

# Dowry's socio-cultural Society & Implications *The News*

27-5-03

*Continued from page 1*

self-acclaimed gender experts, I initiated fight against dowry (FAD) through the platform of *Sachet*, which I co-founded nearly five years back. The main objective of this project, rather a movement, is to eradicate (institution and practice of) dowry in Pakistan. The key strategies to achieve this aim are research and communication. The activity spectrum ranges from surveys, signature campaigns, e-petitions, youth-parent consultations, legal advice, amending the existing law, lobbying, TV programs to anything possible under the sun.

The Government of Nawaz Sharif introduced an ordinance in mid-1990s, banning grand wedding receptions (an implicit upshot of dowry). However, it was enforced for a short period only. Right now, commission of Law and Justice, has drafted a new law in connection with wedding expenses and dowry. The consultation on the draft version is in progress.

## **Challenges, not conclusions**

Such write-ups usually conclude by drawing conclusions and making suggestions. I am concluding by identifying some of the challenges connected with the gruesome practice of dowry and the accompanying violence.

\* How dowry could be made a high priority agenda to create a critical mass to combat this institutional violence?

\* Are we ready to adopt this extremely critical gender issue as a passion?

\* Is our mass media mature enough to advocate and sensitise all stakeholders?

\* Do we have any political commitment in this regard and how far our governments are ready to go in this respect?

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Dawar  
1-6-03

# Suicide can't be the a

By Dr Khalid Mahmood

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RECENT suicide cases among people have received national attention and public concern. Unfortunately, the understanding required by the important issue is far from complete. There are many risk factors and triggers associated with it and is directly related to psychology, personality and family/social factors. These factors interact to what leads to the final act of suicide, is what we need to find out.

What actually is suicide and what compels a person to choose this option? Death as part of whole evolutionary process is considered a final phase and ending of a physical consciousness that affects in many ways. And suicide is the conscious decision to end one's life, a state from which there is no return. In individuals who commit suicide the act of ending one's life seems to be the only choice, the only answer to life's misery.

The problem is multifaceted and no definite casual factor can be recognized. Although suicide is more prevalent in those people with psychiatric illness but psychosocial problems like unemployment leading to economic instability, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual orientation, failing at school, work and love, childlessness, fast deepening sense of insecurity. All play an important role in the development of frustrations and thus suicidal tendencies.

Suicide was supposed to be the domain of the elderly, now young adults have

seemed to have taken the lead in this pursuit of death. Adolescence is a time of extra ordinary change and indeed a stressful and difficult phase. Increasing responsibility, pressures socially and academically. Moreover change is occurring mentally and physically. Sexual orientation too can become a problem as an adolescent struggle to contend with being different from the accepted norm. Self discovery and assuming one's identity during this time can be a tough process. This period can be a time of trial and error and in this day and age when there is a lot of pressure to achieve.

Competition is tough and opportunities are shrinking, so it is the survival of the fittest and if one lags behind and there is no support or guidance, chance of getting carried away with emotions are high. Lack of communication with parents and peers can lead to lack of coping resources. Impulsive behaviour may arise and uncertainty of future can also bring a period of self-doubt and feelings of inferiority and isolation.

New overwhelming feelings may be threatening enough to require dramatic ways to assessing control. Many suicidal youths experience family troubles that lead them to doubt their self worth. Too often parents criticize the child rather than the behaviour. Drug, alcohol abuse and violence is also quiet common now in young generation due to undue exposure of children at a tender age to uninhibited violence and sexuality via TV. Their impressionable minds at this crucial age are unable to explain logically such situations and as a result they take strange steps.

Home environment therefore has a bearing on the child's overall attitude. The scenario is indeed scary. With growing stress in the society, the role of parents has become more important and rearing a child is no longer easy. The children

need to be given a patient hearing, and a close, yet not suffocating watch to avoid such tragic incidents.

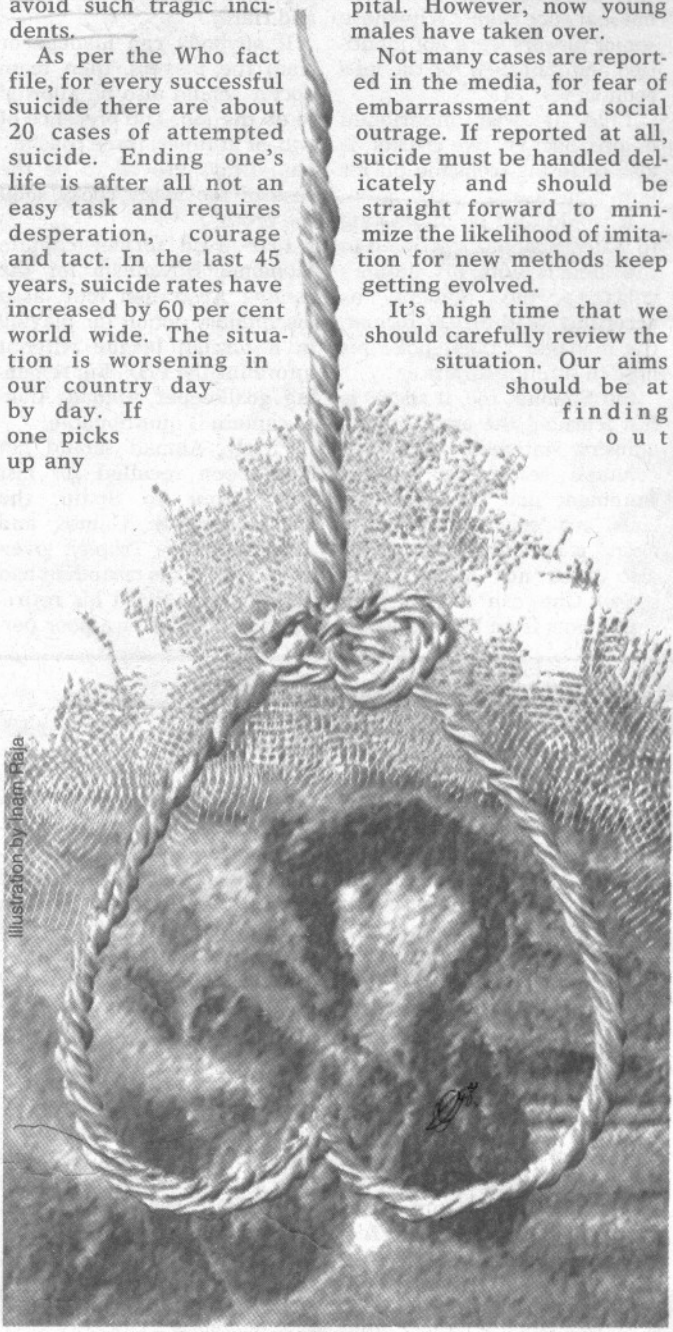
As per the Who fact file, for every successful suicide there are about 20 cases of attempted suicide. Ending one's life is after all not an easy task and requires desperation, courage and tact. In the last 45 years, suicide rates have increased by 60 per cent world wide. The situation is worsening in our country day by day. If one picks up any

young girls attempting suicide, either because of emotional instability or social reasons. This they usually did by ingesting a chemical and landing in a public hospital. However, now young males have taken over.

Not many cases are reported in the media, for fear of embarrassment and social outrage. If reported at all, suicide must be handled delicately and should be straight forward to minimize the likelihood of imitation for new methods keep getting evolved.

It's high time that we should carefully review the situation. Our aims should be at finding out

Illustration by Inam Fala



newspaper one is bound to see a few reports regarding suicide. And these are the successful ones. The unsuccessful ones which are more in number go unnoticed.

Although there is exact statistical figure of successful and attempted suicides, the figure would be in its thousands. Another interesting point is that 10 years back, we used to get more

things that works best in terms of preventing suicide and overcoming obstacles to ensure that things that work best are actually incorporated into the regular activities of health, education welfare and other agencies. Focus should be on public education, prevention of elderly suicide and promotion of mental health in young people.

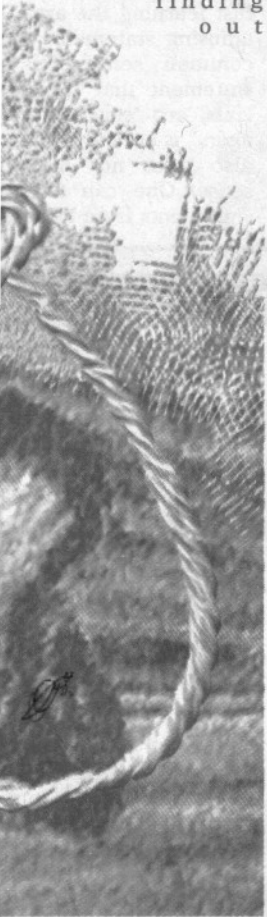
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In this context psychia-  
trists have an important role  
to play. Referral to a psychi-  
atrist for any indication  
should be taken seriously. At  
the same time, in a broad  
category as in our society,  
the misconception is that a  
psychiatrist is there only to  
treat a *paagal*. A team of psy-  
chiatrists and physicians  
should work in collaboration  
for the establishment of sur-  
veillance system for com-  
pleted suicides as well as for  
suicide attempts as the latter  
group is more at risk.  
Benefits of such systems  
could be potentially great.

Its essential that we must  
be alert to the signs of suici-  
dal tendency: changes in eat-  
ing or sleeping habits, hyper-  
activity, being accident  
prone and aggressiveness,  
sudden loss of interest in  
prized possessions, apathy,  
guilt, self-hate, substance  
abuse and anxiety. Anxiety  
is a normal part of everyday  
living, however, it is abnor-  
mal when it becomes over-  
whelming and interferes  
with daily living.

Suicide doesn't have to  
happen, it can be prevented  
and we all can help. Parents  
should spend more time  
with their children in order  
to help them in building  
their character and behav-  
iour. Religion plays an  
important role in building a  
person's moral side.  
Declining influence of reli-  
gion in society parallels  
with the decline of society  
itself as record number of  
youths are falling prey to  
drugs, crime, homicide, illit-  
eracy and suicide. The  
weakening of religious spir-  
it has led to moral and sexu-  
al irresponsibility and cata-  
strophic results, and has  
created real havoc. We  
should understand the need  
of religion to reassert its  
traditional responsibility  
for preserving and protect-  
ing the well-being of citi-  
zens.

Government should pro-  
vide opportunities for jobs.  
NGOs and the affluent of the  
society can help the govern-  
ment in this regard. If sui-  
cide prevention is to be suc-  
cessful it must address the  
biological, cognitive and  
social problems the patient  
is suffering from. ■