

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 23 (1996)
Heft: 3

Artikel: High suicide rate in Switzerland : when young people take their lives
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907752>

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High suicide rate in Switzerland

When young people take their lives

Every few days a young person in Switzerland takes his or her life. Voluntarily. We are talking in terms of about 110 suicides per year. Some thoughts from a 16-year-old.

Boys use guns or jump out of windows or off bridges. Girls swallow pills. Is there any explanation?

Suicide is a subject which is treated with kid gloves in our society. In spite of its prosperity, or perhaps because of

Anne Monard*

it, Switzerland has the second highest suicide rate in Europe after Finland. This should make us think.

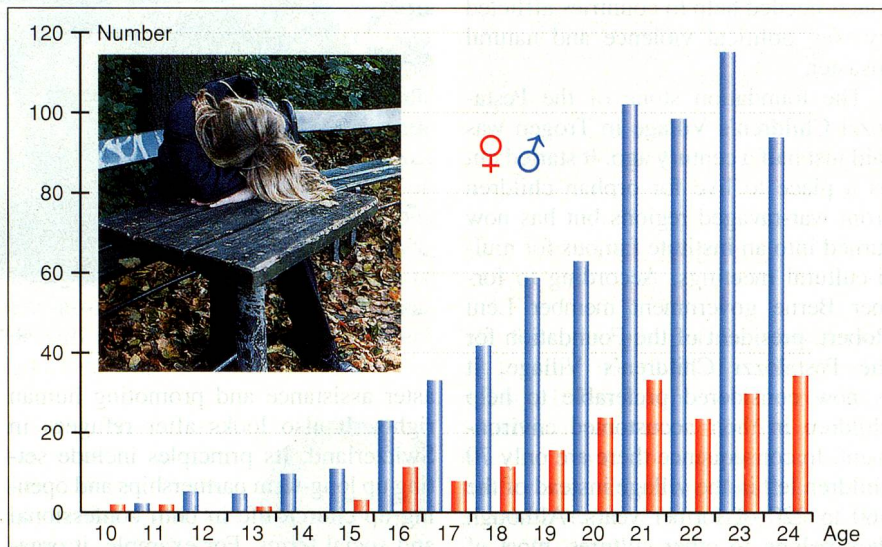
Motives for suicide (and suicide attempts) are varied. Many of those concerned are subject to some sort of social pressure. They have problems with their studies or at work. Family tensions and problems like divorce, child abuse and loneliness can lead to suicide too – even at a later date. Peer pressures and stress are also often given as motives.

When dreams dissolve

Even the break-up of a rock band such as the British group 'Take That' can be behind suicide attempts. In this case it was the fans: girls between 13 and 16. These kids projected all their dreams onto their favourite singers and idolised them. When the group broke up their dreams dissolved. The thing they thought about almost all the time had suddenly gone, and they did not know what to do with their lives.

Like the end of the world

Nathalie, 13, and Tanja, 14, talk about it. Nathalie: "I was a 'Take That' fan and had been in love with Mark Owen for ages. It was already bad enough when Robbie left the group. Tanja was in love with him and cried her eyes out. When 'Take That' finally broke up my whole world went to pieces. At that time I want-



Suicide 1985–1988: Switzerland is one of the countries with the highest suicide rates among young people. With men (blue) the tendency rises steeply with age. (Graphic: Buri Druck/Photo: Keystone)

ed to kill myself". Tanja nods in agreement: "That's right. 'Take That' was our life, our religion, absolutely everything". Both had thought about suicide even though they did not do it. What happened? This was Nathalie's amazing reply: "I got to know about 'Caught in the Act' through a friend. Now I'm their fan and in love with Lee".

Farewell letters as signs of danger

How can you tell who is at risk? Suspicious behaviour includes writing farewell letters, collecting medicaments without good reason and talking about soon dying. Suddenly giving up hobbies and friendships can also be a sign. A broken relationship can lead to suicide or a suicide attempt. Bruno, 22, has this to say: "Yes, I did think about it once. It was when my girlfriend and I split up. But in the end I was simply too proud to put an end to my life. Perhaps I was also prevented by being afraid of dying".

Poems or drawings can also be signs of possible danger. Professional help is needed where there is reason to fear suicide or after a suicide attempt. The po-

tential victim and the family need to be helped through counselling and treatment.

I am only sixteen myself so I know about the problems of today's youth. But for me they have not yet been serious enough for me to feel I would have to kill myself. But it is true that occasionally I do get to the point when I have had enough of everything, and suicide has occurred to me. But I have come to the conclusion that it cannot be the right solution, even if there are times when it is difficult to see another way out.

Go for help

Many young people forget that they have friends of both sexes whom they can go to for help with their problems before they take rash and ill-considered action. Help is always available. But you have to be ready to accept it. ■

* Anne Monard is still at school, and this is her first article.