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Mental Health Day: Depression among students on the rise in Kerala

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By Express News Service

KOCHI: Now this is something quite worrying. One out of every five students in Kerala in the age group of 12-19 suffers from psychological distress, with its severity ranging from mild in 10.5 per cent of students to 5.4 per cent moderate and 5 per cent severe cases. Studies conducted by the Indian Psychiatric Society across the state have also revealed the prevalence of physical abuse (75 per cent), emotional abuse (85 per cent) and sexual abuse (21 per cent) among school-going adolescents, which are prime factors in triggering mental illnesses.

Half of all these mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 years and three-quarters by the age of 20 years. Suicide is the leading cause of death among 15-20-year-old youth. The burden of depression has increased by 67 per cent between 1990 and 2013; by 2025, it is projected to rise by another 22.5 per cent.

Dr Dinesan N, head, Department of Psychiatry, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, said, "Most of the time, youngsters are not able to cope with stress and use a variety of coping mechanisms like substance abuse. In Kerala, the prevalence of alcohol among adolescents is found to be 15 per cent (23 per cent in boys and 6.5 per cent in girls), with prevalence increasing with age.

The prevalence of tobacco use is 6.9 per cent, and the mean age of onset of use is 14 years. Bullying, depression, substance abuse and suicide are major challenges facing today's youth." He was speaking at a workshop on mental health problems among young people.

"Adolescent depression is on the rise, but most of the time, it goes undetected with symptoms like irritability, anxiety and poor performance in studies. Traumatic events in early childhood, frequent migration, negative life events, educational setbacks, early relationship problems and stress at school and family are all linked to depression among children and adolescents. Early identification and treatment are the keys to improving mental health and quality of life of such patients," he said. "Having supportive relationships and an ability to manage emotions and ask for help contribute to resilience," Dinesan said.