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Book Review

Book Review: Suicide in Bangladesh

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Suicide is a neglected issue in Bangladesh. I noticed a recent academic attention as evident by publishing of an increased number of articles, book chapters, and books. Here, I aim to evaluate a recent book "Suicide in Bangladesh" published in 2023, considering its content, analytical depth, and relevance for researchers and policymakers.

The first chapter aims at studying the epidemiological aspect of suicide and the data quality in Bangladesh. It highlights the lack of accurate and comprehensive data as a major barrier to understanding and preventing suicide in Bangladesh. Due to social stigma, legal issues, and inadequate reporting systems, suicide cases are often misclassified or go unreported. The chapter shows that most data come from police reports, media, or small-scale studies, which is not capable of generating strong evidence. It also discusses the demographic and geographic patterns, pointing out higher suicide rates among young people and women, especially in rural areas. The chapter calls for a national suicide surveillance system and better training for data collection officials. Without high-quality data, suicide prevention policies remain unreliable and incomplete. Overall, this chapter stresses that improving data quality is the first step toward building effective suicide prevention strategies in Bangladesh.

Since suicide and attempted suicide are considered as a criminal offense in Bangladesh, forensic and legal assessment is a vital part to ascertain the manner of death. The second chapter describes how forensic medicine is related to suicide declaration process and the current legal dimensions of suicide attempts in Bangladesh. Criminalizing suicide and attempts prevent the survivor and the families from reporting

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the cases. It highlighted the fact that Bangladesh follows century old criminal laws established by British Raj till date. The combined effect of no change in policy level, lack of specialized autopsy facility, mortuary facility, and lack of forensic experts leaves the forensic status in a limbo. The chapter underscores the legal and forensic improvement in terms of decriminalization, modernization of autopsy facilities, human resources in forensic medicine, proper training, benefits of morgue staff, and liaison between mental health professionals and forensic experts.

The presence of psychiatric disorder in up to 90% suicide cases is a global scenario. However, the picture in Bangladesh is different. The aim of the third chapter is to review the connection between mental health and suicide in the context of Bangladesh. Lack of systematic searching of mental disorder and highlighting only the social factors like marital discord, familial disharmony, sexual harassment, and pre- and extra-marital relationship are predominant in suicide research. Limited awareness of mental health and suicide-related knowledge may significantly contribute to the under recognition of psychiatric disorders in suicide and related cases. Thus, the author recommends for effective collaboration between mental health professionals, media personnel, forensic experts, and crisis service center for establishing more evidence-based data on psychiatric comorbidity. Awareness at policymaking sector and school mental health strengthening are also highly recommended.

The fourth chapter explores the cultural, religious, and social norms which have a strong influence on suicidal behaviour and it helps the reader to develop insight about the etiology, methods, and responses to suicide. Gender differences, culture of taboo, poverty, materialism, social dignity, and male control prevails in Bangladeshi culture. Prevailing social stigma in this society and the possible legal consequences often bars the family to notify suicide. Being a Muslim predominant country, suicide and suicidal attempts are considered as grave sins and severe punishments in afterlife. This also influences how suicide cases are handled in the society. This chapter also highlights that women, especially rural women are more vulnerable to commit suicide because of forced marriage, domestic violence, and lack of personal freedom. This chapter gives a detailed overview of cultural context of suicidal behaviour. Since suicide is not only a medical or psychological problem, rather it is a complex phenomenon involving social, cultural, economic, and legal factors. Therefore, solving the problem must need social and cultural changes.

The fifth chapter describes the patterns of reporting suicide in online and print media and motion pictures of Bangladesh and the impact of such reports on public perception. It highlights the sensationalism of reporting especially in Bangla newspapers which might attract readers from all background irrespective of social class and education. However, such reporting increases the risk of suicidality in vulnerable population. Lack of mental health context in suicide news leaves the audience with inadequate information. Thus, preventive measures including mental health facilities, helplines or positive recovery stories are underreported. The country faces multifaceted challenges in the sensible media of reporting suicide. Suicide research is largely based on media reporting on suicide as there is lack of any central suicide database. Other challenges are,

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absence of established suicide prevention policies, lack of collaboration of with mental health professionals, negligence of applying suicide reporting guidelines in local media, under-estimation of actual suicide rates in media, criminalized legal status, and ignoring the social variables influencing suicidality. The author recommends sensible reporting by media professionals by adopting national guidelines for reporting suicide, multi-sectoral collaboration especially with mental health professionals, decriminalization, and training for journalists. The chapter has a clear call to action based on evidence-based analysis on suicide reporting on print and online media. However, social media representation of suicide could be explored extensively.

The sixth chapter summarizes the risk factors of suicide in Bangladesh which is related to family and role of family in suicide prevention. The notable risk factors of suicide in families are domestic violence, pre/extra marital issues, marital conflict, and parental pressure (especially related to education or marriage). In male predominant society, gender inequality increases vulnerability for women and girls. Generational pressure on young people leads to conflict with parents over traditional expectations and modern-day challenges. Social shame and cultural taboo is another important factor that prevent a survivor and the family members to seek for help. The chapter also looked into the protective role of the family which have been expressed through emotional support, open communication, and early intervention. Authors recommend enhancing healthy communication within family and raising awareness as important preventive steps. The discussion develops socio-culturally relevant insights about family's role in suicide. However more real-life examples or interviews would strengthen the emotional and practical impact.

The seventh chapter investigates the connection between crisis, trauma, and suicide. Acute life crises such as job loss, academic failure, relationship breakups, being a victim of sexual harassment, death of a spouse, and divorce have been related with suicidality in Bangladesh. This trauma is often left unspoken and untreated due to stigma and cultural pressure to "cope silently". As most trauma survivors in Bangladesh do not receive professional psychological care due to limited availability of the professionals, the chapter calls for more trauma-informed training for healthcare workers and the caregivers.

The eighth chapter reviews suicide research trends in Bangladesh, revealing that the field is gradually being explored. Most studies are based on media reports, police records, or hospital data including death registry and autopsy records, which lack depth and accuracy. Academic interest in suicide has grown in recent years, but there is still a shortage of nationwide, community-based research. The chapter points out key gaps, most importantly the lack of national suicide surveillance system. It also highlights the heterogeneity of suicide research in Bangladesh. Unexplored areas of research magnitude, psychopathology, impact, and preventive measures are emphasized to be addressed. In conclusion, the chapter stresses that investment in evidence-based, ethical, and culturally sensitive suicide research is critical to develop insights about risk factors and designing effective prevention strategies in Bangladesh.

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The last chapter focuses on the prevention of suicide in the Bangladeshi context, describing available strategies and recommendations. It highlights the urgent need for a national suicide surveillance system and prevention policy, responsible media reporting, adequate mental health support, raising awareness, and more funds in suicide research. It also discusses the importance of decriminalizing suicide, training healthcare workers, and integrating mental health into primary care. Lack of coordination among sectors is identified as a major barrier. Overall, this chapter offers an action-oriented roadmap, stressing that suicide in Bangladesh is preventable with the right commitment and collaboration.

Suicide in Bangladesh: Epidemiology, Risk Factors and Prevention is a comprehensive book on suicidology in Bangladesh. The book provides a valuable insight on a time-demanding yet under-researched field of suicide in the country. Edited by a leading psychiatrist and researcher, the book brings together empirical findings, socio-cultural analysis, and strategies for policymakers to explore the complex interplay of suicide risk factors.

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