

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



2018 | Day 15

Having worked in the Development Sector for about 5 years now, I had this feeling that I understood the fundamentals of human behavior. However, these feelings are challenged almost every time I'm in the field and witness cases of inter-generational prostitution, where for decades certain communities have been forcing their daughters into the sex trade.

We were following up on a case of four minors who were rescued from a dance bar in the year 2015. In our experience, we witnessed pressure being built by the local bar owner's association. After the due diligence processes, the local quasi-judicial body that is authorized to make decisions - the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), decided that restoring the children back to their families at this stage would be putting them in a more vulnerable position. Thus, an order was passed to rehabilitate these children at a Children's Home in a district that was closer to their residence. Prerana was asked to follow up and support the children. We continued to visit these girls at the Home, helping them adapt to the new Home and developed Care Plans for them, as per their skills and interests. Over a period of three months, the children were making progress, from studying basic English to learning stitching and tailoring.

Meanwhile, the claimants, mostly mothers had approached the High Court to get the custody of these girls. However, looking into the facts of this case, the High Court upheld the order of the CWC and rejected the custody applications.



In the subsequent months, when the social worker made a call to fix an appointment to meet these children at the Home, she was informed that these children had been restored to their families. This was quite a shock, since there was no such information that the social worker had received and that the High Court had also passed an order to rehabilitate these children at the Children's Home.

On inquiring further, the social workers found out that the CWC of that district, had passed this order of restoration just a few days ago.

Not just that, they had also visited the Home where these children were placed and tactically spoken only to these four girls during their visit. Despite their progress in the Home, in terms of their rehabilitation, these girls were restored back to their families. It remains an enigma as to why, the otherwise inert Committee take so much initiative to release only those girls back to the families although it was on record that the families may have facilitated their trafficking in the first place. While analyzing this case, we identified significant lapses in this case, right from male members of the Committee visiting a girls' Home on a Sunday morning without being accompanied by a woman, to passing orders without relevant reasons even going against the order of the High Court. The current status and condition of these girls remain unknown till date. **Have they been re-trafficked into the sex trade?**

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It was often experienced that post-rescue, there was very little done to verify the claimants of the girls. In the past, traffickers have produced themselves as the guardians to claim the girls. As it is in cases of inter-generational trafficking, the scope of working with these girls on their rehabilitation is limited, considering the institutionalized nature of exploitation. Such lapses on the part of the State mercilessly robs the victims of their right to rehabilitation post-rescue.

A few months ago, I attended a workshop that was emphasizing the need to adopt strategies in order to keep pace with the fast-changing nature of this dynamic crime especially in the age of the fast-changing technology. Having witnessed cases first hand, I often find myself in a position of conflict, with people talking about the changing dynamics with the use of internet and even the dark web at one end, while we are still unable to even minimally safeguard the rehabilitation rights of the victims of inter-generational sex trafficking.

Our significant failures as a society to protect such children in the 21st century, even after getting them rescued, makes me question our priorities that we, as civil society organization are setting to achieve our larger goals of protecting and safeguarding children.

