

INCIDENTS OF SUICIDE AMONG YOUTH IN KERALA: AN ANALYTICAL AND RETROSPECTIVE STUDY INTO PSYCHOSOCIAL DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

Recently suicide among youth poses a conundrum to socio biologists. As a sociological research, the study endeavor to find the causes and solutions of this social problem. This retrospective study is based on data drawn from the District and State Crime Record bureaus and newspaper reports in Kerala, assesses various psychosocial correlates of youth suicide in Kerala since 2001. The study focuses mainly on the factors of age and gender. The data reveals the degree and reasons of youth suicide in Kerala over the last eight years.

Key words: *Personality deviation, Suicide ideation, Depressive disorders, Suicidal syndrome.*

INTRODUCTION

Self harm is the human act of self inflicting, self intentioned distroyal committed out of constricted thinking, severe anguish and acute depression and disorder. The tendency derives from mental illness. Depression, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and adverse environment caused by sexual abuse, domestic abuse, social isolation, discrimination etc are said to be the reasons of this crime.(4).

Suicidal tendency and incidence among youth are being an ubiquitous phenomenon in the country in recent ages (5, 6, 7). It is increasing among youth in an alarming rate than old age groups. A report from **The Hindu** (16th March 2008) states that a third year student in Kerala ended his life before a web cam while chatting with his girl friend.

Many adolescents in Kerala are in the grip of a death wish. The latest blot on Kerala's social landscape is the disturbing trend of teenagers seeking to end their lives. It came into focus when three girls in Ambalapuzha of Alapuzha district committed suicide by consuming pesticide. All of them were studying in class Eleventh. They jumped over the wall of their school compound at night, entered the classroom and consumed poison. The suicide notes they left behind indicated that unrequited love was the reason. (12).

Another **report** from **The Hindu** reveals that two teenage **girls with low assets** allegedly committed **suicide** by jumping before a running train. They were found close to a **track** near the **Kannur railway** station around 4.30 am on 7th December 2008.

The Hindu reports cumulative suicides in 2009. A higher secondary school girl child aged 17, jumped into a well and sacrificed her life and the reason was unknown. News report from Kasaragod district reiterates that a 16 year old secondary school male student consumed poison on 8th June 2009 and deceased after two weeks in a private hospital at Mangalore. The reason is said to be the mental shock due to the failure in examinations. The single window system adopted by the Government of Kerala for providing admissions to the higher secondary classes creates some adverse effects to the students according to news reports. A report on 3rd July 2009 show that at Mavelikkara in Alapuzha district a female student aged 16, killed herself. Mental agony due to the non availability of admission to class Eleventh is said to be the reason according to the reports. Several such deaths occurred in Kerala in the last year.

Mathrubhumi daily (16 May 2012) reports that Sruthi, 16, a class XII female student of Pattuvam Govt Higher Secondary School, Taliparamba, Kannur District committed suicide by hanging inside her house. Mathrubhumi daily (30 November 2012) reports that Dineshdeenu, 16, a class XI male student committed suicide by hanging near his house at Kundara, Kollam District. Mathrubhumi daily (19 November 2012) reports that Soniya, 18, a female student in a parallel college at Kattappana, Idukki District set ablaze herself with kerosene. Malayala Manorama daily (15 February 2012) reports that Reshma, 16, a Class XI female student in Kamballur Govt. Higher Secondary School, Chittarikal, Kasaragod District found committed suicide inside her house. Malayala Manorama daily (24 September 2012) reports that Athira, 17, a Class XI female student committed suicide by hanging in her hostel at Periyar in Kasaragod District. Mathrubhumi daily (6 December 2012) reports that Sunil, 17, a Class XI male student in Kallyotu Govt Higher Secondary School, Periyar, Kasaragod District found committed suicide by hanging.

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Malayala Manorama (11 February 2013) reports, K. Sumitha aged 22, a female youth in Kasaragod district, found hanging in her bedroom.

Deepika daily (9 February 2013) reports that Sumayya, 18, a class XII female student committed suicide by hanging at her home in Malappuram District.

Deepika daily (11 March 2013) reports that Vinayapriya, a 12 year old female student in class VII, deceased at Medical College hospital in Kottayam. She set ablaze herself with kerosene the previous day.

Malayala Manorama (06 February 2013) reports the suicidal attempt of a first semester BBA (female) student, jumping from the second floor of the educational institution, making her parents and the Principal as onlookers.

Malayala Manorama (18 February 2013) reports that Susmitha, Age 20, a second year degree student(female) in Vivekananda college at Cherkala in Kasaragod District found dead in a pond near her house. The same daily reports the suicide of a male youth aged 22 by consuming poison.

FINDINGS

Study on a sample data of suicides from Kannur district illustrates that as many as 149 suicides (19.35%) are youth in 2001; of which 10.9% male and 8.4% female. In 2008, the percentage of youth suicide has increased by 2.58%.

Table 1. Suicides in Kannur District 2001-2008

<i>NO. OF SUICIDES IN KANNUR DISTRICT 2001-2008</i>													
YEAR	MALE						FEMALE						GRAND TOTAL
	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-59	60 & ABOVE	TOTAL	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-59	60 & ABOVE	TOTAL	
2001		84	146	182	130	542	1	65	60	47	55	228	770
2002		96	211	150	129	586	2	53	56	39	47	167	783
2003	5	74	148	154	145	526	8	60	48	31	48	195	721
2004	5	69	127	150	103	454	5	57	43	49	60	214	668
2005	1	63	129	147	107	447	1	46	41	47	43	138	625
2006	2	58	110	158	87	415	1	47	39	41	43	171	586
2007	14	68	108	157	76	423	3	32	45	45	31	156	579
2008	3	77	110	124	105	419	4	55	37	35	52	183	602

For some reasons, in 2007 suicide among male children below 14 years emerged a two digit figure 14 that is 3.3% of the total number of suicides while it was zero in 2001. While focusing the data of suicide among the female youth, it is found that the percentage has been comparatively in the increase. In 2001 percentage of suicide in the 15-29 age group was 28.5 % (i.e. 65 out of 225) and it has increased to 30.05 % (i.e. 55 out of 183) in 2008.

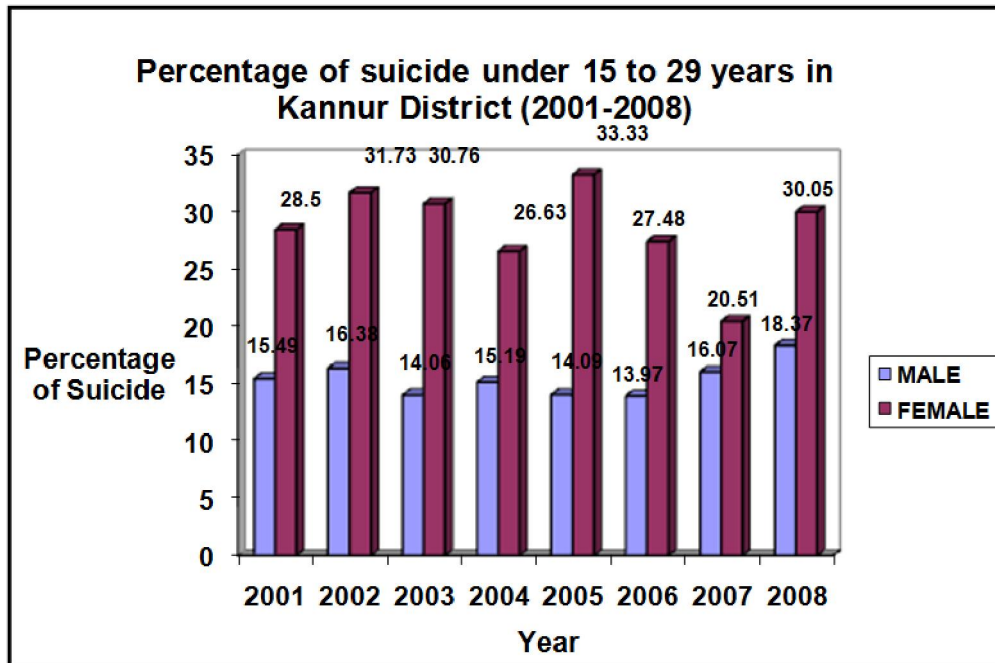


Figure 1. Percentage of Suicide (15-29 Yrs) In Kannur District-2001-2008

Source: District Crime Record Bureau, Kannur

According to National Crime Record Bureau’s (SCRB) report on the suicides in Kerala, the female youth suicide registers all time high in the age group of 15-29; while in all other age groups the female ratio is less than the male (Table No.2). Kerala has witnessed a great number of suicide deaths among school and college girl students in this year. Furthermore, according to the reports of State Crime Record Bureau, suicide among the youth is rapidly increasing in the State. The finding of SCRБ is that maximum suicide occurs in the female youth between 15-25 age groups and the main reasons are sexual abuse and examination stress.

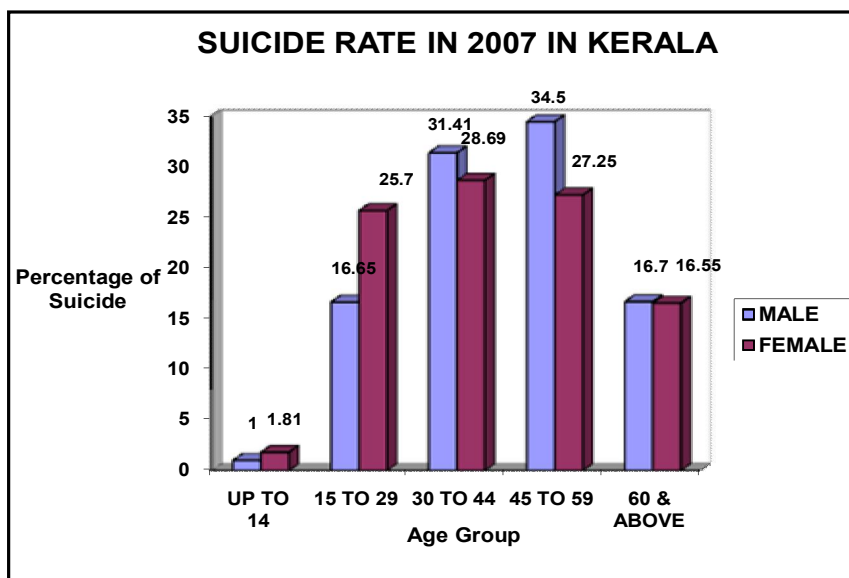


Figure 2. Suicide Rate in Kerala, 2007

Source: National Crime Record Bureau, New Delhi

The Changes in the educational system, influence of media, lack of proper parenting, inadequate guidance to establish emotional stability, family problems, peer pressure, adjustment disorder, academic responsibilities, sexual exploitation, financial stringencies were found to be major reasons for suicide among the youth in Kerala State. Media persons all over the State reiterating that sexual abuse and unrequited love are the major reasons of suicide among the young girls in the State apart from adverse environment and mental illness.

No one to confide in appears to be the reason for the sexually exploited girls to commit suicide in Kerala. Parents in nuclear families have no time to spare for their children and they try to compensate this giving money and materials such a mobile phone which fan up the vulnerability. Uninformed parents justify handing over mobile phones to their schoolchildren saying that it would help them to keep track of their children however, it goes counter to their good intention. When a girl finds herself being exploited sexually, she has no option other than suicide if she has no body to share her agony.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Newspaper reports from January 2009 to July 2013 and data collected from both the District and State Crime Record Bureau are the main sources of information for this study. The website of the National Crime Record Bureau and various study reports in suicide also contributed to the study.

CONCLUSIONS

This explorative study based on the above statistics drawn from the District, State and National Crime Record Bureau, media reports, and forensic records reports that the rate of youth suicide in Kerala is in the increase. . Despite the advances in the medical and educational fields, the mental health of our society is worsening. Young females have registered higher incidence of suicide as per the samples considered. Media reports indicate that 80% of the youth committed suicide .are school and college going students and the incidence is very low in the moths of vacation. This unearths the seasonal element in youth suicide. The examination and publication of results related stress and accompanying depression and disorders and insensitivity of the educational authorities seems to be the reasons. This study evaluates that the measures of psychological guidance and counseling adopted in educational institutions in Kerala to prevent suicide neither could attain the goal nor gain required momentum.

The declaration of HRD Minister Kapil Sibal to revamp and de traumatize school education is an absolute evidence to prove that the problem mentioned in this study exists all over the country. "I have seen children committing suicide due to poor marks. I don't think children in our country should study under pressure. Education should not be traumatic. This is unacceptable." The Minister says. (The New Indian Express, 26th June 2009)

IMPLICATIONS OF PREVENTION

An explorative study it has its limitations still it could highlight some implications of preventing the aggravating youth suicide in Kerala especially among girls. Our finding is that measures should be taken to avoid break down of the traditional framework of the society which gives a stable family pattern and the consequent depressive anxiety of the youth. Adequate measures to build confidence to live and to get ride of predicaments of life in the schooling level to be adopted. Sex education and pro- life messages should be given to the adolescent children. Behavioural disorders are to be detected in the initial stage itself and to be treated.

Suicide is an act which derives from the adverse psychosocial environment and this is a very vulnerable sphere of both the adolescents and the youth. Unless sufficient stability is maintained in this environment, disorders may occur. A comprehensive study based on psycho- social aspects of youth suicide will be followed to suggest means to prevent the youth suicidal phenomenon in the State.

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