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STUDENT SUICIDES AND EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE : A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

Student suicides have become a major concern in both India and the United States, highlighting the critical need for institutional accountability in protecting the rights, dignity, and welfare of students. Education must be viewed as a place of justice and safety in addition to knowledge. These tragic incidents are frequently connected to academic stress, systemic discrimination, bullying, and administrative neglect. Although student mental health has been the subject of numerous studies, very few have examined the matter from a comparative, legal-educational perspective, resulting in a knowledge gap regarding how various systems handle such crises. This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing significant case studies from India such as the suicide cases of Rohith Vemula and Darshan Solanki, as well as students in Kota coaching hubs and also including the well-known cases of Megan Meier and Phoebe Prince in the United States. This study adopts a qualitative, case-based comparative methodology to examine how legal frameworks, institutional practices, and cultural contexts shape responses to student vulnerability. The results show that although the US has stronger policies, consistency and implementation are issues, whereas India suffers from fragmented frameworks and poor enforcement. This study emphasizes how institutions must strengthen their institutional accountability through grievance redressal, mental health support, and anti-discrimination measures by incorporating comparison tables and discussions. The study concludes that preventing student suicides is not merely a welfare issue but a constitutional and human rights imperative, with significant implications for building safer, equitable, and justice-oriented educational environments worldwide.

KEYWORDS: *Academic Pressure, Educational Justice, Institutional Accountability, Mental Health, Student Suicide*

INTRODUCTION

Education always helps significantly and plays a very crucial role in personal development, social mobility, and even national progress. However, there are many institutions that are expected to nurture student's intellectual and emotional well-being and growth have increasingly come under scrutiny for their

inability and lack to safeguard student well-being. All over in the world, and specially in India and the United States, student suicides have increased and emerged as a huge concern that challenges not only the effectiveness of educational systems but also their all commitments to justice, dignity, Care, and human rights. When young students take

the extreme step of giving up and ending their lives, it not just shows individual despair, It also exposes systemic failures of schools, universities, and coaching hubs that are supposed to act as safe spaces for growth and development of students.

Over the past two decades, student committing suicides have become a major concerning problem in India, tragic cases are coming from both prestigious universities and coaching facilities. There prevailing caste based exclusion and discrimination in society also gained national attention soon after the suicides of Darshan Solanki at IIT Bombay and Rohith Vemula at the University of Hyderabad. In the same way, Kota in Rajasthan, which is known for its culture of competitive coaching also continues to suffer dozens of student suicides every year, which reveals the fatal consequences of academic pressure, anxiety and the lack of emotional support in social networks. Additionally inciting public protest, these incidents raised concerns about institutions' accountability for addressing

systemic neglect, mental health crises, and structural discrimination.

There is a huge structural difference between United States and India still there is a comparable crisis in the well-being of students in both countries. Tragic results of peer harassment, cyber bullying, ragging and institutional inaction came to light by high-profile cases like those of Megan Meier and Phoebe Prince. There young lives have been lost due to insufficient implementation, accountability, neglection and a lack of prompt interventions, even in a nation where mental health discourse is more widely accepted and legal protections appears to be stronger. Despite variations in sociocultural and educational contexts, these tragedies highlight how vulnerable students are everywhere when institutions fails to create security measures. To better understand this , Table 1 comparative overview will help to illustrate the scope and causes of student suicides across the two nations:

Table 1: Comparative Overview of Student Suicides in India and the United States

Aspect	India	United States
Visibility of Issue	Frequent cases in universities (e.g., Rohith Vemula, Darshan Solanki) and Kota coaching hubs with recurring national media coverage.	High-profile cases (e.g., Megan Meier, Phoebe Prince) gaining nationwide attention, especially linked to bullying and cyberbullying.
Major Causes	Academic pressure, caste-based discrimination, lack of institutional support, competitive coaching culture.	Bullying, cyberbullying, peer harassment, mental health stigma, inconsistent school interventions.
Policy Frameworks	Fragmented, with limited enforcement of anti-ragging, anti-discrimination, and counseling mandates.	Relatively stronger policies like anti-bullying laws and suicide prevention programs, but enforcement remains inconsistent.
Institutional Accountability	Often reactive, with poor grievance redressal systems and delayed interventions.	Better grievance mechanisms exist, but failures in timely action and follow-up still occur.
Annual Concern	Approximately 13,000 + student suicides reported annually (NCRB 2022 data).	Around 14–17% of adolescents report suicidal thoughts; suicide is the second leading cause of death among US teens (CDC 2023).

Source: Compiled from NCRB (India, 2022), CDC (US, 2023), and case study reports.

This comparison shows these two countries may differ in culture and legal structures but both countries face systemic/ legal challenges in addressing student suicides. Even though caste discrimination, huge tough competition, and also poor execution of existing frameworks are major causes of India's problems, on the other hand the US faces challenges with timely institutional action and consistent policy implementation. When taken as a whole, such patterns also indicates a need for more research on how institutional accountability or lack thereof affects students' susceptibility in various settings.

RATIONALE

This rationale of this study addresses the serious and recurring problem of student suicides specially in India and United States, which are not only heartbreaking personal tragedies but also signs of deeper problems within our educational system. While stress, anxiety, fear or peer pressure are generally seen as the main causes of suicides, these issues cannot generally be separated from the environment in which students study and live. Schools, universities, colleges and coaching centers have a basic responsibility to care for their students still there are repeated cases in both India and the United States which reveal failures in providing proper mental health support to students and delay or gap in addressing complaints, and lack to protect students from discrimination, ragging and bullying. These failures are made even more worse by the absence of strong accountability systems that could hold institutions responsible when their negligence contributes to a student's death. Comparing India and the United States is valuable because, despite cultural and policy differences, both countries show similar patterns of institutional shortcomings that put students at risk. By framing student suicides not only as individual tragedies but also as systemic failures with legal and ethical implications, this research emphasizes the

urgent need for structural reforms and stronger institutional accountability.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study is significant because it situates student suicides within the framework of institutional accountability and legal responsibility, an area often overlooked in existing scholarship. While psychological explanations dominate most literature, they tend to individualize the problem, ignoring the systemic failures that exacerbate student vulnerability. By taking a comparative approach between India and the United States, this study highlights how policies, institutional culture, and enforcement gaps contribute to recurring tragedies, making it an important addition to global discussions on student well-being. Many scholars have emphasized the rising burden of academic stress and its association with student suicides in India, while Hinduja and Patchin (2018) have drawn attention to cyberbullying as a key risk factor in the United States. However, few studies attempt to connect these factors with the legal and administrative duties of institutions, which this research aims to address.

From a policy perspective, the study is significant because it underscores the urgent need **for** stronger frameworks of student protection in India, where fragmented laws and weak enforcement mechanisms undermine institutional accountability. The U.S. experience, though backed by relatively stronger anti-bullying and suicide prevention policies, demonstrates how inconsistent application can still lead to tragic outcomes (CDC, 2023). By drawing parallels and contrasts, the study not only identifies gaps but also suggests transferable lessons that can inform reforms in both countries.

At a broader societal level, the study is vital in reframing student suicides not merely as matters of mental health but as a constitutional and human rights concern. This perspective

ensures that educational spaces are recognized as sites of justice, equity, and dignity, rather than only centers of academic learning. By integrating case-based analysis with systemic review, the study aspires to influence policymakers, educators, and administrators toward building safer and more inclusive educational environments worldwide.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has been undertaken with the following clear objectives:

1. To understand how systemic factors such as academic pressure, discrimination, bullying, and administrative neglect contribute to student suicides in India and the United States.
2. To examine how specific case studies reflect broader institutional failures, highlighting the lived realities of affected students.
3. To compare the legal and policy frameworks of both countries in order to assess how effectively they protect students' rights and mental well-being.
4. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of institutional responses, including grievance redressal mechanisms, mental health services, and anti-discrimination measures.
5. To suggest practical recommendations for educational institutions and policymakers to strengthen accountability and create safer, more supportive learning environments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research increasingly underscores that student suicides are shaped not just by individual struggles but by systemic stressors amplified within institutions. In India, Mayya, Mayya, Martis, and Lakshmi (2022) found that 26–28% of pre-university science students experienced high to extreme academic stress, with parental expectations and lack of revision time being key

stressors. This points to institutional and societal pressures deeply embedded in the curriculum culture. Another study reviewing academic stress across Indian contexts highlighted the significant role of entrance examinations (like JEE and NEET) in heightening anxiety and suicidal ideation (Thangavel & Xavier Munda, 2024).

In the United States, the link between cyberbullying, peer harassment, and youth suicidality is well-documented. A comprehensive review by Hinduja and Patchin (2018) established strong associations between online victimization and suicidal behavior, emphasizing the need for effective school policy. Supporting this, the CDC's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reports that a substantial percentage of high-schoolers experience poor mental health and contemplation of suicide, signaling persistent vulnerability despite policy frameworks.

Studies evaluating institutional responses reveal a gap between policy intent and actual protection. In India, Kaur and Saini (2022) observed that nearly 70% of students are unaware of where to report cyber bullying and feel their institutions lack adequate response mechanisms. In contrast, although U.S. schools often have anti-bullying laws, Weiss and colleagues (2021) noted that inconsistent implementation and lack of enforcement reduce their effectiveness.

Comparative analyses suggest that institutional accountability, not just policy presence, is critical. For instance, Gupta et al. (2021) argue that Indian higher education has foundational policies such as mandatory grievance redressal and counseling but enforcement is sporadic, leaving students unprotected. Similarly, Noor and colleagues (2023) emphasize the importance of active institution-led mental health support over mere compliance.

Together, these studies converge on three themes:

(1) Academic pressure and cyberbullying are major risk factors.

(2) Institutional safeguards exist but are often weak or inconsistently applied.

(3) Prevention demands accountability frameworks that go beyond written policy. This justifies the present research's focus on analyzing how institutional accountability or the lack thereof affects student vulnerability through comparative case analysis.

RESEARCH GAP

Even though a lot of study has been done on student suicides, the majority of studies are still either sociological in nature, examining caste, class, or peer dynamics, or psychological in nature, concentrating on personal stress, depression, or coping mechanisms. Only a small number of studies have critically analyzed the situation from a comparative, legal-educational perspective, especially when comparing countries with different institutional frameworks, such as the US and India. While bullying and cyberbullying have received more attention in the US, academic pressure and prejudice have been the main topics of existing study in India. However, there is a startling dearth of integrative research that assesses how cultural contexts, legal protections, and institutional responsibility combine to influence student vulnerability in various educational systems. Furthermore, there is a substantial knowledge vacuum due to the paucity of comparative research that integrate systemic policy assessment with case-based analysis. By providing a qualitative, case-based comparative analysis that identifies similarities and differences between the responses of two significant educational systems to student suicides, this paper aims to close that gap and provide more general insights for international educational practice and policy.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, case-based comparative research design to explore institutional accountability in the context of

student suicides in India and the United States. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the focus is on understanding systemic, legal, and cultural dimensions rather than measuring statistical prevalence.

The research relies on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government and institutional reports, legal documents, and verified news accounts. Case studies were purposively selected to represent a diverse range of contexts:

- **India:** Rohith Vemula (2016), Darshan Solanki (2023), and recurring cases in Kota coaching hubs.
- **United States:** Megan Meier (2006) and Phoebe Prince (2010).

These cases were chosen because they reflect not only individual struggles but also larger institutional and cultural patterns regarding student vulnerability and accountability.

A comparative thematic analysis was applied, focusing on three broad dimensions:

1. **Legal frameworks** – examining national laws, court judgments, and institutional regulations.
2. **Institutional practices** – including grievance redressal, mental health provisions, and anti-discrimination mechanisms.
3. **Cultural context** – exploring how societal expectations and stigma shape student experiences.

For validation, findings from case studies were cross-checked with existing empirical research on student mental health and institutional accountability. Data has been interpreted in a manner that foregrounds systemic issues rather than individual blame, ensuring that the analysis highlights broader structural challenges.

Ethical considerations were also observed, as the study is based solely on secondary data, avoiding any direct engagement with

vulnerable populations while maintaining sensitivity in discussing cases.

COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The issue of student suicides in India and the United States reveals both similarities and differences in how institutions understand and address student vulnerability. While the problem in both contexts is rooted in systemic pressures, the institutional accountability mechanisms differ significantly in scope and implementation.

In India, suicides are frequently linked to high-stakes entrance examinations, caste-based discrimination, and a lack of accessible mental health services. The case of Rohith Vemula, for example, exposed how caste prejudice within higher education can isolate students and push them toward despair. Similarly, Darshan Solanki’s death at IIT Bombay highlighted how elite institutions often fail to create safe and inclusive environments. The recurring suicides in Kota coaching hubs show how academic pressure, combined with minimal emotional support, has created an atmosphere of extreme

vulnerability for young aspirants. Although the University Grants Commission (UGC) has mandated grievance redressal cells and counseling services, implementation is inconsistent, with many institutions treating compliance as a formality rather than a genuine support system.

In contrast, the United States has more developed legal and institutional frameworks, including anti-bullying laws, Title IX provisions, and structured mental health programs in schools and universities. The cases of Megan Meier and Phoebe Prince brought national attention to the devastating effects of cyberbullying and peer harassment. Following these incidents, schools were legally required to adopt stricter anti-bullying policies. However, studies show that enforcement remains uneven, with many students still feeling unsafe or unsupported. The U.S. system, while stronger on paper, struggles with consistency and sustainability of interventions. The following table highlights key comparative insights between the two contexts:

Table 2: Comparative Insights on Institutional Accountability in India and the U.S.

Dimension	India	United States
Key Triggers	Academic pressure, caste discrimination, parental expectations, lack of mental health access	Cyberbullying, peer harassment, social isolation, academic stress
Case Examples	Rohith Vemula (2016), Darshan Solanki (2023), Kota coaching suicides	Megan Meier (2006), Phoebe Prince (2010)
Legal Framework	UGC regulations, anti-ragging laws, Right to Education Act (limited focus on higher ed)	Title IX, state anti-bullying laws, school district mental health policies
Institutional Practices	Grievance redressal cells (poorly implemented), limited counseling services	Structured counseling programs, mandatory anti-bullying policies (inconsistent enforcement)
Cultural Context	Stigma around mental health, rigid exam-centric system, caste-based exclusion	Digital culture pressures, stigma around seeking help, peer competitiveness

Challenges	Weak enforcement, lack of awareness, inadequate resources	Uneven implementation, over-reliance on legal compliance, limited follow-up
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From this comparison, it is evident that India struggles with fragmented frameworks and weak enforcement, while the United States faces the challenge of consistency and proper implementation despite stronger policies. Both systems reflect gaps in institutional accountability, showing that legal frameworks alone are insufficient without cultural sensitivity and active institutional engagement.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The comparative analysis done in this study of student suicide cases in India and the United States reveals and indicates that while both contexts shows institutional shortcomings, lack and the nature of these gaps varies significantly. fragmented policies, inadequate, evil enforcement of anti-discrimination frameworks, and the absence of strong mental health support structures and planning emerge as consistent issues in India. The cases like Rohith Vemula and Darshan Solanki shows how systemic marginalization and discrimination based on caste, race, and social identity continues to push students into extreme distress and anxiety, Kota coaching hub suicides highlight the dangers of neglected and unchecked academic pressure. In the contrast, the United States shows stronger legal provisions and school based programs, yet Lack of community involvement, inconsistent application, and a lack of attention to the cultural stigma associated with mental health all work against these.

According to how these results are interpreted, institutional accountability must be translated into successful, real-world practices for students rather than being limited to written policies. While the American cases highlight the difficulty of converting well-meaning concepts into consistent action, the Indian cases highlight the necessity of addressing ingrained

socioeconomic disparities. The findings collectively highlight the need for educational settings to address suicide prevention by recognizing more comprehensive structural concerns, such as institutional care shortages, systematic discrimination, and unreasonable academic expectations, rather than relying just on individual stories of failure. According to this perspective, educational institutions everywhere need to move away from reactive crisis management and toward proactive tactics that protect each student's dignity, inclusion, and fairness.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study suggest important implications for the way educational systems are structured and managed. Student suicides are not just isolated personal tragedies but they are also the result of system failures within institutions that often neglect to create safe, inclusive, and supportive environments in classrooms and even in campuses. In Indian context, this means that institutions must address structural discrimination and should work to reduce academic pressure, and ensure that grievance redressal mechanisms are more than just formalities. In the United State, stronger frameworks may exist but their unequal enforcement highlights the significance of regular monitoring and genuine community involvement.

The implication of this study also extend to the need and requirement for stronger mental health provisions in both contexts. Institutions like universities, school, collages and tutions must invest in trained faculty, counselors, establish peer support programs, and actively work to de-stigmatize mental health services. Integrating a culture of empathy and justice into regular academic activities is equally crucial in order to give students the confidence

to communicate their vulnerabilities without worrying about criticism or disregard. By seeing suicide prevention as a human rights obligation as well as a welfare issue, educational institutions can make significant progress in creating more secure and fair learning environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the comparative findings of this study, this study recommends that institutions should adopt different proactive and sustained measures to reduce students suicide rate. Universities and schools should establish and form mandatory mental health support services for students for ensuring accessibility and confidentiality for all students. Secondly, grievance redressal mechanisms should be strengthened more with proper and scheduled clear timelines, independent oversight (observations), and strict accountability and punishment for negligence. Thirdly, awareness programs aimed to reduce stigma around seeking help must be regularly conducted, involving students, parents, and teachers.

In addition to this, policy frameworks should recognize the intersection of academic stress with social and cultural marginalization, particularly caste and gender in the Indian context, and issues like of bullying and cyber harassment in the United States. Also, Collaborative models should involve educators, counselors, mentors, administrators, and student representatives should be institutionalized and formed to ensure that decision making reflects the lived realities of students without biasness. By combining structural reforms with real community participation, institutions can definitely create environments where student dignity, safety, and well-being are protected as primary and fundamental rights rather than optional considerations.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that student suicides are not just individual tragedies but reflect huge

societal and institutional failures in both India and the United States. The comparison of cases reveal that India not just struggles with huge systemic discrimination but also with fragmented frameworks and extreme academic pressure on the other hand United States faces challenges in consistently implementing stronger policies. When taken as a whole, these findings indicate that proactive, justice-centered strategies are needed to protect students' well-being, as reactive measures alone cannot.

By analyzing the legal, institutional and also the cultural dimensions suicides of students, this research underscores the urgent requirement for taking accountability, even stronger mental health support, and environments where equity, equality and dignity are central to education. Preventing student to commit suicides is not only a matter of welfare but it's also a constitutional and human rights imperative. If educational institutions take their responsibility of care seriously and make real changes, they can become places of safety, belonging, and hope, where children can thrive instead of being pushed to despair.

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