

Sikkim is Suicide Capital!

All is not well in the eco-paradise of Sikkim as the escalating suicide rates indicate. **Kunal Rai** takes stock of the situation



Sikkim has recorded the highest rate of suicides among all the states in the country, reveals the latest reports of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). The suicide rate (number of suicides per one lakh population) of Sikkim was listed as 29.1% followed by Tamil Nadu with 24.9% and Kerala with 23.6%. Altogether 181 persons, including 85 females, had committed suicide in Sikkim in 2012 as per the NCRB statistics. The data also mentions that no person in Sikkim committed suicide due to bankruptcy, poverty or unemployment. Illness, drug abuse and family problems were some of the major reasons for suicides in Sikkim while a fall in social reputation, illegitimate pregnancies, failed love affairs, and failure in exams also contributed to the death toll.

Suicide helpline started

Despite Sikkim leading the nation in suicide rates, the counselling helpline number which

Year	Deaths	Suicide Rate (%)	National Rank
2010	280	45.9	1st
2011	184	30.3	3rd
2012	181	29.1	1st

*Source: NCRB

had been installed at STNM hospital in Gangtok has rarely received any calls after the helpline service was made operational this year. 'The response to the suicide helpline number is very poor, there are only a few isolated incidents where a person with suicidal tendencies has called up to seek counselling' says the senior psychiatrist of STNM hospital, Dr CS Sharma.

The state government had installed the toll free helpline number in the month of June this year—to provide free counselling to persons suffering with depression—and suicidal tendencies. 'We received a couple of calls from the public out of which many were prank calls, but we also have

a success story to tell. A woman from Gangtok who is a housewife was cured after she received counselling from our doctor. She was a patient of severe depression. Now, she is perfectly fine. It took almost two hours for us to convince her, over the phone, to meet us for the medication. Later, we found out that the reason for her depression was her alcoholic husband', Dr Sharma says.

Awareness drive crucial

A senior doctor says that one of the reasons for the fewer calls is due to the lack of proper sensitization and awareness, 'Calling a helpline is a new trend in Sikkim and many people are still not aware of its existence. The re-

sources of the government need to be expanded in studying the actual reasons for these suicides and spreading information about the helpline'.

According to the data provided by the Sikkim State Crime Record Bureau, 29 cases of suicides were reported in the month of June and July (the date of August is awaited). Rapid urbanization, unemployment, depletion in the traditional sources of income, depression and substance (narcotics) abuse are some of the key reasons for committing suicides, the experts observe.

Pervasive concern

In all the 29 cases, the victims have committed suicide by hanging. Dr Sharma observes that the prevalence of suicide is more in

the persons aged between 25-45 years in Sikkim. He also said that there are cases in which school-going children and persons above 50 years of age has also committed suicide.

'In one of the cases, an eight-year-old child who tried to commit suicide told me that his parents wanted him to stand first in class which he could not do; high expectations of parents and extreme academic competition often lead the students to suicide'. A senior doctor adds that the number of persons dying of suicide is much more than persons dying of any other killer disease in Sikkim. 'Use of narcotics is another reason for the suicides, it leads to intense depression and which eventually leads one to commit suicide', cautions the

doctor. Speaking on Sikkim Anti Drug Act 2005, Dr Sharma said that the act is too lenient and needs serious amendments.

CM's words

Readers are aware that Chief Minister Pawan Chamling had famously stated in June this year that 50% of suicide victims in Sikkim are non-locals but all such deaths are recorded as from Sikkim. The Chief Minister had directed all police stations to set up helplines through which proper counselling could be provided to people suffering from depression. Only time will tell how effective these measures will be to tackle this persistent concern. 📞

*The writer is a reporter of
The Sikkim Express*