

Suicide of two Russian soldiers

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Abstract

Background> The medical model of suicide ignores history and promotes a distorted view of suicide. **Aim:** In pursuit of a broader (more helpful view) we examine the deaths of two Russian soldiers during the early years of the 29th century. **Finding:** Although details are limited, there was no evidence of mental disorder. These seasoned soldiers (apparently unacquainted) took their lives at separate times in response to defeat and cultural change, which they found unacceptable. **Key message:** Suicide is not always triggered by mental disorder; history is a valuable source of information regarding human reactions to circumstances.

Introduction

Suicide is poorly understood because of our refusal to examine and accept the history of the last 4000 years. Wisdom up to and including the pioneering perspective of Emil Durkheim (1897/1951) has been neglected in favour of a medical model which conceptualizes all suicide as the result of mental disorder (Jamison, 1999). This model has been rejected as a myth by the WHO (2015), but persists.

To better understand suicide, we have studied historical accounts of suicide across times and regions, and fictional accounts by Tolstoy (Pridmore & Pridmore, 2011) and Dostoyevsky (Pridmore & Pridmore, 2015).

Again, to better understand suicide, we recently we examined historical accounts of suicide by two prominent Russian soldiers.

Alexei Kaledin

Alexei Kaledin (1861-1918), the son of a Don Cossack, joined the army in 1882. He fought in the Russo-Japanese war, and during World War One he rose to be become commander of the Russian Eight Army – and enjoyed a number of successes in the early years.

1917 was the beginning of a period of prolonged turmoil in Russia. In the February Revolution the Tsarist autocracy was overthrown and replaced by a Provisional Government. The October Revolution (2017) led on to the Russian Revolution. The October Revolution was an armed insurrection in Petrograd in which the Bolshevik Party (which became the Communist Party) established the Military Revolutionary Committee.

Kaledin opposed military reforms initiated by the Provisional Government and was dismissed in May 2017. He went back to the regions of the Don and became a local leader. He expressed support for the Cossack people and the need for local autonomy.

Following the success of the Bolsheviks at the October Revolution, Kaledin participated in raising an anti-Bolshevik Army, to preserve the independence of the Don Cossack regions. However, his troops were repeatedly crushed. On January 29, 1918 Kaledin was forced to flee and on February 11 he suicided by gunshot (Kalic & Brown, 2017).

Aleksandr Krymov

Aleksandr Krymov (1871-1917), the son of a noble Polish family, was a Russian military commander during the Russo-Japanese War and One.

In the days before his death, the leadership of political/military power in Petrograd (Russian capital) was in a state of flux. The facts of the time have not been discovered – some events of the time are gathered under the heading of the Kolnilov affair.

On August 24, 1917, General Lavr Kolnilov claimed the position of Commander-in Chief, a position he held for only 3 days. During that time, he appointed Krymov commander of the detached Petrograd Army, with orders to advance into Petrograd to rescue the Provisional Government from an anticipated Bolshevik coup. However, Kolnilov was deposed and Krymov was ordered to cease his advance. Krymov and his troops were humiliated by shouted insults from Bolsheviks. He and his staff were travelling in a Cossack train – their progress was halted, and they were abused by railway workers.

On August 30 Krymov travelled to Petrograd to speak with the new Commander-in-chief. At that meeting he explained he had entered the city to preserve peace, but he was ordered to stand military trial.

Krymov went from that meeting to a friend's house where he said, "The last card for saving the Fatherland has been beaten – life is no longer worth living" (Buttar 2017). He wrote a letter to Kolnilov, and shot himself in the chest.

Discussion/Conclusion

Alexei Kaledin (1861-1918) was the son of a Don Cossack. He was unable to defend his homeland and took his own life. Aleksandr Krymov (1871-1917), was caught up in political intrigue and took his own life.

Both men were seasoned soldiers. Kaledin was 66 years of age and Krymov was 41 years of age – both fought in the Russo-Japanese and World War One.

Kaledin saw his Cossack homeland being overrun and changed. Krymov regretted that “the Fatherland has been beaten”.

The similarities are considerable. These were loyal soldiers who took their lives rather live with the distress of change and associated loss. (Krymov also faced a military trial, but this arose from a preparedness to fight to protect earlier ways.)

There was no information to suggest suicide as a result of mental disorder. These were chaotic times and complete information is lacking. However, sufficient information indicates these seasoned officers took their own lives in a setting of disappointment, change and potential criticism/consequences.

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