

## Review (Narrative)

# Student Suicides

## A Tragic Silent Issue and Potential Solutions

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**SUMMARY**

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 15 and 24. Of them, depression is a notorious contributor, and a suicidal thought is one of the most frightening things a person can face in their lifetime. However, acting on the suicidal thoughts is a far too common scenario for a large population across the world. Of the major contributing reasons, lacking of confidentiality is the one underlying the emerging incidences of student suicide. It is of extremely importance for the student to be protected and the school personnel to be enabled to provide assistance on this issue. It is known about the necessity for providing pertinent assistance, yet it is often difficult to obtain actual information upon the student's real condition. Theoretically, we can figure out a list of the measures solving this problem, like securing a signed release from parents/guardians to communicate with the student's therapist/counselor. Nonetheless, it is hard to put them into practice. Attempting to solve this issue is needed to have a straightforward communication between school and parents or guardians, through which vital decisions concerning needed supports and the student's schedule can be made. All related issues are likely to surface and need to be considered seriously on a case-by-case individual basis. In this review, we will discuss at length about the student suicide and will provide potential solutions to help conquer it. ■

**KEYWORDS** Student suicide; Mental disorder; Depression; Measurement; Psychology

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**S**udhanshu Pandey was 17 year old, a young lad who never seemed to become a victim of depression. He was tall with strong muscles. Hair gelled; he was always known to be a cheerful and happy person among his friends and relatives. He was studying in XI-class at DPS-Noida and felt it difficult to cope with his studies. It was much difficult for him to pass the subjects he chose. But he felt better trying to hide his difficulties regarding studies.

On 4th March 2005, the day his class 11th results were to be announced, Sudhanshu looked unusually hesitating to go to school. He asked his mother to walk till the bus stop with his younger brother and promised her that he would also come with them in a few minutes. Time rolled and when there were no signs of his coming and his mother came back, his room was found locked from inside. Feelings of horror swept over them as they broke the room. Colors faded, mind blank, feelings gone, interests dug deep into the grave, targets blurred, hope at the far edge there remain nothing for a Sadhunshu to desire except an escape. So he did what he thought was an easy doing for him to get rid of the problems. But what could be more disheartening for a mother to find his son's body hung to death from a ceiling fan using her own Sarri (1).

A suicidal note was found on his bed, which stated that he was committing a suicide. Nobody else was involved but the pressure that started to depress him a lot. He said a final good bye to everybody and stated that he loved his family a lot and hoped that they would understand the reason he committed suicide. He loved his brother Siddharth very much and wished him all the best for his future in his final note. He said with grief that the Eco teacher was hated by him the most but also claimed that she wasn't the reason of his suicide though.

Overleaf the suicidal note had been written hurriedly some random lines, which said that I am having my first cigarette after a long time since I am not addicted to it. I have heard from someone that this thing makes it easy to die.

Sudhanshu wasn't the only student who preferred death to the burden of studies. A lot of precious lives are lost due to mere pressure exerted by the exams. Students sometime consider exams to be a matter of life and death. Thinking out of the box is the thing we many times lack to do. Hence we are bound by own limitations and it results horribly bad.

It was December 14, 2013 when a class 8th student Twinkle Thapa who was a resident of Gulmohar Colony set herself burnt to fire just because her mother rebuked her for not studying properly (2). Such are the cases that students prefer death to living just because of the pressure exerted to study when they are unwilling to do. Studies should become a reason to get educated and having a satisfied life, not to take its burden and end in death.

On August 17 2014, a 19-year-old girl named Sapna who was a nursing student hanged herself in Ahir Colony

in Jahangirabad after her mother scolded her over talking to someone perhaps her boyfriend (2). In the underdeveloped countries, these petty matters may lead to death in shape of suicide of murder as well.

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## EPIDEMIOLOGY OF STUDENT SUICIDE

About 0.8 million people commit suicide every year all over the world (3). Of these 135,000 (17%) are inhabitants of India, the nation with 17.5% of world's total population. In between 1987 and 2007, the suicide rate had increased from 7.9 per 100,000 to 10.3 with higher ratio of suicide rates in southern and eastern parts of India (4).

In France the death rate by suicide is very high. Every year around 220,000 people attempt to take their own lives there and 10,000 of those die as a result. It means that the number of suicides in France is almost double that of the UK and Spain. Statistics for 2009 show the average of European Union for the number of suicides per 100,000 people was about 16.8 for men and 4.4 for women. On the other hand, in France the number of suicides was 23.5 and 7.5 respectively, which is indeed alarming (5).

In the year 2011, the number of youth aged 15-24 majority of who consisted of students; the number of deaths in United States by suicide was 4882. Suicide was the 2nd leading cause of death for this age group unfortunately. The 2011 Youth Risk and Behavior Survey found that in the last 12 months among the high school students, 15.8% seriously considered to do suicide; 12.8% made a plan for it; 7.8% attempted the suicide once or more and 2.4% made the suicide attempt that had to be treated by doctor or medical staff (6).

Girls are more likely to attempt suicide, but boys are 4.34 times more likely to die by suicide than girls.

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## RELIABILITY OF SUICIDE STATISTICS

The reliability of statistics for suicide is often questioned. Suicides are under-reported for cultural and religious reasons, as well as due to different classifications and also because of figuring out procedures. They are often masked by some other diagnostic categories of death cause. Unfortunately this does happen and it's a sad reality. (7)

In 2013, the number of deaths by suicide in US was 41,149. It equals one suicide every 13 minutes (8).

About 6.6-7.5 % of undergraduates and 7.1-7.7 % of the graduates seriously considered suicide in America in 2012. Out of them, 2.3% undergraduates and about 2.3% graduates made the plan and 1.1% undergraduates actually committed suicide while 0.6-1.2% graduates did it too (9).

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## KEY FACTORS FOR SUICIDE

The general key factors for suicide include depression, hopelessness, anxiety, isolation and lack of social support, alcohol or drug abuse, loss in relations or financial instability, a family history of suicides, child maltreatment, a history of medical disorders, access to lethal means and especially the unwillingness to seek help. It's well said that no one ever lacks a good reason for suicide (10).

## KEY FACTORS FOR SUICIDES ESPECIALLY IN STUDENTS

The risk factors specific to college students are a new environment, a sudden loss of a social network and of a safety net found at home, the academic pressure. This is especially correct with students who succeed to achieve good results in high school and then find them failing in higher studies. Isolation, lack of coping skills, feeling difficult to adjust to new culture of the institute, failure in subjects and experimentation with drugs or use of alcohol are also key factors.

Though most of the people who are depressed do not usually think about suicide but most of the suicidal people are found depressed. The majority dying by suicide suffers from a major depressive disorder unfortunately unrecognized often and thus untreated.

Another main cause of teenage suicide is time. Younger people who spend longer with such a chaotic emotional state are more likely to commit suicide. Bullying is another prime reason of youngster's suicide. It may occur in the classroom, a playground or somewhere else. The bullies might turn to verbal bullying. Sometimes, it also gets physical and they can suffer from severe injuries too.

When someone kills himself, he not only leaves a body behind but leaves broken heart too, and leaves a question behind: that's "why"? This "why" is a great mystery of suicide? Lives of his dear ones become miserable after him. The sound of why keeps punching them in their heads for they cannot digest the suicide of a person who was some days ago perhaps laughing with them.

## BULLYING

In the last 57 years, at least 250 cases of deaths are reported that are linked to bullying, hazing and ragging, reported in English language newspapers from around the globe (11).

Bully victims are between 2 to 9 times more likely to consider suicide than the non-victims, as per studies by Yale University. A study in Britain found that at least half of the total suicides among young people are related to bullying (12). Ten to 14 year old girls are even at a higher risk for suicide, according to the study above.

In India, deaths many students attempt suicide as they cannot bear the pain of Ragging – physical bullying often

leading towards sexual harassment. The Coalition to Up-root Ragging from Education (CURE) has helped the Supreme Court appointed committee-framing guidelines on ragging, said in the last 12 months, 19 cases of deaths and 4 cases of attempted suicides allegedly because of ragging were reported. The number of cases reported during the time was 164 as against 88 in 2008-09, and 89 in 2007-08 (13).

## RELATION OF SUICIDE WITH HEALTH

Suicide is never related to only psychological problem. It is associated to health problems as well. Suicide among young people and especially students who have to continue study along with life is a major health problem in many societies and preventive measures are strongly recommended (14).

## OTHER REASONS

Parental divorce is another reason where the psychological problems begin to occur. When a loving parent permanently leaves the house, it lit the feelings of abandonment in the student or any human in general.

Student's suicide is a permanent solution to a mere temporary problem. A lack of a long-term future plans and no way of being able to imagine a positive future leads to dispassion as well.

## PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Some protective measures can be taken that are the need of the hour. Developing a supportive social and family network can lessen the pain of anxiety, improving the ability to solve problems and regulate emotions, coping others, getting closer to cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicides and it does help getting over temporary feelings for suicide and most importantly visiting psychiatrist and other health care centers to share the problem and get them set. Consulting some professional psychological physician can be very helpful in figuring out what is happening right now and how to resolve. There is absolutely no shame in getting help and one should take the step-consulting psychologist as soon as possible. It's time that may cause a lot of trouble, time to let the negative feelings bubble under the surface and make chaos in life. When the pressure begins to reach a certain levels, the student begins to attempt suicide. By stepping in early and eliminating the risk factors, the rate of student's suicide can go down. When nobody would step in, it can trigger harsh thoughts of suicide, as they feel too much alone and isolated from the rest of the world.

Getting some peace can help a lot. To run away from trouble is a form of cowardice and while it is true that sui-

cides brave death, he does it not for some noble object but to escape some ill (15).

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for college going students and the number one cause of suicide among them is off course the untreated depression. Joining college may prove to be a hectic transition period in which the student feels lost, lonely, confused, and anxious and a lot stressed. These problems straight away lead towards depression and the untreated depression as mentioned earlier is thus the utmost reason for suicide.

Studies indicate that the students who suffer from suicidal feelings remain much quiet, depressed and socially isolated. It's up to us to identify them and help them recover their lives.

It's very sad that even in the most elite universities, mental health resources suffer and suicide rate is intolerably high. MIT is a school that has a reputation for a student suicide rate. IN 2014-15, six students have died by suicide there and a professor too dies from self-inflicted injuries (16).

In the under-developing country Pakistan and India, the cases of suicide are increasing day by day among students.

In Peshawar, Pakistan a schoolboy committed suicide in February, 2016 shooting himself in Gulbela Village after his love interest stopped talking to him. He was 14 named Suleman studying in Sarhad Grammar school, shot himself after his beloved's parent declined his marriage proposal. The girl's parents insisted that she was too young to get married (17).

The male hostel of Agha Khan University Hospital room 227 has seen two deaths in the last six years – one in 2010 who was 21 year old student belonging to Chitral city and the other on 20th April, 2016 belonging to Gilgit. A second year BS nursing student was found dead on Thursday morning the reason of death is yet unknown. He was said to be a very happy boy and brilliant in studies as well and was studying on full scholarship (18).

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## SUICIDE LEGISLATION

When we discuss the suicide legislation, we come to know that there are people believe it is wrong to commit suicide since the act is selfish and leaves the victim's family to deal with severe distress. Also some view the act of killing oneself as being sinful and against a set of religious regulations.

There are also people who believe that everyone should have a complete freedom to take decision of suicide if they are not able to bear the pain and suffering continuously.

In almost all the cases, the ultimate cause of suicide is related to depression. It is found that the person who ends up committing suicide did so as a result of untreated depression.

Although most of the people do not consider the legality of suicide, failed attempts or assistance in the process can get you into legal trouble as well.

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## IS SUICIDE ILLEGAL?

In most parts of the world, attempting suicide or even following through with the act is considered a crime. But if you are dead, how can suicide be illegal and in which law may still affect you? In some cases, government can seize property of the victim and bills for treatment of corpse can be sent to the living member of the family who would already be suffering a lot due to the suicide.

In some countries, if you attempt suicide and fail doing so, you can be criminalized as a consequence. Most legal results have been created out of religion as well. The Section 309 in the Indian Penal Code puts the punishment for attempted suicide as a maximum punishment to be imprisonment for a term of one year (19).

In Singapore, a person attempting suicide may be imprisoned for up to one year as well (20). However, it is not usually put into practice. It is because it can even make the problem worse by such a punishment.

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## MYTHS ABOUT SUICIDE

Some myths regarding suicide need to be enlightened.

- It's a common saying that he, who is serious about suicide, can be stopped by no mean. However if we study the human nature, those who die by suicide have a desire to live without pain. This desire has become stronger force that drags away the desire to live.
- Its most commonly said that talking about suicide may compel others to think about getting rid of their lives by their own hands. We say, "Don't talk or say in public about suicide and it won't happen". But the fact is, by staying silent on such matters, there is a greater risk of compelling a suicidal person feel even more alone and isolated, which isn't good for their state of mind. When we will discuss it more openly, the victim of depression will feel comfortable discussing his state with the helping hands of the society. Suicide is similar to what cancer was some decades ago. People don't want to talk about it; they don't even want to know about it. We are frightened of it and do not understand it, when actually the issue is medically treatable.
- We often say that the person who committed suicide was insane. Calling someone crazy dismisses the pain they are feeling in the difficult times which is really sad. The victim may possibly suffering of some mental issues but he isn't necessarily insane. In most of the cases, those who die this way suffer continuously from hopelessness, depression, distraught and grief.



- We often say that the person who commits suicide is coward. When people die of cancer or some other terminal disease, we say that they have lost their battle and never look at them with disdain. We never shake our heads or think of them as coward. But when someone commits suicide, we title him/her as a piece of cowardice when it's quite sure that there is nothing in the world to which every human has a more unassailable title than to his own life.

## SIGNS SHOWN BY A SUICIDAL PERSON BEFORE COMMITTING IT

There are many signs by which we can come to know someone is suffering through suicidal feelings.

- The person would talk about suicide. It can be in an explicit manner claiming to kill oneself or implicitly saying that living in this world is not deserved by me or more simply that I am in a constant state of pain
- and difficult to manage it. Beware that any type of this discussion about suicide may indicate a warning.
- If a person lacks excitement for a pleasurable or positive future event, it depicts of the high level of depression, which may lead to suicidal attempt. They may lose interest in things once enjoyed and ceasing long-term hobbies.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs or such substances never consumed before can be a sign.
- Getting isolated from the society and spending less time with friends, family or people whose company was once enjoyed is a major symptom for suicidal attempt. The sleeping habits change and a considerable increase or decrease in sleeping pattern without a medical reason is also a sign of it.
- The person would unusually start considering himself of low-esteem and worthless. He would have inferiority complex and feels shame and guilt. He would just say goodbye to friends, family or other people whom he knows (21). ■

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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