

'Stronger social protection needed'

By Hakim Mahari

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Malaysian Medical Association 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. - NSTP/RAIHANA MANSOR

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) wants a comprehensive societal response to tackle growing mental health and socioeconomic challenges.

It cautioned that financial difficulties and untreated psychological distress were 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 described a recent murder case, in which five family members were killed, as saddening and deeply disturbing.

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

"From our frontline experience, doctors are increasingly seeing the impact of job loss,

overwhelming debt and a deep sense of hopelessness presenting as depression, anxiety, family conflict and, in the worst cases, suicidality."

He said public health evidence showed that only a portion of health outcomes was determined within hospitals and clinics.

"Socioeconomic conditions such as income security, housing, food access, education and safe communities play a significant role in shaping overall well-being.

"When these basic needs are not secured, mental health can deteriorate rapidly, often long before a person seeks professional help. Socioeconomic 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 a more coordinated action was needed.

He called for enhanced social welfare outreach to identify households facing sudden income loss, heavy debt or care-giving pressures.

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 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," he added.