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TOPIC

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**YOUTH SUICIDE IN INDIA: WHEN  
OPPRESSION FORCES PEOPLE TO  
CHOOSE DEATH**

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## YOUTH SUICIDE IN INDIA: WHEN OPPRESSION FORCES PEOPLE TO CHOOSE DEATH

### Context

- The tragic **death of two young sisters in Rajasthan**, compelled into unwanted marriages, highlights a disturbing reality, and underscore the urgent need to examine the **societal roots of suicide**, particularly among young women.

### Youth Suicide in India

- According to NCRB's 'Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India' reports, India records **over 1.7 lakh suicides annually**, with a rising trend.
  - ♦ **Youth (15–29 years)** constitute a **significant proportion of total suicides**. Suicide is among the **leading causes of death in this age group**.
  - ♦ 7.6% of total suicides in 2022 were by students.
- States like **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra** report higher suicide rates, often correlating with **higher development levels**, while poorer states like Bihar report lower rates.

### Key Causes of Youth Suicide

- **Social Determinants:** Suicide is shaped by **family pressure and forced marriages**, gender discrimination and patriarchy, caste-based exclusion and discrimination, and economic stress and unemployment.
  - ♦ **Forced marriage and relationship restrictions** are major triggers among young women.
- **Aspirations vs Social Constraints:** Modern India presents a contradiction, and creates a '**structural frustration**', especially among educated youth.
  - ♦ Youth aspire for **education, careers, and choice in relationships**;
  - ♦ Society imposes **rigid norms on caste, religion, and gender roles**;
- **Legal and Institutional Barriers:** Restrictions (formal/informal) on inter-caste and interfaith marriages, live-in relationships, and same-sex unions.
  - ♦ These factors limit **personal autonomy**, intensifying distress.
- **Gender Dimension:** Young women face **double oppression** i.e. family control and societal expectations.
  - ♦ Early marriage, domestic violence, and honour norms contribute to suicides.
  - ♦ Concept of '**honour suicide**' (linked to forced conformity) is emerging.
- **Constitutional and Ethical:** Suicides driven by social oppression resemble '**honour suicides**', morally comparable to honour killings. They violate:
  - ♦ **Article 21** (Right to Life and Personal Liberty);
  - ♦ Principles of equality and dignity;

### Additional Information: Durkheim's Theory (Sociological Perspective)

- **Anomic Suicide:** Due to **rapid social change**; seen in India's transition economy where aspirations rise faster than opportunities;
- **Fatalistic Suicide:** Due to **excessive social control**; seen in forced marriages, rigid family structures, and oppressive norms.

### Related Policy Measures

- **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017:** It **decriminalizes suicide**, assuring adequate medical relief to those attempting suicide.
- **National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022):** India's first comprehensive suicide prevention framework.
  - ♦ Target: **10% reduction in suicide rate by 2030**

- ◆ **Focus areas: Surveillance & data systems** (strengthening NCRB reporting); **mental health services expansion**; **reducing access to means** (pesticides, drugs); and **media guidelines** for responsible reporting.
- **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP):** Launched in 1982; core pillar of India's mental health policy. Key **components** are:
  - ◆ **District Mental Health Programme (DMHP);**
  - ◆ Integration of mental health into **primary healthcare**;
  - ◆ Focus on **early detection and treatment**.
- **Tele-MANAS Initiative (2022):** National **24x7 tele-mental health helpline**; provides counselling in multiple languages; aims to improve **accessibility in rural and remote areas**.
- **Manodarpan Initiative:** It provides online counselling, and psychological support for school/college students.
- **National Mental Health Programme and Health and Wellness Centres:** It aims to provide quality care at the primary health care level, under the Ayushman Bharat Program.
  - ◆ Deaddiction centres and rehabilitation services are available under it.
- **UGC Guidelines:** Mandatory **counselling centres in universities**; and promotion of **well-being and stress management**.

### Way Forward

- **Strengthening Mental Health Systems:** Implementation of **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP)**; and school and college-based counselling;
- **Addressing Social Determinants:** Promote **gender equality and women's autonomy**; reduce caste-based discrimination; and reform regressive social practices.
- **Legal and Institutional Reforms:** Protect the **right to choose marriage and relationships**; and ensure constitutional freedoms under **Article 21**.
- **Youth-Centric Development:** Employment generation, skill development, and safe spaces for youth expression.
- **Community Engagement:** Involve families, educators, religious leaders; awareness campaigns to reduce stigma.

### Case Study: Lessons from China

- China's decline in suicide rates since the 1990s is attributed to:
  - ◆ Rapid economic development;
  - ◆ Urbanisation;
  - ◆ Improved social mobility, especially for women;
- It indicates that **structural transformation**, not just mental health services, is crucial for suicide prevention.

### Conclusion

- Youth suicide in India is a **multidimensional crisis** rooted in the tension between **modern aspirations and traditional constraints**.
- Addressing it requires a shift from viewing suicide as an individual problem to recognizing it as a **societal failure**.
- Sustainable solutions lie in **expanding freedoms, ensuring dignity, and aligning social structures with the aspirations of India's youth**.

### Daily Mains Practice Question

**[Q]** Examine the role of social norms, family structures, and legal frameworks in shaping youth suicides in India. Suggest measures to address this issue in line with constitutional values

Source: IE

