

Mental Health Guidelines - Supreme Court's Response to Rising Student Suicides

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Mental Health Guidelines Latest News

- The Supreme Court has issued guidelines to educational institutions across the country.

Introduction

- Rising cases of student suicides in India have prompted urgent judicial intervention.
- On July 26, 2025, the Supreme Court issued sweeping guidelines to educational institutions across the country, terming the growing mental health crisis a **“systemic failure”**.
- The judgment, issued by a two-judge bench, comes amidst increasing reports of suicides among students, particularly in high-pressure environments such as coaching centres and premier academic institutions.
- The Court directed a uniform, enforceable mental health policy applicable to all schools, colleges, universities, hostels, and coaching centres, irrespective of their affiliation or ownership.

Increasing Suicides on Campuses

- According to the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, 13,044 student suicides were recorded in 2022, comprising **7.6% of all suicides** in the country.
- The number has increased sharply from 5,425 in 2001, underscoring a disturbing trend. At least **2,248 deaths in 2022** were directly attributed to exam failure.
- The Supreme Court observed that students are being driven into a **“rat race”** where the joy of learning has been eclipsed by anxiety, performance metrics, and parental pressure.
 - This competitive grind often isolates students, especially those in residential coaching environments far from their homes.
- The Court stated, *“Education is meant to liberate, not burden the learner... its true success lies not in grades or rankings, but in the holistic growth of a human being capable of living with dignity, confidence, and purpose.”*
- The bench also described the institutional silence around mental health as a key factor exacerbating student vulnerability, warning that suicide cases cannot be viewed as isolated tragedies but rather as a **collective social failure**.

Key Supreme Court Directives

- In an unprecedented step, the Court issued **15 binding guidelines** to be followed until a central regulatory framework is enacted.
- These apply to all educational institutions, public and private schools, colleges, universities, residential academies, hostels, and coaching centres.
- **Mandatory Counsellors and Support Systems**
 - All institutions with 100 or more students must appoint at least one **qualified counsellor, psychologist, or social worker** trained in child and adolescent mental health.
 - Smaller institutions must establish referral linkages with external mental health professionals.
 - Staff must be trained **twice a year** by certified mental health experts.
- **Infrastructure and Physical Safety Measures**
 - Residential institutions must install **tamper-proof ceiling fans** and restrict access to rooftops and high-risk areas to deter impulsive acts of self-harm.
- **Ending Discriminatory Academic Practices**
 - Institutions were asked to **end batch segregation based on academic performance**, avoid public shaming, and refrain from setting unrealistic academic targets.
 - Such practices were deemed detrimental to the mental health of vulnerable students.
- **Institutional Accountability and Protection**
 - Institutions must create **robust, confidential redressal mechanisms** for complaints involving harassment, bullying, caste- or gender-based discrimination, and sexual assault.
 - Retaliation against whistle-blowers or complainants will attract **institutional liability**.
 - Failure to act promptly will be treated as **administrative culpability** with legal consequences.
- **Policy Framework and National Coordination**

- All institutions must adopt and publish an **annual mental health policy**, taking reference from government initiatives such as:
 - *Ummeed* guidelines (Understand, Motivate, Manage, Empathise, Empower, Develop)
 - *Manodarpan*, launched by the Ministry of Education during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - *National Suicide Prevention Strategy* (India's first nationwide strategy, released in 2022)
- The Court also called for the formation of a **National Task Force** to institutionalise student mental health initiatives and suicide prevention mechanisms across the higher education landscape.

Background of the Verdict

- The judgment was delivered in a case involving the suicide of a **17-year-old NEET aspirant in Visakhapatnam**, whose parents sought a **CBI investigation** after alleged lapses in the state police inquiry.
- While addressing the individual case, the Court widened its scope to frame a national response to student suicides, recognising the broader institutional apathy and lack of psychological safeguards across educational spaces.

Significance and Future Implications

- This landmark ruling by the Supreme Court marks a shift in recognising **mental health as integral to the right to life and education**.
- By mandating psychological support systems, regulatory oversight, and institutional accountability, the Court has provided a blueprint for a safer, more empathetic education system.
- However, the success of these measures will depend on:
 - Timely notification and enforcement by states and Union Territories
 - Adequate budgetary allocations for hiring professionals
 - Sensitisation of staff and students toward emotional well-being
- It also underscores the need for **collective societal change**, moving from a culture of academic pressure to one that prioritises the **well-being, dignity, and individuality** of each student.

Source : **IE** | **TOI**

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