

Refused admission motive for suicide

MONTREAL(CUP)—A student from Zaire who had just been refused admission to Ecole Polytechnique, the engineering school associated with l'Universite de Montreal, killed himself in his apartment last December 20.

Immediately after he discovered he would not be accepted for the winter semester, Kapajika Ndala, 29, went back to his Drolet St. apartment and "provoked an explosion with the help of gasoline."

Ndala, who had studied at Laval University in Quebec City since 1980, was not turned down from Polytechnique because of his grades.

"He applied to Polytechnique too late," said Sergeant-detective

Martin Naud of Montreal's arson squad. "They told him to try again next semester."

"So he killed himself," Naud said.

Ndala moved to Montreal in September last year and, unable to find work, re-applied to school. He also applied for political refugee status at that time.

"We think but don't know for sure what the motive (for the suicide) was," Naud said. "He killed himself because he was discouraged; he couldn't get into school."

Violane Ares, a McGill graduate student who works for McGill Nightline, a night-time listening service for students in crisis, said foreign students like Ndala are under even more pressure than other students.

"Imagine coming from outside the country," Ares said. "He had obligations towards whoever was paying for his education."

"Polytechnique is very well-known in engineering," Ares said. "He probably was under intense pressure to get into that school."

"In some families it would be considered an affront to be refused from a school," she said.

Pressure on international students to do well in Quebec schools has increased as the price of tuition for foreigners has risen. Currently, foreign students pay \$5,800 a year to study in Quebec, compared to \$570 in 1978.

Ares said many calls to McGill Nightline are from foreign students. Because they are under more pressure and do not have friends in Montreal, foreign students become even more lonely and confused, she said.

"They don't know anyone in town and don't know where to turn to," she said.

Suicide rates are higher among university and college or CEGEP students than those who do not seek higher education, according to Brian Mishara, the president of Suicide Action Montreal. And studies in England, somewhat confirmed in the U.S., show suicide rates are higher at more prestigious universities than at so-called "red-brick" universities.

The rate is always higher around exam times. The University of Connecticut locks the doors leading to the roofs of high buildings during exam times, said Mishara, also a psychology professor at l'Universite du Quebec a Montreal.

There are nine suicides per week in Montreal, and Quebec is the adolescent suicide capital of North America. Suicide Action Montreal polled a group of CEGEP students about suicide. Sixty-five per cent said they had "seriously thought of killing themselves."

Among young adults, suicide has become the number two killer in Quebec, second only to car accidents.

Asked if any students who call McGill Nightline are considering suicide, a volunteer who asked he name not be used said, "It has been mentioned."

"We've heard that. People don't call up and say 'I'm going to kill myself' but there is that kind of pressure. It has been mentioned," she said.

Ares said: "We are trained to deal with suicide calls. We allow people to let off some steam. It is a safety valve."

"We hope that we will have an effect on the suicide statistics," she said.

In Quebec in 1982, 72 men and eight women between the ages of 15 and 19 committed suicide. One hundred thirty-one men and 21 women between age 20 and 24 killed themselves that year, the last for which statistics are available.

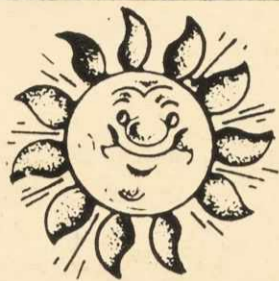
This rate has been stable since 1978, the first year these statistics were compiled. But the overall number of suicides in Quebec has doubled since 1970.

"Most college students try to discuss it (suicide) beforehand, but we refuse to hear their cries for help," Mishara said.

Mishara said suicide is a taboo topic in Quebec, while primary suicide prevention training is mandatory in high schools of some U.S. states.

ALL ABOUT TANS

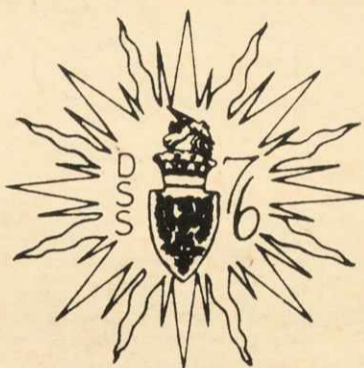
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