

Letter to the Editor

THE HEFTY PRICE OF GOOD INTENTION: 'THOPPUMPADY INCIDENT'

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Dear Editor,

In this part of the world, it is common for friends, neighbors, or community to come together to help a family take one of their family members with mental health or substance use problems for treatment forcefully by overcoming resistance from that person. Often, they might have to use physical restraints, too. The lack of formal mechanisms of outreach support from the health care system to bring such persons into treatment is leading to this default situation.

However, there are instances where people pay with their lives for their good intentions. Based on newspaper reports, I had presented one such incident which happened about eight years back —the 'Pullepady incident' — wherein a person deemed to have a dual diagnosis (substance use and mental health) stabbed to death a 10-year-old boy apparently out of a grudge against his father.¹ A news item quoted in that article speculated that the accused "was angry with the boy's father for taking him forcefully to a mental hospital."² In that context, I had discussed how the incident shed light on several lacunae in the mental health care system.

I would like to draw attention to a similar incident that happened on May 15, 2024, in which a person stabbed his neighbor to death, apparently out of a similar grudge against him,

for having taken him for treatment. Excerpts from the newspaper reports read as follows:

*B*** was murdered following a previous enmity over the victim's involvement in shifting A*** to a mental health center for excessive drug usage, said an official.*³

*It is suggested that the murder was motivated by revenge for taking A*** to drug addiction treatment. The two can be heard arguing over these issues from the CCTV footage. A*** says everyone thinks he's crazy. But B*** is also talking about whether it was wrong to try to rescue the drunken man by taking him. A*** is known to have been admitted to drug addiction treatment out of state. A*** says he was treated by a psychiatrist here. It is also said that B*** was threatened by A*** for some time.*⁴

*Youth kills man in Fort Kochi for sending him to de-addiction center, nabbed (Headlines).*⁵

This incident, which also happened in Kochi city, the largest metropolitan area of Kerala, seems to indicate again that a person forced into mental health/addiction treatment can hold grudges against family, friends, or neighbors who force him to treatment and can potentially be a source of harm to them. Hence, it is suggested that more formal methods are

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instituted to bring such persons into treatment by providing outreach from the health department itself, like a crisis intervention team.⁶ Until such models come into action, family, friends, and neighbors may have to take the support of police personnel directly to provide support to facilitate care. The Mental Health Care Act, 2017 (Section 100) has clearly delineated the role of police in providing support in such situations. Advocacy and awareness building to implement such provisions in the Act are needed.

Thank you.

Postscript

The accused in the Pullepady incident was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment by the trial court by rejecting the insanity defense (SC 794/2017 Additional Sessions Court Ernakulam, Judgement date 25.10.2019). On appeal, the High Court of Kerala granted an insanity defense, acquitted him, and ordered to keep him in safe custody in a mental health establishment (CRL. A No. 1563, 2019, Judgement date 22.12.2023).

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