

Social Justice: High suicide rates in India

GS Paper 2: Issues relating to development and management of social sector or services relating to health, education, human resources.

About 800,000 people die by suicide worldwide every year, of these 135,000 (17%) are residents of India, a nation with 17.5% of world population. Between 1987 and 2007, the suicide rate increased from 7.9 to 10.3 per 100,000, with higher suicide rates in southern and eastern states of India. According to WHO data, the age standardized suicide rate in India is 16.4 per 100,000 for women (6th highest in the world) and 25.8 for men.

The Government of India **classifies a death as suicide** if it meets the following three criteria:

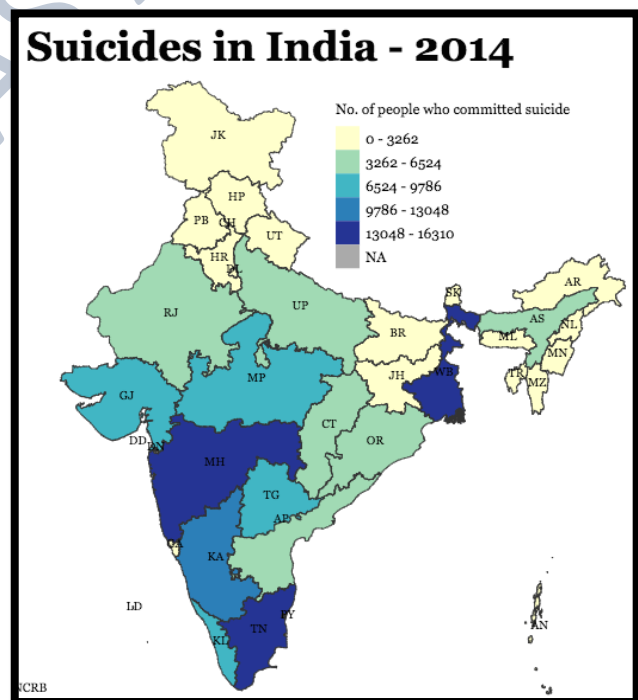
- It is an unnatural death.
- The intent to die originated within the person.
- There is a reason for the person to end his or her life. The reason may have been specified in a suicide note or unspecified.

Suicidal trends in India

Regional

The southern states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu along with eastern states of West Bengal, Tripura and Mizoram have a suicide rate of greater than 16 while it is less than 4 in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Puducherry reported the highest suicide rate at 36.8 per 100,000 people, followed by Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The lowest suicide rates were reported in Bihar (0.8 per 100,000), followed by Nagaland and Manipur.

In the year 2012, Chennai reported the highest total number of suicides at 2,183, followed by Bengaluru (1,989), Delhi (1,397) and Mumbai (1,296). Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) followed by Kollam (Kerala) reported the highest rate of suicides at 45.1



and 40.5 per 100,000 people respectively, about 4 times higher than national average rate. There is a wide variation in suicide rates, year to year, among Indian cities.

Gender and literacy

On average, male suicide rate is twice that of females. However, there is a wide variation in this ratio at the regional level. West Bengal reported 6,277 female suicides, the highest amongst all states of India, and a ratio of male to female suicides at 4:3.

In 2012, 80% of the suicide victims were literate, higher than the national average literacy rate of 74%.

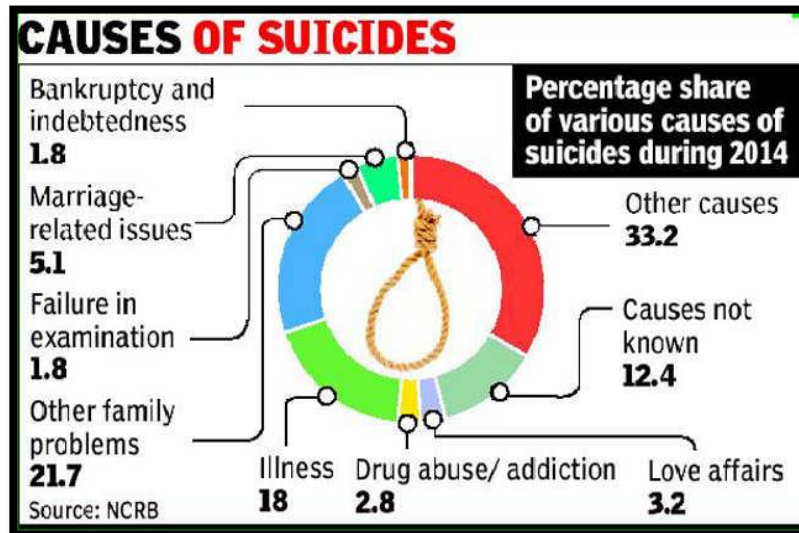
Most used methods of suicide

Poisoning (33%), hanging (26%) and self-immolation (9%) were the primary methods used to die by suicide in 2012.

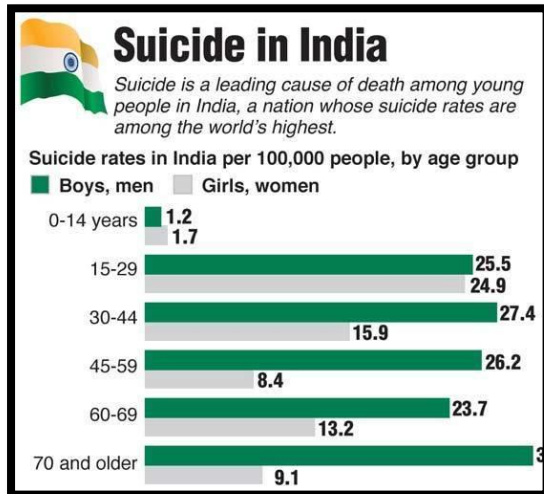
Farmer suicides in India

The farmers' suicides in India, also known as the agrarian crisis, is the phenomenon of suicides among Indian farmers from 1990 to the present. It has been exacerbated by the inability to repay growing debt, often taken from local moneylenders and microcredit banks to pay for high priced high yield seeds marketed by MNCs and the non-implementation of minimum support prices (MSP) by central government and state governments. During the duration from 1998 to 2018, it has resulted in the suicides of 300,000 farmers in the country, often by drinking pesticides themselves.

The National Crime Records Bureau of India reported in its 2012 annual report, that 135,445 people committed suicide in India, of which 13,755 were farmers (11.2%). Of these, 5 out of



29 states accounted for 10,486 farmer suicides (76%) – Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala.



Why suicide rates are higher in South India?

Compared to the bigger states up north like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Odisha and Punjab, the southern states, along with Maharashtra, have consistently higher number of suicides due to reasons like bankruptcy, family problems, illnesses and drug abuse. Most importantly, the number of suicides due to family reasons is significantly high in the southern states. In Tamil Nadu alone, there were 5577 suicides due to 'other

family reasons', with 3149 such suicides in Kerala.

There are a considerable number of suicides due to marriage failure, illicit affairs, love failure and illegitimate pregnancy as well. Deaths due to illnesses are also consistently high across all the southern states, with Tamil Nadu having the highest number of suicides due to illnesses at 4514. In other southern states of AP, Telangana, Kerala and Karnataka, such suicides range between 1500 and 2300. Suicides due to drug abuse are the highest in Tamil Nadu and Kerala at 552 and 475 correspondingly. On the contrary, Punjab, which is known to have a serious drug-abuse problem, only recorded 38 suicides due to drug abuse.

Indebtedness and bankruptcy have also been major reasons for suicides in the southern states and Maharashtra. These southern states and Maharashtra, put together, account for 2099 suicide cases due to financial burden, whereas just 191 cases, in total, have been reported from the northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Odisha and Punjab.

Questions

1. Suicide rates in India is showing an alarming rise, especially in the southern states. What are the reasons for increasing number of suicides in the country? What collective efforts could be taken towards suicide prevention?