

## Rising crimes ring alarm bells | india

- Alifiya Khan & Debasish Panigrahi, Hindustan Times, Mumbai

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It is the last thing you expect – a seventeen-year-old being murdered by his own friends.

But a day after the story of the kidnap and murder of Mukim Khan by his college mates broke, psychiatrists working with children say don't be surprised if it happens again.

“This is an eye-opener that we need to wake up and give the mental health of these kids a serious thought. It's time counselling was made mandatory in schools too,” said Dr Kersi Chavda, psychiatrist at Hinduja hospital and vice-president of Bombay Psychiatric Society.

“There has been a rise in such cases and much of the blame can be put on the consumerism that has set in. There are many choices and peer pressure and competition has risen dramatically. The erosion of values has contributed to this trend,” said Dr Yusuf Matcheswala, psychiatrist at Masina and JJ hospital.

Worrying words, but they perhaps explain the spate of recent incidents of crimes by relatives and friends, many of them teenagers. On the heels of the Mukim case came the kidnapping of an 11-year-old in Thane by his cousin. The fathers of victim and kidnapper were brothers.

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The police say there's another reason for friends or relatives being involved in kidnappings. They are the ones best placed to find out the two most important bits of information for any kidnap plot: the monetary condition of the victim's family and the movements of the victim. But herein also lies the danger for the victims.

Since such kidnappers are generally first-time offenders, they panic easily. And what started out as a kidnap could end in murder, especially if the victim has recognised the kidnappers.

Mumbai police's joint commissioner, Law and Order, K.L. Prasad, said, "In most of the cases, close people are the culprits...it seems greed and value for money overpowers all other values, including relationship."

Besides, says Dr Vishal Sawant, psychiatrist at Cooper Hospital, "The way these crimes are portrayed, the criminal aspect is taken out of it and it is shown almost like a heroic exercise. People who want quick money do it without thinking that things could go wrong. In such cases, they panic and do worse things."

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