

Suicide in India : An Overview

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Suicide has become one of leading cause for death all around the world. It is a tragic incidence affecting not only families and loved ones but eventually to society. According to WHO survey around 800,000 people die due to suicide every year globally. NCRB data shows that an average of 100,000 deaths occurs per year in India. This research paper broadly discusses the history of suicide in India, current status of suicide and factors responsible for the suicide among different age groups. Family problems, illness, drug addiction, love affairs, marriage related issues, bankruptcy, unemployment were found to be important factors affecting millions of lives. The most used methods for committing suicide were by hanging and taking poison. Suicide rates were found to be relatively higher among males compared to females, and more among average and low-income group people. It has affected all sections whether salaried, self-employed, daily wage workers, farmers, students or housewives.

[**Keywords** : Suicide, History, Factors, Status, Family, India]

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1. Introduction

Suicide refers to deliberate termination of life. It includes an unnatural death by the victim himself with a desire to die. Emile Durkheim in his book "Le Suicide" defines "suicide as any death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result". For Durkheim suicide is a social phenomenon that can only be explained sociologically means only social causes can explain it. Durkheim has discussed four types of suicide. His classification of suicide is based on the degree of integration individual attach to the society and degree of regulation found in society. Egoistic Suicide occurs due to individual's lack of integration with society. Altruistic suicide occurs due to over integration of individual with society. Anomic suicide occurs due to lack of regulation in society that leads to a condition of normlessness. According to Durkheim economic fluctuations affect anomic suicide. It can be acute and chronic. Acute anomic suicide happens during sudden economic crisis whereas chronic anomic suicide is found in the modern societies where social existence is no longer ruled by customs and tradition and hence increasing individualism leads people to fully engrossed in their lives and think primarily about their own interests. They demand more than they have at a given time. This situation imbalances the level of aspirations and satisfaction and leads to dissatisfaction, ultimately resulting in increasing the rates of suicides. Last, Fatalistic suicide occurs due to excessive regulation or control. Suicide committed by slaves can be termed as fatalistic suicide.

2. History of Suicide in India

Suicide has been a general practice in India since ancient times and hence not regarded a sinful activity. Instead, people who take their own lives were considered more spiritual and received recognition for their deeds. Ancient Indian texts present large number of evidences regarding suicide. The oldest evidence regarding suicide is found in Vedas where self-sacrifice was considered the best form of worship towards God. Upanishads discloses that life of a person is waste if he does not utilize it for the purpose of self-realization. Incidences of suicide are also present in great epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. In Ramayana, Laxman, Ram, Bharata and Satrughna lost their lives one by one, by drowning

in the Sarayu river. In Mahabharat's the sage Dadhichi sacrificed his life so that his bones could be used by God against demons. Holy scripture Smriti consider suicide a sinful activity. However, Manu has accepted suicide a meritorious act in certain cases like mahapataka, refers to a sin when no other punishment is adequate enough except suicide.

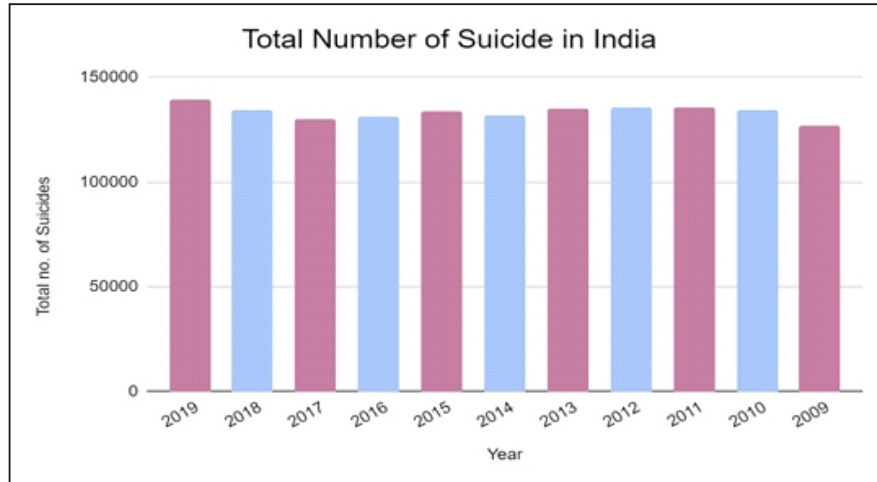
Practice of Sati and Jahur has been a prevalent practice in India till the 20th century. Sati Pratha, is practice where Indian women immolate themselves on the pyre of their husbands. Jahur, as a form of suicide was popular among Rajput's women, when Rajput women commit suicide by jumping in fire walls in order to save themselves from enslavement, rape by foreign invaders during wars.

Santhara, as a religious practice, has been practiced till the 21st century. Santhara is also known as Sallekhana is an old religious practice of attaining moksha in Jain religion. Santhara is a ritual of purification of the body where the devotees voluntarily stop taking food and water (practice starvation) till their death in order to purify themselves from all sins and thus attaining the highest state of transcendental wellbeing. However, this was banned on 10th August 2015 by the Jaipur bench of Rajasthan High Court. Hence, centuries old Jain practice Santhara declared unconstitutional and is punishable under section 309 (Attempt to commit suicide) and 306 (Abetment of suicide) of the Indian Penal Code. Along with Santhara, sitting dharna is another form of suicide where a person tries to establish a direct contact with supernatural powers for receiving divine aids without taking food and water.

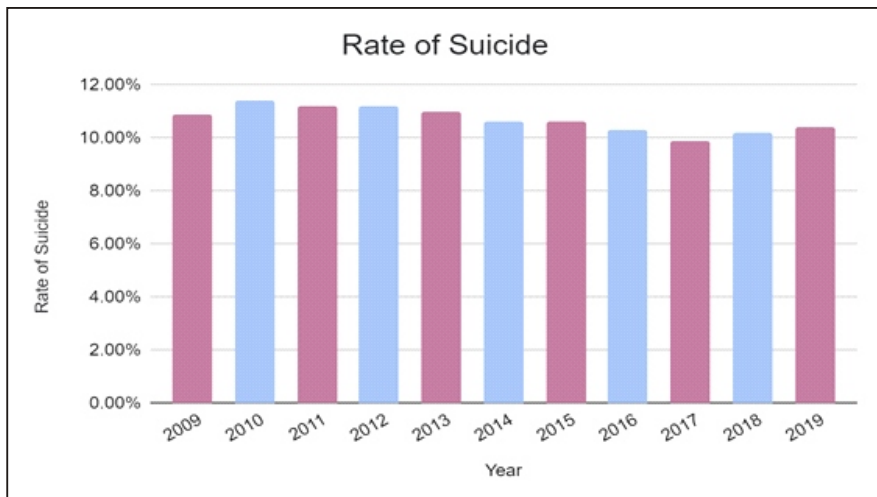
3. Status of Suicide in India

Suicide is a global phenomenon that occurs in all societies of the world. Suicide rates in India are increasing day by day and proving to be an emerging threat to society. National Crime Records Bureau (Ministry of Home Affairs) data (2019) shows that more than 100 000 people lost their lives per year in India. During 2019, total 139123 cases of suicide were reported all over the India. Around 50% cases of suicide were reported in only five States of India i.e. Maharashtra (13.6%), Tamil Nadu (9.7%) West Bengal (9.1%) Madhya Pradesh (8.1%). Most cases of suicides happened due to family relations (32.4%) and illness (17.1%). Suicide rates are gradually increasing in mega cities (having population more than 1,000,000). A total of 2461

incidents were observed in Chennai followed by Delhi (2423), Bengaluru (2081) and Mumbai. These states constitute 36.6 % of total suicide incidences reported during the year 2019. Suicidal incidences are higher among less educated or illiterate people than highly educated people. The report discloses a huge number of mass family suicides where 72 families having 180 members, lost their lives. Maximum number of family suicides were reported in Tamil Nadu followed by Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab and Rajasthan.



Source : National Crime Records Bureau - 2019.



Source : National Crime Records Bureau - 2019.

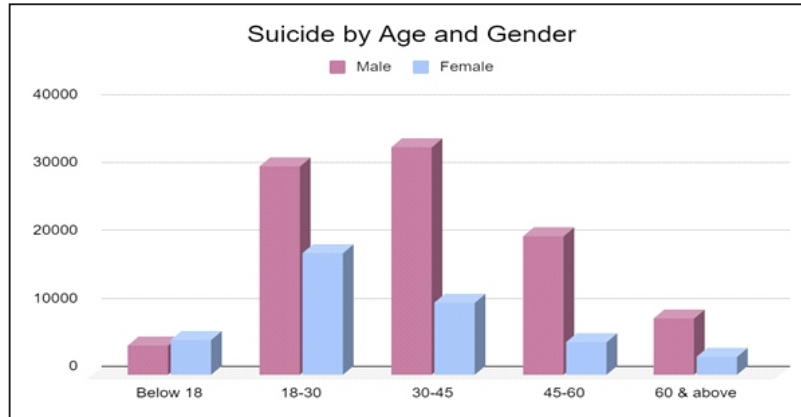
Suicide is an emerging global issue, affecting millions of people. Ratio of suicide is significantly higher among low- and middle-income countries that constitute 79% of the global suicides. According to World Health Organization (WHO) suicide is one of

leading cause responsible for death all around the world. Approximately 800,000 people die due to suicide every year globally. In every 40 second a person dies due to suicide in the world. It discloses suicide as second leading cause responsible for death for the age group 15-19. In India alone a total of 215872 incidences of suicide were reported in 2016 where 93878 were females and 121994 were males. In order to reduce global suicide mortality rates various initiatives have been taken at global level. It has been included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and WHO has prepared action plans like WHO 13th General Programme of Work 1919-2023 and WHO Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030.

4. Facts about Suicide

- ▶ NCRB data shows that a total of 97619 males and 41493 females lost their lives by committing suicide in 2019, comprising 70.2% and 29.8% of total suicide. family problems and illness were major cause responsible for suicide in India. However different causes were responsible for suicide among different age groups.
- ▶ Data regarding suicide among children shows that total of 5208 girls and 4405 boys ended their lives by committing suicide in India. The major reasons behind committing suicide were family problems, failure in examinations and love affairs.
- ▶ Suicide rates are found to be significantly higher for the age group belonging to 18-30 years and 30-45 years that accounted for 35.1% and 31.8% of suicides respectively. A total of 48774 young people belonging to the age group 18-30 years committed suicide. The major factors responsible for suicide were primarily related with family matters and illness. Other major causes were love affairs, drug abuse/ alcoholic addiction and unemployment. A total of 44287 people belonging to the age group 30-45 ended their lives by committing suicide in 2019. Most people ended their lives due to family issues, mental illness, drug or alcohol addiction, marriage related issues such as non-settlement of marriage, extra marital affairs, dowry related issues, divorce, bankruptcy and unemployment.
- ▶ A total 11013 older persons ended their lives by killing themselves. Illness (in the form of paralysis and cancer, insanity and other prolonged diseases) comprises first place in case of

older people suicide. A total of 4369 lives were lost due to illness. Other major reasons responsible for suicide for older people were family problems, drug abuse and bankruptcy.



Source : National Crime Records Bureau.

- » As Durkheim has illustrated in his book “Le Suicide” that married people have low suicide rates than unmarried but today’s scenario has completely changed. NCRB report on Suicide discloses that suicide rates were relatively higher among married persons than unmarried. Married people accounted 66.7% of total suicides where it was 23.6% in case of unmarried people. Widowed (1.8%) divorcees (0.7%) and separated (0.7%) constituted a very small percentage.

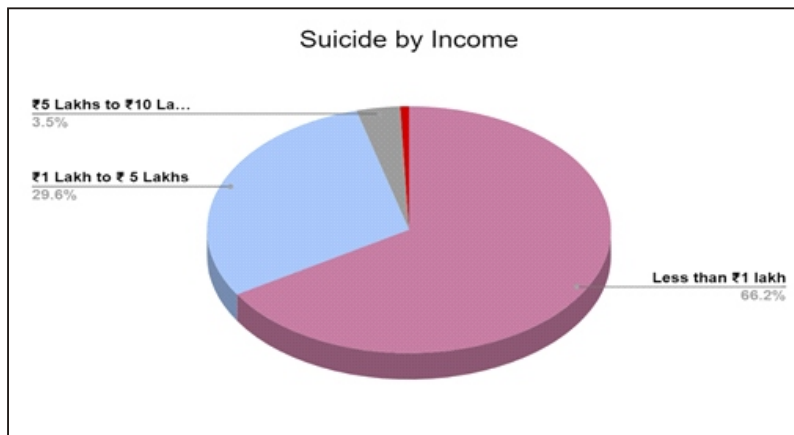
Table-1 : Distribution of Suicide according to Marital Status and Gender

| Marital Status | Gender | | | Total Number of people | %age |
|----------------|--------|--------|--------------|------------------------|------|
| | Male | Female | Trans-gender | | |
| Married | 66815 | 25941 | 12 | 92757 | 66.7 |
| Unmarried | 21638 | 11202 | 01 | 32852 | 23.6 |
| Widow | 1378 | 1094 | 00 | 2472 | 1.8 |
| Divorcee | 595 | 402 | 00 | 997 | 0.7 |
| Separated | 672 | 290 | 01 | 693 | 0.7 |

Source : National Crime Records Bureau.

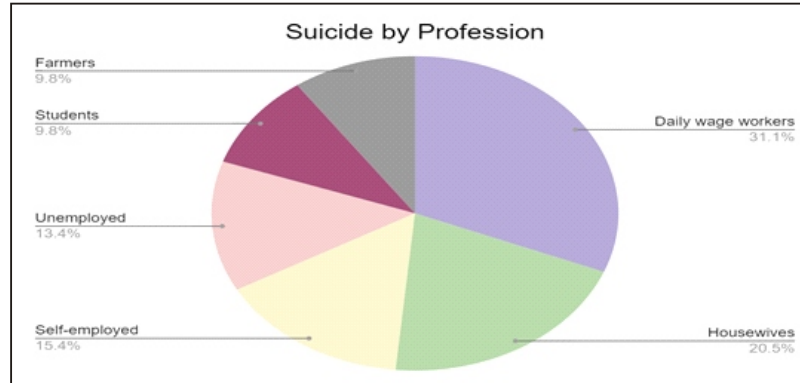
- » NCRB report discloses higher rate of suicide among poor and low-income group people. Out of total incidences of suicide committed during 2019, 66.2% suicide victims had annual

income less than 100 000 whereas 29.6% had annual income between 100 000- 500 000.



Source : National Crime Records Bureau.

- ▶ Daily wage workers alone constitute 23.4% of total suicide whereas proportion of housewives committing suicide is much more than other females. They constitute 51.5% (21,359) of total female suicide. A total of 16098 self-employed and 14019 unemployed people ended their lives. 10,335 students and 10,281 farmers committed suicide.



Source : National Crime Records Bureau.

- ▶ The means adopted for committing suicide slightly varied from easily available, effective and more or less painful method. The most used methods of suicide were by hanging (53.6%) followed by taking poison (25.8%), drowning (5.2%), self-immolation etc. The ratio of males committing suicide through different modes was higher than females adopting the same method of suicide. However, female's proportion was relatively higher in case of suicide by self-immolation.

5. Conclusion

Suicide has become one of leading cause for death all around the world. Rates of suicides are increasing among all age group people. Family as being a universal and most important institution for development of human beings has proved to be a major threat as well. Suicide due to family problems were common among all age group people. Individual suicide as well as mass family suicide are increasing day by day. Family problems, illness, drug/alcoholic addiction, marriage related issues, bankruptcy and unemployment are some major factors responsible for suicide in India. The most used method for committed suicide was by hanging and taking poison. Suicide is common for all profession whether students, unemployed, salaried, self-employed or farmers rates.

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