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Schools to take stringent steps

Psychologists, child rights activists say dont brand the kids bad

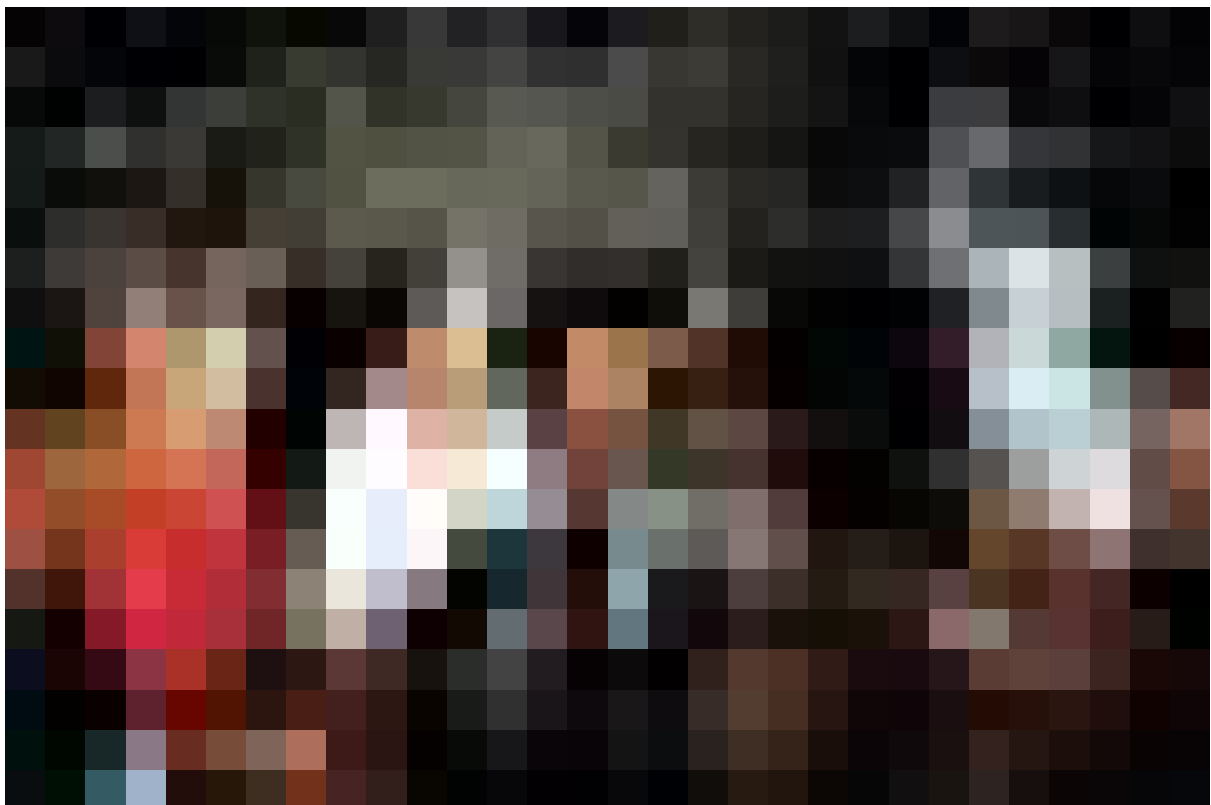
DHNS

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The BBMP raid on a bar in the City where several schoolchildren were caught smoking hookah has evoked cautious responses from various quarters.



Activists and psychologists suggest that elders should go easy on the students and look at the larger problem. For schools, on the other hand, the incident has sounded the alarm bell.

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Teachers at the Bishop Cottons Boys' School confirmed that a few of the students belong to their school, but refused to comment. The Bishop Cottons Girls' School has decided to deal sternly with its students. School Principal Lydia Joshua said parents have been informed about the incident and the school will also write to the Palike urging them to shut down these bars. Action will be taken against students found in hookah bars again, the principal said. The school will also conduct workshops to educate children about the harmful effects of addiction to hookah.

As a precautionary measure, the Cathedral School has issued notification to parents.

School teachers will personally escort students till the schoolgate after class hours and outgate passes will be issued for PU students so that the school can monitor students' whereabouts, said principal Isabella Simon.

While the schools are looking at stricter regulations, psychologists and child rights activists say the problem is much larger.

Nandana Reddy, Director, Development of the Concerned for Working Children, is of the view that not all children going to hookah bars are necessarily addicts. There may be other reasons such as wanting to escape the drudgery of the classroom or because it is the 'in' thing to do or may be peer pressure. Also, it could be to act out a fantasy seen on TV.

In the absence of strong family support, the problem can escalate out of proportion, says Nandana, who believes: "We need an aggressive campaign to combat the problem and alternative healthy outlets where children can get together. Most importantly, parents must invest more time in their children."

Dr B R Madhukar and Dr Srinivas Reddy, consultant psychiatrists at Cadabam's Mind Talk, say very few teenagers come with addiction problems. They feel that students tend to frequent bars out of curiosity or peer pressure.

"I am not surprised to hear this news at all. Children are likely to make mistakes. How could the owner allow students into the bar? It is his mistake," says Madhukar.

He suggested that restricting access to such places could be a solution to this. "These are places where many adults visit. Students may be abused in such places. They have to be educated about it," says Srinivas Reddy.

They further said that students are bound to experiment. Instead of branding them bad, they must be sensitised about the harmful effects of it. Besides, they should be helped to exercise self-control.

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