



Living is a solution...suicide is not!

World mental health day – 10th October

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Jeevan (name has been changed) was a 24 years old boy, an engineering graduate with a brilliant academic record. He had dreams of becoming IAS and to hold a powerful post. Anything less than IAS (according to him) did not interest him. He had made up his mind not to settle with any other alternative career. With this big dream in his eyes, he left his small native town and went to Delhi like lakhs of many others, to join those prestigious coaching centres. Stayed in a tiny rented room with unknown aspirants in isolation under extremely stressful environment of hectic schedules, mock tests, cut throat competition and uncertain future in an unknown city.

Since his childhood he was an introvert with very few friends, short tempered, less flexible about failures and his wishes, would express wish to die with minor setbacks. Many untoward stressful life events like death of his father at a tender age further triggered his insecurity about life.

On a fateful day, following his failure in his very first attempt at the competitive exam, he decided his life was not worth living and that there can be no better future for him. And he lost his life by committing suicide. Leaving behind his loved ones in insurmountable pain to live with all their life.

This is the representative story of innumerable youth and my patients of depression whose youthful children or near ones had ended their lives due to failure, self perceived stress, frustration, hopelessness and many other reasons.

This month on October 10th we are celebrating World Mental health day and this year's theme is "suicide prevention" and promotion of mental health. The

objective is to attract the attention of governments so that the issue might be given priority in public health agendas around the world.

According to the WHO, more than 8,00,000 people die by suicide every year, making it a principal cause of death among people fifteen to twenty-nine years old. In past few decades the numbers have reached alarming statistical levels. The prevention requires a multidimensional approach involving the government health policy makers, educational institutes, coaching institutes, print and social media, sociologists, NGOs, cyber law makers, police department, psychiatrists, psychologists, other speciality doctors, parents, friends and society at large.

Because of the stigma attached with suicide in people's mind, getting the sufferers and their families talk about it has been a major issue. And this is the reason why general public hardly knows the risk factors of suicide and ways to prevent it.

In this article I want to highlight the risk of suicide amongst the student community specially the ones preparing for competitive exams, to promote positive mental health and wellbeing and to instill the spirit of living amongst them.

Who are at risk of suicide?

- Previous suicide attempts or expressed wish to die or self harm behaviours
- Youth or children suffering from mental illnesses like, depression, anxiety, Schizophrenia, Bipolar disorder
- Alcoholism or other drug abusers
- Those who have undergone sexual/physical abuse, bullying, cyber bullying
- Addiction to dangerous mobile games which involve violent moves, like blue whale challenge
- Long standing pain or chronic illness
- Children of separated parents, parental death, broken families, foster homes
- Introverts, less friends, low frustration tolerance, apathetic or antisocial attitude, low flexibility or adjustability while setting goals

Why the students preparing for any competitive exam can become suicidal?

- They live in isolation, away from their families and support systems, feeling homesick
- Most of them go to far off cities, metros, where they meet thousands of new people of different cultural background and come across a competitive or a demotivating attitude from them
- The schedules are so hectic , they hardly find any time to share their feelings with others
- Most of the students stay in small, poorly ventilated rooms and spend most of their times in isolation between the four walls
- There is no accountability or surveillance of such numerous paying guest rooms or rented rooms where the students spend most of their time
- There is no structured programme in most of the coaching institutes of having counsellors or student friendly teachers who can talk to the aspirants from time to time ,on one to one basis when they need the most
- There are no facilities in such coaching institutes for regular medical and psychiatric examination of the aspirants

My suggestions for the parents and relatives:

- Keep a regular track of your ward who is staying away from you through phone calls not just with your child but also with his/her room mates or friends. Make regular visits to them
- Whenever you make a call, try to make a video call to notice any changes in their appearance, emotions or behaviour
- If any previous attempts of suicide or self harm were made, it is not advisable to send the child /youth away from family or support system
- If any warning signs are noticed, like voicing suicidal ideas, talking about death, showing no hope in future, staying aloof, decreased communication, watching suicide videos or reading literature about self harm on mobile or computer, remaining sad or depressed, showing extreme anger on self or others, gathering articles for self harm like tablets, pesticides, rope etc, ..take immediate actions by sending immediate personal help to them till you reach out and take a psychiatrist's help on an emergency basis.
- Since childhood, identify the suicidal behaviours if any and take timely Psychiatric consultation.

- Prepare your child for failures and set backs and promote the spirit of living. Teach them it is OK to fail and that life is still beautiful with many other alternative positive activities to do.

Suggestions for the coaching and educational institutions:

- Make arrangements for regular psychiatrists or psychologist visits to talk to each aspirant personally
- If you notice any depressive or above mentioned warning signs, inform the parents and arrange for psychiatric management
- Facilitate students groups, preferably including students who stay together or nearby hostels or PG rooms and encourage group discussions. This will help the introverts to make friends and to seek help whenever in need
- Regular stress relieving, motivational lectures or workshops by mental health professionals to be arranged

How can fellow aspirants help?

- Keep a track of your roommates, flatmates and friends
- Discuss regularly amongst yourselves how you feel and how you handle stress
- Make it a point to meet regularly, don't stay in single, locked up rooms
- Help given to others is helping yourself. It will definitely revert back when you are in need
- Practice and encourage others to have regular health checkups, healthy diet, physical exercises (1 hour walk, jog, cardio at gym or yoga every day, even during your exams) and enough sleep
- Note down contact numbers of parents and local guardians of your roommates or flatmates. Contact immediately in need
- Whenever you feel low, the person available to you immediately is your neighbouring aspirant. So develop a bonding with them and talk to them
- It's ok not to get through a particular exam..it was just not your day! It does not decide your success in life in future. Further attempts are still available. And an alternative career that suits you is eagerly waiting for you. Just embrace it!

So let us all come forward and save the young lives. Talking more about suicide will not promote suicide, instead it will reduce the suicide risk. Shun the stigma

and work towards promoting a better life for ourselves as well as others.
Remember , suicides are preventable!

To help the youth, specially the students and the competitive exams aspirants , I have set up an email assistance service. Any student when in need or in emergency can write to me at psychiatrichelpindia@gmail.com. I promise to reply back as early as possible with much needed support and a video call will be arranged whenever necessary. Kindly make use of this service for yourselves or your loved ones.