



# World Suicide Prevention Day: Confronting the Unseen Epidemic of Student Suicides

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## Mini Review

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## Abstract

This article highlights the critical issue of student suicides, particularly in high-pressure educational environments such as Kota, India, recognized as a prominent hub for competitive exam coaching. It underscores the alarming rise in student suicides linked to academic stress, reporting 35 suicides in 2023 alone, and a cumulative total of approximately 240 from 2013 to 2023. The psychological impact of academic pressures, coupled with the stigma surrounding failure, creates a perfect storm that exacerbates mental health crises among students. The discussion extends to the mental health challenges faced by medical professionals, revealing that 28-40% of medical students in India exhibit symptoms of depression, significantly surpassing national averages. By integrating evidence from recent studies, we explore the correlation between academic pressure, perfectionism, and increased rates of suicidal ideation. To address this urgent crisis, we advocate for a multifaceted approach that includes enhancing mental health awareness, establishing robust support systems within educational institutions, promoting open communication between students and families, and implementing comprehensive mental health education policies. It calls on governments and policymakers to allocate resources towards mental health services, emphasizing the need for a cultural shift in how mental health is perceived and addressed in India. In conclusion, as we observe World Suicide Prevention Day, the article serves as a clarion call for collective action to confront this silent epidemic, fostering an environment where students can thrive academically without compromising their mental health.

**Keywords:** Suicide; Mental Health; Psychology

## Abbreviations:

WHO: World Health Organization; NEET: National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test; JEE: Joint Entrance Examination.

## Introduction

World Suicide Prevention Day, observed annually on September 10th, is a poignant reminder of the mental health

challenges faced by various populations, particularly among medical professionals, resident doctors, medical students, and teenagers. The pressures associated with academic and career expectations can often lead to tragic outcomes. In India, Kota has emerged as a prominent educational hub for aspiring doctors and engineers, attracting thousands of students each year. However, this environment also contributes to a disturbing trend in suicides among students, underscoring the need for urgent attention and intervention.

## The Alarming Trend of Suicide in Kota (The Coaching Capital of India)

Kota, a city in Rajasthan, India, attracts over 200,000 students annually, seeking coaching for competitive examinations such as NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) and IIT JEE (Joint Entrance Examination). This influx of students has made Kota synonymous with rigorous academic preparation, but it has also created an intensely competitive atmosphere where the pressure to succeed can be overwhelming.

In recent years, Kota has witnessed a significant rise in suicides linked to academic stress. According to a report by the Kota Police Department [1], 35 students reportedly committed suicide in 2023 alone, primarily due to pressure related to NEET and IIT JEE preparations. This represents a tragic increase compared to previous years, as the total number of reported student suicides in Kota reached approximately 240 from 2013 to 2023. The grim reality is that many of these students see no viable way out of their perceived failures, often leading to irreversible decisions that impact not only their lives but also their families and communities [2].

The academic pressure faced by students in Kota is exacerbated by the perception that success in these exams is a matter of life and death. The stakes are perceived to be high, as admission into prestigious institutions can dictate future opportunities. This pressure cooker environment has created a mental health crisis, particularly among students who may lack adequate coping mechanisms or support systems [3].

## The Crisis among Medical Professionals

Suicide is not solely a concern among students; medical professionals, too, face significant mental health challenges. Research indicates that 28-40% of medical students in India experience symptoms of depression, significantly higher than the national average for the general population. This statistic is alarming, especially considering the demands placed on medical students during their education and training.

A systematic review published in West CP [4], JAMA Network Open highlighted that the suicide rate among physicians is higher than that of the general population, with studies revealing a range of contributing factors including burnout, depression, and substance abuse. A survey conducted among medical students in India found that more than 30% reported experiencing suicidal thoughts at some point during their education.

Several tragic cases have brought attention to the mental

health crises faced by resident doctors in India. For instance, in 2022, a resident doctor in Delhi committed suicide after facing severe depression attributed to excessive workload, inadequate support, and long hours. Such incidents serve as a grim reminder of the toll that mental health issues can take on individuals within the medical profession [5].

## The Role of Academic Pressure and Mental Health

The correlation between academic pressure and mental health issues is evident in the narratives of students preparing for NEET and IIT JEE [6]. The intense competition fosters an environment where failure is perceived as unacceptable, leading to feelings of hopelessness and despair. A study published in The Lancet Psychiatry found that students from high-pressure environments, such as Kota, have a higher propensity for anxiety and suicidal ideation [7].

Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to these pressures due to various factors including hormonal changes, social expectations, and academic demands. The World Health Organization (WHO) [8] indicates that suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 29-year-olds globally, highlighting the urgent need for effective prevention strategies tailored to this demographic.

The educational model in Kota is characterized by long hours of study, minimal downtime, and a hyper-focus on exam performance. While the intention is to prepare students for competitive exams, this structure can lead to mental fatigue and burnout. A study found that the average student in Kota spends 10-12 hours a day studying, often sacrificing sleep, social interactions, and personal interests. This exhaustive approach to education can lead to a cycle of anxiety and depression, exacerbating feelings of isolation and despair [9].

## Understanding the Psychology behind Student Suicides

The psychology behind student suicides in high-pressure environments is complex and multifaceted. Many students harbor unrealistic expectations, both from themselves and their families. The stigma associated with failure further compounds these pressures, as many students believe that admitting to struggles is synonymous with admitting defeat.

Several psychological theories can help explain why students in Kota might feel compelled to take such drastic measures. One such theory is the "hopelessness theory," which posits that individuals who experience a prolonged state of hopelessness are at an increased risk for suicidal ideation. Students who fail to meet their academic goals may

develop a sense of hopelessness, leading them to believe that there is no alternative path to success.

Additionally, the “perfectionism model” suggests that individuals with perfectionistic tendencies often set excessively high standards for themselves. When they inevitably fall short of these standards, it can lead to severe emotional distress, increasing the risk of suicidal thoughts. This model is particularly relevant in the context of Kota, where the competitive atmosphere fosters perfectionistic attitudes among students.

### The Importance of Open Communication and Support Systems

Addressing the issue of student suicides in Kota requires a multifaceted approach that includes fostering open communication and establishing robust support systems. Educational institutions, parents, and communities must work collaboratively to create an environment where students feel comfortable discussing their mental health challenges.

- **Mental Health Awareness Programs:** Schools and coaching institutes should implement mental health education programs to destigmatize seeking help. These programs can equip students with the tools to recognize signs of mental distress in themselves and their peers, encouraging them to seek support when needed.
- **Counseling Services:** Establishing accessible mental health resources, including counseling and therapy, is crucial. Educational institutions should employ trained mental health professionals who can provide guidance and support to students facing academic pressures. The presence of a supportive figure can make a significant difference in a student’s life.
- **Peer Support Programs:** Creating peer support networks within educational institutions can foster a sense of community and help individuals feel less isolated in their struggles. Initiatives such as buddy systems or peer mentorship programs can provide students with a support system where they can share their experiences and feelings without judgment.
- **Parental Involvement:** Parents play a critical role in shaping their children’s attitudes toward education and success. Encouraging open conversations about mental health within families can create a supportive environment for teenagers and young adults facing academic pressures. Parents should also be educated about the signs of mental distress, allowing them to intervene when necessary.
- **Work-Life Balance for Medical Professionals:** Hospitals and medical institutions must prioritize the mental well-being of their staff by promoting healthy work-life balance and reducing excessive working hours.

Providing opportunities for relaxation, recreational activities, and stress management workshops can significantly enhance the mental health of healthcare professionals.

- **Reducing Academic Pressure:** Educational institutions must reevaluate their teaching methodologies and assessment systems to reduce unnecessary academic pressure. A more holistic approach to education, which includes emotional intelligence, resilience training, and life skills, can empower students to cope with the demands of their academic pursuits.
- **The Role of Government and Policy Makers**
- Governments and policymakers also play a crucial role in addressing mental health challenges among students and medical professionals. Implementing policies that prioritize mental health in educational curricula can have far-reaching effects.
- **Integrating Mental Health Education:** Schools should incorporate mental health education into their curricula, teaching students about emotional well-being, coping strategies, and available resources. By normalizing discussions about mental health, we can reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behavior.
- **Increased Funding for Mental Health Services:** Governments should allocate more resources to mental health services, ensuring that schools and colleges have access to trained professionals who can provide immediate support to students in distress.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Initiating public awareness campaigns can help educate the general population about mental health issues and the importance of seeking help. Such campaigns can destigmatize mental health challenges and encourage individuals to prioritize their well-being [10].

### Conclusion

As we commemorate World Suicide Prevention Day, it is essential to recognize the unique challenges faced by medical professionals and students in high-pressure environments like Kota. The statistics surrounding suicides in this educational hub serve as a clarion call for urgent action. By implementing effective prevention strategies and promoting mental health awareness, we can help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues and create a supportive ecosystem for those in need.

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