

# Suicide by Students is an Unintentional Murder by Parents, Society, and Education System

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## Abstract

Suicide of students is prominent issue in India. The reason for suicide is not the student but in reality, expectation is the main culprit. Expectations of parents, society, and unrealistic ideals of students. Parental pressure to get an education in a particular area or parental pressure to do best in an academic area is a prominent feature in putting pressure on students. This study is a preview of various research studies and cases of student suicide across India. The findings of this study indicate that parental academic pressure taking education as pride and choosing academics only for their career are the dark power of student suicide. Findings also suggest that it's important for parents, educators, and society as a whole to promote a supportive and balanced approach to education and well-being, focusing on the individual needs and aspirations of students. Access to mental health support and open communication can also play a vital role in addressing this problem.

**Keywords:** Parental pressure, Suicide, Academic pressure, Well-being, Students, India

## Introduction

Parental pressure is the emotional burden parents often place on their children, frequently linked to achievements in academics, conforming to cultural and societal norms, and various other influences. Our society places a significant emphasis on academic excellence, and those who fall short of these expectations often endure harsh criticism, leading to self-doubt about their abilities and intelligence. In today's highly competitive world, students frequently find themselves pushed to their limits by their parents, who desire to secure a prosperous future and success in life for their children. However, this immense pressure not only impedes students' personal growth and learning but also leads to heightened stress and anxiety. The primary driver of parental pressure usually arises from genuine concern for their children's well-being and future employability. Another contributing factor is parents projecting their unfulfilled aspirations onto their children, which can create confusion and inner turmoil for the students. The consequences of these parental pressures are often unhealthy on a broad scale, gradually accumulating and fostering feelings of hopelessness and despair. It's crucial to recognize that this prolonged stress can potentially lead to the development of mental health disorders. Suicide or suicidal tendencies are complex outcomes influenced by a combination of biological, socioemotional, cultural, political, and social justice factors. The predominant catalyst for the rising incidence of student suicides appears to be the relentless high-pressure environment with minimal relief for students. The human psyche is inherently ill-suited to function optimally in such a demanding setting over an extended period. Suicide has been examined from various perspectives, **it is classified as moralist, libertarian, and relativist approach. These are as follow:**

- From Moralists perspective, Kantian ethics indeed emphasizes the intrinsic value of individuals and argues that we should treat each person as an end in themselves, rather than merely as a means to an end. From this standpoint, one could argue that preventing suicide is a moral obligation because it recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. When someone contemplates suicide, they may be viewing themselves as a means to an end (ending their suffering, for instance) rather than recognizing their own intrinsic worth as a human being. This perspective aligns with the broader ethical principle of promoting well-being and preserving the lives of individuals, emphasizing empathy and support for those in distress to help them find alternatives to suicide. The moral perspective is evident in countries such as Singapore and India, where attempted suicide is a punishable offense.
- From the **Libertarian perspective**, In some philosophical and legal contexts, there is a debate about the right to suicide, often framed as a matter of personal autonomy and individual choice. In countries where suicide is decriminalized or euthanasia is legalized, there is a recognition of an individual's right to make decisions about their own life, including the choice to end it in certain circumstances, such as unbearable suffering due to a terminal illness. This perspective emphasizes non-interference from others, respecting the individual's autonomy and rational decision-making. It's worth noting that this perspective is a topic of ongoing debate and varies significantly across different cultures and legal systems. Ethical, moral, and legal considerations surrounding the right to suicide continue to evolve and differ widely around the world.
- From the **Relativist perspective**, the acceptability of suicide can be viewed through different lenses, taking into consideration the needs and impact on individuals, families, and society as a whole. In some cases, there may be arguments that the social utility of suicide (or not suicide) should be considered, meaning the overall well-being and welfare of all stakeholders. These ethical and moral considerations can lead to varying viewpoints on the acceptability of suicide, making it a nuanced and highly debated topic in philosophy, ethics, and public policy.

### Suicide among Students

Many students encounter parental pressure throughout their academic journey. While this pressure can positively impact a student's academic performance, there are situations where excessively high parental expectations can significantly impact their children's mental well-being. Under the weight of extreme parental pressure, achieving excellent grades becomes an absolute imperative for students and failure to meet such parental expectations often leads to a youngster developing a negative perception of life. According to a National Crime Bureau of India, 2017 research paper, this situation gradually drives youngsters to despair and turns them suicidal. Many research studies have claimed that **parental pressure is one of the leading causes of increasing rates of student suicides in India**. The issue of student suicides due to parental pressure and the high expectations for careers like medicine and engineering is a serious concern in India. Mental health and well-being are critical aspects of a student's life, and the pressure to meet specific career expectations can lead to emotional distress.

It is commonly known fact that most of Indian parents want to see their children succeed as doctors, civil servant aspirants, and engineers even though there are good opportunities in the private sector and different

fields like dance, cinematography, music, skill-based education, sports, etc. Around 93% of students were aware of just seven career options as per a 2019 study (**India Today, 2019**).

But this unawareness of a large number of booming career options and the pressure to perform academically, fueled by relentless pressure exerted by families and institutions to excel, shrinking employment opportunities, and a hazardous competitive culture in coaching institutes, is affecting India.

#### **Reasons for rising student suicide:**

- a) **Social Stigma:** Not enough **discussion about depression and suicides**
- b) **Academic Pressure**
- c) **Relationship breakdown.**
- d) **Lack of adequate support:** The ‘**Log Kya Kahenge?**’ attitude in Indian society is the sole trait in the lives of competitive exam aspirants.
- e) **High expectations from Students.**
- f) **Mental Health Issues:** Anxiety, Depression, and Stress which students are not able to communicate or discuss with anyone.

#### **Evidence of suicides among students**

Suicide is the act of deliberately killing oneself. Risk factors for suicide include mental disorders, especially depression, neurological disorders, cancer and HIV infection. Every year, almost one million people die from suicide, 86% of whom are in low/middle-income countries. Suicide ranks as one of the top three leading causes of mortality for individuals under the age of 25, contributing to 10% to 20% of postpartum deaths in women within the first year after childbirth. (**WHO, 2023**).

The significant risk factors for suicide included demographic characteristics, pressure and expectations, adults' responses to youth, limited coping with stressful life events, and exposure to suicide (**Arora et al., 2020**). Academic stress was found to be positively correlated with parental pressure and psychiatric problems, while examination-related anxiety also was positively related to psychiatric problems. Academic stress is a serious issue that affects nearly two-thirds of senior high school students in Kolkata (**Deb et al., 2015**). Suicidal thoughts are disturbingly prevalent among medical students, with risk factors or predictors including academic stress, past experiences of abuse, pressure stemming from family expectations, and strained relationships with friends and peers. (**Desai et al., 2020**). The inability of students to handle performance pressure, meet parental expectations, and achieve aspirations may be responsible for psychological distress and subsequent suicidal behavior (**Kar, et al., 2020**). Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, parental pressure, scolding from parents, discord in the household, domestic violence, and substance abuse have detrimental effects on children and promote them to take these kinds of extreme steps (**Wang et al., 2020**). Most of the students have committed suicide due to failure to fulfill the expectations of a family member (**Kumar et al., 2022**).

#### **Reports Highlighting Suicidal Incidents and Parental Pressure Among Children Nationwide in India**

**Report #1:** The spotlight recently turned to a heartbreaking incident in Bangalore, India, where 12th-grade students lost their lives. The tragedy stemmed from intense parental expectations for their children to excel in the realm of education. In a country where the education system has historically prioritized academic achievements, both parents and teenagers grapple with tremendous pressure. Gaining admission to the

most prestigious institutions demands an almost astonishing depth of knowledge and an unwavering competitive drive (**Anderman, 2002**).

**Report #2:** In Chennai, a tragic incident unfolded as Naveen, a medical student, took his own life. Reports indicated that he was battling depression, primarily stemming from his inability to manage the demanding curriculum. Additionally, it was discovered that he was taking medication not because he chose to, but rather due to the pressure exerted on him by his parents. (**G, 2023; Inbavanan et al., 2014**).

**Report #3:** According to a Bangalore report, approximately 5% of the 14,989 girls who went missing during the period from 2009 to 2011 did so because they chose to elope from home, unable to meet their parents' expectations of academic excellence (**Nagle et al., 2018; Inbavanan et al., 2014**).

**Report #4:** An article in the Times of India shed light on the alarming suicide rates among Indian teenagers, particularly those aged up to 14. This troubling issue demands our attention. The primary catalyst for the rise in suicides, depression, and other mental health issues among adolescents is the intense pressure from parents to excel academically (**Nagle et al., 2018; Inbavanan et al., 2014; P, 2014**).

**Report #5:** Sibal, the former Union Human Resource Minister of India, remarked that the recent surge in student suicides can be attributed to the escalating parental expectations for their children to outperform their peers (**Nagle et al., 2018; Inbavanan et al., 2014**).

**Report #6:** 20-year-old V. Vaipu Pushpak Sree Sai, a third-year B Tech student at IIT-Madras, was found unconscious in his hostel room Tuesday and later declared dead by the hospital authorities, Stephen Sunny, a research scholar, was found dead in his hostel room on 13 February (**The Print, 2023**)

**Report #7:** IIT-Bombay, 18-year-old Darshan Solanki, allegedly died by suicide by jumping off the seventh floor of a campus building on 12 February. (**The Print, 2023**)

**Report #8:** A 19-year-old Chennai girl allegedly died by suicide in Tamil Nadu's Ambattur after she failed to clear the NEET exam. The girl took the extreme step just hours after the results were declared. (**Business Insider News, 2022**)

**Report #9:** On June 30, a medical aspirant allegedly died by suicide over the fear of NEET. The 19-year-old from Choolaimedu (Tamil Nadu) was preparing for the medical entrance examination. (**Business Insider News, 2022**)

**Report #10:** Similarly, on April 30, two 17-year-old girls allegedly committed suicide in separate incidents after failing to clear Class 12 board examination in Balaghat and Tikamgarh districts of Madhya Pradesh. (**Business Insider News, 2022**)

The reports above unveil a situation where parents strive to achieve their own aspirations through their children, often disregarding the impact these actions have on the mental well-being of their offspring. This issue can be traced back to several factors, including the pressure exerted by parents regarding performance, academic stress, feelings of anxiety, depression, and the struggle to effectively deal with disappointments.

## Discussion

We live in a society where academic excellence is considered a matter of pride. Students with low academic interest and poor academic performance often experience brutal criticism and hatred from their parents, teachers, and relatives which make them more rebellious and low self-esteem individual. These behaviors of the people eventually develop self-doubts in children regarding their intelligence and capabilities. Because of the ever-competitive environment and society and also for stereotypical and conservative thinking, most parents constantly pressure their children to build a bright future and also

parents are pressurized to choose a specific area in which children are not interested later on these choices become one of the most prominent reasons for poor mental health and suicidal tendency. Many mental health professionals believe that this excessive academic pressure on students limits their psychological growth and causes anxiety and depression. In worst cases, **extremely harsh criticism by the parents results in youngsters committing suicide**. Psychiatrists argue that **parents can play a pivotal role in mitigating the stress students** experience due to extreme mental pressure. As students spend most of their time at school, teachers can also help their students reduce academic performance-related stress (Pedrelli et al., 2014). **National Crime Records Bureau (2020)** reported that **a student took their own life every 42 minutes, totaling 34 student suicides per day**. In 2020 around **11,396 children below 18 years old ended their lives**. The warning signs date back to 2015 when a National Crime Records Bureau report showed **61.3% increase in student suicides at coaching centers**.

After an interaction and communication with children about their academic performance, always take some time to reflect on your behavior. Have you been fair to them? Were your sayings reasonable? If they disagreed with you, how you will react for their disagreement? And is there a way you can find something that would motivate them instead of making them feel less than they are?

### Parents and teachers as a helping hand

Parents to support their children's mental and emotional well-being:

1. *Promoting Healthy Lifestyle Habits*: Encouraging positive thinking and fostering healthy eating and sleeping habits can indeed reduce stress and contribute to overall well-being.
2. *Embracing Imperfections*: Teaching children that making mistakes and facing failures are essential parts of the learning process can help build resilience and a growth mindset.
3. *Open Communication*: Taking the time to talk and address a child's fears or anxieties is crucial for understanding their concerns and providing emotional support.
4. *Focus on Positivity*: Recognizing and highlighting a child's positive attributes and accomplishments can boost their self-esteem and confidence.

### Teachers can contribute to a positive learning environment:

1. *Teaching Time Management*: Educating students about time management is a valuable life skill that can reduce stress. Allowing flexible due dates can indeed motivate students to manage their time effectively.
2. *Acknowledging Effort*: Recognizing and acknowledging the effort of every student rather than discouraging them is a great way to foster a positive and encouraging learning atmosphere.
3. *Using Humor*: Incorporating humor and sharing personal anecdotes can make the classroom experience more enjoyable and help build a stronger teacher-student bond.
4. *Promoting Deep Understanding*: Focusing on fostering a deeper understanding of subjects rather than overwhelming students with facts and figures can enhance their critical thinking skills and overall comprehension.

These approaches can create a more supportive and engaging learning environment that benefits both students and teachers.

## Global and National initiatives taken to prevent suicide

**World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD)** is a crucial annual observance established by the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) and the WHO. It plays a vital role in focusing attention on the issue of suicide, combating stigma, and increasing awareness among various stakeholders, including organizations, governments, and the general public. The overarching message is that suicide is preventable, emphasizing the importance of suicide prevention efforts worldwide.

### Creating Hope Through Action

The triennial theme for World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) from 2021 to 2023, "Creating hope through action," serves as a powerful reminder that there are alternatives to suicide. It aims to inspire confidence and hope, shedding light on the importance of taking action to prevent suicide.

World Mental Health Day, observed on 10th October every year, has the overall objective of raising awareness of mental health issues globally and mobilizing efforts to support mental health. In 2022, the theme was "Making Mental Health & Well-Being for All a Global Priority," highlighting the importance of prioritizing mental health and well-being on a global scale.

## Indian Perspective

### Mental Healthcare Act-

The Mental Healthcare Act (MHA) of 2017 is a significant legislation aimed at providing mental healthcare services for individuals dealing with mental illness in India. This act was put in place to safeguard the rights of people with mental health issues and to ensure that they have access to proper mental healthcare services, treatment, and support. It also seeks to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and promote a more inclusive and compassionate approach to mental health in the country.

### Kiran

The launch of the "KIRAN" toll-free helpline by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is a significant step in providing much-needed support for individuals dealing with mental health concerns such as anxiety, stress, depression, and suicidal thoughts. It's crucial to have easily accessible mental health support services to address these issues and promote overall well-being and mental health awareness.

### Manodarpan

Manodarpan is indeed an important initiative of the Ministry of Education under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. Its primary objective is to provide psychosocial support to students, their family members, and teachers during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative recognizes the importance of addressing the mental health and well-being of these stakeholders, as the pandemic has brought about various stressors and challenges in the education system and daily life. Manodarpan aims to offer the necessary support and resources to promote mental health during these trying times.

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