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# Table of Contents

1. Teen's suicide reflects stress of China's culture..... 1

## Teen's suicide reflects stress of China's culture

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**Abstract:** Although 16-year-old Wu Wenwen's suicide occurred in January, during high school end-of-term tests, it is resonating during this week's college exams. "Pressure from study and exams is a top reason for psychological problems among Chinese youth," said Jin Wuguan, director of the Youth Psychological Counseling Center at Shanghai's Ruijin Hospital. Most Chinese schools still lack counselors, and teachers receive little training in spotting emotional distress, Jin said. Parents are little help, often piling on pressure while ignoring children's emotional development, he said. "It's a basic unwillingness or inability to recognize and deal with emotional problems," Jin said.

**Links:** [Linking Service](#)

**Full Text:** A teenager's suicide after being barred from a key high school exam for **not tying back her hair** underscores the intense pressure on millions of Chinese who began taking annual college entrance tests Wednesday. Worries are rising about academic stress. There are 2.6 million places at China's universities, but the competition is fierce -- 9.5 million youths are taking the three-day exams that are widely viewed as crucial to career and financial success. Although 16-year-old Wu Wenwen's suicide occurred in January, during high school end-of-term tests, it is resonating during this week's college exams. According to her family and newspaper accounts, Wenwen drowned herself after she was stopped at the exam room door because her hair wasn't tied back as her school required. She returned in barrettes but was told the exam had started and she was too late to take it. Wenwen phoned her mother in tears and then disappeared. Her body was found that night in a nearby lake. As in Japan and South Korea, schooling in China has become a nail-bitingly stressful ordeal for children and parents alike, one that experts say causes undue emotional distress. **"Pressure from study and exams is a top reason for psychological problems among Chinese youth,"** said Jin Wuguan, director of the Youth Psychological Counseling Center at Shanghai's Ruijin Hospital. **In China's increasingly success-oriented cities, academic stress is seen as a rising cause of youth suicides and even murders of parents** by children unhinged by pressure to perform. China doesn't keep comprehensive statistics on student suicides, but Jin said health care professionals see the problem worsening, even among elementary school pupils. **Most Chinese schools still lack counselors, and teachers receive little training in spotting emotional distress, Jin said. Parents are little help, often piling on pressure while ignoring children's emotional development, he said. "It's a basic unwillingness or inability to recognize and deal with emotional problems,"** Jin said. Wang Yufeng, at Peking University's Institute of Mental Health, **estimates the rate of emotional disorders such as depression and paranoia among Chinese students under age 17 at up to 32 percent -- a total of 30 million students. Others say the figure may be as high as 50 percent. A survey last year by the government said nearly 58 percent of students felt highly stressed by academic pressures.** Chinese youth now enjoy greater material comfort and personal freedoms than their parents' generation but are **more emotionally fragile**, experts say. Students educated before economic reforms began in the early 1980s were reared amid austerity and ideals of self-sacrifice. Under the job-assignment system prevailing until the early 1990s, graduates could expect the Communist Party to decide their futures. Teens in China are largely preoccupied by the same worries as those in the West -- exams, jobs and the opposite sex. **"Kids these days haven't been through what we went through. Their hearts haven't been toughened up, and they're distracted by all these other concerns,"** Wenwen's father, Wu Lijun, said in an interview. Wu has sued the school and local education bureau over the death. A hearing

was held in April, but no verdict has been announced. School officials wouldn't comment. Illustration Caption: Associated Press Teacher uses metal detector to scan student for cell phone or other devices before national college entrance exams in Nanjing, China. Credit: ASSOCIATED PRESS

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