



# Student Suicides in India:

## *A Dive Into the Data*

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# Suicide: An Indicator of a Society's Social and Economic Health

- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, student suicide is an issue of alarming concern in India. Incidents of student suicides in India have risen at an annual rate surpassing the population growth rate and overall suicide trends.
- In a shocking turn of events, today, student suicides exceed farmer suicides as per 2024 data collected by the NCRB.
- Based on the data, a report “Student suicides: An epidemic sweeping India” has been launched and this report highlights that the overall suicide rate increased by 2% annually. In comparison, student suicide cases rose by 4%.
- Studies on these themes strongly suggest that suicide is an indicator of a society's social, economic and mental health. Student suicides particularly reflect the condition of a society's educational institutions.

- The above holds true as research suggests a strong link between low and middle-income countries (LMICs) and high rates of suicide amongst the youth, where 77% of suicides occur in LMICs.
- Reports further establish a strong correlation between economic adversity, suicides and attempted suicides.
- Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of student suicides, which stands at 10% as per 2022 data, a marked increase of 2% in the 2020 data.

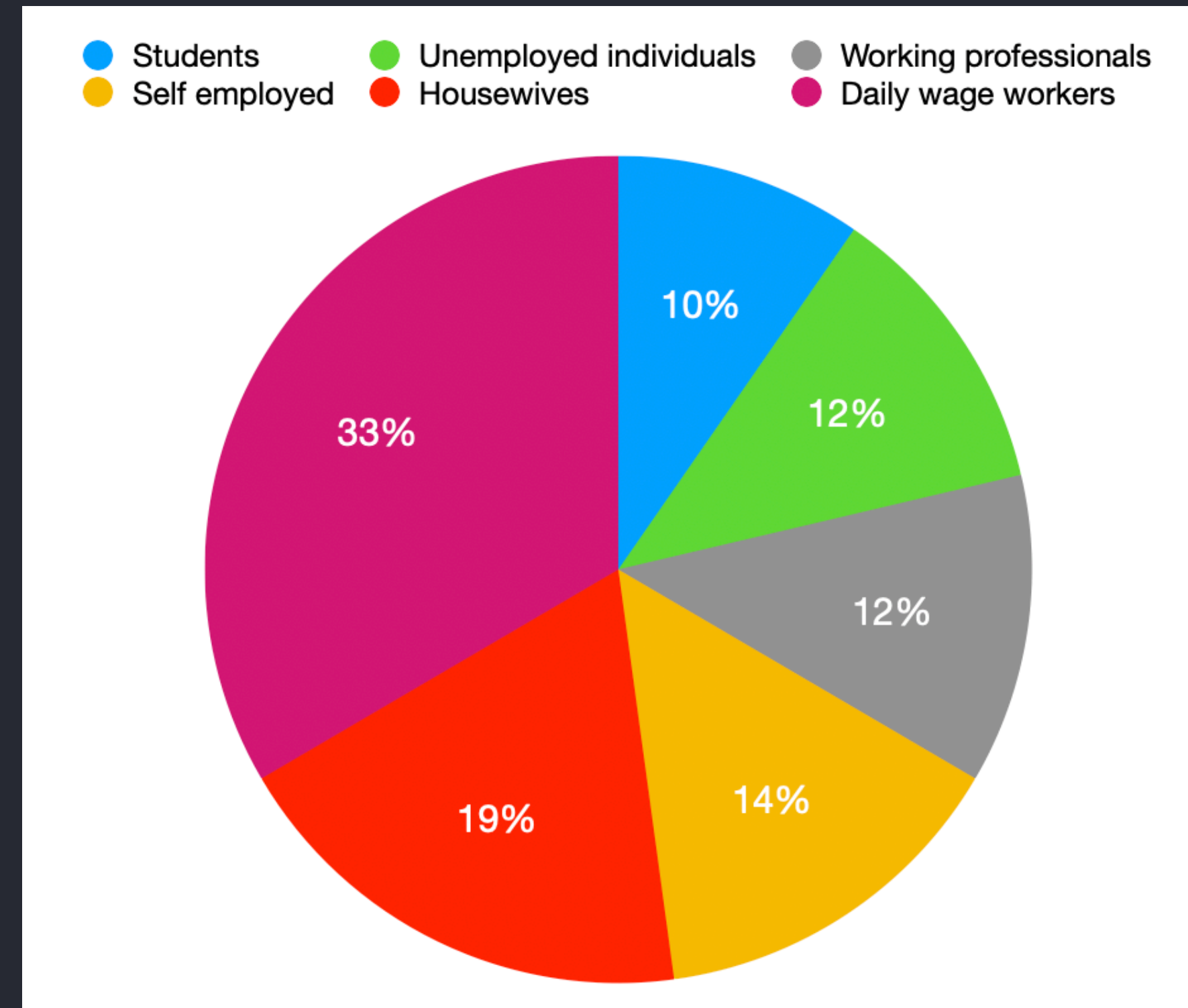


Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Suicide Victims by Profession in 2022. **Indian Mental Health Observatory**

- In a comparison of data between Norway and Denmark's suicide rates show how social integration among young men had an impact on the suicide rates, in Norway where this showed a decline also witnessed an increase in suicide rates among this age group
- The same can be understood in the situation of the rise in student suicide in India, the main reason could be not having family support any kind of social integrations that lead to suicide being the last resort.
- **Economic Development and Suicides**
- As per 2020 statistics, 10 individuals commit suicide due to poverty and joblessness. Growing uncertainty for the youth in a market with bleak job prospects is worsened due to failures by the government and educational institutions in adequately assisting students secure formal employment.

- As per 2021-22 EPFO (Employees Provident Fund Organisation) data, formal sector employment is 5.3% lower than what it was in 2019-20.
- Furthermore, surveys conducted by Azim Premji University shows that 42% of the graduate youth population under 25 were unemployed as per the 2021-22 data timeline.
- These numbers speak volumes of institutional failures, due to lax implementation of structures that instill employment and skilling frameworks for the youth in India.
- Notably though, skilling and employment incentives have gained attention in the recent Union Budget for FY-24-25, with the aims of filling the gaps in these areas.
- States and Institutions that focus on welfare spending and social sector schemes have shown to have lower overall suicide rates. This would thereby reduce the socio-economic and financial burdens on the impoverished and lower classes.

- Evidence suggests that individuals, in this case youth, who are a part of the welfare structure are less susceptible to commit suicide as they are more exposed to welfare facilities. Thus, focusing on Welfare policies and frameworks that not only have a minimum wages in place, but also focus on public health interventions like the establishment of suicide prevention strategies/mechanisms such as emergency departments and helplines for mental health conditions are crucial aspects of a society that aims to prevent high suicide rates.
- **Educational Infrastructure and Suicides**
- Owing to the large numbers of students who vye to be admitted into prestigious institutions like IITs, IIMs and AIIMs, entrance examinations are the norm due to increasing competition driven by large volumes of applicants for a relatively smaller number of seats.
- For top 15 AIIMs institutions, there are 1207 seats for which nearly 2 lakh students appear for the examinations. As for the top IITs, 11 from the 1 lakh 90 thousand applicants compete for each of the 17385 seats.

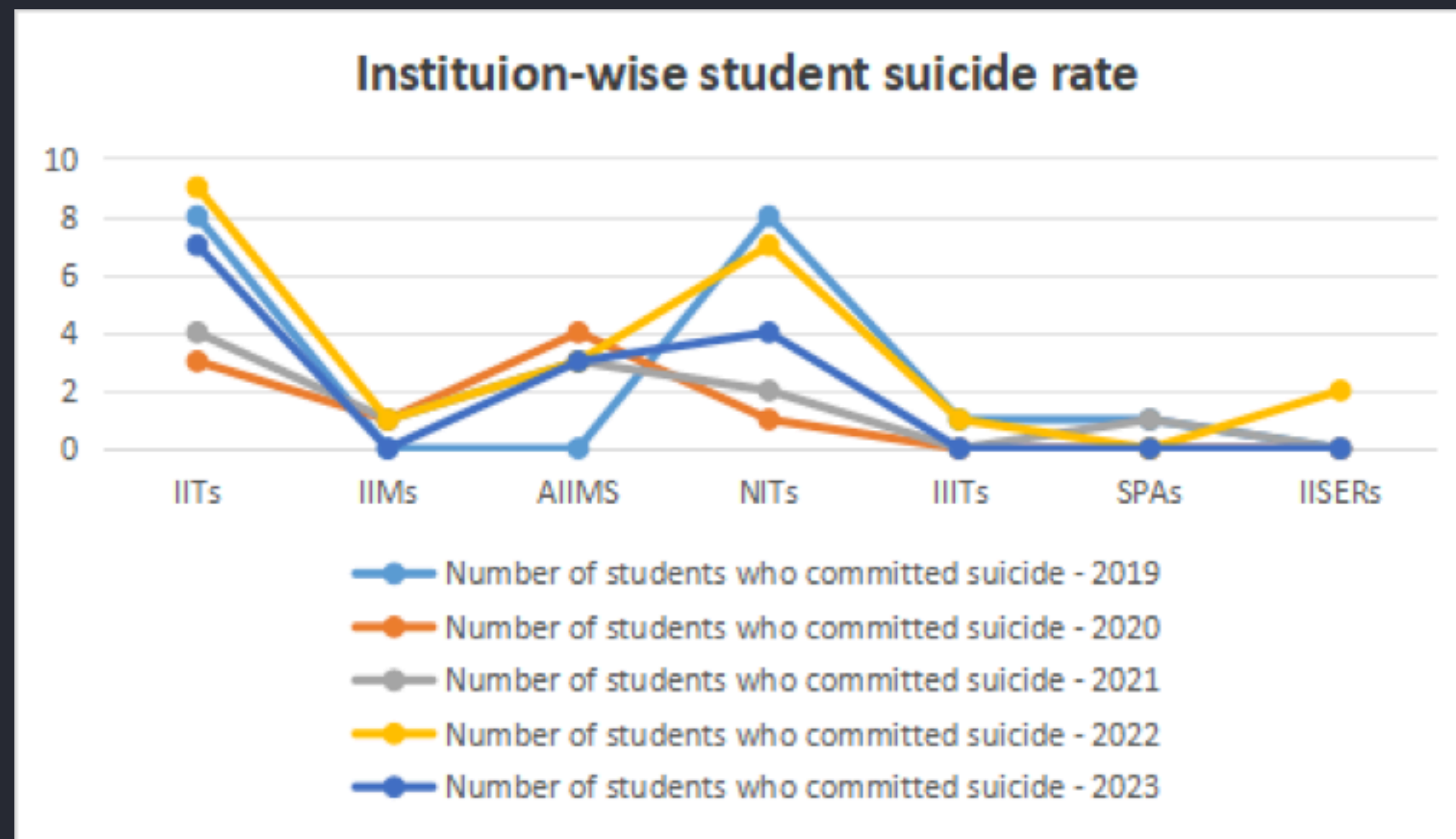


Fig 1: Instituion-wise student suicide rate

- This reflects the immense academic pressure and stress students undergo, to successfully be admitted into these institutions.
- Entrance examinations like JEE and NEET draw over 2 lakh students per year for admissions into top institutions like IITs, IIMs and AIIMs.
- As a result, the ‘selection process’ is now an ‘elimination process’ due to increased competition for the small number of seats in a handful of institutions that offer good quality education.

Causes- wise Number of Distribution of Suicides in All India during 2022

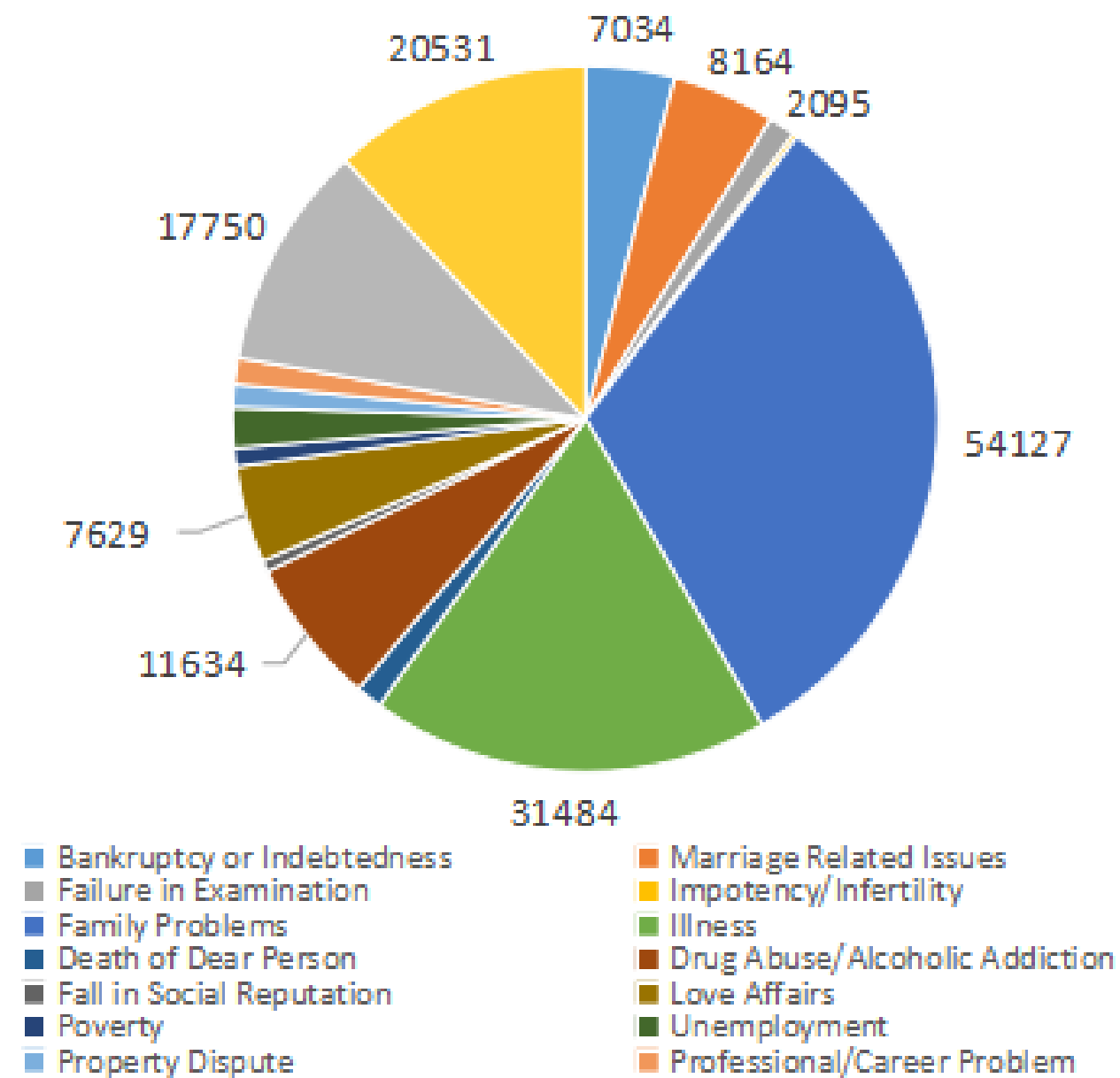


Fig: Cause of suicide

- Major causes of suicide in 2022 are family problems which account for 54,127 cases. this could mainly be due to the unmet expectations and the immense pressure an individual faces
- Illness is the second most prevalent cause of suicide which accounts for 31,484 cases. This includes physical and mental health conditions, that impact an individual's quality of life.
- A high number of suicides due to exam failure (2,095 cases) is alarming. it highlights that many students are affected by the immense pressure of achieving success academically and when they fail they take the drastic step of committing suicide. the stress can be due to expectations from parents, teachers, peers and society.
- some other causes of suicide also included Unemployment (3,170 cases) and Professional/Career Problems (2,083 cases).

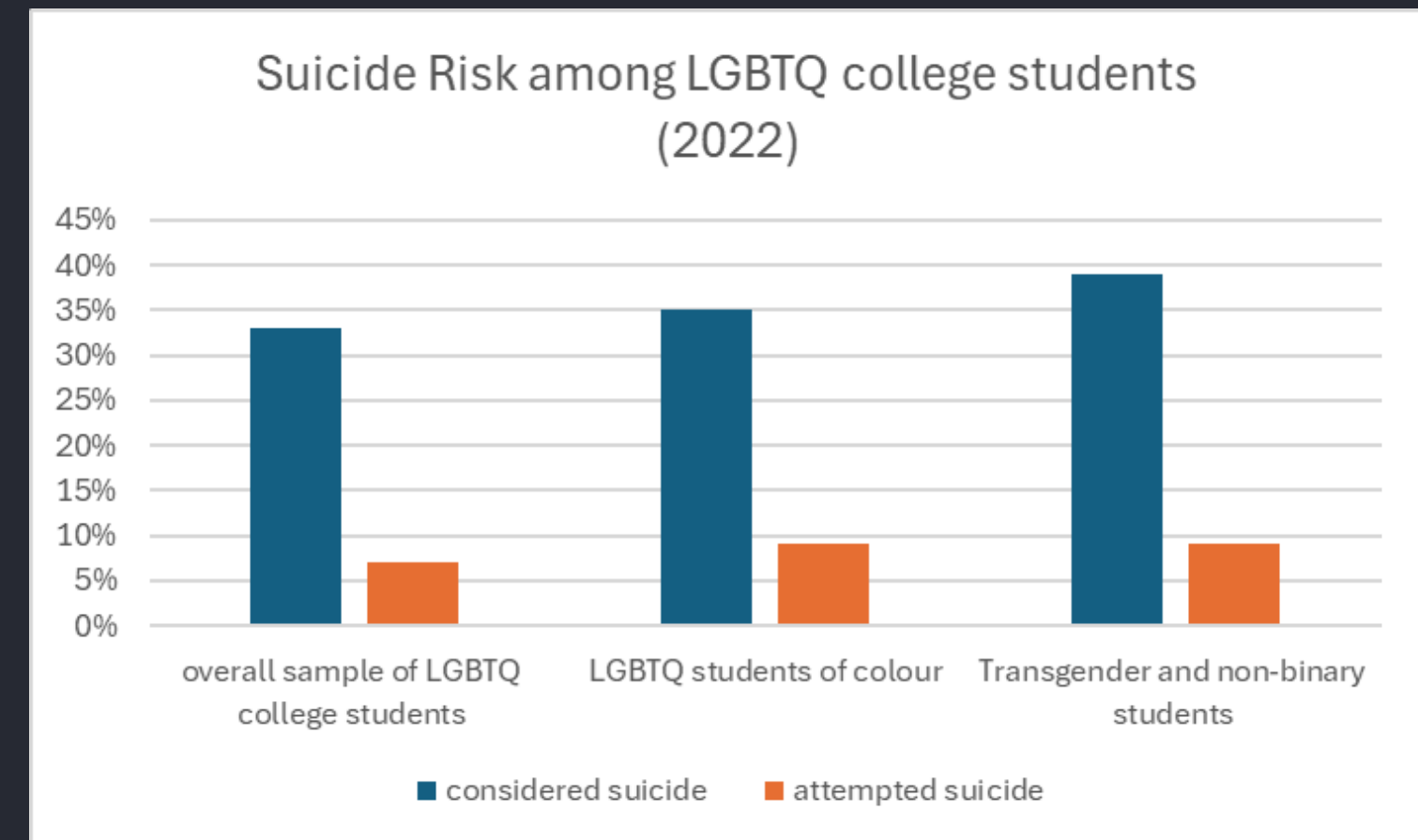


- Despite there being a total of 23 IITs and AIIMs, students vye for the top 5 institutes due to unsatisfactory educational facilities that results from a lack of funding from the State.
- Over the years, the government has consistently allocated the lowest fraction of its budget to education expenditure outlays. The 2024-25 Union budget allocated 3.5% of the GDP to educational expenditure. The expenditure on higher education comprises only 0.6% of its GDP. Thus, to ensure the overall wellbeing of students, more higher educational institutions that offer quality education must be established, so as to even out the number of seats in these institutions in tandem with the competition, i.e. number of applicants. This will in turn ease the academic pressures off students.

# Causes of Student Suicides

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Challenges:

- Students who identify as LGBTQ+ often face discrimination, bullying, and a lack of acceptance from their peers, families, and communities.
- These negative experiences contribute to social exclusion, family rejection, and a hostile educational environment, which can create deep feelings of isolation, helplessness, and despair. This marginalization and emotional distress can overwhelm students, making them more vulnerable to suicidal thoughts as they struggle to find support and acceptance.
- The Trevor Project estimates that more than 1.8 million LGBTQ+ young people (ages 13-24) seriously consider suicide each year in the U.S. — and at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds.



## **Caste Discrimination and Social Alienation:**

- In south eastern countries like India, caste discrimination significantly impacts students from marginalized communities. They frequently face cultural isolation, prejudice from peers and teachers, and a pervasive sense of being unwelcome within educational environments.
- The reservation system further exposes these students to criticism ,biases and exclusion. While the system is meant to protect them, it has reportedly caused more bullying and prejudice against the Sc's.
- Top universities such as IIT's and IIM's have reported 60% Dalit suicides. The cause of this ragging includes both students and professors. This has raised questions of institutionalized discrimination in India's prestigious universities and its equity.
- While this has sparked debate on the continued segregation, it is also causing doubts about the reservation system and its demerits for the supposed beneficiaries.

## **Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence:**

- Sexual harassment and abuse leave deep emotional scars on young students. The stigma and lack of support, especially in conservative societies, contribute to intense feelings of shame and isolation which leads on some to consider suicide.
- Female students, in particular, who face great difficulties to get to that classroom when encountered with these harassments face much more social ostracism and rejection, which worsens their mental health struggles.

## **Economic Pressures and Financial Stress:**

- Students from low-income families often face intense pressure to excel academically while also contributing to their family's financial needs. The challenge of balancing work, studies, and economic hardships usually lead to significant stress, burnout, and mental health struggles, increasing more vulnerability to suicidal thoughts.

### **Job Market Stress and Uncertain Future Prospects:**

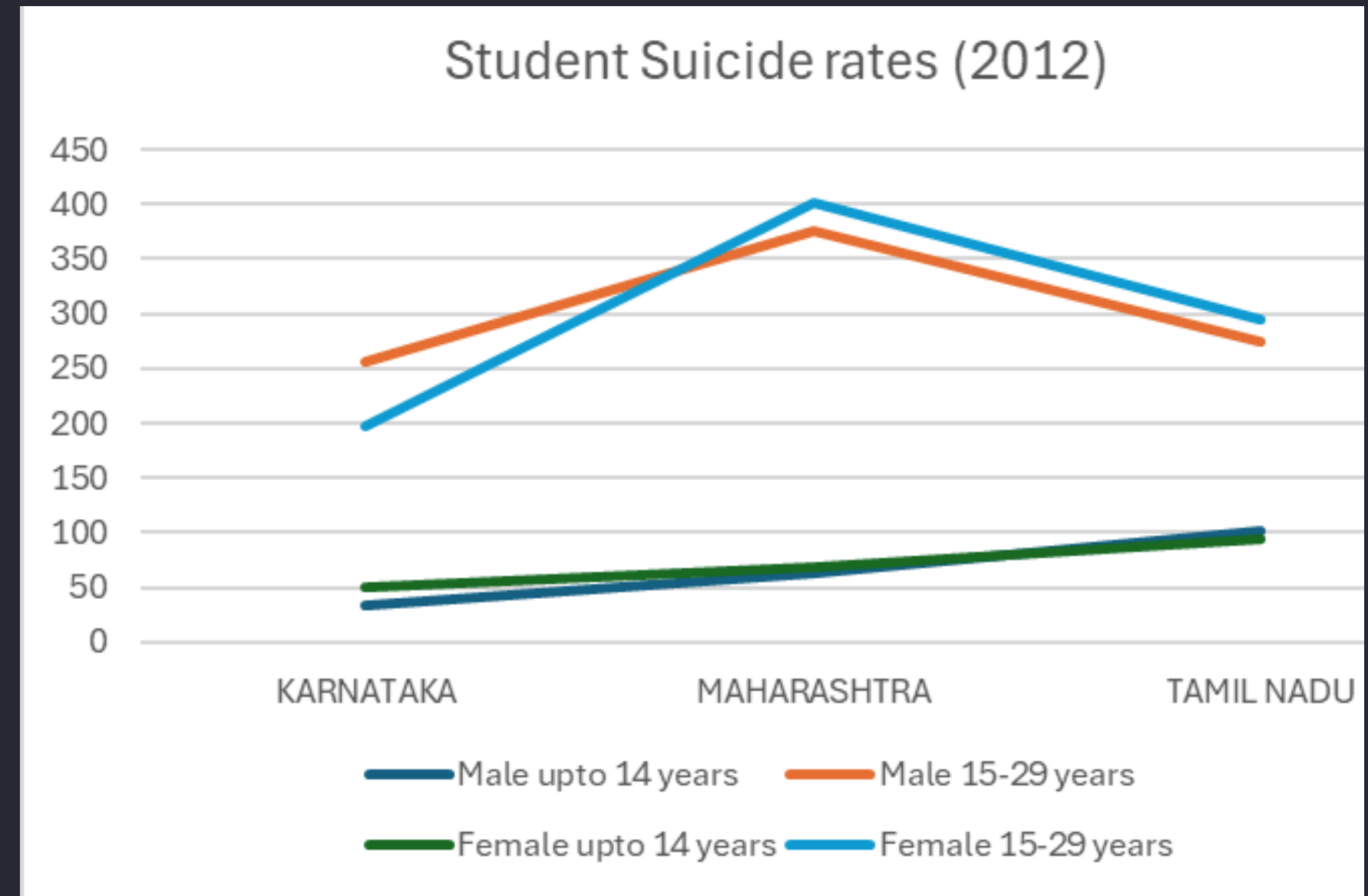
- The fear of unemployment and uncertainty about the future, driven by rising job competition, creates intense anxiety for students, particularly those from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. The pressure to secure stable employment and support their families can become overwhelming, leading to deep feelings of hopelessness and despair.

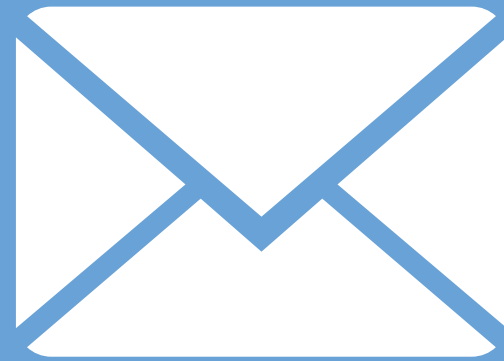
### **Burden of Educational Debt:**

- Many students accumulate significant debt through educational loans, and the pressure to repay these loans without a guaranteed job causes stress not only for the students but also within the family. This stress of becoming a financial burden or failing to clear their debt intensifies feelings of despair, contributing to suicidal ideation.

## Age and State wise

- Student suicides showcase highest rates in the age group of 15-29. This may be due to:
  - Increased academic pressure
  - Heavier exposure to societal norms
  - Exclusion from society and mental health issues
- Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu report high student suicide rates due to intense academic pressure in their major educational hubs. The competition for success, coupled with societal expectations and limited access to mental health support, leads many students to feel overwhelmed and isolated, contributing to this tragic trend.





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