

SELAH - PAUSE AND REFLECT

An Epidemic of Mental Health Neglect

In an era where educational pursuits are more demanding than ever, where Indian students are dealing with excessive stress while trying to reach the expected milestones set for them, it has become disturbing to see the impact on their mental health. It is tragic to see the rising number of student suicides in the nation. According to a survey by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), one in five Indian students suffers from mental health concerns, with depression, anxiety, and stress being the most prevalent. The survey also discovered that stress levels among Indian kids are rising, and this is because of a variety of causes, such as increasing pressure to perform well in school and college, the competitive environment there, and the lack of parental and educational support.

And shockingly, this number has only risen in recent years. According to NCRB Data, in 2020, 12,526 students died by suicide, while in 2021, the number rose to 13,089, while the statistics keep on increasing, there's only little that we as a society are trying to do about it.

Numerous suicides have been reported this year as well, with 24 being recorded in a renowned city for coaching classes. Following competitive tests like NEET and JEE, India has recently seen an increase in students applying to universities for engineering and medicine. These tests can cause extreme stress, worry, and despair because of the constant comparison and fierce competition that surrounds them.



So where does the problem lie?

One of the driving factors behind the rise in student suicides is the prevailing culture of toxic positivity. The pressure to score the highest or be the brightest student, not making our children believe that each student is different with varying capacities and areas they can excel often suppresses emotional struggles. They are coerced into masking their difficulties, fearing that acknowledging their challenges could be seen as a sign of weakness. As a result, these unexpressed emotions can fester, leading to overwhelming distress.

Toxic positivity happens when people respond to negative emotions with overly positive statements. For instance, telling someone with anxiety to "study harder" or someone sad to "be grateful", can be harmful. It oversimplifies complex emotions, invalidates their emotions, creates guilt or shame for feeling them, and can discourage seeking help when needed. Instead, it is essential to acknowledge and validate these feelings, while showing support for accepting them as they are, and applauding them for their efforts, even if their efforts differ from someone else.

Government efforts to address this crisis have often fallen short of addressing the root causes. As recently seen in the news, educational institutes have installed sprinkler systems in ceiling fans and given children motivational videos that are only harming their mental health rather than addressing it, as it sends a message about how lightly these concerns are treated. They tend to focus on the symptoms rather than the underlying issues. A comprehensive approach must delve into the educational system, societal expectations, and mental health support mechanisms to enact lasting change.

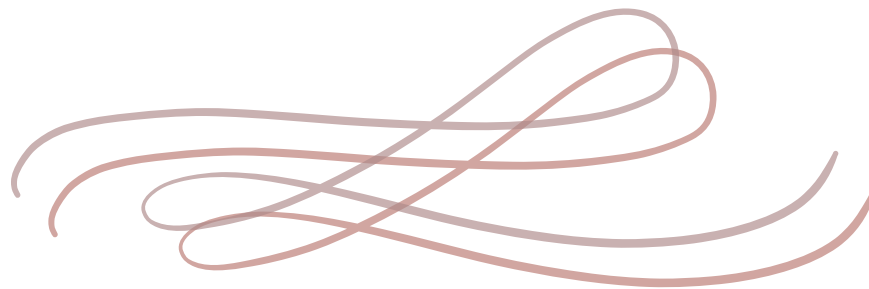
The immense pressure placed on students in India cannot be overstated. Expectations from families, schools, and society to excel academically are immense. The relentless competition for limited educational opportunities creates an environment where failure is often stigmatised as if failing is never an option and is perceived as a personal shortcoming. Our society works on all-or-nothing thinking, it's either a student has excelled at the top of their class or they're considered to be nothing. This constant pressure can lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair among students.



Recognizing the complexity of the student suicide situation is essential to finding solutions. It entails analyzing both the immediate factors that cause suicides and the underlying flaws in the system that support such factors. To create effective solutions, this holistic viewpoint is necessary. Educational institutions unintentionally contribute to the crisis by fostering a culture of guilt and shame. Punitive teaching methods, unrealistic expectations, and inadequate support systems can amplify students' feelings of inadequacy. Schools need to reevaluate their methods and create an environment where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth rather than causes for shame.

At last, changing the narrative around seeking help is paramount. Encouraging students to express their struggles and emotions without fear of judgment is crucial. By normalising conversations around mental health, not always excelling in school, and choosing unconventional fields for themselves, students may find solace in sharing their experiences and seeking the necessary support.

This brings us to the question, What do you think are the factors or reasons for us still so widely accepting a broken system and why are we not collectively able to do something about it? Why is there not enough outrage about the current situation?



Monthly Takeaway

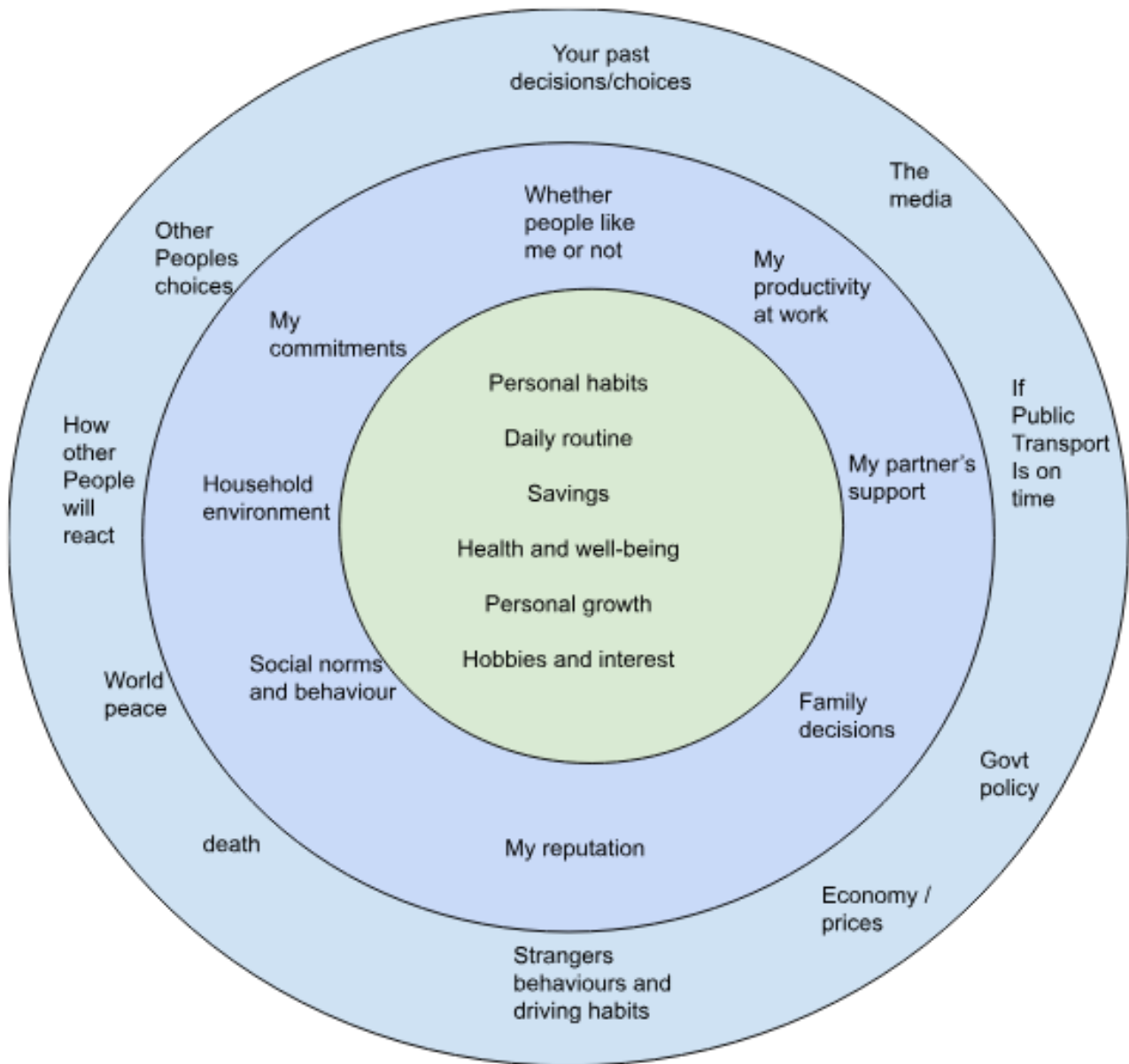
“To live is to suffer, to survive is to find
some meaning in the suffering” -
Nietzsche



Circle of Control

Instructions:

- In the outer grey ring list those things that you are concerned about, but can't control or influence
- In the blue circle list those things you are concerned about, and you can influence
- In the centre list those things you have control over right now



Reflections:

- How can you balance your thoughts between expanding your circle control with managing your own self-care and letting go of the things you cannot control?
- Where might you increase your influence through intentional and meaningful words or actions while letting go of controlling the outcome?
- What is the BEST use of your limited energy right now?

