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A year on, anxiety, fear stalk survivors

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Tuticorin: A year after 13 anti-Sterlite protesters in Tuticorin were killed in police firing, civil rights activists have accused the government of doing little other than providing Rs 20 lakh compensation and a bottom rung government job to the victims' kin. Not one government official has been held accountable so far for the incident and the government's disinterest in providing rehabilitation to the devastated families is appalling, say activists.

According to a report by NGO People's Watch, not even a single family of the deceased or those severely injured were provided post-trauma counselling by the government, though it was announced by the collector. Collector Sandeep Nanduri did not respond to messages and his office told TOI that he was busy on poll duty.

Tuticorin-based psychiatrist Dr Sivasailam, who conducted a camp for a month after the firings as requested by the district administration, said that among the more than 100 who turned up for the camp at a primary health centre in Threspuram, only one was a kin of the deceased. "We attended to a lot of injured victims and their families from June 11 to July 10. They were referred to the government hospital," Sivasailam said. He added it was important that the families of the deceased undergo treatment for at least a year. Anxiety, unknown fears, depression, guilt and suicidal thoughts are common among such people, he said.

Henri Tiphagne, executive director, People's Watch, said, "This shows the shallowness in rehabilitative approach by the government after such a gross human rights excess."

Kanthiah, a repatriate from Sri Lanka who resided at Ceylon Colony in Millerpuram, was a construction worker and the sole breadwinner of the family. He left behind his wife, Selvamani, and son Jegadeeswaran, 28, who is mentally challenged. The widow, who is taking care of her son, had to forego the government job to a relative and live on the interest from the compensation awarded by the government and Rs 1,500 a month given by the district administration to her son. Since the death of his father, Jegadeeswaran had shown signs of violence, say family members.

Like Selvamani, Jesubalan too had a role reversal after the death of his wife, Jancy Rani Fernando, 37. Jesubalan, a fisherman, had not ventured into the sea since his wife's death in order to take care of his two teen daughters.

Selvamani did not make eye contact while narrating the ordeal after her husband's death. Families TOI spoke to said they were not provided any sort of counselling. According to People's Watch, there is a public perception that these families received a lot of money, resulting in a breakdown of relationships and friendships in several cases. "Those who lost their lives and were injured are seen as 'anti-socials' by a section of society," the report stated.