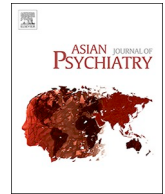




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## Letter to the Editor

## First case of student suicide in India due to the COVID-19 education crisis: A brief report and preventive measures



The novel coronavirus-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted significantly on many sectors globally, and has also impacted mental health of many individuals (Ahorsu et al., 2020; Tandon, 2020) and in greater numbers than those who are actually infected with the disease (Ornell et al., 2020). During the current crisis the resultant mental anguish has led to different behavioral consequences including stress, anxiety, fear, anger, depression, and in the most extreme cases suicidal behaviors (Ahmed et al., 2020; Bhuiyan et al., 2020; Griffiths and Mamun, 2020; Mamun and Griffiths, 2020).

The education sector has faced enormous challenges since the lockdowns (implemented to minimize the spread of COVID-19) and led to the complete closure of all academic institutions worldwide (Nicola et al., 2020). To tackle this issue, home schooling and the widespread use of remote teaching has been introduced via online learning modules and television (Varalakshmi and Arunachalam, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). However, the mental health of students who do not have access to these facilities is of great concern and needs to be rectified with immediate effect (Sahu, 2020).

Here, we report what is possibly the first case of COVID-19-related student suicide. The case occurred in Kerala (India) and was reported on June 2 (The Hindu, 2020). An educationally gifted 15-year old girl in Grade X (who had been given an award by her school for her “academic brilliance”) committed suicide because she was unable to attend online classes or watch television lessons because of a non-functioning television set in the family home and because she did not have access to a smartphone. Her father was a day laborer but had not earned any money for two months due to lockdown and family was consequently in extreme financial poverty (The Hindu, 2020). According to media reports, the student committed suicide because she thought that her academic performance would be greatly affected because she had missed class lessons due to the fact she could not access online or television learning content. Having gone so long without attending online classes, she became depressed and took her own life.

Although there are other student suicide cases that have been reported due to the impact of pandemic (Thakur and Jain, 2020), we believe this is the first case where the suicide’s proximal reason was the lack of education due to lack of access to technology stemming from both the economic problems caused by the lockdown and fragile state of the girl’s mental health. This situation (i.e., lack of education due to a lack of appropriate facilities), is by no means unique and suggests the need for preventive strategies to avoid such events occurring again in the future.

Those individuals running academic institutions need to be made aware that not all families can provide appropriate home schooling and/or access to technology to aid online learning during lockdown situations and that vulnerable families should receive practical support in such situations. This case appears to be somewhat rare in that the girl in question was academically very intelligent and that missing online

classes was an acute psychological stressor. Individuals of lesser academic ability might not have cared so much if they were missing school. Students need to be mentally prepared for problematic issues arising in such situations. Such initiatives could include mentorship programs, consisting of small groups of students under an educator whom they can contact via telephone. Such initiatives would likely relieve stress for students. Institutions need to ensure the status and viability of their online learning infrastructure and who is in a position to benefit (and not benefit) from it, so that alternate methods such as recording of videos can be given to those who are facing resource issues due to poverty.

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