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Suicides in Children

On the eve of World Suicide Prevention Day on 10th of September, we were shocked to get a child who was only 9 years 7 months old and was admitted in a serious condition for attempted suicide by hanging. With intensive resuscitative efforts and proper supportive care, the child could be saved.

It was revealed that he had been scolded by his mother in the morning for not paying due attention to his studies. But, why this trend? Is this the result of media overexposure of immature brains or the increasing intolerance of kids to parental disciplining methods? Who is more guilty? Is it because of heightened expectations or because of heightened level of intolerance in kids? How far the parents can go to discipline their children? Where are these people supposed to go whenever the need arises? Are adequate counseling facilities available? These are some of the questions we all need to answer.

The President of International Association for Suicide Prevention has said- "In this age of preoccupation with global violence, terrorism and homicides, we often ignore the fact that world-wide more people kill themselves than die in all wars, terrorist acts and interpersonal violence combined(1). WHO says that more than one million people kill themselves every year. Many more millions attempt to do so. A vast majority of these are children. But, given this magnitude, very few studies have been done on this subject especially in India. We could find only one study from India on the suicidal pattern in children(2). It was a 10 years retrospective study which had revealed that the most common age-group for suicide in children was 15-18 years. The youngest child in that study was

11 years old. But, our child was even younger, not even 10 years old. We need to find out the real magnitude of the problem in India.

It is important to translate our knowledge and understanding of suicide to promising areas for suicide prevention. These areas include improving mental health treatment and management, educating physicians, restricting access to lethal means of suicide, educating the community, providing help in crises situations, and providing support for suicide attempts. To prevent such unfortunate incidents, we have to educate the parents so that they seek early help. Physicians also need to be trained adequately so as how to handle such situations. Mental health education should be given more importance in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Plans should be made to link-up mental health check-ups with regular growth-monitoring. Schools should also be made to pay proper attention to this aspect. Counselors should be appointed in school also. In short, we all need to think over it and act. Our sincere efforts are needed to stop many more young and productive lives getting nipped in the bud in this pathetic yet preventable manner.

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