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'Society has not accepted ragging as a social evil'

The ragging incident involving 18 students attached to KEM Hospital's prestigious G S Medical College has shocked Mumbai. Mohit Garg, co-founder of Coalition to Uproot Ragging from Education (CURE) and the website noragging.com, tells Jyoti Punwani that ragging can be eliminated:

■ What do you think of the action against the accused students?

Filing the FIR against them was swift and appreciable, and in keeping with the Supreme Court guidelines. But the chief minister's statement that their careers should not be affected does not help. A crime is a crime and should be handled as such. Careers are not more important than the dignity of life. Another issue here is that those who were ragged should not be ostracised. Typically in such cases, freshers are blamed for spoiling careers, which is another



deterrent against complaints.

I wouldn't be surprised if there was far severe ragging happening in other professional colleges in Mumbai. As per a CURE study, the number of media-reported cases in Maharashtra is low compared to Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. This does not imply less ragging, since reported cases would be a tiny fraction of the incidents

happening on the ground.

■ Are there any support systems or networks for victims?

Unfortunately, no. I have seen cases of very severe ragging victims trying to contact one another but either people wish to forget and don't connect with other victims or their own fight is so time-consuming that they are unable to give anything beyond sympathy to others. Another perspective against such a network is that instead of victims carrying the scar throughout their lives, the best remedy is to help them get back to normal as quickly as possible.

■ Some students feel ragging can never end because its victims want to avenge their humiliation on their juniors.

This is a vicious circle – the victim becoming the perpetrator. We can break it by ensuring that two or three batches are not ragged. This would eliminate the revenge feeling. In fact, most colleges

that have successfully eliminated ragging have done this.

CURE advocates a three-pronged approach. One, monitor ragging and mete out strict punishments. The victim cannot be expected to complain. Offenders should be punished strictly according to law, since whatever is inflicted in the name of ragging is a criminal offence. Two, create social awareness. In every ragging death, it emerges that the victim informed his parents, who took it lightly. Whenever one talks to friends about ragging, they think that only cowards are scared of it. Society has not accepted ragging as a social evil. It's regarded as a necessary initiation ritual, a joke. Ragging is not fashionable, please! Three, alternate means of interaction for breaking the ice.

We should have a college-ranking system that includes ragging as a criterion. Only this will make reputation-conscious colleges improve their efforts to eliminate ragging.