



While everybody is talking about the death of KAS officer S P Mahantesh, family and friends are worried about his widow, Poornima. She was married to Mahantesh for 15 years and as people mourned and wept for the dead man, she sat motionless by his body. It is said that even when the purohit asked her to see her husband's face for one last time before his body was consigned to flames, Poornima did not respond. She is yet to shed a drop of tear, wail or mourn. Experts say Poornima is in shock. Family, friends and the other support systems play a crucial role in helping people in shock to overcome it and carry on with life.

Neha S, executive director and psychologist, Cadambams Mind Talk, Centre for Psychological and Psychiatric Services in the city, says, "Any unexpected trauma rattles the psychological health of a person. Shock is the first step to coping with the post-traumatic stress (PTS) which will follow. It is also the first of the five steps of grieving. After shock or denial, the person moves on to a healthy anger, followed by a sort of bargain with God, depression and finally coming to terms

with the situation. The problem begins when they get stuck at shock and denial."

So how does one identify a person in a delayed state of shock? Shock can oscillate between extremes. From stoic silence to hysterical mania, the reaction varies. "The ability to cope with trauma is varied and depends on a person's pain threshold. The threshold itself varies depending on a plethora of reasons like upbringing, conditioning, psychological make-up. Shock itself is normal, because the person is in denial about the incident. Your system shuts down automatically as a self-defence mechanism. But when there is an unnatural way of venting your emotion, that is when you recognise there is a problem," says Dr Sreenivas Reddy, a city-based psychiatrist. The medical professional also adds that people stop eating or sleeping at the beginning but slowly grow out of this phase.

Helping the shocked

"The first step is to ensure that a person accepts the tragedy. Talk to him/her constantly about it. Disbelief often takes time to dispel. But the responsibility is on the family and social circle to keep the dialogue going. In Poornima's case, her children will be a constant reminder of the responsibilities that await her so it will help her come out of the shock more quickly," says Neha.

But while this technique will work with a person who has withdrawn into a shell, only drugs will work with a person who has become hysterical. "You will need to tranquilise him/ her because nothing else will work," says Sreenivas Reddy. But the one thing that should remain constant in both situations is the support system. "You need to give that person hope that he/she does not have to cope with the situation alone. There is nothing that will help them recover like the support of family and society," says Reddy.

Neha, meanwhile, says, "This was the idea of post-death rituals like the fifth or thirteenth day ceremonies, so the family stayed and grieved together and nobody was left alone to cope. In today's age of the nuclear family, this connect becomes more important."

Both professionals are unanimous about the one thing that needs to be avoided. "Never leave them alone because grief can manifest itself in the most tragic ways. They can even hurt themselves." For the first couple of weeks, they should have a constant companion. Over the next few months, keep checking on them.

Seek professional help

More often than not, people who have experienced trauma do manage to bounce back from in about six months to one year and embrace normal life. "But if you have somebody who has not even consumed fluids or slept at all even after a couple of weeks, then it is time to get help," says Reddy.

Shock absorbers - Bangalore Mirror

Seeking professional help becomes imperative. "I had the case of a young child who was in UKG and had watched her mother being raped and was completely traumatised. It took a lot of professional help for that child to come out of the trauma," says Neha.

Shock after a traumatic incident is normal. It is up to family and friends to help the person move on.