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# India tackles worryingly high level of suicides among young people

By Mallika Kapur and Jethro Mullen, CNN

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## INDIA HAS HIGH RATE OF YOUTH SUICIDES

India's alarming rate of youth suicides 02:45

### Story highlights

Report: India has the highest suicide rate worldwide for ages 15 to 29

Mikhail Furtado was extremely worried about his 12th-grade exams.

A few days before he was due to get his results, his father walked in and found him dead.

A father recounts finding his son dead before exam results were due

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A suicide prevention worker says he blames a breakdown in family structures

India this week made it no longer a crime to attempt suicide

"I opened the cottage door, put the light on and I found him hanging. He was hanging," Anthony Furtado says.

When the results came out, his father learned that Mikhail had sailed through with good grades.

collect the results.

He says he still can't bring himself to go and

But Furtado is trying to use his devastating experience to benefit others. He provides counseling and is a regular at suicide prevention workshops.

"Sometimes, at the end, I do break down," he says.

### **Highest rate in the world among young**

The scale of the problem among India's young people is huge.

According to a recent World Health Organization report, India has the highest suicide rate in the world for the 15-to-29 age group. It stands at 35.5 per 100,000 people for 2012, the last year for which numbers are available.

Across all age groups, nearly 260,000 people in India killed themselves that year.

Bobby Zachariah, who runs a suicide prevention group, says he blames a breakdown in India's traditional family structure.

"There were big families, there was a lot of support available," he says.

"Nowadays, there is one child in the family," Zachariah says. "And the kind of parenting styles that were applied to them when they were kids doesn't apply to their children any more."

### **Reducing stigma**

Some experts say a key problem is that families brush mental health issues under the carpet rather than facing them head on.

"Mental illness is like any other illness and is treatable," says Dr. Arun John of the Vandrevala Foundation, which aims to help people with mental health issues and other problems.

This can only be tackled once greater awareness is created, he says, calling for the establishment of helplines.

The Indian government took a step toward reducing some of the stigma around suicide this week, making it no longer a crime to attempt it.

Officials were acting on a recommendation of a law commission report that said the desire to commit suicide should be seen as a condition needing treatment, not punishment.

But in a rapidly developing India, pressures remain high to get good grades and high-paying jobs.

"Parents and schools do not make a child mentally and psychologically strong enough to handle pressure," John says. This leads to a "feeling of worthlessness," he adds.

### **'I'm so much better now'**

One 20-year-old man in the city of Pune, near Mumbai, talked about reasons behind his brush with death.

The man, who declined to be identified, said he never fared well in school and had few friends.

He had problems with his girlfriend and felt his parents didn't understand him.

In his depression and desperation, he would cut himself, he said, showing the scars.

He attempted suicide but was saved by a timely medical intervention.

Nowadays, he gets counseling and enjoys playing the guitar.

He also counsels others.

"It helps them to know I've been there," he says. "And that I'm so much better now."

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