age range. There were also eighty-two (82) respondents that comprised the affected witnesses as follows: thirty (30) family members; forty-seven (47) neighbors/friends and five (5) co-workers who witnessed the incidence and were (30) years old and below during the incidence. The members of the family; were composed of the siblings and/or wife/husband (legal/common-law), cousins, children, nephews and in-laws (legal/common law) of the deceased. They served as respondents of this study with the premise that the family is a basic unit of society where each one of us belongs. The family is also the primary source of socialization, care and affection. In the Philippine setting, close family ties is highly valued. The neighbors and/or friends were also considered as part of the affected witnesses in this study since they are also influential in the development of the personality and socialization of the suicide victims. The camaraderie gained from friends and/or neighbors who were at the same age, likes and among others are influential in the lives of the youths. Filipinos are also known for its collective identity. The co-workers were also part of the affected witnesses in cases were suicide

victims were employed. They spend more hours in the work field and may even become their confidants.

The researchers secured a list of suicide cases from CCPO (Cebu City Police Office) and reports from local tabloids and newspapers. Based on the data gathered from CCPO, fifty-five (55) suicide cases with ages 15-30 years old were identified in year 2007-2011. The affected witnesses were taken as respondents for the data analysis and presentation of the affected person's views and inclination towards suicide. There were also cases which the researchers failed to locate despite the efforts made. There was one (1) case where the immediate family refused to be interviewed. A case was also included even though it was not part of the CCPO file.

A structured interview guide was personally developed by the researchers and reviewed by experts for the content validity. Level of emotions and intention was measured by 4-point rating scale as follows: 4 indicates very high (VH); 3 is high (H); 2 is low (L) and 1 is very low (VL). Whereas, the level of inclination was interpreted using the following scales: 1.00-1.75 is very low (VL); 1.76-2.50 is low (L); 2.51-3.25 is high (H) and 3.26-4.0 is very high (VH). Secondary data from CCPO and collateral interviews from family were also utilized for the presentation of the nature of suicide committed.

The descriptive analysis utilized the statistical tools such as frequency count (f), percentage (%) and weighted mean (WM). Descriptive analysis was also done by sorting out the commonalities of the respondent's responses.

## Findings and Discussions

### Profile of Youth Suicide Victims

#### Socio-demographic Characteristics of Suicide Victims

**Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Suicide Victims**

*N*=26

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Male	22	84.6
Female	4	15.4

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Profession</b>		
Student	1	3.8
Jobless	7	26.9
Meager jobs	17	65.5
Business management	1	3.8
<b>Religion</b>		
Roman Catholic	26	100
<b>Civil Status</b>		
Single (without child/live in partner)	14	53.84
Common Law/Live-In	12	46.16
Married	0	0
<b>Occurrence of suicide cases within the family prior to the incidence</b>		
With suicide cases	7	26.9
None	19	73.1

Study reveals that most of the suicide cases were incurred by males (84.6%). The studies conducted by Canetto & Sakinofsky (1998 as cited by Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004) and DOH records in 1974-2005 (as cited by Renadiel, Maria, Gunnell, David. and Lebanan-Dalid, 2011) also revealed that most of the suicide cases were incurred by males. This can be related to the concept of machismo or the belief of male supremacy. More men succeeded in committing suicide by using harsh methods in order to get rid of the humiliation once the attempt fails. Unlike women, men were more reserved when it comes to their emotions. Based on those interviews conducted, majority of the suicide victims were described as loners.

Majority (65.5%) had meager jobs such as taxi/jeepney/sikad drivers, garbage collector, tattoo artist, computer technician, photographer, housekeeper, security guard, dishwasher, jeepney *conductor* and errand boy. The jobless constituted 26.9 % of the study who had not finished college. In the conduct of this study, it was observed that most of the deceased family resided in squatter's areas and scanty houses in the city. This can be associated with the study of

Burr and company (1999 as cited by Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004), wherein the high disparity of occupation and income resulted to more African-American males to commit suicide.

All of those who committed suicide were Roman Catholics. More than half of the suicide victims (53.8%) were single and the rest were into common law or live-in arrangement. This presented a facet of family life where cohabitation nowadays is increasingly practiced by the young individuals in Cebu City. Medina (2001) said that common-law or live-in marriage is now considered as one of the marital status in Philippine census.

Though majority (73.1%) of their family members revealed that there were no cases of suicide within their respective families prior to the incidence but few cases (26.9%) suggested that suicide have already occurred in the circle of family prior to the incidence.

### When suicide was committed

**Table 2. When Suicide was Committed**

*N*=26

<b>Year</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
2007	2	7.7
2008	4	15.4
2009	3	11.5
2010	9	34.6
2011	8	30.8
<b>Month</b>		
January	3	11.5
February	1	3.8
March	0	0
April	3	11.5
May	1	3.8
June	2	7.7
July	2	7.7
August	7	26.9

<b>Year</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Sept	2	7.7
October	1	3.8
November	4	15.4
December	0	0
<b>Day</b>		
Monday	5	19.2
Tuesday	2	7.7
Wednesday	11	42.3
Thursday	4	15.4
Friday	0	0
Saturday	3	11.5
Sunday	1	3.8

It was in the year 2010 (34.6 %) were the highest record of suicide cases was gathered in this study. It was also in 2007 where the least suicide cases (7.7%) were identified. Based on the list provided by CCPO, suicide cases was on its peak in 2010 with 72 % increase of suicide victims. Tracing the history of famous suicides committed in the country, it can be remembered that in 2009 a wife of a famous broadcaster was widely televised nationwide. It was also in 2011, when former Chief-of-Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Secretary of the Department (Dept.) of Local Government (DILG), Dept. of Energy (DOE) and Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources and (DENR) shoot himself amidst the malicious accusations of corruption.

Majority (26.9%) reported suicide on the month of August, belonging to the third quarter of the year. The month of November (15.4 %) which is known as the month for All Saints and All Souls Day comes next. It was also noted that most suicide cases in this study occurred during the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the year. The CCPO files also revealed that most of the cases of suicide among the young individuals, occurred in August and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter. The third quarter is a typical wet season in Cebu City. Wednesday (42.3 %) was the most common day of suicide followed by Monday (19.2 %) as revealed in this study. These results match with CCPO files where Monday and Wednesday were the most common days preferred by youth suicide victims.



Based from the interviews conducted, two suicide victims committed suicide within a year after a reported suicide incidence occurred within their respective neighborhood. There was also one suicide victim who committed suicide two years after the younger brother committed suicide as well. Both hanged themselves within their house. These cases again supported the study of David Phillips of University of California (as cited by Berkowitz, 1993) on the existence of suicide contagion.

### Place where suicide occurred

**Table 3. Place where Suicide Occurred**

*N=26*

Place	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Outside the house	5	19.2
Inside the house	21	80.8

In most cases (80.8 %) suicide occurs usually in their houses particularly in the bedroom and comfort room. Except for five (19.2 %) cases who took their own lives within the gymnasium, store, comfort room located outside the house and pantheon. The gymnasium incident seemed to be the most public place among the research subjects. The pantheon case took place in that area since the research subject lived in the cemetery.

### Methods and Materials Used

**Table 4. Methods and Materials Used in Suicide**

*N=26*

Methods	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Hanging	26	100
<b>Materials</b>		
Rope	14	53.8
Belt	3	11.5
Blanket	2	7.7

Methods	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Wire	5	19.2
Polo shirt	1	3.8
Shoelace	1	3.8

All of the suicide victims hanged themselves with the commonly used materials such as rope (used in tying roosters and other domesticated animals) and electric wire. In few instances others make use of belt, polo shirt, shoelace, *malong* and sling of a neck pouch. The CPPO files exposed hanging as the most common method used in all suicide cases in Cebu City, which is followed by few cases of shooting. Rare cases of chemical intake, slashing the wrist and stabbing were also reported. Hanging seems to be more accessible for suicide victims as compared to shooting.

### Affected Witnesses' Views, Emotions and Intentions

#### Views on Suicide

**Table 5. Views on Suicide**

N=82

Views	Family		Neighbor/ Friends		Co-Worker	
	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<b>Good</b>	3	9.7	1	2.1	1	20
<b>Bad</b>	29	90.3	46	97.9	4	80

Most of the family members (90.3%) viewed suicide as bad while 9.7 % viewed them as a good act also. Most of the neighbors (97.9%) also viewed suicide as bad while only 2.1 % viewed them as a good act. Majority of the co-workers (80%) viewed suicide as bad while 20 % viewed suicide as a good act.

Most of the affected witnesses viewed suicide as not a desirable act. This view was influenced by the stand of the Roman Catholic Church (where most of the respondents belong) that suicide is considered as a mortal sin especially if it was committed in a deliberate manner. Mortal sin is unpardonable and a sin against the spirit. Moreover, a few considered the welfare of the children left and that problem should have been handled well by the suicide victims. On the other hand, a few expressed it was desirable as a way of ending vices that would lead to an unhealthy family relationship and even considered it as a sacrificial act.

### Level of Emotions and Intentions to Commit Suicide Among the Family Members

**Table 6. Level of Emotions and Intentions to Commit Suicide Among the Family Members**

*N=30*

Level of Emotions	VH (4)		H (3)		L (2)		VL (1)		WM	Interpretation
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Happy	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	-	2.0	Low
Anger	2	8	3	9	2	4	3	3	2.40	Low
Sad	8	32	7	21	4	8	1	1	3.1	High
Surprise	1	4	4	12	1	2	-	-	3.0	High
Fear	2	8	2	6	1	2	-	-	3.2	High
Disgust	-	-	4	12	-	-	1	1	2.6	High
Loneliness	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	3.0	High
Pity	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	3.0	High
Agony	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.0	Very High
<b>Intentions</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>				<b>Percentage (%)</b>					
<b>Yes</b>	8				26.67					
<b>No</b>	22				73.3					
With intentions	-	-	3	9	4	8	1	1	2.25	Low

*Note: 1 respondent viewed suicide both good and bad.*

There was a very high level (weighted mean of 4.0) of agony. There was a high level on most of the emotions such as sad, surprise, fear, disgust, lonely and pity. Anger and happy was at low level. The study reveals that happiness, agony and loneliness were emotions only expressed by the family members among the affected witnesses. Moreover, based from the interview conducted, a common-law wife claimed that the suicide incident brought happiness for her as it ended the pain brought by the unhealthy relationship with the suicide victim.

Though majority (73.33%) had no intention of committing suicide, however 26.67 % of the family members expressed their intention of doing it. Their intention was at low level (weighted mean of 2.25). Loneliness, problems within work, economy and girlfriend were identified instances that may provoke the family members to follow the act. Hanging was the most common method identified in pursuing suicide while one identified drowning oneself in the sea. There were 2 respondents who already committed an attempt to this suicidal act after the victim's death which they fortunately survived.

### Among the Neighbors/Friends

**Table 7. Level of Emotions and Intentions to Commit Suicide among Neighbors**

*N=47*

Level of Emotions	VH (4)		H (3)		L (2)		VL (1)		WM	Interpretation
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Anger	2	8	4	12	1	2	-	-	3.14	High
Sad	5	20	10	30	6	12	-	-	2.95	High
Surprise	-	-	5	15	2	4	-	-	2.71	High
Fear	4	16	6	18	6	12	-	-	2.87	High
Disgust	3	12	9	27	-	-	1	1	3.08	High
Confused	-	-	1	3	1	2	-	-	2.50	Low
Pity	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.0	Very High
<b>Intention</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>				<b>Percentage (%)</b>					

Level of Emotions	VH (4)		H (3)		L (2)		VL (1)		WM	Interpretation
Yes	6				12.8					
No	41				87.2					
With intentions	1	4	1	3	4	8	-	-	2.5	Low

A very high level (weighted mean of 4.0) of pity was felt by the neighbors/friends. There was a high level of anger, sad, surprise, fear and disgust too. Confusion at low level (weighted mean of 2.5) was exclusively felt by the neighbors/friends. The study reveals that fear was felt by the family members and the neighbors/friends among the affected witnesses. Fear was influenced by folk Catholicism, believing that the soul of a departed love one returns on earth. While others feared discussing suicide since it is an unusual form of death in the country. Moreover, based from the interviews conducted, the neighbors/friends revealed that they were confused on the reasons behind the suicide incident since the suicide victims did not disclosed any problem nor shared thoughts of committing the said act.

Majority (87.2 %) revealed no intention of committing suicide. The intention of committing suicide was at a low level (weighted mean of 2.5) which was at the same level, felt by the family members. Poverty, bullying and failure to solve major problems were the probable reasons that may push them to commit suicide through hanging and starvation. A few number of friends already committed an attempt to this suicidal act after the victim's death which they fortunately survived.

## Among the Co-Workers

**Table 8. Level of Emotions and Intentions to Commit Suicide among Co-Workers**

N=5

Level of Emotions	VH (4)		H (3)		L (2)		VL (1)		WM	Interpretation
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Anger	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.0	Very High
Sad	1	4	1	3	-	-	-	-	3.5	Very High
Surprise	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	-	2.0	Low
Disgust	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.0	Very High
Pity	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	3.0	High
<b>Intention</b>	<b>Frequency</b>				<b>Percentage</b>					
<b>Yes</b>	1				20					
<b>No</b>	4				80					
Level of Intention	VH (4)		H (3)		L (2)		VL (1)		WM	Interpretation
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
With intention	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.0	Very High

The co-workers displayed a very high level of anger, sad and disgust among the affected witnesses. The study also revealed a high level of pity and low level of surprise felt by the co-workers. Moreover, based from the interviews conducted, a co-worker revealed that he was mad on the idea of committing suicide as a manner of ending one's miseries and problems in life. Suicide is regarded as an act of cowardice. While others also felt sad on the suicide victim's hopelessness. On the other hand, one co-worker was disgusted on the opportunity lost by the suicide victim in helping his family arose from poverty.

Though majority (80%) has no intention of committing suicide, however 20 % of the co-workers expressed their intention of committing suicide. The study revealed a very high level

(weighted mean of 4.0) of intention of committing suicide from the co-workers, the highest level among the affected witnesses. A co-worker already tried committing suicide after the victim's death which was fortunately survived. Economic crisis and trouble within family/special relationship would probably push them to follow the suicidal act.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In this study, males are more prone to complete suicides. Moreover, a rising number of individuals in a common law or live-in marriage also committed suicide. All suicide cases used hanging as a method to commit suicide. Most of these were done inside their homes. The highest incidence of suicide cases was found to happen in the month of August which is characterized with the wet season. Majority of the suicide victims were from poor families.

Most of the affected witnesses viewed suicide as undesirable which was rooted from the Christian teaching of viewing one's life as a gift from God and only God has the right to take it away. While others, viewed committing suicide as an insult to male supremacy or machismo. A very high level of agony, pity, anger, sad and disgust were felt by the affected witnesses. The co-workers displayed a very high level of intention to commit suicide among the affected witnesses.

It was also revealed, that even if majority of the affected witnesses condemned suicide however, a few revealed their intention of following the act. Hanging was the most common method identified in pursuing suicide aside from starving and drowning into the sea.

A limited number of the affected witnesses already committed suicide after the victim's death which they fortunately survived. This study confirms the studies conducted by Hanson et.al. (2001 as cited by Comer, 2004) that suicide can be imitated after witnessing or reading about the incidence. Further, the results confirm the literature of Nolen-Hoeksema (2004) that suicide clusters usually occur within individuals who had known the suicide victims.

Suicide is socially construed. As the finding shows, the victims used hanging as a way to commit suicide which is a very Filipino way of committing suicide. The materials in hanging are mostly found inside the house. The victims preferred these materials because they are available. They do not used guns because they do not have access to these. And last but not the least, most suicides in Cebu are done by hanging.

## Recommendations

1. Suicide intervention scheme shall be incorporated by the school, concerned government offices, local government units and churches. This may include putting up of suicide intervention units that may provide counseling, stress debriefing, advocacy, community outreach programs and among others.
2. That parallel study will be conducted in other cities and municipalities within the country.

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