

## **Press Release**

Date: 27 January, 2023

**Subject: "Addressing Rising Suicide Rates Among School and College Students"**

Today is Friday, January 27, 2023. I welcome everyone present at the press conference organized by the Aachol Foundation today. The topic of today's press conference is a survey titled "Addressing Rising Suicide Rates Among School and College Students". Present at the conference are Tahmina Islam, Professor of the Department of Social Work at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), Shahrina Ferdous, Clinical Psychologist, and the Founder President of Aachol Foundation, Tansen Rose.

Suicide is a silent problem affecting society, especially spreading quickly among young people. A previous survey conducted by the Aachol Foundation reveals that suicide rates are increasing alarmingly among students at all educational levels, from schoolchildren to university students. In 2022, while researching the number of students committing suicide, the Aachol Foundation found that 446 students from schools, colleges, and madrasas across the country had taken their own lives. Furthermore, 86 university students also ended their lives.

The young researchers of the Aachol Foundation have gathered data on student suicides from over 150 national and local newspapers and online portals. Based on the collected data, the coordinated results are being presented today by me, Md. Farahbi Ishrak, Team Leader of Team Awaj of the Aachol Foundation.

### **Suicide Statistics Among Students**

According to data gathered from newspapers and online portals in the country, the total number of school and college students who committed suicide in 2022 was 446. Among them, 340 were students at the school and equivalent levels, while 106 were from colleges and equivalent institutions. Of these, 54 were students from madrasas. The victims were 285 female students and 161 male students. Additionally, at least 86 students from various universities also committed suicide.

### **Suicide Rates by Division: Dhaka Leads**

The number of school and college students who committed suicide was highest in the Dhaka division, at 23.77%. This was followed by Chittagong division at 17.27% and Rajshahi division at 16.81%. Other divisions showed the following percentages: Khulna 14.13%, Rangpur 8.74%, Barisal 8.53%, Mymensingh 6.27%, and Sylhet 4.48%.

### **Women Leading in Suicide Rates**

Among students who committed suicide, 63.90% were female and 36.10% were male. Among school students, the suicide rate for females was 65.30%, while for males it was 34.70%. Among college students, 59.44% were female and 40.56% male. This indicates that the suicide rate among female students is still alarmingly high.

### **Increased Suicide Risk During Adolescence**

Data from the survey shows that students aged 13 to 19 are most likely to commit suicide, making up 76.12% of the total cases, or 405 students. Among them, 65.93% were female, and 34.07% were male. Students aged 7 to 12 years accounted for 8.08% of suicides, totaling 43 students. Interestingly, in this age group, 46.52% were female and 53.48% male. Experts believe that the increased suicide rate during adolescence is due to the physical and mental changes that young people face at this stage, as they often struggle to adapt to challenging environments.

### **Reasons Behind Suicide**

Students who commit suicide often face multiple personal struggles that push them toward this tragic decision. The survey found that one of the most significant contributing factors is dishonor or humiliation, accounting for 27.36% of cases. The majority of these students had conflicts with their families. Other causes included love-related issues (23.32%), family disputes (3.14%), depression (2.01%), mental health problems (1.79%), financial issues (1.79%), harassment, rape, or sexual abuse (3.13%). In some cases, the exact cause of suicide was unknown.

Additionally, several specific reasons for suicide were noted, such as the spreading of inappropriate images on Facebook (4 cases), being humiliated by a teacher (6 cases), being denied permission to play games (7 cases), failing exams (27 cases), not being allowed to buy a mobile phone (10 cases), and not being allowed to buy a motorcycle (6 cases). Other causes included academic pressure, the fear of poor results, and family-related stress.

### **Nature of Family Conflicts**

Various family conflicts were cited as contributing to suicides. These included quarrels between siblings over visiting relatives, disputes between brothers over food delivery, conflicts with parents about not wanting to take exams, and the effects of parental separation on children. These family issues accounted for 3.14% of suicides among

school and college students, with 2.64% of school students and 4.71% of college students taking their lives due to family conflicts.

### **Government Initiatives for Mental Health Awareness**

The government has taken several steps to address mental health issues, including the Mental Health Act of 2018. Additionally, an online training program on "Mental Health First Aid (Part-1)" has been introduced for secondary school teachers. The National Mental Health Policy-2022 has been gazetted, and plans are underway to appoint a psychologist in every educational institution in each district. In 2023, a chapter on mental health was included in the "Health Protection Book" for sixth and seventh-grade students to help prepare the younger generation for mental well-being.

### **Addressing the Issue of Rising Student Suicides**

Commenting on the rising suicide rates among school and college students, Aachol Foundation's Founder and President Tansen Roz said, "The minds of children and adolescents are fragile by nature. Even small issues can deeply affect them at this age. Many cannot cope with the physical and mental changes during adolescence, and as a result, even minor problems can push them towards making the irreversible decision of suicide."

Tansen further said, "To prevent suicides, the most important role should be played by teachers and parents. While parents have the most influence on children during early childhood, during adolescence, this responsibility shifts more to teachers. However, in our country, there is no proper opportunity to learn about child-rearing practices. Parents often fail to acknowledge that parenting is a learnable skill, and as a result, they are often indifferent to their children's mental health. This leads to a lack of focus on the emotional well-being of the children."

He suggested that teachers should play a mentor's role by fostering friendly relationships with students, listening to their problems, and providing guidance. He also pointed out that proper support systems and counseling resources for students are often lacking at this critical stage of life.

### **Psychologist Shahrina Ferdous on Mental Health**

Psychologist Shahrina Ferdous stated, "In the 2022 survey, we see that the suicide tendency is significantly higher among adolescents aged 13 to 19. This age group is undergoing crucial development, and it is imperative to focus on their mental health and raise awareness. The factors contributing to this trend should be thoroughly investigated, especially concerning their family dynamics, personal needs, and social status."

She also noted that COVID-19 had a major impact on the mental health of adolescents, and recovery from its effects requires time. To improve mental health during adolescence, she recommended increased opportunities for physical activities like sports, reducing screen time, and strengthening family bonds.

**Samira Akter Siam, General Secretary of Aachol Foundation**, emphasized the importance of teaching emotional control from a young age. "It is alarming that most suicides occur among students aged 13 to 19. We need to teach children emotional regulation and empathy from an early age, within the family, school, and community. Encouraging positive emotional behavior and teaching how to handle negative situations will help children lead a more positive life."

### **Recommendations by Aachol Foundation to Address Student Suicides**

1. Increase opportunities for sports and cultural activities to keep students away from depression, isolation, and negative thoughts.
2. Launch parenting programs to help parents better understand their children's mental health and needs.
3. Train teachers and school staff to be more compassionate and strategic in their interactions with students, including evaluating exam papers.
4. Display anti-suicide posters in schools and colleges.
5. Investigate the family's role in every suicide case and include them in legal accountability measures.
6. Accelerate the activities of student welfare funds in schools and colleges to address financial issues, which could reduce suicides due to financial stress.
7. Launch awareness campaigns against cybercrimes such as spreading personal images or videos without consent.
8. Educate teachers and students about recognizing suicide warning signs.
9. Set up mental health corners in educational institutions, providing mental health training to students.
10. Ensure access to clinical mental health services for students.
11. Teach students emotional regulation techniques and patience.

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