

Researchers report high suicide rates among young Indians

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Young people in India, the engine of its rapidly expanding economy, are committing suicide at a much higher rate than in the West, researchers said Friday, calling for urgent intervention.

Suicide is the second-most common cause of death among [young people](#) in India, they wrote in the Lancet, and was set to overtake complications from pregnancy and childbirth as the lead cause among women aged 15 to 29.

For men in the same age group, suicide claimed just slightly fewer lives than transport accidents in 2010.

Urging further research into the causes behind the trend, the report said the suicide rate was highest among well-educated young people from India's richer, southern states.

"Young educated Indians from the richer states of India are killing themselves in numbers that are almost the highest in the world," the report's lead author Vikram Patel, a psychiatrist with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, told AFP.

In the Western world, suicide is more common among older, poorer and lesser educated people.

While the study did not identify the causes, Patel said: "There can't be any other explanation -- it has to do something with social change, the

rapidity of social change and its potential impact on educated young people."

Some 900,000 people around the world kill themselves every year, according to the [World Health Organisation](#) -- about 13 out of every 100,000.

Of the global total, nearly 190,000 suicides were believed to have occurred in India in 2010 -- second only to China with an estimated 200,000 cases per year.

India has a population of about 1.2 billion and China some 1.3 billion -- together they account for more than a third of the [world population](#) of seven billion.

Patel said the rate of suicide among women in India was three times higher than in high-income countries, but tapered off among women who were either divorced, widowed or separated from their husbands.

"This is consistent with other research from India that marriage is also a risk factor for depression, which is of course the commonest mental illness associated with suicide," he said.

"One can speculate, but obviously the most plausible explanation is that for many women marriage is not out of choice and they find themselves trapped in very difficult and stressful social circumstance and of course there is the huge issue of domestic violence."

Self-poisoning by pesticide is the method most often used, followed by hanging.

"Public health interventions such as restrictions in access to pesticides might prevent many suicide deaths in India," said the report, adding that

most Indians did not have access to suicide prevention programmes or mental health care.

The authors based their figures on India's first national survey of causes of death conducted from 2001 and 2003, and United Nations projections.

Suicide is a crime in India, complicating efforts to gather accurate statistics.

Globally, [suicide](#) is the most common cause of death in female adolescents and the third in young men after road traffic accidents and violence, said the [Lancet](#), in a special series on the topic.

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