

**DEALING WITH SUICIDAL TENDENCIES AMONG STUDENTS IN  
ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The opportunity to pursue a higher education, enter adulthood with its added responsibilities and freedoms and participation in student life can be an exciting time. However, students may experience a significant degree of stress as the result of these same developmental opportunities. Research in the past has shown that college students report a higher rate of suicidal ideation than non-college students; therefore, becoming knowledgeable about the concept of suicide is essential when working with college students. Over the past few decades, suicide has become the second leading cause of death in academic institutions. The actual act of suicide is a complex behaviour that is generally not a response to a single event but a series of events, feelings and thoughts that place an individual at risk for suicidal behaviour. College students who are at risk for suicide appear to share a number of risk factors. Some of the more common risk factors associated with suicide includes depression, loneliness, stress and hopelessness. Suicide prevention is an umbrella term for the collective efforts of local NGO's, Professional Psychologists and related professionals to reduce the incidence of suicide through prevention and proactive measures. This proposal is an attempt to gather in-depth information about the suicide in respect of its nature and extent, related attitude and behaviour in order to assess what role can mental health counsellor play in preventing suicides in our country.*

**Key words:** Suicide, Tendency, Depression, Students, Academic Institutions, Psychology

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**1. Suicide from Different Perspectives**

**“Why people wish to die by suicide?” Sigmund Freud, Father of Psychoanalysis**, and his followers answered this question through the concept of ‘death instinct’ or ‘Thanatos’. His student Karl Menninger elaborated the concept of a death instinct, which he viewed as being in constant conflict with the opposing force of the life instinct, or Eros. According to Menninger (1938), there is an inherent tendency toward self-destruction that may, when not sufficiently counterbalanced by the life instincts, result in both direct and indirect self-destructive behaviour.

**Maurice Farber** (1968), a psychologist, proposed that the tendency to commit suicide is a function of the extent of the threat to acceptable life conditions experienced by the individual, the individual's sense of competence, and therefore the individual's degree of hope.

**Aaron Beck** and his associates (1974) showed that hopelessness is one component of the syndrome of depression and is a much more powerful predictor of subsequent suicidal behaviour than other components of the syndrome.

**Edwin Shneidman** (1996), the founder of the American Association of Suicidology, proposed

that all suicides share ten common qualities, which include the following:

1. Common purpose of seeking a solution;
2. Common goal of cessation of consciousness;
3. Common stimulus of unbearable pain;
4. Common stressor of frustrated psychological needs;
5. Common emotion of hopelessness, helplessness;
6. Common cognitive state of ambivalence;
7. Common perceptual state of constriction;
8. Common action of escape;
9. Common interpersonal act of communication of intention; and
10. Common pattern of consistency of lifelong styles.

World Health Organization Assistant Director-General Catherine Le Gals-Camus finds that more people around the world die from suicide than other causes.

- According to Dr Anuradha Bose, associate professor in pediatrics who also works for the CMC's department of community health, suicide is the third largest single cause of death among Indian youth between the ages of 15-19. One in every three cases of suicide in India is committed by people due to academic pressure.
- A suicide is reported in India every 15 minutes and it is believed that there are many more cases of suicides that are not reported, so the actual number is very high.
- Kerala, the state with the highest literacy rate in all of India also has the highest suicide rate which is an alarming factor for academic pressure.
- The average suicide rate in India is 103 per 100,000 people compared with the worldwide average of 14.5 suicides per 100,000 people.

- More than 100,000 people commit suicide in India every year and 3 people a day take their own lives in Mumbai.

The rate of suicide among females in India is close to three times that of males. The average rate for suicide among males in India is 58 for every 100,000 and 148 for every 100,000 women. This is contradicting to the situation in other parts of the world where the rate of suicides is high among men rather than women. Females, in contrast to males, characteristically are more open to ask for medical help and to communicate their anxieties and fears to significant others. Males tend to be acutely aware of feelings of sexual inadequacy or inadequacy of masculinity and believe it shameful to communicate such feelings. This seems to hold true for college-age males and females as well as adolescents. This report, the first WHO publication of its kind, presents a comprehensive overview of suicide, suicide attempts and successful suicide prevention efforts worldwide.

From the death of Pon Navarasu in the year 1996 to the recent suicide by Ms. Ritikeswari (2015), one can estimate how ragging has become a social evil to the society. Considering the gravity of the suicidal phenomena, a committee headed by Dr. R.K.Raghavan, Former Director of CBI, for giving specific recommendations on effective prevention of ragging in educational institutions was constituted by the apex court. Accordingly, the Committee had carried out a very detailed study on the various factors contributing for ragging and collected the public opinion. Further, the committee had submitted a detailed report with suitable recommendations and measures required to effectively curb the menace. The recommendations of the committee were duly accepted and the following directives have been issued to all the educational institutes for necessary implementation by the Honourable Court. The summary of 50 recommendations of RK Raghavan Committee is appended along with this paper.

**Raghavan Committee in its report mentioned the role of Psychological Counsellor for ensuring mental well being of Students in the campus. The following points in the 50 recommendations will highlight the role of Professional Counsellor.**

5.03. At the secondary and senior secondary stages of schooling, every school should be required to arrange regular and periodic **psychological counselling sessions** for every student till the time he/she passes out from the school. Parents and teachers should also be involved in such sessions. Every year there should be a certain number of mandatory counselling sessions with experienced psychologists. Continued,

5.06 ...., Merely getting an undertaking signed from students and parents, without linking it with the information relevant to ragging in our opinion would be ineffective, and hence our modified recommendations. (*a psychological counsellor can promote an environment where students understand the agreement in letter and spirit*)

5.09 ...., By way of incentives, the Central government, State Governments, University Grants Commission and other funding bodies such as the AICTE and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research etc. should provide special/additional annual financial grants-in-aid to those of the universities and colleges, which report a blemish-less record in terms of there being no incidents of ragging. These bodies should also institute another category of financial awards or incentives for colleges or universities which take stringent action against those responsible in respect of ragging incidents. (*a psychological counsellor can initiate activities that will help institutions promote ragging free environment within the campus*)

5.12. The Committee recommends that it is critical that institutions promote a sense of confidence among every student entering the portals of higher education. It is important that the natural anxiety among the 'freshers' is addressed

by institutional authorities. Continued (building confidence is an essential activity of a counselor)

5.14. We also recommend that every institution should engage or seek the assistance of **professional counsellors** at the time of admissions to counsel 'freshers' in order to prepare them for the life ahead, particularly for adjusting to the life in hostels. The Committee feels that preparing students in this manner would enable them to cope with the stresses of the hitherto unknown life in the campus.

5.15. ..., (iv) one or more counselling sessions must be arranged through out the first week as part of the orientation sessions, during which a **professional counsellor** should address 'freshers' and motivate them to confidently deal with strangers/seniors; continued..., we also recommend that the UGC and other funding bodies must make special allocations for the purpose of enabling institutions to engage counsellors and organize various events that contribute to the building of confidence among the 'freshers'.

## **2. The Significance of Psychological Counselling/ Role of Psychological Counsellor**

Students who seek counselling usually are experiencing discomfort or dissatisfaction in some aspect of their personal lives. Some common reasons are problems with friend, family, and or significant other relationships, concerns about personal adequacy, feeling overwhelmed, or feeling sad or anxious without knowing why.

**The following are some important reasons why a Professional Psychological Counsellor is of necessary at Academic Institutions.**

- **Problems in academic performance**  
Dramatic drop in grades, incapacitating test anxiety, sporadic class attendance, excessive procrastination and poor academic performance, dissatisfaction or

confusion about your major or your career plans.

- **Difficult changes in personal relationships**

Death of a family member or close friend; difficulties in marriage or intimate relationships; problems at home with family members; problems with roommates or friends.

- **Feelings of sadness for no apparent reason**

Prolonged feelings of despair and unhappiness, withdrawal, missing family, missing home, loneliness, lack of concentration, loss of interest in usual activities, eating changes, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, sometimes wondering whether life is worth living.

- **Excessive anxiety or fear**

Unexplained nervousness, panic, inability to sleep, avoidance of certain activities or situations, profound shyness or constant worrying.

- **Personality changes**

Unexplained and sudden shifts in mood or behaviour, being overly argumentative, angry or aggressive, excessive alcohol consumption, habitual use of legal or illegal drugs, or strong feelings of disconnectedness with one's self.

- **Physical complaints when no medical reasons can be found**

Frequent stomach aches, headaches, back or joint pain after a physical exam shows nothing.

- **Desire to talk with a neutral person**

You need someone to listen to you and give you an objective point of view.

### 3. Conclusion

There has not been enough focus on the root causes of delinquency. Mental and physical health and wellbeing interact, and are affected by a wide range of influences throughout life... A shift in paradigm is required in the authorities concerned to see that Mental Well Being is given due recognition in all academic institutions from primary to higher education. We should not give importance to the punishment when a deviation occurs but ensure that proper mechanism is working actively at the academic institutions for psychological well-being of student's community. The society does not require mechanical brains but human beings who are focused towards fostering humanity. The Puranas and Ithihasas are a classical example of understanding the purpose of education. Well, as one reads through the Bhagavata, one gets a feeling that the effortless writings of Pothana cannot be mortal efforts after all. See how Hiranyakashapa explains the importance of education and fruits of learning to his son:

*Chadavanivaadajnundagu,  
 Chadivina sadasadviveka chaturata kalugun  
 Chaduvagavalayunu janulaku  
 Chadivineda naaryulodda chaduvumu  
 thandree!*

Meaning: Uneducated remain ignorant; education gives a sense of discrimination and skills; everyone needs to learn; so my dear child, I will send you to the worthy, and learn from them.

Prahlada's answer is much more pleasing: its rhythm in movement and simplicity in composition are so great and lilting that the poem in answer dances in cadence on the tongues of the Telugus on many an occasion. The boy too duly pays his regards to his father before replying as under:

*Chadivinchiri nanu guruvulu  
 Chadivithi dharmartha mukhya sastrammulu ne  
 Chadivinavi kalavu pekkulu*

*Chaduvulalo marmamella jadivithi thandree!*

Meaning: O Father! The teachers have educated me well, and I have studied all the major subjects of dharma (ethics-moral-jurisprudence-philosophy-religion) and artha (secular branches); many are the things I have learnt; in short, I have grasped the essence of all learning.

The essence of education is nothing but understanding the purpose of one's own existence and how he can be of use to the society and country at large.

The Government of India recently introduced the concept of Swachh Bharat. The intention is to make India 'Clean' inside. The concept can be further extended by considering "Cleaning the minds" of lakhs of students graduating from institutions. The society is looking forward for them with a promise that they will safeguard the environment. We have good number of institutions who offer courses on Psychology. Every year, we observe thousands of students graduating from such institutions. Are they being effectively utilized? A student with a very good understanding of his psychology will be of great advantage to the society. He will understand the purpose of his existence, his goals to be achieved, his role in the family and in the society and finally a citizen of highest order quality. All this cannot be achieved in a day. The Government should really feel the need of mental well-being of students. India claims that we have the youngest population. Are we happy about this so called 'young population' in numbers or do we actually see a hope in them. Mental health professionals, like me, have entered this profession not because this profession gives us financial rewards, but, out of our own struggle, conflicts and a reason to live and help others lead a life successfully.

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