



Pressure on Students and Suicides in India: A Case Study in Kota, Rajasthan, India

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Abstract:

In recent years, the issue of student suicides in India, particularly in Kota, Rajasthan, has garnered significant attention due to the intense academic pressure faced by students preparing for competitive exams. Kota, known as an educational hub, attracts a large number of students aspiring to secure admission into prestigious institutes. However, the demanding coaching culture, parental expectations, and societal pressures place immense psychological and emotional burdens on students, often leading to severe stress and mental health challenges. This paper investigates the factors contributing to the high incidence of student suicides in Kota, examining socio-cultural influences, educational practices, and institutional responses. By synthesizing data from academic studies, media reports, and psychological research, this study aims to provide insights into the complex interplay of pressures affecting students' mental well-being in Kota, Rajasthan. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy interventions, mental health support systems, and educational reforms to mitigate the pressures and prevent further tragedies.

Keywords: *Pressure, Students, Suicides, India, Kota, Rajasthan, Mental Health, Education, Stress*

Introduction:

India's competitive examination system places significant stress on students, particularly in cities like Kota, Rajasthan, renowned for its coaching institutes preparing students for entrance exams to prestigious engineering and medical colleges. Kota attracts thousands of students each year, driven by aspirations for academic success and societal expectations. However, the intense coaching culture, relentless study schedules, and isolation from family support systems contribute to a challenging environment that impacts students' mental health. This paper explores the nexus between academic pressure and student suicides in Kota, highlighting the socio-cultural context, educational practices, and psychological factors influencing this phenomenon. By understanding these dynamics, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to support student well-being and promote a healthier educational environment.

Literature Review:

1. Academic Pressure and Stress in Kota:

- **Coaching Institutes and Intensive Study Schedules:** Kota's coaching institutes are known for rigorous study routines that consume students' time and energy, often leaving little room for relaxation or personal development.

- **Parental and Societal Expectations:** High expectations from parents and society to excel in competitive exams create a pressure-cooker environment, where academic success is equated with personal worth and future prospects.

- **Isolation and Loneliness:** Many students relocate to Kota, leaving behind familiar support networks. The resulting isolation exacerbates stress and can contribute to feelings of loneliness and despair.

2. Psychological Factors Contributing to Suicides:

- **Mental Health Issues:** Pre-existing mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety are compounded by the stress of competitive exams and academic performance.

- **Perceived Failure and Hopelessness:** Academic setbacks or perceived failures in exams can lead to feelings of hopelessness and loss of self-worth, increasing vulnerability to suicidal ideation.

- **Stigma and Barriers to Help-Seeking:** Cultural stigma surrounding mental health issues and a lack of accessible mental health services prevent students from seeking timely support.

3. Institutional Responses and Support Systems:

- Role of Educational Institutions: Schools, coaching centers, and universities play a crucial role in promoting mental health awareness, providing counseling services, and implementing stress management programs.

- Policy Interventions: Government initiatives and policy reforms are necessary to address systemic issues, regulate coaching institutes, and promote a balanced approach to education that prioritizes student well-being.

The Issue:

"All India Rank," a recent Hindi film, has garnered praise for its poignant portrayal of the harrowing experiences of a 17-year-old boy sent to Kota, Rajasthan, the epicenter of India's coaching industry, to prepare for entrance exams like the IIT-JEE and NEET. Kota has sadly become synonymous with student suicides, reflecting a deep-rooted crisis in India's higher education sector.

In just the past two months, six young lives were lost to suicide in Kota, with a staggering 26 cases reported last year alone. Each year, approximately 250,000 students flock to Kota's 300 coaching institutes, driven by the dream of securing seats in prestigious engineering and medical colleges. The pressure is immense—of the 1 million JEE aspirants, only 10,000 succeed, while for NEET, 2 million compete for 140,000 seats.

The coaching institutes operate under punishing schedules, with students studying up to 18 hours a day, seven days a week, leaving no room for leisure or personal growth. Financial burdens add to the stress, as families often take loans to afford the steep coaching fees, placing immense expectations on their children to excel.

Tragically, many students, overwhelmed by familial pressure and the relentless academic demands, succumb to depression. Niharika, an 18-year-old aspiring JEE candidate, left a heartbreaking suicide note, feeling like a "loser" for not meeting expectations. Authorities have responded with measures like installing suicide-proofing mechanisms in hostels and regulating coaching centers, but these are seen as temporary fixes. The commercialization of education in Kota, estimated at \$500 million, underscores the urgent need for systemic change.

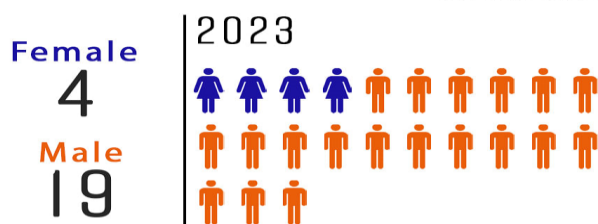
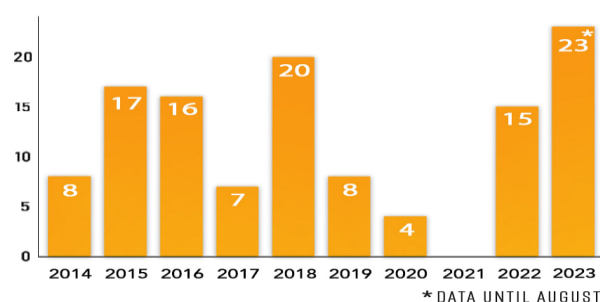
Critics argue that the current system robs young minds of joy and creativity, reducing them to single-minded exam performers. The suicides are a stark reminder of the systemic flaws in India's education system, where students' well-being often takes a backseat to profit-driven educational practices. Efforts to address the crisis include mental health counseling for students and training for teachers, yet more comprehensive reforms are necessary. Counseling parents on realistic expectations and promoting holistic education are crucial steps towards alleviating the immense pressure on students.

The tragic deaths in Kota highlight not only the personal toll on young lives but also the broader failure of India's educational policies. Despite the rising death toll, political discourse has largely overlooked this crisis, focusing instead on unrelated issues. In essence, the suicides in Kota are a sobering reflection of an education system in dire need of reform, where students' lives are sacrificed in pursuit of academic excellence.

Case Study: Kota, Rajasthan:

Kota exemplifies the challenges faced by students in India's competitive education system. The city's coaching institutes have gained notoriety for their intense study regimes and the disproportionate pressure placed on young students. Media reports and academic studies have documented a disturbing trend of student suicides in Kota, prompting scrutiny of the educational practices and support systems in place. Case studies highlight individual stories of academic stress, parental expectations, and the impact of institutional pressures on students' mental health. Understanding Kota's unique context is essential for developing targeted interventions and systemic reforms to safeguard student well-being.

STUDENT SUICIDES IN KOTA (2014-2023)



SOURCE: DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

ThePrint

Fig 1: Analysis of Student suicides in Kota, Rajasthan, India.

Source: The Print online article, May 13, 2024

As of recent available data, Kota, Rajasthan, has been grappling with a significant issue of student suicides, primarily attributed to the intense academic pressure associated with the city's coaching institutes. While specific statistics can vary, especially over time, here are some general insights based on recent reports and studies:

- 1. Incidence Rate:** Kota has seen a notable increase in student suicides over the years, reflecting the high-stress environment prevalent among students preparing for competitive exams. The exact annual numbers can fluctuate but typically indicate a concerning trend.
- 2. Age and Gender Distribution:** The majority of suicide cases involve teenagers and young adults, primarily between the ages of 15 to 24 years old. There is also a notable gender disparity, with male students often being more affected than their female counterparts.

3. Causes: Academic pressure, fear of failure, parental expectations, and loneliness due to separation from family are cited as primary factors contributing to suicidal tendencies among students in Kota.
4. Response and Interventions: The local government, educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have initiated various measures to address the issue, including setting up helplines, counseling centers, and awareness campaigns aimed at mental health support and suicide prevention.
5. Impact on Community: The prevalence of student suicides in Kota has had a profound impact on the local community and has spurred discussions on educational reforms, mental health awareness, and the well-being of young students under intense academic pressure.

It's essential to note that while these statistics provide a snapshot of the situation, ongoing research and efforts are crucial to understanding and mitigating the underlying causes of student suicides in Kota, Rajasthan.

Factors contributing for student suicides:

Student suicides in Kota, Rajasthan, a hub for competitive exam preparation in India, can be attributed to several complex factors:

1. Pressure and Stress: The intense pressure to perform well in competitive exams like IIT-JEE and medical entrance tests can lead to immense stress. Students often feel overwhelmed by the expectations of their families, teachers, and society.
2. Isolation and Loneliness: Many students move to Kota from different parts of India, leaving behind their support systems. This isolation can contribute to feelings of loneliness and depression, especially when combined with the rigorous study schedules.
3. Lack of Emotional Support: There is often a lack of adequate emotional and psychological support for students in Kota. They may not have access to counselors or mentors who can help them navigate the challenges they face.
4. Fear of Failure: The fear of not meeting expectations or failing to secure a good rank can be debilitating for students. This fear can exacerbate stress and anxiety levels, leading to feelings of hopelessness.
5. Unhealthy Competition: The competitive environment in coaching institutes can sometimes foster unhealthy competition among students. This can create a sense of inadequacy or worthlessness in those who do not perform as well as their peers.
6. Physical Health Issues: Long hours of studying and inadequate sleep or nutrition can affect students' physical health, which in turn impacts their mental well-being.
7. Coping Mechanisms: Some students may lack effective coping mechanisms to deal with stress and failure. They may resort to unhealthy behaviors or feel trapped with no way out.

8. Financial Burden: The financial burden of coaching fees and living expenses in Kota can also add to the stress for students and their families.

9. Expectations from Parents: High expectations from parents to excel in exams can sometimes create immense pressure on students, leaving them feeling unsupported or misunderstood.

Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach involving educational institutions, parents, mental health professionals, and policymakers to create a supportive environment for students in Kota and similar educational hubs.

Recommendations and Future Directions:

Addressing the issue of student suicides in Kota requires a multi-faceted approach:

1. Enhanced Mental Health Support: Establishing dedicated counseling services and crisis intervention teams within educational institutions to provide immediate support to students in distress.
2. Promoting Mental Health Awareness: Launching awareness campaigns to reduce stigma around mental health issues, educate students, parents, and educators about stress management techniques, and encourage help-seeking behavior.
3. Regulatory Reforms: Implementing regulations to monitor coaching institutes' practices, ensure adherence to ethical standards, and prioritize student welfare over commercial interests.
4. Community Engagement: Fostering collaboration between schools, families, healthcare providers, and local authorities to create a supportive ecosystem that nurtures students' emotional and psychological well-being.
5. Research and Evaluation: Conducting longitudinal studies to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, identify risk factors, and refine strategies for preventing student suicides in high-pressure academic environments like Kota.

Conclusion:

The issue of student suicides in Kota, Rajasthan, underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in India's educational system. By addressing the root causes of academic pressure, enhancing mental health support systems, and promoting a balanced approach to education, stakeholders can create a safer and more supportive environment for students. This research paper contributes to ongoing discussions on mental health in educational settings, advocating for policies and practices that prioritize student well-being and resilience.

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