

Bal Suraksha Project – Red Dot Foundation and Rise Up

Brief Project Description

Bal Suraksha is an advocacy campaign for the effective implementation and redressal mechanism of The Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act) to ensure the safety, security and protection of children in 20 schools and colleges in the Satara District, Maharashtra in one year (2019 – 2020).

- To enable and empower community and youth (Know your Rights Educators) to be agents of change, for the effective implementation of the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act and its redressal mechanisms.
- To advocate with the Education department and child welfare committee for the effective implementation of the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act and establishments of redressal mechanisms.

To Support this project Red Dot Foundation initiated a research to understand Child Sexual Abuse in India (Details and findings in Annexure1).

Achievements of the project

- **Base Line Survey vs Post Survey**
 - The results of the base line survey conducted with 250 school authorities and faculty members showed that 83% had no knowledge of the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act, while the post survey results showed that 98% of faculty are now aware of the act and its redressal mechanisms.
- **Approval from the Education Officer**
 - The Education Officer - Mr. Ramesh Chawan (August 2019 to March 2020) realized that the intervention and enforcement of the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act was a necessity. Post attending a session, he approved of the project to be implemented in schools.
- **Know Your Right Educators and Charter of Demands**
 - The 20 “Know Your Right Educators” presented a Charter of Demands to the Education Officer in January 2020. Post that meeting, he asked us to implement the Bal Suraksha Program in 250 Schools in the Jawli Taluka – Satara.
 - He also ensured that 300 teachers and Principals attended a session on understanding the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act and its redressal procedures.
- **Developing Intellectual Capacity and Bridging the Technological Divide**
 - A total of **72 workshops** have been conducted for the Know your Right Educators (KYRE) and faculty members including government officials.
 - 21 sessions in schools were conducted prior to the pandemic and the subsequent lock down.
 - 51 online sessions were organized. One on One sessions through calls were done for KYRE’s who did not have access to the internet or technology.
 - **47 KYRE’s as content creators** – The sessions helped the KYRE’s to share stories of culture and traditions, learn how to participate in the democratic process, understand the need to make areas safer for children, have better understanding of

gender equality, cyber awareness and prevention of cyber-crime and got an insight into the SDG's.

- Sessions were customized and organized via zoom, Google meet, conference calls, WhatsApp calls and one on one calls to ensure that all could participate.
- **Change in Government Officers**
 - Multiple online meetings and calls with the Block Officer Mr. Satish Buddhe and Education Officer Mrs. Todarmal were organised to ensure that the demands put by the KYRE's to the previous Education Officers were fulfilled.
 - An online session with the KYRE's and the new Government Official was organized via zoom. The KYRE's who once again put forth their demands, convinced the new Education Officer about the enforcement of the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act. Post the meeting, Mrs. Todarmal ensured that all schools be represented and therefore nominated two teachers from each school to undergo a capacity building workshop to understand, address and take remedial measures to make schools safer for children and prevent offences against them.
- **Counseling Skills, Digital literacy and Train the Trainer Session**
 - Many schools in this district did not have female teachers and through this project we have identified the need for the schools to have a counselor – thereby ensuring the girls can resolve any issues experienced by them.
 - 252 faculty along with government officials attended a 3 hour interactive session on the following:
 - Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act and its redressal mechanisms
 - Counseling Skills
 - Understanding technology
 - Results of polls conducted at the start of the session: 82.5% had no knowledge on the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act while 88.3% had never attended a session on building counseling skills
- **Formation of an Internal Committee in Schools**
 - The two nominated faculty from each school, will now be part of an Internal Committee to ensure that the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act is followed, offenses against children are prevented and additionally perform the role of socio - psychological counselor for their respective schools.
- **Building Community Resilience**
 - The creation of 2 WhatsApp Faculty Community group (256 members in each group) to discuss and facilitate techniques, help build capacity and address issues while focusing on prevention of sexual offences against children in their respective schools have been formed.
- **Increase in number of Know Your Right Educators**
 - Currently 47 KYRE's have been agents of change and have reached out to family, friends and neighbours to share the need for making places safer for children. Our Initial project was meant to train 20 KYREs but we have had a 135% increase in the number of KYREs.
- **Enforcing Policy and Redressal mechanisms in schools**
 - The Teachers and Principals have been given a Child Protection Policy which will be implemented in their respective schools.

Strategies implemented/ learnings - during COVID and the Lock Down

- Closure of schools and unavailability of children: Implementation of different methodologies and strategies to ensure continuity of the project and ideas to keep the children and faculty engaged were designed and implemented immediately.
- Unavailability of government personnel: frequent meetings and calls with assistance from our partner NGOs, helped facilitate advocacy with the government personnel and new office members.
- Bridging the digital divide: Due to lack of devices and no knowledge of technology - sessions had to be conducted multiple times, on different platforms and even through personal phone calls, as most KYRE's had only one phone per family; which most often were not smart phones. Timings had to be adjusted to ensure that the KYRE's could attend the sessions. Myths around usage of zoom and other platforms (as they felt they were owned by china) had to be eradicated.
- Lack of funds and no schooling: Inability to allocate a counselor (due to divergence of funds because of COVID) was leading to a delay in nominating a socio psychological counselor. To ensure that children have someone to approach and share their issues – faculty have been nominated by the Education Officer and trained to handle any issues the children are facing during this period.
- Faculty Community Group – The formation of an “easy to access” WhatsApp group for teachers and faculty members have been created to facilitate sharing and learning.

Impact of Advocacy:

A total of 1090 women and girls were active participants in this project. Approx. 12,200 girls and women will be beneficiaries through this intervention.

- 72 Workshops conducted to **Developing Intellectual Capacity and Bridging the Technological Divide.**
- 500 Teachers and faculty members from 250 schools will be part of **an Internal Committee in Schools.**
- **135% increase in number of Know Your Right Educators** – who will agents of change in their schools, campuses and communities
- **2293** individuals actively participated in this project. Our Know Your Right Educators are in direct contact with approx. 10,000 children and teachers and will continue to reach out to approx. 20000 individuals in the next few months.
- All 250 schools will have an easy to understand Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act and will ensure that new staff are trained on a regular basis.
- The Block Development Officer also agreed to install menstrual pad machines in the schools and villages – which were one of the items in the charter of demands put forward by the children.



Key Challenges

Some of the most challenging moments were during COVID and the lockdown.

- Increase in Domestic Violence.

One of the fall outs of the pandemic has been the growing rates of crime against women. During the lock down, children have been at home and therefore were witness to the violence or the recipient of it. As government funds were used for COVID relief and closure of schools – there has been no urgent requirement of a counselor to address the issues of children.

- Lack of digital devices/ connectivity/ lack of technological knowledge.

The major challenge of remote learning is disparity in access – from electricity and internet connections to devices like computer or smartphones. Helping to bridge the digital divide, drive digital literacy and build capacity for both students and faculty members was one of the challenges we overcame through innovative methods.

- Change / Availability of Government Officials

Access to government officials for issues not related to COVID was difficult. Convincing them that the welfare and safety of children was an important aspect, even during the lockdown, took additional amount of time and effort to get them to address some of the issues and demands.

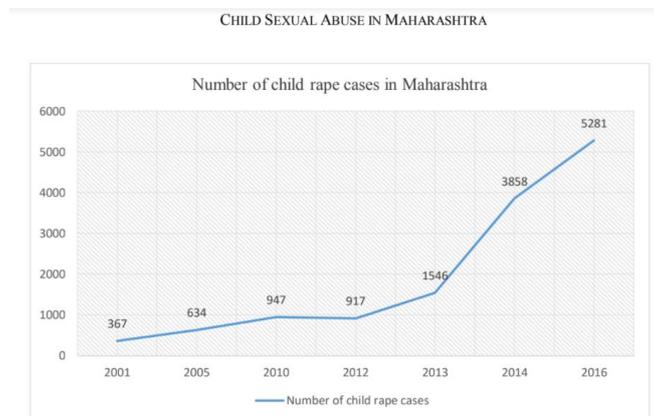
Annexure 1

Research done at the start of the project:

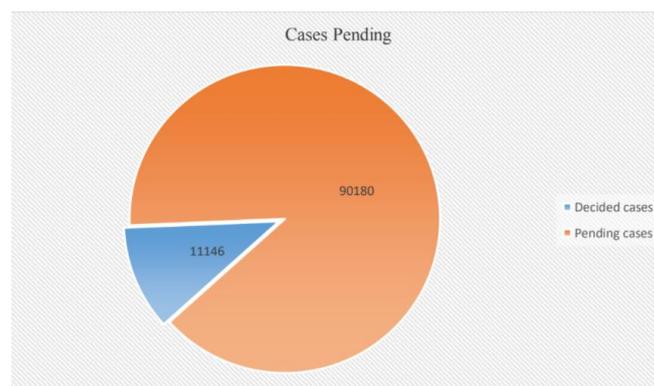
Red Dot Foundation initiated a research to understand Child Sexual Abuse in India.

As per the report, Maharashtra ranks second in India, in terms of the total crime against children. With respect to sexual crimes against children, Maharashtra ranks third in India. *These figures have been on a continuous increase since many years.

**Graphic illustration on the above data:



Out of 1,01,326 cases in India, 89% of the cases were left pending in the courts. In Maharashtra alone, the pendency rate was as high as 94.7%***.



Ref: *PE Behere and A Mulmule, 'Sexual abuse in children' (2013) 18(1) J MGIMS 6.

**Jyoti Belur, 'Child Sexual Abuse and the Law in India' (2015) 4(1) BB Crime Sci. 26.

***<https://cjp.org.in/child-sexual-abuse-95-pc-cases-still-pending/>