

NEET repeat sparks mental health scare

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Calcutta: Many NEET candidates who will reappear for the all-India entrance test on June 21 are showing signs of extreme anxiety and seeking professional help, said psychiatrists.

They are unable to focus or calm themselves, and in extreme instances, are withdrawing from books altogether and resorting to self-harm, a psychiatrist in Calcutta said.

The medical entrance test for undergraduate medical and dental seats is "the most crucial exam" for many students, and as one teacher said, they have years of "emotional attachment and investment" in it.

"We have had a sudden surge of NEET examinees at the clinic. Many have nurtured the dream of securing a medical seat since childhood.

For some, the anxiety is extreme. There are expectations and, at times, pressure from parents who have also deeply invested in this dream," psychiatrist Sanjay Garg said.

This year's NEET held on May 3, was cancelled on May 12 because of "irregularities", pushing almost 23 lakh students into uncertainty.

The exam has now been rescheduled for June 21.

Most candidates had figured out their scores after the exam and were more or less certain about their next career move. All that has gone to waste.

One candidate was seen trembling in the doctor's clinic, not able to put his anxiety into words.

A girl said she did not want to take the test again, but her parents were dogging her to sit and study, said a counsellor.

A boy tried to harm himself because he felt he would



Protest against NEET cancellation in New Delhi last week. (PTI picture)

not be able to perform as well as he did on the first occasion.

The cancellation has also stalled family plans at many homes, resulting in blame and guilt trips, several mental

health professionals said.

"Many parents had taken leave in the run-up to the examination to support their children. Some families had given up on vacation, and now

it becomes an extended period of waiting that heightens the anxiety," said Garg.

A fresh examination date means there is added pressure, whether they will be able to repeat their performance, said psychiatrist Jai Ranjan Ram.

Some students have dropped a year or two to prepare for NEET. Taking the exam twice in the same year prolongs the stress.

"Individuals who were already under treatment have come back after NEET was cancelled and a fresh date announced. They have come back primarily because they are fatigued. They are demoralised," said Ram.

NEET is intensely competitive.

"In a year, I see 80 to 90 people who are worried about NEET. They are anxious about the exam anyway," said Ram.

"Many of the candidates

who come to me are from middle-class families or from the lower-income groups," Ram said.

The stakes are much higher for them.

Not everyone can afford prolonged exam preparation. The financial burden does not allow many of them to attend coaching classes year after year.

Not everyone who performed well in the first exam, which was cancelled, is confident of repeating their performance a second time.

Candidates pace their preparation, and it should ideally peak a few days before the exam, said Garg.

"It is normally a structured revision process where students know what they are studying and how they need to compartmentalise it. But now, within a short period, they do not know how to recalibrate themselves," the doctor said.