

Editorial

When Trust Breaks

For lots of students in India, the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test or NEET is a lot more than an exam to get into college. It is what one takes with hope after years of hard work, discipline and dedication. Every student who gets an admit card has spent years studying and missed out on time with friends, hobbies, sleep and often a normal teenage life. Families put their emotions and money into this. Teachers help students through one of the toughest times in their school life.

When there are problems like the exam paper getting out, the exam being cancelled, or having to be rescheduled, it is not just a problem with how things are run. It really affects the students who're already under a lot of stress. The recent problem with NEET has made people question the exam system again. No matter what happens next, one thing is clear: students are hurt the most when people start to doubt the exam.

The preparation for NEET begins years before the actual exam. The aspirant's whole life revolves around attending coaching classes, taking practice tests and surviving in the overly competitive environment. The day of the NEET exam is the culmination of this tiring journey. When the exam is suddenly cancelled or rescheduled, it can be really hard on the students. Students who did well on the exam often stop studying, and having to start studying after a few weeks can be really disheartening. In contrast, students who did not do well the first time continue with their preparation and eventually get more time to study before the next exam. This can significantly modify the results, resulting in many students feeling as if they have been treated unfairly despite no fault of theirs.

The biggest worry, thus, is how all this affects the students' emotional health. More and more students feel burned out, depressed and hopeless as they restart the preparation for these exams. Sadly, India has seen student suicide because of the cancellation of the NEET exam. In the era of social media and coaching centres with cut-throat competition, students who perform well post-exam are used as brand ambassadors for these coaching centres. They are celebrated, and many such reels go viral. Accepting the sudden change of circumstances with the sudden unexpected cancellation of the exam and anxiety about the inability to replicate the same performance takes a toll on the emotional health of students.

Every time this happens, it is a reminder that the exam system affects not careers but lives. Students are forced to question whether hard work or honesty truly pays. Parents feel helpless after years of patience, and teachers struggle to reassure students who're anxious and have lost faith in the system.

It is not fair to blame any one group for all this. The people in charge of the exams have a role in keeping things fair and secret, but the responsibility needs to be shared by all the stakeholders, like policymakers, teachers, parents, and society as a whole.

As teachers, we need to think about the pressure on students taking these exams. Young people who want to be doctors should not have to give up their health to get into the profession.

To move forward, we need to make the examination system more robust by using technology to keep the exams safe and by having a more vigilant and proactive approach. We also need to be open and honest with students so that rumours and uncertainty do not make them more anxious, and also ensure that the students get the emotional help they need. We should also think about how much weight we put on a single high-stakes exam that happens on one day.

Being a doctor is about gaining patient trust, caring for people, and doing what is morally and ethically right. The way the students get into the profession should reflect these values. The real test of an education system is not just about finding talented students but also about ensuring we do not hurt them in the process.

Dr. Roosy Aulakh

Editor-in-Chief