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Scrutiny of Suicide, Unemployment and Covid

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Coronavirus has affected the whole world. This pandemic is not taking any relief nor giving anybody. After delta again omicron's just name has shaken the world and especially the workers and the common man who just began reviving and getting back to their normal lifestyle. This article is an attempt to enlighten us with the suffering of the common man which is often missed by everybody. We often see the news highlighting the stars being affected or any other elite or group. But hardly anybody sees the suffering of the common people which eventually results in suicide.

Keywords: *omicron, pandemic, suicide, unemployment.*

INTRODUCTION:OMICRON ENTRY, PEOPLE'S GLOOM

Have you seen someone suffering because of love? Have you seen someone losing their persona because one of their strength left them? Have you seen someone who became introverted though they used to be extroverts? Have you seen someone crying without their tears falling? Have you seen someone in a depression phase? Have you seen someone considering himself as unworthy just because he couldn't be able to save his loved one? Have you seen that mother weeping whose only motive for living and breathing was her son and imagine that son leaving her! There is n number of questions going on in my mind which I really want to ask from you all as well so that you too can relate to the misery that these

people were going through. Covid-19 was that misfortune that shook everybody from children to elites. We used to listen about food crisis or people being harassed by the Britishers and used to feel sympathy for the same. But who would have imagined that after so many years later this will be even worst and that too with us the interesting part is that this time there is no Britisher but just a virus whose name doesn't exist before December 2019? Okay so each one of us must have felled sympathy but only a few of us took the stand and really helped even one person in that unprecedented pandemic. Each one of us had heard that horrible news 20000 people today in Bihar contacted with coronavirus "person X died because he didn't get oxygen cylinder" "person Y died because he didn't get a seat in hospital" "Person Z bring a renowned celebrity all the needed medical staff went to their to treat them." Person T being a poor can't afford big hospital fee, so he died". There is an end amount of news like this.

Suffering for a chapati, suffering to share, suffering from social alignment, suffering from depression, all these things seem to come again in the form of Omicron if not taken a proper precaution. The Omicron variant was first reported to the WHO from South Africa on Nov 24, 2021. WHO has designated Omicron as a "variant of concern". According to data from various countries, Omicron is more transmissible and the patients have mild symptoms. When the second wave arrived, we were in a panicked, shocked, depressed phase (all these at the same time). Now just think how people will cope if the unexpected third wave arrives. Already drained income will not even allow us to have time for bread or chapati. The economy has recently started progressing and if it will come all the efforts of various businessmen, employees, labourers, economists, etc will go in vain.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUICIDE, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND COVID

The Covid not only made people suffer emotionally but also financially because they lost their job and in the situation of unemployment, they choose suicide as the last resort. More than 8,000 people lost their life by suicide reason being financial crises in 2020 when the first wave of COVID-19 hit the country and consecutively an abrupt lockdown left many jobless. *"In the year 2020 approx. 8761 people committed suicide and the reason being lack of job, or unemployment,*

*bankruptcy or indebtedness*¹ as stated by Nityanand Rai. The Home Ministry informed in Rajya Sabha that between 2018 and 2020 which is three years as many as 25,251 died because of financial crises caused by unemployment. In the weeks following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's abrupt shutdown in March without giving them enough time to prepare, more than crore migrants including workers, labourers, students, returned to their home districts from almost all corners of the country. The numbers came into focus after the Facebook live video of a worker in Uttar Pradesh creating hype on the internet, a day after he and his wife took poison, blaming various laws of government, like GST which caused financial constraints for him. It's not that government is not aware of the rising number of suicidal cases in these pandemic years but there is a huge difference between having awareness about some issues and acknowledgment and doing something for the same. The planning only and starting new schemes have not helped earlier and will not help in the future too and government needs to understand the severity and not just on paper made laws and act.

Two excellent government programs are the District Mental Health Program (DMHP) and the National Mental Health Program (NMHP). In schools and universities, the program strives to provide suicide prevention services, workplace stress management, life-skills training, and counselling. The government has also launched many programmes to boost job development and social security benefits in order to combat unemployment of the problem and act accordingly by focussing on ground level implementation. Each year almost 800000 people die just because of suicide.² There is a nonlinear connection between unemployment and suicide. The expected number of job losses due to a pandemic is evidenced from the International Labour Organisation's press release from March 18, 2020, reporting a decline of 24.7 million jobs as a high scenario and 5.3 million jobs lost as low scenario, the percentage of jobless would rise to 5.088%, associated with a growth of approx. 2135. According to WHO one suicidal death led to 20 more suicide attempts in an association or a domain. From here the fact is evidenced that unemployment or just taking away the job of one person can lead to the

¹ Neeta Sharma, 'Data On Suicides During 1st Covid Wave Finally Released By Home Ministry' (NDTV, 9 February 2022) <<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/over-8-000-died-by-suicide-in-2020-amid-1st-covid-wave-home-ministry-2758684>> accessed 11 February 2022

² 'Suicide Prevention' (WHO, 24 March 2020) <https://www.who.int/health-topics/suicide#tab=tab_1> accessed 11 February 2022

death of 20 people and this data can increase also if the person is the only bread earner of his family. Suicide is not about just one problem or two instead it is a complex process consisting of many interconnected events or potential factors. From the above evidence, we can conclude that job loss affects a person by making them helpless and can have a devastating effect on them.

SUICIDE

The country's unemployment and suicide rates have been significantly influenced by the financial crisis. However, besides economic crisis lies the personal and family tragedies, the long-term impact of which is difficult to measure. Fear and concern about the disease, as well as the overwhelmed healthcare system, have spread throughout the population, resulting in a nationwide mental health crisis. The effect of the pandemic has been felt not only in a physical sense, but also in terms of agony, death, and solitude. It also has a substantial impact on people's mental health, such as the onset of depression symptoms. This was in part due to loneliness and social isolation caused by restrictions brought in to curb the spread of the virus.

Most people have the notion that elderly people have done more suicide in the pandemic, but this is the half-truth as the young people and children also suffered severely during covid19. Young people have not only lost their job but also employment opportunities their education got disrupted due to online classes and, they lost the option for on-campus recruitment and training. The pandemic has almost come to an end, but its long-term effect will be very grievous which will require a long time to be tackled. The proportion of young workers impacted by the crisis is considerably larger than the elder one. Frontline health professionals and doctors have taken their own lives as a result of the great stress of working amid the pandemic. Many face social and familial stigma, as well as their own fears of becoming infected. Doctors are working without a break and under stressful conditions and this is affecting their own mental health. Prior to the pandemic also, India was experiencing a mental health crisis. *In India the number of death due to suicide was highest in the world, reporting about 381 suicides daily in 2019*, according to a report by the National Crime Records Bureau. This was an increase of nearly 3.4% in suicide deaths as compared to 2018.

INDIA'S MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION

In India, having a mental health disease is viewed with suspicion, and persons who suffer from mental illnesses are stigmatised. Mental problems are also seen to be the result of a lack of self-control and willpower. The stigma attached to mental illness, as well as a lack of access, affordability, and awareness, have resulted in huge treatment disparities. According to the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) from 2015-16, approximately 80% of persons with mental disorders did not receive treatment for more than a year. This survey also discovered significant treatment gaps in mental healthcare, ranging from 28% to 83 percent for various mental diseases. In India treatment costs for mental illnesses frequently put families in financial straits. This burden is usually exacerbated in the case of middle-aged people by impacting their productivity, increasing the weight not just on the person but also on the economy. The Mental Healthcare Act of 2017³ contains various clauses aimed at improving India's mental health situation. The Mental Healthcare Act of 1987 was repealed by the passage of the 2017 act, which was criticised for failing to recognise the rights and agency of people with mental illnesses. The Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 required every state to form an SMHA (State Mental Health Authorities) but this act failed on the implementation level as not all states succeeded in setting up SMHA.

According to WHO's recommendation, the government also introduced The National Mental Health Programme in 1982. This program was also not successful because of constraints of resources and insufficient infrastructure. According to a survey conducted by the Indian Psychiatry Society, more than 20% of people suffered from poor mental health from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic students also suffered a lot since due to lockdown classes were going online leading to abruptly switching to the online platform and no friends meeting, playing, laughing and fun and this became one of the reasons for mental stress because during online classes they were expected to attend classes and no friends meet and no sharing of thoughts which eventually severely affected students.

³ Mental Healthcare Act, 2017

To tackle this government introduced an online platform named MANODARPAN in which people can do interactive online chat.

LEGAL ASPECTS OF SUICIDE

SECTION 309⁴ OF IPC: *Attempt to commit suicide - Whoever attempts to commit suicide and does any act towards the commission of such offence, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year [or with fine, or with both.]*

In the case of *Gian Kaur v State of Punjab*⁵, it was argued that section 309 of IPC violates our fundamental right enriched under Article 21⁶ which talks about the right to live. Here it was argued that if a person has the right to live then he should have the right to take his life also. But the court struck down the contention of breaching fundamental right by saying that there is no ground to hold that Section 309 IPC is constitutionally invalid. By stating so the court was of the view that the lives of people are not only valuable to them but also valuable to the State which protects them. Suicide has been successfully decriminalised by the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. This act aims to portray the accused as a sufferer of mental stress who is experiencing a momentary lack of mental capacity. As a result, the so-called offence of a suicidal attempt takes on a new meaning. In contrast to traditional predecessors such as the IPC, the Mental Healthcare Act is a progressive act with a modern perspective.

CONCLUSION

The number of suicide cases increased in the last two years and one of the main reasons is the financial issue because of unemployment. The reason for unemployment is of course the lockdown and Covid-19 due to which many people lost their job and were severely affected and were left with no option but to suicide. Government should create awareness about mental health and should bring some effective laws which can help people to tackle their mental health. Government should also initiate some measures which can help those who have lost their job in a pandemic.

⁴ Indian Penal Code, 1860, s 309

⁵ *Gian Kaur v State of Punjab* 1996 AIR 946

⁶ Constitution of India, 1950, art. 21