

# Book Review

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**Kanchan Bharati, Lancy Lobo and Jayesh Shah (2021). *Revisiting Suicide: From a Socio-Psychological Lens*. London: Routledge India. Pp. 230. Price 995/-**

Being a peer reviewer of the draft, on a dark theme such as suicide, I can see the long painful enduring journey of the authors to bring this work to the academic world in a meaningful way. One can clearly see this work, as an outcome of deep commitment with 'labour of love' that involves much emotional turmoil during ongoing processes. Its not just a process of review, collecting information, interrogation, collation and analysis and writing up, but at each stage coming to terms with acceptance of multiple realities, resolving internal conflicts with deep reflections, constant rejuvenation and ultimately reaching a stage of hope to present something useful to the world. The book fulfils two major purposes.

- Provide integrated knowledge on this theme and helps the reader root it in the Indian cultural context, with primary research evidence.
- Initiate a meaningful policy dialogue that will have a long-range implication to alter support structures to deal with the issue of unnatural deaths / suicides.

Chapter one titled- '*Suicide – actors and factors*', introduces the theme and its importance (with prevalence data) in a relevant manner from multiple perspectives - the sociological dimension, the psychological dimensions, the biological dimension and the economic dimension. It also highlights the risk factors that push an individual towards the act of suicide in a classified manner, backed by substantial research evidence. In short, it answers the question on - who are the types of people who may be prone to suicide? The goals of the book and research are explained very well to enable the reader to understand the context of the work.

The second chapter aptly titled "*Psychological and social autopsy: making the paradigm explicit*" elaborates on each aspect of this lens vividly drawing from evidence-based research. It integrates the individual factors of personality traits and adjustment mechanisms well with the larger social factors responsible in pre-empting attempts towards suicide. The paradigm guides the study design and application of methods appropriate to the local context. Each aspect is detailed out well, to orient researchers to challenges involved in conducting research and the ways to navigate one's path. Authors have attended to maintaining aspects of rigour in qualitative inquiry and integrated it very well with evidence from other researches to

arrive at clear conclusions.

Chapter three “*Demystifying suicide – insights from research*” provides needed evidence in the form of case studies to validate the psycho-social autopsy paradigm. It first gives us the skeleton and then puts flesh on the bones through narratives, to give us a clear picture of ‘what, why and how of suicides’ in a sensitive manner. Beginning with all factors that have led to self- immolation or attempts towards the same, the chapter focusses on the aftermath of both survivors and deceased, from a variety of dimensions, that enable one to understand in detail the process that unfolds within family and society when such an episode of suicide occurs. This chapter makes the reader emotionally involved and hence can act as a sensitivity raising endeavour!

The fourth chapter titled ‘*Pathways to suicide inferences and theoretical interpretations*’ weaves the data from the present research into the larger body of theory and research evidence, thus helping the reader move beyond the data and narratives to development of a macro perspective on the theme. Chapters two, three and four contain many illustrative conceptual figures that enhance clarity and understanding.

The last chapter ‘*Way forward: Implications for prevention, policy and interventions*’ is put together meaningfully with all details of what is needed to make the situation better, to help victims, families, practitioners. It further makes recommendations for needed alterations in mental health policy and legislations. Bringing all this in one place enables a forward movement that will be remain constant; and maintain a tempo for change / positive action by raising same questions again and again to different audiences, who engage with the subject.

In all, I would say it is a milestone project on the theme, where more books on suicide fall in the category of self- help, personal stories or counselling! This moves a bit apart in presenting an integrated academic view on the subject, to help understand suicide better, by integrating available knowledge and applying it to the Indian context. Helping professionals engaged in interventions will find it useful to offer both preventive and ameliorative interventions to families. It serves as a peg to continue to work with systems and enable policy and program changes. □

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