

## Suicides in professional colleges on the rise

S. Vijay Kumar

Unrealistic expectation of parents or teachers is suspected to be the main reason why students commit suicide. Of late, statistics indicate an increase in the number of suicides involving students studying in professional colleges.

The increasing trend of students taking the extreme step is noticeable and situations similar to the scene in which a final year engineering student commits suicide unable to clear his project work in time in actor Vijay's latest film 'Nanban' are not uncommon. In the last couple of months, there were at least two incidents of students committing suicide by jumping before trains in the Chennai Division of Southern Railway. The parents of students studying final year in different colleges lodged complaints with the Railway Police that the victims were harassed by their teachers. The police registered a case of suspicious death in both the incidents, police sources said on Saturday.

On January 30, a first year student studying Nano Technology in a city engineering college was reported missing. Investigation revealed that the 18-year-old of Hyderabad was sent out of college by his lecturers after he failed in two subjects. His father, a school teacher, convinced him that he would talk to the college authorities and both started in a train to Chennai. While the train stopped at Renigunta (Andhra Pradesh), the boy disappeared leaving a note near his father (who was sleeping) saying that he was leaving forever.

However, investigators found that the boy was active on 'Facebook' a couple of days later. "Initially his parents were worried that he might have committed suicide. After we found him active online, efforts are on to bring the student back home. One of the engineering students who committed suicide is so poor that he used to work two days a week and go to college. His family says he was under extreme pressure to perform at college," Deputy Superintendent of Police (Railways) V. Ponram said.

In the elite Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) here, two suicides were reported in 2010–11. Police said the victims were visibly under pressure days before their taking the extreme step. In Chennai city alone, dozens of

student suicide cases were reported since 2009, though many were allegedly due to personal reasons, the sources added.

University of Madras Vice-Chancellor G. Thiruvassagam says several measures have been taken to ensure that the campuses are pressure-free. "We have created a student-friendly environment where there is hardly any scope for any kind of stress. By setting up 'Black Boxes', exclusively to enable students drop complaints of ragging, we have eradicated the menace from the campuses. Anti-ragging committees meet periodically and students are aware that ragging will attract stringent punishment." Also, 'Green Boxes' have been installed on the university campus to encourage students to drop complaints, suggestions, grievance petitions etc. Letters in the box would straight go to the Vice-Chancellor's desk every morning. "This has ensured direct access to the Vice-Chancellor...even if a student is unhappy with a student or senior, he/she writes to me. Every petition is dealt firmly and the action taken is communicated to the student via email or post," he added.

Dr. Thiruvassagam says the examination and evaluation systems in the university were simplified to suit the academic interests of students. Most of the examinations are practical-oriented...there are no marks for mugging up theories in this university," he says, adding that every college in the University of Madras has professionally trained counsellors to interact with students.