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# Suicide Among Young Women in India: Explaining the Rise

Free · Share

# Suicide Among Young Women

# in India: Explaining the Rise



An Indian woman cooking over an open fire. Domestic roles still weigh heavily on women's lives. Photo: Aditya thaokar, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Suicide among young women is a serious concern in India. This lesson looks at what the official data shows and what pressures lie behind it.

If you or someone you know is struggling, Tele-MANAS offers free support on 14416.

# How big is the problem in India?

## What the official record shows

The National Crime Records Bureau publishes the **Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India** report. It is the official record.

It counted **1,71,418 suicides** in 2023. The year before it counted 1,70,924.

The male to female ratio of victims was **72.8 : 27.2**. In 2022 it was 71.8 : 28.2.

About **64.2%** of the female victims were married.

People aged 18 to 30 and 30 to 45 were the most affected. They made up 32.8% and 32.5% of suicides.

Sources: ncrb.gov.in

## What research says about young women

A 2018 study in The Lancet Public Health covered 1990 to 2016. It was by the India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative.

In 2016 India had 17.8% of the world's people. But it had **36.6%** of suicide deaths among women. That is 94,380 of 257,624.

Suicide was the leading cause of death for women aged **15 to 29**. It ranked first in 26 of 31 states.

The rate for women had still fallen. It dropped by 26.7% between 1990 and 2016.

Sources: pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

> **Quick check 1.** India's official suicide statistics come from a yearly crime-records report. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

## Why are young women under pressure?

### Which states report the highest rates?

The Lancet study found the highest suicide death rates for women in 2016 in **Tamil Nadu and Karnataka**. West Bengal, Tripura, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana followed.

The six states with the highest rates for women also had the highest rates for men.

The overall rate in India was higher than expected for its level of development. This was true especially for women.

So the problem is not spread evenly. It varies a lot from state to state.

Sources: pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov; ncrb.gov.in

### What the causes show

Family problems other than marriage were the biggest recorded cause. They made up **31.9%** of all suicides in 2023.

Illness came second at 19.0%. Drug abuse or alcohol addiction was third at 7.0%.

Together these three causes covered 57.9% of suicides.

Marriage-related issues were 5.3% of the total.

Sources: ncrb.gov.in; cmhlp.org

## Why do marriage and dowry matter?

The report notes that female victims were more likely to die over **marriage-related issues**. This includes dowry-related issues.

So marriage is a key pressure point in the lives of young women.

Researchers also say the effect of the Domestic Violence Act, 2005, on suicide among married women deserves study.

Sources: ncrb.gov.in; pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

## Who carries the burden?

Think of the 1,71,418 victims as one large crowd. Who was in it?

- **Housewives**: 24,048 people, nearly 14.0% of all victims.
- **Self-employed**: 11.8% of all victims.
- **Unemployed people**: 8.3% (14,234).
- **Students**: 8.1% (13,892).

The housewife figure matters most for this lesson. NCRB counts it as a separate group.

Sources: ncrb.gov.in

**Who the 2023 NCRB data counts**

| Group | Figure | What it tells us |
|---|---|---|
| All victims | 1,71,418 | Rate of 12.3 per lakh people |
| Women | 46,648 (27.2%) | About one in four victims |

| Group | Figure | What it tells us |
|---|---|---|
| Aged 18 to 30 | 32.8% | The largest age group |
| Aged 30 to 45 | 32.5% | Almost as large |
| Below 18 | 6% | Family problems, love affairs and exam failure lead |
| Housewives | 24,048 | 51.6% of women victims |

## How do you read these numbers?

Let us work one example. Housewives were 24,048 of 46,648 women victims. Divide the first by the second. You get **51.6%**.

Now divide 24,048 by all 1,71,418 victims. You get about **14.0%**.

Both are correct. The first is a share of women. The second is a share of everyone.

So always ask what the total is before you quote a percentage.

Sources: ncrb.gov.in; cmhlp.org

## What about children and cities?

Among children below 18, three causes stood out.

- **Family problems**: 2,568 cases.
- **Love affairs**: 1,724 cases.
- **Failure in examination**: 1,303 cases.

Cities show their own pattern. The city suicide rate was **16.2**, above the national 12.3. Kollam recorded 48.6 and Vijayawada 38.7.

In cities, family problems were again the top cause, at 33.6% (8,756 of 26,095 victims).

Sources: ncrb.gov.in

> **Quick check 2.** The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, made attempted suicide a crime. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Edge

## Previous Year Questions

The 2023 Mains asked this directly.

## What is India doing about it?

### Strategy, helpline and law

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched the **National Suicide Prevention Strategy** in 2022. Its goal is to cut suicide mortality by **10% by 2030**.

**Tele-MANAS** was launched on 10 October 2022. It is a free, 24×7 helpline on **14416** or 1-800-891-4416.

Calls can be passed on to psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and other specialists.

It has handled over 33 lakh calls so far.

The **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017** decriminalises suicide attempts. It stresses rehabilitation over punishment.

Sources: pib.gov.in

> **Quick check 3.** Tele-MANAS offers free mental-health support on the toll-free number 14416. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

## What did the latest data release show?

### Who is most affected, and what do the numbers leave out?

People aged 18 to 30 and 30 to 45 together made up almost two-thirds, or **66%**, of suicides in 2023.

Suicides below age 18 were 6% of the total. Child suicides rose by **5.68%** compared with 2022.

This shows that young people carry a heavy share of the burden.

NCRB data lists only one cause for each death. Real lives are more complicated.

A young woman may face family conflict, illness and money worries together. The record shows just one of them.

So the cause figures are a guide, not the full story.

The state rates also vary widely. They ranged from 0.7 per lakh in Bihar to 49.6 in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Sources: cmhlp.org; ncrb.gov.in

## NCRB data for 2023

Suicides rose by **0.29%** from 2022 to 2023. The total reached 1,71,418.

The suicide rate fell slightly, from 12.4 to 12.3 per lakh people.

Women were about 27% of victims.

Sources: cmhlp.org

> **Quick check 4.** Women made up roughly a quarter of India's recorded suicides in 2023. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

## What should you remember?

That annual record is the official one. It counted 1,71,418 suicides in 2023, and about 27% of victims were women.

Suicide was the leading cause of death for women aged 15 to 29 in 2016.

Family problems, illness and addiction were the top causes.

Tele-MANAS is on 14416.

Sources: ncrb.gov.in; pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov; pib.gov.in

## Practice MCQs

**1. Which agency publishes the Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI) report?**

**A.** Central Bureau of Investigation

**B.** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

**C.** NITI Aayog

**D.** National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

See answer ↓

**2. According to the 2018 Lancet study by the India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative, suicide is the leading cause of death among which group in India?**

**A.** Men aged 45 to 60

**B.** Elderly women above 60

**C.** Children under 15

**D.** Women aged 15 to 29

See answer ↓

**3. Approximately how many suicides did NCRB record in India in 2023?**

**A.** About 1.2 lakh

**B.** About 1.5 lakh

**C.** About 1.7 lakh

**D.** About 90,000

See answer ↓

**4. Consider the following statements:**

**1. The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 decriminalised attempted suicide.**

**2. Tele-MANAS provides free tele-mental health services on the toll-free number 14416.**

**3. The National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022 aims to reduce suicide mortality by 10% by 2030.**

**How many statements are correct?**

**A.** Only one

**B.** Only two

**C.** All three

**D.** None

See answer ↓

**5. In NCRB's 2023 data, which cause accounted for the largest share of suicides?**

**A.** Drug abuse or alcohol addiction

**B.** Marriage-related issues

**C.** Illness

**D.** Family problems (other than marriage)

See answer ↓

**6. In NCRB's 2023 data, roughly what share of suicide victims were women?**

**A.** About 12%

**B.** About 41%

**C.** About 53%

**D.** About 27%

See answer ↓

# Answer Key

1. **D.** Correct because the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) publishes the annual Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI) report. It is the official source for India's suicide statistics, including the 2023 record of about 1.71 lakh suicides. MoSPI and NITI Aayog deal with statistics and policy respectively, not crime records. ↑ Q1
2. **D.** Correct because the Lancet Public Health study found suicide to be the leading cause of death among women aged 15 to 29 in India. The study also reported that India's suicide rate for that age band is among the highest in the world. Most of the young women who died were married and had little formal schooling. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** Correct because NCRB's ADSI 2023 report recorded about 1.71 lakh suicides, the highest annual total ever reported in India. Women account for about 27 per cent of these deaths, and adults aged 18 to 30 form the largest age group. The rising total underlines why the 2023 Mains paper asked about the increase among young women. ↑ Q3
4. **C.** Correct because all three statements are true. The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 presumes severe stress and decriminalises attempted suicide. Tele-MANAS, launched in October 2022, offers free mental-health support on 14416. The National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022, India's first, targets a 10% reduction in suicide mortality by 2030. Together they mark the state's shift from punishment to care. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** Family problems other than marriage made up 31.9% of suicides. Illness was second at 19.0%, and drug abuse was third at 7.0%. Marriage-related issues were 5.3%. ↑ Q5
6. **D.** The male to female ratio of victims was 72.8 : 27.2, so women were about 27%. ↑ Q6

## Quick-check answers

1. **True.** The ADSI report is published every year by NCRB. ↑ 1
2. **False.** The Act decriminalises suicide attempts, to focus on rehabilitation instead of punishment. ↑ 2
3. **True.** Tele-MANAS is a free 24x7 helpline on 14416 or 1-800-891-4416. ↑ 3

4. **True.** The male to female ratio was 72.8 : 27.2, so women were about 27%. ↑ 4

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