

Call for Papers

15th December 2024

SUICIDE: ISSUES & CHALLENGES

There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide

- Albert Camus

‘Sambhashan’- the peer-reviewed online journal of the University of Mumbai, invites research papers for its special issue ‘Suicide in India: Issues and Challenges’ In this issue, we look at the crisis of the rising number of suicides in India through an interdisciplinary lens, unravelling the complex and

interconnected factors that contribute to suicidal tendencies and behaviours across diverse populations and contexts. We invite scholars, researchers, and practitioners to contribute original research articles, reviews and case studies examining suicide from diverse perspectives. This issue aims to foster a deeper, interdisciplinary understanding of suicide, encouraging collaboration across fields to address this critical issue from multiple vantage points and develop actionable insights for both research and practice.



The serious question common to all in this contemporary world is whether life is worth living, which was raised by Albert Camus in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus". At times, humans feel the universe is cold and indifferent to this quest to find meaning in life and faced with absurd situations. Camus suggested that consciousness of the meaninglessness in life is the first step to accepting life, and suicide is no solution. The idea of the afterlife and happiness in life are not true and the ultimate truth is to make sense of what is in front of you in life. The ability of human beings to resist difficult situations and problems of life is rising in the global world. This age is providing more machines/AI and fewer ears to listen to human issues, fewer helping hands, and less mercy in hearts to understand another being. The cases of suicide are rising, and the reasons are numerous. Still, the discourse about the issues and challenges of suicide will help the readers understand the situation and initiate help.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has highlighted the rising number of suicides in India as an emerging, significant public health concern. Suicide is the leading cause of death among youth between 15 and 29 years of age. India makes up about 18 per cent of the world's population, it accounts for 28 per cent of suicides worldwide. Moreover, India ranks third globally in the number of suicides by females and fourth in the number of suicides by males.

The statistics surrounding suicide in India reveal more than just numbers; they reflect a deeply embedded crisis rooted in a multitude of social, economic, and cultural issues. Factors such as socio-economic disparity, the rapidly growing urban-rural divide, and inadequate mental health infrastructure amplify the challenges of addressing suicides. In particular, the cultural stigmatization of mental health continues to prevent people from seeking timely help, exacerbating their distress and leading them down an irreversible path. The tendency to frame suicide primarily as a personal failure or weakness further impedes collective efforts toward prevention.

Furthermore, the interplay between cultural norms and individual mental health issues creates a complex environment where vulnerability to suicide is heightened. For example, honour-related pressures, particularly for young women, and family expectations rooted in tradition, often leave individuals with

few perceived alternatives. These challenges are magnified in rural areas, where access to mental health support remains minimal, and where deep-rooted patriarchal values create unique stressors for both genders, particularly in managing family and financial crises.

To address this emerging crisis, the first national suicide prevention strategy was released in 2022, in India by WHO as National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022). It outlined the objectives, timeframes for achieving them, and key stakeholders involved, aiming to reduce suicide-related mortalities by ten per cent by the year 2030. India is among the few low and middle-income countries that have systematic and regular reporting of suicide cases. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) compiles annual data on suicides in India through its publication 'Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India' report. Since suicides are registered as unnatural deaths, the NCRB report data is sourced from police records from the states in India. The NCRB assesses states and cities according to their suicide rates, providing information about the areas with the highest rates. High suicide rates are regularly reported in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Karnataka. While the NCRB offers detailed breakdowns of causes, demographics, and trends, it faces challenges like underreporting and data limitations that affect the full understanding of the suicide landscape.

Philosophical engagements with suicide raise a host of conceptual, ethical, moral and psychological questions. Along with Albert Camus' question of suicide as a serious philosophical problem to deciding whether or not life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question in philosophy. An argument against suicide is made in Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*, where he discusses it as wrong because it means prematurely releasing ourselves from the body bestowed upon us by the Gods (*Phaedo* 61b-62c), in the dialogue *Laws* too it is discussed as a wrong, unless, self-killing is by judicial order (like Socrates), if the mind and character is corrupted beyond redemption, extreme personal misfortune or extreme shame for indulging in unjust actions (*Laws* IX 854a3-5, 873c-d). This is interesting as Plato seems to be making a case for suicide limited to individual in relation with the community (and not as a matter of individual right). Religious arguments against suicide largely argue against suicide as a violation of divine will, self-harm and

injuring the community of which the individual is a part. An interesting argument against suicide made by Immanuel Kant spells “to live” as a moral duty of human beings, suicide would translate into uprooting humanity, morality and autonomy itself; and hence can find no justification. However, thinkers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche reject all forms of moralizing suicide and Nietzsche in his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* discusses the possibility of suicide being an assertion of one’s will in an otherwise meaningful world. Nineteenth and twentieth century developments in psychiatry, medicine and sociology; shifted the perspective of suicide from being an individual moral problem to conditions outside such as mental and physical health, degeneration in political, social, cultural values and individual and societal alienation caused by modernity that lead to psychological conditions causing people to inflict self-harm on themselves. The rise in suicide rates is discussed as evidence of cultural decline, making suicide prevention a medical and bureaucratic preoccupation, leading to institutionalization for suicidal persons.

Legal issues and stigma associated with suicide in Indian society are often cited as factors responsible for the underreporting of suicides. Furthermore, there are notable disparities in the statistics because there is a lack of a reliable system for gathering data, especially in rural areas where reporting is less reliable than in cities.

Rural suicides are often overlooked in the broader national discourse, despite their high frequency. This underreporting is influenced by both logistical hurdles and the reluctance of families to report suicides due to the associated stigma. Often, local communities seek to resolve such cases internally, avoiding law enforcement to preserve social standing. The lack of a strong governmental or non-governmental network to support these regions only worsens the problem, as potential warning signs go unnoticed, and opportunities for intervention are lost.

The Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 represents a pivotal step by decriminalizing suicide and providing necessary medical care for those who attempt it. This reform encourages a more compassionate and dignified approach, emphasizing

humane treatment for individuals in crisis. However, despite the act's decriminalization of suicide attempts for those with mental illness, the residual effects of prior criminalization continue to affect the accurate reporting of such cases.

Though the connection between suicide and mental health conditions- especially depression and alcohol use disorders- is well recognized, many suicides occur impulsively during moments of crisis. Contributing risk factors include loss, isolation, discrimination, relationship breakdowns, financial difficulties, chronic pain or illness, violence, abuse, and conflicts or humanitarian crises. A prior suicide attempt remains the most significant risk factor for future suicides.

Although suicides are prevalent across age groups and professions in India, the rise in cases of farmer suicides and student suicides are particularly alarming. Student suicide rates have increased at an alarming 4% annual pace over the previous 20 years, which is double the national average. Student suicide rates are still higher than both overall suicide trends and population growth rates. In the past ten years, the number of people aged 0 to 24 has decreased to 581 million, yet the number of student suicides has climbed to 13,044. The states of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh report the highest number of suicides by students. Together, southern states and union territories account for 29 per cent of these cases. The state of Rajasthan, which is infamous for its demanding and stressful academic environment, ranks tenth in the list, underscoring the tremendous strain associated with the coaching industry in the state.

The NCRB statistics also revealed a concerning trend: the suicide rate among agricultural labourers, or those who depend on daily wages from farming operations, was greater than that of farmers and cultivators. This is crucial since wages from farming, as opposed to crop production, have become a larger source of income for the ordinary agricultural household over time. Research has shown a connection between climate change-related disasters and suicides among India's agricultural labour. Droughts have become more frequent and widespread in the country as a result of climate change. The number of farmer suicides has been higher in years when there has been less rainfall. A total of 2851 farmer

suicides were reported in the year 2023 in the state of Maharashtra alone. Farmer suicides have become a symbol for what is probably profound and pervasive but often neglected agrarian distress.

Suicide among India's agrarian community is not just a symptom of economic failure but also a profound indicator of psychological distress caused by a disempowering cycle of debt, loss of status, and erosion of traditional livelihoods. The deep-seated frustrations in agricultural communities often intersect with personal mental health crises, making suicide an outcome not solely of economic precarity but also of systemic neglect and emotional exhaustion. Effective suicide prevention in these communities thus requires addressing both economic reforms and emotional and psychological well-being.

We welcome submissions grounded in empirical research, data analysis, and case studies that offer practical insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars based on the above-mentioned issues and topics relevant to the theme of the issue. Manuscripts must be original, unpublished works and not under consideration by other publications. All submissions should follow the journal's formatting and style requirements.

We encourage contributions from a wide range of disciplines, including but not limited to:

1. Factors contributing to suicide
2. Farmer suicides in India
3. Media portrayal and reporting of suicides in India
4. Gender differences in suicide cases
5. Suicide and the associated stigma
6. Historical perspectives on suicide in India
7. Suicide from the lens of religion
8. Climate change and suicide
9. Suicides, Education and Pressure
10. Literature, Personality and Suicide
11. The legality of suicide
12. Disability and Suicide

13. LGBTQIA+ and Suicide
14. Genetic and Biological basis of Suicide
15. Economics and Suicide
16. Social Structure and Suicide
17. Migration and Suicide
18. Workplace Stress and Suicide
19. Philosophical Issues of Suicide
20. Suicide, Ethics and Value of Life
21. Suicide, Capitalism and Existential deliberations
22. Politics Social Justice and Philosophy of suicide
23. State Authority, Individual Agency and ethics of Suicide Prevention

Guidelines to follow for writing a research paper in Sambhashan:

Original, scholarly, creative and critical papers with adequate references and empirical work (if applicable).

All references to the author should be removed from the submission to enable the anonymous review process.

There should be a limit from 4000-6000 words (for papers), 1500-2000 words (for commentaries) and 1000 words (for book reviews).

Essays should follow the Times New Roman font in size 12 with double space and be submitted as a word document.

All contributions should follow the author-date referencing system detailed in chapter 15 of The Chicago Manual of Style (17th Edition). The style guidelines can be consulted on the journal webpages for quick reference.

Authors should submit a statement that their contribution is original without any plagiarism. They can also, in addition, submit a plagiarism check certificate.

Last date for the submission of the article is 15th December 2024. The style of Writing the article is given on the website: <https://mu.ac.in/sambhashan> Kindly follow the instructions given on the website. Submit your article through a Word file on the following email id: coeditor.sambhashan@mu.ac.in