

OPINIONS ABOUT ELDERLY SUICIDE AND REASONS FOR NOT KILLING ONESELF AMONG COMMUNITY-DWELLING YOUNG-OLD CHINESE ELDERS

Y.-F. Tsai¹, Y.-J. Chen², S.-H. Lee³, H.-L. Lee⁴

¹School of Nursing, Chang Gung University, ²Department of Internal Medicine, ³Department of Psychiatry, ⁴Department of Nursing, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital at Linkou, Tao-Yuan, Taiwan R.O.C.

Background: Suicide rates are high for older persons worldwide. However, no literature could be found on young-old people's opinions about elderly suicide and the beliefs/expectations that protect them from attempting suicide.

Objectives: To explore opinions about elderly suicide among community-dwelling young-old people in Taiwan and their reasons for not killing themselves.

Method: A qualitative descriptive design was used. Young-old (65-74 years old) outpatients were recruited by convenience from two randomly selected medical centers in northern Taiwan if they had never expressed suicidal ideas and had no severe cognitive deficit. Data were collected in individual interviews and analysed by content analysis.

Results: Among 31 participating young-old people, most participants (87.1%) had heard of elderly suicide. Their opinions about elderly suicide reflected negative emotional reactions (32.3%), judgmental attitudes (32.3%), could happen after losing the meaning of life (9.7%), and expectations of social welfare (9.7%). Reasons for not killing themselves fell into six major themes: living well (32.3%), suicide cannot resolve problems (22.6%), fear of humiliating their children (16.1%), religious beliefs (12.9%), never thought about suicide (12.9%), and living in harmony with nature (12.9%).

Conclusion: Among the factors that prevented participants from killing themselves, perceptions of living well and of children's filial behavior, as well as rational thinking could be adjusted. These factors can be addressed and improved by healthcare providers and policy makers to prevent suicide among the young-old. Our findings may also serve as a reference for geriatric researchers in western countries with increasing numbers of elderly ethnic minority immigrants.