

MMA wants stronger social protection amid growing mental health crisis

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) wants a comprehensive societal response to tackle the growing mental health and socio-economic challenges, cautioning that financial difficulties and untreated psychological distress are leading to family crises, such as suicides and acts of violence.

Its president, Dr Thirunavukarasu Rajoo, said doctors were seeing more patients whose mental health had been affected by job loss, mounting debt and the inability to provide for their families.

The association was responding to reports of a recent murder case in which five family members were killed in a house, describing the incident as deeply saddening and disturbing.

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Dr Thirunavukarasu said the case reflected a wider and worrying trend of rising suicides and severe psychological distress, particularly among working-age individuals facing intense economic and social pressures.

"From our front-line experience, doctors are increasingly seeing the impact of job loss, overwhelming debt, the inability to provide for

one's family, and a deep sense of hopelessness presenting as depression, anxiety, family conflict and, in the worst cases, suicidality," he said in a statement today.

He said public health evidence showed that only a portion of health outcomes was determined within hospitals and clinics, with socio-economic conditions such as income security, housing, food access, education and safe communities playing a significant role in shaping overall wellbeing.

"When these basic needs are not secure, mental health can deteriorate rapidly, often long before a person seeks professional help. Socio-economic policy is therefore, in effect, health policy."

While acknowledging the government's efforts to introduce targeted subsidies and intensify poverty-eradication programmes, Dr Thirunavukarasu said more coordinated action was needed.

He said preventing such tragedies required stronger coordination between the health, finance, education, economic and social welfare sectors, as severe psychological distress and suicide were not solely medical issues but were shaped by socio-economic realities.

He called for enhanced social welfare outreach to identify households facing sudden income

loss, heavy debt or care-giving pressures, with fast-tracked assistance to secure food, housing and educational stability.

Mental health screening and clear referral pathways, he added, should be embedded within such efforts.

At the healthcare level, he urged the expansion of accessible and stigma-free mental health services in primary care and community settings, including routine distress screening, shorter referral pathways to psychologists and psychiatrists, and wider use of tele-counselling services.

He also highlighted the role of employers in creating psychologically safe workplaces and called for responsible media reporting on suicide and family violence to avoid sensationalism and reduce the risk of copycat incidents.

"MMA stands ready to work with the government, welfare agencies, civil society and community leaders to address the deeper roots of such tragedies.

"Stabilising incomes, ensuring food and housing security, and strengthening social protection are not merely economic objectives — they are essential health interventions that can save lives and protect Malaysian families.

"As doctors, we treat illness. As a nation, we must prevent despair."