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RIGHT TO EDUCATION ACT 2009 REASONING SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Availability of structure is a boon for targeting segments of population for their welfare. Educational system is one such available structure. Many times this structure is used for dealing with health issues like malnutrition, immunisation and census drives. Similarly, suicide prevention praxis can also be modulated through this existing network. Magnitude of suicide among students is increasing and is a matter of urgent concern. Hence, the purpose of the present paper is to appeal for appending focused suicide prevention initiatives along with educational policies like Right to Education Act, 2009 for student population.

KEY WORDS:

Right to Education Act 2009, suicide, student suicide, suicide prevention, education policy.

INTRODUCTION

Student is a future and valuable human resource of the country. It is imperative and anticipated from the educational system to assure overall development of the student. However, there are some negative upsurges in the life of the student that needs special attention. Suicidal behaviour is one such aspect. The magnitude of students' suicide is alarming in India. Indispensability of policy intervention for suicide prevention in general and students in particular is the need of hour in India.

There is a wider applicability to the Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) (henceforth RTE) than preventing suicide among students upto the age-group of 14 years. Inclusion of children in elementary education, dealing with dropouts from elementary education and to augment the standard of education are the important implications of the RTE. Prima facie, the RTE appears beneficial for educational health, however, is not free from critical gaps and requires some important modification (Jha & Parvati, 2010). In the absence of suicide prevention policy for students in India, RTE can juxtapose reasoning for focused suicide prevention initiatives as well.

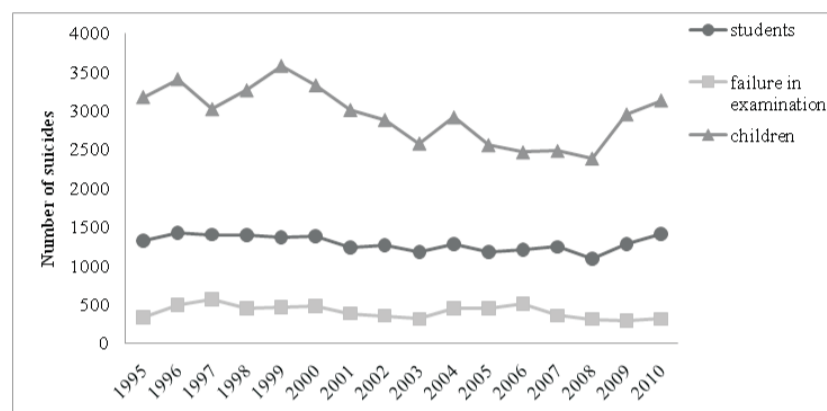
RTE and students' suicide reality

RTE prohibits from holding back and expulsion of any student upto age 14 which is applicable up till eight standards of elementary education. It is implied that no student will be held in same class due to failure in examination despite inadequate performance. The Indian scenario (figure 1) indicates that students committing suicide upto age group of 14 years approximates close to 50% of the total number of children committing suicide upto the age-group of 14 years in India. Suicides due to failure in examination contribute one-fourth suicides out of suicides committed by students. It is also important to note that the trend of total suicides and the number of students' suicide in the age-group upto 14 years are increasing; however, number of suicides due to failure in examination is indicating a descending trend. Hence, no failure as per the act for the student's upto the age group of 14 years will cater to lesser number of students

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across India. Large number of students will be still left form this age-group who may be committing suicides due to other reasons. Thus, this particular provision of the act appears inadequate for suicide prevention for the implied age-group.

Figure 1 Suicides by children, student and due to failure in examination 14 years in India 1995 to 2010



Data Source: National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of home affairs, Government of India [homepage on the Internet]. New Delhi: The Bureau; Accidental Deaths and Suicide in India -Annual Publication [about 2 screens], Viewed on 26 November 2011 (<http://ncrb.nic.in/adsi/main.htm>)

RTE and suicide prevention praxis

In RTE there are sections that can be of some hope. According to the RTE's chapter six, on protection of right of children, section 33.1 and section 34.1, the central and the state government is required to constitute an advisory committee respectively. The committee can advise the respective government to establish mental health centres with an emphasis on suicide prevention as a special task in every educational institute. This task can be well taken by the constituted school management committee under the provision of school development plan.

Chapter IV, Section 24.1 (d) and (e) empowers the teacher to assess the 'learning ability' and communication with parents. It is required to clarify the term 'learning ability', as it can be understood, 'learning disability' and inability due to various restrictions to learn. This may be possible underpinning for failure in examination and can be timely dealt. The teacher can accordingly deal with the appropriately identified difficulties with learning. Further, regular meetings with parents can help exchange teachers and parents/guardians regarding significant information about the child. This can help in identification of suicide risk indicators. Provisions under chapter five can be seen as overarching justification for taking care of general mental health and specifically suicide prevention among the students upto 14 years of elementary education.

Suggestions

Suicidal behaviours are generally attended by the health services in India. The health services appear to be scarce in addressing the issue. However, there is an urgent need for some tangible solutions to this problem. For suicide prevention in educational settings, the Universal, Selective and Indicated (USI) model proposed by Gordon (1983), can be more applicable. The strategies can be framed based on USI model that addresses entire population (students), subsets of the total population (focusing on an at-risk students that has a greater probability of becoming suicidal) and specific high-risk students within the student population (those who show evidence of early signs of suicide potential) respectively. Further, resource guidelines for teachers and school staff as provided by World Health Organization (2000) can be incorporated in the USI model. These possibilities can be considered by the policy makers by appending suicide prevention initiative along with educational policies for student population.

Possibilities of sincere implementation of the act will augment the current enrolment of children upto 14 years. This situation adds to the chance for continuation of education in secondary and further on. As a result, overall enrolment of students may augment. According to population increase theory of suicide (Zhang, 1998) it can be anticipated that the number of suicides due to various reasons among student

population not only upto 14 year will increase, but a general increase may be observed. However, the reality can be assessed only after customising the RTE for some years down the line. The act demands the “collective social responsibility” from the society. Motivation and sincere involvement of the government, educational institutes, teachers and parents are important explanatory variables. Failure of successful implementation of this act may trim-down the overall purpose of the act.

End Notes:

- According to the recent report on Accidental deaths and suicide in India (2010), National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of home affairs, Government of India, 7379 students committed suicide in 2010 all over India.
- In last decade research pertaining to suicide in India is continuously appealing for suicide prevention policy in India. For example two of the representative articles out of a pool of research articles demanding for policy are: Vijayakumar, L. (2007). Suicide and its prevention: The urgent need in India. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 49(2): 81–84. Manoranjitham, S. D., Jayakaran, R., & Jacob, K. S. (2006). Suicide in India: the need for a national policy. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 48 (1), 72.
- The chapter four of RTE on responsibilities of schools and teachers, section 16 states that “No child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education”.
- According to the RTE chapter six on protection of right of children, section 33. (1) The Central Government shall constitute, by notification, a National Advisory Council, consisting of such Members, not exceeding fifteen, as the Central Government may deem necessary, to be appointed from amongst person having knowledge and practical experience in the field of elementary education and child development.
- According to the RTE chapter six on protection of right of children, section 34. (1) The State Government shall constitute, by notification, a State Advisory Council, consisting of such Members, not exceeding fifteen, as the State Government may deem necessary, to be appointed from amongst person having knowledge and practical experience in the field of elementary education and child development.
- RTE Chapter IV, 21. (1) A school, other than a school specified in sub-clause (iv) of clause (n) of section 2, shall constitute a School Management Committee consisting of the elected representatives of the local authority, parents or guardians of children admitted in such school and teachers.
- RTE Chapter IV, 22. (1) Every School Management Committee, constituted under sub-section (1) of section 21, shall prepare a School Development Plan, in such manner as may be prescribed. (2) The School Development Plan so prepared under sub-section (1) shall be the basis for the plans and grants to be made by the appropriate Government or local authority as the case may be.
- Duties of the teacher RTE Chapter IV, 24. (1) (d) assess the learning ability of each child and accordingly supplement additional instructions, if any, as required. (e) hold regular meetings with parents and guardians and apprise them about the regularity in attendance, ability to learn, progress made in learning and any other relevant information about the child.
- Chapter five on curriculum and completion of elementary education provides certain opportunities for inculcating various abilities to the child.

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