

Less trees, more divorces, says study by IISc team

With higher pollution, Bengaluru has become nastier and less capable of sustaining marriages, suggest ecology experts

by Papiya Bhattacharya

Malleswaram: The rise in divorces in Bengaluru is caused by a loss of tree cover and the resultant pollution, according to a study published by the Indian Institute of Science.

Ecology experts at India's premier science institution told *City Express* fewer trees means higher pollution and more irate people.

A survey initiated by the IISc's Centre for Ecological Studies and Centre for Infrastructure, Sustainable Transportation and Urban Planning has led to these observations.

Increased carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide in the air leads to troubled relationships, the experts believe.

Statistics suggest that there were six times as many divorces in 2012 as there were in 1991.

Prof T V Ramachandra, faculty at IISc and head of Energy and Wetlands Research Group, says today's Bangaloreans are less calm than those of earlier generations.

Ramachandra told *City Express*, "We have done a survey of 1,900 households of how people behave when they go out, in comparison to how they behave when they stay at home."

The researchers sent out students of ninth and tenth standards with questionnaires to these households.

"We found that people who go out regularly behave in a more aggressive manner. We found a relation between increased pollution and aggression," Ramachandra said.

The study found eastern and south-eastern Bengaluru more polluted and

WHAT THEY FOUND

- East Bengaluru is worst-affected
- Working spouses are more irate
- Youths angrier than their parents

hence more aggressive.

"We are still analysing the data and will soon publish our findings. Carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides get into the body because of high pollution and lead to aggressive behaviour, one important cause of divorce," he explained.

He said the huge decrease in tree cover, accompanied by widespread concretisation, has led to a hotter city with constant traffic blocks, monsoon flooding and lack of basic amenities in many localities.

"This has led to a struggle in day-to-day life. Today's youngsters are aggressive and this seems to lead to broken marriages," he observed.

Ramachandra and his colleagues suggest working spouses are more aggressive while stay-at-home spouses are calmer and gentler.

The causes of stress in Bengaluru, once called Garden City, have increased in the last decade, according to experts at CiSTUP.

"We have ten million people, and no clean air to breathe. Water is scarce and the water table has fallen. We have huge glass buildings, and only 14.78 lakh trees," Ramachandra said.

CONTD ON P2

Pollution leads to more divorces: IISc research team

CONTD FROM P1

With just one tree for seven people, Bengaluru is experiencing the 'heat island effect,' with rising temperatures and urban flooding.

"These are not factors that make for a happy and peaceful life. No wonder divorce rates are rising," he said.

Dr Anisha Shah, professor at the Department of Clinical Psychology at Nimhans, agrees.

"Yes, divorces are increasing among couples in recent times. Divorce has become an acceptable word when marital problems crop up," she told *City Express*.

Dr Sanjeev Jain, a psychiatrist

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from Nimhans, feels that what the study claims is not far-fetched. "It's difficult to say whether it affects something as specific as divorce, but environmental degradation affects the behaviour of many, many species," he says.

This is why, he opines, mental health hospitals have their own gardens.

Bharath Kumar Mehta, an advocate who also volunteers at the mediation centre, says that green cover depletion is not the only cause for the rise in divorces.

"Work hours don't permit couples to spend quality time with each other, and driving through city traffic can be very frustrating," he says, adding that these could spark off arguments and lead to deterioration in the marriage.

"Being glued to your phone or laptop also could lead to lack of emotional attachment are also contributing factors," he believes.