

## **SUICIDAL TENDENCY AMONG THE ADOLESCENTS IN RAJASTHAN: NEED FOR IMPERATIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Adolescent suicide is a significant public health problem across the world. Adolescents are by nature a vulnerable group for mental health problems. In India, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics showed a consistent, concerning rise in suicide rates from 9.9 per lakh population in 2017 to 12.4 per lakh population in 2022. For the perspective of public mental health, suicide among youth is a main issue to address. Therefore we need good insight in the risk factors contributing to suicidal behaviour in young people. According to the NCRB report-2022, the main reasons for suicidal ideation among adolescents are family problems, failure in examination, love affairs, and illness. Further unraveling and knowledge of the complex interplay of these factors is highly relevant with regard to the development of effective prevention strategy plans for youth suicide.

**Keywords:** Adolescent, suicide, stress, isolation, Suicide prevention.

**1.0 Introduction :** The phase of human life between childhood and adulthood is termed as adolescence. It is the age of children from 10 to 19 years. It is a unique stage of human development as well as an important time to focus on good career building. During the phase of life, adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial growth. (Apter and Wasserman, 2006, Almroth et al, 2019). This affects how they feel, think, make decisions, and interact with the world around them.

Suicide is defined as a fatal self-injurious act with some evidence of intent to die (Turecki & Brent, 2016). A suicide attempt is any self-initiated behavior which, at the time of action, is designed to lead to death. Suicide occurs more often in older than in younger youth, but is still one of the leading causes of death in late adolescence and early adulthood worldwide. The spectrum of suicidal thoughts among the young is broad, ranging from occasionally thinking that life is no longer worth living to actively considering suicide. A suicide plan exists when the young person has already decided on concrete methods. (Portzky et al, 2005, Spirito & Esposito-Smythers, 2006). Self-harming actions not intended to end in death must be distinguished from suicidality. Such actions include, for instance, tests of courage and—relatively widespread among minors—non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI), which frequently serves to regulate aversive emotional states. Tragic deaths such as those resulting from psychotic misconceptions or aversive emotional states. Tragic deaths such as those resulting from organ failure in anorexia nervosa without the intention of dying do not count as suicide. (Varnik, 2012, Soole et al 2015). However, it may be difficult to classify individual deaths as suicide or otherwise. (Van, 2001, Sagar, 2016),

Suicide involves the deliberate and voluntary act of ending one's existence, typically as a result of overwhelming distress, despair, or a perceived lack of hope for the future. It is a complex issue influenced by a range of factors such as mental health disorders, personal circumstances, social factors, and more.(V.Harilakshmi,et al,2013). It is considered a serious public health concern and is often associated with profound emotional pain and suffering. It is important to approach the topic with sensitivity and seek professional help and support for individuals who may be struggling with suicidal thoughts or feelings.(Gould, et al, 2006,Amitai & Apter,2012).

### **1.1 Warning signs of suicide**

The individual factors associated with suicidal recurrence in patients differ person to person(Agerbo et al,2002,Sharma & Siddhu,2011,Prajapati, 2018). Some of the warning signs detected among such patients are –

- Sudden change in behaviour
- Apathy
- Withdrawal
- Unusual preoccupation
- Giving away personal possessions
- Symptoms of depression, basic unhappiness
- Mood fluctuation ,elevated emotional liability
- Distinct hopelessness
- Distinct feelings of guilt and self – reproach
- Expression of altruistic ideas of suicide or self-sacrifice
- Severe sleep disturbances
- Recent experience of loss
- Acute or chronic traumatization

### **1.1 Suicidal trends among youth**

#### **(i) Global Scenario**

Across the world, 800,000 people die every year due to suicide. Asia accounts for more than 60% of such deaths. However, the burden of global suicide is borne by most of the low-and-middle-income countries with 75% of all suicides occurring in these countries (WHO, 2021). Further, young people are the ones who are most affected by suicide and suicide related behaviours and it is the second most leading cause of death for those aged 15–29 years, worldwide (GBD, 2017, WHO, 2021). In the case of the adolescent population aged 10–19 years, the third leading cause of death is suicide (WHO, 2021). Yet, it is difficult to comprehend the pathways that compels one to have suicidal ideation (Cheng et al,2000, Pelkonen and Marttunen, 2003, Hawton and Van,2009, Klomek et al 2009,Patton et al 2016). Although the most frequent reasons of having suicidal tendencies among adolescents are socio-psychological factors (Hawton, 1998, Borges et al 2010, Furlong ,2013), a lack of understanding on how these factors interplay among adolescents are a matter of concern. Therefore, special attention is required towards this sub-group of the population who are fighting with multiple problems such as

depression, anxiety, and substance use, that collectively creates a suicidal setting for them. ( Palmer et al, 2005, Nock, et al, 2008)

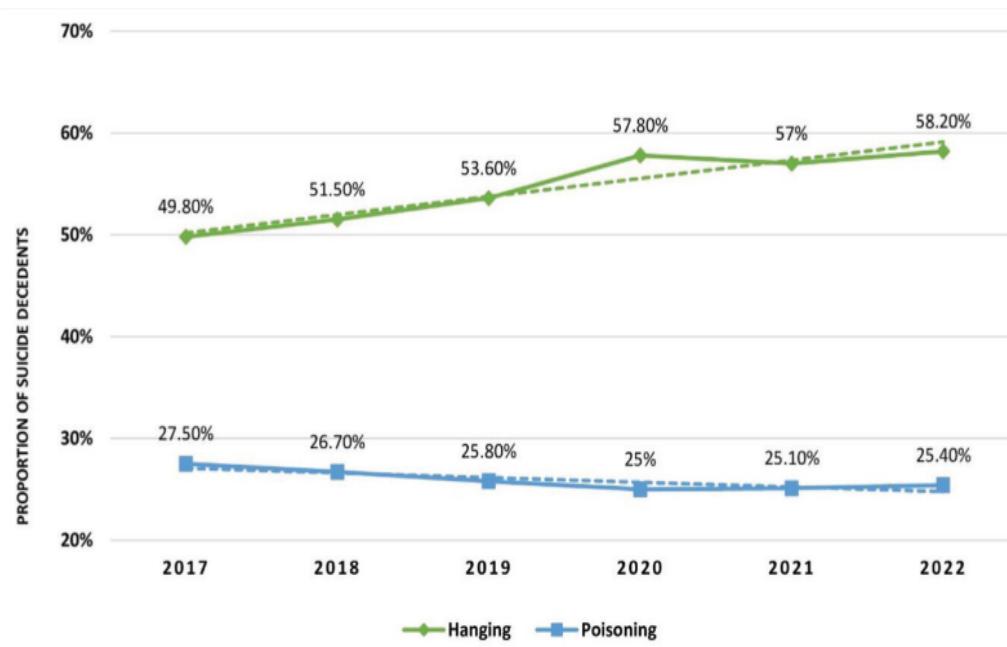
## **(ii) Indian Scenario**

India reports the highest number of suicide deaths in the world. In India, 27.3% of total population is in the age range of 15-29 years. Students in this age group often aspire for higher education, which is highly competitive. According to latest available National Crime Report Bureau -2022, a consistent, concerning rise is observed in suicide rates from 9.9 per lakh population in 2017 to 12.4 per lakh population in 2022. The rates of suicide displayed significant variability nationwide across states, ranging from 0.6 per 100,000 population in Bihar to 43.1 per 100,000 population in Sikkim. The southern cities of Vijayawada (42.6 per 100,000 population) and Kollam (42.5 per 100,000 population) reported the highest suicide rates in 2022.

There are a few noteworthy time trends here. First, suicides attributed to alcohol and substance use increased from 5.2% in 2017 to 6.8% in 2022. Further, this increase was most pronounced in the age group of 30–45 years. These trends highlight the need to focus on reducing substance use and reinforcing adaptive behaviour patterns in suicide prevention programs. Screening, brief intervention, and referral services must be considered for at-risk individuals.

Another area of concern is the persistently elevated rate of suicide among students over the years 2017–2022, with numbers remaining consistently high (7.6% in 2017, 8.2% in 2020, 8% in 2021, and 7.6% in 2022). Failure in examination was the reported reason for suicide in 1.2% of students. Pertinently, suicide clusters have been reported in Kota, Thrissur, and Chennai; all these cities are famous for their coaching institutes targeting competitive professional examinations. Promoting resilience to failure and frustration is crucial for preventing suicide among students, as is addressing issues such as peer pressure, family expectations, and poor coping skills. Media plays a vital role in suicide prevention, and responsible media suicide reporting is necessary to avoid the Werther effect. (NCRB report -2022)

Finally, the preferred means of suicide in India are changing. The proportion of suicides by hanging increased from 49.8% to 58.2%; in contrast, suicides by chemical poisoning declined from 27.5% to 25.4% from 2017 to 2022 (Fig.1). Limiting access to lethal means is an evidence-based suicide prevention strategy.<sup>5</sup> While means restriction is relatively more challenging to apply for hanging, specific steps such as removing or minimizing ligature points and the use of suicide-proof architecture in controlled environments such as schools, hospitals, and prisons may be considered (NCRB report - 2022).



**Fig.1 Suicide trends in India (2017-2022)**  
Source : NCRB report -2022

### (iii) Rajasthan Scenario

In Rajasthan, the city Kota is now known as 'Suicide City' due to increased rate of suicide of adolescents. Kota is renowned for its coaching centres that prepare students for competitive exams like IIT-JEE and medical entrance exams. The intense competition and the pressure to perform exceptionally well in these exams can lead to anxiety and stress. Test results, especially if they do not meet the expectations of the students or their parents, can further exacerbate these feelings. (NCRB report -2022)

According to police data, 15 students died by suicide in Kota in 2022, 18 in 2019, 20 in 2018, seven in 2017, 17 in 2016, and 18 in 2015.

The literature from 2023–2025 highlights a distressing rise in suicides among IIT JEE and NEET aspirants. Gupta et al. (2025) analyzed 80 documented cases and found that suicides peaked in 2023, with a significant clustering of events in August and September. Their findings indicated that NEET aspirants accounted for the majority of cases (73.4%) compared to JEE aspirants. Similarly, Meena et al. (2025) observed that in the coaching hub of Kota, 17-year-old students were most susceptible to suicidal tendencies, driven by academic pressure, financial difficulties, and "romantic failures".

### 1.2 Major reasons to cause suicidal attempt

Adolescents face several hormonal changes during their age. Instead of this, the youth lacks in various emotional intelligence resulting in suicides (Bost, 1984, Dhaor, 2016, Im Y et al 2017).. Major reasons of suicides among the adolescents are :

1. **Lack of motivation :** The relationship between student motivation, depression, perceived ability can be complex and may vary from individual to individual.
  - (i) **Perceived ability and self-motivation:** When students perceive themselves as capable and competent, it can enhance their self-motivation. Positive perceptions of ability can boost confidence and foster a sense of achievement, reducing the likelihood of depression.

Conversely, if students have doubt on their abilities, it may hinder their self-motivation and contribute to increased depression. (Sunny, 2018, Wardani et al, 2020)

**(ii) Perceived ability and parent-motivation:** When students believe that they are not meeting their parents' expectations or perceive themselves as inadequate, it can have negatively impact on their motivation. Parent-motivated students who doubt their abilities may experience increased stress and depression, as they may constantly strive to meet external expectations.

2. **Fear of failure :** All the students, especially those preparing for competitive examinations always have fear of failure. It has a significant impact on their academic performance and overall well-being. Students often face high expectations from their parents, teachers, and themselves, which can create pressure to succeed. The fear of not meeting these expectations can lead to a fear of failure (Brent & Mann, 2006, Florentine & Crane, 2010). Many students have perfectionist tendencies, striving for flawless performance in every task. This perfectionist mindset can intensify the fear of failure, as any perceived mistake or setback becomes magnified. A fear of failure can be closely tied to a student's self-esteem and self-worth. Students may worry that failing at a task or receiving a poor grade reflects negatively on their intelligence or capabilities. The competitive nature of academic environments and the constant comparison to peers can contribute to the fear of failure. Students may fear falling behind their peers or being judged by others for their perceived failures. (Cooper et al 2005, Bridge et al 2006). Students may worry about the consequences of failure, such as disappointing their parents, negatively impacting their future opportunities, or limiting their career prospects. These concerns can intensify the fear of failure. Some students may struggle with resilience and coping skills, making it challenging for them to bounce back from failures or setbacks. Without effective strategies to handle failure, the fear of it can become overwhelming. (Seginer, 1985, Britton & Tesser 1991).
3. **Constant Stress in coaching institutions :** In coaching institutions, preparing students to crack highly competitive examinations, have inherent competitive environment also. The students of these coaching institutions need to constantly prove themselves better and better (Brown, 1985, Gould, 2001, Palmer et al 2005). The fear of failure and the desire to outperform others can create stress and anxiety among them. Students may experience performance anxiety when they are constantly evaluated and expected to demonstrate their skills in front of coaches, teammates, or judges. This anxiety can hinder their performance and increase stress levels (Orbach, 2006, Yip PSF, 2012, Pirkis et al, 2016)
4. **Parent's pressure :** Parents of adolescents can sometimes unintentionally put pressure on them, especially when it comes to academic performance and achievements. This pressure can indeed induce stress in adolescent students (Calear et al, 2016, O'Connor & Pirkis, 2016). Here are a few ways in which parents' pressure can contribute to stress in students:
  - **Academic expectations:** Parents may have high expectations for their children's academic performance and push them to excel in school. This can create a constant fear of failure and the need to meet or exceed these expectations, leading to stress and anxiety.
  - **Comparison with others:** Parents may compare their children's achievements with those of their peers or siblings. Constant comparison can create a sense of competition and the fear of not measuring up, which can lead to stress and self-doubt .
  - **Overloading with activities:** Parents may enroll their children in numerous extracurricular activities, believing it will enhance their chances of success. However, if these activities become overwhelming and leave little time for relaxation and personal interests, it can result in increase in stress.

- **Unrealistic goals and perfectionism:** Parents may set unrealistic goals for their children or expect them to be perfect in every aspect of their lives. This can create a tremendous amount of pressure to constantly perform at an exceptional level, leading to stress and a fear of failure.
- **Lack of support and understanding:** When parents solely focus on academic achievements without considering their children's individual strengths, interests, and well-being, students may feel unsupported and misunderstood. This lack of support can lead to stress and a sense of being constantly judged.
- **Future expectations:** Parents may have specific career aspirations for their children and put pressure on them to pursue certain paths or fields of study. This can create anxiety about making the "right" choices and living up to their parents' expectations.

5. **Poor in Time management** – The coaching culture is known for its rigorous 365 –days, 24/7 schedules, which puts immense pressure on students. The coaching institutions prioritize continuous studying, disregarding Sundays and holidays. Students are bombarded with assignments, practice sheets, and frequent exams, leaving little room for personal needs or leisure activities. As a result, students often sacrifice entertainment, family interactions, and personal interests in their pursuit of academic success. Sleep and rest become compromised, leading to chronic stress among students. The demanding schedule takes a toll on their overall well-being. A survey conducted on studious and high-performing students preparing for competitive exams like IIT and AIPMT revealed that they dedicate the majority of their waking hours solely to studying. Even during meals, their breaks are limited to switching between different subjects. These students may spend 16 to 18 hours each day immersed in their studies. On the other hand, underperforming students allocate minimal time, typically 2 to 3 hours or less, to studying. Their remaining time is often spent with friends or on social media platforms like Facebook. The challenge lies with students who struggle to manage their time effectively. They attempt to balance their studies, personal errands, socializing, and other aspects of life, resulting in an overwhelming burden. Unfortunately, sports, physical activity, and positive recreation are typically absent from their routines. The combination of excessive academic pressure, lack of leisure activities, and the absence of physical exercise contributes to the development of stress, and, in some cases, it may even lead to depression. It is crucial for students in such environments to find a healthy balance between their academic pursuits and other aspects of life. Prioritizing self-care, managing time efficiently, engaging in physical activities, and seeking emotional support can help mitigate the negative effects of stress and promote overall well-being.

6. **Use of drugs, alcohol etc.** – The coaching culture is known for its rigorous 365 –days, 24/7 Among students, the use of tobacco products can be influenced by factors such as peer pressure, stress, and curiosity. It is possible that some coaching students in Kota may engage in tobacco use. Alcohol consumption among coaching students in Kota can be influenced by various factors, including socialization, peer influence, and stress relief. However, it is important to note that the legal drinking age in India is 21, and underage drinking is prohibited. Educational institutions generally have policies against alcohol use among students. Substance abuse, including the use of illicit drugs, is a concern in many communities worldwide, and coaching students in Kota may not be an exception (Biddle et al,2008, Patton et al 2016). Factors such as stress, peer pressure, and a desire for performance enhancement can contribute to drug use .

### 1.3 Suicide Prevention strategies

#### (a) Govt. Initiatives

##### (i) Central Govt. of India guideline

The Union Ministry of Education (MoE) of India, released on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023, the guidelines for schools to prevent suicide, titled UMMEED (Understand, Motivate, Manage, Empathise, Empower, Develop). It is planned to prevent suicide among students, prescribing in its 'plan of action' the setting up of wellness teams, orientation of teachers and family members, and immediate response to students exhibiting warning signs. The guidelines aim to serve as "directions to schools for enhancing sensitivity, understanding, and providing support in case of reported self-harm".

The guideline states, "A school wellness team (SWT) may be formed under the leadership of the school principal, where each member is oriented in handling crisis situations. When a student displaying warning signs has been identified by any stakeholder, they need to be reported to the SWT, which takes immediate action," the guidelines state. The guidelines recommend an orientation a year for teachers and family members, to help build awareness around student suicides. These orientations will be conducted by the schools for the capacity-building of various stakeholders"

##### (i) National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) of India

India launched its National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) on Nov 21, 2022. This is the first policy in India to make suicide prevention a public health priority. The strategy primarily aims to reduce suicide mortality by 10% by 2030 compared with 2020. The NSPS aims to achieve this target by establishing effective surveillance mechanisms (by 2025), establishing suicide prevention services through the District Mental Health Programme in all districts (by 2027), and integrating a mental wellbeing curriculum in all educational institutions (by 2030).

The strategy includes an implementation framework for various activities aimed at achieving its primary objective, involving multilevel stakeholders (ministerial stakeholders at the national level, governmental stakeholders at the state and district level, mental health institutes, and strategic collaborators).

The strategy recognises the crucial role of existing programmes run by various ministries in reducing the burden of suicide, either directly or indirectly (Hindustan Times, 2023). However, challenges exist that might impede its implementation in community settings.

##### (ii) Rajasthan Govt. guidelines to stop suicide.

The Rajasthan Government has released a set of thorough guidelines to address the increasing number of student suicides. The guidelines were formulated by a 15-member committee headed by Education Secretary Shri Bhawani Singh Detha after a record number of suicides took place in Kota. The state government consulted with coaching institutes and other stakeholders to develop these nine-page guidelines.

#### The Guidelines

- The guidelines aim to restrict students below 9th grade from enrolling in coaching centres for medical and engineering entrance exams.
- Other suggestions include maintaining the confidentiality of test results and organizing batches alphabetically, rather than by students' ranks.

- The recent suicide of a 20-year-old NEET aspirant brought the total number of student suicides in Kota to 27. Nearly 200,000 students come to Kota each year to study for competitive exams such as JEE and NEET, causing concern among authorities.
- The government has directed the coaching centres to discourage student competition and stop glorifying batch toppers.
- While tests can continue, the results must be kept confidential. The centres are also advised not to distinguish between batchmates based on their performances.
- The guidelines further recommend not segregating students based on their ranks and introducing a policy for easy exit of students with a refund within 120 days if they or their parents feel any inconvenience or uneasiness.
- The government has also recommended practices to ease mental pressure on students, including facial recognition to prevent faking attendance, mandatory weekly holidays, not holding exams on the day following a holiday, and a code of conduct for faculty and hostels.
- A monitoring cell will be established in Kota and Sikar to oversee the data on all students studying in coaching institutes via a dedicated portal.
- Coaching centres are directed to appoint sufficient professional psychiatrists and counsellors, who should be recruited by NIMHANS or any psychology expert from a government medical college to check the students' psychological health regularly.
- The guidelines also include mandatory gatekeeper training for teachers, institute managers, other staff, and the wardens of hostels and paying guest accommodation to assess the students' behavioural changes and take preventive measures. The students will also have to be counselled regularly, with vulnerable students assessed during the counselling sessions for optional career counselling.
- The administration has taken several steps, including mandating the installation of an anti-hanging device in fans and asking coaching institutes not to hold exams for two months, to address the record spike in suicide cases in Kota.

#### **Further few studies suggested following day to day interventions as coping mechanisms-**

- Exercise and Social Support: Ghatpande and Anand (2025) found that exercise has a strong negative correlation with anxiety ( $r = -0.45$ ) and depression, while social support remains a highly effective buffer.
- Entertainment and Media: Kaur and Singh (2025) found that students primarily cope by listening to music (88%) and surfing social networking sites (86%).
- Mindfulness and Training: Structured stress management training effectively reduced perceived stress by 22.1% and enhanced psychological resilience.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

In Rajasthan, the cases of suicides among adolescents are increasing year by year. Suicide is a complex issue with multiple causes. The study revealed that the major reasons of all these suicides are due to fear of failure and the burden of expectations from family. Parents had not given the permission to their children to go with their own interest as parents impose their choices and burden on their children with their own ambitious dreams. Parents scolded their children for not scoring good and left

alone for a longer period. Parents have not been consoling and reminding them of the hard work done by the child and that they have been not satisfied and happy about the results.

Coaching institutes and the district administration can contribute to creating a more supportive and holistic learning environment for students. However, it's important to note that addressing the issue of student suicides requires a comprehensive approach involving not only coaching institutes and the district administration but also parents, schools, and society as a whole. Long-term efforts should focus on promoting mental health awareness, building resilience, and ensuring a balanced approach to education that takes into account the overall well-being of students.

Transition to coaching has been proved a challenge for the students. As it is associated with new independence, responsibilities and expectations. Coaching has a scenario that stimulates competence and goal attainment, thus this culture of competition generates excessive stress and anxiety.

Strict implementations of suicide prevention guidelines issued by central as well as Rajasthan Govt. can improve the worst situation. The initiative taken by the coaching institutes in Kota to launch a round-the-clock helpline for students is a positive step towards addressing the issue of student suicides and mental health concerns. Providing counseling services and tracking callers suffering from depression can offer much-needed support to students who may be experiencing academic or emotional pressure. Additionally, the decision by the district administration to ask coaching institutes to conduct screening tests for students seeking admission and provide assessments to parents regarding their chances of cracking entrance exams can help manage expectations and reduce the undue stress on students. It is crucial to recognize the intense competition and high expectations that students face when preparing for entrance exams. By implementing measures like helplines, counseling services, and assessments,

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