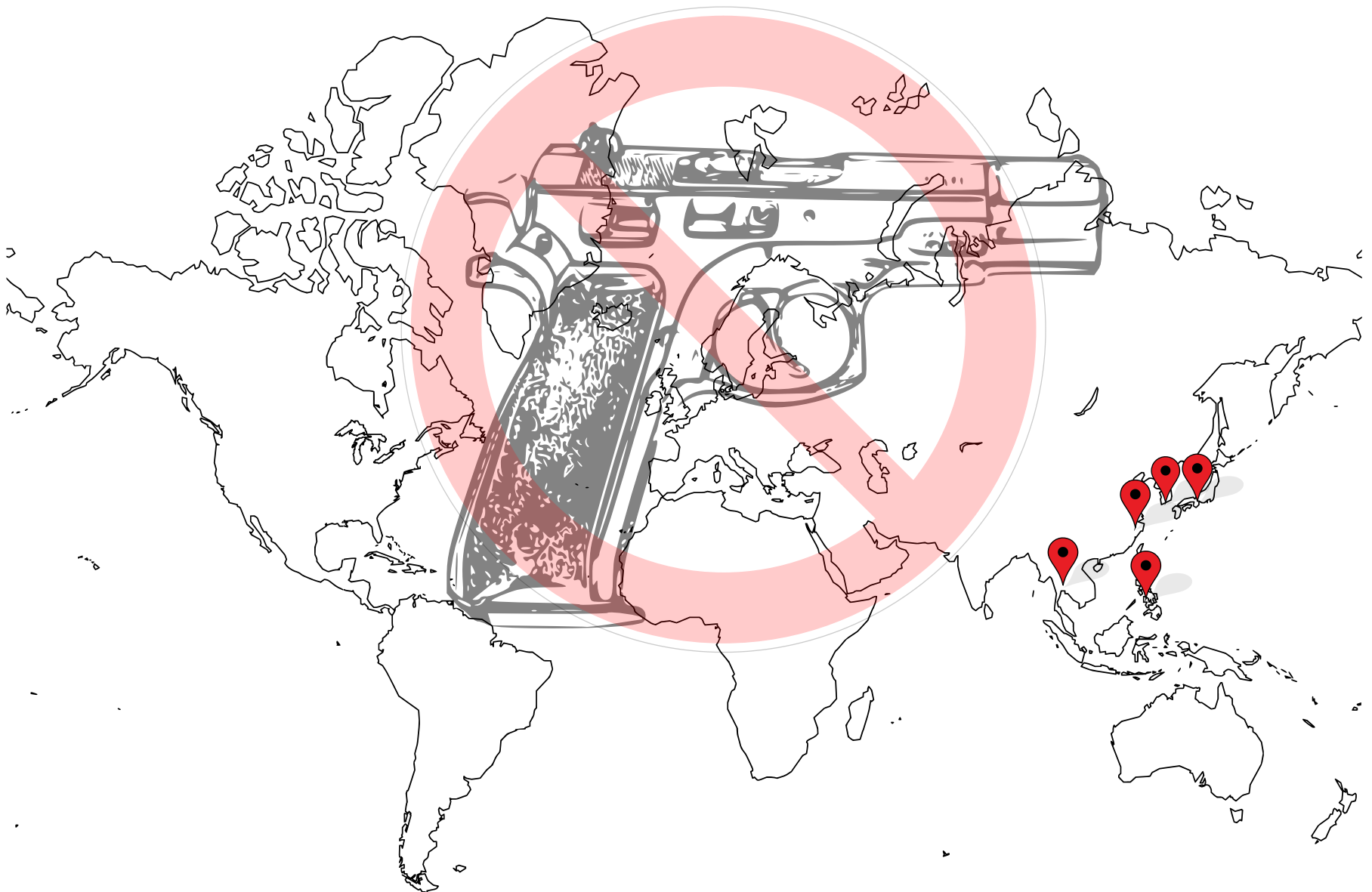


# The Changing Face Of Violence In East Asia



## Summary

As the assassination of Japan's former Prime Minister completes two months, we examine the patterns of rising violence in East Asian societies, against the backdrop of the Covid-19 Pandemic. We take a look at the Pandemic induced social isolation and the associated psycho-social impact as mediating variables, that have acted as trigger points for shift towards an extrinsic expression of violence in the East.

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# Introduction

On 8th July, 2022 Japan witnessed an unprecedented incident. **Shinzo Abe San**, a stalwart leader was assassinated during a wayside election rally. While the eyes of the audience were glued to the television and the news network, there was a global outcry, *"Are you sure this happened? People don't even carry a paper cutter in Japan?"*, such was the apprehension. Yet, it did happen and turned out to be a dark reality. Shinzo Abe San was soon pronounced dead.

Two months forward to his death anniversary, we take a deeper look at the threads of the changing social fabric of East Asia.

East Asia was largely seen as a habitat of safe communities, full of promises pertaining to ease of business ecosystems. These societies were known for their workforce grind, and a reluctance to voice opinions among both employees and citizens. In essence, we can describe East Asia as societies as having a **High Adherence Quotient**.

This makes some questions pertinent to find answers to: how did an adherent society resort to incidents of school gun violence in Singapore, stabbing incident at a hospital in Shanghai and Hong Kong? What were those exact **pent triggers** that culminated into a **vicious expression of violence**?

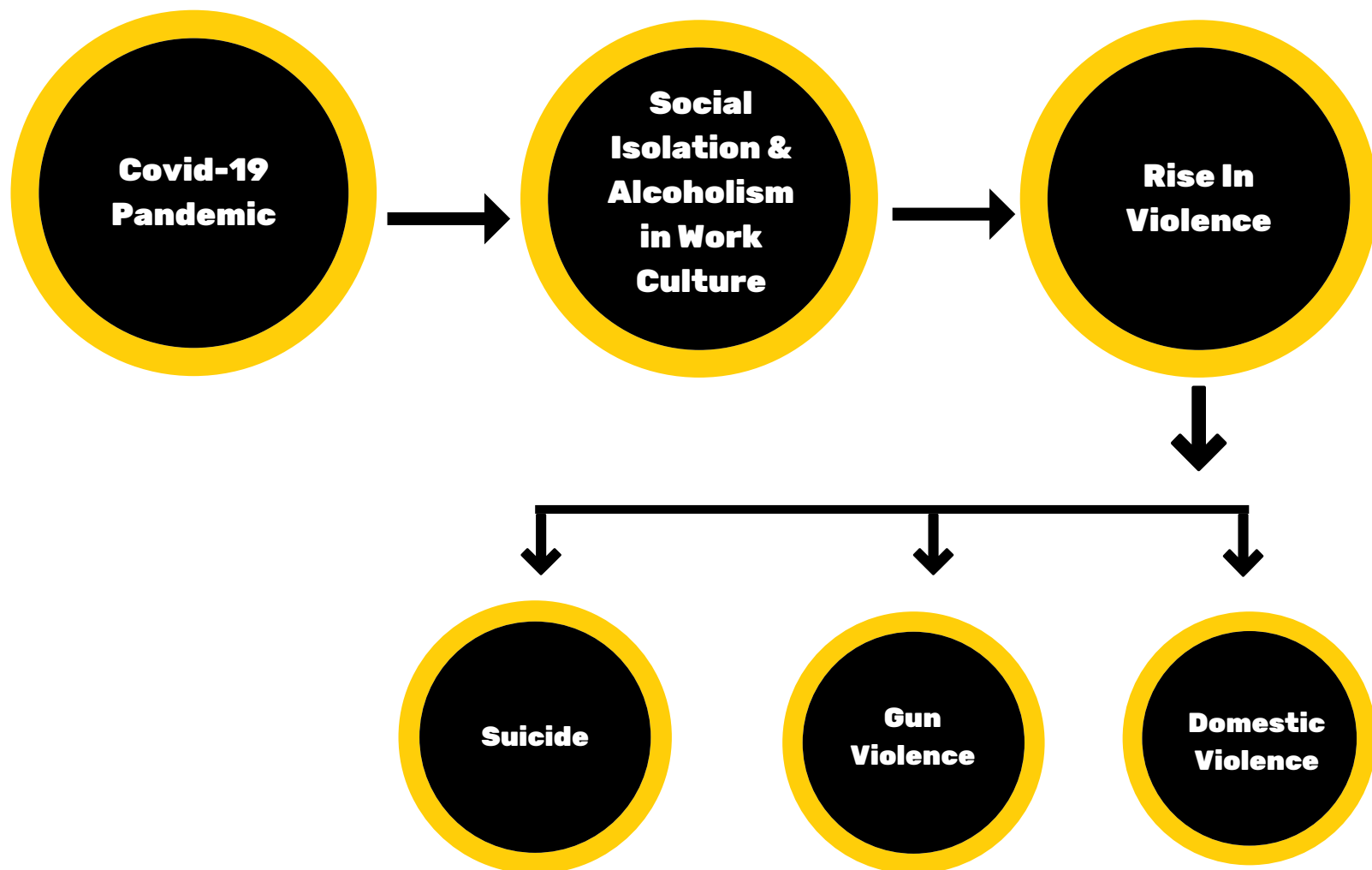
Based on a **comparative analysis on violence**, the west has an **extrinsic expression** of violence, translating into, *"I am upset, so I harm others...I blame the world for my state of world...so I have the right to destroy the world"*.

In comparison, the east has an **intrinsic expression** *"I am upset, I will go into a shell... I won't talk to anyone... this is the end of world... I will commit suicide"*. While the west is known for mass shooting/active shooter incidents, the east has been infamous for its suicide rates, with Japan having a Ministry of Suicide!

What made a self-harming society take out its **vengeance on society**? Were these blind spots or did we ignore the warning signs and chose to turn blind to them? As a Threat Analyst working on Prevention of Crime, these signs were very evident. We take a look at the triggers and the effects.

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# Rise In Violence: The Premise



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In recent years, the expression of aggression has morphed into physical violence, against the backdrop of Asian societies coping with the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated **social isolation**.

Many countries resorted to lockdowns to prevent the spread of infection. While these lockdowns reduced the spread of infection, several negative psychological effects were reported, including a high prevalence of symptoms, like **depression and anxiety**. In East Asian societies, the effect of Covid-19 lockdowns was exacerbated by a pre-existing culture of social withdrawal. Some of the effects acted as **trigger points for an extrinsic manifestation of aggression, as the pandemic receded**. The scenario has been further exacerbated by the existing grueling work culture and alcoholism.

Theories of crime examine how instant and persisting restraints on population movements can influence crime levels. **Individual and Structural strain theories indicate that increased levels of stress and negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration and anger, caused due to isolation, can lead to an increase in criminal motivations.**

In this vein, social isolation associated with COVID-19 containment policies and the resulting **psycho-social impact** can be seen as **intervening variables in the rise of physical expression of violence in East Asian Societies**.

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# The Pandemic and Isolation

The **COVID-19 pandemic** led to the adoption of strict **physical distancing** and **isolation measures**. Studies have shown that **loneliness**, which is now considered as a public health problem, increased during the COVID-19 pandemic in the wake of social distancing measures. During the first mild lockdown in **Japan**, a significant increase in psychological distress and depression was reported.

The experience of social isolation induced by the pandemic has been no different in South Korea than the other countries. China was the first country to be engulfed in the COVID-19 pandemic, and it suffered immensely under the situation. On 23 January 2020, the central government of China imposed a strict **no contact lockdown** in Wuhan and similar lockdowns followed in other cities.

Social isolation usually refers to a **deprivation social relationships or connections**, whereas loneliness can be explained as the **subjective experience of social isolation**. Both social isolation and loneliness have been found to have negative effects on the well-being of an individual. These detrimental effects can be interpreted by the stress-buffering and main effects models of social relationships

The **strict lockdown policies** in East Asian countries led to complete social isolation and negative consequences on the individual well being of the citizens, as well as a breakdown of the larger societal structures.

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## Case Overview: Shanghai Hospital Stabbing



On 09 July 2022, four people were fatally wounded in a **mass stabbing incident at a hospital in Shanghai, China**.

On the morning of the incident, the police department started receiving frantic calls that there was someone stabbing people at the Ruijin hospital, which is located in the city's Huangpu district. At the scene of the incident, on the 7th floor of the clinic, the police found a knife-wielding man holding a group of people hostage.

Videos of people fleeing the scene of crime were circulated widely on Wechat groups and on Weibo, inducing a state of panic.

The mass stabbing incident was the second reported stabbing incident after a COVID-19 lockdown of the financial hub was lifted early in June.

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# From 996 To Bai Lan: Understanding China's Work Culture

The **996 work culture** responds to working 12 hours per day, from 9 am to 9 pm, for six days a week: 72 hours per week. This work culture was deemed **illegal in August 2021**.

In East Asian nations, there is a general trend of companies paying huge bonuses to some employees, enticing them to work more overtime. The intense work culture has met with online and offline criticism. Cities in China are also infamous for being centers of heavy post-work drinking.

Young people in China, exhausted by this culture of hard work with low reward are highlighting the need for a lifestyle change by "lying flat". This trend, known as "**tang ping**", emerged in 2021, amid the pandemic. It is described as opposing society's pressures to perform well while working long shifts. Over time, this trend has turned into a different direction – **bai lan** (摆烂) meaning *leave him rot*. Young Chinese people say that their '**ideals cannot be achieved**' and many of them have given up. They are voluntarily withdrawing from the pursuit of certain goals because they are too difficult to achieve.

On Weibo, one of the biggest social media platforms in China, **bai lan related topics have generated hundreds of millions of views and discussions since March 2022**. These movements opposing the grueling work culture for a low-desire life, has prompted many young Chinese to drop out of hard work – leading to a **slacker culture**.

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## Case Overview: Deaths Due To China's Work Culture



In January 2021, in a video widely circulated on Chinese social media, 45-year-old delivery driver **Liu Jin poured gasoline and set himself on fire** outside a distribution station for Eleme in the eastern city of Taizhou.

In a similar case, a 43-year-old delivery driver **collapsed on the job and died** while delivering food for Eleme.

In December 2020, a 22-year-old employee at a Chinese e-commerce giant Pinduoduo **collapsed while walking home** with colleagues around 1.30am. She died six hours later.

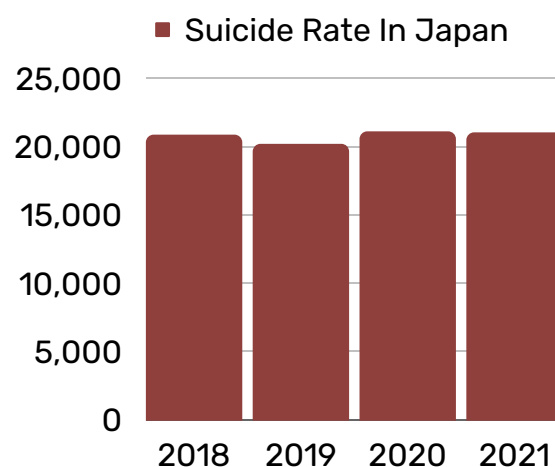
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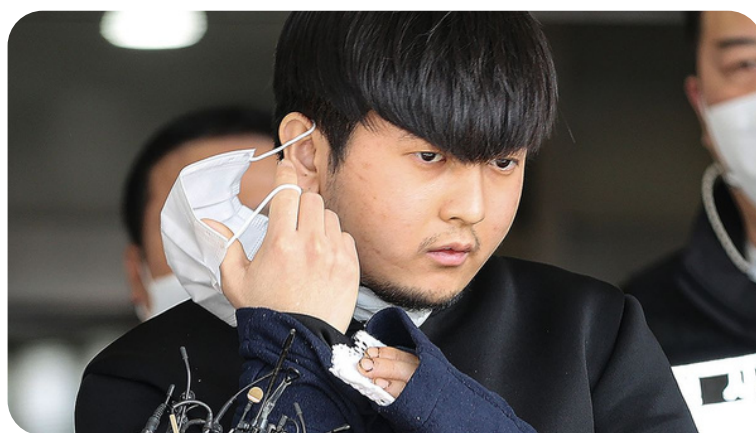
# Suicide Patterns

**Japan**, a country with a high rate of suicide, experienced a **surge in suicide cases during the pandemic**. The coronavirus pandemic led to 8,000 more suicides in Japan between March 2020 and June 2022. **Suicides in Wuhan, China** the city where the virus was first identified, were 79% higher in the first quarter of 2020 (under lockdown) than in the same period a year earlier. Searches in Shanghai for “psychological counselling” on Baidu, a search engine, rose by 253% that month.

**Suicide in South Korea** occurs at the 12th highest rate in the world. In 2020, suicide became the fifth leading cause of death in the country. The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic and social hardships are seen as factors leading to this rise. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, suicide rates in **Thailand** also saw a steep incline. According to Thailand’s Department of Mental Health, the suicide rate has increased by 22% in the first six months of 2020 during the COVID-19 crisis, compared to the same period in the previous year.



## Case Overview: Stabbings In Seoul



On 23 March, 2021, a 24-year-old South Korean man stabbed a woman and her two daughters at their home in the northeastern part of Seoul. The man was later identified as **Kim Tae Hyun**.

The killer had disguised himself as a delivery man to enter their home on the day of the murder. Local media reports stated that Kim had stayed with the corpses for three days in the house after killing them. He reportedly ate food and drank alcohol at the murder scene. When the police caught him, he had sustained **self-inflicted injuries** on his neck. Kim had also allegedly searched for "the fastest way to kill people" on his smartphone.

# Rise In Violent Crime

Data suggests that **murder-suicides** have been occurring with increased frequency in **Japan**, and even seem to inspire **copycat attacks**. Crime incidents in Japan, the light of the isolation resulting from the pandemic point toward a steady connection between **deviant behavior** and extrinsic expressions of violence. A similar trend can be seen with gun related incidents in Japan in the last few years.

In **China** there has been an upwards trend in mass stabbings in recent years. Such attacks have been linked to people bearing grudges against society aiming to get revenge.

In **Thailand**, school violence and delinquency have been common for years. As the pandemic began, colleges have witnessed an increase in rival gang shootings in Bangkok and elsewhere. In **Philippines**, a similar rise in the cases of active shooter incidents has been reported.

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## Case Overview: The Assassination of Shinzo Abe



**Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe**, was fatally shot from close range during a campaign rally on July 8, 2022.

The shooter was identified as **Tetsuya Yamagami**. He was described by former colleagues as being a lonely individual, adding that he would **"eat lunch alone in his car"** and that "conversations with him never strayed beyond the topic at hand. In March, Yamagami started taking **"unauthorized time off"**. His employment ended on May 15, 2022.

According to reports, Yamagami had searched online for instructions on how to make firearms and ordered parts and gunpowder on the internet as well. In addition to the homemade gun used in the incident, at least five guns were seized from his residence. Police also revealed that Yamagami was **angry at "an organization."** He blamed the Unification Church for his mother's financial problems, and had a grudge against Abe, whom he saw as being associated with the church.

The assassination of Shinzo Abe is indicative of the fact that Japan's image as a low-crime nation makes its **hidden landscape for extreme violence** in the wake of the receding waves of pandemic induced isolation.

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# The Triggers and the After-effects

After an analysis of the trends in the expression of violence after the Pandemic, a pattern can be established between the specific **trigger points** - and the **resulting after-effects**. As the **Covid-19 Pandemic** took root, governments reeled under the combined impact of the outbreak. While the scenario for the general masses was even more grave, with strict isolation and containment policies in place. This led to an already inhibited society experience even further societal disconnect.

An increase was reported in the **sustained use of internet services**, in all East Asian countries, including an increase in time spent playing videogames with violent plots. The interactive nature of activities on the internet as well as **prolonged exposure** to them has been found to influence aggressive behavior, mediated by internal mechanisms.

Further, government surveys reported a sharp incline in the reported cases of **suicide** in almost all East Asian countries after the onset of the pandemic. These nations have already been seeing high rates of suicide due to an existing culture of grueling work conditions and poor mental health infrastructure. The rise in suicide cases is also accompanied by a rise in the number of cases of **interpersonal violence**.

The conditions leading up to the present day increase in rates of violent crimes can be visualized as a **bottleneck**. The specific conditions created by the social isolation and withdrawal from society, as well as changing perception of violence, culminated into several lone wolf attacks that have mired the landscape of East Asia.

These incidents pose a threat to the safe functioning of businesses as well as **organizational resiliency**. If these specific trigger points can be narrowed down and the option of intervention is given a space at the table, it can lead to a reduction in the violent manifestations of these after effects.





# People Resiliency Program

- **RCA on Dip of Productivity:** Dip in productivity is the first symptom of loss of Resilient workforce. The normal treatment prescribed “*Let him/her take leave*”, “*Refer him/ her to EAP counsellor*”. Outsourcing the solution is the current trend of dealing with such issues. Very rarely managers actually spend time to figure the **Root Cause behind the dip of productivity** in a high performing employee. The solutions could be very simple- changes in work schedules and tasks. Dissecting the problem statements can help in solution-based exercises. Not everything requires strategic solutions as many are day to day tactics that could be followed.
  - **Employee Engagement Checkpoints:** This doesn’t mean having fun time, and virtual chai sessions. It demands checking on your colleague through greeting “Good morning” and having a normal day to day conversations. Checking mood meter and being with them in their phases of feeling low.
  - **Solidarity Networks:** Having solidarity groups is a big boost for people to express their thoughts/feelings. Birds of the same feather can flock together and create something beautiful and energetic which needs to be followed as a rationale.
  - **Space to Discuss Threats/Risks:** While one has whistle blower lines and POSH committees, the inherent question lies in, how open and ready is the leadership to hear the bad news of perceived threats. Visible/stated threats always are dealt with, however, the crux of prevention of abuse/harassment is to **hear out the perceived threats and address them at the bud.**
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