

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 0



Violence is the result of violation. It is the violation of laws, rules, values, norms, standards of behavior and of the sacredness of human life. It is the violation of the minimum standards that define human dignity. It is the violation of dreams, aspirations and expectations. It is the breach of the non-negotiability of the opposition to commoditization of human life and its barter.

Unlike the popular belief, bloodshed is not the only, most essential or complete description of violence. The impact of violence is not necessarily the worst only when there is 'taking away' of life or a lot of bloodshed.

The victims of sex trafficking suffer from a large spectrum of violence from physical beating, sexual assaults and bloodshed to loss of hope, crashing of dreams, insults, loss of honor and self-esteem, punishment for being a victim, trampling of innocence and alienation from one's self and the society. It can be objectively perceived by the onlookers but the intensity and severity can be determined only by the individual subjected to it.

On the 25th of November 2018, **#16DaysofActivism** (a global campaign against Gender Based Violence) begins. Over the course of the following 16 days together let's understand a few of the numerous shades of violence seen in post rescue and faced by the women and children we work with.



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 1



INTRODUCTION TO POST RESCUE OPERATION

She wasn't merely confined under lock and key in a brothel on the 3rd floor of 'Sapna Mansion' on the outskirts of Kamathipura red-light area. Day and night she had been subjected to numerous rapes. It was feared that many of her rapists were HIV+, at any point she could have caught the deadly HIV virus. She was reduced to a fragile body used and disposed by any sundry man who could pay a pittance to her pimp and brothel keeper.

Her fault – She wanted to get a job in the city to support her family and ailing parents. She was convinced that as the elder daughter in the family it was the right thing to do. A person who promised her a job in Mumbai betrayed her trust, deceived her and sold her into the sex trade. Even if she had managed to run away she had no place to go or take refuge in. She knew for sure that her family wouldn't accept her even when it was not her fault.

During her few hours of sleep that she was left with by her tormentors, she'd wake up with terror dreams. She had lost her social self, her individual self was shattered into pieces. Under torture and multiple rapes she disintegrated like a cracked mirror. From childhood she had considered herself to be a 'decent' 'responsible' and 'conscientious' girl. In those eight months of captivity and sexual slavery her pimp and brothel keeper managed to make her dependent on alcohol and drugs.

She didn't have a moment's relief from the nagging question **"Why me? Why me?"** She wanted, so desperately to get out of the life of sexual slavery, forget all that had happened to her while in the sex trade and live a normal life like many of her friends. She hated to be seen or photographed. She feared that the people in her village would ostracise her and her family if they knew that she was in the sex trade.

She didn't want to merely be free from that captivity. She wanted to get all her possessions, money, documents from the brothel. She needed medical care to recover. She was terrified with the thought of checking her HIV status. Her world would have crumbled instantly had she been detected positive.



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Contd...

She yearned to learn new skills of earning a decent income so she could support herself and her family. Nothing could have restored her trust in the State and society until her offenders were brought to justice.

She was not merely to be freed from that captivity. She wanted *Mukti*, she wanted a comprehensive liberation.

The police, the government officers and the social workers called it “Rescue”. What they meant was **storming** the brothels and **forcibly** getting the girls “out” of their captivity. Often such rescues proved to be temporary physical shifts of the victims from the captivity of their offenders and tormentors.

The police the government and the rescuers could hardly see the invisible chains of captivity that ensured that the ‘Rescue’ could never give a sustainable freedom. It inevitably resulted in re-trafficking, where the rescued girls were returned to the sex trade, sometimes in the same places, under the same offenders as the government’s ‘Rescue’ began and ended with the temporary physical shifts.

Addressing all those concerns together was the soul of the fast emerging idea of Post Rescue Operation (PRO) which was expected to become an important domain of professional intervention in the anti trafficking field.

PRO means a comprehensive victim centric, rights based, development oriented professional intervention starting from the act of physical rescue and continuing till the stage of ‘self and social reintegration’ of the victim and providing justice to her. PRO doesn’t end till the victim is given the resilience to protect herself from any such attempt at trafficking her.

PRO is an emerging field of professional intervention. We at Prerana are proud that it was the Prerana’s Anti-Trafficking Center that coined the term ‘Post Rescue Operations’ globally for the first time and introduced it widely, contributing substantially to its robust evolution.



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2018 | Day 2



MAA... WHERE ARE YOU?

Alia* is the 8-year-old daughter of a prostituted woman from the Falkland Road red-light area. She attends Prerana's Night Care Centre (NCC) regularly. Her mother is quite a responsible mother. During the dance practice at the NCC our social worker noticed that Alia wasn't participating in the dance practice, so she reached to Alia and struck a conversation.

SOCIAL WORKER

Hi Alia! Why aren't you participating in the dance practice Alia?

Namaste *Didi**! (*sister) I am not in a mood!...I am...quite disturbed.

ALIA

SOCIAL WORKER

Hmmm! Want to talk about it?

The police caught *Maa* (mother), and no one knows where she is.

ALIA

SOCIAL WORKER

Caught your mother? Why? What was she doing? Where and when was she picked up?

The police stormed into our house (the children living in the red-light area mostly live in the brothels with their mother and call it their home) where we live and took away all the other women including *Maa. Didi*, everyday after school I go home to meet *Maa*, change my clothes and then come to the NCC. But today, as I came back from school, I saw some commotion right outside our house. A police van was waiting outside. A whole lot of policemen had entered our building. I ran to my house. *Maa* looked extremely worried and rushed me to hide below the bed to evade any attention of the police of the raiding party.

ALIA



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Contd...

The police kept hurling abuses on the women and pushing them around as if they were cattle. I saw two policemen dragging the women around by their hair. They kept asking how many of them were Bangladeshis. They demanded that all the women should show their Aadhar cards and prove that they are Indians.

When women couldn't show their Aadhar card I heard the police shouting, "*Case banav re, case banav, Tyaa sagalya Bangladeshi Aahet* (Make a case man, they all are Bangladeshis!)"

A woman police constable spotted me hiding under the bed and asked me to come out while shouting, "*Milali milali. Minor porgi milali* (Got her. Got her. Got a minor girl)"

Maa noticed that and realizing the dangerous misunderstanding screamed loudly. She told them that I was her daughter. The woman police constable was not in a mood to listen to anyone. She screamed, "*Saali rand, apne khud ki ladki se bhi danda karwati hai* (Bloody slut! Making money by selling your own daughter in the flesh trade!!)"

My mother pleaded with her, telling her and other policemen that I regularly attend school and that I am enrolled in Prerana's Night Care Centre for protection. She then showed the police my Prerana Identity Card. Seeing this the police calmed down, picked me up and were going to drop me at Prerana's NCC.

I anxiously waited at the corner of the road watching many women being pushed into the police van, my mother included. The police had big sticks in their hand and they were pushing the women with those sticks. One woman tried to run away, but she was hit very hard with the stick. **Didi, Maa is not a criminal. Why did the police take her away?**

A *didi* from Prerana's NCC told me that I could not stay in Prerana's NCC since it is not a 24-hour shelter. I was sent to a *Chillar Home* (Children's Home). However, at that place there was no provision for me to go to school. I did not like staying in the *Chillar Home*. I missed my mother. Finally I got to meet my mother after a lot of uncertainty.

Now I don't know when I'll be able to see *Maa* again. I fear that they will now take me to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC). The CWC will place me in a *Chillar Home* again. I hate that place. I will miss my school. I am sad *didi, mera kisi bhi chiz me man nai lagta hai* (I am disturbed and unable to focus on anything). My *Maa* is all that I have. I want my *Maa* back, I want to be with her. *Maa* is on medication which she is not supposed to miss even for a day...maybe she is HIV positive. I don't know where she is now and who will give her the medicines.

ALIA



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

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2018 | Day 3

REVICTIMIZING THE VICTIM | PART 1



The ‘re’ in revictimization stands for the repeated victimization of the victim.

In the English language, ‘re’ has no plural, therefore it also means several and not just one repetition of the original offence. In the conventional sense, it is used to denote the victim suffering from the same assault that s/he has already been through.

What one often fails to recognise is the fact that revictimization can actually take place in forms other than repetition of the initial assault.

A child who is a victim of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking has seen and experienced enough trauma to last a lifetime. When ‘rescued’ from such abhorrent circumstances, she expects that ‘now things would be better for me’; only to soon realise that her ordeal has not ended but has only changed forms.

Even for fully functioning adults, recounting a nightmare is painful. Imagine the plight of a child who is forced to relive her trauma every single time – when people she has never seen in her life before, expect her to narrate her brutal story – with vivid details and in a convincing manner.

IT BEGINS LIKE THIS...

It begins when the first police officer asks her to describe what happened to her. To say that the questions posed to her are not the child-friendliest in nature would be an understatement. **Imagine this** - a male police officer looking intimidating in his uniform, asks the child, ‘*Theek se yaad karke bata kya hua tere saath*’, can we blame the child for being hesitant and nervous?

THEN...

She begins to narrate the happenings only to be constantly interrupted with questions. She somehow manages to finish her story coherently, and then the police officer brings in a diary, begins to act like he is now writing things down, and says, “*Accha abhi jo bola wohi phir se theek tarah se bataa. Ye sab ab writing mein note karana hoga. Kuch bhi chhutna nahin chahiye....*”

Contd...



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

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2018 | Day 3



REVICTIMIZING THE VICTIM | PART 1 *Contd...*

This scenario which begins at the police station is repeated every time the case reaches a different authority. Be it at the hospital, where the doctor asks her “*Kitne time se sab kaam chalu hai?*”, or when she is placed in a Child Care Institution and the Probation Officer asks her, “*Mujhe nahin pata tera case kya hai, toh tuhi bata tujhe idhar kyun daala hai?*”

The victim is **revictimized** by **every police officer** she comes in contact with - from the woman constable, the Investigation Officer, the **service providers**, every **caretaker**, **duty bearer** and by **every other person** who believes that they are entitled to hear the story straight from the victim.

“ **What they forget is that they are not entitled to revictimize the child by making her relive her trauma again and again.** ”

Revictimization is not only limited to repeated narrations, but its element is present in all those not-so-secret whispers, animated discussions pertaining to the case in her presence, that utter disregard for basic sensitivity while questioning her, and denying her the empathetic treatment she rightfully deserves.

This violence in the form of constant revictimization blocks the child’s healing process.

WHAT IT SHOULD BE > Healing and recovery on the part of the victim demands forgetting the sharp and hurting details of the traumatizing experience.

WHAT IT IS > Investigation and prosecution, on the other hand, demand the victim to narrate the incidence in vivid details and in a convincing manner.

Prosecution being a long drawn and procrastinated process forces the victim to be able to remember and recall such details for a very long time.



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

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2018 | Day 4



CHARTER OF RIGHTS OF THE CHILDREN LIVING IN INSTITUTIONS

Over the last 32 years, we have worked with a number of Children's Homes besides running one of our own. In these homes we have worked with countless children living there. Through our Post Rescue Operations, we have spoken with many children who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. During one of these conversations, we asked a girl who lived in a Children's Home post her rescue, to share what she'd like to change in that Home.

SOCIAL WORKER

Hi Anita*, would you be comfortable sharing a few of your experiences while living in a Children's Home and if you could change things what would they be?

Oh *Didi*, you have to only ask. I have so many suggestions. But do you promise you will you keep it between us? I don't want anyone to know it was me who gave all these suggestions.

ANITA

SOCIAL WORKER

Of course, I would, if that's what you want.

Okay, *Pakka na?*(Are you sure?)

ANITA

SOCIAL WORKER

Yes!

*Name changed to protect identity

Contd...

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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

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2018 | Day 4

Contd...

And so Anita began, not even pausing to look for notes or chits.

- > First of all, they need to start calling us by our names, not as 'POCSO case', 'PITA case', 'Dance Bar *waali* case', 'Bengali girl', 'Bangladeshi girl' and like that. We are not cases. We have names, they should learn to start using them.
- > *Didi*, they keep asking us to tell our story to every visitor who visits the Home. I have had to repeat the dark part of my life so many times.... and every time after I narrate it my heart bleeds, I feel sad, but there's never anyone to talk to and share my feelings with.
- > They serve us dinner at 7pm. Isn't that too early? After that we get nothing. By 10 pm we are all hungry again but we have to wait till morning to get to eat something.
- > So many times, they don't even allow us to practice our own religion. Shouldn't they allow us to practise our own religion?
- > *Didi* during winter and when it rains heavily, we don't even get warm water for bath, we take bath using chilled water. They should provide us with warm water at least during winter.
- > Every time we make a mistake or break rules, they constantly remind us about our past and our life back then. Yes, there are times we break rules. It happens but that doesn't mean they should remind us of our life in the sex trade. It hurts and is humiliating.
- > If we say 'no' to participating in any activity because we are feeling unwell, they tell us to stop doing *natak* (acting out) and then they force us to participate. Even when we aren't interested in a specific training, they force us to attend those classes, *didi* I think we should be allowed to choose the trainings we want to attend, what is the use otherwise if our heart is not in it? Of course, we need some guidance on how to choose, but we shouldn't be forced.
- > They bring up our past every time. Just because I love to dance, doesn't mean after I leave the Home, I'm going back to the dance bar. But they never allow me to participate in dance saying I'll go back to the dance bar to resume my life in the sex trade.

ANITA

Didi I can tell you so much more, but if these basic things can't change then what's the use?



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

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2018 | Day 5

IT CAN STILL BE A WONDERFUL LIFE!

I was on my weekly visit to a Children's Home where victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking are placed. It was an especially difficult day as Janvhi*, a 16-year-old child living in the Home had attempted suicide in the Home the previous day and was recuperating in the hospital. It was then that Sonia*, Janvhi's closest friend at the Home recognized me and requested a few minutes.

"*Didi, did you hear that Janvhi consumed phenyl last evening?*" the usually chirpy Sonia asked me. "Yes, Sonia, I know. Are you okay? I know you and Janvhi were quite close" I asked her. Sonia hurriedly replied, "Please don't say we were close. It is what all the other girls also snigger and whisper. Janvhi and I were just friends, there was nothing else." Sensing some reluctance on her part about their relationship, I just asked her, "Sonia, why do you think Janvhi chose to take this step?"

Without missing a beat, Sonia replied, "It's simple. Janvhi was upset because she heard that she wasn't being transferred to a Home of her choice. She did not like it here after Superintendent Madam gave her a lecture and asked her to stay away from me." She continued, "It has happened before, you know. Children here have attempted to kill themselves and then they got what they wanted. Now there are already talks of Janvhi being shifted to another Home. It is for the best, she will now go away and other girls will stop talking about my friendship with her."

I looked at Sonia, and I wanted to tell her that she should not let herself get affected by these rumors, I wanted her to promise me that she would never do something like this. To tell her that no matter what other girls say, she will not use her life to strike a bargain. But in the end, all I could tell her was, "Sonia, you are kind, you are smart, and you are important. You matter, and don't let anyone make you feel any different." Sonia looked like she did not know how to react and all she uttered was "*Didi, at times, you say the most absurd things!*" And then slowly she could not stop grinning.

Initially, I shuddered at Sonia's nonchalance regarding Janvhi's attempt on her own life and how she perceived the suicide attempt as means towards an end. Sonia justified Janvhi's action as the last resort and was vocal that Janvhi's transfer will end the stigma other girls associated to their friendship. These children, who have already seen so much violence in their life, are not well-equipped to deal with setbacks due to lack of informed care. It made me realize how countless children like Sonia and Janvhi do not value their life because they haven't been taught to attach value to their life. This lack of respect and importance in a child for her own life and life choices is violence in a subtle yet treacherous form. It is important to make these children understand the importance of their life, personality and identity without being affected by the thought of what people will say.

Sonia, a child who was trafficked at a tender age needed the realization that she should focus on creating the best version of her life, someone has to do it, someone has to tell her that life is beautiful! It is important to make these children understand the importance of their life, personality and identity without being affected by the thought of what people will say.

*Name changed to protect identity



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

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2018 | Day 6

VIOLENCE IN CONDUCTING MEDICAL EXAMINATION OF VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Medical Examination till date is conducted from the perspective of medico-legal evidence. The intention of victim assistance and care is missing considering the current standards of medical examination.

Scene 1



A child walks into the hospital and is made to sit outside the medical evaluation room, equipped with a single bench and just one vacant seat. She is accompanied by an old woman who claims to be her mother. In a period of 45 minutes, the child and mother take turns to sit on the only available seat on the bench. Doctors and nurses constantly pass by the duo. The mother and the daughter are waiting for their names to be called by one of them.

Scene 2



A doctor appears from inside and calls out loud to the attendant on the counter, “*Woh rape wali ladki hain na, usko ander bhejo.*” The attendant approaches the bench looks at the people sitting there and asks “*rape wala case aap hi ka hai na? Jao aander. Doctor bula rahe hai.*” Looking at the mother he says, “*Tum bhi aander jao*”

Scene 3



The female doctor calls out, “*Tera forensic karna hain naa?*” The child looks around not understanding head nor tail of what’s been said. The child looks at her hassled mother and the mother nods. The examination room is separated by a small dividing curtain. The female attendant calls out to the girl and announces, yet again, “*Medical karna hain, kapde utar le.*” The mother waits for yet another ordeal to end.

Scene 4



Junior doctor to her senior doctor – “*Sir, iska medical ho gaya hain.*”
Senior doctor warns the junior doctor – “*Iska baaki ka history pucha ke nahi, pehle isne kuch lafdaa kiya hain kya? Iske history mein woh sab kuch jaane do.*”

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



2018 | Day 7

REVICTIMIZING THE VICTIM | PART 2

Scenario: Statement recording

Location: Police station

She and five other girls are rescued together from a brothel and brought to the police station for the recording of their statements. The accused are also called. The five girls are huddled into a corner of the room at the police station, they are standing even though there is an unoccupied bench next to them. They aren't sure if they can sit as no one had told them to sit. One of the accused arrives, he is their pimp. He goes straight to the police officer's chair and salutes him. The officer is busy writing something on a paper, as if by reflex the officer too returns the salute although he did not intend to do so consciously. The pimp's lawyer is already sitting in front of the officer. The pimp drags one more chair and sits aplomb in front of the officer. Without wasting a second the pimp spots a delivery boy from a nearby eatery who has come to the police station for a delivery and orders him, "Saahab ke liye masala chai leke aao.. adrak wali."

The girls are watching this. They further lose their already feeble hope for justice. The girls remember what the pimp had always said, "Ek baat theek tarah se samajh lo. Hamari pahunch bahot upar tak hai. Bahot upar tak"

Scenario: The day of the trial

Location: Court premise

After a long wait, finally her case has come up for hearing. She didn't want the social worker to come all the way to her house to pick her up. She told the social worker "Meri maa mere saath court mein aayengi. Main seedhe court mein aap se milungi." It was a long way from her home to the nearest railway station, followed by a long journey in a crowded train and a walk from the station to the court. She has come without eating her breakfast.

The offender arrives in a police van, as soon as he gets off, he is quickly surrounded by his sidekicks who look equally dreadful. Their lawyer in a black-coat joins them. They occupy the court's passage almost blocking it. Each one of them giving her a threatening look. The sheer thought of coming across her offender invokes dread and paralysis. She is terrified.

She asks the social worker who is her lawyer was. The social worker points at the public prosecutor. She turns to the social worker and says "Dalal ka vakeel aur mera vakeel kitne acche tarah se baat kar rahe hain. Mujhe nyaay milega na didi?"

The social worker assures her that they might be consulting over something and that she should not be worried. She also assures her "Don't worry, your trial will be 'in camera', none of the unrelated people will be allowed inside the court room. Only their lawyer, the public prosecutor, the typist and the accused will be there." She looks numb. "What difference does it make? They are still all around, except for in the court during my trial".

Trial begins. The door of the courtroom isn't really a door, it's a thin linen sheet that serves as the curtain. Every two minutes some lay and sundry person passing by the trial room pushes the curtain aside to peep inside. **Her trial was supposed to be 'in camera' but what is the use when this privacy does not shield her from what lies outside the thin linen curtain.**



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

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NO RAID NO TRADE

Mumbai's past records on the enforcement of certain parts of the anti-prostitution legal provisions are 'impressive'. No, it is not alone on that front. In the name of 'raid' several victims (whether minor or major) are picked up, charged with 'indecent behavior in public places' under the respective state Police Act, produced before a nearby magistrate. Some are declared guilty others are tutored to plead guilty and all are made to pay a standard fine. The sex traders 'volunteer to help' by paying the fine on the victim's behalf but not without adding it to the victims' debt-book. In case of the rescued minors, the sex traders posing as parents or relatives approach the Home authorities, claim the custody of the girls and promptly get the girls back too. In the end the girls are returned to their sex traders. The cases are closed, the government treasury gets richer with the fine amount, the Home authorities are happy as the residents (minor or major) are thrown out of their Homes and their files are 'successfully closed'. The prosecutor and the magistrates are happy that the case is 'fast disposed ...no pendency'. The government is happy that the anti-trafficking law is not applied. Had it been applied the government would have had to provide for the victims' shelter, food, clothing, medicines, compensation and rehabilitation besides bringing her offenders to justice through a long process of investigation and prosecution. Finally, the brothel keepers and pimps are happy that the girls are back to their cages and the trade is back on track.

Ironical but true; when the sex traders say - No raid no trade!

Police raids are essential for the sex trade's sustenance! How will the girls otherwise learn the lesson that the raids and rescues are a sham, that the state and society don't care for them, that the reach of the sex traders is very high, that it is pointless for them to resist the oppression or try to escape. The girls don't break fully unless they go through such raids a couple of times."

Light at the end of the tunnel? The Mumbai police is changing. The misapplication of law is getting replaced with the rule of law. Not everywhere though!



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2018 | Day 9



THE GREATER THE POWER, THE MORE DANGEROUS THE ABUSE

“Didi, I don’t think it is right to be beaten by Badi Madams when I did not do anything wrong.”

These are the words Vinita* was working up the courage to tell me. Vinita was 9 years old when her father tried to sell her into the sex trade. Her father was stopped in time, she has since been living in a Child Care Institution, hoping to receive quality education and live a life free of abuse and trauma. Can you imagine hearing these words from a child who has faced violence feel that it is wrong to be beaten ONLY when she did not do anything wrong?

My conversation with Vinita resulted in an investigation which exposed rampant physical abuse at the Institution she was living in, along with 60 other children who were placed there for their rehabilitation. It made me think about the reason Vinita took so long to open up about the abuse, because she was made to believe abuse is the normal condition of life.

In later statements, Vinita clearly stated that in the Institution, corporal punishment was the standard punishment for the smallest of mistakes – like being late for meals, leaving ones hair in a state of disarray, or breaking something in the kitchen.

These were children who had already witnessed some form of violence in their life, imagine their plight when they were forced to live under conditions where violence, as a means of discipline was the accepted norm. The biggest injustice against all these children was their lack of realization that they were victims of maltreatment. The idea of punishment to facilitate correction was ingrained in the minds of the children living at the Institution. The understanding that they deserve to be beaten was not the only violation of their rights. Vinita, along with the other children had internalized the belief that the Institution’s staff were providing them with food, clothing, and shelter and thus have earned the right to deliver justice ‘for their good’. This brutal violence resulted in the child being maltreated under the garb of discipline while being coerced into feeling gratitude for the same.

*Name changed to protect identity



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 10

SHELTER HOMES & INVISIBLE VIOLENCE

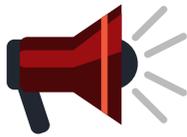


A child victim rescued from maltreatment and produced before the Child Welfare Committee set up under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 is often placed in a shelter facility as a Child in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP).



A shelter facility has to ensure the care and protection of the child and also to facilitate the child's recovery and rehabilitation.

However, rehabilitation remains a remote possibility if the child continues to face maltreatment instead of due care and protection.



A child rescued from violence of any kind seeks recovery and rehabilitation from her trauma at the shelter facility but imagine the horror a child feels when she realizes that her ordeal has not yet ended.

It is true that this country has seen countless instances of children being sexually abused in shelter facilities. There have been cases where children are beaten mercilessly for the smallest mistakes and sometimes even without an error on their part. At times, the children in these facilities accept the ill-treatment being meted to them to the point where it becomes so ingrained that they fail to understand their exploitation.



Here, it is pertinent to note that violence should not only be restricted to physical and/or sexual abuse, but there is a layer of violence in every insensitive and negligent act towards the child.

Instances involving blatant forms of violence like sexual or physical abuse are often strongly condemned in public, but it is important to ensure that other latent forms of violence, which are equally disturbing to the child should also be recognized. The sub-optimum standard of care and protection at these shelter facilities causes additional violence to a child who has already been a victim of violence.

The child encounters violence every time she is denied the rightful minimum standard of care and support services. It takes various forms such as **corporal punishment, verbal abuse, deprivation of food, clothing** or even **recreation**. This violence continues when the child is denied opportunities to pursue **education** and **vocational training**. Every **breach of confidentiality** against the child, **undue pressure** to make her act/perform against her will, **disrespectful behavior, misjudged counselling** and **therapy** are all violent acts and go against the very mandate of shelter facilities.

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AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 11



It was a Tuesday afternoon. I was accompanying 14-year-old Aahana* from the court in Malad back to the Child Care Institution (CCI) – she had been rescued from the sex trade and was placed at the CCI for rehabilitation.

Aahana, usually a cheerful and talkative girl, looked glum! So I asked if she was okay.

AAHANA Didi, can I ask you a question?

Please do!

**SOCIAL
WORKER**

AAHANA Didi, do you think I'm a bad person?

Not at all. Why would you think something like this?

**SOCIAL
WORKER**

AAHANA This girl at the Home thinks that I am a horrible person because I accused my mother for putting me into the sex trade. Didi, when I saw Maa in the court today, she looked pale and old. For a moment, I thought that maybe I did not do the right thing by telling the truth to the police. Because of this my siblings are living in another Home. I haven't seen them for four years now. Sometimes, I think what if I had not taken this step? Would we all be together?

I asked Aahana if I could hold her hand and gathered courage to look into her eyes.

Aahana, you are a brave and a strong girl. What you did four years ago was to protect yourself from the trauma that you were made to go through. Don't you think you also protected your siblings from having to go through the same ordeal? Does seeking justice for yourself make you a bad person?

**SOCIAL
WORKER**

*Name changed to protect identity

Contd...



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 11



Contd...

Aahana was a victim of commercial sexual exploitation since she was 14 years old. Her mother decided to hand her over to a neighbor, who would bring clients to Aahana, keeping a share of the money made and handing over the rest to her mother. Aahana endured this violence for a year and a half before she could gather the courage and approach someone to help her get away from this brutality. Even after that, it was a long journey for her to convince herself that she'd done the right thing.

I assured Aahana that she would be accompanied to the court, if need be to the police station whenever required and that she would not be alone in this entire journey.

It made me realize that in such cases, when the family, especially the parents, inflicts abuse on a child's life, it is so inherently ingrained in the child that it becomes a part of her identity/personality. The abuse is normalized through her acceptance, the basis of which is lack of informed care. There cannot be a fight for justice until realization of injustice seeps in. Aahana did not realize at that time, but she was made to feel guilty for wanting a life devoid of violence and abuse for her and her siblings. It was important to make her understand that this guilt was a result of the violence she underwent before her rescue, which was carried over to her post rescue phase. The biggest challenge with Aahana was to make her conscious of the violence she was facing in the form of unjustified guilt, and empower her with the right to choose her way out of it.

"I freed a thousand slaves. I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves."

*Name changed to protect identity



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 12



WHO AM I?

Read on...



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 12



LOSS OF IDENTITY

For victims of commercial sexual exploitation, loss of identity goes way beyond our psychological understanding and loss of self. Victims who have been trafficked and commercially sexually exploited lose their families and the bond of trust that often binds us as individuals to the larger society.

When a victim is exploited sexually, especially in a commercial context, she is often given different names, to hide and change her identity oftentimes when she is sold from one brothel keeper to another. Appallingly, this continues even after the victim is rescued from the trade and is residing in a shelter facility. It is common for the victims to lie about their identity, including their name and place of origin at the first instance after they are rescued. However, over a period of time, once they do disclose their identities, the insensitiveness of the system often terms them as liars and the victim, even after being rescued struggles with her identity.

The victims often in the search of emotional support, get lured by 'fancy men' who almost always act as their pimps and live off the earnings of these women. In order to prove their right over the women, these men change the women's names to suit their own religion. It is thus common for a Sunita to be called Shaba as per the whims of her 'fancy man'.

Besides being an emotional and psychological struggle for the victim, these changing names lead to multiple discrepancies in the documents proving the identity and residence of such victims. This struggle continues to be a part of the lives of the children born to these victims.

When families traffic their young daughters into the sex trade, it's often difficult for the victims to accept the reality, but once they do, it's difficult for them to reconcile with their families. The meaning of their familial relationship is often lost and that leaves them with a marred understanding of relationships which is often reflected in their future alliances.

Besides the destruction of their psychological self, the changing identities leave the victims with absolutely no sense of political or social belongingness. Post-rescue victims are often asked to prove that they belong to a particular region, either through residential proofs or through a letter from the local self-government bodies. Victims that are trafficked from across states and national borders as well, have in no way to prove that they originally belong to a particular district/village. Without an identity and residential proof, such victims are often left out of the social welfare systems and are not able to benefit from state/national schemes. Their children grow as stateless children and face great difficulties even if helped by civil society organizations to acquire an education.



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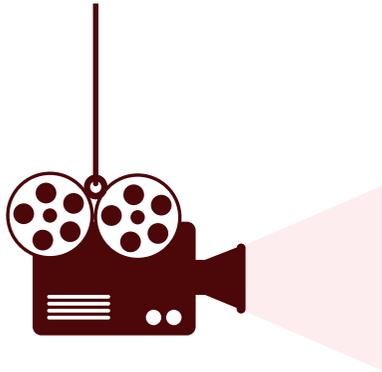
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

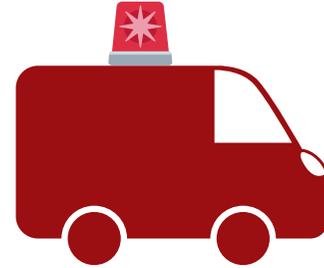
2018 | Day 13



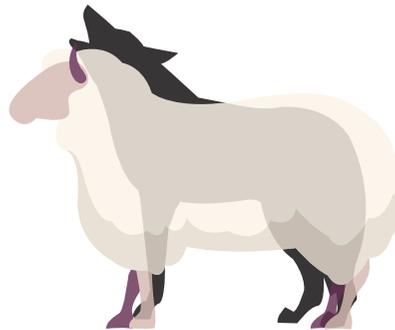
VIOLENCE SEEN IN ABSENCE OF VICTIM WITNESS PROTECTION



THE FILMING



THE TRANSPORTATION



THE MOLE

Read on...



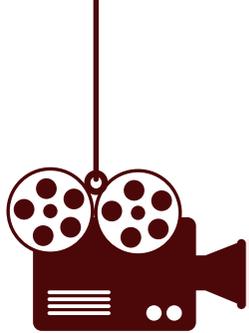
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



2018 | Day 13 | THE FILMING

The 38-year-old Reva* a prostituted woman victim of sex trafficking was furious as well as devastated.



“Kya haq banata hai unko matlab kisiki bhi ki hamako public ke samane nanga kare? Kiti mushakkat se kitne saal hamne kisiko apni photu nekalane nahi di. Dar tha kahi ye tasveer gaav mein hamare rishtodare ke haat padi najar aayi to kya hoga. Sab mehnat pe pani pher diya ye fillumwali ne. Wo bhi apna dhanda chalane ke liye. Bahut bura huwa. Ye ham ko musibat se dhande se chudwane aaye the ki apni picture banane? Bahut bura huwa. Ham jaanate hai. Aaj kal net pe har tarah ki tasveer milatni hai aur dekhate dekhate hajaro meel phail bhi jaati hai. Wo bhi aurat thi. Usne to hamare saath aisa nahi karana chahiye tha.”

What right does she have to expose us in public as sluts? With so much of effort, we had managed not to let anyone take our photographs. We were always scared as to what would happen if the photo lands in the hands of any of our relatives or anyone back in the village. This filmmaker ruined everything. That too for running her own shop. Too bad! Was she here to help our liberation or just to make her film? These days you get all sorts of dirty pictures on the net, and they reach millions of people in no time. She too is a woman, at least she shouldn't have done such a thing to us.

Reva was complaining about a woman filmmaker who had shot a police raid on a couple of brothels for her film. It was obvious that the raid was staged for the filmmakers' shoot. After the rescue, all the women and girls were paraded on the road while the cameraman shot them all.

*Name changed to protect identity

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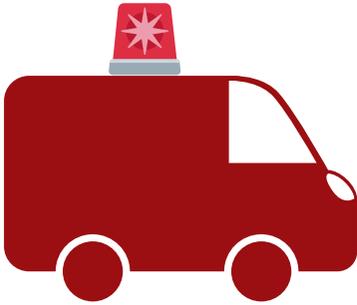


16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



2018 | Day 13 | THE TRANSPORTATION



It was a Monday morning, the six girls rescued on Friday had been kept at a Shelter Home. The police wanted to produce all six of them before the magistrate. The Home authorities were in high spirits as on the previous evening the girls had strongly complained against their pimps and agreed to cooperate with the Home authorities by giving statements before the magistrate. The police were required to also present the accused before the magistrate. The Station House Officer (SHO) said there is just one vehicle and the same should be used for the transportation of both the victims and the accused.

The police van came to the Home at 7am to pick up the girls who left without eating breakfast. The van then proceeded to go to the police station to pick the accused from the lockup. The accused were three pimps. The pimps approached the girls and started talking to them. By the time they reached the court it was 11.30am. No one was granted bail. The police had too many other things to attend to at the court and were busy there. At 5pm, post court hours, the van began its return journey. It first dropped off the accused at the jail and then at 9.30pm the girls were dropped at the Home.

Something had happened in between. The girls looked extremely scared and changed their versions. They refused to identify their pimps or complain against them. Two girls said they did not want to eat as they had eaten outside. One girl was flaunting a fancy mobile phone in her hand while the other two had cigarette packets in their purses. All of them appeared extremely frightened.

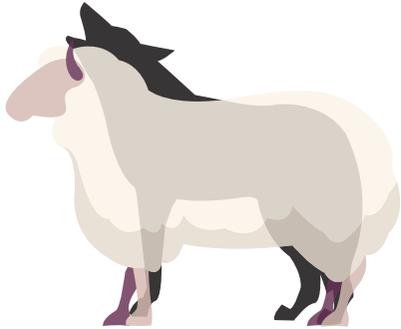
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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



2018 | Day 13 | THE MOLE



The rescued girls reached the court as their case was up for hearing. The accused in their case was already waiting there. Two days ago, when they were rescued and placed in a Shelter Home the Superintendent had met them individually, at the time every girl had stated that they wanted their offenders to be punished. **They had asked for freedom and justice!**

On the previous two days, the Superintendent of the Home had made sensible appeals for them to cooperate with the police and the court by giving proper evidence and facing the cross-examination bravely.

The girls too wanted that, but they were scared. One of them was not a real victim. She was the young sidekick of the brothel keeper. The brothel keeper had ensured that as the police rescued the victim girls her sidekick would also get picked up and go along with the lot. That was the best way to keep an eye on the victims and silence them while at the police station and at the Home. This was done to ensure that the girls do not give any statements against the brothel keeper or their pimps. The sidekick alternatively lured them with promises if they don't cooperate with the authorities. She terrorized them with dire consequences if they gave any statements against any of the sex traders.

In the court, all the girls refused to blame the accused, they stated that the police were at fault and not the accused. They requested to immediately be released or granted bail.

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 14



WHO IS TO BLAME...?

One afternoon I visited Neha at the Child Care Institution (CCI) she was placed at. Neha was thrilled to see me and couldn't stop smiling. As we spoke, Neha* asked

NEHA *Didi, I overheard one of the girls talking to the other girls and warning her to not talk to me as I am infected with some bad condition. Is the condition so bad that people will stop talking to me?*

Neha, you are aware that there is a certain virus in your blood which has resulted in this condition. To stop the growth of the virus you are under medication. Having this condition does not mean you won't have any friends. Don't let such thoughts affect you. I'm happy that you came and spoke to me, I will certainly try and speak to the other children. I think you should also go and talk to your friend, share about your condition, let her know that you are under medication and that your condition won't harm anyone around you.

SOCIAL WORKER

NEHA *Will I ever get cured from this condition?*

I didn't know how to convey the harsh truth, to tell her that the HIV virus inside her blood cells has built a permanent abode and medication can only control further growth of the virus.

The medicines you are currently taking is hindering the growth of the virus and you will observe the progress in coming weeks.

SOCIAL WORKER

Neha seemed a little hopeful, but the tinge of self-doubt was visible in her eyes. Neha bid me goodbye leaving for her Mehendi classes.

*Name changed to protect identity

Contd...



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 14



Contd...

Neha is a 15-year-old girl who was recently detected with HIV and is currently placed in a CCI for her rehabilitation. The possible point of the virus's transmission inside Neha's body could be her contact with an infected syringe when she was compelled to work as a rag picker, undetected mother to child infection or an undisclosed sexual assault.

We discussed this case during our case management sessions, discussing the immense pain and neglect this child had gone through in the past 15 years. One question struck me and continues to bother me - **Who can be blamed for the violence and condition Neha is in today?**

Neha is already a victim of circumstance - created by poor financial conditions and/or carelessness of another. To add to her miseries, she is also facing violence in the form of being shunned by people due to lack of sensitivity and awareness. Neha understands the importance of taking her medication on time, but she is yet to understand the condition and accept the fact she will have to live with the HIV virus for the rest of her life. At the CCI she attends Mehendi classes with keen interest and dedication.

Violence has infinite shades, it isn't just physical harm but mental and emotional suffering which is often difficult to perceive. Many young children like Neha, are victims to such systemic violence.

*Name changed to protect identity



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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?**

Contd...



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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



2018 | Day 15

Contd...

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.



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