

Post trauma counselling sought for kin of Sterlite firing victims

tnn | May 23, 2019, 04.38 AM IST

Tuticorin: The state government, whose police fired at the protesters in Tuticorin killing 13 people one year ago, seems to believe that parameters of justice is providing Rs20 lakh compensation and a bottom rung government job to the victims' kin. While no single government official has been held accountable so far, 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 with post trauma counseling by the government, though it was announced by the district collector. District collector Sandeep Nanduri did not respond to the messages. His office informed TOI that the collector was busy with election duty.

Tuticorin-based psychiatrist Dr Sivasailam who conducted a camp for a month after the firings as requested by the district administration, told TOI that among the more than a hundred turned up for the camp at a primary health center at Threspuram, only one of them 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," Dr Sivasailam said. He opined that it is 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 persons, he said.

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 28-year-old son, Jegadeeswaran, who is mentally retarded. 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 Rs1,500 a month given by the district administration to her son.

Jegadeeswaran awaits his father's return every day. Since the death of his father, Jegadeeswaran had shown signs of violence, say family members. Selvamani's younger sister, Logeshwari had stayed in Tuticorin for the past one year to take care of

Jegadeeswaran. She has not visited her family in Coonoor in a year.

Like Selvamani, Jesubalan too had a role reversal after the death of his wife, Jancy Rani Fernando, 37. Jesu Balan, a fisherman, had not ventured into the sea since his wife's death to take care of his two-school going teenage daughters.

The Thalayari job was taken up by the married elder daughter, while his 21-year-old son Paul Raj is the one who goes to sea to earn the daily bread. On the first anniversary of his mother's death, while all the relatives were at the local church offering prayers, Paul Raj was sleeping after a tired night of pasting condolence posters' in the neighborhood.

Selvamani did not make eye contact while narrating the one year trauma after her husband's death. The families told TOI that they were not provided with any sort of counseling. According to People's Watch, there is a public perception that families have received a lot of money, resulting in breaking down of family relationships and friendships in several cases. "Those who lost their lives and injured are seen as 'anti-socials' by a sections of society," the report stated.

It was true in the case of Kanthiah's family, whose family barely had visitors on the first anniversary, according to family members. Jesubalan gets help from his community and so did several others. But it is time the state government did its part too.