A Case Study – NEET-linked Suicides

Mains: *GS-IV – Ethics*

Why in News?

A case study on NEET-linked suicides highlights the ethical challenges of exam stress, showing how families, institutions, and society must uphold dignity, empathy, and resilience to prevent despair among young aspirants.

What about case study?

- **The Student's Struggle** – A 17-year-old aspirant leaves his home to prepare for a highly competitive entrance examination.
- His family has invested its savings in his coaching; relatives frequently ask about his progress, and social media constantly reminds him of others' achievements.
- After failing to secure the expected rank, he gradually withdraws from conversations, avoids friends, and begins to view himself as a burden rather than a person.
- **The Ethical Question** – He silently asks: Is my worth defined by success, or does life have value beyond achievements? This is not just a psychological dilemma — it is a profound ethical challenge.
- **Ethics & Value of Life** – If ethics is about choosing what is good, then the growing incidence of suicide among young people poses a serious moral challenge before society.
- Every human endeavour, whether education, employment, success, relationships, or public service, is ultimately aimed at sustaining life and giving it meaning.
- **Hope & Resilience** – Death may be an inevitable reality, the desire to live is what nurtures hope, resilience, and human progress.
- It is therefore deeply distressing when young minds, unable to cope with visible and invisible pressures, begin to see death as an escape from suffering.

What are the key ethical themes from case study?

- **Human Dignity** – Every individual's worth extends beyond marks and rankings. The article stresses that life itself has intrinsic value, echoing Kant's philosophy against suicide.
- **Empathy & Emotional Intelligence** – Families, teachers, and administrators must recognize invisible pressures and respond with compassion rather than judgment.
- **Resilience & Ethics of Care** – Institutions should nurture hope and provide support systems that help students cope with failure and uncertainty.
- **Social Responsibility** – Society must move beyond equating success with exam

results, creating environments where young people feel valued regardless of outcomes.

What are the ethical thinkers & philosophical frameworks?

- **Immanuel Kant** (Deontology / Categorical Imperative) – The German philosopher Immanuel Kant presented a argument against suicide in *The Metaphysics of Morals*.
- He argued that using suicide to escape suffering means an individual is treating their own life merely as a "means" to an end (ending pain).
- Because every human being possesses inherent dignity (human dignity), they must always be treated as an end to themselves.
- Therefore, human life has intrinsic worth that transcends immediate circumstances or academic failures.
- **The Ethics of Care** – Rooted in modern psychological and philosophical concepts (such as those highlighted by *Craig J. Bryan in Rethinking Suicide: Why Prevention Fails*), this framework argues that simple "awareness campaigns" are insufficient.
- Human flourishing relies heavily on social interconnectedness, supportive relationships, and social communities.
- True prevention lies in building deep emotional supportive relationships and communities.
- **Indian Philosophical Traditions** – Indian philosophy underscores self-awareness, resilience, and the integration of the self with a broader life purpose (the true concept of Yoga).
- It teaches that character, consistency, and perseverance hold greater value than temporary external outcomes.

What about the collective role of stakeholders shared across three levels?

- **The Family (The First School of Values)** – While individual resilience is important, the first line of support for any child must be the family.
- Parents must not view children as merely competitors or instruments for social prestige, but as individuals with emotions, vulnerabilities, and aspirations.
- Ethical Parenting requires empathy, patience, active listening, and unconditional emotional stability.
- When a child experiences setbacks, parents must practice an "ethics of care," ensuring that discipline is balanced with profound compassion.
- Families are often the first institutions where these values are learnt and practised.
- **Institutions & Coaching Hubs** – Present educational institutions aggressively celebrate success (via massive billboards, advertisements, and rankings) while completely sidelining the discussions of emotional cost of failure.
- A society that glorifies achievement must also learn to normalise setbacks and prioritize mental health over business metrics.
- **The Society & Technology** – With the decline of joint families, many young people now look for companionship and validation in digital spaces.
- Yet being digitally connected does not necessarily mean being emotionally connected.
- Despite living in an era of hyper-connectivity via social media, young people are facing severe loneliness and emotional alienation.

- Online presence may provide interaction, but it often lacks the depth of genuine emotional support.

What is the role of emotional intelligence?

- **Success Does Not Guarantee Well-Being –** Even some of the world's most accomplished individuals have spoken openly about their struggles.
- For example, Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps revealed that he battled depression and suicidal thoughts after the 2012 Olympics.
- His experience highlights an important lesson: external success alone cannot guarantee inner well-being.
- **Beyond Achievement** – Human beings require not only achievement but also emotional support, purpose, and meaningful relationships.
- **Ethical Role of Emotional Intelligence** – Emotional intelligence is ethically significant because it helps individuals to
    - Recognize and understand emotions
    - Manage feelings during adversity
    - Avoid letting temporary failures define identity.
- **Emotional Intelligence in Public Life** – In public life as well, emotional intelligence remains a crucial attribute because it strengthens empathy, resilience, and balanced decision-making.

What is the way forward?

- **Life-Affirming Approach** – A life-affirming approach rests on communication, emotional intelligence, and human connectedness.
- **Lessons for Youth** – Young people must recognise that consistency, perseverance, and character are often more important than immediate outcomes.
- Equally, families, educational institutions, and society must create environments where failure is not viewed as final, & vulnerability is not seen as weakness.
- **Hope as Collective Responsibility** – Hope is not merely an individual virtue - it is a social and ethical responsibility that families, institutions, and communities must collectively nurture it by ensuring -
    - People are not judged only by exam scores or achievements.
    - Human dignity is respected even in setbacks.
- As *Ernest Hemingway* said: "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."
- The ethical challenge is to ensure every person, especially youth, finds support, dignity, and meaning to choose life even in defeat.

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Reference

Indian Express | NEET-linked suicides: A case study — Beyond marks and rankings

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