



PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS

Nagapattinam Situational Analysis and Improvements



GIRLS NOT BRIDES



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Jesu Rethinam,
Director, SNEHA

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INTRODUCTION

According to the fourth edition of National Family Health Survey (2015-16), women age of 20-24 years married before the age of 18 years is 7.1%, which reflects that such percentage of young girls experiencing pregnancy or motherhood in their adolescents.

The Violence against women starts from her birth to death. Female foeticide, infanticide, child marriage, child labour, sexual abuse, physical and emotional violence in family, school and society, dowry harassment, abuse, rape, acid attack and other forms of violence continue throughout their lives.

Child Marriage exploits one gender and steals childhood of millions of children across. It should not be perceived as a business of an individual family. It is a social evil that endangers the holistic development of a particular gender and thus it should be addressed as gender exploitation. The NFHS-IV data reveals that almost 17 per cent of marriages happening in Tamil Nadu are Child Marriages, which goes to prove, two out of every ten marriages are child marriages. It is viewed within the context of force and compulsion, involving pressure and emotional blackmail; and children are convinced to their parents' choice so they lack the choice or capacity to give consent. Therefore, Child marriages are always considered as forced marriage because valid consent is absent. Thus, children are denied to make decisions in their life. Their participation in the family's important decisions is considered negligence.

Women are still considered as second-class citizens with regard to their position within family and society. They are restricting themselves inside the home and so in society. Women and girls from marginalised communities face double discrimination – gender inequalities and caste discrimination. In many child marriages, the girls lack power in their marital relationships. They are forcefully instructed to play a role of an adult with no power. The lack of power within the marital relationship can compromise a woman's ability to exercise her reproductive rights, including decisions related to family planning, childbearing, and maternal and child health services. This leads many girls into distress. This study helps to understand the causes of child marriage, influencers of child marriage and the mental distress the girls are undergone when they are married young. This study was carried out in the district of Nagapattinam with 55 case studies. This study helps to understand the causes of child marriage, influencers of child marriage and the mental distress the girls are undergone when they are married young.

PROGRAMME ROAD MAP

CASE STUDY was carried out with 50 samples with the objective to understand the impact of mostly forced child marriages through case studies in **Phase I**. By understanding the impact, *Training Sessions* was planned and conducted with following objectives in the **Phase- II**,

- Build a sound understanding on human rights and how it is linked with the issues of child marriage. This understanding shall also include ways in which gender roles lead to violations of women's rights, limit them in achieving their potential and hinder their holistic development.
- Create awareness on reasons why child marriages are so prevalent in the district. The key stakeholders are able to analyse the social norms and messages from the society on the expected roles women must play, which fundamentally linked to families choose to get their daughters married early. With this understanding the participants were able to frame their views, ideologies against this prevalent mindset and therefore work towards addressing child marriages.
- Encouraging participants to make clear action plans on rescue, intervention, sensitizing the communities, converge of various stakeholders (police, religious leaders, Child marriage prohibition officers, Parents and Panchayat members and so on) in prevention, rescue, risk mitigation and rehabilitation of Child marriage survivors.

PHASE II

- ✓ **Training/ Workshops:** On Child Rights Related Acts such as POCSO Act, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 and Guidelines for Eliminating Corporal Punishment in Schools by NCPCR and other similar laws
- ✓ Training/Meetings with Key Frontliners and Key Stakeholders – Preventing Child Marriage.

PHASE III

- ✓ **Workshops/Sensitization:** Women's groups, SHGs and youth groups – Trainings in 9 Unions were conducted in Phase I and Phase II. Trainings in 2 Unions were conducted in Phase III.
- ✓ **Formulating Standard Operating Procedure** for key stake holders on their roles and responsibilities in Preventing, Intervening and to rehabilitating Child marriage

survivors. Two Workshops on Developing Standard Operating Procedures for the Field functionaries on Child marriage, one in Nagapattinam District and another in Mayiladuthurai District was conducted in November 2021.

- ✓ Documentation and Compilation of the Case Studies Collected was completed in Phase I and Phase II.

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Objectives

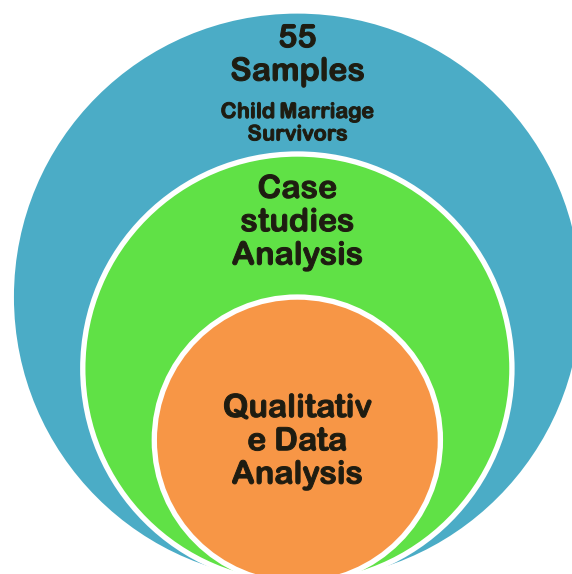
- ✚ To understand the challenges of girl children married in the age group of 15 – 18 years.
- ✚ To explore various reasons for the practice of child marriage.
- ✚ To understand the consequences of girl child marriages.
- ✚ To bring social awareness on the consequences of child marriages and influence policy level changes.

Scope of the Study

- To understand the situation/ challenges of women in age group of 18-25 years, which forced them to engage in child marriage?
- Strengthening the impetus for advocating/ ensuring proper implementation of PCM Act – 2006.

Methodology

The present study adopted an explorative design using qualitative methodology to identify the challenges faced by survivors of child marriage. Semi structured interviews were chosen as the preferred method as they enable participant and researcher to have joint discovery, meaningful interaction and deep reflection. (Patton 2015). Purposive sampling method is used to identify the participant's fifty-five child marriage survivors in Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu was participated in the study.



Semi-Structured Interview Sections:

- ✓ Basic Information
- ✓ Education status
- ✓ Family status

- ✓ Current status
- ✓ Consequences of Child marriages.

Process of the Study

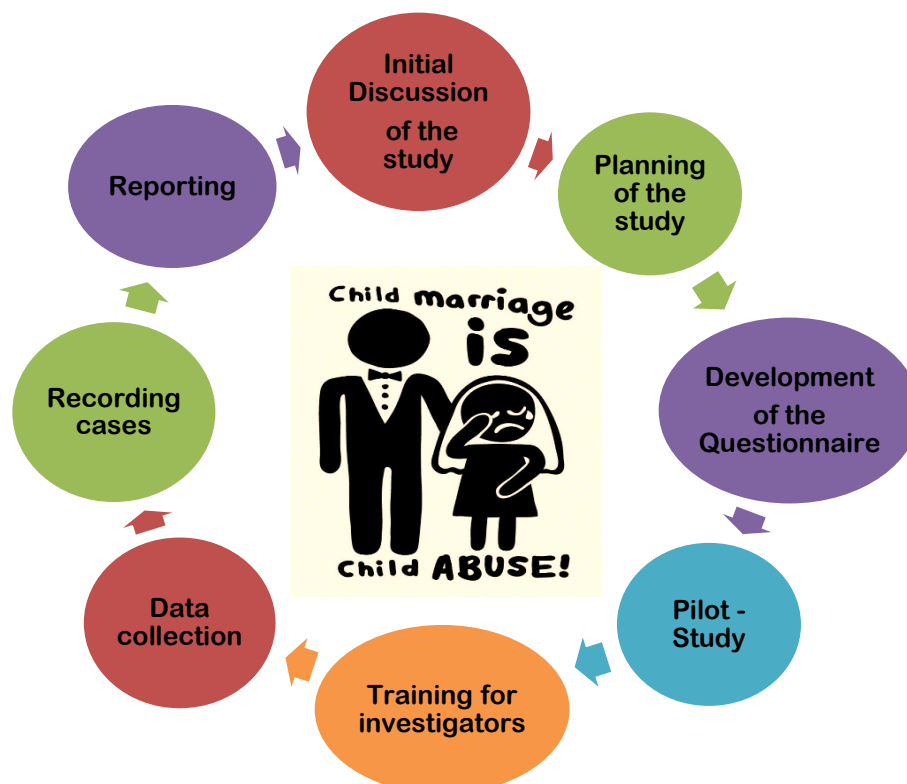
Each interview was conducted individually in a private and quiet space in the respective participants' home. Participants took part in the interview during which they discussed on major challenges faced by them due to child marriage. Participants were reminded that they could discontinue the interview at any point without any hesitation. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were preserved by not revealing their names and identity in the data collection, analysis and reporting of the study findings. Privacy and confidentiality of the interview environment was managed carefully during the interview session, data analysis and dissemination of the findings.

Study Team

A **Core Team of SNEHA** was involved in the field study. They visited the samples with prior permission and consent.

Training of Investigators

Prior training for investigators was conducted at SNEHA Head office, Nagapattinam to sensitise and orient the research team about the study.



An initiative has been taken at Nagapattinam district to understand the impact of mostly Forced Child Marriages through case studies. By understanding the impact, training sessions have been prepared and conducted with following objectives in this Phase- II,

1. Build a sound understanding on human rights and how it is linked with the issues of child marriage. This understanding shall also include ways in which gender roles lead to violations of women's rights, limit them in achieving their potential and hinder their holistic development.
2. Create awareness on reasons why child marriages are so prevalent in the district. The key stakeholders are able to analyze the social norms and messages from the society on the expected roles women must play, which fundamentally linked to families choose to get their daughters married early. With this understanding the participants were able to frame their views, ideologies against this prevalent mindset and therefore work towards addressing child marriages.
3. Encouraging participants to make clear action plans on rescue, intervention, sensitizing the communities, converge of various stakeholders (police, religious leaders, Child marriage prohibition officers, Parents and Panchayat members and so on) in prevention, rescue, risk mitigation and rehabilitation of Child marriage survivors.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The case studies are considered for developing these training sessions and modules. They are as follows,

- Adolescent girls aged between 13-18 years are facing highest risk in getting married early and are also facing domestic violence coupled with other abuse especially physical and sexual.
- They reside in areas with limited facilities and livelihood opportunities. The families are also limited with educational opportunities.
- These girls and women in their families also had limited decision-making abilities and powers in choosing education and livelihood, selecting a life partner, having children and managing household expenses.
- These girls are subjected to age-old customs of child marriage, dowry and gender discrimination. They were also expected to practice old societal expectations from women as daughters/bride/wife/mother.

This will help the stakeholders to understand these complexities of linkages and rights violation to address it and to mitigate the risk of child marriages.

CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS

This Capacity Building Needs of SHGs, Teachers, NGOs and frontline workers have emerged from the findings of case studies and experiential learning through program implementation at the field level.

- ➔ Understanding Gender and Gender Discrimination
- ➔ Understanding child marriage
- ➔ Child rights and laws related to child rights violation – special reference to PCMA and POCSO
- ➔ Importance of Girl child

The Capacity Building Needs have been scoped and sequenced out as follows,

Session – 1	Introduction, Ice breaker and Ground Rules	20 minutes
Session – 2	Understanding Sex, Gender and gender stereotypes	90 minutes
Session – 3	Gender and choices	45 minutes
Session – 4	Understanding Human Rights and Child Rights	90 minutes
Session – 5	Child Marriage: A violation of Human Rights	90 minutes
Session – 6	Reasons cited for child marriages	60 minutes
Session – 7	Impacts of Child Marriage - Discussion	45 minutes
Session – 8	Strategy planning to address Child marriages	60 minutes

Session 1: Introductions, Ice Beaker and Ground Rules:

At the end of this session, participants will be comfortable and familiar with each other and be able to examine the roles in reducing the practice of child marriage.

Ground Rules:

Some ground rules can be no mobile phones, no side conversations, respecting others' points of view, etc.

Recommended ground rules are

1. Respect
2. Confidentiality
3. Openness
4. Non – judgmental approach
5. Sensitivity to Diversity
6. Right to Pass
7. Anonymity
8. Acceptance
9. Have a mutual learning and good time

Activities Carried Out in Sessions

Provoke thinking through Case studies

Screening film - *Mala, Kala Child Marriage Short film was displayed.*

Mala-the short film about child marriage was played. Feedback about the short film was asked. Later they were separated to 5 groups and 6 questions were given to them. Allowed to discuss with the group and to write the answers to the following questions

1. When and where the child marriage happened. Who are the organisers, what is the name of bride, groom, parents, relatives?
2. What are the reasons for the child marriage?
3. What are the effects on children?
4. What is the present status of the child?
5. Whether you have stopped any child marriage like this?
6. What are the resources we can use to stop child marriages?

Awareness song - *“Chinna Chinna Chittu Kuruvi...”*

✚ **Question & Answer sessions and Group Discussion**

✚ **Group Activity – Balloon Gam**



KEY CASE SHARINGS

- In Kallar village, child marriage happened before 8 years. During marriage the child was 16years old. And it happened before parents, villagers, panchayat members and their relatives.
- It had happened in Muslim and fishermen community in rural areas
- In 2005 Mala W/o Prabhakar living in East Street of South Poigainallur was a victim of child marriage. Only the groom's relatives were there in the marriage.
- Sathyapriya W/o Ajith from Nariyankudi got married in Tirupur. At that time the bride was 17 and the groom was 20. Now they are separated not legally and they have a baby girl.
- Sandhya aged 16 of Mela Vanjur, fathers name is Palanivel and mothers name is Samuthara Devi and the grooms' father was Chinnadurai and his mother's name was Kupammal and the grooms age was 20, arranged for marriage by their family members. But it was stopped.
- A girl from my village got married at 15, suffering physically, mentally, and economically and now she is suffering to manage her family. Before she was 19, she gave birth to two children and her husband also died and now she is suffering a lot to take care of her kids without any income. I am able to understand her problem. If someone initiates child marriage, I will stop it by sharing her story as an example. This training is be useful to all of you from the self-help group.
- Saranya studying 9th standard, Buvaneswari studying 10th standard of TATA Nagar, Nagapattinam got love marriage in Karaikal. Amuthaveni studying 12th standard at Karaikal was married by their parents. (sharing here)



- During 2018, in Neivilaku village, Aparna and Anand got married, and it is a child marriage. It was organized by parents Anbalakan and Kamala. Reasons for the marriage are poverty, economic problem, family situation. Now they are living without any issues.
- Karthika studying 11th standard in Pannal Panchayat and Sekar belonging to Singan Kuthakai Panchayat got married. Their parents organized the marriage. The main cause for the marriage is poverty, family situation and economic condition. After the marriage the child got affected physically and mentally, so they departed.
- In Prathiyankarai panchayat during 1997, Kavitha got married at the age of 15 and it was a love marriage. Due to love issue of the adolescent, her education was blocked, faced health issues, and living economically backward.
- Pushpa aged 15 of Aadhanur panchayat got married. Her father's name is Srinivasan. Reasons for the marriage is poverty. Her education got spoiled and her health got affected.
- In Aayakaranpulam 2nd Sethi, during 2001, Vijaya and Sekar got married and it is a child marriage. It was a love marriage organized by one of their relatives. Now they have 3 children. That Child Vijaya not aware of family responsibilities, did not know how to manage the family, how to take care of the kids; not able to manage the family she is in depression and so went somewhere. Now her 3 children are without mother's care.
- Jayanthi aged 16 of Periyakuthakai Panchayat got married in 2005. As she did not have mother, she got married for security reasons. Now she is without any problem.

PHASE II - ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED

Trainings/Workshop were conducted on the Child Rights related Acts and Guidelines such as POCSO Act, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 and Guidelines for Eliminating Corporal Punishment in Schools by NCPCR and similar laws for Women's Groups, SHGs and Youth Groups, were organized in 11 Blocks.

S.No	DATE	BLOCK	PARTICIPANTS	TRAINERS
1	20.09.2019	Mayiladuthurai	Women -52 Adolescent Girls - 11	Dr. R. Selvam Mr. S. Prakash Ms. V. Lakshmi Ms. B. Saroja

2	21.09.2019	Kuthalam	Women -65 Adolescent Girls - 10	Dr. R. Selvam Mr. S. Prakash Ms. V. Lakshmi
3	24.09.2019	Sirkali	Women -58 Adolescent Girls - 15	Ms. B. Saroja Ms. N. Dhanalakshmi
4	25.09.2019	Sembanarkovil	Women -48 Adolescent Girls - 7	Mr. S. Prakash Ms. V. Lakshmi Ms. B. Saroja Ms. N. Dhanalakshmi
5	26.09.2019	Keelaiyur	Women -28 Men – 8	Mr. V. Kumaravelu Mr. D. Jayabal
6	14.12.2020	Nagapattinam	Women -47 Men – 2	Mr. R. Devarajulu Mr. S. Rajandran Mr. V. Kumaravelu Mr. D. Jayabal
7	16.12.2020	Kollidam	Women -53 Men – 1	Ms. N. Dhanalakshmi Mr. S. Prakash Ms. V. Lakshmi Ms. B. Saroja
8	18.12.2020	Kilvelur	Women -77 Men – 3	Mr. R. Devarajulu Mr. S. Rajandran
9	28.12.2020	Vedaranyam	Women -50 Men – 4	Mr. V. Kumaravelu Mr. D. Jayabal
10	31.08.2021	Thalainyar	Women -83 Men – 3	Mr. S. Rajandran Mr. R. Devarajulu
11	11.09.2021	Thirumarugal	Women -37 Men – 3	Mr. D. Jayabal

PHASE III - PLANNED PROGRAMMES

➔ **Trainings/Workshops:** On Child Rights related Acts such as Acts POCSO Act, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 and Guidelines for Eliminating Corporal Punishment in Schools by NCPCR and other similar laws

✚ The Police Department Officials and other Officers in-Charge of enforcing the provisions of these acts were sensitized with relation to Child Rights Acts. Therefore, these sensitized officials will act as an enabler and not a barrier for justice to the victims – This training is pending and was to be conducted in Phase III.

- ✚ The grassroot implementors of Child Rights Acts such as ICDS Staff, VHN and School Head Masters and Education Officers will be empowered with child rights acts. Hence, these trainings will help them to understand, interact with children and also help children understand abuse, teaching them good touch, bad touch, etc., This training was pending and was to be conducted in Phase III.
 - ✚ Government hospital staff and nurses who also deal with child abuse victims – Was to be done in Phase III.
 - ✚ Women's groups, SHGs and youth groups – Trainings in 9 Unions were conducted in Phase I and Phase II. Trainings in 2 Unions was conducted in Phase III.
- ➔ Documenting the outcomes of these trainings and collecting case studies and publishing the same – Documentation was completed in Phase II. Printing of the report is completed in Phase III.

After discussions with District Child Protection Officer, Mr. Sivakumar, it was decided to organize 2 District Level Consultations (Nagapattinam and Mayiladuthurai) on Formulating Standard Operating Procedure for key stake holders on their roles and responsibilities in Preventing, Intervening and to rehabilitating Child marriage survivors.

FORMULATING STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Purpose

Understanding all these above facts, emerges a need to develop a district specific SOP by understanding the vulnerability of the girls, traditional practices and the invisible social norms of the district. This district specific SOP is derived based on the SOP developed in Adolescent Empowerment and End Child Marriage project implementations.

This SOP will be the guide book for the Nagapattinam officials who are involving in prevention, rescue, intervention and rehabilitation of Child marriage survivors. This will definitely ensure the sensitive engagement with the survivors of child marriage.

Objectives

The major objectives for developing the district specific SOP are

- To strengthen the response of the officials dealing with child marriage survivors.
- To strengthen the multi-disciplinary team in the district.

- To establish good coordination among the multi-disciplinary approach in prevention, rescue, intervention and rehabilitation of Child marriage survivors.

Scope

- ✓ Familiarizing all officers to know as to what is their mandate.
- ✓ To set out role and responsibilities of the Nodal officer and multi-disciplinary team in the district.
- ✓ Identifying and finding possible solutions to the negative effects of criminalization of child marriage.
- ✓ Review and revise the existing laws related to child marriage to understand the implementation gaps, inconsistencies and loopholes.

Legal Systems in India

Common law system based on the English model which is separate personal law codes apply to Muslims, Christians and Hindus.

Stakeholder's Roles and Responsibilities in Implementing Laws:

The important role and responsibility of stakeholder in implementing law is participation of all major and multi-disciplinary team to ensure their full support in prevention, rescue, intervention and rehabilitation of Child marriage survivors. Evidence based advocacy and target-based awareness rising among public and in vulnerable pockets, and to mobilize support for the drafting, adoption, dissemination and implementation of the legislation from grass root level to administrative level.

Implementation and Enforcing Child Marriage Laws

Where strong legal frameworks exist, implementation and enforcement are often weak, and the reasons vary from district to district. The below table represents some of the Nagapattinam district specific challenges and potential solutions arrived during the SOP for implementation of Child marriage.

CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Age of marriage for males and females contradict to each other.	Setting the minimum legal age for marriage for both males and females by harmonizing all laws.
Birth and marriage registration is mandate.	Strengthening the civil registration systems free and available for all and ensuring it.

Marriages are conducted outside of formal legal structures.	<p>Verifying age of the bride and the groom.</p> <p>Working with religious and traditional leaders on the impact of child marriages.</p> <p>Raising awareness through Visibility in local temples or in vulnerable areas on legal age of bride and groom, importance of marriage registration etc.</p>
Survivors of child marriage struggles to take legal actions against the perpetrators to court, due to various reasons like fear, dependency, lack of knowledge, stigma and reprisals.	Strengthening children on legal aspects. Strengthening child friendly and gender sensitive justice process and procedures. Accommodating such children in a short stay home to pursue their education and other needs.
Elopement and consensual sexual activities are punished.	Consensual sexual activities and elopement among adolescents should not be criminalized or rehabilitation should be ensured.
Children are not taking up legal action as they have to pay when are depend on their parents.	Free legal aid for children who seek for continuing marriage, or in union divorced or widowed.

Key Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

While drafting district specific SOP, the primary, secondary stakeholders and volunteers were participated. This formulation of Standard operating procedure for key stakeholders were focused on their roles and responsibilities in Preventing, Intervening and to rehabilitating Child marriage survivors

S.NO	STAKEHOLDER	ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY
1	Social Welfare	<p>Leadership in establishing and implementing the legal & policy framework for preventing child marriage and supporting married girls by ensuring coordination with relevant actors and institutions.</p>
2	Education	<p>Incorporating Sex Education and legislations in the curriculum.</p> <p>Keep track on attendance and strengthening the parent teacher relationship.</p> <p>Activating adolescent platforms for protecting themselves.</p>
3	Health	<p>Raising awareness on health and impact of child marriages through various programmes.</p> <p>Reaching the adolescent girls through various medium.</p>

4	Police	Understanding the special acts and implementation. Practicing child friendly approach when dealing with children. Facilitating public- police discussion in an open forum in the village.
5	Judicial system	Legal camp to public and in schools. Legal camp to police on special acts and its amendments.
6	Civil Society Organizations	They play an important role in legislative reform process through, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct advocacy with policy and decision makers • Raising public awareness of the law • Training key actors
7	Youth Networks and activists	Micro level support system for adolescents and engaging them through volunteerism in the village.
8	Child Rights Networks and Activists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Strengthening VLCPC /NCPC through sensitization and linkages with DCPU, DSW, SCPCR ✿ Follow-up Support to the survivors of child marriage.
8	DSWO & DCPO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Strengthening of government mechanisms, systems and structures at various levels such as VLCPC, BLCPC, WLCP, Panchayat level core committee - PLCC and SJPU's/CWPO/VPO'S and Grama Sabha ✿ Sensitization on issues surrounding child marriage and the handling of child marriage survivors for officials. The training would be imparted by the officials of DSW and DCPO. ➡ Rehabilitation of the rescued child ➡ To reintegrate in the school and in community ➡ Claim Annulment, Rehabilitation and maintenance with the help of DSWO through court ➡ Linking the child to the relevant department to avail the existing schemes ➡ Counselling- physical, psychological, legal, sex education, education focusing on career opportunities ➡ Legal assistance

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Linking the adolescent girl to nutrition supplement through ICDS, SAG scheme for adolescent girls ➤ Education - school and SSA, non-formal education ➤ Vocational training/ job placement ➤ Sponsorship and after care ➤ Marriage assistance in the appropriate age if needed ➤ Social security schemes for their family ➤ Legal Assistance and Legal Counselling Premarital Counselling
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THE CHALLENGE

- Though this project was sanctioned and approved in the year 2019, by the State Child Protection Society, we were able to complete the activities only in 2022. The outbreak of Covid 19 in the year 2019 was a major issue. By mid-march, many coastal states had already announced major restrictions in movement, and the all-India lockdown was announced by March 4th week.
- This was followed by outbreak of Covid 19 Wave II and III and the continued lockdown and restrictions continued, which impacted the implementation of the Project Activities. The second wave of the global pandemic, SARS-Cov19 and its multiple variants in India have wreaked havoc all around the country. Unlike the first wave in 2019, this second wave had increased infections and more severe attacks even in rural areas, apart from the major urban centres. But the Wave III had less impacts.
- All these factors continuously delayed the process of implementation of the planned programmes. Many times, it had to be cancelled and postponed after organizing. Hence this major delay and extension of the project to 2022.

CONCLUSION

The interactions, discussions and deliberations made in phase1, phase 2 and in formulating district specific SOP would ensure that the essence of the objectives of this programme reached every member and the stakeholder involved in handling issues pertaining to child protection.

GLIMPSE OF FIELD INTERVENTIONS



GLIMPSE OF FIELD INTERVENTIONS



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