

## Book Review

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### Death is Not The Answer

*Edited By : Anjali Chhabria*

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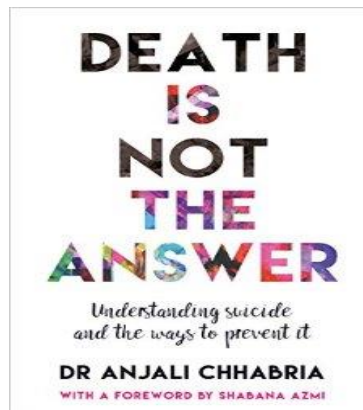
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Pragya Lodha

Research Assistant, Desousa Foundation, Mumbai.

E-mail – pragya6lodha@gmail.com

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“Suicide, fundamentally, is an escape from an unbearable situation that is ironically a self preservative move”, writes Dr. Chhabria. Worldwide, appalling statistics concern the phenomenon of suicide; nations losing greater number of lives to suicide every proceeding year. With suicide being one of the top three causes of death, World Health organization (WHO) mentions that a person thinks about suicide (suicidal ideation) every 3 seconds and commits suicide every 40 seconds, across the globe, accounting for (approximately) 10,00,000 deaths every year. A recent unnerving statistical record that comes from the (unofficial) suicide capital of the world, India, for the year 2015 unravels that more than 1.3 lakh individuals in India lost their lives, succumbing to suicide. Like an aid in need, “Death Is Not The Answer” (2016), authored by a Mumbai based psychiatrist, Dr. Anjali Chhabria reaches out to each and every individual. Written with clarity and comprehensible jargon, the book is a recommended read for people of all backgrounds.

India has more people suffering from mental illnesses than is the population of South Africa. The gap of education and label of stigma continue to overhaul the status and quality of mental health in our nation. Talking about suicide is another such stigmatized concern. The aim of this book is to make people aware and sensitize them about mental illnesses to understand and prevent suicide. The myth that speaking about suicide openly will make people to act on it deters any open conversation about the same. However, the reality is that more conversations around this topic will create more awareness and bring a change in attitude by uplifting the tag of shame and vulnerability about suicide.

Death Is Not the Answer expounds several reasons about suicide, de-stigmatizing suicide and making it a topic of importance to be addressed by all. The book is a torchbearer for every individual to understand and empathize with people having suicidal ideation and suicidal tendencies. The author provides details to identify suicidal ideations and tendencies on an individual level and signifies the importance of seeking professional help in times of signaling ailment in order to get the right treatment. Scientific and research based, the book is a detailed and comprehensive account about suicide with a plethora of real life incidences of suicidality that amplify the impact and learning for the readers.

The author has sub sectioned the book in 8 parts with each section highlighting different aspects relate to suicide. In part one, the book embarks on its way by assuring support for all those battling with self harm, encouraging them to not give up and rekindling their thoughts to search for alternatives to ending their lives. Interesting, the author adds a 'Checklist for Symptomology of Suicide' for readers to understand the severity of their symptoms (with regard to suicidality) as an activity of self reflection. It is cautioned that the checklist be used and interpreted under professional guidance. Additionally, by spelling out statistical information about suicide among various parts of the world and in India, the author brings attention to the less addressed concern in our society.

With mentions in mythological scripts like that of the Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Brahmanical writings, the historical account of suicide is mentioned to be as old as mankind. Traces of Indian religious texts and cultural practices along with the incidences of Western philosophers and legends also find mention in the book to further explain the history of suicide. Moving on, one of the key elements of this book is that the author demystifies various myths relating to suicide in a very simple, clear and understandable manner.

Part two talks about the life and death situations from the multiple viewpoints of adolescence, relationships, role of media, social media and suicidality in the minority population of homosexuals and geriatric. In the present times, the highest numbers of suicides have been recorded between the ages of 15-29 years, who are ideally considered as the national ambassadors and economic assets for any nation. Suicide has been explained with an underlying understanding of Erik Erikson's theory of development of life stages, by focusing on the important issues during the adolescent phase of growth and development. The author talks about the harm of suppressing emotions which turns into a burden in adulthood making the individual vulnerable to mental ill health and lack of healthy resilience. The importance of accepting failure and rejection is also spoken about healthily as a part of coping stress. The author stresses the fact that it is okay to fail and success does not depend on the number of failures or rejections that one faces.

This part of the book also highlights the presence of psychological characteristics that predisposed an individual to suicidal ideation and tendency. The role of child sexual abuse is also discussed in this section, which is a crucial determinant of mental illness in adulthood. An important and frequently asked question about the millennial generation as to how and why are they so 'different' is also catered to by Dr Chabbria with a mention about the link between academic stress and suicide. When it comes to romantic relationships, the author delineates about the causal factors that explain why youngsters experience vulnerability when in love and its connections to committing suicide. A recent trend of the 'copy cat' suicides as result of celebrities committing suicide has been a disturbing event in the society. The youth, without serious reasons, think that they should commit suicide since their favourite TV star or film-star died the same way. With media coming into the picture, Dr. Anjali describes the accountability of the media and reiterates upon the responsible guidelines as proposed by the Indian Psychiatric Society (2015) to be followed by those covering suicide. Social media is referred to as the double edged sword that connects one to the world but also is addictive, harming the mental and physical health of individuals, with a greater harm for those who are emotionally vulnerable. Importantly, the book makes aware the readers about the correlations of suicide and internet use and how professionals can be of important help in crisis.

Homosexuality and the concern of alarming suicide rates within the community is another chief element of this book. The author urges the formation of gatekeepers or bridges to life in order to understand homosexuality from a scientific, medical and psychological point in order to ensure equality of health and

treatment for the sexual minorities who are very much a part of humanity. Part two comes to an end by talking about the 'gold phase' population of our society that is our senior citizens. This is an age where suicidality and poor mental health go undetected as most people think that sadness and disinterest come with age. However, it is not so. The toll of emotional, mental and psychological stress in the later stages of life must be addressed with sensitivity and care. Going to therapists or mental health professionals in such stress can bring a good boost in quality of life for many such senior citizens. This section concludes with preventive strategies for care givers and health professionals who think that suicidal ideation and tendencies cannot be prevented in old age. To a large extent, it can be. Ageism seen with another perspective can bring hope for life.

Dr. Aaron Beck's Cognitive Triad is the lead to the third part of the book which explains the interconnectedness of hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness (the triad of understanding depression which is the second leading cause of death in the world) with suicide. Dr. Chhabria elucidates various explanations and doubts about how and why negative thoughts become the focus of suicidal attempts, how can one cope with the emotional turbulence and the factors that impact one's course of action in treating suicidality as a result of different clinical diagnoses. It gives a magnified understanding from a clinical point of view, especially so for the young psychologists. Further, Dr. Chhabria talks about suicidal intent and suicidal lethality (level / severity of intent, the potential risk or dangerousness of method chosen to commit suicide), providing a list to understand suicidal ideation more descriptively. The author describes the further classification and explanation of suicidal ideation. Such a detailed account is intended for all to learn and know about symptoms in order to access early intervention so that care and treatment can be provided to those who need it. It is a helpful self reflecting manual to those susceptible to or presently battling self harm. The author makes it indispensable that any attempt of suicide must be taken seriously not cornered casually. Lastly, the importance of suicide notes is discussed, supporting them with the findings on suicide notes that gave rise to suicidology as a discipline, founded by Dr. Edwin Shneidman and his colleagues. The central aspects of person's cognitive destruction being dramatic increase in concrete thoughts are abstract, meaningful and high level terms. The author also draws attention to the emotional themes in suicide notes that may be present and reflect feelings of depression, guilt, hurt, shame and anger. Data uncovers that most (55%) suicide-notes have been written by people of ages between 21-31 years which account for 65% of males. Home is cited as the most (80%) common place of committing suicide. On the contrary, a person committing suicide and who is impulsive about his actions may not reason his attempt, not writing a suicide-note. Loneliness and feelings of hurt are also regarded as reasons for people not leaving suicide notes. These suicide notes are an entry into the individual's psyche.

The fourth part of the book is dedicated to the explanation of suicide on the spectrum of various psychiatric illnesses. The author explicates the regions of brain, the role of genetics and various psychiatric illnesses (such as schizophrenia, depression, post partum disorders, anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, body dysmorphic disorder and post traumatic stress disorder) and substance abuse that increase the vulnerability to commit suicide in an individual who is suffering from any of these mentioned illnesses. Suicide is more likely to occur earlier in the course of illnesses. Along with causal factors, the symptoms of various illnesses have been mentioned in the course of chapters for readers to better absorb knowledge about illnesses and identify symptoms earlier. Apart from mental disorders, physical illnesses have also been correlated with suicidal attempts in individuals, highlighting cancer, HIV, cardiac ailments and respiratory disorders. The chapter also mentions the role of the doctor for the understanding from a client perspective and what steps are and can be taken if the situation arises so. Dr. Chhabria maintains the focus on quality of life during the end of life during the span of pathological treatment, as well. Respect for life is essential. The fourth part of the book wraps up with a paramount discussion about the stress and grief felt by caretakers and that they are of equal importance. They deserve attention and care too.

The next and fifth part of the book opens with an incidence describing the feelings and turmoil that an individual goes through during a volatile mental status. With the history of personality disorders being traced to Charles Dickens and Tennessee Williams along with many other eminent personalities, the chapter goes on to explain personality and the different types of personality disorders that have been

categorized by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (V) and deliberate on incidences where people met with suicidality. Further, parasuicide or the acts of intentional self harm/injury acted upon with the objective of achieving death but do not result in death, has received attention with respect to deliberate self harm. The WHO states the yearly global prevalence of parasuicidal acts to vary between 2% to 20% and these attempts are 10-20 times higher than that of suicide. As is, suicide is a call / cry for help. There is equal delineation on deliberate self harm or DSH as well, with author pointing out a step to step guide in order to deal with the same. Suicide has also been explained with content to Narcissistic Personalities and Anti Social personality Disorders.

The sixth section of the book talks about other factors that contribute to the increased risk of suicidal attempts. These are the factors around us, in the environment. Economic hardships have also contributed to be one of the larger factors leading to increasing suicide rates across countries and continents. Shocking statistics of the National Crime Record Bureau claim that in India more than 25,000 housewives and more than 39,000 self employed persons were far more suicidal than farmers (15,000+). Till 2014, the trend persisted with housewives committing the most number of suicides. Farmers' suicides and financial crisis are also a part of economic hardships that make people susceptible to suicide. The media of social media and media in general is importantly highlighted with the referred context. Where bereavement is also discussed with respect to suicide, what holds captivating about part 6 of the book is the discussion on various aspects of euthanasia and suicide. In a country like India, where euthanasia is illegal, like most other countries (except for Netherland, Switzerland and Belgium where euthanasia is strictly regulated) Dr. Chhabria presents the doctor's, patient's and family's viewpoint on the same. An elaboration on suicide bombers is an end to section 6 with sub topics like psychopathic traits of the perpetrator, socio-psychological perspectives and themes of depersonalization, dissociation, moral disengagement, social cohesion, in group influences and the Manichean worldview have been discussed in relation to the psyche of the suicide bombers. David Emile Durkheim's altruistic suicide (suicide committed for benefit of others), anomic suicide (suicide committed when feeling confused and lacking social integration, loneliness), fatalistic suicide (suicide committed when individual experiences pervasive oppression) and egoistic suicide (suicide based on the rationale of feeling apathy, lack of motivation and depression while facing own life) have also found importance.

Part 7 begins with the explanation and discussed factors that help to develop Adjustment Quotient (ability to adjust in a stressful situation) which is crucial along with Intelligence and Emotional Quotients. The author proceeds to talk about suicide in a family and how resilience building and emotional defense systems can be built within a family to cope with the loss and grief. The highlight of this section is the severally pointed steps and guidelines that can be kept in mind when talking to a family where someone has committed suicide, the statements that can be avoided to empathize, resilience building and a mention that counseling is helpful in such scenarios. The seventh part is concluded with an essential closure about law and suicide in our country.

The last part that is the eighth part is the final conclusion of the book that provides with an insight about providing care and taking care of the do's and don'ts with people battling self harm. Anyone can help as an individual, friend or family by keeping certain points in mind. The same has been exemplified to clarify the intricacies of care. A non judgmental, patient, caring attitude can help us deal with vulnerable individuals in an efficient way. Suicidal attempts are majorly impulsive and a vigilant understanding and sensitive concern can help elucidate a hope for life. With clouded judgment, it is difficult to make a decision with thought and an aid from someone close can save a life. Death is not the answer and any situation in life can be sought with various other alternatives which may not seem possible in distress and impairment.

### **Rating**

4 out of 5

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