

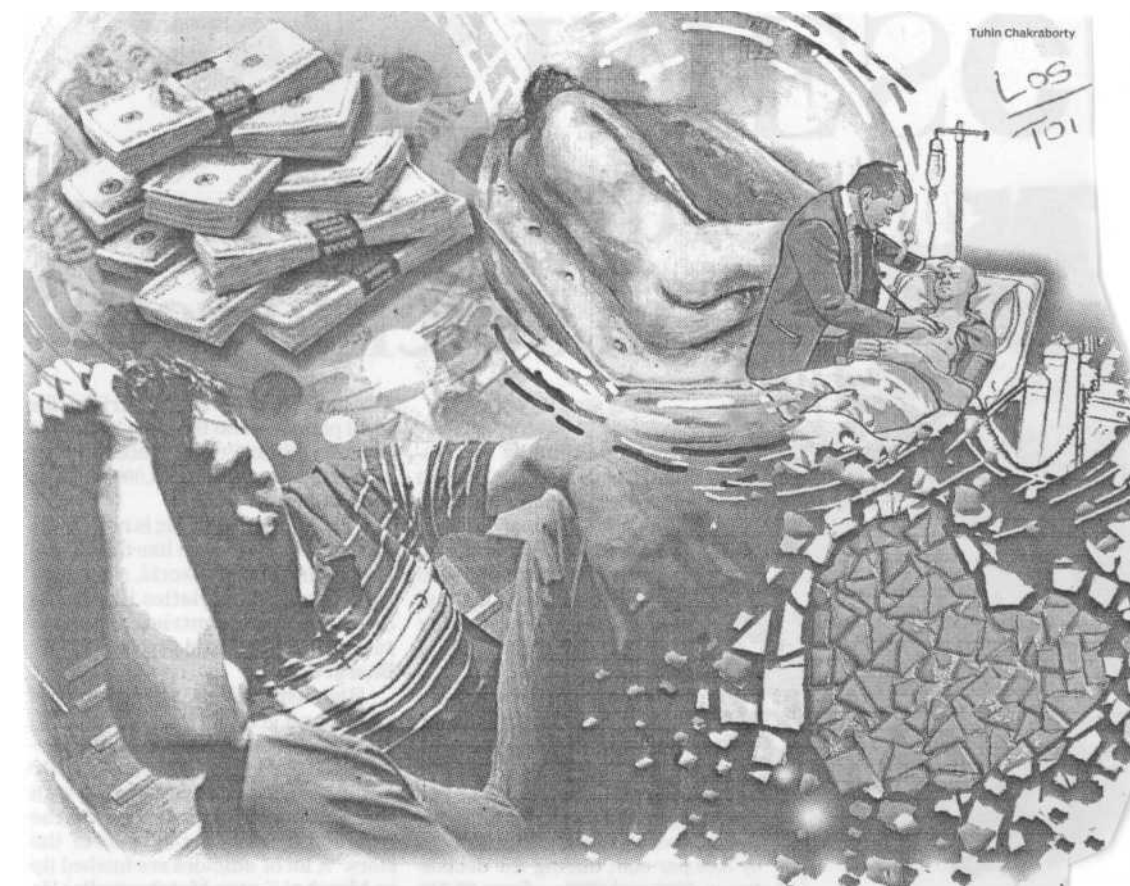
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Academic Strain Shows: 11.5% Of All Student Suicides In Maharashtra Are From Mumbai

STATE OF DISTRESS

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STUDENT SUICIDES				STUDENT SUICIDES (CITIES)			JOBLESS YOUTH ENDING LIFE			FARMER SUICIDES			HOUSEWIFE TOLL				
WB, Maharashtra top in exam stress				Mumbai, southern cities feel the heat			Joblessness takes toll in Kerala, TN			Agrarian crisis raging in the state			Causes: Illness, torture				
Statft																	
West Bengal	639	502	1141	Chennai	95	131	226	Tamil Nadu	746	481	1227	Maharashtra	4111	342	4453	West Bengal	5020
Maharashtra	444	438	882	Mumbai	31	70	101	Kerala	999	218	1217	Andhra Pradesh	2000	607	2607	Maharashtra	3653
Andhra Pradesh	287	225	512	Delhi	45	55	100	Maharashtra	872	72	944	Karnataka	1450	270	1720	Tamil Nadu	2354
Karnataka	230	217	447	Bangalore	41	49	90	Gujarat	410	46	456	Chattisgarh	1212	271	1483	Andhra Pradesh	2156
Maclhya Pradesh	198	167	365	Hyderabad		27	57	Andhra Pradesh	371	58	429	Madhya Pradesh	1178	197	1375	Karnataka	1851
Total (All India)	3123	2734	5857	Total (All India)	481	579	1060	Total (All India)	7415	1471	8886	Total (All India)	4664	2396	17060	Total (All India)	25063



Mumbai: Given that the pressure to perform starts before kindergarten and dogs students all through their academic life, it may come as no surprise that 11.45% of all student suicides in Maharashtra during 2006 were from Mumbai, according to the recently released National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics- In fact, the figures for Mumbai match those for Pune, Nashik and Nagpur put together.

While pressure to excel has reached monstrous proportions in cities like Mumbai, academic pressure is far less in smaller cities and rural areas, said experts. "I have yet to come across a student in a village who is ashamed to come home and say he's failed an exam. In rural areas, children who fail are often allowed to take a break and work for a year, and then get back to studies," says Nilesh Nimkar, director, Quality Education Support Trust, in Thane's Wada block. Nimkar, who has worked extensively with marginalised tribal children in Thane, is also a curriculum

consultant for some of Mumbai's better-known schools. "When we observed some of the city kids in Mumbai under immense strain and advised parents to send them for counselling, parents were upset at the thought because they felt counselling was only for retarded kids," he adds.

While exams may not be the sole reason for student suicides, they are definitely a major cause. For instance, Srikant Mallapallu, a 21-year-old who hung himself in his hostel room in IIT Powai in December 2006, left behind a suicide note where he said he could not make it because of the backlog of exams that he had to clear.

Another suicide victim that year was DEd student Rashmi Kawande, a quiet and withdrawn girl. Teachers, though unsure of the cause of suicide, pin it down to homesickness and hostel life.

According to teachers, the strain on girls who are academically bright but are being pressured to get married also results in suicide. For instance, teachers at a Mumbai polytechnic were stunned when a bright young girl ended her life a

day before her exams. "Kya pata examlikhoongiyanahin," she told a teacher, a day before her paper when she was asked to copy down the time-table. "I got a call next morning informing me that she had killed herself," said her teacher. It was later discovered that she was under pressure to get married.

While Maharashtra also has the dubious distinction of being the state with the second highest incidence of student suicides across the country, beaten only by West Bengal.

With crumbling support systems and the lack of a full-fledged counselling centre in most schools—including some reputed institutions—there are very few mechanisms at hand to spot a child who may be in distress. "Most schools do a shoddy job of counselling. I have visited some well-known CBSE schools who don't feel the need to have a counselling set-up," says Chandni Parekh, a psychologist.

Failed relationships, too, are a cause of student suicide. Especially in the absence of an adult to confide in.