

## ARTÍCULOS

UTOPIA Y PRAXIS LATINOAMERICANA. AÑO: 25, n° EXTRA 5, 2020, pp. 126-134  
REVISTA INTERNACIONAL DE FILOSOFÍA Y TEORÍA SOCIAL  
CESA-FCES-UNIVERSIDAD DEL ZULIA. MARACAIBO-VENEZUELA  
ISSN 1316-5216 / ISSN-e: 2477-9555

### Attitude of Russian Youth Towards Suicide

*Actitud de la juventud rusa hacia el suicidio*

**Yulia Zufarovna BOGDANOVA**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2933-8542>  
[bogdanowa2907@mail.ru](mailto:bogdanowa2907@mail.ru)

*Northern Trans-Ural State Agricultural University, Russia*

**Zinira Foatovna ABRAROVA**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6316-0277>  
[zini\\_ra@mail.ru](mailto:zini_ra@mail.ru)

*Bashkir State University, Russia*

**Vladimir Fedorovich KOVROV**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4907-8111>  
[kovrov@bk.ru](mailto:kovrov@bk.ru)

*Bashkir State University, Russia*

**Nursafa Gafurovna HAJRULLINA**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7290-3290>  
[nursafa@inbox.ru](mailto:nursafa@inbox.ru)

*Tyumen Industrial University, Russia*

Este trabajo está depositado en Zenodo:  
DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3984216>

#### RESUMEN

El artículo presenta los resultados de las entrevistas realizadas a estudiantes de una universidad técnica, que mostraron la relevancia de los temas estudiados, permitiendo identificar las condiciones para la formación del comportamiento suicida, sus causas en general y esbozar un retrato de niños, adolescentes, estudiantes y jóvenes trabajadores desde la posición de su vulnerabilidad al suicidio, así como proporcionar medidas para la prevención de este tipo de comportamiento

**Palabras clave:** comportamiento suicida, prevención, familia, estudiantes.

#### ABSTRACT

The article presents the results of the interviews carried out with students from a technical university, which showed the relevance of the topics studied, allowing to identify the conditions for the formation of suicidal behavior, its causes and to sketch a portrait of children, adolescents, students and young workers from the position of their vulnerability to suicide, as well as providing measures for the prevention of this type of behavior

**Keywords:** Suicidal behavior, prevention, family, students.

Recibido: 24-06-2020 • Aceptado: 25-07-2020



## INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, sociologists have recorded a deterioration in the socio-psychological situation in Russian society (Bannikov et al., 2015; Gorshkov, Sheregi, 2010; Drobizheva et al., 2003). This is due to the socio-economic transformations taking place in the country, which contribute to the weakening of traditional ties between parents and children, between generations, leading to quantitative imbalances between generations, which often provokes a break in ties between representatives of different generations (Sadykova, Khamatkhanova, 2013; Sadykova, 2014; Ustinova, 2014; Khairullina, 2011), misunderstanding between parents and children, adults and adolescents, teachers and students, and, as a result, to the growth of suicidal behavior on the part of adolescents and youth.

The reforms proclaimed in the 1980s and their implementation over the past decades have led to a decrease in the birth rate due to the uncertainty of the present and the lack of a clear idea of the future prospects for many Russian families, despite attempts by the state to solve this problem by paying maternity capital in the last ten years. In the process of transformation of the family and its traditional culture in modern society, nuclear and small families have spread. The resulting weakening of reproductive function has led to quantitative imbalances between representatives of different generations. The smallest share in the population (16%) is made up of children under the age of 16. At the same time, the proportion of young people aged 16 to 29 years old corresponds to the proportion of old-age pensioners (about 20%), which significantly increases the demographic burden on the working-age population. A similar trend was also revealed by Rosstat experts. Given this conclusion, it should be emphasized that it should be understood that the downward trend in the population influences a change in the proportions towards an increase in people over working age, despite the measures taken by the Russian government to stimulate the birth rate.

Currently, such forms of interaction as forums, chats, blogs, online games, social networks are widespread that can not only form but also deform individual identities primarily of the younger generation.

Information opportunities form fundamentally new for each generation forms of social identification, self-expression and lifestyle of Russians, which has two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, the ubiquity of the Internet and other global information networks makes it possible for teenagers to show their individuality, without fear for their public and private life: a teenager at home has the opportunity to communicate with the whole world through a personal computer, laptop, tablet or phone any time of the day. It is no secret that our own children, schoolchildren and students spend their free time on the Internet. And this state of constant mass communication is madly liked not only by adolescents and youth, elementary school students, their teachers, service staff, but parents are also actively involved in this process. Everywhere you can see how young parents, walking with their children (not only young), prefer communication on social networks, rather than communicating with them (Drobizheva et al.: 2003, 223; Gadzhigasanova et al., 2016).

On the other hand, given the active and ubiquitous distribution of modern means of communication and information transfer, as well as the willingness of most parents to show that their children can have phones no worse, and often better than their peers, it should be understood that these and other factors provide additional opportunities for adolescents to spend (almost around the clock) time on social networks. Each of us has repeatedly faced with the fact that social networks do not always offer useful information, on the contrary, they inform adolescents and youth how not to spend free time (from the point of view of adults). In recent years, social networks have been involving teenagers and youth in games that contribute to the depreciation of a person's life, they allow, at the risk of their lives, to take and upload instant snapshots (selfies) to receive approval (likes) from others on Instagram, while lowering the threshold for teenagers to accept suicidal solutions. In such conditions, it is necessary to regularly conduct sociological monitoring of the conditions for the formation of suicidal behavior of children, adolescents, youth and propose suicide prevention measures. So, in 2016 Khritinin D.F., Sumarokova M.A., Esin A.V., Samokhin D.V., Schukina E.P. investigated the conditions of the formation of suicidal behavior among students of a medical university (Khritinin et al.,

2016). In our work, we present the results of research studying the conditions for the formation of suicidal behavior on the example of students of the largest technical university in the capital of the Tyumen region.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study will be conducted with both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method consists in analyzing the results of a mass questionnaire survey of the population of Tyumen and the south of the Tyumen region to obtain information from a directly studied subject. A questionnaire survey is an indispensable method of obtaining information about the inner world of people, their inclinations, motives, opinions. Regular polls (sociological monitoring) make it possible to trace the dynamics of changes in various areas of public life both in a country and in individual regions and provide a unique opportunity to predict the development of social processes, to identify and prevent social conflicts, including latent ones.

A questionnaire conducted with the direct participation of the authors covered a population aged 15 to 75 years (700 people) living in the city of Tyumen and the south of the Tyumen region. In order to carry out a comparative analysis of generational groups, the study was conducted on a stratified multistage sample with related parameters: gender, age, education, social and professional status, which ensured a representativeness error of not more than 5%.

In addition, the quantitative method used in this article was a secondary analysis of sociological research data on the problems of value orientations and intergenerational interactions conducted by sociologists over the past twenty years in various regions of the Russian Federation.

Characterization and analysis of the qualitative essence of the studied problem were carried out by the authors by the method of interviews with students of the Industrial University of Tyumen. Interviews were conducted in January-March 2017 (the total number of informants was 102 people, of which girls made up 60%, boys - 40%). In addition, the results of in-depth and biographical interviews conducted by Kazan sociologists in the Republic of Tatarstan in 2014 were analyzed. Qualitative analysis involves the researcher's concentration "on the concept of a certain entity that cannot be measured, which can only be understood through the prism of personal experience" (Khritinin et al., 2016). In the analysis we have based on the personal experience of students aged 19 to 22 years, reproduced by them in an interview. During the interview, we tried to identify the specifics of socialization processes, intra-family and intergenerational communications, implemented in the process of transferring life experience to identify the conditions for the formation of suicidal behavior (Islamshina, Khamzina: 2014, 468).

## **RESULTS**

Considering the role of the family in the formation of suicidal tendencies among Tyumen teenagers and youth, an analysis of the results of a questionnaire survey conducted with the participation of the authors in 2014-2015 in Tyumen and in the south of the Tyumen region should be carried out. The respondents were asked: "What values are important to you and what values, in your opinion, have been lost today?" A list of 16 values was proposed. Let us consider an analysis of only those values that interest us in the framework of the problem under study. The value "stability of a traditional family" is important only for a quarter of the surveyed adolescents aged 15-17 years (26,6%), about half of the respondents in this age category (42,9%) called it lost. For comparison, we give an assessment of this value by representatives of the age category 41-50 years old, in our opinion, this is the possible age of the parents of 15-17-year-olds. The value "stability of a traditional family" is important for 61.8% of respondents; this value was mentioned as lost by a quarter of respondents in this age category (27,6%). The next value - "mutual assistance on the part of children (parents)" is important for 42.9% of 15-17-year-olds and for 71,1% of representatives of the 41-50 age group. This value is considered

lost by 14.9% of 15-17-year-olds and 14.4% of representatives of the age category 41-50 years. And we will present one more value for analysis - "succession of generations, use of the experience of previous generations". The indicated value is important only for a quarter of the surveyed adolescents aged 15-17 years (28.6%), half the number of respondents in this age category (14.3%) called it lost. For 63.2% of representatives of the age category 41-50 years, this value is important, and for 22.4% - lost.

Let us present the first results of an interview conducted among students of the Industrial University of Tyumen. To the first question of the interview, "Do you think that over the past decade there has been an increase in suicides among adolescents and young people aged 17-24?", most students surveyed (86,0) answered in the affirmative. The opposite point of view (no, it did not increase) was expressed by every tenth student. And only one interviewee admitted that he could not answer this question. Note that most of the interview participants gave reasons for their answer.

For research purposes, it was important for us to find out which group is most vulnerable to committing suicide: children, adolescents, students or working youth? It was allowed to choose no more than two categories. The analysis showed that slightly more than half of the students interviewed (54%) consider adolescents to be the most vulnerable category. The answers allowed to compile a social portrait of adolescents (13-17 years old), which has the following characteristics:

- their consciousness and psyche are not fully formed and, as a whole, their personality did not form, they are subject to enormous pressure from friends, the Internet, cinema, etc., it is easier to influence them, which is what other people use, pushing them to suicide;
- they are most impressionable, emotional, gullible;
- they are most subjected to manipulation from the side, easily become controlled;
- they have a transitional age and they believe that no one understands them and that everyone and everything around them is against them and the only way out is death;
- they spend a lot of time on social networks, in which there are many factors pushing for suicide, where there is a lot of information about this topic (girl, 24 years old, student). It is difficult to disagree with this, since the news about the committed suicide is very vividly and thoroughly covered in the Russian media, thereby generating thoughts of suicide even in those who have never thought about it;
- at the age of 13-17, there is a blooming "youthful all-or-nothing mindset", the development of independence, a desire for freedom appears, to do what one wants, but on the way of an adolescent to a dream appears the limiter, the parent with instructions that the child perceives as an attempt to "cut wings". On this basis, conflicts arise and as an argument, the child begins to oppose the will of the parents with his life.

One in four students considers children under 13 years of age as the most vulnerable group. Their social portrait includes several characteristics:

- they do not know how to understand, but they do everything to make a statement;
- they are too gullible, naive and all-or-nothing mindset is very developed in them;
- they are alone a lot since parents are at work;
- they are often bullied and become unprotected.

One in five (18%) believes that students are also a vulnerable category. This point of view was justified by a minimal set of characteristics: the inability to cope with one's problems and the fear of passing into adulthood due to uncertainty in the future. The authors believe that the students showed solidarity with their peers since they themselves currently compose this cohort.

The least vulnerable category was working youth, who, according to 3% of interview participants, could commit suicide due to financial difficulties or family problems.

Further, the interviewees were asked an open question, to which the authors of the article wanted to get a reliable answer: did they experience suicidal thoughts in the past or present? An analysis of the responses showed that just over half of the respondents (63%) have never experienced suicidal thoughts in the past or

at the present time. The opposite opinion - yes, I experienced - was expressed by a little more than a third of students (37%). In our opinion, not all students openly answered the question, and we think that they will not be able to cross the psychological barrier - admit to strangers, adults about themselves, about their, albeit in the past, secret feelings that they hid from family, close people. Here are indicative answers of two girls who said that "every person in his life feels the call for death, wanted to take one's own life that he considered unjust" (22 years old, girl, student); "it seems to me that every person thought about this" (21 years old, girl, student).

Here are a few answers of students who thought about this in the past or the present: "there were discussions about it: what will happen and how it can solve any problems" (male, 21); "at some moments I thought that no one supported and understood me" (female, 20); "sometimes such thoughts visited me: after failures at school or quarrels with parents (male, 21). In our opinion, these fragments of the interview are useful for representatives of various ages in order to think about themselves, about their friends, about their children, and perhaps help save someone else's life from a fatal step today or in the future.

At the same time, the answers of those interviewees who have never experienced suicidal thoughts (they are no less but more significant for all people who are not indifferent to the topic) are also of interest. The conclusion that we formulated after analyzing all interviews boils down to the fact that in families where parents pay attention to their children, communicate, are interested in their problems, and children, in turn, feel the love and care of their parents, suicidal thoughts, as a rule, do not arise. For example, here is a fragment from one interview: "I have not experienced such thoughts and will not! My parents paid me enough attention, supported me, I went to various clubs, so I didn't care about suicide" (girl, 21 years old).

Those who answered positively to the previous question had the opportunity to tell us about the reasons for which suicidal thoughts arose. Students of the Industrial University of Tyumen in the past or present most often had suicidal thoughts because of:

- conflicts with parents, teachers or friends (44,4 %);
- drug or alcohol intoxication (33.3 %);
- personal experiences or problems: loneliness, lack of meaning in life (18,5 %);
- debt (3,8 %).

Here is a fragment of an interview with a girl (22 years old, student), which clearly characterizes the role of the family in the life of the child and the importance of personal contact with parents: "in the distant past, the desire to die was connected with personal experiences and problems with parents, especially with the mother, who, just as now, puts her personal interests above my happiness. All this became a cause of conflict, hatred and desire to die, which is often used as an argument by the mother."

43% of students know of suicide cases among friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and relatives of the interviewees. Moreover, every third of them described well-known cases. At the same time, slightly more than half of the students interviewed (57%) admitted that they did not know cases of suicide among friends, acquaintances, neighbors and relatives.

The causes of suicide among friends, acquaintances, neighbors and relatives are as follows (in decreasing order of importance):

- unrequited love;
- dysfunctional family, family conflicts;
- loneliness;
- participation in a death group in Vkontakte ("they were told "if you jump from a height, you won't fall, because you will have wings." And the guys, the schoolchildren did it");
- drug abuse.

Less common were reasons such as: bullying by peers, to spite teachers and parents who did not understand them; mental disorders and pressure; financial difficulties. Many participants in the interview

admitted that they could not understand and accept the fact of suicide, because, in their opinion, death was not compatible with these people: "we don't know the reason, no one could assume that such a cheerful guy, activist, participant of a comedy team was capable of suicide" (21 years old, young man, student).

Next, we asked about the main causes of suicidal behavior. The main causes (factors) of suicidal behavior (hierarchy of responses of interviewees, in descending order) were as follows:

- unrequited (unhappy) love, jealousy;
- state of drug or alcohol intoxication;

- loneliness, asociality, deep and incorrect immersion in philosophical topics; complexes; personal experiences, the realization that life is worth nothing since a person does not see further development or is not able to solve any problems; loss of meaning in life;

- family conflicts (quarrels with parents, the problem of "fathers and children", violence, bullying); when parents do not love their children, do not pay attention to them;

- conflicts with peers (misunderstanding, insults, violence, bullying); the desire to prove their uniqueness; media and the Internet, which increasingly cover suicide issues;

- various groups on social networks luring adolescents and youth into them; the gloom and hopelessness emanating from the cases and from "opinion leaders";

- mental illness, depression, nervous breakdowns, mood swings, apathy; psychological trauma;

- problems at school (large study loads) and with teachers;

- youthful all-or-nothing mindset and adolescent stupidity, bad company;

- debt and inability to pay it;

- poor social adaptation to Western culture provoking individualism, competition, hedonism, deformation of values.

## **DISCUSSION**

Foreign scientists who study the development of suicidal behavior among adolescents and young people identify two groups of risk factors: potential ("creating the ground") and relevant (clinical). The most common factor in suicidal behavior, according to G.S. Bannikov, T.P. Pavlova, K.A. Koshkina, A.V. Letova, is a conflict in family relationships and a conflict of personality structure. Actual factors affecting the development of suicidal behavior and included in its structure include a depressed state with feelings of resentment, insult, humiliation, despair, hopelessness, loneliness, unrequited love, anger. Both groups of factors are closely related, but under different conditions they carry a different load and acquire different importance (Khairullina et al.: 2016).

Analysis of life story materials and in-depth interviews collected in 2014 by T.G. Islamshina, G.F. Khamzina showed that older generation negatively assesses the disappearance of warmth and sincerity from interpersonal communication; worries about the fact that people's relations are becoming pragmatic, and the distance between the older and new generations in value orientations is increasing more and more. So, a woman, 75 years old, with a secondary education, a pensioner, wrote (and this is typical for representatives of this generation as a whole): "Our generation grew up in deprivation and want, but we loved our parents, tried not to upset them with our rash acts, respected their words, judgments, life views. In the village, everyone tried to help each other (by common efforts someone was building a house, someone was helping to bring firewood, hay). Respect for elders was the rule. In the presence of children and elders, no one used foul language. I would like such traditions to be revived at the present time" (Islamshina, Khamzina: 2014, 468).

Another informant, a woman, 68 years old, with a secondary education in construction, a pensioner, writes: "Young people spend their free time very poorly - I see from my granddaughter: they don't go to the

theater, museums, occasionally go to the movies, all she sees is a computer, cell phone, the Internet. She has many so-called virtual friends on different networks, but no real friends, one might say”

Due to the fact that for the majority of interview participants, the most dangerous period of life remained in the (albeit not distant) past, when suicides most often occurred, when thoughts about this receded into the background, we considered it important to ask students what measures to prevent suicidal behavior they consider effective. This will allow parents, teachers, mentors to be useful, important for children and adolescents and to reach out in difficult situations.

## **CONCLUSION**

Analysis of the responses of students who took part in the interview showed that almost three quarters of them consider the communication of children with their parents as the main preventive measure to combat suicidal behavior. In direct and indirect form, the answers boil down to the fact that in a prosperous, complete, happy family, a child, in principle, cannot have thoughts of suicide. In such a family, parents and children constantly communicate, talk, share their problems. “The family is the main support of a person that helps to cope with life’s difficulties and only it can fully protect each member,” this was said by a young man (21 years old, a student). Parents through communication with their children learn about the interests of their child, develop their life goals and interests, show that the child is needed, dear and loved. Communicate more with children, call for walks, offer help, try to find out what is bothering them and explain that everything can be solved. Enroll them in different clubs to minimize free time. At the same time, do not forget to exercise control over the interests of your child, to be interested in what kind of people they communicate with, how relations develop within teenage groups. Parents should pay as much attention as possible to their children so that the latter spend as little time as possible on the Internet. It’s no secret, and it was noted above, that parents often choose to communicate on the Internet, rather than with their child. Note that every fifth interviewee peremptorily suggested closing all social networks altogether, restricting access to sites that provide this kind of information. Thus, communicating with children, it is necessary to understand what the child has in their soul, in their head. There is no need to protect them from their peers, you need to find a compromise. Being interested in social networks, do not intrude on personal life, but try to make sure that they themselves show and tell everything. Talk more about what parents experience when children commit suicide.

Three-quarters of students called the next preventive measure extracurricular activities with a school psychologist, open classes with specialists. This measure becomes relevant if the child does not have parental support, then open propaganda at school will be an important decision.

One out of ten suggested not talking about suicide, just like pedophilia, not creating the problem of suicide in society through the media, not discussing on television. The same number of students offered treatment with a psychologist because they are better at understanding problems than parents who can aggravate the situation.

In conclusion, we note that the data obtained by the authors during the interview revealed the conditions for the formation of suicidal behavior of students of a technical university, based on which it is possible to develop measures to prevent suicidal behavior. The data we received prompted us to further research on this topic. In the near future, we plan to conduct a mass questionnaire survey of Tyumen schoolchildren and students using the author’s tools, which will allow us to propose measures to reduce suicidal thoughts among children, adolescents and youth, and parents to realize that the lives of their children depend not so much on the school and environment, but first of all on them.

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## **BIODATA**

**Yulia Zufarovna BOGDANOVA:** PhD in Philology, Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Foreign Languages, Northern Trans-Ural State Agricultural University. Scientific interests: pedagogy of higher education, social sciences, linguistics.

**Zinira Foatovna ABRAROVA;** Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, Associate professor of the department of sociology and youth work. Works at FSBEI HE "Bashkir State University", faculty of philosophy and sociology. Research interests: sociology, youth sociology, pedagogical support of work with youth, professional and ethical foundations of work with youth.

**Vladimir Fedorovich KOVROV:** Candidate of Sociological Sciences, Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology and Youth Affairs. Works at FSBEI HE "Bashkir State University", Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology. Research interests: political sociology, sociology of the electorate, social policy, career guidance, youth sociology, youth employment.

**Nursafa Gafurovna HAJRULLINA;** Doctor of Sociology, Professor of the Department of Marketing and Municipal Management, Tyumen Industrial University. Research interests: ethnosociology, interethnic relations, sociology of family and youth, intergenerational relations. Author of over 400 scientific papers, 18 monographs and 18 study guides, 40 publications in Scopus and 6 in WoS.