

Examination fever toll rises as more students resort to the 'final solution'

Thiruvananthapuram, June 20: Statistics of suicides among students in the State shows that they are "playing with their lives" a lot more nowadays.

If five of them committed suicide in May last year, as many as 14 killed themselves this year. For those who had not performed well in the SSLC exams, or could not come up to the standards expected by their parents, getting out of the world was the only way out.

The suicides are not limited to SSLC students and there are reports of even students in professional colleges going in for the 'final solution'.

Parents and a section of the public have already woken up

to the danger signal. So has the Government, as the counselling centres in all districts would testify.

But these centres failed miserably to create an awareness among the public, before the announcement of results, that they were waiting to help the students in distress.

There is a widespread belief that more publicity on the counselling units would have brought the suicide figure down.

However, psychiatrists feel that the Government alone cannot be blamed for this. "Students prone to suicide usually give warning signs such as sleeplessness or loss of appetite. Sometimes, they even mention their intention to commit suicide

but this is not always taken seriously until it is too late," says Elizabeth Vadakekkara, child psychiatrist. Parents should detect these signs and approach counselling centres, she says.

Depression, disillusionment and distress are not the only problems faced by students who fail to perform well in examinations.

Their frustrations manifest as migraine, backaches, ulcers, asthma and even as skin diseases if agony and tension prolong.

The despair of the students can be noticed before the examinations, during the time of examinations, after they are over and also at the time when

the results are announced.

It is not only the failed students who seek help. In fact, the students who are more disturbed are the ones who expected higher marks than what they got.

Fear of not getting a seat for a particular subject in a particular college is seen as another reason for the disillusionment.

"Over 3000 calls were made to our centre after the announcement of SSLC results this year", says Arunkumar, psychologist at Thrani, a centre for crises control here.

"What the students want most at such times, says Arunkumar, "is somebody to empathise with them and tell them the next step to take."

"Counselling is basically a tension reliever. It is an outlet for anxiety and stress. This is a necessary component as far as every student is concerned. Earlier, this was available at home itself. These days, parents themselves are under considerable stress," says Maitreya, counselor and social activist.

The lack of effective communication between parents and children makes matters worse, says Maitreya.

"Parents are often too busy to listen to their children. What makes it worse is that in this age of nuclear families, there is just one child on whom parents put all their expectations. Since there is nob-

ody to lend a ear inside the four walls of the house, society had to provide it," he adds.

"Parents are prone to comparing their children with academically brighter students. But now, educational institutions too play a big role in creating stress among students," says Maitreya.

"It is in the schools where tension actually builds up. Every student has to live up to the expectations of the teachers. He performs for them. He has to keep up the reputation of the school."

"A counselling centre is a must in every institution. However it should be independent and must not come under the management of the

institution."

"Counselling is a very good concept because it shows the children the right path to take. Students nowadays go to the extent of committing suicides. If they are given proper guidance, they will not resort to such steps," says Sr Renita, principal, Carmel school.

"I would like to start one centre in our school but the problem is that students may hesitate to speak openly if the counselor is a teacher in the same school," she added.

In this angst-ridden society, solace has become a must, especially for young minds. In such a situation, there is, naturally, a big future for counselling centres.

However, this, like anything else, could turn into a business and Maitreya supports this view.

"No doubt, there is a possibility, unless the Government continues to fund these centres," he says.

On the other hand, there are a few people who do counselling simply for the joy of helping out people in distress.

"I hope the Government would see that we have been successful in our endeavors. We need to improve infrastructural facilities and Government help will be most welcome", says Justin Padamadan of the Mental Health Centre at Thiruvananthapuram.

- Divyalakshmi Nambiar