

Suicide and Self-Harm

Among Koreans



The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural
Student Emotional Wellness

Why is suicide the #1 cause of death in South Korean teens and young adults (10-39 years old)?

Fact #1:

Suicide was the #1 cause of death in South Korean teens and young adults (10-39 years old) in 2016.

Some facts that may contribute to South Korea having the highest suicide rates in teens and young adults:

- High stress, long school hours, and limited range of coping skills with stressors, among others.
- Low employment opportunities and high competition to gain admission into the same top universities.
- Academic pressure placed on self and by family.
- Cultural values of diligence, stoicism, modesty and strong work ethics.

Education in South Korea

- Until not long ago, students were required to go to school six days a week.
- Many students go to school and subsequently to afterschool programs called *hagwons* and return home late in the evening.
- Afterschool programs are a multi-billion dollar industry.
- Families spend fortunes on *hagwons*, and students at a young age start to prepare for the highly anxiety-provoking eight-hour national annual college entrance exam called *Suneung*.
- *Suneung* results dictate whether or not the student can attend college, let alone a prestigious one, as this test sets the tone for their career, marriage prospects, financial future, and is ultimately tied to family honor and prestige.
- The importance of *Suneung* culturally is exemplified by a day of silence, including stopping of construction, grounding of planes, and the gathering of worried parents at temple or church praying for good test scores.

Did you know that Korean elders are more likely to commit suicide than elders in the United Kingdom?

Fact #2:

South Korea has the highest suicide rate among the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) nations, including countries such as Japan, US, and the UK.

Fact #3:

Elderly suicide in South Korea is the highest among the OECD countries. Elders who are ≥ 75 years old were 42 times more likely than elders in the United Kingdom to commit suicide.

Some facts that may contribute to South Korea having the highest suicide rates in elders:

- Changing traditional Korean family structure and decreased family support.
- Worried about potential burden on their family members.
- Financial concerns.

