

MEN ACCESS MENTAL HEALTH HELPLINE MORE

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Seventy per cent of callers to a mental health rehabilitation helpline launched, in September 2020 by the Social Justice and Empowerment (SJE) Ministry, were men according to an internal report of the Ministry accessed by *The Hindu*. About 32% of those who reached out were students.

The Kiran helpline (1800-599-0019) of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) of the Ministry was launched on September 7 by SJE Minister Thaawarchand Gehlot. From September 16, 2020 to January 15, the helpline received 13,550 new calls, of which 70.5% were from males and 29.5% from females, the report said.

A total of 1,618 follow-up calls were fielded by the mental health professionals of the helpline, it said.

The majority of callers (75.5%) were in the age group of 15 to 40 years, while 18.1% were older, in the 41 to 60 age group, it said.

Categorising the callers, the report said, 65.9% had “milder nature of distress”, while 26.5% were “moderately distressed” and 7.6% were “severely distressed”. The report said 32.3% of the callers were students, 15.2% were self-employed, 27.1% were employed, 23.3% were unemployed, 1.4% were home-makers and 0.7% did not reveal the information.

While most of the callers (78.2%) sought help for themselves, others reached out for their parents, siblings, spouse and others.

“Majorly the challenges faced by the callers were related to anxiety (28.5%) and depression (25.5%); while few others included pandemic-related challenges (7.8%), suicidal tendency (2.8%), substance abuse (3.4%) and others miscellaneous (32%),” the report said.

Most of the calls were from the North zone (40.32%), followed by West (27.08%), South (16.99%), East (11.28%) and North East (4.33%), the report said.

An DEPwD official said the number of calls to the helpline had increased to 15,170 till January 31, while there had been 1,978 follow-up cases.

Speaking to *The Hindu* on condition of anonymity, a clinical psychologist of the DEPwD working on the helpline said most of the calls had been from “young adults”. Students were facing anxiety and depression due to the uncertainty about their future and lack of interaction with peers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychologist said.

Another psychologist working at regional centre of the DEPwD fielding calls from Haryana, said students were the largest group of callers. The psychologist added that women from rural areas had reached out to the helpline with complaints of anxiety and disturbances within families.

The 24/7 helpline offers early screening, psychological first-aid, psychological support, distress management, mental well-being, psychological crisis management services and referrals to mental health experts and is operated by 81 front-line professionals, apart from volunteer psychiatrists, clinical and rehabilitation psychologists, the Ministry report said.

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