



## OVERCOMING STRESS: YOUTH AND EDUCATION

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### Abstract:

The Constitution of India in Article 21 – A makes provision for free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right. Basic education is the right of every young citizen. The youth is the backbone of an economy. It is their duty to help a nation grow. It has been observed that with the advance in technology there is also an increase in the pressure to perform hence there is a rise in the instability of our young minds. The youth find it difficult to cope with extreme challenge and stands vulnerable to self-harm. This is especially true for developing economies. In such a precarious situation the education system has to step in to find measures how to curb the problem. The paper here identifies the problem and makes an attempt to use education as a means to address the problem.

**Keywords:** Education, Emotion, Globalisation, Identity, Crisis, Motivation, Suicide.

“Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding line, and no way of knowing how near the harbor was. “Light! Give me light!” was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me in that very hour.” **Helen Keller**

Education should be this ‘light of love’ that should shine on the person desiring it. In a larger context it refers to the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits. It involves methods of teaching, training, or research and can take place in formal or informal settings. As Swami Vivekananda aptly said, “Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man”. It is all about understanding the world around us and acquiring wisdom. It helps individuals to develop a certain perspective of life. It is a continuous process which goes on throughout life. From learning basic life skills to professional skills,

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education plays a vital role in shaping a man.

Education is not just confined to the four walls of a classroom. Rabindranath Tagore's idea of what education should ideally be is visible to everyone. The concept of education in an open space and not a claustrophobic classroom is what he had in mind with Vishwa Bharati. Education again has various forms like self-taught learning or e-learning. Educational institutions like schools, colleges, and universities play a crucial role in providing structured education. However, learning can also occur in less formal environments such as community-based programs, online forums, and libraries. Whatever be the case, the fundamental of education is not just dissemination of knowledge...education builds a person. It is holistic and harnesses the latent potentials in an individual.

However the time has come to question whether education is really the guiding star that motivates an individual to find his goal or has education now merely translated itself to a means of achieving undaunted ambition. In the words of John Dewey (1916) education is a social process – ‘a process of living and not a preparation for future living’. If we take a look at the present global scenario we will observe that education is sought only for making profitable living. At present ‘schooling’ and education are considered to have one and the same purpose and the latter is only a means to make the former more effective. The feeling of competition among the youth has aggravated and the fear of failure is a continuous threat to the youth. In the rat race of success our youth stands vulnerable, threatened, and exposed to self-damage. As per United Nations data “Today, there are 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for 16 per cent of the global population.”

As per The Social Statistics Division of National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India, “The Youth represent the most dynamic and vibrant segment of the population. India has the largest youth population in the world. As per the Report of Technical Group on Population Projections, constituted by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, youth in the age group of 15-29 years comprise 27.2% of the population for year 2021”. The same report in Statement 62 (a) titled Incidences of Suicides in various age groups lists twenty causes for suicide in India and unemployment in serial number thirteen shows the maximum cases.

Statistics say that India ranks second to China as far as suicide is concerned. Around ninety five to hundred people commit suicide every day out of which 40% belong to the adolescent group.[Source: CNN-IBN Report, Jan 13 2010] According to the founder of the NGO, ASSRA about 70% of distressed calls they receive everyday are from teenagers. *The National Institute of Mental Health and Mental Science* has been actively trying to find out why there is rise in the rate of suicide among teenagers in India. Psychiatrists are of the opinion that one of the prime reasons is academic. However the ‘copycat syndrome’ cannot be ruled out. There has been an increase in the number of students who now prefer to go abroad for purpose of higher education. This trend has created significant consciousness among the middle class average Indian and there is intense pressure to perform so that they can get good scholarship and fulfil their dreams of studying abroad. Peer pressure has taken a heavy toll on the young lives.

The data prepared by the World Education Services (WES) dealing with credentials of India based students applying abroad show the preference, country wise, of students wishing to study

outside the native land. Though this has caused serious brain drain and loss of revenue for the native country the trend is ever on the rise.

According to recent studies, the percentage of suicides among youth in India has seen a significant increase, with the age group of 15-29 years being most affected. It can be inferred that stress particularly caused by financial insecurity is a serious reason. Stress, particularly due to financial hardship, career pressure, and personal issues, has been identified as a major contributing factor to the increasing rate of suicides in India. In recent years, the correlation between these stress factors and suicide has been extensively studied. It's been observed that economic distress, often resulting from job loss or debt, is one of the primary causes of stress. This economic stress, compounded by the societal pressure to succeed, can lead to feelings of hopelessness and desperation. Career-related stress is another significant factor. High-pressure jobs, long working hours, and a lack of work-life balance often cause severe mental fatigue. The fear of failure or of losing a job can amplify this stress. Personal issues, such as broken relationships, family problems, or the loss of a loved one, can also trigger extreme stress. These issues often result in feelings of isolation and a sense of being unable to cope.

The importance of mental health support and stress management strategies in mitigating these stressors cannot be overstated. Effective interventions, like counselling and therapy, can provide individuals with the necessary coping mechanisms. Moreover, there is a growing need to foster an environment that recognizes and addresses these issues, breaking the stigma associated with mental health in India. This alarming trend highlights the urgent need for mental health awareness and resources targeting this specific age group. The underlying causes for such drastic rates are multifaceted and complex, often involving a combination of personal, social, and economic factors.

Stigma surrounding mental health issues remains a significant barrier. Many young people are afraid or ashamed to seek help, fearing societal judgement. This lack of support and understanding can exacerbate feelings of isolation and despair. Moreover, economic stressors such as unemployment and financial insecurity have been linked to higher suicide rates. The pressures of educational expectations and the competitive job market are also contributing factors. Preventive measures and strategies need to be implemented at various levels. On an individual level, awareness and education about mental health issues, as well as early detection and treatment, are paramount. On a societal level, reducing stigma, increasing accessibility to mental health resources, and providing economic support can contribute to a decline in suicide rates.

It is indeed a matter of concern that the mad race to attain success has cost us heavily. Success is an objective that now gets rooted into an individual the moment he joins school. It is the new mantra to lead a happy life. Our present focus has taken a heavy toll on our children as they remain susceptible to emotional crises. Intense belief in globalization has made our children vulnerable to the inability to handle failure. This crisis is a global phenomenon - the mad race to reach the zenith has claimed too many young lives as children, especially adolescent children, are unable to balance the success and failure of life.

Education or put correctly proper education may be an answer to this problem. Our schools and colleges need to be more systematically developed and empathetic towards this issue. The purpose of education seriously stands questioned. The task of education is to *educate* and it is related

to the Greek notion of *educere*, i.e. to bring out or develop potential. This concept of education should be able to help our teenagers and adolescents to come to terms with their own emotional identity and not let loose a flurry of uncontrollable emotions that end up in demanding life. What should be the real nature of education in the context of present globalisation – how can these three terms, education, emotion and globalisation work together to build a more secure future, thereby building a more secure world. These are questions that need to be dwelt upon.

The new age schools are all trying to capture the market by trying to make their students global citizens and arranging for the students courses that would keep them at par with international standard. But one needs to pause and introspect the need for this. In the pursuit to transform students into mini zombies what is at stake is that very often students find it difficult to cope. The embarrassment on non – performance is so claustrophobic that students might develop complexities that could generate dangerous result. It is important that schools and colleges try to emanate the best in their students, prepare them for the next level, but it is equally important that students be taught that success is not the only reason to live. It is essential to learn, to understand to love the knowledge associated with study. These days students only focus at marks and miss the enjoyment of learning...that is not what education is all about. The policies to make education accessible to all should also ensure that mindless education ultimately leads to frustration. Students should be taught to hone their skills and teachers need to show them how to chisel skills.

If the system of education is more directed at imparting knowledge rather than breeding ambition then the youth will be less in danger. Mental health is an issue that needs addressing like the physical health. Society should not treat mental health as a taboo and shun it, rather it needs discussion in open forums. Educational institutions are the areas where this issue needs to be tackled first.

“Research indicates suicide is the leading cause of death amongst 15–18-year-olds. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), while the total number of deaths by suicide showed a 10% increase from the year 2019 to 2020, the number of deaths by suicide of children below 18 years of age increased by 18.5%, almost twice the national average. In 2021 there were 10,730 deaths by suicide of children below 18 years of age, a small decrease from the 11,396 deaths by suicide in the year 2020.” The incident that happened in a school in Haryana in February 2022 served as an eye opener. Though this incident had a different context still it brought to the fore, once more the need for educational institutions to take up the matter with priority. We all know the proverb “nothing succeeds like success” but proper guidance at young age and a certain agility in handling sensitive issues can be a way to handle the threat of suicide. Philip W Jackson in his book *What is Education*, priorities informing over forming as the goal of a teacher. He writes, “We could say that teaching, as conventionally understood, has less to do with “forming” than with “informing.” He opines it should be the other way round as students “...routinely look on their teachers as fountains of knowledge.”

Mark Twain said “Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.” Let us hope he is not misunderstood. This effort to become great is a journey not an end in itself. It is the quality of good education that makes a person feel that he /she can become great. Our educational system should focus at the path that one has to traverse and should also teach that

hurdled along the path is an integral part of the whole. These hurdles should be tackled with positivity as each hurdle serves as a step in becoming great. While educational system and good educators do not profess “The paths of glory lead but to the grave” they also should not advocate “Let not Ambition mock their useful toil”. A lot is left to our policies of education and balance should be accorded between ambition and competition. No youth should be so stressed as to resort to what the engineering student decided to do in the film *Three Idiots* – “I Quit”.

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