

A "GLOBAL" ASSET AND STRENGTHS BASED (UN)CONFERENCE

LOVING LIFE: Creating safer spaces for Adolescent Girls and Women –

Hosted by Dr Mamatha Achanta, Founder, Tharuni (www.tharuni.org):

QUESTION – ANSWERS:

1) Eve-Teasing:

Name: Krushi

Balika sangha (Girl Child Club) Name: Telangana

Village: Elgur Station

We have been facing some situations like indecent assault in our village. We don't have a proper bus stand. So, we need to stand in open places. Sometimes, some strangers come on bikes and they will tease us. We are very scared of physical attacks.

With the help of Tharuni NGO, we have contacted Sarpanch and we are planning to write a letter to RTC Depo Manager for a bus stand in our village. However, though we get a bus stand, eve-teasing may continue at that particular place.

Q. We heard that you have started SHE teams in rural areas. How can they Curb Eve-teasing?

Answer by **Ms Swati Lakra IPS**, Additional Director General of Police, State of Telangana, India: *"Thank you for asking a very good question. Yes, we have started SHE Teams in Hyderabad in 2014. They have been very successful in curbing sexual harassment in public spaces particularly Eve-teasing, stalking, etc. SHE Teams consists of five police constables and one Sub-Inspector in mufti (plain clothes). They all have devices to record discretely and nab the offender red handed. We have also started SHE Teams in all rural areas. You can call Police Help Line – Dial 100 and ask for help when you face such harassment in public spaces. SHE Teams will come and arrest the offenders. Be brave and report the incidents so that no other girl will face such problem again."*

2) Child Marriage:

Name: Pavani

Balika sangha Name: Crow's

Village: Ramachandrapuram

In our Mandal, a 14-year girl named Ravali was forced to drop out from the school and was about to get married. Her marriage was settled in the month of March. We discussed about

her marriage in our Balika sangha meetings. We informed to Tharuni team. Immediately, our Tharuni team enquired her date of birth as per the school records came to know that she is still a minor.

We called Child Help Line 1098, ICDS team, Mandal Revenue Officer, Village Revenue Officer, Police and Anganwadi teacher. We all went to Ravali's house and counseled her parents along with her. Her marriage was stopped successfully. Now, Ravali is continuing her studies happily.

Q) What is the police role in stopping child marriages?

Answer by **Ms Swati Lakra IPS**, Additional Director General of Police, State of Telangana, India: *"Pavani, your Balika Sanghas seems to be working so well. It's the duty of the police to stop any child marriage according to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006. There were 204 child marriages happened during Lockdown in the State of Telangana, although we could stop more than 300 child marriages. Parents want to get rid of their girls during these turbulent periods. You can call police by dialing 100 whenever you have the information of child marriage. Through your Balika Sanghas try to create awareness among parents on the ill effects of child marriages."*

3) Child Sexual Abuse:

Name: Shravya

Balika sangha Name: Rani Rudrama devi

Village: Thimmapuram.

We form Balika sangha in our village and conduct meetings every week. We discuss about the problems and find the solutions immediately.

On Republic Day, January 26th2018, we were ready to start to school for flag hoisting. Our Balika sangha girl, Swathi also started to school by an auto. Auto driver abused her sexually. He bit her hands legs and inner parts. He left the place hurting her very badly. After sometime, slowly Swathi came on to the road. Some people observed Swathi's condition and informed her father. Her father came immediately and took her daughter to home, filed a complaint on auto driver and he was arrested. Swathi was completely depressed and did not dare to come out of her home. We discussed this in our Balika sangha meeting and went to her home. After some days, she recovered from depression and she is now attending Balika sangha meetings regularly. She is now in her Degree Final Year.

Q: How can Bharosa centers help sexual abused victims?

Answer by **Ms Swati Lakra IPS**, Additional Director General of Police, State of Telangana, India: *"Shravya, yes child sexual abuse is a major problem everywhere. In our State we are taking all the precautions to prevent such crimes and trying our best to prosecute the offenders."*

*We have started with technical support of **Tharuni NGO**, integrated support centres named "**Bharosa Centres**" in the State. Through these centres we provide all the required services like police, legal, counselling, medical and rehabilitation – everything under one roof to avoid re-victimization of the victim. We have a child friendly special court attached to Bharosa centre in Hyderabad. Through this unique court we could improve the convictions from 2.5% to 30.5% in two years of its establishment Don't keep silent, please report any incidence of child abuse. Try to sensitize your friends about child sexual abuse in order to prevent them. You can also take the help of your local leaders, members of self-help groups, village elders in bringing awareness".*

4) Domestic violence:

Name: Akshaya

Balika sangha (Girl Child Club) Name: Mahatma Gandhi

Village: Kapula Kanaparthi

Many children are suffering due to domestic violence in their house. They are becoming the victims of emotional, physical abuse due to domestic violence. This is also affecting their mental health condition leading to depression and anxiety.

Recently, one of our Balika sangha girl was suffering due to domestic violence in her house. So, she was unable to concentrate on her studies, not having proper food, was crying and became emotional. She was much worried about her parents.

Our Balika sangha group have discussed about the incident, gave moral support to the girl and we called for police help by dialing police help line 100. Police came, counseled her father and now the girl is leading a happy life as her father changed to a greater extent after counseling sessions.

Q) What is that police are doing during Covid pandemic about the increase in domestic violence cases?

Answer by **Ms Sumathi IPS**, Deputy Inspector General of Police, State of Telangana, India:
"Yes Akshaya, Domestic Violence has been on rise during Covid pandemic. Police have been playing crucial role whenever there is incidence of violence or physical harm on the victim in the domestic violence cases. We receive more than 500 domestic violence calls every day throughout the State of Telangana to our Police help line. There was raise in these numbers during lockdown period as the victims were staying with the offenders without any other choice. We have taken up over the phone counselling during lockdown connecting directly to the psychologist when they call up Dial 100, Police Help Line. In an emergency, police team immediately rescues the victim. Children get disturbed when there is violence in the family. Parents have to realize this and maintain harmony in the family."

5) Online Abuse

Name: Kaveri

Balika sangha Name: Jupiter

Village: Aashalapally

I want to share one of my experiences about Online abuse. Previously, in villages, we do not have online abuse but due to rapid development in technology, we have got so many online facilities. Now-a-days, due to lockdown, we all are using Mobile phones for online classes.

We are coming across these cyber harassment incidents. One of my friend was chatting with a stranger online. She shared her photo to that stranger. He morphed her photo and started blackmailing her. She suddenly stopped talking with us and remained isolated. Me and my friend went to her home and spoke with her affectionately. She shared her problem with us. We discussed this issue in our Balika sangha meeting. We have contacted her father and registered a police complaint on that stranger.

We advised her not to make friendships with strangers as this may lead to cyber molestation, rapes, trafficking, abuse etc. We protected this girl but not only this girl there are many other girls who are being abused.

Q. Kindly suggest, how to be safe online as, now we are having online classes due to Covid (Lockdown)?

Answer by **Ms Sumathi IPS**, Deputy Inspector General of Police, State of Telangana, India:
"The Police are trying their best to curb Cyber harassment. We have set up Cyber Cells in every district to work on cybercrimes. Using technology is a boon at the same time it is risky. Children due to this pandemic are having online classes. The parents should know how to be make their children safe online. For this we have started an awareness building survey on online safety #TeensOnlineSurvey (<https://bit.ly/TSPolice-Youngster-Conscious>) to lessen their social isolation gaps caused due to the pandemic and sudden transition towards #safe&productivedigitization. Learn to keep safe while using the technology and don't share anything which is personal online."
